

# Fleeting Beauty

Directed by Virginia Pitts  
Written by Shuchi Kothari  
Produced by Shuchi Kothari & Sarina Pearson



**A mistress of spice, a hot afternoon, and a pinch of pepper.**

New Zealand Film Festival 2004  
World Film Festival, Montreal 2004  
49<sup>th</sup> Valladolid International Film Festival 2004  
Montreal Film Festival 2004  
St. Tropez Film Festival 2004  
Kerala Film Festival 2004  
Toronto Worldwide Short Film Festival 2005  
Palm Springs International Film Festival 2005  
International Women's Film Festival, Torino 2005  
Taipei Golden Horse Festival, Taiwan 2005  
Rio de Janeiro International Short Film Festival Curta Cinema 2005  
Hofer Filmtage, Germany 2005



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# Fleeting Beauty



## **Short Synopsis (36 words)**

An Indian woman traces the spice routes of antiquity on her lover's back. She tells stories of conquest and vengeance with the scent of cinnamon, the golden stain of turmeric, and the heat of red chili.

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**Short Synopsis: (62 words)**

In the diffused light of an overcast afternoon, an Indian woman traces the spice routes of antiquity on her lover's back. She tells her story with the scent of cinnamon, the golden stain of turmeric, and the heat of red chili. Though her tale of power, conquest, and surrender is lightly brushed off by her lover, she still has the last laugh.

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## **Longer Synopsis: (120 words)**

In the pale, diffused light of an overcast afternoon, an Indian woman traces the spice routes of antiquity on her lover's back. She tells her story--not with 'objective' facts and figures, but with the scent of cinnamon, the golden stain of turmeric, and the heat of red chili. As her tale unfolds, the map increases in complexity-- Africa, India, Southeast Asia, all penetrated and plundered by Europeans in search of pepper or powdered 'gold'. An exquisite portrait develops upon her lover's flesh but despite its genesis in stories begun millennia ago, on this afternoon, in this apartment, at this time, it is merely ephemeral, easily brushed off, destroyed in just a few moments--but not before a final 'sting'!

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## **Description of Project:**

*Fleeting Beauty* is a lyrical film that provokes us to reconsider the lessons handed down in history textbooks. While it recounts the travel and enterprise of ancient voyagers in search of spices, it describes how these journeys are benchmarks of colonization. In telling this story of exploration and exploitation, *Fleeting Beauty* does something brave...it reverses the notion that the scars of history are written on a woman's body. Instead we see an Indian woman rewriting history on a white man's body. The romantic adventures of male travelers over many centuries come to an ironic finale, when the supine man howls in agony as he hobbles to the bathroom to wash the pepper off his privates.

*Fleeting Beauty* challenges the idea of the colonial male gaze by denying the man access to the woman's artwork. But the film is also a meditation on the transitory nature of creation and beauty, permanence and temporality. The woman surrenders her creation to the moment while the man desires to fix it forever.

What makes *Fleeting Beauty* appealing is that while it makes us think about our intertwined colonial histories, it also makes us laugh. Through the magic of her designs on her lover's body, our mistress of spice reveals dramatic anecdotes of power, conquest and surrender. And like beauty, power can also be fleeting--subject to change, reversal, and surprise!

Sound is an integral and evocative dimension of this film. Conjuring distant times and places along the spice routes, we use geographically specific musical variations on a central theme. Our composer, internationally renowned musician Tom Bailey, has capitalized upon the emotive and visceral links between taste and sound.

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Internationally acclaimed actress  
*Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1998), and  
*Bawandar/Sandstorm* (2000)

**Nandita Das** in *Fleeting Beauty*.

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## **Director's Statement**

When I read Shuchi Kothari's script I was immediately struck by the originality of the idea, the way it deftly reverses conventions of dominance and submission, and the potential it offered to make a film of both substance and beauty.

In making a film that speaks clearly about the 'big picture' in an intimate and sometimes magical setting, there were some fine lines for me to tread as a director- between intensity and didacticism, between the conceivable and inconceivable, between the appreciation and exploitation of cultural difference. I was extraordinarily lucky to work with Nandita Das in the main role. She absolutely understood these demands and brought a compelling mix of delicacy, intelligence and intensity to the part.

By fusing the intellectual and sensual realms, my aim was to seduce viewers into thinking about the themes explored in this film -- power, trade, and how they so often come together at great cost to humanity. These themes were made all the more relevant to the cast and crew as war raged in Iraq during our production. We all felt inspired to make something engaging and beautiful that throws light on the present by re-telling the past.

*Virginia Pitts, May 2004*



# Fleeting Beauty

## Writer's Notes

*Fleeting Beauty* was born out of my interest in the complicated relationships between food and power. A visit to the Malabar Coast in India brought some of these fraught relationships to the fore. As I meandered through Kerala's spice plantations, I saw mace and nutmeg trees, vanilla orchids, cardamom plants and pepper vines for the first time. Here, I was made to acknowledge that the spices that I cook with daily had a life before they appeared in my shiny steel spice box. Each of those spices had a story, a journey, and a secret. I discovered that it was the pursuit of pepper that brought the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and later, the Portuguese, Dutch, and the English, to India. I learnt that if the Dutch had not raised the price of pepper by five shillings a pound, the East India Company would not have existed.

Back in Auckland, I told my friends that I was writing a script about the spice trade. All I could see were maps, a body, spices, and Nandita Das as a storyteller. I wanted to write something that challenged conventional ways of seeing and listening. I wanted to write something sensual, tactile, but ephemeral. I wanted to visit versions of history that were relatively unknown. And for a change, I wanted to write it on a man's body.

*Fleeting Beauty* became a dialogue between an Indian woman and her Anglo Kiwi lover; an exchange rife with pleasure, desire, misapprehension, laughter, loss, and poetic justice.

*Shuchi Kothari, May 2004*



# Fleeting Beauty

## **Producers' Comments**

*Fleeting Beauty* truly represents an independent creative spirit. This film would not have happened without the great generosity of time and resources from film professionals, colleagues, friends, and family. When *Fleeting Beauty* was not seen as a quintessentially 'New Zealand' story by various funding bodies, we decided that we would have to find a way to fund it privately. Thankfully, many people shared our belief that immigrant stories of colonization are relevant in New Zealand. While we found raising the requisite finance challenging, (privately financed short films are an exception rather than the rule in New Zealand), we were also incredibly gratified that our commitment to this project was shared by a number of private individuals and institutions who played a crucial part in getting the film underway.

Despite the sensible adage "never write a part for someone you may never get", Shuchi threw caution to the wind, and always envisioned Nandita Das as the protagonist. In November 2002, Shuchi cold called Ms Das and was very pleased when she agreed to read the script. On the strength of the project, Ms Das agreed to fly to New Zealand for the five-day shoot.

Nandita Das was not the only person who was drawn to this project on the basis of its script. Throughout the pre-production phase, we found that time and time again, creative professionals were willing to participate in this project because they liked the story and what it stood for. We acknowledge their support.

*Shuchi Kothari & Sarina Pearson*  
*June 2004*



### **Brief Biographies:**

**Virginia Pitts (director):** Virginia's last short film, *Trust Me*, featured in competition at the Berlin (2001) and Locarno (2002) Film Festivals and was in official selection at numerous other festivals, including Valladolid and Montreal. The film sold to nine territories and continues to feature in cinema events.

After completing a foundation art course in the mid 80's, Virginia's career began in the theatre in England. She then moved into film and television via a filmmaking degree. Her graduation film, *Hassan*, screened in competition at the Melbourne Film Festival, was selected for the Edinburgh Film Festival, and it was sold for television broadcast.

As well as short films, Virginia has written and directed documentaries, television drama, and dance video. Her work has aired on television networks in Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Europe, and the U.S. Virginia also works as a lecturer at Waikato University, provides screenplay assessments for local filmmakers and, with development finance from the New Zealand Film Commission, is writing a feature film inspired by the life of New Zealand dancer, Freda Stark.

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## **Brief Biographies:**

**Shuchi Kothari (writer/producer):** Shuchi Kothari is a screenplay writer and an academic. *Fleeting Beauty* was her first foray into producing. After a Masters in Screenplay writing for motion pictures, and a PhD in International Communications from the University of Texas at Austin, Shuchi came to New Zealand to lecture in the Department of Film, Television, and Media Studies at the University of Auckland. She continues to write screenplays for the film industries in NZ, USA, and India. She is currently writing a feature *Bollywood Bride*, for the Los Angeles based Jag Mundhra Films.

**Sarina Pearson (producer):** Sarina Pearson is a producer and an academic. She became interested in film as an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Cruz, went on to study at the University of Southern California and completed her PhD in the Film, Television, and Media Studies Department at the University of Auckland, where she is currently a lecturer. For the most part, Sarina has been involved in documentary production. She has worked as an archivist and as a researcher on feature documentaries and produced television documentaries such as *A Taste of Place: Stories of Food and Longing*.

**Nomadz Unlimited Ltd:** Established in 1999, *Nomadz Unlimited* is a small production company dedicated to fostering provocative projects that resonate with the nomadic experience of the company's founders. Sarina Pearson and Shuchi Kothari produce both documentaries and narrative projects. Nomadz has two projects currently in development: a television documentary and *A Thousand Apologies: An Asian Skit-Show*.



### **Contact**

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**CAST**

Nandita Das

William Wallace

**Directed by**  
Virginia Pitts

**Written by**  
Shuchi Kothari

**Producers**  
Shuchi Kothari & Sarina Pearson

**Executive Producers**  
Shuchi Kothari  
Karla Rodgers  
Rashmi Tank

**Additional Funding**  
Silent Valley Promotions  
Moonraker Entertainment  
University of Auckland Research Council

**Director of Photography**  
Simon Raby

**Production Designer**  
Grace Mok

**Editor**  
Eric de Beus

**Music**  
Tom Bailey

**Sound Mix**  
Chris Burt

**Line Producer**  
Karla Rodgers

**1st Assistant Director**  
Jennifer Butcher

**Continuity**  
Adrienne Moyle

**Storyboard Artist**  
Dominic Hannah

**Focus Puller**  
Tim Pope

**Clapper Loader**  
Anna Stylianou

**Video Split Operator**  
Dominic Hannah

**Stills Photographer**  
Frank Sandberg

**DV Camera**  
Marc Laureano

**Gaffer**  
Marc Mateo

**Lighting Assistants**  
Kabir Singh  
Stephen Joyce

**Grip**  
Dean Maxted

**Grip Assistant**  
Pip Lovell-Smith

**Sound Recordist**  
Anthony Nevison

**Boom Operator**  
Bradley Chapman

**Costume Designer**

Anuradha Vakil

**Rangoli Artist**

Smita Upadhye

**Body Artist**

Carmel McCormick

**Make Up Artist**

Eithne Curran

**Art Department Assistants**

Angeline Loo

Roseanne Liang

**Production Assistant**

Sunil Narshai

**Auditions Co-ordinator**

Alison Booth

**Catering**

Usha Aggarwal

**Unit Manager**

Candida Keithley

**Unit Assistant**

Rebecca Kunin

**Location Manager**

Roseanne Liang

**Runners**

Arjen Stienstra

Sunil Narshai

**Visual Effects**

PRPVFX

**Visual Effects Supervisor**

George Port



**3D/Matte Artist**  
George Ritchie

**Composer**  
Nicky Farnsworth

**Assistant Editor**  
Roseanne Liang

**Post Production Intern**  
Kristi McLaren

**Edit Suite**  
Images Post

**Negative Matching**  
Upperdeck Film Services

**Film Processing & Optical Effects**  
ATLAB NZ LTD

**Telecine**  
Images Post

**Negative Scanning**  
Weta Digital

**Title Credits**  
Salt Design  
Picture Head  
Wynter Graphic Design

**Rostrum**  
Film Unit

**Camera Equipment**  
Panavision

**Grip Gear**  
Harrison & Watkins  
Filmech

**Lighting Equipment**  
Reel Lights  
Filmech

**Lighting Equipment**

Reel Lights

**Transport**

Henderson Rentals

**Video Mixer**

Kog Transmissions

**Film Stock**

Kodak

**Legals**

Alex Lee

**Insurance**

Willis

**Publicity**

Megan Baldwin

**Ms Das' Accommodation**

Heritage Hotel

**Ms Das' Catering**

Sharon Subidra (Pacific India, NZ)

**The Producers wish to thank**

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R Patel

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Bhavna Bhoola

Manjul Harilall

Sunita Ratanjee

Web Presence

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Asha Murthy (Starbucks) Cian O'Donnell Dianne Taylor  
University of Auckland Pete Williams Guy Williams

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# Fleeting Beauty



**Nandita Das & William Wallace in *Fleeting Beauty***

EPK Designed by Salt Design  
Illustrations by Yuri Erakovich  
*Fleeting Beauty* Stills by Frank Sandberg