

INTRO

00:00.00

Jess Brough: Welcome to Before the Applause - an audio programme for hybrid arts festival Fringe of Colour Films. We are going to be hearing from the filmmakers and artists who are behind the films in this year's festival programme. Some of these films will make you laugh, many will challenge you, and others will be thoroughly dismantling in their ability to find their way straight to your heart. Please enjoy hearing from the people behind these remarkable films and this continuation of their stories. In this episode, we are going to hear about the film *maud.*, directed by Natasha Thembisu Ruwona.

DIALOGUE

AH: My name is Ashanti Harris, and I am the creator of the film *Black Gold*. The film starts with sentence and thinking about pressure and building pressure. And that's really what I was trying to set the sort of starting scene with. I was thinking about footage that had lots of texture, lots of depth, lots of energy to it, and something that was kind of illustrating some of the things that I'm going to sort of explore as text behind the film unravels throughout it. The first thing I did in making the film was I wrote a text, one of many texts that were exploring all of the things that I was researching in the moment. And to be honest, I was getting myself in total tumble. I was getting really stuck. I was making things really hard for myself. An earlier text that I wrote started with, it's the full moon in Virgo, and I'm swimming in the wake of its energy. And that just really kind of illustrates the place that I was at, uh, in the process of making this film. I was really sort of swimming in the wake of some energy that I couldn't even necessarily pinpoint what it was, but I could feel it. And because all I was doing was researching, I was like, there's something in this research that is just like an overwhelming energy and overwhelming pressure. And that became the beginning of this text that I wrote.

[FILM CLIP] This fossil fuel formed, um, from tiny plants and beings who once inhabited ancient seas, past souls fallen to the bottom of the ocean for centuries, living in peaceful isolation on the seabed.

AH: I first started researching oil in 2019, when Georgetown, which is the capital of Guyana, which is also the country where I was born, was twinned with Aberdeen. And at that time, in 2019, I was doing quite an intensive research project exploring games women who'd been in Scotland in the 18th and 19th centuries. And, I mean, it's a complex history to delve into. On the one hand, I was kind of falling in love with these women that I was researching and finding so much joy in knowing that they were here in this place that I am now, and going to places where I could feel their presence. But on the other hand, you're looking at the histories of Black women 200 years ago. It's like, also histories that are filled with a lot of pain, a lot of sadness, a lot of trauma, and also, like, a lot of anger can build out of that. I was driving to a place that one of these women were recorded to have been, and I heard it on the radio that Georgetown and Aberdeen were twins. And I thought, oh, weird. Most people, when I even say the country Guyana, they say, oh, you mean Ghana? Like, nobody knows. Most people don't even really know of Guyana as a country. And then, upon doing a little bit more research, discovered that four years previously, oil producing sandstone had been discovered off the coast of Georgetown. And, slowly over that time, they were moving towards extraction and production. And again, it was like a kind of insidious sort of narrative

that overlapped with my research into these guys and these women who ultimately ended up in Scotland through the entanglements of the transatlantic slave trade of colonialism. It just sort of felt like in all of the ways that I was already feeling, these narratives kind of wiggle their way into the present moment. There was a whole other layer of it with oil. I just wanted to know more. I learned all kinds of things like that the oil production was being led by ExxonMobil. I was doing a lot of research into the history of ExxonMobil, also looking at the Gaimes branch of ExxonMobil that seemed to have a base in Aberdeen. And, just all of these sort of layers and layers of complex narratives just started to build up. When I started working on this film project, I was thinking about pressure. When you've sort of dedicated time into researching these invisible histories, into Black histories, into sort of silenced narratives, there is a lot of pressure. And I think the pressure is sort of on for your own kind of dedication and commitment to these histories, to do them justice. But also this sort of pressure that you're pushing against as you're sort of realizing that you're existing as part of a long, complex, painful narrative. You have to do something with all of that. Like, you're doing all this research, and you have to make something with all of that. One evening, I was listening to a talk on Zoom. In fact, that was the full moon wake of the energy. And the therapist writer Felicia Taylor, one of the things that she said that just woke me up was, I'm supposed to know something. I'm supposed to be here telling you something, and I have nothing. I felt that absolutely drained by the intensity of what I was thinking about and what I was researching, and I felt depleted. I felt like I had nothing. It just became an anchor for me. But she said something like, in order to make a way for the reader, you have to make a way for the text to be written. You have to stop interrupting the ancestors and let them finish their sentences. I think I just kind of realised in that moment that actually this sort of pressure was this process of me interrupting the ancestors. Whereas actually, what happens if I just let that all go and let this research speak to me the way that I work in general. I've made some film work before and I've made quite a lot of soundworks. I love making soundworks. I think there's so much memory in different sounds and like, so much evoking in sounds. Wherever I go, I collect footage sometimes, but I collect a lot of sounds. I always have a Zoom recorder when I'm going on holiday, when I'm traveling, when I'm doing research. And I just try and capture as much as possible. And I already kind of knew the sounds that I wanted to maybe work with and play with some of them that I wanted to go back to and draw out from the archive. But the furnish was a little bit more difficult. I'd done some work with some dancers. We kind of developed this sort of guided movement workshop. And I was kind of capturing some of the movement that they were doing and I guess they were embodying this energy exchange in some way that it just didn't feel like it was supposed to be a film. That felt like they were going through this wonderful, quite personal process and it just didn't feel right to illustrate this text, that actually was quite personal to my experience of not interrupting the ancestors and letting them finish their sentences and sort of getting a little bit stuck. And I don't think in images, I think in sounds. Uh, on my birthday, I'd gone to this waterfall near Lags and just felt like alive. It wasn't just about the what the water, it was about everything that was there. And I've taken this lens, uh, that kind of creates a kind of like a mask, like a circle, circular mass, um, around the edges, so it's almost like you're looking into something. I liked that all of the different things that that evoked, I liked this idea of like this cave, like cave into the center of the earth, or, like looking into the barrel of an oil drum. I liked that it evoked quite a lot of different things. And also a softness. It added like a softness to the edge of the frame that also felt really pertinent to what I was trying to put across. And also, I'm a performer, so I also start dancing around I guess trying to take myself back into some of these movement workshops that I was doing with other dancers. That didn't feel right

because it felt personal to me and just trying to embody some of these sort of personal narratives and capturing the reflections of that in the water. There was something that allowed that experience to still be mine if it wasn't captured directly, but when it's captured through the water, I guess it's like there's the lens of the camera, the lens of the water. The water makes the movement so intensely oily. It held the feeling of the writing, which I really love. And then working with Tao, the editor, was a whole other layer of that. I normally do everything myself. Tao's amazing. And I guess just sort of really followed feeling and put together something that felt right and it felt really sort of body driven. It was really nice to share that process with another person and I guess to invite another body into that editing process. Yeah, that was a really, really wonderful process.

OUTRO

09:01:03

Jess Brough: Fringe of Colour Films 2023 takes place from the 23rd to the 29th June, but this audio programme will be available in perpetuity. If you are listening to this before the festival, we hope you can join us either online or in-person in Edinburgh, and if you are listening after the festival, you can stay up-to-date with our work at fringeofcolour.co.uk. This podcast was brought to you by Fringe of Colour Films, a hybrid arts festival for Black people and People of Colour. This series is presented by me Jess Brough, produced by Halina Rifai and Fringe of Colour, theme music by Xavier LaCroix and is supported by Creative Scotland. Thank you for listening.