

THE SOCIETY OF BIRDWATCHERS | NUMERA FILMS  
DIRECTOR'S VISION



The Society of Birdwatchers is a project that's been mulling around in my head for the better part of 6 years. The film started as a short I pitched while in film school at SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology) in 2015 and went on to screen at a few small festivals and ended up online. The original story follows the character of Jeff who happens across the Society while wandering around the forest. The short is full of allusions to a mysterious and sorted history of the club and this feature aims to tell that story. This short film was one of our first projects as a company and everything we've learned since then has been built on the foundations that this film created for our team. As our first real stab at storytelling The Society of Birdwatchers holds a place near and dear to many of our hearts.

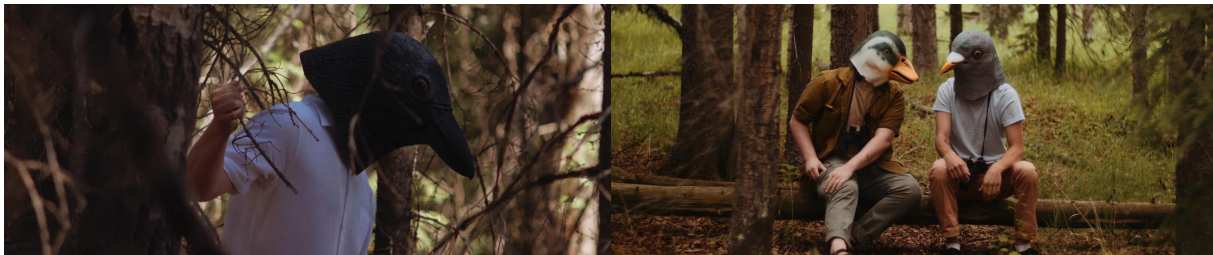


When approaching filmmaking I work closely with our long time Production Designer Kenya Weaver (*Abracadavers*, *CBC's Hudson*). As we've started to expand the world from the short film we've looked at ways we can improve and elevate the framework we initially created together. We always start with the intent to create something that feels timeless. This has materialized as an eclectic mixture of vintage elements infused with modern sensibilities. In The Society of Birdwatchers this will mean juxtaposing elements of modern university life with the retro nature of the feuding bird-watching clubs.

The Crows are modeled after greaser subculture from the 1940's and 1950's and showcased in films like *The Outsiders* (Coppola, 1983) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, 1955). They typically gather in a wooded trailer park for club activities. The S.O.B.s will go from wearing the rubber party masks used in the short to well crafted pieces depicting their favorite birds. The Society is largely characterized by each member's passions. This includes cartography, photography, painting, research and nature based scientific trials. Their gathering place, a cozy

cabin filled with this work, is a reflection of each of these characters. One of the benefits of living with this story has been that for the past 6 years is that we've been gathering tidbits, trinkets, and props that will help populate this whimsical world and tell our story for a long time.

The Society of Birdwatchers has always had a colour palette that focuses heavily on natural greens and browns with flashes of yellow and orange all rooted in very natural warm earth tones. The Society has always strived to blend in with nature and we'll be utilizing Albertan forests as a backdrop to capture these characters. The world of university does away with the green and brown notes of the palette and will focus on the brighter, saturated colours.



The story of The Society of Birdwatchers benefits from this unique look and helps set our team apart from others working with the same subject matter. The Society of Birdwatchers is first and foremost a comedy. I've always approached comedy as an observational way of storytelling. I prefer strong characterization and comedy based on movement, staging, and editing over written jokes (although those are certainly present). The Society of Birdwatchers has characters with large personalities made even larger through the birdwatching masks. For a large portion of the movie the cast will be bringing their characters to life while donning giant bird masks. On it's own this is comical to look at but it's important that these characters are able to express themselves fully and come to life inside the story. I'm excited to explore the challenges, humour, and light-hearted surrealism these masks can bring to the story. Using masks is not only a way to inject humor into the story but also a way to metaphorically represent a lot of insecurities and struggles these characters are trying to hide.



As I've grown as a storyteller my work has been gradually shifting towards telling more stories centered around difficult subject matter in an approachable way and this film is no

exception. The Society of Birdwatchers focuses overtly on bullying with an undercurrent of dealing with depression, suicidal tendencies and what role friends can play in supporting those close to them. Although The Society of Birdwatchers is a film with potential for a wide audience I've been intentionally targeting a younger demographic. My prerogative is to create films that deal with the same subject matter as their darker counterparts but present them in a way that is accessible to a wider audience. One that allows you to revisit the stories told and creates discussion without being overbearing. This strategy helps present diverse characters on the screen without pandering and has the potential to educate the uniformed without being condescending.

Part of the brevity of the film comes from its writing and certainly a large amount of the humor in The Society of Birdwatchers is thanks to the giant bird heads but camera placement, movement, and editing have always been key to my directing style. Stylistically my work has



been compared to The Coen Brothers, Wes Anderson, and Taika Waititi. This manifests on screen as wide shots, plenty of back and forth banter, symmetrical or balanced framing and staggered staging. Inspiration from The Coen Brothers comes from the excellent pacing throughout their films and use of careful editing to perfectly accent a joke or ramp up tension. Wes Anderson has always been an inspiration for his meticulous attention to detail and rich, layered production design. Taika Waititi has a unique way of crafting emotionally heavy moments that still live and breath inside of intensely comedic films. I've come to believe that I can't create anything completely original as a filmmaker. While I try to explore unique concepts the work I create is a product of everything that's influenced me to become an artist in the first place. I have an affinity for long uncut shots, I find it allows the viewer to settle into an emotional moment or laugh at how awkward a character looks on screen but even this is something that's been done before. Using what I've learned while recognizing the importance of the work I'm inspired by is something I'm still working on.

As a group of aspiring filmmakers, creatives and technicians our company has been extremely fortunate to create and shoot two seasons of our web-series, *Abracadavers*. With a similar budget, scale and style as The Society of Birdwatchers we're excited for the opportunity to take what we learned from that production and use it to better ourselves, grow from our shortcomings, and create a film that we've spent a long time dreaming about and now feel ready to create.