

25 NEW FACES OF INDEPENDENT FILM SUMMER 2009

bradford young *

Growing up in Louisville, Ky., Bradford Young had his life planned out for him. It was expected, like all the males in his family, that after college Young would return home to take over the family business of running a funeral home. "I come from four generations of morticians," says Young, 31. "But I was so interested in arts, I always tried to figure out how I'd do the family business but also do art." Spending a lot of his childhood in art galleries, attending local theater and listening to his uncle (folk musician Leon Bibb) playing blues at family events, Young itched to express himself. After his mother passed away in 1993 he moved to Chicago to live with his father and there he was introduced to photography through the tutelage of Pulitzer-prizewinning photographer John H. White, and later, when attending Howard University, began to get into cinematography. "I spent a lot of time [at Howard] thinking of images through photo journalism," he says, "learning where the camera goes, where the right place for the camera to be, really being a custodian of the moment instead of just being ushered into the moment."

With the funeral home a distant memory, Young received his MFA in '04 from Howard, and three years later his work garnered attention when he lensed Dee Dee's short, *Pariah*, which won the Audience Award at the 2007 Los Angeles Film Festival. His profile continues to rise with the two distinctly different projects he shot that are currently on the festival circuit: Tina Mabry's Southern family drama, *Mississippi Damned*, and Paola Mendoza and Gloria La Morte's gripping immigrant story, *Entre nos*. Young says both films highlight his sensibilities on lighting. "I'm constantly battling this idea of reconstructive reality with artificial things," he says. "I'm always concerned that my intrusion of technology will take audiences out of the moment, so my ideal situation is to shoot with available light." He continues, "In *Mississippi Damned* I really tried to figure out way to do scenes without focusing lights or aiming lights. I discovered black silks on that film and used them a lot. I continued that for *Entre nos* - there are these heartfelt conversations and there's something about the essence of raw light in those scenes that sucks you in. It's really hard to recreate that [feeling] with film lights."

Currently working on Rees's feature version of *Pariah*, Young tries to work constantly between features, whether it be on commercials, music videos, or even *American Idol*, as earlier this year he shot Alicia Keys visiting Africa for the show's philanthropy segment. "I'm always concerned about not getting enough practice as a cinematographer," he says. "I always want to practice how to lens situations but also interactions - getting to know new people and discovering things in them." - Jason Guerrasio



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