




How to Build a Library

A film by Maia Lekow & Christopher King

A photograph of two Black women in a library or archive. The woman in the foreground, wearing a dark blue jacket, is smiling and looking towards the right. The woman behind her, wearing a purple scarf and a denim jacket, is also smiling and looking in the same direction. They are both holding and looking at a piece of aged, yellowed paper. In the background, there are tall stacks of books and a wooden cabinet. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image in a white serif font.

Two tenacious Nairobi women
decide to transform what used to
be a whites-only library until 1958
into a vibrant cultural hub. Along
the way, they must navigate local
politics, raise millions for the
rebuild, and confront the lingering
ghosts of Kenya's colonial past.

"The unwavering determination of these two women makes for one hell of a protest story."

SCREEN DAILY

"Shiro and Wachuka have immense charisma and shine like superstars in a film that above all takes decolonization seriously in both its complexity and its necessity."

CPH:DOX



*“Beautifully-crafted ... one of
the year’s must-see films.”*

BLACKGIRLNERDS



“... a nuanced exploration of legacy
and reclamation that extends
beyond the library’s walls.”

“A moving portrait of resistance
and the radical potential of
knowledge.”

Sundance



UPCOMING UK PREMIERE



Sat 21 June 12:45 - 14:45

The Light - Screen 9

Q&A with directors Christopher King and
Maia Lekow. Moderated by Tara Brown.

Sun 22 June 18:15 - 20:15

Showroom - Bertha DocHouse Screen 3

Q&A with directors Christopher King and
Maia Lekow. Moderated by Shannon Dias.

Mon 23 June 10:00 - 12:00

Showroom - Screen 2

Q&A with directors Christopher King
and Maia Lekow.

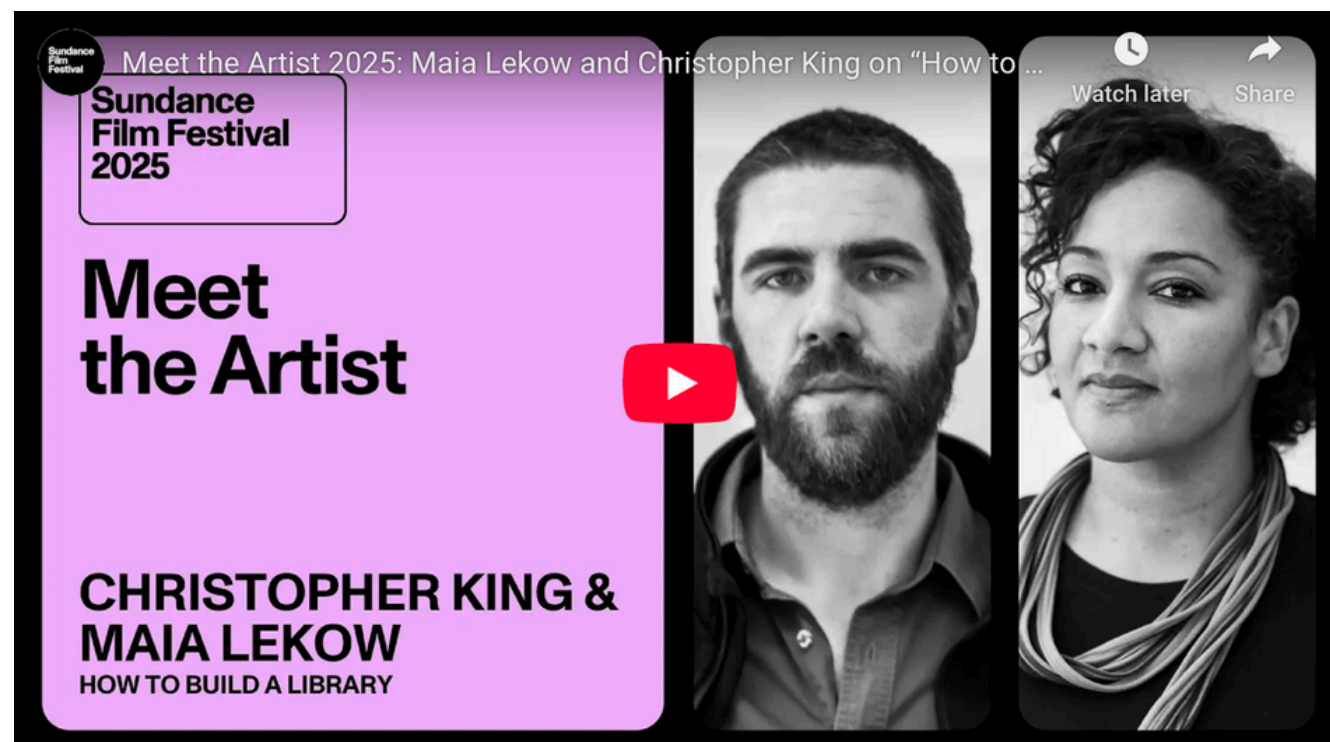
Director's Statement

Maia Lekow & Christopher King

As Nairobians, one born and the other bred, we share the frustrations of the creative community here, because we are them. This is why making *How to Build a Library* is so important to us. Working as a husband and wife team in Nairobi for the past 16 years, we are constantly struck by the infectious energy and talent of our peers, but also the city's contradictions and struggles. For us, all of that comes together in this film.

Shiro and Wachuka have made it their mission to not only rebuild this library physically, but psychologically as well. They have given us incredible access to film their lives and work, which we feel is an important and untold story of the urban Nairobi we know. As filmmakers, it's been fascinating to blend the past and the present by intertwining the historical archives found within the library, together with an intimate, verité approach to the film's characters. We have also leant into formal interviews to explore the surrounding bureaucracy that encases the library.

We also love that the timely theme of decolonisation speaks gracefully to the global movements of 'statues must fall' and 'black lives matter', while Shiro & Wachuka's story provides a powerful glimpse of a future that is young, visionary and female-led.



Co-Producer's Statement

Roger Ross Williams & Geoff Martz



How to Build a Library tackles the complicated legacy of colonialism in a fresh, intelligent and completely entertaining way. Maia and Chris expertly introduce us to two intrepid young Kenyan heroines, Wachuka and Shiro, who are fighting against the forces of evil and benign neglect to reinvent this dusty old relic of British oppression (for its first 30 years, Black people were not even allowed to enter it).

Like Miss Havisham's house in Great Expectations, it has been preserved just as it was on the day a jilted British Empire pulled up stakes-- seemingly encased in amber in the heart of a vibrant new Nairobi.

Shiro and Wachuka battle corrupt officials, an Iago-like head librarian... and the actual King of England-- who arrives in Nairobi in the third act-- in their effort to turn it into a place of actual relevance. The film includes moments of laugh-out-loud delight, and moments of heart-catching pain. We are very proud to be associated with it.

FEATURE DOCUMENTARY | 2025 | LENGTH: 101 MINUTES
PRODUCTION COMPANY: CIRCLE & SQUARE PRODUCTIONS & ONE STORY UP
LOCATION: NAIROBI, KENYA | LANGUAGE: ENGLISH, SWAHILI | FORMAT: 2K COLOR - 25P - 16:9
SALES: AUTLOOK FILMSALES

Directors: Maia Lekow & Christopher King

Producers: Maia Lekow & Christopher King

Writers: Christopher King, Maia Lekow & Ricardo Acosta

Editors: Christopher King, Ricardo Acosta C.C.E., Maia Lekow, Michael Onyiego.

Supervising Editor: Maya Daisy Hawke

Cinematography: Christopher King, Wambui Muigai, Emma Nzioka, Ronald Ronics

Composers: Katya Mihailova, Maia Lekow, Daniel Hoffknecht

Executive Producers: Roger Ross Williams, Geoff Martz, Judy Kibinge, D.D. Wigley,
Maxyne Franklin, Nikki Heyman, Geralyn Dreyfous, Regina K. Scully, Tegan Acton,
Emma Pompetti, Melony and Adam Lewis, Jamie Wolf, Nathalie Seaver

Co-executive Producer: Meryl Metni





CIRCLE AND SQUARE
PRODUCTIONS



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