

ABOUT: JASON WISHNOW

PRESS: JASON WISHNOW 1 of 10

CONTACT: JASON@WISHNOW.COM

RECENT PRESS FROM: Wired, The Hollywood Reporter, Los Angeles Times, Fast Company, The New York Times, NPR

+ FROM THE ARCHIVES: New York Magazine, The New York Times, Newsweek



Jason Wishnow is the filmmaker who launched TED Talks, the Peabody Award-winning series that has been watched over one billion times (even in outer space).

Wishnow works at the intersection of film and emerging technologies and has been called "no stranger to difficult shoots" (Wired UK, 2014), an "online-video virtuoso" (New York Times, 2009), the "enfant terrible of digital film" (The Guardian, 2000), and one of the ten most influential digital filmmakers of 1999 (RES Magazine).

Prior to joining TED, Wishnow founded one of the first film websites, The New Venue, in the mid-'90s, an entire decade before YouTube. In 2000, Wishnow organized the first handheld/mobile film festival, The Aggressively Boring Film Festival, named after the technical limitations of its time.

As a director, Wishnow's award winning short films and videos have played on television (Sundance Channel, MTV, Channel 4 UK), in museums (such as MoMA), and at over 100 film festivals worldwide (including Telluride, Sundance, Seattle, São Paulo, and Hong Kong) – Wishnow's most recent is a controversial sci-fi film made in China: The Sand Storm (沙尘暴) starring acclaimed artist, Ai Weiwei.

*Also – for fun or commission, or sometimes for both, he's slept out with Star Wars fans – staged zombie yoga flash mobs – helped launch the first tv news satire show in Nigeria – and been called out on social media for... (see above).

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EMMA GREY ELLIS CULTURE 04.20.17 06:00 AM

THE ORAL HISTORY OF TED, A CLUB FOR THE RICH THAT BECAME A GLOBAL PHENOMENON



TAMARA SHOPSIN

BEFORE ITS 2,000-PLUS videos had been viewed 8 billion times, TED was an annual conference for wealthy eggheads. Starting in February 1984, 1,000 people who could afford to pay \$4,000 (and up) would gather in Monterey, California, to hear 18-minute lectures on technology, entertainment, and design. (TED, get it?) Then, in 2006, TED started posting the presentations on its website, transforming a once-exclusive conference into a viral think-piece factory. As TED kicks off its 33rd conference this spring, here's how the talks went global.

Ken Robinson: Back then it was a very unusual conference—more like a club. There was also a kind of mystique around the speakers. Most conferences, people tend to be checking their watches for the next coffee break. At TED, people were desperately keen to get into the next session. They were jockeying for the best seats.

Kelly Stoetzel, TED content director: Inviting speakers to come to TED before video was like a sales job, though: “Give up five days of your life to come make a speech. It’ll be to a closed room of a thousand people. But I promise you’ll love it.”

Chris Anderson: We believed from the get-go that something special happened in the room. The question was how to allow that magic to escape. At first we thought that the best way to do that was TV. But then it turned out that no one in TV was interested.

June Cohen: The BBC told me it was too intellectual. When you hear that from the BBC, where else do you go?

Jason Wishnow: I didn't think anyone was going to rush home on a Thursday night at 8 o'clock to see a brainy, academic lecture either. So rather than bringing TED to TV, the first conversation I had with Chris and June was about bringing TED to the internet.

David Pogue, tech columnist at Yahoo Finance and early online TED speaker: I thought it was probably more of an experimental vanity project than anything that would really change the world. Sure there were a few people then with internet pipes fast enough to stream video. But it wasn't an everybody sort of thing.

Chris Anderson: It did feel risky. People were paying a lot of money to come to TED, so to give it all away for free ... But at TED in 2005, people like Clay Shirky gave talks about the web's ability to facilitate collaboration, so we kind of drank our own Kool-Aid.

June Cohen: We decided to launch with six videos that covered the breadth of our content: Ken Robinson, David Pogue, Al Gore, Hans Rosling, Majora Carter, and Tony Robbins. We wanted to make the speakers look like rock stars, and we made probably a hundred technical decisions to support that.

Jason Wishnow: The key thing on my mind was: How do you create the sense that someone watching a video at home has the best seat at the conference? How can we really draw a viewer in through lighting or camera angles? So the first thing I did was double the number of cameras in the room.

June Cohen: There's an invisible grammar to how we shoot the talks. If the speaker is making a point and they open their arm to the left, we'll do a cut that marries with their motion. If they're talking about something intimate, we're up close. If they're making a sweeping gesture about the world, we pull back.

Chris Anderson: I think we thought the success would be if, I don't know, 10,000 people viewed the talks. We got 10,000 or so that first day in June 2006, but instead of following a decaying exponential curve that would trend to zero, the videos had more views on day two than on day one, and more on day three than on day two. This was just people forwarding links to friends.

June Cohen: A big surprise was that Ken Robinson and Hans Rosling were so popular. They gave what became two of our most popular talks of all time.

Ken Robinson: I'm always amused by that phrase, “the most-viewed TED talk of all time.” It's only been the last 10 years! It's not the most-viewed message since the Dead Sea Scrolls. I think it's currently just over 43 million views.

Jason Wishnow: A few weeks after those videos were posted, Chris said, “I've rethought our business plan. We're now a media platform.”

Chris Anderson: That was the biggest decision we made—to invest a lot of money in building a new site with the sole purpose of distributing all the talks for free. We knew it might upset enough of our audience to make it hard at the conference, but we just said, this is it. Here you go, world: Take it. And that decision had huge consequences for us, because we became obsessed with this idea of radical openness, of giving everything away for free. That led to us giving away the TED brand itself, in the form of the TEDx conferences, a couple of years later.

Ken Robinson: Even when they gave the brand away, with TEDx, it just made more people want to go to the conferences and more people want to watch the videos. It's funny: In my talk, I mention I was writing a book called *Epiphany*. But about three months after they shot my talk we decided to change the title to *The Element*. Since then my TED Talk has done wonders for books called *Epiphany*, but it's had no impact on mine. I've often thought I must get back to Chris and see if they can do an overdub.



Ken Robinson Educator and early TED talker



Chris Anderson TED chief executive



June Cohen Former executive producer of TED Media



Jason Wishnow Former director of video at TED

MOST-WATCHED TED TALKS: -----

Ken Robinson, educator: “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” (44 million views)
<https://youtu.be/iG9CE55wbT4>

Amy Cuddy, psychologist: “Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are” (39.6 million views)
<https://youtu.be/Ks-Mh1QhMc>

Simon Sinek, motivational speaker: “How Great Leaders Inspire Action” (31.1 million views)
<https://youtu.be/qP0HF3Sf14>

Brené Brown, researcher: “The Power of Vulnerability” (28.7 million views)
<https://youtu.be/iCvmsMzIF7o>

Mary Roach, writer: “10 Things You Didn't Know About Orgasm” (21.4 million views)
<https://youtu.be/7jx0dTYU05E>

This article appears in the May issue. [Subscribe now.](#)

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#MAGAZINE-25 DS #TED

Chinese Artist Ai Weiwei Starring in 'Secret' Sci-Fi Film Shot in Beijing

3:44 AM PST 04/02/2014 by Patrick Brzeski

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Ai Weiwei in "The Sandstorm"

Kickstarter

Described as a dystopian short set in the not-too-distant Chinese future, the dissident artist's latest project has launched a Kickstarter campaign and is filmed by celebrated cinematographer Christopher Doyle.

"When the air is toxic and your lead actor is under surveillance, you make a *short* film and you shoot it *fast*."

RECOMMENDED:



Ai Weiwei Sends Empty Chair to Stockholm Film Fest in Protest »



China's 'House of Cards' Fans Protest Online Over Fears of More Censorship »



Johnny Depp Makes First Trip to China »

So reads the tagline of a new [Kickstarter campaign](#) for *The Sandstorm*, a dystopian sci-fi project starring acclaimed Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei.

PHOTOS: Inside Hollywood's Surprise Trip to China's Huading Awards

The Kickstarter campaign describes the project as "a low-fi sci-fi short, made in China under the radar." Ai, making his acting debut, stars as a smuggler in a world without water. The film is shot by acclaimed cinematographer **Christopher Doyle** (*In the Mood for Love*, *Chungking Express*, *Hero*, *Infernal Affairs*).

The film was written and directed by **Jason Wishnow**, former head of video for the popular Internet lecture series TED Talks. On the campaign page, Wishnow explains how he met Ai after a secret TED Talk was smuggled out of China and delivered to his desk.

Ai has been under constant surveillance by the Chinese authorities since at least 2009. He is by far China's most internationally well known artist; his work has been featured in solo shows at museums around the world. But despite being the son of one of China's most celebrated revolutionary poets, he fell afoul of state authorities after publicly criticizing their handling of the devastating 2008 Sichuan earthquake and other incidents. In 2011, the police kept him in captivity for 81 days, then placed him under house arrest and seized his passport. He's now known to be working to get his passport back, so that he can again travel abroad.

STORY: Johnny Depp Makes First Trip to China

Describing their original meeting, Wishnow writes, "An hour into our first conversation (about the flow of information and the collateral damage of uncertainty), he leaned in close and asked, 'What can we do together?' I seized on an unexpected opportunity to pitch a film."

"He listened, confided he loved sci-fi and asked how fast I could write the screenplay," Wishnow continues. He later notes that a subsequent meeting with Ai was interrupted by plainclothes police interrogators who escorted the artist away.

Describing the feel of the film, he says, "Beijing felt like the future, not cool and sleek -- that's Shanghai -- but dim and gritty."

He adds that he brought Doyle onboard, "a man whose eye shaped the aesthetic of Asian cinema," to make his dark story look beautiful.

Because of Ai's status with the Chinese state authorities, Wishnow says they tried to work undercover while filming in Beijing: "We told no one what we were up to. The crew used code names and ever-shifting modes of communication."

Filming of the project is complete, and Wishnow and his team are now using Kickstarter to try to recoup their investment of \$33,000 in production costs. Their release plans for *The Sandstorm* are TBA.

INTERNATIONAL ASIA



Ai Weiwei's acting debut 'a bit more badass than big teddy bear'

Los Angeles Times

Arts & Entertainment /
Movies / Movies Now

This article is related to: Entertainment, Movies, China, Ai Weiwei, Beijing (China), Skype



By JULIE MAKINEN

APRIL 5, 2014, 6:00 AM

BELJING -- Sculptor, dissident, activist, blogger, rock 'n' roller, barber. Multi-hyphenate Ai Weiwei wasn't really in need of another descriptor, but now you can add this: actor.

The roly-poly, 56-year-old Chinese artist makes his acting debut in a 10-minute sci-fi short called "The Sand Storm" filmed in Beijing in early 2013. The existence of the project wasn't widely known until this week, when the film's writer-director, Jason Wishnow, launched a \$33,000 [Kickstarter campaign to fund](#) post-production work (it's already exceeded the goal).

The movie, shot by Australian cinematographer Christopher Doyle -- a frequent Wong Kar-Wai collaborator on films including "Chungking Express" and "In the Mood for Love" -- features Ai as a nameless smuggler in a world without water, bringing the liquid of life to others. Wishnow says Ai is "a bit more badass than big teddy bear in this movie."

PHOTOS: On the set of "The Sand Storm"

"He walks a razor's edge between being very serious and very playful, in real life as well as in this movie," said Wishnow, who hopes to use the short as a launching pad for a full-length feature. "He channels some of himself in this role.... It's something only Ai Weiwei could play."

In a short clip promoting the film, Ai says the movie is "quite scary." (Watch it below.)

Wishnow, 40, who previously made films for TED Talks, stumbled into the project after arriving in Beijing in 2012 on what he called a self-imposed writing retreat. ("It seemed like a perfect place to go because the Internet would be blocked for me," cutting down on distractions, he said.)

Not long after Wishnow landed in Beijing, the city was deluged by heavy rains that led to massive flash floods, killing 79 people and stranding hundreds of thousands as roadways filled with water. Wishnow himself had to hitchhike back to a part of town with a bunch of strangers in a delivery truck.

"That was my first week in Beijing. I was encountering these disastrous moments and thinking ... about how people behave and treat strangers and also those close to them," Wishnow recalled. "And that leads back to the flow of information."

Thanks to his TED connections, Wishnow was invited to meet Ai and they ended up talking about the floods. "Our conversation about the flow of information inspired the ideas of a film about a water shortage," Wishnow said.

A few days later, Wishnow went to Ai and told him about his idea for the film. "I said it would be fiction -- sci-fi; the premise is a future city runs out of water and you are a smuggler. He smiled when I said that, and just said: 'I love sci-fi; how fast can you write a script?' So I went off to write the script."

Wishnow finished the screenplay and sent it to Ai. While he waited for a response, an associate arranged for a copy to be sent to Doyle.

"By chance, they both arranged to have meetings with me on the same day, Chris by Skype from Hong Kong and Ai in person," Wishnow said. "I knew whatever they had in store would completely change my life."

Three days later, Doyle came to Beijing, and the three had lunch and then went location scouting. Doyle and Ai, despite having many mutual acquaintances, had never met before and hit it off.

With the Chinese New Year holiday fast approaching, the team decided to rush the movie into production. In two weeks they assembled a crew, cast the film and built sets. Actual filming took two days. The dialog is in Mandarin.

Wishnow and his team decided to keep the project under wraps until it was closer to completion. (Doyle and Ai would go on to team up on [Ai's first music video](#), which was released in May 2013.)

PHOTOS: Behind the scenes of movies and TV

This week, Ai opened a new exhibit in Berlin, "Evidence," which draws on his run-ins with Chinese authorities, including his 81-day detention in 2011. He remains unable to leave China because officials confiscated his passport three years ago and have refused to return it to him.

He recently filmed a video asking the Beijing Public Security Bureau to give it back.

They've "promised many many times," he says in the clip, but never deliver. "I never get a clear answer."

Wishnow says he has "no idea" what the Chinese government will think of "The Sand Storm" or whether it will create further tension between Ai and the government.

"I wasn't setting out to make a film that's an overt political statement, a message-y film," he said. But "given the scope of the subject matter and who one of the stars is ... I maintained a degree of discretion to avoid the discomfort of constantly having to explain that."

Wishnow says he's aiming to finish the film by summer, premiere it at a festival, then roll it out online. ("Every time I see Ai Weiwei, the first thing he asks is, 'Why isn't this done yet?'" the director said. "And I say, 'I know, it took you less time to build an Olympic stadium.'")

Asked if he could divulge any more details about "The Sand Storm," such as whether Ai has any love scenes or gets naked in the film, Wishnow said: "There are no nude scenes involving Ai Weiwei. But we did shoot in subfreezing weather, so that was mainly so no one would get frostbite. If there is a [full-length] feature and Ai Weiwei wants to get naked in it, that's something we can discuss at that point."

PHOTOS AND MORE PHOTOS: [Faces to watch 2014](#) | [Movies ENVELOPE: The latest awards buzz](#) [DOCUMENTARIES: 10 best of 2013, and a new crop in 2014](#)

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Ai Weiwei Doesn't Want You To See This Sci-Fi Movie He's In

Director Jason Wishnow cast the political activist and artist as a water smuggler in a dystopian, polluted world. But a few days before the enormously successful Kickstarter film's final deadline, Ai Weiwei demanded a full cancellation.

0 NOTES / 0 PIN / 0 PLUS / 27 TWEET / 39 LIKE / 5 SHARE

Shooting a film is stressful enough. It's even more stressful if you're shooting in China, and your principal actor remains something of a permanent fixture on the Chinese government's shit list. Yet, somehow, filmmaker Jason Wishnow was able to pull off casting famous Chinese political activist and artist Ai Weiwei in a [Kickstarter-funded sci-fi film](#), one in which the artist plays a water smuggler in a heavily polluted, water-scarce future. There's only one problem: Ai Weiwei just wiped the \$88,000-funded project from the Internet.

Until Sunday night, Wishnow's 10-minute sci-fi flick was shaping up to be one of the most successfully funded Kickstarter films of all time. The full-length, Kickstarter-funded Ai Weiwei documentary, *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*, only had 793 backers, and yet *The Sand Storm* reached 2,000 backers two weeks ahead of its May 1 deadline. In a matter of days, the filmmakers easily met their initial \$33,000 goal, then exceeded an \$88,000 stretch goal. It seemed like a director's dream come true. When I met with Wishnow last week to talk about the film's environmental themes, he told me that he had taken a major risk and poured much of his own savings into the project.



It now appears that Wishnow may have misconstrued Ai's involvement, misunderstood him, or played an unwitting role in a larger performance piece. A few days before the deadline, Kickstarter abruptly removed the page, citing copyright infringement. Ai also tweeted a [cease-and-desist letter](#) from his studio representatives.

"We want to make it clear that Ai Weiwei does not approve of the way in which his image and involvement have been co-opted for promotional purposes," they wrote. "We believe that the promotion of the film has been misleading, both to Ai Weiwei as a participant and also to those who have helped fund the campaign."

Ai's reps accused the director of using Ai's name and image without the artist's consent. They argued that Wishnow breached copyright by posting images of the film shoot from the artist's public Instagram feed. Ai's studio demanded a full cancellation of the Kickstarter project as well as a public apology. (Wishnow has not yet responded for comment on the allegations.)

It was a bizarre turn of events, especially considering the amount of work that had gone into the project, and Ai's own promotional zeal.

Wishnow first made indirect contact with Ai as the head of TED Talks' video department. A month before Ai would be detained by Chinese authorities for vague "economic crimes" (and [remain there for 81 days](#)), TED [published a video](#) from the artist that had been smuggled out of China. Ai still does not have a passport, and has reported searches and constant monitoring from the Chinese government.

Wishnow eventually met Ai, and pitched him the *Sand Storm* film idea: "Ai Weiwei would play a smuggler in a world without water, as told through the lens of a personal, human drama. Already the subject of an Oscar-nominated documentary, this would mark his acting debut." Wishnow wrote on the now-defunct Kickstarter page. "He asked how fast I could write the screenplay."

“
We want to make it clear that Ai Weiwei does not approve of the way in which his image and involvement have been co-opted.”

The director tracked down cinematographer Christopher Doyle, translated the script into Mandarin, shot the film covertly in China, and recorded an original score with a 28-piece string orchestra in London. It was supposed to be discreet, but Ai himself Instagrammed an image of the shoot.

At first, it appeared that the artist's participation in the film would bring even more attention to one of his pet issues: China's extreme air-quality problem. Last year, Ai posted pictures of himself to Twitter [wearing a gas mask](#) after Beijing's smog concentration hit a level 40 times the World Health Organization's safety ceiling. Pollution also played a large role in the film to-be: While Wishnow intended to have the actors wear gas masks for effect, much of the crew had to wear masks anyway just in order to breathe on set.

So was Ai Weiwei truly misled? The artist's protest against Wishnow's use of his image just seems weird. After all, Ai's face and middle finger has [been plastered all over tea towels and iPhone cases](#) now on sale at the Brooklyn Museum gift shop. (Something Ai acknowledged by [retweet](#).)

And yet, it is possible that Ai caved to some sort of pressure to sink the project (unlikely), or simply [imagined something more](#) along the lines of a cameo rather than a starring role. Then again, it could be that Ai Weiwei just turned *The Sand Storm* into a larger performance. If the artist could make a statement by shattering a [2,000-year-old Han dynasty urn](#) to bits, what would stop him from doing it to a Kickstarter?



SYDNEY BROWNSTONE

Sydney Brownstone is a New York-based staff writer at Co.Exist. She's written for the Village Voice, Mother Jones, Brooklyn Magazine, The L Magazine, and has contributed to NPR. [Continued](#)

It was time to follow my heart," she says. When Spring's doors open it will represent not only a professional milestone but a personal one for the single mother who once struggled with addiction. Calling on her contacts in the design and fashion worlds (Gyngell was once a Somerset House institution in central London. composition of seasonal flavors. "It has always been my dream to make my own bread, butter, yogurt, ice creams — everything," she says. "I can do that now." — DAVID PRIOR springrestaurant.co.uk)



Getfucker and Dior Homme



Rick Owens: The Man who fell to Earth

Ai Weiwei and the Apocalypse

Despite inflated budgets and egos, the art provocateur makes his film acting debut.

In 2013, after more than six years as the head of video for TED Talks, Jason Wishnow went to Beijing for a break. During a visit with Ai Weiwei he asked the artist to appear in "The Sand Storm," a short film he had been developing. Drawn to Wishnow's idea of water as a metaphor for the flow of information, Ai agreed to play a water deliveryman in an arid world. They shot rogue near Ai's studio in the gritty district of Caochangdi, where a spike in Beijing's pollution index required the crew to wear face masks and gave the film its sickly brownish yellow tint.

By the time Wishnow locked his edit, he was out of cash, so he launched an ill-fated Kickstarter campaign. Ai sent Wishnow a cease-and-desist letter, furious that his image and involvement had been exaggerated and "co-opted for promotional purposes." Kickstarter suspended the campaign, and Wishnow returned to Beijing hoping to make amends. In a widely reprinted — and ultimately successful — open apology, he wrote, "Creative endeavors with artistic titans should not be treated lightly." The rebooted campaign became the third-best-funded short film in the site's history, bringing in over \$100,000.

Ai hasn't made any further comment. He doesn't say much more than that in the film, in which he mainly drives a tuk-tuk while wearing a costume that's part Mad Max, part Chinese laborer's uniform. But his presence is deeply felt in "The Sand Storm" — which will premiere exclusively at tmagazine.com — just as it is in the international art world. Asked on set how he felt about his role, Ai answered with typical mischievousness: "In life, we all deliver something." — SAMANTHA CULP



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6:05 PM WED SEPTEMBER 10, 2014

"The Sand Storm" Screened In Berlin Featuring Ai Weiwei

By ABIGAIL WICK



Ai Weiwei starring in "The Sand Storm" by filmmaker Jason Wishnow
Credit: Jason Wishnow

In 2006, everybody told New York filmmaker Jason Wishnow it was career suicide. Nobody wants to watch academic lectures on a computer screen, they said. More than 1-billion online views later (including from, of all places, outer space), TEDTalks naysayers couldn't have been more wrong--securing for Mr. Wishnow, the filmmaker who helped transform the ideas-driven TEDTalks platform into its highly-watchable modern format, a legacy in the pantheon of viral-content gods.



In 2013, ready for a career shift and to reawaken the art-film passion of his youth, Mr. Wishnow journeyed to Beijing. He hoped the Great Firewall of China--the Chinese government's strict Internet censorship and surveillance program--would curb the distraction of online consumption, pushing him to pen his Next Big Thing.

As fate would have it, when Mr. Wishnow reached-out to his only contact in Beijing, hoping for nothing more than a few restaurant recommendations, it resulted in a meeting with legendary artist Ai Weiwei.

Mr. Ai, the publicity-hungry provocateur whose largest-ever one-man exhibition was recently shown at Berlin's own Martin-Gropius-Bau, warmed to Mr. Wishnow. After lively discussion, the two agreed to collaborate on a short science-fiction film--directed by Mr. Wishnow and featuring Mr. Ai.

With water shortages cropping up every day (according to the UN, 700-million people in 43 countries currently suffer from water scarcity), along with alarming predictions about the future of water access (again according to the UN, almost half the world's population will be living in areas of high water stress as soon as 2030), the artists wondered: What would it look like if one of the world's mega-cities, such as Beijing, whose population exceeds 21-million people, experienced such a crisis?

Mr. Ai was particularly attracted to a parallel that Mr. Wishnow's script hoped to draw between the flow of water and the flow of information--an especially salient issue in censorship-addled China.

Planned over a rapid-fire course of two weeks, the film was shot with a 60-person crew over a mere two days. Because the film was shot rogue, without formal permits, extraordinary speed of execution was required over this 48-hour period--resulting in staggering production costs, totalling \$70,000. All paid in-cash and out-of-pocket.

In conjunction with time constraints, the temperature on-shoot was below freezing, while the pollution index (measured on a scale of 1-500, with the worst smoggy days in LA recorded around 90) exceeded all precedents with a record 800. All crew members wore masks.

Upon returning to the US, Mr. Wishnow [launched a crowdfunding campaign](#), with an initial goal of raising \$30,000 in 30 days. But that much poured in over only three days. Amidst a swell of media attention and donations, he re-set the goal to raise \$90,000 in order to break-even, considered a holy grail of indie filmmaking.

With fame comes consequence. Mr. Wishnow woke one morning to learn that Kickstarter had frozen his campaign. Why? Mr. Ai's team had filed a cease-and-desist letter, claiming misuse of Mr. Ai's name, asking that all mention of him be eliminated from the crowdfunding page.

When I asked Mr. Wishnow if this was, in part, a matter of Ai being a diva, the director offered no comment. He would only say that he had 'made the mistake of not having Ai as fully involved as he would have liked,' indicating he would make no further on-record statement regarding the matter.

A last-minute flight to Beijing, bootstrapped with borrowed money, resolved the matter. Mr. Ai wanted from Mr. Wishnow a formal apology, in the honorable Chinese tradition, issued publicly. Mr. Wishnow complied, Kickstarter reactivated the campaign (which exceeded its goal), and the final film--all nine-minutes of it--debuted at the Telluride Film Festival just last week.

Opinions about 'The Sand Storm' (沙尘暴)--a sci-fi short, complete with a love triangle--have been mixed. Critics ask if it was but a mash-up of art-world egos. Others, if it was worth the cost. Nevertheless, the themes of impending water crises and government surveillance are, by all counts, worthy of consideration.

As Mr. Wishnow himself quipped, "Doesn't every Kevin Costner film deserve a remake?"

The film, shot entirely in Chinese, with English subtitles, was screened in Berlin on Saturday, September 6th, at [TEDxBerlin](#).

TAGS: [Ai Weiwei](#) [film](#)



NEWSFEED | JAN. 29, 2007

Spoiler Alert: The Story of Oedipus, With Scenes of “Vegetable Sensuality”

If you missed its debut on the Sundance channel last week (or its showing at the actual Sundance festival), prepare to veg out to the above: Jason Wishnow's take on *Oedipus* is, the subtitle informs, “the story of Oedipus, in 8 minutes, performed by vegetables.” The stop-motion flick, featuring elaborate stage sets worthy of *Ben Hur*, depicts what is perhaps the goriest vegetable-on-utensil violence since food surrealist Jan Svankmajer's *Exhaustive Discussion* as well as the only tomato-on-potato incest scene we can remember (and trust us, we'd remember). The day after a party for the film at *Manitoba's* (owner Handsome Dick isn't exactly a veggie guy, but we'll disregard that), we asked director Wishnow what it was like to spend two years of his life shooting produce.

Why vegetables?

I was a struggling filmmaker, and I thought it would be cheaper to do it with vegetables instead of human actors. Little did I know how expensive this production would be. I joke that the budget was somewhere between \$100 and \$100,000.

How did you get the vegetables to look so good?

Before every shoot you could potentially find me in any grocery store in L.A. County looking for the right characters. The best fruits and vegetables were not the succulent Whole Food types; we went to the big chain groceries and got the most pesticide-laden, iconic ideal version of what a vegetable should look like.

How did you keep your actors from spoiling?

It's actually a different vegetable from shot to shot because it takes so long to shoot each scene. The very last shot of the movie took sixteen hours to shoot a ten-second shot. If you look closely at each shot, you can see broccoli wilting under hot studio lights.

Was it hard to cast the voluptuous tomato for what your disclaimer calls the “vegetable sensuality” scene?

My big concern was finding a tomato that was the right size and would look appropriate next to the potato she was performing against. I looked for one that was as red as possible with a heart-shaped cleavage — so that her ample bosom would stand out.

Did you have to overcome any unexpected obstacles?

There was a broccoli blight in middle of filming the fight scene; we couldn't find any broccoli that conformed to my aesthetic expectations of what a regal head would look like. Also there was a fruit-fly infestation in the middle of summer when we were shooting the nightclub scene. We were constantly batting away fruit flies between takes. You wouldn't think fruit flies and mold would be such a problem, but ...

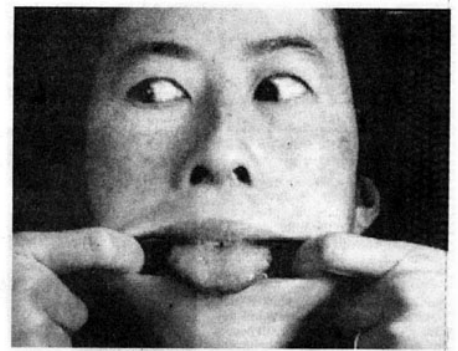
Did you consider using fakes?

Some are more machine than vegetable — There's a metal skeleton under Oedipus's robes. Some of the characters, like the sheep, have an external exoskeleton to help them move around. But if you're going to do the vegetable Oedipus movie, you need to use real fruits and vegetables. There's something about the sort of glow and inner luminosity of a real tomato that can't be captured in a fake. — *Daniel Maurer*

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Short Films Coming Soon to a Hand-Held Device Near You

By MATTHEW MIRAPPAUL

JASON WISHNOW'S film festival is coming soon to a theater near you. In fact, it may already be in your pocket.

Mr. Wishnow, 28, has organized the Aggressively Boring Film Festival, the first curated showcase for short films that are meant to be seen on a hand-held computer's small screen. The festival opened today on a Web site (newvenue.com/takeout), where its entries can be viewed and, if you own a Sony CLIE hand-held computer, downloaded to that pocket-size device.

The festival's 69 submissions range from 2-second loops to 228-second mini-epics. Some were made expressly for the festival, while others were converted from digital films. But all had to cope with the technical limitations of the CLIE and its Palm operating system: 12 or fewer frames per second, a meager 16 shades of gray or 256 colors, a cramped 160-by-120 display and no sound.

Mr. Wishnow said the festival was an opportunity for filmmakers to push those limits — aggressively, of course — and transform a utilitarian product into a new medium for creative expression.

"What I find most compelling about hand-helds is their simplicity," Mr. Wishnow said. "At their core, they are nothing more than a

Rolodex and a day planner. But within those boundaries, there are stories that people can tell, there are ideas that people can share, and there's art that's waiting to be made."

Festival entries include cartoons, silent dramas, computer animations, travelogues and Mr. Wishnow's "Hindenburg," a spoof of the trailers for summer-blockbuster movies. Greg Niemeyer's "Squash Til Blue Tongue Stretch" plays with the confines of the CLIE's screen. Like early silent films, many are choppy and rely on title cards to advance the story. (Some entries are for mature audiences.)

Mr. Wishnow awarded the festival's unnamed top prize — the Cannes-like Palm d'Or

is under consideration — to Louise McKissick's "I Love You," a 15-second visual ode to the computer virus. Ms. McKissick, a Chicago artist, explained why she had entered the festival: "I'm always trying to put my work in an unconventional format. I like the idea of being in places



Entries in the Aggressively Boring Film Festival: "Squash Til Blue Tongue Stretch," top, by Greg Niemeyer, and "I Love You," Louise McKissick's Palm d'Or winner, in which the artist whispers sweet nothings to 3,000 ladybugs.

where people don't usually expect to come across art." She added that she was excited by the possibility that her virus-inspired film could be transmitted, or "beamed," from one hand-held device to another.

Palmtop organizers were not conceived

as portable screening rooms, but the capabilities of the devices have expanded as they have become more popular. Generic Media, the film festival's sponsor, makes the CLIE's video-player program.

ActiveSky offers a player for Palm organizers, and a video player is included with the Pocket PC hand-held devices.

Web sites like Undergroundfilm.com (www.undergroundfilm.com) and CinemaElectric.com (www.cinemaelectric.com) have started to provide short, downloadable films for these platforms.

Although most hand-helds will probably be stuffed with video clips of a tubby toddler's first steps or teeny excerpts from "Titanic," Mr. Wishnow believes that a new medium demands a new approach.

"Everyone who's got one of these gizmos is going to be making movies for them, so let's shape what those movies should be," he said. He noted that the most successful festival entries favored close-ups, shunned camera motion and pared down their text.

The festival is a spinoff from The New Venue (newvenue.com), a Web site Mr.

Wishnow put up in 1998 to encourage filmmakers to produce movies specifically for the Internet. It now contains 44 films. Like the Aggressively Boring Film Festival, The New Venue recognizes the medium's limitations, demanding that each film's file size not exceed five megabytes.

Peter Hoddie, chief executive of Generic Media, said: "It's not like you're making a movie, it's not like you're making a TV show. You have to do things differently because of the constraints of the technology. It's not like you can go out and find the latest, hippest, coolest video off of MTV, compress it and have it be interesting. You have to start to think about what kind of video will work here."

As its name suggests, the Aggressively Boring Film Festival has its share of tedium. But as a whole, the diverse entries resemble a compact history of the moving image, from kinoscope peep shows and grainy newsreel footage to quirky video art and glossy television commercials.

"You can really see the origins of the medium," Mr. Wishnow said. "In a lot of ways, the festival is more about paving the way for what can be done with integrating video on these hand-helds than finding the first masterpiece of the medium. That comes next. That's the Massively Boring Film Festival."

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Extra

WEEKEND EDITION, May 1-2, 1999

Stuck on 'Star Wars'

Tent lines outside movie theaters. People skipping work, class and appointments to camp out for movie tickets for weeks at a time. The growing mania for "Episode I: The Phantom Menace"? No. Flashback two years ago, to the 1997 re-release of the "Star Wars" trilogy.

Jason Wishnow knows that better

Want to see a Quicktime 3.0 sample of "Tatooine or Bust"? [Click here](#) to get it.

Don't have the Quicktime 3.0 plug-in? [Click here](#) to get that.



A video clip from "Tatooine or Bust," a documentary on fans of the Force (Jason Wishnow)

than anyone. The 25-year-old director made a short film, **"Tatooine or Bust,"** in 1997 while finishing his master's degree at Stanford University. He filmed the 13-minute documentary, which explores the world of fanatical "Star Wars" fans who would do anything to get tickets, outside five movie theaters across America. "They were sleeping out for a movie they'd already seen," says Wishnow wonderingly.

Many of the fans interviewed by roving crews in "Tatooine or Bust" describe "Star Wars" as a near-religious experience. One young man, who explains that as a three-year-old in 1977 he fell asleep during the film, says: "In order to fulfill my destiny as a human being, I have to see it in a theater all the way through." Another guy explains quite earnestly his greatest fear: that George Lucas might die before making the ninth and final "Star Wars" movie. (Lucas has since said he'll only go as far as six.)

Wishnow never banked on this year's release of "The Phantom Menace" bringing new attention to his film. But since January, when he posted "Tatooine or Bust" on [Jason Wishnow's Internet site](#), he's been interviewed by MTV, the Los Angeles Times and Wired. The digitally-filmed and -edited "Tatooine" will be screened at the upcoming Cannes Film Festival and Wishnow is in negotiations with the UK's Channel 4 about distributing it in England.

And as perhaps the ultimate accolade, LucasFilms itself screened Wishnow's movie at the Skywalker Ranch last month — twice. — *Esther Pan*

"Tatooine or Bust" is available for free downloading at [Wishnow.com](#) and [Newvenue.com](#) (an online digital movie showcase co-founded by Wishnow).

Related Links:[Starry, Starry Knights](#)["Star Wars" Sooner](#)[Waiting for Star Wars](#)[Buzz Wars, Episode One: The Backlash Menace](#)[The Second Coming](#)[Oscar Alert](#)**Newsweek.com**

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THE SAND STORM

The "low-fi sci-fi" art house tale of a mysterious smuggler navigating a dystopian city where water is as scarce as honest communication...



CINEMASCOPE (2.40:1)

9 MINS (SHORT FILM)

MANDARIN (ENGLISH SUBTITLES)

WORLD PREMIERE: TELLURIDE

written, directed, produced, and edited by
JASON WISHNOW

in order of appearance
AI WEIWEI HU JIANING LI NING BAI YAO

story by LI-ANNE HUANG, JASON WISHNOW executive produced by DAVID HORNIK

associate producers BRITTA DELMAS, KEN EDDINGS, ADAM MONIER EDWARDS, RUTH ANN HARNISCH, LI-ANNE HUANG, JASON PORT, PETER SALLADÉ
god of associate producers ELISABETH AVNET MORSE director of photography CHRISTOPHER DOYLE art director ZORANA ZEN music and sound WILLIAM STORKSON

MISTER HANDSOME

A love story between a grown-up girl and a mysterious friend from her childhood.



14 MINS (SHORT FILM)

directed by
JASON WISHNOW

in order of appearance

HEATHER BURNS BETH GRANT MICHAEL CHIEFFO AJAY NAIDU MILES FISHER

written by **SUZANNE WRUBEL, JASON WISHNOW** produced by **MELISSA M LEE, JASON WISHNOW**

associate producer **JOSEPH RUSIN** director of photography **DAVID WALDMAN**

art direction **KAY LEE** edited by **MATTHEW FRIEDMAN, JASON WISHNOW** music **BLAKE NEELY** sound **WILLIAM STORKSON**

OEDIPUS

A sword and salad epic – WARNING: Contains scenes of vegetable sensuality.



CINEMASCOPE (2.40:1)

8 MINS (SHORT FILM)

WORLD PREMIERE: SUNDANCE
80+ FILM FESTIVALS

written, directed, produced, and edited by
JASON WISHNOW

starring
A POTATO A TOMATO BROCCOLI GARLIC and BILLY DEE WILLIAMS as THE BARTENDER

executive produced by MICHAEL GREEN, ALEX SUTER associate producer GIAN MARCO MASONI director of photography JIM MATLOSZ
production design RICK CORTES costume design SARA KOZLOWSKI art direction JOHN MILLHAUSER music BLAKE NEELY sound WILLIAM STORKSON
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