A Pad of Paper
Musings on Writing

By Kathryn Gardiner
Diary of a Novice Producer

A Photo Album chronicling the production of the short film “Venus on Valentine’s Day”

Written by Kathryn Gardiner

Photos by Debra Branscome and Kathryn Gardiner
Part of the deal with this thesis project was that I would write something to accompany the main thesis work, the short film entitled *Venus on Valentine's Day*. This I have done, but with reservations. One of the ideas suggested to me was that I write a book of advice for students wanting to do what I have done. Though I would love to flatter myself into thinking that someone would want to produce their own film in spite of me, let alone *because* of me, I understand reality. I still have yet to figure out exactly what a producer does. I have seen a book that is called *What a Producer Does*. A book, an entire book. If that's not daunting, I don't know what is. I don't know anything about producing and, even now, after calling myself a Producer for the last year, I do not feel qualified to give anyone advice, so I won't dispense any.

What is worth hearing is how this film was accomplished — by amateurs — from concept to completion.

I wrote a mediocre short story in November of 1999. I wrote about a smoky bar filled with blue lights and a bad band. And I started writing about a woman sitting at the bar, a melancholy woman who was waiting for someone. I decided the woman was Venus, the Goddess of Love — I have no idea why.

The short story became my class project and I revised it repeatedly over the semester. I turned it in the last day of class to my professor. When I received the graded copy back she had written “I think this would make a fine movie script, don't you?”

I had never thought of it. But now I had. Within weeks I had the first draft of the screenplay written and, full of apprehension, I took it to a Cardinal Filmworks meeting. I received positive comments and was greatly bolstered. Alejandro Marin was in attendance and spoke to me briefly afterward.

I can easily gloss through the next few months. Indeed, I can gloss through them more easily than I can impart them with any sort of detail; I don't remember exactly how or when anything happened.

During the Spring 2000 semester I had a class with Alejandro and, after many weeks of nervousness, I asked him if he might be interested in directing the film. He said yes. We spent the summer in pre-production. Then, to complicate matters, Alejandro left for several weeks to work in New York on another film. It was a wonderful experience and I was happy for him, but not for myself. His leaving left me alone spearheading a project that I didn't have the first clue how to begin.

We had the auditions the first week of school to grab the campus actors before they were stapled down to other projects. We had a final turnout of about 25 people, which completely delighted me. I got the thrill of hearing my words for the first time spoken by other people and everyone was impressed with the “my director’s working on a film in New York” line.

Everything on this page can be accurately summarized by saying “Yadda yadda yadda.” Though, of course, the screenwriting part of filmmaking is fascinating to me, it doesn’t have mass appeal. However, the tricks and cheats behind the camera during filming do, and this photo album focuses mainly on those fascinating tidbits. What follows is an account of the hard work, imagination, ingenuity and huge mistakes that went into the making of *Venus on Valentine’s Day*. 

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After his return from New York, Alejandro worked diligently on his storyboards and I set to work scheduling the movie. I had never scheduled a film before and had no clue how to begin.

Though this wasn't an internship per se, it was a real life practice in what I claimed I wanted to do. I never had any opportunity to practice being a producer or fiddling around with methods to see what worked: time did not allow for that. When I chose to do something, I had a deadline (self-imposed, granted) to which I must adhere and within days of completion, my work would be viewed by a dozen or so people. That did not make for restful times.

To begin, I bought a book entitled *Film Scheduling* – that seemed a good place to learn the elements involved in scheduling a film. I followed through the book step by step with *Venus*. It wasn’t until the end of the book that I realized that, though the book had been amended for the invention of scheduling software, I hadn’t gotten to that part. As a result, I did the whole film the old fashioned way. I crafted my own Breakdown Sheets and Production Strips using paper, scissors and more White Out than I really care to acknowledge.

One Saturday night I cleared off the floor of my living room, pulled out my scissors and my calendar and I scheduled the whole film. By the end of the evening I was covered in correction fluid and drowning in paper scraps, but I knew so much more than I did when I started.

Weeks later, I ordered Movie Magic Scheduling and rejoiced. What had taken me all Saturday night took only an hour or so. It was incredibly frustrating to think of the time I’d wasted, but in retrospect I’m glad I didn’t have the miracle software at the first. I now know what methods one employs to schedule a film and, more importantly, I know why. Perhaps it is my tendency to be anal-retentive, but I loved scheduling this movie. And I felt so professional carrying my production boards around with me. Though my production bag was bursting, I didn’t give those up for at least a month. Those boards were the coolest movie stuff I had!

This movie was perfect for a novice scheduler like myself. I didn’t have to battle with unions or days off requirements. However, our little film had its own troubles. Our lead actor, Beau Christian Danner, got an amazing opportunity to travel with National Geographic to, among other places, Singapore. Unfortunately, that amazing opportunity spanned our first weekend of filming. Beau’s character Mars appears in 23 out of 24 scenes, a feat surpassed only by Holly Carr as Venus herself. I did what I could to find the few scenes that might be filmed without Beau and managed to, thankfully, fill a weekend so no scarce filming time was wasted or misused.

The only other bit of trouble during the scheduling process dealt with one of our actors. Natisha Anderson was not the first actress cast in the role of Ali. We had cast another young lady, who, unfortunately, was unable to attend one whole day of filming and with the limited time we had to complete the film, one day was an unacceptable delay. We were relieved that Natisha was available and willing to fill in.

With our storyboards drawn and our scheduling completed, we were ready to start the actual filming. I was not calm – and I realize that is an understatement.
4 November 2000 - I had no idea that filmmaking could be so glamorous. Alejandro had used the term “Guerrilla Filmmaking” before and it was this day when I completely understood what he meant. Up until Alejandro told me what to do to help, I had no idea how he was going to accomplish the “Doily FX,” as we called them. All we needed was a doily heart to flutter through the air. What we had was a cardboard heart with fishing line tied to either side.

Alejandro lit the scene with a gerry-rigged china bulb, which created a deep, black field on screen. But when the cardboard heart entered the frame, it was illuminated and appeared to be “floating” in blackness.

Our goal was only to create a rough template of what we wanted our computer graphics to look like, but what we got was footage good enough to use.

But it didn’t come easily.

For much of the morning, Alejandro and I comprised the entire crew. Alejandro’s clever method of getting the heart to flutter was to pull either side of the fishing line tight and wind it up [above and right]. Then, he would call “Action” and let go. And the heart would spin and spin (ideally) as we would slowly lower the line, causing the heart to “flutter” through the frame.

It felt silly, but it looked pretty good. Or as Alejandro, clearly overwhelmed, put it, “Well, that almost looked pretty cool.”
Soon, Ron Rinker and Adam Purcell [left] arrived and took over the manual labor, allowing Alejandro to direct and me to produce - whatever that really means. We affectionately called them our “Doily boys,” though I’m pretty sure the nickname’s charm was lost on the boys themselves.

This day was more relaxed than I expected filmmaking to be. We were certainly easing into this whole movie, though we did force ourselves to be in the studio by 7:30am, no easy task for most college students. Our crew was small - only Alejandro, Ron, Adam and myself the whole weekend - and our work load light. We munched on bagels with cream cheese, sipped coffee and hot chocolate and basically had a good time.

My mind was in a fever, of course, in turmoil over the arrangements yet to be made for the following, much more challenging weekend. But I tried to focus and not irritate Alejandro with too many advanced and admittedly unimportant questions - whether or not I succeeded is up to him.

“Guerrilla Filmmaking” would, I imagine, include a set-up similar to the following: a camera and tripod, two monolithic carpeted pillars, and two chairs propping up a reflector board.

Alejandro made himself a cave, but it served our purposes. And gave us a wonderful photo opportunity [right].
Besides the "Doily FX" our call sheet also listed "opening stills." Our title sequence included various close-ups on different paintings of Venus, featuring Botticelli's "Birth of Venus," depicting the goddess' birth from a shell.

Alejandro and I chose the paintings [below left] and then we filmed them. Not exciting, I'll grant you, but entirely necessary.

It was during this, our first weekend, that Alejandro and I began a trend. Every weekend was our toughest one.

Just as we conquered one difficult sequence of shots or a tricky lighting scheme that had been worrying us, the next weekend would loom in our minds and seem infinitely more difficult.

The weekend and all it's demands only seemed easy once we had figured out how to solve all the problems.

But, really, we were wrong: every weekend was difficult...

Except this first one.

The most important of the stills was our close-up on Venus' face in Botticelli's beautiful "Birth of Venus" painting. Adam, acting as our cameraman, zoomed in close on her face and we recorded [above right]. We all watched the monitor in near silence and fell in love with the painting. Venus' expression is captivating and we were captivated.
5 November 2000 - If it was ever present in the first place, dignity left Studio C this particular morning. The last of our “Doily FX” remained to be shot. This one rather complex scene was of the doily heart falling - fluttering, of course - away from the camera to a distance of about twenty feet. The lighting posed a brief problem that Alejandro quickly dispatched, restoring our empty black field on screen. And instead of actually having the heart fall down, away from the camera, he decided to have it fall away, growing more distant as, without other objects in frame to anchor up from down and left from right, the actions would appear identical.

However, to accomplish this well-thought-out plan, we had to lengthen the heart strings and back up - a lot. To make sure we weren't on camera, Ron and I had to stand about fifteen feet from each other and run the length of the studio, the heart spinning all the way.

If movie making was supposed to be glitzy, we were failing miserably. But, then again, if it was supposed to be fun and unusual, we were doing fine. Ron and I actually got pretty good with our choreography. We would walk quickly, careful to match speeds, of course, lift the strings up to clear the lights, while simultaneously stepping over any unmoving object in our path, and walk the length of the studio, where we often ran into the wall, our attentions so focused on the actions of the other.

I think perhaps that belongs on our résumés. “Proficient in heart string choreography.” If anything, it might get us an interview just so they can find out what we mean.

That first weekend was fun. I had no idea what I was getting into or what I had set rolling, but so far, it was going well - ignoring the fact, of course, that with all the arrangements I had made, I had forgotten to buy videotape. One little thing...

10 November 2000 - I had written the word “rain” in the screenplay. “She [Venus] walks down the street, her head down against the rain.” That’s how the description read. Rain. Four little letters and it ended up being the biggest headache of the entire shoot.

I have been keeping a mental tabulation of the mistakes I’ve made with this film with the possibly futile hopes that I won’t make them again. (I probably won’t make the same mistakes, actually - I’ll make all new and exciting ones.)

We had contacted the Muncie Fire Department and obtained two hundred feet of fire hose, plus a hydrant wrench. The Indiana-American Water Distribution Center knew of our plans. We were simply going to hook up the fire hose and create rain.

When this all sounded like a good idea, it wasn’t November.

In retrospect, despite what Alejandro and I thought of subsequent weekends, this was the hardest.
We arrived early at Club Olympus, our first location, to prepare with our crewmembers Del Feltz [below in baseball cap, with Alejandro] and Ron.

The day had been punctuated with frantic calls searching for any sturdy vehicle bearing a three inch ball hitch. For an overhead shot of Venus, we needed a 47 foot lift and so we rented one, but we had no truck with which to haul it. After much stressful searching, Del allowed us to purchase a ball hitch and use his pick-up truck, though he was understandably uneasy about towing a twenty-foot long piece of equipment.

Soon after arriving at Olympus, we discovered that our two hundred feet of fire hose [right, with Ron] were useless. The fire hydrant was too far away. Now we had to make rain without our water supply.

True ingenuity solved the problem.

I quickly drove home and collected fifteen or so trash bags, while the others located buckets. I didn’t know what we were going to do, but at least we were going to do something.

To overuse an analogy: we had hit a rather large curb, but we were going to keep on driving.
[right] Alejandro discusses the best plan of action with Del and Adam.

[left] Alejandro climbs to the roof of Olympus to work with the lights.

Next page: [top], [bottom left] Adam sets up lights on the roof of Olympus. [bottom right] Alejandro checks the shot.
For the most part, and despite my better judgment, I was the head make-up artist for the film. Those who know me and my skill with make-up likely feel that was an unnecessary cruelty, but actually, it turned out all right. Our lead actress, Holly Carr (Venus), was the picture of patience and this was only the first example. She let me do her make-up [above], though she and the other actors quickly warmed to the idea of doing what they could [left].

I checked out a book at Bracken Library that was a bit of a crash-course in film make-up. Though far from brilliant, the make-up doesn’t look too bad. Praise, indeed, I realize. I was lucky to have Anne Taylor on the set. She was technically our Continuity Coordinator, but she was familiar with make-up and, thankfully, had the expertise I lacked.
[above] Kathryn wets Holly’s hair.

[below] Alejandro and Holly practice the shot.
In lieu of the fire hoses, we had to improvise.

We wetted the walls by splashing them with buckets of water [above] and our rain was supplied by a trash bag with holes poked in it [below]. During filming, other crewmembers stood on the roof and slowly poured water over the edges of the building, giving the appearance of a dying rain storm. Those crewmembers braved the ladder, climbing the uncomfortably wobbly metal path while carrying heavy, nearly over-flowing buckets of water - repeatedly.
Fortunately, a spicket was located nearby giving us easy access to water when we needed it, which was often.

We would fill one of the fifteen trash bags with water and then poke holes in it with a bent paper clip [left]. Ron, who was basically assigned the position of rainmaker for the first part of the evening, stood on the dolly with Alejandro, manipulating the bag so the streaming water would appear more like rain and less like water streaming out of a trash bag with holes poked in it [below].

Each trash bag could only be used once or twice before having to be replaced with a fresh, hole-less trash bag.

Having Ron and the bag of “rain” in such close proximity to the camera only created more challenges. He had to stand higher than Alejandro on the dolly to allow the water to fall, but then his shadow would easily appear in the shot, following Venus along the building. And, of course, he had to give added attention to the location of the camera and be careful not to rain on it.

We had few to no mishaps. Ron did a wonderful job.

Yes, the rain in one portion of the opening sequence of *Venus on Valentine’s Day* is Ron Rinker with a trash bag.
[this page] The scene is shot with Holly acting, Alejandro on camera, Del on dolly, and Ron on rain.
Holly and I both took great care to make sure we had sufficiently wetted her hair with a spray bottle, as, according to the screenplay, she was to be soaked. That ended up being completely unnecessary. By the third take, she was soaked to the skin [left].

It was, in fact, November and we in the crew, though dry, were shivering in the 30 degree temperatures, but Holly was drenched. Between takes she would cuddle up in a blanket, attempting to ward off the cold [below, with Anne Taylor].

And this was only the first part of the evening. We had a second location and four more shots yet to tackle.

I'm amazed Holly still speaks to me.
At this point, Alejandro and I [right] were doing okay. We looked professional, we had conquered every trouble that had arisen and we were getting what, as far as we could tell, was beautiful footage.

In a smaller version of our “tough weekend” syndrome, we assured each other that this half of the night was the easy part. The tough part would be the second half, the half in downtown Muncie.

That summer Alejandro and I had driven around town looking for a place to film our exterior scenes. We wanted a place that had a certain charm to it, someplace that was Muncie, but didn’t look it, someplace that would provide a background more interesting than building after building. We chose Walnut street in downtown Muncie.

Between Doc Holidaze and Vera Mae’s there is a little alleyway. It’s surprisingly charming. And it fit our needs perfectly. We could use the lights that usually lit up the alley, freeing us from the trouble of having to set up lights and find electrical outlets for them.

Unfortunately, it is a frequently traversed alleyway and we were very much in the way. Also, wind whips down the narrow path easily, which didn’t help our already chilled crew and our nearly cryogenically frozen actress.

It had been a tough night and it was only going to get tougher. I think all of us might have been emotionally traumatized by this night.
The men folk pushed the lift into the alley [above] and set to building a little tent at the top. Alejandro would have to be in the crane’s passenger pod (for lack of a better term) and therefore be just as open to the rain as Holly. Using the leftover and terribly useful trash bags, they built a cave for Alejandro and the camera to keep both of them dry. That done, we were ready to shoot.

Alejandro climbed in and Ron manned the controls. Nothing happened. It took us a few minutes to figure out that the legs of the lift must be locked open before it can be operated. A sensible, if irritating, caveat. We were forced to pull the crane back out into the wider street where the legs could be opened. We were forced to block a lane of traffic. I had a signed permission from the Mayor, but I was still edgy. Fortunately, traffic was light and we weren’t bothered – or a bother.

At this location, the fire hose worked. We were all nervous around the fire hose. We each expected to turn on the water and shoot ourselves into the air by the water pressure. The Fire Department would not have let us have it if that were the case, I’m sure. Adam took charge of the hose and remained firmly on the ground.

Through several shots, Holly stood in the – “torrential” is putting it lightly – faux rain storm. The water had saturated through every layer of her clothing. She stood in 30 degree temperatures, in a wind tunnel, in the spray of a fire hose. Alejandro would call “cut” and she would rush back to the heated minivan and attempt to regain feeling in her limbs. Soon, she was a definite shade of blue.

We tried all we could, but the human body simply cannot withstand what we were asking Holly to undertake and we had to end the night with several shots incomplete. I drove Holly home, the heat on full. We had an early start to our day the next morning and we hoped she would be all right. She assured us she was fine and she was. As Del said, Holly was a trooper.

This was by far the biggest mistake I made throughout the film. I had nearly given my lead actress hypothermia.

And this was only the first real day. I was scared out of my senses.
11 November 2000 - We were inside. We were warm. We were dry. This day seemed as if it would be a breeze.

But, of course, it presented its own difficulties.

Anne Taylor [above] had more of a challenge with continuity, as we now had more strictures than simply “wet,” and the lighting of the dim, lower level of Olympus proved time-consuming for Alejandro and sometime-gaffer Adam [right].

On the slate for the day were the scenes between Venus and the Bartender (portrayed by Jina Kofi), which, fortunately, don’t include Mars, as Beau was still out of the country.

But, due to the complex lighting, for everyone but the crew, this day involved a lot of waiting.
We passed the time by sleeping [Jina, below] or sending ourselves into hysteries by plugging the word "squirrel" (a funny word in its own right) into our favorite movie titles. Some of our best were Austin Powers: International Squirrel of Mystery, Saving Private Squirrel, and Terminator 2: Judgment Squirrel.

We were easily amused.

But after the wait was over, we went straight to work.
[left] Kathryn fills out the slate.

[right] Anne and Alejandro go over the script.

[left] Anne touches up Holly’s make-up.
[right] Holly and Jina go over their lines.

[left] Kathryn visits with Jina in monitor.

[right] Jina ready to go.
Alejandro and I were unprepared for one inconvenience.

Olympus has a intricate, impressive and state-of-the-art set of dance lights. The lights spin, flash and strobe, washing the entire club in alternating bold colors.

But they’re loud.

Each spin of the light fixture whirs and that noise is easily picked up by our microphones. We needed the dance lights, but we couldn’t used them. So, Alejandro quickly decided to use two of our lights that we had brought with us. By attaching different colored gels to each light and having a crewmember, in this case, Ron [right], wave them back and forth, the dance light affect was achieved with almost total silence.

Unfortunately, the job proved to be a tiring and unpleasant one. The lights were heavy, the takes were long and still Ron, or whoever else was gracious enough to accept the position, had to wave the light back and forth and back and forth.

Though we hadn’t planned for it, it was decided that extras were needed in the background. The only two people available were myself and our photographer, Debra Branscome. I had wanted to do a cameo, a’la Alfred Hitchcock, but Alejandro asked me to dance.

Dancing is not my strong suit.

But we all made sacrifices for this film and I was not going to stop at my pride. So, I got my cameo, but not in the cool fashion I had hoped, though it did inspire me for the future. Perhaps I will “one-better” Mr. Hitchcock. While he simply appeared in each of his films, I could appear in each of my films doing something that makes me look like a fool.
12 November 2000 – The word “tattoo” is a bit like “rain” – a small word that encompasses so much work.

In the screenplay, the character of Ali was to be pierced and tattooed. We decided against the piercings and slimmed the tattoos down to one, albeit complex tattoo.

We obviously couldn’t ask our actress, Natisha Anderson, to get a permanent tattoo displaying her affection for a fictional man, and so I began doing research.

My roommate, Taran Harman, and I toyed with different materials while she designed the tattoo itself. We experimented with food coloring, dry erase markers, and some bizarre concoction involving cold cream. For one night in our house, we both sat on the living room floor attempting to tattoo our arms and legs. We found watercolor pencils to be the best. It writes easily on skin, dries quickly, smudges only minimally and washes off with water.

The application of the beautiful “Paul” tattoo became the problem, as Taran would be unable to attend the filming to draw the tattoo herself. We tried stamping, stencils and patterns, but none were perfect, or even adequate.

The solution to our tattoo conundrum put Alejandro’s artistic skills to the test. He drew the tattoo freehand [above and right] from Taran’s original drawing. It turned out beautifully, but the rest of us had to attempt to ready the set without our director, while he dutifully spent over an hour “tattooing” Natisha.
Natisha, for reasons I don’t think I really understand, though I admire them, wanted to try smoking a cigarette and asked if her character Ali could be a smoker. Alejandro and I had a weird debate where we were actually so pretentious, though correct, as to discuss what the cigarette would “say about Ali’s character.” We finally decided that it was fine.

Natisha did a great job smoking and went through a pack of cigarettes (kindly donated by Ron). The room was almost unbearably smoky. I thought it was just me until our smokers, returning from a cigarette break outside, commented that it smelled like smoke inside. We almost managed to smoke out the smokers.

The pack of cigarettes needed to be on Natisha’s person, but her neon blue jacket had no pockets in which to keep them. Anne quickly and creatively manufactured one inside the coat using gaffer’s tape. Functional, if not fashionable.

During their rehearsals together Natisha and Holly [below] had come up with a cute bit with an ashtray and a cigarette. It was clever and fit well with the dynamic of the scene’s dialogue. In the script, Ali didn’t smoke and an ashtray was never mentioned, which, as the screenwriter, I find interesting.

Through the input of Holly and Natisha, the dialogue between Venus and Ali has a dynamic and activity that I did not create. It is a better scene because of their imagination.

In discussions with the cast and crew I discovered a lot about my writing. On the set I was teased for my entirely too clean scripts. No one in Venus originally smoked or drank, with the exception of Lonely Man and, of course, Drunken Man. Venus even requests water. I guess it’s a trait of my work, but then again, the first script I ever wrote was an adaptation of a Jane Austen novel. Austen can always be counted on for a complete lack of sex, drugs and alcohol.

At one cast meeting we all sat together and discussed the script for nearly two hours. I practiced a method that I was taught in my screenwriting class: I remained silent. I listened to everyone talk about the script. I listened as they praised it or criticized it. I didn’t defend or explain anything. I learned so much. The script, evidently, has layers and internal symbolism that I never saw. It was incredibly gratifying to think that this group of intelligent and talented people could find enough to say about my script to fill twenty minutes, let alone two hours. It is one of the greatest compliments I have ever received.

Our cast was outstanding. Each of them showed immense dedication to their characters and to the film. They put their trust — blindly, I might add — in Alejandro and I and relied on us to know what we were doing. And they had the sweetness of temper to be patient when we didn’t.
On the set, I had a dream that was never realized. Nearly every weekend of this production involved Alejandro, Ron and I traveling to WIPB and borrowing their dolly and dolly track. (By the last weekend, we had the over-loading of Ron’s van down to a science.) We had dolly track around us almost all the time. People exerted themselves to carry it, actors and crewmembers tripped over it - if dolly shots didn’t look so beautiful, we might have actually disliked the spare metal (which, incidentally, gets very cold when used outside during the winter). I wanted to get one photo of someone, anyone tied up with extension cords and laid on the track with Alejandro bearing down on them on the dolly. It was just so classic, but, unfortunately, we always had some silly thing like finishing the movie on our minds.

But that doesn’t mean we didn’t occasionally have fun with the dolly [Alejandro, right].

I, however, was always the picture of professionalism... I’m lying.

In fact, the picture below was likely taken in the five minute period during which I looked busy. Most of the time, due to Alejandro’s decree that “the producer shouldn’t touch the equipment,” I wandered around being nervous. If that is what a producer does, then I’m set, but, unfortunately, I think there’s more to it than that.

Though far from well-oiled, we all worked well together. I won’t say we never had frayed nerves. We had them. And we had them often, but we had amazingly few blow ups. The cast and crew showed incredible professionalism for a bunch of amateurs. Alejandro and I said all along that we didn’t want this to look like a student film. By this point, it wasn’t even being run like a student film.
But, of course, the trappings of college were still present.

Breakfast every day included cold bagels with cream cheese, and doughnuts. Lunch was always pizza [top right, and right]. And I had had such high hopes for food. I had wanted to bring each actor’s favorite treat to the set each day they were called, but I left my house each morning at 6:30am and somehow, in my multiple trips to Marsh grocery store, I discovered I had only two hands and much less patience. The day was new and filled with work and I didn’t want to be grocery shopping.
18 November 2000 - Extras proved interesting throughout. Those people in the background, dancing, walking or talking, are friends. So, it is who you know...

In lieu of an actual blonde woman to play the Blonde Woman, we asked crewmember Cassie Lambert [above] to don a blonde wig and pretend. We decided the blonde version was Cassie’s twin sister Lassie.

[right] Holly and Beau ready for the day in our make-shift dressing room.

[below] Alejandro directs from his comfy post.
Venus de Milo. The tiny statue was too small for any conventional snow globe, so we turned to jars. My mother wandered the aisles of the grocery store examining jars, turning them upside down and trying to imagine how they might look with a tiny example of Renaissance art inside. She brought home a baby food jar. The thought was a bit odd, but it would work.

Alejandro and I went to constructing it, finding that nothing really likes to stick to a lid when immersed in water. Our little glass Venus would hold for a time and then-cling-cling-cling-she would be tapping her misshapen glass head against the jar. And furthermore, everything floats in water. The glitter we used as the snow would look beautiful when shaken, but alas, when left to drift, would shoot directly to the top. As a testament to how trying that little glass toy was, we don't actually have any pictures of it. We were all too busy making repairs and handling it gingerly. Fortunately, due to some well-timed actions and camera movements, you can't tell how incredibly make-shift the globe actually is.

My roommate Taran [above, with Holly] was put to good use. It was she who would rush to repair the snow globe and even put her sewing skills to work fixing Venus' coat [right], which kept dropping buttons for no apparent reason. Perhaps it, too, was traumatized by the rain scenes.
19 November 2000 -

Alejandro and I were both a bit uneasy about this day’s scenes. The whole morning we talked [right] and looked over the script [above], but our discomfort proved to be entirely unfounded.

Of course, Alejandro and I decided that this day would be the toughest. It wasn’t, but unlike the other days of which we made that claim, this one was surprisingly easy. Today was the day we filmed the dancing scene. We all expected trouble. As Holly jokingly sang to the tune of “Dancing Queen:” “Dancing scene, take 16…” We thought the scene would take forever. The scene as it originally appeared in the screenplay was static. Mars and Venus just stood there, talking. Yawn. So, I decided they should dance. Alejandro and I knew it would be challenging for the actors, but that was only another reason to do it. Though, during the rehearsals, the dancing scene was the roughest, on set Beau and Holly pulled it off masterfully.
A moment about Beau... I think we could fill an entire blooper reel with just this man's moments of silliness. I'm still unsure I ever heard Beau's actual voice. Always he was talking like Cheech Marin or a Monty Python character, or speaking in broken Spanish. His crowning moment was singing a good, albeit wrong, version of "Luck Be a Lady" as Marlon Brando.

Sometimes he would spend the day tossing out one line non-sequiturs and Alejandro would jokingly give him the task of sucking on a cord to keep him quiet.

He was a constant source of sometimes much-needed levity on the set.

All of our cast and crew proved to be ideal working companions. Though tired and hungry, all remained in impressively high spirits and in astoundingly good humor. I have no idea how we managed that.
Alejandro and I made many promises to our cast and crew when each agreed to be involved with this production. The first of those promises was that this film would be done professionally. Fortunately, the cast and crew took us seriously. One night, only a few of us remained. It was nearly 11:00pm and we had all been there since 7:30am. Alejandro asked us all to watch the last take and give him our opinions. We were all tired. We were all hungry. We all wanted to go home. But we each gave our critiques and stayed until the shot was right. It was a late night, but no one complained...well, we all did, but not maliciously. Not that we weren’t chagrined when Cassie reminded us we still had to record ambient sound.
Equipment was always fun. Everything worked just fine, but nothing arranged itself. Each set-up was time-consuming, especially if the dolly track [above, left and right] was involved. Ron was nice enough to let us shove his car full of equipment, but he and the others didn’t relish hauling the dolly track equipment down the stairs for those days when we filmed in the lower level of Olympus.

And very rarely, the equipment would check out on us. During a scene at the bar, one of our lights went out with a pop. We had noticed an unpleasant smell filling the room, but we were unable to find the source. It was our light. Evidently, a few of its wires got crossed and it melted itself from the inside out [right]. We had to operate the rest of the weekend short one light.
25 November 2000 – The early mornings started to get to us. We were, after all, moonlighters: college students by week, filmmakers by weekend. We caught naps when we could [Cassie, above] and marveled in getting to see the sun rise every weekend for an entire month.

This was our last weekend at Olympus and our last mornings at all. Our final weekend would be all night shoots.

But for now, we had two early mornings left.

Not until this final weekend did we get the nerve to commit a small traffic violation and unload Ron’s van just outside Olympus, by the No Parking sign [right].
Though we all lived for the MOS shots, those scenes that could be filmed without sound, the movie is dialogue heavy and therefore, through most all of it, we had to have our dance lights supplied by good old humans with lights. Ron and Cassie [above] to whom the job often fell, disliked the task, but did it. And Alejandro gave them breaks, but understandably no slack. If he didn’t like the way the red was blending with the blue, he would ask them to do the take again. It’s to Ron and Cassie’s credit that they would.

Just as the lights presented a sound problem, music would too. All the dancers, Beau and Holly especially, had to dance to silence. But this was only a difficulty for those of us who can’t dance...

This day witnessed a quickly squelched rehashing of the Squirrel game (evidently it annoyed some people – who knew?) and Beau and Cassie using the dance floor for its intended purpose [left], though still in silence.
Alejandro was good enough to put himself into situations that quieted any complaints from uncomfortable crew members.

Aaron DeLong, who doubled as crew and cast member, played Lonely Man. He was to sit, look lonely and play with a fake engagement ring. On set, the cast and crew came up with the idea of having Lonely Man pitch the ring into the tips jar. I approved and so they set to filming.

Take after take, Aaron landed the ring, “nothing but net.” Between takes, Ron asked if Aaron had missed yet. From then on, Aaron couldn’t do anything but. Finally, we got what we needed — a toss that hit its mark.

Alejandro wanted to get an angle from above the tips jar and so he climbed up on the bar. He became the Origami director, squatting in the short space between the bar and low-hanging ceiling [left].

The shots that occur to Alejandro impress me because I know that I could not have thought of them. When I told people that I was working on a film that I wrote, they instantly assumed that I would be directing. That is likely the obvious choice as it is a position of power, but I knew going into this whole scheme that a film directed by me, would be a poor film indeed. I had heard of Alejandro; he was one of the TCOM big wigs as far as I could tell. He happened to have been at the Cardinal Filmworks meeting where Venus was approved and took its first steps.

The next semester, he was in my Single Camera class and, after weeks of vacillating, I worked up the nerve to ask him to direct. He immediately agreed. We recently realized that he has never read any of my other scripts and I have never seen any of his other movies. We were both going completely on faith with each other and just happened to get lucky.