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Sometimes, Making a Documentary Can Take Years (and Years and Years...)

Three films showing at the Tribeca Festival tell stories over several years, a challenge for the filmmakers and the subjects.

One of the magic tricks of documentaries is the ability to film somebody changing over a period of time. When it's a span of several years, audiences can get a unique psychological portrait. But these long-haul projects come with particular challenges and obstacles for the filmmakers who see them through.

These documentaries might take anywhere from a few years to more than a decade to shoot and complete, and the reasons vary. Sometimes, the goal is to track a crucial segment of a person's life in full. Or the filmmaker's approach might instead be open-ended, taking cues from the person's emotional experiences as to how much ground to cover, and when to say "the end." No matter the circumstances, every production requires the filmmaker's careful management of the relationship with the subject.

Three recent movies that follow their subjects over the course of more than a year are showing at the [Tribeca Festival](#), which runs Wednesday to June 18 in New York City: ["Apolonia, Apolonia,"](#) ["Between the Rains"](#) and ["Q."](#)

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Lea Glob's "Apolonia, Apolonia" films a young Paris painter, Apolonia Sokol, over the longest span of time — 13 years. Ms. Sokol grew up in the building that housed a theater run by her parents, which became a boisterous haven for actors and other artists. Over the course of the film, she forges a career in the tough, often sexist arenas of the art world and the academy.

Ms. Glob first made a short movie about Ms. Sokol while studying at the National Film School of Denmark in 2009, after other potential subjects turned her down. At the time, the director didn't know she would go on to make a feature about Ms. Sokol, but in the course of making that film, she recognized something special about the young painter.



Apolonia Sokol grew up in a bohemian theater community. In "Apolonia, Apolonia," Lea Glob focused on her as she navigated art school and the gallery world. Danish Documentary

“She really wants to give something in front of a camera. And I wasn’t able to let her go after that,” Ms. Glob said in a phone interview from Denmark, where she lives.



Lea Glob filming the documentary “Apolonia, Apolonia” in 2009. Glob began shooting the film that year, and wrapped in 2022. via Lea Glob



Ms. Glob continuing work on “Apolonia, Apolonia” in 2016. She eventually decided to focus the film on Ms. Sokol’s journey as an artist. via Lea Glob

The decision to film over the course of 13 years was not made from the outset. Ms. Glob and Ms. Sokol agreed on an essentially open-ended arrangement that turned into the decade-plus production, with Ms. Sokol not viewing footage while Ms. Glob was shooting, but offering input during editing. As Ms. Sokol pursued her career, Ms. Glob began to think a possible conclusion would come when Ms. Sokol had reached some milestone of success, but the (amicable) ending had more to do with Ms. Sokol wanting time to herself.

Ms. Glob recalibrated to track Ms. Sokol's development as an artist, instead of chasing events. Watching Ms. Sokol navigate art school, have her first gallery show, and travel to Los Angeles under the auspices of the art dealer Stefan Simchowitz — this was now a movie.

“I built a relationship with her camera and then with her,” said Ms. Sokol, who now teaches, in addition to painting.

“It's not family, it's not friendship. It's something else. Something stronger, I think,” she added.

Ms. Glob said she tried to check in with Ms. Sokol about once a month, but she didn't live in Paris. There were other logistical challenges, too: Ms. Glob was working on other projects, and there was variable funding for this one. At first, Ms. Glob edited footage along the way, but when that proved counterproductive, she waited till later to undertake an edit.

Ms. Glob also had to stop for at least a year when she nearly died after giving birth, a trauma she reflects upon in the film. And Ms. Sokol weathered an intense relationship with the Ukrainian activist Oksana Shachko, who took her own life in 2018. But in 2022 Ms. Glob completed the portrait of her fellow artist, calling the process “liberating”; the film won the top prize at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam after its world premiere.