Interview by Evelyn White; Answers by BH. September 6, 2015

1.  What attracted you to the story of Elizabeth Bishop?

I have always wanted to go deeply into one poet’s life and work. With my studies for my first Masters degree in Literature I wasn’t able to do that as Western education meant we had to read poet after poet in one semester. Finally, now, many many years later I was able to put my full attention on one poet. I chose Elizabeth Bishop for her complex life, multiple homes, and, her art (poems, prose, paintings and photographs)

2. How long did the process take from conception to completion? Were their difficulties in obtaining funding?

It was two years since I first had the idea, began my research and made a 9minute sample (that meant visiting her childhood camp in Wellfleet, photographing stills at Vassar, interviewing a key narrator), until I finished the 90 minute film. The early research and video sample payed off as I was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship which became the sole funding for the film.

3. Did you work with the woman who composed the score for the film (fantastic!) from the very beginning or did she come in after your film was completed?

For many of my past films I have selected an avant garde female composer who uses her voice as an instrument. Years ago I had heard Joan La Barbara perform solo voice and I had gone up to her afterwards and told her I would more than likely want to work with her on some future project.

The way I worked with Joan’s music composition was similar to the way I used Meredith Monk’s music in *A Horse Is Not A Metaphor* (2009). I pay the composer and then select the music myself from the multiple CDs each has published. I do the sound mixing and composition from already released material. This is wonderful for me as it gives me great freedom and control at the same time. I asked Joan to come to my editing suite early on in my work and she critiqued some sound layering I had done and thought it would be better if it were more simple. I agreed. I sometimes asked her to go into her sound banks and send me files of music without words or language, or something more languid than what had been previously published. That’s the way we worked and she seemed happy with the results (as was Meredith).

4.Did you encounter any stumbling blocks/obstacles during the years (yes?) you worked on the film? If so, what were some of the strategies you utilized to deal with same?

It was very difficult to obtain interviews with some people. A well-known American poet promised to meet me but didn’t return phone calls or emails. I made an interview with a Brazilian that was quite shocking and different from other people with whom I had talked, but at the end of the interview (which had been extremely difficult to set up), the participant refused to sign a release so it isn’t in the film.

5. Do you think that Bishop’s internalized homophobia contributed to her substance abuse?

I do, but more so was the early loss of both parents and the abrupt dislocation to Worcester by the parental grandparents which not only removed Bishop from the home, town, and maternal side of the family, but which also put her in an upper middle class home with all the social propriety that accompanied that move. She was sick most of that year.

6. In my experience, many re-enactments in film fall flat. The re-enactments in your film were extremely well-crafted. How did you decide to utilize the technique and was it difficult to accomplish, successfully?

I wanted to show the relationship of the size of the human figure in the Bishop homes. It was as simple as that. I didn’t want to overdo or over dramatize the scenes so I tried to keep them to a minimum with just a hint of human presence. The difficulty lay in determining how much or how little to use. The easy part was finding the photographs of Bishop in the locations which gave me a starting point for the recreation.

7. You’ve been making important films for many years. Did you learn anything new or did anything surprise you with Welcome To This House?

I’ve never made a film about an iconic figure such as Bishop. This was a bit intimidating and I had to overcome that feeling. Some of Bishop fans and friends still don’t approve of everything in the film (does one ever?) and have asked me to make changes. I won’t. The film is finished and I stand behind it.

8. Were there any books, films, music, other creative projects (dance, visual art, etc.) that served as inspiration to you while you were working on the film?

Amazingly enough, in my research I only found one book that was written expressly about the idea that shaped my film: that the architecture of an artist’s studio influences her work. That was a book by Diana Fuss titled *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers that Shaped Them*. She has an excellently researched chapter on the writing room (the bedroom) of Emily Dickenson and has diagrams of sight lines from the desk out her window to a tree, road, landscape that figured in her poetry.

9. What would you like viewers to take away from the experience of watching your film.

Inquisitiveness to read for themselves Bishop’s work, biographies, look at her paintings, and, perhaps go deeply themselves into one artist’s life and work of their own choosing and explore.