

a
short tale
of xuan

A SHORT TALE OF XUAN A FILM BY TERRIE SAMUNDRA
STARRING KERINA YAO KOE INLOW KIM MAI HANG NGUYEN
ORIGINAL SCORE BY JASON PACE EDITED BY TERRIE SAMUNDRA AND D.W. LECH
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY D.W. LECH STOP MOTION ANIMATION BY SCOTT NORDLUND
WRITTEN, DIRECTED, AND PRODUCED BY TERRIE SAMUNDRA

PHOTO BY PAUL BURKE INMAN

12 MINUTES. 16MM. COLOR. 2006.
WWW.ASHORTTALEOFXUAN.COM
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... everything holds a story

Synopsis:

“A Short Tale of Xuan” is a coming of age story about a young Vietnamese girl from an immigrant family. She is a young scavenger, collecting found objects and the stories that they carry. Her imagination blends with reality as she navigates thru the world in between childhood and adulthood.



written · directed · produced
by
terrie samundra



director of photography
DW Lech

original score
by
jason pace

edited by
terrie samundra
DW Lech

Animation
D.W. Lech
Terrie Samundra
Ceili Samundra-Carr
Kapi'olani Lee

Stop Motion Animation by
Scott Norlund

Sound
angela park
Slava basovich
Milenko Skoknic

P.A.'s
Kapi'olani Lee
Aaron Rockwell

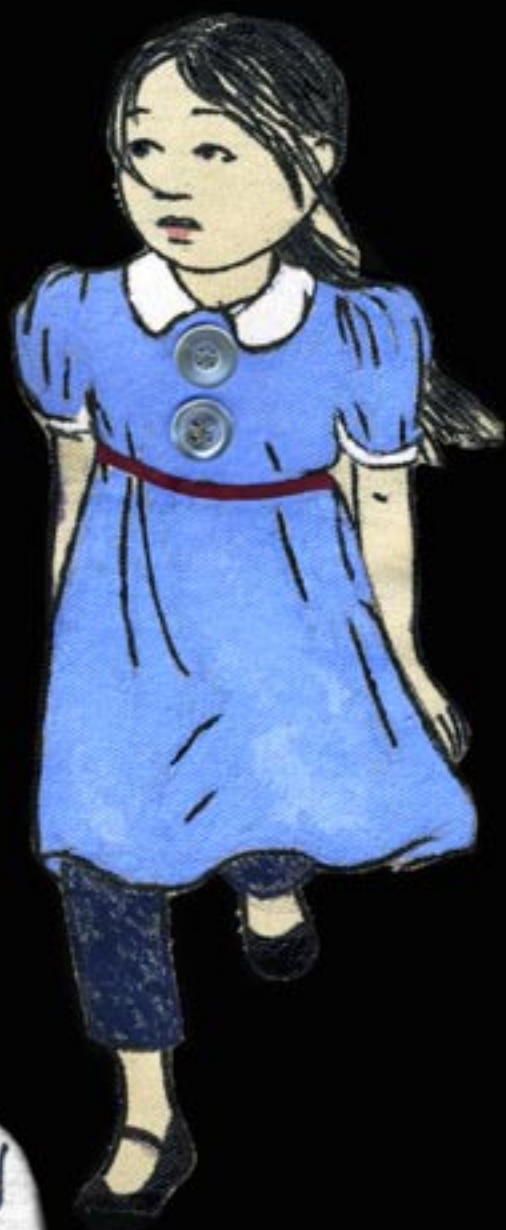
1st AD · ambika jain
1st AC · paul inman
2nd AC · sinisa kukic

Sound Mixed by
Dan Olmstead

CAST

Kerina Yao · Xuan
Hang Nguyen · Mai
Kim Mai · Kim
Koe Inlow · Thuy

Toby Quach · teenage boy
Kapi'olani Lee · neighbor
Christine Ong · bus stop girlfriend
Kyle Greenwell · bus stop boyfriend



“A Short Tale of Xuan”
stills





Director's Bio:

Terie Samundra is a Bay Area filmmaker, photographer, and writer. She was raised in a multi-cultural household, growing up in a rural village in India, a small farming town in Missouri, and along the coast of California.

Currently, Terie is studying at San Francisco State University, getting an MFA in Cinema and is also teaching.

She is working as the producing assistant at Grottofilms in San Francisco. Her recent film "A Short Tale of Xuan" is a coming of age story about a young Vietnamese girl who is a scavenger, collecting found objects and the stories that they carry. The film employs a mixture of live action, puppet animation, and stop motion animation and utilizes experimental photographic techniques. During pre-production this film was awarded the 2006 Fotokem Grant.

She has had a number of photographic exhibits of her work documenting rural Punjab. Along with collaborator DW Lech, Terie has written the feature screenplay "Theodore, Ellora, and Ethan", which is the intertwining stories of three misunderstood people in a small town.

She loves to perform puppet shows with her friends and is also an avid crafter and zine maker. Terie lives in the Bay Area with her 11 year old son, Ceili, and partner in crime, filmmaker DW Lech. She is committed to living sustainably and staying true to her convictions as an artist.





cast



Kerina Yao - Xuan

My name is Kerina Yao and I am 13 years old. I was born and raised in San Francisco. I love acting and modeling and have been continuously working for the past few years. I love to dance, it is a passion of mine. I love all forms of dance; hip hop, ballet and free-style. I am bilingual and am working on becoming fluent in a third language. I also love to shop and hang out with my friends. This short film was really fun and very natural, Terie and Walter are great and made everything fun. This was also an experience I will never forget.



Hang Nguyen - Mai

I've been acting since I was a little girl but never pursued it until now. While growing up and having Asian parents, artistic endeavors were not a road to a career. I had to be a doctor, a lawyer, or an engineer. We immigrated to the States from Viet Nam and seeing how my parents struggled to learn English and each of them working two jobs to support us, I didn't have the heart to pursue my passion. Instead I pacified them and went into the science field but I had always maintained my passion for acting. Now that I'm older and more established in my career, I am determined to give my passion a chance.



Koe Inlow - Thuy

I was born in Osaka, Japan, on September 27, 1996. I walked when I was about 8 months old. After about a year I was born, my family and I moved to China to my grandparents, friends, and cousins. I stayed there for 2 and 1/2 years. Then, we moved to San Francisco for about 3 years. After that, my family decided to move to Alameda, CA. We have stayed here for about 3 years. I have lots of best friends and favorite teachers that I have made here. I also have an older sister that is always annoyed at me. I have two birds, Tweety and Twato. I am a swimmer and a gymnast. My favorite thing in the whole world is gum. I also like Snoopy. Because This film was exciting and a lot of fun. I will always remember it throughout my life.



Kim Mai - Kim Ly

My son was searching for an acting role for himself and found a posting for Terie's film. The next thing I knew I'm in for acting. I couldn't believe it; I got life after IT! I love it. I grew up loving to sing but was not in the liberty to choose that as my career since under my parents' old-fashion's view it's not a good job. But I think it was in my blood, now two of my three sons are actors. One of them is pursuing the career on Broadway. Acting has created a good balance for me after many many uncreative but good years in the Information Technology arena.

crew



D.W. Lech - Director of Photography

D.W. Lech is a Bay Area based filmmaker, photographer, and writer. As a cinematographer, he has lensed many films in a wide variety of formats. He is also an award winning filmmaker. In 2006 he went to work on a collaborative film "Machi and Rosy" with the indigenous Kuna people of Panama. To check out his work, go to <http://www.dwlech.com>.



Jason Pace - Composer

J. Pace is a musician, writer, and all-around creative incorrigible living in San Francisco. His rudimentary claymation Turk and Jim is currently being reborn as a 2D animation series for 2007 (go to <http://www.turkandjim.com>.) His nonsense and endeavors are collected on his website <http://www.exiledmidwesterner.com>.



Scott Nordlund - Stop Motion Animation

Scott Nordlund got his start working on TV commercials, MTV logo's and Sesame Street Shorts. He's made moving images for the rock group "KISS", and directed a music video for Weird Al Yankovic. He also designed and created sets, props, and costumes for opera, circus, theater and film productions. He's taught animation at children's summer schools, museums and colleges to pass around ideas, encouragements and enthusiasm. He loves teaching as much as creating.



Paul Burke Inman - 1st Asst. Camera / Still Photographer

Paul Burke Inman is an award winning photographer. He lives in Oakland, California with his wife Kristin. His photography focuses on fine art, studio still life and portraiture. Other work can be seen at <http://www.PaulBurkeInman.com>

production notes



"A Short Tale of Xuan" is the first part of a trilogy. The trilogy consists of three short unconventional fairy-tales with stories that revolve around mushrooms. The film consists of both live action and animation. There are clear experimental aspects employed in both the live action cinematography and the mixed medium fabric animation sequences. This film is my first attempt at animation, which I love, and I plan to implement mixed mediums with the other films as well.

The winter prior to writing the script, my little sister, Scenery, took a mycology class and had begun to go mushroom hunting. I too had started to become really interested in mushroom hunting and the culture that surrounded it. I began to research and find out about families who made a living as mushroom hunters and also peoples love for spending days and days searching the grounds of cold damp forests for mushrooms. There were two stories that really affected me, one was about a family that lived in a camper with their children and their dog. They went from camp to camp making a living as mushroom hunters. Another story was about a Japanese family who had gone out together to hunt, came home, cooked their poisonous mushrooms and then after eating them, all died together. These haunted me and I started to create fairy-tales from these real stories.

What I also found compelling about these families was that most of them were poor and immigrants. I started to imagine what it would be like as a child to explore those forests with my family. It is complex and hard for any child to go through a coming of age. In this film I show a piece of what it is like as a child living between many worlds culturally, in poverty and within your self and your imagination while trying to find a place that is your own.

I chose to work within the Vietnamese community because of a strong connection to that community from my childhood. I related very closely to those childhood friends and their families. We were all children of poor immigrant parents and had very similar experiences. I wanted to maintain a strong integrity with the representation of the culture. It was very important that my cast was Vietnamese, which was a challenge in terms of finding the right actors. At one point, after having gone thru all of the avenues I could think of, I began to post casting calls in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco which has a very large Vietnamese community.

Once I found my actors, this cultural integrity was largely maintained by them. They were many times my consultants regarding language and cultural nuances. My two adult actors, Hang Nguyen and Kim Mai, had to match their accents, as they come from two parts of Vietnam where they speak different dialects. The actors, along with their families, were a great help in teaching me how to dress the set, especially in the kitchen, telling me exactly what a Vietnamese family living in San Francisco might have in their apartment. They also worked with me during the improvisational acting where I asked them to speak naturally as a family, flowing back and forth in between Vietnamese and English.

For the part of Xuan, I only had two auditions. Kerina Yao was strongly recommended to me by another SF State graduate student, Van Nguyen, who had cast Kerina in her film "Circle" two years earlier. When Kerina showed up at the audition, after taking the bus across town with her mother and a friend, I knew immediately that she was Xuan. In silence, she had exactly the curious and thoughtful look that I imagined Xuan to have. Since Xuan doesn't speak for most of the film, Kerina's

facial expressions were key in the casting of this role. This is Kerina Yao's first lead role, but she has played supporting roles in many other short films and has been modeling for a few years

The close ups and details of what Xuan sees and feels capture her discovery of the world around her, her relationships to herself, her emerging sexuality and her growing curiosity. There are also other important relationships which reveal her emerging loss of innocence and childhood into a new realm, these are her relationships to her sister, her mother and her grandmother and a love interest.

I found my other actors, Kim Mai, Hang Nguyen, and Koe Inlow after a long search. Kim Mai was urged to audition for the part by her son, who is an actor himself. This is her first role, and her subtleties and naturalism as an actor are amazing. Hang Nguyen is a trained actress and I was very lucky to work with her on this film. Kim and Hang were great in collaborating with the improvisation in Vietnamese. This is Koe Inlow's first film, she is a family friend of Kerina's and I knew she was perfect right away. She was a lot of fun on the set and a natural on screen. Koe and Kerina also became really involved behind the scene, doing things like the slate and calling for quiet on the set. I am always hearing that it is difficult to work with children but all the films I've made involve kids. I love working with them and I think they are natural actors and easier to direct. They always make the set a lot more fun for everyone.

The Director of Photography is my partner in crime, DW Lech. DW is a filmmaker and photographer, and he was a very instrumental part in the making of this film. I chose him as my cinematographer because of his past work, which was extremely beautiful, innovative and unique. I also knew that we could work closely together and he would give me the space and flexibility I needed to work in a narrative but also experimental style. We wanted to have three very distinct and separate looks in this film, a natural look for most of the film, a magical look for the storytelling sequence, and a distinct look for the animation sequences. When Xuan tells the story to her sister Thuy in the forest, we used alternative processing with the film, both cross processing and pushing. In addition, we also played with filtration, smudging vaseline onto a clear filter, which refracts the light. The influence for this is the complex darkness of traditional fairy-tales, while at the same time keeping a childhood innocence with the softness and glow of light.

For the animation sequences I wanted to create a world that was uniquely my own style and that is why I chose to hand sew, paint and use found objects in nature to create the fairy-tale world. I created the sets at home with my ten year old son, Celli, who also helped film the sequences. We used recycled fabric and found objects to create the puppets and animated world. We collected objects from the woods behind our house and DW made felt animals with me and helped sew the set. My friend and fellow filmmaker Kapi'Olani Lee drew the puppets of the girl. Scott Nordlund, another friend and filmmaker, helped with the stop motion animation. Scott's stop motion resume is very impressive, ranging from the Pizza Hut "Noid" commercials, California Raisins commercials, and directing the Weird Al Yankovic stop-mo video "Jurassic Park". The last animation sequence is a stop motion piece which reflects the transformation of Xuan, her inner world of stories and the world around her.

Sound design was essential for this film in many ways, in particular in revealing the world around the young girl and helping us as an audience understand her inner world. The original music was composed by Jason Pace a local musician from the groups



Bottled Og and Lord God Bird. His innovative compositions gave me the sound I was looking for, creating a landscape of childlike sounds and experimental music with a woven thread of Vietnamese/Chinese influences.

Prior to shooting the script, I was awarded the Fotokem Grant from the Cinema Department, which was an incredible support financially for the film. In September of 2006, I struck my final answer print of the film, using this grant. "A Short Tale of Xuan" was shot in the winter of 2006. The locations were all over San Francisco and Tilden Park in Berkeley. Tilden Park was perfect in the late winter, especially with all of the rain, because there were mushrooms everywhere.

This film has led me to the next part of the trilogy, another coming of age tale of a young boy. I hope to cast my son Ceili as the lead, he is the perfect actor for the role and also the main influence of the story.

This film is primarily animation and involves communication between animal species, the forest and our relationship to the natural world. The third film involves a gypsy family who lives in their trailer, moving from forest to forest searching for mushrooms. This is a love story between two young girls. It is also the tale of a family transcending strip malls and consumerism to create their own world.

-Terrie Samundra



16mm. color. stereo.
12 minutes. 2006.