

UNUSUAL BONES PRESENTS

# BAPTISM OF SILENCE

A FILM BY KANYA VILJOEN  
& EMILIE BADENHORST**DIRECTORS: Kanya Viljoen, Emilie Badenhorst**    **PRODUCER: Casey Diepeveen****Technical info:****Genre:** Fiction / Drama**Production country:** South Africa**Shooting location:** South Africa**Total budget:** \$ 636,320**Funds secured:** see financial status.**Logline**

A teenage girl, Isabel, and her younger brother Joshua, have always been each other's refuge in a small, mining town of South Africa, but Isabel loses grip of the relationship, when Joshua endures a violent initiation at an all-boys' high school and withdraws from her. With no one to turn to, Isabel is forced to find resilience within herself and to call Joshua to reflect on who he is becoming.

**Synopsis**

In a rural South African mining town, siblings JOSHUA (13) and ISABEL (15) share an unshakable bond, spending their long summer holiday, swimming and wandering around aimlessly, before school begins. But when Joshua returns from his high school initiation weekend, violated and uncertain of what it means to be a man, their world shifts.

As Isabel explores her own sexuality and the shame that shadows it, boundaries blur as a boy not only shares her photos with others, but pushes for sexual experiences she isn't truly ready for. When Joshua publicly humiliates her, calling her a slut, their bond shatters. Isabel begins to reclaim herself; Joshua, silenced and broken, unravels, and it is only once they turn back to one another that the shame and silence starts to dissipate.

## Director's Note

As a female directing duo, **Baptism of Silence** is our way of confronting the toxic masculinity woven into the culture we grew up in. Rooted in Afrikaans traditions and sibling bonds it speaks to the silences we were taught to keep in schools and churches, the quiet violences we survived when it came to being initiated into adulthood, and the questions we can no longer ignore around us. Growing up with younger brothers taught us how paradoxical sibling relationships can be: both sanctuary and battlefield, bound by an unspoken promise to protect and remain connected. Yet sometimes, that connection fractures in ways that feel irreparable.

We were sixteen when our brothers started high school. Their initiation marked a visible shift in our homes - a week of hazing disguised as "building character." Though illegal in South Africa, these rituals persist to this day as young boys are humiliated and forced to endure physical and emotional abuse. When we asked our brothers what happened, they stayed silent, and that silence shifted our relationship well into our adulthood.

This film is a deeply personal exploration of a loss, of watching someone you love change under the pressure to belong. Told through the eyes of a teenage girl, Dané, it examines toxic masculinity's ripple effects: how boys are broken to fit in, and how girls absorb the aftermath. This is not just a coming-of-age story; it is a reckoning, with silence, with gendered violence, and with the devastating cost of a culture that views this as tradition.

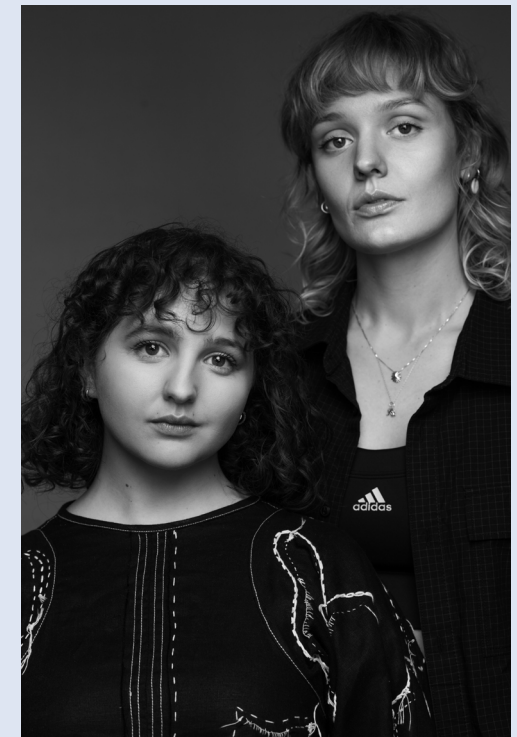
## Directors

### Kanya Viljoen & Emilie Badenhorst

South African writing-directing duo and lifelong friends, Kanya Viljoen and Emilie Badenhorst, have gained international recognition for their innovative and deeply collaborative work. Both studied Theatre and Performance at UCT, and their shared background as writers and directors for the stage continues to shape their filmmaking, rooted in ensemble storytelling, improvisation, and the inclusion of multiple voices both in front of and behind the camera.

Their debut short film, **ekstasis**, won the Silver Screen at the Cannes YDA for Best Direction, as well as Best Direction at the New Renaissance Film Festival. Their follow-up, **'n Doop om Stille** (2023), premiered

at the Silwerskerm Film Festival, where it won both Best Director and Best Short Film. Since 2024, the duo has continued to gain momentum internationally, earning the International Emerging Film Talent Association Award at TALENTS Durban, Best Pitch at Berlinale's JETS Initiative, and the Sørfond Award at the DFM Pitch and Finance Forum.



## Producer's Note

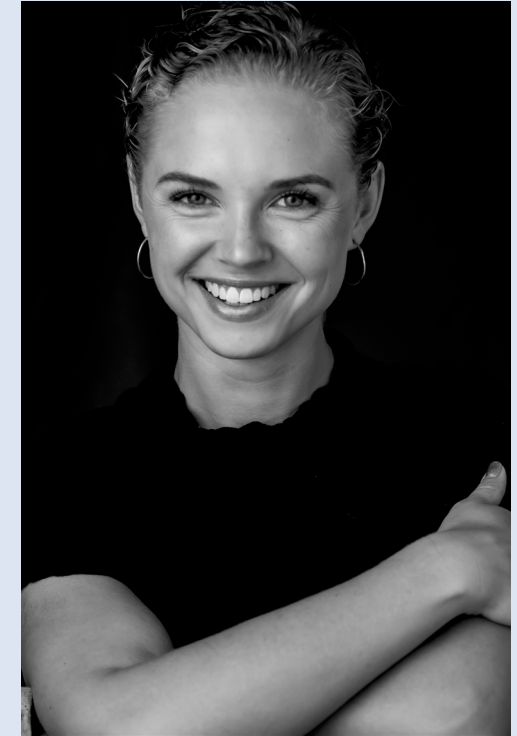
Baptism of Silence is a raw, unflinching exploration of the harrowing initiation rituals young boys endure and the suffocating silence they maintain to belong. Set in South Africa, the film follows siblings Isabel and Joshua, whose deep bond frays under the crushing weight of toxic masculinity. This debut feature confronts the silent struggles that define too many lives, urging a vital conversation about resilience, betrayal, and the cycles that choke our youth.

Inspired by mentors Cait Pansegrouw and Khosie Dali, I'm driven by the power of this narrative and the opportunity to collaborate with a female-led creative team. In an industry often bound by entrenched power structures, creating space for women to lead and tell stories that reflect South African realities is essential. My journey began at age eighteen in a small town, Strand, where I met Kanya and Emilie, whose community plays ignited our small hometown. After crafting short films together, we took Baptism of Silence to TALENTS Durban 2024, winning the IEFTA Award. This milestone led us to the CIRCLE Fiction Orbit Lab, where we honed the female gaze, deepening the film's themes.

Drawing from the gritty authenticity of Moffie (2019), the quiet power of The Quiet Girl (2022), and the intimate scale of Close (2022), Baptism of Silence blends personal urgency with global resonance. For me, this story is personal—my brother's silence, the toxic cycles I've witnessed—are a call to break the silence.

## Producer Casey Diepeveen

Casey Diepeveen is a creative producer known for projects such as **ekstasis** (short film, Cannes YDAs for Best Direction), **reaching** (experimental film, Infecting the City), **Ma Lina** (short film), and most recently, *Trifole*, a feature film supported by the Piedmont Film Commission and distributed by Officine UBU and Cohen Media Group. Since 2021, she has been a producer at Holding Thumbs Productions and Unusual Bones, and holds a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Psychology and Political Science, an honors degree in Strategic Brand Communications, and completed a one-year film conservatory at New York Film Academy. She is the Development Director at Bond Street Theatre NGO based in New York and facilitates arts



programs with local partners in South Africa (Rape Crisis Trust), South Sudan (Likikiri Collective), Egypt (Noon Creative), and Palestine (Fragments Theatre). Casey's work has been supported by public and private funding.

**This project was selected from Durban Film Mart in 2025.**

**Producer Casey Diepeveen and director Kanya Viljoen will be presenting the project at the Sørfond Pitching Forum.**

### **Financial Status**

Baptism of Silence's finance plan, totaling \$636,320, supports a robust production timeline for a July 2026 shoot. Development funding of \$38,528, secured through CIRCLE Lab (\$6,272, 2024), NFVF Development Fund (\$12,880, 2025), JETS Initiative (\$8,400, 2025), DFM Market Pitch (\$2,240, 2025), and Sørfond Market (2025), has driven early stages.

For production, a \$100,800 NFVF grant and a \$49,280 Sørfond grant, both to be applied for in March 2026, provide substantial support. A \$53,200 investment from UK co-producer Agile, in discussion, strengthens global ties. Local presales and equity of

\$196,000 from Multichoice, backed by a letter of intent, anchor the budget. Private investment and gap funding of \$140,000, also with a letter of intent, compliment \$98,000 in European presales under negotiation. A \$140,000 South African D.T.I.C. tax rebate, planned for submission by principal photography, ensures full financing.

This diverse strategy, blending South African, UK, Norwegian funding, realizes Baptism of Silence's bold vision for global audiences.