

## Project Description

**Title:** *Quicksilver Chronicles* (feature documentary, in production)

### **Logline**

In a fearless battle against conformity, the brilliant and volatile Kate Woods and her brother Kemp resettle in an abandoned California mining camp, conjuring the zeal of the ghost town's past inhabitants. While homesteading duties are eased by fervent discussions with their old friend Tommy about politics, art, and existence, a new challenge arises: facing their own ghosts.

### **Story Summary/Synopsis**

Amid the ruins of an abandoned California mercury-mining town, *Quicksilver Chronicles* follows daily lives of the outspoken and gifted writer Kate Woods, her brother Kemp, and their close friend Tommy. The three garrulous companions navigate rural isolation on quad-runners, talk astrophysics and existence, party and self-medicate, and connect through TV to the country's changing political climate. The film observes them within the context of their home in New Idria, which is at once a rugged wilderness, an environmental disaster, and a dell for lost souls.

After twenty years as a respected mariachi violinist, an accident left Kate unable to play music. Having given up this part of her identity and now coping with chronic pain, Kate is both fiercely independent and emotionally vulnerable. She is most at-home on her ghost-town ranch, where she cares for her pets and brother. As a result of dedicating much of her post-music years to environmental journalism and activism, Kate was a key figure in drawing political attention to the damage left behind by the New Idria Mining Company.\*

Kate's brother, Kemp Minor Woods, is a geologist and inventor. Originally buying land in the abandoned town to construct an experimental anti-aging bunker, he later invested in a mining claim, creating the Whimsy Mining Company to extract Benitoite, an extremely rare mineral. Struggling with severe illness, he gets by selling gems and minerals to geology students and other infrequent visitors. Having had a number of extraterrestrial encounters, and being able to predict the weather through numerology, he is a scientist with a bend towards the paranormal.

A childhood friend of the Woods, Tom ("Tommy") Chargin studied visual arts and then went on to work as a homicide squad photographer, later becoming master printer for famous portraitists such as Annie Leibovitz. His black-and-white prints are windows into key elements of the Woods' past: his intimate and turbulent history with Kate, her strength and elegance as a young woman, and her camaraderie with her brother. He is bluntly opinionated on his field, from critiquing Susan Sontag's writing to praising the mystical landscapes of photographer Minor White. Almost always with his camera in hand, Tommy guides us through the story, acting as a narrator and an on-screen reference to the filmmakers themselves.

On May 25, 2017, while the film was in production, Kate was killed in another car accident, not far from her home. Her death and absence made evident how much life and energy she had brought to New Idria. The film presents a symbolic representation of her death and its impact on the surviving characters, contrasting the atmospheres and activities before and after this tragic event. It is a portrait of the last year of her life.

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\*The town was recognized as a superfund site in 2011, although little cleanup has been done.

## **Artistic Approach**

*Quicksilver Chronicles* is an artistic portrait of a ghost town and its inhabitants. The people and places that it explores are dense with conflictual histories and sublime beauty. Our observational approach lets the details of the past emerge organically, creating surprises and mysteries in the narrative.

The film's poetic base became apparent after the loss of its main subject. As filmmakers, we were forced to pause and reconsider the meaning of our work. Kate's discussion on-camera of her seemingly far-off death took on new significance after her car accident. A question central to the narrative and the project as a whole surfaced: what does it mean to photograph the living and hold that evidence of their existence (so soon) after their death? What does one capture when photographing the remains of a once-inhabited town, to photograph the absence of life, of movement, and of structure? Parting from Barthes' notion that "the photograph tells me death in the future", we hope to use this film to discover our own and the subjects' roles in this process of conjuring ghosts from the past and ushering new ones into the future.

When shooting we use a handheld DSLR camera with no tripods or rigs. Even when the camera holds a static shot, it "breathes" in order to avoid the feeling of rigid and impersonal observation. The feeling of presence and participation is always supported and preserved for the audience. When filming, we don't attempt to startle the viewer with an active montage, but prefer to fully immerse them into the spatial dimensions of the film, living and breathing with the characters. The shooting style is similar to a languid, somewhat dreamy, wandering of the eyes, at times focusing on details and at others redirecting to a long shot of the landscape.

We prefer natural light and when filming, we strive for fully using its potential. We tend to use lenses that are close to the angle of view of the human eye (24-35mm). Tactility and intimate proximity are very important to us, and we try to achieve this by living with our subjects and gradually changing from strangers to family. We hope to transmit this closeness to our audience.

## **Project Stage and Timeline**

We have a 73-minute rough cut of the film and have begun working with a sound editor. We are working toward a final edit and will then begin with color correction. We are still seeking partnerships and possible distribution/sales through contacts made at TFI Networking and WIP screening, and are applying for additional WIF programs and finishing funds. We hope to have postproduction completed in late fall 2018, in time to apply to festivals in early 2019. We will focus on festival screenings, outreach, and sales throughout 2019.

**Teaser:** <https://vimeo.com/222922056/3b6a18c068>

## Key Creative Personnel

### **Ben Guez**, Co-Director/Producer

Ben Guez was born in 1983 in the Soviet Union and at the age of nine immigrated to Chicago. After graduating with a degree in history and Latin American studies from the University of Arizona in 2006, he resumed his documentation and research of large metropolises (Bogota, Buenos Aires, Havana, Mexico City) and isolated communities in the Americas (Sierra Madre in Mexico, Colombian/Ecuadorian Pacific, and maroon settlements of the Caribbean among others). His last two short films “The Memory of Turtles” and “Valentina” participated in numerous festivals worldwide including SFFILM and GIFF. He worked as associate producer, 2<sup>nd</sup> camera, and sound mixer for the feature documentary “Antigone” (Pedro González-Rubio, 2018). He is currently developing “Quicksilver Chronicles” as a 2018 San Francisco Film Society FilmHouse resident.

### **Aleksandra Kulak**, Co-director/ Cinematographer

Aleksandra Kulak is from Vitebsk, Belarus. In 2015, she graduated from Saint-Petersburg University Culture and Arts program for photographer-filmmakers. Since 2014 she has also been studying at the department of cinematography at the Moscow Film School. Her work as director and cinematographer includes the short films “Christmas” (co-directed with Ruslan Fedotow, 2014) and “OK Good” (documentary musical, 2015). Her award-winning medium-length documentary “Salamanca” (co-dir. Ruslan Fedotow, 2015) premiered in IDFA and was an official selection in international festivals throughout the world. She is currently working on an almanac of Russian football players and a video-art collaboration with musician Kate NV, as well as curating an art exhibition in Kiev.

### **Misha MacLaird**, Producer

Originally from Oakland California, she has worked with film festivals and production funds in the San Francisco Bay Area and Mexico, and is currently a programming consultant for the Guanajuato International Film Festival. She is developing several short and feature-length projects, including adaptations of the novels by award-winning Mexican author Yuri Herrera.

### **Pedro González-Rubio**, Executive Producer

Born in Brussels, he studied Communication in Mexico and Cinema at the London Film School. His film “Toro Negro” (co-dir. Carlos Armella, 2005) received the Horizontes Award for Best Latin American Film from the San Sebastian Film Festival, and “Alamar” (2010) received the Tiger Award in Rotterdam and the Best Film award in BAFICI. His most recent film, “Antigone”, premiered in Cinéma du Reel 2018.

### **Andrey Dergachev**, Sound Editor/Designer

Andrey Dergachev is a composer and sound supervisor whose work includes internationally acclaimed director Andrey Zvyagintsev’s “Loveless” (2017), “Leviathan” (2014), and “Elena” (2011), as well as the documentaries “City of the Sun” (2017), “Songs for Kit” (2017), and “Salamanca” (2015).