



LEEDS
ARTS RESEARCH
CENTRE

PICTURE PERFECT

PHILIP ROBERTSON

OUTPUT INFORMATION

Title:
Picture Perfect

Output Type:
Q - Digital or visual media

Year:
2014

Output allocation:
Filmmaking practice research



BEST DIRECTOR
HAWAIIAN ISLAND
INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM
FESTIVAL
2013

BEST SHORT FILM
CYPRUS INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
2013

BEST SHORT FILM
EUROPEAN FILM ACADEMY
2013

BEST SHORT FILM
THE VENICE EXHIBIT
ACADEMY
2013

NOMINEE BEST
SHORT FILM
SOUTH WEST LONDON FILM FESTIVAL
2013

MESTRE FILM
FESTIVAL
2013

7 ISLAND FILM
FESTIVAL
2014

REEL ISLAND
FILM FESTIVAL
2014

AMERICAN
ONLINE FILM
AWARDS
2014

LONDON
INDEPENDENT
FILM FESTIVAL
2014

SOUTH WEST
LONDON FILM
FESTIVAL
2013

COSY CINEMA
SCREENING
2013

John Carson Tina Gray Dina Korzun Sidney Kean and Ivor
Andrews
EDITOR Pete Lurie PRODUCTION DESIGNER Maria Dagher SOUND Julius Zubavicius MUSIC Christoffer San
PRODUCER Rebecca Knapp WRITERS Peter Devonald & Kevin Scrantz DIRECTOR Irina

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

Picture Perfect is a short film for which Robertson researched, designed and directed the cinematography. Robertson sought to find a visual language through cinematography to express the subjective experience of aging and loneliness. Robertson's approach to cinematography draws on a three-stage process: thorough research of the narrative themes, subjective immersion in location/place, and formulation of a corresponding colour palette drawing on references in fine art. In Picture Perfect this addressed the challenge of conveying the experience of aging through light and colour.

Robertson drew on resources from Age UK and Independent Age and extensive reading on aging (Binstock & George, 2006); Jylha & Jukka, 1990; Miller, 2014), also drawing on his experience of having elderly parents suffering from vascular dementia. Robertson conducted primary qualitative research during a fieldtrip ahead of filming, interviewing residents at a local nursing home and in sheltered accommodation, as well as accessing locations. The final development of the cinematography drew on fine art references in the work of two of the "Glasgow Boys" (Paterson and Guthrie) whose muted colour palettes influenced the resulting cinematographic aesthetic.

Drawing on his three-stage methodology (research into aging, location fieldwork, fine art references) Robertson devised a cinematographic aesthetic for Picture Perfect which conveys the psychological and emotional content of the film's characters through its use of light and colour.

Receiving positive reviews from the New York Times, Empire, and The Guardian, Picture Perfect featured in over 25 film festivals internationally and was included in accompanying educational seminars. It has won numerous film festival awards including: Remi award, 47th WorldFest Houston (2015); Best Film, 4th Peloponnesian Corinthian "Bridges" CINE@ART (2015); Best Short Film, Cyprus International Film Festival (2015); and Best Film, Mestre Film Fest (2016) Project funding: £18,000 UK Film Council. Release date (US): 8 April 2014.

PICTURE PERFECT

Sometimes a picture really is worth a thousand words...



John Carson Tina Gray Dina Korzun Sidney Kean and Ivor

COSTUME DESIGNER Alice Andrews

EDITOR Pete Lurie

PRODUCTION DESIGNER Maria Dagher

SOUND Julius Zubavicius

MUSIC Christoffer Sandberg

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Philip Robertson

PRODUCER Rebecca Knapp WRITERS Peter Devonald & Kevin Scrantz DIRECTOR Irina Izmestieva

Picture Perfect Film Poster

Film Festival screening - ***
WINNER *** Best Director award
Kharkov Lilac Film Festival
(Ukraine).



The film "Picture Perfect" enriches film culture through bringing "magic realism" to a worldwide audience through the media of narrative filmmaking. Robertson's contribution to this is a creative and interpretive process that culminates in the authorship of an original work of art - the cinematography.

WRITER'S STATEMENT

"The film depicts the contrast between the grey, bleak, empty existence that is David's life and the warm, inviting rural utopia he yearns for in the picture. The script explores themes of love, loss, family, loneliness and happiness. It asks big questions: what happens beyond this life's horizon?"

- Peter Devonald & Kevin Scrantz, writers

PLOT SUMMARY

"Picture Perfect is a film about aging, loneliness, death, regret, longing to change the past, forgiveness and love; these profound themes connected with me on my initial reading of the script and I hope they will with the film's audience."

- Philip Robertson, Cinematographer and Camera Operator

ON CINEMATOGRAPHY

Cinematography is a creative and interpretive process that culminates in the authorship of an original work of art rather than the simple recording of a physical event. Cinematography is not a subcategory of photography. Rather, photography is but one craft that the cinematographer uses in addition to other physical, organisational, managerial, interpretive and image-manipulating techniques to effect one coherent process – [the film]

These visual images for the cinema, extend from conception and preproduction through postproduction to the ultimate presentation and all processes that may affect these images, are the direct responsibility and interest of the cinematographer.

The images that the cinematographer brings to the screen come from the artistic vision, imagination and skill of the cinematographer as he or she works within a collaborative relationship with fellow artists.”

(John Hora ASC, American Cinematographer Manual ninth edition – volume 1. p.1)

ROBERTSON'S CINEMATOGRAPHIC HISTORY

Philip Robertson is an internationally renowned cinematographer who also serves as the Senior Lecturer in Cinematography at the Northern Film School in Leeds Beckett University. Robertson trained at the Russian State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow (VIGK) and is a graduate of the Northern Film School.

Robertson has an impressive international body of work ranging from feature films, TV dramas, commercials and documentaries.

The drama strand of his film and television career embraces most genres and budgets – from gritty Northern comedy such as *Ideal* (2006) (Jonny Vegas – Best Comedy, Royal Television Society) to lush costume dramas such as *Larkrise to Candleford* (2008) to BAFTA winning single dramas such as *Zig Zag Love* (2009) (director Gillies McKinnon BAFTA, *Small Faces*) to mainstream Hollywood productions.

Robertson has won numerous national and international awards for his work, which include two prestigious Kodak Vision awards for cinematography; one for his first feature film *Beyond the Ocean* (2000), the other for the critically acclaimed *Frozen* (2005) (Shirley Henderson BAFTA).

Some of Robertson's other feature film highlights include *You And I* (2011) (director Roland Joffé -*The Killing Fields*, 1984 and *The Mission* -1986 Oscar nomination for Best Director) to *Rokland* (2012)(Martin Thorsson, *Varieties* '10 directors to watch') which was nominated for four Eddas (Icelandic Oscars), one for best Cinematography.

A short film which Robertson was Cinematographer on titled *Shok* (2016) -

shot in Kosovo - has received an OSCAR Nomination for Best Live Action Short Film.

<https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/staff/philip-robertson/> as well as an additional 22 international film festival awards.

His ongoing approach to researching his aesthetics in visual storytelling has gained Robertson (and the films that he served as a cinematographer) with numerous awards and reviews. Philip Robertson press/awards

[Philip Robertson research profile](#)

[Philip Robertson IMDb profile](#)

[philiprobertsondop website](#)

GG

“A visually arresting film captured in luminous black and white...this intriguing feature's major selling point by far is Philip Robertson's widescreen lensing of rural Russia”.

Variety - Dennis Harvey

GG

“Pinpointing the mood... it is a beautifully stark film. Recommended”.

BBC Review - Alex Crawford

“

It's a thoughtful,
beautiful film”.

The Guardian - Gareth Mclean

“

A strikingly
beautiful feature”.

The Times

GG

“The most enthralling and intelligent British feature since Lynne Ramsey's *Ratcatcher*. Achingly beautiful”.

Channel 4 Reviews - Anton Bitel

GG

“The black and white scenes of provincial Russia could be mistaken for Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's* childhood”.

New York Times - Scott Tobias

“

“Strikingly beautiful
imagery”.

Screen international - Geoffrey Macnab

“

“Laden with
promise and
thick with
atmosphere”.

Sight and Sound - Sam Wigley

GG

“The muted cinematography is beautiful, reflecting Kath's innermost torment”.

Empire - Nikki Baughan

GG

“Making the most photographically of the grim flats and decaying industry of this northwest corner... DVD of the week”.

Time Out

GG

“It's a visually striking film”.

The Observer - Philip French

ROBERTSON'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PICTURE PERFECT

Robertson's film history is 'a series of original creative works which make a significant contribution to knowledge' and this contribution is demonstrated by means of practice, working methods, originality, mastery, impact and professional reputation in Cinematography. Awards and nominations testify to the world class quality and impact of his practice. Additionally, Filmmaking as research (n.d., p. 1) notes "festival selection [prizes and reviews are] is often referred to as a proxy for academic peer review" A selection of his work can be seen at <http://philiprobertsondop.com/> and a selection of film festival/prizes and reviews at <https://www.philiprobertsondop.com/press-awards.html>

BACKGROUND RESEARCH – THE STORY WORLD

Practice (practitioner) based research and interpretation allowed a cinematographic aesthetic unity to be constructed by Robertson's immersion in the story world of "Picture Perfect". As Young and Petzold, (1972, p. 23 quoted in Cowan 2016, p. 68) state "The cameraman stands at the natural confluence of the two main streams of activity in the production of a film - where the imagination [and research] meets the reality of the film process".

Pedagogical research led to the creation of a deeper understanding of the profound themes explored within the narrative of the film. These processes led Robertson to construct a visual and created a unity of authorship for the aesthetics of this film.

Key texts to the understanding of the themes explored within the narrative of the film were:

Nationally - Age UK and Independent Age websites <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/> , <https://www.independentage.org/> were identified as sources to inform Robertson's background research - particularly research documents (Davidson & Rossall 2006), (Age UK - Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review, nd) and Independent Age's articles (2013 & 2014. Isolation: the emerging crisis for older men).

An International perspective was also explored key texts used were (Binstock & George 2006) and (Jylha & Jukka 1990) this latter text helped Robertson form ideas for his open ended questions.

A Christian perspective on death and the afterlife was also sought - such as the resources at <https://probe.org> (Zukeran, 2005), (Wright, 2003) together with broader research and reading into how cultures around the world view the afterlife. (Miller 2014)

Reference was also made to the abundant audio-visual reports available on the central themes. Robertson, also called on his personal experience of having aging parents both of who are suffering from vascular dementia for this project.

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Robertson travelled to the location Eynsford, Sevenoaks in Kent for a week of scouting one month before filming. Robertson had the opportunity to visit a nursing home/ sheltered accommodation in the nearby village of Dartford and older members of the village, to talk first hand to these people, many of whom had retired to the village (this was one of the reasons Eynsford was selected as a location as its demographic of older people is very high) and had a similar experience to that depicted in the film. This is one example of the Qualitative Research Robertson conducted in situ. As Bornat (2012, p.1) states “Oral history, with its combination of methods drawn from history and sociology, places emphasis on the significance of temporal context and memory by interviewing people about their experience.”

John Starr Professor of Health & Ageing at the University of Edinburgh and Director of the Alzheimer Scotland Dementia Research Centre states “...professionals, along with policy-makers, should listen to the story of the lives of people aged 85 years or more. They have much to learn from the stories of those whose lives have gone well enough to have survived so long.” (Starr n.d p.18).

The open ended questions and answers, Robertson received from the older people interviewed exhibited three major themes those of loneliness, fears of poor physical/mental health and regret – some key concerns identified by Age UK and Independent Age.

Another advantage to this location which was determined in pre -production was its nearby lavender fields – lavender in British mythology is associated with “Devotion” and this is integral to the story.

UNDERPINNING CINEMATOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

“Artistic inspiration, perceiving and thinking are indivisibly intertwined” (Arnheim, Visual Thinking, 1996, p. v). Robertson’s work shows coherency of process and research methodology in his contribution to his films. He does this by the immersion of himself in the story’s culture, society, and other tangible and intangible influences of the people, lands and environments where his films are set. “reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by the image” (S Sontag, 1997, p. 153). This reality provides a way of seeing a particular truth or themes in the concepts being explored, (Arnheim, Visual Thinking, 1996), (Feyerabend, 1991).

Robertson draws on a variety of influences – images aren't just representational, they also represent the psychological and emotional view of how you're telling a story. Not only for the characters but for the audience, (Arnheim, Visual Thinking, 1996), (Kracauer, 1997, pp. 27-58,60-73.157-192). As one critic’s review of Robertson’s work stated, The muted cinematography is beautiful, reflecting Kath's innermost torment.

<http://www.empire-wards.html> Empire - Nikki Baughan This way Robertson interprets the lead character’s internal landscape within this film as well as contribution to the strong sense of place as Anton Bitel, Channel 4 reviews pinpoints “Frozen is serious, mannered, rich in theme, achingly beautiful, with nuanced performances and a strong sense of place” <http://www.rsproductions.co.uk/film/frozen/reviews.php>

As Picasso put it “The artist is the receptacle of emotion that comes from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from the scrap of paper, from the passing shape, from the spider’s web” (Walther 2000, p.18). This is Robertson’s ongoing research dialogue. He has followed this approach in his past work and will continue to develop what he sees as “a lifelong investigation into the aesthetics of visual storytelling”. This research dialogue is clearly reflected in the Cinematography of “Picture Perfect”. As a review states of Picture Perfect “It is a short film that remains in your mind and in your eyes.” Simon Cup Italian Grazia. <https://www.grazia.it/stile-di-vita/cinema-e-tv/picture-perfect-a-palazzo-tiepolo>

Robertson’s background and visual aesthetic stems from being a Northern European Cinematographer trained at the Russian State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow and this is articulated in his work. Two pivotal references for “Picture Perfect” came from one of VGIK’s most famous alumni: Andrei Tarkovsky <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0001789/>



Instant Light Tarkovsky Polaroids 2006

KEY VISUAL REFERENCES

At the outset, the visual structure for *Picture Perfect* was inspired by two of the Glasgow Boys - Paterson and Guthrie. These works influenced how Robertson saw and executed the aesthetic of visual storytelling in *Picture Perfect*.

Perhaps Robertson's use of the Glasgow boys to hang his visual for the storytelling stems from the fact that James Guthrie, whose work Robertson refers to, was a clergyman's son from Greenock. In *Picture Perfect* the character David, played by John Carson <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0141264/>, arrives back in the "retirement" village having been away "50 years living in Greenock".



Autumn in Glencairn (1887) James Paterson



A Highland Funeral (1882) Sir James Guthrie

IMPACT

“Picture Perfect” has achieved a wide-ranging and significant impact, informing public debate, bringing this “snapshot” of the main theme of aging and loneliness to both a national and international audience. Transforming the lives of the cast and crew and giving a voice to a generation whose stories are not often depicted in drama productions. Generating employment in the region – one of the requirements of the funding of the film was that we used a substantial element of local crew who acquired new skills and methodology in the film industry. Picture Perfect has influenced fellow filmmakers and made a significant contribution to cultural life through national and international discussion and coverage.

GG

“What follows is both unexpected considering the tone of the film up to that point, and beautiful at the same time. To tell anything else would be to spoil the film. But its hauntingly beautiful. You can’t help but naturally doubt the sanity of this old man, and also sympathise with him. Perhaps that was the intent of the filmmakers. One hopes it was. Picture Perfect is beautifully shot. The director of photography is a gem and really carries the film. Every shot keeps your attention no matter how mundane the situation. Special mention also to actor John Carson who plays the lead David. His performance as curmudgeonly David is hearteningly captivating at times and really is a pleasure to view.”

Mike Michaelson, Strangers in Cinema

GG

"I found the script surprisingly moving and poignant. The characterisations are very vivid and the dialogue is naturalistic and effective. The story is well structured, and shows a gradual change in David as the picture softens his character before completely absorbing him. The script is very well written and I very much liked the contrast between the grim, sour existence David lives and the romantic, idealised vision in the painting."

PEDAGOGY

In Robertson's workshop-based teaching "Picture Perfect" is used as a case study to disseminate his work and to explore his poiesis (making), phronesis (practical wisdom), praxis (reflection on [and in] action, techne (craft) and episteme (knowledge) (Greenhalgh, 2018, p.143) as a Cinematographer and working methods to students. This forms a concrete 'real world' example which explores his cultural and creative research, impact, together with the technical and professional dimensions of Robertson's practice. A research seminar was planned where Robertson would have explored his praxis with colleagues but was cancelled due to the ongoing covid 19 pandemic.

AWARDS & SIGNIFICANT FESTIVALS

- *** WINNER *** Remi award 47th WorldFest Houston April 2014
- *** WINNER *** Best Film 4th Peleponnesian Corinthian "Bridges" CINE@ART Dec 2013
- *** WINNER *** Best Short Film Cyprus International Film Festival Oct 2013
- *** WINNER *** Best Film: Mestre Film Fest - Venice Event Academy Sept/Oct 2013
- *** WINNER *** Best Director award Kharkov Lilac Film Festival May 2013
- *** NOMINATED *** Best Short Film Suffolk International Film Festival July 2013
- *** NOMINATED *** Best Short Film London Independent Film Festival April 2014
- ***NOMINATED*** Best Cinematography at the Suffolk international Film Festival 2013
- *** NOMINATED *** Best Short Film Goid Remi award 47th WorldFest Houston April 2014
- *** RUNNER-UP *** 9th Marbella International Film Festival Oct 2014.
- *** NOMINATED *** Best Short Film Award Carmarthen Bay Film Festival May 2014.
- *** NOMINATED *** Best Short London Independent Film Festival April 2014.

SCREENINGS

Unofficial screening for cast, crew and sponsors on Aug 2013 at Soho Hotel.

Screened at Non-Multiplex Films' industry event Aug 2013.

Screened Electric Lantern Film Fest 8th Sept 2013.

Shortlisted Aesthetica Short Film Festival 2013.

Screened at the South West London International Film Festival (SWLIFF) 3 Nov 2013.

Screened 4th Corinthian Peloponnesian Film Fest Greece, Dec 2013.

Screened Cosy Cinema Corn Exchange in Tunbridge Wells Dec 2013.

Screened 7Islands International Film Festival, Mumbai, India Jan 2014.

Screening The Film Festival Doctor's 'Short Stories' at Century Club in Soho Feb 2014.

Reel Islington Film Festival 1st March 2014.

Landed Music & Arts Festival May 2014.

Krakow Film Market 2014

Carmarthen Bay Film Festival May 2014.

Medway Visions Film Festival September 2014.

9th Marbella International Film Festival October 2014.

Official Selection American On-line Film Awards December 2015



Prince Maurice Agosti - President of the Venice Academy Events - presented the Special Prize for the short film Picture Perfect with the words, "for the delicacy and originality in addressing the issue of old age, regret and love with a touch of melancholy and esotericism".



Q&A with Producer Rebecca Knapp talking about Picture Perfect at the Red Carpet Screenings Film Festival & Exhibition

GG

“...An appealing and charming thirty minute short... A handsomely shot and well-constructed film, with a romantic edge to the proceedings, Picture Perfect is a nicely understated piece about age, regret, forgiveness and longing to change the past – themes which everyone can relate to. It will certainly keep you intrigued, and John Carson as David is a pleasure to watch as the sour old man labouring under past grievances (a particularly strong scene occurs when he drunkenly confronts his father’s grave, and the truth of his hurt comes to light). There are a few moments of light humour... Picture Perfect is a skillfully made, subtle and quietly entertaining film.

David Ollerton - The London Film Review

GG

“The young Russian born director Irina Izmestieva released her short film "Picture Perfect". In her film, a painting turns out to be not evil or inciting envy and greed, but a cure that eases a very old pain. Carson's heart is touched by a cracked old painting which he finds in a car boot sale. Irina Izmestieva's film premiere was held in the Soho Hotel in London. After the film screening, many of the audience had been so involved with such an unconditional interpretation of love, that many of them requested Irina to make a follow up film. People should think through the ending themselves and never forget that in paradise those we have lost are awaiting for us”.

Kristina Moskalenko - Angliya (Britain's biggest Russian newspaper)



“What follows is both unexpected considering the tone of the film up to that point, and beautiful at the same time. To tell anything else would be to spoil the film. But its hauntingly beautiful. You can’t help but naturally doubt the sanity of this old man, and also sympathise with him. Perhaps that was the intent of the filmmakers. One hopes it was.

Picture Perfect is beautifully shot. The director of photography is a gem and really carries the film. Every shot keeps your attention no matter how mundane the situation. Special mention also to actor John Carson who plays the lead David. His performance as curmudgeonly David is hearteningly captivating at times and really is a pleasure to view.”

GG

“... Expertly shot and edited, it told a brilliant love story of the older generation...”

TRISTAN NOON reports on the weekend's Red Carpet Screenings Film Festival

GG

“has made a short 30 minutes to support the theory that a picture is worth a thousand words. It's called “Picture Perfect” and tells of a man in the twilight of his life, embittered by hatred of the father and loneliness. He finds an old picture, bought at a charity market, of Gloria, the girl he left behind, but continued to cherish for a lifetime... The image of the girl, who died prematurely of pneumonia, comes to life, it changes the existence of man, David, and finally takes him away with it. This short addresses important issues such as loneliness, death and forgiveness”

Venice 70. For one evening at Palazzo by Elizabeth Smith

“ Like the Dorian Gray painting in reverse, the image changes from day to day, the colors become more vivid, the girl portrayed seems to come alive. *Picture Perfect* addresses the theme of regret, forgiveness, youth and old age, the only alternative to death. It is a short film that remains in your mind and in your eyes.”

Picture Perfect at the Palace Tiepolos exhibition of the Venice Film Festival by Simon Cup Italian Grazia.

“Picture Perfect was a very well put together short indeed, starting out as a seemingly simple love story, the narrative has a very interesting and well-handled supernatural twist in its tail. Fantastically shot, acted and engaging throughout, this comes highly recommended.”

“the brilliant cinematic storytelling, the skillful directing approach, the realistic character development and the evoking feeling of nostalgia, reinforced by the amazing acting of John Carson.”

GG

“I found the script surprisingly moving and poignant. The characterisations are very vivid and the dialogue is naturalistic and effective. The story is well structured, and shows a gradual change in David as the picture softens his character before completely absorbing him. The script is very well written and I very much liked the contrast between the grim, sour existence David lives and the romantic, idealised vision in the painting.

Nikita Kolesnikoff - Kommersant UK London

GG

“Picture Perfect tackles themes of regret, forgiveness and the desire to change the past. Rather than the dialogues between the characters, the communicative strength lies in the images that speak to the viewer. Images of a lost love, then found through a picture.”

Daniela Paties Montagner - “The poetry for images of Russian director Irina Izmestieva arrives in Venice

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Keywords:

Cinematography

Aging

Lonliness

Links:

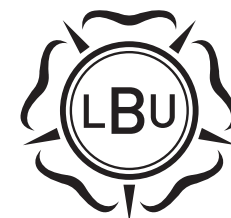
<http://www.izmproductions.com/picture-perfect/>

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