

FAITH BALOYI

NICOLE FORTUIN

IZEL BEZUIDENHOUT



69 Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Panorama

WINNER  
GOLDEN PANDA  
2019  
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# FLATLAND

a film by Jenna Bass

THE MATCH FACTORY PRESENTS A PROPER FILM PRODUCTION WITH DEAL PRODUCTIONS AND IN GOOD COMPANY IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH IMAFILM AND ZDF/DAS KLEINE FERNSPIEL IN CO-OPERATION WITH ARTE  
"FLATLAND"

FAITH BALOYI NICOLE FORTUIN IZEL BEZUIDENHOUT DE KLERK DELFOSE ALBERT PRETORIUS CLAYTON EVERTSON INTRODUCING KIM GONCALVES WITH BRENDON DANIELS AND ERIC NEBES  
WRITTEN BY JENNA BASS PRODUCED BY DAVID WOLTER PRODUCED BY DESIRÉE WOSBOSCH ALEXANDRA HOESBORFF RUSHANAK BEHESHT NEJAD

CO-PRODUCED BY TITUS KREYENBERG PRODUCED BY ANNA TELFORD LINDA KIRMSE SIMON RATCLIFFE RICHARD WEST

EDITED BY SARAH CUNNINGHAM PRODUCED BY SARA HARTINGER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JACQUES DE VILLIERS JOSHUA CHANTELL LUNGISWA JOE

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DABALWA DJEUTCHED JINHAI BAO-THAN TRAN "MOBILEGIRL" CASTING BY BELINDA KRUGER AND MONIQUE MURRAY DU PLESSIS

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ROBERT BALS FUND-EUROPE AND WORLD CINEMA FUND

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## Production Notes

A film by Jenna Bass

# FLATLAND

**FAITH BALOYI  
NICOLE FORTUIN  
IZEL BEZUIDENHOUT  
DE KLERK OELOFSE  
ERIC NOBBS  
BRENDON DANIELS  
CLAYTON EVERTSON  
ALBERT PRETORIUS  
KIM GONCALVES**

Writer/Director  
**Jenna Bass**

Producers  
**David Horler  
Désirée Nosbusch  
Alexandra Hoesdorff  
Roshanak Behesht Nedjad**

Co-Producer  
**Titus Kreyenberg**

Director of Photography  
**Sarah Cunningham**

Production Designer  
**Sara Hartinger**

Editor  
**Jacques de Villiers**

Costume Designer  
**Chantell Lungiswa Joe**

Original Music  
**Bao-Tran Tran “Mobilegirl”**

Casting  
**Belinda Kruger**  
**Monique Murray du Plessis**

## Short Synopsis

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FLATLAND is a contemporary Western, a journey of self-discovery for three different but equally trapped women. It paints a vivid and unique portrait of femininity against a hostile frontier land and questions what it means to be a woman today in South Africa and the world at large.

## Synopsis

When her disastrous wedding night leads to an accidental killing, Natalie flees her husband and her small, rural town in South Africa's desolate Karoo region. After reuniting with her rebellious best friend Poppie, who is heavily pregnant, the two young women escape together on horseback across the endless winter landscape. Hot on their trail is Captain Beauty Cuba, a lonely policewoman intent on proving the innocence of her long-lost fiancé, who has been framed for Natalie's crime. The fate of these three different, yet equally desperate, South African women will eventually converge as they ride towards self-discovery in the face of the ever-present threat of violence, psychological as well as physical.

## About the Film

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'Flatland', a South African film directed by Jenna Bass, comes to the big screen in April 2020.

The unique, contemporary drama is a journey of self-discovery for three different but equally trapped women – a pregnant teenager, a young bride, and a middle-aged cop – played out against the backdrop of the Karoo.

The film had its North American premiere in the Contemporary World Cinema selection of the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). It also opened the Panorama section of the Berlinale Film Festival in February 2019. The film filled four theatres on its opening night and was sold out for several subsequent screenings.

Questioning issues of race, class and gender, 'Flatland' is a portrait of femininity set against the backdrop of a hostile frontier land, that interrogates what it means to be a woman today – in South Africa and the world at large.

The life of a lonely, middle-aged policewoman Beauty Cuba (Faith Baloyi) changes forever when she receives a call for help from Billy, her fresh-out-of-prison former lover who has recently been re-arrested for the murder of a pastor. Beauty returns to her hometown of Beaufort West, deep in the heart of the surreal landscape of the semi-desert Karoo, and quickly learns that this case is not as simple as she had thought.

The real culprit of this accidental murder is the painfully shy, young and just-married Natalie Jonkers (Nicole Fortuin) who flees her small, rural town on horseback and teams up with her now pregnant childhood friend Poppie (Izel Bezuidenhout) to outrun the law and make their way to Johannesburg. Natalie and Poppie's story explores an inter-class and -racial friendship (Natalie is the daughter of a black woman once employed by Poppie's white family), as well as topical explorations of gender roles and consent, especially when it comes to Natalie's abusive husband.

'Flatland' explores social rifts through a genre mashup of western, police procedural and pure kitsch. The hard-boiled detective, Beauty, for example, has a penchant for velour tracksuits and

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flashy sunglasses. She's also addicted to her favourite soapie 'Generations', with each clip in the film featuring a lovers' spat about infidelity. There's also a dreamy scene in a deserted bar where the two girls do choreographed dance to Smile.dk's Butterfly (ayayai I'm your little butterfly).

'Flatland' is the third feature from writer-director Jenna Bass — who also co-wrote last year's Kenyan Cannes headline-grabber 'Rafiki'.

"I have long wanted to make a western set in the Karoo," says Bass. "I love the drama, action and locations of the traditional western. The unwritten rule of westerns is, however, that they are for men and by men. 'Flatland' is the opposite — it's a feminist post-western. The main characters are women, each one of them raw and authentic in their own way. In making the film, we deferred to each of the actresses and encouraged them to 'own' their characters. The story interrogates life in communities that exist on the margins, where there is a sense of the land returning to lawlessness, which is what made Beaufort West an ideal setting. It became its own character. The film looks at complex questions and injustices, offering no solid conclusions or happily ever-afters."

Shot by international cinematographer Sarah Cunningham, 'Flatland' takes the audience into South Africa's dry interior region, emphasising dusty roads, distant mountains and endless sky.

'Flatland' was produced by South Africa's Proper Film, with Luxembourg's Deal Productions and Germany's In Good Company, in co-production with Germany's unafilm and ZDF/Das Kleine Fernsehspiel, and in cooperation with Arte. It was made in association with the National Film & Video Foundation of South Africa as well as the Hubert Bals Fund, the Berlinale World Cinema Fund and EAVE. It is distributed in South Africa by Indigenous Film Distribution.

'Flatland' opens in cinemas countrywide on 10 April 2020.

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## Critic's Comments

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"An exhilarating fusion of contemporary western, policier and girls-gone-wild road movie...Baloyi's *Beauty Cuba* is superb" – *Variety* (US)

"Intriguing and worthwhile" *Sight and Sound* (UK)

"Picaresque road movie and emotionally rich, female-driven character study" *The Hollywood Reporter* (US)

"It's adorably weird" *Cineuropa* (International)

"An extraordinary road movie" *Kino-Zeit* (Germany)

## Reviews

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**Variety (Guy Lodge), Feb 14, 2019 – “Exhilarating”**

<https://variety.com/2019/film/reviews/flatland-review-1203139585/>

Leaner, meaner and altogether more exciting is “Flatland,” an exhilarating fusion of contemporary western, policier and girls-gone-wild road movie that kicked off this year’s Berlinale Panorama program with a wallop. The third feature from distinctively voiced writer-director Jenna Bass — who also cowrote last year’s Kenyan Cannes headline-grabber “Rafiki” — “Flatland” represents something of a feminist milestone for a national cinema where genre film in particular has hitherto been a boys’ game. Wittier and more kinetic than the predominantly solemn South African fare that has popped through on the international festival circuit in recent years, Bass’s film ought to travel widely on the strength of its crowd-pleasing story switch-ups and strikingly integrated racial and gender politics — virtues undiminished by an admittedly drawn-out last act that feels a little drunk on its own momentum. Adventurous distributors with a taste for world-meets-Hollywood cinema should investigate; international casting directors, meanwhile, should note the film’s sensational trio of female leads. Bass’s three stars seize the material with hungry swagger, etching a high-contrast triptych of put-upon South African womanhood between them. Baloyi’s superb Beauty Cuba, as cool and collected as the soap operas she compulsively watches are ripely overwrought, feels like a character who could be serialised in future projects. Fortuin’s quietly haunted child bride movingly finds shape and resolve before our eyes; as both her best hope and worst influence, Bezuidenhout is the film’s frayed, sparking livewire. In the free, friction-based energy of the film’s performance style and the ragged lyricism of the filmmaking itself — with its happy mixing of gravelly realist texture and romantic metaphor — there are shades of Andrea Arnold’s work in “Flatland.” Ultimately, however, it’s a jar of very South African honey, with its keen ear for local lingo and an eye for physical particularity in faces and locations alike.

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**The Hollywood Reporter (Stephen Dalton), Feb 8, 2019 – Review: Once upon a time in South Africa**

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/flatland-review-1184201>

Writer-director Jenna Bass initially set out to write a feminist contemporary western with her third feature but ended up with a hybrid mix of picaresque road movie and emotionally rich, female-driven character study. Opening the Berlinale's Panorama section with a splash, Flatland [...] is never boring, and riffs on timely themes in an entertaining, compassionate manner. [...] Flatland has the marketable novelty factor of a dramatic milieu rarely seen outside South African theatres. It also features a winning central performance by Faith Baloyi as a dogged detective with a selection of glossy wigs and an addiction to cheap soap operas. There are pleasing echoes of both Fargo and Thelma and Louise in the droll, darkly comic mix here. With backing from European TV networks and sales agents, this charmingly eccentric not-quite-western could be gunning for modest sales prospects beyond the festival bubble. [...] Bass is more adept at bittersweet human drama than pistol-packing action, but she uses these more violent scenes to tease out the unspoken racial and sexual tensions that lie just beneath the surface story.

In-keeping with its western-inspired roots, Flatland puts a lightly feminist spin on a very macho, patriarchal genre that Bass says she wanted to deconstruct more out of love than anger. She certainly finds some pleasing contemporary angles on the form's traditional blend of epic landscapes, amoral tough guys and even tougher frontier women. Notably, she is working here with a largely female cast and crew, diverse in age and ethnicity. Technical highlights including Sarah Cunningham's cinematography, by turns fuzzy-dreamy and jarringly vivid, and composer Bao-Tran Tran's pulsing electronic score. [...] Baloyi's Beauty is a hugely compelling anti-heroine, a kind of South African Marge Gunderson battling against a cruel universe with infinite patience and defiant optimism.

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**The Upcoming, Feb 8, 2019 – review, 3/5 stars**

<https://www.theupcoming.co.uk/2019/02/07/berlin-film-festival-2019-flatland-review/>

The feature follows three women but elects Natalie as its central protagonist. Natalie is a teenager, newly married to a man who fails to inspire her interest, but succeeds in instilling fear. As she escapes her marriage, her narrative intersects with that of Beauty Cuba, played wonderfully by Faith Baloyi. Beauty is by far the film's most complex and captivating character, whose intricacies are, in turn, masterfully interpreted by Baloyi. She's a black woman and a police officer who takes it upon herself to pursue Natalie and her pregnant friend Poppie (Izel Bezuidenhout).

Beauty not only provides fuel for the narrative, but she is the point at which many thematic elements of the film coalesce. Mainly through her, the audience is able to identify the intersections between race, gender, language and class in South Africa. She and Natalie offer the audience some understanding of the specific conditions of black womanhood there. Some of this comprehension is also filtered through the film's white female character, Poppie, who serves to further clarify the oppressive race/gender systems present in the country today.

The film is like a series of beautiful and illuminating vignettes, connected by the long and expansive roads that the women travel through: the landscape of the flatlands. The vastness of the scenery is accompanied by a thoughtful soundtrack, which mixes traditional South African music, trashy pop and original scoring, noticeably assisting the tension built throughout the feature.

Although Flatland is in some ways fragmented, this doesn't necessarily detract from the narrative itself. Flashes of intense clarity and powerful recognition mean that viewers will be stimulated, provoked and left perhaps with more questions than answers.

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## Director's Statement – Jenna Bass

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'What is a Western?' I used to think this was a simple question. True, there are tangible signifiers – horses, guns, wilderness – but I challenge anyone to prove the Western genre hasn't transcended its colonial, American origins over the course of the past century. It seems rather a tableau upon which we can thrash out fundamental human concerns away from modern distractions, in a place where rules can be broken.

Another, not-so-simple question: 'What is a woman?' Femininity has become equally indefinable, its old rules broken. In our times, the necessity for women's solidarity is as great as ever, while other boundaries like race and class ensure that unity and understanding will always be complex. Then, there's 'What is South Africa?' the country I live in, which has 11 official languages, countless more peoples, yet is named by its place on a map. I grew up thinking these questions were simple and it took a long time for me to realise they are not.

My original intention with 'Flatland' was also simple: To set a Western narrative in South Africa's heartland of the Karoo; an endless wilderness of semi-desert dotted with small towns, boiling in summer and freezing in winter, near mythical.

On further interrogation, I realised that though I loved Westerns as much as my father did, I couldn't identify with them. I knew Clint Eastwood would survive, but what about me? What would I do, shot at by enemies, alone? I wanted adventure for myself and for others who were ignored by these films.

Women have just as much right to be in the saddle, and I was sure that women audiences had the same desires I had, as well as the spirit to act them out. If I wanted to make a Western, I'd have to take a long, hard look at the Western and ask myself what is it about this frequently racist, misogynistic genre that I want to hold onto? Maybe the same things that make South Africa such a perfect setting for the Western are exactly what makes it so problematic. How different is our present from our colonial past? Maybe the rules of the Western itself need to be broken.

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For me, the starting point was three different women, on their own terms: A lovelorn policewoman, a pregnant teenager, and a naive young bride, all of who re trapped, by circumstances, their environment and by their own misconceptions of what they must be. I soon realised that the film's themes were inextricable.

If 'Flatland' were to climax with anything approaching the Western's obligatory, final shoot-out, then it would have to be a show down not just between some men in a desert, but a battle between genre, gender and the psyche of South Africa. And so we made 'Flatland', a strange film about some strange people and places that can't begin to encapsulate the whole, complicated country. Then again, these characters are no more strange than the picture-perfect images of urban wealth, smiling poverty, photogenic violence or exotic landscapes that we usually present in our national cinema.

## About the Filmmakers

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### **JENNA BASS (Writer/Director)**

Jenna Bass is a South African writer, filmmaker and former magician. Her award winning films include the short, 'The Tunnel' (2010), and the collaboratively-created features 'Love The One You Love' (2014) and 'High Fantasy' (2017), which have screened around the world, including at the Sundance, Berlinale and Toronto film festivals. Together with Wanuri Ka-hiu, Jenna co-wrote the coming-of-age romance, 'Rafiki', which premiered at Cannes Un Certain Regard in 2018. 'Flatland' is Jenna's third feature film as a director and writer.

### **SARAH CUNNINGHAM – Cinematographer**

Sarah's work has screened in festivals all over the world, from Berlin to Cannes, Toronto to Rio. Her two self-directed documentaries, 'Birds Get Vertigo Too' and 'Like Love', picked up more than a dozen awards, including for cinematography, while the BSC showcased Sarah's work in their New Cinematographers Night 2013. She is a member of Illuminatrix, a UK collective of experienced female cinematographers.

On her journey to becoming a DP she has worked as operator and second unit DP for the likes of Robbie Ryan and Ken Loach, Guy Maddin and Ben Kasulke, and for DP Gavin Finney. She graduated with distinction in cinematography from the prestigious national film school of France, La Fémis and previously read Classics at Cambridge.

## About the Cast

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### **FAITH BALOYI (Beauty Cuba)**

Faith Baloyi is a South African actress, writer and designer based in Johannesburg. She graduated from Wits University with a Master of Arts Degree, having majored her undergrad in Drama and Film. She started her acting career on stage and has performed in various productions including a leading role in 'The Coloured Museum (2001)', 'For the Love of a Nightingale', 'Romeo & Juliet' and 'Ska Nkatamela Tsotsi'. She appeared on the television magazine show, 'Zooming in On Men' and 'The Phat Joe Show'. Faith featured in SABC's '91 Plein Street' and popular soapie 'Generations'. Specialising as a voice artist for commercials, she also hosted 'African Dialogue' (a radio show on Channel Africa). She broke into film in 2007 when she starred as the lead in a short film, 'Tried To', which was soon followed by a supporting role in a made for TV film 'Blowing in The Wind' (produced for TV channel Mzansi Magic). During 2017 Faith featured in her first International film, 'Beautifully Broken' (USA) after which she landed the role of Beauty in 'Flatland'.

### **NICOLE FORTUIN (Natalie)**

Nicole Fortuin is a professional screen and theatre actress who graduated with a BA in Theatre and Performance from the University of Cape Town. Her versatility of both characters and performance mediums extends to theatre, film, series, voice-work and soap-operas. On stage, Fortuin has starred in the Sleeping Beauty pantomime as well as the role of Carol in David Mamet's critically acclaimed 'Oleanna'. Her most recent TV work includes the lead role the Warner Bro's 'A Cinderella Story: If The Shoe Fits' as Georgie, alongside Sofia Carson, for the Disney Channel, and more recently as Kat Vargas in Syfy's 'Dead In The Water' (2018). Her lead role in 'Flatland' is her first in a South African feature.

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### **IZEL BEZUIDENHOUT (Poppie)**

Izel Bezuidenhout completed her training under leading South African and international coaches including Anthony Meindl, Anthony Montes, Marth Munro, Lelia Etsebeth, Jacques Bessenger, and Heidi Mollentze. Now 20, her first professional role was on stage in the production of 'Balkie, Aged 10'. Her first leading role in a feature film came in 2014 in 'Agent 2000: Die Laksman'. Following this role, she featured in numerous South African television shows such as 'Bloedbroers', 'Mignon "Mossie" Van Wyk', 'Fluiters', 'Vaselinetjie', '7de Laan' and 'Dominee Tienie', and was the voice of Felicity Fourie in South African radio drama 'Ratels'. She later portrayed Anna in the South African award-winning film 'Dis Ek Anna', directed by Sara Blecher, where she played the character at various ages between 12 and 16. She also starred as Ilze Fischer in the Netherlands feature 'An Act of Defiance', directed by Jean van de Velde.

### **De Klerk Oelofse (Bakkies Bezuidenhout)**

De Klerk is known for his starring role as Lourens in the kykNET drama series 'Die Boekklub'. Having attended Stellenbosch University to do a Bachelor of Arts degree in Drama, he won the 2011 Most Promising Student Fleur du Cap award. He went on to act in numerous theatre productions, being nominated and winning numerous other awards. He first appeared on television as a recurring guest star in the second season of the kykNET drama series 'Vloeksteen' (2013). He has since guest starred in numerous shows, including 'Dominion', 'Oupa en Ouma', two seasons of 'Die Boland Moorde', and recurring roles in 'Fluiters' and 'Sara se Geheim'. Films he has appeared in include 'Hotel' (2016), and 'Kanarie' (2018).

### **Brendon Daniels (Billy)**

Daniels has starred in an Oscar-nominated South African film 'Four Corners' (2013) and was seen on the small screen in several series. In 2012 he won KKNK and kykNET Fiesta awards for Best Actor for his role in 'Rooiland'. In 2013 he was one of the main cast members of the kykNET crime

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anthology series 'Die Boland Moorde' (The Boland Murders) playing the role of Officer Shane Williams.