

A woman with her hair in braids, wearing a grey hoodie, is shown from the back and side. She is looking back over her shoulder with a serious expression. Her right arm is wrapped in a white bandage, and there is visible blood on her hand and the sleeve. The background is a dense forest with sunlight filtering through the trees. In the distance, another person is visible, carrying a large blue backpack.

A SAFE DISTANCE

A feminist thriller set deep in the British Columbia wilderness.

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SYNOPSIS

NOTE: This film takes place in two timelines. What happens BEFORE and what happens AFTER.

Deep in the British Columbian wilderness...

A woman emerges from the trees, covered in blood, and buries a bloodstained hammer.

A few days earlier that same woman, ALEX, drives into the remote woods for a relaxing camping trip with her boyfriend, JOEY. After a scenic mountain hike, Joey gets down on one knee and offers Alex an engagement ring. It's a proposal. Alex takes a long time to answer.

“No”.

Alex scurries through the woods with a young woman, KIANNA, also covered in blood. The two women speak cryptically about the violent event they survived together. They stumble upon a familiar dead dog on a dirt road and Kianna has an emotional breakdown.

The morning after the failed proposal, Joey disappears without a trace. Alex struggles alone in the woods until she finds a young couple, MATT and Kianna. The couple are searching for their missing dog, Otis, who ran away in the dead of night. Alex agrees to help them find Otis, in exchange for a ride back home to Kamloops.

Against her better judgment, Alex takes magic mushrooms with Matt and Kianna and they end up in a drug-influenced threesome. While joining their search for Otis, Alex learns more about the twisted nature of Matt and Kianna's relationship. She notices the many small and not-so-small ways Matt manipulates his partner. Tensions build to a head when Matt forcibly kisses Alex while they are alone in the woods together.



Alex and Kianna wash away the blood in a beautiful stream flowing through the woods. In a rare peaceful moment they open up to one another and share intimate secrets about sex, relationships, and unwanted pregnancies. Later they have a tense chance encounter with a POLICE OFFICER who reveals a dead body was found in the woods nearby.

Alex wakes up in the morning and discovers Matt and Kianna are suspiciously absent. She searches for them and stumbles upon a scene of brutal violence. Kianna wields a familiar hammer and Matt bleeds from a gaping head wound. Before Matt has the chance to strike back, Alex snatches the hammer and finishes the job. WHAM. CRUNCH.

Matt is dead.

Alex and Kianna work together to hide Matt's body and any other evidence of their crime. The two timelines converge as the film returns to the very first scene. Alex emerges from the trees and buries the bloodstained hammer in the dirt.

Alex and Kianna hitchhike their way back to Kamloops. They say goodbye before parting ways, knowing they will never see each other again. Alex returns to her suburban home and stands at the edge of the driveway. Through the living room window she watches Joey lounging comfortably on the couch. Her boyfriend, her partner, the man who abandoned her.

Cut to black.

OUR STORY

Aidan and Gloria met in film school in 2012. They've been collaborating on films ever since.

They have been developing *A Safe Distance* together for two years. As artistic collaborators who are also romantic partners, they drew inspiration from their own experiences to develop this film. They believe that they are uniquely positioned to tell a compelling story that dissects heterosexuality and the fraught power dynamics of romantic relationships.

Aidan and Gloria are grateful to be living and working on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.



CREATIVE TEAM

GLORIA MERCER DIRECTOR/PRODUCER



Gloria Mercer was born and raised in Vancouver, BC. She has a bachelor's degree from Simon Fraser University, majoring in film and minoring in gender, sexuality, and women's studies. She is a recent alumna of the Women in the Director's Chair Career Advancement Module.

Her film *Hekademia* was supported by the NFB and the Canada Council for the Arts. It won Best Sci-Fi at the Oscar-Qualifying Hollyshorts Film Festival, and garnered two Leo Award nominations. It is now

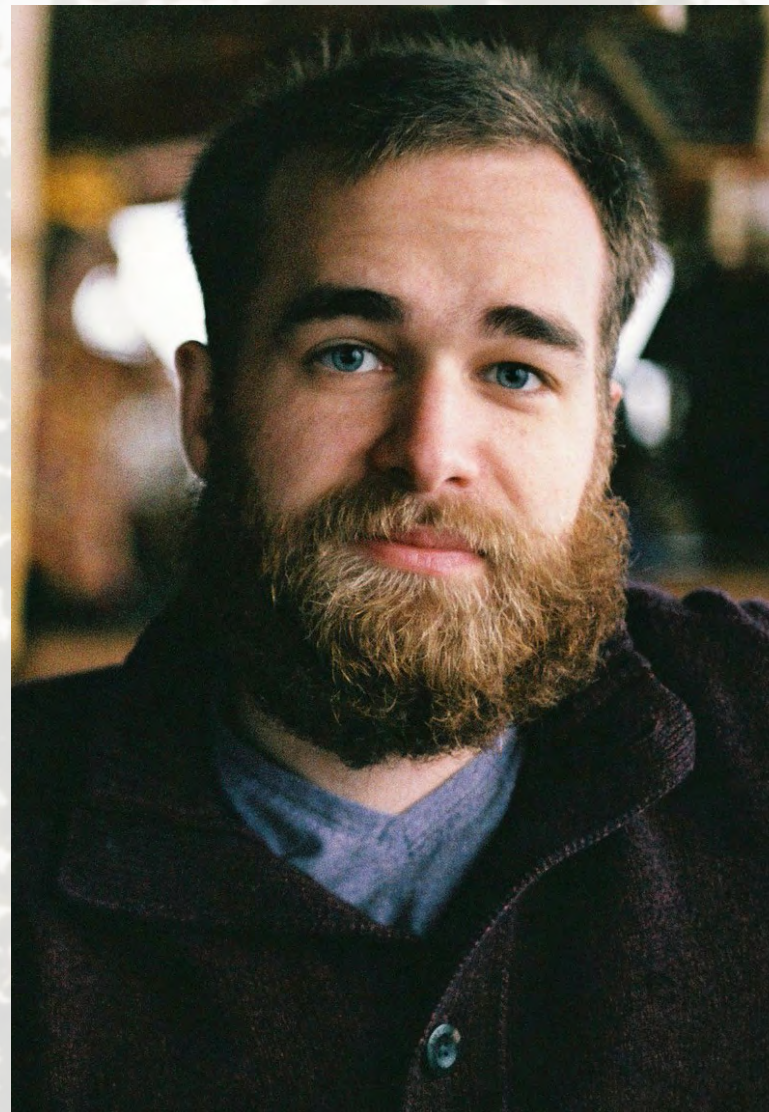
streaming Canada-wide on CBC Gem.

She recently completed *Smoke Eater*, one of three recipients of the 2021 Harold Greenberg "Shorts to Features" fund.

Her short film *Bombing* screened at over 30 film festivals in North America and Europe, winning best in its category at the Whistler Film Festival, and screening at Geena Davis' Bentonville Film Festival. She is a frequent producing partner and collaborator of Aidan West.



AIDAN WEST WRITER/PRODUCER



Aidan West is a writer and filmmaker, born and raised in British Columbia. He is an alumnus of the SFU undergraduate film program and a recent graduate of the MFA screenwriting program at UCLA's School of Theatre, Film, and TV. He wrote and produced *Smoke Eater*, a short film funded through the Harold Greenberg "Shorts to Features" fund. He was awarded the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation screenwriting fellowship for *She Sells Seashells*, his script about the life of Mary Anning. His

screenplays have placed in the top 10% of the Nicholls fellowship and the second round of Austin Film Festival. He was a quarterfinalist in the Final Draft Big Break screenplay competition, the Blue Cat screenplay competition, the Fresh Voices screenplay competition, and a finalist at the UCLA screenwriting showcase. Aidan West is a co-founder of See Horse Films alongside his partner and frequent creative collaborator, Gloria Mercer.



DEVAN SCOTT CINEMATOGRAPHER



Devan Scott has worked as a cinematographer, colourist, and director for ten years. As a cinematographer, his work has screened around the world at the Toronto International Film Festival, Locarno Film Festival, Clermont ISFF, and Busan IFF along with the Criterion Channel and Mubi. As a colourist, his clients have included Google, Film Boldly, the National Film Board, Wondershare, and Global.

As an artist on the autism spectrum, he aims to find new ways in which to better represent the sensory and emotional experiences of neurodivergent individuals through the development of visual and aural textures. He holds a BFA in Film Production from Simon Fraser University.





BRITTANY ALLEN *as* “ALEX”

Brittany Allen is an Emmy Award-winning actor, com-poser, and producer, best known for her work in the hit Amazon series *The Boys*. She has also starred in independent films such as *What Keeps You Alive*, *It Stains the Sands Red* and *Extraterrestrial*. She has made appearances on series such as *Schitt’s Creek* and *Taken*.

Originally from Canada, she now lives in LA, splitting her time between composing and acting. Her first score for *What Keeps You Alive* was released through Lakeshore Records, and she has recently completed the score for Shudder’s *Z*.

Alex (35) is the assistant to a provincial politician. She’s a workaholic who lives her life in a near- constant state of stress. Anything to distract herself from the many ways she’s compromised and settled for a life that isn’t satisfying. She’s stubborn, strong-willed, unwilling to take big risks or to try new things. People often find her “cold” or “uncaring”, especially when standing beside her happy-go-lucky boyfriend. The events of *A Safe Distance* push Alex far outside of her comfort zone and force her to question every piece of the life she’s built for herself.

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TYLER JOHNSTON *as* “MATT”

Tyler Johnston is best known for his role as Stewart on the comedy series *Letterkenny* and Danny Lubbe in *Less Than Kind*. Johnston was nominated in the Best Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series category for *Less Than Kind* at both the 1st Canadian Screen Awards and the 2nd Canadian Screen Awards. In 2014, he was also nominated in the Best Lead Actor in a Television Film or Miniseries category for *The Phantoms*. In 2016, he was nominated by the Montreal International Wreath Film Festival Awards in the Best Actor category for his role as Edward K. Wehling, Jr. in the short film *2BR02B: To Be or Naught to Be*, based on the story of the same name by Kurt Vonnegut.

Matt (25) is a bookish California hipster, a former creative writing student and current aspiring novelist. These days he lives in a vintage camper van with his girlfriend, Kianna, traveling across the West Coast without a care in the world. Matt is a self-identified feminist, a progressive who believes in legalizing drugs, sexual liberation, and dismantling the patriarchy. Matt's outward sensitivity hides his worst tendencies and his nasty temper. Matt manipulates and lies to the women in his life, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. Regardless of what labels Matt uses to describe himself, he's a perfect example of contemporary toxic masculinity.

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LEE SHORTEN

as “JOEY”

Lee Shorten is a pan Asian Australian actor/writer/director. An adoptee, Lee grew up in rural Australia. A former musician, Lee graduated Law School in 2009 and practiced law for several years before moving to Canada in 2014 to pursue a career in the arts. Lee recently starred opposite Mahershala Ali and Glenn Close in *Swan Song*, he is best known for playing Sergeant Yoshida on *The Man in the High Castle* and Walt Yoshida on *The Terror: Infamy*. Lee was nominated for a Jessie Award for Best Supporting Actor for his work as Jung in Pacific Theatre’s production of *Kim’s Convenience*.

Joey (35) is the human equivalent of a golden retriever. Always friendly, always happy, goes with the flow no matter where it takes him. He’s not career-minded and doesn’t have many aspirations besides one day getting married and starting a family. As a boyfriend, he’s low maintenance, and maybe that’s why Alex has stuck with him for all these years. But Joey doesn’t recognize the way he pushes the emotional labour of his relationship onto his partner. He doesn’t notice the dozens of ways that Alex has compromised her own life just to keep him happy.

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*Pictured left to right:
Stephanie Hsu, Andrea Bang, Maitreyi Ramakrishnan*

Further Casting...

The role of Kianna is pivotal to the film. Kianna is in her late teens, and in order to authentically convey that innocence and vulnerability, we would like to cast a younger actor. For this reason, we have decided to cast this role closer to production.

We are also committed to casting a BIPOC actor to play Kianna. We would like to do an open casting call. Our reasoning for this is that the Canadian star system can be prohibitive to BIPOC actors, and we would like to use this film as an opportunity to elevate a newcomer.

We've worked with Kris and Kara Casting to cast the other roles of the film. They are a talented and thoughtful duo, who introduced us to some amazing talent. We are confident that with their help, we will be able to find an actor who will shine as Kianna.

“KIANNA”

Kianna has all the energy and attitude that comes along with being twenty-years-old. She angers quickly, doesn't back down from an argument, and doesn't apologize easily. She'll try anything at least once, and she isn't afraid of much. But Kianna's attitude is really an armour, defending her many doubts and insecurities that have developed over her life. Matt, her older boyfriend, knows just how to twist those insecurities and manipulate Kianna. Kianna still recognizes all the things in Matt that she was attracted to in the first place, but she's beginning to resent Matt for all the little things he does to control her.

DIRECTOR'S VISION

I remember being twenty-three, huddled on the front steps of my house at two in the morning. My ex-boyfriend was drunk and he'd locked me outside during an argument. Later that night, he'd try to throw my laptop out the window while I pleaded with him to let me inside. Sometimes, you tuck pieces of yourself away. I spent years doing this. Years reshaping myself to fit inside destructive, unfulfilling relationships. After the incident with the laptop, I didn't leave until months later, but the moment I did I felt a heavy weight lift off my shoulders. I hadn't realized how much of myself I had tucked away until it was over.

My experiences are familiar to many women, and they are echoed in the stories of Alex and Kianna. Kianna is beginning her first serious relationship, and Alex is suffering the consequences of her last. Alex's struggle with an unwanted proposal and secret abortion reflects my own experiences with an abortion, and the instinct to hide it from those closest to me for fear of judgement. I see my young, impressionable self in Kianna being drawn to a much older boyfriend who manipulates her. In both women, I see my difficulty opening up, which stems from a deep-rooted lack of self-esteem. After Alex and Kianna meet in the woods, a series of traumatic events lays bare what they've both been avoiding. We see these women's transformations as they discover the ways they've been hurt without realizing it. We see the women do to keep themselves safe, and the ways that men, either consciously or not, sabotage that work.

The films I make unpack my struggle to understand how deeply I've been affected by my experiences as a woman. This process hasn't been tidy. It has been questioning and evolving, without easy answers. I am inspired by filmmakers like Lynn Ramsay and Kelly Reichardt, whose films are morally complex and strive to ask more questions than they answer. These filmmakers use simple stories to probe deeper through rich characters and striking visuals. They are provocative, and they engage with genre in a way that subverts audience expectations.



There is a quote from Kelly Reichardt about stories where people are alone in the woods. “They’re either going to kill each other or they’re going to fuck each other – One of those things is bound to happen!”. *A Safe Distance* is about the way that sexual desire and the threat of violence are often tangled together in women’s attraction to men. I’m interested in presenting women’s sexuality and bodily autonomy through a feminist lens. Alex and Kianna’s journey to find themselves in the wilderness includes new sexual exploration and discussion of problematic past sexual experiences. What I love about *A Safe Distance* is the way this film utilizes a simple premise to take its characters to unexpected, unsettling places. The deep, complicated bond that Alex and Kianna form throughout this film feels real to me, like something I have experienced in my own life.

I will use the camera to isolate our characters as they struggle to escape the woods. Static, slow-moving frames will stalk them like a wolf hunting its prey, emphasizing their vulnerability against the vast, wild landscape. Long takes will build tension, slowly and steadily honing in on the character’s emotional state. Minimal score and lush sounds grounded in realism will emphasize how foreign this world is, and how far they are from home. Focusing on the textures of the wilderness will immerse the audience in the sensation of this environment. This is a story told through two timelines, and I want the viewers to feel disoriented as they are transported from past to present as the mystery unravels.

This film is deeply personal to me. From its feminist subject matter, to the emphasis on my home, British Columbia, this is a story I have poured myself into. My passion for *A Safe Distance* has only grown since completing the proof of concept short film, and watching these complicated characters come to life. I am so excited to delve further into this world, and fully realize the film that has lived in my heart for so long.



Gloria Mercer
Director/Producer



PROMOTION & DISTRIBUTION PLAN



OVERVIEW

Proof of Concept

- We invested in the short film to demonstrate the tone, aesthetic and sense of artistry to our potential collaborators including cast, crew, partners and potential investors.
- The short film screened at the **2021 Vancouver International Film Festival**.
- We will continue to use the short to build an online presence and establish our social media following.

Distributor Partnership

We will target the following distributors to form a partnership to aid in distributing the film:

- **Vortex Media** - We have a relationship with Matt Orenstein, Vice President of Acquisitions and Strategy. We respect their slate of films and believe they would be great partners.
- **Winnipeg Film Group** - They distributed our previous short film, *Hekademia*. As they are already supporters of ours we look forward to approaching them with our next project.
- **Video Out** - They co-distributed *Hekademia* and were great partners.

Digital Marketing Campaign

- We will create evocative press materials including a trailer and poster, tailored to invoke the arthouse thriller aesthetic. We will outsource this to a professional designer and trailer specialist.
- We will create an EPK, with our cast and crew that will help tell the story of the film and its creation. We will use the EPK as a deliverable and also for social media promotion. Using this and traditional social media strategies, we will amplify the message of the film through our cast, and leverage their already existing fanbases to elevate the film each step of the way.
- As we already have a social media presence, built from our short film, we will use this to post BTS stills, festival announcements and promote our roll-out plan and announcements for the feature film. This will include casting news, start of production, BTS and more.

Film Festival Run

- We will be targeting a winter 2024 film festival premiere. Our list of target film festivals includes **Sundance Film Festival**, **Slamdance Film Festival**, and **The Berlinale**.
- After our premiere, we will target women-focused and genre-focused festivals
- We intend to have an approximately eighteen-month festival run.

Streaming Release

We chose a streaming release because we would like this film to be widely accessible. We have targeted the following streaming services:

- **CBC Gem** - Home of Canadian film. We have a relationship with the team at Gem. They are currently broadcasting our film, *Hekademia*.
- **Mubi** - Curator of bold independent cinema. They focus on international films made outside the Hollywood system, and they explicitly mention their interest in new directors.



TARGET AUDIENCE

- Self-Identified Feminists
- Fans of Arthouse Thriller Films
- Canadian Cinema Enthusiasts

Self-Identified Feminists

The #metoo movement has created a new generation of feminists interested in issues of consent, toxic masculinity, and challenging historic gender norms. These issues are the most important themes in our film.

Fans of Arthouse Thriller Films

In recent years, successful films like *The Assistant*, *Midsommar*, and *St Maud* have bridged arthouse independent cinema with the thriller genre. There is an existing audience hungry for films in this genre cross-section.

Canadian Cinema Enthusiasts

Many Canadians consume American media, but are looking for stories more relevant to their home country and their lives as Canadians. Our film tackles issues of Canadian identity and showcases the beautiful wilderness of British Columbia.

COMPARABLES

Examples of recent critically acclaimed slow-burn thrillers:

- *The Assistant* (2019) - Dir. Kitty Greene
- *Burning* (2018) - Dir. Lee Chang-dong
- *You Were Never Really Here* - Dir. Lynne Ramsay

These are three recent examples of films from directors with strong voices that take an unconventional approach to genre. These arthouse thrillers tell simple stories but interrogate important social issues through morally ambiguous characters. These examples prove that there is an audience hungry for bold new perspectives on this genre.

CAST APPEAL

Brittany Allen

Brittany Allen has a history of working in thrillers and will bring in fans of the genre. Her most high-profile role was as Popclaw in the smash-hit Amazon Original series *The Boys*. She has starred in independent genre films such as *What Keeps You Alive* and *It Stains the Sands Red*.

Tyler Johnston

Tyler Johnston has a substantial following built around his role in the highly popular Canadian series *Letterkenny*. Tyler is active on social media and enthusiastic about promoting his projects. He will be an excellent ambassador for our film.

Lee Shorten

Lee Shorten has a re-occurring role in the blockbuster Amazon Original series *The Man in the High Castle*. Last year he starred alongside Glenn Close and Mahershala Ali in *Swan Song*. Lee has a history of working in big projects with name talent and will bring a new audience to our independent film.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

We plan to approach local non-profit organizations in the hopes of partnering to raise money and awareness for survivors of sexual assault and domestic abuse. Below are select organizations that fit this mandate:

Battered Women's Support Services

WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre

WISH Drop-In Centre





PUBLIC RELATIONS

We know the value of PR and promotion, a strong PR team can drive audiences and awareness for the launch of a project, which is why we would engage Pender PR. With our already established relationship we would work alongside the team at Pender PR to announce our news through press releases from Casting, through Start of Production, Festivals, and Release.

With credits like *Blade Runner: 2049*, *High Rise*, *Kim's Convenience*, *Monkey Beach* and *Red Snow* we are confident that Pender PR's relationships and expertise will help enhance our film's release and exposure to audiences across the country.

Our public relations strategy will be tailored to our genre audience as well as a general entertainment audience and particularly targeted to our demographic. Our PR strategy will be rolled out in tandem with our social media and marketing strategy to make the most of the cast, team and experts we are bringing on board. We will work with our PR team to create a Press Kit, EPK and a streamlined rollout of the film.

In addition, we will harness the support of the alumnae network of WIDC, whose founder Carol Whiteman has expressed support for this film.

Target Press Outlets

We will target the below press outlets for promotional opportunities.

- IndieWire
- The Mary Sue
- Film Threat
- Playback
- Deadline
- The Hollywood Reporter
- Variety
- That Shelf
- Pop Horror
- Rue Morgue
- CBC Q
- Maple Popcorn Podcast
- Globe & Mail
- Vancouver Sun
- Original Cin
- In The Seats



SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Proof of Concept Short Film

•

Telefilm Pitch Video

•

Letters of Interest

•

Director Reel

