

# American Cinematographer

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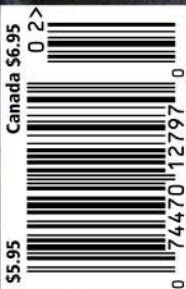


## ESCAPE AT DANNEMORA

JESSICA LEE GAGNÉ  
SHOOTS JAILBREAK MINISERIES

ASC AWARD HONOREES:  
ROBERT RICHARDSON, ASC  
JEFFREY JUR, ASC

PLUS:  
RISING STARS OF  
CINEMATOGRAPHY



## AC SPECIAL FOCUS

### Rising Stars of Cinematography

By John Calhoun, Jim Hemphill and Jon Silberg

An essential part of the ASC's history is the long-standing tradition of fostering new talent who will help usher the craft into the future. Our annual feature on AC's Rising Stars of Cinematography thus takes on special meaning this year as the Society celebrates its centennial. Sine Vadstrup Brooker, DFF; Ashley Connor; Boaz Freund; Damián García; Halyna Hutchins; Anka Malatynska; Jordi Ruiz Masó, AEC; Lowell A. Meyer; David Procter; and Zoë White, ACS have all demonstrated impressive skills and visual sensibilities in their projects to date, which include exceptional portfolios of shorts, commercials, music videos, documentaries, features and television work. We caught up with these ascending directors of photography to discuss their personal stories and the stories they help create.

#### Sine Vadstrup Brooker, DFF

In the barely four years since director of photography Sine Vadstrup Brooker, DFF graduated from the National Film School of Denmark, she has already accumulated a list of credits numbering in the dozens, which include projects that have screened at such festivals as South by Southwest, Telluride, TIFF and Cannes Lions.

Brooker is excited to talk about the production that won high honors at the latter competition, a three-minute passion project titled *Period*, which she describes as a "commercial for periods made by women for women." The short — directed by Emilie Thalund, who took home gold at the Young Director Awards at Cannes Lions — presents a series of images of women and their bodies, and doesn't shy away from the color red. "We wanted to show the commercial industry that period blood isn't blue or pastel colors," the cinematographer explains.

"The concept was that the project should be as intimate and genuine as possible, and therefore I went with available daylight," adds Brooker, who shot with an Arri Amira camera and Cooke S4 lenses. "It didn't require a lot of equipment or a large crew; it was more about having the courage to let go of a gaffer and sometimes even a focus puller and trust in my creative intuition. Being able to do this, depending on the project, is in my view an essential part of the work of the cinematographer."

As an undergraduate in film studies, Brooker discovered the work of cinematographer Christopher Doyle, HKSC, and "it was like something clicked," she recalls. "When I saw *Chungking Express*, I was really inspired by his poetic camera movement, the colors of light, and the playful subjectivity he used on that film." Her next stop was the National Film School of Denmark, where she specialized in cinematography — and where her work attracted the attention of ArtOfficial, a Scandinavian agency specializing in representation for behind-the-camera creative talent. Her graduate



Cinematographer Sine Vadstrup Brooker, DFF.

project, *Melon Rainbow*, won the Best Cinematography prize at the London Independent Film Awards. She also completed an ASC Master Class in 2015.

Since then, Brooker has shot short features, music videos, commercials and several documentaries — as well as *Land of Glass*, a low-budget feature captured with Arri's Alexa Mini and Kowa Mirrorscope Anamorphic lenses. "Because the film had some fantasy elements, I chose anamorphic lenses in order to emphasize this universe by creating interesting bokeh backgrounds," she says. "One of the characteristics of the Kowas is that they create these rainbow flares that complemented the story very well."

Brooker has three other Danish features in the pipeline, and "would love to work outside Scandinavia," she says. Having shot part of the 2017 web series *Polar* in Greenland, and the short *Maria* in Portugal with a Portuguese cast and crew, she notes, "I find it very inspiring to work abroad, getting out of your comfort zone and seeing different environments, faces, textures, lights and colors."

To Brooker, what's most important is "a good script and a creative, trustworthy collaboration with the director and production company," she offers. "If the trust is mutual, then you become a film family that creates something together that's bigger than yourself."

#### Ashley Connor

Ashley Connor grew up in the Los Angeles suburb of Chatsworth, and fell in love with movies at an early age. Her father was a studio manager for the Universal Studios Backlot, and brought her on many golf-cart trips to various sets. While his position was more business-related, he opened up a new world



▲: David Procter.

recognition in documentary work with a short he shot and directed called *Red Sands* — a visceral look at Spain's running of the bulls and bullfighting, which was nominated for a British Independent Film Award and the Camerimage International Film Festival's Golden Frog, and screened at festivals worldwide. The short documentaries *The Corridor*, which he shot in the Kalahari Desert in Namibia, and *Solace*, shot in London, landed him further Golden Frog nominations. "The documentary work I did really helped shape me as a cinematographer," he says, "because you're often working in a language you don't understand, trying to read situations, environments and people, without knowing what's actually being said. You develop intuition to read body language and react quickly."

Of that period, he recalls, "I was traveling to film festivals all over Europe to meet as many directors and collaborators as I could." At Camerimage, he met several cinematographers who would make a lasting impression — particularly Phil Méheux, BSC, who became something of a mentor. "I could email, telephone or quiz him over a lunch," Procter says. "He was someone I could check in with as I was moving into larger-scale lighting work and much larger sets. Sometimes, I would have hesitation that I was maybe going too big, and he would be there with advice and reassurance."

Among the many future collaborators/employers Procter met at film festivals, producer Samm Haillay was pivotal in the cinematographer's expansion into feature narrative. Indeed, Haillay produced

the first two such features Procter shot — the dramas *Bypass*, directed by Duane Hopkins, and *Blood Cells*, from the directing team of Joseph Bull and Luke Seomore — both of which premiered at the 2014 Venice International Film Festival. *Bypass* was nominated at Camerimage for Best Cinematography Debut — an honor that was, Procter recalls, "overwhelming."

The cinematographer recently completed shooting the eight-part Netflix original science-fiction drama *The Innocents*, starring Guy Pearce. The large-scale series was shot in remote parts of Norway, with additional locations and studio work in the U.K.

Regarding his work on the Sam Pilling-directed music video for "Nobody Speak" — a track by DJ Shadow featuring Run the Jewels — Procter attests, "I think it transcends entertainment and moves into the area of social commentary. It was a controversial piece of work that became viral almost immediately for its political, provocative nature."

Procter notes that lessons from his early documentary work still infuse his approach today, regardless of genre. One such lesson: "Just because you have two or three trucks full of lights, that doesn't mean you always have to use them."

#### Jordi Ruiz Masó, AEC

Jordi Ruiz Masó, AEC learned the power of light as it relates to storytelling at a very young age. "During my childhood, I read fairytales under my blanket at night," he remembers. "Using my dad's flashlight as a source, the gleam created an environment that captivated me, and allowed me

to feel and imagine the story. That's when I began to notice that light affects the narrative."

From there, Ruiz Masó credits horror films like *The Exorcist*, *Psycho*, *Halloween*, *Poltergeist* and *Friday the 13th* with introducing him to the art of cinematography. Though he initially entered college with the goal of becoming a still photographer, he realized that he wanted to focus on shooting the moving image. "I decided to enroll in the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, where I received my bachelor's in cinema and media arts," he says.

Ruiz Masó adds that he worked throughout his studies. "I started as a camera operator for major broadcast television networks," he says, "which allowed me to learn a lot about lenses, camera movement, framing, exposure and angles. I also learned how to work in a fast-paced environment. What I learned in that period of my life now allows me to give freedom to actors when they move during the take."

After graduation, Ruiz Masó worked as a camera assistant on various feature productions, commercials and music videos, and received an MFA in cinematography at the Cinema and Audiovisual School of Catalonia (ESCAC) in Barcelona. Persistently honing his craft, he continued to attend Eastman Kodak and Arri workshops, while also immersing himself in movies, books, paintings, and magazines like *American Cinematographer*.

When he moved to Los Angeles in 2012, however, he found that he had to start from scratch. "I got involved in



▲: Jordi Ruiz Masó, AEC.

several [student] thesis films," he recalls. "One of those projects, from USC, got me the Best Operator of the Year award [in the student category] from the Society of Camera Operators." That accolade led to Ruiz Masó's introduction to director Michael Feifer, who hired him as a 2nd-unit cinematographer on two movies before moving him to the main unit on a subsequent feature.

The two continue to work together, and have the new Western *Soldier's Heart* — starring Val Kilmer, Anna-Lynne McCord, and an ensemble of well-known character actors — on the way. "I'm very excited for that release," Ruiz Masó enthuses. "The approach was to combine the use of soft and hard light, allowing the shadows to be part of the frame. We didn't want to put our 'fingerprints' on the picture; instead I just let natural light play."

When discussing a short he framed called *Reflections: Mojave Desert* — a companion piece to the album of the same name by British electronic musician and music producer Sam Shepherd — Ruiz Masó opines that music is as important an influence on cinematography as the visual arts. "I think cinematography comes from a lot of places," he says. "Photography, painting, architecture, sculpture — and music is also one of them."

Ruiz Masó notes that one of the greatest pleasures of filmmaking is the people one meets and works with. "I love what I do," he adds. "I think I have a dream job."

#### Zoë White, ACS

Director of photography Zoë White, ACS has spent much of the past year immersed in the dystopian world of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Hulu series based on Margaret Atwood's novel. It's the job that she says has unquestionably "put me on the map" after years of training and steadily rising in the profession. "It's been amazing," she adds, recalling how she had watched the series' first season — the first three episodes of which were directed by Reed Morano, ASC, who worked alongside full-season cinematographer Colin Watkinson, ASC, both of whom won Emmys for their work — and scarcely

imagined her upcoming involvement. "When they were putting together the second season, Colin wanted to share it," White recounts. She thus alternated blocks of episodes with Watkinson on the second season, and is now alternating in like manner with cinematographer Stuart Biddlecombe on Season 3, "with Colin opening Season 3 and passing the baton," White notes. She adds that though it was challenging coming to a project with an established look, "I think I'm getting to the point now, a whole year in, where I feel I've found my voice as one of the creative collaborators on the show."

White, who grew up in Australia, trained as a classical violist, but was also schooled in classical cinema by her movie-buff mother. After high school, she "made the big leap" and enrolled in the University of North Carolina School of the Arts' film program, soon discovering her affinity for the camera. "I think it goes back to having a connection with music," she says. "There's something abstract in the idea of composition and balance, and in the artistic discipline it takes to make an image — in the same way that there is when making music."

After graduation, she completed a summer internship in Los Angeles with James Chressanthos, ASC, GSC, and then spent a year back in Australia as camera assistant for director of photography Newton Thomas Sigel, ASC on *Superman Returns*. "Six months out of film school, I was observing a gigantic blockbuster day



Zoë White, ACS.

what filmmaking is at the very top level," White says. "Tom Sigel to this day has been a really wonderful inspiration and support for me."

White went on to shoot and assist on smaller projects, after which she completed a two-year masters program at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. Then came the "slow build," as she says, of shorts, music videos and commercials — as well as some work in features, her most notable of which was Rachel Lambert's 2016 family drama *In the Radiant City*. What she loved about that production, she notes, was the narrative's psychological layering. "Something not necessarily on the page — maybe inferred, but it's the imagery that takes it there," the cinematographer describes.

Following her first season on *Handmaid's Tale*, she took a sharp visual turn on *Dare Me*, a Steph Green-directed pilot about competitive cheerleading. "It's popular these days to shoot with vintage glass to offset the sharpness of the digital sensor," White says. "But I felt compelled to shoot it on Master Primes, which are known to be more commercial and sharp. I was seeing this really saturated, contrasty palette. Maybe it'll just be a zigzag from here on — whatever I've tried, I'll be wanting to try something new. That's what's so great about this art form. You never run out of things to explore."

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All images courtesy of the cinematographers.