

# OBSESSED with LIGHT



WITH CHERRY JONES  
AS THE VOICE  
OF LOÏE FULLER



ROME  
FILM FEST 2023  
FREESTYLE



INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION



BETWEEN THE RIVERS PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS OBSESSED WITH LIGHT

DIRECTORS: SABINE KRAYENBÜHL AND ZEVA OELBAUM PRODUCERS: ZEVA OELBAUM, SABINE KRAYENBÜHL

VOICE OF LOÏE FULLER: CHERRY JONES CO-PRODUCER: CHRISTIAN POPP EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: ELIZABETH RODRIGUEZ CHANDLER

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: DENISE BENMOSCHE, RUEDI GERBER, SUSAN MARGOLIN

CONSULTING PRODUCERS: KEVIN BROWNLOW, CYNTHIA KANE, KATHARINA OTTO-BERNSTEIN, CARLA SOLOMON

EDITOR: SABINE KRAYENBÜHL DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY: BOB RICHMAN, CLAUDIA RASCHKE

DESIGN & ANIMATION: MOMENTIST INC. COMPOSER: PAUL CANTELON



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***Obsessed with Light* is a meditation on light and the enduring obsession to create. The film pulls back the curtain on Loïe Fuller, a wildly original performer who revolutionized the visual culture of the early 20th century. But it is not a bio-pic. Creating a dialogue between the past and the present, the documentary delves into the astonishing influence Fuller's work has on contemporary culture including artists like Red Hot Chili Peppers, Taylor Swift, Bill T. Jones, Shakira and William Kentridge, among many others. In the process, the film uncovers commonalities that connect these creative luminaries to Fuller and each other.**



The American creator of modern dance, Fuller (1862-1928) created a completely new kind of spectacle which combined dance, fabric and movement. She also pioneered the ingenious use of electricity for the stage, even building a glass floor so that she could be lit from below. Fuller propelled herself into swirling abstractions that made audiences gasp and she immediately understood the importance of protecting her ownership of these innovations. She took out dozens of patents in the U.S., France and UK. Always struggling against a flood of imitators, she sued in court to protect her copyright as early as 1892. Given the recent Supreme Court decision in the dispute between Andy Warhol Foundation and photographer Lynn Goldsmith, Fuller's early battles against copyright infringement are incredibly relevant.

Anyone who has been to a rock concert has seen a modern version of the lighting designs that Fuller patented over a century ago.

Fuller shot to international stardom after performing at the Folies Bergère in Paris. Her rise to fame was intertwined with the very beginning of cinema and her Serpentine dance became an iconic subject for the earliest filmmakers like Georges Méliès and Alice Guy Blaché. She launched Isadora Duncan's career, promoted Auguste Rodin's sculpture in the U.S. and consulted with Marie Curie and Thomas Edison to make her costumes glow. Her work influenced the most important artists, performers and thinkers of her day, including Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Picasso, Stéphane Mallarmé and Filippo Marinetti.

*Obsessed with Light* is a film about transformation. It is about a Midwestern vaudeville performer who performed with Buffalo Bill before becoming a world-famous star of Belle Époque Paris and the embodiment of the Art Nouveau movement with her elaborate productions of ephemeral, shape-shifting abstractions. It's about a woman, described by contemporaries as "odd and badly dressed," who transformed herself into the "Fairy of Light" onstage. It's about a woman who became famous on her own terms- unapologetic about her body type and open about her sexuality. And it's about a visionary artist who disrupted the prevailing notions of dance and the imagined limits of the human body. Lastly, the film is about a lost modernist whose story is crucial to understanding both early cinema and performance.

## Directors' Statement

We have always been intrigued by women whose accomplishments have been overlooked or forgotten, particularly women who straddle the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Our previous film, "Letters from Baghdad," is about the remarkable British explorer and archaeologist Gertrude Bell (1868–1926). Sometimes called the female "Lawrence of Arabia," Bell was, in fact, much more influential than her famous colleague T.E. Lawrence.

We began our search for a new film subject in 2018 and since we spend a substantial amount of time excavating documents and researching archival footage for our films, we try to choose subjects that appeal to us on many levels.

As passionate lovers of early cinema, we'd seen film clips of Loïe Fuller's Serpentine Dance over the years. The footage was nearly always exquisitely hand-tinted, frequently represented in museum exhibitions around the world and in compilations of clips of early cinema.

We later discovered that this was because Fuller's rise to fame was intertwined with the very beginnings of cinema and her Serpentine dance became an iconic subject for the earliest filmmakers including Georges Méliès, Segundo de Chomón, the Lumière brothers, Thomas Edison and Alice Guy-Blaché.

We became fascinated by Loïe Fuller (1862–1928). She was an unlikely woman to become the embodiment of Art Nouveau and the belle of the Belle Époque. Born during the Civil War outside of Chicago, she had begun her career as an actress and even performed with Buffalo Bill.

We were amazed at how she seemed so very *modern*. She was modern in her enthusiasm to embrace the scientific and technological innovations of her day in her productions and she was also modern in her unwillingness to be limited by anyone else's expectations. She was honest about her ambition and open about her life partner, Gabrielle Bloch. She wasn't thin or beautiful or highly educated, and she was all too human and far from perfect, but she had one quality that we really admire—she was unstoppable. Nothing was off-limits to her imagination. Fuller was even the first performer to begin on a blackened stage in a dark theater, convincing nervous and skeptical theater managers that this wouldn't be dangerous for their patrons.

She was a woman of sensational "firsts."

Almost immediately, we found online references to Loïe Fuller in the work of William Kentridge, a performance by Taylor Swift, Alexander McQueen's hologram of Kate Moss and the Dior, Spring-Summer 2019 Ready-to-Wear collection. We noticed mentions of Fuller's work posted from around the world and across many different creative disciplines.

Suddenly, Loïe Fuller's Serpentine Dance seemed to be everywhere, even as Loïe Fuller the woman was largely unknown. Like her dance spectacle, her work appeared to shape-shift into a thousand different colors and configurations through the eyes of contemporary artists, performers and designers. We interviewed many creative luminaries from around the world, deciding that these artists would highlight different aspects of Fuller in the context of how they were influenced by her.

We realized that Loïe Fuller's story went far beyond simply who she was and what she did, but it also encompassed how her remarkable innovations are still in the *zeitgeist*, nearly a century after her death.



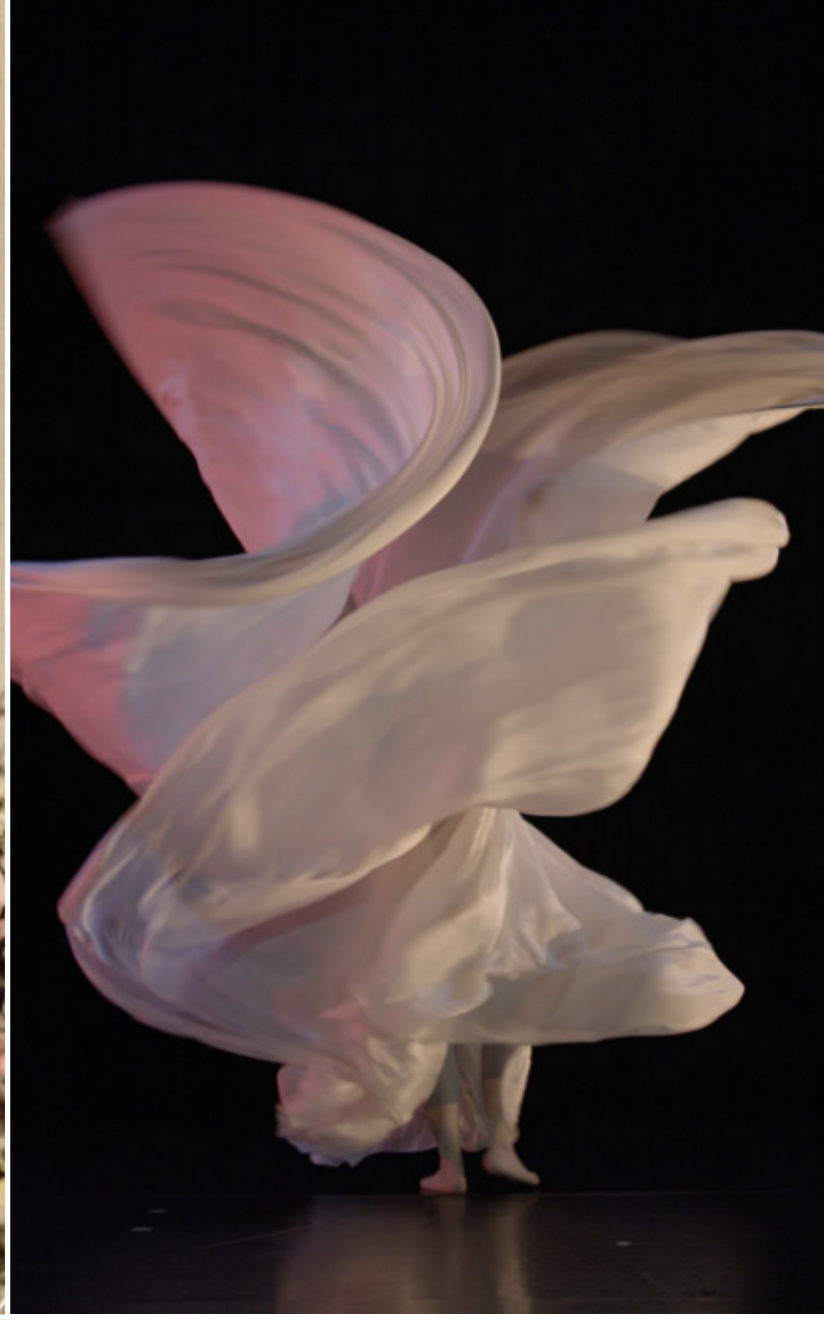


**BETWEEN THE RIVERS PRODUCTIONS**

Zeva Oelbaum and Sabine Krayenbühl co-founded **Between the Rivers Productions** in 2012. Their most recent film, **Letters From Baghdad**, tells the story of British diplomat and explorer Gertrude Bell, sometimes called the “female Lawrence of Arabia.” Voiced and exec produced by Academy Award winner **Tilda Swinton**, it screened in over 125 theaters across the U.S. and U.K. and was broadcast on networks across the globe including PBS, the BBC and ARTE/ France and Germany. The company’s work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, New York State Council on the Arts, Regina Scully/Artemis Rising Foundation, Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund and the Rodin Museum in Paris, among many others.

*Obsessed with Light* is co-produced by ZDF, in collaboration with ARTE, and co-produced by YUZU productions (France).









Courtesy of Macklowe Gallery

## Selected Interviewees Appearing in the Film

### **ROBERT WILSON**

Robert Wilson is an experimental theater director and playwright. He is known for his signature use of light, his investigations into the structure of a simple movement and the classical rigor of his scenic and furniture design. His collaborations with leading artists, writers, and musicians including Philip Glass, Lucinda Childs and Tom Waits continue to fascinate audiences worldwide. Wilson established The Watermill Center on the East End of Long Island, New York in 1991.

### **BILL T. JONES**

MacArthur Fellow Bill T. Jones is a choreographer, director, author and dancer. He co-founded the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company and founded New York LiveArts. He has been called “one of the most notable, recognized modern-dance choreographers and directors of our time.” He has been awarded numerous fellowships and awards including two Tony Awards and the National Medal of Arts.

### **MARIA GRAZIA CHIURI**

In 2016, Dior named Maria Grazia Chiuri as the first-ever female artistic director in Dior’s seven decades of male leadership. In two short years, the former Valentino co-creative director has made an important impact on the fashion house, using the runway as a platform to spread messages of female empowerment and feminism. In July 2019, Chiuri was awarded the Légion d’honneur, France’s highest honor.

### **JORDAN ROTH**

Six-time Tony Award-winning producer Jordan Roth has established himself as a theatrical innovator and style influencer. Roth is best-known for championing shows that push the boundaries of theater on Broadway and for creating unique experiences for audiences. As President of Jujamcyn Theaters, he oversees five Broadway theaters, presenting some of the most successful shows on Broadway.

### **IRIS VAN HERPEN**

Widely heralded as one of fashion’s most forward-thinking designers, Iris van Herpen was trained in classical ballet and throughout her career, the Dutch designer has been fascinated by fluidity and the entangled art of movement. Over the past 15 years, she has redefined the old-world charm of couture to show how technology can and will transform the way we dress.

### **WILLIAM KENTRIDGE**

William Kentridge was born in Johannesburg, South Africa and his work frequently draws from socio-political conditions in post-apartheid South Africa. He uses a diverse range of artistic media such as drawing, performance, film, printmaking, sculpture and painting. Kentridge is the recipient of numerous honorary doctorates from universities including Yale. Recent venues for major exhibitions include Kunstmuseum Basel in Switzerland, the Whitechapel Gallery in London and the Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark.

### **TRAJAL HARRELL**

A dancer and choreographer, Harrell’s show, “Maggie the Cat,” was listed as one the Best Dance Performances of 2022 in *The New York Times*. Harrell gained global recognition with his series of works “Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning” at the Judson Church in New York. His unique style is a result of the unusual way in which he combines dance languages, such as voguing, postmodern dance and butoh and the humor that pervades all his work. He has received numerous fellowships including from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the Doris Duke Foundation.



Wrapped In  
Electric Sparks,  
La Loïe Dazzles!

The  
Billboard

*She's nothing if not modern*

RENOWN ON THE LONDON STAGE

VARIETY

La Loïe has revolutionized Paris.  
*La Goulue has taken to absinthe*





## **MAITE MARCOS**

Maite Marcos is a choreographer with more than 20 years of experience in staging shows and teaching dance. For the past 15 years, she has worked as a choreographer with the Colombian singer **SHAKIRA**. In her interview in the film, Maite shares a fascinating story of how Loïe Fuller was the inspiration for Shakira's live performance of her song "No."

## **MARCEL DZAMA**

Marcel Dzama is a visual artist living in Brooklyn, NY. He was born in Winnipeg, Canada. His work has been represented by David Zwirner since 1998 and he has had thirteen solo exhibitions at the gallery. His work has been exhibited extensively in solo and group shows throughout the world and in 2016 he created the costume and stage design for the New York City Ballet's *The Most Incredible Thing*, a performance based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale.

## **JENNIFER TIPTON**

MacArthur Fellow Jennifer Tipton is an internationally renowned lighting designer whose distinctive designs have redefined the relationship between lighting and performance. She has designed lighting for numerous Broadway productions, the New York City Ballet, the American Ballet Theatre, Twyla Tharp Dance, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, the Public Theater and the Metropolitan Opera. She has received numerous awards and fellowships including two Tony Awards and is a professor of lighting design at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale.

## **OLA MACIEJEWSKA**

Born in Poland and based in France, Ola Maciejewska is a dancer and performance artist. Since 2013, she developed a unique choreographic practice based on re-reading of the iconic Serpentine Dances invented by Loïe Fuller. Her works have been presented at Centre Pompidou in Paris, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, National Taichung Theater in Taiwan, Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, London Royal Opera House, Musée d'Orsay in Paris and the Watermill Center.

## **BASIL TWIST**

MacArthur Fellow Basil Twist is a puppeteer and theater artist whose experiments with the materials and techniques of puppetry explore the boundaries between the animate and inanimate, the abstract and the figurative. His wide-ranging and trailblazing body of work is revitalizing puppetry as a serious and sophisticated art form in and of itself and establishing it as an integral element in contemporary theater, dance, and music.

## **DRIFT**

Dutch artists Lonneke Gordijn and Ralph Nauta founded studio DRIFT in 2007 which creates experiential sculptures, installations, and performances. DRIFT's work is featured in the permanent collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among others. In 2014, DRIFT was awarded the Arte Laguna Prize, Venice.

## **ELÍN HANSDÓTTIR**

Elín Hansdóttir is a multidisciplinary artist who works across several disciplines including installation, sculpture and photography. She often creates *in situ* immersive installations and she has created and installed work in several international venues including the Frieze Projects, London, the National Gallery of Iceland. In 2021-2022 she was the artist in residency at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien. She lives and works in Reykjavik, Iceland.





# Filmmakers Team

## **SABINE KRAYENBÜHL, Director**

Sabine Krayenbühl is an award-winning filmmaker with over twenty theatrical documentaries and narrative features to her credit. She co-directed and edited *Letters from Baghdad*. Her editing work includes Oscar and Independent Spirit Award nominated *My Architect* for which she received an American Cinema Editors (ACE) Eddie Award nomination and the Emmy winning *The Hunt for Planet B*. Additional credits include *Mad Hot Ballroom*, *The Bridge*, *Picasso and Braque Go to the Movies*, produced by Martin Scorsese, *Ahead of Time*, Jennifer Fox's Emmy nominated *My Reincarnation*, *Salinger* on which she consulted and HBO's *The Price of Everything*. Krayenbühl has a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and is a member the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

## **ZEVA OELBAUM, Director**

Zeva Oelbaum is an award-winning filmmaker. She recently co-directed and produced *Letters from Baghdad*. Oelbaum also produced *Ahead of Time*, a feature length documentary about the trailblazing journalist Ruth Gruber, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival before garnering six Best Documentary awards. She comes to film from a career in still photography and her work has been published in periodicals such as *The New York Times Magazine* and collected in public collections such as the Bibliothèque nationale de France, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and The Brooklyn Museum. Two monographs of Oelbaum's photographs have been published by Rizzoli International Publishers. She graduated from Brandeis University with a degree in anthropology and is a member of the Producers Guild.

## **CHRISTIAN POPP, Co-Producer**

After earning a Masters Degree in History and Arts, Christian was a commissioning editor for ARTE from 1998 to 2005. From 2005 to 2010, he worked as a producer in Berlin for interscience film. In 2012, he co-founded YUZU Productions in Paris which produced 50 documentaries in 10 years. At the end of 2022, Christian joined the French company TAG FILM. The films Christian produced have screened at Festival de Cannes, IDFA, Sundance, Berlinale and more. In addition, for more than 20 years Christian has been a consultant and mentor at various documentary events including IDFAcademy, EAVE and Documentary Campus. He was also Head of Industry at FIPADOC for both the 2020 and 2021 editions and a jury member at IDFA in 2017 and the ARTE-Jury at the Duisburger Filmwoche 2019-2021. Christian was an associate producer on *Letters from Baghdad*.

## **DENISE BENMOSCHE, Executive producer**

Denise Benmosche is a noted philanthropist, collector, and patron of the arts with a special focus on women in the visual and performing arts. She was Executive Producer of *Ahead of Time*, a documentary feature about centenarian journalist Ruth Gruber, and *Letters From Baghdad*. With the Benmosche family, Denise saved the Lafayette Theater in Suffern, NY from demolition and fully restored it. She sponsors an annual Jewish film festival at the theater. Denise is also dedicated to the fight against anti-Semitism and the advancement of human rights involving tolerance and social acceptance. She has worked internationally to support these missions as a Board member of The Tolerance Project, as well as, numerous other non-profits. Denise is Chair of the 92nd Street Y Committee for the Endowment of the Jewelry Department.

### **ELIZABETH RODRIGUEZ CHANDLER, Executive Producer**

Elizabeth Rodriguez Chandler is the founder of Crescent River Productions, producing films with social impact. She was Executive Producer of *Letters from Baghdad*, advising on the film's financing and market strategy and execution. Currently, Elizabeth is in production on a documentary film entitled *Femme, Family, Farm*, about a remarkable woman growing a small farm, family and community in northwest Connecticut. She comes to film from a 25-year career in investment banking during which time she advised sovereigns, cultural institutions and corporations throughout the world.

### **RUEDI GERBER, Executive Producer**

Ruedi Gerber has produced and directed award winning shorts and documentaries including *Living With the Spill* and *Meta-Mecano* (Best Architecture Documentary, Paris, 1998). His first narrative feature *Heartbreak Hospital* starred Patricia Clarkson. His trilogy about the life and work of Anna Halprin, include *Breath Made Visible*, which premiered at Locarno Film Festival and won the Audience Award at the Mill Valley Film Festival, *Seniors Rocking* and newly released *Journey in Sensuality—Anna Halprin & Rodin*. He is a producer of the Italian feature *Girl in Flight (La Fuga)* and *Basmati Blues* with Donald Sutherland and Brie Larsen. In 2015, he became a partner in the culture and gastronomy project KOSMOS in Zürich.

### **SUSAN MARGOLIN, Executive Producer**

Susan Margolin most recently premiered her film *Desperate Souls, Dark City and the Legend of Midnight Cowboy* at the Venice International Film Festival and Telluride Film Festival. She has built a reputation as a pioneer of home entertainment and digital distribution. Her company, New Video featured programming from brands including A+E, History Channel, Sundance Institute, Tribeca films and Scholastic. Through Docurama Films Margolin championed more than 400 award-winning non-fiction films. She launched St. Marks Productions LLC and produced the feature documentaries *The Rape of Recy Taylor* and *Generation Startup*. Margolin serves on the Board of Chicken & Egg Pictures, the Hamptons Documentary Film Festival and the Advisory Board of New York Women In Film and Television. The Producers Guild of America honored Margolin as one of the “Digital 25: Leaders in Emerging Entertainment.”

### **CARLA SOLOMON, Associate Producer**

Carla Solomon is a documentary film producer and one of the founding principals of Anthos Media LLC. Her producing credits include *Particle Fever*, *The New Public*, *Colliding Dreams* (executive producer), and most recently the HBO documentary *The Price of Everything*. Currently, Solomon is participating in *Creative Chaos' Post-Truth* (in production), about the birth of the “fake news” phenomenon, and developing a film about the college mental health crisis. A clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst by training, Solomon is on the board of trustees of the NYU Langone Medical Center and founding chair of KiDS of NYU Langone Medical Center. She is also on the board of directors of the Hamptons International Film Festival.

### **KEVIN BROWNLOW, Consulting Producer**

Kevin Brownlow is a British filmmaker, film historian, television documentary-maker and author. He is a world-renowned expert on early cinema. In 2010, Brownlow received an Honorary Academy Award for his role in film and cinema history preservation. He has written nearly a dozen books on the silent era and produced several documentaries.



### **CYNTHIA KANE, Consulting Producer**

Cynthia Kane, a former commissioning editor for documentary, helped transform the way global documentaries are seen on American television. She created DOCday on Sundance Channel, shepherded over 150 international and U.S. co-productions for public media at ITVS, and at Al Jazeera America oversaw Kartemquin's series *Hard Earned* (2016 Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia Award). She currently works with East Village Entertainment and Women Make Movies.

### **KATHARINA OTTO-BERNSTEIN, Consulting Producer**

Katharina Otto-Bernstein is an Emmy award nominated director and producer whose credits include *The Price of Everything*, *Mapplethorpe: Look at the Pictures*, *Absolute Wilson* and *Beautopia*. She serves as the president of Film Manufacturers Inc. where she develops and produces independent films, documentaries, and television series. Otto-Bernstein won a Silver Hugo award from the Chicago International Film Festival and has been nominated for numerous awards including the Critics' Choice Award, GLAAD Award, Cinema Eye Honors, Grierson Award and Sundance Film Festival Grand Prize. She is a member of the Writers Guild of America, Women in Film and Television and the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

## **Credit Block**

**DIRECTORS:** Sabine Krayenbühl and Zeva Oelbaum

**PRODUCERS:** Zeva Oelbaum, Sabine Krayenbühl

**VOICE OF LOIE FULLER:** Cherry Jones

**CO-PRODUCER:** Christian Popp

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:** Elizabeth Rodriguez Chandler

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:** Ruedi Gerber

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:** Denise Benmosche, Susan Margolin

**ASSOCIATE PRODUCER:** Carla Solomon

**CONSULTING PRODUCERS:** Kevin Brownlow, Cynthia Kane, Katharina Otto-Bernstein

**EDITOR:** Sabine Krayenbühl

**DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY:** Bob Richman, Claudia Raschke

**COMPOSER:** Paul Cantelon

VISIT:

[Betweentheiversproductions.com](http://Betweentheiversproductions.com) | [Obsessedwithlightdocumentary.com](http://Obsessedwithlightdocumentary.com)

## Quotes

“Loïe Fuller, more than anything, wanted to break with tradition. She had the ability and the desire to define herself on her own terms.”

—**MARIA GRAZIA CHIURI**

“Loïe Fuller has opened a new path for art of the future.”

—**AUGUSTE RODIN**

“She was a painter of light.”

—**ROBERT WILSON**

“I retain one vibrant image from the exposition...Mme Loïe Fuller...  
the dancer who created the phantom of an era”

—**JEAN COCTEAU**