

Attracted by fleshy mushrooms a young girl enters a lush meadow. She swims through the grass. She can move easily through the meadow and the earth pushes up more mushrooms for her. A young male hunter can only slide across the surface.

The film focuses on capturing an encounter, between a girl, stealing a swim and mushrooms, and a young hunter of hares.

Pixillation/Animation  
Running Time: 7m 12s  
Colour PAL 16:9

### Cast

Girl: Clare Bennett  
Boy: James Hutchinson



MUSHROOM THIEF JOAN ASHWORTH



## Joan Ashworth

Ashworth studied at the National Film and Television School graduating in 1987 with her short film *The Web*. Ashworth co-founded 3 Peach Animation through which she directed many projects including the opening titles for Tim Burton's *Batman*. Ashworth joined the Royal College of Art in 1994 as Professor of Animation. In 2002, Ashworth completed *How Mermaids Breed* inspired by Bronze Age Cycladic fertility figures and the drawings of Henry Moore. *Mushroom Thief* was produced by Seed Fold Films with the support of the Royal College of Art Staff Research Fund.

## Filmography

*How Mermaids Breed* 2002  
*Eggs, Fish & Blood* 1999  
*The Web* 1987  
*Macbeth* 1981

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# MUSHROOM THIEF JOAN ASHWORTH

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Running Time: 7m 12s Col PAL 16:9 Dolby 5.1

## About Mushroom Thief

Mushroom Thief is based on a memory of almost being caught stealing mushrooms from another farmer's field. I hid in a dip in the field and watched the farmer through the grass flattening myself into the ground like a hare. This memory is combined with imagining pushing my way under the turf of a meadow, as if it were a loose carpet, and easing myself into the earth, tunneling down through time, meeting fragments of pots, stones, roots, and ancient objects.

While developing the script I looked at the work of two German painters Otto Mueller and Erich Heckel, both were concerned with the symbolic expression of an inner experience of the world. They painted pensive figures enjoying the idyllic beauty of a landscape. This combination of the straightforward juxtaposition of nudes in unspoiled nature resonated with my thoughts about the directness, and matter-of-factness of nature. Their rough-painted grass had an aliveness that connected with the stop-frame twitching grass movement I had achieved while testing the time-lapse/stop-frame technique. When watched, the grass seems to be warning us of something, almost rattling and shouting. I read it as the deep earth trying to warn the girl about her encounter, her threatened loss of innocence, and loss of closeness to the earth. But her desire to grow up is strong, and she is willing to tame her wildness, at least for now.

To develop the characters, I researched the symbols of the hare, the myths surrounding the animal and some of the knowledge of a hare's behaviour. I was particularly drawn to the fact that hares jump sideways to hide their scent from predators, also that hares could swim as this resonated with my swimming girl. Hares are thought to be shape shifters and associated with fertility, puberty, renewal and love. These connotations fitted well with my idea that the hare and the girl were interconnected and both part of a changing person.

The film uses the techniques of pixellation (animated actors) and stop frame (articulated puppets) and was shot in the Trough of Bowland, Lancashire, England, and in the studios of the Royal College of Art London. The actors were cast from a local school in Lancashire.



## Crew

Director, writer, animator, producer: Joan Ashworth  
Cinematographer: Hugh Gordon  
Sound Design and Music: Philippe Ciompi  
Production assistant: Nic Welbourne  
Compositing: Guy Nesfield  
Sound mixing: Adrian Rhodes  
Colourist: Sue Giovanni  
Hare model: Se-ma-for studios, Poland

## Location

Black Moss Farm, Trough of Bowland, Lancashire

## Thanks to

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Gordon Ashworth Snr  
Tom Ashworth  
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Stuart Franey  
Edie, Jacob and Martin Greaves  
Cathy Greenhalgh  
Goldcrest, London  
Angela and David Heane  
Neil Jones, Gamekeeper  
Jo Ann Kaplan  
Deborah Levy  
Kate and Chris Plumb