

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Box of Birds

Chiwan Choi · Wednesday, February 24th, 2016

I met Maya Hawke through a mutual friend, Katy. She told me about a new interesting project that Maya was starting on Facebook. It was called *Currency of Despair* and it was a fascinating look at storytelling, cinema, images, and editing.

Maya, an editor who has worked on multiple Werner Herzog films, recently unveiled a new project, once again on Facebook, called *Box of Birds*.

https://youtu.be/sSrZr_XKsnY

Unlike *Currency of Despair*, which, although it was endlessly interesting, was also hard to connect to in an emotional and personal way, *Box of Birds* instantly began receiving comments and likes from people who wanted to know more, who were deeply engaged even before knowing where the story would ultimately lead to.

I was one of those people, and by the time it had run its course, it felt not only as if I'd watched a film (cut together, the episodes do add up to 88 minutes), but as if I had experienced/read a book.

From Maya:

Box of Birds exists entirely on Facebook, it's an interactive fictional/non-fictional autobiographical social media film noir storytelling project, told in 15 short videos, created over three weeks for an audience of trusted friends. It deals with marijuana addiction and promiscuity, and growing up as a white girl in South East Asia. I've always wanted to tell my story, but I didn't know how until now. I was influenced by the Singing Detective, David Lynch, Marguerite Duras, Sylvia Plath and Nick Cave. I wanted to make art in public, like graffiti on a subway train, somewhere unexpected.

This project was less Cinema themed than *Currency of Despair*. I found people weren't into the movie theory stuff so much. They just wanted the story, so I tried not to use too many. But I think there's something really great about bringing Joaquin Phoenix to life in the Finale. That was fun for me, I tried to have as much fun as possible. And I did. I hope that shows. The humor. It's very dark otherwise.

About the technique:

I used the application Evernote for a year to gather images and create my story in stills. Then when I was editing, I also went searching for very specific images to work with. For example, the coffee service on the bed in the finale is from Getty

Images, I left the watermark on to show what it was. I needed a very specific image. I could find anything. I had iPhoto open the whole time, also, for whenever I needed an idea, I just went to the family albums! I use tags a lot.

I had a massive database, maybe a thousand photographs, I had been approaching writing like an editor from the beginning. Clips like from the movie *Her*, were just in my mind for years.

I did each piece to order, as it were. Like a live performance. I didn't have any episodes stock piled to roll out. I revised as little as possible. There are so many things I want to go back and fix, but I don't, they are first ideas. Charcoal sketches. They can almost be watched in any order, non-linearly, chronologically the story moves from contextual to plot, so which comes first? Whatever you want. It's part of the interactive nature of the piece.

Go check out [Box of Birds](#) in its entirety (and *Currency of Despair*, if you can). It is ultimately an incredibly personal, emotional, and deeply moving story told using existing images and clips.

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Maya Hawke has edited eight feature length documentary films, including Werner Herzog's Cave of Forgotten Dreams, together with her husband, Joe Bini. Prior to that, she was assistant editor on eight of Herzog's films of the last twenty years, including Grizzly Man. Films she has edited have played at the Toronto, Telluride and Sundance film festivals. She has cut Apple iPhone commercials with Errol Morris. She is a published author. A year ago she quit editing to return to writing. She is now the creator of interactive social media storytelling experiments, Currency of Despair, and, currently, Box of Birds.

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