



SOCDOC

MFA
SOCIAL
DOCUMENTARY
FILM

ELEVENTH ANNUAL THESIS SHOWCASE

SEPT. 16-26, 2021, ONLINE • SEPT. 16-17, SVA THEATRE, NYC
sva.edu/socdocshowcase11



2020 and 2021 have been years of remarkable challenge and change. Lives have been forever altered and the entire world has been affected with more than 4 million lives lost to the pandemic. Today, we face political upheaval in Afghanistan, the global impact of another major earthquake in Haiti, and climate change which is now affecting unprecedented fires around the world. The impact on how we live and communicate will reverberate for generations to come. For documentary filmmakers, to live through such a time of transition and dramatic shifts in culture and behavior in and of itself is interesting, and has completely altered the way we see the world around us and how we tell stories – our own stories, and importantly, the stories of others.

Documentary film is one of the crafts through which artists can find ways to express themselves and find their own voice and vision while remaining truthful and responsible to what is unfolding

before them. In this volatile time, we are proud to foster a diverse set of filmmakers whose unique perspectives are needed, wanted, and accepted. The platforms available for documentaries are growing exponentially. From long form series, to feature documentaries, to documentary shorts, the audience is hungry and present and in large numbers flocking to the landscape of real life.

This year, our students from Group Eleven – who shot and edited their films during the pandemic, are sharing their thesis works-in-progress. The films range from the love story of a couple who run a Chinese puppetry troupe in New York but face an uncertain future, to a personal meditation exploring the early letters of the first Chinese students in America mirroring the filmmaker who is struggling with anti-Asian sentiment while isolated in NY due to COVID 19, to the honest revelations of an on-line sex worker during the pandemic, to a filmmaker’s personal

journey to get to know her estranged grandmother -- experimental in nature, the story is underscored by past experiences of domestic violence that mark their common ground. All this year’s work was hard to film, and in some cases is startlingly personal, speaking to the fractured reality, isolation and frustration experienced by the filmmakers themselves. Our students persevered and we honor their grit in this process.

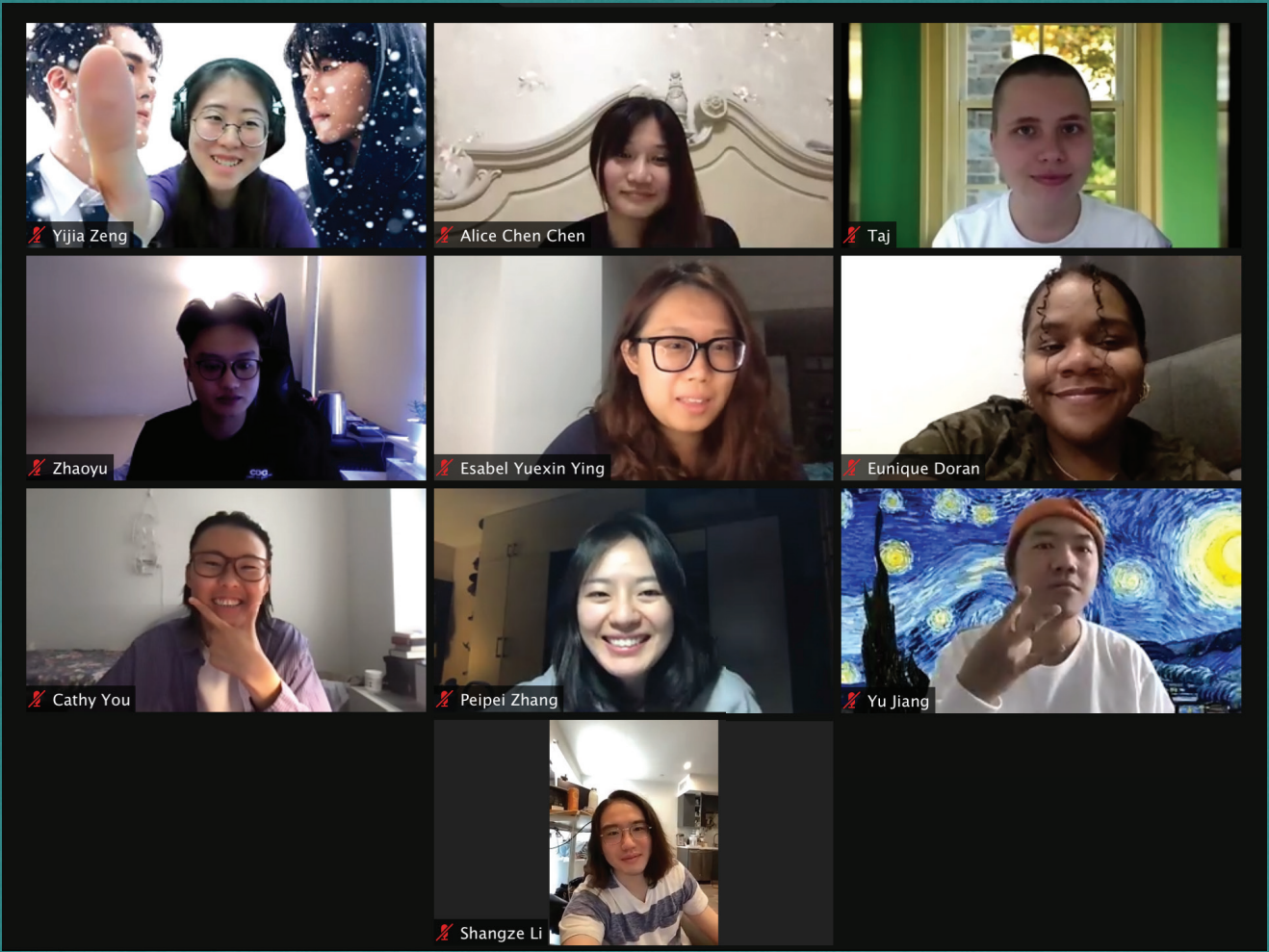
Many thanks as always to the SVA SocDoc Faculty and Staff, President David Rhodes, Executive Vice President Anthony Rhodes, and Provost Christopher Cyphers.

Maro Chermayeff

—**Maro Chermayeff**,
Department Founder and Chair

★ Thesis Showcase Spotlight

Selected filmmakers have the opportunity to share their films with a group of documentary Industry Advisors who can potentially help further their projects – and careers. In addition, all graduates will receive career strategy consultations from the Industry Advisors.



Class portrait, April 2021, conducted in the Zoom Era!

ELEVENTH ANNUAL THESIS SHOWCASE

Thesis Showcase is a preview of the films of our 2021 graduates. All films shown are works-in-progress and are looking ahead to festival premieres. Please be in touch with the department to track the films as they evolve.



Butterfly Home

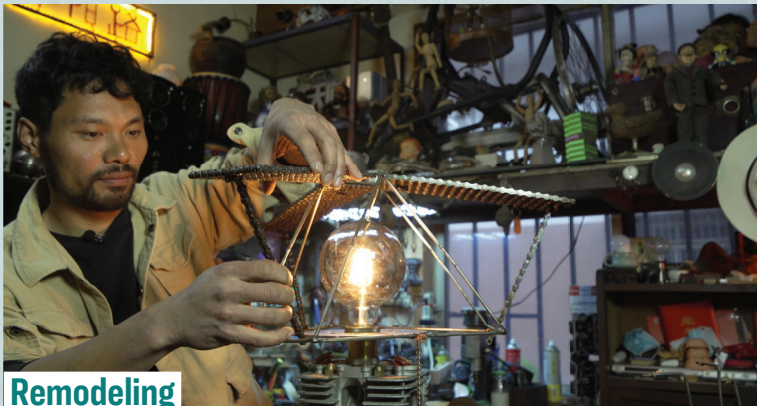
LENGTH: 60 minutes

DIRECTOR: **Chen Chen** (SocDoc Thesis Production Grant)

ONLINE Q&A: Mon., Sept. 20, 8:00 AM ET

Opened by the Changsha (China) Social Welfare Institute to care for terminally ill children, Butterfly Home gives the kids everything they can. Filmed during COVID-19, when the nurses quarantined on-site 15 days a month, devoted to the children's needs, above even their own families. They also struggled with Butterfly Home's near-collapse due to lack of funds and supplies; as the kids fought their own battles. They saved each other, and they cured me.

alicechen12162728@gmail.com



Remodeling

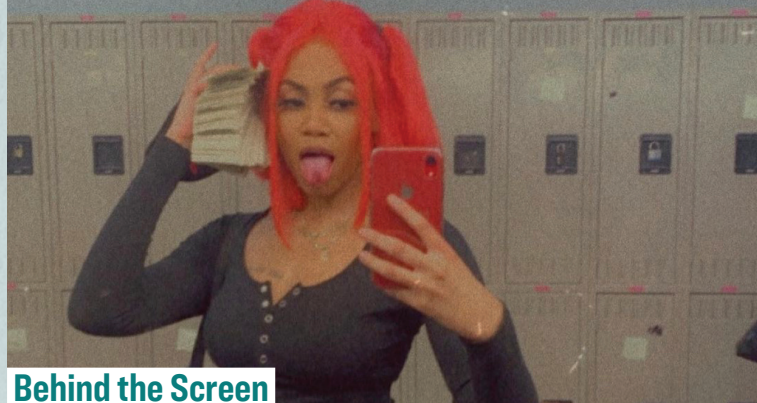
LENGTH: 25 minutes

DIRECTOR: **Esabel Yuexin Ying** (SocDoc Thesis Production Grant)

ONLINE Q&A: Mon., Sept. 20, 8:00 AM ET

In a small motorcycle repair shop in Shanghai, there is lots of fascinating magic. Yangde came from Anhui when he was in the middle school. He started out collecting rubbish, then worked for lots of factories, until he could open his own motorcycle repair shop. He has an apprectice with autism whose life he influences. And from the broken parts he turns in to sculptures, he gives himself a brand new life.

esabelying@163.com



Behind the Screen

LENGTH: 15 minutes

DIRECTOR: **Eunique Doran**

LIVE SCREENING & Q&A: Thurs., Sept. 16, 8:30 PM ET

Stevee is forced to take her adult entertainment work online to OnlyFans during the pandemic, but realizes this virtual work is not enough to sustain her. When COVID restrictions are relaxed, the world begins to reopen but strip clubs are left out.

doraneunique@gmail.com



Chinatown Auxiliary

★ **SHOWCASE SPOTLIGHT** | LENGTH: 35 minutes

DIRECTOR: **Zijun Cathy You** (SocDoc Thesis Production Grant, SVA Alumni Award)

LIVE SCREENING & Q&A: Fri. Sept. 17, 4:30 PM ET

A group of Chinese immigrants has volunteered for more than forty years as NYPD auxiliary officers, to protect their isolated community from crime, as well as an effort to join mainstream society decades ago. However, as anti-Asian discrimination increases during the pandemic, they feel powerless to help their community, as their health is at risk patrolling the streets. Now about to retire, they find hope in the younger generation to make a better future.

zijunyou@gmail.com



Floods Occur

★ **SHOWCASE SPOTLIGHT** | LENGTH: 45 minutes

DIRECTOR: **Taj Irzhavskaia** (Promos (DAAD) Scholarship)

LIVE SCREENING & Q&A: Fri. Sept. 17, 3:00 PM ET

An experimental, personal contemplation on domestic violence, passed from generation to generation. What does it mean to be a "victim" and how can you unlearn it? The heroines of the film, a grandmother, her daughter and grand-daughter, have not seen each other for 20 years. During this time, they have experienced violence but now are making a film together that will bring healing, using selfie techniques. The confession without names or details deepens the story.

ivanovta@me.com



Overseas

★ **SHOWCASE SPOTLIGHT** | LENGTH: 30 minutes

DIRECTOR: **Yijia Zeng** (SocDoc Thesis Production Grant)

LIVE SCREENING & Q&A: Fri. Sept. 17, 6:00 PM ET

A Chinese student is stuck in the United States because of COVID-19, facing hate crimes and political pressure. By chance, she finds letters written by the first group of Chinese students to come to the U.S. in the 1870s. Through these letters, she digs into their story, and the ways their situaion is similar to her present.

vimeo.com/yijiazeng0710 | zeng0710@foxmail.com



Dancing with COVID-19

LENGTH: 40 minutes

DIRECTOR: **Yu Jiang** (SVA Alumni Award)

LIVE SCREENING & Q&A: Thurs., Sept. 16, 7:20 PM ET

During the pandemic, a group of young Asian immigrants took their dancing to the street. They faced many troubles and responded with dance. Is dance a kind of escape from reality, or a manifestation of the true self? Everyone has different answers.

yjiangxx.wixsite.com/xyyjiang | yjiang19@sva.edu



Lost In Places

LENGTH: 15 minutes
 DIRECTOR: **L. Zhang** (SVA Alumni Award)
 ONLINE Q&A: Mon., Sept. 20, 8:00 AM ET

The narrator searches for the meaning of home: what gets lost and what is kept from place to place in her life.
slzhang0826@163.com



Our Curse

★ **SHOWCASE SPOTLIGHT** | LENGTH: 60 minutes
 DIRECTOR: **Peipei Zhang** (SocDoc Thesis Production Grant)
 LIVE SCREENING & Q&A: Fri. Sept. 17, 7:00 PM ET

After years of avoiding her parents, a young filmmaker decides to travel back to China and relieve the negative dynamic in her family. But, a discovered secret makes her think more deeply about how one suffers from a traumatic childhood and passes the pain through generations.
pzhang7@sva.edu



Puppetry, Us

LENGTH: 50 minutes
 DIRECTOR: **Zhaoyu Zhang** (SVA Alumni Award)
 LIVE SCREENING & Q&A: Thurs. Sept. 16, 6:00 PM ET

A couple from different cultural backgrounds runs a Chinese puppetry troupe in New York, but their studio is facing closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The film tells their love story and how they promote Chinese traditional culture in the United States.
zzy9042@hotmail.com



Clockwise from top left: Partial class portrait, September 2019; Cathy You filming her thesis in NYC, 2020; Lisa Durden and Cathy You in a camera workshop, 2019; In-class interview workshops with Zhaoyu Zhang, Eunique Doran and Aria Raofi

Photos by R. Vincell Gustine, A. Montgomery-Neutze and E. Spink

ADDITIONAL FILMS
(WILL NOT BE SCREENED)



My Brother: The Ethiopian Orthodox Priest

LENGTH: 60 minutes
DIRECTOR: **LISA DURDEN** (SVA Alumni Award)

This film is more than a story, it's a quiet meditation about this ancient religion. It shows the spiritual awakening of a man, Kenneth Durden, whose complex journey to the priesthood unfolds and how he rose to prominence from the outside, to become Kesis Amdetsion, a respected priest and leader in this sacred community.
www.lisadurden.com | LisaRdurden@gmail.com



Maestro

DIRECTOR: **Shangze Li** (SocDoc Thesis Grant)

Tate is learning how to paint in Princeton Academy of Arts, a private studio in New Jersey where classical painting technique and ideology are being taught by a master of the genre, Gilberto. Gilberto gave up his fame, and left his family to come teach here from Russia, and through a translator he teaches all his classes. Tate, and Gilberto's other students are here to pursue some kind of art dream. What awaits them in this way of becoming a master?



Through the Lens

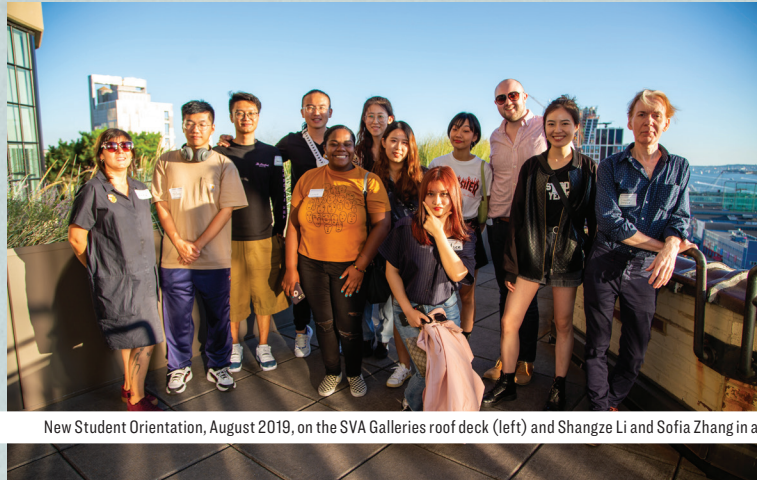
DIRECTOR: **Aria Raofi**

Once photography was a crime and punishable by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Now photography is restoring hopes and dreams of internally displaced girls, living in severe poverty inside a refugee camp. Due to the ongoing war between the Taliban and the Afghan forces, they left their home province, and taken refuge in the outskirts of Kabul. The girls are neglected and voiceless inside this camp. But, the filmmaker teaches children basic photography, so they can document their own lives, revealing their dreams and hidden talents.



Clockwise from top: Peipei Zhang filming her thesis in China, 2020; Interview workshop with Aria Raofi, Sofia Zhang and Eunike Doran; Taj Irzhavskaia and Zhaouyu Zhang in Bob Richman's verité workshop, 2021

Photos by E. Spink and J. Eisenstein



Photos by Yuby Hernandez (left) and Weixin Zhuang (right).

New Student Orientation, August 2019, on the SVA Galleries roof deck (left) and Shangze Li and Sofia Zhang in a camera workshop with instructor Tom Hurwitz, 2019 (right)

FACULTY

Department Chair: Maro Chermayeff, exec. producer/director, *Atlanta's Missing and Murdered: The Lost Children*; producer/director, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*

Julie Anderson, producer, "Vick," *30 for 30*

Axel Baumann, cinematographer, *Pavarotti*

Alan Berliner, director, *Letter to the Editor*

Mira Chang, producer, *Half the Sky*

Lori Cheatle, producer, *Matangi/Maya/M.I.A.*

Peter Chelkowski, director/cinematographer, *Harpooned*

Ann Collins, editor, *Joan Didion: The Center Will Not Hold*

Deborah Dickson, director, *The Lost Bird Project*

Bob Eisenhardt, editor, *Free Solo*

Michael Epstein, director, *John & Yoko: Above Us Only Sky*

Micah Fink, director, *Mann v. Ford*

Leslie Asako Gladsjo, director, *Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise*

Kristian Gonzales, editor, technical consultant

Richard Hankin, editor, *Capturing the Friedmans*

Judith Helfand, director/producer, *Cooked: Survival by Zip Code*

Tom Hurwitz, ASC, cinematographer, *Queen of Versailles*

Amitabh Joshi, director, *Tashi's Turbine*

Ross Kauffman, director, *Born into Brothels*

Sabine Krayenbühl, editor, *My Architect*

Beth Levison, producer, *Made in Boise*

Christa Majoras, editor, technical consultant

Mark Mandler, production sound, *Reconstruction: America after the Civil War*

Kat Patterson, cinematographer, *12th and Delaware*

Samuel D. Pollard, director, *MLK/FBI*

Thom Powers, artistic director, DOC NYC

Bob Richman, cinematographer, *Paradise Lost* trilogy

Jerry Risius, cinematographer, *Parts Unknown: Anthony Bourdain*

Amy Schewel, archival producer, *Atlanta's Missing and Murdered*

E. Donna Shepherd, editor, *Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present*

Toby Shimin, editor, *Ernie & Joe*

Karen K. H. Sim, editor, *Who Killed Garrett Phillips?*

Erik Spink, producer, *Tashi's Turbine*

J.T. Takagi, sound recordist, *Strong Island*

Ana Veselic, editor, *Kehinde Wiley: An Economy of Grace*

Rose Vincelli Gustine, film strategy consultant

Farihah Zaman, director, *Remote Area Medical*

STAFF

Maro Chermayeff, founder and chair

Rose Vincelli Gustine, director of operations

Timothy Doyle, assistant to the chair

Kristian Gonzales, sr. systems administrator

Christa Majoras, senior systems administrator

Joseph Eisenstein, video production manager

SVA ADMINISTRATION

David Rhodes, president

Anthony P. Rhodes, executive vice president

Christopher J. Cyphers, Ph.D., provost

Steven Heller, co-chair, MFA Design; co-founder, MFA SocDoc Department

THANK YOU!

Aom Prapaporn Pinyopusarerk, editor, Thesis Showcase sizzle reel

Group 10 and Group 12

Kristian Gonzales, systems admin emeritus

SVA Theatre

Visual Arts Press

Unless noted, all photos courtesy of the directors.

Dank Je

Спасибо

जी शुक्रिया

Danke schön

Thank you

Gracias

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Kiitos

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...to all the SocDoc faculty, guest lecturers, alumni & staff, our family & friends and the whole SVA community for your thoughtful insights, your care, attention, and unique perspective throughout the process of making these films.

...And to our film subjects, who share their lives with us.

DEPARTMENT CONTACT INFORMATION

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Front cover: *Overseas*
Back cover: *Through the Lens*



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