

Downton Abbey and played a vicious pimp in *The Deuce*, chips away at Kieran's saintly urban-paramedic persona to unearth the insecurity of a man perpetually unsure of his partner's preferences. Labeled, meanwhile, is tasked with playing an obscure object of desire who's unknown even to herself, and the highest compliment that I can pay the three of them, individually and as a unit, is that at any given moment they all seem believably turned on by and terrified of one another in endless configurations, less a sitcom-style case of slow-burning will-they-or-won't-they than an anxiously horny evocation of the inevitable.

As its title suggests, *Trigonometry* has its measured and mechanical aspects, and in TV, where "good" writing is often commensurate with (and indistinguishable from) heavy-handed calculation (see also the fifth, generally excellent and yet somehow unsatisfyingly deliberate season of *Better Call Saul*), such on-the-nose obviousness is an occupational hazard. One possible artistic solution to solving material that's been laid out too neatly is to power through it so the design blurs in real time, but it's not right to give all the credit for the show's sense of headlong momentum to Tsangari or Williams. MacMillan and Woods have a knack for screwball dialogue in a contemporary vernacular, and thanks to the actors—especially Teixeira as the hyper-verbal Gemma—the occasional over-articulation seems to belong to the characters, as if they're trying to talk themselves out of (or through) problems more easily fixed through body language. There's also a generally nice sense of timing that's partially a matter of editing, but also evidence of the writers' will and patience, of craftsmanship that's aware enough of clichés and conventions to mostly sidestep them, or else strategically lean on them as the sturdy, long-standing crutches that they are.

"We're good people," Kieran insists to Gemma at another point during their honeymoon, as if trying to convince her—and himself—that their mutual attraction to Ray and shared hope that it be reciprocated isn't a selfish proposition. He's right, and while, like most solid long-form storytelling, *Trigonometry* is enjoyable because its featured people are so appealing—attractive, funny, and flawed in ways that almost always countenance empathy rather than alienation—there's maybe something a bit too Teflon about its contents. This timorousness is tied not to the frank, full-frontal adulthood of its content, but to a reluctance to really get messy with its subject matter in a way that a feature film, unbound by the requirement to keep people watching for multiple episodes (or seasons), could do. At the same time, a show whose creators and creative personnel so evidently care about their characters and possess the skill to make us feel likewise is a rare and impressive thing—maybe not as scarce as a unicorn or as awe-inspiring as the Northern Lights, but worth seeking out all the same. ♦

Coming soon to Acropolis:

- Short Films by Athina Rachel Tsangari (1993-2013)—May 17 at Vidiots
- *Two Seasons, Two Strangers* (Dir. Sho Miyake, 2025)—Los Angeles premiere, May 28 at 2220 Arts + Archives

Acropolis Cinema presents:



May 16, 2026 – Vidiots

ABOUT THE SERIES

In crowded, expensive London, a cash-strapped couple open their small flat to a third person. Gemma is a chef who runs a café; her boyfriend Kieran is a paramedic – and Ray, who moves in with the young couple, is at a loss. Until recently, she was a world-class synchronised swimmer, but now she’s looking for a new direction, job and place in life. She discovers two people who love each other very much, but who don’t really know where they are going – in terms of the café, sex, or their lives. What commences is a modern-day love story that will change all of their lives forever.

Written and created by Duncan Macmillan and Effie Woods, *Trigonometry* is the first series project by Athina Rachel Tsangari (*Attenberg*, *Chevalier*). The Greek director and actress has directed five of the eight episodes, all of which will be screened at today’s event. While the rest of the world talks about identity politics, *Trigonometry* turns this into an intense, compelling, funny and intelligent drama about relationships and family. Can the three characters find a new way to love? And will the world let them? *Co-presented by MUBI*.

TRT: 235 minutes (5 episodes with 15 min intermission)

In person: Athina Rachel Tsangari

The Math of Love Triangles by Adam Nayman

The following article was originally published by Sight and Sound, July 20, 2016

The most arresting image in the new BBC Studios series *Trigonometry* (airing in the US this summer on HBO Max and in Canada on CBC Gem) comes in the fifth episode, when restaurateur Gemma (Thalissa Teixeira), in the middle of a difficult Nordic honeymoon getaway with her new husband Kieran (Gary Carr), goes on an evening field trip to see the Northern Lights. As Kieran sulks back at the hotel, she gazes up at a display that imbues the uncanny sensation—for the character, as well as the audience—of a planetarium-show special effect despite its you-are-there authenticity. As a visual metaphor for a young woman who is trying to “see the light” in response to her fraught personal situation, Gemma’s encounter with the Aurora Borealis is legible and clever, but as filmed by director Athina Rachel Tsangari and cinematographer Sean Price Williams, the shot glows with something extra and ineffable. It’s a little bite of the sublime.

That feeling of an everyday that’s slightly enchanted around the edges—not magic-realist, exactly, but attuned to the possibility of magical-feeling moments—is present in the five episodes of *Trigonometry* signed by Tsangari, whose transition from cinema to a format succinctly if imperfectly defined as “prestige television” provides an interesting test case for auteurism. This isn’t an example of a distinctive, idiosyncratic filmmaker developing a property for broadcast or streaming, à la Davids Lynch and Fincher, but a work-for-hire scenario closer to Andrea Arnold’s sojourn on the second season of *Big Little Lies*, with considerably happier and less compromised results. In her features *Attenberg* (2010) and *Chevalier* (2015), as well as her superlative fashion-show short *The Capsule* (2012), the Greek director has honed a style adjacent to the “Greek Weird Wave” with which she has

inevitably been identified. Where her increasingly upwardly mobile former collaborator Yorgos Lanthimos became a model transnational provocateur in the Lars von Trier mould, Tsangari has continually privileged intimacy over spectacle, eschewing arm-punching outrageousness in favour of more plausible interpersonal drollery. Contrast the gilded, finicky (and distinctly Kubrickian) claustrophobia of *The Lobster* (2015) and its luxury hotel of the damned with the tender farce of *Chevalier*’s self-quarantining, seafaring exhibitionists and the difference is deeper than big budgets and marquee English-language talent: it’s the contrast between precious conceptualism and a real vision of human nature.

Tsangari announces her directorial presence in the first frame of the first episode of *Trigonometry*, which begins with a synchronized-swimming routine whose stiff, mechanized choreography and carefully curated pop soundtrack (Robyn’s defiant club hit “Dancing On My Own”) recalls the passages of goofy, lip-synced showmanship in *Attenberg*, *Chevalier*, and *The Capsule* (set respectively to Suicide, Minnie Riperton, and America), and there’s also the added auteurist bonus of seeing *Attenberg* star Ariane Labeled in the mix. After a teammate’s errant knee knocks her unconscious underwater, Labeled’s Ray floats limply to the surface, an accident that is also an unexpected emancipation. When we see her next, she’s OK but bruised, fed up, and trumpeting news of her early retirement from a sport that, as her parents remind her, took her around the world (and to the Olympics) but has in other respects left her in a suspended state of adolescence, a physically fine-tuned, early-30s specimen without any other marketable skills or a long-term relationship.

The behavioural link between Ray and Labeled’s awkward *Attenberg* protagonist Marina—a younger woman similarly struggling to escape a sheltered life and confront an adulthood rushing up to meet her—combined with the actress’ singularly physicalized acting style, in which control and clumsiness co-exist in a series of elongated gestures, is strong enough to make *Trigonometry* feel like a spiritual sequel for Tsangari fans. For everybody else, Labeled and her girl-who-fell-to-earth affect will simply be a wild card, just as Ray, who begins the series as Gemma and Kieran’s lodger in a cramped London upstairs flat and gradually joins them (or maybe they join her?) in the throes of thruple-hood, is described and depicted variably, and sometimes simultaneously, as an agent of grace and chaos. Another bit of magical reality: retreating to her room to sign her tenant’s lease at the close of episode one, she selects a light-up pen in the shape of a unicorn, a noble, mythical beast that’s also millennial slang for the third vertex in a functional love triangle.

In terms of authorship, *Trigonometry* has its own tripartite, self-allegorizing aspect. Tsangari joined the project after the script had been written by playwright Duncan MacMillan and his wife, actor and writer Effie Woods (*Emmerdale*), and untangling the relationship between the show’s visual and linguistic flourishes and symbolism—the unicorn pen; a *Jaws*-but-hot sequence in which the three protagonists compare physical scars while sharing a bathroom; the name of Gemma’s establishment, the Ampersand Cafe, with its intimations of “plus one”—is a challenging proposition. At its best, the show synthesizes Tsangari’s corporeal methodology—storytelling and character development inscribed on her characters’ bodies and through their movements—with the writers’ swift, literary theatricality. The juggling act between exposition and mystery in sketching the three leads shows a lot of hands working with maximum dexterity.

An acclaimed stage actress, Teixeira inhabits Gemma’s flinty self-sufficiency and underlying sexual-identity crisis without crowding out ambiguity or humour. (Gemma’s avowedly queer, except, to her and her friends’ surprise, when it comes to Kieran.) Carr, who showed up on