



Small Media Extra Large  
in association with BullMoose Pictures  
present

# PEPPER AND THE SALT SEA

The sea took everything she loved.  
Can a mermaid give it back?

genre: magical realism / drama / narrative short | running time: 13:29 | country: USA

programming niches:  
climate change, the ocean, photography, strong female characters

## SYNOPSIS:

After losing everything in Superstorm Sandy, a devastated photographer tries to forget that she ever loved the sea. Until a mermaid appears, to seduce her into picking up her camera again.

## ALL PRESS INQUIRIES:

Stacie Capone, Small Media Extra Large  
stacie@smallmediaxl.com +1.917.626.3879

TheSaltSea.com

---

## Director's Statement

I had been working on a screenplay about a photographer who lives in Red Hook, Brooklyn for quite a while. It wasn't quite working for me, so I decided to add a mermaid to the story.

It was right about then that Superstorm Sandy came up the Atlantic coast and flooded my neighborhood. Suddenly, the whole idea of making a story about Red Hook and the ocean became unthinkable without addressing the impact the storm had on the community. Pepper became a stand-in for what every Red Hook resident was going through. And the story transformed into Pepper and the Salt Sea.

Pepper is an oceanic photographer whose apartment was flooded by the storm. She lost her belongings, her camera equipment, but most importantly, a lifetime of photographic work. I have met a lot of real-life artists — and at least one photographer — who went through exactly this scenario.

Distraught to have lost all her work without ever having had a breakthrough moment in her career, Pepper gives up on her dreams. But the sea, taking the form of a mermaid, comes to Pepper one night and tries to seduce her into picking up her camera again.



Director Don Downie, on set during production.

As I wrote this film, I wondered what my friends and neighbors who lost so much in the storm would say to the sea if they had a chance to confront it in person?

This film also brings up a lot of issues about what it is to be an artist in a careerist, financial-success-driven culture like New York City is today. Whether you are a photographer, a musician, a painter, or a filmmaker — it's not easy to keep your dreams alive against what sometimes feels like overwhelming adversity and constant invalidation.

In Pepper's case — even though she has never gained the attention of an important gallery or magazine — the sea itself is aware of Pepper's photographic devotion. After Pepper stops taking photographs of the sea, the sea takes action.

I hope every artist finds within him or herself a force of nature to help keep them creating, against all odds. I hope they find places to look for inspiration — as I have when I look at the creative, resilient residents of Red Hook, to whom this film is dedicated.



## DON DOWNIE

Writer / Director

Don is a director who creates films, television, digital content, and commercials.

In addition to *Pepper and the Salt Sea*, some of his other directing credits include the award-winning web pilot *The Pickup Chicks* and the 32-episode web sitcom *Caffeine & Crullers*.

His short screenplay *Adultnapped* was a finalist in the *Screencraft Short Film*

*Production Fund*, and took first runner-up at the *DC Shorts Screenplay Competition*.

Other projects include a music video for the artist *Moby*, video installations for a live performance at *Judson Arts Center / The Public Theater*, and cinematography for the feature film *Wedgerino*.

“On a good day, we make a film and entertain an audience. But on a really good day, we might just change somebody’s life for the better. How cool is that?”



## STACIE CAPONE

Pepper / Producer

Stacie's producing credits include the feature film *Blood Junkies*, the narrative pilot *Exit Strategy* for *Teen Nick*, and numerous commercials, short films, and web series.

Stacie created and produced the narrative web pilot *The Pickup Chicks*, which won *ZoomTilt Media's TV Reset Project* competition.

Stacie is an accomplished actress, with numerous film, and stage credits. Stacie has spoken at industry events on subjects such as producing independent film and on the intersection of food and social media.



## KAT CUNNING

Selene

Kat is a singer, actress, dancer and photographer. She has been featured as a vocalist and dancer with *Company XIV* for three years and is about to appear on Broadway in *Cirque du Soleil's Paramour* as the understudy to the leading lady.

She is in the process of writing her first original album with affiliates of *White Star Sound* and her virtuosic band.

A 2011 graduate of *Purchase College*, she holds a *BFA in Dance* and has participated in many other programs including the *Terry Schreiber Acting Conservatory*, *Springboard DanseMontreal*, and *Taipei National University of the Arts in Taiwan*.



## MIN SOO ELLE KIM

Producer

Min Soo produces narrative, documentary and commercial films, promos and video projects. Most recently, she produced Wedgerino, a feature film now in post-production, Wednesday with Anna, a narrative short currently in festival circuits, and The Two-Minute Review, a web series for Kozak Films.

Min Soo began her work in film while growing up in Hollywood, taking on production, art and wardrobe departments on many projects ranging from small independent films to studio movies.

Her experience includes the set decoration for J.J. Abrams' Super 8, wardrobe for Stop Loss, costume design for an art film in Tel Aviv, Night Before the Morning Sun and co-production for the feature, Then There's the Afterlife.



## KYLE I KELLEY

Cinematographer

Kyle studied filmmaking at Ithaca College, New York. His work ranges from award-winning fiction films to music videos to feature documentaries.

Kyle has worked under Emmy winning cinematographers Andrew Young and

Buddy Squires on several PBS documentaries--seeing the beautiful images they were able to create inspired him to strive for the same, regardless of genre.

Recent projects include the shorts Worlds We Created, Mutt, Like a F#@king Punk, and the feature film The Cocks of the Walk.



## SMALL MEDIA EXTRA LARGE

Studio

Small Media Extra Large creates movies for media companies, agencies, brands, and real people like you.

SMXL is just-the-right-size to bring larger-than-life characters to screens of all sizes.

We are oversized kids when it comes to creativity and enthusiasm, and very much the grown-ups when it comes to handling budgets, paying people fairly, and maintaining quality for ourselves and our clients.

Heck, we even recycle.

---

## About the Production

Don Downie (writer / director) and Stacie Capone (Pepper / Producer) are longtime residents of Red Hook, Brooklyn. Their apartment was spared when Superstorm Sandy flooded Red Hook, but they observed many of their friends and neighbors struggle through a long recovery from the effects of the storm.

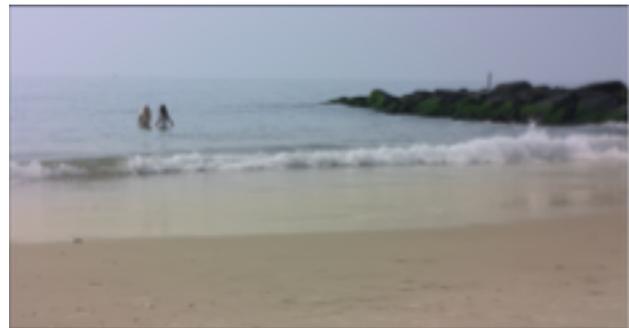
During the crowdfunding phase of creating this film, Don and Stacie partnered with The Red Hook Volunteers to donate 10% of the money raised to Sandy relief efforts.

As a result of that collaboration, the Red Hook Volunteers connected the production with a homeowner who had been very badly flooded in the storm. At the time of principal photography, the home was still undergoing repairs from the storm. (The contractors installed a working toilet just hours before the film crew moved in.) The Pepper and the Salt Sea production rented the ground floor of the home and transformed it into Pepper's apartment.

"It was really powerful to shoot Pepper's apartment, which had been flooded floor-to-ceiling, in a space that had gone through that in real life," said director Don Downie. "It was also great to be able to spend some of our production dollars renting space from a homeowner who was still going through renovations from the storm."

Other scenes in the film were shot at historic Sunny's Bar, which had also been very badly flooded during Sandy. The Red Hook community — and in particular its tight-knit group of artists and small business owners — provided significant logistical and moral support to help get the film made.

Principal photography took place in October, 2013. That included scenes shot with actors and crew in the ocean, on location at Rockaway Beach, Queens. The production rented wetsuits for the crew, but the actors (and the director, in solidarity) had to brave the Fall ocean temperatures for hours in just regular clothes, swimsuits, and in the case of Katrina Cunningham as the mermaid Selene... even less.



One of the key shots in the film is an aerial shot of Pepper and Selene in the ocean. While the production did have a waterproof housing for our RED camera, they didn't have the budget for a SuperTechnoCrane or helicopter for this shot. Using some good-old-fashioned indie film ingenuity, Key Grip Ian Hoban rigged a GoPro camera to a 25 foot painters pole, which Cinematographer Kyle Kelley wielded from within the ocean to create the shot. Many of the viewers of early test screenings have called this out as their favorite shot of the film.

It was in the production plan to shoot underwater shots at Rockaway Beach, but the water conditions proved too cloudy for the camera to see the actors. The underwater shots were rescheduled and shot in an indoor swimming pool thanks to the kindness of a hotel manager in a suburban hotel that shall remain nameless, to protect the innocent (and the guilty).

---

Film Stills

Various formats available. Email [stacie@smallmediaxl.com](mailto:stacie@smallmediaxl.com) to request.



Stacie Capone as Pepper.



Kat Cunning as Selene.



Kat Cunning and  
Stacie Capone in  
Pepper and the Salt Sea.

---

## Contact Information

Please direct all press and sales inquiries to Stacie Capone  
Small Media Extra Large  
+1.917.626.3879  
+1.718.473.0905  
stacie@smallmediaxl.com

An electronic press kit can also be found at <http://www.thesaltsea.com/>

Official Website: [www.thesaltsea.com](http://www.thesaltsea.com)  
Twitter: @dondownie  
Instagram: @dondownie  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/thesaltsea](http://www.facebook.com/thesaltsea)



Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens & Red Hook Arts & Entertainment

## Hurricane Sandy Short Film Brings Memories and a Mermaid to Red Hook



By Nichita Venugopal on September 12, 2013 @ 11am | Updated on September 12, 2013 @ 11am  
 @nichitav

RED HOOK — When Pepper, a young photographer, lost her life's work after Hurricane Sandy flooded her Red Hook home, the story continued, just as it has for dozens who are still recovering almost a year after the storm.



Pepper & the Salt Sea

But when a mermaid visited Pepper, her seemingly familiar story turned magical.

Red Hook filmmaker Don Downie is creating a short movie, titled "Pepper & the Salt Sea," the story of a mermaid and a photographer whose love for the ocean, along with her photographs and equipment, were washed away in the storm.

"She loses her future," said Downie, a director and cinematographer who has been making films for nine years.

One year after the storm, Pepper is walking home when she finds a woman who is "soaking wet and seemingly helpless," Downie said.

The woman, Pepper later discovers, is a mermaid named Selene who begins a conversation about the ocean, which, until the storm, had been the photographer's muse.

Selene becomes an ally and symbol of the water, said Stacie Capone, Downie's wife, who will be playing the role of Pepper.

As longtime Red Hook residents, Downie and Capone hope the film will provide solace to a neighborhood where many people, like Pepper, lost their homes, businesses and love for the sea during Sandy.

Downie also hopes to honor those who rebuilt the waterfront neighborhood, many of whom are moving towards complete recovery, he said.

"They have rebuilt something that is even more special," he said.

Last week, the couple launched an Indiegogo campaign to raise \$19,500 for the film's production. Ten percent of the funds raised will be donated to Red Hook Volunteers.

Interviews with Red Hook Volunteers, Home/Made's Monica Byrne and Leisah Swenson, and others, will assist Downie in the film's creation.

Their stories will be available to the public after "Pepper & the Salt Sea" is completed at the end of the year.

Whether it's flooding during a storm or walking to the subway in February, Downie admits there are challenges to living in the waterfront neighborhood.

To Downie, Pepper's story is a love letter to Red Hook, "his magical place in New York City."

"Red Hook is a neighborhood where anything could happen," he said. "I've never fallen out of love with [it]."



The official film poster for "Pepper & the Salt Sea." Don Downie

Celebrating 17 Years of Film.Biz.Fans.



NEWS · MOVIES · FESTIVALS · TELEVISION · BLOGS · FILMMAKING

MORE · REVIEWS · BOX OFFICE · INTERVIEWS · CRITICWIRE · SUNDANCE VIDEO · AWARDS · TRAILERS

## PROJECT OF THE DAY

Jump to: **CATDOR**

INDIEWIRE

### Project of the Day: A Photographer, A Mermaid & The Aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in 'Pepper and the Salt Sea'

1 comment

Like 44

Tweet 10



MORE: Project of the Day

By Indiewire on September 19, 2013

Here's your daily dose of an indie film in progress: at the end of the week, you'll have the chance to vote for your favorite. In the meantime, is this a movie you'd want to see? Tell us in the comments.

READ MORE >



Nothing Shines Like Dirt  
 NSLD Ep 08 Stacie Capone & Don Downie

3 months

Entertainment



2 | Report | Add to playlist | Share | Download | 141 Station | 10

### EPISODE 24: DON DOWNIE

© February 08, 2005 / storyaroundthestory 0 comment

DAMN! Film Series presents its own podcast, **The Story Around the Story**. Each month DAMN! Film Series' producers Phil Newsom & Lanie Zipoy speak with filmmakers whose films are featured in the screening series.



Our 24th episode features screenwriter/director **Don Downie** of **Pepper and the Salt Sea**, which will screen at Theaterlab 657 West 38th Street, 3rd Floor in New York City at 7:30pm on March 28th, 2005. **Tickets** are \$7.

Running Time: 13:29



Music: "Twinkle Toes" by Podington Bear (available on the [Free Music Archive](#))

---

## Full Production Credits

Written and Directed by Don Downie

### Cast

Stacie Capone                      Pepper  
Katrina Cunningham              Selene

### Producer

Min Soo Elle Kim

### Producer

Stacie Capone

### Cinematographer

Kyle I. Kelley

Original Score Composed by  
Eddy Bayes

### Production Designer

Juliette VonHess

### Costume Designer

Cortney Hillman

### 1st Assistant Director

Jaelyn Gramigna

### Associate Producer

Meghan Scibona

### Production Manager

Aaron Wertheimer

### Production Coordinator

Avi Saban

### 1st Assistant Camera

Brett Checkelsky

### Gaffer

Michael Sutter

### Key Grip

Ian Hoban

### Swing

Andy Lobashevsky

### Sound Recordists

Kip Sturm  
Tom Myers

### 2nd Assistant Camera

Jen Hubbard

### Makeup Artist

Rachel Hevesi

### Script Supervisor

Dorian Carli-Jones

### Production Assistants

Aarika Patel  
Chris Wos  
Mike Downes  
Lily Van Leeuwen  
Hannah Kettering  
Rose Reid  
Wesley Scanlon  
Heather Ogletree  
Kenya Jones

### Editor

Anthony Mascarro

### Colorist

Frederick Trevino

### Sound Design and Mix

Joshua Berger  
Ian Gaffney-Rosenfeld

### Guitar and Keyboards performed by

Eddy Bayes

### Cellist

Abbi Loutoo

### Behind the Scenes Photography

Ryan Lash  
Leigh Loranger  
Kate Stryker

### Photographers for Pepper's Photos

Anne Doubilet  
Leigh Loranger

---

## Technical Specs

Runtime: 13:29

Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1

Language: English, Portuguese

Completed: June 2015

Screening History: (WORLD PREMIERE) 2015 Woods Hole Film Festival, 2015 Golden Door International Film Festival\*\*, 2015 Coney Island Film Festival, 2015 Red Hook Film Festival\*, 2016 DAMN Film Series\*\*\*\*, 2016 Blackbird Film Festival\*\*\*, 2016 Katra Film Series.

2016 Buffalo International Film Festival, 2016 Artists & Beers Screening Series

Camera: RED Epic, RED Scarlet, Sony FS100, GoPro, Zeiss CP2 and ZF lenses

Locations: Red Hook, Brooklyn & Rockaway Beach, Queens

Awards:

\* Spirit of Red Hook

\*\* Best of Fest Selection

\*\*\* Best Narrative Short, Nominated for Best Sound Design, Best Cinematography, Best of Fest

\*\*\*\* Best Cinematography, Best Supporting Actor