

# CINEMATOGRAPHY

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**Cinematography** involves the use of **lighting** and **composition** to create the images that will bring out the significance of a scene as visualized by the film director. The elements of cinematography are lighting, which helps create drama, mystery, suspense, and humor; composition or the arrangement of people and objects within the frame; and **movement**, which includes the mobility of the camera to change a vantage point.

The **cinematographer**, also called the **director of photography** (DOP), works directly with the production crew or shooting unit in the setup of a particular scene. The DOP scrutinizes the set together with the director and instructs the camera operator where to position the camera. He or she tells the gaffer where to place the lights and how to adjust the lighting, runs an exposure meter over the faces of the actors, and peers through the contrast filter to check the relationship between light and shadow. When everything is set up, the DOP advises the director who then steps up to the camera to approve its setup. On

the director's signal or call for "Roll camera ... action!" the camera starts grinding, the actors perform until the director yells "Cut!"

The early Filipino director-producers like Jose Nepomuceno and Jose Domingo Badilla were first of all highly competent professional photographers. Lighting then was basic illumination, merely to allow the camera to record images on film. But these pioneer filmmakers knew that cinematography was more than that. They knew the magic of the camera and lighting devices and followed their products to the laboratory, nursing the movie up to the projection room where it told its story on screen. Later, they learned to improvise to find solutions to problems of illumination and lack of proper lighting equipment. They made use of available lighting, using sun reflections and even automobile headlights in place of kleig lights. It became increasingly necessary to compensate for the adverse effects of strong lights, which could melt a hairpin on a star's coiffure.

In the absence of a school for cinematography in the country at the time, most practitioners learned their craft through training and experience. They started out with the camera crew, worked their way up as electricians and gaffers, finally found themselves promoted as assistant or full-fledged camera operators.



Ramon Estella on the director's chair directing *Kundiman*, 1941 (Cesar Hernando Collection)





Cinematographer Rody Lacap, film director Mike de Leon, and Mark Gil in *Batch '81*, 1982 (Cesar Hernando)

Higino Fallorina, Maria Clara award winner for *Baguio Cadets*, 1950, and *Roberta*, 1951, started at Philippine Films in 1935 as a stills photographer. A year later he became assistant cameraman and, in 1937, a full-fledged cameraman with *Gamu-gamong Naging Lawin* (Moth That Became a Hawk).

Tommy Marcelino first worked in the photo department of the *Philippines Free Press* before becoming an assistant cameraman to his father, Ricardo Marcelino, at Premiere Productions. Both father and son are Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS) awardees, the elder Ricardo for the Gerardo de Leon film *Huwag Mo Akong Limutin* (Never Forget Me), 1960, and the younger Tommy for *Paltik* (Homemade Gun), 1955.

Remigio Young, FAMAS awardee for *Luksang Tagumpay* (Dark Victory), 1956, started in the movies as a camera crew member for Jose Nepomuceno. After he became cameraman, he worked with various studios and established his own company for technical services in 1940. He is credited with the camera tricks in the fantasy

film *Ibong Adarna* (Adarna Bird), 1941, and for Rosa del Rosario's flight over the Bureau of Posts as the wonder woman Darna in the 1951 film *Darna* by Fernando Poe Sr's Royal Productions.

For years, particularly during the transitional 1950s and 1960s, it was assumed that no artistic film could be made in **color**. **Monochrome** was the medium of the "art film," of neorealism, of the New Wave and film masters from Bergman to Kurosawa. **Black and white** was the medium of unities and contrasts: the intensity of shadows, patterns of light and darkness, and the varying rough textures of a brightly illuminated or dimly lit scene. Color was used only in dream sequences and big production numbers in musicals where it added to the spectacle.

The first attempts of the major studios to shift to color in full-length films are seen in LVN's *Batalyon Trece* (13th Battalion), 1949; Premiere's *Ang Lumang Bahay sa Gulod* (The Old House on the Cliff), 1949; and Sampaguita's *The Big Broadcast*, 1962. The shift to color called for drastic changes in filming, and cinematographers had to subject



themselves to a different orientation. During the early years of color production, the **costume movie** became very popular. The choice of material increased the cost of production, and emphasized costume and set design. LVN played a leading role in the production of such films as *Prinsipe Amante* (Prince Amante), 1950; *Rodrigo de Villa*, 1952; *Dagohoy*, 1953; *Hawayana* (Hawaiian Girl), 1953; *Prinsipe Teñoso* (Prince Teñoso), 1954; *Medalyong Perlas* (Pearl Medallion), 1956; and *Casa Grande* (Mansion), 1958.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, when the studio system was in vogue, most cinematographers were part of the regular studio personnel assigned to particular film units. Then, with the studio system broken, cinematographers parceled out their services to film producers and directors with whom they felt artistically compatible. Mike Accion worked with Lamberto V. Avellana in *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, 1965, and Gerardo de Leon in *Ang Daigdig ng mga Api* (The World of the Oppressed), 1965. One of de Leon's early favorites was Emmanuel Rojas, first FAMAS Best Cinematography awardee for his work in *Sawa sa Lumang Simboryo* (Python in the Old Dome), 1952. Conrado Baltazar, Lino Brocka's favorite cinematographer, was awarded the Gawad Urian three years in succession for his work in Brocka's *Gumising Ka... Maruja* (Wake Up... Maruja), 1978; *Jaguar* (Guard), 1979; and *Angela Markado* (Angela the Marked One), 1980. Baltazar's creative association with Brocka ended with the cinematographer's fatal heart attack in 1988, while another latter-day Brocka cinematographer, Pedro Manding Jr, who worked on *Miguelito: Batang Rebelde* (Miguelito: Young Rebel), 1985, and *Gumapang Ka sa Lusak* (*Dirty Affair*), 1990, was murdered in 1990.

Some cinematographers have created a distinctive style, like Felipe Sacdalan in *Ito ang Pilipino* (Behold the Filipino), 1966; Ricardo Remias in *Kapag Puso'y Sinugatan* (When the Heart Is Wounded), 1967; Loreto Isleta in *Igorota (Mountain Maiden)*, 1968; Justo Paulino in *Lilet*, 1971; Nonong Rasca in *Nardong Putik*, 1972; Mike de Leon who did *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag (Manila: In the Claws of Light)*, 1975, before he became a prizewinning director; Romy Vitug, the acknowledged master of controlled brightness and bold color combinations, who did *Mga Bilanggong Birhen* (Caged Virgins); Fredy Conde in *Bakya Mo, Neneng* (Your Wooden Slippers, Neneng), 1977; Sergio Lobo in *Ang Lihim ng Guadalupe* (The Secret of Guadalupe), 1979; Ver Reyes in *Pagbabalik ng Panday* (Return of the Blacksmith), 1981; Rody Lacap, who exhibits his originality without contradicting a film's directorial intentions as seen in *Kisapmata* (In the Wink of an Eye), 1981; and *Batch '81*, 1982; Manolo Abaya, whose intense

personalism has become his own trademark as seen in *Karnal (Of the Flesh)*, 1983; Ely Cruz, who has shown considerable mettle in his craft, particularly in the polish and expressiveness of his camerawork as seen in *Scorpio Nights*, 1985; Johnny Araojo and Romulo Araojo in *Bagong Hari* (New King), 1986; Ricardo Jacinto in *Ibulong Mo sa Diyos* (Whisper to God), 1988; and Eduardo Jacinto in *Pahiram ng Isang Umaga* (Lend Me One Morning), 1989. Also notable were Philippine cinema's forays into underwater cinematography as exhibited in *Zamboanga (Fury in Paradise)*, 1935, *Dyesebel*, 1990, and *Muro-ami (Reef Hunters)*, 1999.

Since the advent of cinema, cinematography has continually been refined by its practitioners and has evolved steadily as an art form. Profound technological changes in the craft have occurred since the 1990s with the introduction of digital technology. This new **digital cinematography** is even credited as one of the main catalysts for the surge of independent or "indie" films in the country, which began in the late 1990s.

As early as the mid-1980s, the Japanese electronics giant Sony began introducing high-definition cameras but it was met with little enthusiasm by consumers. However, in 1997, with the introduction of the Sony HDCAM (high-definition camera) recorders and professional video cameras based on CCD (charge-coupled device) technology, the idea, now re-branded as "digital cinematography," began to attract the attention of filmmakers and cinematographers. Digital cinematography is the process of capturing movement as digital video images, as opposed to the traditional use of film stock. This form of digital capture may occur on video tape, hard disks, flash memory, or other media that can record digital data through the use of a **digital video/film camera**. Most recently, even mobile phones and tablet PCs (personal computers) equipped with high-definition video cameras are being used to shoot moving images. The images in these high-definition cameras are so sharp that their overall quality already approximates that of celluloid film. Furthermore, digital video cameras are cheaper and therefore more accessible compared to film. The same applies with the ancillary tools that are compatible with digital video, such as nonlinear editing, digital sound design and mixing, and a host of other tools used for filmmaking and animation. Thus, with digital video, the cost of production became significantly lower compared to that of celluloid film.

Two of the pioneers of **digital film** in the Philippines are independent filmmakers Jon Red and Khavn de la Cruz. When digital video was introduced in the mid-1990s, Red was among the first to use digital video for a full-length feature film. *Still Lives*, 1999, stars indie





Cinematographer  
Neil Daza  
(Photo courtesy of  
Ellen Ramos)

favorites Joel Torre, Nonie Buencamino, Alan Paule, and Ynez Veneracion. It screened as an official selection in the 2000 Singapore International Film Festival. He followed this up with *ASTIGmatism*, 2004, featuring a more mainstream cast of actors led by action superstar Robin Padilla, Albert Martinez, Francis Magalona, Jeffrey Quizon, and Alessandra de Rossi. It won the Silver DV (Digital Video) Award at the 28th Hong Kong International Film Festival.

On the other hand, de la Cruz, an experimental filmmaker and poet, began making films using a video camera and has never used celluloid film at all. With the arrival of the digital film, he wrote a manifesto titled “Digital Dekalogo: A Manifesto for a Filmless Philippines,” and posted it in his own website. Part of it reads: “Digital film, with its qualities of mobility, flexibility, intimacy, and accessibility, is the apt medium for a Third World country like the Philippines ... [T]he digital revolution has reduced the emphasis on technology and has reasserted the centrality of the filmmaker, the importance of the human condition over visual junk food” (de la Cruz 2014).

A few pre-digital cinematographers have successfully crossed over to digital filmmaking. Among these award-winning directors of photography is Rody Lacap, well-known for his work with Mike de Leon, Lino Brocka, and Marilou Diaz-Abaya. He used DV technology for digital films like *Paglipad ng Anghel (Flight of an Angel)*, 2011, and *Felix Manalo*, 2015.

Lee Meily is a director of photography who did *Crying Ladies*, 2003, and *Tanging Yaman (A Change of Heart)*, 2000. Neil Daza worked on a number of mainstream

movies like *Dekada '70 (The 1970s)* and indie films like *Bwaya (Crocodile)*, 2014.

With the accessibility of digital cameras, many cinematographers of different generations have come to the fore. Among these cinematographers and their works are Nap Jamir, who worked on *Ang Pagdadalagani ni Maximo Oliveros (The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros)*, 2005; Boy Yñiquez, who worked on *Kubrador (The Bet Collector)*, 2006; Raymond Red, who worked on *Himpapawid (Manila Skies)*, 2009; Christian Linaban, who worked on *Ang Damgo ni Eleuteria (The Dream of Eleuteria)*, 2010; Arvin Viola, who worked on *Ang Sayaw ng Dalawang Kaliwang Paa (The Dance of Two Left Feet)*, 2011; Lauro Rene Manda, who worked on *Norte, Hangganan ng Kasaysayan (Norte, the End of History)*, 2013; Pong Ignacio who is known for his work in *Tandem* and *Heneral Luna (General Luna)*, 2015; Odyssey Flores, who is known for *Magnifico*, 2003, and *Serbis (Service)*, 2008; and many others.

With the advent of the portable camera, new neorealist cinematic styles have emerged and affected the aesthetic delivery of many local films. In “capturing the moment” with a raw flavor, the technique of the “meandering camera” is a staple in many independent films such as *Kubrador*, *Serbis*, and *Kinatay (The Execution of P.)*, 2009.

The local cinematographers’ guild, the Filipino Society of Cinematographers, is represented in the Film Academy of the Philippines. ●

Source: de la Cruz 2014.