



# LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION ...

**W**hen I started art school, I never gave much thought to what a director does, or considered becoming one. I see myself more as a filmmaker than a director – but, using industry titles, director best suits what I do.

I see the director as someone who is the driving force for an idea, working with others to realise a project. On set, my closest ally is the director of photography (DOP), and together we decide how we want each shot to look.

Even the simplest short film can take a lot of work and preparation. Here, I outline my process when making a film.

## Concept

At university, I had a particular interest in depicting everyday life. So, while

exploring ideas for a short film, I came across an image by Miles Aldridge and couldn't get it out of my head. It showed a lipstick-stained cigarette stubbed out in a fried egg. There seemed to be an inherent narrative in the picture and this inspired *Egg & Fag*, shortlisted for DepicT! in 2011.

## Script

The script is not always a screenplay, for me. As I don't use much dialogue, I might just have a list describing the on-screen action. For *Egg & Fag* I wrote a single paragraph illustrating what happens in the present tense.

It's important the script is as detailed as possible, but leaving enough room for interpretation. I want input from others – particularly the DOP. It's important there's space for innovations on set, which might not happen if everyone is too closely following a detailed script.

## Storyboard

The storyboard is a series of images showing how shots will look on the screen alongside a description of the action. It helps the director and DOP visualise the film before the shoot.

With *Egg & Fag*, I knew I wanted it to begin with a woman lighting a cigarette, ending with her stubbing it out in an egg. My original storyboard included lots of close-ups of the actor's hands, feet and the cigarette lighter. But after speaking to the DOP, he suggested that the film just be a single shot. From there we decided it would begin with a close-up and slowly pull back to a wider shot.

## Pre-production

Here, I contact the cast and crew, making sure everyone is available for the shoot.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

#### ROSE HENDRY

A graduate of Duncan of Jordanstone in Dundee, Hendry lives in London, working on commercial commissions. She is also currently working on her latest personal project, a 35mm short film entitled *Bubblegum*.

To see a selection of Hendry's films, including *Egg & Fag*, visit [cargocollective.com/rosehendry](http://cargocollective.com/rosehendry)

For more filmmaking techniques, turn to page 701



Above left and centre: shots from *Stovies*, one of Rose Hendry's short films and, above right, a scene from her production *Bubblegum*

## A professional film director, and one-time DepicT!-shortlisted artist, Rose Hendry outlines the process of making a short film

To organise the shoot, I draw up a shot list, which is a log of all the shots that need to be captured during production. The shot list should be clear and easily understood by anyone new to the project. It will help keep everyone on track and prevent production running over schedule.

When finding a location, you have to consider both practical and creative aspects – the logistics of a place as well as how it looks. Can I squeeze all the cast and crew into such small a space? Can a dolly fit through that doorway?

### Production

This is when we capture the material that will make up the scenes in the film. Depending on the project's needs, I work closely with a team of heads of department: DOP, production designer, costume and hair and make-up.

Shooting a film never goes entirely to plan. It's therefore important I have a clear concept, which will be a reference point when things go awry. As the author of this concept, I'm the one tethering everyone to that 'vision', even when real-world elements come into play, such as weather and time restraints.

### Post-production

This is when the project comes together. I usually edit my own films, but editors are valuable: someone less invested in the footage, watching it with fresh eyes. Music and sound design come into play here, which are further creative avenues, allowing you to explore fresh ideas.

After this, all that's left for you to do is find an audience. Look out for short film festivals, such as Encounters festival in Bristol, which can be the perfect way to reach like-minded audiences.

## WHAT IS A DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY?

Rose Hendry's regular collaborator Ian Forbes talks about his role

A director of photography (DOP) is someone who leads the camera and the lighting departments to capture the film's scenes in a way desired by the director.

All the team's questions about the look and feel of the film come directly to me, but I also pose a lot of questions to the director.

I usually get involved in a project during pre-production, but if it's a short film or an artist's film it will tend to be earlier.

Some directors come to me with a plan and have an understanding of the aesthetic they wish to create. Others are less exact and require I be more involved creatively, offering



my aesthetic input.

I use the camera as a tool to get the best shots possible. On most shoots, I will also operate the camera.

In my eyes, a good DOP is someone who can come to a project with ideas and enhance the director's vision.

For me, it's about getting to grips with the elements of the director's concept that need to be brought on to the screen. It's about connecting those ideas with the audience by understanding what the director wants the audience to feel.



A scene from Hendry's film *Egg & Fag*, which was shortlisted for a DepicT! award in 2011

'Lighting your subjects from one side can be powerful'



# A shot in the dark

Cinematographer Karim Souissi reveals the best ways of filming in low light

**P**roperly lighting a scene is one of the most important aspects of cinematography. You often get better results with good lighting on a regular camera than poor lighting with a good camera – just as you would shooting stills.

The same factors have to be considered: sensor sizes, ISO vs grain, apertures, focusing and available light. I always recommend investing in light as a priority.

## CHOOSE THE RIGHT CAMERA

**1** The bigger the sensor in your camera, the more sensitive to light the sensor will be. So if you can, get or rent a full-frame camera such as the Sony a7S II for your film. It's a spectacular camera that performs very well in low light.

## USE PRIME LENSES

**2** Even though zoom lenses are more flexible and seem more convenient, fixed focal-length (prime) lenses are better suited for low light conditions. Prime lenses usually have wider apertures than zooms, so can get the most from the available light. They also typically offer better image quality and can be less expensive.

## A CONSTRAINT CAN BECOME A STRENGTH

**3** When your budget is too tight to invest in lighting, be creative and use available light sources, such as windows, lamps or a garden projector, to create a specific, original look. Lighting your subjects from one side can be powerful, and as long as you are consistent with this look, you can tell your critics that it was by design and an artistic choice.

## STAY FOCUSED

**4** When shooting with wide apertures, manual focus can be a challenge. But a shallow depth of field can give an interesting look to your image. In my film *Hand Maid* most of the shots were like this, and my subject moving in and out of focus gave the image a feel of energy and dynamism.



**AUTHOR PROFILE**  
**KARIM SOUISSI**  
 Depict! 2015 winner  
 Souissi made an impact with his film *Hand Maid*, the story of a Moroccan maid told through her hands.



A still from Karim Souissi's short film *Hand Maid*



**SIGN UP | NIGHT SHOOT**

Explore the wonders of nighttime photography with a workshop at Bath Abbey on Saturday 12 November, 18:00-22:00. For more details turn to page 708



IN DEPTH

# World in motion

Make films with impact, whatever the budget. Cinematographer Adam DJ Laity explains how

I'm a cinematographer and filmmaker working on low-budget digital motion pictures. I'm also a practice-led researcher looking at cinematographic approaches to depicting the landscape, specifically in terms of climate change.

Essentially, I'm examining how 'the human' and 'the landscape' relate to each other cinematographically, with reference to the history and theory of film, and in relation to my own practice.

For most of my work, I have to travel into quite inaccessible landscapes on foot, so my kit is often the smallest it can possibly be without jeopardising the aesthetic results. Sometimes this means shooting on a DSLR attached to a homemade shoulder mount or camera-stabilising rig.

Photography and



## 'TAKE THE TIME TO THINK WHERE EACH SHOT FITS IN TO THE GRANDER SCHEME OF THE NARRATIVE'

cinematography are completely separate and distinct crafts and practices. They have a lot in common in terms of kit and, to some extent, method, but they both require very different sets of skills.

The primary thing the 'DSLR revolution' has brought about is the accessibility of kit, which has empowered

people to approach a subject photographically, and then add movement.

I've known some excellent stills photographers who have started making films – the framing and composition of their shots is always impeccable.

However, there is a lot to learn when it comes to moving the camera and

editing moving images together in a sequence.

The world is saturated with moving images of massively varied quality and impact, thanks to the growing accessibility and affordability of digital video kit. This means that as makers we have to raise our game to produce more effective and affecting cinema.

Working on a low-budget project comes with challenges, but there are approaches I adopt to make these challenges work for my projects.

## Think big

Whatever I'm making, or at whichever stage of production, I always take the time to step back and think of the bigger picture. Shots have to balance and match with what comes before and after,



**AUTHOR PROFILE**  
**ADAM DJ LAITY**  
 DepicT! RPS  
 Cinematography  
 Award winner 2014,  
 Laity was director of  
 photography on  
 2016 indie feature  
 film *Brown Willy*.  
[adamlaity.com](http://adamlaity.com)

so I have to consider where each shot fits in the narrative.

To this end, I will always design my work – whether it's a small-scale community video project, an online music video or a low-budget feature – to be experienced on a cinema screen. If you design your images to work well on a large screen, then they will transfer down to other formats with the best possible quality.

### Shot selection

The wide shot is often used to make sure all of the action is being covered – it's a safety net to cut back to – but it's not really cinematography. Cinematography is understanding when to use a specific type of shot – close-up, medium, wide, static, steady, hand-held – and how it will

work with the shots in a sequence.

For example, I will often shoot in close first, because this is where most of the action and emotion of a scene usually happens. That way, I understand the drama of the scene as I start to move my camera back, and I have a clearer idea of how the sequence might fit into the landscape and the larger story.

### Keep shooting

Too many times I have pressed the button to stop shooting only to find that I should have kept rolling. Shooting at sunset is a perfect example of this – if you think you've got that perfect 'magic hour' moment, the likelihood is it's only going to get better if you keep on filming.

### Bare bones

I always aim to travel light: a camera, a couple of prime lenses, a couple of reflectors and three small directional lights. Using minimal equipment can be inspiring and a boon to the imagination.

And thinking minimally in terms of set-up can also give the work an authenticity lacking in a lot of films, ie if I use a reflector instead of lights, or shoot a whole scene on a single lens instead of having multiple changes.

Above all, I would swap all the kit in the world for an assistant who 'gets' my vision and understands how I want to work.

### Location

For me this more often than not means landscape, and this is often the largest

character that one sees on the cinema screen. Landscape, if shot well, can add to the poetics and meaning of a narrative in ways that no human character ever can.

I try to spend time hunting for the right place and, when I find it, spend time there, reading the weather and tracking the direction of the sun. Being prepared and patient is everything.

### Score

I always have a soundtrack, or at least key pieces of music that inspire how I want a scene or sequence to feel or look. It's great to have music in mind as a common point of reference for the director, editor or sound designer. For me, it is inevitably an emotional conduit to specific scenes and landscapes.