



THE CAMERA IS OURS

Cow

+ Q&A with director Andrea Arnold

Director's Notes – Andrea Arnold

Whenever I have felt troubled or lost or overwhelmed with life, I have always sought nature. It has always grounded me and put me in touch with myself again.

No one taught me this. It came quite naturally. Like some innate knowledge. Partly I think because I had a very free childhood. My mum had me very young, at 16, and three siblings followed by the time she was 22. My dad was only a few years older. I never saw him that much in my early years and he was gone completely by time I was ten.

So unsupervised most of the time I lived a fantastically wild life. I grew up in North Kent on an estate surrounded by liminal wilderness. From early on I played out and would spend entire days roaming wherever the fancy took me. Between estates and chalk pits and deserted old industrial spaces and woods and motorways. Out of this grew a deep love of insects and birds and animals and plants. Stray estate dogs, the traveller ponies chained by the motorway, the fish and frogs in the water-filled bomb site, wild strawberries on the banks of the chalk pits. I can conjure up these places vividly now. The smells and sounds and feels and colours.

We had pets. Lots. No one really stopped us bringing animals home. One day when I was eight or so I went into a house where there was a litter of puppies. I felt sorry for the tiny runt so took him home. I didn't ask anyone if I could. I just assumed I could. Like us he roamed. Never owned a lead or collar ever. None of our dogs did. He did his own thing and got into a whole load of trouble. But that is another story.

We really loved our animals but none arrived in a conventional way or got cared for in a conventional way. I had gerbils but didn't have a cage so they lived in a clothes drawer. Jumpers, underwear, gerbils. My dad sometimes sold stuff in Brick Lane Market in London. One time he took me with him and someone was selling a lamb that no one wanted. As we were leaving I pleaded for it and we took it home. It grew huge living on our overgrown, backyard grass. And was often in the house too. Baaing if anyone knocked on the door.

I left home at 18 to live in London. Life changed dramatically in many ways. The city and pressures of adult life changed my relationship with nature. It wasn't so immediate or accessible in the city. I continued to seek it as it mattered to me in a fundamental way. I learned to drive and drove out to it. Kept a stray dog I found in the street. Had cats. But I guess as I got busier with life I began to feel less connected. Nature sometimes felt like something that was 'over there'. I would gaze out of train and car windows on my way somewhere feeling a little bereft. Separated.

One of the animals I saw most out of those windows are cows. Cows grazing in green fields. Pastoral, peaceful, romantic. Like a painting. I wondered about the reality of their lives and what that was really like. Making *Cow* the film emerged from that curiosity. Cows are so much part of our lives. They provide

us with so much. But I felt disconnected from them. I liked the idea of jumping into that familiar scene. Seeing what their reality really was.

Before we started filming an international and prominent bunch of scientists signed The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness in which they proclaimed that animals are conscious and aware to the degree that humans are. They said the evidence was overwhelming.

What does that mean? Do they feel pain, fear, desire, anger, affection, loss, frustration, empathy, and intention? Like humans do? Are they individuals? Do they have distinct personalities? In all my relationships with animals they for sure feel like they have distinct likes and dislikes and individual quirks. So what about the animals we use for food? Cows? I wondered if we watched a cow long enough we would see any of this? I didn't want in any way to attempt to get inside her head or suggest human emotions. I just wanted to watch her reactions to her daily reality. In all of its beauty and challenges and brutality. To look. To see. To see her.

Dairy cows work hard. They spend their lives giving birth and making milk. A lifetime of maternal existence. They will bear maybe 10 to 20 calves but each time the calf is taken shortly after birth so the milk can be used for us.

One time at the seaside in Denmark I was using a stick to flick beached and still alive jellyfish back in the water. There were lots and it was taking a while. A couple walked by holding hands. Watched me for a while and then said. 'You shouldn't bother. Leave them to die. It's nature.' I replied without thinking, 'I know but I'm nature too and I'm putting them back.'

We are nature. We are animals. The top of the food chain. But we are still animals and we have many animal instincts. Denying this, separating ourselves and disconnecting from this is starting to seem more and more at our peril. Our relationship with the millions of non-human lives we use is very much part of our existence. I made *Cow* to invite engagement with that.

My childish wanderings and love for animals was I think something very instinctive and natural and honest. I wasn't restrained by anyone and so followed my own expression. And my relationship with nature as a kid wasn't just a romantic, whimsical one. It was engaged and immersive. There was both joy and pain. It was real.

I hope this film in some small way can connect anyone who sees it not just to cows and other non-human conscious animals but to that deep knowing and animal nature in ourselves. That we are all connected to everything living.

Production notes

COW

Directed by: Andrea Arnold
A Cow Film production
Production Company: Halcyon Pictures
Presented by: BBC Film
In association with: Doc Society
International Sales: MK2 Films
US and Canada Sales: Submarine Entertainment
Executive Producers: Rose Garnett, Maxyne Franklin, Sandra Whipham
Produced by: Kat Mansoor
Assistant Producers: Emily Burrett, Charlie Falconer, Tessa Morgan
Line Producer: Joanna Riding
For BBC Film: Head of Production and Finance: Michael Wood;
Head of Legal and Business Affairs: Geraldine Atlee; *Legal and Business Affairs Manager:* Helen Giles; *Head of Communications:* Emma Hewitt;
Production Executive: Emma Kayee; *Legal & Finance Assistant:* Ruth Sanders
Production Accountant: Nyman Libson Paul
Production Bookkeeper: Iris Fraser
Post Production Manager for Goldcrest: Rob Farris
Researchers: Jessica Gutch, Luke Moody, Stephanie Pochet
Director of Photography: Magda Kowalczyk
Digital Image Technician: Ian Pinder
Camera Assistant: Miha Lungu

Electricians: Andy Cole, Alex Macauley
Electrician Assistant: Kae Ho
Stills Photography: Kate Kirkwood
Graphics: Mike Ellis
Edited by: Rebecca Lloyd, Jacob Schulsinger, Nicolas Chaudeurge
On-line Editor: Chloe Warner-Harris
Edit Assistants: Adam Lavis, Dennis Mabry
Titles: Mike Ellis
Senior Colourist: Rob Pizzey
Music Supervisors: Simon Astall, Ben Turner
Sound Designers: Raphaël Sohier, Carolina Santana
Sound Supervisor: Nicolas Becker
Sound Recording: Nikky French
Additional Sound: Marina Fusella
Mixing Engineer: Cyril Holtz
Supervising Dialogue Editor: Linda Forsén
Foley Artist: Gilles Marsalet
Foley Recordist: Florent Lavallée
Publicist: Charles McDonald
Special Thanks: Christine Langan, Jess Search

UK 2021©
94 mins

SEEN & HEARD: DARING FEMALE COMING-OF-AGE FILMS

Skate Kitchen

Tue 1 Mar 20:40; Sun 13 Mar 20:45

Divines

Wed 2 Mar 20:50; Tue 15 Mar 20:50

Jinn

Sat 5 Mar 17:45; Tue 8 Mar 21:00

37 Seconds (37 sekanzu)

Sat 5 Mar 20:30; Sat 12 Mar 20:45

Water Lilies (Naissance des pieuvres)

Sun 6 Mar 18:45; Mon 14 Mar 20:50

Marie Antoinette

Tue 8 Mar 18:10 (+ intro by Hannah Strong, Little White Lies Digital Editor and author of *Sofia Coppola: Forever Young*); Sun 13 Mar 18:00

Somersault

Fri 11 Mar 20:50; Mon 14 Mar 18:10

IN THE EYES OF A SILENT STAR: THE FILMS OF ASTA NIELSEN

In the Eyes of the Law (Nach dem Gesetz)

Tue 1 Mar 20:50; Mon 7 Mar 18:15

Hamlet

Wed 2 Mar 18:15; Sat 5 Mar 17:00 (+ Intro by Prof Judith Buchanan)

Earth Spirit (Erdgeist)

Sat 5 Mar 12:10 (+ intro by Season Curator Pamela Hutchinson); Wed 9 Mar 20:50

The Decline (AKA Downfall) (Der Absturz)

Sat 5 Mar 14:30 (+ intro by season curator Pamela Hutchinson); Tue 15 Mar 18:20

The Joyless Street (Die freudlose Gasse)

Sun 6 Mar 17:40 (+ intro by BFI Inclusion Team Coordinator, Miranda Gower-Qian); Wed 16 Mar 18:00

Impossible Love (Unmögliche Liebe)

Wed 9 Mar 18:20; Tue 15 Mar 20:45

THE CAMERA IS OURS:

BRITAIN'S WOMEN DOCUMENTARY MAKERS

From Beside the Seaside to the English Inn: Restoration Programme 1 + intro by BFI curator Ros Cranston

Thu 3 Mar 18:15

For Sama + intro by director Waad Al-Kateab + Children of the Ruins

Thu 3 Mar 20:30

The Camera Is Ours: Study Day + Independent Miss Craigie + Q&A with director Lizzie Thynne and producer Hollie Price

Sat 5 Mar 12:00-17:00

From the Sea to the Land Beyond

Sat 5 Mar 18:15

Seniors Free Archive Matinee: White Riot + discussion

Mon 7 Mar 14:00

Cow

Tue 8 Mar 20:40

The Hermit of Treig + Q&A with director Lizzie MacKenzie

Fri 11 Mar 18:10

From Birth-Day to Something Nice to Eat: Restoration Programme 2 + intro by BFI curator Ros Cranston

Mon 14 Mar 18:15

Hostile + director Sonita Gale in conversation with journalist Jon Snow

Tue 15 Mar 18:00

NEW RELEASES

La Mif (The Fam)

Continues from Fri 25 Feb

Rebel Dread

From Fri 4 Mar

Ali & Ava

From Fri 11 Mar; Tue 15 March 14:00 Seniors' matinee + discussion

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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