

PHOTO- GRAPHIC MEMORY

A film by

Ross McElwee

87 minutes; HDCAM, Blu-ray and ProRes; 16:9/1.77:1; Stereo; English & French w/ English subtitles;
United States/France



FIRST RUN FEATURES

The Film Center Building

630 Ninth Ave. #1213

New York, NY 10036

(212) 243-0600 / Fax (212) 989-7649

Website: www.firstrunfeatures.com

Email: info@firstrunfeatures.com

www.firstrunfeatures.com/photographicmemory

Synopsis

Filmmaker Ross McElwee (*Sherman's March*, *Bright Leaves*) finds himself in frequent conflict with his son, a young adult who seems addicted to and distracted by the virtual worlds of the internet. To understand his fractured love for his son, McElwee travels back to St. Quay-Portrieux in Brittany for the first time in decades to retrace his own journey into adulthood. A meditation on the passing of time, the praxis of photography and film, and the digital versus analog divide.

Director's Statement

Raising a teenage son is far more difficult than making a documentary film, but to attempt to do both simultaneously is madness. In *Photographic Memory*, I try doing both. At first, I imagined my film, shot in a French village where I had found work as a wedding photographer 38 years ago, might be a kind of Proustian meditation on lost love, the accuracy and fallacy of memory, and what it means to take a photograph. My son would have none of this. "That's so boring, Dad!" So I placed scenes of him throughout the film, and now it is not so boring. In fact some moments in the film are fairly outrageous. But if I may say so, it's still stubbornly Proustian.

Filmmaker Bios

Ross McElwee, filmmaker

Ross McElwee has made nine feature-length documentaries as well as a number of shorter films. *Sherman's March* has won numerous awards, including Best Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival. *Time Indefinite* and *Six O'Clock News* won a number of festival awards before being distributed theatrically throughout the United States. *Bright Leaves* premiered at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival's Directors' Fortnight, and *In Paraguay* premiered in the Venice Film Festival Orizzonti Section in 2008. McElwee's films have also been included in the festivals of Berlin, London, Vienna, Rotterdam, Florence, Sydney, Wellington, and Gwangju, South Korea, as well as Cinema du Reel in Paris. Retrospective of his films include those presented by The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; Doc Lisboa, One World (Prague), Encuentros del Otro Cine (Quito), and Périphérie/Centre de Création Cinématographique in Paris in 2004. McElwee teaches documentary filmmaking in the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University.

Marie Emmanuelle Hartness, producer

Marie-Emmanuelle Hartness is a specialist in the adaption of theater and film across multiple media and languages. Hartness has been involved in films appearing in festivals of Cannes, Toronto, Prague, Paris, Clermont-Ferrand, and Locarno. Born in Paris, France she completed research work at la Sorbonne in 2001, and has accumulated experience in various independent multimedia production formats, including screenwriting, literature, translation, television, theater and film.

Sabrina Zanella-Foresi, editor

Sabrina Zanella-Foresi has been making films since 1991. She has directed, produced, and edited more than 20 experimental and non-fiction short films and videos. Her feature-length editing credits include: *Shadow of the House: Photographer Abelardo Morell*, directed by Allie Humenuk (2007); *Twisted*, directed by Laurel Chiten (PBS Independent Lens, 2007); *A Jew Among the Germans*, directed by Marian Marzynski (PBS Frontline, 2005); *Damrell's Fire* (PBS, 2005), *American Wake* (2004), and *Touched* (2003). She has acted as consulting editor on several documentaries, including *For the Love of Movies*, *Buddy*, and *Any: In and Out of Focus*. Zanella-Foresi also has six years of university teaching experience in Film/Video Production and Film Studies at Boston University, Harvard University, Emerson College, University of Massachusetts-Boston, and the Massachusetts College of Art.

Adrian McElwee, actor / production assistant

Adrian McElwee has made appearances in several of Ross McElwee's highly acclaimed films, including *In Paraguay*, *Bright Leaves*, and *Time Indefinite*. He has also assisted in shooting and doing technical work for some of Ross's films. Adrian has made appearances at various film festivals including: New York, Toronto, Cannes, Venice, Portugal, Ecuador, Paris, Vancouver, Hawaii, Pesaro. In addition to his entrepreneurial and creative work, Adrian McElwee continues to pursue his passion for freestyle skiing and filming these exploits both on mountains and in snowy urban streets.

Credits

Produced by	MARIE-EMMANUELLE HARTNESS, ROSS MCELWEE
Narration	ROSS MCELWEE
Cinematography	ROSS MCELWEE
Additional Camera	ADRIAN MCELWEE, NICOLE PROWELL
Editor	SABRINA ZANELLA-FORESI
Assistant Editor	NICOLE PROWELL, ETHAN GOLDHAMMER
Graphic Design	ANDREW HARTNESS, HARTNESS VISION LLC
Titles and Color Correction	JUGURTHA OUAR
Sound Mix	LIONEL GUERNOUN
Co-Produced By	ST. QUAY FILMS, BOSTON, FRENCH CONNECTION FILMS, PARIS
In Association With	ARTE-FRANCE - LA LUCARNE
Arte Documentary Program Unit	PIERRETTE OMINIETTI
Arte Program Manager	LUCIANO RIGOLINI

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/07/movies/ross-mcelwees-photographic-memory-captures-his-life.html>

The New York Times

Camera Angling to Reconcile Then and Now

Ross McElwee's 'Photographic Memory' Captures His Life

By JOHN ANDERSON

Published: October 5, 2012

AMID the new and old footage, still photos and wobbly recollections that make up Ross McElwee's latest film, "Photographic Memory," is a scene of his son, Adrian, at the age of 7, baiting a hook and being asked why he likes to fish. "The deep surprise of the ocean," he replies sagely, providing a metaphor not only for life, but also for his father's brand of filmmaking.

"Photographic Memory," which opens in New York on Friday, continues Mr. McElwee's cinema of self, a k a "personal documentary," by which nonfiction filmmakers use autobiography as a springboard for exploring larger themes, and perhaps even greater truths. He never scouts locations, conducts pre-interviews or does research, and the process has produced acclaimed work like "Sherman's March," "Time Indefinite" and "Bright Leaves," as well as a devoted following both inside and outside Harvard, where he has taught filmmaking since the '80s.

In 2010, having found himself at loggerheads with Adrian (now 22, an extreme skier and relentless Internet surfer), Mr. McElwee decided to revisit his own early 20s. He went back to France, where he had worked as a wedding photographer, and, armed with a handful of his photographs and his memories, looked up a woman he'd once loved and tried to reconcile his recollections to reality. To say he was surprised would be like calling Moby Dick a fish.

"The attraction of fishing," Mr. McElwee said by phone, "is that you don't know what's going to happen. And the attraction of this kind of filmmaking is you don't know what's going to happen. There's just something about that yearning for

spontaneity and having your expectations defied, or shifted, that's very important to me as a filmmaker. It all goes back to cinéma vérité at M.I.T."

It was at M.I.T., where Mr. McElwee received a master's degree in filmmaking in 1977, that a small but influential revolution had started the previous decade. Many of the faculty members at its architecture department had come out of the German Bauhaus, and they initiated programs reflecting a multidisciplinary curriculum, including the Creative Photography Laboratory, the Center for Advanced Visual Studies and the film section, led by Richard Leacock and Ed Pincus. The film section's graduate program, begun in 1975, would attract Mr. McElwee, his fellow filmmakers-to-be Michel Negroponete and Robb Moss, and Richard Peña (the outgoing programming director of the Film Society of Lincoln Center).

"Ricky Leacock brought to M.I.T. the American cinéma-vérité dogma," Mr. Negroponete said. "We were not permitted to shoot interviews. Our cameras had to be observational. No music or voice-over was permitted. I think Lars von Trier's Dogme 95 paled in comparison."

Mr. Pincus, however, was going his own way, with the film "Diaries."

"The subject was his own life and his marriage," Mr. Negroponete said. "Ross McElwee, Robb Moss and I, and all the other students in the program at the time, saw 'Diaries' as it evolved. Ed was breaking the barrier between subject and filmmaker."

They could hear Mr. Pincus talking to his subjects and, to their surprise, the dialogue remained in the film. There were references to the making of the film, and they were included too. And because of "modern" 16-millimeter technology Mr. Pincus could work solo: no sound person, no gaffer, no assistants.

"Today it may be hard for people to understand how unconventional and radical these ideas seemed to us in the mid-1970s," Mr. Negroponete said. "But Ed was breaking every single rule of so-called professional documentary filmmaking, and he inspired us to do the same."

One of Mr. McElwee's contributions to the form was the literary sensibility of a Southern writer. (He is from North Carolina.) "He expanded the vocabulary of the personal documentary," Mr. Pincus said from his home in Vermont. "We tried to stay

away from voice-over, and he showed us how it could be a wonderful, creative element.”

Mr. Pincus, who has a background in philosophy, said he traced the attitude of personal documentary back to Hume. “He called personal identity ‘a quandary of perceptions.’ And I wanted to see how much of that we could get through.”

In “Photographic Memory” Mr. McElwee just wants to get through to his son. The little boy with the fishing rod has grown into a seemingly sullen young man, who in the eyes of his father is an enormous risk taker without connections to much beyond his iPhone and virtual communities. Some parents will be sympathetic, some will be exasperated by Mr. McElwee’s lack of exasperation, although he’s often described as a Southern gentleman. The critic Gerald Peary, who was at *The Real Paper* in Boston, recalled that he didn’t like “Space Coast,” a 1979 film Mr. McElwee and Mr. Negroponte made about the closing of Cape Canaveral. Mr. Negroponte yelled at him and demanded he watch again, Mr. Peary said, but “Ross is very polite and accepted the criticism graciously.”

Mr. Peary said that appreciating the films, with their often languorous pace, and unconventional structures, usually took time — something the filmmaker Steven Ascher, who, with Mr. Pincus, wrote the seminal “*Filmmaker’s Handbook*” cited as a key to the entire movement: subject matter and stories that can be revealed only over time.

“One thing ‘Diaries’ pioneered was filming mundane, everyday moments, which traditionally would have been considered home movies, but as part of a film they take on a different meaning,” Mr. Ascher said. “Suddenly it’s documentary footage. What’s the difference? When those themes are put up against each other, they start to speak about different things.

“I think it’s interesting in ‘Photographic Memory’ that Ross is going back to a past that he has still photographs and memories of, and he’s confronted with how his world has changed and how the memories propped up by those images need to be revised. He may have gotten it wrong.” And if you get it wrong, he said, “you are risking losing these memories that are an important part of your life.”

One of the subtexts of “Photographic Memory” is that someone like Adrian, a child of the digital age, would never make a similar film.

“Because we have a few images, they are more precious to us,” Mr. McElwee said.
“Adrian’s generation has so many that they’re drowning.”

<http://www.timeout.com/us/film/photographic-memory>



Photographic Memory

Time Out rating: 4/5

Time grows ever more indefinite for autobiographical documentarian Ross McElwee. His melancholic new film *Photographic Memory* finds him contemplating a daunting question: “Seriously: How did I get to be this old?” Now in his 60s and frustrated and confused by his college-age son Adrian’s increasingly obnoxious behavior, McElwee finds himself reflecting on his own past as an aimless twentysomething, when he briefly lived in France, working as the assistant to a philosophical photographer named Maurice and romancing a beautiful young woman named Maud. Curious what happened to these two key figures from his life, he travels back to Brittany to try to find them.

As in his previous work, McElwee serves as his own subject, cameraman, interviewer and narrator, drawing his way through Brittany past and present; making new friends and sifting through his memories—both photo- and neurochemical—of the old ones he’s lost. It’s a personal journey, but one that speaks to universal ideas about aging, fatherhood and the way, as Maurice once put it, that “time wears on a photograph, erodes it, until all of its context is gone.” McElwee’s quietly reassuring voice dominates the film, but that doesn’t mean he can’t craft a magnificently eloquent image when he wants to, as in the moment when he frames Adrian, seated in a coffee shop, inside his own reflection in the shop’s front window.

Matt Singer | Tue Oct 9

<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117947854/>



Photographic Memory

Mon., Jul. 2, 2012,

By EDDIE COCKRELL

Ross McElwee continues his Socratic mandate of living a fully examined life with the assured and insightful "Photographic Memory," in which the inevitable sojourn into his past once again helps him understand the present and brace for the future. In the quarter-century since "Sherman's March" announced the helmer's droll wit and fearless instinct for turning an unblinking lens on his life's minutiae, he's nurtured a faithful fest and ancillary aud (via longtime domestic distrib First Run Features) that can be counted on to remember and spread the word.

In his 1993 docu "Time Indefinite," McElwee and his wife have a son, Adrian. The boy has subsequently popped up in two of his father's films, "Bright Leaves" (2003) and "In Paraguay" (2008).

Now a media-savvy young adult with the requisite attitude, Adrian here provokes Dad's half-hearted ire and complete consternation, to the point where the elder McElwee decides to revisit a seaside French town where he'd worked for a time when he was about his son's age, in order to glean some insight into their friction. Once there, memories of courting the vivacious Maud Corbel-Rouchy spur the inevitable search to reconnect with his former flame.

The pic's pleasures are subtle yet resonant, as the helmer slowly but with quiet determination ties these two strands together, to his satisfaction as well as the audience's.

There's an appealingly elegiac feel to both stories: In France, he compares his old photographs with the locations today, and his eventual rapprochement with Corbel-Rouchy over her sauteed frogs' legs is quite moving. Once home, he seems to have gathered the requisite strength to let Adrian, to whom the pic is dedicated, be Adrian. "Seriously, how did I get to be this old?" he wonders at one point, undoubtedly verbalizing what his longtime viewers must be thinking as well.

As befits McElwee's one-man-band strategy, the tech package is refreshingly straightforward and unfussy. Pic reps his first digitally shot endeavor, which of course prompts an onscreen elegy to the enduring pleasures of film.

<http://www.villagevoice.com/2012-10-10/film/photographic-memory-film-review/>

the village
VOICE

Photographic Memory

By **Nick Schager** Wednesday, Oct 10 2012

Ross McElwee attempts to understand his son in the present day by revisiting his own past in *Photographic Memory*, an autobiographical doc in which the acclaimed filmmaker travels back to the French countryside where he spent part of his youth to reconnect with early years that, in their risky, aimless excitement, mirror his teen offspring Adrian's directionless circumstances. McElwee believes that finding Maurice and Maude—his French wedding-photographer employer/mentor and lover, respectively—is the key to coming to terms with Adrian's life, which is full of drinking, pot-smoking, and distracted artistic ambitions. That investigative process for lost acquaintances is echoed by his mournful ruminations on the discrepancies between film and digital photography, with the former cherished for the physical connection it created with memories, and yet which has been made archaic by a current techno landscape that, in its hyper-connectivity, seems to have distanced McElwee even further from Adrian. Alternating between time periods and geographic locations, all of it connected by McElwee's narrated thoughts, the film proves a bracing and sometimes uncomfortable peek into private fears and regrets about mortality and missed opportunities. It's also, in its portrait of wayward Adrian, further proof that there's nothing more difficult, frustrating, messy, and insufferable than teenagerdom.



A- Photographic Memory

By Noel Murray October 11, 2012

One advantage of **Ross McElwee's** film-everything/edit-later methodology is that whenever he wants to reflect on his life and family—which is pretty much what he's done for the last 30 years—he has the clips to back up any story he wants to tell. That's what makes McElwee's latest feature-length documentary, *Photographic Memory*, so quietly devastating. He was inspired to make the film by his strained relationship with his now-grown son Adrian, whom McElwee worries is too distracted by technology and partying to follow through on his many creative ideas. So to understand his son better, McElwee decides to revisit his own early 20s, when he was a hippie free spirit with a fiddle, a notebook, and a camera, kicking around France having romantic adventures and worrying *his* father, a successful North Carolina surgeon. As McElwee returns to Brittany to track down the photographer he apprenticed with—and as he struggles to stay in touch with Adrian—he revisits the films and videotapes he has of his son, of his own father, and of a life that keeps slipping by and changing before he can get a handle on what's happening.

McElwee is smart enough to know his exasperation with Adrian is not unusual. (“It’s all so predictable, these stages,” he says in voiceover at one point, his whispery Southern twang now deepened with age.) So *Photographic Memory* approaches this generation gap with sensitivity, as McElwee admits to his preferences for the slower pace and precious tactility of his youth, when everything committed to film had permanence, meaning, and expense. Simultaneously, he also realizes that in some ways, his son’s generation is more connected and communal, now that it isn’t so much of a hassle for them to stay in touch. *Photographic Memory* cuts back and forth between McElwee’s visit to Brittany (where his quest goes in directions he wasn’t expecting) and clips of him trying to coerce his son into a sentimentality and idealism that Adrian doesn’t yet share. McElwee wants to be a mentor to Adrian in his various multimedia ventures, but his son seems more interested in making money from shooting videos than in making art.

Photographic Memory is less wry and more melancholy than McElwee’s earlier documentaries; it’s a lot like his superb 2003 film *Bright Leaves*, which was also

concerned with family history and the shifting meaning of images. The documentary proceeds cautiously through its dual storylines, never pushing any point too hard, but still arriving at a meaningful conclusion. Early in the movie, McElwee looks at an old photo of himself and says that at that age, he couldn't have imagined himself as a father. And as he tours Brittany, he realizes that the memories and associations he had with the pictures he took in the '70s are very different from how the subject of those photos experienced those moments. Nothing is fixed: not images, not people. Which means that even as his son flees him, there's always hope that he'll make his way back.

<http://movies.tvguide.com/photographic-memory/review/382415>



Photographic Memory: Review

★★★★

Ross McElwee's *Photographic Memory* adds another warm verse to the director's ongoing cinematic canon about human relationships -- the oeuvre that he began nearly 35 years ago, with the short documentary *Charleen*, and that found national footing with 1986's *Sherman's March*. In this outing, we initially find Ross concerned with the well-being of his son Adrian, now a teenager prone to outrageous, death-defying skiing stunts shot in first-person with a go-pro; equally troubling are Adrian's preoccupying interest in smoking pot, his immersion in online social networking, and a general lack of direction in his life -- at one point, he shakes Ross up by espousing a kind of hip-hop philosophy. "You might as well make life a complete video game -- an acid trip, if you can make it that way," Adrian declares. "You know, if I could have a helicopter, and a penthouse on the top floor of a skyscraper, and live ridiculously every day, I would." McElwee then decides to gain some perspective via geographic distance from the young man: he travels back to Southern France, where he himself spent an exploratory period of life in the early-mid 1970s -- a time when he worked for a wedding photographer, took a French paramour named Maud, and shot black-and-white stills as he roamed around the countryside. His present-day journey nominally revolves around re-locating and reconnecting with the photographer who fired him and the lover he abandoned, after decades sans communication with either individual.

It wouldn't be difficult, here, to take a quick, ephemeral glance at *Photographic Memory* and characterize the *démarche* as vaguely desultory -- an accusation some critics have hurled at McElwee's prior films. But that summation feels too pejorative. It doesn't begin to hint at the infectious charm to be found in the observer's relentless wayfaring, and his delight in offbeat life-details that artists with less-acute observation frequently gloss over. More importantly, any impressions that the film meanders are entirely sophistic: subtextually, this picture has a clearer narrative arc than most self-reflexive documentaries. McElwee is building a concrete network of thematic connections here, and the broadest -- per the film's title -- involves his own therapeutic attempt to bridge the present with the past. At the core of the movie is a highly specific dialectic -- McElwee's need to comprehend and empathize with his son by revisiting his own complicated history -- the years that helped form the adult artist. We embark on this mental and emotional journey along with the director.

In the process, a fascinating theme emerges: that of mnemonic fluidity. Louis Malle once observed that "Memory is not frozen. It's very much alive, it changes over time." Recalling this assumption, middle-aged McElwee's discoveries of the truths belying the relationships with the photographer and Maud are more disarming and far more complicated than one could ever expect. They suggest that over the past forty years, his

memory has smoothed out the details, and repackaged them into a digestible narrative. What McElwee is implying, here, is remarkably profound: that as a young man, he himself was every bit as lost and disconnected from his father, and as uncertain about the future, as Adrian has been, but time and maturity have obscured this fact in Ross's mind.

The director's observations that play on the soundtrack may appear to be on-the-nose, but it's a Socratic dialogue, not an autocratic one. In other words, we're never told about Ross's gradual attainment of empathy with his son courtesy of his own process of self-discovery -- instead, it plays out before our eyes. This is a film of negative spaces: the central arc is Ross's own, and it happens between the lines. We're required, mentally, to fill in the gaps for ourselves, to connect the dots. That is the documentary's most profound achievement, and an enormous compliment to the intelligence and sophistication of the audience.

McElwee also made a savvy choice via the setting of the film -- on two levels. One is purely evocative: especially when combined with vivid recollections of prior experiences, his trekking around Southern Gaul in search of Maud conjures up the wistful exuberance of youth with a degree of romantic intensity that few recent films (documentary or otherwise) have mustered. It re-evokes the sense of unlimited possibility that so many adolescents possess but adults often seem to lose with time and age. The second benefit of the French setting is one of tonal preservation. During the first twenty minutes of this documentary, we can sense the father-son tension rising in the Cambridge, MA, household, but it dissipates, of course, when Adrian isn't onscreen, which means the bulk of the movie. One can ostensibly imagine a director in Ross's position limiting the action to the homefront to lasso more domestic conflict or depth, but McElwee is too self-aware to make this sort of a miscalculation. He knows instinctively that he isn't an Allan King sort of filmmaker, gifted with fly-on-the-wall cinema direct documentaries where familial emotional violence explodes onscreen. McElwee's perspective is milder, gentler -- no less revelatory, but much more wry and subtle, slightly ironic. His voice is actually closer to Nanni Moretti, but without the fatuous self-aggrandizement that made watching Moretti's *Caro Diario* such a chore. It's an inimitable outlook, and one that many admirers of *Sherman's March*, *Time Indefinite*, and *Bright Leaves* will recognize instantly and welcome back into their minds and hearts.

--Nathan Southern