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Unspoken (2017).
Emma Zurcher-Long (Co-Director), Geneva Peschka (Producer, Co-Director), & Julia Ngeow (Co-Director, Cinematographer).

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The film is now available through [Video Project](#) and [Kanopy](#).

‘Unspoken’ is a point-of-view documentary directed by Emma Zurcher-Long, Geneva Peschka, and Julia Ngeow. The film explores Emma’s relationship with spoken and written language, and challenges viewers to disrupt their preconceptions about autism and autistic people. Emma, a 14-year-old Autistic girl with “unreliable speech”, engages us not just through typed words, but through the artistry of film-making and music - inviting us with all the senses we might have to access the fullness of her voice debut.

The cinematography maintains a sensory delight of both auditory and visual texture, vibrancy, color, reverberation, and echo. This is 「hi-res technicolor surround sound」 of Emma’s world experience. The small sounds of bodies in space, keys tapping, string twirling, and even distant car horns in the busy city are all maintained so that we can feel and understand that Emma is not *in her own world* as the dehumanizing autism trope so often demands - but that this is our world together. Emma taunts us, gazing directly into the camera, “Take a peek.” But this is not voyeurism. This is celebration.

“If you have ... can’t spit whole thing out...”

「This will be my spectacular voice debut, when everyone will gasp in dismay and there will be thunderous applause and uproarious laughter. I will charm and astound and it will change how people think about people like me. 」

Emma pledges to 「work tirelessly」 so that other autistic people are not doubted the way that she has been. By producing this spirited representation of autism, non-fluent speaking, and use of facilitated communication - Emma and the entire ‘Unspoken’ documentary team have committed themselves to activism in preservation of the human right to communication access. The recent statements by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) on Rapid Prompting

Method (RPM) have far reaching consequences for non-speaking disabled people and those with unreliable speech. For Emma to use RPM and Facilitated Communication methods on film for others to witness is a powerful act of resistance.

There are many moments of resistance in the film's short 26 minutes. Emma's unrestrained femininity flies in the face of mythologies of autism as "extreme male brain". Her delightful silliness is resistance too, as she reflects - 「silliness is acceptable in those believed smart but for those like me it indicates stupidity.」 And so, she makes faces anyway. And at conferences, she congregates in joy with other Autistics, entangled and enmeshed like string.

In a difficult scene between Emma and her mother Ariane, we are shown just exactly what it is that these moments are in resistance against. Despite montages of home movies showing a delightful child, Emma has internalized, as we all do, the messages from our culture - that autism and being autistic is the source of stress in a family. Ariane bursts into tears, "We believed all these things people were telling us. You weren't the reason. ... You just got hurt... More than anyone." It is painful, but essential, to witness these moments. To understand the truth - Autism is not pain, stigma and fear are pain.

Emma and + Disrupter Productions offer this film as a 「remedy for fear. 」