

The shaping of Schwerkraft

DP Ngo The Chau has gained himself an enviable reputation since graduating from the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin. The young Vietnamese-German director of photography has shot a number of memorable commercials, including one for Michael Ballhaus, ASC, as well as 16 television programmes and films. He won the German Camera Award and the German Television Award for *Tatort: Scheherazade* and, this year alone, he has completed *Entführt* and *Phantomschmerz. 66/67* is currently in post-production.

His latest venture, *Schwerkraft*, is a DFFB graduate thesis feature film produced by Valeska Bochow. The dramatic human tale of a bank clerk turned rogue is from Berlin-based Frisbeefilms in co-production with ZDF Das kleine Fernsehspiel and Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin, in co-operation with ARTE Strasbourg. Frisbeefilms was co-founded by brothers Alexander and Manuel Bickenbach and has earned a reputation for identifying and collaborating with outstanding cinematographic talent. *Schwerkraft* represents Chau's second film with screenwriter and director Maximilian Erlewein.

Chau and producer Bochow searched for a format that would allow them to create a high-quality cinematic experience on a relatively low budget and during pre-production they considered the possibility of shooting on HD. "Technical reliability was all-important, since 80% of *Schwerkraft* needed to be shot outside at night in winter and in difficult, often rainy conditions" says Chau, who became unconvinced that HD provided a solution. After numerous tests he opted instead for 16mm film for anamorphic origination, combined with a few 35mm sequences, and a 35mm CinemaScope release print. "I was very happy when Chau told me they had abandoned the idea of shooting digitally," says camera assistant Gregor Grieshaber. "I knew it would be a demanding shoot for the crew and also for the equipment, so the choice of film made my worries about technical issues almost disappear."

With high-quality origination to the fore, Chau opted for KODAK VISION2 stocks and Vantage Film's brand-new small lightweight Hawk V-Lite 16 anamorphic lens series. He discussed his vision for *Schwerkraft* with staff from Vantage, whom he met at the Kodak Filmmakers' Reception

during the 2008 International Berlin Film Festival, and ultimately used 18, 24, 28 and 35mm Hawk V-Lite 16 lenses; 45, 55 and 80mm V-Lites; 135 and 180mm V-Series; and a 46-230mm V-Series zoom. "We used the V-Lite 16 18mm lens throughout the film and it was exactly what we needed for the shoulder-mounted ARRIFLEX 416," says Chau. Grieshaber found the new V-Lite 16 lens changes "very fast and comfortable, and a great advantage when shooting handheld."

Brilliant results

KODAK VISION2 200T 7217 was Chau's choice for daylight and night-time interiors and exteriors, which he shot filterless and achieved "brilliant" results. He used KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 for "fast night work on a basic lighting budget" and KODAK VISION2 50D 7201 for several significant daylight exteriors. "7201 captured the best possible detail," he says. "I obtained good results on 16mm which combine very well with the Moviecam 35mm sequences. The latter enhance the film with rich detail." Chau did a D.I. in post-production.

"I greatly trust Kodak materials, which I've used since graduating. They give me the time and space to concentrate on vital tasks on set," continues Chau. "I love the contrast range, which I can't find with HD, and I'm always amazed by the dynamic capabilities of the negative in post-production. I can draw amazing detail from even the most under-exposed shadows. Film is certainly the most expressive medium on which to make a movie and create a cinematic screen experience."

"Kodak is a crucial factor in my career: from reliable film stocks and a continuous presence, to its participation in high visibility events such as the International Berlin Film Festival where it nurtures cross-communication. Kodak goes to great lengths to support the young filmmakers of tomorrow. It has not only encouraged me, but it has also decisively shaped *Schwerkraft*".

Schwerkraft will be released in the autumn.

1 DP Ngo The Chau in foreground with viewfinder.



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