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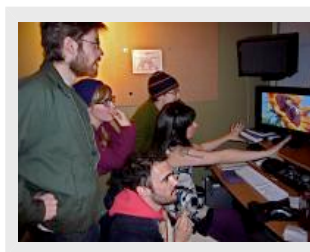
## Documentary 2.0: Making Media That Matters

*Katy Chevigny, Executive Director of Arts Engine, Inc., the nonprofit arm behind the festival, and Gina Teleroli of Meerkat Media Collective, one of the seven collaborators behind Every Third Bite, another of this year's official selections, discuss artistic collaboration, trends from this year's festival, and how the Internet is changing the way we make and view film.*

June 13th, 2008 | [Jen Swanson](#)

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Each June, The Media That Matters Film Festival selects a group of 12 shorts by independent filmmakers designed to spark action and debate in twelve minutes or less. Unlike other festivals, MTM works to promote its selections year-round through online streaming, broadcasts and community screenings. Finalists from this year's festival, which just premiered in New York City on May 28, introduce us to a community center post-Katrina, two sisters living with HIV and a young family in Tibet questioning whether their nomadic traditions can survive in the modern world. *The Independent* catches up with Katy Chevigny, Executive Director of Arts Engine, Inc., the nonprofit arm behind the festival, and Gina Teleroli of Meerkat Media Collective, one of the seven collaborators behind *Every Third Bite*, another of this year's official selections, to discuss artistic collaboration, trends from this year's festival, and how the Internet is changing the way we make and view film.



**Some members of the Meerkat Media Collective discuss decisions in the editing room.**

MTM is in its 8th Year. What's different about this year's festival?

KC: Several things. First, just 12 films were selected as finalists this year, as compared to 16 on previous years. We did this to allow the filmmakers to create a longer piece (films can now be up to 12 minutes long; last year they could only be up to eight minutes long) and also so we could promote each film for an entire month. We're starting this month with *A Loud Color*, a piece about a community center in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Another difference is the quality of the production. Each year, the quality gets better. This year, we had almost 500 submissions which is higher than any other year. Short film has seen a renaissance in recent years because of the Internet, which has provided a platform where there wasn't one before. And viewer habits have changed as well – people are getting used to watching films online and now there's a high bandwidth of short films viewed over the net. The year 2006 was really the tipping point when people got used to watching short films over the Internet.

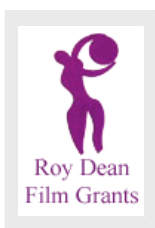
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**Do topics reflect what's going on in the news?**

KC: That's a good question. Submissions tend to reflect what's going on in society today and what concerns young people now. Obviously, they aren't able to talk about yesterday's news due to production constraints, but we can see by the submissions which issues concern young people today. One example would be Iraq. We've received lots of shorts from young people sharing how they felt about the recruitment process and on coming home from war.

**What happens to the filmmaker and the short once it's been selected?**

KC: We promote the film all year long, and provide multiple platforms for the entire year. So, we stream the entire film on our website year round, and each month we'll focus on and provide extensive outreach for a specific film. This weekend, we'll be showing *A Loud Color* in New York City and various other places around the country; in July we'll shift that focus to a different film. After it's promoted, the film goes onto DVD for educators and to be promoted at other festivals

**So, *Every Third Bite* by Meerkat Media Collective... Did seven people really collaborate on that project? How does that work? Isn't filmmaking generally an individual craft?**

KC: Actually, it hasn't always been that way. Collaborative filmmaking was actually quite common platform in the '70s. It's only recently that we've moved towards a more solitary form. *Every Third Bite* was a really interesting piece for several reasons. The first was that, yes, it's the result of an artistic collaboration between seven people, and we haven't seen that community platform for the past 15-20 years. All of the artists involved in this project are young, in their mid-20's and co-ed. That energetic, collective spirit really shows through in the final production. The filmmakers also used technology in a really interesting way. The film was shot in several different locations and some of the artists lived outside New York, the group would take footage, upload to a central site and use Skype to discuss as a group.

GT: Joint ownership helps individually and helps the project collectively. It helps keep the project alive. There may be days when it's hard for me to get motivated, but I can rely on someone else that day for motivation, and they can lean on me for support on their down day. It's inspiring to see people rally around a cause. It's not just you and your free time.

We use consensus to ensure everyone's voice is heard and we keep turns so everyone gets a chance to speak. A lot of our filmmakers studied at Sarah Lawrence, so have been taught in a collaborative environment. Sometimes conversations get heated, but we discuss as a group until we can agree on the best solution for the project.

**How many Meerkats are out there?**

GT: The collective can grow to include 15-20 people at any given stage, depending on the project. Seven people collaborated on *Every Third Bite*, and 12 of us are working on *Stages*, a feature-length documentary premiering at SilverDocs June 17. Most of our projects are a work-in-progress. They're always evolving, depending on the schedules of the people involved. Not all of us are filmmakers – some of us are artists, educators and most of us juggle day jobs.

**How difficult would be to establish an arts collective before Web 2.0?**



GT: Possible, yes, but definitely not as productive. Technology plays a big role in what we do, and the Internet allows us to get a lot of work done. Even though many of us are living in New York, we're juggling day jobs and different schedules, so being able to log into a secured central site to view clips, post comments and edit on our own time is key. Ten years ago, this would have been much different. Lots of work would have had to have happened face-to-face. We have monthly Sandbox meetings to collaborate on new and ongoing projects, and track a lot of our ideas using Wikis and Google applications. One of our Meerkats just moved to Texas, but she can still work with us because we download our cuts to a secure central site and discuss using Skype. Google, scary as it is that they own everything, makes lots of great applications for working together remotely.

**How did you come up with the idea for *Every Third Bite*?**

GT: Wendy Cohen, who used to work at Arts Engine [she now works for Participant MediaArts Engine], actually approached us with *Stung*, an article on Colony Collapse Disorder that had just run in the *New Yorker* and said, 'this needs to be made into a movie.' (Meerkat Media's *How Wal-Mart Came to Haslett* was a selection from the 6th Annual Media That Matters Festival). We agreed, and began to pool our resources – a Meerkat in New York City knew David Graves (featured in film) raised bees on rooftops in New York City; someone in Chicago had heard of Dr. Shameul Israel, who keeps 75 hives and runs a beekeeper training program in depressed neighborhoods of urban Chicago. Another collaborator had a relative in Nantucket, which is how we found Jim Gross. The kids seen at the beginning and end of *Every Third Bite* were filmed at the Botanical Gardens in the Bronx.

**How long did it take to produce *Every Third Bite*?**

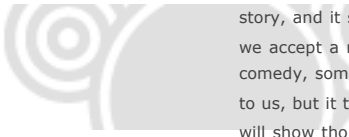
GT: Production started when the *New Yorker* article ran last August. We filmed the end of last summer and edited in the fall/winter to meet the festival deadline in January. *Every Third Bite* was one of our longer projects, though, mainly because we changed direction part way through. Our original intent was to produce a longer, investigative piece about Community Collapse Disorder to air on PBS. But, as we started to review our footage, we noticed a common theme – community and individual change-maker – which led us to shift our focus towards a more human interest, community angle. We have lots of projects in the works though and production time always varies. We shot a piece about Iraq veterans against the war in just three days.

**Is it just a coincidence that a "colony of artists" makes a film about colony collapse disorder? Does the plight of today's honeybees at all represent the fragility of collaborative art?**

GT: Well, the *New Yorker* really inspired this piece, but there is a common fragility between the two. While the Internet has done a lot of great things for filmmakers in terms of platform, it's still really difficult for filmmakers to get funding or make money. Media that Matters is a good festival to be involved with because they showcase our film and help promote it year round, which opens to the door to more festivals and additional platforms. We also show all of projects for free on our website.

**What advice would you give to a filmmaker interested in submitting for the 9th annual festival?**

KC: There are two main criteria, really. First, the film must tell a great



story, and it should be vibrant. There's no strict format for how to tell it, we accept a range of styles and format... some mixed genre, some comedy, some serious. The second is that it must matter, not necessarily to us, but it to the filmmaker. If it matters to the filmmaker, that passion will show though and *then* it will matter to us. Also, we're looking for stories that make a strong argument. We're not interested in propaganda.

**When can filmmakers submit shorts for the 9th Annual festival?**

KC: We are currently accepting submissions for MTM9, but the official season for submissions will be announced in the fall. If someone wants to submit, they should send their information to:

Festival Submission  
ATTN: MAIA ERMITA  
Director of the Festival and Outreach  
Arts Engine  
104 West 14th Street, 4th Floor  
New York, NY 10011

**Related Links:**

Watch *Every Third Bite* and *A Loud Color*, and *How Wal-Mart Came to Haslett*.

Media That Matters Film Festival <http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/>

Arts Engine  
<http://www.artsendengine.net/>

Meerkat Media Collective Website:  
<http://meerkatmedia.org/>

*New Yorker* article  
[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/08/06/070806fa\\_fact\\_kolbert](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/08/06/070806fa_fact_kolbert)

**See Also:**

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