

Kathryn Bigelow unlocks the HURT LOCKER

Written by NaRhee Ahn (SOA Film '99)

Sunday, 31 May 2009 13:55



Kathryn Bigelow SOA Film '79 is the recipient of Columbia University's 2009 Andrew Sarris award for alumni achievement. As a conceptual artist turned filmmaker, Kathryn studied at The San Francisco Art Institute and The Whitney Museum Independent Study Program before entering the graduate film program. In her multi-genred career, Kathryn has brought to the screen society's outcast bikers in *THE LOVELESS* (1982); vampires in a wild wild west in *NEAR DARK* (1987); Jamie Lee Curtis as a tough cop in *BLUE STEEL* (1990); Keanu Reeves and Patrick Swayze in the mother of all undercover FBI agent infiltrating surfing bank robbers flicks *POINT BREAK* (1991); *STRANGE DAYS* (1995) written and co-produced by James Cameron featuring a kick-ass Angela Bassett protecting Ralph Fiennes; *THE WEIGHT OF WATER* about complicated families (2000) and *K-19: THE WIDOWMAKER* (2002) starring Harrison Ford and Liam Neeson. In her own words, Kathryn's experience at Columbia wasn't the actual set up for her film career even though her thesis film ironically was titled *THE SET-UP*. "I transitioned from art to film while at Columbia, completing my first film, *THE SET-UP*, with voiceover commentary by cultural theorists Syslvre Lotringer and Marshall Blonsky."

I asked Kathryn if being a pioneering female action director in Hollywood was difficult and if looking back, she would have done anything differently. While she chose not to answer that question, she did say, "I choose projects that are artistically interesting and possess challenging subject matter." The statement is succinct and liberating. Any filmmaker, regardless of gender, race or creed, ought to have the freedom to speak about and interpret whatever subject matter they wish. Just so long as they accept the responsibility of having taken whatever that particular point of view is as an individual.

Kathryn's new film *THE HURT LOCKER* is set in the midst of the Iraq War where we follow soldiers trained to clear enemy bombs. Sergeant Sanborn (Anthony Mackie), Specialist Eldridge (Brian Geraghty) and Staff Sergeant James (Jeremy Renner) face high-stakes mission after mission. As the team's personal conflicts start to ignite under pressure, it's only a matter of time before one false move costs them everything. The title of the film comes from the expression that any mistake can put you in "the hurt locker." Kathryn spoke about the process of finding the story and making the film. "I had been a fan of Mark Boal's reporting for some time and when he returned from his embed with a bomb squad in Baghdad in 2004, his observations about these men, who have the most dangerous job in the world, suggested a filmic translation that could be both topical and relevant. The fact that these men live in mortal danger every day makes their lives inherently tense and iconic. On a metaphorical level, they seemed to suggest both the heroism and the futility of the war. The film began as a piece of reporting by Mark, therefore I wanted the feel of the film to be reportorial, placing the audience squarely in the middle of the action, a boots on the ground, you-are-there experiential look at combat in Iraq 2004."

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Considering Kathryn is no stranger to difficult productions and was bound to have some good on-set stories, I asked her what she found to be the most rewarding aspect of making the film. "In Jeremy Renner, Anthony Mackie and Brian Geraghty I found three talented actors whose ability to humanize the helplessness and heroism of these soldiers unnerving and mesmerizing. Then with the help of the visually gifted cinematographer Barry Ackroyd and four Super 16 cameras, we returned from our shoot in the Middle East with about a million feet of film. We finished post with two extremely dexterous editors, Bob Muraski and Chris Innis. I think this production, though as challenging as anything that I've ever attempted in the past, also is somehow personally the most gratifying."

Asked if she had any advice for young graduates of Columbia's film program, Kathryn replied, "Never take no for an answer."

Check your local listings for [THE HURT LOCKER](#) in limited release on June 26th.