

SAMANTHA

10:07:32 So. Hello! Thank you. Everyone for joining me for this. Q. A.

10:07:37 With Weeda Azim, Director of Ahu's Journal, and Kalli Anderson, Director of Open Water.

10:07:42 Of our Reflections program. Thank you both so much for being here.

WEEDA

10:07:45 Thank you for having us,

SAMANTHA

so I wanted let's dive right in both of these films spoke to being alone with oneself during a time of personal and in the case of open water also physical intensity, and both of these

10:08:00 primary characters had a support network of some kind to be at the journal itself, or team on the boat.

10:08:06 But at the end of the day they are facing their challenges alone.

10:08:09 Where did this interest in a story driven by just one person come from?

10:08:16 Anyone who has an answer first can jump in first.

WEEDA

Okay.

10:08:21 So the reason why there's only one character in my film actually comes from like Covid

10:08:30 And so it actually has nothing to do with the story itself. it's sort of stemmed from me wanting to create a movie really badly.

10:08:36 And I didn't want to have multiple actors so I thought i'd challenge myself to write something with one character

10:08:45 And then I worked out for the better, because it challenged me to kind of think about what other characters could exist that are not, you know, like a literal person.

10:08:52 So in the case of my movie it's the journal and it's like the how like this studio apartment itself.

10:09:02 And Essentially these all these other characters felt like they were also humans to me, cause I had to treat them that way.

10:09:09 But yeah, it's not it's been the script just ended up looking that way.

KALLI

10:09:13 So yeah for for me it was partly just the nature of the the thing we were filming because open water swimmers, you know.

10:09:26 There's sort of a community around the world of people who do this, and for it to kind of count as an official solo swim.

10:09:32 You have to do it by yourself, and you have to not get back in the boat or touch the boat, or even so you can see there's times where they have to throw things to her on the rope.

10:09:41 You know they can't touch the book so yeah in some ways. it's just the nature of how it is and we were just interested in another level of trying to really bring the viewer into like the

subjective experience of what it feels

10:09:55 like to do those swims because I think there have been other films made sort of from above from watching someone do this, and from the sort of there is the support boat like you said, and there's people around and It's they don't

10:10:07 really do it alone. But there is a certain element of it that is alone, and it's between you and the water.

10:10:14 And so we really did want to try and show what it's like to be in the water for that long and what it feels like to be the person doing it right a little.

10:10:24 And so we did a lot of that's where all the underwater and other techniques came in, trying to really pull the viewer into that more subjective point of view of what it feels like to be the one plotting along in the

10:10:37 water,

SAMANTHA

and those shots are are so stunning I know that was something that we on the board just couldn't stop talking about

1~10:10:47 It was those water shots, and how amazing they were! And you both clearly have incredible instincts for cinematography.

10:10:54 Your shots are gorgeous. we don't want to give away anything too much.

10:10:58 But some of the final shots in Ahu's Journal really took my breath away.

10:11:04 What advice would you give to an aspiring filmmaker who is hoping to hone that skill?

WEEDA

10:11:09 Do you wanna go first?

KALLI

Yeah, yeah, I mean about how to make things sort of visually compelling.

SAMANTHA

10:11:17 How to, I guess, find their own visual voices.

KALLI

Yeah, I mean, I I will say for this film.

10:11:25 It was actually a crew of 2 people like we didn't have all the all the you you know resources available. It's like 2 people jumping in and out of this little Zodiac boat from us shoot so my

10:11:40 collaborator and director photography, Kaija Siirala.

10:11:46 She was just shooting the whole time, and so I mean our and I do.

10:11:50 The underwater stuff mainly with the gopro camera.

10:11:52 And some of I was in the water, you know, with my flippers on trying to go underneath her and all that kind of stuff.

10:11:58 So I I feel like, in terms of how you find that I mean for me.

10:12:01 I could just speak to you in this film like, I just really really really could see what I

wanted to try and show because I love swimming, and I'm a swimmer.

10:12:10 And Kaija and I both grew up around lakes in in Ontario. and so we just kept trying to find ways to show what it really feels like to be in the water.

10:12:19 And so that's how we pushed ourselves creatively and a lot of those shots that are underwater water. we're done like at the beach, you know, before and after the swim at us just trying to find different ways to

10:12:29 show what it really feels like, and diving in the water during the swim, and putting big booms with cameras attached to them from out of the boat and like. I think if you have like, a strong vision of what you want to show even when

10:12:45 you only have a crew of 2 people like you just have to be really creative about trying to keep finding different ways and pushing and pushing until you start to see what's showing up looking like what you want it to look like I don't know how to

10:12:58 say that. but I I would say that you don't need a huge crew, and we felt really happy with the visual impact of the film.

10:13:05 And we were just 2 people and we didn't have what what you'd usually have for a bigger phone shoot. And I guess in that way anyone could do it right because if you just one or 2 people you just sort of keep trying different.

10:13:17 Things until it starts to click than that that kind of is how we did it.

10:13:21 We were lucky to have, I guess, 13 h on the boat.

10:13:23 Keep trying different ways over and over again.

SAMANTHA

Yeah, Well, I mean I'm so impressed that you did it with 2 people.

10:13:29 Because watching it, you would never expect that. Weeda, how about you?

WEEDA

10:13:36 For me. I feel like I still haven't found my creative style, like I'm done still a journey i'm on

10:13:46 And with this movie I was really lucky because I got to make it through the Reel Asian Unsung Voices program last year.

10:13:53 So it's kind of like a summer intensive bring your script like make a movie

10:14:00 And so the crew is also really small, too, and mostly consisted of my friends, and we like shot it in my bedroom that we're sitting in right now.

10:14:07 That I'm sitting in right now. And so it was a lot of like what resources do you have at hand?

10:14:12 And how can you use them? And the actress is one of my friends?

10:14:16 And she'd never acted before but I always wanted to work with an actor who's afghan and I don't know where the Afghan actors are at but I was like you're Afghan

10:14:28 I'm Afghan, and let's do this and so I guess it was initially I could see it very vividly, but it was more about how can I logistically make this happen and use what resources.

10:14:40 I have at hand, and still make it look to the for the most part the way I want it to look, and I feel like as an emerging, aspiring filmmaker.

10:14:50 It is a really big challenge to get those like really ambitious shops that you have in your

head, with little resources, or like with whatever resources you have at ahead.

10:15:00 So surprise like I i shouldn't be surprised but i'm like really really happy, that a lot of it did turn out exactly the way I wanted with compromises.

10:15:10 But I was very pleasantly surprised. like i'm not gonna give anything away either.

10:15:14 But the last shot, although I guess everybody's already seen the movie, now that they're here.

10:15:19 But the last shot is is definitely something I saw very clearly, and i'm really happy that it ended up turning out that way.

10:15:30 But yeah, So I guess advice to others and myself is that it's in, I guess.

10:15:37 Take it one step at a time, because even I don't know what i'm doing.

10:15:40 Sometimes I wish I had advice to get, but but I I I would hop off

10:15:45 What Kalli's saying. but but if you can make it with 2 people or a team of like 4 people, or like small team, and use whatever you have at hand. it is really possible to make something amazing as long as you know the story

10:15:58 you want to tell?

SAMANTHA

Yeah, definitely. And I mean, that is it helpful advice to get.

10:16:05 Because I think a lot of people think they need to have it all figured out.

10:16:10 They have a story, but they need to know They think they need to know everything about how that production is gonna go before they start. like you said, You don't.

10:16:17 You can just figure it out along the way yeah. I'm curious for both of you.

10:16:22 What moment during filming and or production made you proud of yourself, of your team, of your of this accomplishment,

WEEDA

10:16:34 For me. It was learning animation and vfx it's something that I kind of knew i'd have to tackle in post-production, but I didn't realize like I was kind of like

10:16:48 i'll do that when I get there and then I got there, and I was like, Wow, this is really complicated.

10:16:52 But but even before that, you know, making the journal like to make it from scratch like physically.

10:17:00 And so then animating those parts. that journal and stuff like that was all very new for me, like in after effects.

10:17:09 So I I think that was one of my prouder moments where it was like.

10:17:12 I have conflict already accomplished this whole making this whole movie with a great team.

10:17:15 But now I have to do this whole like editing part.

10:17:19 That is just a whole thing. on its own and it's one thing to edit another thing to edit, and then do a d effects on top of it.

10:17:25 So I guess I felt like one challenge on top of another, and I was proud of myself in that way.

10:17:32 Because I always wanna learn some like at least one new thing with each project.

10:17:37 I do, and I felt like I achieved that.

SAMANTHA

That's amazing congratulations on learning those effects they were very cool with that.

10:17:47 How about you, Kalli?

KALLI

I think we felt, I mean, we sort of got the most proudest, I guess, as the whole crew that we sort of become embedded as a part of, and when we need it to the other side, of the

10:17:59 lake. I guess and we we're very tired you know because we had to leave at 3 in the morning, so we didn't really sleep the night before, and then it's now been like a whole other day so everyone's a bit

10:18:11 loopy and you know it's like you've been awake for really long time.

10:18:17 And we just didn't know how well it was gonna go, and whether we could get all these shots, and whether we can manage the 2 of us, and whether we make it to the beach ahead of her like there was just

10:18:27 so many things that we had to just go with the flow and see how it turned out.

10:18:32 So I think we felt proud that we had sort of We were pretty sure that we had the elements to make a film at that point.

10:18:39 But like a little unsure, we were kind of and I do remember going for another swim.

10:18:45 Actually that evening, and we were still sort of feeling like we were on a boat.

10:18:49 You know that feeling all the time, and we kind of felt good to get back in the water and then eat meal.

10:18:56 And yeah, we just felt like, Wow, we tried. to do this kind of wild thing and made it through. And we think we've got like we never dropped the camera in the light. There's a lot of like really basic things that we weren't

10:19:07 gonna happen. So that felt really good, that we had kind of given ourselves a bit of an extreme challenge and given ourselves just a challenge of yeah going with whatever happened.

10:19:18 And there was just this huge, long list of unknowns with tea and make it, would.

10:19:22 Would we make? Would we be able to keep filming and you know if it was the weather hold?

10:19:27 So yeah, I think it's the other side. we we had our own version of like sense of completion.

10:19:33 But of course, not physically as amazing as the person who just was in freezing cold water the whole time.

SAMANTHA

Artistically amazing.

KALLI

10:19:41 Instead, I mean, sure, but we were very focused on her.

10:19:44 So it was sort of after we said, Wow, I think we got we did it.

10:19:47 Maybe we we hadn't seen everything yet. but it felt like probably gotten what we

thought we could.

SAMANTHA

10:19:54 That's fantastic. i'm like I mean as viewers will have seen it.

10:19:58 You really did get it. It came together so beautifully.

10:20:01 So final question the standard question for every filmmaker.

10:20:05 Q. A. ever. If you can say, what's next? What can we expect next from Kalli Anderson and Weeda Azim?

KALLI

10:20:15 Do you want me to go with it?

WEEDA

yeah, sure

KALLI

so i'm thinking about what's next?

10:20:19 Well, i'm actually currently working on something right now I work in film, and also an audio documentary.

10:20:26 And podcast so Kaija, who's my key collaborator for this film and I are actually just right now, working together again, which is our favorite thing to do.

10:20:35 This is on an audio documentary and a Bbc show called shortcut.

10:20:41 Soon, and it's a short Audio documentary about a researcher who found that what happened to birds around the San Francisco Bay area in the spring of 2020 and they

10:20:57 found really really interesting things. but when the birds didn't have to yell over the noise, when everything got very quiet that the way that they sang changed, so we need a short piece about that and that's what's coming next?

10:21:09 For us.

SAMANTHA

I know nothing about the impact of noise pollution on bird songs.

10:21:16 I look forward to it.

KALLI

I didn't either but now I do, and it's really beautiful to see what what they found.

SAMANTHA

And Weeda, how about you?

WEEDA

for me it's more about learning new things again.

10:21:31 So I really want to get into hand processing analog film.

10:21:35 It's really random kind of considering I mean like a whole digital short film.

10:21:40 But I think I want to really be in tune with like being physical with my art, and a lot of my friends around me are like illustrators or animators, and I feel very inspired by them like working on their craft literally at their

10:21:57 desk like, I know I could be writing my screenplay or whatever, but it's something very different when you're working with different materials.

10:22:04 So like when I was in Ryerson [Toronto Metropolitan University] I went for film, and there was a film lab there, and I worked there, so it's kind of like.

10:22:12 Oh, I really want to reconnect with working with film

10:22:17 So that's my current goal for this year at least hand processing something. even if it doesn't end up like even if I do it once, and i'm like oh, I didn't really like this and I move on I

10:22:25 just wanna try it. but otherwise, like just you know, screenwriting.

10:22:30 My next film, and it's not something I plan to shoot this year.

10:22:35 But hopefully, you know the next year it's something i'll be focusing on mostly for the whole year.

SAMANTHA

Amazing.

10:22:42 Well, I think I can confidently speak for everyone in the audience, and saying that all sounds great, really looking forward to to all of that.

10:22:50 Thank you so much, both of you, for joining us for sharing your films with Breakthroughs and with the world.

10:22:55 They're really really spectacular, and I personally feel very lucky to have seen them.

10:22:59 So I appreciate that I appreciate you, your artistry, thank you for your time and again.

10:23:04 Just thank you for for joining this. Q. And A: Thank you so much.

WEEDA

10:23:08 Yeah, Thank you.

KALLI

10:23:16 Yeah.