

“**Birth of the Sun**” is a 27 minute documentary about Grady Alexis, an artist from Haiti who moved between many sides of the downtown east-village scene in the late 1980’s. He struggled to develop a unique artistic vision – as a painter and as a sculptor he made playful works from found urban objects. In 1991, on a comfortable summer evening, he died in a chance street encounter with an off-duty policeman. True to the kind of hand-made low-tech kinds of paintings and sculpture that Grady created, his story is told through the art and music of people who knew and were influenced by him.

Grady’s death in 1991 represented a turning point in the life of the east village. In that year the murder rate in the city was at an all-time high and police relations within communities was severely strained. But there was also a balance between gentrification and “regular people” that allowed artists like Grady and the different groups that he moved between to exist, and even flourish. The change since Grady’s death has been remarkable; the communities depicted in the documentary have been wholly transformed. The city is safer in general but is harsher in particular of those without disposable income.

Grady moved between the worlds of art, music, the streets, cafes, wherever a creative scene was happening. When he lived at El Taller from 1986 until his death he painted and made music with a colorful and creative group of people. In the film a number of people who were close to Grady look back on their relationships. Both Bernardo Palombo and his son Demian considered Grady to be part of their family. Grady collaborated with Thom Corn on large scale work, before and after they were part of an art group called “The Maroons”. Hamlet Zurita, painter, was another friend of Grady, collaborating with the group of artists associated with the Mars Bar. Lori Leistyna was his girlfriend in 1990-1991 when he began to intensify his art output while facing some difficult personal issues.

The musical soundtrack was created by guitarist and songwriter Demian Palombo, who called on his memories and experiences with Grady to compose and perform a complex and haunting series of original songs and music. Most of the soundtrack was recorded at present-day El Taller, in both multi-track and live sessions. Guest musicians who appear in the film include Quiqie Sinesi, Bernardo Palombo, Jose Valdez, Mike Campani, Gilberto Mendoza and Victor Hernandez.

The film also documents the recreation of a signature work by Grady, the mural called “Birth of the Sun”. The recreation of Grady’s work, which hung at El Taller for many years, is a central act of the film, establishing a physical link between the past and present. Artists who knew Grady, and others who learned of him, brought their own talents to the recreation. Among those who participated are Andrea Arroyo, Thom Corn, Jeff Schlanger, Angelo Romero, Demian Palombo, Hamlet Zurita, Laura Gilbert, Ricardo Pliego, Bernardo Palombo, and Marc Romero. The mural will now become a permanent addition to the present day El Taller on Broadway and 103rd Street.

Birth of the Sun

Written, Directed and Produced by Thomas W. Campbell, Associate Producer - Juan Loney, Cinematography by Emmanuel Alexandre Jr., Edited by Hyunjung Cho, Original Musical Soundtrack by Demian Palombo, Musical Supervision by Bernardo Palombo, Assistant Camera by Kemah Keita-Diouf, Grip/Sound Recording by Nicole Tarver 27 minutes, DVD, Video 2008