

**STRAND
RELEASING**

presents

AGGIE

A FILM BY
CATHERINE GUND

A Documentary on Agnes Gund

PRESS NOTES

*OFFICIAL SELECTION
Sundance Film Festival*

<https://aggiefilm.com/>

Country of Origin: United States
Format: DCP/1.78/Color
Sound: 5.1 Surround
Running Time: 91 minutes
Genre: Documentary
Not Rated
In English

National Press Contact:

Carly Hildebrant
Strand Releasing
Phone: 310.836.7500
carly@strandreleasing.com

LOGLINE

Aggie is a feature-length documentary that explores the nexus of art, race, and justice through the story of art collector and philanthropist Agnes “Aggie” Gund’s life.

SYNOPSIS

Aggie is a feature-length documentary that explores the nexus of art, race, and justice through the story of art collector and philanthropist Agnes “Aggie” Gund’s life. Emmy-nominated director Catherine Gund focuses on her mother’s journey to give viewers an understanding of the power of art to transform consciousness and inspire social change. Aggie is internationally recognized for her robust and prescient support of artists—particularly women and people of color—and her unwavering commitment to social justice issues. After falling in love with art as a high-school student, Aggie discovers a new way of looking at the world. The film opens with Aggie selling Roy Lichtenstein’s “Masterpiece” for \$165 million to start the Art for Justice Fund. The proceeds from one of the highest grossing artworks ever sold fuel a monumental effort to reform the American criminal justice system and end mass incarceration. The film captures Aggie as a true maverick, who demonstrates the unique role and potential of collectors and benefactors to use art to fight injustice. This is untapped terrain, and we see Aggie leading the way.

DIRECTOR’S NOTE

“When are you going to make a documentary about your mother?” Friends and even strangers have urged me for years. I always assured them, and myself, that it wouldn’t happen. But then Aggie did something surprising and I realized I could tell a bigger story to a broader world.

I grew up recording street protests to document the life I am trying to understand and hoping to re-imagine. I am an artist, activist, communicator. Agnes Gund, on the other hand, is a powerful woman of great, but quiet, conviction who lets her intuition guide her. Where I collaborate, organize, strategize, she doesn’t telegraph what she’s planning. While making this film, I learned things I didn’t know about her. I witnessed her ability to dive into a canvas and come out somewhere else, to a different plane of understanding. She allows art and activism to come together in a way that no one could have anticipated. Throughout her life, she managed to move through art to activism and not leave either thing behind. I wanted to make that visible.

Early in her adult life, she realized that being in the company of imaginative people and their transcendent power make her feel fierce and whole. She told me artworks are gifts artists give to the world. Throughout her lifetime, she has been dedicated to partnership, commission, and innovation with artists and the ideas they represent, never wavering in her commitment to support them and to cultivate a society where art and those who create it are at the center. And she has always given her art away. She has filled museums, universities, libraries, embassies, and the public square with art made by people she believes in and understands. She has expanded the imaginative capacity of these spaces. She knows people are missing from this landscape and that their voices can provide the leadership our society requires to thrive.

Art makes Aggie act—often in very political, iconoclastic ways. For decades, she has given money to organizations advancing a wide range of answers to inequity—women’s rights, environmental protection, access to education—and to countless arts organizations because of her core belief in

the transformative, democratizing power of art. But then in 2017, like alchemy, she sold her favorite painting to join the fight to end mass incarceration.

I made this film to document the conversations her act ignited about race, art, wealth, violence, and fairness. She turned her moral imperatives into social justice leadership. The film's real commitment was showing how her disruption overwhelmed cynicism and the intractability of racism and sexism. Funds from the sale support the decarceration movement that has effectively unmasked a corrupt and unjust system. She made the invisible visible by exposing a contradiction of capitalism. Her actions effectively changed the discourse around who is impacted by our broken criminal justice system and who is responsible for repairing the immense damage incarceration has caused to families, communities, and society as a whole in the United States. In concert with impacted leaders alongside many seasoned organizers, Aggie helped reshape narratives about criminality, philanthropy, and the power of art.

The film's central premise is the idea that we are *all* uniquely positioned to affect change. With her radical act, she made a gamble that she could influence others like herself. She gave permission to other wealthy white people to see that direct action is the most innovative when it invites others to be bold.

James Baldwin said, "The artistic image is not intended to represent the thing itself, but, rather, the reality of the force the thing contains." What is the force of our imagination? Of our creativity? What is unleashed by the trail we leave behind us?

So the answer to that first, persistent question finally changed. Aggie's bold move to create Art for Justice inspired me to make this film. She challenged us to imagine the world she wants to live in. She envisioned a future for her grandchildren. Through Aggie's story, I share the power of empathy and art to create ripples of change that reverberate for years to come. I made a film about the way she acts to illuminate the truth that justice doesn't yet exist. We have to create it.

-Catherine Gund

CATHERINE GUND | DIRECTOR/PRODUCER BIOGRAPHY

Founder of Aubin Pictures, Gund is an Emmy-nominated producer, director, writer, and activist. Her media work focuses on strategic and sustainable social transformation, arts and culture, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, and the environment. Gund's most recent projects include: *Dispatches from Cleveland*, a five-chapter documentary that looks at the police murder of 12-year-old Tamir Rice; and *Chavela*, a documentary about the life of the iconic Latin-American gender-bending diva, Chavela Vargas. Her past films include *America, Born to Fly, What's On Your Plate?, A Touch of Greatness, Motherland Afghanistan, Making Grace, On Hostile Ground*, and *Hallelujah! Ron Athey*, which have screened around the world in festivals, theaters, museums, and schools; on PBS the Discovery Channel, Sundance Channel, Netflix, and Amazon.

TANYA SELVARATNAM | PRODUCER BIOGRAPHY

Tanya Selvaratnam is a writer and an Emmy-nominated and Webby-winning filmmaker, who has collaborated with Planned Parenthood, Aubin Pictures, Glamour Women of the Year, and the Vision & Justice Project. She is also a board member and advisor of For Freedoms and, with Laurie Anderson and Laura Michalchyshyn, a cofounder of The Federation. She has produced projects by Gabri Christa, Lisa Cortés, Liz Garbus, Catherine Gund, Le Tigre and Laura Parnes, Tiffany Shlain, Mickalene Thomas, Lucy Walker, Carrie Mae Weems, and Jed Weintrob, among others. Her films have premiered at Sundance, Berlin, SXSW, and Tribeca; and played on HBO, IFC, PBS, and Starz, and the Sundance Channel. Selvaratnam is the author of *The Big Lie* and the forthcoming *Assume Nothing: A Memoir of INTimate Violence*, and her writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *CNN* and *McSweeney's*.

GIL SELTZER | EDITOR BIOGRAPHY

Gil Seltzer's career as an editor has spanned over 20 years. His most recent film, *TransMilitary*, recently won the coveted Audience Award at the 2018 SXSW Film Festival. He started out at CNN cutting Anderson Cooper's 360 and moved on to editing commercials at several major brands and agencies. His work has featured the likes of Spike Lee, Brooke Shields, Alicia Keys, and Beyoncé. Directors he's worked with include Bennett Miller, David Blaine, and Inez and Vinoodh. Seltzer also worked with The History Channel on the edit of *Superheroes Decoded*, a feature length-show featuring George RR Martin and Stan Lee.

JASON MORAN | COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY

Jason Moran is an American jazz pianist, composer and educator, heavily involved in multimedia art and theatrical installations. Moran recorded first with Greg Osby and debuted as a band leader with the 1999 album *Soundtrack to Human Motion*. Most recently, he has composed the score for the multi-nominated 2014 film *Selma* and the 2016 documentary *13th*. In addition to recordings under his own name, Moran has recorded with a range of other musicians including Greg Osby, Steve Coleman, Charles Lloyd, Cassandra Wilson, Joe Lovano, Christian McBride, Von Freeman, Francisco Mela, and Don Byron.

AGNES GUND | BIOGRAPHY

Agnes Gund is president emerita of the Museum of Modern Art and chair of its International Council. She is also chair of MoMA PS1. Ms. Gund joined the MoMa Board in 1976 and served as president from 1991 until 2002.

Ms. Gund is a founder and chair emerita of Studio in a School, a non-profit organization she established in 1977 in response to budget cuts that virtually eliminated arts classes from New York City public schools.

A philanthropist and collector of modern and contemporary art, Ms. Gund serves on the board of the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies, and the Morgan Library & Museum. She is co-founder and chair of the Center for Curatorial Leadership, as well as an honorary trustee of the National YoungArts Foundation, Independent Curators International, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland.

A civic leader and staunch supporter of education, environmental concerns and social justice, Ms. Gund has served on the boards of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center, the Andy Warhol Foundation, the Barnes Foundation, Chess in Schools, the Frick Collection, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, the New York City Mayor's Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission, and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, among others. In June 2017, she launched the Art for Justice Fund in partnership with the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors to support criminal justice reform in the U.S.

Ms. Gund earned a B.A. in History from Connecticut College and an M.A. in Art History from Harvard University. She holds honorary doctorates from Bowdoin College (2012), the CUNY Graduate Center (2007), and Brown University (1996), and was elected Honorary Fellow of the Royal Academy of Arts (2016). She received the National Medal of the Arts from President Clinton (1977) and the J. Paul Getty Medal (2018).

AUBIN PICTURES | ABOUT

Aubin Pictures, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization founded by Catherine Gund, with a mission to create cultural awareness and strategic, sustainable social justice through transformative, community-based production and impactful distribution of media. The work covers a range of topics including: art and culture; racial justice; LGBTQIA issues; reproductive justice; HIV/AIDS; the concept of democracy; and the radical right wing. Our goal is to educate and inspire dialogue on the issues and themes relevant to our times and to foster better understanding among communities

AUBIN PICTURES | AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

Over the years, Aubin Pictures has produced numerous award-winning and groundbreaking films including Chavela (OutFest Grand Jury and Audience Award, Frameline Audience Award, Berlinale Panorama and Teddy nomination), Dispatches From Cleveland (Official Selection of Frameline Film Festival, Cleveland International Film Festival, MIX Copenhagen Film Festival), Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity (Official Selection of the SXSW Film Festival, Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, Sheffield Doc Fest, PBS Independent Lens broadcast, Emmy nomination), What's On Your Plate? (Official Selection of the Berlin Film Festival and Seattle International Film Festival, Discovery Channel broadcast); Motherland Afghanistan (AFI Festival Official Selection; PBS broadcast); A Touch Of Greatness (Best Documentary Award, Hamptons Film Festival, Ohio Film Festival, and Denver International Film Festival; PBS Independent Lens broadcast; Emmy nomination); Making Grace (theatrical release); On Hostile Ground (Sundance Channel broadcast); and Hallelujah! Ron Athey: A Story Of Deliverance (Best Documentary Award, Chicago Underground Film Festival).

FEATURED IN THE FILM

IN CONVERSATION WITH:

Jamie Bennett
Gabriella de Ferrari
Abigail Disney
Teresita Fernández
Nicole Gallo
Thelma Golden
Paul Greengard
Tenzin Gund-Morrow
Kim Hastreiter
Alex Herzan
Maria Hinojosa
Kofi Hope-Gund
Rio Hope-Gund
Sadie Rain Hope-Gund
Dorothy Lichtenstein
Glenn Ligon
Sonia Lopez
Julie Mehretu
Rajendra Roy
Jack Shear
Xaviera Simmons
Bryan Stevenson
Darren Walker
John Waters

ALSO FEATURING:

Marina Abramović
Tunji Adeniji
Elizabeth Alexander
Yoyoi Asoma
Klaus Biesenbach
Ava DuVernay
Giancarlo Fernandez
Prentiss Haney
Lyle Ashton Harris
Rujeko Hockley
Helena Huang
Sarah Lewis
Frantz Lucius
Catherine Opie
Robert Rooks
Ann Temkin
Kara Walker

KEY CREDITS

Directed and Produced by
Produced By
Executive Producers

Catherine Gund
Tanya Selvaratnam
Sarah Arison
Geraldyn White Dreyfous
George Gund IV Family
Adam and Melony Lewis
Regina K. Scully
Jack Shear
Jon Stryker and Slobodan Randjelovic
Alice and Tom Tisch

Co-Executive Producers

Blavatnik Family Foundation
Dorothy Lichtenstein

In Association With

Susan and David Rockefeller
JustFilms / Ford Foundation
Artemis Rising Foundation
Bloomberg Philanthropies
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Advisory Table

Hilton Als
Gina Belafonte
Jamie Bennett
Elizabeth Méndez Berry
Scott Budnick
Thelma Golden
Helena Huang
Sarah Lewis
Claudia Rankine
Hank Willis Thomas
Darren Walker
Carrie Mae Weems

Editor

Gil Seltzer

Cinematographers

Catherine Gund
Rachel Lears

Composer

Karen Song

Associate Producers

Jason Moran
Polina Buchak
Arielle Knight

Archival Producer

Hannah Shepard

Original Theme Song “Into The Unknown”

Samora Pinderhughes featuring Tenzin Gund-Morrow

Aubin Pictures Website: <https://www.aubinpictures.com/>

Aubin Pictures Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/aubinpictures/>

Visit Aggie's Film Site: <https://aggiefilm.com/>

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For more information, please contact Carly Hildebrant at carly@strandreleasing.com

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