

# Venice 2020 Women Directors: Meet Mona Fastvold – “The World to Come”

Laura Berger September 3, 2020



"The World to Come": André Chemetoff

Mona Fastvold is a New York and Oslo-based writer-director. In early 2012 Mona received a prestigious development grant from the Norwegian Film Fund followed by production support for her directorial feature debut, "The Sleepwalker," which went on to premiere at Sundance in the U.S. competition and was later distributed by IFC Films. Fastvold frequently writes for and in collaboration with other directors, most recently on the films "Mustang" and "Vox Lux."

"The World to Come" will screen at the 2020 Venice International Film Festival, which is taking place September 2-12.

**W&H: Describe the film for us in your own words.**

MF: "The World to Come" is a romance set in Upstate New York across four seasons in 1856. It chronicles the developing emotional, intellectual, and sensual connection between two neighboring farm wives: Abigail and Tallie.

Largely through Abigail's journal entries, we discover her unquestioning willingness to assume her role as dutiful spouse and the increasingly poignant gap between the intensity of feeling she allows herself in her diary versus her real-world reticence.

We follow the progression of Abigail and Tallie's growing intimacy and their devotion to one another, even as the two begin to register there is little to no precedent in their community — and therefore no prior model — for the nature of their relationship.

**W&H: What drew you to this story?**

MF: Ron Hansen and Jim Shepard's script was beautiful. Rich in historical detail, it is both a precise chronicle of farm life in the 19th century, as well as an engrossing character study of four second-generation Americans.

The characters jumped out at me and I felt compelled to tell their story.

**W&H: What do you want people to think about after they watch the film?**

MF: Were it not for characters such as these two women, a woman like myself may not have had the opportunity to tell this story or make this film. That was on my mind. Their expedition into the unknown is allegoric of the travails of women past and present.

**W&H: What was the biggest challenge in making the film?**

MF: The film was shot across two seasons — and we recreated the other

two seasons — in a very challenging location. We were battling snow, mud, rain, and wild dogs, a trademark of this part of the Romanian countryside.

Our schedule was tight and we were shooting on celluloid. Of course, I always wanted more time, more takes, more film, more everything! To quote David Lynch, "more time to get dreamy."

**W&H: How did you get your film funded? Share some insights into how you got the film made.**

MF: First I created a very detailed pitch for the film. Then I had hired my key partners — DOP, PD, composer, and the cast of the film.

The film's financial structure is a patchwork of cinephilic investors. I sat with each of them and talked everyone through the plan for the film. A lot of headway was made in Berlin. We accessed a Romanian tax credit, as well as the NY tax break on post-production. One last big piece came from Sony at the very last minute.

The process was laborious and complicated, but we had the will of a very capable production team.

**W&H: What inspired you to become a filmmaker?**

MF: I was a child actor back in Norway, where I grew up. I spent time on-set gaining an appreciation and understanding of choreography, camera, and light. Above all, I just loved movies.

**W&H: What's the best and worst advice you've received?**

MF: Aye! Best advice is probably along the lines of, "It'll get made if you don't stop making it!"

The worst advice was, "One for you, one for them."

**W&H: What advice do you have for other female directors?**

MF: I don't think female filmmakers need any unique advice. I think the folks holding the purse strings, however, could use some consultation.

**W&H: Name your favorite woman-directed film and why.**

MF: Here's a few that are relevant for "The World to Come."

"Olivia" by Jacqueline Audry. It is, of course, a landmark of lesbian representation onscreen but most of all, it is just masterfully directed.

"Troløs" by Liv Ullmann. This is a fellow Norwegian whose work inspired mine from a very young age, particularly her close-up work and the landscapes.

Everything by the late Larisa Shepitko.

**W&H: How are you adjusting to life during the COVID-19 pandemic? Are you keeping creative, and if so, how?**

MF: It's been challenging to write at times with homeschooling and a remote post-production. My partner and I are making another film this autumn and writing on a few projects as well.

**W&H: Recent protests in the U.S. and abroad have highlighted racism and anti-Black police brutality. The film industry has a long history of underrepresenting people of color onscreen and behind the scenes and reinforcing — and creating — negative stereotypes. What actions do you think need to be taken to make Hollywood and/or the doc world more inclusive?**

MF: It's urgent and essential for all industries to commit to active anti-racism. In entertainment more specifically, we have to look at what kinds of stories are being told and who gets to tell them, as well as work to dismantle marginalizing language, values, and conscious, unconscious, or semi-conscious biases.