

NOVA '78



Locarno Film Festival

FUORI CONCORSO
OFFICIAL SELECTION

NOVA CONVENTION
WILLIAM BURROUGHS
FRI SAT



THE PAST WAS LOUDER THAN YOU THINK

A PINBALL LONDON & BANDO A PARTE PRODUCTION

FEATURING WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS FRANK ZAPPA LAURIE ANDERSON ANNE WALDMAN PATTI SMITH JULIA HEYWARD
JOHN GIORNO ALLEN GINSBERG JOHN CAGE MERCE CUNNINGHAM BRION GYSIN PHILIP GLASS TIMOTHY LEARY LENNY KAYE

MUSIC BY THE LEGENDARY TIGERMAN **EDITED BY** TOMAS BALTAZAR AARON BROOKNER **CINEMATOGRAPHY** TOM DICILLO

HOWARD BROOKNER JAMES LEBOVITZ **SOUND RECORDING** JIM JARMUSCH HOWARD BROOKNER

PRODUCED BY PAULA VACCARO AARON BROOKNER **CO-PRODUCER** RODRIGO AREIAS

DIRECTED BY AARON BROOKNER AND RODRIGO AREIAS

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PINBALL
LONDON



“ Much of what Burroughs said in the late 1970s could be said today, with the same relevance and urgency. ”

OBSERVADOR

“ An immersive time capsule that captures the essence of New York in the aftermath of punk. ”

DEADLINE

“ More proof that William S. Burroughs was way ahead of anyone else in terms of political futurology. ”

DEADLINE

“ A moment of creativity, invention, challenge, and risk, spiritually led by William S. Burroughs ”

MICROPSIA CINE

“ Nova '78 is not just an accurately composed archive footage documentary, but an urgently must-see movie in 2025. ”

FILMEXPLORER

“ A testament to an era of forward-thinking creativity, in which art was being made and experimented with constantly ”

DIEGO LERER, MICROPSIA CINE

“ Imagine going to a gig where Keith Richards couldn't make it, so Patti Smith stepped up to break the news, read you a poem, offered you your money back, and Frank Zappa filled in instead. ”

DAMON WISE, DEADLINE



NOVA '78

Photos and marketing material: [here](#)

Original Title: NOVA '78

Year of Production: 2025

Premiere: LOCARNO 78 (2025)

Countries of Origin: UK, Portugal

Genre: Documentary

Running Time: 78 minutes

Original Format: 16mm (digitised)

Colour Final Format: DCP, Apple ProRes 422 HQ

Aspect Ratio: 16:9 (1.78:1)

Sound: 5.1 Surround and Stereo mixes.

Language: English.

Subtitles: English, Portuguese, French.

Press, Sales and Festival enquiries: smash@pinballonline.co.uk

Directed by: Aaron Brookner and Rodrigo Areias

Produced by: Paula Vaccaro and Aaron Brookner

Co-Producer: Rodrigo Areias

Written by: Aaron Brookner

Editing: Tomás Baltazar and Aaron Brookner

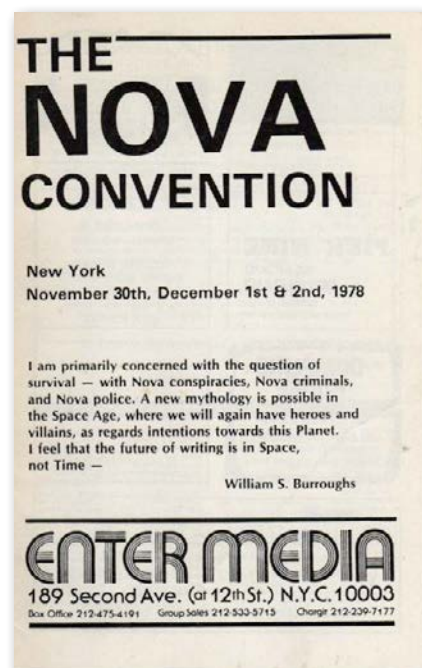
Cinematography: Howard Brookner, Tom DiCillo and Jim Lebovitz

Sound Recording: Jim Jarmusch and Howard Brookner

Production Companies: Pinball London (UK), Bando à Parte (Portugal)

Funding & Institutional Support: Howard Brookner Legacy Project, Instituto do Cinema e Audiovisual (ICA), Portuguese Ministry of Culture, RTP

Short Synopsis: NOVA '78 is an electrifying journey into the heart of 1970s counter-culture, built around never-before-seen footage from the legendary Nova Convention. This explosive three-day event in New York City celebrated William S. Burroughs' return to America after living over twenty years in Latin America, North Africa, Paris, and London.



It brought together icons such as Patti Smith, Frank Zappa, Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, Allen Ginsberg, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, and many more. A cultural time capsule on the enduring power of creative freedom, the footage captures backstage moments, candid encounters, and raw performances at the heart of the downtown scene.

Originally shot on 16mm by filmmaker Howard Brookner and long considered lost, the footage also marked the beginning of his cult classic **Burroughs: The Movie**.

Original score by The Legendary Tigerman.

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Featuring

William S. Burroughs

Lenny Kaye

Patti Smith

Laurie Anderson

Frank Zappa

Julia Heyward

Timothy Leary

Anne Waldman

Merce Cunningham

Brion Gysin

Philip Glass

John Giorno

James Grauerholz

Rebecca Christensen

Allen Ginsberg

Peter Orlovsky

Steven Hall

Steven Taylor

Jackie Curtis

Melody London

Lucien Carr

Brion Gysin

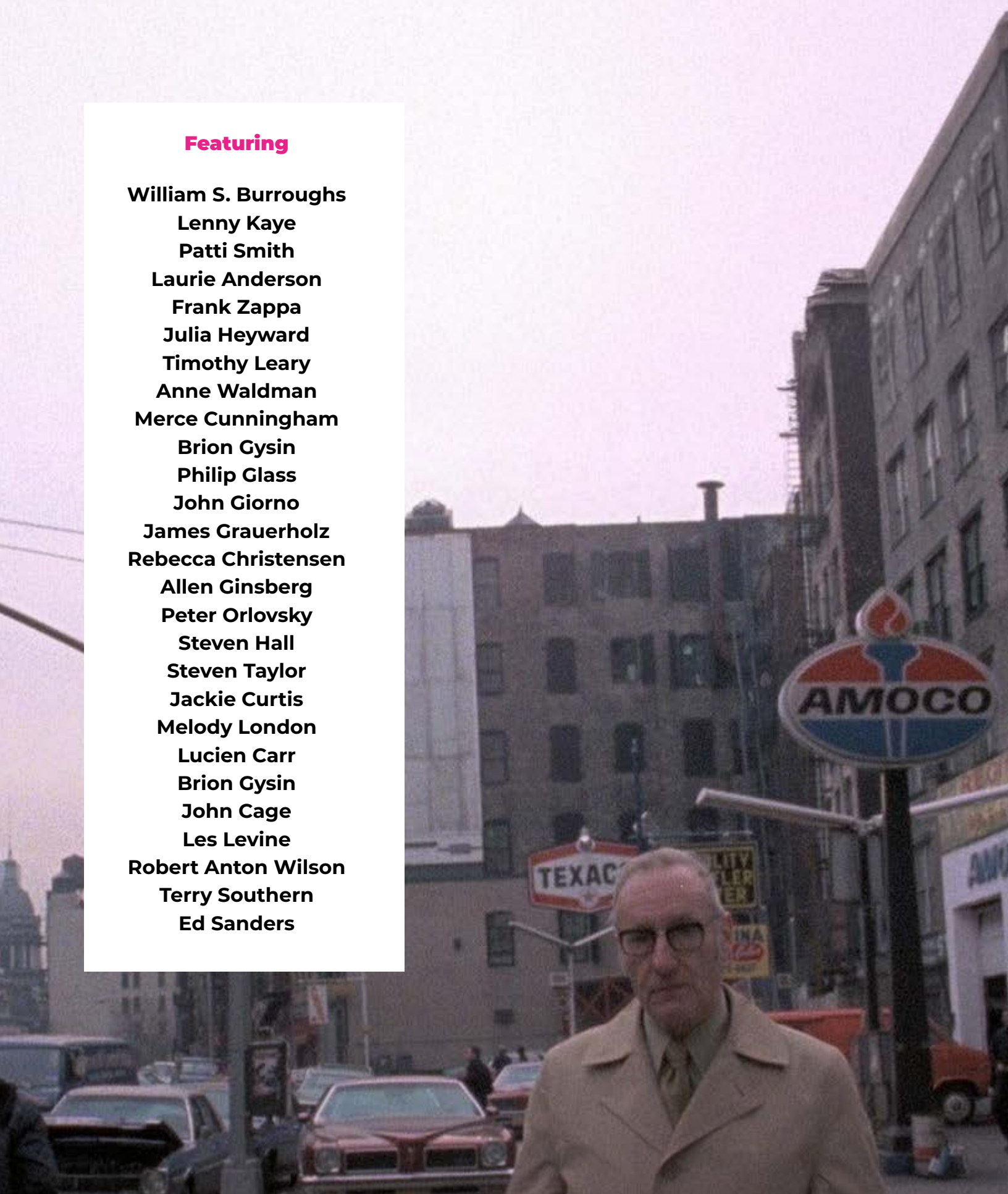
John Cage

Les Levine

Robert Anton Wilson

Terry Southern

Ed Sanders



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Directors' Biographies

Aaron Brookner is an American-British writer, director, producer, and visual artist, born in New York City and based in London since 2009. He studied film at Vassar College and began his career assisting on Jim Jarmusch's *Coffee and Cigarettes* and Rebecca Miller's *Personal Velocity*, before directing the award-winning documentary short *The Black Cowboys* (2004).

Brookner wrote an authorised screenplay based on the life of legendary writer Budd Schulberg and began a feature documentary with him, which remained unfinished due to Schulberg's passing in 2009. His first feature film *The Silver Goat* (2012) was the first ever made exclusively for iPad and released as an app. It was downloaded in 24 countries and ranked among the top 50 entertainment apps in the UK and Czech Republic.

In 2011, he launched the recovery and restoration of the work and archive of his late uncle, director Howard Brookner. This led to the acclaimed restoration of the cult documentary *Burroughs: The Movie* (1983), featuring William S. Burroughs, which screened in the 2014 New York Film Festival Revivals section with Jim Jarmusch, Tom DiCillo, and James Grauerholz in attendance. The film was distributed by Janus Films and is part of the prestigious Criterion Collection.

In 2014, he created his first video installation, *Double-Breasted Trench*, for the William S. Burroughs centenary.



His visual artworks have since been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in Tallinn and the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB).

He has worked across narrative and documentary for over two decades. Selected works include directing *Uncle Howard* (Sundance, Berlinale), co-writing and producing *Listen* (Venice, 2020), and co-producing *Diciannove* (Venice, TIFF 2024). He leads the Howard Brookner Legacy Project. His latest release is 1986's *Robert Wilson & the CIVIL warS* at Bologna's Cinema Ritrovato in 2025.

AARON BROOKNER

Filmography

As Director

- 2004 – *The Black Cowboys* (short)
- 2012 – *The Silver Goat*
- 2016 – *Uncle Howard*
- 2022 – *Mountain Spirit* (short)
- 2025 – *NOVA '78*

As Producer

- 2014 – *Burroughs: The Movie*
- 2019 – *Listen*
- 2024 – *Diciannove*
- 2025 – *Robert Wilson and the CIVIL warS*
- 2025 – *NOVA '78*

As Writer

- 2012 – *The Silver Goat*
- 2016 – *Uncle Howard*
- 2019 – *Radical Eye* (series)
- 2020 – *Listen*
- 2025 – *NOVA '78*



Rodrigo Areias is a film director and producer. He began his professional life as a musician and music producer at the label Garagem and as Sound Designer in cinema working for directors such as Paulo Rocha and Edgar Pêra. He studied Management at the Portuguese Catholic University and graduated in Sound and Image at the School of Arts. He took a specialisation in film Direction at Tisch School of Arts at NYU and attended the “Production Eurodoc Program” and “Venice Biennale College”.

In his early career, he developed creative work in fiction and documentary, video art and video clips for some of the best bands in the Portuguese rock scene (The Legendary Tiger Man, Wray Gunn, Mão Morta, Sean Riley and the Slow Riders, etc.).



RODRIGO AREIAS Filmography

As Director

- 2024 – A Stone Dreams to Blossom
- 2024 – The Worst Man in London
- 2021 – Down by Life
- 2020 – Surdine
- 2018 – Blue Breath
- 2015 – Ornament & Crime

Areias has directed 8 feature films and several shorts that have been awarded in more than 40 festivals, including Karlovy Vary (Hay Road). His latest feature documentary, Blue Breath, premiered in Locarno FF First Look and won the Festivals of Ismailia, Pristina and Kalajoki.

Since 2001 he has produced and co-produced over 150 short and feature films including fiction, documentaries, and animation, by international directors such as FJ Ossang, Gabe Klinger, Teddy Williams, Lois Patiño and Matias Piñeiro, and the Portuguese Edgar Pêra, João Canijo, Ana Rocha de Sousa and André Gil Mata.

As a producer he won a Golden Lion in Venice and a Golden Leopard in Locarno. His productions premiered in the most important festivals: Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Rotterdam, Locarno, Clermont Ferrand, Annecy.

He was responsible for the Guimarães 2012 European Capital of Culture film production and produced the films of Jean-Luc Godard, Aki Kaurismäki, Peter Greenaway, Manoel de Oliveira, Pedro Costa and Victor Erice, among many others.

Directors' Statements

On Valentine's Day, 2022, I received a message from an archivist at the John Giorno Foundation: more boxes of my uncle Howard Brookner's films had been discovered.

*I was stunned. For years, I had fought to access Howard's archive, locked away for three decades in William S. Burroughs' former New York City home, "The Bunker". When I finally succeeded in 2013, I uncovered a massive cache of material, including 183 original camera negatives Howard shot between 1978 and 1982 while creating his feature documentary, *Burroughs: The Movie* (1983).*

*Thanks to an early Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign, generous donors, and the Criterion Collection, *Burroughs: The Movie* was restored and re-premiered at the New York Film Festival in 2014. My journey to uncover Howard's legacy and his extensive film archive became my own feature documentary, *Uncle Howard*, premiering at Sundance in 2016.*

Yet, despite these discoveries, 44 negative rolls from Howard's years filming with Burroughs remained missing. After exhausting every possibility, I had reluctantly accepted their loss, until that unexpected message in 2022. Miraculously, the newly discovered boxes contained precisely these 44 rolls.

*Before creating *Burroughs: The Movie* as a definitive biographical portrait, Howard had assembled multiple camera crews to document the legendary Nova Convention, an extraordinary three-day celebration of William Burroughs held in 1978. The newly recovered film rolls revealed unseen performances, intimate conversations, and precious audience interactions, capturing the event's groundbreaking atmosphere and the profound cultural moment it represented.*

Nova '78 immerses viewers in the vibrant energy and transformative ideas of 1978, a cultural high-water mark for artistic expression, gender equality, gay rights, human rights, and environmental awareness. Shaping this rich archive into a compelling narrative for contemporary audiences has been both challenging and profoundly rewarding. I'm deeply grateful to my long-time producer, Paula Vaccaro, and my fellow director, Rodrigo Areias, whose belief in the potency of this material and our storytelling approach has remained unwavering.

*Of all the gifts my uncle's archive has given me, perhaps the greatest has been the ability to travel through time, to experience a New York City that existed before I was born, and to engage directly with some of our boldest artists and thinkers. With *Nova '78*, I invite today's audiences to join this remarkable journey, to rediscover, and discover, the excitement, creativity, and enduring spirit of *The Nova Convention*.*

Aaron Brookner

When Aaron Brookner invited me to co-direct a film using the extraordinary archive Howard Brookner filmed in the late 1970s with William S. Burroughs, I was already familiar with Burroughs: The Movie and Aaron's Uncle Howard. The opportunity to immerse myself in this remarkable material, filled with iconic figures from an era of American culture that greatly influenced me, was irresistible.

In this dive, my main concern was to respect the author of the images and those involved, trying to maintain their roughness, the out of focus, the zooms looking for something, the clap boards... the nature of a film that is assuming to be using images that were shot with a purpose.

The challenge was to reveal images that deserve to be seen, without adding modern explanations or placing them within a fixed historical frame. My aim was to let them convey the energy of their time, as a reminder of a fierce creative utopia and a vivid portrait of a New York that has vanished.

Through this time capsule, I want audiences to recall what it meant, politically and artistically, to be creative at the start of the 1980s, when Donald Trump was only beginning to emerge on the public stage.

The film carries a Burroughsian belief that literature should move from the time continuum into the spatial one. It anticipates a political shift that is still urgently needed, and the dystopia he foresaw is now part of our everyday reality.

Rodrigo Areias

UK Team – Pinball London

Associate Producer: Agustina Figueras

Production Coordinator: Victoria Cordoba Lima

Archivist & Researcher: Aaron Brookner & Paula Vaccaro.

Archival Research & Media Syncing:

Tom Cottey, Rafael D'Andrea, Agustina Covian, Sibua Va.

Legal Services: Fraser Bloom, Bloom Media, Moss Legal, Dechert LLP

Insurance: A-N The Artists Information Co., AXA, Churchill

Archive Supplied by:

The Estate of Howard Brookner and The Howard Brookner Legacy Project.

PORTUGAL Team – Bando a Parte

Production Manager: Carlos André

Production Assistant: Nuno Vassouras

Production Secretary: Cristina Dias.

Post-Production Supervisor: Carolina Justo

Sound Post Supervisor: Pedro Marinho

Sound Editing: Bernardo Bento

Sound Mixing: Vasco Carvalho.

Colour Grading: Maria Neto.

Accounting: Capitalges.

Legal Services (Portugal): CLT – Sociedade de Advogados



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