

the sign of a frog

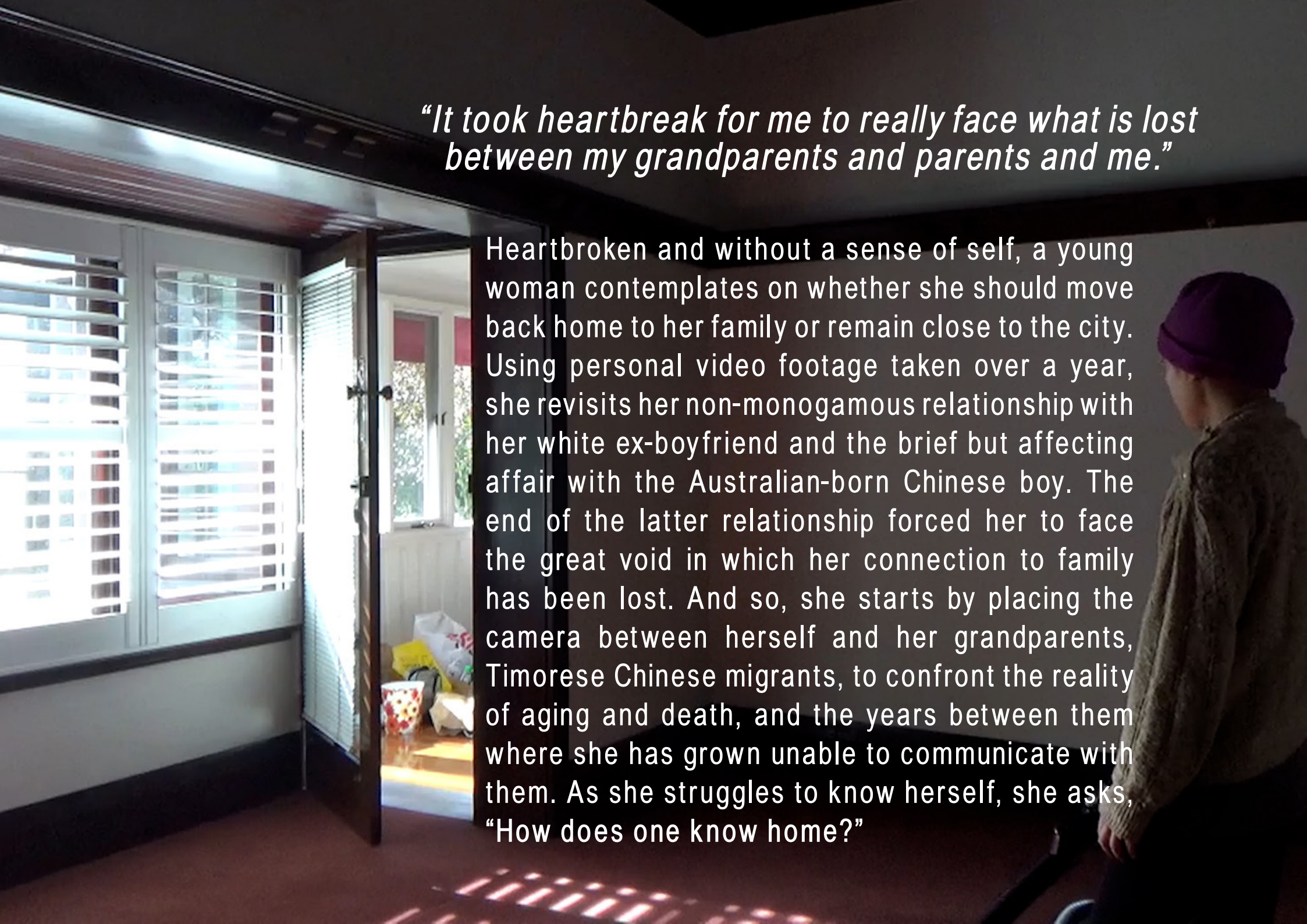
by cass li





An experimental diary film that meditates on rebirth, the meaning of home and the construction of self. It explores the journey of a young woman confronting the distance between herself and her family following heartbreak and moving out.





"It took heartbreak for me to really face what is lost between my grandparents and parents and me."

Heartbroken and without a sense of self, a young woman contemplates on whether she should move back home to her family or remain close to the city. Using personal video footage taken over a year, she revisits her non-monogamous relationship with her white ex-boyfriend and the brief but affecting affair with the Australian-born Chinese boy. The end of the latter relationship forced her to face the great void in which her connection to family has been lost. And so, she starts by placing the camera between herself and her grandparents, Timorese Chinese migrants, to confront the reality of aging and death, and the years between them where she has grown unable to communicate with them. As she struggles to know herself, she asks, "How does one know home?"



Director's Statement

the sign of a frog was developed during lockdown 2021 as an immediate response to the emotional traumas I was struggling with at the time. The timing of the lockdown created the opportunity for me to use solitude to examine the feelings of upheaval and loss that ensued from the end of two formative relationships, coinciding with the process of moving out.

It served as part of my own healing process, of (un)becoming, as I looked at my life material and the truths that were contained in video footage taken over the last year. In the early stages I pitched this work as, "The creative wet dream and labour of a depressed, angry and horny young woman fraught with the conditions of contemporary life." I still believe this stands, however, the feelings of resentment, confusion and anguish that were the emotional forces driving my work have, through the creative process, settled into something new.

It was this grief that I felt from breakup that opened other layers of grief, for the disconnection I have felt between my family and heritage as Timorese Chinese. I believe this film will have deep resonance with second-generation Australians like myself, and those within diaspora communities. It is for them and this experience of being perpetually "caught between two worlds", that I endeavour to use film as language to explore and understand how fragmented parts of identity coexist and create meaning despite struggling with their frictions.

My biggest inspirations were experimental and documentary female filmmakers such as Naomi Kawase, Junko Wada, Agnes Varda, Chantal Ackerman and Su Friedrich as well as the work of Jonas Mekas. Cheryl Dunye and her philosophy towards filmmaking especially resonated and further informed what I wanted to do, and what I will continue to do as a filmmaker. "Dunyementary is Do-Your-Own Documentary...If you are living in the margins and you're invisible...basically putting myself in my own picture with my own truth, using documentary elements."

It has been with great emotional labour that I have undertaken this project independently, but I feel rewarded by the strengthening of my own artistic voice and convictions. My greatest challenges have been with narrative and voice, as well as maintaining stamina and perspective, over technical proficiency, although aspects such as sound editing have been tedious and consuming. Hence, I have great gratitude for the people who have provided me with insight and advice throughout this process.

I have developed a wholistic skillset that allows me to produce film and I am proud to have done so in a way that has been true to my personal values towards filmmaking as art. Continual discoveries were made through stages of reviewing footage and diary entries, writing, editing, and narrating voice-over.

family christmas



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MAH00004
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29.8 MB

MAH00003
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MAH00006
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MAH00010
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MAH00012
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MAH00013
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Matt found out from Haru that girls don't have wet dreams. He believed Paul McCartney's w he say

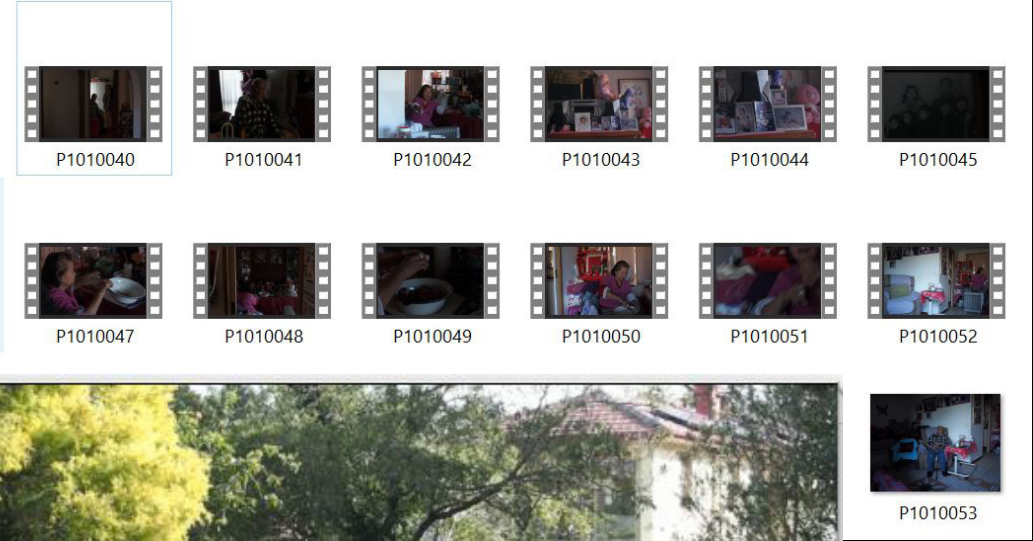
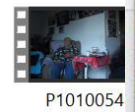
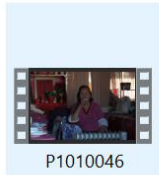
Everyone has wet dreams. (Everybody had a wet dream)

He means metaphorically I say. No, I think he meant it quite literally he says. Girls don't have wet dreams. I woke up from a wet dream, I want to say.

internet addictions

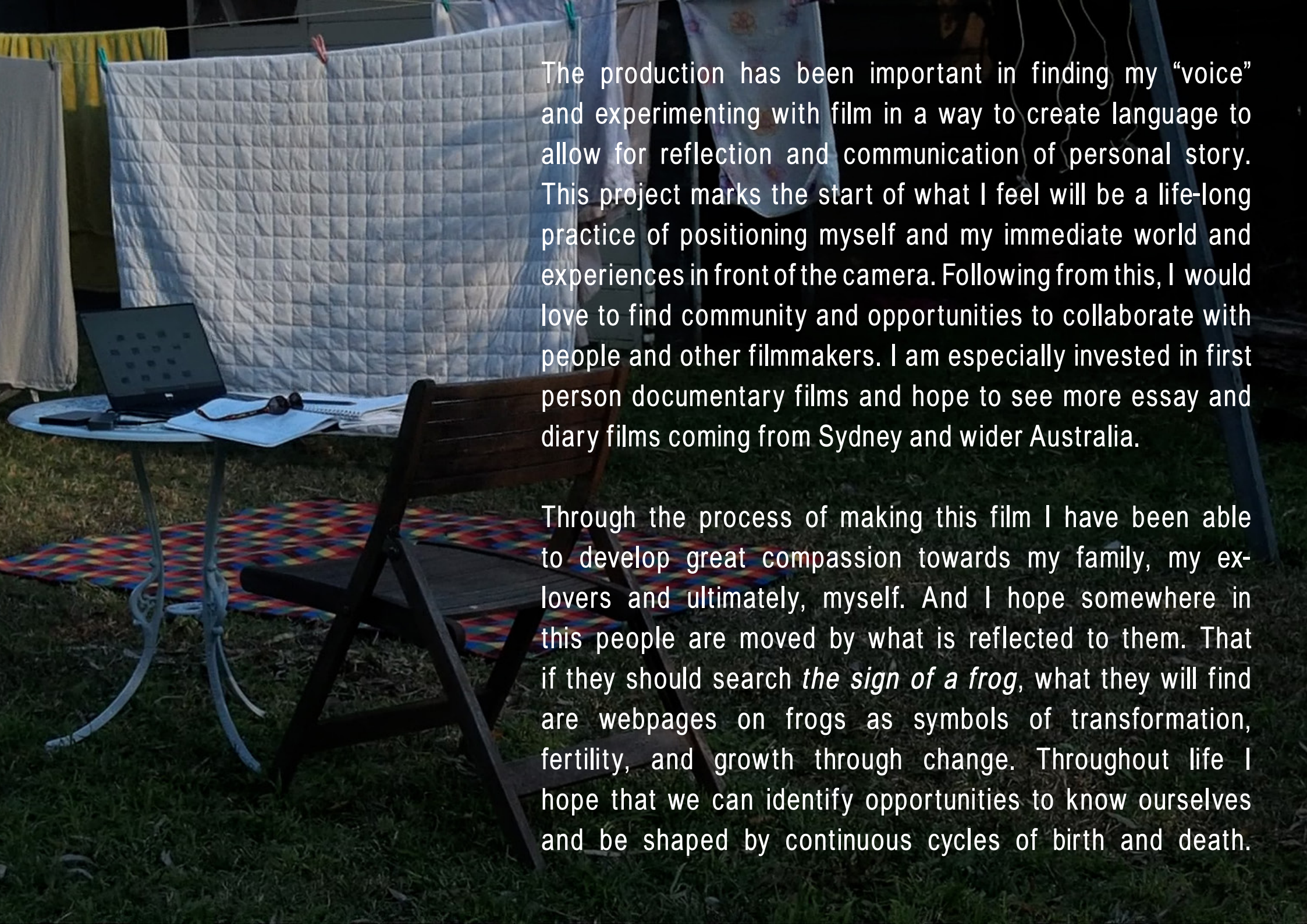
your parents are your second gods

Thawing pains



23



A person is sitting at a small, round, light-colored metal table outdoors. On the table is a laptop, a pair of sunglasses, and some papers. The person is wearing a dark shirt and is looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a large white quilted blanket hanging on a clothesline, and other laundry items are visible. The setting appears to be a backyard or a similar outdoor space with grass. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

The production has been important in finding my “voice” and experimenting with film in a way to create language to allow for reflection and communication of personal story. This project marks the start of what I feel will be a life-long practice of positioning myself and my immediate world and experiences in front of the camera. Following from this, I would love to find community and opportunities to collaborate with people and other filmmakers. I am especially invested in first person documentary films and hope to see more essay and diary films coming from Sydney and wider Australia.

Through the process of making this film I have been able to develop great compassion towards my family, my ex-lovers and ultimately, myself. And I hope somewhere in this people are moved by what is reflected to them. That if they should search *the sign of a frog*, what they will find are webpages on frogs as symbols of transformation, fertility, and growth through change. Throughout life I hope that we can identify opportunities to know ourselves and be shaped by continuous cycles of birth and death.

Bio

cass li is a writer and developing artist based in Sydney. Her creative passions for storytelling lace experimental literature and filmmaking forms. cass is a graduating student of UTS, majoring in Media Arts and Production and Creative Writing, and plans to undertake Honours in 2022.

the sign of a frog is her first film. Her previous work includes hybrid multimedia projects such as *cicadas* (2019), a text and audio-visual piece exploring language and 'voice' through spoken poetry. cass has gained experience crewing in varying capacities on several film projects, from camera to costume design, and is now concentrating on work that resonates with her.

As a filmmaker, cass plans to continue creating independent work that explores the human condition and reflects complex relationships of culture, interpersonal connections, and identity. She would like to further develop skills in writing, directing and cinematography across documentary and drama. cass looks forward to opportunities to work in collaboration with others and crew on projects that supports experimental filmmaking, her fascination with people and philosophy of heart-centred cinema.





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Title: the sign of a frog
Year of Production: 2021
Completion Date: November 2021
Country of Production: Australia
Location: Sydney
Duration: 17 minutes
Genre: Documentary
Shooting Format: HD & FHD
Screening Format: ProRes
Aspect Ratio: 16:9
Sound Format: Stereo
Language: English,
Chinese Hakka with Eng subtitles

