

Kyle Corea

## Kissed on the Lips

I had never seen any of Thea's films before she asked me to be in one. She was making a film about the concept of love and wanted to interview various people. She came into Funk 'n Waffles after hours with her video camera in hand and we sat down in a booth facing each other. I had opened Funk 'n Waffles with my friend Adam Gold around the same time Thea opened a little shop in the area. Adam and I took our idea of throwing house parties with live music and fresh-made waffles into an actual establishment. Here were the three of us, all filmmakers with no prior experience, trying to run businesses to support our creative pursuits in the arts. We gave each other advice, always bouncing ideas around and trying to turn these start-ups into something sustainable. We had talked countless times in this space before, but this time would be different.



With her delicate directness she turned the camera on me, looked me in the eyes and started. *What does it mean to love? Can you be in love with more than one person at the same time? Do you believe you have to get married to stay in love?* These simple yet deep questions made me really have to consider my beliefs, my experiences and my reality. I have memories and I have faith, but at that moment I was attempting to articulate myself in that time and place. As I sat there I couldn't help but to think about my answers and wonder about my own identity and voice of reason. I knew Thea was interested in getting a range of perspectives, but I never knew her own. Her orientation and beliefs were mysterious to me. As much I as I am a very open person and part of a progressive religion, I

couldn't help but feel a slight disparity in my own desire to get married one day and my feeling that it is okay to be in love and not be married. If love is a spiritual connection, then how does the tradition of marriage have restrictions? In Thea's curiosities to learn about the human condition, she created the space for exploration and truths. In her process of discovery through filmmaking, she allowed her own questions to be revealed in others. As I would answer one question, she would follow up with another, prompting me to explain further, or just make me wonder. At that moment I realized that Thea was a very powerful thinker.

Eventually I got to see her film *A Truth About Tupac*. This was an interview film as well, that was diverse and illuminating. After seeing the film, Thea's methods of filmmaking became more clear to me. She didn't always have a shot list, or a complete script. But she had rich ideas stirring inside her. On the other hand, her work was calculated, and she took her time editing, laboring over each take. The Tupac film was profound for me because of the way she presented it: a close-up shot of each interviewee, but angled slightly different, in separate locations that felt unstaged. The way she ordered and connected their responses created a narrative for the viewer. I wasn't being lead down a path to the clear conclusion. There wasn't an underlying agenda fed to me. Her straightforward, unrehearsed technique allowed the viewer not to be wrapped up in aesthetics but rather gave space for reflection upon what was being said. Much like the film's considerations about Tupac evolving into mythical figure after death, the film about Love takes a similar approach through uncovering and demystifying what may be thought about but is rarely talked about. Thea had a way to pose a forthright question and evoke such a range of colorful answers, giving equal importance and consideration to each and every voice. This was one of the intangible qualities she had a filmmaker and a person.

She was not afraid to address personal topics of love, race, sexuality—that which our society at large has conditioned and classified. She was able to evoke authenticity in her subjects and work. This was also true outside of her art. Always doing things her own unique way, many times against the norms. Filmmaking to me is very personal: these ideas start from within, and are expressed through a specific lens. As a filmmaker the process consumes you for better or for worse. Thea struggled to make her films and I could sympathize. She was an inspiration to me, because I took a break from filmmaking to run the business, but she kept going all the while. She had an inexplicable drive to create her unique films, even if those projects took many different forms and had lots of heartache. However, she never really would state that she was a filmmaker. She was so humble and a student of life—inquisitive, experimenting, designing. She embodied the spirit

of an artist and that was uplifting to me. As time went on, I started to feel the pull back into filmmaking. I wasn't fulfilled anymore. I was conflicted with the overwhelming need to create. I turned for guidance to Thea, who had a real gift to immediately connect with your heart, and I knew she would understand. I was thinking about leaving everything I had created in Syracuse and move to New York City to follow my dreams. Warmed by her compassion and angelic nature, we would sit and talk for hours, breathing new life and perspective. One night this conversation lasted until dawn, one of the last I would have with her. Soon after I decided to move to New York City and never saw her in person again.

I hold on to my memories of Thea and the life force she brought into this world. Some people are so memorable that it doesn't matter the quantity of time together but the quality, and that impact on how they made you feel. The most meaningful memory for me is when Thea would come to Funk 'n Waffles, down a long flight of stairs off a side alley near the edge-of-campus commercial strip on Marshall Street. Every time we would greet each other with a kiss on the lips. A gesture of our intimate bond of friendship. She remains the only person whom I would ever greet this way. This simple kiss seemed to break down any barrier, any custom, any notion of the boundless connections between us, between anyone. Thea never got a chance to finish her film about love, and I still to this day I haven't figured out all the answers to those questions she asked me. I am certain about one thing though—Thea is love.



**Kyle Corea** is currently living in Brooklyn, NY, as an independent filmmaker. He teaches workshops in Super 8 and 16mm filmmaking at MONO NO AWARE. He received his BFA in Film-Art at Syracuse University in 2006. In 2007 Kyle and Adam Gold opened Funk 'n Waffles at the edge of Syracuse University campus. Later Adam opened a second location downtown in Armory Square. Many of Thea's paintings now hang in this space, which happens to be only a block away from her loft space & last shop. Kyle recorded the Palace Theater memorial gathering for Thea in May 2015, as well as the interview with James Francis Richards at NYU last October.