



PAST LAND, PAST LAW, PAST PERMISSION

VESSEL

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VESSEL

A fearless sea captain sails a ship through loopholes in international law, providing abortions on the high seas, and leaving in her wake a network of emboldened activists who trust women to handle abortion on their own terms.

A film by Diana Whitten

88:00 | HD Video | 16:9 | Stereo | Color | 2014 | USA

International Sales:

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North American Sales:

FilmBuff | 212.627.9898 | christina@filmbuff.com

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SOVEREIGNTY PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS "VESSEL" A FILM BY DIANA WHITTEN
IN ASSOCIATION WITH FORK FILMS, IMPACT PARTNERS, & CHICKEN AND EGG PICTURES EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DAN COGAN, GERALYN DREYFOUS, & ABIGAIL DISNEY CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JENNY RASKIN
EDITED BY SIMEON HUTNER ORIGINAL MUSIC BY T.GRIFFIN & HEATHER MCINTOSH ANIMATOR EMILY HUBLEY & EMILIE HSIN PEI LIU CO-PRODUCED BY ELISSA BROWN PRODUCED BY MITCHELL BLOCK DIRECTED, PRODUCED AND FILMED BY DIANA WHITTEN



VESSEL



SYNOPSIS

Dr. Rebecca Gomperts sails a ship around the world, providing abortions at sea for women with no legal alternative. Her idea begins as flawed spectacle, faced with governmental, religious, and military blockade.

But with each roadblock comes a more refined mission, until Rebecca realizes she can use new technologies to bypass law – and train women to give themselves abortions using WHO-researched protocols with pills.

From there we witness her create an underground network of emboldened, informed activists who trust women to handle abortion themselves. *Vessel* is Rebecca's story: one of a woman who hears and answers a calling, and transforms a wildly improbable idea into a global movement.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



Rebecca's story first drew me in because of the metaphor I found to be inherent to her work: a woman seeking a space outside of sovereignty in order to reclaim her own. The metaphor manifests on the ship, with practical, tangible consequences that empower others and change the course of lives. In that way, Rebecca's approach to activism inspires; *Vessel* aims to do the same.

Over the process of making this film, I have learned a new perspective on why women need safe access to abortion, and respect for the dedication of those working to help secure this. Of the 42 million abortions that women have every year, approximately half happen in illegal settings. Statistically, these laws have no control over whether or not abortions happen; the only thing they can control is whether or not they happen safely. Every ten minutes, somewhere in the world, a woman dies due to complications from unsafe abortion. This is about a plane crash a day.

There have always been networks of women, of mothers, sisters, healers, and whispered information that help women access alternatives to violent ways of ending unwanted pregnancies. The abortion pill - available in most of the world - is the modern "women's knowledge" for those living under restrictive abortion law. Networks of activists are aware of its existence, but not always clear on the protocols. *Vessel* contextualizes the pill: introducing it to a wider audience.

The film shows women working primarily in countries without the protection of *Roe v. Wade*, but is a cautionary tale in this respect. As anti-choice efforts increase, women in the United States, my home, are increasingly looking to women's networks for help. *Vessel* will help bring this issue out into the open, furthering the understanding that laws cannot prevent abortion; they can only make abortion less safe; and when empowered with information and the strength of a network, women reclaim this right, on their own terms.

Since I began, my reasons for making the film have evolved. It was impossible for me to witness this work without internalizing how desperately alone women and abortion providers feel in illegal settings. The Women on Waves campaigns make them feel connected, and less scared. *Vessel's* goal is to offer that same solidarity, to share the view I've had of a movement emerging from the underground, and invite audiences to join.





PRODUCTION NOTES

When I first learned about Women on Waves, it was like a light switch went on – I knew it would be a powerful story. I had a background working with cameras and production design, but the first interview on film I ever conducted, with Associate Producer Anita Shillhorn van Veen, was with Rebecca on the day we met.

Several filmmakers had documented Rebecca's earlier work, including American producer Hilary Heath and Portuguese filmmakers Dina Campos Lopes and Racquel Freiere, who kindly donated their unused footage. My editor, Simeon Hunter, and I thus had the challenge of piecing together from their footage what had happened on early ship campaigns. We turned to Emily Hubley for animations to convey complex legal and medical information intrinsic to the story. T. Griffin and Heather McIntosh produced an original score with the cello at its center.

Over 150 individual donors and friends came together to get the project off the ground, and were joined by 13 foundations who supported the film. Executive Producer Abigail Disney and Co-Producer Elissa Brown were brave early allies of the film, taking a risk on a first time filmmaker and a controversial subject. When Chicken and Egg Pictures, and Dan Cogan, GERALYN Dreyfous and Jenny Raskin of Impact Partners came on board, we knew we had the potential for great reach. The film then partnered with Cinephil for international sales, Film-Buff for North American sales, and Film Sprout for outreach and audience engagement.

After a standing ovation at our World Premiere at SXSW, Vessel took home a Special Jury Recognition for Political Courage and the SXSW Audience Award for Documentary Competition. Vessel was honored with the Peter Wintonick Award at Sheffield DocFest, the Adrienne Shelly Excellence in Film-making Award at Nantucket Film Festival, and an Honorable Mention for the Moving Mountains Award at Mountainfilm in Telluride. The film continues on the festival circuit and plans for release at the end of 2014.

Rebecca, now a friend and mentor, lives by her creed, to Trust Women, and she has entrusted us with her story. It's been seven years since that first interview, a long and thrilling learning experience with one of the bravest groups of people I know, a global network of people devoting their lives, at great risk, to helping women and families.



ABOUT WOMEN ON WAVES

Women on Waves was founded in 2000 with the aim to prevent unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions by providing sexual health services, including early medical abortions (abortion with pills), on board a Dutch ship, outside the territorial waters of countries where abortion is illegal.

In the last 10 years Women on Waves has generated enormous public interest, and much controversy, with ship campaigns in Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Morocco. The ship campaigns are conducted by invitation and in collaboration with local partner organizations, and are designed to add momentum to activist efforts already on the ground working to liberalize law.

Although legalization of abortion is important, medical abortion now gives women the possibility to take their lives into their own hands, regardless of the legality of abortion or the willingness of doctors. Ensuring that WHO-researched information about medical abortion is easily available to women can save women's lives. Therefore, Women on Waves now focuses on helping women access information about medical abortion by distributing information through the internet, grassroots efforts on the ground, and by supporting the creation of safe abortion telephone hotlines in collaboration with partner organizations across South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

ABOUT REBECCA GOMPERTS

Rebecca Gomperts, founder and director of Women on Waves, studied medicine and visual arts in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. After graduating Gomperts became an abortion doctor and sailed as a ship's doctor with the environmental activist Greenpeace ship, the Rainbow Warrior. While sailing in South America, she was first exposed to women who suffered greatly due to lack of access to reproductive health services and safe, legal abortions. These women and their stories inspired Rebecca to start Women on Waves.

She has won numerous awards for her work with Women on Waves, including the "Allan Rosenfield Award for Lifetime Contributions to International Family Planning" by the Society of Family Planning (2012), the "Global Women's Rights Award" from the Feminist Majority Foundation (2007), the "Rosie Jimenez Award from the Women's Medical Fund" (2005), and Planned Parenthood's "Margaret Sanger Woman of Valor Award" (2004) and "Women Making History Award" (2002). She was named one of Women Deliver's "Top 100 most inspiring people delivering for girls and women" (2011), one of the "1000 Peace Women for the Nobel Prize" (2005) and "Woman of the Year" by Ms. Magazine (2001).

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Vessel has partnered with Film Sprout to launch on an international tour of screenings intended to provide a forum for further debate, discussion and education about the global challenges facing reproductive healthcare. Any group can host one!

Nonprofits, student groups, activists and educators can host a local screening. You contribute a modest screening fee and, in return, we give you:

- The Vessel DVD
- the Public Performance Rights for Vessel
- Action and Discussion Materials
- Digital Promotional Tools
- Hands-on support from our community screenings team

Interested parties may visit our website for a brief request form to indicate interest, or email vessel@filmsprout.org.



THE TEAM

DIANA WHITTEN director/producer cinematographer

is a filmmaker with a decade of professional film/TV direction, production and design experience, including work on shorts and features appearing in over 25 international film festivals. A graduate of Tufts (BA), the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (BFA), and the New School (MA), she was a Fulbright Fellow to Indonesia in 2000, founded Sovereignty Productions in 2008, and was the Director of Communications at Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program. This is her first feature film.



SIMEON HUTNER editor

Editing credits include: *When I Walk, Harlem Street Singer, Melting Planet, and Praying with Lior, Self Made Man, Blue Vinyl, Chicks in White Satin*, (nominated for an Academy Award in 1994), *Mentor*. He was Series Producer on the television series *Dog, The Bounty Hunter* for A&E. Simeon received MacDowell Fellowships in 2001 and 2003, and fellowships from Yaddo in 2002 and 2004. He has an MFA in Film Production from the USC, an MBA from NYU and a BA from Middlebury College.

MITCHELL BLOCK producer

Handled the distribution and marketing of hundreds of documentary, live action, and animated shorts films and documentary features, 25 have won Oscars and 71 have received Academy Award nominations. He is president of Direct Cinema Limited, a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Television Academy, a founding member of BAFTA-LA, and a life member of the UFVA and the IDA. Recent work includes the Emmy Award winning PBS series *Carrier*, and the Oscar nominated short doc *Poster Girl*.

ELISSA BROWN co-producer

Produced, directed and edited corporate videos for the Heinz Family Foundation since 2010, and is currently co-producing the feature *Windshield: A Vanished Vision*, directed by Joanna Datillo. She Associate Produced *By the People: The Election of Barack Obama*, (HBO, 2009). Prior work includes assistant editing *Bi the Way* and an internship at THINKFilm. She completed her undergraduate work at Brown University and post-grad coursework at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies.

T. GRIFFIN composer

Scored dozens of film and theater projects, worked with leading independent filmmakers including Jem Cohen, Tze Chun, Michael Almereyda, Esther Robinson, Sam Green and Kimberly Reed, and has collaborated with musical luminaries such as Patti Smith, Vic Chesnutt, Tom Verlaine, DJ/Rupture and members of Fugazi, The Ex, and godspeed you! black emperor, and was a 2008 Fellow at the Sundance Composer's lab.

EMILY HUBLEY animator

Animations for films include: *Blue Vinyl, Everything's Cool, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Disturbing the Universe, Boy in the Bubble, the Storybook Project*. Her feature film, *The Toe Tactic* was developed at Sundance Institute's Screenwriters' and Filmmakers' Labs and premiered at MOMA 2009. Ms. Hubley's shorts have shown at Sundance, South by Southwest, MOMA, Tribeca, the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar and the Southern Circuit Tour; and are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, Department of Film. She is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

HEATHER MCINTOSH composer

The house cellist for the Elephant 6 Collective, has played with of Montreal, The Olivia Tremor Control, The Music Tapes, Gerbils, Elf Power, Circulatory System, Apples in Stereo, Great Lakes, and The Ladybug Transistor. She has extended her talents outside of Athens performing with Linda Perhacs, Kevin Ayers of the Soft Machine, Faust, Animal Collective, Cat Power, Superchunk, M Ward, The Clientele, St. Vincent, Azure Ray, Icy Demons, Bright Eyes, Washed Out, Dr. Dog, Gnarl Barkley, and Lil Wayne.

THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

ABIGAIL DISNEY executive producer

is a filmmaker and philanthropist. Her longtime passion for women's issues and peacebuilding culminated in her first film, the acclaimed *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, about the Liberian women who peacefully ended their country's fourteen-year civil war. She is currently Executive Producer of the groundbreaking PBS mini-series *Women, War & Peace*, the most comprehensive global media initiative ever mounted on the role of women in peace and conflict. Her work in philanthropy, women's engagement and leadership, and conflict resolution has been recognized through the Epic Award from the White House Project, the Changing the Landscape for Women Award from the Center for the Advancement of Women, and the prestigious International Advocate for Peace (IAP) Award from the Cardozo Law School's Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution. In addition, Abigail holds degrees from Yale, Stanford, and Columbia.

GERALYN DREYFOUS executive producer

is the co-founder of Impact Partners and has a wide background in the arts, long experience in consulting in the philanthropic sector, and is active on many boards and initiatives. She worked at the Philanthropic Initiative in Boston, which guides families of wealth in strategic giving opportunities and also taught Documentary and Narrative Writing with Dr. Robert Coles at Harvard University. Geralyn is also the Founder/ Board Chair of the Utah Film Center and a charter member of the Utah Coalition for Film and Media. Geralyn's executive producing and producing credits include the Academy Award winning *Born Into Brothels*; Emmy nominated *The Day My God Died*; and multiple film festival winners such as *Kick Like a Girl*, *In A Dream*, *Dhamma Brothers*, *Project Kashmir*, *Miss Representation*, *Connected*, and *The Invisible War*.

DAN COGAN executive producer

is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of Impact Partners, a fund and advisory service for investors and philanthropists who seek to promote social change through film. Since its inception less than three years ago, IP has been involved in the financing of over 25 films, including: *The Cove*, which won the 2010 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature; *Freeheld*, which won the 2008 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Film; *The Garden*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 2009; and *The Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, which won the 2007 Emmy for Best Documentary Special. Mr. Cogan has spoken on documentary film finance at film festivals and conferences around the world, including the The Sundance Film Festival, The Toronto Film Festival, The Silverdocs Film Festival, the IFP's Independent Film Week, and Film Independent's Filmmaker Forum. Mr. Cogan received his B.A. from Harvard University, Magna Cum Laude, and attended the Film Division at Columbia University's Graduate School of the Arts.

JENNY RASKIN co-executive producer

is a documentary producer, director and writer. Her work has been broadcast on PBS, The National Geographic Channel, The Sundance Channel and The Discovery Channel. Her feature documentary *On Hostile Ground* was released theatrically to critical acclaim and broadcast on The Sundance Channel. She produced the feature documentary *Motherland and Afghanistan* for PBS/Independent Lens. Most recently, she wrote and produced *Saving Michael Vick's Dogs*, a special for The National Geographic Channel. She has also worked as a story consultant and writer for several documentary films and television series. She received her B.A. from Barnard College and a masters degree from the Culture and Media Program at New York University.

THE CREW

Featuring Rebecca Gomperts
Kinga Jelinska
Cecilia Costa
Gunilla Kleiverda
Myra ter Meulen
Margreet Parlevliet
Juil Brockling
Lizet Kraal
Margie Moore
Susan Davies
Ivette Mrova
Annemarie van den Heuvel
Ana Cristina Santos
Sara Iarrea
Ana Cristina Vera
Veronica Vera
Paula Castello Starkoff
Manuela Luna Creciente
Nondo Ebuela Ejano

Voiceover Kinga Jelinska
Inês Rodrigues

Additional camera
Ecuador Aubree Bernier-Clarke
Jennie Allen
Cedric Zoenen
Ivette Mrova

Netherlands Janine Abbring
Anita Schillhorn van Veen

Costa rica Natasha Pachano

Ireland Hillary Heath

Portugal Dina Campos Lopes
Raquel Freire
Noor Venrooy
Monica Dijkstra
Luisa Homem
Fausto Cardoso (sound)

Pakistan Nisar Ahmad

Vienna Thomas Christian Eichtinger

Original music performed by
Cello Heather McIntosh
Viola Jessica Pavone
Violin Catherine Mcrae
All Other T. Griffin

Online editor
& colorist Björn Bellenbaum

Online assistant Jacob Kedzierski

Audio post-
production David Wilson

Associate producers Anita Schillhorn van Veen
Montana Wojczuk
Adriana Young
Thomas Eichtinger
(Vienna)

Production assistants Kathryn Conkling
Carolyn Whitten
Danielle Bell

Archives producer Marianna Yarovskaya

Archives assistance Tim Manders

Titles design Emilie Hsin Pei Liu

With acknowledgment
to the editing team through 2011

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Intern David Dunham

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Andrew Hauser

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Community and grassroots
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Kelly Matheson

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