

[dreamy fun sapphic intro music]

[00:00:00] **Laurel:** Hi, everybody. Welcome to Sapphic Time Travel Club.

**Audrey:** [sing-songy] *AaAaaAhhHh...*

**Laurel:** We're your hosts. I'm Laurel Hechanova.

[00:00:12] **Audrey:** [still sing-songy] *...and I'm Audrey Nieh.*

[00:00:13] **Laurel:** I was going to say, "and I'm Audrey Nieh."  
[laughs] Oh great.

[00:00:17] **Audrey:** [a little sing-songy] *Doing so well!*

[end intro music]

To kick off the new year, 2024, we thought we'd go all the way back to 2020 when we were just wee baby *Portrait* fans. We were literally four. And had just started this podcast back when it was called Podcast of a Lady on Fire. Today we're gonna revisit our second episode released over three years ago, uh, which is like 13 years in panini time, on April 24th, 2020 deep, deep, deep in the early days of shelter-in-place. Um, we had literally just met.

[00:00:58] **Laurel:** Still virtually.

[00:00:59] **Audrey:** Yeah, we had not met in person, and I think it was, uh, maybe like the second time, third time we spoke to each other. And you can tell we really like each other.

[00:01:10] **Laurel:** That's a great idea, yeah, so the second conversation you have should be recorded and then released as like a public artifact.

[00:01:16] **Audrey:** For every meeting, for everyone?

[00:01:18] **Laurel:** Yeah, everyone should do that. Yeah.

[00:01:19] **Audrey:** Love it.

[00:01:20] **Laurel:** All right. So now travel back in time with us to one of our very first conversations about the movie that started it all. And then we'll all come back together at the end and talk about it, which is very meta talking about the podcast on the podcast. But all right, here we go!

[00:01:37] **Audrey:** [a lil sing-songy] Lesbian chaos!

[00:01:39] **Laurel:** Okay, great.

[Podcast of a Lady on Fire intro music! a.k.a. "Non possum fugere" a.k.a. the song from the end of the bonfire scene]

Hi, everybody. Welcome to Podcast of a Lady on Fire, where we'll explore the filmmaking, themes, and community involved in Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*.

[end intro music]

We are your hosts. I'm Laurel Hechanova.

[00:01:55] **Audrey:** And I'm Audrey Nieh.

[00:01:56] **Laurel:** And today we are talking about why we love this film so much. A couple of quick disclaimers before we dive in: neither of us speak French, so apologies in advance for our pronunciation, and we are also assuming that you've watched the movie, so this podcast will have a bunch of spoilers if you haven't. That's just a heads up.

So, first off, how did you first hear about this movie?

[00:02:18] **Audrey:** So, my friend, Dor, saw the film at the Woodstock Film Festival last year, and she recommended it to me, and I think at that point I had already seen the trailer a few times, and it was one of those things where I was like, I'll watch this because I'll watch any queer film or queer-leaning film, but she was like really excited about it.

She loved it immediately and thought I would love it too. And I think she compared it to *Carol*, not at all in terms of the

actual storyline or anything, but she knew I loved *Carol* and thought that I would have kind of the same reaction to *Portrait*. But I have to admit, after I saw the trailer the first time, I was not...I was, I was like, okay, like this looks fine, like this looks really pretty, but otherwise, kind of a basic period piece.

[00:03:03] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:03:04] **Audrey:** Did you have a similar reaction?

[00:03:06] **Laurel:** So you were aware of it when it first was released in, what is it, like mid 2019?

[00:03:12] **Audrey:** Yeah, I heard about it maybe last summer while it was doing the festivals, and then I think the trailer came out around that time as well. And then if I remember correctly, it was first released in the States in November last year for a very, very limited run.

[00:03:26] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think I started seeing the trailers on like...Instagram knows to send me queer film trailers, I guess, which is great. That was probably, yeah, later in the year. And same, it's like, I got the sense that it was a queer film, but in the trailer, I wasn't really drawn to either of the main actors.

I'm not generally a fan of period pieces, so I was like, oh, I guess I'll see it whenever it's easy for me to see it. And I guess I'm sort of glad that I, I waited because, and I think we were talking about this earlier, I don't know that I would have been able to survive if I had seen it during the limited run and not been able to watch it five more times consecutively.

But we'll, we'll get into that later. So yeah, I think I first heard about it via Instagram mid 2019. And then you actually were one of the the few people on my, on any of my social media feeds that was at all excited about it. And I think you,

you posted several times and that got me more interested in it.

So I finally sought it out when it ended up on Hulu.

[00:04:31] **Audrey:** I felt like I wanted to post about it constantly, like every, every hour, but I was really restraining myself. Yeah, you responded to a post asking if you should see this, if it's tragic. Inside I was like, *you need to fucking see this now*, but what I wrote was a little bit more constrained. And I was like, [very soft voice] yeah, you know, you should check it out. It's sad, but it's not tragic.

[00:04:54] **Laurel:** Yeah, I'm glad you were honest about the ending, that was, that was helpful. So where did you end up seeing it?

[00:05:00] **Audrey:** I saw it at this little indie theater in San Francisco, The Landmark, in Embarcadero, I don't know if you're familiar with that. Side note for anyone listening, we both live in the Bay Area, which probably made it a little bit easier for us to see it earlier, maybe?

[00:05:15] **Laurel:** Yeah, probably. Yeah.

[00:05:16] **Audrey:** When they released it to a wider audience on Valentine's Day, I think I went on that day to see it.

And similar to you, I'm really glad that I waited and I did not see it in November because I think I would have pulled my hair out. Because as soon as I got out of the theater, it was kind of like, okay, how do I...I mean, I needed some breathing room because it felt like it impacted me so hard that I needed to be able to breathe for a little bit, but I did immediately want to, you know, go back and see it again.

[00:05:45] **Laurel:** Just like turn right around and go back in the theater.

[00:05:48] **Audrey:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Where did you see it?

[00:05:51] **Laurel:** So the first time I saw it was not in a theater, and I'm hoping that like after we're not sheltering in place, they re-release it into theaters or something, because I really want to see it on a big screen. But I saw it on Hulu the day after it came out. One of my guy friends on Twitter posted about it and said that he loved it, and I was like, oh, huh, that's interesting.

And so I saw it the next day, and I watched it with my girlfriend and we were both floored. We loved it so much, and I watched it again by myself around midnight that night. But, yeah, TV viewing.

[00:06:26] **Audrey:** So talk a little bit more about your first impression.

[00:06:30] **Laurel:** It was surprising to me, and okay, so one of the things that I will maybe forever regret is that I told my girlfriend walking into it--she hadn't heard anything about it--and I told her that we should watch it because it's a queer love story. And I wish I hadn't told her that. I wish that we had started watching the film and then she would have realized that they were falling in love as they were realizing that they were falling in love, you know? I wish I could take that back.

[00:06:57] **Audrey:** Don't regret, just remember.

[00:06:58] **Laurel:** Don't regret it, remember! Oh my god, you're right. So It was a slow build, I wasn't really expecting to love it, and then almost immediately, the way that Marianne is presented is...I liked her instantly, you know? The way that she's teaching her class, she seems very poised, and she seems very good at her job, I feel like even subconsciously I felt like this isn't a woman that I've seen in period pieces too often, if ever, before, right?

It's like, this woman who's very confident, She's *working*, you know? She's at the front of a room that was maybe even on a subconscious level very new to me and very engaging. And then the boat scene where, without hesitation, she jumps into this icy cold deep ocean, you know, to retrieve her crate without any assistance or asking for assistance.

Also, just prior to that, she's not seasick in this, like, really rocky journey across the waves. She doesn't appear weak at all at any time. And so I started to love her more and more. And then as the film went on, like, I, I liked everyone, you know, even the Countess who, in some respects, represents the patriarchy in a way, you know, it's like she's kind of the go between between her daughter and this, this Milanese noble, and I liked her. I thought she was really smart, and I found myself in love with the movie subconsciously before I realized it consciously, and then I think it wasn't until I finished the movie that I was like, whoa, what, what just happened, you know?

That was my first impression. What was your first impression?

[00:08:38] **Audrey:** I felt like it was just so consuming and similar to you where I don't, I think I knew during the film that I was falling in love with this movie, so to speak, but I don't think it really occurred to me like how big of an impact it had until I kind of stepped out and I was like, holy shit, like something just happened. It like rocked me.

[00:08:55] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:08:56] **Audrey:** I felt like it became sort of my lifestyle?

[00:08:59] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah!

[00:09:00] **Audrey:** You know, like my gender identity. It was all consuming, it was all I could think about afterwards. I think I immediately went home, if not while I was biking home, like looking at my phone, looking up everything I could find

about it, like articles, anything on Instagram, anything about the actors, anything about the director.

I'd heard of Céline Sciamma before, but not really either of the two main actors. Yeah, it was just completely all consuming, and it still is in many ways.

[00:09:25] **Laurel:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:09:27] **Audrey:** I don't know if I can say that about any other film. When I was watching it, it was for me similar where it was a sort of gradual build up where I think because of the way that it was shot, you're looking at everything from Marianne's point of view, at least at the beginning of the film.

You know, when you're like following Héloïse to the cliff and when she's running. So I think your...or at least my experience almost paralleled Marianne's, right?

[00:09:51] **Laurel:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:09:52] **Audrey:** But I remember one scene in particular where Héloïse has just gotten back from listening to music at mass, and there's that now famous quote where she says something like, "In solitude I felt the liberty you spoke of, but I also felt your absence."

[00:10:07] **Laurel:** Wait, she had gone to mass?

[00:10:09] **Audrey:** Yeah, so Marianne really needed time to paint. She kept getting back late and not having enough light. And so she told her mom that it would be really good--or her mom suggested, you basically take a day off from babysitting Héloïse and just paint for a day. And then Marianne was like, well, why don't you just let Héloïse walk on her own this time?

And so she talked to Héloïse about that later in the day where she was like, your mom's going to let you hang out by yourself.

[00:10:32] **Laurel:** Hahaha right.

[00:10:33] **Audrey:** And Héloïse, I believe, said she'll go to mass, and I think Marianne was like, oh, to like, pray or something? And Héloïse was like, no, to listen to music, and then that led up to the harpsichord Vivaldi scene.

[00:10:44] **Laurel:** Right right right.

[00:10:44] **Audrey:** And so she gets back from mass, and Marianne is in the dining area, and she walks in, and Marianne has oil paint on her hand, and she does that thing when she turns, and then Héloïse is glowing because she just listened to music, and then I don't know if you remember this but the way they were standing was Héloïse was kind of in the background in focus and Marianne was in the foreground out of focus and that's when Héloïse says "In solitude I felt the liberty you spoke of."

And then she says, "but I also felt your absence." And then I think it's called rack focus where they shift the focus. So Héloïse becomes out of focus. Marianne goes into focus, but as she's going into focus, she also turns simultaneously, which was so skillful. The cinematographer is incredible. I mean, I'm just, I'm getting chills thinking about it now.

I remember, like, gasping, grabbing my girlfriend's leg and just, it just pulled my heart out. It was just so powerful, the editing, the dialogue, you know, it was just very poetic, everything about that scene, and that was one of the first times in the film I remember being like, oh my god, what am I watching?

[00:11:48] **Laurel:** Yeah! Ok...



[00:11:49] **Audrey:** You know?

[00:11:49] **Laurel:** ...so that, yeah, that, that exact feeling, the, "oh my god, what am I watching," happens so often in that film, and it's so unexpected because, especially if you walk in thinking, oh, here's another period piece, and then you get this weird bonfire scene where all of a sudden there's this droning noise, and then there's this clapping, and the droning noise starts to harmonize, and then they start singing in the dark around a bonfire, and you're like...what?! Like, what's going on? And yeah, it was moments like that that just gutted and floored me over and over.

[00:12:21] **Audrey:** Absolutely. They were so unexpected, but then looking back, it all makes sense. Of course, of course, this is it, you know, this is the film.

[00:12:29] **Laurel:** Yeah, and it's, it's amazing how complete the film is without feeling overdone or like it's trying too hard. It's just so elegantly put together that the more that I rewatch it and the more that I dig in, it never loses the initial magic. It actually feels even more beautiful and complex, like, every time I find out something new about it.

Yeah, it's just incredible filmmaking.

[00:12:57] **Audrey:** Yeah, I mean, I think you mentioned this last time, but it truly rewards multiple viewings.

[00:13:02] **Laurel:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

[00:13:03] **Audrey:** Sometimes I have it on in the background. It's just so beautiful. There's not a lot of dialogue. There's no music. I'll be working and it's just like, oh, look, it's playing.

[00:13:12] **Laurel:** Right, yeah, yeah. There was one point where I was trying to re-watch something in it and Hulu was giving me this error message and I was like, oh no, "Have I

watched it too much?!" Like, did I, did I meet a maximum, did I meet a quota and I can't watch it at all anymore? I think that was the day I bought the DVD.

[00:13:30] **Audrey:** Hulu was like, "Your obsession has peaked," like "you can not...sorry, we're shutting you down."

[00:13:36] **Laurel:** "Suspicious level of activity coming from your account." So I bought the DVD, but now I also have to buy a DVD player because we don't have anything that plays DVDs anymore, but it's like, okay, yeah, I guess that's what I'll have to do.

[00:13:47] **Audrey:** You're talking about the Criterion Collection one? Okay, that one's coming out in June,

[00:13:51] **Laurel:** June. Yeah.

[00:13:52] **Audrey:** You have two months to get yourself a DVD player. Now I'm kind of curious, have you purchased anything else related to *Portrait*?

[00:14:00] **Laurel:** No, I haven't. There are a couple, um, really cute looking things. Like, I've come across some enamel pins, some shirts and stuff on Instagram, but I haven't purchased anything else. You have an awesome hat.

[00:14:12] **Audrey:** Yeah, it's super cute. It's this black dad hat, as they say. It's hand embroidered by someone in Texas.

[00:14:20] **Laurel:** That is such a nice touch. I love that it's embroidered.

[00:14:23] **Audrey:** I wanted to go back to something you said earlier. You mentioned your girlfriend had never seen any of the trailers and knew nothing about the film?

[00:14:31] **Laurel:** Yeah, I don't think she was familiar with it until we saw it on Hulu. Yeah. Yeah, how about your girlfriend?

[00:14:36] **Audrey:** I think she was kind of in the same boat as me where she had seen the trailer and was kind of like I'll watch this but you know, I don't know, but then yeah when we saw it we were just like oh my god. Like what in the world what just happened?

But I do I wish I could watch it with someone who knew nothing about it.

[00:14:56] **Laurel:** Yeah, same. Well, I would also want that person to be queer and preferably female, because I feel like it has a special impact on, on us.

[00:15:01] **Audrey:** Absolutely. For sure. I don't know how we're going to find that person, but that's my goal during this quarantine is to find someone.

[00:15:13] **Laurel:** But I guess, I think it also has to be a particular person, though, because I insisted that one of my queer female friends watch it, and I told you this earlier, but she was *not* as into it, like, not nearly as into it as I was, she was, I think she said the ending left her sad and sort of annoyed, and I get it, like, I get that we've maybe run our course on sad endings, but I was so sad, because she used to be a film studies major, so I thought that she would at least love it from that angle, and I thought, like, oh, if there was ever an audience for this film, it is *you*, and then I sent it to her, and it was like, oh, this didn't also change your life?

Because I am a different person now. And I was kind of hoping that it would have the same effect, but, yeah, that was disappointing.

[00:15:54] **Audrey:** Yeah, I have one friend who is also a queer female who saw it and was like, it was fine. It was really pretty. I think she described it as simplistic. And I was like, do not mistake minimalist for simplistic.

[00:16:06] **Laurel:** Yeah...

[00:16:08] **Audrey:** Thank you very much.

[00:16:09] **Laurel:** Totally. Also, we're gonna need about two weeks before I talk to you again.

[00:16:13] **Audrey:** Yeah, yeah, I don't talk to her anymore. It's cool.

[00:16:18] **Laurel:** It's fine. Yeah, so I'm, like, on that note, I'm really happy that my girlfriend had the same reaction. Because at least we were able to, like, gush at each other about...I mean, I'm more obsessed than she is, of course, but I think that's just the nature of who I am versus the nature of who she is.

[00:16:33] **Audrey:** Yeah, I mean, it's nice that you don't have to split up now, right?

[00:16:36] **Laurel:** Right yeah, yeah.

[00:16:38] **Audrey:** No, but similar, like, I definitely have way more obsessive tendencies than, than my girlfriend. We watched it twice together and I don't, I don't know if she'll watch it again. She's not like a, you know, watch multiple times kind of viewer, but I, I am like, I'll watch a movie 30 times, no problem.

So that's okay!

[00:16:55] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:16:55] **Audrey:** I can continue watching it on my own. That's okay.

[00:16:57] **Laurel:** So we watched it twice as well, and I think she would watch it again if it were for a specific thing. So it's like, okay, help me pick out symbolism, you know, throughout the movie. Or help me, yeah, figure something else

out about it. But I don't know that she would be up for just a casual third rewatching of it.

[00:17:14] **Audrey:** Part of the reason Heather, my girlfriend, won't watch it again is because, not because she doesn't love it, but because there's still this heart wrenching aspect to it. Even though it's not tragic, it's still painful, right? Like, I have to admit, on a couple viewings, I did not watch the last scene,

[00:17:29] **Laurel:** Yeah, totally.

[00:17:30] **Audrey:** I'm gonna just cut myself off here because it's, I don't want to spend the rest of

[00:17:32] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:17:35] **Audrey:** We saw it once and then we saw it, I think, like a couple weeks later with some friends, who also loved it. Afterwards she was like, I can't, I can't do that again, you know? It's a trial, and it's a lot, so, I can kind of understand that.

[00:17:45] **Laurel:** and Adèle Haenel said something that secured the ending for me in a way that I was really grateful for. She said they weren't going to end the film happily because it felt like telling the world, oh yes, thank you for allowing us to be alive. She was like, no, we're ending it like this because you are not letting us be alive enough.

So to have made a happy ending would have given everyone a false sense of the way that you treat women and queer people is okay. You know, it's like, no, it's not true. We have this great love and because of the way that the world is, this is the ending that feels more honest. There's still work to be done, and that felt accurate to me.

Like it wasn't just tragic for tragedy's sake, or exploiting queer love and queer stories for a guttural emotional

reaction, which is what I feel happens with other queer films sometimes. It just felt like a very straightforward truth about queer experience.

[00:18:43] **Audrey:** Yeah, I really like that. I think the ending is kind of perfect. It's like multifaceted, right? It's, that reason is is beautiful. Also the parallel with the Orpheus and Eurydice story, you know, this is the poet's ending, not the lover's, right?

[00:18:57] **Laurel:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:18:58] **Audrey:** It feels true to the time, you know, as much of an expert as I am on, you know...

[00:19:03] **Laurel:** 17th century queer love?

[00:19:05] **Audrey:** Right, right. And also, I feel like since so much of the film is about that equality and, you know, the, the consent and the exchange between the two of them, I think by the end they had both agreed, this is the path we're going to take. I'm not going to try to possess you and make you feel bad for making this, this choice that you kind of don't actually have a choice in.

And so the fact that it ended the way it did, which was not tragic, but still heartbreaking, it's like something they both they both consented to.

[00:19:31] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah, it wasn't like one of them [died by] suicide in a very, like, dramatic way.

[00:19:36] **Audrey:** Right, they're both deliberately like, we can't be together, but I'm gonna sneak these little messages to you.

[00:19:41] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah. Well, okay, so speaking of, speaking of which, is there anything that you didn't get the first time you watched it?

[00:19:49] **Audrey:** There was one scene where it took me a second and third viewing to really understand the nuance. It's after Marianne finishes the second painting, and I think Héloïse says something along the lines of, um, you know, you didn't destroy the first one for me, you did it for yourself. And then Marianne responds with, you know, I'd like to destroy this one too.

[00:20:10] **Laurel:** Right, yeah, yeah.

[00:20:11] **Audrey:** And there's this whole exchange where, I don't think it was clear to me the first time I watched it, that at this point Héloïse had, she had basically accepted her fate.

[00:20:21] **Laurel:** Right, yeah.

[00:20:22] **Audrey:** And anything that Marianne was doing to sort of disagree with it or kind of complain about the fact that she's leaving, from Héloïse's perspective, was her not being on her side.

[00:20:33] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:20:34] **Audrey:** I didn't, yeah, I didn't fully grasp that exchange. I think it may have been a language barrier. It just felt very nuanced. But the more I watched it, the more I was like, oh, okay, I kind of understand now what's, what's going on and why there was this huge emotional outburst.

[00:20:46] **Laurel:** Yeah, no, same! Especially because I, I was with Marianne, like, I understood where she was coming from. It's like, no, I want to destroy the painting, too. I could see how she would feel frustrated as an artist to have done this painting that essentially puts her lover in someone else's hands. It's like, got it. I'm with you 100%.

And then Héloïse turns around and she's like, you know, I don't understand. And she's very upset and it's like, what

don't you understand about this? This is, you know, a horrible position to be in as, as Marianne. But yeah, so that took me a while to come around to as well. But I think you're right, like, I think some of it is a translation thing. And I heard that the Criterion version will have a different English translation, so that'll be interesting.

[00:21:28] **Audrey:** Oh, really?

[00:21:28] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:21:29] **Audrey:** Was there anything else that warranted additional viewings to...?

[00:21:32] **Laurel:** Yeah, so after the first portrait is done, she also says, she's like, this is me, you know, whatever, and she says, I can understand how it is not close to me, but I find it sad that it is not close to you, and I feel like there's something in the translation that I'm not getting there. I think I get that she's essentially saying, I understand why this doesn't mean anything to me, but I find it sad that it, you know, it doesn't mean anything to you. And it's like, I think it was just the phrasing, like, I find it sad that it is not close to you. I think that means something else, but yeah, so that took a minute as well.

And I feel like there are so many things, like, oh, it's this person on Tumblr who translates the DVD commentary. She pointed out that there's a theme throughout the movie about looking and seeing, and in the English translations, they don't use the same words they do, like, "when you look at me, I look at you, when you see me, I see you," or she says that the way that she would have translated it would have kind of kept it along those same lines of, like, looking and seeing, whereas the translator made it something that was more about, like, just being in the same moment together.



And so I feel like we're missing so much because the translation isn't as artful as the original dialogue, which kind of breaks my heart and makes me want to learn French.

[00:22:54] **Audrey:** Yeah, yeah. I'm curious if the Criterion one will be updated as well...?

[00:22:58] **Laurel:** I think so.

[00:22:59] **Audrey:** I think you're right. It's like, I feel like the poetry of the language and the dialogue is, is so important and I imagine the hardest thing to translate?

[00:23:06] **Laurel:** It has to be. Yeah, yeah, for sure. It's like, if everything else in the movie is so considered and so thoughtful, and there isn't much language at all, whatever language is in there has to be, you know, just incredibly precise.

[00:23:20] **Audrey:** Yeah, I guess we have no choice but to learn French.

[00:23:23] **Laurel:** I guess we have no choice.

[00:23:27] **Audrey:** Okay, see you in about three years.

[00:23:27] **Laurel:** I know, yeah.

[00:23:28] **Audrey:** We'll come back to this in three years, after we're both fluent.

[00:23:36] **Laurel:** Oui. Do you have a favorite scene?

[00:23:39] **Audrey:** So, I would say the one I mentioned earlier with the, when she comes back from mass, is definitely up there. It's really hard to pick just one, but there's this other scene that really stands out to me. It's when they're at the witchy gathering and Héloïse's dress catches on fire. There's this moment where Marianne runs up to her and you just see this close up of her reaching for her, and Héloïse is on the ground.

And then it cuts to them in the sort of rocky hideaway area.

[00:24:09] **Laurel:** Climbing down the cliffs.

[00:24:10] **Audrey:** Yeah, kind of climbing down the cliffs, but it cuts to them, it's kind of this fluid edit where her arm goes from one shot to the next?

[00:24:18] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:24:19] **Audrey:** And something about the way it was edited that really retained that excitement and energy, that just hit me so hard.

I was like [gasps], again, like I think another moment where I gasped audibly in the theater and like grabbed my girlfriend. Where I was like, it's happening! Because like, you know, how far are we into the film at this point, right? It's like, probably two-thirds, if not further. The whole time building up to this has just been a lot of gazing.

[00:24:43] **Laurel:** Oh my god, my heart is like racing right now. No, totally. Yeah, yeah.

[00:24:47] **Audrey:** And this is one of the many reasons I love the movie, is just like, the way that they look at each other, it just feels so sincere, the way the camera looks at them, you're like, I'm looking at you guys too! You know, it's like that gaze that's happening, this building of this momentum, that finally leads to this scene.

[00:25:02] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah. In studying this one film, I have learned a new term, and it is called the match cut, right? So it's like, yeah, that was a perfect example of a match cut. But then also, it's like the only scene in the film where music is playing in the background that isn't actually in the scene. So the music from the bonfire is carrying over, like, for the first time in the film, and I feel like all of these things are done to such good effect.

It's like, clearly the emotion of the characters has carried through to the from the night before to today, and it leads into their first kiss, and the whole thing is just ridiculously beautiful.

[00:25:39] **Audrey:** Yeah, that whole build up, it's like the swell, and then the gates open, you know?

[00:25:45] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:25:47] **Audrey:** What would you say is your favorite scene if you had to pick one?

[00:25:48] **Laurel:** Oh, oh, I have I have many favorite scenes. Ha ha ha, like...

[00:25:52] **Audrey:** Hold on, I have a list. Let me pull out my list. First, it's the first scene.

[00:25:56] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah. Second, it's the second scene.

[00:25:56] **Audrey:** No, anyway, sorry, go ahead

[00:25:57] **Laurel:** No, my favorite scene is, is definitely when Marianne sees the page 28 in the painting. My heart just shattered into a million pieces when, I'm, I'm even like almost tearing right now.

[00:26:12] **Audrey:** I'm, I'm actually, I was gonna say, I'm, I'm like about to cry, like honestly, like you literally, you just said page 28, I'm like [weeps].

[00:26:17] **Laurel:** It's like the way that she, she saw something in the program and then she ran across the, a crowded gallery, a gallery crowded with fancy noble people, right? She just shoved her way through and then the look on her face when she first sees Héloïse's face in the portrait? It's not even her in real life, but she might as well be there, right? The way she that she regards her expression. And then as her gaze travels down to the face of her child, she

pauses there--this is all the camera work but...and then you see it. It's like everything just floods back immediately and then you see it in Noémie's face as Marianne and you see it happen, like you see the realization, you see that this is a message from Héloïse to me, and then she looks back up to Héloïse's face and it's like, *ahhh*.

[00:27:08] **Audrey:** I'm dying.

[00:27:09] **Laurel:** You know? I just, yeah. Yeah. Every time. Man.

[00:27:14] **Audrey:** Yeah, just hearing you talk about it, like, gives me the chills, like, I just, I feel like I'm reliving that moment. But yeah, you're right, when they cut to Marianne's face and the way it's framed, it's so perfect. She's in the center, all this noise behind her, and she has the perfect expression, and you, you really feel it, you know?

[00:27:31] **Laurel:** I think Céline said something about, Noémie, like she described her as, she always looks like a kid who's just been woken up for Christmas, and it's like, you're right! Oh my god, you're right!

[00:27:43] **Audrey:** Oh my god.

[00:27:44] **Laurel:** And I feel like it's especially, that vibe is especially strong in that scene.

[00:27:48] **Audrey:** Was she saying that about her character or...

[00:27:49] **Laurel:** No, I think...

[00:27:50] **Audrey:** Noémie? Oh my god!

[00:27:52] **Laurel:** ...that's just like the presence that she exudes.

And if you look at her, just her, her photos and stuff from red carpets and whatever...yeah, definitely.

[00:28:02] **Audrey:** Yeah, I can see that. I was just watching the live stream from like a promo for *Jumbo* with the director And they did a live stream over Instagram And I think she's she's just holding up her phone in front of her face the whole time. And she just looks like you just want to...

[00:28:16] **Laurel:** Uh huh,

[00:28:16] **Audrey:** ...squish her, you know? Like yeah, that's a, that's, wow. That's a perfect description of her.

[00:28:19] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:28:21] **Audrey:** Incredible.

[00:28:23] **Laurel:** We talked about many things that we liked about the film. And first, but maybe not foremost, is the fact that it's a beautiful and well made film. I think foremost for me is the fact that it was a film made through the queer gaze, and specifically through female queer gaze, right? Or queer female gaze. And I don't know that I had thought about it, well I know for a fact that I didn't think about it at all while I was watching the film, but afterwards, like, I think that even though I didn't understand that that's why it had such an effect on me, that is definitely why it had such an effect on me.

And it's sort of heartbreaking for me to think about how different the world would be or how different everything would be if women--just women, like not even queer women, but like women were treated this way in the things that we consumed all the time, you know? Like just with such respect and complexity and, and love, you know? Like how different would, would culture be if this is how everyone viewed women?

I think that's probably why--the biggest reason that I love this film so much.

[00:29:37] **Audrey:** Yeah, I don't think I realized how much that perspective--that point of view and that gaze was missing from the culture. I mean the culture in general, but in this case, in film, until I saw this movie, it's like, I didn't notice the absence until I experienced it.

[00:29:54] **Laurel:** Whoa

[00:29:55] **Audrey:** Yeah, that's a really...

[00:29:55] **Laurel:** That's exactly like that line, didn't it feel like?

[00:29:58] **Audrey:** Wait, what?

[00:29:59] **Laurel:** Like, I felt the liberation, but,

[00:30:01] **Audrey:** Oh, right.

[00:30:02] **Laurel:** ...but I also felt your absence.

[00:30:03] **Audrey:** Oh my god! I'm telling you, this movie is just like, completely It incepted itself into everything about my life. It's funny, you know, this is, again, off topic, but like, I'm not a baby. I'm not, I'm not, I'm not a baby gay. I'm not just, I'm not just starting to sort of consume queer media, um, I've been in this game a while.

But this movie, when I saw this, it was very reminiscent of discovering something for the first time. Oh my god, it's just like that line, like, do all lovers feel like they invented something new?!

[00:30:34] **Laurel:** Are we in the movie? This is...

[00:30:35] **Audrey:** I think we are.

[00:30:36] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:30:37] **Audrey:** It's super meta. Um, but without sounding too cheesy, it felt like kind of falling in love for the first

time and definitely seeing a queer film for the first time, although 10 billion times better than...

[00:30:49] **Laurel:** Right. Yeah.

[00:30:50] **Audrey:** ...the first queer film I saw, I think, but I totally lost my train of thought, but we were talking about the the queer gaze and the female gaze.

[00:30:57] **Laurel:** Not realizing that it was missing.

[00:30:59] **Audrey:** In multiple ways, right? Like not just the viewpoint of the camera, but also the way that the characters looked at each other with such desire, but also respect and equality, you know? That is something else that's absent from not only queer cinema, but from women in films. I don't think we're given that kind of regard, generally, and that kind of respect.

So yeah, it's, it's kind of incredible. It is heartbreaking to know that this isn't the norm. But at the same time, I feel very lucky and privileged that we have something like this now. You know?

[00:31:35] **Laurel:** And, you know, it's like, I think about current films with largely female casts, and if you take something like *Ocean's 8*, was it? So, clearly passes the Bechdel test, fine, but the women still have to be super attractive, you know, and they're planning a heist and they're in charge of everything, but there's something missing.

There's an environment missing that this film created so easily. The way that Marianne and Héloïse talk to each other, but also the way that they talk to Sophie, you know, or the way that Marianne interacts with the Countess, you know, they're not equal in class but they just have like a normal conversation and it's taken for granted that they'll treat each other in a way that is normal and respectful and I don't know, yeah, I think in a future episode we're gonna have to

dive directly into the queer gaze stuff but this movie is amazing and I love it so much.

[00:32:34] **Audrey:** Something you said just reminded me of when I was referencing the scene earlier where Marianne finishes the second painting. When I think of that scene, I think of it as when *they* finished the painting.

[00:32:43] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah,

[00:32:44] **Audrey:** In my mind, it's this collaboration, you know, which is just, not only is it not typical of films in general, but also, you know, with paintings, anything involving an artist and their, like, muse, it's always this sort of imbalance.

And I think, in this case, it felt very much egalitarian and consensual, you know?

[00:33:02] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah, so we like it for a lot of reasons. Great. Okay.

[00:33:07] **Audrey:** So we like the movie.

[00:33:08] **Laurel:** We like the movie. So to wrap things up, let's turn it outward a little bit. Are there other movies, other things that you've seen or experienced that hit you similarly to *Portrait*?

[00:33:21] **Audrey:** The short answer is no. Nothing quite to this extent that I can recall. However, when I saw the Black Mirror episode, "San Junipero"...

**Laurel:** YUP.

**Audrey:** I had...not to the same extent but a similar reaction where I was like, *what?* Like, what where did that come from? Was totally blown away. I was also pretty preoccupied with it for a while, and I think for different reasons maybe? I mean



maybe similar reasons and even though it was I believe directed by...

**Laurel:** \*cough\* Mackenzie Davis \*cough\*

**Audrey:** ...well, okay, Mackenzie Davis.

[00:33:51] **Audrey:** There's that... And that's it, let's be honest.

There's something about the--even though it was, I believe, directed by a man, there's something about the respect that is paid to the story and the actors where it does still feel like a queer gaze. It doesn't feel like a male gaze, I should say. And also just that aesthetic, neon 80s, overly saturated look, like, I'm a sucker for that, but that definitely had an impact on me.

Also, as I mentioned earlier, I saw *Carol* in theaters and I think I was already anticipating that film and really excited about it. And so I walked out of that one too, feeling like, holy shit, that was incredible. And that was directed by Todd Haynes, who's a gay man. And so again, I didn't feel like there was this male gaze.

I felt like, similar to *Portrait*, the actors in the film, they gaze at each other throughout the whole movie in this way that is just like, I'm gonna eat you alive. It's super beautiful, it's super sexy, and also another period piece. I don't know if there's, there's a connection there, but um, again not quite to the same extent, but I walked out of that film also feeling like, wow, this is incredible.

What about you?

[00:34:56] **Laurel:** So, oddly, maybe not oddly, I haven't seen *Carol*, and I hadn't seen it...

**Audrey:** That is odd.

**Laurel:** ...well, thank you. I hadn't seen it because it's like a love story between two women set in, what is it, like the 50s or something? 40s? Yeah. *Can not* possibly end well, so I'm just gonna let this one pass, but side note, it's interesting that it seems like the trend for queer women romance is "blonde lady and brunette lady fall in love with each other", which is fine. That's fine.

[00:35:28] **Audrey:** That's fine, it's totally fine, it's okay.

[00:35:29] **Laurel:** Especially, I guess, for, like, period romances, so I will definitely be seeing that one, but *San Junipero*, I forget why it came up, but I think it was just sort of talked about around the internet as being a very, very good episode. I think a couple of people had mentioned that it was a queer romance, and I was like, okay, and it's like one of the few, if not the only, *Black Mirror* episode that ends happily, in a sense.

[00:35:56] **Audrey:** Ends not just happily, but not in the most disturbing, twisted way.

[00:35:59] **Laurel:** Right, yeah, yeah. Like, even the one about the crew of that *Star Trek* parody, even that was super dark. They escaped, but, you know, spoilers, sorry. It was, that was really dark. Anyway, "*San Junipero*" hit me pretty hard. Not as hard as *Portrait*, but hard enough for me to order. An enamel pin for it immediately.

I think I have something that says like, "*Resident of San Junipero*". But yeah, I'd love to eventually break down why those particular things have the impact that they did and what are some of the criteria that makes, that makes for good queer cinema and television.

[00:36:37] **Audrey:** yeah, because I mean, I don't think the pattern, if there is a pattern there, I don't think it's overt or explicit, so it'd be great to dive into that. In the meantime, if you haven't seen either of those--including you.

[00:36:49] **Laurel:** Right, got it, got it.

[00:36:51] **Audrey:** Those are two that we recommend.

[00:36:53] **Laurel:** Yep, and if you have recommendations for us, for things that we should see, that we should put on our list, you can email us at [podcastofaladyonfire@gmail.com](mailto:podcastofaladyonfire@gmail.com), and we've also got an Instagram account we've started posting. Check us out at [podcastofaladyonfire](#) on Instagram.

[00:37:11] **Audrey:** Until next time.

[00:37:12] **Laurel:** See ya!

[outro music: that's the end of "Non Possum Fugere"]

[00:37:23] **Audrey:** Hello, hello, hello, we're back. Hello, present day Laurel and Audrey have returned. Uh, we're older. Older. So much older. Not much wiser. And, uh, yeah. What are your, what are your initial thoughts? Because we just sat here and listened to it together.

[00:37:40] **Laurel:** Oh, it was hard. It was a little hard. Um, I mean, it's always kind of weird listening to your yourself, but listening to an earlier version of yourself is especially strange. Um, like, hearing that episode brings back very clear memories of, um, the realization that, oh no! I have never really seriously analyzed a film for an audience before, and now we're just gonna be talking about it and recording it, but luckily I loved *Portrait* so much that I had consumed the analyses of much smarter people beforehand, and everything ended up being okay! And now we're on our fourth season! Yaaayyy!

[00:38:24] **Audrey:** You know, I actually, I feel like the fact that neither of us had done something like that before but both of us were really conscious of like production you know like you you done podcasting before. I had like edited, you know video stuff before.

[00:38:38] **Laurel:** Yeah, that worked out really well!

[00:38:40] **Audrey:** Yeah, I think like that combined with our sort of I don't know like there was this sort of like innocence and almost like a naivete around what we were saying?

[00:38:49] **Laurel:** True, that's true,

[00:38:50] **Audrey:** I felt like made it really special and now we're like jaded and like

[00:38:55] **Laurel:** We're jaded lesbian crones.

[00:38:56] **Audrey:** We think too much about no, no, no, I think we I don't know I think we still because we're approaching it as to people who are not like professional critics or you know film scholars? I can't speak for anyone listening, but like I think that's kind of that's one of the reasons I like what we're doing,

[00:39:12] **Laurel:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:39:13] **Audrey:** Yeah, I had a similar reaction. I was more, or what, what caught my attention was less like the being non-practiced side of things, but more like the audio production. I was like, this is the second time I'd edited a podcast episode--it was our second episode. And for, I could tell, it's funny because I used to spend a lot more time editing and dealing with like sort of post production stuff, but I think it sounds a little bit better now. I don't know. Anyway, I guess that's how it works.

[00:39:41] **Laurel:** I'm so curious what you heard because I...it sounded great to me then and now.

[00:39:46] **Audrey:** Okay. The main thing is like I didn't really give us room to breathe in the editing. Like I think like the flow for me--I tried to keep it like really tight and like move it along but like listening to more podcasts now and

like just listening back on some of our older episodes, you know, back then I was thinking people just want a quick thing and you know, I think some people do they listen to a podcast at like four times the speed or whatever, but I think for like flow and like story it actually helps to have more spacing.

[00:40:16] **Laurel:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:40:17] **Audrey:** ...and back then I was just like cutting everything So it was like this really tight shift and like you have no

[00:40:21] **Laurel:** So we're barely like breathing.

[00:40:23] **Audrey:** Yeah, that's literally, yeah. So there's that there's some stuff with levels that...It doesn't really bother me. I think it's still, you know, that's something that I kind of let slide now because I can't sit there and like manipulate everything so it's like perfect. But um.

[00:40:35] **Laurel:** And we were doing that every week. That's crazy.

[00:40:37] **Audrey:** That was the crazy...I mean this was again in the middle, middle early days of the pandemic. And so I think we just had a little bit more time because we were...

[00:40:46] **Laurel:** That's true.

[00:40:46] **Audrey:** Kind of forced to stay at home, right? There's aspects of that that I really miss.

[00:40:51] **Laurel:** Yeah, it's true. I still don't really, like, I can't. I don't, I still don't understand how we did it, but yeah.

[00:40:57] **Audrey:** I know. All I was doing was this. I mean, I was working from home. I was, but I was doing the podcast stuff and I was like playing Animal Crossing. And that was like my whole life. I think I had like 10 other art projects

too, but now I'm like, I can't, I can barely, you know, take a shower. Um, I think the other thing too is, this is dumb, but like I, I didn't get my pop filter...

[00:41:18] **Laurel:** Ohhhh...

[00:41:19] **Audrey:** So I had a lot of like little plosives, which it's like these little things that, you know, most people probably don't even notice.

[00:41:24] **Laurel:** Do you remember which episode you got the pop filter before?

[00:41:27] **Audrey:** I don't. I think it was, it was pretty early on. It was like within the first, like maybe five episodes, probably.

[00:41:32] **Laurel:** Okay, yeah.

[00:41:33] **Audrey:** I don't go back and listen to everything every day. This might be like the first time I've revisited this episode.

[00:41:40] **Laurel:** I think I used to listen to the episodes after they came out. I don't know, it was fun, because it was like, oh, this is a fun conversation that I had.

[00:41:47] **Audrey:** And like now everything is so sad and depressing.

[00:41:50] **Laurel:** But now it's like, ugh.

[00:41:51] **Audrey:** Um, and chaotic. Yeah, I mean, I usually when I'm editing, I'll listen to an episode like three times.

[00:41:58] **Laurel:** Right, yeah, that's true, that's true.

[00:42:00] **Audrey:** You know, not all of it, but most of it on various like, modalities, whatever platforms. And so, um, yeah, I think so too. Like, I think when stuff came out, I would listen to it again, um, just to, just to relive it.

But it's been like, at least, what, three years since I probably listened to this one. But I had the same sort of like, emotional reaction, where, um, I was clutching my arm on my chest...

[00:42:22] **Laurel:** Ha ha

[00:42:23] **Audrey:** ...cuz like when we're talking about like how we're like, oh my god, we're getting chills and we're like tearing up and all this stuff.

I was like, yes, yes, I feel it! I think you can, you can really hear in our voices and like the way we're talking about the movie, like how hard we'd fallen and it's like really cute, you know, to like listen to us talk about this crush, you know, slash obsession actually that we have for this this movie I mean, we're like literally gushing and that's really cute because when's the last time you gushed?

[00:42:51] **Laurel:** Aww. This was my last cinematic crush.

[00:42:54] **Audrey:** That was it that was it yeah, but yeah, we I thought we sounded really like young and wholesome and like kind of chipper And now we've hardened. Yeah, I don't know. It was really sweet. It was very emotional to go back and listen to it.

[00:43:11] **Laurel:** I guess it, like, the timing was really...the timing was such that the crush that happened came at such a surreal time that it probably amplified it, right? Like, we were isolated, the world was kind of ending and then we had this movie and I was like wowwww this is wonderful.

[00:43:33] **Audrey:** Yeah, and I think I don't know about you, but I don't think I had a opportunity to really talk about it in depth, like that was probably the first time that happened, you know and so it was like we had to sit with it for a little bit and then it was like the floodgates opened, you know, and all of our gross lesbionic emotions poured out. [both sigh]

But yeah, I was thinking like that that whole experience I mean, it's still special, but like, obviously that was like, the beginning of everything, right? And so, you know, we've talked about this before, but like, have we had that feeling since? Or even close? You know, like, we've talked about this a lot with like, Heather Petrocelli, and I think there are a couple movies that I definitely felt something. I mean like intensely but nothing to that point where I was like...

[00:44:24] **Laurel:** What's another movie that you felt intensely about?

[00:44:26] **Audrey:** *Aftersun* was one of them.

[00:44:28] **Laurel:** Oh, yeah.

[00:44:29] **Audrey:** Like I definitely lost my breath. I had to sit there for a while and I still and I actually think about it a lot and I feel like that's a movie I tell a lot of people to see.

**Laurel:** That's a good one. Yeah.

**Audrey:** Um, and then another one, was maybe surprisingly *Past Lives*, which um, not quite *Portrait*-level obviously, but like I, I saw it at Sundance and I was not expecting, I almost skipped it because I was like, oh this doesn't look like I'm gonna love it.

And then um, afterwards I was really, really, really moved and I think uh, Valerie Complex tweeted immediately like, Uh, "this is *Portrait* for straight people." I was like, oh my god, that's so spot on. But I still felt it. I feel like when, when something is at that level, it sort of transcends, you know, sexuality or whatever, like, you know, and so I think it moved me a lot, but I don't, yeah, I don't know. What about you?

[00:45:18] **Laurel:** *Aftersun*, definitely. I'm glad you said that because I had forgotten, but for sure. Um, and then I was



thinking that it's weird that it didn't happen with *A League of Their Own*, which I really, really loved, but it didn't like. I wasn't crushed out on it. Like, it didn't give me the feels, which it wasn't supposed to.

It's like a really sweet, fun series, um, that I did really, really love, but yeah, it wasn't a crush.

[00:45:47] **Audrey:** I was thinking about this yesterday because I just saw, um, *All of Us Strangers*, and I think that *Portrait*, for a movie to do that, for me personally, one of the things I have to check off is like, where it kind of meets you, like how restrained it is, I think, in, in the, in the whole cinematic experience, like the story, and I think with *Portrait*, because it's not, It's not doing a lot of telling me how to feel, I think, like, it pulls me closer to it, if that makes sense, I don't know.

[00:46:17] **Laurel:** So it's playing hard to get and you are into that.

[00:46:19] **Audrey:** Kind of, but I think, thank you, that's a better way of putting it, but, like, I think with something like *League of Their Own*, which I, like, obviously loved, I'm never gonna, like, fall so hard that I, like, I'm, like, falling forever, in a sense, because it's just not the right kind of storytelling, I think,

[00:46:34] **Laurel:** Yeah. *Kajillionaire* actually had a little bit

[00:46:37] **Audrey:** Yeah, that's

[00:46:38] **Laurel:** It wasn't as like, severe is maybe the wrong word, but like, it wasn't as intense as the other films. But yeah, there was like, I think it's the weirdness. Because it's so, like, not straightforward, I think I was able to get lost in it a little bit more.

Yeah.

[00:46:53] **Audrey:** Yeah, yeah, same. That one, that one definitely blew me away. I don't know if it was like the romance or what, but there was, it was a different kind of mind blowing.

[00:47:03] **Laurel:** Yeah. It's interesting, because I was going to say, I wonder if it has to have a romance in order for me to feel like that, but *Aftersun* wasn't a romance. But there was a lot of love in it, you know? Like, so maybe it just has to be this kind of deeply felt human connection has to be there.

[00:47:20] **Audrey:** Maybe the drama part, because I, *Kajillionaire*, like, you know, it's Miranda July, so it's, it's very quirky, and I think there's like a twee aspect of her movies that it's not going to kind of like just totally slaughter me the way that a movie like *Aftersun* and *Portrait* does, but yeah.

[00:47:39] **Laurel:** Yeah. Cool. Okay. Great.

[00:47:43] **Audrey:** Ugh. Okay, well I'm gonna go lie down now.

[cute sapphic interstitial music]

[00:47:53] **Laurel:** Well, thanks for joining us, everyone. And, um, if you've been here since our *Podcast of Lady on Fire* days, big thank you for sticking around. Do you still have portrait feels after all this time? Uh, leave a comment about it on Instagram at sapphiccultureclub or email us about it at sapphiccultureclub at gmail.com.

[00:48:13] **Audrey:** I'm gonna guess that everyone still has the *Portrait* feels too. You are going to find links to things we mentioned as well as the episode transcript in the episode description wherever you're listening to this podcast. I don't

know why I said that like a threat. You're gonna find the links! Thank you for joining us! Talk to you next time.

[00:48:34] **Laurel:** Thanks everybody, bye!

[cute sapphic music + sing-songy robotic "LESBIAN CHAOS"]