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with *Rina Yang*



“ MAKING SOMETHING WITH CREATIVE PEOPLE THAT I ADMIRE AND RESPECT IS WHAT I LOVE MOST. ”

RINA YANG

Celebrated Top Boy DoP Rina Yang reveals how portrait painting in Japan and sci-fi film fuelled her early interest in cinematography.

From Netflix's hit show 'Top Boy', to big-brand commercials and music videos for likes of Björk, FKA Twigs, Skepta and Jorja Smith, cinematographer Rina Yang has worked on some of the most exciting and outstanding projects throughout her career. Often cited as 'making waves' in the industry, her ability to adapt to any type of brief, adeptly picking up on exactly what style the project requires, has earned her a respected reputation across the trade.

March 2020 saw Rina revealed to be one of the women cinematographers on filmmaker Spike Jonze's (renowned for Being John Malkovich, Where the Wild Things Are and Her) collaboration wish list. Considering her creative genius and impressive portfolio of work, it's no surprise why.

In a conversation with LBB's Sunna Naseer, for Cinelab London's series Cinematographers Behind the Camera, Rina reminisces on her artistic upbringing, shares her filmmaking advice, and makes a case for creative choice.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

The collaboration! I get to work with so many different people who are creatively inspiring and my work takes me to all sorts of amazing locations. No one day is the same. Making something with creative people that I admire and respect is what I love most.

What is your favourite medium for shooting?

I work with both film and digital, I never studied a formal cinematography degree, but we had a week of cinematography at film school and they brought in a 16 mm and it was interesting to learn about how differently it works to digital. I love the texture and the color you can achieve on film. But some people prefer the cleanness and sharpness of digital. It is down to preference.

What was it that first sparked your curiosity into film?

I grew up in Japan and my mum encouraged me to study portrait painting and still life as I was always creative as a child. But it wasn't until I was around 16 years old when I stumbled across a behind-the-scenes

programme on TV that I realised all the opportunities the film industry holds. It was a sci-fi film and I was quite amazed by it all; the costumes, prosthetics, cameras and special effects were a whole different world to what I knew. I thought, wow - is this really how they make it? That's when I first had the idea of looking to film as a career.



RIMOWA x ADWOA

How did you get into the industry?

When I was 20 years old, I decided to go to London to study English. My friend also lived there and I was initially planning to stay for 6 months but I saw an ad for film school so I applied and ended up staying to study filmmaking. I didn't have a reel or anything but I showed my passion in the interview and through the essay that I had to write and they could see that I was determined. Even if you don't know anything about filmmaking, if you're interested and you're able to show your enthusiasm then you'll be given opportunities to learn.

Where do you draw inspiration from?

I find inspiration in stories; whether that's reading a book, watching a movie or listening to someone's

anecdote's. Inspiration also comes from where I am at the time - the city I'm in or the people I'm hanging out with. I like to be observant of my surroundings. Most inspiration strikes at unexpected moments though. I tend to find something when I am not looking.

In your opinion, what sort of projects are better suited to being shot on film?

One of the most obvious reasons is if you're shooting in crude lighting conditions. Film can soften the image and I feel it adds a layer of magic. Personally, I would also choose film for projects that are heavily based on people and characters. Whereas, if I'm shooting something more technical, I'd prefer to use a digital camera.



RIMOWA x ADWOA

What have been some of your career highlights so far?

I worked on 'Top Boy' for Netflix last year which was well received, and I've just done a film for BBC1, I'm back on shooting commercials now whilst I read the next long form drama scripts. I like working on different types of projects; from commercials to music videos, TV drama to

movies. Highlight wise, there have been many shoots that are quite memorable, not necessarily because of the creative but because of the experience I had on the project or the friends I made. I love making connections across the world, I have crew and friends in many cities now, and it's always great to revisit them and get to work with them again.

Is the future digital?

Absolutely not. I think film will always have a place. The future is not all digital. I mean, digital is great, but I think there are certain projects that myself and other filmmakers will still choose to shoot on film. So, the future of making film is that we will have more and more options to choose from.

Do you have any advice for up and coming directors who are interested in exploring shooting on film?

I think the best place to start is to experiment with photographs on a stills camera. If you enjoy the process and like the look of the pictures, then move onto using film cameras. You don't need to wait for a great idea to start shooting, just stay in the habit of documenting things and gain practise. Shoot your friends, shoot your surroundings, shoot your travel. Just keep an open mind and stay curious (and spend less time looking down at your phone).



See more from
Rina Yang



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