

When The Sky Was Blue

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A FILM BY
RAE CHOI

SCREEN QUEENSLAND & UNLESS PICTURES PRESENT "WHEN THE SKY WAS BLUE" FEATURING ELISE LI KRUGER, OAKLEY KWON, SARAH XU, YU SUN & HSIAO LING TANG
MUSIC BY BRODIE McALLISTER EDITED BY NAVAZ ILLAVA PRODUCTION DESIGNER ARUNDHATI MADAN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY BONITA CARZINO EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MEG O'CONNELL & JACKSON LAPSLEY SCOTT
PRODUCED BY SHEREE RAMAGE & RAE CHOI WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY RAE CHOI



unless PICTURES





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LOGLINE

One Sunday between meals and chores with her family, ten-year-old Leah experiences small but striking moments of longing and loss.

SUMMARY

A series of reimagined memories from writer/director Rae Choi's childhood, WHEN THE SKY WAS BLUE is a coming-of-age short film exploring themes of belonging, resistance and acceptance within the context of Chinese-Australian diasporic identities. Following a day in the life of ten-year-old Leah, the film portrays her struggle with knowing she is loved but not always feeling it, through the nuanced nature of inherited narratives and love languages. As both mother and daughter strive to do their best, the film ultimately reaches for embracing imperfect expressions of love.

Duration 14 mins

Completed October 2021

Shooting Format 16mm

Screening Format DCP

Sound 5.1

Aspect Ratio 1.66:1

Country of Production Australia

Language English, Mandarin

Rae Choi

Writer, Director & Producer

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Sheree Ramage

Producer

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SYNOPSIS

LEAH, a sensitive, artistically inclined 10-year-old girl, finds herself torn between the desire to please her parents and the need to forge her own identity.

During a bustling Sunday lunch at a Chinese restaurant after church, Leah grapples with her complex feelings about her sense of belonging within her Chinese family and specifically, her relationship with her strict, hardworking mother, LI-JING. Overhearing Li-Jing and a church auntie exchanging stories and boasting about their children's achievements, Leah retreats to the bathroom. While gazing at her reflection in the bathroom mirror, she wonders what it would be like to have a different, more pointed nose. A beautiful tropical fish in the restaurant's tank becomes a symbol of her own entrapment.

Leah's day takes an unexpected turn when she discovers another girl her age hiding beneath their restaurant table. Their encounter is short-lived as Li-Jing scolds Leah.

As the family heads home with a car full of Asian groceries, Leah glimpses moments of Li-Jing that reveal surprising similarities. Li-Jing faces her husband's indifference regarding dinner plans and seeks solace in the expansive blue sky. Interested in the girl she met at the restaurant, Leah cuts through an argument between her parents to ask about her and is delighted to learn she will soon attend her school. However, her excitement is crushed when she returns home to find her beloved pet fish has passed away.

Later, Leah struggles to scale a fish while helping her mother prepare dinner. For Li-Jing, this task is essential for their survival, and she insists on Leah doing it.

During dinner, YeYe (Grandpa) calls, and Leah awkwardly attempts a conversation in Mandarin and English before handing the phone to her father, who makes an unkind remark about her Chinese skills. Leah confronts him, and though her father dismisses her, Li-Jing takes notice of her daughter.

As Leah lies on her bed, her mother enters with a plate of cut fruit—a silent display of love. Leah begins to understand that her mother is doing her best, just like she is. She embraces her and takes her hand to go outside.

Leah and Li-Jing kneel at the spot where Leah buried her fish, holding incense. In this shared moment, Leah doesn't fully comprehend its significance but is thankful. She gazes up at the deepening blue sky.

AWARDS

SCREEN PRODUCERS AUSTRALIA AWARDS (2023)

Finalist, Best Short Film Production

AUSTRALIAN WRITERS' GUILD AWARDS (2022)

Nominated, Best Short Film

SCREENINGS

DHAKA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (2023)

Bangladesh

LATEST VISIONS FILM FESTIVAL (2023)

United Kingdom

CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL (2022)

United States

ASIAN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (2022)

United States

SVANETI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (2022)

Georgia

HEART OF GOLD INTERNATIONAL SHORT FILM FESTIVAL (2022)

Australia

BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (2021)

Australia



NOMINATED FOR BEST SHORT FILM
THE
AWGIES
55TH ANNUAL AWARDS





WRITER & DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I began writing this film during an incredibly transformative and transitional time, during which buried childhood memories would emerge and wade into my periphery, demanding that I pay attention. I was faced with confronting reminders of loneliness and self-doubt, and the sweeping ambivalence that comes with straddling multiple worlds and being too young to understand how or why.

In looking back, I found that I was able to bring more compassion to my younger self, as well as to those around me, especially my mother. I became preoccupied with examining generational differences and the intersection of languages – when love language meets cultural modes of communication. Particularly as I contemplate motherhood myself, I wonder about mother-daughter relationships and the nature of inherited and mirrored narratives. What do we pass on? Can we intend not to, and do so anyway?

My hope is that the film sparks more of these questions and offers some sense of the acceptance required to embrace the expansive, meandering and brave task of loving imperfectly.



RAE CHOI // Writer, Director & Producer

Rae Choi is a filmmaker and lawyer based in Meanjin (Brisbane, Australia). Through her work as a producer, Rae is a firm believer that relationships are the project. She produced short film *MY HOME IS A DOG THAT LIVES INSIDE ME* (2017) which screened at Edinburgh International Film Festival and New Orleans Film Festival, and worked with the same team on their first feature film *PARIS FUNERAL*, 1972 (2021). Adopting a similar process as with their previous project, the film is unscripted, shot on 16mm with non-actors and on location in Australia, France and Italy.

Venturing into writing and directing, Rae harnesses relational filmmaking practices to make nuanced, culturally specific work through a personally intimate lens. *WHEN THE SKY WAS BLUE* is Rae's debut film in the role of writer and director. She also co-wrote and produced *VIV'S SILLY MANGO*, a coming-of-age short for ABC ME and Screen Australia's joint initiative The Kaleidoscope Project. She is currently developing several of her own projects.

SHEREE RAMAGE // Producer

Sheree Ramage has 15 years of project management experience within the film industry, having worked on prestigious international events such as the Asia Pacific Screen Awards, Edinburgh International Film Festival, London Film Festival and Brisbane International Film Festival.

In 2021 she founded the Asia Pacific Young Audience Award, which screens three Asia Pacific films to a jury of young people and gives them exposure to and space for discourse about international cinema, creating industry connections and tertiary pathways in film.

Sheree holds a Bachelor of Business from the Queensland University of Technology and was a peer assessor for Arts Queensland. Currently, she is a participant in Asialink Business Leaders Program, and Chair of Heart of Gold International Short Film Festival.

BONITA CARZINO // Director of Photography

Bonita Carzino is a Naarm / Melbourne based cinematographer. Since graduating from Swinburne University with a Bachelor of Film & TV in 2017, she has been working on short films, music videos and commercial work, growing and developing her skills as a cinematographer working with both film and digital.

Bonita's work has been shown at various international film festivals such as Berlin International Film Festival

in 2020 for short film GREVILLEA which also had its Australian premiere at Sydney Film Festival 2020; St Kilda Film Festival 2018 for graduate short film SKATES which was also awarded Best Short film at Emerge Short Film Festival 2018 and received an Award of Merit for Women filmmakers at Accolade Global Film Competition 2019.

Bonita has also had her work premiered online at publications like Fashion Journal Magazine and Clipped TV: Clip of the Day.

ARUNDHATI MADAN // Production Designer

Arundhati Madan graduated from a Fine Arts (Fashion Design) degree from the Queensland University of Technology in 2015. She first worked in film as the costume designer and assistant production designer on the short film IN A CANE FIELD (2016). She has since worked as a Costume Assistant for a production by Expressions Dance Company, in Set and Visual Merchandising, as well as Styling for artists such as Pete Murray, JDFR & Tori Forsyth. Most recently, Arundhati was working in product development for local jewellery business, Molten Store.

Through her creative endeavours, Arundhati has established an interest in communicating ideas through visual storytelling and supporting a director to execute their vision.



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CAST

Leah
ELISE LI KRUGER

Li-Jing
OAKLEY KWON

Fei-Hong
YU SUN

Claudia
SARAH XU

Josephine
HSIAO-LING TANG

Other Girl
GRAYA McIVER

Grandpa (YeYe)
PANG PING TING

CREW

Directed & Written by
RAE CHOI

Produced by
SHEREE RAMAGE
RAE CHOI

Executive Producers
MEG O'CONNELL
JACKSON LAPSLEY SCOTT

Casting
TOM McSWEENEY
DAVID NEWMAN

Editor
NAVAZ ILLAVA

Music Composer
BRODIE McALLISTER

Director of Photography
BONITA CARZINO

Production Designer
ARUNDHATI MADAN

Sound Designer & Mixer
DYLAN BARFIELD

Script Supervisor
SARAH DAHL

Script Supervisor's Attachment
MILLIE ROWLEY

Production Manager
NICK BUDDING

1st Assistant Director
KATE DILLON

Unit, Transport & Environmental
Manager
GEORGE LEVI
IMOGEN O'DOYLE

Unit Assistant
JOANNE WILKINSON

Production Assistant
RILEY LIM

1st AC
CINDY YOHANA

2nd AC
LILLI CORRIAS-SMITH
EMILY REID

Art Department Coordinator
HARRIETT WILLIAMS
MIRI BADGER

Art Department Assistant
AVA HAWES

Props Assistant
CLAUDIA CHOI

Art Supplier
LISA TRAN KELLY

Makeup Artist & Hairstylist
JENNIFER HOLT

Sound Recordist
MARY DUONG
BRODIE ROCCA

Boom Operator
HAGGAN DILLEWAARD

Performance Facilitator
ALEEA MONSOUR

Gaffer
ELLIE HAYWARD
PAIGE HILLIARD

Best Person
ALEX SHINGLES
ROBERT RILEY

LX Assistant
JOEY JENSEN
MEGAN KEENE

Vehicle Safety Driver
STEVE ISAAC ACS

Colourist
KALI BATEMAN

Music Mixed by
MARLY LÜSKE

Music Licensing
TYLER McLOUGHLAN,
THE SOUND POUND

Storyboard Artist
SAM UTER

Graphic Designer
CORNELIA VAN RIJSWIJK

Chinese Calligraphy
ERIC LIN

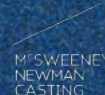
Stills Photographer
MEGAN KEENE

Dialect Coach
DORIS NGIE-LIK CHOI

Chaperones
LINGYIN TANG
REBECCA WANG
ROWENA McIVER

Medics
JO-ANNE WRAY
KEVIN SU

*This film was made on the land of
the Yuggera and Turrbal peoples,
whose sovereignty has never been
ceded.*



Executive Produced by



Developed & Produced with the assistance of



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