

SMARTHOUSE  
PRESENTS



A FILM BY  
KEVIN OSEPA

# LA ÚLTIMA



# ASCENSIÓN

SMARTHOUSE PRESENTS LA ÚLTIMA ASCENSIÓN

STARRING KENDRICK ETMON, YOLANDA FANEYT AND ABEL SÁNCHEZ GONZÁLEZ

COSTUME, HAIR AND MAKE-UP: SUZETTE MARTINA PRODUCTION DESIGNER: KEVIN OSEPA CHOREOGRAPHER: CLINT GOSEPA GAFFER: PITOPOLLO SOUND RECORDIST: CHRIS DE GEUS

COMPOSERS: COLIN BENDERS, TJEERD BOMHOF AND MATHIAS JANMAAT SOUND DESIGNER: GIJS DEN HARTOGH COLOURIST: ROMAN STRIJBOS VFX SUPERVISOR: BECANTI WIJNBERGH EDITOR: ELLEMIEKE MIDDELHOFF NCE

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: MYRTHE MOSTERMAN NSC LINE PRODUCER: MANDY LIM PRODUCED BY: DANIELLE GUIRGUIS WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY: KEVIN OSEPA

SMARTHOUSE  
CREATIVE IMPACT STUDIO

NL FILM  
FONDS

M  
mondraan  
fund

AF  
amsterdams  
fonds voor de  
kunst

FONDS 21


Prins Bernhard  
Cultuurfonds

De Korte  
Verbeelding



**DIRECTOR & SCENARIO:** Kevin Osepa  
**PRODUCER:** Danielle Guirguis  
**CAST:** Kendrick Etmon, Yolanda Faneyt, Abel Sánchez González

**LENGTH:** 23 minutes  
**LANGUAGE:** Papiamentu  
**SUBTITLES:** English  
**ASPECT RATIO:** 16:9  
**SOUND MIX:** 5.1  
**GENRE:** Magical Realism  
**DUTCH PREMIERE:** September 26 at the Netherlands Film Festival  
**SELECTED FOR:** The Directors’ Forum at the Netherlands Film Festival

**WINNER OF:** the Netherlands Film Festival - Best Short Film 2022 

**SCREENING:** From 8 October as part of the exhibition ‘Unpacking Boijmans’ in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

**TEASER:** <https://vimeo.com/smarthousefilms/lua-teaser>  
**IMDB:** [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21213384/?ref\\_=ttco\\_co\\_tt](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21213384/?ref_=ttco_co_tt)  
**STILLS:** <https://smarthouse.amsterdam/la-ultima-ascension/>

The film was made in the context of De Korte Verbeelding, a collaboration between the Mondriaan Fund and the Netherlands Film Fund, and supported by the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, Fund 21 and the Prins Bernhard Cultural Fund Caribbean Region.



# SMARTHOUSE

## CREATIVE IMPACT STUDIO

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## LOGLINE

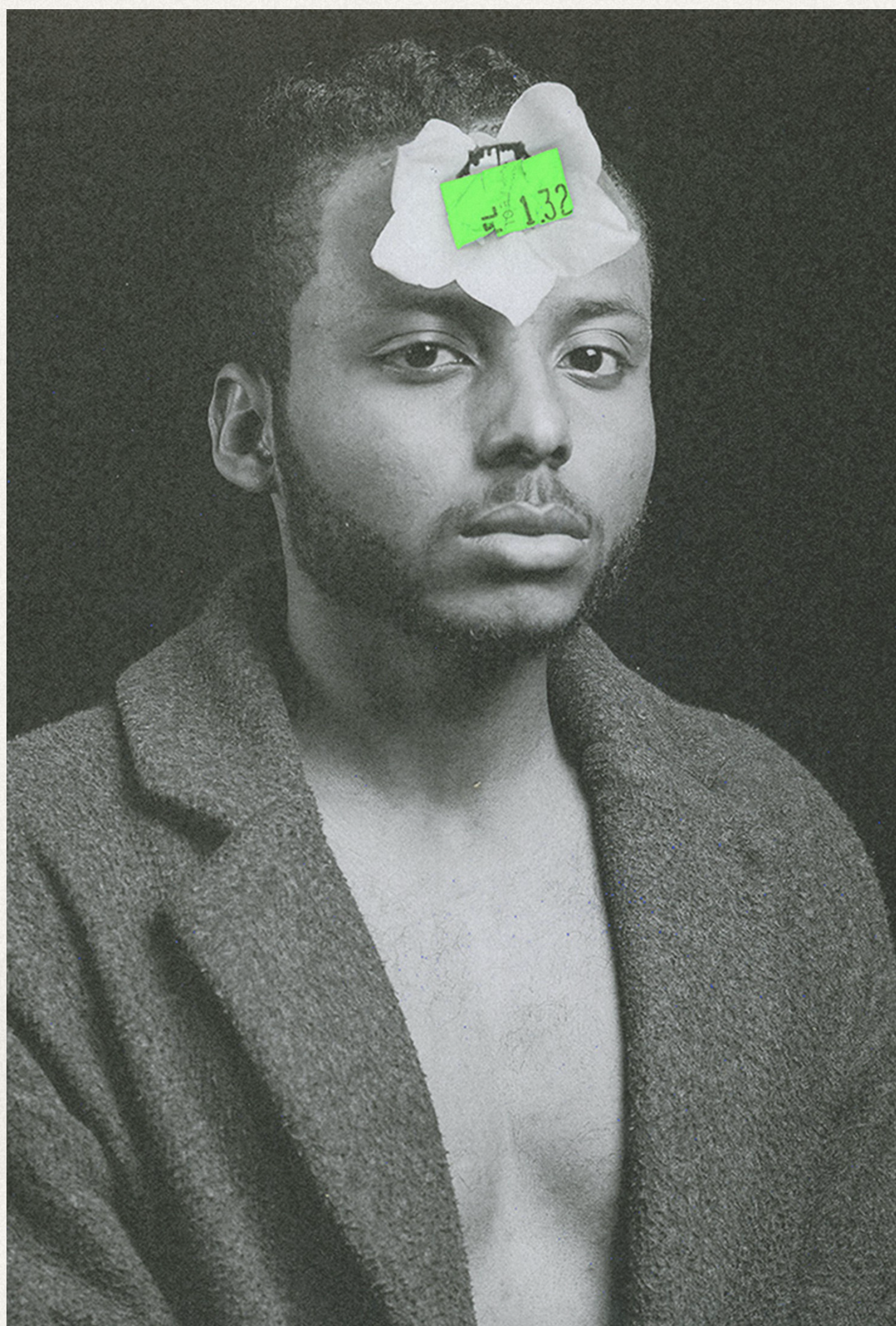
Thanks to the magic of Curaçao, a mother and her son rise above a painful loss.

## SYNOPSIS

Every day Rowin goes to the rocky coast of Curaçao to catch fish. Though his mother Gracia doesn't want him to, he keeps going, magnetically drawn to the water. There he meets an apparition from the precolonial world. Wordless encounters follow, full of magic, rituals and synchronicity. Mother and son appear to be involved in a grieving process that drives them apart, but the natural forces of Curaçao with its mystical and charged history ensure that their pain can be healed. La Ultima Ascensión is a layered and symbolic ode to the island and its countless untold stories, carried by Afro-Caribbean and indigenous spirituality.







## BIOGRAPHY KEVIN OSEPA

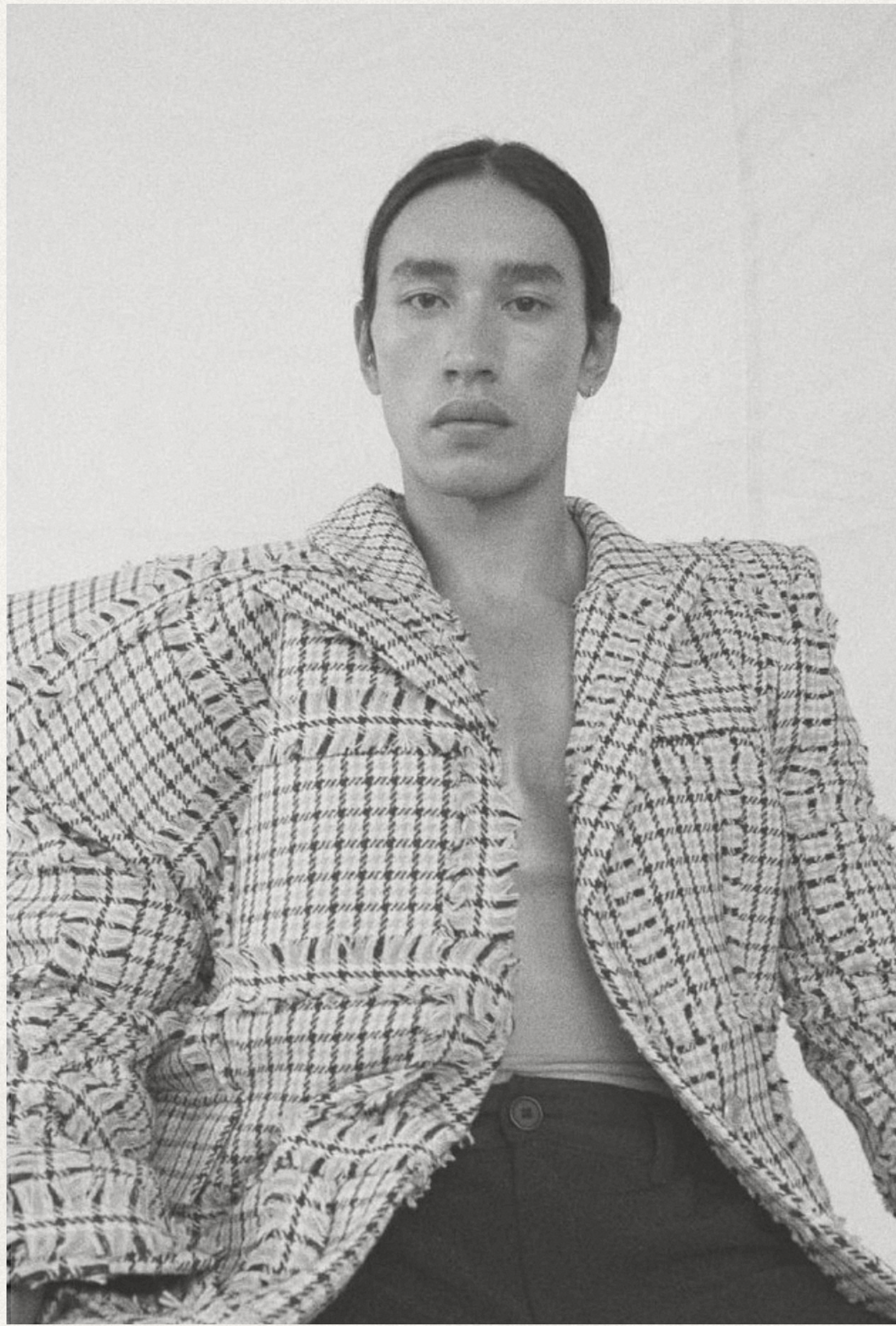
Kevin Osepa (1994) was born and raised in Curaçao. In 2017 he graduated from the University of the Arts Utrecht in photography. With the *Mester Blousé* project in which he examines how much his identity has been shaped by the spirituality and rituals of his native country, he became the youngest ever nominee for the Volkskrant Visual Arts Award. Numerous nominations, awards and exhibitions soon followed, among others in the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, Nederlands Fotomuseum, Amsterdam Museum and TENT. Osepa quickly became an important young voice in the art world. He shifted his focus from photography to film, and his debut *Watamula* (2020) won three nominations for a Gouden Kalf. A key theme in Osepa's oeuvre is his research into Afro-Caribbean identity within a postcolonial reality. The stories he tells often have a strong personal starting point.



## BIOGRAPHY KENDRICK ETMON

Kendrick Etmon graduated from the Toneelacademie Maastricht in 2019. During his studies he already played in two productions by director Marcus Azzini for Toneelgroep Oostpool. He also starred in the TV series *Stanley H* and *Dit zijn wij*. Kendrick's parents are from Curaçao but he himself was born and raised in the Netherlands.





## BIOGRAPHY ABEL SÁNCHEZ GONZÁLEZ

Mexican born Abel Sánchez González works as an international (fashion) model, from his base Mexico City. Kevin Osepa scouted him on Instagram, and after an impressive casting video Abel landed his first movie role as Shi.



## BIOGRAPHY DANIELLE GUIRGUIS

Danielle Guirguis started out as an Assistant Producer on Paul Verhoeven's *Black Book*, was involved in *Komt een Vrouw bij de Dokter* by Reinout Oerlemans. She worked as Executive Producer on *De gelukkige Huisvrouw* by Antoinette Beumer and produced the teen hit films *Spijt* and *Razend* by Dave Schram.

Subsequently she set up her own production company Smarthouse Films. After many short films and service productions (including several for Netflix and Canal +), the first feature film *La Holandesa* conquered the festival circuit with a world premiere in Toronto at TIFF and two Gouden Kalf nominations for Best Film and Best Actress. In 2015 Smarthouse Commercials was added to Smarthouse Films, as a production company for international brands and advertising agencies.

In 2019 the fashion documentary *Puck & Hans - Made in Holland*, broadcasted by AVROTROS, was the most viewed film on TV in the Netherlands, and a box office hit as well. The film *Nummer achttien - The breath of life* by video- and performance artist Guido van der Werve will be in theaters in 2023. Documentaries about Ronald van der Kemp, the world's first sustainable designer, and about the Amsterdam-based drag queen Jennifer Hopelezz are in post-production.

In 2021 we changed course. Smarthouse Creative Impact Studio now works exclusively with purpose driven filmmakers and brands to help them tell their story. Everything Smarthouse Creative Impact Studio does is aimed at creating a positive impact on people and planet. Danielle is a mentor at the Sustainability Program of Startup Bootcamp, Treasurer of the Executive Board of the producers association ACE, co-founder of AdGreenNL (promoting sustainability in the advertising industry), and a speaker at impact events.



# CONVERSATION WITH THE DIRECTOR

*La Última Ascensión* is a short film full of magic, spirituality and symbolism, shot amidst the enchanting nature of Curaçao. Director Kevin Osepa tells a penetrating story about loss, mourning, hope and resurrection – which can be seen as a metaphor for the story of the island. One could almost forget that Osepa graduated only five years ago from the University of the Arts Utrecht, specializing in photography. With his film debut *Watumula* (2020), he was nominated for Best Debut Film, Directors’ Forum and the Gouden Kalf Awards. While making *La Última Ascensión*, he was able to work even more confidently, with more focus on the concept. The result is an urgent, breathtaking and vagarious film that is very strong visually as well as conceptually.

## A STORY WITH INFINITE LAYERS

As with Osepa’s previous projects, the Afro-Caribbean culture is central, as well as the continuing traumas caused by colonialism. His latest film is not only about the stories of enslaved people and their descendants but also about what was done to the original inhabitants of the island. It makes *La Última Ascensión* an especially layered film, because in addition to all that postcolonial trauma he also shows how magically realistic forces, arising from that past, are integrated into current island life.

The story seems simple: young Rowin goes to the seaside every day to fish but his mother Gracia is suspicious of his attraction to the sea. Gradually it becomes clear that both in their own way are dealing with loss. Together they heal from their grief – a process in which the primal forces of the island play a leading role, as does the sea, which ceaselessly gives and takes, and which on a symbolic level refers to the baptismal ritual and the shipping of enslaved people. “I see the sea as an innocent force in relation to good and evil”, says Osepa.



Osepa filmed in Ascensión, Curaçao: a place with a mystical and charged history. Here the original inhabitants of the island, the Caquetio, buried their dead after which they would ascend to heaven. After the Caquetio were expelled from the island, it became a trading post for enslaved people. Ascensión, they believed, was a place from which they could fly back to their homeland and their freedom. Although both histories did not touch each other in time, they are connected in their pain, and in the movie they meet in this special place.

The story is largely told through choreography: in *La Última Ascensión* communication is sparse with words, but it flows with body language, dance and rituals. “Through movements, the story is told in a deconstructed way”, says the director. He worked closely with Curaçao choreographer Clint Gosepa, drawing inspiration from nature, music and the traditional dance Seu (to celebrate the harvest) and the Tambú used as a form of resistance.





#### THE MAGIC OF THE ISLAND

An important source of inspiration for Osepa is brua – a collective term for spiritual practices with elements from different Afro-Caribbean belief systems and Catholicism. The rituals are surrounded by mystery. Osepa: “It’s something that happens indoors; it’s not talked about openly.” The taboos surrounding brua is a vestige of colonial rule, which forbade these practices. Therefore, it is not common usage to portray them. Osepa: “Especially for the older generations, it is very evocative that I call it by its name. But it is also appreciated because I mainly focus on the healing and protective effect of brua.” The superstitions, the ghost stories, and the rituals form an important cultural heritage that has rarely been recorded.

To shoot the film, Osepa went back to Curaçao, which he left in 2012. “Since then, I have been haunted by the longing for the feeling of being at home. Although my umbilical cord was buried on Curaçao, I can no longer find it there. But the island has a rich history, full of stories that have not yet been told. To be able to tell this from my own knowledge and cultural background – that’s a great honour.”

#### THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

Collaboration is of great importance to the director. “I’m not making the film alone - we’re doing it together. I think it was important to work with people who have roots in Curaçao.” Kendrick Etmon for example, who has a leading role in *La Ultima Ascensión*, or Yolanda Faneyt, who plays his mother and who works as a grief coach in daily life. Osepa: “That was very meaningful. We had deep, personal conversations about grieving.” The collaboration with cinematographer Myrthe Mosterman was also inspiring: “It was great that she was so involved and critical. Straight from the beginning she was very much into the story; strict and practical when needed but also very sensitive to all facets of the story. It was a match made in heaven because that’s how she complements me. In a way it was a great game of ping pong. A DoP that I hope to work with more often.”

*La Ultima Ascensión* was shot on film: “That really is my ode to the island. For more than thirty years, since Felix de Rooy’s *Ava & Gabriel* no major films have been shot analogously in Curaçao. The island really comes into its own when you capture it on film: the process is more organic, you work with what nature gives you.”

About the collaboration with producer Danielle Guirguis of Smarthouse Creative Impact Studio he says: “Danielle has been my great encourager as well as my safe space, where I could make sense of all my clouds of ideas and bring them together. I could always be myself in all respects, in all facets of the process. That is one of the most important things for me as a filmmaker, to have someone who gives me confidence, understands where I want to go and helps me to always stay sharp and find the core.”

Osepa worked with his family as well: “I learned so much from my mother about art direction. For this film we scouted locations together, selected the clothing and did the set design. My sister worked on set as a dresser. As a photographer I used to work with her all the time. It feels like the circle is complete.

*La Ultima Ascensión* is a deeply personal film. Osepa: “I know from my own experience that when you lose someone, you only want one thing: for that person to come back. But that’s the one thing you can’t get. I wanted to make a film wherein the impossible can happen.” There is also something unsettling about the ending of the film, in all its mystical synchronicity and catharsis. But sometimes a wound has to be reopened – and then healed for good.





## BLUE CURAÇAO

### TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR THE ANTILLES

*La Última Ascensión* is a local story that we wanted to tell with the help of as many local filmmakers as possible. In this we largely succeeded as the choreography, the impersonation of the characters, clothing, hair and make-up, catering, gaffer, location scout, and art department is done by people from the island. During the filming we noticed that there is a great need among (young) local filmmakers to show the rest of the world what they got. But that requires money, equipment and knowledge, something that is not always readily available in the Antilles. This poses a problem because many funds and training programs state that you can only apply if you have made at least one short film. That is why Kevin and Smarthouse Creative Impact Studio are together creating *Blue Curaçao*, a talent development program for producers and directors from the Antilles, that gives them the opportunity to make a short film in a curriculum that goes further than simply transferring knowledge through workshops and talks, but effectively helps to get filmmakers on track.



# CAST

ROWIN	Kendrick Etmon
GRACIA	Yolanda Faneyt
SHI	Abel Sánchez González
AARON	Malcolm Damiana
NEIGHBOUR	Etna Ricardo
BABY	Q’zaiah Walter Qshaidion Constanca

# CREW

DIRECTOR & SCENARIO	Kevin Osepa
PRODUCER	Danielle Guirguis voor Smarthouse Creative Impact Studio
LINE PRODUCER	Mandy Lim
DOP	Myrthe Mosterman NSC
GAFFER	PITOPOLO
SOUND RECORDIST	Chris de Geus
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Kevin Osepa
COSTUME, HAIR AND MAKE-UP	Suzette Martina
CHOREOGRAPHER	Clint Gosepa
COLOURIST	Roman Strijbos
VISUAL EFFECTS & SUPERVISION	Becanti Wijnbergh
SOUND DESIGNER	Gijs den Hartogh
COMPOSERS	Colin Benders, Tjeerd Bomhof, Mathias Janmaat
EDITOR	Ellemieke Middelhoff NCE

