



# OVARIAN PSYCOS

A Documentary Directed and Produced by  
Joanna Sokolowski & Kate Trumbull-LaValle



**PRESS NOTES**

## **OVARIAN PSYCOS (2016)**

*In East Los Angeles, three young misfit women find solace in an unapologetic, feminist all women of color bicycle crew. They call themselves the Ovarian Psycos Bicycle Brigade.*

### **Directed and Produced by**

Joanna Sokolowski & Kate Trumbull-LaValle

### **Editor**

Victoria Chalk

### **Director of Photography**

Michael Raines

### **Composer**

Jimmy LaValle

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## SYNOPSIS

Riding at night through streets deemed dangerous in Eastside Los Angeles, the Ovarian Psycos use their bicycles to confront the violence in their lives. At the helm of the crew is founder Xela de la X, a single mother and poet M.C. dedicated to recruiting an unapologetic, misfit crew of women of color. The film intimately chronicles Xela as she struggles to strike a balance between her activism and nine year old daughter Yoli; street artist Andi who is estranged from her family and journeys to become a leader within the crew; and bright eyed recruit Evie, who despite poverty, and the concerns of her protective Salvadoran mother, discovers a newfound confidence.

- ★ *World Premiere, SXSW Film Festival 2016*
- ★ *International Premiere, HotDocs Canadian International Film Festival*
- ★ *Official Selection, Seattle International Film Festival (West Coast Premiere)*
- ★ *Official Selection, Human Rights Watch Film Festival (NY Premiere)*
- ★ *Official Selection, Frameline LGBTQ Film Festival (SF Premiere)*
- ★ *\*Los Angeles premiere will be announced soon!*

*Ovarian Psycos* is a co-production of Sylvia Frances Films and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), with funding provided by The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). This project was made possible with support from California Humanities, a partner of the NEH. Completed with the support of WMM's Production Assistance Program. Additional funding was provided by Pacific Pioneer Fund. *Ovarian Psycos* is produced by Sylvia Frances Films who is solely responsible for its content.



## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

The story of Ovarian Psychos landed in our laps. We had wanted to make a film together for some time, a film about women, but there was no one story that was jumping out at us. Then we heard about the Ovas.

Like a lot of their fans, we were drawn in by the boldness of their politics, their brazen approach to feminism, and unapologetic aesthetic: a hybrid mix of Chicana, Riot Grrrl, Zapatista and militant-punk cultural markers. With bandanas tied across their faces, throwing up their Ova "hand sign," and a slogan that can make you both laugh and cry out loud – *Ovaries so big we don't need fucking balls* – we were enamored. It took us no time to realize that this was an important moment in time, one that was a clear extension of the legacy of civil rights activism in East Los Angeles, the birthplace of the Chicano Movement, and one that needed to be documented and shared. And a moment in time that echoed the memory of women in history who have fought boldly for racial and gender equality, yet continue to be rendered invisible. The Ovas pay homage to women of the past, and are also clearly reinventing their own hybrid-identity as urban, women of color feminists. □

Our initial concept of the film was an all-out-super-heroine story. A story where confident, unwavering young women – the Ovas – take back the streets en mass, on bikes, shouting in the face of convention, and bucking expectations. But once we started production the film took a turn. The real super-heroine work was happening behind the scenes, in daily life, within their personal relationships as mothers, daughters, and sisters. We discovered working class young women who were strong but vulnerable, and like all of us, dealing with trauma and disappointment. Feminism isn't something the Ovas choose, but it has been inherited. Inherited from living in a community politicized by the civil rights movement, and by the realities and challenges of growing up within the context of colonization, immigration, racism, misogyny and gendered violence. These were women dramatizing power and freedom on their bikes, at night, publicly in the streets, and at the same time struggling to hold onto that same power as single mothers, aspiring artists, students and working women.

Last night we showed the Ovarian Psychos crew the final film. We are still basking in the afterglow of that moment. They laughed and cried. In a room full of 20 former and current Ovas what resonated most loudly was how gratifying it was to see themselves, their stories, and their efforts reflected on the big screen. Our hope is that this film will speak to the same misfit women and girls the Ovas are looking to attract, the ones who don't feel like they fit in, the ones "at-risk" and under-represented. But we also hope that all folks, both mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons, will catch a glimpse of something authentic and relatable in the stories of Xela, Evie and Andi that will help to expand our collective understanding about gendered politics and race, and conversations about what feminism is and should look like.

- Joanna Sokolowski & Kate Trumbull-LaValle

## SUBJECT BIOS



### **Xela de la X**

Not only is she the Ova's fearless founder, Xela is also a mother and poet M.C. Her music, which she describes as urban, indigenous, political hip-hop, is sharp, biting, painfully honest, and speaks to the history of women's experience of abuse and violence. She wears her politics and education on her sleeve, explaining, "*Growing up in a post-colonized, traditional Mexican household was difficult.*" Xela appears to have a thick skin; she's direct and unapologetic. But the film will reveal her courageous self-disclosure, her vulnerability and tenderness. As a survivor of sexual abuse, she knows there is a need to create support systems for young women, especially women of color. Becoming a mother and raising her daughter Yoli has underscored Xela's motivation to form a collective of sisters to begin to break the silence and taboo of abuse, and confront the conditions that perpetuate it.



### **Andi Xoch**

Andi is a 24-year old street artist, and the middle child of immigrant parents. Red lips, dyed red hair, and tattooed, she has a quiet, yet tough demeanor. Born in Mexico and raised in Highland Park L.A., Andi felt caught between two worlds. Feeling like the black sheep, she pulled away from her mother and sisters. At 20 she jumped at the opportunity to join the Ovas when she heard Xela was planning to start a bike crew. Today she is the resident artist of the crew and she is responsible for some of the Ova's most irreverent and iconic imagery – including their infamous ovaries bandana. A constant and supportive presence in the crew, Andi is often in the background, but soon her dedication to the group will be challenged and we see Andi, once a quiet artist, now confident at the helm of the Ova's.



## Evelyn (Evie)

On a borrowed bike, Evelyn (Evie) is not your typical cyclist. She is relatable, optimistic, and mature beyond her years. After building up the courage to ride at night with the Ova's, she is exploring a newfound strength and confidence, and the female-centric politics of the Ovarian Psycos speak to her. Evelyn grew up in a tight knit family, under the watchful eye of her hardworking mother, Maria Isabel Torres, who barely makes a living wage working nights cleaning office buildings. Maria Isabel is a refugee from El Salvador and vividly recalls leaving home because of war; the trauma of leaving her family behind still lingers. She is hesitant, confused, and worried about Evie's interest in the Ova's. She doesn't want her to ride, especially not at night. *"The bike is more for boys than it is for girls,"* she says. But Evie is resolute; she intends to join.

## The Ovarian Psycos Bicycle Brigade

The Ovarian Psycos are an all women of color bicycling brigade cycling for the purpose of healing their communities physically, emotionally and spiritually by addressing pertinent issues. They envision a world where women are change agents who create and maintain holistic health in themselves and their respective communities for present and future generations.



## FILMMAKING TEAM

**Joanna Sokolowski (Director/Producer)** is an independent documentary filmmaker. She co-produced the film *Very Semi Serious* (Tribeca, 2015), and has worked as a producer at Walking Iris Media and Open Studio Productions. She formed Sylvania Frances Films with her filmmaking partner Kate Trumbull-LaValle in 2013 to produce their first feature: *Ovarian Psycos* (SXSW, 2016).

**Kate Trumbull-LaValle (Director/Producer)** is an independent documentary filmmaker who first began in the field of social justice media as an educator and program coordinator for the Media Arts Center San Diego. She is associate producer for PBS's *No Más Bebés* (Los Angeles Film Festival, 2015) and is the director and producer of *Ovarian Psycos* (SXSW, 2016). In 2013 she co-founded Sylvania Frances Films with Joanna Sokolowski.

**Victoria Chalk (Editor)** is a well-travelled lover of stories, currently residing in Los Angeles, with 10 years of post-production experience. Her work includes *Vivre, jusqu' au bout . . .* (2010), additional editing on *Before You Know it* (SXSW, 2013), and *The Lovers and the Despot* (Sundance, 2016) She was also a contributing editor at the 2013 and 2015 Edit and Story Labs at Sundance.

**Michael Raines (Director of Photography)** is a filmmaker and self-taught cinematographer. He is the director of *Beyond There* (2014), *Bliss Point* (2015), and *Northern Passage* (2016). He is the DP for *Ovarian Psycos* and is currently in pre-production for a new short narrative titled *Role Play*.

**Jimmy LaValle (Composer)** is best known as The Album Leaf, known for his distinctive, dreamy, cinematic soundscapes featured on five full-length albums, in film, television, and commercials. LaValle composed original music for the films *Spring* (Toronto International Film Festival, 2014), *Before You Know It* (SXSW, 2013), *Wander Women! The Untold Story of Female Superheroes* (SXSW, 2012), among others. Music from The Album Leaf frequently appears on television, most notably on ABC's *Scandal* and FX's *Sons of Anarchy*.



\* All photo credits: Michael Raines