



EyeSteelFilm and TVO present

a Compy Films production

produced with the participation of the Canada Media Fund

Telefilm Canada, Ontario Creates

in association with Ford Foundation JustFilms

THE SANDBOX

Runtime: 90 minutes

Languages: English, Arabic, Greek, Somali

Country of Production: Canada

Countries of Filming: Canada, USA, Greece, Italy, Germany, Kenya, South Africa

Logline: Through meditative, cinematic landscapes, *The Sandbox* explores global borders where surveillance and AI decide who lives and who dies. From the Arizona desert to the Mediterranean sea, suffering is clinically managed while control is packaged as security. But if there is no opting out, who is *The Sandbox* really protecting

Synopsis:

The Sandbox—director Kenya-Jade Pinto’s debut feature—exposes the global machinery of surveillance and its devastating human cost. Spanning the deserts of Arizona, to high-tech refugee camps in Greece, Mediterranean rescue operations, and digital labour centers in East Africa, this visually daring, conceptually bold film invites us to see and feel the unsettling reach of borders that have been transformed into dystopian laboratories. This is

The Sandbox – EPK Document

a world where human lives are raw material for observation, experimentation, and control—and there’s no opting out.

The story alternates perspectives: from the architects of modern border control—armed with AI, surveillance, and militarized technology—to the people whose lives are governed by it. Survivors of disasters like the Adriana shipwreck, which claimed over 650 lives in June 2023, testify to being watched—and deliberately ignored—as they struggled to survive after days at sea. One survivor, “Ramon” says the drone he saw circling overhead had something to do with their sinking—and his near-death. “They did it on purpose,” he says declaratively.

The Sandbox reveals how migrants like him become test subjects, tracked, measured, and controlled. They are, after all, the easiest to manipulate and the hardest to hear. They’re the alarm bells the world has learned to ignore.

Grains of hope glimmer in The Sandbox, too. In planes flying over choppy, international waters, rescuers squint into binoculars for hours out of giant gleaming windows. Clear vision is a matter of life and death here. That speck could be a life, or 40 of them, packed into a barely sea-worthy boat. In the unforgiving Arizona deserts, search-and-rescue volunteers scan for signs of life, finding a single shoe, a human vertebra. They have the Sisyphian task of bringing water, food and hope to migrants looking for safety in a landscape that kills.

The film gives the chilling sense of being both observer and observed. In Mediterranean refugee camps, cameras track movement and sensors scan bodies for potential signs of illness. In East Africa, migrants surrender fingerprints and iris scans for food, medicine, or cash, handing over their very likeness for a chance at survival. Meanwhile, in Nairobi’s “Silicon Savannah,” young workers quietly train the algorithms that will monitor the world—including themselves. The sandbox expands.

From militarized border expos to volunteers scanning the horizon for sinking boats, The Sandbox reveals a world where surveillance extends far beyond the border: into land, sea, and digital space. Survivors, volunteers, and technologists each hold a fragment of the system, but no one sees it whole—precisely by design.

The film asks timeless, and timely questions: Can technology this powerful ever be separated from politics? Who bears responsibility for its devastation? When migration is framed as a threat, whose security is being defended—and how much death is built into the design? The Sandbox presents a world where movement is monitored, life is calculated, and death is collateral. It leaves an unsettling truth: the sandbox is no longer just on the margins. It is everywhere. And we are already inside it.

Kenya-Jade Pinto Director-Producer Short Bio:

Kenya-Jade Pinto is an Indo-Kenyan-Canadian storyteller whose training as a lawyer has deepened her practice as a documentarian. Her hyphenated worldview informs her focus on the nuances of our shared human experience in an increasingly interconnected world.

Kenya-Jade has participated in DOC Institute’s Breakthrough Program as well as HotDocs’ Emerging Filmmaker Program and Incubator. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, a Juris Doctor with a specialization in international law, and is a member of Women Photograph and Diversify Photo. In 2021, she was invited to be a National Geographic Explorer.

Shasha Nakhai - Producer Short Bio:

Shasha is a storyteller whose work has taken her to the Hawaiian coastline, the ski slopes of Davos, a Cold War bunker, Philippine sugar mills and the front lines of Nigeria’s energy crisis.

Her work has aired on the BBC, CBC, ZDF, and Arte; screened at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA); been nominated for 16 Canadian Screen Awards; named TIFF’s Top 10; and shortlisted for an Oscar.

After over a decade of experience in documentary, Shasha released her first drama feature, *Scarborough* (2021), adapted from the award-winning novel by Catherine Hernandez, and co-directed with Compy Films partner Rich Williamson.

Production Company Description:

Compy Films is a film and television production company based in Toronto, founded in 2010 by filmmakers Shasha Nakhai and Rich Williamson.

We create award-winning, ambitious, thought-provoking, and nuanced productions that transcend borders. Our work culture, documentary roots, agility, scalability, and demonstrated audience-engagement prowess set us apart.

Our scripted and unscripted work has taken us to the Hawaiian coastline, the ski slopes of Davos, a Cold War bunker, the engine room of a decaying ship, Philippine sugar mills and the front lines of Nigeria’s energy crisis.

Our body of work over the years includes the TIFF breakout hit *Scarborough*, adapted from the novel by Catherine Hernandez, and the Oscar-shortlisted *Frame 394*.

Director’s Notes:

Field Notes Excerpts: January 2022

There was a moment, standing at the border wall that bisects the town of Sasabe - between the USA and Mexico - that I realized I’m not really trying to tell a “tech” story. I understand this will likely be the entry point for many: a futuristic, algorithmic hook that implicates drones, robo-dogs, and AI.

But today the wind was snaking its way through giant steel rods that jut out of the ground like a rusted-out grin and it all felt eerily familiar. A tidal metronome. Rhythmic steadiness. If I closed my eyes I could just as easily have been standing on the shoreline of a Greek Island. Because just as the ocean steals many of the lives who dare cross it, so too does the harsh landscape of the Sonoran desert.

We are not so far away from one another, each of us.

FAQ’s & Interesting Facts:

- *The Sandbox* is director Kenya-Jade Pinto’s first feature film.
- Kenya-Jade is a trained lawyer with a specialization in International Law from the University of Ottawa. She was called to the bar in Ontario in 2018. She does not practice law day-to-day, but is a practicing documentary photographer who has been published in The Globe and Mail, Business Insider, and Al Jazeera.
- Development on *The Sandbox* began in early 2020. In 2021 Kenya-Jade spent three months in Athens with support from National Geographic Society for a stills project. The control room scene was filmed toward the end of that period.
- Filming comprised a total of 74 shoot days over 6 years
- Filming locations: Ajo, Arizona; Lampedusa, Italy; Nairobi, Kenya; Garissa, Kenya; Dadaab, Kenya; Durban, South Africa; Bremen, Germany; Taranto, Italy; International Waters; International Airspace.

Key Credits:

Written and Directed by: Kenya-Jade Pinto

Producers: Shasha Nakhai, Kenya-Jade Pinto

Executive Producers: Rich Williamson, Bob Moore, Jennifer Baichwal

The Sandbox – EPK Document

Commissioning Editor, TVO: Alexandra Roberts

Production Executive, TVO: Shane Smith

Co-Executive Producer: Robin Smith

Director of Photography: Luc Forsyth

Editor: Jordan Kawai

Music by: Robbie Teehan

Financing Partners: EyeSteelFilm, Canada Media Fund, Telefilm Canada, Ontario Creates, TVOntario, Ford Foundation JustFilms, Knowledge Network, Hot Docs Crosscurrents, Hot Docs Ted Rogers Fund, Hot Docs First Look Prize, Rogers Telefund, Federal and Provincial Tax Credits

Market Partners: Canadian Creative Accelerator, DOC Institute, Hot Docs Accelerator, Hot Docs Fourm & Deal Maker, Hot Docs Netflix Incubator, Women Make Movies, the Voices of Canada Roundtables at DOC NYC

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Kenya-Jade Pinto [Website](#) | [Instagram](#) | [BlueSky](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Letterboxd](#)

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