

“...an extraordinary and
pioneering film.”

ANN THOMAS, INDEPENDENT WRITER
AND PHOTOGRAPHY CURATOR

Artist Max Dean
asks, “How do we
fix ourselves?”

STILL MAX

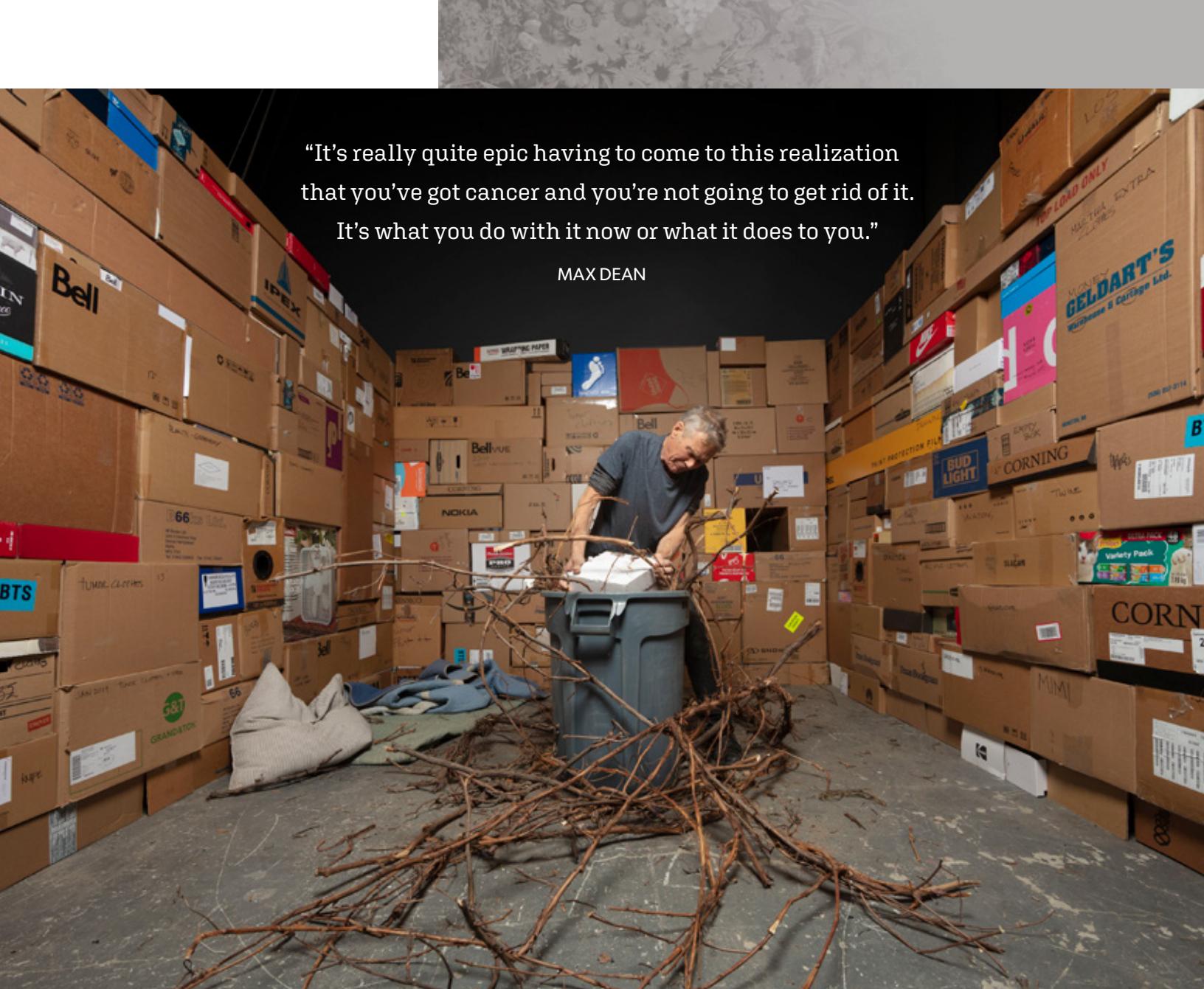
“...one of the best films on
art and life I’ve seen in a
long time.”

MICHAEL BENSON, KINETICON FILMS



DIRECTOR KATHERINE KNIGHT CINEMATOGRAPHER JOHN PRICE EDITORS ANTHONY SECK AND SABRINA BUDIMAN COMPOSER SAM SHALABI
SOUND DESIGN ELMA BELLO & DANIEL PELLERIN POST PRODUCTION 902 POST INC. PRODUCERS KATHERINE KNIGHT AND DAVID CRAIG

A SITE MEDIA PRODUCTION WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS, THE TORONTO ARTS COUNCIL,
STONECROFT FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS, YORK UNIVERSITY, TORONTO FRIENDS OF THE VISUAL ARTS.



"It's really quite epic having to come to this realization that you've got cancer and you're not going to get rid of it.

It's what you do with it now or what it does to you."

MAX DEAN

Diagnosed with prostate cancer, charismatic artist Max Dean asks, "How do we fix ourselves?" With relentless creativity Max expresses his struggle with illness artistically and for the camera. Through this turbulent period of his life, Max Dean confirms he is *Still Max*—always curious and thoughtful, always seeking to know himself. *Still Max* is an immersive cinematic portrait of persistence and resilience that packs an emotional punch.

THE ESSENTIALS

Feature film, 2021
75 minutes and 52 minutes

DIRECTOR: Katherine Knight

PRODUCER: Site Media Inc.,
Katherine Knight, David Craig

Still Max is distributed internationally by
FilmOption International:
www.filmoptioninternational.com



STILL MAX

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Short Synopsis (100 words)

Facing a diagnosis of prostate cancer, charismatic artist Max Dean asks, "How do we fix ourselves?" Embarking on a new series of artworks, Max expresses his struggle with illness creatively for the camera. The idea of fixing oneself takes on a poignant and pressing meaning as the artist's partner, Martha Fleury, is confronted with an aggressive form of ovarian cancer. Though this turbulent period of his life, Max Dean confirms he is *Still Max*—always curious and thoughtful, always seeking to know himself. *Still Max* is an immersive cinematic portrait of persistence and resilience that packs an emotional punch.

Medium Synopsis (300 words)

Charismatic artist Max Dean's desire to cinematically document his journey with prostate cancer takes on new meaning after his partner, Martha Fleury is diagnosed with aggressive ovarian cancer. His drive to express the emotional impact of cancer illuminates the core vulnerabilities of being human.

Known for *The Robotic Chair* that collapses and then reassembles itself, Max looks for new metaphors that illustrate the line crossed when cancer is diagnosed. Rescuing and 'fixing' a dozen discarded animatronic figures from a decommissioned amusement attraction provides Max with a 'care team' of silent helpers.

Working in a large studio overflowing with tools and props, Max embarks on a series of creative experiments that highlight how art and medicine are historically intertwined. Through art, Max strives to visualize both the psychological and physical impact of a cancer tumour as it multiplies and grows, hoping to chart his own course towards healing. Through a cinematic dance of interviews, actuality and staged scenes, the film follows Max's creative process as he creates a tumour, layered with the detritus of consumer culture and encapsulated in canvas only to chop it open in a dramatic conclusion.

Through art, Max strives to visualize both the psychological and physical impact of a cancer tumour as it multiplies and grows, hoping to chart his own course towards healing.

Throughout the film, Max and Martha, alone and together, describe their medical and personal experiences as they face illness. The film follows Max's shock at his initial diagnosis then recognition that Martha's aggressive cancer is more serious. The stakes are high and to cope Max's instinct is to follow what he knows best—art! Max makes the point that waiting is not stillness but an active time of creative enquiry and learning. Meanwhile, Martha asks that we recognize empathy and generosity of spirit even as her choices narrow.

As Max says, "It's nothing new for me to fall apart and put myself back together." *Still Max* is an immersive cinematic portrait of persistence and resilience that packs an emotional punch.

BELOW: HAND SEWING. PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX DEAN FROM THE SERIES OBJECT WAITING, 2011. COURTESY MAX DEAN AND STEPHEN BULGER GALLERY.



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AWARDS

Rogers Audience Award for Canadian Documentary, Hot Docs

Top Ten Audience Favorite, Hot Docs

Best Documentary, Victoria Film Festival

FESTIVALS OF NOTE

Hot Docs, Toronto International Documentary Festival - World Premiere

FIN - Atlantic Film Festival

Charlottetown Film Festival

Victoria Film Festival

Big Sky Documentary Film Festival

FIFA - The International Festival of Films on Art

FAFF - The Fine Arts Film Festival



"You feel that is your body has literally been invaded by aliens. There's this potential explosion going to happen in the body."

MAX DEAN

ABOVE: DISSECTING THOMAS EAKINS. PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX DEAN, 2020. COURTESY MAX DEAN AND STEPHEN BULGER GALLERY.

MODELED ON THE 19TH CENTURY PAINTER THOMAS EAKINS, MAX METAPHORICALLY PREPARES FOR SURGERY.

Long Synopsis (650 words)

Facing a diagnosis of prostate cancer, charismatic artist Max Dean asks, "How do we fix ourselves?" *Still Max* cinematically follows Max's attempts to answer this question through his own cancer journey.

A quick backstory of Max's early life in Vancouver sketches his artistic career and acknowledges the influence of his reclusive mother and his ongoing seizures as factors that propel his idiosyncratic and emotional approach to art.

With the example of his close friend and artist, Arnaud Maggs, who kept his cancer a secret, Max takes a different approach and highlights the importance of a support network as he works cancer while referring to the historic association of art and medicine. Max explores the benefits of cannabis, fitness, and diet. In a dramatic water fight, Max acts out a battle with cancer where neither side wins. Throughout Max reminds us that we know our bodies best and as a patient he takes responsibility for guiding the healing path.

He explores the intertwined history of art and medicine in his investigations, visiting Philadelphia and the 19th-century painter Thomas Eakins' famous medical portraits found there. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Max and Eakins expert Kathleen Foster reflect on Eakins' historical representations of 19th-century surgery in his masterpieces *The Gross Clinic* from 1875 and *The Agnew Clinic* from 1889 noting the advances in medical practice evident in fourteen-year difference between the two paintings.

When Max's partner artist Martha Fleury is diagnosed with an aggressive form of ovarian cancer Max's work and the film reach a turning point. Max externalizes Martha's threat as he begins to build a giant tumour, one that fills his massive studio space as an unavoidable menacing presence.

As Max transforms his studio with this new project, outside we hear and see the ongoing dismantling and demolition of the Port Lands area adjacent to where he lives and works. The redevelopment of Toronto's former Port Lands is the largest urban redevelopment project in North America. Once heavily industrialized, the area more recently has provided cheap space for independent artists, filmmakers and other creatives who are now threatened with displacement. This state of flux, destruction and rebuilding becomes a metaphor of uncertainty, transition and determination as the film progresses. As the world around him is flattened by the wrecking ball, Max's tumour has grown, now reaching 10 feet in diameter, constructed from discarded items of everyday life including paper, clothing, books and netting surrounded by metal fencing.

At the climax of the film, with the massive tumour shrouded in darkness, Max begins to cut it in half, peeling back the layers to expose his infected prostate at its center. Never willing to be overwhelmed by his illness, the artist affirms that he is still Max Dean; the key to fixing ourselves, he asserts, is through the creative process of knowing ourselves.

As a coda the film revisits Max's *Robotic Chair*, a generic chair that falls apart and puts itself back together. From a state of collapse, we see the *Robotic Chair* painstakingly seek out its disparate parts and struggle to pull itself upright and intact. As Max says, "It's nothing new for me to fall apart and put myself back together." It is a moment that packs an emotional punch in this immersive cinematic portrait of persistence and resilience.

Throughout Max reminds us that we know our bodies best and as a patient he takes responsibility for guiding the healing path.

Max Dean is a respected and much-loved figure in the Canadian art world. In 2014, he received the prestigious Governor General's Award in Visual Art. He is an internationally-exhibited artist whose works are in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, the AGO and others. He is the co-founder of Art-Waterfront, an activist group promoting a city plan for waterfront development that supports mixed-use and creative activity in the Toronto Port Lands.

Max Dean was born in Leeds, England in 1949, and received a B.A. in Art History from the University of British Columbia in 1971. He has had a prolific career as a performance, video and installation artist, producing work that actively questions and explores the relationships between the artist, the spectator and the work of art. He has employed a diversity of materials from traditional drawing tools to cars, found objects, bathtubs, and television monitors as well as new technologies to explore issues pertaining to the psychological and metaphorical aspects of interactivity.

Max Dean is represented by Stephen Bulger Gallery in Toronto.



ABOVE: CHAIR WITHOUT FRONT LEGS. PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX DEAN FROM THE SERIES OBJECTS WAITING, 2011. COURTESY MAX DEAN AND STEPHEN BULGER GALLERY.



"The importance of having a friend network, of having people in place, of sharing this information. Of doing it together."

MAX DEAN

MEETING THE TEAM. PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX DEAN, 2020. COURTESY MAX DEAN AND STEPHEN BULGER GALLERY.

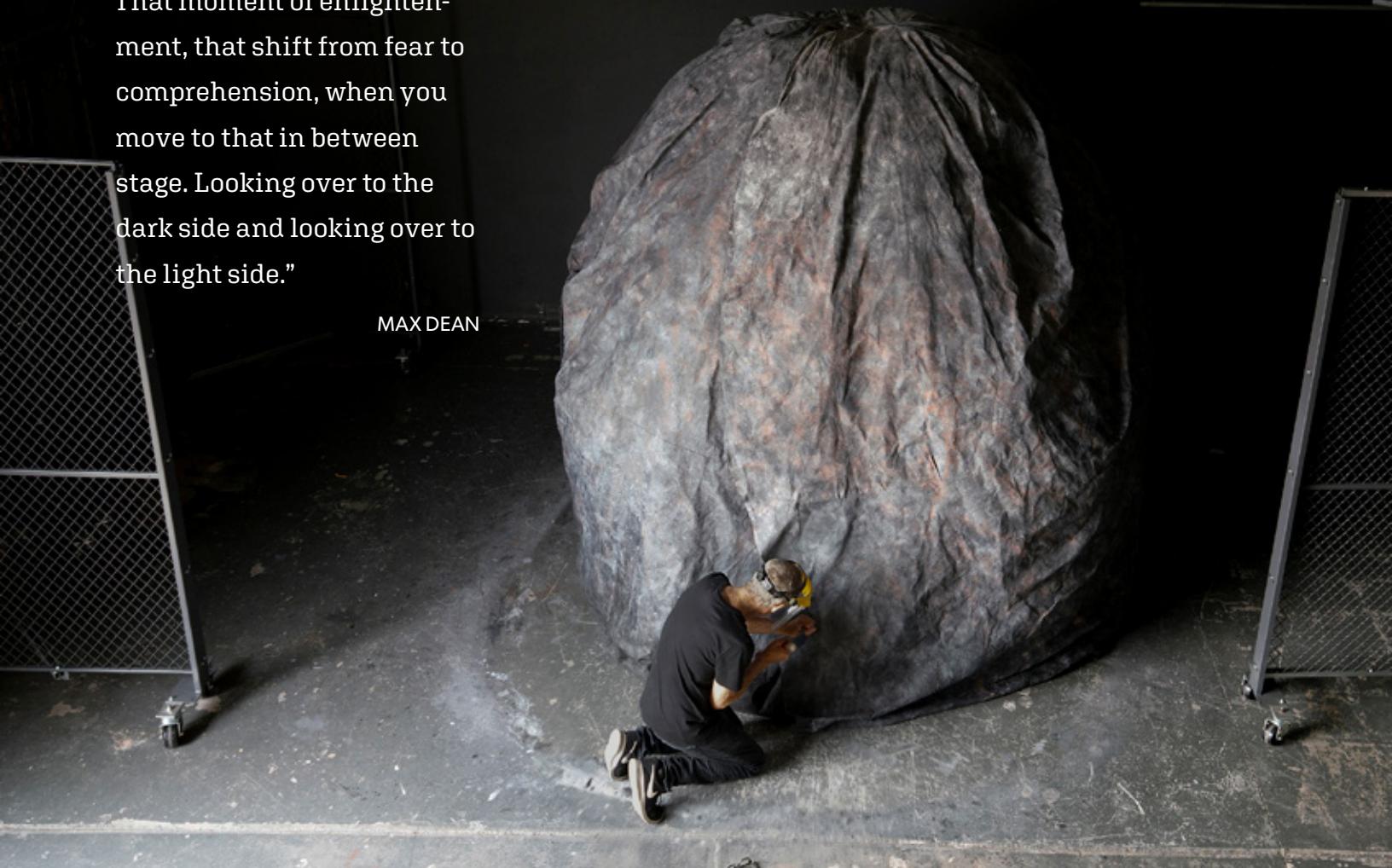
MAX SHARES HIS DIAGNOSIS OF PROSTATE CANCER WITH HIS TEAM OF MANNEQUIN HELPERS.

STILL MAX

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"That moment of enlightenment, that shift from fear to comprehension, when you move to that in between stage. Looking over to the dark side and looking over to the light side."

MAX DEAN



ABOVE: PRODUCTION STILL, 2020.

MAX CREATES A MASSIVE TUMOR TO REPRESENT HIS PROSTATE CANCER.

A vision of this film took shape in my mind when Max told me his plan to build a room sized tumour and then cut it in half. Somehow Max's idiosyncratic approach to art making and his studio in Toronto's Port Lands, reminded me of the 1966 science fiction film *The Fantastic Voyage*, where a submarine crew is shrunk to microscopic size to repair a scientist's damaged brain. Was Max's journey similarly fantastic? What obstacles would have to be overcome?

Our film began, not with the promised tumour, but with Max working out a series of photographic tableaus with his team of animatronic figures salvaged from Ontario Place. Each photograph was a response to Max's experience of prostate cancer; a jungle journey in search of a cure, a water fight, a wall of boxes that toppled when pushed. We filmed over the course of four years. We were bound up in Max's creative process.

Halfway through filming, Max's partner, artist Martha Fleury, was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. One cancer story now became two. Building the massive tumour took on new

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"What we get to see, what we get to do, and how we get to play. That's what it's all about. That's why I do it."

MAX DEAN



ABOVE: THE GROSS CLINIC. PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX DEAN, 2016.

THOMAS EAKINS' REPRESENTATIONS OF 19TH-CENTURY SURGERY INSPIRE MAX TO CREATE NEW WORKS EXPLORING THE BODY AND CANCER.



urgency for Max. The tumour began to take shape in the studio and continued to grow even as our film went into hiatus during COVID-19 lockdowns. When we returned to work several months later, the tumour was complete, and filming was finished in two days.

It was a fantastic voyage after all and like the classic movie it was a journey deep into someone's mind, in this case, that of the ever-generous Max Dean. It was a fantastic voyage for me because making *Still Max* offered a profound creative collaboration and a window to the artistic process. This is what motivates me as a filmmaker.

- KATHERINE KNIGHT

LEFT: PORTRAIT OF DR. SAMUEL D. GROSS (THE GROSS CLINIC), THOMAS EAKINS, 1875.

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART, GIFT OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION TO JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE IN 1878 AND PURCHASED BY THE PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS AND THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART IN 2007 WITH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF MORE THAN 3,600 DONORS.



IN SEARCH OF R.S.O. DETAIL, PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX DEAN, 2020.

MAX IMAGINES A JUNGLE SCENE SEARCHING FOR A CANNABIS CANCER TREATMENT.

Site Media Inc.

SITE MEDIA INC. is a creative presence in the Canadian documentary community with a passion for making high-quality films on art, culture and biography. It has produced seven award-winning films that have screened in festivals around the world. Its productions have also been broadcast by CBC, TVO, Knowledge in Canada, as well as by AVRO and SVT internationally. Principals Katherine Knight and David Craig co-founded the company in 2006.

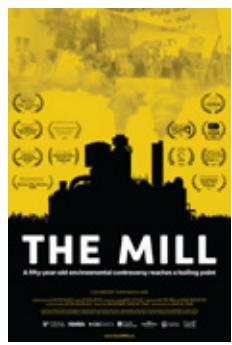
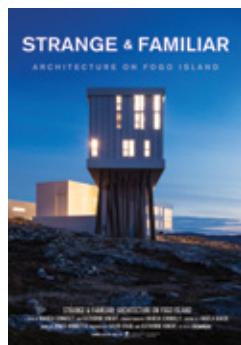
Katherine Knight Director

Knight co-founded Site Media to create films on artists and creative process in relation to experiences of place. In 2014, *Strange and Familiar: Architecture on Fogo Island* was awarded Best Canadian Documentary at Montreal's International Festival of Films on Art. *Spring & Arnaud*, a chronicle of art, love and mortality in the lives and work of Spring Hurlbut and Arnaud Maggs, was a Top Ten Audience Favorite at Hot Docs 2013. Knight is also known for her photographic work as an artist and is a recipient of the Duke and Duchess of York Prize from the Canada Council recognizing excellence in photography.

David Craig Producer

Craig is co-founder of Site Media and, with Katherine Knight, has produced all of the company's films. He has worked as the Head of the Film, Photography and Video section of the Ontario Arts Council and for Telefilm Canada. In 2019, he directed the television documentary *The Mill* for CBC, which was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for Best Documentary Program.

ALSO FROM SITE MEDIA INC.



STILL MAX

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CREW

John Price Cinematographer

Price is a Canadian filmmaker based in Toronto. His cinematographic work has screened at major festivals around the world. Active as a much sought after cinematographer on a range of documentary, dramatic and fine art installation projects. He maintains his own artistic practice of analog filmmaking, shooting with vintage motion picture cameras and hand developing and printing the material for 16mm and 35mm projector performances. Primarily interested in humanist documentary films with a social conscience, Price has extensive experience shooting in extreme climates from the Canadian Arctic to the Atacama Desert. He was a cinematographer for Site Media's film, *Kinnait: Riding Light Into The World*, directed by Annette Mangaard.

Sam Shalabi Composer

Shalabi is an Egyptian-Canadian composer and improviser living in Montreal, Québec. Beginning in the late-70s punk rock scene, his work has evolved into a fusion of experimental, modern and traditional Arabic music that incorporates shaabi, noise, classical, text, free improvisation and jazz. He has released six solo albums, five albums with the instrumental band Shalabi Effect, and four albums with *Land Of Kush* (an experimental 30-member orchestra, for which he composes). Shalabi has appeared on over 60 albums and toured Europe, North America and North Africa. He has also composed music for over 20 films in North America, Europe and the Middle East.

Anthony Von Seck Editor

Canada-based filmmaker, actor and musician Von Seck is a 30-year veteran of the Canadian filmmaking scene. He is known as a professional cinematographer, shooting music documentary and feature work around the world. He has documented high-profile artists like Drake and Ziggy Marley, and won a Canadian Juno Award for his feature directorial-debut documentary *Look at What the Light Did Now* for Canadian artist Feist. Von Seck most recently wrapped production as Cinematographer and Lead Editor on the Apple+ TV series *Long Way Up*, starring Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman. *Still Max* is his second collaboration with Site Media.

Sabrina Budiman Editor

Budiman is a Toronto-based filmmaker with a focus on editing documentaries, narratives and experimental productions. Her own work explores themes of identity, both individual and in a larger societal context. Budiman won the 2016 CineSiege award for Best Editing, as well as the Regent Park Film Festival's 2017 pitch contest. *Still Max* is her first documentary feature.

"I have to solve the problem visually"

MAX DEAN



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Credits

Director

KATHERINE KNIGHT

Cinematographer

JOHN PRICE

Editors

ANTHONY VON SECK
SABRINA BUDIMAN

Composer

SAM SHALABI

Sound Design

ELMA BELLO

Sound Mix

DANIEL PELLERIN

Additional Camera

ZACHARY FINKELSTEIN
CHRIS ROMEIKE
ANTHONY VON SECK

Philadelphia Unit

CINEMATOGRAPHER JEN SCHNEIDER
MIKE TOLAND
HELIAN ZHANG

Motion Graphics

JUSTIN WOTHERSPOON

Prostate 3D Animation

DENIZ KAYA

3D Modelling

JOE KIEZ & STEVE CORY, OBJEX UNLIMITED

Max Dean 3D Animation

JENN NORTON

Photo Retouchers

KATARINA MARINIC
ANDREW S AVERY-WHITEWAY

Post Production

902 POST INC.

Designer

RON MCDougall

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COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS, TORONTO ARTS
COUNCIL, STONECROFT FOUNDATION
FOR THE ARTS, THE MAX DEAN FILM FUND
& YORK UNIVERSITY, TORONTO FRIENDS
OF VISUAL ARTS.

Thank You

There are many people to thank on this project, but the superlative talents of the film's creative team were intrinsic to the look and feel of *Still Max* so a special thanks to Cinematographer John Price, Editors Anthony Von Seck and Sabrina Budiman, and Composer Sam Shalabi. Author Alanna Mitchell and her deeply personal memoir, *Malignant Metaphor*, dedicated to those, "dancing with cancer," guided this film from its inception. Without Max and Martha's generosity, humour and collaboration this film would not have been possible.



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