GENERAL

american cinematographer september 2017

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American Cinematographer September 2017: A Deep Dive Into the Visionaries Who Shaped the Decade

September 2017 marked a pivotal moment in the world of cinema. Across Hollywood, indie circuits, and streaming platforms, a wave of fresh visual storytelling emerged, driven by a new generation of American cinematographers. This month saw the release of landmark films, the announcement of groundbreaking technology, and the rise of auteurs whose camera work would set the tone for the next decade. In this comprehensive guide, we explore the key figures, films, and industry trends that defined American cinematography in September 2017, and how they continue to influence the craft today.

Setting the Stage: The Cinematographic Landscape of 2017

Technological Shifts: From Digital to Hybrid

By 2017, the transition from analog film to digital had largely completed, but the debate over the best medium was far from settled. In September, several American cinematographers experimented with hybrid setups, combining the warmth of 35mm film with the flexibility of digital cameras. The introduction of the ARRI Alexa LF and the RED Weapon 8K camera provided unprecedented dynamic range and resolution, allowing filmmakers to capture details that were previously impossible.

Emerging Voices in the Academy

The American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) announced a new cohort of emerging cinematographers in September, many of whom had begun their careers in independent cinema. These artists were lauded for their bold color palettes, inventive use of light, and a willingness to push the boundaries of traditional storytelling. Their work would soon be showcased in festivals worldwide, influencing both mainstream and indie productions.

The Rise of Streaming Platforms

Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu were investing heavily in original content. Cinematographers were now tasked with creating high-quality visuals for smaller screens without compromising the cinematic experience. In September 2017, several high-profile series premiered, featuring cinematography that rivaled feature films in depth and artistry.

Iconic Films and Their Cinematographic Signatures

“Blade Runner 2049” – The Return of a Visual Masterpiece

Although released in October, the production of “Blade Runner 2049” began in September 2017, and its cinematographic approach became a benchmark for the industry. Roger Deakins, an ASC legend, collaborated closely with director Denis Villeneuve to create a neon-drenched, desaturated aesthetic that balanced futuristic bleakness with moments of stark beauty. The film's use of anamorphic lenses and meticulous lighting set a new standard for science-fiction visuals.

“The Shape of Water” – A Romantic Fantasy Through the Lens

Director Guillermo del Toro's 2017 masterpiece, filmed in late 2017, showcased the work of cinematographer

Guillermo Navarro. The film’s color grading leaned heavily into saturated blues and greens, mirroring the aquatic world of its protagonist. Navarro's careful manipulation of natural light and reflective surfaces created an immersive atmosphere that earned the film an Academy Award for Best Cinematography.

“Get Out” – Horror Meets Social Commentary

Jordan Peele's debut feature, shot in 2017, featured cinematographer Bradford Young. Young’s use of high-contrast lighting and tight framing amplified the film’s unsettling tone. The choice to shoot on a RED camera provided the flexibility to shoot in low-light conditions, essential for the film’s suspenseful scenes. The result was a visual narrative that complemented the film’s social critique.

Spotlight on Emerging American Cinematographers

Rachel Morrison – Breaking Barriers

Rachel Morrison made history as the first woman to win the Academy Award for Best Cinematography for “Mudbound” (2017). In September, she was highlighted by ASC for her innovative use of natural light and her ability to capture the emotional depth of rural landscapes. Morrison’s work on “The Shape of Water” further cemented her reputation as a visionary who blends technical mastery with storytelling.

Christopher Doyle – A Cross-Cultural Influence

While Doyle is a celebrated Hong Kong cinematographer, his work in American cinema during September 2017 had a significant impact. His collaboration with director Alejandro González Iñárritu on “The Revenant” showcased his signature fluid camera movements and naturalistic lighting, influencing a generation of American cinematographers to embrace more organic shooting styles.

Emmanuel Lubezki – The Master of Naturalism

Known for his long takes and natural lighting, Lubezki’s work on “The Revenant” (released in 2015) continued to resonate with filmmakers in 2017. In September, he served as a mentor for several emerging cinematographers, emphasizing the importance of pre-visualization and collaboration with directors to achieve a cohesive visual narrative.

Key Techniques and Trends in 2017

Color Grading and Post-Production

September 2017 saw a shift toward more stylized color grading. Cinematographers began experimenting with LUTs (Look-Up Tables) that allowed them to apply cinematic color palettes during filming, reducing the workload in post-production. This technique enabled a more efficient workflow without sacrificing visual quality.

High Dynamic Range (HDR) Imaging

HDR technology became more accessible to independent filmmakers. Cinematographers started shooting in HDR to capture a broader range of light and color, enhancing the viewer's experience. The adoption of HDR in September 2017 paved the way for its widespread use in streaming platforms, where image quality is paramount.

Drone Cinematography

The use of drones for aerial shots became mainstream in September 2017. Cinematographers leveraged drones to capture sweeping landscapes and dynamic movement, adding a new dimension to storytelling. The technology was especially popular in action and fantasy films, where expansive vistas were essential.

Industry Events and Milestones

American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) Awards

The ASC's annual awards ceremony in September 2017 celebrated the year's best in cinematography. Highlights included awards for “Blade Runner 2049,” “The Shape of Water,” and “Get Out.” The ceremony also honored emerging talent, reflecting the industry's commitment to nurturing new voices.

Film Festivals

September 2017 was a busy month for film festivals. The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) opened with a showcase of American films that highlighted innovative cinematography. The Sundance Film Festival, also in September, featured several shorts and features that pushed the visual boundaries of independent cinema.

Technology Launches

In September, major camera manufacturers announced new lenses and sensor upgrades. The Canon EOS C300 Mark III and the Sony FX9 were among the most anticipated releases, offering improved low-light performance and higher frame rates, which appealed to cinematographers seeking greater creative control.

How September 2017 Influenced Modern Cinematography

Emphasis on Collaboration

One of the key takeaways from September 2017 was the importance of collaboration between directors and cinematographers. Projects like “Blade Runner 2049” and “Get Out” demonstrated that a strong partnership can lead to groundbreaking visual storytelling. Modern cinematographers continue to prioritize communication and shared vision to achieve cinematic excellence.

Technological Adoption as a Creative Tool

Rather than viewing technology as a hurdle, cinematographers in September 2017 embraced it as an extension of their creative toolkit. The widespread use of drones, HDR, and hybrid camera setups set a precedent for future productions, encouraging filmmakers to experiment with new techniques to enhance narrative depth.

Inclusivity and Diversity in Visual Storytelling

The achievements of cinematographers like Rachel Morrison in September 2017 highlighted the need for greater diversity behind the camera. Their success has inspired a new generation of cinematographers from diverse backgrounds, enriching the industry with fresh perspectives and innovative visual styles.

Practical Tips for Aspiring Cinematographers

1. Master the Fundamentals: Understanding lighting, composition, and camera mechanics is essential. Practice with both film and digital sensors to grasp their nuances.
2. Stay Updated on Technology: Keep abreast of the latest camera models, lenses, and post-production tools. Attend workshops and webinars to learn new techniques.
3. Build a Portfolio: Showcase a range of projects, from short films to music videos, highlighting your versatility.
4. Network: Attend film festivals, join cinematography forums, and collaborate with filmmakers to expand your professional connections.
5. Seek Mentorship: Learn from experienced cinematographers. Their insights can guide you through technical challenges and creative decisions.

Conclusion

September 2017 was more than a calendar month; it was a catalyst for change in American cinematography. The convergence of technological innovation, emerging talent, and groundbreaking films set a new standard for visual storytelling. Today, the legacy of that month lives on in every frame shot by cinematographers who continue to push the boundaries of the medium. Whether you're a seasoned professional or an aspiring artist, the lessons from September 2017 remind us that the fusion of creativity, technology, and collaboration is the key to crafting unforgettable cinematic experiences.

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