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PRESS RELEASE

Berks Native Brings Movie and Muse to the GoggleWorks

GoggleWorks Center for the Arts will host a screening of *Ilona, Upstairs*, a film by Berks County native and critically-acclaimed director Melissa Hammel, on Sun., Dec. 6 at 1 p.m. A reception will be held following the screening with Hammel as well as the muse of her film, acclaimed artist Ilona Royce Smithkin, where guests will have an opportunity to speak with both.

Ilona, Upstairs is a 25-minute documentary in which Ilona sings, dances, orates, paints, swims, and smells the roses, but will not, under any circumstances, face the specifics of her painful past. Melissa Hammel, the director and Ilona's downstairs neighbor, aspires to unearth some of Ilona's many skeletons in order to learn how one transitions from a place of great sorrow to a place of great joy. The film has garnered praise from Academy Award nominated Filmmaker Albert Maysles and Jim Jarmusch.

Ilona was born in Poland and raised in Germany. She studied art in Belgium until she was forced to flee the Nazis with her family in 1938. Though she struggled initially in New York, she was eventually discovered and went on to paint personalities like Tennessee Williams, Ethel Merman, Ayn Rand and Senator and Mrs. Edward Kennedy. She pioneered instructional painting on PBS in the '70s, and now travels throughout the southern United States teaching art.

Melissa Hammel has received critical acclaim with each of her creative endeavors. An alumnus of both Tufts University and New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Hammel has directed three award winning films: *NY Neighborhoods*, which won the CINE Golden Eagle; *Wanderlust*, which aired on the Sundance Channel, won a Warner Bros Pictures Film Award and The Best Young Filmmaker award at the Narrowsburg International Film Festival; *Ilona, Upstairs*, winner of the New Filmmakers Award at the Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival, the Spirit of Moondance Award at the Moondance International Film Festival, and HBO's Audience Award for Best Short Film at the Provincetown International Film Festival.

From December 7 -11, admirers of Ilona's unique artwork will have the amazing opportunity to participate in a class taught by Ilona herself. It will run from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. , and will allow students the opportunity to learn a much revered painting technique at the hands of a true master.

Both events should be registered for in advance by contacting GoggleWorks at 610-374-4600. Tickets for the film and reception are \$18. Attending the five-day class is \$175.

The GoggleWorks Center for the Arts is a community art and cultural resource center for Berks County and central and southeastern Pennsylvania, and is the largest, most comprehensive interactive arts center of its kind in the country. The GoggleWorks is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Free parking is available in the GoggleWorks parking lot.

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