

DAWN

Todd M. Duym csc Crafts a Visual Poem

By Fanen Chiahem



“We were talking about what kind of film we wanted to make, and then the subject matter presented itself. The film was a result of us chatting about ideas and what inspired us as people and as filmmakers, and Jörn ultimately wanted to create a quiet, unassuming film that actually had a lasting impression on the viewer.”



Lining up the shot for the 100' dolly shot. Director Jörn Threlfall (left) and Todd M. Duym csc.

Cinematographer Todd M. Duym csc and his long-time collaborator, BAFTA-nominated director Jörn Threlfall, had been shooting commercials for several years when they decided it was time to make a narrative film. But they wanted the film to come about organically, so they spent a good year or so talking about current events, the future of the world and the art that inspired them.

It wasn't like he had an idea and wrote it down. It was an evolution for Jörn. We were talking about what kind of film we wanted to make, and then the subject matter presented itself,” Duym reveals. “The film was a result of us chatting about ideas and what inspired us as people and as filmmakers, and Jörn ultimately wanted to create a quiet, unassuming film that actually had a lasting impression on the viewer.”

Threlfall, who is based in London, U.K., spent a year in Santa Fe, New Mexico, surrounded by the desert, which became the inspiration for the short film *Dawn*, a 14-minute meditation on the 1945 nuclear test that was conducted around the Los Alamos region.

Once the director had found his story, Duym flew out to Santa Fe and the two of them spent time driving around in a pickup truck surveying the landscapes to come up with the visual language for the film. “There was a special quality and clarity of the light due to the altitude. It's dry, it's hot, it's vast. We wanted to capture that,” Duym offers.

Although they shot the film in just six days, they spent a month in preproduction finding locations, shooting stills of the environments and making photo boards. Because they wanted to remain as natural as possible, Duym captured the sun paths at all the locations, so he would know when the sun was coming up, when it was going to be high noon and when the sun was going down.

They decided to shoot the film with the anamorphic aspect ratio to best capture the striking landscapes and to keep the subjects small in the frame. “There's something lonely about the anamorphic aspect ratio,” Duym

Behind-the-scenes photos: Credit Justin Dawson



Credit: Justin Dawson

Chasing the stunt double on 100' of dolly with key grip Miguel Benavides.

says. "So I went back to L.A., and I cropped all of the images that we shot in the anamorphic aspect ratio. I worked to get the colours where we wanted them to be, I shared all of my sun paths in each one of the locations and then Jörn took all of that stuff and built storyboards based off of the shot list, the sun paths and the photographs."

They shot the first two days with a crew, the third and fourth with just essential crew members, and on the last two days, Duym and Threlfall just drove around capturing dawn and dusk shots, the cinematographer says.

"We'd wake up at 4 in the morning, we would shoot from when the sun would come up, different locations, two or three spots at that magic hour, and then we would wait till the end of the day, and we would do that again. We did that multiple times to get all those landscapes. It was a real jigsaw puzzle to be able to have enough time to do what we needed to do,"

"Dawn is a perfect example of what is possible when you allow people to do their best. Jörn surrounded himself with likeminded people and trusted their instincts. It was a very special project and I'm grateful for the experience."

Duym explains. "We never felt rushed in this project. We never felt like we had to settle and move on just because we had to get out of the location, or we had to get somewhere else. We always had enough time to settle into the environment and be present."

"There were a couple of times I had to put up lights, but not much," he continues. "For night stuff, obviously I had to put up lights, but any of the day exteriors I would try to minimize using bounces or negative whenever possible. I tried to have the least amount of influence on those images because the light was so incredible. Balanced and considered composition played the biggest role when photographing this film."

The scenes with the farmer in the adobe hut were captured at high noon when the sun was highest in the sky, using reflector boards, mirror boards and bounces to push the sunlight into the hut, Duym explains. "This location required a lot of gripping as I had some form of grip gear outside each window, as well as inside the hut. Luckily, Miguel Benavides was my key grip," he says. "My gaffer, Lamarr Gray, was brilliant and understood that subtlety was key. We used an ARRI SkyPanel S60-C, a LiteMat 4, a LiteMat 2 and a LiteMat 1 to create separation when needed. We used a lot of negative over the windows to avoid direct sunlight."

All of this was captured on the ALEXA Mini with a set of Hawk C-Series anamorphic lenses, "which for me is the perfect marriage between new and old," Duym says. "They come together in a beautiful complementary way. I just absolutely adore those lenses, and I also did something much different than I do normally – I shot with deep stops. I was shooting between a 5.6 and an 11 stop for most of the film. There's this real trend now to always be shooting wide open, but because we were shooting these vast landscapes, I really was inspired

by classic cinematography that you would see in films like *Lawrence of Arabia*, where everything is in focus, and it's just incredibly sharp, beautiful and expansive."

For the shot where the atomic bomb goes off, Duym created the illusion of an explosion using a pyramid of PAR cans. "I took a bunch of warm PAR cans, had a bottom row, then a middle row that was slightly smaller, and then a third row that was a little bit smaller. So when the explosion happened, it would happen as though it starts at the bottom and rises up," he explains. "That was all controlled on a dimmer board. And then when the camera pulls back and looks through the window where you see that bright red sky, that was one of the sky plates that we had shot on the last two days. The director and I were just looking for a deep red sky. We found this incredible sky that we ultimately enhanced a little bit in post, but it wasn't far off from what we captured in camera, and then we put that on the other side of the window."

Although he had a small crew, he says they were "all top notch. Everyone that came out to help was amazing and worked hard. So we were lucky. They were some of the best people I've ever worked with." He also praises Keslow Camera in Los Angeles for supplying the camera and lenses. "They've always been supportive of my career, so I'm grateful," he says.

Postproduction took place at MPC in London under the guidance of colourist George Kyriacou, working off a mood



Duym waiting for the sun to disappear behind the horizon.

board inspired by Andrei Tarkovsky Polaroids. "[Kyriacou] has a brilliant eye for colour and understood what we wanted to accomplish, so we gave him the opportunity to explore the image and elevate it to the fullest potential," Duym notes.

"Dawn is a perfect example of what is possible when you allow people to do their best," he says. "Jörn surrounded himself with likeminded people and trusted their instincts. It was a very special project and I'm grateful for the experience."

AN LED FOR EVERY PROJECT

flexible LED products & dimmers
check us out @ www.mossled.com
1.800.924.1585 - info@mossled.com
designed in toronto - fast canada-wide shipping

MOSS LED
www.mossled.com