



**BORDERLINES
FILM FESTIVAL**

BLACKBIRD BLACKBIRD BLACKBERRY (15)

Director: Elene Naveriani

Starring: Eka Chavleishvili, Temiko Chichinadze, Lia Abuladze

Switzerland/Georgia, 2023, 1 hour 50 minutes, Georgian + English subtitles

Blackbird Blackbird Blackberry is based on a 2020 first person novel by the the Georgian writer Tanya Melashvili and is the second feature film of Georgian director, Elena Naveriani, who grew up in Georgia, but now lives in Switzerland. In the film, the main character, Etero, is single, middle aged and looked down upon by the married women of her small village. The story leads Etero to unlearn how she's been told to behave as a woman all her life, which echoes the director's own experience - discovering role models in films from a young age and forging their own way of being in the world. For Elena, at 10 years old, seeing *Miracle in Milan*, the 1951 movie directed by Vittorio De Sica, about an orphan, who struggles to make the best of his life on the streets, was the very first inspiration.

Elene, who is known as they, started their career as an artist/painter and, wanting to get away from home during the Georgian war with Russia, they found that only Switzerland would accept their application to study abroad. After a Masters in Critical Curatoria Cybermedia at the Geneva School of Art and Design, they started their studies in Cinema. Their first feature *I Am Truly a Drop of Sun on Earth* (2017) premiered in Rotterdam and was awarded numerous prizes (Seoul, Xining, Valladolid, Porto), and their second feature, *Wet Sand*, made its World Premiere in Locarno in August 2021 and earned the Best Actor's Prize.

When Elena first discovered the novel, they read it in four hours and instantly recognised the tiny Georgian village where it was set and understood the way people lived together and the heroine's struggle to listen to her own voice and make her own decisions regardless of social pressures. Elena knew straight away they could make this story work as a film, and who should play the lead - an actress they had worked with before - leading to a collaboration that makes invisible stories visible, that makes unheard voices heard and creates a space for marginalised lives. It took only eighteen months between their reading the book and starting to shoot the film.

Elene's direction echoes Estero's instinctive feminism, her awakening and her realisation that the married village women are not happy, for all their moral precepts and disapproval. Elene's camera keeps at a distance from the action in the film in order to show a wider picture, to pick up small details, but not to focus on them in close up. For instance, where Etero and Merman are beginning to get to know each other, his hand creeps slowly towards hers. The stylised production design also emphasises the contrast between Etero's spaces - bold and earthy solid colours against the pretty pastels of her female neighbours.

"Naveriani has given us a most unusual feminist heroine, one experiencing the mischievous, rarely seen triumph of a woman coming into bloom just as those around her are beginning to fade: the last and sweetest blackberry on the bush." (Jessica Kiang, **Variety**)

Preview courtesy of New Wave Films

Notes compiled by Jane Jackson