

## FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

**Mon Dec 7 | 8:30 pm |**

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$11 [members \$8]

# **Ben Rivers: *The Sky Trembles and the Earth Is Afraid and the Two Eyes Are Not Brothers***

Color, 98mins, 35mm, 2015

Arabic / Spanish / French with English subtitles

*Los Angeles Premiere*

<http://www.redcat.org/event/ben-rivers-film-portraits>

Coming to REDCAT after successful screenings at the Locarno, Toronto, New York and BFI London Film Festivals, *The Sky Trembles and the Earth Is Afraid and the Two Eyes Are Not Brothers* is a labyrinthine and epic film that moves between documentary, fantasy and fable. It was shot against the staggering beauty of the Moroccan landscape, from the rugged terrain of the Atlas Mountains to the stark and surreal emptiness of the Moroccan Sahara, with its encroaching sands and abandoned film sets. Rivers' work contains multiple narratives, the major strand being an adaptation of "A Distant Episode," the savage short story by Paul Bowles. The film also features the enigmatic young film director Oliver Laxe, whose onscreen presence becomes interwoven with the multiple narratives that co-exist amidst the various settings of Rivers' cinematic exploration.

Critics and juries worldwide praise London-based Ben Rivers as one of the most compelling independent filmmakers of this generation. His landscapes and portraits convey subjects with an evocative vividness that distinguishes them from all familiar genres. Often following and filming people who have separated themselves from society, the raw film footage provides a starting point for oblique narratives imagining alternative existences in marginal worlds. Rivers is the recipient of the FIPRESCI International Critics Prize, 68th Venice Film Festival; the

Artangel Open 2013; the inaugural Robert Gardner Film Award; the Baloise Art Prize, Art Basel; Artangel Open 2013; and two Tiger Awards from International Film Festival Rotterdam.

### **In person: Ben Rivers**

“Ben Rivers’ cinema has emerged in recent years as one of the most constantly evolving, mysterious, elemental, and resonant bodies of work by any active filmmaker.” – Robert Koehler – *Cinema Scope*

“Ben Rivers’ awesomely titled *The Sky Trembles and the Earth is Afraid and the Two Eyes Are Not Brothers* veers off in a completely unexpected direction halfway through. The first part, shot and edited in Rivers’ characteristic observational mode, portrays the shoot of a film in the Moroccan desert. Although it’s documentary footage that Rivers shot on the set of the new film by the French director Oliver Laxe (*You All Are Captains*, 2010), the extreme stylization of the 16mm images endows the film with an otherworldly feel. In some shots, the colors are washed out so that the desert landscapes resemble those of a Pasolini film and the actors wearing traditional costumes look like biblical figures. As a result, whenever crewmembers and actors are simultaneously present, the effect is weirdly anachronistic. This impression reaches surreal levels in other shots, in which specific colors are rendered so vividly – Lisandro Alonso’s *Jauja* came to mind – they seem to explode on the screen.

After about 45 minutes, Laxe leaves the shoot and drives off on his own. At this point *The Sky Trembles* shifts fully into fictional territory, turning into an adaptation of Paul Bowles’ short story “A Distant Episode.” The surreality from this point onwards is amped up to the point of turning hallucinatory. The environment’s inherent violence, the gritty air and feverish heat of the desert seemed to ooze out of the screen, which, combined with the beauty of the images, made for a singularly breathtaking experience.” – *Filmmaker Magazine*

“It’s the beguiling strangeness of Rivers’ technique that carries *The Sky Trembles* on a sandy sirocco to its inscrutably cathartic denouement. Shooting in texture-rich 35mm, absorbing hard sunlight so directly that the edges of the frame appear singed, Rivers uses the khaki starkness of his surroundings to place in relief his most nightmarishly surreal images. The disparate, densely meshed components of Philippe Ciompi’s sound design serve in themselves as a severe narrating voice: Strains of indigenous music, often disembodied, raise questions of the filmmakers’ relationship to the

culture they're observing, clashing with less identifiable industrial components that suggest the swarming, inarticulate noise in the captive's head." – *Variety*

"Most of what Rivers depicts is the downtime between filming, where the mystical, unknowable quality of the land as expressed through more active footage gives way to the quotidian and banal. Even cutaways to static landscapes and animals suggest boredom, skewering the poetic effects many ethnographic filmmakers and exoticizing fantasists consciously place over their supposed truth...

Just as the deliberate tedium starts to become genuinely tedious, Rivers throws a curveball when Laxe's director is suddenly abducted by locals... This downturn of fortunes could be called the film's punch line: Western filmmakers ordinarily use exotic locales and indigenous people to entertain viewers back in the West, but here the director suffers the inverse fate by becoming the sport of Moroccans...

*The Sky Trembles* also boasts perhaps the best final shot of the year: a sprint across sunset-lit desert sand that's at once liberating, bleakly funny, tragic, and, above all, sublimely photographed." – *Slant*

### **Director's Statement**

In a cafe in Morocco, around 50 years ago, Paul Bowles overheard a man, high on kif, say the title of this film. And so he wrote a story around this statement, a story that moves between different planes of reality. I read the story, and the story behind the story, and the strange phrase kept circling around my mind, creating images and dreams. This film is a manifestation of these images, along with obsessions about cinema and how far we will go to make it.

– Ben Rivers, 2015

For more information, check <http://www.theskytrembles.com>

### **Biographies**

**Ben Rivers** is an artist and filmmaker using 16mm and hand-processing. His practice treads a line between documentary and fiction, often following and filming people who have in some way separated themselves from society.

Notable works include: *Two Years at Sea* (2011); *A Spell to Ward off Darkness* (2013, co-directed with Ben Russell); *Sack Barrow* (2011); *Slow Action* (2010); *I Know Where I'm Going* (2009); *Origin of the Species* (2008); *Ah, Liberty!* (2008); *This Is My Land* (2006).

Rivers has exhibited widely both in the UK and internationally. Recent exhibitions include: *The Two Eyes Are Not Brothers*, Artangel Open Commission 2015, Television Centre, White City, London, 2015, *Things*, Kate MacGarry, London, 2014, *Fable*, Temporary Gallery, Cologne, 2014, *Ah Liberty!*, The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, 2013, *Slow Action*, Hepworth Wakefield, 2012; *Sack Barrow*, Hayward Gallery, London, 2011.

He is the recipient of numerous prizes including: The Tiger Award, Rotterdam International Film Festival 2015, Artangel Open Commission 2013, The Ann Arbor Film Festival Jury Prize 2012, the 68th Venice International Film Festival for his first feature film *Two Years At Sea* and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists, 2010.

His work has been shown in a number of international film festivals, including: Courtisane Festival; Pesaro International Film Festival; London Film Festival; Tirana Film Festival; Punto de Vista, Pamplona; Indielisboa; Milan Film Festival; Venice International Film Festival; Ann Arbor Film Festival; Karlovy-Vary International Film Festival; Rotterdam International Film Festival; Locarno International Film Festival; Toronto Film Festival; and New York Film Festival, among others.

Rivers has forthcoming solo exhibitions at Camden Arts Centre in autumn 2015, and Kunstverein, Hamburg in 2016.

<http://www.benrivers.com>

Born in Paris in 1982, Spanish filmmaker **Oliver Laxe** lives and works in Morocco. Since 2007, he has run a cinema workshop at a shelter for impoverished children in Tangier, giving them access to 16mm stock and equipment. Laxe is a graduate of the film program at Barcelona's Pompeu Fabra University, which has recently made a name for itself as a center for innovative documentary filmmaking, with faculty members including José Luis Guerín and graduates including Mercedes Alvarez. His first feature *Todos vos sodes capitáns* (*You Are All Captains*, 2010) was premiered at the Directors' Fortnight, where he received the International Critics Award. He is one of the founders of Zeitun Films. He is currently working on his next feature, *Las Mimosas*.

*The Jack H. Skirball Series is curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud.*