



## Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry

Directed by: Elene Naveriani

©: Takes Film LLC

Production Companies: Alva Film, Takes Film, Totem Films

Presented by: Alva Film, Takes Film

Produced by: Thomas Reichlin, Britta Rindelaub, Keti Danelia

Line Producer: Lado Chikhradze

Location Manager: Khatuna Gogua

1st Assistant Director: Marina Kulumbegashvili

Script and Continuity: Ana Machabeli

Casting by: Leli Miminoshvili, Shoka Maghradze

Screenplay by: Elene Naveriani, Nikoloz Mdivani

Based on the novel by: Tamta Melashvili

Script Consultants: Isabelle Fauvel, Hakim Mao, Suzy Gillett

Director of Photography: Agnesh Pakozdi

Set Photographer: Khatia (Juda) Psuturi

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Sosa Gvasalia

Editing by: Aurora Franco Vögeli

Production Designer: Teo Baramidze

Costume Designer: Nino Injia

Hair and Make-up Designers: Julia Nietlispach, Eka Chikhradze

Sound Designer: Philippe Ciompi

Location Sound Mixer: Marc von Stürler

Stunt Co-ordinator: David Khubua

Cast:

Eka Chavleishvili (*Etero Gelbakhiani*, 'Eto')

Temiko Chinchinadze (*Murman*)

Pikria Nikabadze (*Neno*)

Tamar Mdivaradze (*Londa*)

Lia Abuladze (*Natela*)

Anka Khurtsidze (*Tsisana*)

Giorgi Kartvelishvili (*Nukri*)

Ani Mogeladze (*Elene*)

Mariam Didia (*Sopiko*)

Rezi Karosanidze (*Etero's brother*)

Gocha Nemsitsveridze (*Etero's father*)

Emzari Khachapuridze (*watermelon seller*)

Switzerland-Georgia-France-Netherlands-Germany

2023©

111 mins

A New Wave release

## BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://bfi.org.uk/join)

## SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](https://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)

**SIGHT AND SOUND**

## NEW RELEASES

# Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry

After *I Am Truly a Drop of Sun on Earth* (2017) and *Wet Sand* (2021), it's no surprise that the title of Elene Naveriani's third feature makes poetry of natural imagery. If Ingmar Bergman hadn't got there first, it could just as easily have been called 'Autumn Sonata', focusing as it does on a solitary woman seemingly in the autumn of her life who, one year, as the leaves begin to fall and the post-summer downpours set in, undergoes an existential awakening.

Out walking one morning picking blackberries in a Georgian village, local woman Etero (Eka Chavleishvili) loses her footing and plunges down the side of a ravine, narrowly saving herself from falling into the churning waters below. It's an uncharacteristic misstep for this stolid, taciturn shop proprietor, and as she stares down at the spot where she almost ended up, and locks eyes with a vision of her dead self washed up on the shore, something clicks inside her.

Mere hours later, she all but pounces on the delivery guy who's arrived at her store with a consignment of shelf stock, making passionate love to him on the storeroom floor. It's her first-ever sexual encounter, and one she is careful to conceal from the inhabitants of the small, gossipy village in which she lives: the man who has taken her virginity, Murman (Temiko Chichinadze), is a married father of two.

The stage seems set for a story of doomed liaisons and small-town melodrama, but what follows is as organic and unpredictable as the film's opening sequence. For Etero, everything's changed, yet nothing has: she's still a marginal figure among her so-called friends; she still conducts herself with proud, laconic confidence; she still loves to pick and eat wild blackberries. But when she sits alone by the dining table one evening, exulting in the feel of her own body, the warmth of the long-suppressed fire inside her suffuses the frame for the very first time.

As the narrative unfolds, pointed ironies make themselves felt. Etero's shop specialises in beauty and cleaning products, yet she has no interest in pursuing the normative path that the other women in this particular village have ordained for themselves. At one point, tucking into a decadent millefeuille, surrounded by pastel-pink wallpaper, Etero makes clear to one flirty customer: 'If marriage and dicks brought happiness, many women would be happy.'

Though there are thorns to be found in this bright bougainvillea of a film, its easy going story, which sees Etero pursue her affair with Murman on her own terms, blossoms with a similar enchantment to Naveriani's compatriot Alexandre Koberidze's 2021 film *What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?*. Much of the charm springs from the attention to detail: when Murman 'forgets' his glasses as a pretext to head back into the store to see Etero, he's so smitten that when he departs a minute later he forgets his specs for real. The two films are alike, too, in the stillness of their camera and their beautifully framed and lit interior shots.

Naveriani's use of bold colours and deep shadow also recalls late-period Aki Kaurismäki, whose autumnally titled *Fallen Leaves*, like *Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry*, premiered at Cannes in 2023. Both films are about a solitary shop

## NEW RELEASES

### Love Lies Bleeding

From Fri 3 May

### Made in England:

#### The Films of Powell and Pressburger

From Fri 10 May

### Hoard

From Fri 10 May

### Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry

From Fri 17 May

### The Beast La Bête

From Fri 7 Jun

### Àma Gloria

From Fri 14 Jun

### Green Border Zielona granica

From Fri 21 Jun

### Bye Bye Tiberias Bye Bye Tibériade

From Fri 28 Jun + Q&A on Fri 28 Jun 18:00

### Sleep Jam

From Fri 12 Jul

### About Dry Grasses Kuru Otlar Üstüne

From Fri 26 Jul

## RE-RELEASES

### Rome, Open City Roma città aperta

From Fri 17 May

### Network

From Fri 28 Jun

### The Conversation

From Fri 5 Jul

## BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](http://player.bfi.org.uk)

## BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop. We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at [www.bfi.org.uk/signup](http://www.bfi.org.uk/signup)

worker who embarks on a relationship in middle age; both films share a certain sense of timelessness, with few signifiers of modernity; both situate their romances in a gentle but unmistakable social critique. In *Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry*, it's not so much capitalism under the microscope as gender conventions. All Etero's friends have settled down and procreated with their husbands; Etero's apartness is conveyed as much by Naveriani's careful blocking as by Chavleishvili's subtly modulated performance. In one early scene, Etero is visited by domineering visions of her father and brother, who ensured, as long as they were alive, that she duly fulfilled her role as matriarch, her mother having died of ovarian cancer shortly after giving birth to Etero.

The death has cast a long shadow over Etero's life, leaving her riddled with misplaced guilt. When she notices some dark discharge – the colour of blackberries – in her underwear, she immediately fears the worst. But it's characteristic of the film that this ominous turn of events sets up a delightful climactic twist. As a twittering blackbird appears on the soundtrack before the final cut to black, a line from McCartney-Lennon's 'Blackbird' seems to fit Etero perfectly: 'All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to arise.'

Arjun Sajip, *Sight and Sound*, May 2024

## Elene Naveriani on 'Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry'

*You worked with Eka Chavleishvili on Wet Sand [2021]. What was it like working with her again on this film?*

Basically it was written for her. So that also helped me a lot during the writing process... I felt her sensibility. I knew that she was able to carry the character on her shoulders... I think that she still doesn't know what she carries as an actress. She's very, very humble and this makes her even more mesmerising.

*When it comes to sexual exploration, we tend to see a very particular type of body on screen. I was wondering if that was in the back of your mind, in terms of having a character of Etero's age shown in such beautiful shots?*

I mean, it's a bit too flat to say that we are lacking representation of bodies like hers. We are lacking a lot of things... It's very repetitive. It's very boring. There are the same kind of humans that we see all the time in cinema... All of us [are] going to get to this point in life, but we don't know how to deal with this because nobody talks about this and nobody shows that... In the beginning I felt that there were people [who] didn't know how to look at it. It made them a bit awkward... But, by the end of the film, they totally forgot about this. It's not the main thing.

*I'm curious about the use of colour in the film. You have these mauve-y purples to mirror the blackberries and the spot of blood on the sheets...*

Of course the first inspiration was blackberries... For me, it always represents [Etero's] interior world. I wanted the colours to be very defined and very expressive. In her life, she is very reserved, she doesn't take a lot of initiatives. She always waits... But inside she's very expressive. There is this full palette that she carries. And I wanted that on the walls where she lives or where she goes. The entire environment kind of enhances her expressionist character and being.

Interview by Nathasha Orlando Kappler, *Sight and Sound*, May 2024