

A FILM BY
FLORIAN HABICHT



A ROMANCE
WRITTEN ON
THE STREETS
OF NEW YORK!



LOVE STORY

MASHA YAKOVENKO

FLORIAN HABICHT

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MARIA INES MANCHEGO EDITOR PETER O'DONOGHUE SOUND DESIGN MARC CHESTERMAN MUSIC BY NINO ROTA GEORGES DELERUE ENNIO MORRICONE MARC CHESTERMAN LAJO SCHIFFRIN
WRITTEN BY FLORIAN HABICHT PETER O'DONOGHUE AND THE PEOPLE OF NEW YORK CITY ALSO STARRING FRANK HABICHT DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY FLORIAN HABICHT VISIT PICTURESFORANNA.COM
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION THE ARTS FOUNDATION OF NEW ZEALAND PICTURES FOR ANNA METROPOLIS FILMS LTD LAUGHING WHALE FILMS LIMITED





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QUICK REFERENCE FACT SHEET

Title:	Love Story
Tagline:	A romance written on the streets of New York
With:	Florian Habicht, Frank Habicht and Masha Yakovenko
Director:	Florian Habicht
Producers:	Pictures for Anna in association with The New Zealand Film Commission and the Arts Foundation of New Zealand
Director of Photography:	Maria Ines Manchego
Editor:	Peter O'Donoghue
Sound Design:	Marc Chesterman
Music:	Nino Rota, Ennio Morricone, Georges Delereu, Marc Chesterman
Written by:	Florian Habicht, Peter O'Donoghue and the people of NYC
Financed by:	Self-funded with assistance from the Arts Foundation Harriet Friedlander NYC Artist Residency and the New Zealand Film Commission.
The Shoot:	Between July and December 2010 in New York City
New Zealand Distribution:	Metropolis Film / Laughing Whale Films Ltd
Technical:	High Definition 16:9, Digital Video, Surround Stereo, 92 mins approx Screening format: DCP or HD CAM
Festival Bookings	
& International Sales:	NZ Film James Thompson james@nzfilm.co.nz
Publicity requests	Beth Brash Beth@nzfilm.co.nz
Trailer & website:	www.picturesforanna.com

AWARDS

Opening night film New Zealand International Film Festival 2011

Winner of Best Film, Best Director and Best Editor at the NZ Film & TV Awards 2011



LOVE STORY

A romantic fantasy about love, cake and New York City.

A filmmaker from New Zealand meets a beautiful Russian woman on the subway to Coney Island. He falls in love with her and convinces her to make a film of their ensuing affair.

Made in the style of a pick a path book, the filmmaker turns to the people on the street for help. The couple's love story becomes dictated by the often outrageous ideas of New York's real life personalities - their candid and colourful advice dictating whether a man possessed can ultimately find true love.

Love Story is a genuine embrace of New York and New Yorkers and the blurred line between documentary and fiction.

'Habicht's simple formula articulates the painful truth, that all love stories are part documentary and part fiction.' – Thomas Coughlan, *Salient Magazine*

LONGER SYNOPSIS

A romantic fantasy about love, cake and New York City.

Love Story follows the love affair of filmmaker Florian Habicht and a mystery Russian woman he first sights on the subway heading towards Coney Island carrying only a slice of cake perfectly balanced on a plate. Florian cannot get her out of his mind and wonders about the likelihood of seeing her again in a city the size of New York.

Eventually he tracks her down. She is Masha Yakovenko, an exquisite Russian actress living in New York, and Florian convinces her to allow him to make a film of their ensuing relationship. What happens next in this unconventional love story is literally left to the real-life denizens of New York.

Made in the style of a pick a path book, Florian turns to the people on the street for help. The couple's love story becomes dictated by the often outrageous ideas of New York's real life personalities - their candid and colourful advice dictating whether a man possessed can ultimately find true love.

Throughout the film Florian's Dad offers career and romantic advice to Florian (from New Zealand) via skype as Florian sits in his New York bathtub.

As autumn sets in, the film takes on a melancholic undertow. Florian cannot contact Masha and both the love affair and the successful completion of the film look fragile. Harsh reality jostles with hopeless fantasy, and fiction with documentary are blurred.

Florian now goes to the people of New York for ideas on how the film should end and a surprising suggestion from a passer-by provokes a beautiful, melancholic and perfect ending.



Libra from Harlem.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The inspiration

One of Florian's first observations about NYC was the number of psychics everywhere. During his first week he went to see one and, in order to test her accuracy, asked her what she did as a job. She replied; "You're good in front of the camera, but you're much better behind the camera, stay behind the camera, don't ever go in front of the camera!"

Florian set about making a film and decided to do the opposite.

Florian met a girl on the subway and knew straight away that was how his love story was going to begin. He went out one weekend and started asking people on the street for ideas of what could happen next in the love story. They came up with such great wild responses and when he watched the footage back Florian fell in love with the characters' spontaneity and felt confident he could make an entire film in this way - a love story dictated by what people on the street suggest.

Florian was also fascinated by the concept that all the characters in the film (except Florian's father) are met on camera for the first time. The conversation between Masha and Florian at Mars Bar in the film is actually their first real life conversation.

Shooting in NYC

Supported by the Arts Foundation of New Zealand, the Harriet Friedlander Residency sent Florian to New York for as long as \$80,000 would last him. Harriet Friedlander was a dedicated supporter of the arts. She also loved New York. She believed that any young artist exposed to the city would learn and grow in unimaginable ways.

Bill Gosden writes in his synopsis of *Love Story* for the 2011 International Film Festival programme; "Florian was under no obligation to do a jot of work, let alone return with the opening night movie for Auckland's 2011 Film Festival. It's hard to imagine a more shining validation of Friedlander's faith in the regenerative powers of New York City."

Love Story is as much a love story between Florian and New York City as one between himself and Masha.

"I felt like the whole city was my set and everyone on it was giving great performances and contributing ideas to the story. The film is kind of written by the people of New York, they came up with most of the raw ideas." Florian said he felt lucky, blessed, alive, free and happy living in New York. The cliché that anything can happen certainly felt true.

How it was shot

The shoot was about three month's long. It was a small team who were totally trusting and excited by the idea. Maria Ines Manchego, a Kiwi photographer and DOP living in New York, shot the drama scenes using a Canon 5D and 35mm film lenses. Florian himself shot the documentary footage on a small camcorder, never using the zoom button, but moving in and out physically. Artist Isobel Dryborough shot additional scenes.

Editor Peter O'Donoghue was in NYC for half of the shoot. He edited on location on his portable edit suite so was able to shape the story as it went along. Peter only knew the beginning premise of the film 'Florian meets a woman on the subway', he didn't know anything else and was totally in for the ride!

The star, Masha Yakovenko, decided not to view any of the rushes throughout the shoot. She worried that watching them would cause her to over-analyze her performance and become self conscious during the filming which followed.

Florian was the film's Art Director and Teresa Peters designed the film's poster. All the locations in the film are real locations and not sets. Most of the film takes place on the streets of NYC and in Florian's bath tub!

Spontaneity and keeping it fresh

Florian's pick-a-path model for filming was designed to capture the initial magic that comes from an idea and is often lost in the re-writing and development process. All the people in the film (except his father Frank) Florian meets for the first time on camera, including Masha. The film consciously tries to create a film in the 'now', literally evolving on the streets of New York.

Love Story plays with the idea of pick-a-path stories from the 1980s and 90s where the audience can influence the direction of the story but in a documentary one must try to create it in real time, and create something for the audience out of that. The audience feels involved when they watch it, like they too are participating in the story. They should be constantly wondering what is going to happen next, in the same way the production crew did!



Masha Yakovenko gets to know Florian Habicht more after he gives her a foot massage.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

It was exciting to make a film in this way. It was a bit of an adventure but not great for my insomnia levels as I had no idea where the film was going to go. But it was exciting insomnia! In real life I'm a very cautious person, but in fantasy land when making films, I love taking risks. I didn't audition Masha Yakovenko for example, I just met her, and later during the filming discovered that she has huge special talent. The way I operate best is by not intellectualising too much. I just do it and then think about it afterwards rather than censor things and over-think it - and then not do it.

Love Story was a personal challenge too. When people would give me these ideas Masha and I had to be receptive and open to where the idea took us. At one stage I thought I was going to end up marrying my psychic. There were some pretty wild suggestions from the streets - an artist from the East Village suggested I make love to my audience, so we filmed a love scene between myself and the audience. It didn't end up in the film. (And won't end up on the dvd.)

When finding characters in NYC, I realized that I'd go into this child like intuitive zone. If I was in the right head space, everything seemed to flow. If I wasn't in the right space, I could spend the whole day walking around and not talking to anyone. All the interviews I got for *Love Story* are amazing, the hard part was what *not* to put in the film.

In most documentaries you research and then interview people. This was the opposite; it was all about pushing record and meeting people. I love people. I love talking to strangers. We are all connected. Problems begin in the world when we forget that I think. When I was at high school, being a shy lad, I learned how to connect with people through the lens of my stills camera. My dad Frank Habicht is the same with his photography and can really strike a connection with his subjects through that medium.

The way in which we shot *Love Story* has not been done before to the best of my knowledge, so that felt exciting. Normally you can't make a film like this because it is too much of a risk. There was no funding initially which gave me a lot of freedom to explore. As soon as you have a budget you can't do films like this one, it's too much of a financial risk. I had the Art Foundation residency so I was lucky I had my rent and food paid for. After seeing a rough cut, the NZFC have been supportive and funded the film's post production.

The last couple of years, I have been making films how I want to make them and blurring documentary with fiction. Experimenting with that turns me on. When I was in Amsterdam I filmed on the street for a workshop as part of the Binger Filmlab. I realised the street was my home – with real things, and being spontaneous. In *Love Story* the ideas are born off the street. It also has the fantasy and constructed world that I love, and the two feed off each other.

My dream is for *Love Story* to be released in NYC and given back to the people that gave so much to me.

-Florian Habicht

BIOGRAPHIES

FLORIAN HABICHT ACTOR, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, CO-WRITER

Florian Habicht was born in Berlin in 1975 to German/Austrian parents, and immigrated with his family to New Zealand in 1982. He is the son of acclaimed sixties photographer Frank Habicht.

Florian studied film making at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland New Zealand and at the Binger Filmlab in Amsterdam.

He is responsible for some of this decade's most original New Zealand films. His debut feature *Woodenhead*, a Grimm inspired musical fairytale, became a cult hit in New Zealand, and has screened in international festivals as well as being distributed in the U.S.A. by Olive Films. The film is renowned for the innovation of recording the entire soundtrack first, (including the dialogue with different actors) before shooting the visuals for the film.

This was followed by iconic documentary *Kaikohe Demolition* which was released theatrically throughout New Zealand and won best digital feature at the New Zealand Screen Awards. It is studied in Universities and Schools throughout New Zealand, and has been screened on Television locally and internationally.

In 2008 Florian completed the hybrid documentary *Rubbings From a Live Man*, a documentary performed by and based on the life of the film's subject Warwick Broadhead. The film premiered at the New Zealand International Film Festival and screened at galleries and Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals internationally.

In July 2009 Florian unveiled *Land of the Long White Cloud*. The documentary returns to the Northland locales of *Kaikohe Demolition*, but moves on from crashing cars to a five-day fishing competition held on 90 Mile Beach. The film premiered in July 2009 in Auckland shortly before he took up the inaugural Harriet Friedlander New York Artist Residency from the *New Zealand Arts Foundation*.

Florian recently returned from his year in New York with his latest film born from his experiences there. *Love Story* opened the 2011 New Zealand International Film Festival, and won Best Feature Film, Best Director and Best Editor at the NZ Film and Television Awards that year.

"Florian is a surprising, resourceful, thoroughly independent film-maker and artist. He is a true original – at once a fantasist and a documentary-maker, a dreamer and an observer."- Gregory O'Brien, New Zealand City Gallery Wellington Curator and advisor for the *New Zealand Arts Foundation*.

FILMOGRAPHY (DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER)

Liebestraume (2000), Woodenhead (2003), Kaikohe Demolition (2004), Rubbings from a Live Man (2008), and Land of the Long White Cloud (2009) Love Story (2011)

MASHA YAKOVENKO ACTOR

Masha was born in Russia to Ukrainian parents. She describes a feeling of being an alien of sorts in both countries, never spending a school year in Ukraine nor a summer in Russia.

In 1998 Masha moved with her family to the United States and she finished high school in suburban American Midwest. She moved to New York in 2003.

Masha studies psychology, art and theatre. Masha says that acting forces you to make a choice where there is no correct one. "In some way I grew up with the idea that everything has a solution, like math, there is a goal and you just have to figure out how to get there, but that goal is definite and predetermined. I've come to regard this way of seeing as untrue and impossible because we are the ones that infuse life with meaning. I've spent the last 10 years learning to 'get out of my own way' and acting is one of the best tools. It is terrifying and it is child's play."

Masha is currently involved in a project with theatre company Waxfactory.

Masha on *Love Story*:

Masha enjoyed the interaction with Florian as actor/director and the reality of the interactions in *Love Story*.

When asked to describe how it was to be in a film written by people on the street, she answered; "It affected me through Florian, I just see him as a flower with a multitude of petals and they are all different colours. I loved it."



FRANK HABICHT ACTOR AND PRIMARY BATHTUB SKYPE ADVISOR

Frank is Florian's Father, brother and best friend. Frank is Florian's filmmaking 'coach' in Love Story. Frank was super excited about his son making a film in NYC, and would regularly check the weather in NYC from his home in the Bay of Islands during the shoot and offer advice and ideas via skype.

Frank taught Florian b&w photography and has acted in his sons films Liebestraume, Rubbings from a Live Man, and played Santa in Kaikohe Demolition. (Not the Santa the kids attacked one year...)



'Part of the scene' photo by Frank Habicht taken in London during the sixties.

Born in Hamburg in 1938, Habicht began his career as a photographer in 1960 attending the Hamburg School of Photography, from which he graduated in 1962.

He quickly became established as a freelance photographer and writer in Europe submitting works to be published in magazines including *Camera Magazine*, *Spiegelreflex Praxis*, *Twen*, *Jasmin*, *Esquire*, *Hoer Zu*, *Die Welt*, *Sunday Times* (UK) and *The Guardian*.

Habicht also gained employment working as a stills photographer for film directors, Bryan Forbes, Roman Polanski and Jules Dassin (1965-68), as in-house photographer for the *Playboy Club* in London (1970) and as a freelance photographer for *Top of the Pops* (1969). These encounters provided Habicht direct access to international pop idols and film stars who became subjects of his most celebrated photographs and included Mick Jagger, the Rolling Stones, actor/director duo Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg, actors Vanessa Redgrave, Marty Feldman and Christopher Lee, director Roman Polanski and photographer Lord Lichfield.

Habicht's images capture the uninhibited spirit of the 1960s offering a glimpse into the heady period that still manages to arrest the imagination some forty years later. His book *Young London, Permissive Paradise*, a social document on London's youth, was published in the late sixties. Another photographic book, *In the Sixties* (Tandem Press & Axis Publishing London 1997), juxtaposed those who achieved international fame with the unnamed people not recorded in history books. Florian Habicht's new film project *Permissive Paradise* is inspired by Frank's experiences as a photographer in London during the sixties.

In 1981 Frank left a successful international career to reside in New Zealand's Bay of Islands, drawn to this unique country for its beauty and tranquillity. He now spends much of his time devoted to creating images that celebrate the landscape and community in and around the Bay of Islands where he lives. His two books, *Bay of Islands Where the Sunday Grass is Greener* an acclaimed satirical pictorial on New Zealand's Bay of Islands with Kiki and Helme Heine and his recent *Bay of Islands A Paradise Found with Bob Molloy* (Totara Press, Paihia 1995) capture the fun and friendship to be found in this stunning part of New Zealand.

In October 2004 Frank exhibited his *Karma Sixties* collection at the Colette Gallery in Paris. In July 2007 Random House published Frank & son Florian Habicht's photographic book *I DO*.

Frank's Auckland exhibition in June 2007 *Hightide and Green Grass* attracted nationwide critical acclaim and New Zealand's current affairs TV show *Sunday* paid homage to his work of this immortal decade.

A party in the spirit of the 'The Sixties' was held in Moscow on April 18, 2008 at the exclusive Arterium Gallery to celebrate the opening of Habicht's exhibition. Paris Hilton was one of the celebrity guests. Funds were collected by the charitable foundation *Peace Planet* in aid of orphaned children.

www.frankhabicht.com

MARÍA INES MANCHEGO DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY (DRAMA)

Aucklander Maria Ines Manchego is a photographer, cinematographer and director living in hipster ground zero—Brooklyn, New York's Williamsburg.

She studied Film and Philosophy at Auckland University and then went on to complete a one year certificate programme in General Studies at the International Centre of Photography in New York City.

Maria Ines has worked in the New Zealand film industry for several years. She assisted Vincent Ward on *River Queen* and Armagan Ballantyne on *The Strength of Water*. She has worked in a film production company in Sydney and on small independent films in Los Angeles and New York such as *Breaking Upwards*.

Maria Ines now works as a director at *The Colony*, a New York based collective made up of directors, designers, animators and artists set up to pool resources and create advertising. To date she has made commercials for Vietnam Airlines, Hangar One Vodka and HBO.

She is part of and exhibited with *BADCAT Collective* (Brooklyn Association for the development of Camera based art theory). Her video installation *Doorsien Cast* was exhibited at the International Center of Photography and her solo photography project *Civic Haze* was selected in 2010 (when it was still in development) for the *Summer Staged Competition*, a group show in Chelsea NYC.

Maria Ines is currently working on a music video and short film script. *Love Story* is the first feature she has shot.

Maria Ines' website

<http://www.mariainesmanchego.com/>

Maria Ines on *Love Story*:

Working on *Love story* was a different, interesting and at times demanding experience. When we shot it was a very hot summer in New York, most of the time it was just the three of us moving around the city with a melting cake.

We shot this unscripted and as guerrilla style as you can get from often attaching the microphone with sticky tape to my shoulder mount, relying on the interaction and unexpected results you get by shooting in a city full of characters who aren't camera shy!

PETER O'DONOGHUE EDITOR

Peter O'Donoghue is a digital filmmaker and freelance editor based in Sydney and working in Australia and New Zealand.

After collaborating informally on Florian's earlier films from the sidelines, Peter first became part of the 'official' team as editor on the 2009 documentary *Land of the Long White Cloud*. This cemented the working relationship which was taken up a notch with Peter's role as co-writer and editor of *Love Story*, written, shot and edited (not always in that order) from mid 2010 to mid 2011. Peter takes great joy in wondering where this creative partnership and bending of the rules will lead next.

In addition to jamming ideas for what's next with Florian and cutting some documentaries for Australian television, Peter is also currently directing his own long form documentary *Park Life*, set in the parks of Shanghai and Beijing and produced in association with Film Camp, Sarah Wishart and the South Australian Film Corporation. *Park Life* finished shooting late 2011 and will be ready for release mid 2012. Peter has made two short films, *Hear No Evil* which screened in NZ and international festivals in 2008/09, and *Super Man* starring Matthew Sunderland and Niamh Peren which will be released in 2012.

Peter's website <http://www.peterofilm.com/>



Film Festival World Premiere after party... Pictured from left:

Marc Chesterman, Bob Van Der Wal, Florian Habicht, Peter O'Donoghue, Maria Ines Manchego & Jon Baxter.

MARC CHESTERMAN: SOUND DESIGNER

Marc has worked with Florian as either composer or sound designer on *Love Story*, *Land of the Long White Cloud*, *Rubbings From a Live Man*, *Kaikohe Demolition* and *Woodenhead*. They first worked together on the 1997 16mm short film *Liebestraume*. These projects have involved a large amount of collaboration and Marc has also been responsible for locating much of the source music for these films.

Other film projects include composition for *Eating Sausage* by Zia Mandviwalla and sound mixing for Michelle Savill's *Martin & Snakes*. Marc created complimentary environmental soundscapes and music for *Animalia*, an interactive video installation created by Angela Main and Caroline McCaw.

Marc's career started as the drummer for alternative rock trio *Lushburger* (1990-91). He went on to perform & release CDs with experimental rock band *Sudersuk* (1994-98), performance group *Sone* (1996), and with the improvising trio *Audible 3* (1999-2007).

Marc's film soundtrack work developed out of sound design work in theatre for numerous companies including Auckland Theatre Company, Massive and Pandemonium. He toured internationally with Mau Dance Theatre attending Venice Biennale 2003, Holland Festival 2005, LIFT Festival London 2007 and Mostly Mozart Festival New York 2008.

Marc on *Love Story*:

The film itself contains a story about the making of a film so we thought why not use 'film music'? Ennio Morricone and Nino Rota are two of our favourite and most inspiring film composers as well as some of the biggest names in the world of film composing.

It's a simple equation; you've got to love the music that goes into the film, be it composed or licensed (and that box is certainly ticked) then of course you've got to marry the sound with the pictures and the narrative feeling.

There's quite a swift pace to this film so the music compliments that with a jazz feel that is predominantly about momentum and forward progression, pushing against time. The tracks are not overly emotive, they don't tell you to feel a particular way – they're more about momentum and providing energy and drive.

There's also a fine line between reality and fantasy in *Love Story*. The music and sound both play a role in identifying those scenes and spaces to the audience. Early edits of the film saw all sound completely disappearing during fantasy scenes. Now what we've ended up with is a very slight layer of sound in the distance. I love this line between *just* being able to make out sound... and silence.

FRONT CREDITS

pictures for anna

presents

a florian habicht film

in association with the
new zealand film commission

and the arts foundation of new zealand

laughing whale films limited

& metropolis film limited

LOVE STORY

starring masha yakovenko, florian habicht, frank habicht and the people of nyc

BACK CREDITS

Love Story dedicated to harriet friedlander **director of photography** maria ines manchego **sound design** marc chesterman **edited by** peter o'donoghue **additional photography** isobel dryburgh bob van der wal **cast (in order of appearance)** masha yakovenko florian habicht frank habicht earl kallemein jena kallemein richie wang jane martinez kera nerusskaya nicolas page kevin goscina jasen hunt miriam lehrer lucille bignom teresa peters chelsea ebin jackie vimo chow il park nicolas, eliza & victoria isaac quinerly emmanuel howard katie brown danielle dimitre – psychic jokino drayton hank penza judith pisano joe pisano raymond bell 'libra' irveana parker robert galindo jana k weaver erin leland and alex sotomayor as michael **film poster** teresa peters **flame artist** jon baxter, perceptual engineering **legal** matt emery **mastering** olivier wardecki, next technology **music by** lalo schiffrin marc chesterman ennio morricone georges delereu piero piccioni carlo savina killer ray & nino rota **creative consultants** teresa peters maria ines manchego **publicity** trigger publicity **viral publicity** prue clark **dialogue editor** emile de la rey **re-recording mixer** phil burton **mixed at** underground sound **music licensing supervision** jonathan hughes franklin rd **directed & produced by** florian habicht **written by** florian habicht peter o'donoghue **thank you !** gregory o'brien simon bowden angela busby bryna o'brien jason, daniel, michael, & harriet friedlander miriam westercappel bixio music group libra katie brown **kia ora !** marilyn milgrom christopher pryor armagan ballantyne jonathan hughes cam ballantyne gavin coad alleluja cafe hank, brian & the regulars at mars bar & the people of new york **grazie !** peter wareing keith ballantyne jana weaver nicholas butler kate et Olivier arne bro binger filmlab amsterdam carmen kabel **merci !** christen connell greta & Hannah vanessa rhodes rosa & hazel mina meister prue clark prue cunningham bentley dean katherine plante stark white gallery the arts foundation of new zealand **danke !** bill gosden cushla dillon gordon adam james wallace graeme mason james Thompson jasmine mc cweeney naomi wallwork sarah allerby the new zealand film commission **thank you !** teresa maria maria ines masha peter stichbury steve abel james hewison obscura oddities frankie, christine, steinach oma, marlena irmgret & sebastian **the end** some of the film characters and events in this film are entirely fictional and any similarity to any person living or dead is purely coincidental. the documentary footage within the film does depict living persons however their depiction is not intended to cause any offence or harm to those persons or their relatives. this film including its soundtrack is protected by the copyright laws of new zealand and all other applicable laws worldwide. any unauthorised reproduction, distribution or exhibition of this material of any purpose whatsoever is a breach of copyright and will result in civil and criminal prosecution. copyright **laughing whale films limited 2011** visit picturesforanna.com.



Florian Habicht, Maria Ines Manchego, Peter O'Donoghue & Marc Chesterman. World Premiere, Civic Theatre, Auckland, New Zealand 14 July 2011. The film was completed two days before the premiere! Pictured, Florian & his 'flatmates' from the film. Florian called Masha in NYC on the stage after the credits rolled. Someone from the audience shouted 'Tell her you love her!'

MASHA YAKOVENKO LOVE STORY

Love Story star Masha Yakovenko talks to Scott Kara, New Zealand Herald

about playing the muse to Florian Habicht in his oddball romantic comedy.

What must she have thought when a strange man from New Zealand asked her to be his muse in his funny film about finding love in New York City?

Well, Russian-born actress Masha Yakovenko ran with it.

"It was just an interesting project," she laughs on the phone from New York. "Something that I really liked was the reality of the shoot and the acting, because it really is an exploration of life in a way. And with every take there was a different way you could go, a different possibility."

That's because the plot twists of Love Story, the fifth feature by Kiwi director Florian Habicht, were determined by the people of New York. He made the film while in the Big Apple in 2009/10 on the Art's Foundation's Harriet Friedlander Residency and, following a case of "writer's block", he hit the streets to ask ordinary people what they thought his film should be about. They included everyone from his local shopkeeper and a group of friends dining at a restaurant, to a stockbroker and street-dwellers.

As with Habicht, when you talk to Yakovenko there is a certain amount of mystery surrounding what she says about the film - and especially what she reveals about their relationship. Is it real love? Or are they just acting? And really, does it matter, because Love Story is a great little film whichever way you look at it.

It is ambiguous how she and Habicht first met. She claims they met on the first day of the shoot; then again - and this is for all you romantics - perhaps they did meet on the subway and fell in love (well, at least Habicht did) like they do in the film.

What is clear is that they both put themselves on the line for their roles - and reveal all on both an emotional and physical level.

"What does that look like on screen?" she laughs, referring to the love scenes. "But you know," she continues more seriously, "when actors are in a play or something, there are emotions that come up because of what you are doing. And it becomes very difficult to separate what you are doing from reality, especially in a situation like this when there is a lot of exploring who you are."

Yakovenko, who moved to the US with her Ukrainian parents in 1998, is studying psychology, art and theatre. She hadn't had much acting experience previously and says Love Story's impromptu script suited her.

She has fond memories of the shoot, best of all, being led, blindfolded, by Habicht through Chinatown.

"I think that sort of thing should happen more often. It was quite terrifying actually. But it was also a really beautiful experience."

By Scott Kara

DIRECTING LOVE NEW ZEALAND TAKE MAGAZINE

BY JANETTE HOWE

Florian Habicht has forged a career as one of New Zealand's most innovative independent filmmakers. Born in Berlin and brought up in New Zealand, it is fitting that his work weaves between worlds imagined and real.

'Cinema is such an illusion. I love to collect real people and throw them into that fabricated world. I also love to celebrate people's idiosyncrasies. I love filmmaking. It takes up most of my life. My life and the filmmaking worlds always become the same thing in one way or another. *Love Story* is no exception. I love working with people I'm close to, and making connections with complete strangers. Both make me feel alive. Most of the characters in *Love Story* I met on camera for the first time. Even the initial conversation Masha and I have (at Mars Bar) in the film, was our first conversation in real life!' – Florian Habicht

Habicht's path as an independent filmmaker started at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland, where experimentation with form and pushing boundaries was expected. Of art school and later of his experience at Amsterdam's Binger Filmlab, Habicht has said that 'both courses let me experiment, rather than be told "how to make films". I think it's nicer to learn the rules later.'

His latest work *Love Story* continues the themes and style that he first explored in this environment.

'At Elam [Academy of Fine Arts] Habicht began making "oddball, slightly surreal love stories" using his classmates (and sometimes his father) as actors and collaborators. The most ambitious of these was the 75-minute feature *Leibestraume – The Absurd Dreams of Killer Ray* (2000), about cult performer 'Killer Ray' Edmundson. Like a number of Habicht's films to come — notably *Rubbings from a Live Man* — the film mixes drama and documentary, as it spins sometimes fantastical tales from the life of the genre-crossing jazz musician (who died in 2005).' – NZ On Screen

'*Liebestraume* was a film about NZ cult performer Killer Ray, and his life – not as it happened but how he remembered it.' – Habicht

Habicht's first film made outside of art school was *Woodenhead*, described as a Grimm musical fairytale that takes a Hansel-and-Gretel-like journey through New Zealand's towns, bush and forests. Habicht pre-recorded *Woodenhead*'s entire soundtrack (all voices, music and location sounds) and then in a crazed reversal of accepted practice filmed the visuals after. (This technique was inspired by two Rastafarian Angels – 80's pop duo Milli Vanilli – that visited the director in one of his dreams.

While this technique helped the tight \$30,000 budget it also provided a principle around which to shape the film. 'A truly unsettling, visually inventive, stylistically thrilling and quite marvellous diamond in the rough.' -James Hewison, Melbourne International Film Festival 2003.

Hernán Migoya of Sitges International Film Festival (Spain) describes *Woodenhead* as 'an emotional journey into a disturbing landscape – the landscape of the human spirit.' It is the strength of the human spirit that seems to reverberate in Habicht's works, whether documentary, narrative or a blend of both. His celebrated documentaries *Kaikohe Demolition*

and *Land of the Long White Cloud* both document small rural New Zealand Northland communities where the local characters take centre stage. Habicht has an ability to strike up easy relationships with the most eccentric characters, giving them centre stage and allowing them to reveal themselves and their philosophies with the candour of the unscripted.

'Habicht's love for the city and love for people is what shines through in this ebullient film – it is this same love that disarms his subjects, allowing the people of New York City to open up on screen in beautiful new ways. And in the cinema too, the guffaws, random applause, and belly laughs indicate that we too are being disarmed by this man with a movie camera, and that we too are falling love.' – Sam Trubridge, Flicks.co.nz

Love Story is described by Habicht as 'consciously trying to create a film in the now'. Just like the romance it portrays, it captures the magic and spontaneity of first encounters with him asking advice from complete strangers. In one memorable meeting Habicht hijacks a stockbroker's taxi. He bounds into the cab with the young woman who is at first indignant but then forthcoming with love advice for the filmmaker "Slow and steady wins the race... slow and steady wins the race."

As with any documentary, the story was discovered in the edit: 'I filmed twice as many people that are in the film, and most clips used in *Love Story* are the beginnings of our meetings. We had to use the footage that propelled the story along, so lots of gold was sadly not used. Lots of the street characters actually made eye contact with me first. Often it was just a smile from them that prompted me to approach them with the camera rolling. So we cast each other... no auditions for this film!' – Habicht

Editor (and co-writer) Peter O'Donoghue was an early collaborator on the project, flying to New York with his portable edit suite to join Habicht on the premise of a story that would evolve on the streets of New York.

The film itself starts with an enticing encounter on a New York subway. A gorgeous girl (Masha – Masha Yakovenko) balancing a piece of perfectly balanced cake on a plate is a magnet to a tall man in pink pants Florian Habicht. Like all good romantic comedies they are separated, and with no phone number to connect them, it seems that fate must intervene.

Taking advice from his father Frank Habicht via bathtub Skype, Florian sets out to meet his muse again using posters and following the pearls of wisdom proffered by the people on the street he meets in classic documentary segments. 'What does it mean when a woman is holding a piece of cake?' Florian asks one New Yorker waiting at a bus stop. 'It means she wants your body,' he replies. 'If a woman doesn't hold a cake, then she don't want your body, you understand?' When Florian and Masha find each other, the filmmaker again turns to the streets and asks people 'What happens next?' One of the first suggestions is to give her a foot massage, and that's exactly what happens next in the story.

'Habicht and his Russian muse Masha are making a film – or are they falling in love? The set pieces that emerge from this tender interrogation of New Yorkers' love lives are deranged and wonderful: impotence, a car crash, hermaphroditism, all intrude as the story is invented – dictated by the kind of strangers only New York can provide, saying the first thing that comes into their heads. Habicht and Yakovenko's rendering of this saga is exquisite, somehow conjuring a living, breathing relationship from these *vox pop* directions.' - Henry Feltham, Critic Magazine September 2011

Habicht likes to tell that it all started when a New York psychic told him that he shouldn't step in front of a camera:

'One of my first impressions of NY was psychics everywhere – and apparently immigrants get a really good tax break if they are psychics! On my first week I saw one and what she told me was incredibly true, about my life in NZ – so I thought I have to ask something really simple to check her accuracy, so I asked 'what's my job?' so she said 'you're good in front of the camera, but you're much better behind the camera, stay behind the camera, don't ever go in front of the camera.' ...so that inspired me to make a film where I'm in front of the camera.'

His whimsy takes full flight as he plays the unlikely romantic lead, a Quixotic character with a Kiwi sensibility that viewers of *Flight of the Conchords* will be familiar with. New York is seen with a fresh pair of child-like eyes and the people on the sidewalks become characters, revealing their own love stories as they help Habicht uncover his. It is never clear where the imagined begins and the real is left behind, but that is true of love, filmmaking, and certainly of Habicht's vision.

'His simple formula articulates the painful truth, that all love stories are part documentary and part fiction.' – [Thomas Coughlan](#), Salient Magazine 12 Sep 2011.

While we can be beguiled by the story and the protagonists, the undercurrents of *Love Story* remind us that love is not always so easy to define, but that is the fascination of both real life and the journey on screen.

'The film's charm has a slightly unsettling side too: at one point we sense that Masha and Florian may have different perceptions of what's happening - and our own may be one of theirs, or another perspective altogether. It's an entirely intentional bending of the rules and part of what you might call a dark playfulness that has distinguished everything this unique and original film-maker has done.' – Peter Calder NZ Herald

CRITIC MAGAZINE LOVE STORY REVIEW BY HENRY FELTHAM

There's a point in Florian Habicht's **Love Story** where he faces the camera and confesses 'I fall in love so often.' Not quite explaining, not quite apologising. 'It happens all the time,' he sighs. The fatalism is no surprise. He has handed responsibility for his film's story over to a cavalcade of punks, drunks, grade-schoolers, pensioners, teens, psychics and drag queens. His hapless, ever-shifting love is palpable, as he records their answers to the question 'What should happen next?'

Habicht and his Russian muse Masha Yakavenko are making a film – or are they falling in love? The set pieces that emerge from his tender interrogation of New Yorkers' love lives are deranged and wonderful: impotence, a car crash, hermaphroditism, all intrude as the story is invented – dictated by the kind of strangers only New York can provide, saying the first thing that comes into their heads. Habicht and Yakavenko's rendering of this saga is exquisite, somehow conjuring a living, breathing relationship from these *vox pop* directions.

It comes from all sides. Broiling in the N.Y. heat, Habicht sits in his bath, ringing random numbers for advice. A Texan advises him to pursue his infatuation, while a few minutes later, the tarot reader tells him to keep his defences up. A stockbroker orders him to 'play it shy'. What actually happens? The guerrilla documentary style of *Kaikohe Demolition* and *Rubbings From a Live Man* meets the maximalist fiction of *Woodenhead* and spawns a not-quite-documentary that feels bizarrely fresh.

I realised I had been holding my breath for a young New Zealander to make a film this clever. Shot entirely in NY – by a German-born Kiwi – it was the standout entry from New Zealand in the 2011 International Film Festival, and a gloriously successful experiment. Having managed to license a score by the likes of Ennio Morricone and Nino Rota, the soundtrack is sumptuous and potent, imparting a touch of emotional velvet to the film's more erratic seams.

Love Story wears its logic lightly, always returning to its spontaneous premise as it winds itself into a charmingly neurotic confusion that seems to speak for the plight of lovers everywhere. A peon to the people on New York's streets, an absurdist rom-com, a flawless comic subversion.

YOURS AFFECTIONALLY LOVE STORY

THE LUMIÈRE READER (NZ)

NEW ZEALAND artist/filmmaker Florian Habicht has become a regular fixture on the *New Zealand International Film Festival* circuit, and for good reason: he consistently produces unique and striking works of idiomatic cinema that demand attention. If 2008's *Rubbings from a Live Man* (a cinematic portrait of colourful New Zealand thespian Warwick Broadhead) was a documentary steeped in fantasy, then his latest outing, *Love Story*, is a fictional feature t-boned by the documentary truck. So effectively has Habicht mashed fact with fiction, reality with fantasy, that he has virtually erased the lines of traditional cinema. Despite this (agreeable) confusion of affairs, of one thing I am sure: true to its title, *Love Story* is well and truly overflowing with love.

The construction of this film is a story in itself, and becomes a vital part of the completed feature. Coming to the end of his (inaugural) Harriet Friedlander Residency in New York City, Habicht stumbled upon a young Russian woman, Masha, carrying a piece of cake on the subway, and subsequently convinced her to take part in his 'love story' film project. Now, what to do about plot for this film-within-a-film? Brainwave! Seek help from the people of New York. Armed with a handheld camcorder and one trailing camerawoman, Habicht took to the streets to confront an unsuspecting, and by turns, delighted/annoyed, intrigued/suspicious, reticent/loquacious populace to move his story forward. The camera films these interactions, which make up about two thirds of the movie. The rest is comprised of the ostensible 'love story' referred to in the title, and the whole is chaptered by regular intercut sequences of Habicht having Skype catch-ups with his father (back in New Zealand), mostly in subtitled German, talking about the project and receiving advice and feedback. These father-son conversations include some of the funniest, most touching interactions in a film full of such moments.

Where the real blending occurs is not in the documentary versus fictional elements of the film, but in the relationship between Masha and Florian. The pair play themselves in a 'love story' featurette, and simultaneously appear to be actually experiencing a real love story of their own. Forget that Habicht (as many have commented) should listen to his psychic/clairvoyant guide and opt stay behind the camera—in my opinion this misses the point—as the fact is that the raw, amateurish feel of the internal 'mini-film' makes their true feelings and relationship all the harder to decipher, which in turn gives the film some meaty complexity around themes of reality, experience, authenticity, and how we interpret these in our lives. It would be easy to say that the *true* love story here is Habicht's obvious ode to New York City and its meat-and-potatoes inhabitants—and there is certainly much evidence for this broader reading in the documented on-the-street interviews and extended shots of the city—but I would argue that the film's title encapsulates the personal as much as it does the communal. So, we the viewer, end up getting at least four 'love stories' for the price of one:

Fictional Florian and Masha's end-to-end romance.

The possibly mirrored actual romance occurring parallel to the making of the featurette. (It doesn't even matter whether this is 'real' or not, in fact that the ambiguity might *be* the point.)

Florian's love for New York City and its people.

New Yorkers' love for their city.

A further broadening of the tone and theme came out in the post-screening discussion, where a number of the crew joined Habicht onstage and effused (in a very understated New Zealand kind of way) about how much they loved being a part of this project, and how enjoyable the production process was.

The latter two love stories (above) are delivered visually through documentary-style interviews and footage, augmented (courtesy of photographer Maria Ines Manchego) by some striking shots of New York locales and views. Manchego shoots with obvious skill and passion, and the thoughtfully framed

and composed sequences—such as birds taking wing from a rooftop in the inner city, or a long shot of Masha walking down a street filmed from a tight bend in the road—provide an effective tonal contrast to the often more urgent clandestine feel of the interview material.

Habicht's deft hand weaves together all of *Love Story*'s wayward strands into a single joyous, effusive tapestry, which graces the screen beautifully in its own riotous fashion. I see *Love Story*, particularly in terms of cinematic construction, as a natural companion piece to *Rubbings from a Live Man*. Both films blur accepted genre boundaries, yet each approaches it from the opposite direction: a kind of yin and yang relationship. It's cinema Jim, but not as we know it.

By Jacob Powell.

