

Canon

Canon supports the next generation of filmmakers at Berlinale Talents



Interview

Why did you decide to enter the Canon Short Film competition?

"I had recently shot a film in black-and-white called 'After Ella' and I wanted to work with colour for my next film. 'Writer's Block' has a majority of red and warm tones and I wanted to use 4K, possibly the Canon C500. The Canon competition came at the right time!"

How did you get the idea for your film?

"In 'Writer's Block', the main character, Victoire, is trying to work to design her new fashion collection and she is constantly interrupted. She decides to escape, to stay away from her phone and her neighbours, and sits on her narrow balcony. Her creative process finally starts but she accidentally drops her large folder; it falls down the building to the sidewalk. This actually happened to me. I was living in Paris at the time and my folder fell down five floors. It was scary; luckily no one was hurt!"

Please explain what the film is about?

"'Writer's Block' is about the process of creating; the need for creating and the inherent obstacles. Victoire wants to create; but she is constantly interrupted and convinced that the outer disturbances prevent her from creating. But they might, in fact, be feeding her creativity... reality and fiction eventually meet, by accident."

Can you tell us more about the characters and narrative in the film?

"The main character is Victoire, a young designer; then there is Grumpy Schmidt, her landlord who wants her rent money. There is a wolf who wants to be human, a Little Red Riding Hood who rides a motorbike... all the characters are bouncing back and forth between dream and reality, from Victoire's distorted perspective."

What were the challenges or surprises you faced when making the film and how did you overcome them?

"The main challenge was the very small budget. Filming 'Writer's Block' required a professional crew, animations, after-effects, and these are costly. Some people offered to work for free to make it happen."

Had you shot any previous projects with Canon cameras?

"Yes, I shot 'After Ella' with two cameras; one of them was the Canon EOS 5D Mark II."

How long did the film take to shoot and what crew did you work with?

"We shot 'Writer's Block' in three days. I worked with a cinematographer, an assistant cameraman, two gaffers, an art director, a line producer, a make-up artist, an assistant producer and an assistant director."

How did working with the Canon camera and lenses help you to shoot the film?

"I used several lenses so I could create different effects, zooming on faces or filming from the balcony down to the street, for example."

How did you set up the Canon camera for the shoot?

"We actually used a Codex [recorder] to do the Canon RAW, [which was] kindly loaned by Codex for the duration of the shoot."

What was the performance of the Canon camera like in terms of the quality of footage produced?

Which Canon lenses did you choose to use and how did these perform optically?

"We had a set of the Canon cine primes (from 24mm to 85mm), plus 14.5-60mm and 30-300mm zooms."

How was the footage ingested and was this straightforward?

"We used Codex for the RAW and I needed four-Terabyte hard drives to save the footage because the files were very big. In post-production, I worked with an editor, an animator and an after-effects specialist. The sound design, mix and edit were done separately."

How did you record sound for the film?

"We did not record any sound on-set for 'Writer's Block'. It was all created in the studio, as well as the voice-over."

What is your overall impression of working with the Canon equipment and would you use Canon cameras for future film projects?

"I like working with Canon cameras; there are a variety of cameras for whether I need to film static or not. The cameras and lenses offer different depth-of-field and contrast possibilities... yes, I will certainly use Canon again."



Marie-Emmanuelle Hartness is a specialist in the adaptation of theatre to film. Born in Paris, France, she writes, directs and produces character-driven stories and has been named as one of the '10 Filmmakers to Watch in 2014' by The Independent newspaper in the UK. Her previous work was a film she wrote, directed and produced called 'After Ella', which was successfully crowd-funded on Kickstarter. 'After Ella' premiered at the 67th Cannes International Film Festival in 2014 and won First Prize in the Directorial Discovery Award at the Rhode Island International Film Festival that same year. She has been a Harvard guest speaker in Production and Screenwriting since 2012 and is currently producing Michel Negroponte's new film 'An Autobiography of Michelle Maren'.

Marie-Emmanuelle Hartness

'Writer's Block'

Remaining creative when the pressure is on – that's the central idea behind this intriguing short film about a female fashion designer who finds herself plagued with distractions. Just click on the window above to view the trailer and read on below to discover more about how Marie-Emmanuelle Hartness' treatment went from concept to reality...

Treatment of the brief

Marie-Emmanuelle's film focuses on the power of the mind. "In my previous works, I explored memory, identity, loss and now imagination," she reveals. "I want to explore the contrasts between slowness, city intensity and the spiraling anxiety of the blank page in an intense but playful way."

Her treatment uses a variety of visual metaphors to impart a feeling of panic and desperation and, taking cues from film heroes such as Jean-Luc Godard, Marie-Emmanuelle uses the power of sound and vision to heighten the viewers' senses, explaining: "I play with contrasts – strong lighting, backlighting and low angles – to create the atmosphere and the 'back and forth between the subject's reality and imagination."

Why the film was chosen

The judging panel chose this film because it demonstrated clear lines of approach in the concept and storyline. The judges were impressed at the strength of the original idea and how Marie-Emmanuelle's evocative descriptions of the central character – the fashion designer Victoire – and her battle to focus on creativity brought the story to life for them.