



# Cairo Time plays on the importance of color

*Cairo Time* is the story of Juliette, a Canadian woman who is waiting for her husband to arrive in that mysterious and chaotic Egyptian city. She has promised they could experience the wonders of the pyramids and the Nile together, but as she waits, she finds herself inexorably drawn into the foreign culture. The film is the third collaboration between cinematographer Luc Montpellier, CSC and director Ruba Nadda.

## What was the visual grammar you developed for the film?

My first impression was that this story needed to be shot in a very classic, guided way. I think that counterpoint is important when you're shooting in a place that has a sense of chaos, like Cairo, where we made this film. I felt that to go documentary style would be a mistake. We chose a 2.35:1 aspect ratio, which enabled us to integrate our actors within backgrounds, to isolate characters, and, at times, to use the frame like a still photo.

## Which film stocks did you choose?

To capture the tones that I needed, I chose to shoot (KODAK VISION3 500T) 5219 for night exteriors, and (KODAK VISION2 250D) 5205 film, which enabled me to shoot from early morning light all the way to magic hour. I changed filtration as the day went on to maintain a consistent look while still not compromising grain, which to me was very important.

## How did you use color to enhance the drama?

Our plan was to contrast Juliette's character with all the colors surrounding her, to depict her feelings of foreignness. She is shown in cooler tones at the beginning of the film, representing a more modern urban landscape. That contrasts with the warmer,

earthier golden browns and tans of Cairo. When she arrives, for example, her wardrobe is made up of blue and cyan colors. In subtle ways within the frame, we slowly start to pull away from that as she starts to venture out and experience Cairo. At a certain point, she finally decides to go out into the city on her own. She goes to the oldest mosque in all of Cairo. Since you are not allowed to go into mosques without a head covering, she decides to put on a scarf that she got from a local woman who cleans her room. The scarf is a subtle symbol of her evolution, another small part of our attempt to create a story that could be understood without the words.

## How did you light the pyramid?

Shooting in Cairo meant we didn't have all the luxuries of North American film light equipment. My gaffer Scott Tremblay and I did some heavy sensitometer calculations to figure out what lamps and proximity we'd need to light the pyramids. We researched the exact dimensions, and studied which lights were available to us. We settled on six 18Ks in full spot mode, placed strategically at the foot. We supplemented that with three 6Ks with the Par lens pulled out to reach the peak. I needed as much depth of field as possible because I wanted to see details. We did the shot from almost a mile away using KODAK VISION3 500T 5219. The colors had to be warm, but correcting the 18Ks back to tungsten would knock down my exposures too much. In the DI, which was done at Technicolor Creative Services in Toronto, I was able to isolate and track the pyramid within the frame and manipulate the color.

A longer version of this article can be found at [http://motion.kodak.com/US/en/motion/Publications/In\\_Camera/index.htm](http://motion.kodak.com/US/en/motion/Publications/In_Camera/index.htm)

1 Luc Montpellier, CSC behind the camera on the set of *Cairo Time*. (Photo by Colm Hogan)