

cinéwomen

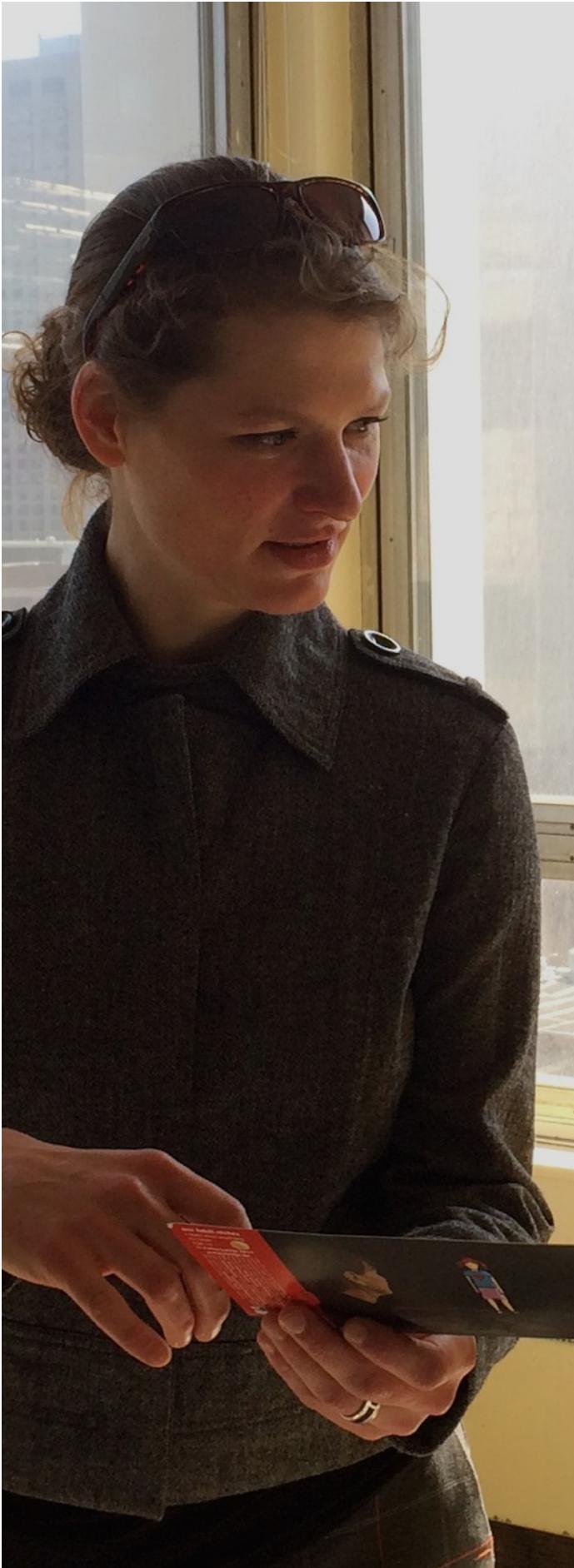
women's cinema & performing arts



MICHELLE BREZINSKI
SHANNON KHOLI
JADE BRYAN
PETRA LOTTJE
NATHALIA SYAM
LUD MONACO
LUCY SHEEN
ZHI-MIN HU
MEGAN ROETHLIN
CHUNG WEI HUANG

wac*

CINEMA
DANCE
THEATRE
CINEMA



Building on the success of the fifth edition, **CinéWomen** continues showcasing video practice from around the world. As the ultimate mirror-medium of our times, video is all around us. Despite the proliferation of mainstream cinema, independent films continue to be made -radical, poetic, and dreamlike films, whose directors work on the edge of the mainstream film industry, never restricting themselves to any single field, yet inviting the eye and the mind to travel further. Cinema is no longer the monolithic system based on large capital investment: in the last decade the technological advances have dramatically changed the economic conditions of cinema production. Revolutions arise from obstinacy.

It is not by chance that today one of the protagonists of the digital revolution in cinema is a talented and courageous woman director, Elle Schneider, co-founder along with Joe Rubinstein of the Digital Bolex Project, who after developing a cult-camera harking back to 16mm film aesthetic -a significant leap towards the democratization of technology- is now promoting an application process for a grant for producers employing women in their camera troupes. Only eight percent of 2014's top-grossing films were directed by women: it's time to reverse this trend.

However, cinema is not only technology, but ideas, experimentation, and above all dialogue, networking, interaction. Creating and supporting a fertile ground for innovation and dialogue does not necessarily require compromise. Honoring the influence of women in video art and cinema, our womenartconnect.com editorial board is proud to present a selection of powerful and surreal visions from nine uncompromising outsiders.

In these pages you will encounter details on a new wave of filmmakers and videoartists marching away from the Hollywood stereotype, with films like *My Color* by Zhi-Min Hu; the visionary world of Michelle Brezinsky and Shannon Kholi; an astonishing documentary by Jade Bryan; the childish imagery of Chung Wei Huang, reminiscent of Victor Erice's films and much more.

editorial

womenartconnect.com

CinéWomen Board
Cine Women



**MICHELLE BREZINSKI &
SHANNON KHOLI**

Independent cinema / Madness

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Still from *Madness*,
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Petra Lottje, I don't
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Production still from
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Hopscotch (USA, 2015)



Women
Video. Independent
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independent cinema

Hopscotch is an ancient game which appears in different cultures. For me, it is fascinating to imagine the origin of the game and how it spread. In Taiwan, the shape of hopscotch is associated with the image of a house. This is the beginning of Hopscotch. I conceived the idea of a Taiwanese girl who meets an American boy, and hopscotch connects them until the moment when they need to decide if they are going to build a real home together. The film tries to explore the fusion of memory, imagination and reality. The structure is fragmented but eventually all the elements come to a whole. The story is set as a flashback. I believe that is what we see when we look back to certain critical moments in our life. The memory is scoured and altered by the present. Ultimately, that is what we really own. Hopscotch shares not only a love story, but also the difficulties that we might encounter no matter who we are, or where we are from. But the game continues, and life moves on.

Hopscotch is a psychologically penetrating film that delicately weaves past and present, exploring the blurry boundaries between memory and imagination. Chung Wei Huang dissects identity with the sure hand of a surgeon, playing with the notion that images tend to exist in continuum,

residing somewhere in memory. We are honored to present Chung Wei Huang for this year's CinéWomen Edition. Chung Wei, we want to take a closer look at the genesis of your film: how did you come up with the idea for Hopscotch?

As I was developing the idea, I was fascinated by how ancient the game actually is and how it appears across a wide range of different cultures. It was surprising to me that it is a childhood game shared between Taiwan and the U.S. In some places in Taiwan, the layout of the hopscotch squares is associated with the image of a house. This visual connection between game and homelife was the origin for my idea for the film. Hence, hopscotch became a metaphor for what we all must face in life: the many miscellaneous conflicts and difficulties inherent in any romantic relationship. I started to see the numbers of the hopscotch game as different stages in a relationship and sometimes you just cannot reach a happy ending. The first image that I saw in my mind was a lonely, adult man playing hopscotch by himself, reflecting back on his childhood. This scenario later became the first scene in the film and the catalyst for the story. Often, I see images like this that are the inspiration that triggers the genesis of my films, where I see a specific image in my mind before I can see the character or the plot. Hopscotch is one of



those cases.

Hopscotch is marked by an elegantly structured storytelling and a sapient use of flashbacks: each shot is carefully orchestrated to work within the overall structure. How did you develop the script for this film?

There are three intersecting threads within the story. First, there is the beginning of the the relationship where the children met when little Matt is playing the game. Secondly, there is adult Matt playing the game by himself. Finally there is adult Matt and Emma heading towards the end of their relationship. The major challenge was when and how to interweave these stories. I knew that I want to blur the boundaries between memory, imagination and reality. I felt that this was what we see when we look back to certain critical moments in our lives. The memory is influenced by the context of the present. Everything is fluid and subject to change.

had an idea for the children to extend the numbered squares of the hopscotch game into infinity. And then the structure somehow became more clear to me. Matt looks back into his past to the moment when he first meets Emma. It is one of several memory scenes in the film.

These scenes then overlap with surreal dream sequences of the children and the adult Matt playing the hopscotch game. And these sequences then overlap with the reality of the present moment where we find Matt and Emma's relationship falling apart. These multiple threads continuously overlap and intersect. The process is quite like playing with puzzles. You get some pieces here and there. And gradually the whole picture starts emerge.

Your modern approach to narrative and characters reminded us of Kiesloski's Color trilogy. How did you develop your filmmaking style and who were your chef influences?



I don't know if I have fully developed film style yet. Each project takes its own form and I allow that process to unfold organically. There are many different cinematic forms that interest me. I also very interested in the hybrid of fiction and documentary and the essay film, particularly the work of Chris Marker and Agnes Varda. That is a format I will be pursuing in future. Kieslowski is indeed one of my favorite directors. The Double Life of Veronique is the first film that I watched of his. The tone and the cinematography is seared into my memory. I was very impressed by how everything about the film is so poetic and graceful. When I first watched the film, I did not yet have the idea to become a film director. I was just swept up in the moment, purely enjoying the film as a cinematic experience, and the film stood out in my mind in a way I couldn't articulate back then. Now that I think back, that lyrical style is probably what I absorbed and used as an influence in my own films. Furthermore, I am very interested in exploring the

concept of the "dream-state" and how that is represented in film. I like the overlap between dreams and reality and wish to confuse the boundaries between the two. The film that influences me in this sense was Fellini's *8 1/2*. I think it is wonderful that they can coexist in film.

We have been deeply impressed by the extremely natural feel of the cinematography. You have shot Hopscotch on the RED camera, one of the most flexible and powerful tool for independent filmmakers. Can you describe your approach to lighting?

I didn't want a very heavy-handed separation between the visual design of the reality scenes and the visual design of the dream and memory scenes. Instead, I wanted these different states to subtly blend together and thus blur the boundaries separating each in the viewer's eye. My cinematographer, Joseph Kraemer, and I studied many films for reference.

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*Much of the fragmented
style developed in the pre-
production stage, but then
further discoveries were
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in the editing room*
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Eventually we decided to adapt a more naturalistic approach, allowing the lighting to be dictated by the setting and the environment. This meant harnessing and controlling the natural light in these spaces.

We have been fascinated by the fragmented editing of your film, did the overall structure unfold before the camera, or were you already aware of these various pieces of the puzzle?

A puzzle is a fitting analogy for the film. Much of the fragmented style developed in the pre-production stage, but then further discoveries were made while experimenting in the editing room. The shooting script was itself quite fragmented, and lots of the shots, especially the scene transitions, were designed to support this mosaic-like structure.

This allowed me to reach a rough cut very quickly, as most of how the film was shot

remained quite close to the storyboard and thus the order of the shots fell into place naturally in the first cut. But then as I continued editing the film, I expanded the intercutting between scenes. One scene was removed to improve the rhythm and I began to push the surreal style of the narrative further. I realized the film is not so much about what happens to Matt and Emma, but rather it expresses a universal experience of the deterioration of a relationship. So I recut much of a scene where Matt and Emma are fighting, and intercut that with the surreal children scenes. I think it works because when it gets more and more fragmented it leads to the scenes where the dream state and the reality of the present moment intersect, when the child versions of Matt and Emma encounter and interact with the adult versions of Matt and Emma.

Hopscotch is a mind-bending meditation on love. What do you want people to remember after seeing your



movie?

I guess what I want people to remember most is the hopscotch game as a thematic visual and story device, extending off into infinity. It is a game most of us share in our nostalgia for childhood. The game is much like how we live our lives, dutifully hopping along forward. Maybe it will make them recall someone they missed or lost along the way in life.

What challenges did you face while making your short film?

First of all, this is an extremely low-budget film. It was also my very first film. I didn't have any portfolio of film work to show people, when gathering my cast and crew. And yet, I was able to assemble a small and dedicated team of crew and a great cast, who I was able to trust and collaborate with. It was a very rewarding experience. And thanks to my school, Temple University, I am able to use RED camera

and a wide collection of lighting, grip and sound equipment without additional expense.

Casting was very challenging. Generally people think working with kids is difficult. But I think if you cast the right child actors, they can be surprisingly easy to direct and bring their own wonderful perspective to the set. A director once told me: "you have to respect the child living in all actors." I think that is very true that kids know how to have fun and try things. But casting child actors is not only casting the kid, you sometimes are casting their parents too. If the parents are not enthusiastic about the film, sometimes it makes things more difficult. But I think I am very lucky that all of the kids' parents were very passionate about this project.

It is also difficult to cast Asian actors. I did another casting session recently for my next film project and expanded the casting area to New York and the Mid-Atlantic and



still it was a challenge to find and reach Asian talent. It was quite frustrating especially when people don't realize how difficult it is. There are not so many professional Asian actors, not because they cannot do it or because they don't want to be actors, but because there are so few roles that they are offered or that are written for them. It's a shame that we are so underrepresented in the movie industry. But it's a hurdle like any other and it is one that we must overcome in order to do what we love. Other than casting, there was just the normal film set madness. It is organized chaos.

There's never enough time or enough sleep or enough money to do exactly what you imagine. I am very appreciative of the dedication and support from the crew that we were able to overcome these obstacles.

Chung Wei, tell us about your trajectory as a filmmaker. What inspired you to express yourself in

this medium?

I think what inspired me is confusion. I was quite confused for a long time that I don't know what I wanted to do. Somehow I found my place in filmmaking. I guess if you are clear headed in everything you do, you probably won't be interested in film at all. Because where's the drama in that?

I think many of my ideas are some variation on the coming-of-age story archetype. It comes from the moment when you realize the the world could actually be worse than you thought - that kind of confusion. But I do also believe there is a silver lining in everything that makes you feel maybe everything will be OK.

For more than half a century women have been discouraged from getting behind the camera, however in the last decades there are signs that something is changing. What's your



view on the future of women in cinema and animation?

I feel positive about the direction in which we are headed, but I also believe there is a long way to go. The question itself is actually quite self-explanatory, because no one would ask "what is the future of men in cinema and animation?"

It is a structural problem inherent in the industry. But I do believe audiences want to watch stories that are told from a female director's perspective. Today, there are many alternative venues and platforms via social media that allow a female filmmaker or a filmmaker-of-color to interact with her audience more directly and reach her own demographics. That, for me, is very exciting. Crowdsourcing is also a very powerful tool to bring equality to the business. I think ultimately if your story speaks to people, you now have a better chance

than ever to make it come to alive. **Thanks for your time and thought, Chung Wei. We wish you all the best with your career. What's next for Chung Wei Huang? Have you a particular film in mind?**

I am currently in the post-production stage for my thesis film, *Midnight Carnival*, which will conclude my studies at Temple University, where I am getting my MFA degree in Film and Media Arts. *Midnight Carnival* is told by an outsider's point-of-view - in this case a Taiwanese student doing a work study abroad in America - depicting how she experiences working in a traveling, midnight carnival. The film is more accessible and has a stronger emphasis on social commentary, as the film is very much about different cultures interacting within the "carney" culture of the carnival. Beyond this film, I am also developing an idea for a feature film.