

The first documentary film about art critics in the U.S. explores a period of dramatic change for art and media

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MILWAUKEE – The first feature-length documentary film about art critics to be made in the U.S., “Out of the Picture,” is gaining accolades for its decade of work as it continues to screen across the country and world.

“Out of the Picture” has screened in more than 60 cities around the world as part of its impact campaign and festival run. It has been translated into multiple languages and garnered several jury awards. The film had its U.S. premiere at the Milwaukee Film Festival and a world premiere at the Master of Art Film Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria.

“It’s a beautiful film. It’s an amazing film,” Oscar-winning screenwriter and filmmaker [John Ridley](#) said during a live interview for the Doc Talk podcast. “It’s analysis, it’s thought, it’s conversation, it’s slowing down. Here’s something to think about. And that’s really, really important.”

Directed by Mary Louise Schumacher, a longtime and former critic for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the film explores the lives and work of writers living through a period of dramatic change for both art and media.

The film’s team followed a handful of writers who have made it their life’s work to translate the experiences of art for others. We tracked Jen Graves through the underground art scene in Seattle and Carolina Miranda to a mountaintop “dashboard Jesus” outside Tijuana, Mexico. We witnessed Jeneé Osterheldt interview artists at the intersection where George Floyd was murdered. We were there when Seph Rodney spontaneously recited a Sylvia Plath poem at length, trying to explain art’s mysteries, and when Hrag Vartanian started his “blogazine” for his then-fledgling website, Hyperallergic.

Criticism – and its role in the world – was remade while our cameras rolled. Some of our subjects have risen to become essential voices for their generation, while others have become marginalized, obsolete even.

“Our idea of art and what art should be has changed,” says Osterheldt, deputy managing editor for culture, talent, and development at The Boston Globe. “It’s not seen through such an elite lens ... or as much of a secret society as it used to be. Everyone’s getting a say.”

While ostensibly about an esoteric subject — the American art critic — our film is also about something everyone can relate to: change. “Out of the Picture” is poised to prompt a national conversation about the voices who shape our cultural conversations and how meaning gets made in our time.

OUR RESEARCH

“Out of the Picture” is fundamentally about human stories, but it is also rooted in research. While Schumacher was the 2017 Arts & Culture Fellow with the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University, she conducted a national survey of arts journalists, publishing the top-line takeaways in a [series of articles](#) for *Nieman Reports*, a quarterly print magazine covering thought leadership in journalism. This research raised critical questions about who has the capacity for this work today and who holds visibility and influence. These questions bring essential context and weight to the stories we’re telling. The survey’s findings were also the subject of a [special ARTnews column](#) by Schumacher, and a [lecture at the Smithsonian American Art Museum](#). It was also referenced in [an important New York Times op-ed](#) calling for more critics of color that was written by Elizabeth Méndez Berry and Chi-hui Yang, co-founders of [Critical Minded](#).

IMPACT CAMPAIGN

“Out of the Picture” is currently the centerpiece of a national impact campaign, with screenings that provoke community-based conversations about the future of arts writing, including in museums, galleries, art schools, and journalism schools. The film’s team takes a pay-what-you-can approach in order to eliminate barriers to sharing the film.

“Out of the Picture” is a production of Artspeak Media. It was edited by Johnathon Olsen and produced by a team based primarily in the Midwest. It was supported, in part, by the Heil Family Foundation; a grant from the Wisconsin Humanities Council, with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Greater Milwaukee Foundation; JustFilms of the Ford Foundation; the Brico Forward Fund; the Herzfeld Foundation; the Brico Covid Emergency Relief Fund; the No Studios/gener8tor Fellowship; the Astor Street Foundation; and others, including more than 150 individual donors.

IMAGES FOR PUBLICATION

A press folder with images and a film poster, including a sheet with caption and credit information, [can be found here](#). The film’s [website is here](#). A screening link may be made available upon request.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT “OUT OF THE PICTURE”

Full title: “Out of the Picture”

Runtime: 98 minutes

Year completed: 2024

Language: English

Film type: Feature documentary

Director: Mary Louise Schumacher

Editor: Johnathon Olsen

Featuring: Jen Graves, Carolina Miranda, Jeneé Osterheldt, Hrag Vartanian, Seph Rodney

Logline: The first documentary film about art critics in the United States, “Out of the Picture,” follows a handful of writers from across the U.S. through a critical time of cultural reckoning and historic transformation to both art and media.

Brief Synopsis: “Out of the Picture” takes us inside the lives of some of the most relevant writers on art today, thinkers who are making sense of a period of unprecedented change to art and media. For more than a decade, the filmmakers turned their cameras on critics navigating these rapidly changing landscapes, including Carolina Miranda, of the Los Angeles Times; Hrag Vartanian, of Hyperallergic; Jen Graves, of The Stranger; Jeneé Osterheldt of The Boston Globe; and Seph Rodney, independent critic. “Out of the Picture” is poised to prompt a conversation about the nature of art, modern life, and how meaning gets made in the 21st century.

[“Out of the Picture” website](#)

[“Out of the Picture” trailer](#)

[Mary Louise Schumacher’s Instagram](#)

Press

- [“Out of the Picture” documentary explores decline of art criticism in America](#)
- [Oscar-winning screenwriter and filmmaker John Ridley and Deadline’s Matthew Carey interview director Mary Louise Schumacher on Doc Talk Podcast.](#)
- [Steve Pond, awards editor at The Wrap, interviews director Mary Louise Schumacher.](#)
- [Isthmus: Where Have All the Art Critics Gone?](#)
- [Milwaukee Magazine: This Documentary Is Going to Change the Way We Look at Art Criticism](#)
- [Artful Jaunts: Mary Louise Schumacher on Her Coast-to-Coast Look at Art Critics in America](#)
- [Artdose Magazine: Film About Art Critics Explores Radical Change to Art and Media](#)
- [Creative MKE podcast: “Out of the Picture” with Mary Louise Schumacher.](#)