ISSUE #58

Quarterly Journal of the
Australian Cinematographers Society

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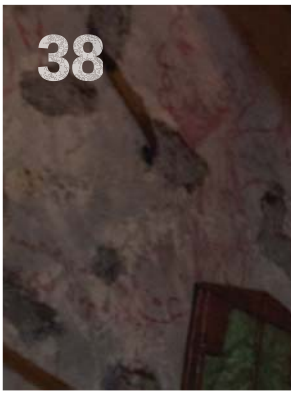

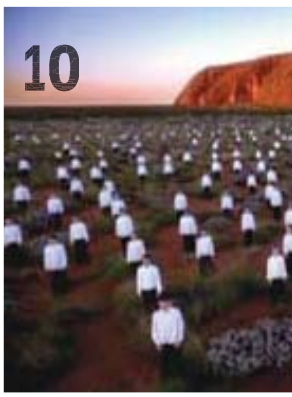

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FROM THE EDITOR

As you read this, Patricia and I will be commencing our two month stay in Buenos Aires, living the Latin life and hanging out with the locals. Above is a snap I took as we flew over the mighty Andes Mountains.

At least 2 years ago I made the decision to spend a year visiting all the places that we had always promised we would visit before we checked out and now seemed like the right time. Whilst I'm away, I have invited 4 guest editors to step in and put their spin on the magazine and issue 59, due out in September, will be the first. You'll just have to wait to find out who has accepted the challenge. They are all highly accomplished cinematographers, so I'm really looking forward to their fresh ideas. I'm sure they would be grateful for your contribution, so if you've got an interesting story to tell, drop a line to the editor at AC Magazine and I shall pass it on.

As you are well aware, there are many genres of image making and I want to assure you that we at AC Magazine are seriously interested in all of them. At the recent National Awards I saw some excellent work that won Golden Tripods and the cinematographer/s never pulled a light out of its case… preferring (or limited) to shoot with beautiful, natural light. But great natural light photography will always draw the judges attention… you know the story, time of day, the positioning of subjects, choosing the right focal length and aperture, background/foreground detail… the list is endless.

So you don't have to shoot movies to get a story in AC Magazine. You just have to be good. And I know there are many cinematographers out there who have the credentials, so please get in touch. You have nothing to lose.

Regards, dm. ed.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear ACS mag,

I have a photo of myself filming in the field that I thought would be great for the magazine (for the pics of cine's in action). Find attached. Photo is of myself, Abraham Joffe with a Himba Tribesman. Showing him moving footage through the viewfinder. Location: Damaraland, Namibia – July 2012 – shooting a promotional film for an African Safari company.

Photo credit: Jay Collier.

warm regards,

Abraham

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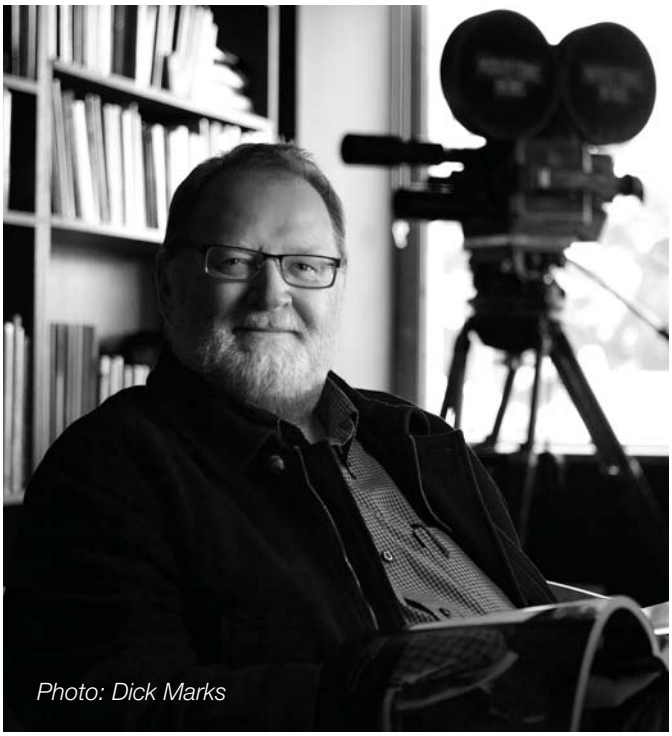


Photo: Dick Marks

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings ACS colleagues

I think it's almost a given that despite the advances in technology we cinematographers still consider ourselves the "Keepers of the Flame" when it comes to the integrity of the images we shoot.

We also believe it's a collaborative effort, and we are only as good as the Producer, Director, Grip, Gaffer. Focus Puller etc who we work closely with on a daily basis, and this applies across all genres.

But in some quarters things are changing and not for the better, as the collaborative spirit is being slowly eroded, and in some instances the cinematographer is being left out of the final decision making process that determine the overall integrity of the images.

But why do we consider it so important to remain focused on retaining this visual control of the image, when so much around us, associated with our industry, is constantly changing and evolving?

To me it comes down to one thing…pride. Pride in knowing that as the cinematographer you have done all in your power to deliver the Directors ultimate vision to an audience. Thereby assuring that the visual integrity of the story will be told and conveyed in the manner in which it was intended.

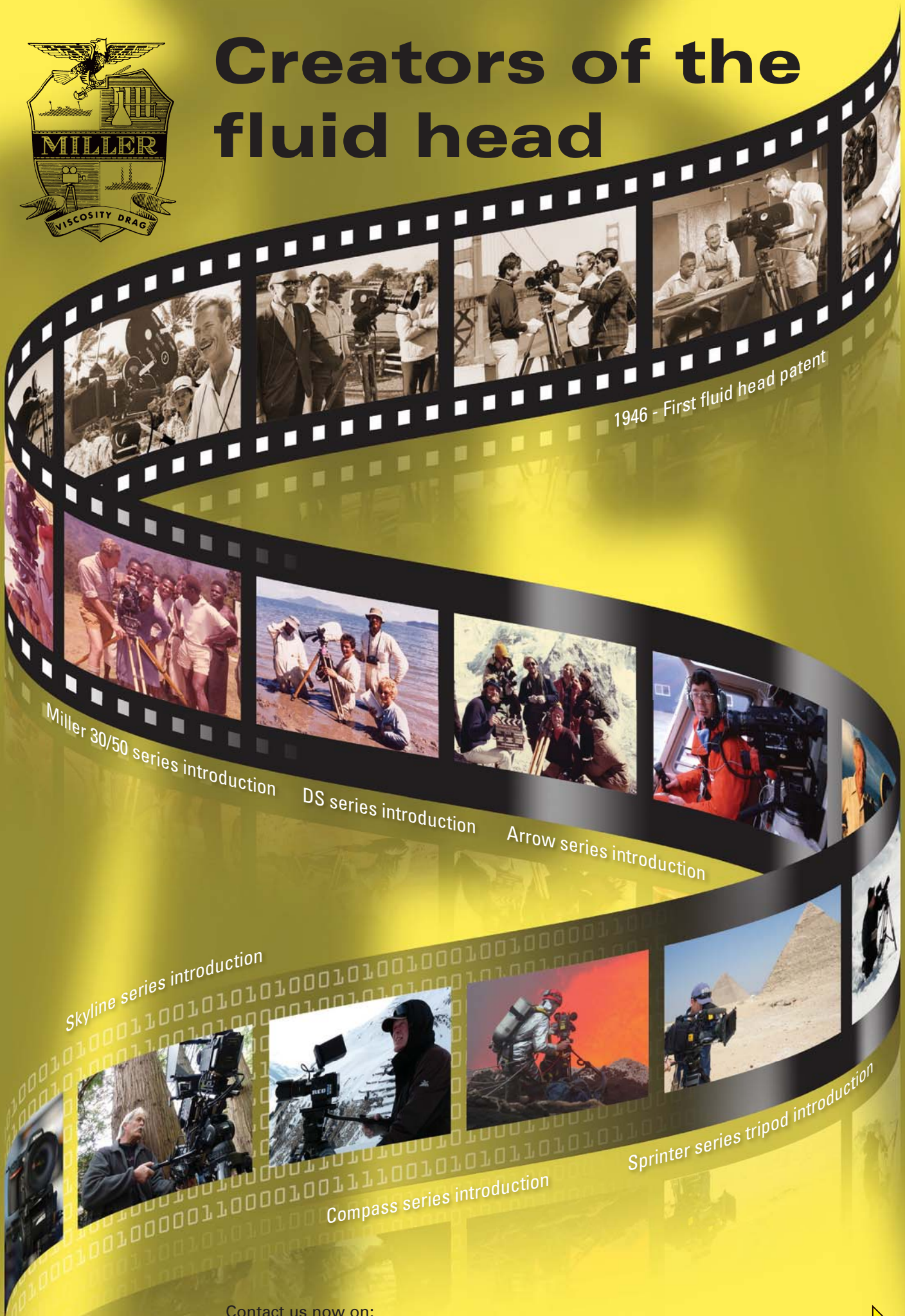
It's vital that we engage in positive dialogue with Producers as early as possible to ensure we do retain the right to grade the final images.

To not have that "stamp of approval" as such, brings so much into question, and we as cinematographers, not only here in Australia, but globally must continue to fight the good fight and protect the images we create for future generations…it's really as simple as that.

Until next time.

Ron Johanson ACS
National President

Creators of the fluid head



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MILLER

DOW: Mali

IAIN MACKENZIE

What separates good from great, clever from brilliant, better from best? Over the years I've tried to understand and define greatness… and failed. In my own small way, in documentaries I've written, directed and shot, I've tried to delve into the minds of people who fit into that category, to find out their secret, (these days that would be what drugs they have taken), and have always come up empty handed. And they themselves can't seem to shine a light on their brilliant self… they simply don't know. A champion Australian jockey once squeaked to me "Horses just seem to go well for me Dick" when I asked him what made him better than the rest, and when I asked our greatest big mountain climber how he managed to summit and survive when so many of his climbing partners had perished, he replied "I don't know, but please don't suggest it was divine intervention."

And so it is with Iain Mackenzie. No, to my knowledge he's never summited Mt. Everest and I seriously doubt he has ever craved to sit astride a galloping horse in the Melbourne Cup, but I can say, without fear of contradiction, that Iain is a brilliant visualist and an extraordinary communicator. His TVC's are always beautiful, exquisitely spare, but somehow manage to carry the most powerful messages. It's as if every pixel of every frame is deeply thought about, and only the perfect ones, the relevant ones, get to make it to the screen. If one was thinking of an inscription on Iain's headstone, it might well be that old cliché 'Less is More'. Hopefully, in the following conversation with him and his production designer/friend for the past 20 odd years Tess Strelein, you may be able to glean a tiny sense of what makes his work magical. dm.

AC: Tell me little bit about yourself Iain, how and where you started, how you ended up running a production company in Australia and why you're now based in Brussels.

IM: That's a good one... How long have you got? Well, I started off in England. I went to film school. I did a BA Photographic Arts, as it was called in those days, at Regent Street Polytechnic in London. And we had sort of exchange things with Hungary and Czechoslovakia and other film schools in Europe, so I travelled around a bit. Then I started working in the industry, as a van driver, then through the whole camera assistant sort of curve... Clapper loader, focus puller, operator... that little ladder there. Mostly in commercials, but all sorts of other things. I guess I was 23 by the time I was a Director/Cameraman working at Studio Lambert. Then I went to The Directors Studio (working at the time with Lester Bookbinder and Barry Lategan).

AC: How did you end up in Oz?

IM: So I worked there and then... and I might get the chronology slightly buggered up... I did a job for the Singapore Army in Singapore. We did our editing in Australia. And then I decided that Sydney would be a good place to be, so shifted there and set up Commercial Picture Makers. I think it was about '84. And sort of stayed there ever since, using it as the base and then moving around the world. I moved to Brussels about eight years ago but still kept my own production company based in Sydney (and one in LA). I work out of Europe , the USA and Australia

> ***"So you go looking for things and observing things, rather than going there and creating something that's not really there."***

AC: I'm going to fast forward to 2012 now, because I can't wait to discuss your latest work for Dow, which appears to have been shot all around the world without any artificial lighting. It's quite magnificent. Where do you start with TVCs like that, as every frame has your fingerprints all over it. Hardly working to an agency storyboard?

IM: No, but they had a very poetic script. The very first one that we did they had a ripamatic, kleptomatic, whatever you want to call it, which was just images put with those beautiful words. They were pretty literal, which they kind of got away with because the words were so poetic, but the actual visuals that they used weren't particularly great.

So I just went away and worked out places in the world to go. And, like you say, tried to strip things back. Just to get an atmosphere. And a lot of that is maybe practical as well, so that I could shoot things that had the right atmosphere and were possible to shoot. So you go looking for things and observing things, rather than going there and creating something that's not really there.

Tess Strelein: I think the thing that's super important about Iain is that he hates fake, pretending to be real, so if ever we have re-created something it's based on fact. Like when you talk about the tall, skinny poles holding the little red flags blowing in the wind in the Dow TVC… we'd been driving along in Bali and we saw something like that in the fields. So we thought we'll do our version that for Dow, the little bit of red; that kind of thing, trying to put something in but still making it beautiful, not dominating but subliminal and real.

AC: You seem to have a wonderful and close working relationship with Iain.

TS: Well, I'm spoilt working with Iain as his designer because both sides of his brain work; he's got the academic and the creative thing going side by side (his father was a nuclear scientist) I have a photo of Iain with his dad and he's holding a camera when he was about 2 years old I think ... officially taking his first photo. The thing is there's a logic, always a logic; he'll never just take a shot because it's beautiful… anyone can do that. There has to be that logic there or he just can't do it. You know what I mean? That's not in his psyche. Even if we are doing a fragrance ad, he's always got the logic behind it, so that whoever's looking at it has to be able to make sense of that image.

DOW: Kiev, Ukraine

AC: Iain do you location scout or do you say, "Alright, I might go to Kazakhstan because I know there's a big open plain there with traditional flags flying from long wooden poles"?

IM: A little bit of both. I would go take stills as I went, do a stills project. A stills diary if you like. Went around just by myself, finding things with local guides. And then we worked out a way to shoot with an incredibly small crew. Go back again. Things change, but it was more about the size of the crew and the flexibility of shooting… you can be observing things, then shoot when the light's right or when the conditions dictate, rather than the other way around.

AC: And by "small crew", you're talking just camera dept, producer and...?

IM: Yes, basically. We'd be casting on the run. Getting real people, sticking them in there. Sometimes they'd only be tiny figures in the landscape, other times intimate portraits… people who we'd see, talk to and try to persuade them – I mean, not try to persuade them against their will, but... [laughs]

AC: Coerce a performance!

IM: Yeah!

TS: He's just gifted, talented, funny, intelligent, smart, very serious about what he does, but also there's this whole other side to him where I think he does honestly live to shoot; to be totally honest, it's like his love of books, his photography books, his photos.

He's also an incredibly lovely person. My mum has said to me that her ideal night out is sitting next to Iain at dinner, because she knows she'll laugh all night and my mother's 90 . I mean, in 25 years, I've never seen him throw a wobbly, or speak to somebody rudely. But to do that level of work, he is under enormous pressure, as we all know, to deliver. I find those traits quite… well they're so endearing, because they're rare. I think he's so well rounded in every way and humble. Iain is not… well you know the drill ... there're so many people out there who you meet and you're like, "Please, you're so full of yourself " ... it's such a dull trait .

"The thing is there's a logic, always a logic; he'll never just take a shot because it's beautiful... anyone can do that. There has to be that logic there or he just can't do it."

AC: Iain, do you prefer shooting guerrilla style?

IM: I think it's more "me". I do enjoy it more. It's not that I don't enjoy sets and things – I really like things with actors and sets. Although, like you say, horses for courses. I mean, there are some scripts that are really good, but I'd much rather be working with what's available, what's there. Whether that's available light, available cast… configuring things. Paying attention to the light and then building the shot around that. Rather than "Ah, this has got to be a shot about such-and-such".

AC: And the decision to put a shot with a particular piece of copy – that's a decision you make?

IM: On the Dow commercials we were lucky enough to

DOW: Mongolia

LEXUS : Universal Studios , California , USA

control the entire edit. As you would know, this doesn't always happen with American based commercials. The agency and the client were really good and looked at things and sort of agreed. Because I guess they kind of knew that it was a sensitive way of compiling it, really. Like you say, even from the beginning they knew that they had some very good words. It was just finding a way of illustrating that interestingly. Or with some sympathy.

"I'd much rather be working with what's available, what's there. Whether that's available light, available cast... configuring things. Paying attention to the light and then building the shot around that."

TS: Creatives trust him and say so. I've heard them say "I don't actually know about that image, but I trust you" When you're working with Iain, somehow it's in his head the shots are all logged. And he will go "I haven't got it yet, because I need to do this in case it's going to be edited in another way".

The most incredible thing about Iain is he frames things up beautifully, and one thing he will not do and cannot do, is bang something off. He'll tweak it and everyone will be thinking it looks beautiful, but he won't shoot because he knows something is wrong .. and he will eventually work out what is wrong. Until he thinks it's perfect, he won't roll.

AC: I strongly recommend readers view Iain's Dow campaign at www.blindfoldpictures.com

AC: Iain, tell me about the 'breaking glass' commercial.

IM: Oh, the Lexus. The Lexus LFA, which is their version of a " Supercar "

AC: The look of that commercial, the actual aesthetics of it are exceptional. The backdrops and the props, the devices... is that something that comes out of your head?

IM: For that particular commercial, I came up with the look of the set and how we should shoot it. But like you say, different films need different approaches. I mean, ordinarily I work with Tess (Strelein) and she does all the production design/styling. We did Dow together and other commercials like that. We still travel the world and do that. She's the production designer most of the time. We have a relationship based on being in strange parts of the world and making the most out of what's available and being creative with limited things. Lexus was shot in LA and that was 7,000 trucks and a huge stage... It was an interesting commercial because we had to shoot it for real, that is breaking the glass with the actual sound of the Lexus engine. We had some University of California blah-blah Physics Department, and we recorded the car going "Rrrrrr..." and "Vrrrrr! Vrrrrrrrrr!". When it made the right pitched noise, they'd pump it through a speaker and it would smash a glass. So we spent days recording the car and smashing glasses! We had to do it legally, you know...! There was an observer there to see that we were doing it correctly… legally. I said "We've proved that it happens, now can we just shatter the glass any old how!" But no… so we were there shooting 1000 fps and thinking "Ahhhh! When's it going to break? Is it going to break?". Glad it did!

AC: Do you shoot mostly digital now?

IM: Now it seems to be, yes. I resisted... well, I didn't really resist. I would shoot the odd thing… but then, you know, with the Alexa, I seem to be shooting digital the whole time now. I don't mean to say that I don't shoot some scripts on


Bali Dow // Iain MacKenzie , Lawrence Blair , Tess Strelein
Photographer : Viv Scanu

film. But we talked before about high speed filming with strawberries and cream and stuff like that… I mean that was the studio where I worked in London in the first place. I grew up very technically, with stop frame and high speed and burning your own titles into the film. Remember all that? Shooting on a Mitchell S35. Filming footage of a fridge revolving around on an old car wheel with a plank of wood on it! Then you'd cut, twist the belt, rewind the Mitchell, then point the camera at a light box and focus on it with an old stocking or fishnet over the front of it, then burn in the title. Like dissolving the title on. I mean, they went to air, those ads!

AC: So you have no lament about the demise of film?

IM: I do; I love shooting on film. The same with my stills, because I shoot stills mostly for my personal library or as background for atmosphere and so on. And I really like shooting on film, but I mean even Polaroid, it becomes increasingly difficult to actually get the stuff. I hear of labs closing their doors all around the place and think 'I hope I can still get it processed for a while longer'.

AC: How do you stay fresh in the ad game? Do you review your style or approach from time to time? A little bit of re-invention?

IM: A little bit. You're always trying to refine the look. But I think it comes down to what I said earlier, that I try to base everything on atmosphere or a feeling. And as long as you have that atmosphere and that feeling, it sort of takes care of itself. You find yourself coming up with the images that are relevant. And that was probably the reason, in certain instances, I began to distill things down to the minimum. But then you've got to be lucky to get those kinds of scripts. Scripts that suit that look, that style. So it's kind of searching out your scripts and hoping that your interpretation of someone else's script... an interpretation that they might not even have thought of, resonates with them.

In the past you would go "That's a nice script, I'll go and shoot it" and wallop, you've shot it and that was the thing. But now you find yourself talking about it and thinking "I'll shoot it like this or like that". And I keep wanting to say, "In a way, I can't really tell you how it's going to be shot or how we're going to do it, you know? What I can tell you is it's important that it's got a feeling of blah blah blah". An emotion that we can get by… like wouldn't it be good if the room was a disused hospital or something. Or whatever and then you go from there.

"I do; I love shooting on film... but I mean even Polaroid, it becomes increasingly difficult to actually get the stuff."


London : Murdo and Iain Mackenzie (aged 2)
First photo ever by Iain Mackenzie


PACE : Autlan De Navarro , Mexico


PACE : Autlan De Navarro , Mexico

"And I keep wanting to say, "In a way, I can't really tell you how it's going to be shot or how we're going to do it, you know? "

AC: Do you get inspiration from any particular source? Like photographic books, magazines like Spanish Vogue, which is my go-to mag to for edgy photography and brave fashion images.

IM: Spanish Vogue, that's an interesting one... I must renew my subscription! I do, but they're mostly older, classic photographers. I've got a big library of interesting photographic books.* I've got an awful lot of influences and references coming from there. But really, it's not reference that you copy. But as in love as I am with film and filmmaking, I don't have powerful influences coming from movies. And I mean these days, very, very recently really, you can just find the most amazing books and references online. There's a wealth of stuff there. But I mean, is an image that you show as a visual example an influence, or is it just a way of communicating to people, to the agency, the client? Putting something down as a discussion starter, so that people can dissect it and say "Well of course it's like this… but it won't be like that" and then by the end of the conversation, you've actually used up the talking point. [laughs] And you think it's nothing to do with the picture you started with! People really like a visual to be able to talk about and around.

TS: Iain doesn't follow trends. There're always trends in everything; trends in art, trends in photography, trends in architecture, trends in the way models look, but I've never known him to follow a trend and it's almost like when some new camera comes out with some tricky technique, he'll make a point of avoiding it, because you just see it everywhere.

I don't think you can fake it when you have a working relationship like we have .. You can't fake it when you're in the middle of Mali for instance and it's a million degrees in the shade, with insects everywhere and you're totally under the pump, you're working with people who don't speak the same language and have possibly never been in front of a camera before . So when I do put something in front of the camera for him, if we did not have the same aesthetic we would just be staring at each other … because Iain will not turn over on anything he does not like and that can get awkward ....Iain will refer to it as being "ugly scope". In these situations design collaborations are really put to the test .

Clients trust him and love him so much because as I said to you his visual and his mental sides are in synch and he can describe to anybody what he sees and he has no arrogance. Whether he's explaining his ideas to the simplest person or an incredible academic, he will describe to them what he sees and they will understand.

Dow , Kiev , Ukraine // Iain MacKenzie
Photo : Jonathan Murphy

KONICA MINOLTA : Mali

KONICA MINOLTA : Mali

KONICA MINOLTA : Randwick, Australia

ANTZ PANTZ : Tonya Bird / Set

ANTZ PANTZ : Tonya Bird / Set

"I love him because he really doesn't think he's cool. He doesn't walk into a room with all guns blazing; he creeps in, sits in the corner and takes it all in."

With his portraits, he always shows something that a viewer can see in themselves; he never projects himself onto a subject. He simply lets them evolve in front of the camera. Sometimes he'll let them think he's not rolling, so that they'll just… they'll just be themselves. I love him because he really doesn't think he's cool. He doesn't walk into a room with all guns blazing; he creeps in, sits in the corner and takes it all in.

I can't tell you how many times he's just gone "We've got to pull over." He's remembered something he's seen and we've had to drive back and find it.

AC: Is there anything in particular that you do to prepare for a shoot? I'm guessing that your work is about preparation, preparation, preparation?

IM: No, not really. They're about worry, I think! But I always have a negative checklist… I go through what could possibly go wrong. Which is a source of great torment, but probably quite useful. And I think that's also borne out by the fact that I try to do things by reacting to the location, the elements. I know that I'll react to it when I'm there. I get churned up because I know what the scene's going to be or what we're trying to get out of it. As long as I get those elements… and the same thing with actors… to be able to let them know and talk about what's happening. Rather than say "No, you've got to do this, do that". You know you're going to work something out, and you work the thing out and that's how it becomes what it ends up. It's that slightly simplistic approach if you know what I mean. Fuck of a worry before you actually start to shoot though!

AC: I'm so pleased that even at your level of excellence you still worry if you're going to nail it. I wonder how many readers of this article are nodding their heads in agreement. I know I did. Technical question now. What's in your lens kit? Your favourite lens? I'm punting it's wide angle.

IM: Strangely enough, I think my favourite lens is a 40mm. Master Prime or an Ultra Prime 40 is probably the lens I use the most.

AC: Do you own your own lenses?

IM: I have four Master Primes. I've also ordered a set of Leicas, which seem like they're never going to arrive from Germany. I've always had Leica stills cameras . I became quite well known at Leica when I drove over my 135mm lens in a car park in Broome . .. reversed and heard a horrible crunching noise .. I'd left it on the ground behind the car (Laughs) When I told Leica what happened they replaced it so for once honesty paid .

ANTZ PANTZ : Jessica Hart Model/Set

ANTZ PANTZ : Christina Model/Set

QANTAS : Flinders Ranges , Australia

QANTAS : Uluru , Australia

"I always have a negative checklist... I go through what could possibly go wrong. Which is a source of great torment, but probably quite useful."

AC: Not sure you deserve to but do you own your own digital motion picture camera now?

IM: I have a company in LA and we have an Alexa. I've had that for about a year.

AC: So you could put your whole camera kit (without legs etc) into a backpack?

IM: That's possible, yeah. I also have a Canon 1DC. And that's the aim of the Leicas, which are really small, so I can take those around the world. So they're good for certain jobs. It's great to have that. It's great to be able to wander around. It's all about time though. But I much prefer shooting on an Alexa .

AC: Do you find you shoot more with digital capture or do you know when you've got it and move on?

IM: No, not really. Yeah pretty much, I know when I've got it.

AC: Regarding your work, I find it's your interpretation that's the most powerful and the fact that while most people would be adding things to a set, you're taking things out, stripping it back.

IM: That's fair to say. I do have an advantage with the director/cameraman bit as much as if I'm flogging a dead horse I can change it as opposed to, "Well why can't you make this work?".

AC: Do things change on the run? Do you ever turn the camera around to shoot where you've told the 1st AD would be safe?

IM: Oh yeah, that happens a lot. I've re-parked many a Unit! [laughs] "Where would you like me to park?" - "Well, in shot would be handy! [laughs] Because then I know where I think I'm going to be shooting is not actually there… I'm definitely going to be shooting somewhere else!"

AC: On that admission of human indecision, all I can say is thank you for your wonderful images, your iconic TVC's and being a humble, honest bloke.

TS: I know a great Iain story to finish on... Iain is on a job in the Northern Territory in a hire car, on location with the agency Art Director and they are driving along and a kangaroo goes straight through the windscreen, the car is a complete write-off and the kangaroo dead . They have to let the hire car company know and they also have to go to the police to report it and they're trying to describe to the police what happened. Eventually Iain just turned around and said "Look we will draw you a storyboard." And they did the storyboard... it was adorable, they drew the cutest storyboard and he's got them driving along in the car and they're looking at each other smiling and he does the little shot of the speedometer and then he gets a little shot out the window and then he does the shot of AHHHH!!! and he does the shot of the kangaroo through the window and the written off car and the policeman goes "Now I understand." He's hysterical!

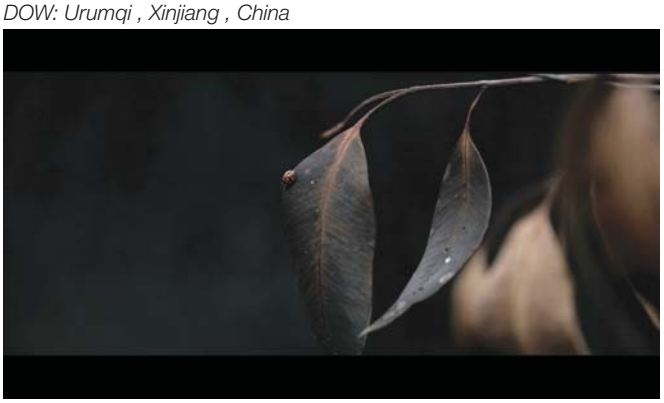
* A few of Iain's favourite photographers ... he has hundreds who he loves, but these five immediately come to mind: Walker Evans, Robert Adams, Don McCullin, Richard Misrach, Lewis Baltz.

DOW , Mongolia
Photo of Iain Mackenzie by Tess Strelein

DOW

DOW: Urumqi , Xinjiang , China

DOW

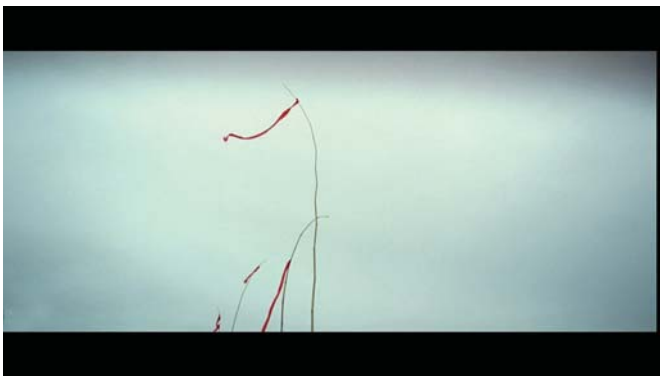


DOW: Gosford, NSW, Australia

DOW : Mali

DOW : Kiev Ukraine

DOW : Gosford, NSW, Australia



DOW : Bali

DOW: Bali

DOW: Angola

DOW: Mongolia

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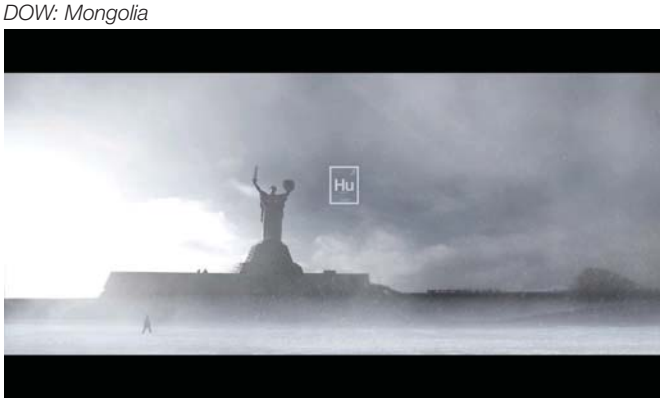
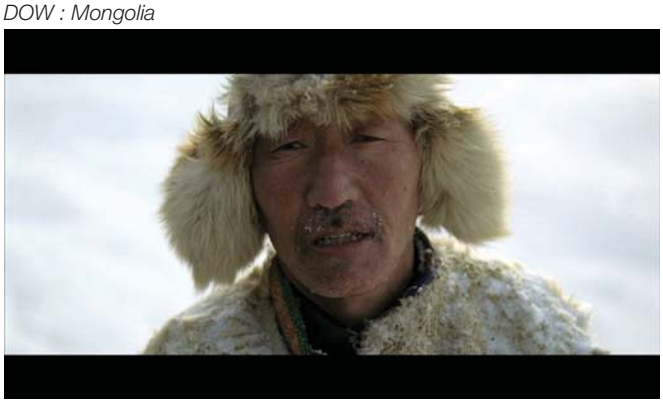


DOW : Kiev Ukraine

FORD: Mojave Desert, California, USA

DOW : Mongolia

DOW : Mongolia

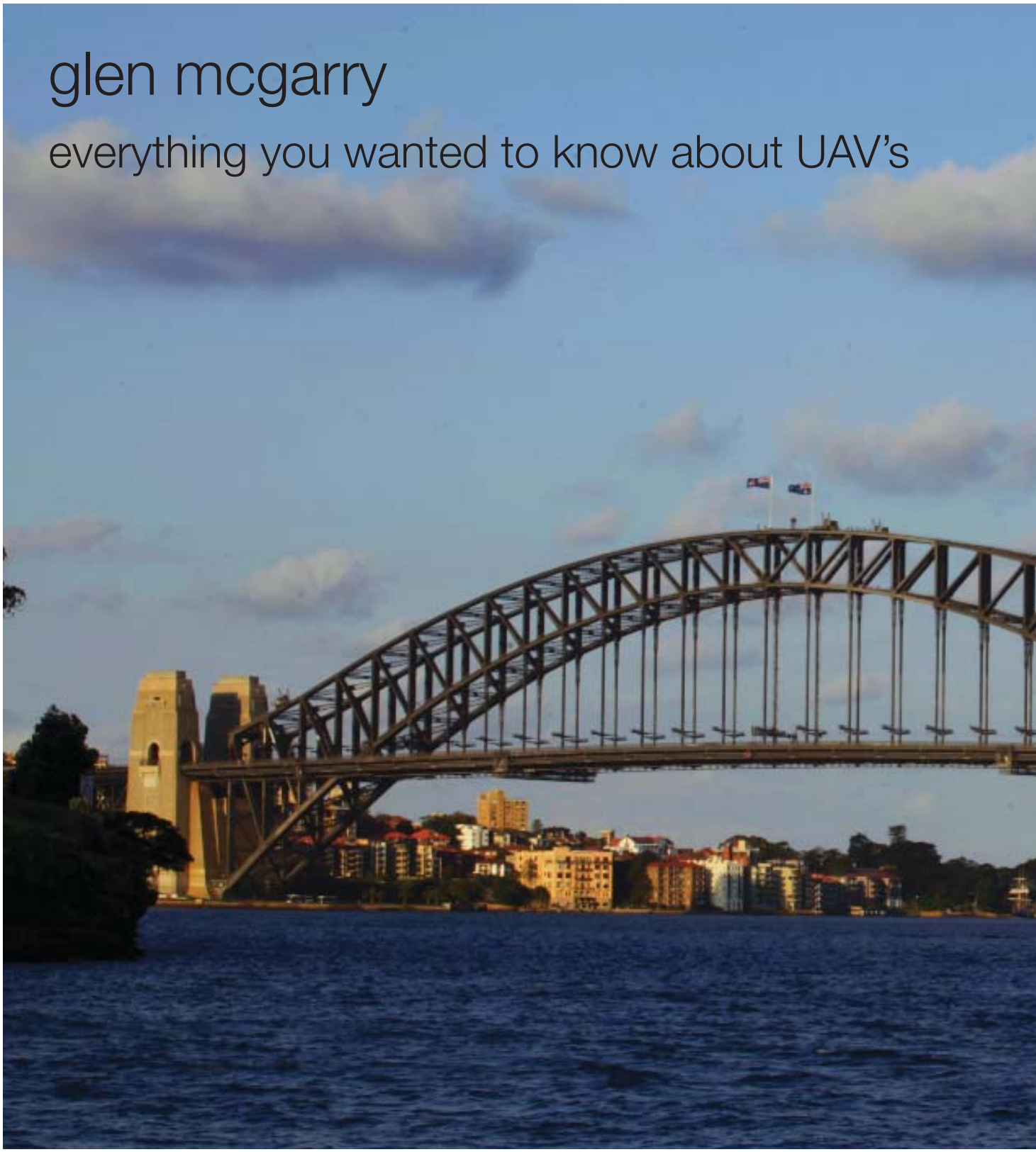


DOW: Mongolia

LEXUS : Universal Studios , California , USA

glen mcgarry

everything you wanted to know about UAV's



AC: Glen, give our readers an overview of your operation.

GMcG: We have operations in Sydney and Perth with 9 aircraft in our fleet, varying in size, payload capacity, configuration etc. Our work includes aerial photography and video for real estate, survey, inspection and television including Full HD live sportas coverage for Fox Sports.

We have Quadcopters (4 rotors), which we generally use for faster sports action, which can carry lighter cameras such as the Go Pro Hero3 and Sony NEX-7 to perform indoor work.

For most of our regular commercial work, including real estate photography and television, we use Octocopters, which as the name suggests have 8 rotors, allowing a higher payload and redundancy. That is, if one or even two/motors fail, the aircraft doesn't drop out of the sky. Our Octocopters carry cameras including the Sony NX30, FS100 and FS700 and full DSLRs. In comparison, a failure of one or more motors in a Quadcopter. Results in an uncontrollable and unstable aircraft,heading to an inevitable crash.

AC: Probably best that that doesn't happen when

someone has their Red Epic strapped under the blades.

GMcG: Absolutely. To be honest, we haven't actually carried an Epic for an actual commercial job. We have tested a Red Epic on an aircraft that we're in the final stages of configuring and that's because we don't like to take on work if we don't know we can definitely deliver to expectations. So at the moment we've got one aircraft, a Sky Jib Octocopter, specifically set up to carry an Epic size camera; we can't carry a Scarlet, it's too big and too heavy. The Sky Jib is 1.2 metres across, as opposed to .9 metres across and has larger propellers and larger motors to handle the higher required payload.

AC: Have you used any of the Canon cameras, eg: the 5D?

GMcG: Yes, we have 5 Octocopters capable of carrying the Canon DSLR cameras. We've flown and shot with the Canon 5D Mark 3 using a 10mm-22mm lens. We don't usually carry long, cinema lenses, purely because one they're heavy, two, we don't use a zoom as such and three, they hang out a

long way forward of the centre of gravity, they work against stability and balance of the copter. So what we suggest to our clients is that they stick to prime lenses, so that the copter is balanced in order to maintain stable flight… which equals stable video.

AC: Can you paint me a picture of how you have these copters configured.

GMcG: Under the aircraft we've got the gimbal which holds the camera, enabling 360 degrees continuous rotation with full control over tilt; the actual roll is automatically compensated to maintain a level horizon. The gimbal is gyro stabilised in all 3 axes, with the top half of the aircraft controlled by the motors and the electronics which are operated and 'flown' by the pilot. This setup allows complete separate control of the camera and aircraft from the ground, with a live digital video feed (no latency) from the camera to the ground station operators.

AC: I'm guessing that the chopper and camera operators would have to be very smooth and compatible dance partners. I shot hundreds of hours of helicopter aerials and the very first thing I would say to my pilot was 'You're shooting these aerials. I frame, focus and roll and you do the rest. Where the chopper goes my camera will follow and please don't touch the rudder. The gyro will deal with the vibration, but the horizontal rotation cannot be eliminated.' Of course today it can, but the point I make is that you don't want two operators that are not in the same groove.

GMcG: Yes, yes, absolutely, that's right. The cameraman and the pilot need to be one, they need to work together in order to get the shot; they need to plan the flight path ahead of time. But when we're talking about non-live video, obviously we can do as many re-takes as we need within that 8-12 minutes of flight duration and then basically land, change packs and go again. But the good thing we do have is that if the top half our copter moves (yaws), the camera still stays locked on the subject; even though the top rotates, it's stabilized on that axis as well.

AC: Can you just clarify that. You're saying that if the pilot does move the helicopter away from the subject being filmed, it stays locked onto that subject?

GMcG: Yes, that's correct. As an example, let's call the subject on the ground being shot a wicket and we point the camera at that wicket, if the pilot accidently or intentionally decides to use what you have referred to as the rudder in a normal aircraft, the camera will still stay fixed on its last position.

Obviously that's extremely important, because the pilot needs to make slight adjustments and you don't want the camera to jerk left or right when you're trying to get the shot.

AC: But what if you want the chopper to 'jerk off', so to speak, to the right, can you program it to accommodate that desired movement?

GMcG: Absolutely, we have control as to whether we want to turn that function on or off. If you want the camera fixed to the top half of the aircraft and you want the pilot to control the camera's orbit around the subject on the ground, he can do that, but we can also add inputs in terms of pan; or if you want to have it stabilise the pan so that it's locked onto the subject, you can engage it simply by a switch on the radio.

It's a great feature. It's a feature that has been critical to covering the sports for Fox Sports initially with cricket and now NRL and A-League. When we track a bowler, for

Frame pull

example, we have the pilot starting side on to him as he's running in; we then have the aircraft go over the bottom left corner where the batsman is and the camera actually stays parallel to the pitch. We fly over behind the batsman after he's hit the ball so the viewers have seen that full action.
And totally stabilised; no jerking to the left or the right.

The benefit of our technology is basically getting closer to the action from ground level and tracking up to 400 feet (122 metres) altitude and being able to manoeuvre in tighter spaces and capture camera angles that previously were not possible. We fill the void between your traditional jib and your traditional full size aircraft. We're akin to a jib that keeps going.

AC: There must be rules and regulations governing the use of these choppers; who are you responsible to?

GMcG: The same for all aviation, CASA, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. They control the operation of UAV drones, be it ours, something similar to ours, or even the more hobby style aircraft, if they're used commercially. For hobbyists, for non-commercial use, they are not regulated; CASA has no control over a hobbyist if it's for a non-commercial use. Once you introduce promotion of your aircraft or promotion of your service or you receive a fee for the UAV service you provide in connection with the operation of your drone, then suddenly it comes under the control and the domain of CASA. In order to operate our UAV drone we need to have an operator certificate, not too dissimilar to other airlines having an operator certificate or a flight school having an operator certificate and to actually pilot the aircraft you need to have a controller certificate for the pilot, so the two go hand in hand.

AC: What training is required before you can pilot a remote chopper for commercial purposes?

GMcG: As it stands at the moment, until CASA introduce new UAV specific education and requirements, you need to have, at a minimum, a private pilot licence theory/ practice exam pass. These include a pass mark of two aviation theory exams. In addition you must log a minimum of 5 hours manufacturer training of the aircraft


Frame pull


Screen shot


Screen shot


Frame pull

you intend to use commercially, obtain a Class 2 medical certificate and proficiency in radio telephone operation. Once you have all of these, you submit a controller licence application to CASA, which they normally grant within 45 days; if you've met all the requirements. But once you've received your controller licence, you still can't actually fly the aircraft commercially; you need to be linked to an existing operator's certificate, or alternatively apply for your own operator's certificate under UAV regulations 2002. It's a very involved process, costs a fair amount of money and there can be frustration along the way.

AC: I guess anything flying in the air is a dangerous object, so one would expect stringent laws and regulations regarding same.

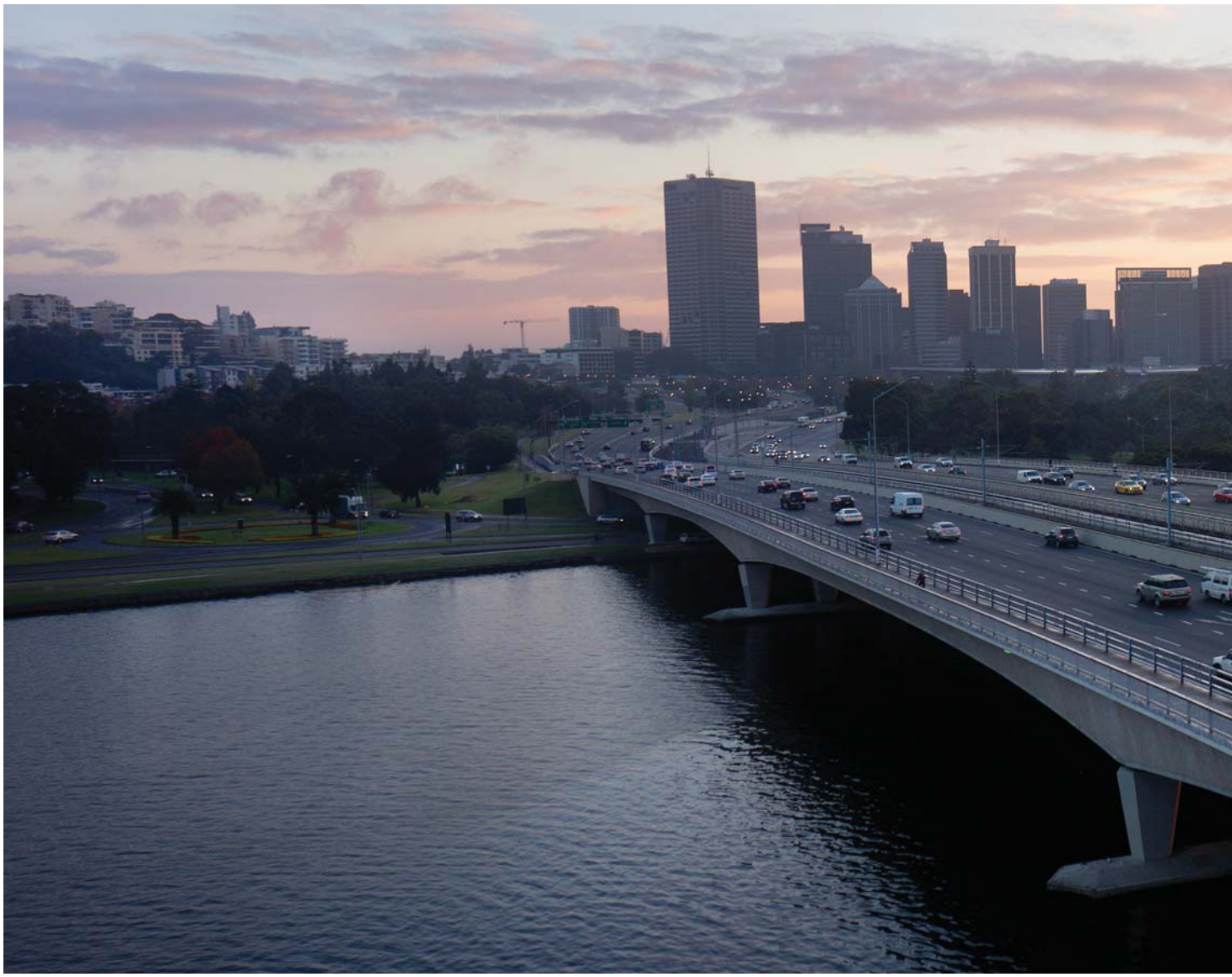
GMcG: Absolutely; in the wrong hands with little care or concern for public safety, a crash into public property and especially a person can result in serious injury. This is why we completely respect that the operation of UAV drones commercially should be controlled and regulated by CASA, to ensure public safety and only responsible, professional operators.

AC: How long did it take for you to get your operators certificate Glen?

GMcG: To actually get into this business it's not "I'm a hobbyist, I've flown for 20 years, I'll just go out and get started tomorrow". You need to set aside at least 6-12 months to get yourself up and running. And in order to get an operator's certificate, your aircraft needs to be certified, you need to do a check flight with CASA, you need to actually create an operations manual which details standard operating procedures and processes that you will follow to ensure reliability and safety at all times. Further, your manual must detail your maintenance of the aircraft and especially the process and procedure when you're carrying out an actual commercial activity.

AC: Do you have to put in flight plans?

GMcG: Yes, if you want to operate in controlled airspace and you don't have area approval for a particular location, you do need to put in an application for area approval, which obviously includes a flight plan. We try to minimize that by operating in non-controlled air space, especially as it can take at least 21 days to receive that area approval, though



Frame pull

approval is not guaranteed. We basically have to follow, very closely, the rules and regulations of full sized aircraft with extra conditions specific to UAVs. Our aircraft operate, under our licencing, up to 400 feet (about 122 meters), which is sufficient separation from other aircraft in most cases, other than manned helicopters that can take off and land similar to ourselves. Fixed wing aircraft have a lower limit of 1000 feet over populated areas and only 500 in an emergency. Also we can't generally operate any closer than 3 nautical miles, which is about 5½ kms from an aerodrome.

AC: Are there any other restrictions we should know about?

GMcG: For sure. There's minimum separation from the public of 30 meters, which applies to all operators of UAVs or RPAs (remotely piloted aircraft) and which must be maintained at all times. But I can confidently say, as of last December, we are the only UAV operator in Australia, and there are 22 of us, who have an exemption to the 30m separation rule; it's conditional on the wind being 8 knots or less, but we can bring that separation down to 5 metres from the public if the conditions are right. That's why we are able to cover the cricket, NRL and A-League in stadiums for Fox Sport.

AC: Why do you think you are the only ones licenced to do so?

GMcG: I can't speak for CASA, however we understand we have consistently demonstrated a high level of competency and skill in all our operations, not just in piloting the aircraft itself. We have also demonstrated that our aircraft are precisely controllable, very stable and extremely reliable; we have a blemish free track record. At present we are the largest operator of drones for aerial photography and video in Australia, in terms of full time personnel, offices and our fleet of aircraft. We've successfully completed over 45 live event coverages, which are the higher risk and higher stress environments. We needed to have that 5 metre exemption in order to cover live sports and to get certain key shots that others cannot.

AC: How many employees do you have?

GMcG: There're 19 of us in total and 4 are pilots. Our 2 senior pilots, who operate the more difficult work including within stadiums, have 20 and 30 years RC experience, respectively.

Glen McGarry (left), with Fox Sport crew member.

AC: What does it cost to set up a standard helicopter?

GMcG: The basic copter itself, not including radio gear, camera and all of the other bits and pieces, is close to $15K. That's the Octocopter. When you add in controls, the camera we typically use at the moment, video ground station, batteries, chargers, test equipment, full spare, and all the other ancillary and supporting equipment, total cost is at around $25 per aircraft.

AC: How do you ship them? Can you break a unit down to a practical shipping size?

GMcG: Yes, sure. We can remove the booms of our Octocopter and pack it down into a Pelican case about ½ metre cubic, and all up weighs 17 kgs. It doesn't need to be shipped as over-sized baggage.

Presently we have full operations in Sydney and Perth and a full suite of equipment and aircraft located in Melbourne. Areas outside of these require a pack down of an aircraft from one of these base locations.

AC: What are the weather restrictions? Can you fly in the rain and/or wind?

GMcG: We can't fly in rain because the electronics are air cooled, with motors and the avionics largely exposed. Besides, the camera on-board will get wet and you can't really have plastic bags and such over the camera to try and weather proof it. If it's light rain, just sprinkling, we shoot with our aqua copter with a GoPro on board. So there's no issue for very light rain, despite the chance of water on the lens. And if the air temperature exceeds 36 degrees, we can't operate, because, as I mentioned before, our aircraft electronics and motors are air-cooled and cannot cool sufficiently in high ambient heat.

Safety always comes first. You know, we do our very best to get the shot that the DOP/Director/client wants, but obviously there are certain scenarios, certain situations, when it's not safe to fly. So we do a reccie of the site ahead of time, and we discuss at length with the client what we can and can't do on site before filming begins. We propose safe alternative flight paths to what the client may suggest, where and when necessary.

In higher wind conditions we won't fly in close proximity to trees, buildings or persons. If it's less than 12 knots, generally less than 8 knots, it's safe to do so. Our 5 metre exemption is 8 knots and below. We always need to maintain line of sight, which means we don't typically fly greater than 250-350 metres away from the control position. We can, given the technology and the link of video and control, fly a km away, but we don't do that because you're introducing risk. If something does fail, you can't actually see the aircraft, so with non line of sight you have very limited control to get it down to a safe position and land

AC: How's business?

GMcG: Fantastic. Every week we receive more and more exciting work. In the past year, from when we started with simple real estate photography, we've gone on to shoot numerous TV commercials, live sport including the cricket,

NRL and A-League for Fox Sports, the ASP RipCurl Pro at Bells Beach, Havaianas thong challenge, Avon Descent, Western Mud Rush, motorsports, trailbiking to name a few.

Upcoming events include the Mazda MX-5 media challenge in Canberra, Iron Man series, Surf Life Saving. Other work in the television space includes House Rules for Channel 7, The Block, X-Factor for Fremantle Media, Ten, ABC and 7 News Sydney for the 7 Network.

AC: What about peoples privacy? Should we be concerned that there may be a drone hovering outside our bedroom window some time soon?

GMcG: No, absolutely not and that is something which is very important to us; we do not intentionally invade and fully respect the public's privacy. Sadly we have heard that there are a few hobbyists who have used similar technology, specifically to invade peoples privacy. I do understand that the current privacy laws in Australia haven't really kept up with the great proliferation and usage of drones and such. It comes down to the morals and ethics of the operator.

AC: So the obvious question is "What's the damage Glen?" How much does a unit on location cost?

GMcG: We charge a professional fee and direct costs associated with travel and accommodation. In terms of the actual fee to the client, we charge $450/hour, or the equivalent of $4,000 to $5,400 per day or $2,000 a half day. dependant on location complexity and other requirements. Our minimum booking is a half-day shoot, and one day for all interstate work outside of Sydney and Perth

AC: So what is the future for Coptercam?

GMcG: Our main role is always to build, configure and pilot an aircraft to achieve images that you haven't been able to achieve before. But we're looking forward to sitting in our transporter van with the TV screen and the controls and flying the copter around 100% remotely without line of sight. The potential is enormous and things are already moving ahead in leaps and bounds. We feel very privileged; we saw the technology, embraced it, we invested all we had and we put in the hard yards to get ourselves to where we are now. Already we have started completing remote inspection and aerial survey work that complements our existing business areas.

AC: Obvious question number two. Have you had any crashes?

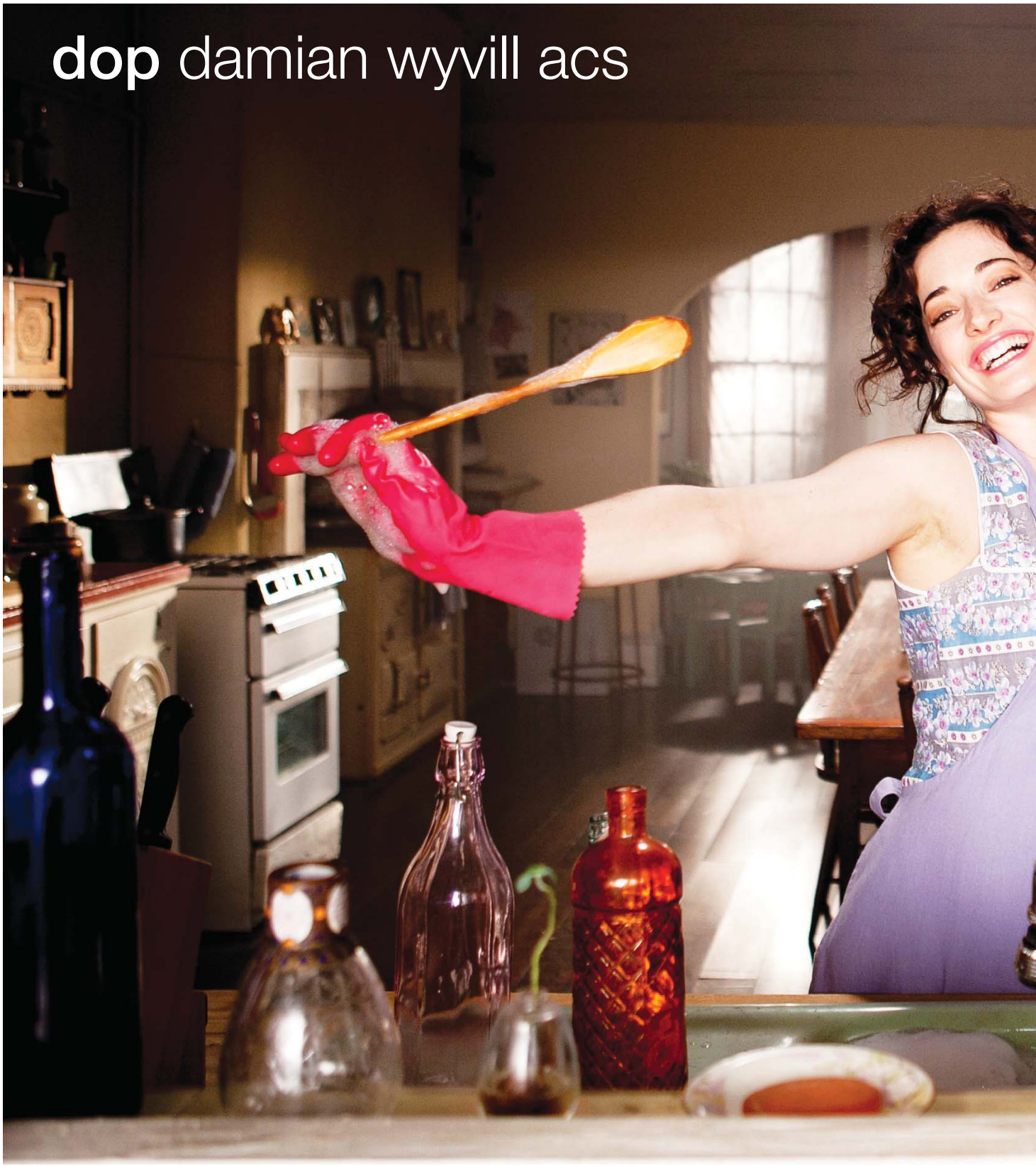
GMcG: I was actually wondering whether you were going to ask that. Commercially we've had zero crashes. But I'll be honest and say that when we were hobbyists we had lots of crashes. (Laughs). This is how you learn to fly with remotely piloted aircraft in a controlled and safe environment.

AC: And obvious question number 3. Do you have insurance coverage for the equipment you carry?

GMcG: Given our Fox Sports work with insurance coverage for in stadium work we are presently working closely with our broker and underwriters to attain insurance for third party equipment – stay tuned. Naturally we clearly inform the client that their equipment at this time needs to be covered under their insurance policy.

Screen shot

dop damian wyvill acs



AC: How did you get into the game?

DW: Well, I started up in Brisbane with a little company called Video Image Productions, pretty much straight out of school. This was in the '80s. And then I met John Stokes, who took me under his wing, and I started loading and then focus pulling for him… there was a run of American TV series… *Mission Impossible, Air Force* and *Time Tracks,* which was my major apprenticeship as far as 35mm focus pulling goes. It was amazing to do that much 35mm work.

And then a movie called *Street Fighter* came into the studios, and I met David Williamson (Daisy), and after that moved to Sydney and focus pulled for him for quite a few years. I did that right through until 2000. Too long really, as John Stokes always said to me, "Start shooting as soon as you can." I did short films and music videos etc, but then I got the call to do a big budget feature film and, you know, I loved it. I loved the size.

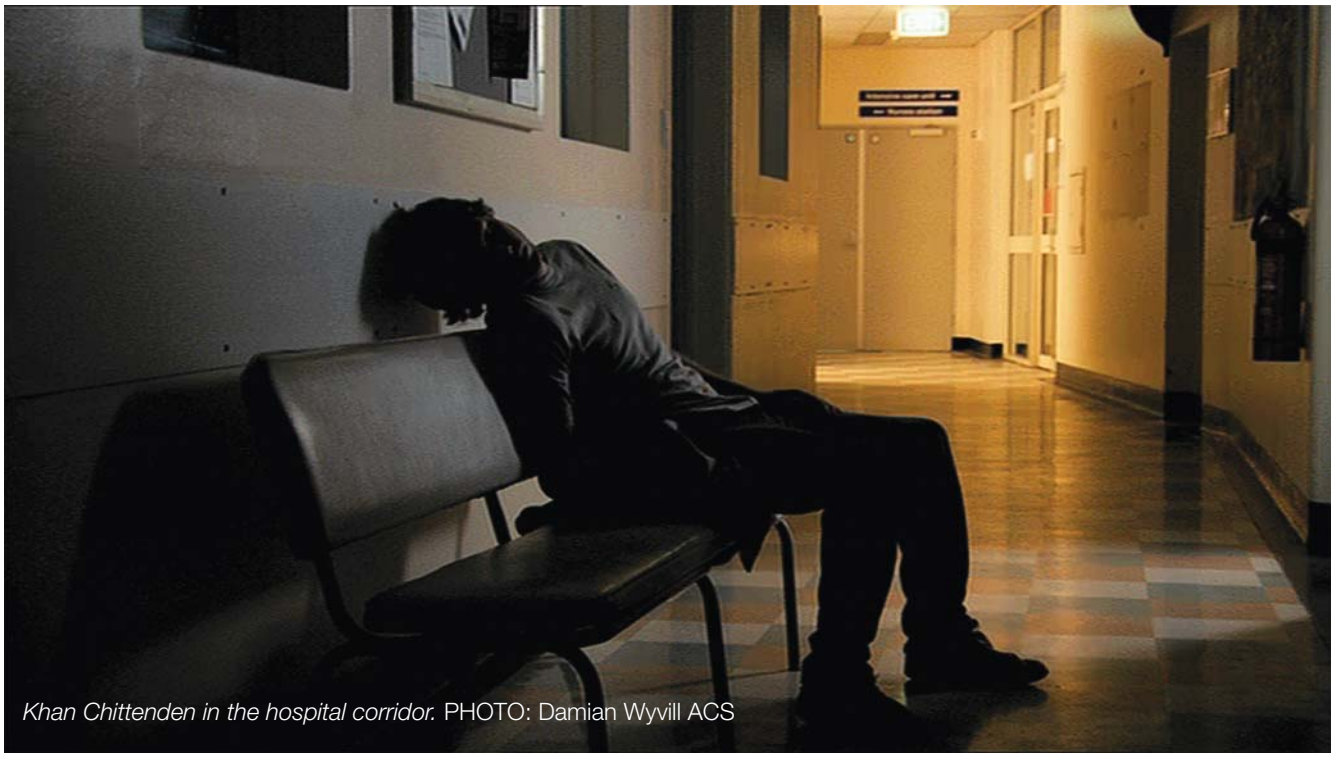
It was great to work with Dariusz Wolski and William Fraker and Andrew Lesnie… it was fabulous to watch those guys

Lisa Tomasetti (Laura Michelle Kelly) PHOTO: Damian Wyvill ACS

light. But I knew that when it came my turn to be the DOP it would be about discovery and I would have to work it out for myself, but to watch them and get all the tips and tricks.

AC: In the last magazine I did a story on Brad Shield, who is working out of LA now. He also gave a huge amount of credit to the extraordinary list of world class Cinematographers he worked alongside, especially Aussies like Dean Semler and Andrew Lesnie. Aussie DOPs really do stick by their own, don't they? They give each other a hand up, and are very generous with their knowledge.

DW: Oh absolutely. Absolutely, it's brilliant; the guys go out of their way to give us a hand. But Mandy Walker would be my major ally. I met Mandy towards the end of my focus pulling career, then she gave me big break. She let me shoot second unit to her on Paul Goldman's film *Australian Rules,* down in South Australia, which was fabulous. Ever since she's always given me her second unit gigs… *Australia* (the movie) was a cracker. I've just finished pick-ups for her on a film that she shot last year called *Tracks.* So, yeah, I've tried to take on bits



Khan Chittenden in the hospital corridor. PHOTO: Damian Wyvill ACS

from all of them.

AC: OK, so we've got a reasonable idea of where you came from and your climb up the ladder, let's go to your last film,* Goddess*. How did you get that film?

DW: Look I'm not a hundred per cent sure. I actually met the director a few years previous about another project. And he had seen a film that I did called *West,* which was a little, million dollar movie shot in the western suburbs of Sydney. You know, a 'druggie' sort of film, for want of a better genre name.

He'd also seen a lot of the clips that I'd shot and he knew that he had a limited budget, so he was quite interested in what I'd managed to achieve on five and ten thousand dollar budget music videos. They are a valuable asset on anyone's reel.

AC: Well, that's where you pull the rabbits out of the hat isn't it? Usually no continuity hassles either.

DW: It is! You just go for it and make lots of beautiful images and it looks a million bucks. So that was something that they were quite attracted to. I also came up with a much cheaper way to do a big sequence in the film… a magical realism scene when she goes off into the musical parts of the film which aren't real, they're just in her head. They were originally very Chigago-esque, you know, sets opening up and all that sort of stuff, but they just didn't have the money for those kind of production values. My idea was to shoot in one direction at one location, then go to a different location to shoot in the other direction, you know, and it just looks like her whole world has opened up. And doing a trick with light to marry the two locations together makes it look like something's happened magically. They loved the idea and that sort of won me the job.

AC: It's what you bring to the table isn't it?

DW: Always.

AC: I made commercials most of my working life and people often asked me "What's the split between politics and creative?" My reply "Up to the point where I was awarded the job it was 90% creative and after that it was 90% political". But initially it was always my creative contribution that won the gig.

Back to* Goddess*. You did a particularly nice treatment of the earlier scenes in the kitchen, on the supposed webcam. I loved the shift from reality you achieved when she was at the kitchen sink, simply by placing the web camera high up looking down on her, the pov of a viewer in a theatre, and your lighting had just the right amount of theatricality to it. Whilst she (Laura Michelle) was mum in the kitchen, she wasn't just mum in the kitchen.

DW: Thank you. That was very much Mark Lamprell, the Director's idea. He kept referring to storybook and fairytale. They were his big things. He didn't want this to look real, and more so her home. He really wanted it to be idyllic and, you know, a home where everybody would want to live. So when she does go off to the big city and everything that unfolds there, the lure of her idyllic home wasn't unbelievable; you'd understand why she would want to go back there. That was the big thing.

A lot of thought went into the placing of the webcam. It became the device of the film. We were looking at her world through the kitchen window.

AC: It certainly worked for me. I felt like I was sitting up in the dress circle looking down on her and those scenes were really nicely done. I loved that subtle sense of detachment from the real environment.

I'm just going to skip back to a film you mentioned right at the beginning of this conversation… the little million $ movie* West*. I loved* West*. I thought your lighting was

Nathan Phillips and David Field in the kitchen. PHOTO: Damian Wyvill ACS

really tough and gritty. Very different to* Goddess*. I don't think there'd be any two movies less similar than* Goddess *and* West*, so it shows your the range.

DW: Thank you. You know, I get quite annoyed, and you find this a lot in commercials, when the agency or client want to see on your reel the look of the commercial they haven't yet made, but they say they don't really want something that's already been done… but they want to see it anyway, you know what I mean?

AC: You bet. My agent in New York once called me up and asked me to urgently send him my 'jungle reel'!!! As if !!! Needless to say he didn't get it.

DW: Ha, ha. Classic. One of my favourites, and I don't know if it's true, but one of the stories that goes round is John Seale's agent, this is years ago, got a call from an agency and they wanted his commercial reel and his agent said, "Oh, he doesn't have a commercial reel, you know, but he does have an Oscar." And they said, "Oh, we really like the way he shot the grass in Witness. We want that shot." And they said, "Well, unfortunately he doesn't have a commercial reel." And they said, "Ok, well can you send us the reels of some DPs who have shot grass like that?"

AC: Yeah. You want to stab them with a really blunt object.

DW: Yeah. But that's the thing, you know, we're lucky because we are very visual people, but not everybody has that gift. You assume that everybody does think like you and see like you, but they don't and a lot of people have to see stuff before they know what it looks like.

AC: Sad but so true. Let's get back to* Goddess*. Apart from what we discussed, what were your pre-conceived lighting plans?

DW: We watched films like *The Sound of Music.* The Director wanted a very classic look; there was to be no hand-held, you know, he wanted movement but the movement had to be motivated. He was very interested in one-shot scenes. If we could do a scene in one shot, with movement of the camera, he would buy that every time. Another film we referenced was the original *Babe.*

AC: Beautiful film.

DW: I did *Babe 2* as an assistant cameraman with Andrew, so I sort of knew his bag of tricks, which was fantastic. Mark would reference *Babe* time after time. Like its storybook-ness, its fairytale-ness and all that sort of stuff.

AC: In my opinion, you had a really good art department, wardrobe, hair and make-up team on* Goddess*.

DW: Spectacular, spectacular. Annie Beauchamp, the designer, is brilliant. I just think she's got a fantastic eye. You don't usually get a lot of time for pre on smaller Australian films so I was lucky to get a couple of months. I cut a deal to do the prep on a lesser rate and could duck away and do commercials to keep me going – but I was there on the first day of pre with the art department.

AC: I just particularly liked the aesthetic switch from the domestic to the austere, beautiful minimalism when you went into the city, like Magda's office. The choice of colours… very good. Did you use Kinos to light those scenes?

DW: No, I have a thing about Kinos. I either love it or I hate it. I did all of *West* with Kinos, but for *Goddess,* the gaffer and I made a bit of a thing about not using them… I sometimes find the Kinos a bit savage… especially with skin tones. So I ended up using big silks. But it's funny, when I was a young guy up in Brisbane, one of my favourite lamps was a 4k Zip light… I loved it and I discovered that my gaffer had one in his truck, so the Zip became the lamp of the film, Laura Michelle's

Alexa screen grab - Magda Szubanski. PHOTO: Damian Wyvill ACS

lamp. She has that beautiful, pale English skin, so she just glowed.

AC: I get the feeling that you really enjoy lighting women, as you do it very well. When you have to light a woman, what is your modus operandi regarding coming up with an angle or a way to light her?

DW: On a film, you know, you're lucky because you get that day of make-up tests and it's like… it's like a car. I remember watching a DP years ago, I think it might have been Andrew Lesnie… on a commercial, and he got the gaffer to walk around hand holding a Pepper or some little lamp; just circle the car pointing it, as directed. That's what it's like with a face, isn't it? You don't just walk in and go, "Oh well, this is what worked last time or this is the way I always do it". Every face is different.

AC: Any funny stories from the set?

DW: Well, Laura had never played a lead in a film before. She's a Broadway star. The first week we were doing all the kitchen stuff, and Mark Lamprell was very precise. He knew what he wanted and he knew when he got it, and we'd go until we got it absolutely perfect. But when we got the go take, everybody would immediately walk off to the next set-up. One day I noticed that she had teared up so I asked her if she was ok. She was very upset. It turned out that she was concerned that she hadn't got anything right yet. And I said, "No, it's absolutely spectacular. We're loving it. You look fantastic, it's beautiful, the songs are amazing, you know." And she said, "Well everybody just walks away." And I said, "Oh, that's it!" She was waiting for the applause. Making a movie is very different from performing to a live audience. That drug of having people applaud you night after night must be a powerful thing; almost like an addiction.

AC: Speaking of difficult situations, working with kids is always a challenge. Did you have to compensate with your lighting or did you have any sort of instant, hand-held, 1x1's for the kids, just in case they went wandering off into the wings?

DW: Yeah, I tell ya. Yeah, the old 1x1, it's a fabulous little tool. I actually prefer them to the Kino now. I like putting four of them together on a stand… now that's a sweet little light. The kids were pretty good, you know. They were amazing actually. But *Goddess* was shot on the Alexa, so when I got into the DI suite I could just pull up

Lisa Tomasetti - (Laura Michelle Kelly, Pheonix and Levi Morrison). PHOTO: Damian Wyvill ACS

Lisa Tomasetti (Laura Michelle Kelly) PHOTO: Damian Wyvill ACS

the raw files, and when a kid stepped out of the light, which, as you know they are always going to, I could just click right up to 1600ASA or 2400ASA and still not see any noise. Just window, grade and track that little portion of the frame at the desired ASA, then come back and grade the rest of the picture the way I wanted it… seamless.

AC: So, what's next for you?

DW: Oh, I'm just shooting commercials at the moment, which is nice. I've got a few scripts that I've read, that I like, and just waiting for them to get some money.

AC: I've heard that one before. Is there anything else that you think we should touch on, or you want to talk about?

DW: Oh, maybe… straight after *Goddess,* I did second unit on *The Great Gatsby,* which was an incredible experience, working in 3D and all the difficulties that go with that. Working with Simon Duggan was fabulous. And my third picture with Baz, which was great.

AC: Sorry Damian, but this magazine is locked off a couple of weeks before Gatsby gets released, so we can't discuss that can we? From what I've seen, it looks absolutely amazing. Maybe next time.

Lisa Tomasetti (Laura Michelle Kelly) PHOTO: Damian Wyvill ACS

FILM FACTS

FILM FACTS IS A NEWSLETTER WHICH HAS BEEN SPECIFICALLY PRODUCED TO PROVIDE FILM INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS WITH SNIPPETS OF UP-TO-DATE ACCOUNTING AND TAX NEWS AND INFORMATION.

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Accountancy News for the Film Industry

Big Tax Savings using Artist Averaging

Big tax savings can sometimes be had where you can use the artist averaging provisions.

You first need to fall under the definition of 'Production Associate' noted below:

'Production Associate' refers to those persons who have an artistic input, as distinct from a technical input, into motion picture production. People who qualify as production associates are specified in the definition of 'artistic support' to be: an art director, a choreographer, a costume designer, a director, a director of photography, a film editor, a lighting designer, a musical director, a producer, a production designer, a set designer and any person who makes an artistic contribution similar to that made by any of these persons.

As an example using the 2012 financial year the tax savings would be as follows for a qualifying person.

- Taxable income for 2011 financial year $20,000
- Taxable income for 2012 financial year $300,000
- Tax on $300,000 ordinarily would be $115,300.
- Tax on $300,000 using artist averaging would be $72,098, a saving of $43,202.

If you think you might qualify and you have not used artist averaging, call us and we can advise you what refund of tax you might receive. Tax returns can be amended back two years from the date of lodgement.

The income averaging scheme applies to performing artists and production associates and is designed to prevent such people from being pushed into higher tax brackets when income from their professional work in a year fluctuates above their average income from such work.

Asset Write Off

Taxpayers who qualify as small businesses can now write off assets which cost up to $6,500.

Home Office Expenses

Instead of recording actual expenses for heating, cooling, lighting and furniture depreciation (such as desks and shelves), you can claim a deduction of 34 cents per hour based on actual use or an established pattern of use. This rate is based on average energy costs and the value of common furniture items used in home areas.

Written Evidence of Deduction

The Tax Office has published a Practice Statement which recognises the changes in technology and the way receipts etc. are issued since the substantiation rules were introduced.

The following types of evidence are treated as satisfying the substantiation rules:

- Bank statements
- Credit card statements
- Internet-generated bank or credit card statements
- BPAY reference numbers, combined with bank statements
- BPAY reference numbers, combined with tax invoices
- Internet generated receipts
- Email receipts
- Paper copies of receipts
- Electronic receipts; and
- Electronic copies of receipts.

Graphic Design: Willmore Design www.willmoredesign.com.au

FILM FACTS

If you would like further information on any of these matters raised in this newsletter, please contact:

Ranald Duhig rduhig@filmfacts.com.au or
David Clark dclark@filmfacts.com.au
Telephone 3862 1361

The information contained in this newsletter is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of financial and accounting advice and should not be relied on when making business or personal decisions

Jo Rossiter ACS - 2013 Australian

"... might well be a love letter to stop animation... This is serious film making."

Real to Reel Magazine.

"... AFF is proud to feature this patiently created stroke of genius."

Austin Film Festival.

"... for the high level of visual stop action ... the ability of the film makers to capture such emotion and sympathy..."

Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

Cinematographer of the Year

Jo Rossiter ACS, ACS Milli Award winner 2013

Jo Rossiter ACS is a journeyman. He shies away from publicity and self-promotion, so it took me several months to get this story on the rails. Jo started making clay and plasticine models and doing odd jobs at the Adelaide based animation studio Anifex way back when he was a scruffy, wee lad. Now, 27 years on, but now fashionably crumpled, Jo's warm, wonderful lighting and seamless motion control cinematography on their new animated short film, *Sleight of Hand*, has won him serious acclaim worldwide and he is now standing uncomfortably in the spot light.

During his time at Anifex, Jo has worked on over 500 ads in various capacities. He has photographed for clients such as Schmackos, Mortein - Louie the Fly, Home Hardware, Visa Bank, McDonalds etc etc and numerous short films. *Sleight of Hand* is arguably his best work so far, and the awards just keep rolling in. Every week during the course of editing this article, I have had to update his CV.

Sleight of Hand took just under a year to produce and its 9 minutes and 48 seconds running time is composed from over 14,000 individual images. Jo shot it on a Canon DSLR with Nikon lenses.

Not long after joining Anifex, Jo pestered owners Richard Chataway and Michael Cusack to start shooting and a career was born. When Milton Ingerson ACS suggested to Richard that they should all be ACS members, Richard replied "We're not really legitimate filmmakers; we just shoot animation", Milton responded in true Milt style "Look, you bloody idiots, you should be; all this stuff you've shot is fantastic and of course you're all filmmakers, so bloody join!". And they did… and soon started to pick up 'gongs'. Then Milton dropped by again and said to Jo "When are you going to join the bloody committee, you little bastard?" How could he resist? So 15 years later he's still on the committee. There is another very important cog in the Anifex creative wheel and she's the not-crumpled-but-svelte DOP JoAnne Bouzianis-Sellick. You'll meet her later in this story.

AC: Jo,* Sleight of Hand *is an exceptional film and is now picking up awards with regular monotony. Did you have a specific look in mind when you first set out?

JR: Yes. Well, okay, I'm just trying to remember the film… um, ah yes, The Proposition. That was the greatest inspiration for me. Guy Pierce was in it, Stan Winston, no not Stan Winston, sorry, I'm just going to have a very quick look on IMDB… it's just completely gone from my mind…Ray Winston! No, it's not Wally Pfister who…ah, ha, it was shot by Benoit Delhomme. He captured the Australian landscape in a way that I'd never seen before and so that was my inspiration.

"… It is simply brilliant. Beautifully lit, great design and score…"

Barry Purves. Academy Award and Bafta nominated Director/Animator.

main pic: Final composite MoCo shot of animated character and animated angle grinder sparks. 1st inset: Our animated puppet contemplates his miniature steam punk camera (35mm of course). 2nd inset: The puppet sculpting the likeness of himself - halfway through the rotating McCo shoot. 3rd inset: Me at the helm with angle grinder creating animated sparks at 1 fps. 4th inset: The puppet in deep contemplation as he concentrates on animating the likeness of himself.

AC: How big was the set and how did you light it?

JR: The whole set was probably about 1.5 meters square. As luck would have it, there's a suspended ceiling in our studio and that came in very handy to bounce a warm wash over the whole set. The rest of it was lit with clear globe lights with 100 watt globes in them, but they're monstrously bright, so I pulled those back with a stack of ND and various layers of blue; you know full blue or half blue and little bit of diffusion here and there. The rest was lit with Dedos. JoAnne come up with a wonderful technique with the Dedo barndoors, where you can actually close the two smaller ones over the lamp completely and two tiny slivers of light escape, which you can quite cleverly put wherever you want. Little highlights that you can zing anywhere. Thanks Jo. And I used a lot of salmon gel and full and half CTO for my backlights and top lighting of the characters. A little rim light here and there.

AC: Why not just use dimmers for the hotter lights Jo?

JR: We have dimmers, but I like to run them… I'm going to sound anally retentive here, but I guess cinematographers are… I run them at 11.9 volts, so they're just a whisker under 12 volts, in order to maximize the longevity of the globes and so they don't blow as frequently. And shooting animation, that is a disaster. And Murphy's Law states that they always blow when you're well into the sequence or just as you roll.

AC: And, of course, the dimmer may be dodgy, so the light value might fluctuate a tiny, indiscernible amount.

JR: Yes, the last thing you want is a globe gradually getting brighter or dimmer during the course of a long shot and as a result it's color temperature changes and then it pops. Then you've got to be extremely careful changing the globe without moving the light. It has happened and we've covered the light change by switching the action of the character or introducing a bit of action to help hide this sudden pop, like introducing a lightening strike effect. You can actually hide a multitude of sins if a globe does blow by using a bit of creative license. You either try to somehow invent a way around it or start again.

AC: So it's that precise. 11.9 volts as against 12 volts?

JR: Yes, absolutely, 11.9 volts. We built our own power supplies… a 15-volt, regulated DC power supply that we put rectifiers in to get DC out and kept it at 11.9 volts. My understanding is that as soon as you start to run those globes over 12 volts, it shortens their life.

AC: Do you shoot at a pre-determined aperture Jo?

JR: Most of the stuff that I shoot will be between f5.6 and f11. But the lucky thing for us is we can pick our f stop and choose our depth of field, and then change our shutter speed to whatever we want, you know, it could be a second, or 2 second, or ½ a second, 1/8th of a second or even a 15th.

We use manual Nikon lenses on a Canon 5D camera, which means we've got to get an adapter to go from Nikon to Canon. They're not Panavision or Arriflex quality, and sometimes this configuration gets a bit wobbly, so you end up having to Jerry-rig brackets to really hold the lens firmly in place. Especially if you're manually pulling focus when you're shooting with motion control… bit of a challenge.

AC: It seems quite intense. You would have to stay very concentrated for long periods of time I suspect.

JR: You know, of all the projects I've worked on, this was the first one where the lighting was intuitive, it just kind of happened and made for really fast set-ups, which kept Michael Cusack, my director, very happy. I guess a lot of people don't know this, but when you're animating, it's almost like acting and being, you know, in character. And Michael tried to maintain the character of the puppet, and having those fast turnarounds helped him tremendously to be able give life to that puppet.

top left: Contemplating the armature that our character is about to sculpt upon. mid left: The sculpture is now complete as his personal journe admires his hard work. top right: The horror of our heros reality is about to dawn upon him. mid right: Wins at the Santa Barbara Film Festiva give me hell for not shaving. bottom right: Pascall Pineapple Lumps.

ey is about to begin. bottom left: Our hero
l. Milton Ingerson ACS OAM would always

AC: So it's very much you, the director and the puppets, in your own little world. It would be very important not to have interruptions and distractions.

JR: Yes, absolutely, even just someone walking on set or hearing a phone ring or someone saying, "There's a call for you." is incredibly disruptive. We've got black curtains all around the studio and we pull them shut and people know not to enter the set.

AC: I'm guessing that you and Michael have worked a lot together?

JR: Yes. Michael and I have collaborated on 2 short films and many, many commercials. But on *Sleight of Hand,* we designed what turned out to be one the most difficult shots I have ever done. Michael wanted his main character to be seen creating his animation 'double' over the course of two days (suggesting a passage of time)… in a single 360 move around the set. So I shot day, night, day, night in what appeared to be one long, continuous 360 degree motion control camera move. Circumstances dictated that we move the set 360 degrees rather than the camera, which just had to do the vertical moves up and down while the set rotated one frame at a time. And of course the whole lighting rig above the set had to rotate with the set and at exactly the same speed. Then the next problem emerged… we discovered that as the set revolved, the approaching wall had to be removed so the set could squeeze past the camera in the craned down position, then reinstated before it came back into frame. All the time the lighting changes had to take place to suggest day, night, day, night. We prepped that 'shot' for 6 months and it took 3 weeks to actually shoot.

I'd love to talk more about shooting with the old motion control camera we have, but I don't know where to start. It's tremendous fun to use… old Pentium 266 computer… still got its original hard drive… log into Windows 95… re-start in DOS… kick-start the software… just wonderful… give it home positions… it knows where it is… first position… key that in then move to… might be booming up a little… a bit of tilt… smoothest possible curve for all those axes… set focus… away you go. Then you have to…

AC: At this point my brain vaporizes and my eyelids slowly start to droop to black. Jo's voice fades to white noise and my untethered mind now starts to drift down the Anifex hallway lined with old characters and artifacts from previous campaigns and into the office of the other Jo employed there, JoAnne Bouzianis-Sellick. Tall, svelte and beautifully lean, Jo can fill any room with her presence. So congratulations to the Anifex boys for seeing her potential way back in 1992 and giving her a playroom of her own. The CAMERA ROOM! The Golden Sand Pit of any studio, just bursting with solid, vintage motion picture royalty like the 35mm Mitchells, a chunky, indestructible Arri 16mm BL4 and a wee Bolex, plus a flock of DV Cams and DSLRs. DOP/Camera Assistant JoAnne immediately became their den mother. Her sharp eye and fine aesthetic soon had her model making, seamstressing, props buying, building sets and set dressing… and believe me, this girl knows how to dress. Very stylish indeed.

And like Jo Rossiter, she loves stop motion cinematography and has lots of State and National Awards (Golden Tripods x 2) to prove she's pretty bloody good at it. Check out her Pascall Pineapple Lumps TVC on the Anifex web site. Love the British bulldog dragging its bum on the lounge room carpet… classic. What can I say… looks, brains, and a serious sense of humor. She has IT.

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And just to rub it in, the last time I was in Adelaide I happened to see some of her hand made, vintage jewellery. Hand made by JoAnne, of course, and I thought that you might like a peek. It's cool, funky stuff and all certified vintage or antique. Keep you ear to the ground, as her online vintage store will be opening soon. It's good to know that cinematographers have a life outside their obsession with images. What's yours? E-mail me, I'd love to know. Gives me a bit of respite from 'key to fill ratios' and labs closing down. dm.

Pics: (clockwise left-right): 1. JoAnne Bouzianis-Sellick, 2.Japanese Netsuke necklace - Ebay Japan. 3. Earrings. Old basson reeds - trash and treasure market. 4 & 6. Earrings. 1950's-60's pen nibs - Etsy Europe. 5. Earrings. Old style Japanese Calligraphy Brushes - ebay Japan. 7. Brooch. Vintage 1960's travel domino - ebay. 8. Earrings. Vintage 70's Voodoo doll key rings - trash and treasure.

NEWS FLASH… NEWS FLASH… NEWS FLASH… NEWS FLASH… NEWS FLASH…

Jo Rossiter ACS, is now freelance and can be contacted at jonathanrossiteracs@gmail.com or 0420 821601

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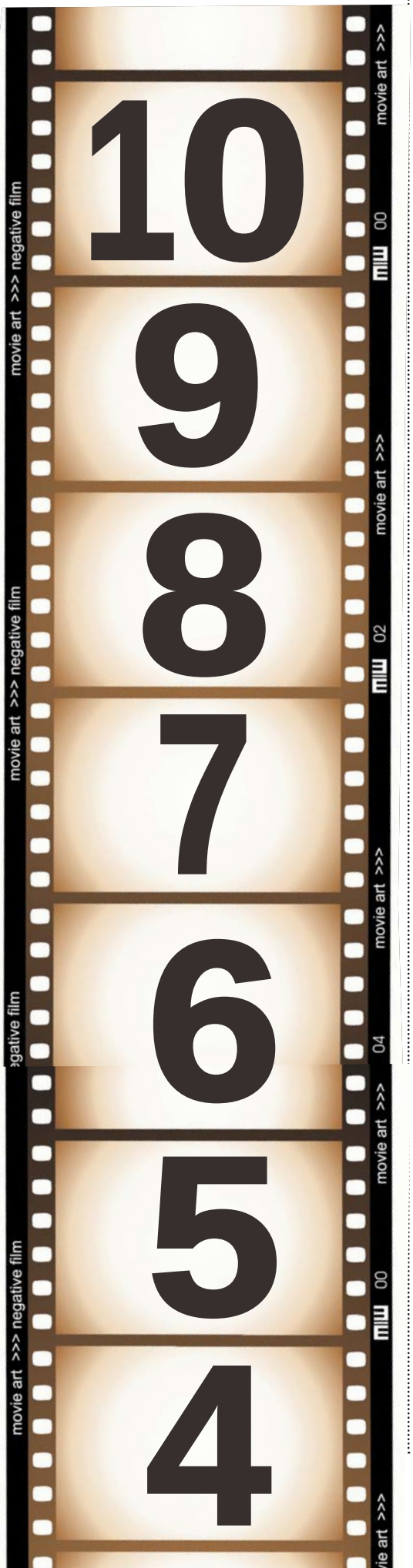

"Film laboratories are the nurseries of the movies; they represent both the origins of cinema and its ends. When Marius Sestier arrived in Sydney in 1896 to shoot scenes for the Lumière brothers, the first task was to find a photographer with a darkroom where his film could be developed. A lab is still the last place in postproduction before the distribution of a new release. It is also the first stop in the revival of an archival print, where, through restoration techniques, a movie may be reborn. [1]"

THE FIRST LAB

Arriving in Sydney in October 1896, Marius Sestier was met with a cable advising that the film he had recently shot in India and sent back to Paris for processing had been ruined. The unprocessed rolls had been opened en route for inspection by customs officials. So, for the Australian scenes he planned to shoot, he decided to take advantage of his local contact and business partner, Walter Barnett, a Sydney society photographer with his own darkroom.

Sestier spent a day shooting on Sydney Harbour. It appears however that neither he nor Barnett had any idea about processing long rolls of film, and the day's work, roughly bundled into a bucket of developer, was also ruined. Barnett's darkroom foreman rose to the challenge the next day and constructed a wooden rack, around which the next batch of film was wound before being immersed in a large tray of developer, with much greater success.

Australia's first motion picture laboratory was thus born.

In the succeeding years, film production in Australia grew prolifically. Film processing was seen as part of camera work, and most cameramen would be found in the lab, processing, editing or printing, any time they weren't out shooting. Fifty years ago, there were at least ten commercial film processing laboratories in Australia, including the lab at Supreme Sound Studios, Filmcraft, founded in 1928 and soon to become Colorfilm, and ATN7's Atlab. Over the years, several smaller labs have been owned and operated by current or past members of ACS, and cinematographers have continued to have a close relationship with particular labs and – importantly – lab technicians.

BOOM AND BUST FOR THE LABS

Labs survived on newsreels, government documentaries, commercials and later on, television work. But with the rapid renaissance of the feature film industry in the 1970s, labs grew larger and more professional, and there were consolidations and amalgamations. Negative and print stock showed variation between batches, and so consistent process control, together with the eye of the lab's colour grader, and his or her communication with the cinematographer, were critical to ensuring the desired result – from rushes through to the release prints.

Labs tend to be viewed as lacking the creative potential of crafts such as editing and cinematography. However, while on the one hand a lab has had to maintain absolutely consistent and predictable standards, the ability of a technician, grader, or liaison person to understand the needs of the script, and work with the filmmaker to achieve entirely non-standard results has always set a good lab apart from others. Lab technicians would have seen results from every production going through the lab: so they would have been able to comment on everything from choices of stock or special processing techniques, to questions such as "I'm going to be three stops short of light on this scene: how will this stock react? Should I push the neg or use a faster emulsion, or can you just fix it up in the transfer, and will I lose the hazy blue look that we're going for?"

The other major relationship for laboratories was with distributors, and the steady demand for release prints kept many laboratories going, and enabled them to provide a full range of services. As cinemas became multiplexes screening new titles nearly every week, and films got simultaneous release dates around the country (and often the whole world), print orders at the lab grew larger, to the point where major titles ran up to fifteen thousand

copies, worldwide. Locally, Atlab's output peaked at around a million feet per day, providing the major Hollywood studios with prints for much of the SE Asian region as well as for Australia.

But at the same time, the ever-larger print orders made release printing a more and more expensive operation for distributors. As digital projection improved, digital distribution became an ever-more cost-effective alternative to 35mm prints.

So now, well over a century after that first reel of film was shot, processed and screened in Australia, the use of photochemical film has turned full circle. Ongoing improvements in digital cameras from the early Sony cameras, through Reds to the new Arri Alexa, have overcome many of the early criticisms of digital image capture and the use of camera negative film has shrunk to a fraction of what it was. Editing, postproduction and visual effects have been entirely digital for a decade. Many countries in the past two years have finally seen a total conversion of all their commercial cinemas to digital projection. It's hardly surprising, therefore, that Fuji announced its exit from virtually all motion picture manufacture in March, while Eastman Kodak, although valiantly continuing to wave the flag for film, is a shadow of its former self.

Many film laboratories around the world are therefore flushing out their processing lines, pensioning off their printers and closing down. In Australia, effectively all are gone. Movielab and Neglab closed some years ago. Deluxe Australia closed its Melbourne lab (formerly Cinevex) and ceased its bulk release printing operations in Lane Cove a year ago, and closed its Sydney negative lab in April this year, marking the group's complete exit from film processing operations. In New Zealand, Park Street Post closes at the end of June. All that remains is the National Film and Sound Archive's internal black and white laboratory in Canberra, while experimental filmmaker Richard Tuohy still provides an 8mm film processing service at Nanolab in Daylesford.

But we'll always have the archives?

The idea that drove those early inventors to bring photography, moving images, projection and sound recording together to create cinema, was the possibility of capturing events from one time and replaying them at a later date and in a different place. It is ironic that the majority of films that have been made (for example about ninety per cent of Australia's silent films) are completely lost. Many films arrive at archives not as a pristine new copy, but years later as the result of a company move or closure, or the death of a collector. Often they are incomplete or already in a deteriorated condition.

Government records, newspapers, books and correspondence are all being digitised. It would be reasonable to assume that audiovisual archives of the future will eventually be entirely virtual: a vast amount of digital files, containing the world's recorded moving image and sound experiences.

However, most film archivists would argue that their challenge is to preserve every aspect of their collection. Not just the content of the films, but, to every possible extent, the complete viewing experience. And so that means that the content, the carrier, and the means of viewing and reproduction are inseparable from each other.

Arguably, with many types of audiovisual item, the carrier is not really of such importance. Few people have questioned the process of copying programs from early video formats such as two-inch quad tape onto a more modern format, or of digitising them to files.

But of all the audiovisual media, photographic film stands out. Alone among video, audio tape, vinyl records, CDs and DVDs and even data files, film is the one format that requires no – or virtually no – replay equipment. The image that is stored is exactly the image that you see: it's one of light and shade and colour. It doesn't need translating from an electrical signal or a wiggly groove or a stream of 0s and 1s. A photographic image is an icon of its subject: it directly resembles it. Other formats (whether analogue or digital) have symbolic signifiers, relying on a systematic code to understand them. And so there is some defining nature about the physical artefact itself that makes the idea of preserving the original material so much more meaningful.[2]

In practical terms, the question is simply whether we trust the technology. All you need to see and recognise a film image is a light source, whereas once the equipment and expertise to retrieve a digital image is lost, the image itself is lost too.

There is another more compelling reason to prefer archiving on film. It lasts longer. Film archives around the world have developed expertise in preserving film. The old problems of inflammable nitrate film, of shrinking and decomposing acetate film, and of fading colour dyes, are all understood and controlled. With storage in the right conditions, many archives plan for their film collections to last for up to 400 years. Of course, climate controlled warehouses and vaults are expensive to

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maintain.

However, analogue materials fade gradually, so it's hard to be clear about a "use-by" date, especially with material that is many years old before it reaches the archive. Traditionally, a ten per cent fade in any layer was taken to be just tolerable: but now, it is possible to fully restore even severely faded colour images via a digital intermediate stage.

No-one knows how long digital data can be preserved. Typical estimates for the best digital media to be totally reliable are around ten to twenty years. But digital loss is much more abrupt, unpredictable, and devastating when it happens. A regular routine of checking data won't predict when a particular file will lose data, only when it has already done so! Of course you cover that by having redundant copies of the data – just as you do with film - to guard against all forms of accidental damage.

Then there is the format issue. There are always new versions: MPEG 1 to 4: LTO 1 to 6: and so on. In fact Fuji announced their LTO-6 tape cartridge while this article was being prepared. It's the third configuration in three years, and with a claimed 30-year life, arguably the best yet, but still relatively short for film archivists. Regular copying and updating can solve this, although at substantial additional cost.

The technical problems may very well be solved in years to come. Film preservation wasn't well understood at first, it took time. But around the world, film archivists generally agree that photographic film remains – for the time being - the best proposition for serious long-term preservation of born-on-film material. Despite digitisation of every other phase of film, archiving remains the last bastion of analogue photochemical technology.

WHERE DO LABS FIT INTO THIS?

While many archives (both public and commercially owned) hold video or digital access copies of TV film, documentaries and short films, feature films from all periods are generally preserved on film, and access copies are also on film, with many also available on DVD. For many years, cinemathèques, arthouse and repertory cinemas and festivals have been able to rent 35mm prints from distributors' back catalogues, but have often had to rely on public archives, which sometimes hold the only remaining prints of older titles. Archives have needed to replace these prints from time to time as they become worn out. The NFSA's Kodak Atlab collection and its successor the Deluxe Kodak collection, consist of prints of 75 Australian features that were struck to ensure that these titles were available for such screenings.

But when it comes to screening archival films today, the rapid transition to digital cinema in the past couple of years has thrown this into disarray. In Australia, programs such as NFSA's touring Big Screen which show prints from the Archive in regional cinemas, now find that many of these cinemas have switched to digital (for improved access to the latest releases). The archive has few films (either current or older) available in the required DCP format. Conversely, in the USA, small-town film societies are finding that distributors are no longer holding prints of back-catalogue titles (storage space is expensive!), but baulk at the cost of producing DCPs (Digital Cinema Packages) of less-popular items.

If release copies need to be digital – at least from now on – while preservation copies need to be on film, then archives need three key pieces of film technology to make it work. They need a film scanner, to convert preserved film images to digital, so as to provide (with the appropriate DCP systems) a digital cinema copy of any of their titles for screening. Then, for films that have been finished (or restored) digitally with no final printing negative, they need a film recorder to make a film preservation copy. This, of course, demands the third piece of technology: film stock and film processing.

BUT WHAT ABOUT FILM STOCK?

Kodak now offers three different types of film stock designed specifically for "Asset Protection" as they refer to archiving. Their current Digital Intermediate stock (2254) – a colour dupe negative optimised for exposing in digital film recorders – has a claimed life of at least 400 years. A recently announced less expensive colour stock

(2332), processed in colour positive chemistry, claims at least 100 years: a significant improvement on regular print emulsions.

Hollywood studios have long preserved film in black and white tri-separations. With no colour dyes to fade, the silver image is effectively permanent. Since red, green and blue records are recorded in separate frames, three times as much stock is required, adding to the cost of this method and most other archives, including NFSA, have found it too expensive. Both Kodak (stock type 2237) and Fuji (type 4791) have backed this method with new stock types optimised for film recorders. This is now the only motion picture stock that Fuji continues to manufacture.

Australia's NFSA has its own black and white lab, comprising two black and white processing machines as well as a variety of specialist printers etc, but has used local commercial labs for colour work. Now it must face the dilemma of either adopting black and white tri-separations as its new standard for 35mm film preservation, or sending all its work overseas, to American or European archival labs – assuming they have the capacity to accept what will be an increasing flow of work from other archives left without local processing services.

Restoration is different from preservation, and the Digital Intermediate process offers a powerful, though expensive, method of film restoration: damaged or faded film can be scanned, restored to its original state, and then recorded back to film stock for long-term preservation. The NFSA's restoration of Wake in Fright (1971), carried out by EFILM Australia, is an excellent example. Film restorers now have a dangerously powerful set of tools at their disposal. But the goal of archival restoration must always be, "to present material in such a way that, as far as is now possible in practice, the audience is able to perceive and appreciate it in its original form"[3]. Archivists must guard against producing a "revised" or "renovated' version rather than a "restored" version.

And so any labs that remain anywhere in the world, working with restorers in the world's archives and combining the best of digital and photochemical systems, could serve as a bridge between cinema's photochemical and digital technologies. Their unique blend of art, technology and industry will continue to give rise to innovative techniques in the service of the filmmakers' intentions: clever new ways to restore a film exactly to its original state.

But this will rely on preserving, not just the films themselves, and the equipment used for them, but also the knowledge and experience that produced them. Just as images are copied from one deteriorating format to another, so the knowledge of the art and the technology accumulated by filmmakers and technicians over a lifetime must also be transferred to younger people so it is not lost.

THE LAST LAB?

Laboratories started as the nursery of the movies. In the infant years of cinema, they ran uncomplicated, manually operated black and white processes. As cinema matured, the labs did too, becoming industrial, technological, and commercial. As film grows old, so the nursery laboratories seem to be preparing for a return to simple, restorative black and white chemistry. Perhaps a second childhood? For this final age of man, Shakespeare predicted "mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything". But Shakespeare's murdered heroes were often a long time dying, sometimes making their most eloquent speeches long after the blood should have drained from their bodies. And so it may be with film. Although the major labs in Australia and New Zealand can't find a business case for keeping their processors running, it seems the film faithful - both young and old - aren't ready to pull the plug, and there is a possibility that Neglab may refill its tanks to keep film going just a little longer. And with the care of the archives too, labs will be around for a while yet, and it will be a very long time before film approaches oblivion.

(Endnotes)

1 Adapted from Gabriel M. Paletz: *The Finesse of the Film Lab: A Report from a Week at Haghefilm* in The Moving Image, Volume 6, Number 1, Spring 2006

2 Dominic Case: *Digital Archiving: The Last Hurdle, or a Bridge too far:* presented at SMPTE 2011, Sydney

3 Ray Edmonson: *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles,* UNESCO, 2004.

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dop mark bliss

AC: You're living in Prague now aren't you Mark?

MB: Yes, in a beautiful attic flat in a house built around 1895. We sit on the fifth floor, so we've got a beautiful view of Prague. It's a nice bonus!

AC: How long did you live in Australia?

MB: I spent most of my adult life in Australia. I escaped from what used to be Czechoslovakia when I was a very young lad. I decided that none of that communist crap was for me and I wanted to travel, see the world and basically do something with my life. My family was blacklisted here, because of my father's involvement during the 1968 invasion by the Russian army so when I tried to get into the film school here they just laughed at me because I was blacklisted also. So in 1987 I escaped and made my way to Australia. That's where I studied film and I spent nearly 20 years there; that's where my children were born.

AC: So why did you go back and base yourself in Prague?

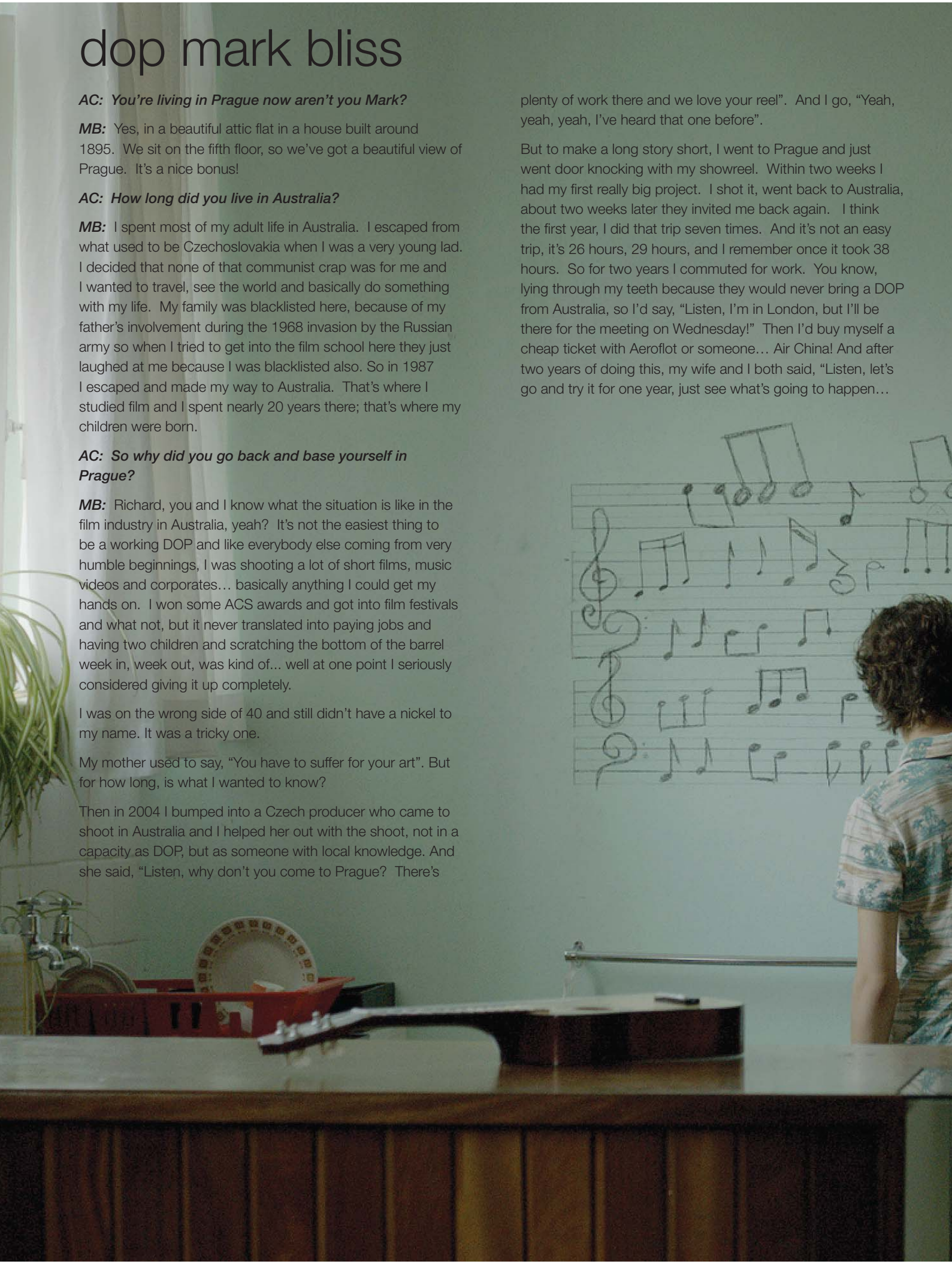
MB: Richard, you and I know what the situation is like in the film industry in Australia, yeah? It's not the easiest thing to be a working DOP and like everybody else coming from very humble beginnings, I was shooting a lot of short films, music videos and corporates… basically anything I could get my hands on. I won some ACS awards and got into film festivals and what not, but it never translated into paying jobs and having two children and scratching the bottom of the barrel week in, week out, was kind of... well at one point I seriously considered giving it up completely.

I was on the wrong side of 40 and still didn't have a nickel to my name. It was a tricky one.

My mother used to say, "You have to suffer for your art". But for how long, is what I wanted to know?

Then in 2004 I bumped into a Czech producer who came to shoot in Australia and I helped her out with the shoot, not in a capacity as DOP, but as someone with local knowledge. And she said, "Listen, why don't you come to Prague? There's plenty of work there and we love your reel". And I go, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I've heard that one before".

But to make a long story short, I went to Prague and just went door knocking with my showreel. Within two weeks I had my first really big project. I shot it, went back to Australia, about two weeks later they invited me back again. I think the first year, I did that trip seven times. And it's not an easy trip, it's 26 hours, 29 hours, and I remember once it took 38 hours. So for two years I commuted for work. You know, lying through my teeth because they would never bring a DOP from Australia, so I'd say, "Listen, I'm in London, but I'll be there for the meeting on Wednesday!" Then I'd buy myself a cheap ticket with Aeroflot or someone… Air China! And after two years of doing this, my wife and I both said, "Listen, let's go and try it for one year, just see what's going to happen…



let's just go".

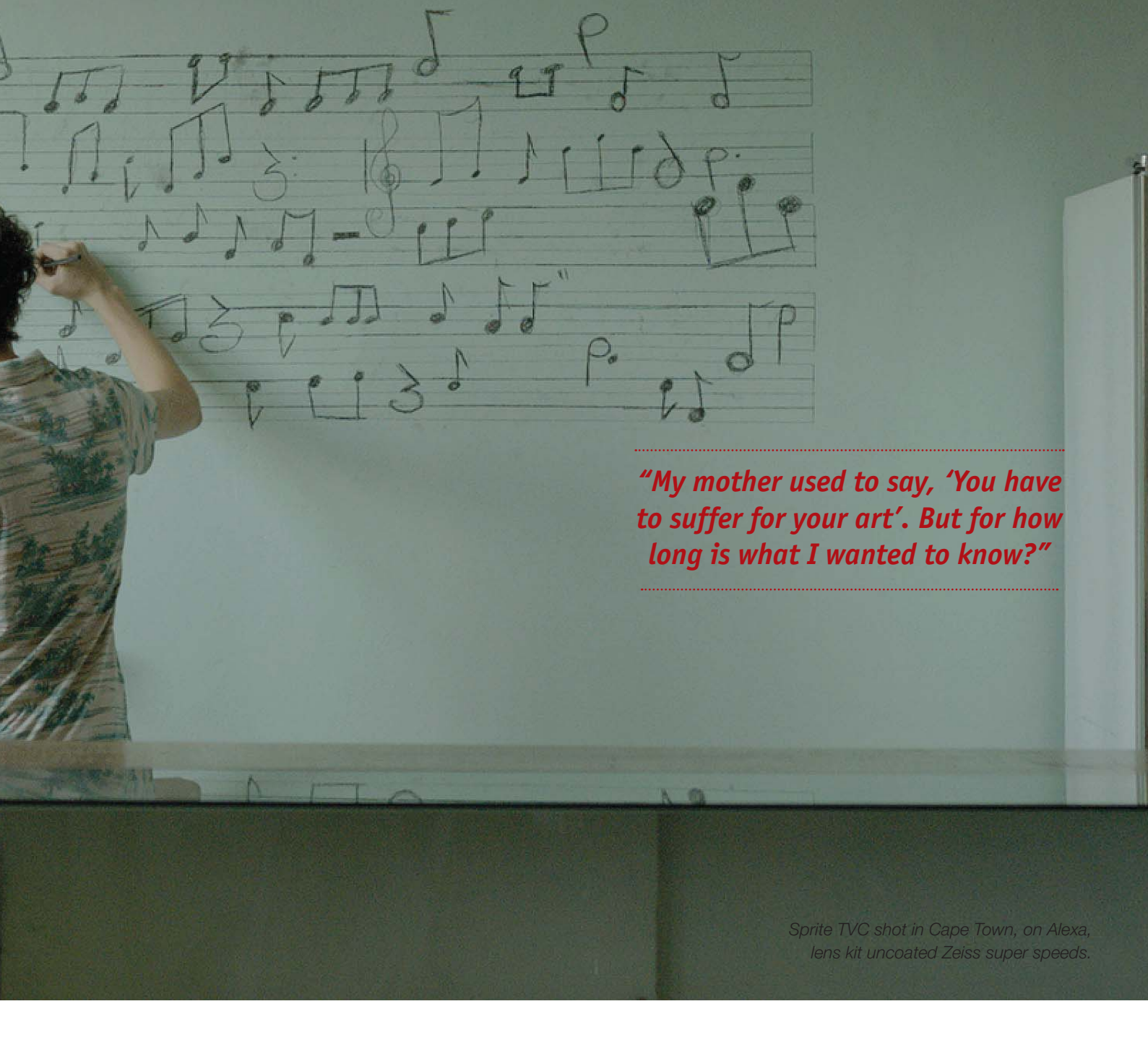
AC: Did you go to a film school in Australia?

MB: Yes I did, North Sydney TAFE was running a four-year course in film, and they had Cinematography, Editing and Sound as the majors. So I enrolled. The first year they kicked me out because my English was non-existent. [laughs] So I had to eat a bit of humble pie and come back the following year. I was fortunate enough to have Terry Byrne as my teacher, a wonderful gentleman and a very experience cinematographer. Terry Byrne ACS, he would be in his 80's now.

The college was very technical; they did not care for the artistic stuff so much, but because we had great teachers we obviously got that as well. We were the first year to actually shoot short films. Instead of doing a lighting exercise using low light levels, we just wrote a short film which was in the "film noir" lighting style, then shot it as a short film... [Dick's cat Roy gets stuck on the roof so he has to break the interview briefly while he goes and rescues him]

AC: He's ok. Let's pick it up from the films you made at TAFE.

MB: (Laughs) Making short films was a fabulous way of learning, because there's no better way to learn than to actually see what you've shot, on a big screen. Unfortunately nowadays it's so rare to see anything on the big screen until the very, very end. At school we had a screening room with a decent sized screen and seeing your 16mm reversal rushes, overexposed, underexposed, out of focus and what not was sometimes very humbling, because you'd be watching it with



"My mother used to say, 'You have to suffer for your art'. But for how long is what I wanted to know?"

Sprite TVC shot in Cape Town, on Alexa, lens kit uncoated Zeiss super speeds.

all your classmates. So obviously there was competition - who's going to shoot the best looking images? I think it was brilliant. Unfortunately a lot of film students nowadays don't get to experience that, because everything is shot in HD.

Do you know what HD really stands for?

AC: I just assumed it was High Definition.

MB: No, no it's Horrible Detail. (Laughs)

AC: I assume from that comment that you still prefer to shoot film?

MB: I've been very fortunate to keep shooting film until... I think this year (2012) I shot three projects on film, but the last six months, everything's been shot on Alexa and also some Red Epic.

AC: And what did you think of the digital experience?

MB: I've shot a lot on Alexa. I've seen brilliant stuff shot for the big screen. But I think there's this misconception that with HD cameras you don't need lights, because they're so light sensitive. I think on the contrary – it's much harder to make them look anywhere near as good as film. But the Alexa is probably the best thing that there is at the moment as far as digital acquisition.

But for my money, I can shoot Super 16 film, not to mention 35mm, much better. And unfortunately the current situation is that people so quickly embrace the digital revolution that we're kind of giving away this beautiful means of shooting. And I've talked to a lot of editors and they're all going, "Guys, turn these cameras off sometimes!" Because people go, "Let's do another take, just keep it rolling'". "Keep it rolling" is the thing I hear a lot! And a friend of mine who cuts feature films here, he says that digital has lumbered him with ten times the amount of raw material, that has to be logged in, look at, sorted out. And guys, when you go into post production with hours of material for a 45 second commercial, then you'll know!

AC: Is there a craft loss as well as a discipline loss?

MB: Absolutely. Everyone's a little bit slack because "Hey, we'll just do it again" or "We'll fix it in post", "They can rub it out", "They can key this out". Also because there's a direct feed of the image from the camera, people will look at it and go, "Hey, let's shoot!" but you as a DP are nowhere near ready… you're not even half there. But the producer or director sit there and see an image and go "Let's shoot… let's go, let's shoot". It's because the image is going to the video village from the moment the camera is built and powered up. And obviously for lack of anything else to do, they just make comments, yeah? So what I do now is I ask the video operators not to give the picture to the client or the agency until we're actually ready to present. While I'm building the picture, while I'm building the composition, while I'm putting things in foreground, background, mid ground, I don't want clients to be looking at what I'm doing, because obviously they haven't got an understanding of how long the process can take. We need to stand up for ourselves because the cameraman is the guardian of the image. To me it's the soul of the filmmaking process, because it's a visual medium. We are responsible for keeping the standard.

"Unfortunately nowadays it's so rare to see anything on the big screen until the very, very end."

I think discipline is a good thing. In the film days, if you went on a shoot and had a 10:1 ratio then you had to bloody well stick to it! But unfortunately, with digital, that's all gone. You know, multiple cameras, multiple set-ups, multiple shots, "Let's shoot this again" you hear so many times. But that obviously depends on the director – I worked with a director, who after the first take said, "Yeah, it's fine, check the gate", and it was interesting because everyone really lifted their game, because they realised the director would do one or two takes and, if he was happy, move on. I mean, I shoot a lot of commercials these days and some feel like they're directed by a committee.

AC: And features also, wouldn't you agree?

Two too many in a bath tub - Music video for the band "Moja Rec", song "Nocny Let", shot with Alexa and Kowa anamorphic lenses (Prague).

Rexona TVC shot in Warsaw in an old astronaut training facility (35mm film).

MB: I agree, they're just eye candy. You watch them and you kind of go, "Yeah, it's just motion and colour, motion and colour", and you're being bombarded with these glossy images of whatever... the visual impact is so overwhelming that the storyline is completely left behind.

AC: Makes you yearn for low budget, great story film making, where film makers have more control.

MB: Indeed, but not necessarily the low budget, the creative control, YES, great storytelling, definitely. I've shot a lot of ultra low budget projects in Australia and I think budget's got very little to do with how your visuals turn out. I shot a feature film where the budget was $30,000, so I just went out and bought a whole lot of Chinese lanterns. The whole film was shot with Chinese lanterns and I think our biggest light was one Blondie, which we used only occasionally because it would blow the fuses and we didn't have a generator. And the film looked really nice. I mean, it has none of those traces of a low budget production. I think it's really about understanding all the elements of a film and then navigating a certain path through them. Of course you go right to the edge, you've got to be shooting with very little lighting and low light levels. Budget's got nothing to do with how good the film is. I mean, if it's a good story then it will come through. You would tailor the look as best as you can within the budget and the director's vision.

AC: Where have you been shooting lately and was Prague the right move?

MB: Being in Europe means that nothing is too far; one, two max three hours by plane from anywhere. This summer, in one go, I did three jobs back to back. Moscow, Havana and then Istanbul. I also did Indonesia, Singapore, Germany, Vietnam, Switzerland, Egypt, Ukraine and few others.

The move to Prague? It was a gamble. A calculated gamble from me but I really wanted to see... I think three days after landing here, I was on a project and I have not stopped since.

"... what I do now is I ask the video operators not to give the picture to the client or the agency until we're actually ready to present."

I have not said "NO" to so many projects as in the last five years. I've now purposefully slowed down a little bit, because I would shoot three or four commercials in a month and these would be all fairly big sized productions, sometimes four, sometimes five day shoots. But I'm very, very busy here in Europe. I must say it brought peace of mind for me, because I have a young family and working in Australia… it was touch and go at times. And the budgets were smaller, much tighter, it was difficult. The children obviously protested, they wanted to go back to Sydney and Bondi! [laughs] The novelty of winter wore off after the first two weeks of sub-zero temperatures and snow! Getting up in the morning and still being dark at 9am!

AC: What are the facilities like in Pargue?

MB: We have the Barrandov studios here, which are absolutely unbelievable. Outside of the US, I think it's among

"Budget's got nothing to do with how good the film is."

the largest studio complex anywhere in the world. The skills and the expertise of the crews are also unbelievable. My grip is a third generation grip, and his grandfather was a legend… there's a long tradition of filmmaking here and a huge appreciation for filmmakers and for the art of filmmaking, which is fantastic. The rental houses here are great, and as with any place you tend to stick with one. I think I was lucky that I hooked up with the best people from the start. They have been looking after me and supporting me really well. The post houses are also absolutely top level as their credits would suggest. There's a lot of big feature films coming here to shoot and once they realise what is available in terms of post they would stay for post too. Lots of films shot elsewhere do their post effects here as well.

There's also several arthouse cinemas and the state film archive runs a cinema here and you can go and watch Citizen Kane on a big screen... imagine that! They had a Werner Herzog and a WD Griffiths retrospective just recently and it's amazing because you get to see beautifully restored 35mm prints of classic films that you'd no longer see elsewhere.

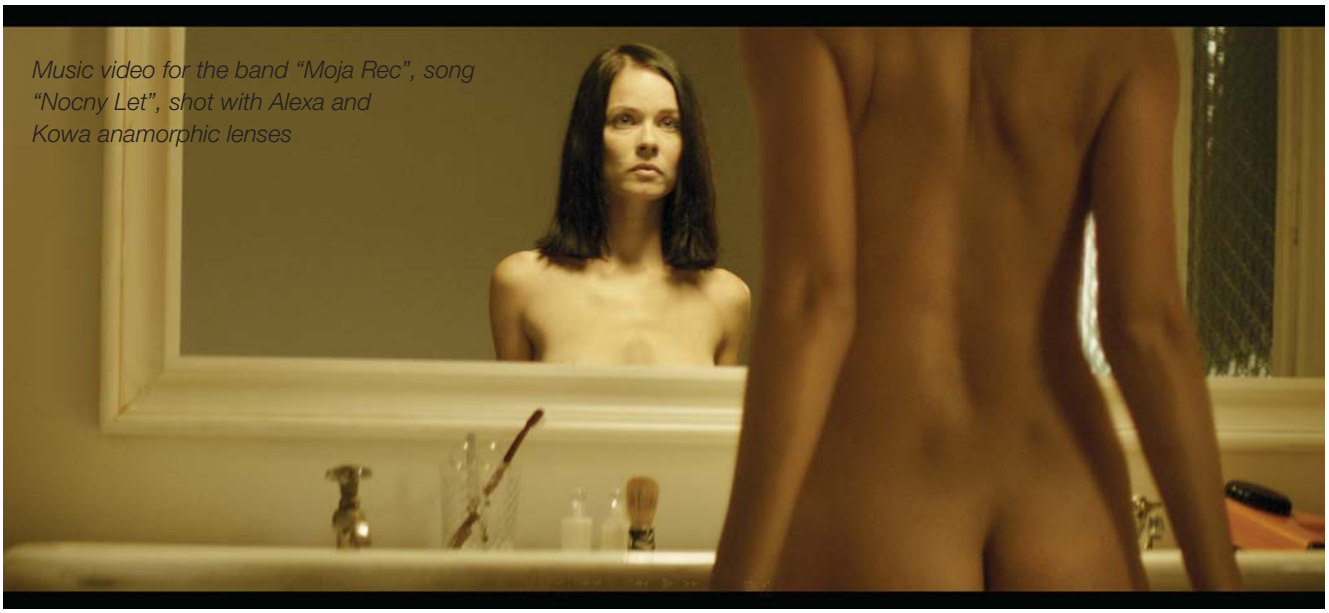
Micromax TVC for mobile phone, shot on Alexa, Prague

And an interesting thing as well here is that when the movie finishes, hardly anyone leaves before the credits roll through – everyone stays and watches the credits. Last year, or the year before last, at the Box Office, the largest grossing film was Czech, second was another Czech film, and an America blockbuster came in third… fourth and fifth were both Czech movies also. Which is quite amazing, because it's a small country with some 10 million people, and we shoot around 35 feature films a year… it's a huge success. But that's because it's got a history, people talk about movies, they're genuinely interested in the art of film-making.

AC: Did you slot in easily when you returned to Prague?

MB: Judging by the number of projects I have done here since landing, I would say I could never imagine it going so smoothly, mind you I was commuting to Prague for the previous two years.

But to be honest, I was a strange beast for the locals, as I was too young to know anyone when I defected the country and I did my film studies in Australia, so I had no network here



Music video for the band "Moja Rec", song "Nocny Let", shot with Alexa and Kowa anamorphic lenses

in Prague. One story to illustrate.

(Laughs) I got invited to an interview with a director and a producer for their upcoming project. He says, "Hi, my name is Jan" and I go, "Very nice to meet you, my name is Mark", and so we started talking about the film. And after about ten, fifteen minutes, he says, "You don't know who I am, do you?" and I said, "Yeah, you're Jan, you just introduced yourself, you're a film director, you want to shoot something...". He goes, "Yeah, but you don't know who I am, you don't know my surname." And I go, "So what's your surname?". And he and his producer started to laugh. He was Jan Sverak and he's the only Czech director who had won two Oscars! And of course I know all of his movies, I've seen all of his films and I appreciate his work very much, but I'd never seen his face. And they thought it was very, very funny that a Czech speaking DOP didn't know him. [laughs] That was fun, and then I got to shoot his film.

The shoot itself was an amazing, amazing experience. As far as we know, there's never been a movie done that way. The schedule went for the original 60 day shoot, got extended to 80, and ended up being 180 days. The ever expanding schedule also meant that I was unable to complete the project as I was contracted on another production. The film was completed by a legendary Czech DOP Vladimir Smutny ACK.

It's called Kooky http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBQbkbnj780. The original title was something else, but it would not translate too well. It's like Mad Max with puppets. The main character's about 15-20 cms tall. The original idea was that we would shoot everything outside, no studio, no lights, just to do it really low budget sort of thing.

As we didn't want to be looking down at the little guy and only seeing the floor in the background, we were constantly digging the camera in, under ground level, using periscopes and low level prisms and all sorts of gadgets to make the film exciting and I think that we succeeded. The film won the best cinematography award for 2010.

AC: You shoot a lot of TVC's all over Europe; do you still light the way you used to when you were in Australia?

MB: I try to keep on top of things so my work gets better and better. And a lot of the time that means actually doing less. I remember Terry Byrne, my Aussie teacher, used to say, "Mark, if it looks good lit with one light, don't bother bringing in another one, because you just create problems for yourself". And I've been doing a lot of that. And obviously, on a lot of the big productions, you're expected to pull out big lights and construct big set ups, and that's the expensive way. But I love simplicity; of course it must work for the scene and the desired atmosphere, but I've been refusing to do that and shooting the way that I think is correct for the project.

It's funny sometimes; I did a commercial, it's the Nescafe Noir film, where the producer said,

"I saw your equipment list and there's no generator"... I replied, "I don't want a generator" and she goes, "You don't understand, you haven't read the script, it's a night shoot and the main guy is black. How are you going to light it?" To cut a long story short, we didn't powder him down, we oiled him up to pick up the reflections. I shot some tests and didn't even use a 500ASA film stock, I decided to go with 200ASA, because after the test I really liked its structure and blacks. And I think my Gaffer aged about 10 years during that shoot. He would repeatedly say, "Mark, Mark! I can give you a light in two minutes", and I'd say, "Nah, I don't want to overlight it...". I remember the first day when the rushes came back and we put them up, half the crew are standing there saying, "This is amazing!"

AC: We're in a global business now and I get the feeling that a lot of Australians, who work in TV commercials particularly, are kind of stuck here. Or at least they think they are. I've heard DOPs (and directors) here say, "Sydney (or Melbourne) is dead, there's nothing out there" and this is exactly what happened here during the 'recession we had to have' (thank you Paul Keating) from 1989 to 1993. It was a very serious recession, following the stock market crash in 1987, and on top of that Keating deregulated our industry. And I remember thinking that if they're going to deregulate, all the good work's going to be overseas, so I jumped on a plane and went overseas and I was away for nearly the whole of

1990 to 2000. Lived in Bris Vegas but worked wherever. Chased it down. And a lot of DOPs (and particularly a lot directors) felt that they didn't have to jump on a plane and that the work would come to them, but of course it never did, and a lot of them exited the industry. Would you recommend Aussie DOP's get agents in Europe, America and/or Asia?

MB: I know of quite a few who have done just that. I know that Mark Lapwood has done it, I think he's based in India and then there's all those DOPs who went to Hollywood, Tristan Milani, Peter Holland, to name a few from my generation. Following in the footsteps of the old guard. Deam, Russel, Don, John, Dion and many others. When I was in Sydney during the projection of the Kooky film, I spoke with quite a few DOPs and I heard the same thing. Australia is so far away from anywhere, that unless you have an international agent who can push you, the tyranny of distance will work against you. Being based here works favourably for me, because there are a lot of foreign companies coming to shoot in Prague for the locations, the studios, on-screen talent, and all that. So a lot of foreign productions say, "We're not going to fly a DOP in, we'll see who's available on the ground". And I think, on this particular level, there are only about four or five of us in Prague who have international showreels that fulfil the requirements of the clients like the global banks, mobile phone companies, breweries and the car manufacturers.

"You don't understand, you haven't read the script, it's a night shoot and the main guy is black. How are you going to light it?"

AC: The ones with the money!

MB: If they don't find who they need on the ground here they'll get someone over from England, France or Poland, the competition is also very very strong. You have to be very dogged. It's hard to do it from a distance because here in Europe, everything is on a personal level. You know, you go and meet them, talk to them face to face. But I think it's the same everywhere; I've got a lot of friends from here who are quite aware of the booming markets in India and China, and

they will pack themselves up and fly to India and stay there for four or five days and visit production companies. They go with DVDs, other material, with their websites and business cards. No longer is it enough to be a DOP, a technician, and a creative person. You have also be a strategist and a marketing person. Because the fact that you make beautiful pictures is useless unless people know about you.

AC: Self promotion is imperative.

MB: Absolutely, absolutely. You actively have to promote yourself, that's really important. And with your showreel, less is more. If you've got 50 projects on it, no one's going to watch all of it. Select the five or eight best things you've ever done, that represent you best in terms of "this is my style, this is how I work". Hopefully some have won awards. And also the problem nowadays is how do you make sure it actually gets into the hands of right people? That is the hardest thing.

"I don't need someone with a big ego and small penis to make me feel like an idiot. I can do things better and faster than anybody else..."

AC: I know a way. A good mate of mine from the tiny island of Jersey, in the Channel Isles, UK, came out to Australia a few years back and I hooked him up with production companies in Bris Vegas. 'Jersey', as he was immediately nick named, stayed for a year, learnt heaps, made many friends, then went back to take up a permanent job on the island. Later he decided to try London and picked out 3 production companies whose work he greatly admired and for whom he would love to work. He made a plaster cast of his foot, painted it high gloss blue, (don't ask me why), popped in a short note and CV and posted the foot to the three production companies. The note commenced "I've been told that the hardest thing to do in the film industry is to get a foot in the door, so I guess I've already succeeded at doing that. Hi, my name is …" Brilliant. All three production companies replied immediately and he got a job with his number one choice. He has just art directed a TVC for this company which you can view at http-//www.youtube.com/w#216FF5. It's exceptional.

How do you get your foot into the door? What's your modus operandi?

MB: It's useless to send it addressed to a production house, because it will just end up on a shelf with 500 other DOP's reels. Obviously the website is an amazing tool, because it works for you 24/7. Also you don't want to be cold calling anyone, because that's the worst way of turning people off… because you keep calling them saying, "Listen, have a look at my showreel".

It's a tricky one, you have to target very precisely who you want to work with, "OK, I love this director's work. I'd love to work with him/her." Then call him/her ahead. You must have a strong showreel. A lot of times it's just about the right time, the right place, the right people. But I think in this business it's very personal, everything is personal. Like this guy makes pretty pictures, but is he a dickhead? He could be an enormous arse-hole who shoots beautiful images.

Let me tell you about my first job here in Prague. It was a big commercial and my first question to the producer was, "Who's going to be my focus puller?" and obviously gaffer, grip etc. And he says, "We'll give you the best people, but there's this really quirky thing. You have to go for an interview with the focus puller." I go, "I have to go for an interview?". He goes, "Trust me, just go there, see him". I go, "Fine, OK". So we caught up, had a beer together in a bar, had a chat, see you later.

The next day they're calling me, "Mark, it's all fine, you're in. He's going to do the job with you".

I go, "That's fantastic, that's great." [shakes his head] Love it! So after about three days of shooting I said, "So Frank, tell me about this interview business of yours". He said, "Mark, no disrespect, you're a wonderful guy, I love working with you. But not so long ago I worked with another foreign DOP and he was a "major arse-hole", he said. "Yes, he made beautiful pictures but he made me and everybody else on the set suffer. I've been doing this for 20 years, I'm a focus puller, I travel around the world, I've worked on feature films, you name it. And I don't need someone with a big ego and small penis to make me feel like an idiot. I can do things better and faster than anybody else, so I just wanted to check you out to see if you were a normal person". And I love that, it's part of the system here. I've got enough work. I don't need to be working on every other job that comes through town.

And it's interesting because I've been here for a long time now, and I ring a focus puller and he asks, "Who's the job with? Which company?" I go, "So and so" and he goes, "Ah, I don't work with them." And I go, "Why?". "I only work with three production houses here because I know that everything is going to be by the book, you know, having the right number of assistants, having the right equipment. I know they're not going to say I can't have wireless focus, I can't have this and that". He says, "I don't need all the other ones. They're going to give me shit, then take three or four months to pay me." There's a very strong solidarity here among the crew as well.

And in Europe, the creative partnerships between director and and DOP are unbelievable. There are some who have been working together for 20 or 30 years.

AC: How would you describe your lighting style Mark?

MB: The way I look at it is that the style is dictated by the story, by the script and what's on the page. The energy comes from the story, the director will have a certain vision in mind and together with him and the art director we'll forge ahead to make that vision come alive.

I've been told this by many directors "Your showreel looks like the showreel of five different DOP's", because the jobs don't have one look. To me it's like a cook who can only cook spaghetti bolognese. Nothing else! And I always get surprised when people say, "We want to shoot a food commercial, and we're going to have chocolate and milk mixing . Have you done it before?" It's like asking a car mechanic if he's fixed a Volkswagen before. Give me the food stylist and I will shoot is 150 frames per second and make it look beautiful. I can appreciate that in the TVC part of the industry the responsibilities to the client is paramount and therefore the stress in on getting people with that precise experience to shoot your spot. That's why there's DOPs who are beauty specialist, car specialists, food specialist and so on.

With my style of lighting, I don't want to be coming in and repeating myself. I mean it's hard because I could just walk in and go, "OK, guys, we've done this all before so camera's here, [points] ¾ backlight, give me something here". You could do it like that. But I think you'd kill yourself after two months if you kept doing the same thing. I love the challenge. For me it's the magic of the craft and the magic of the moment. And I will be tweaking the lights, the camera's already rolling and I might be, you know, tweaking a light here because I see something. Or I might change a light after five takes. I'll say, "Guys, I'm sorry, but I've just spotted this thing and it's going to make it infinitely better."

For me, the style should come from the story. The script dictates the way the film should look. Whenever I can I'll shoot a test. Because I really would shoot stuff very borderline when it comes to light levels, and I would be shooting wide open… two stops under, and I'd be crossing all fingers and toes and hoping that there was something on the neg.

On the way to the telecine I'd be saying to the director, tongue in cheek .."Listen, it's about the journey, yeah? There might not be anything on the film, but you know...!". [laughs] I must say I miss that; the time where you've exposed the film and you go to a telecine and see it going through the gate for the first time. With HD you've already seen it.

For one film, the director wanted this girl, where she wakes up and she's still dreaming and she puts her hands up and the ceiling's full of water – it's coming down on her. And

Tracker TVC shot in South Africa, shot on canon 5D as stills that were later animated.

I said, "OK, I think I know how to do it.". And so, I've put the bed upside down, put the camera on it upside down as well. Fixed the bed and the camera on one plate, positioned a pool, 15-20cms deep, on the floor underneath the bed, then lowered the bed towards the pool. One guy with a set of pulleys was doing it by hand, just walking. And when you project the image what you get is a girl in bed with the ceiling coming down, and she puts her hands through it.

AC: Was the actor strapped in?

MB: Yeah, she was strapped in, her hair was glued to the pillows, and everything else glued down. But because the way it was done, you actually see it happening in real time and there's no green screen and it's all real... And to me that's the magic. It worked brilliantly, took two takes and was cheap as chips.

"I don't actually do much grading, as most of the time it's very subtle... the look has already been created on the set."

I did a shot just recently where it was supposed to be "magic hour" and it was overcast. So there was no magic hour – it was as flat as a pancake, and we had to do the shot that particular day. So I put my actors underneath a 20 x 20 ft negative fill and worked them three quarter to camera so the light was only hitting them from one side. And it looked like this beautiful soft light hitting them from the "magic hour" and I could still see light behind them. And it was a simple solution to potentially a big problem. Better than saying "We've got to do it in post!" - "No, you can't do it in post, because if there's no contrast in the image you can't do anything."

And also the choice of your tools. I mean now with the HD cameras, if you put any of the new lenses on them – the master primes and the ultra primes – the image is just too clinical, too good, too polished. I see far too much. I shot something recently on a set of old anamorphic lenses, and they were just magic. Just magic. They're not very easy to get hold of… they're sharp, yet soft.

AC: Who makes the anamorphic lenses?

MB: They're called Kowa. Japanese. They still make lenses now, but only small 'C' mount lenses for industrial use. They don't make movie lenses anymore.

I got them through Vantage; they've got a branch here in Prague and I must say they're unbelievable. It's a rental house that has its own development department and they manufacture lenses. And there's a couple of guys in the cellar and I think they're like these mad scientists and they come up with these new and wonderful things. The new Hawk anamorphics, the V-lites, they're about as small as the Zeiss Mark II prime set. Very tiny, beautifully crafted, anamorphic lenses. Which is quite interesting because the old Japanese lenses were the same size. They're 80mm in diameter and 40mm lens is about this big [holds fingers about 20 cm apart], 50, 75 and 100 [moves fingers apart about 5cm each time]. So they're extremely small for anamorphics. The latest thing to come out of Vantage is the T1 lens, I saw it at Camera Image this year, stunning.

AC: I'm interested in the look of quite a few of the images you sent me… very low contrast and often with a 'dirty' yellow hue. Is that a trend in Europe now or is the look simply driven by the narrative?

MB: In regards to the grading, I never do any of it consciously, the look of the film comes to life after a long process of pre-production, discussions with the director, sourcing reference images, talking about the style, the story and the emotions that we want to portray. Another very important part in that is the selection of locations and also the art direction.

And the shooting schedule has a huge influence on how you shoot things, as it is really up to the DOP to walk in, look at the storyboard and say "OK, I can do this scene in 30 minutes, I will need bla bla bla", because you know you will use all the existing light fixtures and only model your actors, or maybe just one large source outside and a bit of smoke.

Everything effects the final look, from wardrobe, to the colour of the location/set and it's up to you to chisel something out of it. It's about the decisions that you make, and how well prepared you are. For me though, it's about the emotional charge of the scene.

I don't actually do much grading, as most of the time it's very subtle… the look has already been created on the set.

I don't really have the time to watch for trends, the look usually comes out of the situation

I very rarely desaturate images in post, maybe slightly, but most of the colours are controlled through planning, lighting, set design etc….

I also don't use filters all that much either, except for the occasional grads, NDs of course and pola if needed.

Part of the look is also created by carefully selecting your lenses for each job according to what the desired effect is. I use a selection of fantastic old and new lenses… Bosh & Lomb, Kowa, Technovision, some very old Canon super speeds, or the 1.3 x anamorphic lenses to give each project it's distinct look and feel. Recently I used an uncoated set of Zeiss super speeds and talking about low contrast, these lenses are crazy!

AC: Switching subjects, is there a place for film in the future?

MB: In Britain now, I notice Fuji has this deal where in the cost of one roll of film, you've got the telecine for free, you've got the processing and transfer to HD for free, and pick-up and delivery for free.

So, you shoot on film, they come and pick it up from location and when they give it to you back, it's already been developed, scanned and telecined. And it's all the same price. Because unless Kodak and Fuji say they're going to bring the cost of the film stock down to the point where it's comparable with HD, we're going to lose the battle.

On a happier note, Mihai Malaimare jr. just used 35mm and 65mm to shoot The Master. So film will live on.

It's up to us.

AC: Mark has just acquired his US working visa, has signed up with a US agent and already shot his first job in LA. Watch for his name in the future. Ed.

SHORT FILMS

CINEMATOGRAPHERS STATE ROUND-UP

BY NICOLA DALEY

TAU SERU DOP MICHAEL LATHAM *(VIC)*

Tau Seru, directed by Rodd Rathjen, is a story about the son of a nomadic sheepherder set in the Indian Himalayas. Travellers moving through his world distract the son, until one day he decides to take action.

The crew knew the key to getting the story told was to keep it simple, as shooting at 4500m above sea level, with non actors, animals and all exteriors was never going to be easy.

As Michael says, “everything becomes a struggle at high altitude so we chose a location we could shoot 90% of the film in walking distance from our camp. The day before filming we found out a miscommunication with the sheep herders meant that the 3 days we thought we had with the sheep, turned into only a few hours. It then became a run and gun approach scrambling to capture as many shots of the sheep as we could. The landscape is very much a part of the character of this story but we never wanted it to be showy. Visually we wanted the world to feel barren, void of sustenance: a place hard to survive in both visually and mentally. The sun was our only light source and as much as we tried to schedule for the right time of day the sheep generally dictated our shooting schedule.”

Michael would have loved to have shot on film, “but we were far from camera support and without the ability to test it was pretty risky. We chose the Alexa for its dynamic range, a camera which I had never used before but with its large record button I figured it out!”

Tau Seru is the only Australian film selected for Cannes this year and more information can be found at www.circuitbreakerfilms.com

BEEHIVE DOP ERRAN EDWARDS *(NSW)*

Penny (Aimee-Lee Druett) is an emotionally repressed girl hiding behind her sexuality. As her lifestyle becomes unsatisfying and destructive she is forced to admit her need for connection. *Beehive* is a visually stylized, dramatic short film inspired by the fashion and energy of 1960's European Cinema. It is directed by Alastair Wharton and produced by Chloe Lawrence-Hartcher

Cinematographer, and writer Ehran Edwards was looking to develop an exciting project that would require visual creativity and production innovation on a low budget. Ehran primarily shot the film on the RED Epic using a set of Carl Zeiss CP2s. Pickups were done using the RED Scarlet-X and Cooke S4 prime lenses.

Ehran worked closely with her gaffer Dimitri Zaunders, and production designer Diva Abrahamian to create the visually vibrant look of *Beehive.* The film incorporates influences from *Les Amours Imaginaries, Cemetery Junction*, and *An Education*.

THE BUNKER DOP ADAM HOWDEN *(NSW)*

The Bunker was shot on the Red One-MX with Zeiss Superspeeds MkIIIs and produced by Azure Productions. "The film was challenging from a cinematography perspective. It was a short shoot, just one day and the weather was against us. The day started out with a beautiful blue sky, moved to ominous black clouds off the coast and transitioned to full blown rain and lighting with the entire crew sheltering for cover in a disused war bunker," remembers Adam.

The film centres on a young girls decision to enter womanhood. The main scene takes place in a disused war bunker. Adam remarks that "there were two options for lighting, a porthole in the roof and a narrow door way. We made use of an Arri 2.5k Fresnel and 4x4' 216 diffusion frame through the doorway, and bounced a 125w Arri Pocket Par off the low ceiling with an Arri 575w Par through the porthole."

More information can be found at http://www.azureproductions.com.au/

COCKATOO DOP CHRIS BLAND *(NSW)*

Cockatoo, written and directed by Matthew Jenkin, and produced by Oliver Leimbach and Matthew Jenkin, is a short film about a man with a broken heart who tries to relive his failed relationship by hiring a girl to play his ex-girlfriend. If only she could get the accent right!

Cockatoo was shot on the Red One using Zeiss Standards. Matthew and Chris discussed the look of the film and considering the natural style, decided this camera package was the ideal choice.

Chris' design of the lighting was to feel natural and soft, to create this look he decided to bounce all the lighting. Larger HMI's were bounced into ultra bounce for the main source and a smaller array of HMI's into poly for fill. A number of cutters were also used to control the shape. The combination of lighting, location, simple art direction and costume all come together to create a very natural world.

CONTAINER SAVERS DOP BEN BERKHOUT *(WA)*

To shoot the short documentary about the litter problem, Ben choose to use a Canon 5DMkII, Canon lenses, a Lens Baby and using Magic Lantern software, a Red Rock Micro handheld rig and an Easy-rig for the handheld work. Ben says, "we used the 5D for two reasons, budget and look. Using a unique picture profile from Technicolor, the Cinestyle Profile was able to give me a much wider latitude than what the camera stock profiles could. It was just a matter of controlling the skin tones as it does tend to reveal a bit more pink into those areas."

Ben decided early on that he wanted to use an observational style and create a lively vibe to contrast with the factual nature of the documentary. To keep the theme rolling he shot the interviews with a loose floating head.

As the documentary evolved Ben started to notice a lot more litter around, " I felt that we often pass this litter by not even noticing it because it was generally hidden. The wider shots weren't giving me the impact I felt the scene deserved, so I decided to take on a more macro look at the litter and really put it in peoples' faces, make it bold but still try to attack each scene as a stand alone piece of art and make each frame beautiful in it's ugliness. I often opted to get as low to the ground as possible to show these containers in a way that people wouldn't normally see them in their every day lives."

DOUBLE BOOK REVIEW
BY JONATHAN DAWSON

BELIEVING IS SEEING: MYSTERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

ERROLL MORRIS

PENGUIN, NY, 2011

Erroll Morris: Photo Detective!

To Erroll Morris, every frame ever shot is a mystery in need of decoding. Morris is a great filmmaker and his greatest documentaries are superb precisely because they reveal a filmmaker using the medium to hunt down the Truth like a hound of hell. When he turns to gaze upon some of the most famous and studied stills since the birth of photography, bringing to the job a relentless analytical streak and an almost obsessive focus, his work is at its very best.

Of course obsession brings both success and punishment. The filmmaker becomes a hero when the convicted and sentenced Randall Dale Adams, his Death Row inmate in The Thin Blue Line (1988), was finally sprung, based almost wholly on Morris' lawyerly (and beautifully shot!) argument. Of course when free and after a year or two to reflect, Adams then sued Morris for a part of the profits! Whose movie was it anyway? That's show biz.

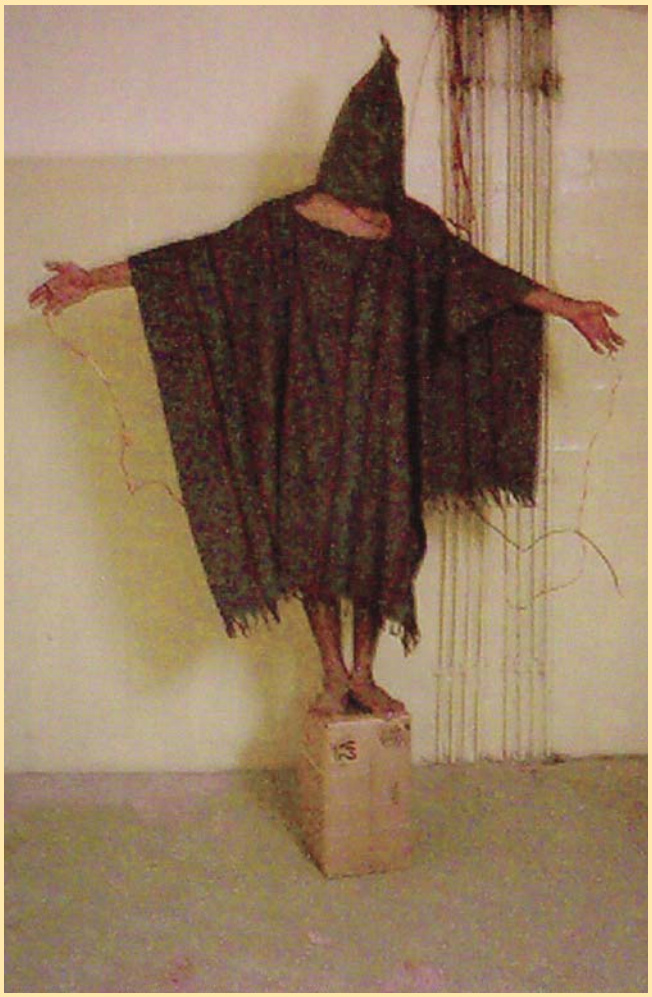
The essays in this book should be seen as a collection of mystery stories. Imagine finding a trunk in an attic filled with photographs. With each photograph we are thrown into an investigation. Who are these people…what were they thinking? (Morris: xxii)

Two examples will give you Morris' deeply obsessive general method: a Crimean War road with several cannonballs lying in it and that notorious Abu Ghraib prison snapshot. [Morris Cannonball.pdf]

Morris had found a reference to the cannonball shot in Susan Sontag's last published book: Regarding the Pain of Others (2004):

(Roger) Fenton made two exposures from the same tripod position: in the first version of the celebrated photo he was to call "The Valley of the Shadow of Death" (despite the title it was not across this landscape that the Light Brigade made its doomed charge), the cannonballs are thick on the ground to the left of the road, but before taking the second picture – the one that is always reproduced – he oversaw the scattering of the cannonballs on the road himself. (Sontag in Morris: 4).

This is enough to drive Morris to wild surmise and Holmesian researches. What is the truth of the matter? Which shot is, er…which? Morris sets out to create a little and very useful history of early wartime photography, its heroes, its equipment, and finally those claims to journalistic 'fact'. He consults curators of photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and even sets out with cameraman Bob Chappell



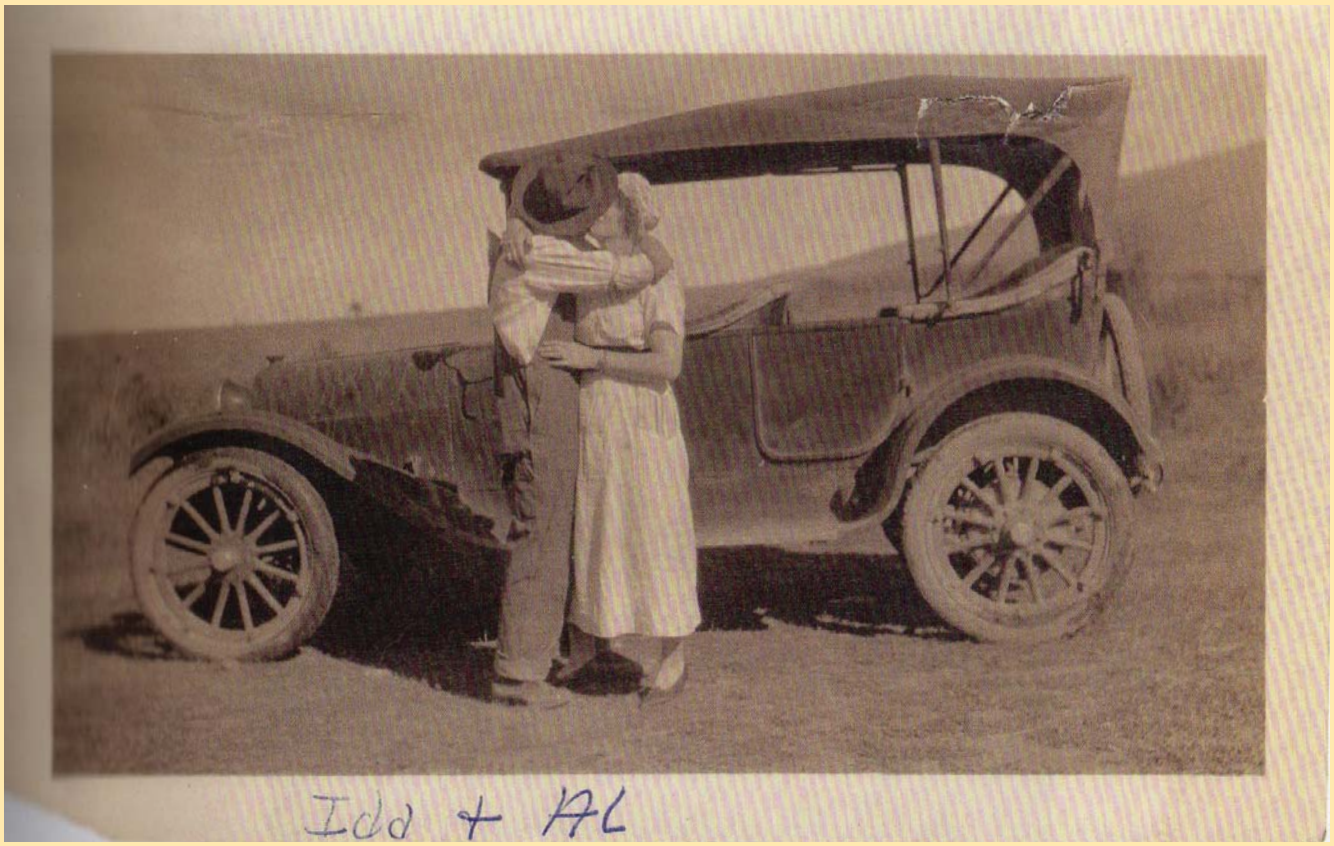
to map the area, take tests shots of light angles on the cannonballs.

As Morris himself says: (it all began)…with my suspicions about Sontag's ability to order the photographs in a hierarchy of authenticity based on what she imagined were Fenton's intentions. (Morris: 53)

This whole heroic effort comes to the size of a small and (very) scholarly monograph. All the essays put together have produced an encyclopedic book on photography. It also happens to be a lengthy discourse on ethics in general.

And now Holmes, we come to that most vexing question of all for professional photographers. We saw hints of the problem in the Crimean War cannonball picture. Nowadays we find it cropping up everywhere. It is that single pathetic object abandoned in a ruined city (presumably by a doomed child) and is seldom an accidental discovery. Errol Morris finds one example [Morris Mouse.jpg] and in so doing, rips the top off Pandora's Box of ethics in Photography 101.

By the time the reader reaches the Abu Ghraib investigation [Morris Hooded Man.pdf] (which even calls in a professor of Psychology from University of California) and draws on complex lens theory, charts, maps, grids and all the rest, we know we are in the presence of a filmmaker truly driven by a desire to find the authentic at the heart of the (possibly) accidental image, and, in the end, realizing that there's maybe nothing but what the photographer – and the reader – have put there themselves and is now, by simple repetition, true.



TALKING PICTURES: IMAGES AND MESSAGES RESCUED FROM THE PAST

RANSOM RIGGS

HARPER COLLINS, NEW YORK, 2012

Ransom Riggs and the Found Photograph

People don't write on the backs of photos much any more. That's because we don't write on anything as much as we used to – at least not in a traditional pen-to-paper senses (Riggs: 361)

From its very beginnings, photography has escaped from the specialist studio out into the wider universe of images. Thus, photography itself often seems to be split up into two opposing themes: the more expert photographs (whether from studio or location), with the best equipment or great eye behind the lens – or the Box Brownie galaxy of endless, often apparently meaningless, images that once could be read like a family bible but as witnesses fade away, families die off and annual clean ups take their toll, would be reduced to faded and impenetrable private mysteries, with fading illegible brown ink on the back. Give or take a digital revolution or three, that's still pretty much the line drawn up between professional and amateur, historical (or client driven) and happy snaps.

This is where Ransom Riggs' amazing little book comes in, just in time to remind us that the modern camera increasingly does all the work, right down to sepia toning in post production ten seconds after the shutter clicks. In other words, if it's out there, you can shoot it, however good or bad you are. Nowadays everybody has a picture diary, theoretically an unstoppable flow of images.

Riggs reminds us that mountains of images offer a constant stream of contexts, technical breakthroughs, on-the-job stories and eye witness perspectives on anything from combat stills to studio glamour shoots, the world of the Box Brownie all too often ends up on the Council tip: sans history, sans context! A found object like a discarded photograph then requires us, as readers, to invent or discover the story behind it.

In the first picture, [Riggs 1, Ida and Al, p45.jpg] context is everything. If you're at all familiar with some of the great Dorothea Lange stills of the Dust Okie Bowl, Ida and Al are surely at the centre of a drama – a man and a woman driven apart by the terrible dust storms of the mid 1930s. How the story ended is up to you.

The French critic and lover of photography, Roland Barthes, has an equally elegiac tone when he writes of the photographs of the past:

Hidden in the shadows of posh antique stores lurk secondhand shops. These overlooked treasures are bursting with both history and small remnants of human life – reminders of those that have flitted in and out of this world leaving behind nothing but a stack of photos or a selective record collection. You walk through the doors, your fingerprints joining the other smudges on the doors' glass window. Dank and musty smelling, walking room is limited to a six inch space between the chipped china and the basket of ripped stuffed animals. Stuck in the back, there are inevitably two or three large bins filled with photographs. (Camera Lucida: 1)

The second picture [Riggs 2, Business is good, p107.jpg], too, is like a magic pudding, an endless source of mercantile hope, another dream of retail wealth gone sour. Maybe the fallout from The Great Depression, perhaps just a pile of junk and despair? If it weren't for those ironic signs ("Business is

Good Thank You") which suggest a bankrupt salesman with a sense of humour to go with his failing business. Or is it just a Man's Shed, after all? The possible readings are myriad.

So what to do with all those images – shot by you, found by you, accidental or intended. One thing is certain: if you do toss them to the winds, Ransom Riggs (or your grandchildren) will be there to catch them. And see in them something utterly different to what you may have originally intended. The meaning they find will not necessarily be derived from those words – or maybe just a date – scrawled on the back or clues like cars, clothes, weapons, landscapes.

In the end the reader of your pictures will write their own narratives: and unless you decide to place them all in a vault with fifty volumes of explanation and circumstance, the pictures are now free agents and, as Riggs has it:

Cameras have proliferated as never before, but the images they produce are ephemeral strings of ones and zeroes, rarely printed, stored on chips and drives…easily damaged or erased, susceptible to heat, magnets, wear and obsolescence. …(but) a well-printed snapshot will still be visible after a century and maybe even longer (Riggs: 361)

So great photographic stories as well as private and personal ones are everywhere – depending on your willingness to read the Great into the Small.

In [Riggs 3, Peace at Last, p209.jpg] two lads get the good news, but have they just joined up and their smiles are of pure relief or have they already been To Hell and Back – the movie (Jesse Hibbs, 1965) or the real thing, so the date ought to be 1945. But what happens to our lads next? Levittown Life and Mad Men dreams or dropping off the military rolls to be the first guys hitchhiking On the Road?

Riggs is a romantic of the purest sort but in matter he is utterly right: others will read our snapshots, bringing their own histories, memories, and even beliefs to them and though the print may seem the same, it's meaning, for that time, is utterly changed!

NEW GEAR

With 4K being the conversational trend at NAB 2013, the upgraded, newly invigorated or finally ready for shipping options for cinematographers, brought on-board recorders to our attention. Here are a few that you should keep your eye on or go and test one out at your local retailer.

Convergent Design's New Odyssey 7 or 7Q, with choose your own recorder options

Convergent Design announced two new monitor/recorder products: Odyssey7 and Odyssey7Q. The Odyssey products are suitable for workflows from DSLRs to high-end 4K raw cine cameras. It all starts with a professional 7.7" OLED monitor with high-end monitor features, including Waveform, Zebras, Histogram, Vectorscope, Focus Assist, False Color, Timecode Display and Audio Level Meters, and 1:1 Pixel mode. Odyssey7 includes HDMI I/O, and SD/HD/3G-SDI I/O; in both single and dual link configurations. The Odyssey7Q model adds two bi-directional SDI's (2-In, 2-I/O, 2-Out), enabling a 4K@60fps-ready option. Additional computational power supports recording/playback of up to four-compressed HD/2K simultaneously, support for one video stream up to 120fps and concurrent proxy and raw recording. Odyssey7Q includes a built-in Quad Splitter and Four-Channel Live Switcher. Out-of-the-box, Odyssey7 & Odyssey7Q products are monitors only, without any recording or playback capabilities. Recording options can be purchased (or rented) separately from the Convergent Design website, available 24/7. A wide range of recording options will be available, including compressed, uncompressed and various flavours of RAW including the following: Uncompressed HD/2K RGB 444 (up to 60p), 2K/HD Raw, ARRIRAW (full 16:9 and 4:3 support), Canon 4K Raw, and Sony Raw for the FS700.

For more details or specs visit http://www.convergent-design.com/Products/Odyssey7.aspx#Overview-19

CINEDECK NEW FORMATS AND FEATURES FOR RX3G AND MX MODELS

Cinedeck showcased a number of new capabilities for its dual-channel RX3G and quad-channel MX record, playback and monitoring systems, at NAB 2013. Available in forthcoming software upgrades, Cinedeck will expand the toolsets of its recording systems for on-set and post-production professionals working in digital cinema, episodic broadcast and live event production. Highlights include support for a wave of new cameras and formats including ARRIRAW, CinemaDNG, CanonRAW, JPEG 2000, OpenEXR, LUT shaders and ACES color workflow, plus new features to streamline and speed the transfer of recorded media into post production.

For more information go to: http://cinedeck.com

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For more information go to http://www.codexdigital.com/

AJA VIDEO SYSTEMS KI PRO QUAD - AVAILABLE NOW FOR YOUR FORAY INTO 4K

The AJA KIPro Quad has a manageable workflow for 4K. Ki Pro Quad serves as a central gathering point for the main needs of 4K production; bring camera signals into Ki Pro Quad and then simultaneously create edit-friendly 4K ProRes files, output to 4K monitors and record RAW data directly to Thunderbolt-enabled computer/storage system. Supports 4:2:2 and 4:4:4 recording even at HD and 2K resolutions. Real time scaling from 4K to 2K/HD. Shoot 4K but record 2K to keep file sizes down but still have theatrical quality images to work with. HDMI output allows connection even to HD consumer monitors.Ki Pro Quad has new hardware-based features, such as real time, high-quality RAW debayering, recording directly to 4K resolution Apple ProRes files and real time scaling from 4K to HD.

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