



SOCDOC
MFA
SOCIAL
DOCUMENTARY
FILM

FOURTH ANNUAL THESIS SHOWCASE
September 26 – 28, 2014



“DOCUMANIA” — THAT’S HOW *THE NEW YORK TIMES* recently referred to the stunning proliferation of documentary film made possible by the signature technologies of our time. In short, it has never been easier to make a documentary. But producing a film that stands out is another story, another challenge altogether. Now in our sixth year as an MFA program at the School of Visual Arts, the faculty and staff of the Social Documentary Film Department have been proud to support our students as they attempt to do what can sometimes seem impossible: create films that engage, illuminate and inspire.

Regardless of the subject matter or style—be it personal, political, comical or revolutionary—these films aim to increase our awareness of ourselves and the world we inhabit. This year they engage us in the fate of elephants in the remote village of Dzanga Bai in the Central African Republic to the 911 emergencies of the Stony Brook Volunteer Ambulance Corps on Long Island. They examine the clinical and corporate obstacles faced by the emerging drug market and bring us into the center of a modern-day *Romeo and Juliet* story. They shift our consciousness and change the way we see our world. By taking us places we’ve never been, they open windows into who we are.

For such a young program, it’s hard to believe the reception these films and filmmakers have had already. From Princess Grace Awards, to the SVA Alumni Scholarships, to winning Student Academy Awards, and receiving ITVS funding and public television broadcast, our students have been recognized throughout the student filmmaking community. What’s more, these young filmmakers have also found interest and financial backing in the larger documentary world. Their short films have screened in festivals internationally; they have raised over \$500,000 in private funds via Kickstarter and other platforms; and some have received grants and support from organizations such as the Sundance Institute, the Jerome Foundation, CAAM and the IFP Spotlight on Documentaries, to expand their thesis films into features.

None of this could have been possible without the generosity and genius of all our faculty, the unflappability of our staff, and the institutional support and guidance from the SVA community, especially David Rhodes, Anthony Rhodes, Jeff Nesin and Steven Heller.

—**Maro Chermayeff**, department chair and founder



FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH
6:00PM
FILM SCHEDULE

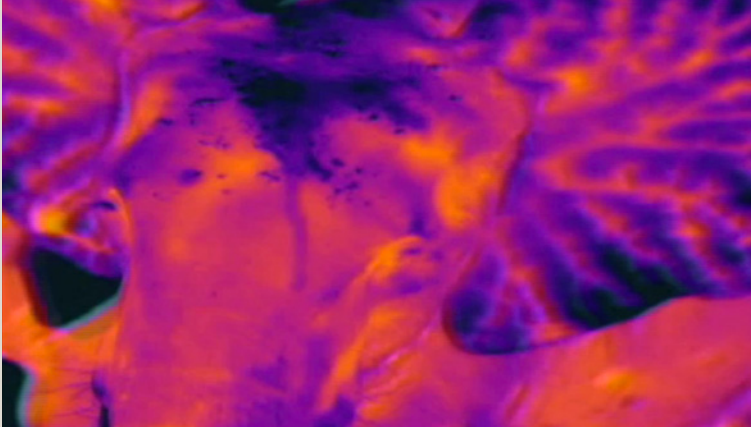
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26TH

SCHEDULE

This Thesis Showcase is a preview of the films of our 2014 graduates.

They are all works-in-progress; please contact the Department to track the latest developments as these films evolve.

**6:00 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION BY MARO CHERMAYEFF,
DEPARTMENT CHAIR AND FOUNDER**



TODD McGRAIN

Elephant Listening

6:15pm (38 min)

Paula Rhodes Awards

In a remote corner of the Central African Republic, in a clearing called Dzanga Bai, forest elephants emerge to reveal secrets of their complex society. To the Ba'Aka people of the Congo Basin, they are an integral part of the forest upon which they depend. To park officials, they are a lure for tourist dollars. To the American field biologists, they are a mystery at the center of a complex ecosystem. To each other, forest elephants are family.

Filmed as rebels sweep across this failed state, and as international wildlife security contractors work to thwart ivory poaching, *Elephant Listening* captures a crucial moment in the lives of forest elephants and the complex world that threatens their existence.

JA'TOVIA GARY

Cakes Da Killa: NO HOMO

7:00pm (30 mins)

Born Rashard Bradshaw, Cakes da Killa is a young up-and-coming rapper who also happens to be an out and proud gay man. With provocative lyrics that explore sexuality and gender politics, he's not your run-of-the-mill rapper but he just might be your new favorite.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



XIAOCHUN FAN

The Other Eye: A Film About Liu Dan

8:00pm (65 min)

Paula Rhodes Awards

A good painting extends its life through the viewer. So does seduction. The true artist sees the seduction—the beginning of creation. A woman, the Comtesse d’Haussonville, who was gazed upon by the French painter Ingres in the 19th century, is gazed in our time more deeply, in an unusual way. The beholder, Liu Dan, a modern master of Ink painting, decides to place the seduction on paper.

Every stroke is heading towards the abyss. The stroke occupies the unknown—to unearth the abyss, and also to fill it.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



DUO ZHANG

A Chinese American Film

9:30pm (42 min)

This film follows the story of young Chinese international students studying filmmaking in New York City, who decide to make a distinctly archetypical American film themselves.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM

END TIME 10:30PM



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27TH
12NOON
FILM SCHEDULE

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27TH

SCHEDULE

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INAYA YUSUF

Minding Our Own

12:00noon (55 min)

Minding Our Own is a compassionate portrayal of two families and their quest to understand the world of caregiving. While unearthing relationship dynamics, these unlikely heroes provide an intimate look into what it takes to truly care for another person and is a meditation on life's surprises as well as its immeasurable rewards.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM

GUILLERMO FERNANDEZ FLOREZ

Aphasia

1:15pm (56 min)

Aphasia is a Greek word that means "speechlessness." It is defined as a loss or impairment of language, most likely the inability to speak, understand, read or write. It is caused by a brain damage, often a brain stroke.

An athletic trainer, a housewife and a businessman all suffer a stroke and the subsequent aphasia. They see their whole world destroyed, but soon they begin a quest for their lost happiness. Even if they cannot totally succeed, their struggle has made them real life heroes and allows us to understand the importance of communication and the social consequences of its loss.



NATALIE RUIZ TOFANO

The Edges of Healthcare

2:30pm (35 min)

The Edges of Healthcare follows the lives of two nurse practitioners in New York City who provide holistic and sensitive healthcare to people who are typically neglected by the U.S. healthcare system. Ronica is a leader in transgender healthcare and is determined to influence change on a large scale. Chance, another nurse practitioner, tries to develop his own approach to healthcare for drug users, one patient at a time. This documentary film examines how these two providers are radically challenging the boundaries and models of healthcare.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM

BREAK UNTIL 4:00PM

MELANIE ARONSON

Denied

4:00pm (60 min)

SVA Alumni Award

A modern day *Romeo and Juliet*—A Jewish-American filmmaker and her Palestinian fiancé struggle to find a home and build a life together despite their own cultural differences and the simmering conflict between their peoples.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



RECEPTION IN LOBBY
6:00 – 8:00pm

ALEX BUDMAN

Hapus

5:15pm (30 min)

What is Happiness? One year ago, filmmaker Alex Budman set out to answer this question. Through interviews with an array of seemingly disparate characters—from a bubble magician to a holocaust survivor—one connective thread surfaces: happiness is something you create for yourself. This collection of short films explores the rituals and the subsequent choices that these select people make to create their own happiness.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



NORI MIZUKAMI

PERCEPTION

8:00pm (45 min)

SVA Alumni Award

PERCEPTION, a personal essay and visual meditation, depicts two years in the life of the filmmaker after he meets a group of blind and sight-impaired photographers, and decides to confront his own fears of blindness and explore the meaning of sight.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



ALCEE H. WALKER

The Pain of Love

9:00pm (30 min)

Royal Poinciana Chapel Grant, Urban Youth Impact Grant, Palm Beach County Film Commission Grant, SVA Alumni Award

The Pain of Love is a documentary that explores the life of the filmmaker, having grown up in a dysfunctional family and having survived a nightmarish childhood. It is the story of the emotional legacy of a broken family and the lasting effects of childhood trauma. In an effort to chart his own survival, the filmmaker attempts to bring his family together for a family dinner—the first one of his lifetime.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM

END TIME 9:45PM



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28TH
12NOON
FILM SCHEDULE

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28TH

SCHEDULE

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SHIHUI YE

Dance with Spirit

12:00noon (45 min)

In Shanggan, an ordinary village in China, people have their own way to celebrate the New Year—with an ancient dance called “Nuo.” Indigenous to this village for over 1000 years, this traditional dance is not only still performed, but is gaining in popularity amongst the younger generation. This film documents the journey of the dancers from preparation of the event through the final New Year celebration of 2014.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM

VANESSA VON HESSERT

Sophia’s Cure

1:00pm (45 min)

A tenacious New York City construction worker raises millions of dollars to fund a cure for his young daughter’s rare and terminal illness. He joins forces with a soft-spoken researcher who has developed a remarkably promising, but incredibly costly remedy. Before the potential cure can make it to the children, it must not only make it through successful human trials and FDA approval, but also navigate a labyrinth of clinical and corporate demands where money is often the dominating factor.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



JENA LENZ

Nonno and Nonna

2:00pm (50 min)

“Til death do us part.” For many, these words are not just a vow but form a living covenant. This certainly seems to be the case with Nonno and Nonna, the filmmaker’s Italian grandparents, who give viewers an unflinching glimpse into their marriage at twilight. Through a blend of rare archival photos and intimate present-day footage, the film reveals their shared experiences as husband, wife, grandmother, grandfather and everything in-between.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



RONNIE BHARDWAJ

Signal 16

3:15pm (30 min)

Signal 16 is a glimpse into the lives of the men and women of the Stony Brook Volunteer Ambulance Corps. The corps is comprised mostly of full-time college students who balance their time between school, work and their dedication to SBVAC and its intensive training program. We follow these young men and women as they train the incoming probationary members, respond to 911 emergencies, and prepare to take on the roles of officers—all while living the life of college students.



YAO WANG

Dissatisfactory Life

3:45pm (45 min)

A documentation of the life of the filmmaker's grandparents, this film tells the story of the way in which individual destiny has been affected by changing policy and is emblematic of the epitome of modern Chinese history.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM

BREAK UNTIL 5:30PM



VICTOR ILYUKHIN

Two and Twenty Troubles

5:30pm (45 min)

SVA Alumni Award

Anthony Lopez and Rachel Handler, two disabled actors (both amputees), intend to restart their acting careers after a long hiatus. Rachel was a promising young actress before surviving a car accident two years ago. Anthony was born with his physical disability and has been taking a break from acting due to a persistent lack of confidence. Both meet each other at the Nicu's Spoon Theater—a company whose mission is to give an opportunity to both disabled and non-disabled actors of various ages, gender, races and cultural backgrounds alike.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



SURINA

The Ghost City

6:30pm (30 min)

Ordos is close to 7,000 miles from New York City, and is referred to as China's most infamous "ghost city." Hearing Ordos termed this way in the mainstream media, the filmmaker travels from New York back to her hometown. Encapsulating the traditional Chinese proverb, "the leaves fall to the root," this tour through the ghost city examines the influences that valuable real estate has on people and explores the subsequent boom and bust that it delivered.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM



LILIYA ANISIMOVA

Love is the Highest Law

7:15pm (87 min)

A unique, firsthand look into three powerful stories connected through the strength of love triumphing over hardship, and the overcoming of stringent same-sex laws both in Russia and the United States.

Q&A FOLLOWING THE FILM

END TIME 8:45PM

