



# **I'll be your mirror**

A film by Johanna Faust

Switzerland 2019, 91 min, documentary, DCP  
OV: Swiss-German, English, Spanish with English, German or French subtitles

Produced by Frank Matter, soap factory GmbH

World premiere at the Zurich Film Festival, October 2019

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## I. SYNOPSIS

**To what degree can motherhood and self-fulfilment be reconciled? Johanna Faust would like to leave her children and her husband behind in order to pursue her artistic career. But when she gets an invitation to study art at Oxford, doubts arise. Johanna vaguely remembers painful stories that her mother told her about her grandmother. Didn't she leave her family, too? And what were the consequences? In search of an answer, Johanna and her family embark on a journey into the history of her family, which takes them from Switzerland through the USA to the Mexican desert. «I'll be your mirror» is the intimate portrait of three generations of women torn between social norms, children's needs and their own desires.**

Johanna feels increasingly lonely and unfulfilled in her day-to-day life with her partner and their three children. She longs to immerse herself in her art again. An invitation to study for a master's degree at an art school in Oxford presents the perfect opportunity. But can she really leave her children? Is a mother allowed to do this? Her partner supports her decision and would look after the children, but Johanna still has doubts. She has dark memories of her grandmother also leaving the family at a young age to devote herself to art, with dire consequences for Johanna's mother. But what did really happen back then? Johanna feels that she must first get to the bottom of her own family history before she can make a decision about art school. With her husband and children in tow, she embarks on a journey deep into the past that takes her from Switzerland, to the United States, and to the deserts of Mexico. Layer by layer, memory by memory, she unveils the stories of four generations of women, all of whom have struggled with their roles as mothers, with social norms, and with the painful, often-unresolvable conflicts that inevitably arose between their own desires and the needs of their children.

«I'll be your mirror» is an extraordinarily personal road movie about a taboo subject. With unsparing honesty and captivating imagery, the film explores how intergenerational traumata can profoundly impact our lives.

### WITH

Margaret Miinch  
Johanna Faust  
Mayka Marchesi  
Jeremias Holliger  
Linus Faust  
Gian-Andrin Faust  
Benedict Hiebel  
Anne Bell  
Michael Miinch  
Gloria Marchesi  
and many others

## II. DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I was twenty, I gave birth to my first child: it was a radical experience. I was overwhelmed by motherhood and didn't give it much thought. The father of my daughter developed multiple sclerosis. My daughter grew up half-time with her grandmother while I studied painting.

I realized very quickly that I would only survive as a mother if I was also able to develop my artistic side. For that I needed space. My mother always told me, "You can become anything you want." But this has turned out only to be a half-truth. Being born as a woman struck me as an obstacle. I felt torn in the conflict between motherhood and being an artist, and the two ways of life turned out to be incompatible. Children and art require exactly the same kind of mental energy and attention. Devoting space to art as a mother is still problematic in our society, especially if you're not making a living with it.

In my mid-thirties everyone around us had kids. I thought now I'm also ready to be a full-time mom and that this would fulfill me. I had two more sons with my new partner. We moved to Berlin. It was adventurous and inspiring. I was totally there for the kids while my partner was studying art. Although everything seemed right on the outside, a big emptiness suddenly overcame me. I was at a loss. I didn't understand why I felt so empty. Where did this feeling come from? What was going on with me? The emptiness was uncontrollable and weighed heavily on me. I knew I couldn't go on like this. The desire to fully devote myself to my artistic work was too strong.

I decided to get a Masters in Fine Art. I applied to a program in England – to a special course in social sculpture research, which only Oxford University offers worldwide. And I was actually accepted to study there. For my partner it was obvious that he would stay with the children in Berlin. But several women around us couldn't accept my plan to leave the children. The reactions were so strong that I began to wonder if something was wrong with me.

Memories of my mother welled up inside me. The idea that the emptiness I felt might have something to do with my mother was almost unbearable to me. But I already suspected that was the case. I knew that she had not grown up with her parents, but I didn't know the reason why. I knew I had to talk with her before leaving my children. But I needed something to hold on to, something that would allow me to keep my distance when dealing with my mother. I had an idea: I would take a camera with me. That might also prevent my mother from avoiding the confrontation and running away. I asked a friend who was a camerawoman to explain to me how to use the camera and its settings. But she insisted on coming with me and filming the conversations. At first, I had no idea what I might use the material for.

During the conversations I quickly found out that my grandmother, like me, was an artist who had put art ahead of her children. The consequences were terrible for my mother; it really had a deep impact on her life. I realized that my behavior seems to follow a family

pattern. Because soon I discovered that my great-grandmother also found art to be more important than her own children. For a long time I had kept a distance from my parents and other relatives, feeling that the family was irrelevant to me and my life. Now I paused and questioned myself. Where did I come from? How are my actions motivated? Am I really free in my decisions or am I following a pattern dictated by my family? I had so many questions. I wanted to know more. In the following conversations with my mother, I was able to open myself up and listen to her for the first time – also with the help of the camera.

For the time being, I decided not to go to Oxford and instead made the film as an artistic project. In addition, I decided to shoot the film together with my family, to incorporate the conflict between being a mother and being an artist into the film. I tried to realize this film as a way of being together and also to include, along with my partner and my grown-up daughter, my younger children in the adventure. This exposed the very tangible dimension of a conflict, which turned out to be both an obstacle and an opportunity.

My highly personal questions and processes lead to more general, socially relevant questions: do I want to make art that can only be realized by detaching myself from my responsibility as a mother? In observing the history of fathers, I see exactly this process. In my family, some women were artists and apparently made radical choices. At the same time, men have evaded their children's immediate needs and emotional relationships and left these to women for centuries. I understood that my private family affairs are meaningful in a way that goes beyond the purely personal.

Will we as a society be successful in overcoming the idea that women can take better care of children than men? What will it take to change how fathers see themselves? In my view it's not about switching roles – even if this can be a very helpful means – but about radically rethinking gender-based role models. As my film with my family shows, positive experiences as well as traumas are transmitted across generations. This aspect often plays a subconscious role when it comes to allocating gender roles. An important focus for me in working on my film was showing how these various aspects are intertwined.

Johanna Faust, Autumn 2019

### III. CREW

Written & directed by	Johanna Faust
Producer	Frank Matter, soap factory GmbH
Conceptual and artistic advisor	Jeremias Holliger
Cinematography	Ute Freund, Johanna Faust, Jeremias Holliger
Location sound	Ulla Kösterke, Jeremias Holliger
Editor	Rune Schweitzer
Music written by	Fred Frith
Musicians	Fred Frith Ada Gosling-Pozo Bernhard Settelmeyer Karoline Höfler
Sound editing & design	Pedro Haldemann, himex:sounddesign
Music recording & mixing	Peter Hardt, Jankowski Soundfabrik Sound
mixing	Peter von Siebenthal, Projektstudio GmbH
Video postproduction	point de vue
Color grading	Peter Guyer, Ueli Müller
Technical advisor Berlin	Sven Heussner
Assistant editor	Mayka Marchesi
Assistant editor supervision	Jean-Baptiste Perrin
Communication & sales	Loredana-Nastassja Fernandez
Subtitles	Manuela Vonwiller; Zaxaph
Graphic design	Vera Reifler
Voice-over coach	Judica Albrecht
Oeil extérieur	Luzius Heydrich

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## VIII. BIO-/FILMOGRAPHIES DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

**JOHANNA FAUST, director**



Johanna Faust was born in 1973 in Basel. She's the mother of three children. In 2001, she obtained the master of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in Basel. Afterwards she studied Color Design at the Höhere Fachschule für Farbgestaltung in Zurich. From 2014 on, she dedicated herself to filmmaking. She participated at several film workshops and master classes in Zurich, Berlin and Los Angeles. «I'll be your mirror» is her first film.

Films:

«I'll be your mirror» (2019)

## **FRANK MATTER, producer**

Frank Matter, born in 1964, first worked as a reporter for various Swiss magazines and newspapers. 1992 he got into filmmaking as an assistant director on Peter Aschwanden's «Unzucht – Ermittlungen im Fall des Pädophilen H.». A year later he moved to Brooklyn, where he has been working for many years as a director, producer, writer and reporter. After returning to Basel in 2006, he founded the film production company soap factory GmbH. His films have garnered numerous international awards.

### filmography as a producer:

«Love Stories» by Nicola Bellucci (in development); «Play with the devil» by Olivier Joliat and Matthias Willi (in post-production); «Ruäch» by Andreas Müller and Simon Guy Fässler (in post-production); «Ann's Pub» by Thabea Furrer (2021); «Arada» by Jonas Schaffter (2020); «Who's afraid of Alice Miller?» by Daniel Howald (2020); «I'll be your mirror» von Johanna Faust (2019); «Ciao Babylon» by Kurt Reinhard and Christoph Schreiber (2017); «Amalia e Giancarlo» by Kurt Reinhard and Christoph Schreiber (2017); «Grozny Blues» by Nicola Bellucci (2015); «La buena vida – The Good Life» by Jens Schanze (2015); «Thomas Hirschhorn – Gramsci Monument» by Angelo A. Lüdin (2015); «Nel giardino dei suoni» by Nicola Bellucci (2010); «Judge Not» by Robert Champi (2000)

### as a director, producer, writer:

«Eddie» (in development); «Parallel Lives» (2021); «From One Day To The Next» (2013); «The Definition of Insanity» (2004); «The Beauty Of My Island – Shooting Klaus Lutz» (1999); «Morocco» (1997); «Hannelore» (1994)



## **IX. FESTIVALS & AWARDS**

Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival, 2021

Sydney Women's International Film Festival, 2020

Zurich Film Festival, Competition Focus, 2019, Switzerland

## **X. CONTACT**

### **Production**

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