

# Interviews: City & State Short Film Directors at the 52nd Chicago International Film Festival

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CHICAGO – One of the great nights at the 52nd Chicago International Film Festival is the short film presentation celebrating the best of area filmmakers, the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois. Included in the program were three notable filmmakers, Anne Beal ("Positioning"), Filip Kojic ("HUH") and Brian Zahm ("The Nude").

Every year, HollywoodChicago.com seeks out these filmmakers, to talk about the challenges of using cinema as a expressive platform, in addition to finding their style and artistic energy through the process of creating their films.



Anne Beal, Director of "Positioning"



'Positioning,' Directed by Anne Beal

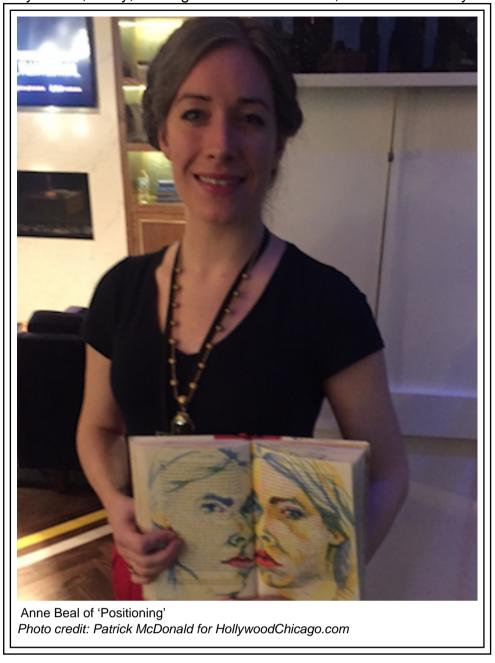
Photo credit: Chicago International Film Festival

Anne Beal is a local artist and academic who spent a year filling a book called "Know How" – that she randomly found – with self portraits. After that project was done, she decided to create an animated film using the artwork.

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Published on HollywoodChicago.com (http://www.hollywoodchicago.com)

HollywoodChicago.com: Your film is very timely, as treatment of women by a patriarchal society is on the table in this campaign. What good do you see, if any, coming from this discussion, in the context of your film?



**Anne Beal:** People take their own experience to my film, because with the images combined with the text in the book flashing at the viewer, what it brings up for them is their experience. The words 'positioning,' 'operating mechanism' and 'money making' come up a lot, which are jargon words, but when they're put into the context of the workplace, for example, it becomes more in depth.

For background sound, I was using snippets of Lucky Strike cigarette ads and also me reading from an old book from 1898, 'Women and Economics.' It's amazing what is in that book about emancipating the woman from the household, and how it is relevant 120 years later.

HollywoodChicago.com: Sound design is a vital part of your animated dream. When you are planning the design, do you want a certain soundbite and endeavor to find it, or do you remember certain things that you've heard and animate around them?

Anne Beal: It was a combination. For example, I have a fondness for old radio shows, and I used soundbites from these cassette tapes I found at a thrift store. One of radio shows on that collection was an adaptation of 'The Jazz Singer' [first sound film], and the Lucky Strike ads were in that program. The words, 'the taste that makes the difference' kept radiating, which has a subversive tone when applied toward women.

HollywoodChicago.com: Martin Scorsese once said, 'films are the fever dreams of psychotics. What do you believe to be the most psychotic element of your work?

Beal: Well, the images come at you really quickly, and if you think of the psyche as the self and the mind, the way that I put it together was grabbing different parts of my artistic experience. Just the act of drawing my face on every page, in a book I found in a parking lot, was a psychotic act. [laughs] I saw the book through the lens of myself.



Filip Kojic, Director of "HUH"



'HUH,' Directed by Filip Kojic

Photo credit: Chicago International Film Festival

"HUH" is a wonderfully rendered visual poem on the randomness of mortality and life. A series of long shots with the actions in the framing tell more about the participants than traditional narrative.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You like the action in the long shots from afar, rather than close-ups or cutting into action. What about your view of cinema informs that style?



**Filip Kojic:** I like duration, and there is a type of filmmaking called 'slow cinema,' which I subscribe to. I like to have static shots with object movement in the frame, with many things going on at once. I want to give the viewer the freedom to look where they want, and pay attention to what is interesting to them. I think it's a good way to engage, and creates a more active experience. It's my own battle against the



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hyper-speed edits we see everyday in our image consumption. I want to create images to give space you as a viewer, and give you an opportunity to create a more meaningful visual relationship.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** When you are visually assessing a landscape for a shot, what elements do you focus on to get what you want visually?

**Kojic:** I shot the film in my neighborhood, so I knew what was visually interesting to me. When I'm thinking about the rhythm of the film, I'm also thinking about how the images are connecting in the edit. For example, there are cement trucks in one shot, and it always caught my attention whenever I saw them. So I went to that space, and told my actor to ride his bike into the scene. It became a beautiful reveal as he rode through where the trucks came out, it's like he came out from behind a curtain.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you talk about your love for filmmaking, what it the first thing you talk about?

**Kojic:** The communication that you can have through poetic imagery is an effective one, and the cinema has the ability take intimacy to another level, expressing more that even language or words. It's the ability to speak in images, rather than dialogue, that's magical. To communicate that clearly, and then to challenge the audience in a provocative way, can result in an experience that a viewer might not encounter in their regular life.



#### Brian Zahm, Director of "The Nude"

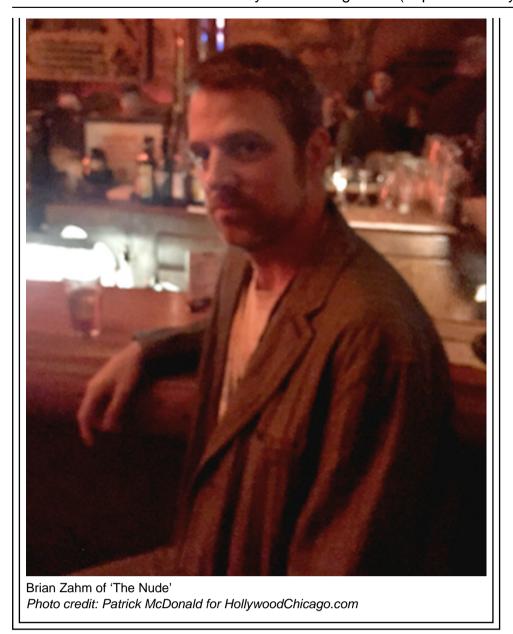


'The Nude' (Le Nu) Directed by Brian Zahm Photo credit: Chicago International Film Festival

The absurdist film is a sharp spoof of pretentious French films, done with precision, hilarity and style by Brian Zahm, a filmmaker and instructor at DePaul University.

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Brian Zahm: I do admire French New Wave like a madman, it changed the way we look at cinema and how we do cinema. The real answer is in trying to make the most pretentious film ever, I harken back to my first experiences with foreign films, and I wanted to emulate everything that stuck in my crawl.

I would say, 'f\*\*k this,' because I was young and undeveloped. I didn't understand those film's power back then, so I wanted to mock all the things that f\*\*ked with me – the slow motion, the cross cutting and a bird. I wanted it to be grainy and soft focused, basically the most pretentious film ever.

HollywoodChicago.com: The themes of your films seem to be the ordinary scenarios of everyday life brought to punch line. Do you agree with Charlie Chaplin, in the context of your films, that in the end it's all a gag?

**Zahm:** I don't think it's all a gag, but I do tell my students that it's all about being the perfect liar. You have to believe in whatever reality you're bringing to life. My film is a gag ultimately, but it's a gag about being human. When you're younger, your life energy is limitless, but when you're older it's about the limits – so it became about those limitations. Even thought the film is about pretension, I'm not pretentious, but I am a jokester.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Given your perspective and world view, how is film the ideal medium to communicate that point of view?

**Zahm:** More Trump commercials, so he becomes king! [laughs] It is f\*\*ked up how media is distorting the world and our beliefs. Whether there is truth or lies, it's a very f\*\*ked up time. I can grab a camera and I have a good eye, so for me it works. Ultimately, I want to make something that people remember. I throw it together, and at the very least it can give you some entertainment.

Cinema/Chicago, the sponsor of the 52nd Chicago International Film Festival, has events throughout the year. Click here [20] for more information. For a complete list of films that screened at the City & State short film program, Click here [21]



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