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A LIEN
A FILM BY SAM & DAVID CUTLER-KREUTZ

SYNOPSIS

Logline: On the day of their green card interview, a young couple confronts a dangerous immigration process.

Short Synopsis: On the day of their green card interview, Oscar and Sophie, an immigrant husband and his American wife, find themselves under intense scrutiny by an officious immigration officer. What begins as standard paperwork soon escalates into a harrowing ordeal, testing their relationship and unraveling hidden fears. With their future in the U.S. at stake, they discover the painful realities of a system designed to separate rather than unite. A LIEN captures the raw emotional toll of the immigration process, set against a backdrop of love, vulnerability, and a relentless bureaucracy.

Long Synopsis: A LIEN is a short film directed by Sam and David Cutler-Kreutz that explores the harsh realities of the U.S. immigration system. The 15-minute drama follows Sophie and Oscar, a young couple who think they are attending a routine green card interview, only to face unexpected dangers and systemic barriers. Their young daughter, Nina, adds emotional depth to the story as the stakes become increasingly dire.

The film critiques real-life immigration enforcement practices, particularly the detention of undocumented individuals during official proceedings. Through intimate cinematography, a tense atmosphere, and strong performances, A LIEN delivers a powerful and timely message about immigration reform. The film has been nominated for an Academy Award and has received critical acclaim for its emotional impact and relevance to current political discourse.

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DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

A LIEN is a call to action for comprehensive immigration reform urgently needed in the United States. A hard look at the complex bureaucracy and enforcement incentives is desperately needed to build a more compassionate and straightforward immigration process. *A Lien* speaks to the tangled structure and unending labyrinth of paperwork, rules, and red tape that defines the immigration experience. At its heart, *A Lien* is a story about Americans and their desire for family, unity, and identity, but also a story about wrinkled shirts, braided hair, and the desire to just feel at home.”

— *Sam and David Cutler-Kreutz* (Co-Directors)

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INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS

Q: What sparked the idea for this film?

We stumbled across the marriage entrapment process in 2018 and immediately felt that we had to do something. The idea that this twisting of immigration rules happens right now, in states across the US, massively damaging the lives of families, sparked our desire to advocate against this practice. As filmmakers we feel the most impactful thing we can do is call attention to this insane process and intertwine it with a story that shows the real impact it has.

We strongly believe that art is political in nature. For us it's about trying to engage with the cultural themes around us, finding ways as directors to soak up the zeitgeist, crystalize it, and give it back to the viewer in a form they can engage with. Oftentimes that comes down to trying to bring large and convoluted themes down to the individual level - looking at the impact on families or single people. Strangely the most hyper specific is often the most universal.

Q: The title of the film, A LIEN, is unconventionally split into two words. What is the impetus for this?

We think that A LIEN as a title encompasses the heart of the film in many ways. When thinking about liens, a right to possess property belonging to another until a debt owed is discharged - the film is about bureaucratic processes, about debts owed and paid, about humans in the immigration process being seen as numbers, as essentially property. Liens speak to the legal complexities inherent in the system. On top of all of this, the fact that A LIEN is a play on "alien", speaks to the separation, feeling "alien" in one's home, and how we talk about immigrants in this country. All together, we felt like A LIEN captured the essence of what this film is about.

Q: What is one memory from production that has stayed with you?

One of the most challenging parts of filming A LIEN was finding buildings that convincingly looked like U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) buildings. As the film was made on a very very minimal budget, there was no way we could even consider filming in a government building, so we spent 8 months looking for locations that we thought could emulate the design and feel of a USCIS building.

We couldn't find anything for 7 months, and had made a plan to shoot the film in some less ideal buildings. 3 weeks before shooting, we re-scouted a college in New Jersey to see if there was anything we missed, and the last building (after a long day of scouting and finding nothing), we were shown the building in the film, which so perfectly captures the government waiting room and USCIS hallways that we had been looking for.

Q: What has been the reception of this film?

The film has resonated with so many viewers across the country and the world. We've heard from many that the film mirrors their experience going through similar processes.

Q: What do you hope this film will accomplish?

We hope the film will help push for urgently needed comprehensive immigration reform. Not only do we think the practice of entrapping immigrants at their green card marriage interview is

immoral, we think a hard look at the complex bureaucracy and enforcement incentives in our immigration system are desperately needed.

We hope the film will help humanize the green card and immigrant process, while galvanizing Americans to push for a more compassionate and straightforward immigration system.

Q: What is unique about this film?

This film was made as a labor of love. Basically everyone who worked on the film worked for free because they felt this story needed to be told. Because this film had a very minimal budget, we focused on downsizing everything, while emphasizing quality with each person & piece of gear. Instead of having lots of options, we worked with the limitations of limited gear and people, to try and make the film feel as real as possible. Instead of complex lighting setups that would require crew we didn't have, we shot the film more docu-style, leaning into handheld, fast movements and camera swings. We think this helps the viewer feel more placed into the film, while hiding all the elements of the film/buildings that didn't look right and that we didn't have the capacity to change.

Q: How did you begin your career in film?

We grew up sharing a room together in a house with no TV. So our entertainment as kids was reading and telling stories together. We would lay in bed for hours telling stories to each other every day, so when we started writing together, it was just an easy extension of all the storytelling we had done with each other our entire lives. Sam studied film at Bard College, and spent many years working as a commercial cinematographer before we both started to work together writing, directing, and producing.

Q: Have you always been collaborators?

While we have always been telling stories together since we were kids (and collaborating on a range of projects), we spent 10 years pursuing other things before coming back together to start collaborating professionally. In many ways those ten years helped shape both of us and gave us important, but different, tools that we now use together. Luckily because we had spent so much time with each other as siblings, collaborating felt incredibly easy.

Q: What is a dynamic that is unique to your collaboration, not only as artists, but as brothers?

We have been creating stories together since we could walk. Growing up without a TV, we would go on long walks and lay in bed at night telling stories to each other. We played our own version of Dungeons & Dragons (we didn't have the books so we just made it up). That experience has given us the foundation of our collaboration. I think what makes our collaboration unique is the depth of trust and shared history we have with each other in combination with our love of telling stories together. It's fun to spend our time professionally doing the exact same thing we did for fun as kids (taking walks and creating stories).

Q: What projects are you working on next?

We are working on writing our debut feature, which we hope will be our next project.

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KEY CREW BIOS

Directors

SAM & DAVID CUTLER-KREUTZ are an award winning writing, directing & producing team based in NYC and LA. As brothers, they grew up making films together. Their first short film FLOUNDER premiered in the Clermont-Ferrand International Competition 2022. Their second A LIEN is Nominated for the 97th Academy Awards. Their third short TRAPPED premiered at SXSW 2024 Narrative Shorts Competition, where it won the Special Jury Prize and Palm Springs ShortsFest Best US Short.

Their work together has been shown at - SXSW, Palm Springs ShortsFest, Clermont-Ferrand, SIFF, Austin, Vancouver, Hamptons, Rhode Island, Oldenburg, Brooklyn Film Festival, Flickerfest and Festival Regard, among others. Their work has premiered online with Vimeo Staff Picks, Short Of The Week, Director's Notes & Director's Library features. They are Vimeo Breakout Creators 2024

Producer

Tara Sheffer is an award-winning filmmaker from Arkansas with an MFA in filmmaking from NYU Tisch School of the Arts. She has produced over twenty-five short films including A LIEN (nominated for the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film), FLOUNDER (Clermont Ferrand Official Selection and Vimeo Staff Pick), TRAPPED (SXSW Jury Award Winner and Palm Springs ShortsFest Best US Short), PLAISIR (SXSW Official Selection and Searchlight Short), and she line-produced THE LETTER ROOM (nominated for the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film).

Her previous positions include coordinator at the Department of Motion Pictures and assistant to Scott Rudin. Tara is a The Gotham/Rotterdam Producing fellow, a Sundance Producing Lab fellow, a Film Independent Fast Track fellow, and the recipient of the Robert Oberman/Gregory Pickert Media Services award for excellence in creative producing.

Producer

REBECCA ESKREIS is a director, writer and producer whose work has screened at numerous international festivals, including SXSW, TIFF, SIFF, deadCenter, Savannah, Munich, Stockholm and Thessaloniki.

Her directorial debut project, WHAT BREAKS THE ICE (Goldcrest Films), received the Sandra Adair/Empowering a Billion Women Grant for promising female filmmakers from the Austin Film Society, and was selected for the Austin Film Society's Artist Intensive, hosted by Richard Linklater. WHAT BREAKS THE ICE stars Sofia Hublitz and Madelyn Cline, and premiered at the 2020 Woodstock Film Festival as a drive-in double feature alongside a special presentation of Francis Lee's AMMONITE. The film was released theatrically across the U.S. in October 2021. It is now available on Showtime and other streaming platforms. She is currently in post-production on her next film, CLEARMIND, which will premiere in 2023.

Mentored by the late Jonathan Demme, Eskreis previously worked as a producer at his company, Clinica Estetico, following stints at 72 Productions, Red Hour Films and Di Novi Pictures, where she was the Creative Executive. Eskreis began her career as a reporter and producer/director for Forbes.com's Video Network. She holds a BA, Magna Cum Laude, from Barnard College at Columbia University, and an MFA from the USC School of Cinematic Arts. She is also an Assistant Professor and Head of the Producing program at the Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema at Brooklyn College.

Executive Producer Adam McKay

Hyperobject Industries is a multi-platform production company from Academy-Award winning writer-director-producer Adam McKay. The company's name is a shout-out to environmental philosopher Timothy Morton's use of the term 'hyperobject' and his belief that humankind needs to re-evaluate its relationship with nature as a whole. The Hyperobject Industries team includes McKay's long-time producer Kevin Messick and producers Betsy Koch, Todd Schulman and Maeve Cullinane. Hyperobject Industries' focus is wide ranging from comedies, dramas, horror, documentaries and documentary-series, as well as politically charged and challenging subjects with which McKay has become synonymous. McKay's last feature, Don't Look Up, which he and Kevin Messick produced, is one of Netflix's most successful films and received four Oscar and BAFTA nominations, including Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay. Other recent productions include the box office hit The Menu starring Anya-Taylor Joy, Nicholas Hoult and Ralph Fiennes for Searchlight Pictures, and Fresh starring Daisy Edgar-Jones and Sebastian Stan from director Mimi Cave with a screenplay from Lauryn Kahn that was released on Hulu.

Television projects included the HBO drama series Winning Time: The Rise of the Lakers Dynasty and HBO late night series Game Theory with Bomani Jones. McKay and Bong Joon Ho are partnering on an HBO limited series inspired by Bong Joon Ho's Academy Award Best Picture Parasite. McKay and Messick served as Executive Producers on HBO's critically acclaimed and Emmy-winning series Succession. McKay is an executive producer on HBO's Painting with John and HBO documentaries Q: Into the Storm, 537 Votes, BS High, and Hulu's most-watched documentary film God Forbid: The Sex Scandal That Brought Down a Dynasty. Most recently, he served as an executive producer on the Oscar short-listed documentary feature Union.

Hyperobject Industries has developed original podcasts, such as Bedtime Stories with Adam McKay, Death at the Wing, Death on the Lot and Broken: Seeking Justice.

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CREDIT LIST

Directed by	Sam & David Cutler-Kreutz
Produced by	David Cutler-Kreutz Sam Cutler-Kreutz Rebecca Eskreis Tara Sheffer
Executive Produced by	Adam McKay William Martinez Victoria Ratermanis
Cinematography by	Andrea Gavazzi
Costume Design by	Blair Maxwell
Production Design by	Megan Elizabeth Bell Hallye Webb

Featuring

Sophie	Victoria Ratermanis
Oscar	William Martinez
Nina	Koralyn Rivera

Supporting Cast

Mike Aquilino	Wendy Hammer-Ehring
Jen Bergum	Tyler Joseph
Scott Broughton	Lauren Lattimore
Vinny Fazio	Stephen Shore
Max Gordon	

Crew

Line Producer	Amandine Thomas
Assistant Director	Alex Morsanutto
1 st AC	Shuyao Chen Oliver Finley
2 nd AC	Mason Fox
Sound Mixer	Yves Armand Albaret Kevin Hastings Michael Louis Gordon
Gaffer	John Izaparte
Key Grip	Jonathan Saavedra
Production Assistants	Nina Benashvili Jacob Friedman Daniel Pimenel

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ABOUT THE FILM

Production Notes / Behind-the-Scenes

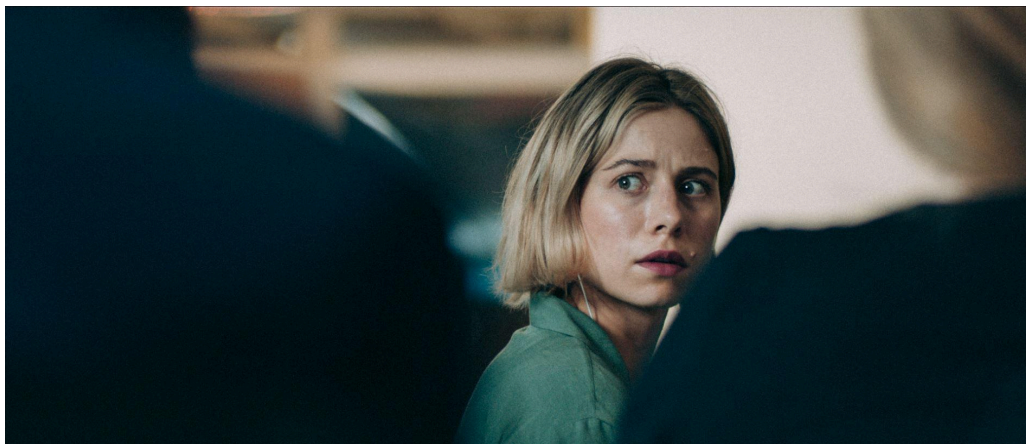
- **Inspiration**
 - <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/19/us/immigration-marriage-green-card.html>
- **Filming Location & Challenges**
 - We shot on location at a college in northern NJ. Given the small budget of the film we didn't have much ability to change location into a USCIS building, so we used a lot of long lenses and camera movement to hide the parts of the location that didn't look real.
 - We filmed with a very minimal budget. Almost everyone worked for free on the film simply because they felt the story was important to tell.
- **Stylistic Choices**
 - A Lien is centered around anxiety and restless pacing. The camera nervously watches the characters as glass, bodies and foreground elements haze our view of Sophie and Oscar. The camera moves with skittish precision, never settling, always searching, framing tightly our characters anxious ticks: tapping feet, hair caught in glasses.
 - We used handheld for most of the shots, shooting specifically open on long lenses to place the audience more intimately with Oscar and Sophie.
 - As we go farther into the USCIS building, the color palette becomes more monochromatic and the sounds become more mechanical and non human. We lose organic sounds and colors as we get deeper in the labyrinth of hallways and generic doors. It isn't until the end we claw our way back to the surface - getting outside where we regain those organic colors and sounds. This mirrors our use of shots, keeping our shots tighter and tighter as we are deeper in the building, not letting us see very much, until we reemerge back outside.
- **Filming Facts**
 - We shot the film in 4 days.
 - We searched through something like 6000 actors to find the leads (Sophie and Oscar) played by Victoria and Will.
 - We worked with multiple immigration lawyers to make sure we were telling an accurate story.

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PHOTO STILLS
[LINK](#)



KEY ART IMAGE:



All Photography Credit: Andrea Gavazzi

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IN THE PRESS

IndieWire: [Adam McKay Boards Oscar-Contending Short 'A Lien' as Executive Producer](#)

Exclusive: The Oscar winner calls the Best Live-Action Short contender about immigration issues, directed by Sam and David Cutler-Kreutz, "pure cinematic tension."

Directors Notes: [Sam & David Cutler-Kreutz's Oscar Nominated 'A LIEN' Finds a Young Family Crushed by a Vicious Immigration Process](#)

Intensity is the name of the game for brothers/co-directors [Sam and David Cutler-Kreutz](#).

The Contending: [Sam & David Cutler-Kreutz On Creating a 'Documents Thriller' for 'A LIEN'](#)

The immigration process comes center stage in Sam and David Cutler-Kreutz's thrilling and frustratingly real Live Action Short Film contender, A LIEN. A young couple come face-to-face with an unstoppable enemy, and the most heartbreaking thing is that they did everything correctly before their scheduled appointment. By separating its characters in a bureaucratic setting, the directing duo mounts the tension in a stressful crescendo while never letting us forget what truly matters.

Accolades & Festival Screenings

Austin Film Festival 2023 - Nominated Best Short

Seattle International Film Festival 2023

Vancouver International Film Festival 2023

Rhode Island International Film Festival 2023

Brooklyn Film Festival 2024

Flickerfest 2023

Salute Your Shorts 2024 - Special Jury Award

March on Washington Film Festival 2024 - Grand Prize Narrative Short

Indie Street Film Festival 2024

Ennesimo Film Festival 2023

Postira Seaside Film Festival 2023

Houston Latino Film Festival 2024