



WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

An Icarus Films Release
Directed by Kimi Takesue

World Premiere, Rotterdam International Film Festival
Official Selection, Los Angeles Film Festival
Official Selection, Documentary Fortnight, Museum of Modern Art
Official Selection, Gotenborg International Film Festival, Sweden
Official Selection, Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival
Official Selection, Milano African, Latino and Asian International FF, Italy
Official Selection, International Film Festival Kerala, India
Official Selection, Amakula International Film Festival, Uganda
Official Selection, Planete Doc Film Festival, Poland

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Serious documentaries are good for you.



SYNOPSIS

A high society wedding, a movie set, a beauty salon, a women's weightlifting competition: these are a few of the many places in Uganda visited in Kimi Takesue's feature documentary, *Where Are You Taking Me?* Employing an observational style, Takesue travels through the vibrant streets of Kampala to the rural quiet of Hope North, a refuge and school for survivors of civil war. *Where Are You Taking Me?* offers multi-faceted portraits of Ugandans and their country, slyly exploring the complex interplay between the observer and the observed. This stunningly beautiful cinematic journey challenges notions of the familiar and the exotic. Where are we going... and what will we find?



CREDITS

Title:	<i>Where Are You Taking Me?</i>
Length:	72 minutes
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
Production:	USA / Uganda
Location of Shoot:	Uganda
Screening Formats:	Digibeta, BetaSP NTSC, HDCAM 1080i / 29.97
Film Website:	www.whereareyoutakingme.com

SELECTED PUBLICITY

The logo for the publication VARIETY, featuring the word in a stylized, green, serif font with a decorative flourish above the letters.

"Where Are You Taking Me is an uplifting observational documentary that plays on seeing and being seen. Though the premise of commissioning non-Africans to reveal the "Dark Continent" to (largely) white arthouse audiences can be seen as suspect, Takesue's beautifully meditative work is aware of its outsider status... Lovely transitions, via image and sound, and striking compositions make the pic an enriching experience." –Jay Weissberg, VARIETY

The logo for the publication CINEASTE, featuring the word in a large, black, sans-serif font.

"Stellar! Takesue's documentary took the explosive subject of former Ugandan child soldiers in an unexpected direction; instead of choosing the usual routes of investigative journalism or bombastic commentary, the film keeps its distance from the traumatized youngsters and observes them with detached empathy as they readjust to 'normalcy'." –Richard Porton, CINEASTE

The logo for the publication LA WEEKLY, featuring the words in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

"CRITIC'S PICK! For the first several minutes of director Kimi Takesue's documentary, viewers may well be asking the question in the film's title. Delivered sans voice-over or any establishing context, Takesue's film drops the audience into an elliptical journey through layers of life in modern Uganda: a high-society wedding (whose groom looks like he's attending a funeral); a female weight-lifting competition; a break-dance battle that's stolen by a young child. Once you're acclimated to the unforced pace, the wonderfully composed images (some quite painterly) wash over you. It's only near the end that any reference to the country's bloody history arises, and you realize you've been watching a poetic corrective to lingering stereotypes." –Ernest Hardy, LA WEEKLY

The logo for the publication the village VOICE, featuring the words in a white, sans-serif font on a blue background.

"Just as voiceover and story arcs are endemic to most theatrically distributed docs, exposition in most selections here is, by inverse convention, DIY. Thus you get the extraordinary postwar Uganda dream flight of Kimi Takesue's *Where Are You Taking Me?*, which begins by dropping us in medias res at a bustling curbside in Kampala before tunneling through bubbly weddings, soul-thrumming drum circles, a girls' weightlifting tournament, and more. Takesue's askew angles, sealed-off compositions, and embrace of return glances foster the strange beauty, humor, and disorientation so rare in the global glut of hard-drive-dump docs. The physical grace of her subjects and the detergent-ad brilliance of the colorful clothes don't hurt, either, nor does the music. (A little girl taking her turn in a breakdance-off is alone worth the price of admission.) But the secret weapon here is Takesue's unnerving ability to zoom with uncanny focus into (and out of) individual perspectives—with or without close-ups—building to one electric encounter with her outsider-chronicler status: "Why you want to go with it there?" asks one seemingly edge-of-tears teenager of his New York-bound image." –Nicolas Rapold, VILLAGE VOICE

'Where Are You Taking Me?' is an observational documentary that lets the images tell the story.
By Peter Rainer / March 2, 2012

The marvelous documentary "Where Are You Taking Me?" was originally commissioned by Rotterdam's international film festival in conjunction with a series on African cinema. The Asian-American director, Kimi Takesue, who has an extensive career in documentaries and teaches film at Syracuse University, had never traveled to Africa. Along with 11 other international filmmakers, she and local African filmmakers were given no-strings commissions to make pieces for the festival. It sounds like a documentarian's dream, and from the look of the film, that's just what it was.

As Takesue has written: "I was particularly excited to participate in this project because my film work often deals with various kinds of cross-cultural encounters. I am interested in the process of 'looking' cross-culturally, and the interplay between the observer and the observed."

This may make the movie sound like some sort of ethnographic field trip, but it's far more lyrical than that. What the film is really about, as Takesue has said elsewhere, is "finding poetic moments in the everyday." The film has no driving agenda, no overbearing story arc.

Since the movie was shot in Uganda in the aftermath of its brutal civil wars, her approach, which dispenses with voice-over narration and even subtitles, may at first seem unconscionably arty. But I think she is right to work in this way. The film doesn't dispense with the horrors of the wars, it just mitigates the pain by finding in the people, the countryside, a revivifying beauty. The movie is both a representation of and a testament to healing.

Takesue's biracial background – she grew up in Hawaii and Massachusetts with an Asian-American father and Caucasian mother – no doubt contributes to her sensitivity to those "cross-cultural encounters." But she has a principled reticence when it comes to recording the Ugandans. She often lets her camera, at a discrete distance from its subject, simply register the human activity in its sights. The film's opening shot, for example, of a busy street corner in Kampala, is a microcosm of Ugandan city life, with motorbikers, women toting children, businessmen, beggars. By holding the shot, as she so often does in this film, Takesue is encouraging audiences to take a deep, long look at things they might otherwise miss.

This tactic, of course, only works if there is something worth looking at in the first place. Fortunately, the Uganda of this film is almost brazenly photogenic, and no more so than with the faces of the people themselves. Takesue has a wonderful eye for human portraiture, and for landscape portraiture, that is arresting without being static. She captures, as she intended, the lyricism of the everyday.

We are taken seemingly everywhere in the country, from Kampala to rural villages. We see a high-society wedding, with the bride and groom as crisply fashioned as figures atop a wedding cake; we observe a women's weight lifting competition held in the banquet room of a fancy hotel. In another sequence, a video VJ does live translations of Bruce Lee films in the local Lugandan language to a roomful of sleepyheaded kids. Boxers at a makeshift outdoor gym spar furiously in rhythmic pirouettes. We visit a movie set where what looks like a pulp action film is being shot. (Later on we see snippets from such a film inside a darkened theater.)

An impromptu break dancing competition turns into a joyful whirligig, especially when, to the onlookers' delight, a little girl wanders into the circle to try out moves. In the marketplaces, where the wares include colored fabrics of almost incandescent brightness, Takesue, who is always off camera, registers the curiosity and wariness her presence elicits from the vendors. A few people duck the camera altogether; others stare stonily into it or embrace it with wide smiles. They surely feel, and rightly so, that they are not zoo specimens, and Takesue is careful to respect their sympathies. And yet, in the end, she gets what she wants, even from those who turn away from her. The turning away, she seems to say, is part of the story, too.

One group that does not turn away are the children. In the second half of the film she concentrates on Hope North School, a refuge for children, some diagnosed with AIDS, many of them former child soldiers forced to commit unspeakable atrocities. These orphans and castoffs are rehabilitated here. They are given the gift of rediscovering human connections in peacetime. This is one part of the film that could have used a bit more context, but we get the message anyway. We get it not only in the rompy scenes with young kids mugging for the camera but also in the shot of a stricken-looking older boy who talks about how he dreams of guns and asks Takesue, "Why are you taking my story to USA New York?"

If he were to see this film, he would know why.

Grade: A



Review: 'Where Are You Taking Me?'

A documentarian crosses borders, then erases them entirely.

Four Stars

Critic's Film Pick of the Week!

By Eric Hynes / February 24, 2012

Why do we travel to foreign lands, and what are we hoping to find? How do we distinguish between our preconceived projections of nations and the reality of what's in front of us? In her impressive documentary feature debut, Kimi Takesue interrogates the outsider's gaze while still offering an expansive, wide-angle view of contemporary Uganda. She eloquently employs the vocabulary of objective cinema—prolonged static shots, fly-on-the-wall perspective—to paint a knowingly subjective portrait that's somewhere between Cubist travelogue and epic poetic reportage. A young man sits placidly in the chaotic swirl of cars and pedestrians moving along a hectic city street. Takesue pointedly and playfully punctures our exotic notions of wild Africa: A shot of a fiercely fanged lion pulls back to reveal Day-Glo-shirted schoolkids at a zoo; children laboring in a rock quarry turn out to be participating in an on-location film shoot.

Though the country's social and political ills are left largely out of frame—an AIDS-awareness T-shirt makes a memorable cameo—we're never allowed to forget that we're trespassing. Passersby glare into the camera, and subtitles are never furnished for non-English dialogue. The only time a subject directly addresses Takesue, it's with a doozy of a query: "Why are you taking my story to USA, New York?" The answer is as complex as the film itself, and as simple as deciding to not look away.

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 viewers 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.

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 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 Luganda 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, 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 FILM'S MESSAGE?

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.



BIOGRAPHY **KIMI TAKESUE**

Kimi Takesue is an award-winning filmmaker and the recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in Filmmaking. Takesue's films have screened at over 200 film festivals and museums, including the Sundance Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, New Directors/ New Films, Los Angeles Film Festival, Locarno International, SXSW, the Walker Art Center, and the Museum of Modern Art. Her narrative and documentary films have aired on PBS, the Independent Film Channel, and the Sundance Channel.

Raised in Hawai'i and Massachusetts, Takesue is an Assistant Professor in the Film Program at Syracuse University. Among her fellowships and grants are a Rockefeller Media Arts Fellowship, two artist fellowships from the New York Foundation in the Arts, grants from the Independent Television Service (ITVS), Ford Foundation, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, National Asian American Telecommunications Association, The Arts Council of England, Yaddo Artist Colony, and the MacDowell Colony. Narrative projects include award-winning *Summer of the Serpent* and *That Which Once Was* (winner of the *Futurestates* Audience Award) starring Natar Ungalaq (*Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*). 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*.

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.

BIOGRAPHY **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.

BIOGRAPHY **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*.

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