



A Film by Ash Goh Hua

I'm Free Now, You Are Free

DIRECTOR & EDITOR ASH GOH HUA PRODUCER ARIELLE KNIGHT
CREATIVE PRODUCER MIKE AFRICA JR. DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JUDE CHEHAB
COLOR LANE BIRD SOUND MIX & DESIGN SAMANTHA SKINNER



**I'm Free Now,
You Are Free**

Directed by
Ash Goh Hua

Run Time:
14:44

Language:
English (USA)

Country of
Origin: USA

Country of
Filming: USA



Logline

I'm Free Now, You Are Free is a short documentary about the reunion and repair between Mike Africa Jr and his mother Debbie Africa—a formerly incarcerated political prisoner of the MOVE9.

Synopsis

I'm Free Now, You Are Free is a short documentary about the reunion and repair between Mike Africa Jr and his mother Debbie Africa—a formerly incarcerated political prisoner of the MOVE9. In 1978, Debbie, then 8 months pregnant, and many other MOVE family members were arrested after an attack by the Philadelphia Police Department; born in a prison cell, Mike Africa Jr. spent just three days with his mother before guards wrenched him away, and they spent the next 40 years struggling for freedom and for each other. In 2018, Mike Africa Jr. successfully organized to have his parents released on parole. “I realized that I had never seen her feet before,” was a remark he made when he reflected on Debbie’s homecoming. This film meditates on Black family preservation as resistance against the brutal legacies of state sanctioned family separation.



Director's Statement

I met Mike Africa Jr. through comradely circles and organizing work connected to prison abolition and the political prisoner liberation movement. We then began this process as Mike's own oral history project to tell his life story (just sitting down together for months, hours at a time, recording him recounting his life, and subsequently transcribing it into text), until we got to a point where we realized that utilizing a filmic audio-visual element could create a depth that expresses what he cannot explain. My work is here: showing different imaginations to demonstrate the possibility of something other than the condition that we are coerced to live under, to challenge and expose dominant ideologies. Dylan Rodriguez, cofounder of Critical Resistance, speaks of how unconvincing statistics and empirical evidence are, and that there is a whole other dimension that needs to be articulated within our political work: the cultural dimension, ways to retell a historical story, ways to narrate what is true and not true, ways to tell a story of a humanity of living as human being that draws from the very existence of those deemed to be other than human. It is so important, when addressing the death making institutions that are prisons, to talk about love, the life affirming essence. The film we made weaves together multiple non-linear threads to creatively tell this story of Mike and Debbie's love (in all its nuanced, complex truth): It utilizes the super 8 medium to tap into an abolitionist imagination where Black life is celebrated and sustained. Armed with a vintage super8 camera, the Africa family recreates family tapes that could've been, creating a portal into an alternate lifetime in which Mike and his mother were never separated—an insistence that this memory is what should've been.

Yet, the cultural dimension of our struggle cannot be alienated from the political struggle. One of the goals of making this film is for it to tangibly support organizing efforts for prison abolition and the political prisoner liberation movement. As a filmmaker and cultural worker, whose chosen family is a community of organizers, my work seeks to prop up and move in tandem with political grassroots organizing movements. My hope is that this is a film whose lifespan prefigures other relationships to institutions, and extend its consumption beyond passive spectatorship. This film would be best built into an organizing and political education curriculum, that actively engages/challenges audiences' reflexivity, while also posing/negotiating the continuous questions "What is filmmaking as praxis?", "How can an intentional and subversive programming create new dimensions for storytelling, when films live next to each other, and form bonds with each other?" and "How can we use this means to build coalition for the larger liberation struggle?"



Funding & Support

Jacob Burns Creative Culture Fellowship

NeXt Doc FleX Fund

IF/Then | Field of Vision

The NYC Women's Fund for Media, Music and Theatre by the City of New York Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment in association with The New York Foundation for the Arts.

Awards

Golden Starfish Award Nominee at the Hamptons International Film Festival

Best Short Doc Award at TIDE Film Festival

Festivals, Screenings & Events

- July 2020 — [Allied Media Conference 2020](#) workshop
- August 2020 — [BlackStar Film Festival](#) (World Premiere)
- October 2020 — [Camden International Film Festival](#); [Hamptons International Film Festival](#); [Hold, Hope and Heal: Spatial Justice in Black Spaces](#) on Archive Acts
- November 2020 — [TIDE Film Festival](#); [Cucalorus Film Festival](#)
- December 2020 — community screening with Mayday Space, co-sponsored by Common Notions, COVID Bail Out NYC, Campaign to Bring Mumia Home
- February 2021 — [Big Sky Documentary Film Festival](#)
- March 2021 — [Athena Film Festival](#); [Las Cruces Film Festival](#); [Salem Film Festival](#); [Ann Arbor Film Festival](#) (in competition)
- April 17, 2021 — [Screening Scholarship Media Festival](#)
- May 2021 — [San Diego Intl ShortsFest](#)
- June 2021 — Sheffield Doc Fest; Third Horizon Film Festival; BAMcinemafest
- & more TBA

Filmmaking Team

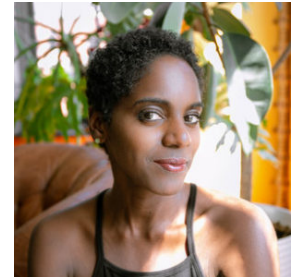
Ash Goh Hua: Director, Editor

Ash Goh Hua (any pronouns) is a filmmaker and cultural worker from Singapore, based in New York. She creates documentary and experimental based work informed by the politics of abolition and autonomy; their filmmaking practice imagines future acts of collective liberation. Ash is a Jacob Burns Creative Culture Fellow, a NeXtDoc Fellow, a Points North Institute North Star Fellow, and a Common Notions collective member.



Arielle Knight: Producer

Arielle is a New York based documentary film producer invested in using film to create moments of critical engagement, dissidence and play. She is a graduate of the New School for Public Engagement where she received an MA in Media Studies & Documentary Filmmaking. Since then, Arielle has worked with award-winning filmmakers like; Garrett Bradley, Catherine Gund, Peter Sillen. Her work has been supported by NYSCA, Chicken and Egg, Women Make Movies and IFP. Most recently she joined the Rada Film Group to support multiple projects in production and development.



Jude Chehab: Director of Photography

Jude Chehab is a Lebanese/American filmmaker whose early career work has landed over 20 international awards screening in film festivals worldwide. She was part of Abbas Kiarostami's last student group in Cuba, where she worked on a piece under his guidance; she was also part of the North Star Residency at CIFF and a NeXtDoc fellow. Jude's richly visual and intimate personal shooting style has illuminated issues close to her heart including the refugee crisis and female empowerment. Currently based in NYC, she is working on her first feature documentary which has received support from IDA and ITVS.



Lanee Bird: Colorist

Lanee Bird is an indigenous queer photographer, colorist and video editor based in Brooklyn, NY. She is experienced within the commercial beauty and fashion industry as a post-production artist. Through her personal work of photography she reveals the intersections of fine art and fetishism.



Samantha Skinner: Sound Design & Mix

Samantha Skinner is an Austin native and has worked in audio, podcasting, producing, and documentary storytelling for the past 5 years. Her work as a director with FemBeat, a feminist film production company that she co-founded, has been featured in festivals like Austin Short Film Fest, WAMMFest, and Babes Fest. Her work as an audio engineer has played in South by Southwest, Fantastic Fest, and Fusebox Festival.



Malav Kanuga: Development Producer

Malav Kanuga is a cultural anthropologist trained in ethnographic and archival studies of space, culture, and power, as well as uneven development in an internationalist and historical framework. As an urban researcher and as an activist, his work on the cultures and histories of popular mobilization and imagination attends to the articulations and resistances to domination and hierarchy in the urban and social lifeworlds of racial capitalism.



Mike Africa Jr: Creative Producer & Additional Camera (Super 8)

Mike Africa, Jr. is a member of The MOVE Organization, and the Black Philly Radical Collective. He is a motivational resilience speaker who pushes his “Never Give Up” message with his dynamic stage performances mixing music in his orations. Mike is the son of two political prisoners who were each sentenced to 100 years in prison. Mike was secretly born in a Philadelphia prison following a police raid on his family’s home. He is the subject of a phenomenal new HBO film titled 40 Years A Prisoner.





Credit list

I'm Free Now, You Are Free
featuring Mike Africa Jr, Debbie Africa, Alia Africa

director, editor: Ash Goh Hua
producer. Arielle Knight
creative producer. Mike Africa Jr
development producer. Malav Kanuga
consulting producers. Sean Weiner, Chloe Gbai, Caitlin Mae Burke
director of photography. Jude Chehab
colorist. Lanee Bird
sound mixer. Samantha Skinner
super 8. Lucas Gonzalez, Mike Africa Jr, Alia Africa

special thanks to Johanna Fernández

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supported by Jacob Burns Creative Culture program, NeXt Doc FleX Fund,
IF/Then Shorts, Field of Vision, the NYC Women's Fund for Media, Music
and Theatre by the City of New York Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment
in association with the New York Foundation for the Arts

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“There’s a need for a cultural component of political organizing,” says documentary filmmaker Ash Goh Hua via Zoom while visiting South Korea for a week-long fellowship. “I can come in as a cultural worker, essentially, and create things that support grassroots political movements.”

This mentality was the catalyst behind *I’m Free Now, You Are Free*, Ash’s debut short released by POV in 2020. The film captures the reunion of Mike Africa Jr. and his mother, Debbie Sims Africa, who was arrested in 1978 because of her involvement in the Philly-based political organization MOVE. Africa and eight other members (who became known as the MOVE 9) had their communal residence attacked by police, resulting in a shootout that fatally wounded an officer. Africa, eight months pregnant at the time, and the MOVE 9 were each sentenced to a maximum of 100 years in prison. After 40 years of political incarceration, she was released in 2018, finally reunited with the son she gave birth to just a month into her sentence. Now a father himself, Mike navigates the euphoria and awkwardness of getting to know Debbie, and she Mike, after decades of enforced estrangement.

“Political organizing preceded the film,” says Ash. “I met Mike through abolitionist circles, and we just started making this.” Originally, Africa Jr. had asked Ash to collaborate on an oral history of his life. Ash then convinced him to incorporate a visual element, which would capture a snapshot of his budding connection to his mother: “What drew me to *I’m Free Now, You Are Free* is that I have my own mommy issues.”

Indeed, the filmmaker’s relationship with their mother is unflinchingly explored in *The Feeling of Being Close to You*, Ash’s most recent short, which premiered at Palm Springs International ShortsFest earlier this year. By juxtaposing their father’s recently digitized archive of home movies with a taxing present-day phone call with their mother, the filmmaker is finally able to address (and perhaps even begin to heal from) childhood trauma. “When I talked to my mom about wanting to make this film, it was very difficult,” they say. “But we both wanted a connection to each other. When I moved to the U.S., I went a long time without talking to her. She decided to take a leap of faith and say yes to my project.”

Born and raised in Singapore, Ash originally had “grand ideas” of shooting *The Feeling of Being Close to You* as a feature there, but COVID, coupled with the daunting task of confronting their mother in person, curbed those plans. Still, helming this short remotely was incredibly taxing in its own right. “The phone calls were long, and we ended up talking over the span of a year,” they

say. "It was important to take time in between these calls to process things and continue talking without filming it."

After graduating with a BFA in digital filmmaking from Singapore's Nanyang Technological University in 2016, Ash moved to Austin, Texas, where they previously spent a semester abroad as an exchange student. After living there for a year, they relocated to New York City. However, they are currently hoping to figure out a way to live and work between NYC and Singapore ("Being in Seoul right now is really dope because I'm making those connections.")

The next project on the docket is Ash's debut feature—temporarily known as *Untitled Kiento Film*—which will follow a burgeoning reggaeton artist who is also a close friend of the filmmaker's. In late development (and still seeking funding), the film hinges on Kiento's long-awaited return to his hometown of Medellín, Colombia, which he has not been able to visit for roughly 20 years. As an undocumented trans man, he also worries that his homecoming trip might be terribly fraught. "What really drew me to the project is the material that already exists," says Ash. "There's some VHS footage from when he was a kid, but there are also these video diaries that he recorded of himself when he was transitioning, photobooth videos from the 2010s."

While they wait for production to pick up steam on *Untitled Kiento Film*, Ash patiently awaits *The Feeling of Being Close to You's* debut on the *New Yorker's* digital site on December 23. Despite mounting recognition and opportunities within the documentary world, the filmmaker staunchly believes that each project they tackle must act principally as a prospective tool to dismantle oppressive hierarchies. "If you're in a room of people who are not convinced of abolition, and you come in with facts and statistics, they're not going to get it," Ash concludes. "Ideology is emotional. That's why films can shift the dominant ideology."—NK/photo by Kristie Chua



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