

# mother's skin

a short film by leah johnston



RHIANNON MORGAN (left) and BRIAR MOSHER (right). Photo Credit: Jason Buxton

Canada, 2022.  
English, 19 mins.  
16mm, Colour, Dolby Digital  
Arri 416 & SR111 / 1:37:1  
DCP, DVD

**PRODUCTION COMPANY:**

Pretty Fierce Films Inc.  
Contact: Leah Johnston  
55 Forbes Beach Rd,  
River John, NS, Canada. B0K 1N0  
Mailing: 2257 Creighton Street,  
Halifax, NS, Canada. B3K 3R6  
tel: 1+902-956-9814  
email: [leah@leahjohnston.com](mailto:leah@leahjohnston.com)

**SALES & DISTRIBUTION:**

La Distributice de Films  
Contact: Serge Abiad  
4760 A, rue Parthenais,  
Montreal, QC, Canada  
H2H 2G7  
email: [serge@ladistributice.ca](mailto:serge@ladistributice.ca)

## logline & synopsis



BRIAR MOSHER. Photo Credit: Jason Buxton

### **LOGLINE**

A neglected six-year-old girl struggles to cope with her mother's depression, uncovering a secret from her mother's past.

### **SYNOPSIS**

Newfoundland, 1971. A neglected six-year-old girl struggles to cope with her mother's depression and her father's alcoholic rage. She spends her days alone, fending for herself, as her father works and her mother sleeps. At night, violence erupts around her, threatening to tear her family apart. But when the girl discovers a secret hidden within their home, her dysfunctional world takes on a strange new meaning.



BRIAR MOSHER. Photo Credit: Jason Buxton

## **DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

Fusing Irish folklore with real-life accounts from my mother's childhood memories growing up in an abusive home in Newfoundland, *MOTHER'S SKIN* examines intergenerational trauma and female subjugation through a modern retelling of the ancient Selkie myth.

Selkies (“seal folk”) are mythological beings capable of transforming from seals into human-form. Folktales typically describe a female Selkie who, while in human form, is found sunbathing naked on the shore by a man. The man becomes enamoured with her and steals her seal-skin, thus preventing the Selkie from returning to her native form. So long as the Selkie cannot find her skin, she is powerless, and the man can coerce her into marriage and having children with him. But the Selkie woman will spend her time in captivity longing for the sea, her true home, and will often be seen gazing longingly at the ocean. Once the Selkie finds her skin, she will immediately return to the sea, abandoning her human children.

The Selkie folklore has its roots in Scotland and Ireland and was carried over to Newfoundland by early settlers. Similar myths are echoed across cultures in folktales involving the “swan maiden” motif - frequently revolving around females being coerced into relationships by men stealing and hiding their

true skin. In Germanic mythology, it is a swan-maiden whose skin is hidden. In the Japanese legend of Hagaromo, it is a heavenly spirit, whose robe is stolen. In Africa, the same motif is shown through Buffalo Maidens.

The concept of a woman's skin being robbed - in essence her true identity being taken by a man - is an archetypal theme that recurs throughout time across cultures. It's not difficult to ascribe literal meaning to this myth in patriarchal society where women's true powers and potentials are repressed. This motif retains relevance today and is fertile ground for modern exploration.

When I first learned about the myth, it immediately resonated for me. My mother is from Newfoundland and there is a long history of physical abuse extending back through my bloodline. This trauma played out across multiple generations with victimized relatives who then, in turn, victimized their children, perpetuating the cycle. My grandmother, an ongoing victim of my grandfather's physical abuse, abandoned her children, leaving my mother and her siblings alone to bear the brunt of his rage. That abandonment left my mother with deep emotional scars which, in turn, had an impact on me and my relationship with my mother.

The story of a Selkie who abandons her child became the perfect parable to explore this personal theme of intergenerational trauma.



RHIANNON MORGAN. Photo Credit: Jason Buxton

## DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

### **LEAH JOHNSTON (Writer/Director/Producer/Editor)**

Leah is an award-winning filmmaker from Nova Scotia, Canada. Her most recent short film, **INGRID AND THE BLACK HOLE**, premiered at Fantasia Film Festival and was showcased at over twenty film festivals, winning eight awards, including Best Canadian Short at Edmonton International Film Festival. She is the recipient of the Corus Fearless Female Filmmaker Award (2015), the \$35K Bravofact/WIFT Prize (2015) and the National Screen Institute Drama Prize (2013). She graduated with a B.F.A. from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and is an alumnus of the National Screen Institute, the Reykjavik Talent Lab and the Academy of Canadian Cinema Directing program.



## DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2016

### **Ingrid and the Black Hole**

Writer/Director/Producer/Editor

2015

### **My Younger Older Sister**

Writer/Director/Actor/Producer

2014

### **Some Things Won't Sleep**

Writer/Director

2013

### **Another Man**

Writer/Director/Producer/Editor/Actor



## **CAST (in order of appearance)**

### **BRIAR MOSHER (“Molly”)**

Briar Mosher is a seven-year old actress from Halifax, Nova Scotia. She began her acting career at age six, playing the lead role of Molly in Leah Johnston’s upcoming short film, “Mothers Skin”. She also appeared in the film production, "Bystanders", directed by Koumbie and as a background actor in the TV series "Moonshine", directed by Scott Smith.

Briar attended the Neptune Theatre School in Halifax and is currently enrolled at the Leblanc School of Acting, based in Vancouver. She is actively involved in the Drama program at her school, and recently played a key role in the annual school play,

When not acting, Briar attends Grace 3 in Halifax, and enjoys drawing, dancing, singing, reading, swimming, and loves animals of all kinds.



### **RHIANNON MORGAN (“Mother”)**

Rhiannon Morgan is a Canadian actor based in St. John’s, Newfoundland. Following her supporting role in the 2019 feature length film, Black Conflux, she went on to co-star alongside Alison Woolridge as Lore in the CBC Gem special, The Existence of Magic (2020). In 2016, she played Colleen in the CBC Documentary, Newfoundland at Armageddon and was also cast as Claire in Away from Everywhere. Before her starring role in the 2018 short film, New Woman, for which she received three Best Actress nominations and two Best Actress awards. Rhiannon had leading roles in numerous other shorts, as Amelia opposite Joel Thomas Hynes in Bait (2014), as Anna in Waste It (2017) and as Sadie in Brad (2010). Rhiannon also co-starred in the web series, Moving On as Angela (2015) and appeared as Fiona Michaels in season three of CBC’s Republic of Doyle (2012). She played The Banshee in the 2019 short film, Always Going Never Gone and more recently the role of Kay in the award-winning feature film, Little Orphans, co-starring Emily Bridger and Marthe Bernard (2020). Rhiannon is starring in the upcoming 2022 film, Mother's Skin by Leah Johnston. She can also be heard narrating the newly released audiobook and novel, We Jane, by Aimee Wall.



**JOEL THOMAS HYNES** ("Father")

Joel Thomas Hynes is a multi-disciplinary artist (screenwriter, novelist, actor, filmmaker and musician), from Newfoundland, Canada. He was the creator, lead actor and an executive producer of the critically acclaimed CBC comedy series *Little Dog*. Hynes is the author of numerous novels, stage-plays and works of non-fiction. His most recent novel "We'll All Be Burnt in Our Beds Some Night", won the Governor General's Award for Fiction, The BMO Winterset Award, the NLB Award for Fiction, and long-listed for the ScotiaBank Giller Prize. Joel Thomas Hynes has been working creatively in the film and television industry since his early twenties and is known for both comedy and drama, usually playing darker, bad boy roles - social misfits, outcasts, criminals, rock-and-rollers and all round irreverent characters. He has written and directed two award-winning short films and recently won the Michael Weir Award for Best Atlantic Screenwriter for the acclaimed feature *Cast No Shadow*, in which he also plays a leading role. *Cast No Shadow*, adapted from Hynes's book *Say Nothing Saw Wood*, was nominated for four Canadian Screen Awards including Best Adapted ScreenPlay and Best Feature Film. Hynes's first novel *Down to the Dirt* was also adapted to the big screen with Hynes playing the lead role. *Down to the Dirt* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, won numerous festival awards across the country and screened at Canne's Film Festival as a part of its "Canadian Perspectives Showcase". His TV credits include guest spots and recurring roles on *Mary Kills People*, *Rookie Blue*, *Orphan Black*, *Book of Negroes*, *ReGenesis*, *Eye Witness*, *Republic of Doyle*, *Frontier* and *Little Dog*. Also a singer-songwriter, Hynes recently released his first full-length studio album *Dead Man's Melody*. His music is available across all online platforms including iTunes, Spotify and CDBaby. Hynes is a 2015 alumni of the Canadian Film Centre's Cineplex Screenwriter's Lab in Toronto. He divides his time between Newfoundland and Toronto.



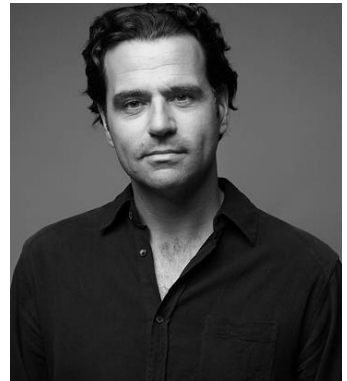
MOTHER'S SKIN CAST AND CREW. Photo Credit: Craig Mosher

## **CORE FILMMAKING TEAM**

### **JASON BUXTON** (Producer/Cinematographer)

Jason Buxton is a writer-director with twenty years' experience in the film and television industry. His debut feature BLACKBIRD premiered to high acclaim at TIFF12, winning Best First Canadian Feature. It also won Best Canadian Feature at VIFF12, the Claude Jutra Award at the 2013 Canadian Screen Awards, and the Grand Prix in the Ecrans Juniors section of the Cannes Film Festival.

In 2016, Northwood Media (ANNE with an E) commissioned Buxton to adapt Joseph Boyden's epic First World War novel THREE DAY ROAD into a limited series. Buxton is currently packaging his sophomore feature SHARP CORNER. Buxton studied film at Simon Fraser University and is a BFA graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design.



### **MICHAEL PIERSON** (Production Designer)

MICHAEL PIERSON is a Nova Scotia based Production Designer and Art Director focusing on design for commercial, event and independent production. With an involved background in contemporary installation art and Photography, he made a fluid transition to design after moving to the east coast more than a decade ago. His creativity is heavily influenced by east coast stories and directors. Notable credits include: "Werewolf" (2016), "Trailer Park Boys" (2013-2017) "Wildhood" (2021) "Night Blooms" (2022) "Queens of the Qing Dynasty" (2022)



### **VICTORIA DOBSON** (Costume Designer)

Victoria is a Nova Scotia based costume designer with over 35 years of experience. She earned design degree from Dalhousie University with a focus on Historical Costume Studies. Selected costume design credits include: Life with Derek, Seasons 1-4 (Shaftesbury Films), Dark Oracle (Shaftesbury Films) as well as coordinating credits on Mrs. America (FX/Disney) and Umbrella Academy (Netflix). She recently designed for Jason Eisener's upcoming independent feature film Kids vs Aliens and is currently the costume designer for Season 4 of CBC's Diggstown.





PHOTO BY CRAIG MOSHER



BEHIND THE SCENES OF MOTHER'S SKIN. PHOTOS BY JEFF BABINEAU



JASON BUXTON PREPARES A SHOT OF RHIANNON MORGAN. PHOTO BY JEFF BABINEAU

## CREDITS

Writer/Director/Producer/Editor  
LEAH JOHNSTON

Producer/Cinematographer  
JASON BUXTON

Production Designer  
MICHAEL PIERSON

Costume Designer  
VICTORIA DOBSON

## CAST

BRIAR MOSHER as MOLLY  
RHIANNON MORGAN as MOTHER  
JOEL THOMAS HYNES as FATHER  
GIL ANDERSON as CONSTABLE DWYER  
RICK COURTNEY as MAN ON BEACH  
HALLE HUSKA as MOLLY UNDERWATER DOUBLE  
MONTE MURRAY as POLICE OFFICER

Production Manager  
TAMI THOMSON

Production Manager/Assistant Director  
CRAIG CAMERON

1<sup>st</sup> AD  
JASON SHIPLEY

Production Designer  
MICHAEL PIERSON

Art Director  
JESSE STEWART

Costume Designer  
VICTORIA DOBSON

Wardrobe Assistant/Sec Decorator  
KATHERINE JOHNSTON

Wardrobe Assistant  
LAURA CORKUM

Seal Skin Designer  
KELVIN SWINIMER

Key Make up and Hair  
SHAWNA SULEK

Make up and Hair  
ARIANA ROBERTS

1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Camera  
CYLVAN DESROULEAUX  
PAUL BEGIN

2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Camera  
LAUREN DIAL  
MIKE ROY

Gaffer  
LAWRENCE WILLET

Key Grip/2<sup>nd</sup> AC  
MARK HINES

Best Boy/Electric  
CHELSEA INNES

Electric/Grip Swing  
KEITH MITCHELL

Electric/Set Decorator  
COLLEEN BUTLER

Electric/Grip/2<sup>nd</sup> AC  
DONALD JOHNSTON

Production Sound Mixer  
JOSH OWEN  
OLIVIA KING

Production Coordinator  
ANDREA VANDERBOER

Locations Manager/Production Assistant  
PATRICK MACDONALD

Associate Producer/Casting Director  
GIL ANDERSON

Assistant Editor  
COLIN MACDONALD

Online/Colorist/VFX  
DOUG WOODS

Sound Designer  
LUKAS PEARSE

Re-recording Mixer  
MATT DAWSON

Thank You:

Colleen Dwyer  
Gerry Dwyer  
Sheila Johnston  
Donald Johnston  
Katherine Johnston  
Justin Oakey  
Wanda Graham  
Andy Hoffman  
Marc Tetrault  
Jenna MacMillan  
Serge Abiaad  
Cynthia Allen  
Craig Mosher

Christopher Ball  
Jeff Wheaton  
Abner Collette  
Emily Nixon  
Dominique Gusset  
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Ray Macke  
Kenzie Drover  
Andrew Sheridan  
Andrew McInnes  
Heather Young  
Sadie Buxton  
Gillian Everill  
Jeff Babineau  
Jean-Sebastien Chambonnet  
Matt Glazier  
Tonya Wimmer  
Alexandra Vance  
Marine Animal Response  
Society  
Kimberley Oren  
Leo Hearn  
Susan Furneaux  
Clare Fowler  
John Gallagher  
Lauren Wilkins  
Latonia Hartery  
Kelvin Swinimer  
Kelvin's Gun and Taxidermy  
Shop  
Catherine Clark  
Rick Courtney  
Sally Way  
Kathleen Ruggieri  
Wendy Nelson

Linda Wood  
Chuan Eva Li  
Paul Lipkus  
Serge Morin  
Trevor Myers  
Matt Lynds  
Trevor Sutherland  
Amanda Huska  
Scott Thorne  
Chris Spencer-Lowe  
Marcel Henneberry  
Sherry Supple  
E Tenebris Lux  
Chris Johnston  
Theresa Moody  
Martha Curry  
Helena Mariott  
Neptune Theatre Costume  
Department  
Laura MacNutt  
KingPIER Vintage  
International Movie Services  
Marie-Christine Lemire  
Nadia Ferguson  
Kevin Fraser  
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THE HIDEOUT STUDIOS  
WILLIAM F. WHITES

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ACTRA MARITIMES

**ACTRA**

**CMPA**

Canadian Media  
Producers Association



No animals were harmed in the making of this film.  
Shot entirely on location River John, Sambro and Sandy Cove, Nova Scotia, Canada.

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Pretty Fierce Films was founded by filmmaker Leah Johnston and is dedicated to facilitating multilayered female-driven films aimed at a universal audience.