

PORTRAIT



a documentary by

LILY EKIMIAN & A.T. RAGHEB



2020 / 74 minutes / Documentary / USA / Color / English / Dog Door Films

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Synopsis

91-year-old American-born Canadian physicist Anthony S. Arrott spends his days alone in his Vancouver apartment, continuing to work on his research in the field of magnetism. When pressed on the deadline set for his work, Dr. Arrott candidly replies, “I’ve got to get this done before I die.” He lives surrounded by the hundreds of faces drawn by his late wife, New York City- and Vancouver-based portrait artist Patricia Graham Arrott. Dr. Arrott is filmed over the course of a five-month period by first-time filmmakers Lily Ekimian (Arrott’s granddaughter) and A.T. Ragheb. While on its surface *Portrait* follows the highs and lows of Dr. Arrott’s current research, the heart of the film is found in its meditation on marriage, family, and mortality.

An experimental use of form, *Portrait* blends the line between documentary and narrative in search of deeper truths. A couple themselves, filmmakers Ekimian and Ragheb did not shy away from including themselves in the film, placing an emphasis on relationships and family. The presence of Dr. Arrott’s wife (Ekimian’s grandmother) is felt throughout the film, despite her having passed away a few years ago. Her artwork acts as the anchor of the film’s soul, placing the story being told into a tradition of portraiture that allows it to transcend the boundaries of cinema.





Directors' Statements



As to be expected, making a documentary about my grandfather, co-directed and co-edited with my partner of six years, was a deeply personal process. It was at times emotional, occasionally painful, and certainly rewarding. The intimate portrait that Ahmed and I set out to make of my grandfather became an intimate portrait of relationships.

In this brief note I would like to draw your attention to two aspects of the film that continue to resonate with me. The first is a visit to a friend of my grandfather's, Dr. Vlad Shapiro; like my grandfather, Vlad is a widower and a physicist. At first glance, this casual visit may seem like an aside, interrupting the action of the story, but what we find in Vlad's cozy Vancouver dining room is a microcosm of the film as a whole – a microcosm of the enduring motivations and passions of a life devoted to the advancement of science and of the decisions we must confront in the face of old age.

The second aspect is my grandmother's artwork that is featured prominently throughout the film. Her drawings possess a certain ethereal quality. Many say that she didn't simply draw her subjects, but rather distilled their essence, drawing the very soul of each person. In making this film, we hoped to emulate her method of portraiture and capture not just my grandfather's day-to-day life, but the very essence of his being. It is for others to determine if we succeeded.

— Lily

Directors' Statements (cont.)

Any project about family is bound to be a particularly sensitive one and *Portrait* is no exception; however, this project is uniquely footed in its divided directorial vision and experience. For the eight months of the film's production (from conception, to shooting, to editing in "lockdown"), co-director Lily Ekimian and I were not separated for more than thirty minutes at a time and yet, despite this, our understanding and connection to the film's subject matter was inherently distinct. This did not come from any disagreement or misunderstanding at all, but rather from Lily's position as Tony's granddaughter and mine as a natural outsider.

This uneven internalization of film's subject by its directors/editors may, to some, seem a documentary-misstep to be "corrected" by an abundance of professionalism that would either see Lily distancing herself from her grandfather to achieve an unbiased view or, perhaps, me integrating myself as a "member of the family." Nevertheless, this discrepancy of understanding is, we believe, what makes the film so powerful and so unique. It imbues every shot and editorial decision with a subtle tension that can seldom be replicated through narrative scripting. In this way, the six-decade-long relationship between Tony and his wife, Patricia, which is retroactively documented in *Portrait*, is shadowed closely – in the film's production – by my relationship to Lily. The film is thus indirectly built off of, and around, overlapping circles of relationships and familial connections as well as our perception of those relationships and those people whom we most love and cherish – that is to say, our portraits of them.

— *Ahmed*



The Directors

Lily Ekimian & A.T. Ragheb are independent filmmakers based in Pittsburgh, PA. Ekimian, originally from Washington, D.C., and Ragheb, originally from Cairo, Egypt, met while both attending high school in Cairo. Together they run an online arts publication, *The Dog Door Cultural*, and a film production platform, Dog Door Films. Ekimian & Ragheb have recently completed their feature debut, *Portrait*. They have produced and directed music videos for Daniel Knox and The Handsome Family, as well as a series of short films. Their work deals heavily with the concepts of identity and place with a special emphasis on feminism, cultural dislocation, and domestic relationships.





“Does it matter? No, just to me.”



DOG DOOR FILMS PRESENTS

PORTRAIT

a documentary by LILY EKIMIAN & A.T. RAGHEB

A FILM BY LILY EKIMIAN & A.T. RAGHEB WITH MUSIC BY DANIEL KNOX FEATURING ANTHONY S. ARROTT



Credits

DIRECTORS | EDITORS | PRODUCERS Lily Ekimian & A.T. Ragheb

MUSIC Daniel Knox

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