



Article by:  
Chloé Brulé-Dawson  
Find me: [@](#)

June 15, 2022

FILM LESBIAN LOVE

Show some love & share

# The Other Side Of Patricia Highsmith With Eva Vitija

Released in January 2022, "Loving Highsmith" is the second documentary of Swiss writer and director Eva Vitija and an opening to the life of Patricia Highsmith. Famous for her 1952 lesbian novel "The Price of Salt", later renamed "Carol" and adapted to the screen in 2016 by Todd Haynes, the American novelist exiled in Switzerland has always been a mysterious and controversial figure. On the occasion of the documentary's screening in the Cinérive's LGBTQIA+ program in Vevey (CH), we could sit with Eva Vitija who lifted the veil of the personage through her intimate and sensible 84 min portrait.

Constructed with excerpts of more than 8000 handwritten pages of diaries and notebooks, many of them unreleased, "Loving Highsmith" gives a unique window to the mysterious house of Patricia Highsmith. Jumping from pages to interviews with Highsmith's lovers and family by way of various archive material and film adaptations of Highsmith's novels, the documentary is an attempt to solve the puzzle of her personality.



Screen writer, director and producer Eva Vitija

• **What was the first piece of literature you encountered from Patricia Highsmith? What was your first impression of her?**

I can't recall exactly what I read first, but my very first encounter was when I was a child. I was spending my holidays close to where she was living. My parents would tell me that near was living a very famous writer, alone with her cats. As a child, it was a big question for me. Why would a woman live alone with her cats? Somehow it was some kind of mystery already. I probably read "The Snail-Watcher" first. It's a story where someone is growing snails, before getting eaten by them. It's a ruthless story that sticks to your mind. Then, I read "This Sweat Sickness". It's a story about a man in love with a woman that isn't interested in him, with whom he starts an imaginary love story. He thinks they are married and live together, but everything happens in his imagination. I found it very interesting because it's the story of the writer. You always imagine things. You start with a small real thing then everything comes from your imagination. It is also a story of obsessive love, but the imagination of this lover is very similar to the process of writing itself.

• **Love, or the absence of it, is essential in your documentary, it's even its title. How do you think those two things -writing & love- intertwine in her life and her work?**

I think she wrote a lot about people who had an insecure identity or a double life. It was in nearly every book. This comes from her own experiences. She has a lot of couples in her books, mostly men, who have a difficult relationship with each other's and bring homoerotic subtext. The idea of an imaginary world is also very important in some books like "Edith's diary". She is talking about this woman who has a diary in which her life gets more and more perfect as her real life is crumbling. This imaginary world has a lot to do with falling in love, with all the possibilities, the things that could happen.

• **The musical background you chose for the documentary is mostly guitar instrumental, how did this come up?**

I was sharing my research with the French guitarist Noël Akchoté while working on the documentary. He would send me music that was tied to the places that I was visiting or from Highsmith's era. It was really interesting because it was the music of Patricia Highsmith, the cities she went to, her era. So we decided he would do the film music as well. The guitar is a very American instrument, so it would tie to the American identity of Patricia Highsmith as well. He chose to play it together with two American guitarists, Mary Halvorson and Bill Frisell.

• **At the end of her life, Patricia Highsmith was infamous for her antisemitism and racism. How difficult was it to address the issue through the documentary?**

It was rather difficult because she wasn't walking around telling people she was an antisemite, she was writing these things in her private diaries. Nobody that I met knew about it. It changed in the course of her life. What I found in her oldest notebooks were concerns about discrimination. She hated the racism in Texas and wanted to leave as soon as she could whenever she visited. But there are antisemitic quotes in her diaries, and when I tried to find people that could tell me more about it, nobody could.

• **From her first diaries to the last ones, how did Patricia Highsmith evolve and change?**

I have never seen someone change so much through the course of their life. From being this very romantic, enthusiastic young person to getting bitter somehow. It was really impressive to witness this extreme change. But it's always difficult with Patricia Highsmith because she was many things at once. She said herself that she never changed after she was 16, and that is also true. She had a fixed core. She still had a humorous and happy side in the end, but there was this rage and bitterness as well. Highsmith wasn't only mean and somber at all. She was quite happy with her life in the end somehow. She had found some peace.

• **How was it deciding whether or not to share some very intimate and private elements in the documentary?**

I was always wondering if it was okay. But some notes show that Patricia Highsmith was aware that those private diaries would someday be published, and she was okay with that. Otherwise, I think she would have destroyed them. She was very private, but she was aware that it would probably be read and she kept them in this cupboard. She also explicitly wrote once that if her life would be reviewed later, it would probably be through the lens of homosexuality, and she approved of it.

• **What would you like people to take from this documentary?**

I wanted to show this other side of Patricia Highsmith, far from this image of a dark and bitter old woman. I wanted people to see this different Patricia Highsmith, with her touching, emotional and vulnerable side that touched me a lot.

Watch the trailer of Loving Highsmith down below



Show some love & share



## More Articles



We Need More Movies Directed By Women And Queer People



Tis The Season For (Our Top 10) Queer Holiday Movies



Lesbian Scary Movies: Our Top 7



'You', Romcoms, And The Culture Of Toxic Hetero Relationships

**BOWIE** connects you to a global community of creators reshaping gender through film, fashion, art, music and more. Join the collective (r)evolution.

Sign up to the BOWIE weekly newsletter and receive our latest projects, articles and opportunities straight to your inbox.

NEWSLETTER SIGN UP