



# Suzanne, Suzanne

*"...examines the potential for violence and abuse that underlies the carefully tended facade of middle-class respectability..."*

- Valerie Smith, Professor of English, UCLA

Directed by Camille Billops and James V. Hatch  
Produced by Camille Billops and James V. Hatch  
1982, 25 min, United States, English

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## SYNOPSIS

This poignant documentary profiles a young black woman's struggle to confront the legacy of a physically abusive father and her headlong flight into drug abuse. Suzanne, after years of physical and psychological abuse, is compelled to understand her father's violence and her mother's passive complicity, who suffered at her husband's hands as well, as the keys to her own self-destruction. After years of silence, Suzanne and her mother are finally able to share their painful experiences with each other in an intensely moving moment of truth.

A remarkably incisive short documentary film, much more than one woman's story of abuse and addiction, SUZANNE, SUZANNE captures the nature and spirit of a troubled family.

## REVIEWS

*"...examines the potential for violence and abuse that underlies the carefully tended facade of middle-class respectability..."*

- Valerie Smith, Professor of English, UCLA

*"This insightful 30-minute documentary profiles a young black woman, Suzanne Browning, as she confronts a legacy of physical abuse and its role in her descent into substance abuse. The film was conceived by Browning's aunt, Camille Billops, as a sort of cinematic drug intervention. Family remembrances revealed the truth behind the addiction: Suzanne and her mother were victims of domestic abuse at the hands of the family patriarch. Armed with the key to her own self-destructive behavior, Suzanne struggles to understand her father's brutality and her mother's passive complicity. After years of silence, Suzanne and her mother are finally able to share their painful experiences with each other in an intensely moving moment of truth. Directed by Billops and James Hatch, this film essay captures the essence of a black middle-class family in crisis."*

- National Film Registry

*"One of several films Billops made with James Hatch about her family, SUZANNE, SUZANNE presents a devastating portrait of the artist's niece, haunted by the abuse she suffered as a child and the passivity of the family members who allowed it to continue."*

- Nellie Killian, *Tell Me: Women Filmmaker, Women's Stories*

*"In SUZANNE, SUZANNE, the eponymous subject was the apple of her father's eye, and also the object of his abuse; the testimony of Suzanne and her mother in this short film is a moving examination of longstanding family trauma and the double identities women often acquire to survive it."*

- Maria Garcia, *Film Journal International*

*"For Camille Billops, autobiography is a means to a new black documentary style."*

- B. Ruby Rich, *Sight and Sound Magazine*

*"Billops provides sister Billie and niece Suzanne the necessary space to reflect on the burdens of patriarchal abuse and drug addiction that have haunted them for years. This film is a testament to the resilience that runs in their family."*

- Matthew Eng, Tribeca News

*"The films of Camille Billops are heartrending, fearlessly personal meditations on a range of emotionally charged subjects."*

- BAMcinematek

*"The texture of the film -- the family activities shown and the fact that this was filmed in their home -- make SUZANNE SUZANNE truly a home movie. This film tells the story of how society is especially tolerant of batterers who are "good providers."*

- Loretta Campbell, Jump Cut Journal

*"Camille Billops' devastating documentary on a young black woman's struggles to come to terms with her physically abusive father (dead at the time of the making of the film) as well as a mother, abused herself, unable to protect her children..."*

- Tambah A. Obenson, Shadow and Act Blog

*"Camille Billops and James Hatch's SUZANNE, SUZANNE (1982)... interrogates the wreckage left behind in the absence of a dead parent. The subject is Billops's niece, Suzanne, a recovering heroin addict who discusses the abuse that she suffered at the hands of her deceased father. The film's arresting climax has Suzanne and her mother... breaking down as they share together the memory of the beatings that they'd suffered alone."*

- Nick Pinkerton, Artforum

*"A wrenching portrait of a woman confronting drug addiction and a legacy of abuse..."*

- A.O. Scott, New York Times

*"Camille Billops and James Hatch's emotionally raw SUSZANNE, SUZANNE (82) shows Billops's own California family, torn apart from the inside by domestic violence, female body-image issues, and heroin abuse."*

- Violet Lucca, Film Comment

## **SELECTED SCREENINGS, FESTIVALS & AWARDS**

New Directors/New Films, MoMA (1982)

International Film Festival Rotterdam (1982)

Black Women Filmmakers, Whitney Museum of American Art (1987)

Winner: National Film Registry, National Film Preservation Board (2016)

## BIOGRAPHY OF DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER



### **CAMILLE BILLOPS**

Camille Billops (1933-2019) was a fearless filmmaker, artist, sculptor, historian, archivist, and staunch supporter of Black art and artists. Billops came into her own within the converging contexts of the 1960s civil and human rights struggles, New York’s emerging Black artists movement, and her personal struggles for affirmation. Her work is autobiographical, interpretive, and challenging. Without apology, she successfully drew from her life’s experiences, her education, and her observations of the world around her to carve out a space for her voice to be heard. She and her husband James made their loft in SoHo a hub for artistic collaborations, collecting thousands of books, documents, photographs, and ephemera related to Black culture. They held salons with Black artists, performers, and musicians, and recorded more than 1,200 oral histories, which were published in an annual journal called *Artist and Influence*.



### **JAMES HATCH**

James V. Hatch (1928-2020) was a historian of Black theater who taught English and theater at the City College of New York for three decades. He has written and co-written more than a dozen books, including “The Roots of African American Drama: An Anthology of Early Plays, 1858-1938” (1990),

which he edited with Leo Hamalian, and “Sorrow Is the Only Faithful One: The Life of Owen Dodson” (1993), about the titular Black poet and playwright.

Camille Billops and James Hatch made six films together, starting with *Suzanne, Suzanne* (1982) and ending with *A String of Pearls* (2002). At the time of Billops’ death the two were working on their final film, *Mama and Papa Lala* which is still left incomplete.

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

Produced and Directed by James V. Hatch and Camille Billops

Song “Suzanne Suzanne”

Written by Christa Victoria

Performed by Christa Victoria & Camille Billops

Camera Dion Hatch

Editor Michael Kirchberger

Sound David Brownlow

Assistant Camera Mark Freund

Continuity Kris Wagner

Assistant Editor Barbara Palmer

Archival Footage Walter E. Dotson

Special Thanks to Roz Myers and Movie Magic

Angels

Althea Alexander

Elaine Attias

Irving and Eleanor Brown

Richard and Garcie Carpenter

Earl Cooper

Gordon Davis

Owen Dodson

Jeff Freeman

Leo and Linda Hamalian

Dion Hatch

Mal Helstien

Toni Humphries

Herbert Kee

Kenkeleba House

Pamela LaBonne

Dora de Larios

Louise McGrew

Olga Mahl

Victoria Sherman

Ellen Simon  
Mae Smith  
George Wolfe  
Bil and Susanna Baird

Late Angel  
Shafik Benjamin

Hatch-Billops Producton  
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