



Dolores

A SHORT BY DOROTEJA JURICAN
& RYAN MERCATANTE

LOGLINE

After a human-sized marionette comes to life, it must decide between appeasing its master's strict regimen or taking autonomy of its own body and actions.

SYNOPSIS

A wooden marionette doll wakes up in a kitschy antique store, embraced by its creator, Dolores. Though it becomes sentient, it remains mute.

Dolores abuses this opportunity by forcing the doll to dance for her customers' entertainment for profit. Attempting to win the woodworker's love, the Doll tries its best, yet fails every time, leading to further punishment and vitriol.

After a particularly disobedient performance, The Doll, now chained to the roof, attempts to escape, but finds out the dark truth:

It is not the only creation.







THE DOLL



DOLORES

This film began not with a concept, but with a relationship. When Doroteja approached me to direct the piece, so she may embody both the Doll and its creator, Dolores, the story became inseparable from our shared understanding of intimacy, projection, and control. At its core, this film explores how we treat those closest to us, and just as importantly, how we treat ourselves.

Dolores and the Doll represent two sides of a toxic friendship. Not one rooted in overt villainy, but in misaligned care. Dolores attempts to mold the Doll into her own image, believing love is something that can be shaped, directed, and perfected. When the Doll begins to stray from that vision, conflict arises. The central question became: even if someone is “built for you,” are they meant to follow your path—or are they allowed to choose their own?

Control is the film’s driving theme, paired with a quiet exploration of nature versus nurture. The Doll is mute, not as a limitation, but as design: it was created to follow, not to speak. Its silence reflects the experience of being valued for obedience rather than agency.

Telling this story through a marionette fairy tale felt essential. The image of red velvet strings disappearing into the sky captured the invisible forces that bind us in unhealthy relationships; beautiful, theatrical, and quietly oppressive. The antique store setting allowed the story to exist slightly outside realism, where emotional truths could take precedence over logic.

The ending reveals that the Doll is not alone. That this cycle has existed before and will exist again. My hope is not to offer answers, but reflection. If the film asks anything of its audience, it’s this: how can we recognize toxic patterns in our lives, and how might we begin to treat ourselves with more care?

– Ryan Mercatante



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Country: *USA*

Year: *2026*

Running Time: *10 min*

Aspect Ratio: *2.35:1*

Sound: *Stereo*

Language: *English & Slovenian*

CONTACTS

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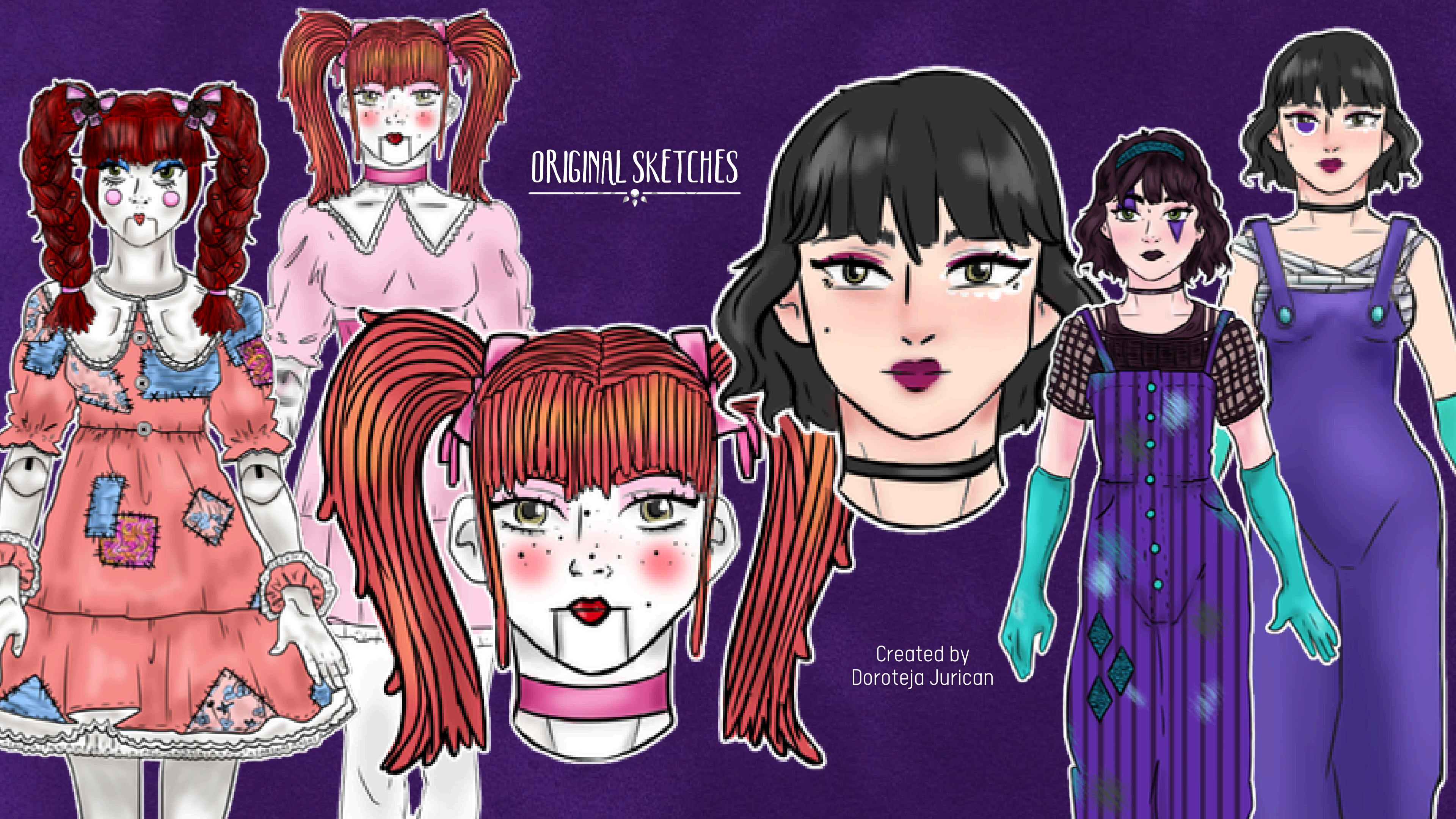
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ORIGINAL SKETCHES

Created by
Doroteja Jurican



DOROTEJA JURICAN as DOLORES & THE DOLL

Doroteja Jurican, a self-proclaimed Dorothy from Kansas, was, in fact, born and raised in a small village in eastern Slovenia. She began acting as a young star at the age of four through her community theater. It wasn't until 2018 that she took the leap, followed the yellow brick road, and settled in her very own land of Oz, Hollywood, California.

Through a mix of theater training and screen acting, she solidified her training at CSUN and the New York Film Academy. Here, she would perform in many short subjects and theatrical productions. Eventually, she would obtain her Master of Fine Arts in Acting for Film from NYFA.

Even though she met Ryan years ago, it wouldn't be until this project that the two would work together for the first time. And now that it is entering its festival run, she couldn't be more proud and excited for the film to find its audience.



AN INTERVIEW WITH DOROTEJA JURICAN



/ You're playing two different characters simultaneously. What helped you ground yourself in each of these characters?

The Doll was definitely a character I felt closer to from the very beginning, as many of her qualities were written based on my past self. Dolores and The Doll are each half of the same coin; very alike but also on opposite sides. For The Doll, I was inspired by the behavior of a Slow Loris, a big-eyed, timid, and curious mammal. For Dolores, a black panther felt more fitting, a loner predator who calculates every move.

/ This is your first time working with Ryan Mercatante. What was your experience like, and how did it differ from other films?

I like the collaborative approach Ryan takes. He knew immediately that this project was very personal to me and took great care of this project since the day I came to him with an early version of the screenplay. Many ideas emerged spontaneously during our conversations, and I appreciated that he wasn't holding back, while also ensuring I felt heard. Having Dolores speak Slovenian was actually Ryan's idea, and I think it truly helped me connect with the character more. I was quite overwhelmed during the filming days due to the stress of preproduction and had a few doubts about my performance, but he kept me reassured and encouraged me to trust my own skills and our vision. He is, overall, a great director and a friend who will make everyone feel safe and heard on set.

/ This film required quite a lot of makeup. Can you describe the process of finding the doll's look?

I've never felt more doll-like until I had to wake up at 4:00 am for a 5-hour makeup session prior to filming and stand in many awkward poses to get every inch of me airbrushed. Luckily, our makeup artist, Eileen, and I had conducted several makeup tests prior to the shoot, so we were able to maximize our time. I had given her some I

references and sketches of the look I wanted. I did not want the doll to look too silly or too scary, so we needed to find that balance. Certain features, such as the eyes, needed to be exaggerated in size to give The Doll a more innocent and appealing look, while making the mouth dramatically small to evoke the idea that she has no say in her own life. The bright colors and pale white skin also contrast with the dark color palette of Dolores, further highlighting that, despite sharing the same face, these two characters are complete opposites.

/ Not only were you a performer, but also the costume designer. Could you elaborate on how you developed each character's look?

Making the costumes for this film was a nightmare, but also a dream come true. I had a couple of designs early on, but they continued to evolve as I worked on them. For Dolores, I wanted to showcase her background through her worn-out purple overalls, which she would often wear as a performer in a traveling circus. She might still be stuck in her romanticized past, but she is also very resourceful in patching up her own clothing, showcasing her crafty and clever nature. The teal gloves were a pop of color that shows her determined and passionate side, but also her need for control.

The Doll, however, was a lengthy process due to the intricate construction of the dress. My inspiration was a combination of ragdoll dresses and Japanese Lolita fashion. Lots of patches, hand-stitching on top of a puffy dress, decorated all the kitschy, over-the-top details, and a big handmade yarn wig. Unfortunately, like Dolores, I have a bit of perfectionism in me when it comes to my creations, so the dress that you see in the film is not the dress I originally planned. The latter was scrapped after months of work because I knew that Dolores herself would never approve of it. So I set aside the dress that had taken me four months to make and created a fully improved one in the next two days.



/ Let's talk about the dance scene. Can you talk a little bit about the preparation for that?

My body double and choreographer Nickey was a great support. Together, we met weekly before class to research and brainstorm movements that mimic those of a marionette doll. We watched numerous videos of professional puppeteers, as well as animations like Pinocchio, to gain a thorough understanding of how to move like a doll. Then, limb by limb, we broke down the movement and performed a series of walking exercises while attached to long ribbons (sometimes even chunky yarn) to feel the resistance.

The choreography itself was quite simple, but difficult to translate into less human-like movement. Nickey and I went verse by verse and tried to find simple movements that a marionettist could actually execute in real life. At some point, Nickey stood up on the sofa and "puppeteered" me, so that my body was getting used to the feeling and movement restrictions. The latter was very apparent on set, since I was actually attached to ribbons and the crew would pull and release tension, so that my movement was more doll-like.

/ What inspired you to make this project?

My own experience of a long-term friendship with a narcissist. How helpless I felt during and after I left. I've never felt such deep pain and numbness at the same time, as if I had no autonomy over my own actions. Alike a marionette, following its master; otherwise, I would be collecting dust on the shelf. I knew that I needed to tell this story because I was not the only one in my circle going through this, and very few talk about narcissism abuse or Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). Love bombing, devaluation, discard, and an endless cycle are just briefly explored in this short.

/ What do you hope stays with the audience after watching?

Watching the film back, I am proud of the person I am today and the person I was back then, able to stand up for herself, just like the Doll did. Although the tone is somewhat darker, I hope that watching it can help viewers recognize narcissistic behavior in their own lives. And if the viewer is in a similar situation themselves, knowing that speaking up is the hardest step, but it is the most essential to reclaiming their sense of self.









ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Ryan Mercatante, a gentle giant, was raised in the small town of New Fairfield, CT, where his only escape was Television and YouTube. He began studying film at the University of Rhode Island, but eventually realized he needed to escape the harsh New England winters.

In 2016, he would move across the country to sunny Burbank, CA, to complete his studies at the New York Film Academy. Post graduation, he would continue to create short-form content. Outside of directing, Ryan has appeared in several television shows, including *'Raven's Home'* and *'Everybody's Live! with John Mulaney'*. His goal is to expand his directing repertoire and support his fellow creatives to bring their projects to life.

Ryan has found success with one of his most recent films, including winning the best student short award for his project *'Concrete'*. He has multiple films entering the festival circuit at this time. So keep an eye out for one of his many projects.

AN INTERVIEW WITH RYAN MERCATANTE



/ What first drew you to this story?

The people as well as the characters. I have been friends with Doroteja for the past few years, and I have always wanted to work with her on a project since I first met her. When she approached me with the idea for Dolores, I related to the people in the story, but also to Doroteja herself, in a way that we hadn't spoken about prior. This film allowed me the opportunity to not only explore aspects of my own life, but also to share and strengthen my bond with creatives I respect.

/ What was it like collaborating with someone who is not only the co-writer on this project, but also the lead actress?

Doroteja was excellent in that regard. I won't lie, I was worried when I first approached her, asking if we could amend the original script. Many writers are very attached to their work, but she was fully there for it. We sat down and really got under the hood to make this project a true collaboration, entirely through and through. Once it came time to film, she took the writer hat off and on went the acting hat. If I have the chance to work with people as generous as that on all my projects, I would be pinching myself; it was a level of trust I don't know if most possess.

/ How did you navigate scenes where the same person played two separate characters?

It's a challenge for sure. One aspect that drew me to the project. It reminded me of a time back in my adolescence where I would make these home movies playing three or four different characters at a time. I think that my approach actually didn't differ all that much, treat each performance as its own performance, silly as it may sound. Day one of filming, Doroteja was the Doll. Sure, I had to prep blocking and such, but day one was the Doll's performance, where Nickey was Dolores, and so notes for the Doll go to Doroteja, and notes for Dolores go to Nickey. When day two hit, everything went the other

around. Doroteja was Dolores, and Nickey was the Doll. On top of all that, the intricate Marionette makeup and wardrobe allowed me to direct the characters, and not the actor.

/ How did you decide the look/movement of the Doll and the maker?

We knew that for an audience to believe that these characters were two distinct individuals, they needed to be **different**. So early on, we set up several break-off meetings with key members of our team: our lead makeup artist, Eileen Avalos, and coreographer, Nickey Van Tooren, to achieve this individuality.

The makeup for the Doll underwent numerous iterations, including how to create a porcelain look. We initially hand-painted the white texture onto Doroteja's skin to give it a more homemade feel, but it felt too homemade and distracting. So, we evolved to airbrushing, not only allowing for a cleaner look to refine the performance, but also to save valuable time in the makeup chair. But when it came to Dolores, we wanted to make sure that it had that homemade feel; she needed to look like a tinkerer, and how would she put that side of her away to showcase the performer in her?

The choreography was all about the push and pull of each. Starting with the Doll, how much we turn the dial from actual marionette performance to trained dancing. At one point, with her permission, I tied Doroteja's limbs to the elastic ribbon that we would eventually use in the film, got up on a chair, and supported her arms to allow her to experience what the Doll would feel. The resistance of the ribbon holding her up changed the way she danced. Then, once we had the Doll's choreography solidified, we flipped to the other side. Each direction Dolores moves her controller correlates with a movement of the dance. So I had Nickey, as the Doll, perform concurrently in front of Doroteja, as Dolores, to ingrain this cause and effect.



/ What was the most challenging scene to direct?

I don't know if there's ever a truly easy scene to direct. Just from a stamina perspective, as you get closer to the end of the day, and the daylight is going, and the cast and crew are exhausted, and the bed is calling you, you hit a wall. But from a technical standpoint, the one I was most worried about was the dance. To this point, I hadn't directed any choreographed set pieces in a narrative work. So I was nervous about it all coming together. I had to worry not only about the physical movement itself, but also how to execute it without disrupting the ribbons, ensuring they remained taught to maintain the illusion, and how to keep everything safe; it's a lot to consider.

/ Could you talk about the production design and location?

The world of the film needs to be as believable as the story itself. I was thrilled to avoid filming another story set in a living room or backyard. Once we locked the script, finding the location was the first on our checklist. Luckily, that was easy; with an incredible stroke of good fortune, we discovered 'The Upcycled Home' early on our search. Its unique texture made it the perfect spot for filming. But it wasn't until

the first day of filming, our fabulous production designer, Rody Villegas, made it our set. With such a fantastical story, we needed our location to feel grounded. I wanted everything in the film to feel very *'tactical'* (My word of the day throughout production). Colors, muted and tame, except by choice, of the popouts of our characters' clothing, and an excellent purple velvet curtain that screamed *showtime* for the performance. Which took forever to find and in some ways becomes a character in its own right, blocking off the Doll from the outside world, where the ribbons are the shackles, the curtains are the bars on the window.

/ What do you hope stays with the audience after watching?

I find that I don't know what an audience will think of my films until I'm sitting in a dark theater watching it with them. So at this point in time, I haven't been given the opportunity to do that, yet. As of right now, all I have are hopes. I hope they connect with the characters and the story in itself. I hope I gave them a person to root for, even if that person was a porcelain doll. Most of all, I hope I told an entertaining story that people enjoy.





BTS & Stills:



IMDb:



CAST

Dolores & The Doll	DOROTEJA JURICAN
Body Double	NICKEY VAN TOOREN
Audience Members	ADYA KUMAR
	CAESAR ALVAREZ
	MARLY FEIGIN
	JOSIP POZGAJ
	EILEEN AVALOS

CREW

Director	RYAN MERCATANTE
Written & Produced by	DOROTEJA JURICAN
	RYAN MERCATANTE
Director of Photography	RYAN MERCATANTE
Choreography by	NICKEY VAN TOOREN
Production Designer	RODY VILLEGAS
Production Sound Mixer	IVAN NICO LIM BERNAL
Key Makeup Artist	EILEEN AVALOS
First Assistant Camera	DLVAN BEILER
Script Supervisor	BRYAN "BUBBA" PEREZ
Gaffer	JAIRO ALEXIS PEREZ
Key Grip	ANDRES RUIZ
1 st Assistant Director	JESSICA GAMBOA VASQUEZ
Editors	RYAN MERCATANTE
	JESSICA CORO
Sound Designer	MICHAEL DEAN MILLER
Original Music By	NOAH BALAMUCKI
BTS Photographer	GIOVANNA GENARO
Production Assistant	CAESAR ALVAREZ
Assistant Makeup Artist	ISABEL ACEVEDO
Runner	SUSANNE MERCATANTE
Costume Designer	DOROTEJA JURICAN