

#GLASS #BOX

by Christopher Sinico

Photography: Jeff Pella

While most of the crew and actors had some sort of experience in acting or amateur filmmaking, the lack of technical ability at the start of the film was compensated by the passion of all the volunteers. "It was a really a great learning process for everyone involved in terms of both filmmaking and grit," Finlin explained. "We started off learning the basics and ended with an impressive level of professionalism."

The film is the collaborative work of many foreign and Taiwanese hands and minds. The main actors were Lin Ke Hsin and Kelly Creighton. Lin is a student of fine arts at Kaohsiung Normal University and landed the part when a previous actress dropped out the night before the first day of filming because her father did not want her portrayed as a Bin Lang Mei. "I can't believe how lucky we were to find Ke Hsin," said Finlin. "She was perfect for the role of Yin-May."

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It seems as if everywhere you go in Taiwan there are two kinds of glass boxes dispersed across the country. Some are on the edges of highways and the others reflect light from uptown to downtown. These ever present boxes are either betel nut (bin lang) booths or buxibans. They have been sprouting up for decades as symbols of expansion and sex appeal.

The Glass Box is the second film by Matt Finlin and his first to be shot in Taiwan. This film is the place where the unlikely coupling of buxiban and bin lang come together. The film itself has been in the works for the past year, and it is the story of Claudia, a twenty-three year old North American who has reluctantly come to Asia with her boyfriend to teach English at a cram school.

At a bin lang booth, Claudia meets Yin-May, also twenty-three, who was born and raised in Taiwan by her father in a fishing community on Chijin Island. The two girls come to realize that despite cultural differences they have a lot more in common than they realized.

The plot itself is paralleled by sketches of daily life describing the esthetic of what it's like to live in the rising metropolis of Kaohsiung. Scenes filmed from both Yin-May and Claudia's perspectives from all over Kaohsiung County contribute to a pictorial assemblage of their two different but interwoven lives.

The film also attempts to create a synthesis between the two characters by merging language. Subtitles and conversations take place in English, Mandarin, and Taiwanese.

It is Matt Finlin's filmmaking philosophy that "we may be unconnected in a conventional sense, but watching a film brings us all together on the same emotional wavelength when we are in the theater." The Glass Box is a narrative based on this philosophy, where two women who are seemingly unconnected on the surface find common ground as the film develops.

Creighton is from Massachusetts and The Glass Box is her first screen acting role. She has been living in Kaohsiung for 2 years and has acted on stage in the United States.

Other indispensable members of the cast and crew were Eugene Wu, a writer and translator associated with the Womb Bloc artists group that screened Finlan's first movie.

Alex Williams was the lead cinematographer for the film. Laura Lee, a Taiwanese film school graduate, was the lighting technician for the film. She was brought to the project by Jeff Pella who did the production photography.

Walter McGee was the assistant cameraman on set and Brad McDuff was the sound technician. A variety of supporting roles were taken by Taiwanese and foreign actors with ties to Finlan and the crew.



Making a movie anywhere must be a nerve-wracking undertaking. But filming on the streets of Kaohsiung County poses several of its own particular complications: from sound editing to capturing and controlling the chaotic street life of Taiwan.

As with most films, one of the primary concerns for the Glass Box was funding. Almost everyone who worked on the film was either a student or teacher working on a volunteer basis in their free time.

Helping the process was Hu Chin Chi of Fe Hou Communications. "There were a lot of times where it looked like this film was going to be completely independent and low budget," says Finlin "But thanks to the dedication and help of Mr. Hu, our producer, we eventually developed a quality look that we're proud of."

Hu has been working in Taiwan's communication industry for years. His indispensable contributions included the camera and hardware, which he offered exclusively on weekends. He also made his acting debut in the film as Yin-May's father.

Behind the scenes were translators and editors that pushed the film through the stages of post production. "Everyone came together in a really serendipitous way to make this movie work and I can't thank everyone enough," Finlin said.

"Just like the characters in the film, everyone who worked on this project started off tenuously and ended as a family. It's been a helluva ride." ❏

