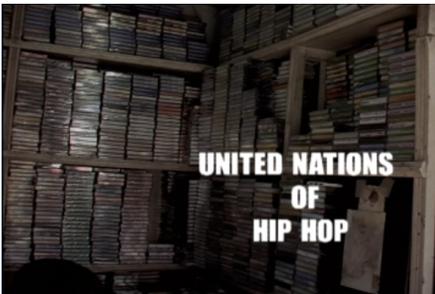


2008/09 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships Anonymous Award



CHRISTINA CHOE

Film
Graduate student
Columbia University



I first realized the power of the image while I was an undergrad studying cultural anthropology in Kenya, Africa. For the first time in my life, I had been taken out of my comfort zone of the first world. I spent one month living among the Samburu tribe in the bush with no running water or electricity. I danced, ate goat, and went to their circumcision ceremonies. Mostly, I interviewed the elders about how they used black magic and curses to police their society. I often felt like I was living inside an issue of *National Geographic*. Sometimes when I tried photographing them, they would refuse because of their negative experiences with Europeans exploiting their images. Their photos had been sold to make countless coffee-table books, objectifying their unclothed bodies, while they remained living in poverty. It was then that I realized I could not be the one using images to oppress or perpetuate stereotypes. I knew I wanted to somehow use the image in order to empower and change people's perceptions.



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the professional association for design

CHRISTINA CHOE

Film



Growing up as the only Korean American in a quaint Norman Rockwell town in New Jersey, I always knew I was the outsider. Perhaps that's why I've always been drawn to outsiders and their stories. After returning from Kenya, I became passionate about making documentaries about people living on the margins. During my last year of college, I made an experimental documentary about migration and globalization called *Turmeric Border-Marks*. I spent two months in Korea, interviewing illegal migrant workers from Southeast Asia. But as I was interviewing them, I realized that I was going through my own strange experiences of living in the "motherland." Somehow I had become an outsider again, among millions of people that looked just like me. With my punk hair, hippie clothes, piercings and American loudness, they knew I wasn't really one of them. Image is everything. It has power. I realized this again and again. Especially when I was invited to film a "wedding." That day, I filmed images of Bangladesh men rubbing turmeric (yellow spice powder) on the groom's face, and decorating the Korean sweatshop where they worked with cheap balloons. Others knelt on the floor praising Allah and throwing confetti, as the groom recited his wedding vows over a speakerphone to his arranged bride in Bangladesh. It was a historic moment. I'm sure it was the first tele-wedding ceremony held in a sweatshop.

In the past, I have used documentary and experimental techniques to express other people's stories. But recently, I have been drawn to express my own stories and started writing my first feature length screenplay called *Guess Who's Coming for Kimchee*. The script was inspired by the moment when I told my mom that my boyfriend was black and the three years I kept it a secret. The film deals with cultural taboos of interracial relationships within Korean society against the backdrop of Confucianism, hip hop culture, and performance art. Writing the script was therapeutic, and ultimately it became a comedy about defending your love to your family and learning to accept yourself as an outsider.

I'm just discovering my voice as a writer/director. Going to grad school to learn how to direct/write narrative films is new and exciting. As evidenced by my prior work (short docs, writing), I'm interested in continuing to create projects that are underrepresented in content, innovative in style, and also address issues of today, such as globalization, cultural hybridity, music as protest, and much more. Whether it's using sci-fi, comedy, or hip-hop in my films, my aim is to leave a social footprint.