

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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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

Emily and John Airey
Dorothy Ashworth
Gordon Ashworth Snr
Tom Ashworth
Ken Drinkwater, Drinkwater Mushrooms
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