**We Believe In Dinosaurs**

A 137 Films Production

Directed by Monica Long Ross and Clayton Brown

Produced by Amy Ellison, Monica Long Ross, and Clayton Brown

97 minutes, 2019

**Logline:** A documentary film about creationism, Noah's Ark, and America's troubled relationship with science.

**Summary (200 words)**

Amid protests and controversy, young-earth creationists build an enormous, $120 million “life-size” Noah’s Ark in rural Kentucky with the specific aim of proving that the Bible is scientifically and historically accurate.

*We Believe In Dinosaurs* follows the building of the Ark from blueprints to Opening Day through the eyes of three Kentuckians: Doug, a gifted artist who creates lifelike animals for the Ark; Dan, a geologist and impassioned pro-science activist who blows the whistle on the Ark’s discriminatory hiring practices; and David, a young former creationist who mowed lawns to raise money for creationist causes in his youth.

Shot over the course of four years, *We Believe In Dinosaurs* follows the Ark from blueprints to opening to aftermath and tells the story of the troubling relationship between science and religion in the United States.

**Summary (400 words)**

Built to demonstrate that the Bible is scientifically and historically accurate, an enormous “life-size” wooden ark takes shape in rural Williamstown, Kentucky. Lead designer Doug Henderson and his team of talented sculptors labor for months crafting lifelike animals for the project. Among their creations are dinosaurs, which they believe sailed with Noah and his family. “They probably took juveniles,” he says, explaining how the enormous animals would have fit on the boat. To Doug it doesn’t matter that mainstream science puts the age of the Earth at 4.5 billion years. Ph.D. “creation scientists” at the Ark’s parent organization Answers In Genesis maintain that the Bible is the inerrant word of God and that evolution is the work of atheists. Doug believes them.
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The creationist vision disturbs Dan Phelps, a Kentucky state geologist. For years, Dan has fought against Answers In Genesis’s “non-science” through op-eds and letters to the editor. When he discovers that the Ark will receive tax incentives despite discriminatory hiring practices, he ramps up his fight. A local Baptist minister also protests the incentives, intensifying the struggle over the American principle of the separation of church and state.
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David MacMillan, a 26-year-old former creationist, has a different perspective on the Ark. A charter member of Answers In Genesis’s Creation Museum in his youth, he now writes articles and blog posts that examine the creationist mindset. He hopes his writings help creationists hear a different message: that evolution is not the work of the devil, and creationism is not the only way to understand the world.

In tiny Williamstown, home to the Ark, residents hold their breath hoping the attraction will revive their economically depressed town. Showing off Elmer’s, her newly opened store and café, Megan McKamey dreams that maybe the Ark could help Williamstown become the next Branson, Missouri or Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

As the giant wooden structure rises atop Kentucky’s rolling hills, Dan, David and Doug join a growing number of protestors, creationist supporters and Williamstown hopefuls in preparation for the Ark’s dramatic Opening Day.

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**Artists’ Statement**

**Directors, Monica Long Ross and Clayton Brown**

*We Believe in Dinosaurs* takes place in rural Kentucky, a region whose demographics have come into sharp focus since the 2016 election as representative of conservative, fundamentalist, disaffected America—a place where distrust of science and scientists has hardened into outright science denial. When we heard that a creationist religious group based in Kentucky was expanding their “creation science” outreach with a Noah’s Ark theme park that would attempt to debunk the theory of evolution we knew this was a story worth telling.

In order to present the story in an authentic way it was important to us that all of the characters and voices in the film, both supporters and critics of the Ark, come from that region. Our three local characters (a creationist, a former creationist, and a scientist) provide different perspectives as they watch the “largest wood timber structure in the world” rise up in the Kentucky countryside and become the biggest news story in their state.

To capture the building of the giant Noah’s Ark we use verité footage, interviews, archival news stories, animation, and examples of the sophisticated commercials the Ark promoters use to speak to (and to gain) followers. Visual motifs compare and contrast two very different worldviews; the imagined animals and constructed history of the creationists clash with the natural beauty of the Bluegrass state’s horses, ravines, and soaring birds. Ark designer Doug Henderson looks out at the same countryside as geologist Dan Phelps and former creationist David McMillan, but they see impossibly different truths in the landscape.

Our approach is to reveal and explore what the creationists believe in order to understand why they believe it, never mocking or ridiculing. The creationists speak for themselves without a voiceover narrator to interpret or explain, allowing the viewer to understand first-hand the challenge that mainstream scientists and teachers face as they try to educate America on the bedrock of the biological sciences: evolution. The fact that, according to Gallup, over a third of Americans say they believe that humans were created in their present form less than 10,000 years ago underscores the stakes for the United States.

For three years we were given incredible access to the construction of the Ark and the work of the design team, a group of talented artists who are passionate young-Earth creationists. Local scientists and mainstream ministers were eager to take part in the film as issues of science education and the separation of church and state mixed with Kentucky politics. The film echoes the present political climate as Americans stare across a divide at one another, science growing ever more politicized and truth dependent on one’s worldview. Given this highly polarized state of affairs, we understand that *We Believe in Dinosaurs* will not convert creationists to the truth of evolution. However, we do believe the film will spark a vibrant dialogue about the thorny intersection of belief, religion, and science, penetrating the cultural “bubbles” in which so many Americans seem to exist.

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**Director Bios**

**Clayton Brown**

Clayton is a Senior Lecturer in the department of Radio / TV / Film at Northwestern University.  He is a documentary and narrative filmmaker interested in exploring the hidden stories and compelling characters that emerge when people pursue their passions.  Of particular interest are the ways in which science and storytelling intersect, both in fiction and non-fiction.  His fiction work includes *Galileo's Grave*, winner of the Chicago IFP Production Fund and Best Short Film at the Albany and East Lansing film festivals, and *The Darkening Sun,* about the first woman to photograph a solar eclipse in 1869. He is a co-founder of 137 Films, a Chicago-based award-winning documentary production company committed to telling stories about America’s complicated relationship with science. He co-directed [*The Atom Smashers*](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/atomsmashers/) (Independent Lens), a documentary about the search for the Higgs boson broadcast on Independent Lens; *The Believers*(winner, Best Documentary at Chicago International and Maryland Film Festivals), which tells the story of two scientists who thought they had discovered Cold Fusion; and 137 Films’ newest documentary, *We Believe in Dinosaurs,* about a Kentucky group’s  “life-size” replica of Noah’s Ark built to promote creationism.

**Monica Long Ross**

Monica is a filmmaker and playwright.  She is a co-founder of 137 Films, a Chicago-based documentary production company. In addition *We Believe In Dinosaurs*, Ross co-directed and co-produced the award-winning documentaries *The Atom Smashers* (PBS Independent Lens), and *The Believers* (Chicago International Film Festival’s Gold Hugo for Best Documentary, Maryland International Film Festival Best Documentary).  Monica's documentaries have been screened at festivals around the world, as have her short films including *Dinner*, a finalist at the Rose d'Or Montreux in Switzerland. She was a founding member and playwright for Childsplay Inc in Tempe AZ (*Mythic Proportions*, *Clarissa's Closet, Montana Molly and the Peppermint Kid, Phoebe Joins the Circus*) and founding member/playwright/ Associate Director of the Arizona Women’s Theatre Company (*Complications, Crazy Sexy*).  Her plays have been produced nationally and are published by Dramatic Publishing