

# Worship of Pope, King of Pop to be aired at last; Film Finished In 1986

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

"They were damage-controlling what was a very expensive, very controversial film," said Prof. [Thomas Waugh], in Toronto to formally introduce *Passiflora* (which means "passion flower") at its first-ever English screening on Sunday night, where it is part of the Inside Out gay and lesbian film festival.

Its communications chief, Lily Robert, says they feel it's their "duty to be part of a great social debate," as much as ever, but she wasn't there during the 1986 *Passiflora* clampdown.

"They are doing lots of exciting things there," he says. "But now they just slip them under the wire."

## FULL TEXT

An obscure documentary held back from its mainstream premiere in 1986 for being too controversial, and kept in archives ever after, will finally get its screening this weekend.

The film *Passiflora*, made with what was at the time an enormous budget in the heyday of the National Film Board, is about the former Pope and Michael Jackson, and touches on everything from transexuality to abortion.

The simultaneous visits of Michael Jackson and Pope John Paul II in 1984 turned Montreal into a mecca for screaming, praying and utterly devoted masses who came to worship the two main religions of the era: Christianity and Showbusiness. This ecstatic scene became the backdrop for a documentary that looks at all those on the sidelines of the media frenzy -- gay men, cross-dressers, abortion seekers, victims of domestic violence.

Men kiss each other and caress, while images of the Pope flicker across a TV screen between them. Children in complete Michael Jackson getups perform flawless moonwalks on the street. A transvestite marches in a Corpus Christi procession.

Twenty-two years ago, English audiences were supposed to get their viewing of the bizarre film at the Toronto International Film Festival.

But then something mysterious happened, and the Board declined to subtitle the film into English. It never screened at the festival, and has not been shown publicly in English since.

Thomas Waugh, a film professor from Concordia in Montreal, says it was pulled because the NFB was scared.

"They were damage-controlling what was a very expensive, very controversial film," said Prof. Waugh, in Toronto to formally introduce *Passiflora* (which means "passion flower") at its first-ever English screening on Sunday night, where it is part of the Inside Out gay and lesbian film festival.

Prof. Waugh says he caught wind of the documentary because it had an unbelievably huge budget for its time -- around \$1-million -- and because it was the first gay and lesbian project for the NFB.

Its canceled premiere was enough to send him on a tirade of activism: letters to the NFB, members of parliament, magazines and journals.

Finally though, tomorrow night, Prof. Waugh will introduce the film at Inside Out and answer questions from the audience after the screening.

One of Prof. Waugh's former students typed out English subtitles for the film himself for the purposes of the screening.

*Passiflora* can be screened privately at Mediatheque and bought on the Internet (though, in both cases, only in

French).

And on the eve of its English premiere, the reason why it didn't have one long ago is more obscure than ever at the NFB.

Its communications chief, Lily Robert, says they feel it's their "duty to be part of a great social debate," as much as ever, but she wasn't there during the 1986 Passiflora clampdown.

One of the film's co-directors, Fernand Belanger, has since passed away. And the other, Dagmar Teufel, has moved on from the NFB.

"I think they might have forgotten about it," said Prof. Waugh, calling it small potatoes next to the litany of taboo topics the board now grandly tackles – even on a significantly smaller 21st-century budget.

"They are doing lots of exciting things there," he says. "But now they just slip them under the wire."

Credit: Brianna Goldberg; National Post

### Illustration

Black & White Photo: / Canadian audiences will finally get a chance to see the controversial 1986 documentary Passiflora. ; Caption:

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