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CATHERINE GOLDSCHMIDT, ASC, BSC

Emmy-nominated cinematographer and 2009 cinematography intern

BY LIBBY SLATE



Considering this a bit more closely, dancers of tap and directors of photography do share some attributes: physical stamina, personal flair and the ability to establish a rhythm, create complex movements and, perhaps most important, tell a story visually and compellingly. Goldschmidt has been demonstrating these merits for years, working on some of television's buzziest shows and earning an Emmy nomination in 2023 for Outstanding Cinematography for a Series (One Hour) for HBO's *House of the Dragon*.

Goldschmidt also counts among her credits HBO's post-apocalyptic series *The Last of Us*, the venerable British sci-fi series *Doctor Who*, the BBC/Amazon Studios psychological thriller miniseries *Chloe* and the Disney+ fantasy-adventure *Renegade Nell*. She's currently working in Budapest on season two of Netflix's sci-fi series *3 Body Problem*.

Born in Berkeley, California, and raised in New Jersey, Goldschmidt has a bachelor's in film studies from Wesleyan University and an MFA in cinematography from the American Film Institute. While at AFI she was chosen as a 2009 Television Academy Foundation Cinematography summer intern; immediately after graduation, she spent her eight-week stint on the NBC medical drama *Trauma*, hosted by show DP Alan Caso, ASC. The series shot entirely in San Francisco.

She went on to work on indie films and documentaries before returning to television. "There are so many skills and parts of the job that are the same, no matter what medium or genre you're doing," she notes. "But it took a while to come full circle to television."

Goldschmidt has been based in London since late 2014, having moved there with her English husband. In 2016, she and cinematographer Vanessa

Whyte cofounded Illuminatrix, a collective of professional U.K. women cinematographers that promotes and celebrates their work, showcases upcoming cinematographers and provides networking and other opportunities.

Q: How did you come to apply for the Foundation internship?

A: We had a teaching assistant at AFI who now teaches there and is a cinematographer in her own right, [cinematographers peer group governor] Sandra Valde-Hansen. She had done the internship program, and I think someone else in my class had as well, and it was recommended that we apply.

I took my application very seriously. Getting into the final round, you had to record an on-camera interview piece. A classmate of mine came over with some lights, and we set it up and shot it. I was aware that to do an on-camera interview as a cinematographer, you had to make it look really good — the lighting, the framing and all of that.

My understanding of how the process worked was that Alan chose me based on that video. I had to submit a reel and an application, but in the end, I was told it was the video. I graduated in June, and the internship started in July, and it was meant to finish in August. But I made myself so indispensable to the camera department that the show ended up hiring me after the internship was over, so I stayed on that show for six months.

Q: How did you make yourself indispensable?

A: The internship program didn't call it "shadowing," but that's what we were theoretically meant to be doing. Shadowing is only observing. But I had a hard time doing that for eight weeks,

and I wanted to be helpful. [The camera department] was missing a role, which I have now on every show: They didn't have a trainee — a camera PA — and that person at the bottom of the camera department is essential to help keep the department running. So, I basically filled that role. And when the internship was up, the whole department went to the production and said, "Look, Katie's been doing this job that we really should have somebody doing," and that's why they then hired me. But I wound up leaving the show early to shoot my very first feature, *Northeast*.

Q: When you were away from the show and on your own, how did the internship help you?

A: I had this whole different confidence, or probably a way to approach the lighting, that I don't remember having had in film school. It felt like a great transition between film school — where you're working on student projects and it's a safe space for experimentation and it's fine to not know what you're doing — and being in the professional sphere, which is obviously a whole

different thing. It was great to be on somebody else's set, observing how they're working, how they're leading the crew and engaging with the politics [while] also doing the craft. And then to immediately leave that and take the reins myself on something — that experience helped me do that.

Q: And how has the intern experience helped you over the years of your career?

A: Just stepping into that new arena of high-end TV, there are a million things to observe about how it all works, and because I'm now working in that very sphere, there are so many direct correlations to draw. That's why I try to bring people onto my sets to shadow me.

Q: You've worked on some big shows. Do you feel any extra pressure or responsibility on such series?

A: It's definitely more pressure to work on something that you know has a pre-existing fanbase, that you know a ton of people are going to watch and have thoughts and opinions on, but



Goldschmidt lines up a shot on *The Last of Us* with director Mark Mylod (center) and first assistant director Dan Miller (far left)

CATHERINE GOLDSCHMIDT, ASC, BSC, MAY BE THE ONLY CINEMATOGRAPHER WHO LISTS "TAP DANCER" AMONG THE DESCRIPTORS ON HER WEBSITE, ALONG WITH FRENCH SPEAKER, DOG LOVER AND THREE-BALL JUGGLER. "TRUTHFULLY, I HAVEN'T DONE IT IN YEARS," SHE SAYS CHEERILY, "BUT I GREW UP DOING IT, AND I JUST THINK, 'ONCE A TAP DANCER, ALWAYS A TAP DANCER.'"

ALEXANDER SALSUKI

LAURE HENTCHER/PHOTO

as somebody who for years worked in independent film, it's nice to know that something has an audience already. It's really enjoyable, because you're making it for all these other people, and that's, sadly, not always the case with an indie film. They just don't have the reach, and not as many people will see what you've worked equally hard on.

Q: And your hard work on *House of the Dragon* earned you an Emmy nomination.

A: It was a huge honor to be nominated for an Emmy. That was a huge show to be a part of. My biggest takeaway was having this wonderful collaboration with my director, Geeta Patel. I was incredibly proud of what we did on that episode ["The Lord of the Tides," season one] and very proud and honored to be nominated.

Q: Do you have a certain approach to projects, no matter the genre?

A: The starting place is already the script. Having said that, I worked in documentary for so many years, and for documentary, there is no script. You're starting with what is otherwise step two in a narrative, which is talking

to the director about what they want to make — what they want the project to be like and look like and feel like. Different directors have different ways of describing what that is, so part of the pleasure of the job is trying to crack their code and translate it into actual imagery and photography and lighting. And while you're doing that, you're also trying to bring in your own tastes and sensibilities and make it the kind of film or television show or documentary that you yourself want to watch. For cinematography, that's in terms of lighting, framing, camera movement, color. So, I'm bringing what I think is good or is best, but I'm also trying to make sure that applies to what the director has said they want the show to be.

Q: What advice would you give people who want to break into the industry?

A: The Foundation internship is a tremendous opportunity that everybody should apply for. Even if you aren't selected, just the process of making the application focuses your mind on what your goals are and what you want to do. You have to put yourself into your

application. I remember reading some applications for the internship program, and you can tell when people are using AI to write their applications, because it becomes so general. I would definitely say, please don't use AI. Please write in your own voice. Make it specific. Make it be about who you are and what you want and why this would be an incredibly meaningful opportunity for you. And then, obviously, it's essential to have a body of work so that people can see the potential in you.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to say about your own career, looking to the future?

A: The opportunities I'm looking for [involve] getting to play in new sandboxes, getting to tell new stories, using new techniques and pushing myself and experimenting.

A lot of people working in the industry are feeling a bit unsure about what the future holds, as far as AI is concerned and as far as whether young people care about watching TV shows. I share those concerns. But I also know that the power of storytelling and visual storytelling is incredibly strong, and I feel certain that humans need stories as told to them by other humans. I really can't imagine that going away. ☺

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Goldschmidt (kneeling) lines up another shot on *The Last of Us* with Mylod (center) and A-camera operator Robin Smith (behind Mylod).