

Interview by Rose Parish
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TOMMY CHA

A short interview between Rose Parish and Tommy Cha following his recent body of films. Here Rose Parish and Tommy Cha discuss four pertinent films, *Field Strip* (2011) *More Than You'll Ever Know* (2012), *Norma* (2011) and *Angelina and Gabriel* (2011.) These four films are a crucial interchange between what we know of feminist critique and the obvious female perception in imagery and film. These themes, if we want to call them that, such as 'desire' 'aspiration' 'parental relationship,' are thematised and cinematized in Cha's films. They are short but sweet reminders of how these engendered-genders break through in social media and to an extent in self cameos on film made at home.



Field Strip, Digital Film, 2012 © Tommy Cha (film still)

R: So where's best to start really? I've looked at your website and there's quite a few pieces of work to talk about but I thought maybe we can start at what you are doing now? TC: Yeah, what I am doing now is that I left university last year and I'm involved in this artist collective alldaybreakfast, we have just finished a run of shows and we are applying for new shows, expanding out in Bristol as well as planning to expand elsewhere. I'm also working on a project at the moment that is continuation of what I was working on beforehand.

R: Is alldaybreak is run by you? TC: And four other artists. So there is a collective of four including me from the MA fine arts at UWE Bristol. Originally it started with two, setting up a show in the galleries but it has just continued on. I thought it would be good experience to pick up a lot of things, general running of shows, curating and proposing shows, that type of thing.

R: So before alldaybreakfast were you curating shows for yourself or other artists, or was that the first time you were involved in curating? TC: That was the first time. I got involved through university really and that was the first time I'd become involved in art at all. I wouldn't say it was on a whim because it was thought through but I wasn't interested in making art before then, it was in the back of my mind though. I got some money from work to apply for the MA and I didn't have any art to show but I had good intentions.

R: So you all stemmed alldaybreakfast from coming out of university and so during the period of time you were on the MA did you all work together before? TC: We worked together, so the last couple of shows we did it was collaborative. We didn't set out to do a collaborative show but there were empty shops around Bristol, a tiny corner shop... it just happened. The one before that, there was Carol Laidler and me. We had an idea to do something prior to our graduate show, knowing it was going to be rubbish. There was one room we curated together as a team.

R: So you curated another space away from the MA? TC: We wanted to present it more like an

art gallery, instead of cubicles, like these courses you have studio spaces delegated to students.

R: Yeah I remember seeing a lot of open plan curating, but I realised some students minds aren't really curatorial... or not there yet. And what about the digital films you've been doing over the last few years? TC: Yeah the piece I put in was Unseen Footage, it was a selection from that small film piece, and it was a silent film, looping continuously.

R: And what was Room With A View 1971... was that similar? TC: Essentially there was a series of pieces I beginning of 2012, third year of my MA. My mum passed away and I was making a film based on experiences coming to Korea. I flipped the character instead of a Korean woman It was an English woman. Although I'm half Korean I don't have any affinity to being Korean. I've been to Korea once in my whole life.

R: It was interesting because there is a certain curatorial set up to the film, some artists might choose to look at that from a removed perspective or to document it a different way. You were editing everything you did so the details were important. There was an affinity with curating and editing constantly. That's what I found in the other films as well, as it wasn't in tune with that character or person it was the cinematic feel. TC: I do distance myself but in a way certain characters are representing of me, but I like to put someone else in that position. Like a game. There is a woman in the dress, but in this perspective it is me I'm just not in front of the camera.

R: Is there a theme with using women in the films? TC: I think I just admire women. My mum has always been this very heavy influence on me. She was very resilient; she has been through a hell of a lot such as wars and all kinds of things.

R: Ok let's go back to being removed from the front of the camera. That was interesting. There are a few films I watched; More That You'll Ever Know, Field Strip, Angelina and Norma. Where did the ideas come from for

the films? TC: This stems from my background as I started out as a photographer. I had some work for Maxim magazine and The Front, so basically lads mags, and through this I met some interesting people who played a part in my films. One was the girl with the gun and snake. It leads me to think about representations with women at the workplace in magazines. It was a doorway to getting in touch with people I wouldn't normally get in touch with. It started off as simple portraits.

R: Which one did you film first and was there something about that first one that you carried on filming the other two the same way? TC:

The Angelina and Gabriel and Field Strip came one after the other. Angelina was someone I knew and our paths crossed. She was a model and I did a test shoot for an agency and she contacted me out of the blue and she had a snake... it just evolved from that. Whereas as Field Strip was someone who contacted me that I didn't know. More Than You'll Ever Know I found on YouTube and I re-produced it. There was something about it that scared the shit out of me; it was really aggressive and hostile to me that someone just published it on social media. What scared me more was the number of views was so high, just for one bit of footage.

R: Re appropriating it must have been a different way of using film for you, I thought it was all the same footage I thought it was another model, not an actor. TC: Actors re-enacted it and I gave them the dialogue from YouTube, it was an English accent instead of an American accent. Where it comes from made me think about relationships – the daughter and the father, I found that moving but other universal questions cropped up such as how could a father really treat his daughter like that? These were parental issues whereby they are moving away and disappearing throughout the filming.

R: Do you think you will produce another film from this piece talking about those kinds of relationships? TC: Well I was going to make a film about my mums life and coming to this country but when she passed away I didn't have time to finish it. Translating those memories.

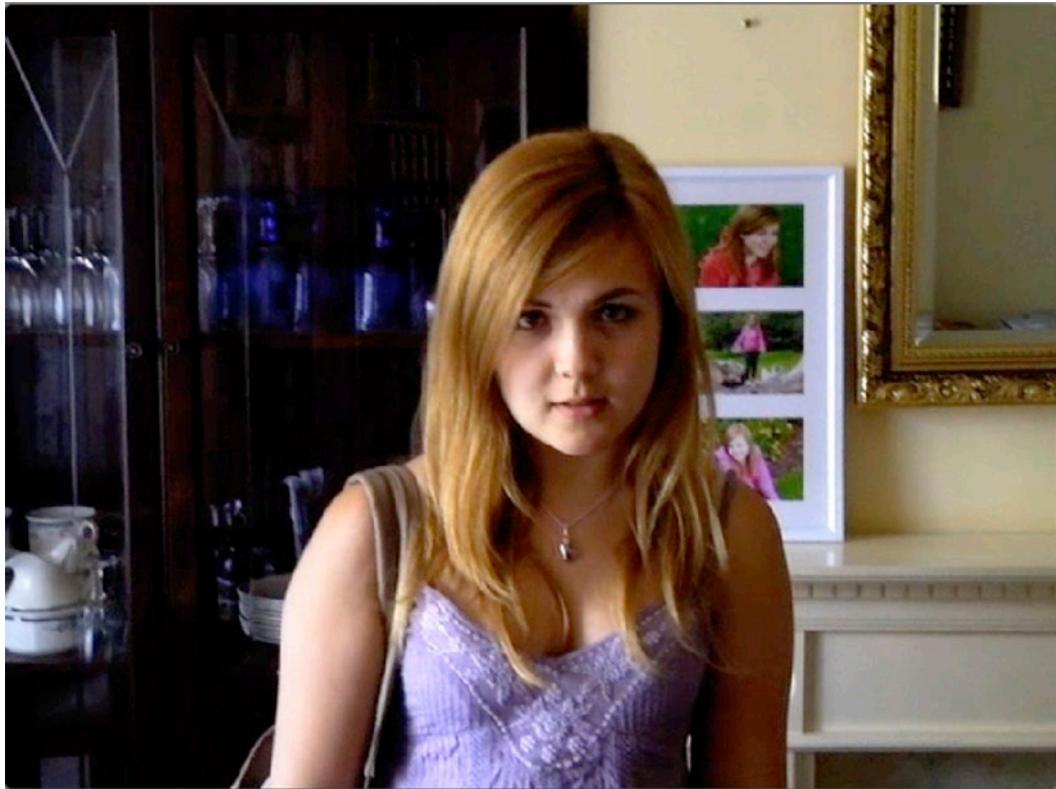
I'd be taking that further forward. Partly factual,

partly fiction. It should be fairly convincing as documentary. That's as far as I've thought about it.

R: Have you heard of Ryan Trecartin? He had some films in the Liverpool Biennial for a few years running, they were shit scary in a sort of MTV Shakespeare ride way. Like theatre plays, very un-TV and film like. I remember watching some clips of him renting out bungalows and thinking he was playing the same person.

Theres something about the way it was filmed with the MTV look. This reminded me of the YouTube clip All Youll Ever Know. TC: It's a polarizing piece of work, like you don't understand what's going on at all in All You'll Ever Know. Even though it's about family. It can be uncomfortable and rapid in following it. I showed it to two child psychologists to get some feedback. No one really finds it funny either. It is actually the desperation of finding relevance in the relationship between father and daughter. It's not like conventional family films or photographs. I think it was important to point out they were performing, not just following a script. The guy had to go against inner sensibilities, like someone playing a villain.

R: Do you find the same with the short film Norma? When you watch it there is something charming about her, when you see her speaking. TC: That was an interview that was set up for someone who was breaking into the model industry. So I interviewed her but I didn't make any eye contact with her but just read out stupid questions. It was just done in one take, in an eight minute long digital film. I took out my voice and the questions. Her composure was there, going out of character and then go in to character. There was lots of revealing behavior that came out of it. It was called Norma because of the early film footage of Norma Jean whose industry name was Marilyn Monroe. Norma was also younger and breaking into the industry. It was the simple idea of romanticising a young girl but she was as messed up as the rest of us. I showed it to three young lads and they were all uncomfortable with it, thinking it was sexist or going to far. I think there was another cinematic side of it that was completely lost in that moment with the critique.



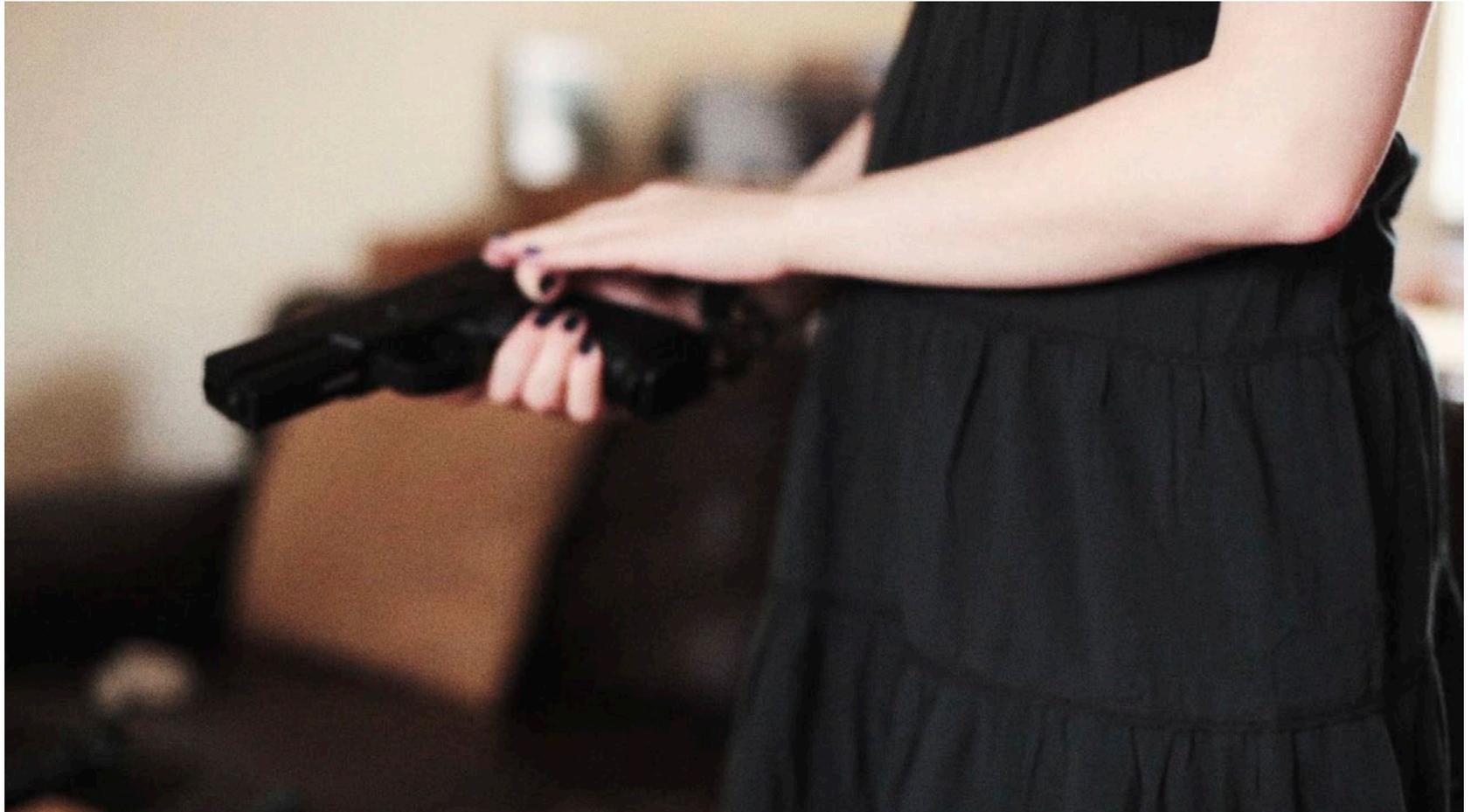
More Than You'll Ever Know, Digital Film, (still) 2012 © Tommy Cha



Norma, Digital film (still), 2012 © Tommy Cha



Angelina and Gabriel, Digital film (still) 2011 © Tommy Cha



Field Strip, Digital Film, 2012 © Tommy Cha (film still)