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Meaghan Kimball



photo credit: BFA

By Danny Deza

Meaghan Kimball craved a fresh start, some inspiration, a stint in a foreign land where no one knew her name. Berlin hit the spot.

In 2004, she left her home in Los Angeles to tour Europe and came across this growing capital, where a new generation lives among streets that were once divided. Everything was new, and an adventure was waiting.

"A friend said it was my *Eat, Pray, Love* moment. I was living abroad just for the sake of living abroad with no destiny of making a film," she explained.

What was meant to be a three-month summer break turned into a yearlong exploration of a culture with a long history of American influence. This filmmaker stumbled upon a documentary idea without even wanting to.

While sitting in a Berlin café, specks of the United States could not be ignored. American slang dominated German magazines and new acquaintances were eager to share their ideologies on American culture—good or bad.

"They knew the music, they knew the songs, they knew American television and movies better than I did. So that was pretty remarkable," she said.

Whether it's globalization or a kinship developed from a dark past, Meaghan found a notable bond between Germany and the United States that was worth exploring. After interviewing dozens of cultural influencers in Berlin—professors, journalists, artists, etc.—she found a new obsession and decided to tackle her first full-length documentary. She called it *Blau Jeans*.

"Once I started exploring that, it really led to another idea about the movie, which is about how [Germans] see us and what makes Europe and Germany—Berlin in particular—love us and what makes them hate us," she said.

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Meaghan has always been the artsy type with an appetite for pop culture. This San Francisco native enjoys the art of piecing things together. From directing films to applying her detailed taste in décor to her Upper East Side studio, this bubbly brunette has an eye for getting things just right.

As we both enjoyed a glass of wine in her kitchen, every possession surrounding us had an origin that needed to be explained. From her mother's china to a trinket from her time abroad, Meaghan's fascination with the connections between the past and the present holds true in her stylish NYC apartment.

"As I talked with [cultural experts] I realized how important the past was in shaping their views, and if I was going to show how the love and hate relationship was developed I had to go into the past," she said.

Nowadays, it seems like American pop culture can't be ignored in Berlin, but sometimes in order to understand the present, the past must be explored. The city's youth appears to criticize American culture more than its older counterparts.

Meaghan recalls interviewing Winfried Fluck, a professor and chair for American Culture for the JFKennedy Institute, at the Freie Universität. He depicted memories of heroic soldiers who once saved the day in a post WWII Germany.

"He remembers how this American soldier came to him with candy and Coca-Cola, and how this memory felt like a modern hero helping him out of this desolate place," she said. "As someone from our generation, my generation, I couldn't really visualize how America really touched someone like that, and that was the America people did love in the past."

After long hours and frequent trips across the pond, Meaghan returned with priceless knowledge. Although her documentary is primarily filmed through the perspective of German subjects, she kept her fellow Americans in mind.

"I really made this for an American audience because I feel like one of the problems they critique about us is that we don't know enough about people beyond our borders," she said. "This film highlights pivotal parts of American European history that's mixed in with culture, so it's a way of understanding how European 20th century took place.

In 2009, after a long five years and moments of wanting to call it quits, Meaghan finished *Blau Jeans*. The ever-changing amount of information flowing in during the filming process can be overwhelming to digest, but the recognition at film festivals made the long journey worth it.

From 2009 to 2011, *Blau Jeans* toured the film festival circuit. It won awards at the International Television Festival, Rhode Island International Film Festival and the World Fest Film Festival in Houston.

"Making a film is not easy. I was really lucky because I had a really great team of people," she said. "That's why it's so nice to win an award, and it's so nice for the people who worked on it, not just for me. To have this merit is great."

Now, *Blau Jeans* is available streaming online and being shown at various universities around the world.

Meaghan's curiosity turned into the inspiration she needed. What was meant to be a breather from her homeland exposed her to ideas that led to an award-winning career.

"It was a whole new challenge and a different sensibility. Like running a sprint versus running a marathon," she said. "It's a process in the moment, always discovering something that you didn't expect."