

First LOOK



There she was with her Sony F5 standing in the middle of a sea of reporters fighting for the best angle: not an unusual position for cinematographer **Laura Hudock.**

But shooting *The Circus: Inside the Greatest Political Show On Earth* documentary for Showtime was special because Hudock (like the candidate who was about to take center stage) knew what it felt like to be a woman in an arena dominated by men.

"You could feel the energy in the room when Senator Bernie Sanders came out and announced Hillary Clinton as the Democratic nominee," the Brooklyn, NY-based Hudock remembers. "Regardless of what you think of Hillary as a candidate, you couldn't deny this was a big step forward for our country. The first woman nominated by a major party for President of the United States. It was long overdue – but wow! I felt like I wasn't just filming history, I was a part of it."

As of this writing, Hudock is still on the campaign trail, shooting various segments for *The Circus*. (At one point she was even traveling with the White House Press Pool, on Clinton's plane.) And although filled with memorable moments, *The Circus* is not Hudock's only history-making footage. In the last two years, her work on women's rights-themed documentaries has yielded intensely compelling images. By her own admission, Hudock brings a special passion to these projects, but is quick to add she's not defined by the subject matter.

"I can shoot anything a man can shoot," she states "I think that in and of itself is an exercise in woman's rights. Mostly I'm interested in stories that can move, shift and shape our conscience, stories that illuminate some truth about the human condition."

Two of the most notable nonfiction examples are *Woman*, hosted by Gloria Steinem (recently nominated for the 2016 Emmy for Outstanding Documentary TV Series) and the Emmy Award-winning documentary series *Vice* on HBO. (Hudock is the first female DP *Vice* hired in four seasons of the show.) *cont'd on page 22*

by Pauline Rogers / portraits by Sarah Shatz



While shooting for *Vice*, Hudock traveled to seven countries, including three trips to Afghanistan in the course of eight months, where she encountered challenging subject matter and hostile environments. For a feature-length documentary, she traveled with the first women's mountain-climbing team in Afghanistan, helping to frame the context of Afghani women's rights.

"It's about 13 young Afghan women, from the ages of 15 to 25 years old, who were literally risking their lives doing sports, just so they could show that a woman can do anything a man can do," Hudock recalls. Having just returned from an assignment in Africa, she didn't have time to train for the high-altitude climb. "I had four hours of training at Brooklyn Borders, and Hostile Environment training in D.C., and then we were off," she remembers.

Physical danger was ever-present. A few months before Hudock arrived, a woman had been beaten to death in the middle of Kabul. The team trained at the Olympic Stadium, where not long before the Taliban were executing women. Then there was the climb itself. The group's base camp was at 14,000 feet, and the climb took them to 17,000. "It was tough being creative at that elevation," she admits, "but I was determined to make a beautiful film."

On their last night, one of the porters who moved their base camp got word to their security team that there

was a Mullah order to kill all foreigners on the expedition. According to the porter, a group of men had made a couple of attempts to come over the ridge and failed. "Although our security didn't know if the threat was real, it was enough to pull us out," Hudock describes. "So in the middle of the night we packed what we could and moved down to the next camp. I was relatively calm, considering."

Hudock endured a different kind of personal threat filming stories for Gloria Steinem's *Woman* (for *Viceland*). For the *Rape as a Weapon of War* documentary she traveled through the Congo, "being thrown around in a Land Rover on roads that weren't really roads, stuck in the mud for hours, knowing we were traveling through areas where women had been raped and shot," she recalls.

"At one point, we were in the car for over seven hours, and then, when we arrived at our drop-off point, we had to hike for three hours to interview a rebel warlord in the jungle about his soldiers, who were possible [rape] perpetrators."

While Hudock did many interviews for the Steinem-hosted series, there was one scene that was especially memorable – shot in a Congolese village made up of rape survivors and their children. "[The scene] revealed how strong survivors are when they are able to support each other," Hudock explains. "In this culture, women depend on their husbands for work and for support. When a woman

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Hudock on location in Rwanda for MasterCard Foundation Project
Photo Courtesy of Jennifer Huxta

is raped, the husband abandons her. These women literally have nowhere to turn.”

Hudock recalls one subject she interviewed named “Mamacita” who took the experience of being raped (five separate times) and turned it into an opportunity to help her community, by creating a self-sustaining village for the women and their children.

“I was filming a close-up of her, and I could literally feel her pain and her strength,” the DP says softly. “To be a good storyteller you need to be open and present to the moment you are filming. If what you are shooting doesn’t reach you, it isn’t going to reach the audience.”

Not all of this young doc-shooter’s work is filled with danger and sorrow. Hudock did a project with executive producer/director Michael Weatherly. “*Jamaica Man* is a portrait of an 80-year-old eccentric Englishman named Nigel who has lived down in Jamaica for over 50 years,” Hudock explains. “We wove stories from his past with a little bit of Jamaica’s history through his unique point of view.” Weatherly, who grew up in Jamaica, has known Nigel all his life and believed him to be a fascinating subject.

“Nigel seemed to be a character out of an Ian Fleming novel, and presenting him with a particular style was important to Michael,” Hudock continues. “We looked at Slim Aarons’ photography and films such as the original *The Thomas Crown Affair*, *To Catch A Thief*, and *Dr. No*. Slim Aarons is known for his portraits of the rich and famous. Much of his photography is wide angle, with the subject center framed, allowing the elaborate surroundings to inform the viewer.”

When Hudock’s not chasing her social passions around the world, she’s at home in New York working on TV shows like *Madam Secretary* or *Search Party*. A staunch defender of

women’s rights in any industry, she’s grown tired of hearing, “Oh, I’ve never worked with a female DP or female camera operator before.”

“Last I checked there were 13 female DPs and 24 female camera operators in the entire Eastern region of the ICG, which seems crazy low for 2016,” Hudock announces.

“But the good news is I’ve seen a major shift in consciousness, mainly in the last year. Posting an all-white-male camera-crew photo on your Facebook page just isn’t cool anymore. Being part of a future that supports and recognizes talent by providing equal opportunity to all ethnicities, sexual orientations, and genders is where it is at.”

That’s why Hudock attended the Local 600 Women’s Forum, hosted by longtime Guild member Ellen Kuras, ASC, at Kuras’ house last fall, and has become a member of Cinematographers XX. “In the past year, meetings [about how to better facilitate diversity on sets] have become the norm,” she concludes.

“It’s not that we want to create a separation; it’s quite the opposite. We’d like to eliminate gender from even being a part of the conversation, but, the reality is, until this huge gap is narrowed in our industry, it’s best we shine a light on it.”

Although Hudock discovered her passion for visual storytelling in a high school photo class, where she says she would “skip Calculus to sneak into the darkroom,” it wasn’t until her freshman year at Sarah Lawrence College that her path became clear.

“I took a Film Theory and History class with professor Gilberto Perez and fell in love with the magic of cinema,” she concludes. “Working in the nonfiction world has provided an incredible space for growth, both as an artist and a human being. It’s also been quite an adventure.” 🍿