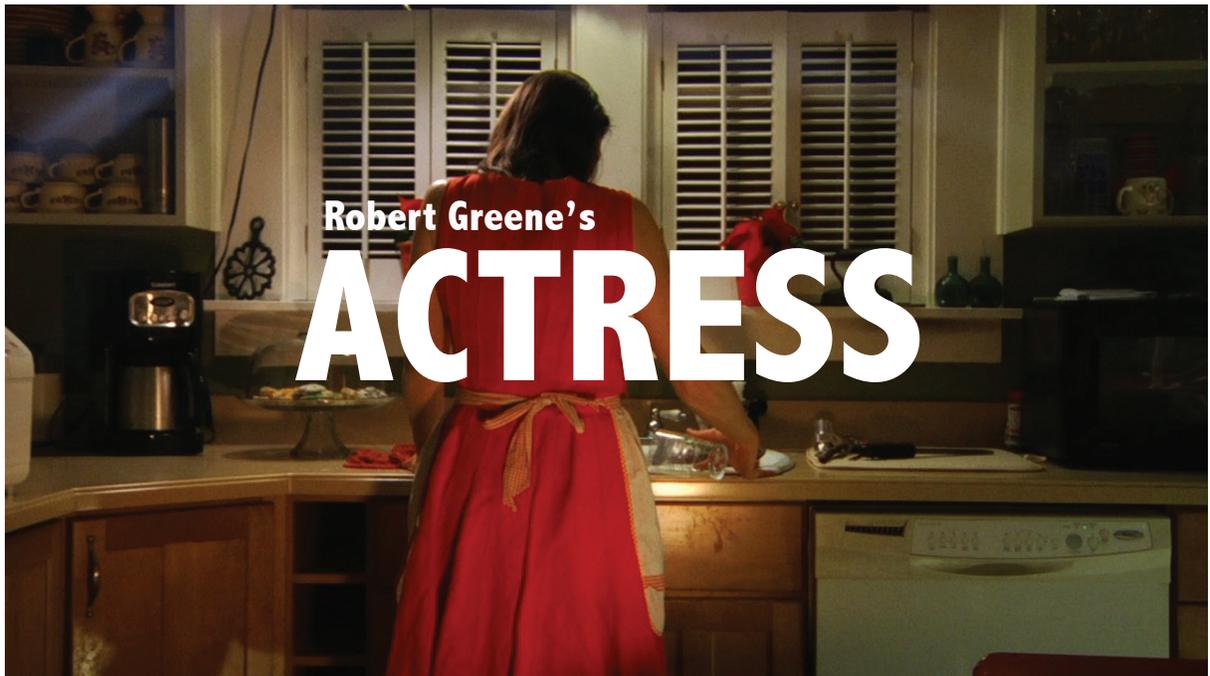


Acropolis Cinema and the Cinefamily present

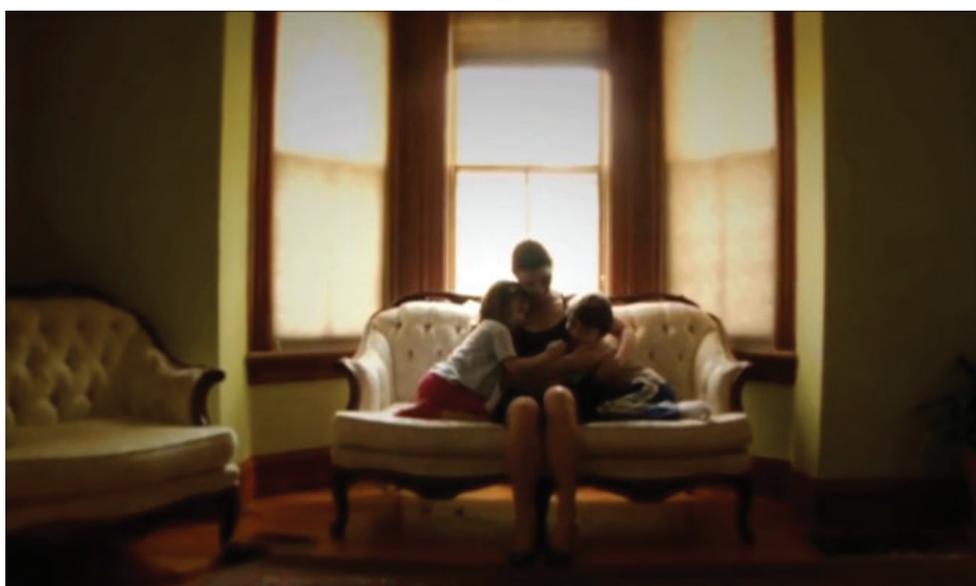


December 17, 2016 ~ 6:00PM ~ Cinefamily

ABOUT THE FILM

Brandy Burre had a recurring role on HBO's iconic drama *The Wire* when she got pregnant with the first of her two children. She gave up her career and moved to a small town to raise her new family with her partner, Tim. Things were fine for a while. But when Brandy decides to get back into acting, the foundations of her domestic life prove too fragile for her ambitions and the way she sees herself. As she tries to find balance between being a good mother and her desires for a life she once walked away from, Brandy is forced to make painful choices that will affect her family forever. Using elements of melodrama and cinema verité, *Actress* is both a present tense portrait of a dying relationship and an exploration of a complicated woman, performing the role of herself, in a complex-yet-familiar story. It's a film about starring in the movie of your life. When a woman performs the roles of mother, wife and actor, what's real? How far will Brandy go to remake her life? *Actress* chronicles what happens when we break the rules. (Cinema Guild)

87 min // US // 2014



Diary of a Mad Housewife by Adam Nayman

The following article was originally published in Cinema Scope 59.

"I tend to break things," says Brandy Burre early on in *Actress*, and Robert Greene's film gives her plenty of opportunities to validate this claim. An aggressively stylized profile of a former ensemble player on *The Wire* who now lives with her husband and two young children in sleepy Beacon, New York, *Actress* places the idea of fractured or crumbling domesticity front and centre early on: while trying to organize a shelf in her son's room, Brandy gets brained by a falling metal box and exclaims "Death!" as she regains her equilibrium. It's a moment so thematically on the nose that it couldn't possibly be spontaneous, and as such it's emblematic of a film that doesn't differentiate between its obviously contrived scenes and its simply authentic ones—and which also implies that doing so might not be possible anyway.

It's no great feat of critical acuity to point out that *Actress* is a movie about performance. Acting is not only Brandy's profession, it's something that she does all the time, whether interacting with her restaurateur husband Tim, her children, or her Greene's camera, which alternates between fetishizing her chores in luxurious slow motion and bobbing on the periphery while she begins the long, arduous process of restarting her moribund career. We're so attuned to Brandy's overt physical and vocal gamesmanship in every aspect of her life that the film starts to feel turned inside out—when she begins confessing things about her dissatisfaction with her marriage or, later, about a one-night stand, they could be acting exercises. Except that they aren't.

So marriage is another of the things that Brandy breaks in *Actress*, and the process is extremely painful to watch, not least because of the tension between Greene's initial project—a collaborative showcase with a woman he's obviously fond of—and the basic decency he shows by trying to keep out of the way of the wreckage and not involving the children in the fray. What Brandy is also smashing here—for reasons that would seem to exceed her participation in the movie—are conventional expectations about what a woman in her late 30s is supposed to want from herself and from others, and the affirmative aspect of her brass-ring-chasing (which involves, among other things, going through DVDs of *The Wire* to put together a new sizzle reel) bumps up against the sense that she's sacrificing the feelings and futures of her loved ones on the altar of self-interest.

Actress is an extremely carefully made movie, and Greene really picks his spots as far as big moments are concerned. In addition to the carefully poised *hausfrau* tableaux in the opening minutes (which are productively juxtaposed with such sticky quotidian images as fingers flicking food waste around the rim of a kitchen sink's drain), *Actress* pivots on a truly startling close-up of its protagonist with her face looking recently pummelled—an off-screen event that's left as ambiguous as any of the faked-it-so-real manoeuvres that take place in front of our eyes. The circumstances of Brandy's injury are vague, but the polyvalence of this image in dramatic, thematic, and simply affective terms is a great accomplishment: in terms of "readability," it's a two-second shot that takes on the resonance of a disturbing, densely packed short story.

That *Actress* feels so shaped and sculpted is potentially a point of criticism, but as signifiers of “hybridity” in non-fiction filmmaking are being increasingly valorized instead of ghettoized, it also feels a bit like business as usual. (To wit: *Actress* showed at the Lincoln Center’s “Art of the Real” series, where it was surrounded and complemented by a set of wholly different yet similarly elastic films.) The most fascinating thing about Greene’s film isn’t the way it plays with convention or form, but rather its tacit suggestion that all documentaries engage in (and strive to disguise) similar tactics. Pace, say, Sarah Polley’s *Stories We Tell* (2012), by calling attention to its constructedness *Actress* gestures outwards rather than merely touting its aesthetic sleight of hand. It’s a testament to Greene’s skill that this movie about a woman who likes to break things holds together so smartly, but it’s equally true that it takes its cues from its subject in this regard: above all else, the film resonates as a portrait of a woman remaking herself in her own image. ◆



Upcoming Events

December 18, 2016 ~ *Fake It So Real*

Robert Greene’s acclaimed wrestling documentary
4:00pm ~ Cinefamily ~ 611 N. Fairfax, Los Angeles, CA. 90007

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