

DIRECTED BY NISHTHA JAIN  
CO-DIRECTED & PRODUCED BY DEBORAH MATZNER

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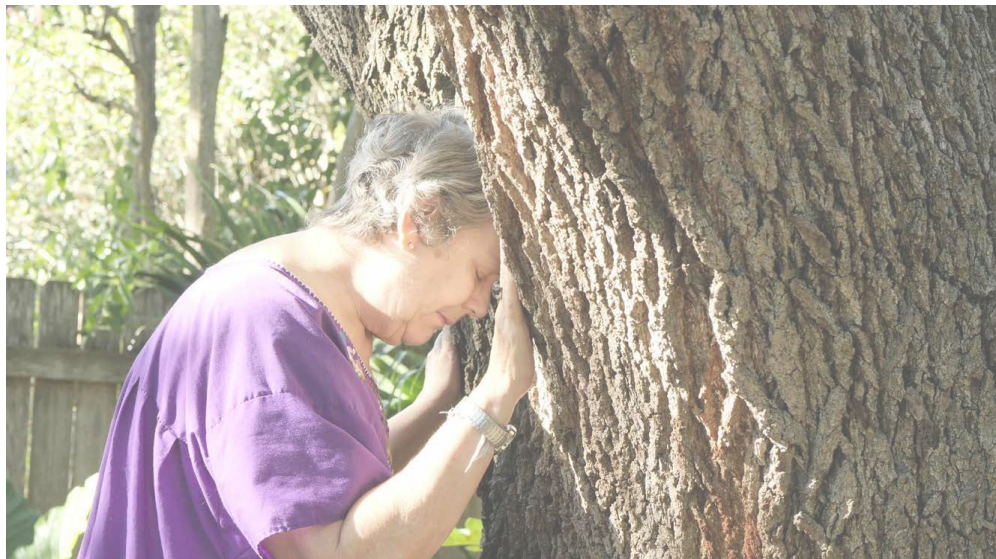
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AN AMERICAN COMING-OF-OLD-AGE STORY FROM THE DIRECTOR OF [GULABI GANG](#) AND [LAKSHMI AND ME](#)

When Nishtha, a filmmaker visiting Austin from India, rents a room in the overstuffed ranch-style home of Roxanne, an irreverent Texan, the two form a deep and unexpected bond. As Roxanne struggles to pack up the accumulated detritus of a life lived large and transition to senior living, she and the director unpack the elements of an American life.

*Summer with Roxanne* explores aging, our relationships with possessions, and the imperfect and transitory nature of existence. Sisterhood and irrepressible good humor carry the two women through the ups and downs of a transformational Texas summer.



## SYNOPSIS

*What does an American life look like from the outside?*

# STORY

## MARCH

Recently arrived in Austin from Mumbai, Nishtha looks for a room to rent for her first extended stay in the US. She finds a room in a house in a quintessentially middle-class American neighborhood called Allandale.





In this Blue city at the heart of a Red state, the neighbors proudly display their political leanings alongside their other lawn ornaments.





Roxanne's voice dominates the soundscape inside Nishtha's new home.

A six-foot tall, tattooed, hard-of-hearing seventy year-old, Roxanne narrates her troubles at top volume on speakerphone. Nishtha is soon inadvertently drawn into the drama of her landlady's life.

Twice divorced, once widowed, distanced from her adult children, low on cash, and in questionable health, Roxanne's life no longer fits neatly in a single-family home. The architecture of the middle class American dream isn't designed for the aging.



JUNE



Three months into Nishtha's stay, Roxanne announces that she is selling her home and moving into a senior living community.

Nishtha discovers that she has a front-row seat to the difficulties of American life.

The stakes for Roxanne are high. In order to secure a place in Blue Skies of Texas, the retirement community she's selected, she needs to sell quickly and for the highest possible price -- all while still living at home with a tenant, surrounded by a lifetime's worth of possessions.

At the same time, she has to enjoy every fleeting moment, celebrating and saying goodbye to the "little oasis" where she's nourished an eclectic family and community.





SUMMER WITH ROXANNE CAPTURES A SEASON  
OF TRANSITION:

TRANSITION IN ROXANNE'S LIFE....

Without movers, she separates her "Shit from Shinola," each item prompting a story from her improbably rich life.

As she sorts through possessions from her past, she re-negotiates her relationships with loved ones, both living and dead.

The many people she has been -- debutante, wild child, tattoo impresario, abortion rights activist -- are present just below the surface, defying our stereotypes of an elderly woman or a Texan grandma.





... TRANSITION IN THE CITY ...

As travels around Austin selling off and giving away her possessions, Roxanne takes Nishtha on a tour of the city that she and her friends helped make into a counter-cultural destination, the city that is quickly being replaced by a gentrified playground for the young.

As her frustrations mount, she returns every Friday to the "Old Farts Happy Hour" at the Saxon Pub, where she dances away her cares with the help of cannabis candies, surrounded by other gray-haired fixtures of "Weird Austin."



... AND TRANSITION IN THE US AND  
INDIA.

All summer long, Roxanne's country and Nishtha's both slip further into autocracy.

It's the summer of Trump's border wall, kids in cages, a militaristic Fourth of July parade...

... and the "Howdy Modi" rally in Houston with India's right-wing Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose re-election quashed a season of hope for change and began an era of even starker repression.





Roxanne, like most Americans, remains oblivious to events in India, despite the Om symbol tattooed on her arm and the similar political winds blowing in her own country.

While Nishtha faces often grim realities at home, Roxanne is focused on her own fate, as she heads toward a surprisingly happy ending.

## DECEMBER

Roxanne succeeds in selling her home and securing a place at Blue Skies, the retirement community where she hopes to “walk in and coffin out.” And she surprises herself by thriving there.

The film has a bittersweet end, as Roxanne bids Nishtha goodbye and settles in for the next chapter in her life, at Blue Skies.





## CHARACTERS

### ROXANNE

Roxanne might strike some at first glance as an embodiment of the “Ugly American” stereotype. Crass, obstinate, and loud, she loves television, soda and chicken-fried steak. But this film goes beyond first impressions to reveal Roxanne’s depths.

Packing up to move, Roxanne unpacks a treasure trove of astounding stories about her past. She’s lived several lifetimes and has been a key, if unsung, figure in iconic moments in Austin’s countercultural and underground history.

Irrepressible and uninhibited, she freely reveals her stories and shares her emotions with Nishtha and the camera, riding waves of joy and regret, reverie and levity. She becomes the ideal, if highly idiosyncratic, guide for Nishtha to the complexity of American life.

# NISHTHA

Mostly behind the camera, although sometimes seen in reflections or on screen, Nishtha is Roxanne's tenant and friend. With no stakes in the sale of the house and worldly possessions, she becomes a welcome shoulder to cry on and listening ear to vent to. Although Nishtha and Roxanne are very different, they bond over their refusal of their society's expectations of women's behavior and life choices. Their friendship grows over the course of the summer.





## HARPER & LYRA, THE GRANDCHILDREN

This is the last of the annual summer visits to their Nana's house for Harper and Lyra. These visits give their single mother a much-needed break and allow Roxanne a chance to instill what she sees as much-needed manners. The kids make the most of saying goodbye to the house and pool, fully and unabashedly inhabiting the spirit of this summer. Their departure, carrying cherished family heirlooms with them, raises Roxanne's worries about her family's future and her legacy.





## CARA & ALIANNA, THE DAUGHTERS

Roxanne's two grown daughters were once "thick as thieves". But one's now an environmentalist and the other a born again Christian who voted for Trump. Their strained yet affectionate relationship with Roxanne, and their concern mixed with exasperation about her move illustrate the complexities of family played out over property, debt, distance and obligation.



## JESSE, HOUSEKEEPER AND FRIEND

Jesse, who speaks Spanish, English, and American Sign Language, cared for Roxanne's dying ex-husband and now helps her, casting an amusing and amused eye on the chaos of her home.

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## HONEY, THE DOG

With her giant ears and expressive eyes, Honey, the young Chihuahua mix, observes the changes afoot with alarm and seeks to comfort and be comforted.



# FILMMAKERS

*When it's time to move on, what do we carry with us,  
what do we pass on, what do we leave behind?*

## DIRECTOR: NISHTHA JAIN



Nishtha Jain is an internationally-recognized filmmaker based in Mumbai and, now, also, Austin TX, best known for *Gulabi Gang* (2012), *Lakshmi and Me* (2007) and *City of Photos* (2004). Her films explore the political in the personal and uncover the mechanisms of privilege and inequality.

Recent awards and recognitions include: Chicken & Egg Award (2020); Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences Membership; Fulbright-Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Fellowship (2019); Film Independent Global Media Maker Fellowship (2019-20); American Showcase Fellow (2016).

After postgraduate training at Jamia Mass Communication Research Centre, Nishtha pursued Film Direction at the Film and Television Institute of India prior to launching a career in independent cinema. Since then, she's worked in a number of forms including documentary, narrative, virtual reality and TV series. Her films have been widely screened at film festivals and art-house cinemas and broadcast on TV in several countries. They have won over 25 international awards and have been reviewed by print-media and academic journals. Jain has served as a juror at IDFA, ZFF, Cinéma Vérité and IDSFFK. She's given lectures and master classes at numerous universities internationally.

See her website: [www.nishthajainfilms.com](http://www.nishthajainfilms.com).



## ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR & PRODUCER: DEBORAH MATZNER

Born and raised in Allandale, Roxanne's Austin neighborhood, [Deborah Matzner](#) is a Brooklyn and Austin-based cultural anthropologist and documentary filmmaker. She has written about South Asian media and visual culture for academic and popular publications, with a focus on women in independent documentary filmmaking and television programming, based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in India. .

Deb holds a PhD from New York University in cultural anthropology with a certificate in Culture and Media. She has taught cultural anthropology, cinema studies, and South Asian studies at NYU and Wellesley College.

Deb and Nishtha first met in 2004 in Mumbai. Deb has written extensively about Nishtha's filmmaking based on her unique insight into Nishtha's process.. *Summer with Roxanne* is her first feature film and she is thrilled to be exploring her childhood terrain with her favorite filmmaker.



*Summer with Roxanne* is a chronicle of a long Texas summer, in which Nishtha uses her camera to understand the unfamiliar physical terrain of American suburbia and the biographical and psychological terrain of her landlady. At the same time, it is a document of exile, as Nishtha's home country, India, disintegrates under the forces of fascism that are also on the rise in the US.

The footage for *Summer with Roxanne* is primarily made up of vérité material shot by the director. It reveals the immediacy and intimacy of Nishtha's relationship with Roxanne and provokes subtle questions about the implicit and complex inequalities within it. Via interludes rendered in artful animation, contemporary events in India insert themselves as Nishtha checks into news broadcasts and social media posts that alert her to the deterioration of conditions back home.

Throughout the film, Roxanne unabashedly displays all of the complexity of her life for her friend and viewers. As is the case with the protagonists of Nishtha's other films, Roxanne is neither heroine nor villain, victim nor victor. The moral dichotomy that often informs the way women are perceived -- the binary of slut or good girl -- certainly cannot contain Roxanne's free-wheeling, tattooed, burping, cussing version of womanhood. Roxanne is inspiring and imperfect, off-putting and compelling. As the film progresses, her complexity emerges. Ultimately, she offers Nishtha lessons in how to live without regrets despite the shame that society -- both Indian and Texan -- projects onto women's joy.

We believe *Summer with Roxanne* will have broad appeal with its idiosyncratic lens and universal themes:

- aging
- womanhood
- friendship
- intercultural exchange
- politics
- gentrification
- family
- home
- transition

We can see it being of particular interest to:

- US audiences, who might be more familiar with the mythology around Austin than with Indian perspectives on it or on the US;
- Indian viewers for whom Nishtha is a national award winner, but Texas unknown beyond the broadest stereotypes; and
- European and other international audiences who are a built-in fan base for Nishtha's work and who appreciate the novel (global) South → (American) South directionality of the film's gaze.

*Summer with Roxanne* will be a feature documentary (~75 minutes) with an additional, television- friendly cut (~52 minutes).

We plan to deliver a fine cut in summer 2021.



# CONTACT

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All photos by Jain and Matzner except for Allandale Air Conditioned Village by Dewey Mears, and Trump & Modi by Jonathan Ernst/Reuters.