



# Close-up Christopher Chomyn, ASC

## When you were a child, what film made the strongest impression on you?

Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* inspired me to make my own Double 8mm films. Later, *The Godfather* introduced me to the power of cinematography.

## Which cinematographers, past or present, do you most admire?

Each for a different reason: Freddie Young [BSC], Gordon Willis [ASC], Owen Roizman [ASC], Sven Nykvist [ASC], Vittorio Storaro [ASC, AIC], Conrad Hall [ASC], Roger Deakins [ASC, BSC], Woody Omens [ASC], Ping Bin Lee. My list goes on...

## What sparked your interest in photography?

I understood from an early age that photography is not about copying reality; rather, it is about sharing a feeling that comes from the photographer, and not from the instrument. In seventh grade I had a teacher who taught me to develop and print film — I was hooked. I lived in the darkroom through college.

## Where did you train and/or study?

I majored in history at Fairfield University and took my first photography class there. I received my Master of Fine Arts in film production from UCLA.

## Who were your early teachers or mentors?

My father taught me the importance of preparation. Sondra Steinman, Alison Wachstein and Kevin Wolfthal were my still-photography mentors. Miles Anderson trained me to be a set-lighting technician. Bill McDonald, Frank Valert and Owen Roizman were my cinematography teachers at UCLA. AC magazine continues to inform and educate me.

## What are some of your key artistic influences?

Everyday life experiences. Johannes Vermeer, Claude Monet, Andrew Wyeth, Edward Hopper and Maxfield Parrish. Jerry Uelsmann, Edward Weston and Diane Arbus, to name a few.

## How did you get your first break in the business?

I don't think anyone's path is a straight line. I have been given many 'first breaks' and had many false starts. My father was a television director; he helped me get my first job as a production assistant. Of course, I worked long hours for no pay to prove myself — but I made enough of an impression that I was able to keep working and learning. Years later, Roberto Quezada offered me a second-unit cinematographer opportunity.



## What has been your most satisfying moment on a project?

There are too many to count.

## Have you made any memorable blunders?

Who hasn't? The key is to own one's mistakes and to turn them into successes.

## What is the best professional advice you've ever received?

Share the credit for success and accept responsibility for mistakes.

## What recent books, films or artworks have inspired you?

I loved reading *The Shadow of the Wind*, and more recently have been hooked on Philip Kerr's Bernie Gunther series of noir detective novels set in Nazi Germany. Michael Haneke's films inspire me; I was captivated by *Caché* and was moved to tears by *Amour*. James Turrell's exhibit at LACMA was remarkable. I loved shooting the documentary *Levitated Mass* about Michael Heizer's monolithic sculpture.

## Do you have any favorite genres, or genres you would like to try?

My favorite films are intimate stories set against epic backdrops. David Lean and Akira Kurosawa were masters at this. My work spans several genres — I can't say that I have a favorite. I look for projects that interest and challenge me while offering the opportunity to work with inspiring and creative collaborators. Noir would be fun.

## If you weren't a cinematographer, what might you be doing instead?

Naval architect. I think I'd enjoy designing sailing-yachts.

## Which ASC cinematographers recommended you for membership?

I was honored to be recommended by Woody Omens, Owen Roizman and Hiro Narita.

## How has ASC membership impacted your life and career?

To be invited by one's heroes to join their ranks as a colleague is a great honor and obligation, but never a burden. As members we build on the legacy of those who preceded us. I enjoy my relationships with my peers and I am honored to mentor the next generation of cinematographers. Each time I pass through the doors of our Clubhouse, I feel a rush of excitement, and recognize how fortunate I am to be living my dream.