

# DAVID MAGDAEL & ASSOCIATES, INC.

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## WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

A FILM BY KIMI TAKESUE



NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE  
LOS ANGELES FILM FESTIVAL 2010

Sun. Jun 20, 7:30pm  
Mon. Jun 21, 9:45pm  
Thurs. Jun 24, 5:15pm

Regal Cinemas #13  
Regal Cinemas #10  
Regal Cinemas #9

HDCAM 72 MINUTES

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### FILM CONTACT

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# WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

A film by Kimi Takesue

## SYNOPSIS

A high society wedding, a boxing club, a beauty salon, a school for survivors of the civil war: these are a few of the many places in Uganda discovered in Kimi Takesue's feature documentary, *WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME*.

Employing an observational style, this contemplative documentary reveals multifaceted portraits of Ugandans in both public and private spaces. The film travels through Uganda, roaming the vibrant streets of Kampala and the rural quiet of the North, to reveal a diverse society where global popular culture finds expression alongside enduring Ugandan traditions.

Throughout the journey, *WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME* compels us to consider the complex interplay between the observer and the observed, and challenges our notions of both the familiar and exotic.

*WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME* offers unexpected images of a complex country, encouraging us to abandon pre-conceived notions of where we are going and what we will find.

*WORLD PREMIERE at the 2010 Rotterdam International Film Festival.*

*WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME is directed, produced, shot, and edited by award winning filmmaker Kimi Takesue; produced in association with Lane Street Pictures; co-produced by Richard Beenen; and co-edited by John Walter.*

# WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

A film by Kimi Takesue

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME is a film that speaks to the beauty and rhythms of everyday life in Uganda. The film charts my travels through Uganda, from the kinetic energy of urban life to the tranquility of rural areas. In exploring the nuances of everyday life, the film challenges the dominant and prevailing images of Africa that focus only on the horrors of war, poverty, and AIDS. Outside of East Africa, there are very few representations of Uganda that reach beyond the sensational and stereotypical. In contrast, WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME offers unexpected images of a complex country, and challenges the viewer to abandon pre-conceived notions of where we are going and what we will find.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME was commissioned by the Rotterdam International Film Festival as part of a special series on African Cinema. Twelve international filmmakers, who had never traveled to Africa before, were invited to make films on their experiences in Africa. I was particularly excited to participate in this project because my film work often deals with various kinds of cross-cultural encounters. I'm interested in the meeting point, when people from different cultures come together and search for a mode of communication. My work often explores the process of "looking" cross-culturally and the interplay between the observer and the observed.

I went to Uganda without a specific agenda or set of expectations. As a one-person crew, I had a great deal of flexibility with my time and method of working. Rather than execute a specific plan, I was interested in responding to what unfolded and emerged during the journey. Often, I would station myself in a particular place and observe with my camera. Over a period of time interesting interactions would surface as people approached me and interacted with the camera; these relationships were constantly changing and in flux. A group of children might initially clamor for attention but then become bored and move on. I was interested in this interplay between observation and engagement, voyeurism and intimacy.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME is primarily an observational film; there is no voice-over narrating the journey. No translations are provided. No attempt is made to explain or definitively inform the viewer about Uganda. Instead, the film re-constructs my sensory impressions of people and places, by concentrating on the images, details, colors and sounds that left an impact: a high society wedding, bustling city streets, a nightclub filled with music and laughter. The film captures moments of visual inter-connection and disconnection---voyeuristic fascination and fleeting intimacy. Throughout the journey my presence as a filmmaker is constantly felt through the eyes of the camera---looking and being looked back at.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME invites the viewer to come along on a journey to Uganda—to watch, to listen, to experience. As the title suggests, it is a journey into new territory that is both familiar and exotic, disorientating and eye opening.

### **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND ON THE ROTTERDAM COMMISSION:**

One of the main objectives behind the initiative was to increase the visibility of African cinema at the Rotterdam Film Festival. Rotterdam was particularly interested in discovering new, young, talented African filmmakers whose work had not yet reached the international stage. As a visiting filmmaker, I was asked to help facilitate a dialogue between local Ugandan filmmakers and the Rotterdam Film Festival. Overall, the Ugandan film infrastructure is quite small so I quickly became acquainted with a number of Ugandan filmmakers, working in both the independent and commercial sectors. Rotterdam then commissioned work by African filmmakers for the series, and also asked the visiting filmmakers to make pieces about their impressions.

### **PLACES VISITED:**

My filming began, the day after I arrived, with an invitation to a Ugandan wedding. I was expecting a small, modest affair but it turned out to be the most lavish, extravagant wedding I've ever attended. The day included a visit to the beauty salon for elaborate hair styling, a traditional church wedding, and an enormous reception with guest appearances by local pop stars.

On another day, I noticed signs in the lobby advertising an African Women's weightlifting competition. The following day I wandered over to the hotel and discovered an amazing group of young women lifting weights in the middle of an ornate hotel banquet hall. Again, it was a surprising and wonderful image.

Other highlights of my trip, included a visit to a video hall in Kampala, where a resident "VJ" did a live translation of a Bruce Lee film from English to the local Lugandan language. I also traveled to the Entebbe Zoo where hundreds of energetic school children swarmed the grounds in packs, wearing brightly colored uniforms. Other wonderful discoveries included: a kickboxing school, a group of Ugandan independent filmmakers at work on set, and street kids learning break dancing at a local youth center.

The most meaningful personal experience I had involved my visit to Hope North, a school located in Northern Uganda in the Masindi region. Founded by the Ugandan artist, Sam Okello, Hope North is a school that provides an education and home for children displaced by the civil war that has ravaged Northern Uganda for the last 20 years. Many of the kids at Hope North have suffered tremendous loss, displacement, and personal trauma—a number of them were abducted and forced to serve as soldiers in a brutal war. To help with the emotional healing process, the school integrates art, music and dance into its curriculum. Hope North is an inspirational place that helps to empower and prepare kids for a better and more hopeful future.

At Hope North, I was able to speak to several kids who were forced to serve as child soldiers; they shared very intimate, personal stories with me. I was inspired by their resiliency and determination to rebuild their lives. However, within the film I only refer to their pasts very briefly, in order to provide context. I didn't want to define these kids by the horrors of their pasts. Instead, I wanted to present their daily rhythms as students and playful teenagers immersed in life at school. <http://www.hopenorth.org/>

## **WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE TITLE?**

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME? is a question that applies to the viewer, the Ugandans in the film, and to myself, as the filmmaker. For the subjects represented within the documentary the question “Where are you taking me?” also moves beyond curiosity into a confrontation of the politics and ethics of the documentary contract. How are these images being appropriated and for what use? How will these images be disseminated and consumed? What right do I have to take these pictures? Sometimes the question registers in a subject’s eyes, less often it is stated—as it is several times in this film. It is an inquiry that can never be fully answered, and one that implicates both the filmmaker and audience.

## **CHALLENGES WHILE FILMING IN AFRICA:**

As an Asian-American woman wandering through the streets of Kampala with a camera there were legitimate suspicions about who I was and what my intentions were in filming. Most people assumed that I was a journalist with a specific agenda; there was a lot of fear that I would likely misrepresent a situation. These concerns were justifiable--so often, in the context of Africa, people’s images are appropriated and misused. People also assumed that I was directly profiting from “stealing” their image and therefore expected to be paid, if filmed.

I spoke with one young Ugandan man about this issue at length. I asked to film him and he initially refused. He was concerned that his image might be used out of context---for example, to inaccurately illustrate a news story on poverty or AIDS in Africa. I then explained the Rotterdam project to him—that I was an artist, and my intention was to show everyday aspects of Ugandan life, filtered through a very personal lens. Once he understood that I was an artist, rather than a journalist he was willing to be filmed. It was rewarding to have this personal dialogue but it wasn’t always possible. At times, it was frustrating to be denied access, but I understood and respected people’s concerns about filming.

## **STYLISTIC APPROACH:**

Stylistically, I was interested in creating a visually driven hybrid film form that combines characteristics of documentary and experimental film. Within this piece I was interested in the interplay between naturalism and stylization. On the one hand, the film is anchored in a very naturalistic world but it also has elements of abstraction and stylization. I wanted to create a distinct sensory world with its own geography, textures, colors, and sounds. Much of the piece is structured in a series of long observation tableaux where action unfolds within a static frame. This formal strategy encourages a viewer not only to look, but to continue to look, hopefully more deeply, and, thus, to become aware of the complicated, and often changing, spatial and personal relationships revealed by the camera .

## **WHAT IS THE FINAL MESSAGE OF THE FILM?**

I don’t intend for the film to have a specific message. Within the media, I feel we are inundated with images of Africa and Uganda that relate to war, poverty, hunger and disease. As outsiders, we get a very distorted view of a particular place and people. WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME? is filtered through a very personal lens, but I hope it offers images that speak to the beauty, vitality and specificity of everyday life in Uganda.

Kimi Takesue / Filmmaker



## FILMMAKER'S BIO

Kimi Takesue is an award-winning filmmaker and the recipient of the prestigious John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in Filmmaking. In 2010, she was awarded her second artist fellowship from the New York Foundation in the Arts in the category of Video. Her films *WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME* (2010), *SUSPENDED* (2009), *E=nyc2* (2005), *SUMMER OF THE SERPENT* (2004), *HEAVEN'S CROSSROAD* (2002), *ROSEWATER* (1999) and *BOUND* (1995) have been televised in the U.S. and have screened at over 200 film festivals and museums, including the Sundance Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, New Directors/ New Films, Locarno International, Vancouver International, London's Institute of Contemporary Art, the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art, the Walker Art Center, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Takesue's films have aired on PBS, the Independent Film Channel, and the Sundance Channel.

Film honors include the SPIRIT OF SLAMDANCE AWARD, Slamdance Film Festival; BEST DOCUMENTARY, Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema; GRAND JURY PRIZE, Brooklyn International Film Festival; GOLD MEDAL & GRAND JURY PRIZE, Brno International Film Festival, Czech Republic; JURORS' CHOICE AWARD (1st place), Black Maria Film and Video Festival; BEST NARRATIVE SHORT, San Diego Asian Film Festival; and the GOLDEN REEL: NEW VISIONS AWARD, Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival.

Takesue has been awarded a Rockefeller Media Arts Fellowship and fellowships and grants from the New York Foundation for the Arts, ITVS, Ford Foundation, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, National Asian American Telecommunications Association, Philadelphia Foundation, The Arts Council of England, Yaddo Artist Colony, and the MacDowell Colony, among others. She has been a visiting filmmaker at Yale University, University of Minnesota, Clark University, UC Irvine, and the University of Massachusetts.

Takesue has produced and directed television programming for A & E Network and PBS, including the documentary series *THE FIRST 48* and *AFTER THE FIRST 48*.

Raised in Hawai'i and Massachusetts, Takesue received her B.A. from Oberlin College and her M.F.A from Temple University. Takesue is currently an Assistant Professor in the Film Program at Syracuse University. She works in both dramatic and documentary genres and is in development on a narrative feature film project *CRAWLING AT NIGHT*: A cross cultural love story between a grief-stricken Japanese ice-carver mourning the death of his only child, and a struggling cabaret singer in New York City.

Her films are distributed by Kimikat Productions ([www.kimitakesue.com](http://www.kimitakesue.com)) and Women Make Movies ([www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com)).

## KEY COLLABORATORS:

### **RICHARD BEENEN (Co-Producer):**

Richard Beenen is a New York based artist, photographer, and educator with teaching experience at Parsons School of Design, Pratt Institute, and recently at the Museum of Modern Art, NYC. His fine art work has been exhibited at numerous galleries and museums including the Brooklyn Museum of Art, White Columns/ NYC and Museo D'Arte Contemporanea Roma. Richard has received artist fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Pollack Krasner Foundation, and the Adolph & Esther Gottlieb Foundation. Recent projects include creating video pieces that have screened internationally at film festivals and museums, including Viper Basel: International Festival for Film & Video, Switzerland and Les Recontres Audiovisuelles, Lille, France.

Beenen has also been a co-producer on numerous award winning short films including: *SUMMER OF THE SERPENT*, *E=NYC2*, and *SUSPENDED* which have screened at the Sundance Film Festival, Rotterdam, Locarno and the Museum of Modern Art, NYC.

<http://www.richardbeenen.com/>

<http://www.beenenphotography.com/>

### **JOHN WALTER (Co-Editor):**

John Walter is an award-winning filmmaker and editor. In 2002, Walter made his documentary feature debut with *HOW TO DRAW A BUNNY*, a portrait of the Pop Art collage artist and prankster Ray Johnson, which won the Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and received an Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Documentary. In 2008 he directed and edited *THEATER OF WAR*, described by the New York Times as an “inspired, inspiring essayistic documentary” about German poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht.

Walter has also edited a number of projects, including Amir Bar-Lev's *MY KID COULD PAINT THAT*, and Michael Moore's *CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY*.

### **LANE STREET PICTURES:**

Lane Street Pictures spotlights the best in independent filmmaking talent having supported Jennifer Phang's Sundance feature *HALF-LIFE*, Mia Trachinger's Sundance feature *REVERSION*, and Kimi Takesue's Rotterdam and Los Angeles Film Festival debut documentary *WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME*. LSP's first international co-production is Korean director Jeon Kyuhwan's *ANIMAL TOWN* that premiered in competition at the 2009 San Sebastian Film Festival. The films and filmmakers which LSP supports have garnered numerous awards and distinctions and are supported by Film Independent, The Sundance Institute, IFP New York, and the Tribeca Film Institute.

<http://lanestreetpictures.com/>

# WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

A film by Kimi Takesue

## FILM CREDITS

**Title:** WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

**Director:** Kimi Takesue

**Producer:** Kimi Takesue

**Production Company:** Kimikat Productions

**In association with:** Lane Street Pictures

**Co-Producer:** Richard Beenen

**Cinematographer:** Kimi Takesue

**Editors:** Kimi Takesue & John Walter

**Sound Mix:** Tom Efinger

**Colorist:** Charlie Rokosny

**Publicity:** David Magdael & Associates

**Production:** USA / Uganda

**World Premiere:** The International Film Festival Rotterdam

**Screening Format:** HDCAM (29.97)

**Length:** 72 minutes

**Location of Shoot:** Uganda



[http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print\\_review&reviewid=VE1117942204&categoryid=31](http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_review&reviewid=VE1117942204&categoryid=31)

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**Posted: Mon., Feb. 15, 2010, 9:24pm PT**

## Where Are You Taking Me?

(Documentary) A Kimikat Prods. production. (International sales: Kimikat, New York.) Produced by Kimi Takesue. Co-producer, Richard Beenen. Directed, written by Kimi Takesue.

By **JAY WEISSBERG**

**Kimi Takesue was one of several non-African filmmakers commissioned by the Rotterdam Film Festival to go to Africa and make a movie. Her entry, the Uganda-shot "Where Are You Taking Me?" is an uplifting observational docu that plays on seeing and being seen. Though the premise of commissioning non-Africans to reveal the "Dark Continent" to (largely) white arthouse auds can be seen as suspect, Takesue's beautifully meditative work is aware of its outsider status. Fests with an artier bent should accept her invitation and travel along.**

Shots of varying lengths show such locales as a busy street corner or a village road, allowing the viewer time to watch passersby and acknowledge the camera and Takesue's presence. Some look; others walk by without a glance; children, of course, delight in the camera. The director films a variety of urban and rural spots giving glimpses of Uganda's varied social fabric, shifting in the second half to the Hope North School, where former child soldiers are rehabilitated. Lovely transitions, via image and sound, and striking compositions make the pic an enriching experience.

Camera (color, DV), Takesue; editors, Takesue, John Walter. Reviewed on DVD, Rotterdam, Feb. 6, 2010. (In Rotterdam Film Festival -- Where Is Africa.) Running time: 71 MIN.

Read the full article at:

<http://www.variety.com/story.asp?l=story&r=VE1117942204&c=31>

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