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PETER HUJAR'S DAY

Directed by Ira Sachs



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Film Info: US | 2025 | 76 minutes | Color | English Language | 4:3 aspect ratio

SYNOPSIS

“The photographer Peter Hujar, whose images exist in an important lineage and dialogue with the work of groundbreaking gay artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe and David Wojnarowicz, forms the center of the latest movie by fearless independent American filmmaker Ira Sachs (*Passages*). Based on rediscovered transcripts from an unused 1974 interview by nonfiction writer Linda Rosenkrantz (played by Rebecca Hall), in which she asked Hujar (Ben Whishaw) to narrate the events of the previous day in minute detail, Sachs’s film is a mesmerizing time warp, an illustration of the life of the creative mind, the quotidian and the imaginative at once, fully and lovingly inhabited by its two brilliant actors. With this engrossing and wholly unexpected film, Sachs shuttles us back to a specific moment in New York queer cultural history and a still-influential art scene that lives on in words as much as images.” - *New York Film Festival*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Peter Hujar: American portrait photographer born October 11, 1934, in Trenton, NJ; died November 26, 1987, in New York City; published *Portraits in Life and Death* in October 1976.

Linda Rosenkrantz: American writer (1934—); founding editor of *Auction Magazine*; met Hujar in 1956 and remained close friends until his death; wrote *Talk* (1968), novel based on the recorded daily routine of three New York artists; author of *Peter Hujar's Day* (2021).

Jacqueline Mornay: French representative of *Elle*; visited Hujar on December 18, 1974, to collect photos he shot of model Lauren Hutton.

Lauren Hutton: American model (1943—); signed Revlon contract in 1973, the biggest of its kind at the time; photographed by Hujar for French *Elle* in 1974.

Susan Sontag: American writer, critic, and intellectual (1933–2004); author of *On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others*; close friend of Hujar, who photographed her in 1975; appears in *Portraits of Life and Death*.

Max Kozloff: American art historian, critic and photographer (1933–2025); *Artforum* contributing editor beginning in 1967; executive editor 1975–1977. Contributed essays to *Peter Hujar: A Retrospective* (1994).

Richard Avedon: American fashion and portrait photographer (1923–2004); admirer and champion of Hujar's work; Hujar was a student in a masterclass taught by Avedon and Marvin Israel.

Clydine Malleck: Girlfriend of British American visual artist and painter Malcolm Morley; known by her nickname Lily.

Paul Thek: American painter and sculptor (1933–1988); Hujar photographed Thek in the late '50s after they met in Coral Gables, Florida, and became a couple.

Alan Lloyd: American composer (1943–1986); scored theatrical works for Robert Wilson, including *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974); photographed by Hujar in 1975; appears in *Portraits of Life and Death*.

Phoebe Lloyd: Elder sister of composer Alan Lloyd; art historian who specialized in the life and work of Raphaëlle Peale.

Linda Lloyd: Born Linda Fosberg; friend of Linda Rosenkrantz who sold ads for *Auction Magazine*.

Ed Baynard: American still-life painter (1940–2016) and close friend of Hujar; graphic designer for the Beatles, clothing designer for Jimi Hendrix, featured in Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*; photographed by Hujar on several occasions, including in a portrait with Warhol Superstar Pat Ast in 1973.

Fred McDarrah: American counterculture photographer (1926–2007) who documented the Beat Generation in the 1950s, and the gay rights movement in the '60s and '70s; staff photographer for *The Village Voice*; photographed Hujar in 1965.

Christopher Makos: American photographer and visual artist (1948—) whose subjects included queer icons, pop stars, and male nudes; apprentice to Man Ray and Warhol.

Lilo Raymond: German-born, American-based still-life photographer (1922–2009) who fled Nazi Germany and settled in New York City in 1938; her work is included in the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Allie Anderson (Alexandra Anderson-Spivy): Former arts and centerfold editor of *The Village Voice*, senior features editor at *Vogue*, and editor-in-chief of *Art and Antiques*; author of *Keith Haring: Last Works*, among others.

Bill Elliott: American theatrical composer (1944–1985); musical director for La Mama Experimental Theatre Club from 1971–1978; photographed by Peter Hujar in 1974.

Allen Ginsberg: American Beat Generation poet and writer (1926–1997), author of *Howl*, seized by US Customs in 1956; photographed by Peter Hujar for the *New York Times* on December 18, 1974.

Frederic Tuten: American novelist, short-story writer, and essayist (1936—); married writer Simona Morini in 1962; close friend of Peter Hujar and Paul Thek.

Simona Morini: Italian writer, philosopher and academic with a doctorate in classical philology (1932—); former spouse of Frederic Tuten; close friend of Hujar; teaches decision theory and game theory in the Department of Art & Industrial Design at the University IUAV in Venice.

John Gruen: French-born art critic, art historian, author, photographer, and composer (1926–2016) who settled in New York City in 1939; first chief art critic for *New York Magazine*; author of *The Private World of Leonard Bernstein*, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography*, and others; photographed New York City artists and creative luminaries.

Peter Orlovsky: American poet and actor (1933–2010); long-time partner of Allen Ginsberg; met Ginsberg in San Francisco in 1954 while modeling for the painter Robert La Vigne.

Daniel Ellsberg: American political activist, economist, military analyst, and Pentagon Papers whistleblower (1931–2023); mentioned in a conversation between Hujar and Allen Ginsberg on December 18, 1974.

Hibiscus: American actor and performance artist (1949–1982) born George Edgerly Harris III in Bronxville, NY; toured with the Angels of Light and The Cockettes; Hujar performed with the Angels of Light, which he also photographed in the early '70s; died of AIDS-related causes in 1982.

Gregory Corso: American poet (1930–2001) who was the youngest member of the Beat Generation; signature poem *Marriage* (1960) featured 111 lines in the free-verse style; prominent in the same Lower Manhattan cultural circles as Hujar during the 1970s.

Vivian Leigh: British-born stage and screen actress (1913–1967) who played Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* and Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*; married to Laurence Olivier from 1940–1960; Hujar played Mother Goose in an Angels of Light show in New York City, and believed he looked like Leigh.

Tuli Kupferberg: American counterculture poet, author, comic artist, and publisher (1923–2010); co-founder of the New York City satirical rock band The Fugs, formed in 1964 with Ed Sanders.

Ed Sanders: American poet, singer, activist, author (1939—); co-founder of The Fugs with Tuli Kupferberg; proprietor of the Peace Eye Bookstore in New York City's East Village.

William S. Burroughs: American writer and visual artist (1914–1997) who was a primary figure of the Beat Generation; published *Naked Lunch* in 1959; taught creative writing at the City College of New York beginning in 1974; photographed by Peter Hujar in 1975.

Felicity Mason: British-born heiress, debutante, writer, and British intelligence agent (1917–1993) born Felicity Anne Cumming; author of the autobiographical novel *The Love Habit: The Sexual Confessions of an Older Woman* (1977); close friends with Hujar, who photographed her in 1977 for the book's publication.

Glenn O'Brien: American writer and cultural producer (1947–2017) who covered art, music and fashion; Warhol Factory member and managing editor of *Interview* (1972–23); created *Interview* logo with Richard Bernstein; *Rolling Stone* writer from 1973 onward.

Neke Carson: American performance and visual artist (1946—); Warhol Factory member; painted Warhol's portrait, and other works, with a paintbrush inserted inside his rectum; director of performances at the Robert Friedus Gallery in SoHo.

Lisa Robinson: American journalist, author and broadcaster; founded *Rock Scene* in 1973; documented punk rock in New York City in the 1970s; author of *There Goes Gravity: A Life in Rock and Roll* (2014).

Fran Lebowitz: American author and public speaker (1950—); met Hujar in 1971 at a Midtown film screening; remained close friends until his death; photographed by Hujar in bed in Morristown, NJ, in 1974.

Vince Aletti: Writer, curator and photography critic (1945—); *Rolling Stone* contributing writer from 1970 to 1989; *Village Voice* photography critic from 1987 to 2005; frequent visitor and dinner guest at Hujar's East Village home studio.

Robert Wilson: American playwright and experimental theater director (1941–2025); created *Einstein on the Beach* with Philip Glass (1976); photographed by Hujar in his Vestry Street apartment in Lower Manhattan in 1975.

Craig S. Karpel: American investigative journalist who began his career writing for *Creem* in the early 1970s; advisor to Abbie Hoffman and John Lennon.

Paul Costello: Worked at Wartoke Concern talent agency and management firm, led by Jane Friedman; represented Patti Smith, John Cale, Stevie Wonder, and Divine in the 1970s.

Stevie Wonder: American singer, songwriter, musician and producer (1950—); photographed by Peter Hujar at the Waldorf Astoria for *Crawdaddy* in 1971.

Rod Stewart: British singer-songwriter (1945—); joined the Faces and released his debut solo album in 1969; went on to sell 120 million records worldwide; photographed by Hujar while on tour.

Suzi Quatro: American singer, bass guitarist, songwriter and actress (1950—) who released her self-titled debut album in 1973, including her glitter-rock smash “Can the Can”; in a discussion with Hujar, Rosenkrantz compared Quatro to the fictitious performer Topaz Caucasian.

Tina Mandel: Hujar’s psychotherapist in the early 1970s, who had a practice on West 84th St. and West End Avenue on Manhattan’s Upper West Side; one of the four people Hujar thanks in *Portraits in Life and Death*.

Janet Flanner: American writer and journalist (1892–1978) who was *The New Yorker*’s Paris correspondent from 1925–1975; wrote her “Letter from Paris” column under the pen name Genêt; mentioned by Hujar, who intends to bring photographic prints of Flanner to his therapist, Tina Mandel.

Frank Lima: American street poet (1939–2013) and member of the New York School; wrote about ghetto life in the ‘60s and ‘70s. Discovered by Sherman Drexler and Frank O’Hara, who secured him a scholarship at Adelphi University; mentioned by Hujar, who intends to bring a print of Lima’s daughter to his therapist, Tina Mandel.

Maurice Hogenboom: Fashion photographer and street photographer; mentioned by Hujar after Hujar saw Hogenboom and his partner Catherine Milinaire at Phoebe’s; he never saw Hogenboom again because the photographer fell off a cliff to his death on a shoot in Rio de Janeiro while shooting a subject.

Catherine Milinaire: French-born journalist, photographer and author (1942—); partner of photographer Maurice Hogenboom prior to his accidental death.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Writer/director Ira Sachs was in pre-production on his eighth feature, *Passages*, in the fall of 2021 when he sat down to read the newly published book *Peter Hujar's Day*. The 36-page book reproduced a newly discovered transcript of an audiotaped 1974 conversation between the author Linda Rosenkrantz and her close friend, photographer Peter Hujar (1934-1987). Rosenkrantz had an idea for a book featuring different people's descriptions of a typical day in their lives, and had friends, including Hujar, Chuck Close, and others, write down everything they did on a randomly chosen day. On December 19, 1974, Hujar went to Rosenkrantz's apartment and proceeded to chronicle his activities on the day before, from the time he woke up until the moment he went to sleep. Far from a dutiful recitation of events, Hujar's account of his waking hours was full of astute observations, honest self-assessment, amusing dollops of gossip and quotidian minutiae. The creative ferment and dodgy conditions of 1970s New York City came alive in his telling, as did Hujar himself: exacting, slyly funny, passionately dedicated to his art and rigorous about its execution.

Sachs came to Rosenkrantz's book as someone with a longstanding interest in and admiration for Hujar, a pioneering queer artist and master of black-and-white photography. Hujar turned away from commercial work early in his career to focus on subjects of his own choosing, including his circle of friends and lovers, landscapes, nudes and animals. He loomed large as both a brilliant artist and valuable mentor in the Lower East Side avant garde arts/cultural scene of the 1970s and 80s. Sachs moved to New York in January 1988, at the twilight of that creative era. "As someone who came to that part of New York in my 20s, I was late to the scene that Peter was involved in, and also experienced its passing in my youth," Sachs remarks. "I find Peter and a number of other artists of that time incredibly generative because of their commitment to their work and their seeming lack of fear. They were making work that was very honest and in its honesty became radical. And they were doing this at a time in which bourgeois expectations were present, but not very possible for most of them. They made their art because they had to, not because there was anyone giving them money or permission to do so."

Sachs wasn't looking for a potential film subject – yet that is what he found in *Peter Hujar's Day*. As he explains, "The book evoked a feeling and a time and a place and also a surprising emotional narrative. I felt something at the end that I didn't expect at the beginning. On the last page I was like, 'I want to make a film from this material.'"

The idea to adapt the book was entwined with the belief that it would be an ideal project to make with Ben Whishaw, who was playing one-third of the love triangle in *Passages*. As he explains, "I felt that I had found a rare collaborator in Ben – someone with a deep curiosity about art and beauty, life and queerness, an interest not limited to movies alone, but including all the various art forms, as well as all sorts of cinema, from the experimental to the narrative, mainstream to the avant-garde. It makes for a very fruitful partnership. Even as we were making *Passages*, I felt we had more to do and now was the time."

Sachs and Whishaw began talking about the adaptation soon after *Passages* wrapped. Like Sachs, Whishaw loves Hujar's work and is deeply familiar with it. "There are many reasons that I am drawn to Peter but one of them is that he captured a world that's gone, a world that's not that long ago. There's something very tender and melancholy about the way he looks at people, but also so unguarded and so raw. And at the same time, his photographs are classical, they're so beautifully framed and spare. They are truly beautiful images. Some months before I worked with Ira for the first time I saw an exhibition in London of Peter's work. It was the first time I saw a lot of Hujar images together and it was very moving. Because he was really an artist, the quality of the prints is very much a part of what they are doing as images."

The actor tracked down Rosenkrantz's book as soon as he learned about it from Sachs. "I was excited that this transcript had been published for the first time and I read the book in one sitting," he recalls. "I enjoyed it as a kind of stream of consciousness, a portrait of a moment in time and the kind of tiny events that make up a day in someone's life. I had no idea how it would be the basis for a piece of work. But I really wanted to work with Ira again and we were fascinated by Peter Hujar. When Ira constructed that text into a screenplay, I started to see other layers. It seemed very much like the territory Ira explores in his films: small moments of everyday life, but with a sensitivity to the monumental things within those moments. I was totally up for whatever the film transpired to be."

Meanwhile, Sachs had also begun an online conversation with Linda Rosenkrantz, after reaching out to her via Instagram in December 2021. He'd described how her book had affected him and expressed his interest in making it into a film. It was a surprising but welcome inquiry, says Rosenkrantz. "I was very excited by the thought of it being a film in any way. I couldn't imagine how Ira was going to do a film of just two people talking, but I was all for it. I really liked Ira, and found him very impressive. It all felt right from the very beginning."

Sachs and Rosenkrantz developed a friendship over the coming months, and she was involved throughout the development and making of the film. Says Sachs, "Linda's an extraordinary woman, kind and funny, curious, excited, and as young at heart at 90 as any of us could ever hope to be. She was collaborative at every step, answering questions big and small, from sharing photographs to describing in detail her friendship with Peter."

While a film centered on two people talking in 1974 would seem to be a difficult project to get off the ground, the opposite turned out to be true. *Peter Hujar's Day* quickly attracted the support of a small group of investors who recognized the unique nature of the endeavor, and were willing to give Sachs, Whishaw and their collaborators complete freedom. Says Sachs, "They set no boundaries upon us as to how we might make the film or what it would turn out to be. For all of us, it was an art project first and foremost and only a commodity upon completion."

However, there remained the question of just what an adaptation of *Peter Hujar's Day* would look like. How could a transcript of a conversation be transformed into a motion picture – emphasis on

“motion”? The answer wasn’t immediately obvious to Sachs, who spent some fairly miserable hours thinking about it. “It was night after night of waking up in the middle of the night trying to envision this film,” he recalls. “I thought to myself, what have I gotten into? The text was exactly the opposite of what interests me most in film, which is movement and action and cinema. I’d set up something that had inherently no movement, no action, and no cinema!”

He began to see a path forward as he looked at a number of films from ‘60s and ‘70s, including the documentaries *My Girlfriend’s Wedding* by Jim McBride, *Portrait of Jason* by Shirley Clark and *Poor Little Rich Girl* by Andy Warhol, along with narrative features such as Chantal Akerman’s *Je Tu Il Elle*. His sister, experimental filmmaker Lynne Sachs, gave him a list of 25 experimental films of people in a room with a camera and one other person. What those films shared, he explains, was “an intimate relationship between the camera and the subject. They led me to an understanding of how a movie that has boundaries of space could actually be expansive. And also could be extraordinarily intimate and engaging, without inherent plot.”

The highly unusual nature of the film, together with the opportunity to work with Sachs and Whishaw, was hugely appealing to Rebecca Hall, who signed on to play Linda. Her involvement came on the heels of a general meeting with Sachs in New York, where they both live. Hall notes that she had initiated the meeting. “I’d been a fan of Ira’s movies for some time. After I saw *Passages*, I did something which I don’t often do when I really admire a filmmaker. I called my agent and said, ‘What are the chances that I could do a general meeting with this director?’ Ira and I had breakfast and just talked about everything under the sun. I adored him and adored his sensibilities. A few weeks later, he contacted me and said, ‘I have this thing that I’m trying to do with Ben Whishaw that is more like an art project than a traditional film.’” I basically said yes before I even knew what it was or understood anything about it. Ben is one of my all-time favorite actors working today. I think he is touched with a kind of magic. When I understood what the movie would be and what would be required of me, which was essentially to sit and listen to Ben talk, I said, ‘Actually, that sounds really special.’”

Sachs had long admired Hall’s work– he cites in particular her performance as a Florida newswoman in *Christine* (2016) – and they quickly established a comfortable rapport. Says Sachs, “I think Rebecca is one of the most interesting actors working. I was obsessed with *Christine*; I thought it was a genius performance – so hard and so human. I left the breakfast meeting with Rebecca and thought, of course she should play Linda. That was based on the ways that we could talk to each other, as well as her acting chops. And then her intelligence, her beauty, her poise, her curiosity, her intimate knowledge of New York. So it was my good luck, really, that she responded to the material.”

The materials Sachs provided included not only the book and the script but also photos of Hujar and Rosenkrantz and a large sampling of Hujar’s photography. Hall also read Rosenkrantz’s 1968 book “Talk”, which transformed a summer’s worth of recorded conversations among the author and her friends into a novel in dialogue. The more she learned, the more Hall realized just how special *Peter Hujar’s Day* would be. “I remember thinking: this is such a sort of dodo of an idea for a movie. How

many people get to do this anymore? Purely make art for art's sake without any kind of attempt to make it commercial. Here it is just two people talking in a room. Perhaps not since *My Dinner with Andre* has anyone tried to do something like that – where nothing, and yet everything happens in the recounting of time. I thought it was so daring and bold, and I wanted to be part of it.”

Hall and Rosenkrantz spoke by phone a few times, and Hall was able to get a feel for the person Rosenkrantz was and is. “Linda and I had some wonderful conversations,” Hall affirms. “I told her, ‘I’m going to be playing you but it’s not an impression of you. It feels like I should get to know you a little bit before I do that.’ So we mostly just chatted – about her career, her life, all sorts of things. We talked about Peter a lot and her relationship with him and what she felt about it in hindsight now. There was a funny aspect to it because at one point I said, ‘Look, would you mind terribly if I recorded some of this on the voice note, so I have some of your voice to listen to?’ Occasionally I would check in with her if I wasn’t sure how to say a particular word in her voice, because I obviously am British-accented even though I’m half-American. I asked her once about the word ‘hibiscus’ and how she would say it. And she left me a voice note saying ‘hibiscus, hibiscus, hibiscus.’”

Working with producer Jordan Drake, Sachs began assembling a team of behind-the-camera collaborators in 2023, with an immediate focus on the film’s cinematography . He knew that finding an evocative visual language for a two-character, single-location film would be tricky, and the fact that he planned to shoot on 16mm film further complicated the brief. “I was looking anywhere in the world for a cinematographer who would be the right partner for this film,” Sachs recalls. “My friend, producer Mike Ryan, suggested that I look at a young cinematographer named Alex Ashe, who had just shot a film for him in Florida on 16mm. I saw the film, *The Ballad of Suzanne Césaire*, and called Alex that day to say, ‘Would you like to work together on this project?’ Alex’s understanding of light and beauty is rare. I have since learned that he’s a beautiful camera operator. That is actually significant in a film like this because the camera moves so seldomly that when it does, it has real force. Alex brought a simplicity, an elegance and a rigor to those movements. There’s a lot of cinematic pleasure in the work we did together that we didn’t resist.”

As is Sachs’s customary practice, he and Ashe watched numerous films together while figuring out their cinematographic approach. In terms of lighting, Ashe notes that they took inspiration from several of Jean-Luc Godard’s 1980s films, including *King Lear* and *Passion*, along with several works by Maurice Pialat. “These films by Pialat and Godard had very naturalistic but beautiful lighting,” he remarks. “Many of the films we watched don’t look perfect in the classical Hollywood movie sense. They’re not glossy. Ira and I were both interested in the idea that sometimes the most beautiful image is a little underexposed, in a way that is almost too underexposed from a commercial standpoint. But those images are some of our favorites to look at.”

The filmmakers got a critical boost when they were offered a stunning location: a split-level apartment at Westbeth Artists Housing in the far West Village. Established in 1970 to provide affordable housing and work spaces for artists and arts organizations, Westbeth occupies a complex of repurposed

mid-19th Century industrial buildings. The organization donated the space because the ethos of Sachs's film project aligned with its core mission to support artists. "It was wonderful to have access to this apartment but also this building, which comes with its own history," says Sachs. "It's a building full of artists' lives, artists' living, and artists' work."

Moreover, Westbeth allowed Sachs and his creative collaborators to begin working in the apartment several months before shooting began. Sachs and Ashe spent days and nights together there, getting to know the different spaces within the apartment and observing how the look of those spaces changed relative to the position of the sun. Ashe also went on his own some days, arriving very early in the morning and staying through the evening. In the process they came to the understanding of how to harness space, movement and light in the absence of conventional narrative dynamics. As Ashe explains, "Typically in a film you might have anywhere from like 20 to 100 locations during different times of day, which keeps it moving. Even just cutting to a new location can jumpstart the audience's attention. And so our plan was to use every single inch of the apartment and a lot of different kinds of light to do that same thing."

Sachs and Ashe also spent some days working with stand-ins for Peter and Linda, photographing them in different sections of the apartment, at different times of day, doing different things. Taking those photos answered simple but important questions, and gave Sachs the building blocks for a kind of storyboard. Says Sachs, "We needed to know, what does a figure look like at daytime? What does a figure look like at night? What does a figure look like inside? What does a figure look like outside? What is the difference between someone lying on a bed and sitting on a couch, standing at a window or eating apple pie at a table? Each of these things are drama. Because of the time we spent at Westbeth, I had a series of photographs that I could sequence to see how they would become the movie."

The months of preparation shifted Sachs's approach to transforming the book into the film. "I began the film much more realistically and it was in the process of pre-production that it became, in terms of time and location and space, more abstract," Sachs summarizes. "Unexpectedly, during this time, I realized that I was making a film as much about photography, and portraiture, as anything else. I had in fact run into the very thing in Peter's work that moves me the most: the manner in which he treats bodies, light and space, and in such, creates something intuitively psychological." Over the course of their exchange, the camera might find one or both of them sitting at Linda's dining room table, or lying together on her bed, or standing on the roof as the sun begins to set. Sachs was interested in how these purely physical differences transformed the mood of the scene. And at times, the film might step outside of Peter and Linda's moment altogether, and the camera instead would be focused on Ben Whishaw and Rebecca Hall. The film asks in a variety of unexpected ways, "How do we look, and what do we see?"

That question is posed from the film's opening shot of Whishaw getting into an elevator, with a film clapper signaling the start of the scene. Says Sachs, "It's a moment to say that this is a theatrical event. It's a simulacrum of period, and part of that is entertainment and enjoyment and theatricality. Both Ben

and Rebecca are speaking in accents different than their own. It's a translation, and it's a transformation. I think that gave me the freedom to change their costumes four times in the course of a day, and go inside and outside. And trust that the viewer could move through the ellipses without pause."

While the structure became more abstract, care was taken to ensure the setting – the apartment, the clothes worn by the actors – felt true to the moment without tipping into 70s kitsch. Production designer Stephen Phelps was careful to strike a balance between period-appropriate decor and the types of furniture and objects that people naturally acquire over time. Explains Phelps, "A lot of times, period films can be very stylized and specific, and everything is very much like that year. But Linda being a real person living in New York, I didn't want the apartment to be overly stylized to look like 'this is period.' Because the way people actually live, their furnishings are a little more eclectic. And that made sense going through the photos of Linda's actual apartment and the places that she and Peter were hanging out together."

He dressed the space in a mixture of furniture styles and accent pieces – a Noguchi glass-topped coffee table, a traditional upright piano, a mid-century style cream-colored couch (lent by Ashe) – with homey touches like a crocheted pillow, a gold lace table covering and potted plants. And he built a shelving unit that holds a turntable, receiver and speakers, as well as albums, a variety of books and decorative pieces. A portable TV occupies space on a kitchen counter next to the sink.

His choices enhanced the visual appeal of the film while also telling a story about the apartment and the woman living there. Says Sachs, "Stephen Phelps turned an empty shell of an apartment into a home with life and history and character and color. It's period without shouting. That is also true of the work by the costume designers Eric Damon and Khadija Zeggai. All of them found things that were of the period, but didn't turn it into a period film."

Production on *Peter Hujar's Day* began on April 14, 2024 in New York City.

As is his habit, Sachs didn't rehearse with the actors prior to the start of filming. Because Whishaw carried the majority of the film's dialogue – 55 of the screenplay's 58 pages – maintaining this approach – no rehearsal – was particularly risky for a film in which one actor has so much text to deliver. Ultimately, however, maintaining this unrehearsed quality was vital to the texture of the finished film and Whishaw's performance in it.

Whishaw took a practical approach to mastering all that text prior to filming, assigning himself a certain number of words to learn per week. "I've never had to do anything quite like it," he remarks. "I showed the script to a friend of mine who's a musician. She read a few lines and said, 'This is like trying to learn somebody else's improvisation.' That's sort of what it felt like. But once we decided to learn the text exactly as it was transcribed, it was great. Peter remembers things in a way that I know I wouldn't remember them if I were to narrate my day yesterday. The things that happen over the course

of this day are quite small things, but they nonetheless speak somehow about who he was. There's an obsessiveness, I think. As obvious as it might sound, he had a photographic eye and he's very precise about the details. The more I sat with the text and learned it the more all the tiny details – what he ate, which part of the city he was travelling to, what people were wearing – became incredibly fascinating.”

For as much as Peter talks during the film, the words never overpower the character. Says Sachs, “Ben was able to make everything have value. There's not a wasted article. There's not a wasted adjective. It was extraordinary to witness someone take this amount of text – and very detailed text, and also this simple text emotionally – and convey so much in every phrase and in every pause. And that is the beauty of Ben and his acting.”

The director found that Hall did something analogous in her performance as Linda. The dynamic between Hall and Whishaw makes palpable the intimacy of a friendship that began when Linda and Peter were in their early 20s. Says Sachs, “Starting on set, I saw the love story that was being told about friendship. That is something that Rebecca brought to the film instinctually, I have to say without being directed to do it. The way that she looks, the way that she adores, the precision with which she listens, means that she becomes equal to Ben in terms of space and time and volume, but not through dialogue. The finished film is, rather unexpectedly, a true two-hander.”

Hall was keenly focused on telling that story about Peter and Linda's relationship. “That was the most important thing,” she remarks. “It wasn't going to be an active performance. It was about receiving something and then reflecting back the love and the warmth that Linda had for this person. You might not see that in reading the book because Linda doesn't really say much, but the act of asking him to be part of this project is infused with love. And when I spoke to Linda, it was just so apparent how much she adored him. And looking at photographs of the two of them from the time, you could see the intimacy there.”

She adds that it wasn't a difficult emotion to register in performing opposite Whishaw. Their paths had crossed at the occasional theatre opening in London, but they'd never worked together and had an opportunity to socialize prior to making *Peter Hujar's Day*. “I pretty much fell in love with Ben on sight. The moment that we met each other, it was as if we had been friends for a lifetime. We just had an ease with each other which was very lucky and right for the movie.”

Whishaw agrees. “Rebecca and I really enjoyed each other's company. We would often just natter away between takes whilst everything around us was being prepared. It was somewhat similar to what the two characters are doing. I think we just really loved each other and loved doing this work with each other. And that's what you hope for.”

Hall explains that Sachs was very intentional in how he shot each scene, but the actors themselves had room to discover the different moods that came into play depending on what area they were shooting in, and what time of day. “How Ira was marking the passage of time was very precisely envisioned, and

that's exciting. But the acting wasn't prescribed in the same way. Within his vision of the film, it also felt like we were all finding those scenes together. It felt like we were making something that was experimental – not for the sake of being experimental, but experimental because it was sort of rooted in a particular time with people and characters that were artistic souls and had that spirit. So, there was a sort of fluidity to the way we could do things.”

“It was wonderful to work with such freedom,” adds Whishaw. “I remember when I got to New York, Ira messaged me and Rebecca. And he said, ‘we're just going to gather images and make images together. And it's going to be light and space and bodies and this text, and that's it. And we'll see what we get.’ And that felt lovely.”

Editing was a crucial part of achieving the cinematic effect Sachs was after; not only creating transitions between one section of conversation and the next, but also determining when and how to step away from the world of Linda and Peter into the purely photographic moments with Rebecca and Ben. And so Sachs reunited with his editor Affonso Gonçalves, continuing a collaboration that began with *The Delta* (1996), the first of seven feature films the two have made together.

Gonçalves did a first pass on his own, without Sachs's involvement. It wasn't the typical way Sachs works, but in this case it was to the film's advantage. “It allowed Fonzie [as Sachs and others call Gonçalves] to work on an associative level that didn't require explanation or motivation or an explanation of reason; it could just exist in the place of instinct,” Sachs explains. “He wasn't afraid to use takes that I shot conventionally. For example, there are some moments in the film which are shot/counter-shot, and that's not something that I imagined for myself, but they work. On the other hand, he really understands that sounds and image create emotion. So these images of Rebecca and Ben that are interstitial and dispersed in the film – we referred to them as the 'photo shoots' – I wasn't certain how they would be used, but Fonzie understood their place, and their potential poetry, as both disruptors and new layers.”

Gonçalves also suggested the ongoing use of Mozart's “Requiem in D Minor” in the film, a cue that given the scale of the story is almost shocking in its over-the-top grandeur. Sachs liked the use of the Requiem because it reminded him of ideas embedded in works like James Joyce's “Ulysses” and Virginia Woolf's “Mrs. Dalloway”, in which everyday events become unexpectedly monumental. “Film can capture moments in life that seem to contain nothing and everything,” he reflects. “In some ways, Peter Hujar is filled with the kinds of scenes that in my fictional films, I only hope that I get to achieve. Because it's just people together with the camera, watching and listening and observing how they are, how they listen to each other, how they speak to each other, how their bodies entwine, what happens on their faces in a moment and in a second that disappears. So this movie allows for that kind of observational patience, which is, for me, one of the great pleasures of cinema.”

Hall felt something similar in watching the film for the first time, struck by the mundane details that are threaded into Peter's account. “It calls to mind those rare moments that everybody gets, like when

you smell the top of your child's head," she comments. "And you're like, this is just an everyday occurrence but it's making me so starkly aware of how much I want to remember every detail of my life and how precious it all is. That feeling is in the film. It becomes less about the famous names or the 70s or New York and more about the preciousness of it all, and how art is always trying to capture those moments. Which this film does."

And it does so while offering a genuinely pleasurable viewing experience. "Ira is a great lover of beauty and I so admire that," says Whishaw. "Watching the film for the first time, I felt like it doesn't matter if you don't follow bits of the text or know who every person is. But that's not really the point. There is something else going on and I think it is to do with beauty and feeling and something fleeting and ephemeral that's being captured."

Fifty years after she spent that afternoon with Hujar, Rosenkrantz is happy to see their time reflected in *Peter Hujar's Day*. "Ben and Rebecca are so perfect. The glamorous Rebecca Hall playing Linda Rosenkrantz from the Bronx – it was quite a stretch! But she's great. She captured how I felt about Peter so beautifully. At first I couldn't conceive how this could be a film, just two people talking. But what Ira did in constructing the film works so well – it's ingenious."

"Anything that adds to Peter's reputation as an important photographer gives me pleasure," she adds. "Peter died penniless and only known among a certain group of people. I think that hearing his voice, so to speak, in the book and in the film really tells people who he was, and I think his very individualistic personality comes through in both the book and the film. I hope people get to know him better."

ABOUT IRA SACHS

Ira Sachs needs no introduction as one of the most acclaimed American independent filmmakers working today. With a career dating back over thirty five years, some of his notable feature films include: *Frankie* (2019), starring Isabelle Huppert; *Little Men* (Grand Prix, 2016 Deauville American Film Festival); *Love is Strange* (2014), starring John Lithgow and Alfred Molina; *Keep the Lights On* (Teddy Award, 2012 Berlinale); *Forty Shades of Blue* (Dramatic Grand Jury Prize, 2005 Sundance); and Ira's first feature, *The Delta*, which was filmed in his hometown of Memphis. His films are notable for their exploration of queer themes as well as the complexities of modern romance and family dynamics. He is a rare filmmaker who remains entirely committed to working in a truly independent space.

Ira's 2023 film *Passages*, starring Franz Rogowski, Adèle Exarchopoulos, and Ben Whishaw, was the most acclaimed of his career to date. The film premiered at Sundance in January 2023, was distributed by MUBI and nominated for multiple Gotham and Independent Spirit Awards, with Franz receiving Best Actor from the New York Film Critics. For his follow-up to *Passages*, Ira re-teamed with Ben Whishaw to play the artist Peter Hujar in *Peter Hujar's Day*, a chamber piece that premiered to rave

reviews at Sundance and will be released by Janus Films later this year. Rebecca Hall co-stars as Peter's confidante Linda Rosencrantz.

ABOUT BEN WHISHAW

Ben Whishaw is a multi-award-winning British actor. His notable film credits include the role of Q in *Skyfall*, *Spectre* and *No Time to Die*; the voice of Paddington in *Paddington*, *Paddington 2* and *Paddington in Peru*; *Perfume: The Story of a Murder*; Jane Campion's *Bright Star*; *Cloud Atlas*; Tom Hooper's multi award-winning *The Danish Girl*; *The Lobster*; in the role of Mr. Banks in Disney's *Mary Poppins Returns*; Armando Iannucci's *The Personal History of David Copperfield*; Alice Englert's *Bad Behaviour* with Jennifer Connelly; and *Passages* with Franz Rogowski and Adèle Exarchopoulos. He was also seen in *Women Talking* alongside Claire Foy and Frances McDormand, for which he was nominated for a Satellite Award, a Hollywood Critics Association Film Award and longlisted for a BAFTA for Best Supporting Actor.

Ben starred in *Limonov: The Ballad* as Eduard Limonov and in the titular role in Ira Sachs' new film *Peter Hujar's Day* as the photographer Peter Hujar, which will premiere in US cinemas this November and UK cinemas in January.

He starred in the short film, *Good Boy*, the directorial debut of Tom Stuart with the support of Gia Coppola, which was shortlisted for Best Live Action Short Film at the 96th Academy Awards. Ben's TV credits include his role as Norman Scott in the mini-series *A Very English Scandal* opposite Hugh Grant. This performance saw Ben recognised with a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actor - Series, Miniseries, or Motion Picture Made for Television, along with a Primetime Emmy Award and a BAFTA. *Criminal Justice*, *The Hour*, *Fargo* and a BAFTA award-winning performance in *The Hollow Crown*. He starred in the lead role of *This Is Going to Hurt*, the series adaptation of Adam Kay's bestselling novel, for which he won Leading Actor in the 2023 BAFTA TV Awards along with Outstanding Performance in a New Series at the 2022 Gotham Awards and winning in the Best Actor category at the Broadcasting Press Guild Awards. Ben was nominated for numerous awards as well including Best Actor by the TV Choice Awards; a Critics Choice Awards for Best Actor In A Limited Series or Movie Made For Television and a Gold Derby Award for Limited / Movie Actor.

His most recent television project is *Black Doves* (Netflix), for which he won Outstanding Supporting Performance in a Drama Series at the 2025 Gotham Awards. This performance also saw Ben nominated for an RTS Award for Leading Actor – Male, and a Critics Choice Super Award for Best Actor in an Action Series, Limited Series, or Made-for-TV Movie.

Ben's theatre credits have included *Mojo* (Harold Pinter Theatre), *Peter and Alice* (Noel Coward), *Some Trace of Her and The Seagull* (National Theatre), *Leaves of Glass* (Soho Theatre), *Hamlet* (Old Vic), *Julius Caesar* (The Bridge Theatre), *The Crucible* (on Broadway) and *Bluets* (Royal Court Theatre) with Emma D'Arcy and Kayla Meikle. He was most recently seen starring opposite Lucian Msamati in *Waiting for Godot* (Theatre Royal Haymarket).

ABOUT REBECCA HALL

Rebecca Hall is an acclaimed British American actress and filmmaker, known for her versatile roles across multiplex, art house cinema, and esteemed theatres. Hall's career includes collaborations with top industry talents, continuously challenging herself with diverse roles.

Upcoming, Hall can be seen in Ira Sachs' *Peter Hujar's Day*, co-starring opposite Ben Whishaw. The film is based on the 2021 book of the same name by Linda Rosenkrantz, which documents Hujar's life and activities over 24 hours in 1974. The film had its world premiere at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival to critical acclaim and will be released on November 7th, 2025. Hall can also be seen in James L. Brook's *Ella McCay*, starring alongside an ensemble cast Emma Mackey, Jamie Lee Curtis, Woody Harrelson, Ayo Edebiri, Albert Brooks, Kumail Nanjiani, Jack Lowden and Spike Fear. The film follows an idealistic young politician who juggles familial issues and a challenging work life while preparing to take over the job of her mentor, the state's longtime incumbent governor. 20th Century Fox is set to release the film December 12th, 2025.

Recently, she completed production Ryan Murphy's hotly-anticipated FX series, *The Beauty*– a dystopian take on modern day beauty standards. The series also stars Evan Peters, Ashton Kutcher, Anthony Ramos and Jeremy Pope.

Hall has multiple projects in the works and has been cast in the sci-fi film *The End Of It*, directed by Maria Martinez Bayona who also penned the script and stars opposite Gael García Bernal, Noomi Rapace and Beanie Feldstein; the A24 action thriller *Onslaught*, which will reunite her with *Godzilla x Kong* director Adam Wingard as well as her co-star Dan Stevens; the fourth season of Ryan Murphy's Netflix anthology series *Monster*, which will focus on Lizzie Borden with Hall portraying Lizzie's stepmother, 'Abby Borden,' opposite Ella Beatty and Vicky Krieps; as well Debs Paterson's zombie-action horror *Zero Protocol* for Anton and Andy Serkis and Jonathan Cavendish's UK company Imaginarium Productions which will start shooting later this year.

Her directorial debut, *Passing*, premiered at the 2021 Sundance Festival, earning critical acclaim. The film, adapted from Nella Larsen's 1929 novel, explores the lives of two Black women who "pass" as white in 1920s New York. Hall and the film received numerous accolades, including BAFTA and Gotham Independent Film Award nominations. Hall's notable film credits include *Christine*, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, *The Town*, *The Gift*, *Godzilla vs. Kong*, *The Night House*, and *Professor Marston & The Wonder Women*.

Her television work includes the Apple TV+ show *The Studio*, the BBC miniseries *The Listeners*, *Tales from the Loop* and the acclaimed miniseries *Parade's End*, for which she received multiple nominations, as well as Julian Jarrold's *Red Riding: 1974*, for which she won a BAFTA TV Award for Best Supporting Actress; Philip Martin's *Einstein and Eddington*; Stephen Poliakoff's *Joe's Palace*; Brendan

Maher's *Wide Sargasso Sea*; Stuart Orme's *Don't Leave Me This Way*; and Peter Hall's *The Camomile Lawn*.

On stage, Hall has earned Ian Charleson Awards for performances in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *As You Like It*, and *The Winter's Tale*. She made her Broadway debut in *Machinal* and starred in The Atlantic Theatre Company's *Animal*.

CAST

Peter Hujar
Linda Rosenkrantz

Ben Whishaw
Rebecca Hall

CREDITS

Written and Directed by

Presented By

In Association With

A Production Of

Based on the Book

Director of Photography

Production Designer

Costume Designer

Editor

Additional Editor

Sound Designer

Produced By

Co-Produced By

Producer

Executive Produced By

Executive Producers

Executive Producers

Executive Producers

Executive Producers

Executive Producers

Executive Producer

Co-Producer

Associate Producer

Location Provided By

Ira Sachs

Complementary Colors, Blink Productions & Primo Content

We Are Films & Materia Cinema

Jordan Drake & One Two Films

Peter Hujar's Day by Linda Rosenkrantz

Alex Ashe

Stephen Phelps

Eric Daman & Khadija Zeggai

Affonso Gonçalves

Thomas Meyer

Eli Cohn

Jordan Drake

Fred Burle

Jonah Disend

Lucas Joaquin

Paul Weston, Corin Taylor & Michelle Jaffe

Martin Kalina, Nicolas Pérez Veiga & Alfredo Pérez Veiga

Franklin Laviola & Nicholas Laviola

Ellis Fox, Sol Bondy, Nadine Rothschild & Inés Massa

Ben Whishaw & Rebecca Hall

Adam Kersh

Aaron Craig

Alex Mitow

Westbeth Artists Housing