Dubai is a city in the cross hairs of explosive growth and crushing economic collapse. The feature documentary Glitter Dust: Finding Art in Dubai follows the city’s cultural capital. Three artists balance the city’s artificiality (indoor ski slopes in the desert) and its brutal truths (political and economic pressures). Art and life merge as delightful hand-drawn animations interplay with live footage. In turns funny and poignant, this unauthorized documentary explores the human labor, both artistic and otherwise, behind the flash of Dubai.
Begun in 2008 and filmed over the course of three years, Glitter Dust: Finding Art in Dubai was a way of making sense of both human capital and cultural capital: modern migration and modern art. By allowing the characters to speak for themselves without a narrator, Chang portrays the bittersweet struggle of Middle Eastern artists to live authentically in a challenging political and social environment. The cinéma vérité style inspires us to find art in our everyday lives.

Glitter Dust: Finding Art in Dubai is scheduled to premiere and begin festival screenings in 2012.
Katy Chang is an artist and filmmaker whose work has been exhibited internationally. She currently runs Mer-chan, a Washington DC based production studio, which she interprets in the broadest sense possible. Most recently, she has produced award-winning pickles while chronicling her culinary misadventures through video and film. Katy holds an MFA from the University of California, San Diego and a JD from the George Washington University School of Law.
The visual style of the film reflects the bewildering experience of our life in Dubai: vibrant colors, dusty horizons, and mind-boggling bureaucracy. Daily tasks that sound simple took an inordinate amount of time, while impossible constructions sprang up over night. We wanted to film the confusion of a postmodern city still seeking its direction. The biggest, the tallest, and the most expensive of Dubai’s superlatives are juxtaposed with the gritty recycled materials of local artists. When we asked about the burgeoning art scene, everyone spoke at once. Dubai is full of talk and dreams, but the lived experience is less glamorous than the hype. A cacophony of voices chime in on topics from censorship to consumerism to workers’ rights, contrasted with the quiet solitude of artists at work. Despite the colossal changes in the city, desert sands still flow languidly.
Hazem
Hazem is an unemployed artist who must find a job in order to avoid deportation. If he returns to Egypt, he faces conscription into the army. As Dubai buckles under the economic crisis, he struggles to find both his artistic voice and secure employment that will allow him to remain free. If he fails, he will be forced to cradle a gun instead of his beloved camera.

Shaqayeq
Shaqayeq is an Iranian artist and gallery owner who established her roots in Dubai before the boom. She hopes the creative seeds she planted long ago will bloom into a vibrant art scene. But as the number of local galleries grows and the stream of tourists increase, her new work is moving in a more experimental and controversial direction.

Vivek
Vivek’s love of street culture and graffiti style infuses his artwork. He prepares for his first solo show, where he hopes to put Dubai’s youth culture and underground scene in the curatorial spotlight. His style of hallucinatory hedonism, urban decay, and found materials presents a more liberating vision for Dubai...that is, if he doesn’t get censored.
J.R. Osborn (Producer, Editor)

J.R. Osborn is a scholar and experimentalist of visual communication. His research focuses on the history of design, media technologies, and the visual culture of the Middle East and Africa. He holds a Ph.D. in Communication and a Certificate in Ethnographic Film from the University of California, San Diego and is currently a professor in the Communication, Culture & Technology program at Georgetown University.

Ben Bracken (Original Music)

For the past 15 years, Ben Bracken has slowly been creating a unique sonic language utilizing electronics, acoustic sound sources (guitar, cymbal, bells, found objects), electric guitar, and field recordings. Primarily interested in the possibilities of echo-relocation in sound-based art, his work oscillates between performance and installation. Locations become active participants, intimately shaping the nature and direction of each work. He currently resides in Oakland, CA.

Drew Kennedy (Sound)

Drew Kennedy is a sound recordist, videographer, and editor at DDAVW, Digital Diligence Audio Visual Works, in Washington DC. He has worked extensively on documentaries, features, reality TV, and commercials. In his free time, he enjoys making films, taking photos, and biking.

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Inka Resch (Principal Photography)
Inka Resch is a photographer, graphic designer and teacher. She grew up in Honolulu, Hawaii and studied French literature at the University of California at Santa Cruz. In 2003, she decided to pursue an MFA in The Netherlands, combining graphic design, photography, and environmental perception. Inka currently lives in Dubai, where she continues her photographic explorations and design work, and where she has discovered a new challenge in teaching.

Sari Al Houseini (Camera)
Palestinian Sari Al Houseini has lived in Dubai all of his life, where he enjoys the year-long sunshine. Sari is completing a dual degree in Graphic Design and Advertising at the American University in Dubai. He loves traveling to different places, experiencing different cultures, and documenting his journeys with memorable images.

Ashley Bellouin (Music)
Ashley Bellouin resides in Oakland, CA where she is pursuing an MFA in Electronic Music and Recording Media at Mills College. Her work merges sound art, electroacoustic composition and instrument building, where she focuses on creating alternative designs to rare or forgotten musical instruments. Ashley’s compositions have been performed at international music and media festivals.
Filming in the Urban Desert

We were not authorized to film in Dubai, so we were always concerned about the possibility of our tapes getting confiscated. To get around that, we often acted like tourists and asked a member of the crew to pose just outside of the frame. There is a strong cultural sensitivity against men filming women, and we found that it was easier for the female director to capture shots, despite the fact that her visa explicitly stated that she was “not allowed to work.”

Illustrations in Glitter Dust

The idea of a drawcumentary came from the doodles in my journal and a feeling that no realistic camera image could accurately capture the surreality of the city. The illustrations act as intuitive visual elements that help establish the tone of the film. The free form, playfulness of the illustrations comment on the objective viewpoint of the film and visually disrupts the footage in order to emphasize the dislocation of the city’s migrant population.
For more information or to obtain high-resolution images or video clips please contact J.R. Osborn at whosborn@gmail.com or 202.503.7207 (USA)