



Compass Rose

Literature and Art Journal

Compass Rose Interviews Laura Colella

Compass Rose: Did you ever see yourself as a filmmaker?

Laura Colella: I grew up interested in theater, and in being an actress. It wasn't until college that I discovered the possibility of making films, and never looked back.

CR: What type of theater classes did you participate in?

Colella: I took acting and dance classes growing up, and was in several productions at the Trinity Repertory Theater in Providence before finishing high school.

CR: Was there a specific movie in your childhood that sparked your interest in films?

Colella: Growing up with much older siblings, I saw a number of films before I was old enough to understand them.

CR: Besides writing and filming, do you participate in any other artistic disciplines such as painting or sculpting?

Colella: I've done a bit of sculpture, and would love to try painting. I fantasize about doing both every time I go to an art museum.

CR: How did you first break into the film industry?

Colella: My first industry experiences were as a camera assistant after college.

CR: Was there ever a time when you first started working with the cameras, that you felt nervous and that you were going to make every mistake known to man?

Colella: My early experiences as a camera assistant come to mind. For some reason, film productions often rely on the least experienced member of the camera department to do the critical task of loading and unloading the film into/from the cameras. If any light leaks onto the film, it's catastrophic.

CR: How did you overcome this anxiousness?

Colella: Maybe I overcame the fears by making mistakes and realizing the world wouldn't end.

CR: What did you do to get noticed and have your work be taken seriously by the industry?

Colella: To this point, my films have been quite marginal by commercial film standards; but they've had a degree of success in the independent realm, and with people who care about film as an art form. I was fortunate to receive support and a Fellowship from the Sundance Institute, who lent equipment for my first feature, and very extensive donations for my most recent one.

CR: *What kind of impact did the Sundance Film Institute have on the quality and production of your work?*

Colella: It gave crucial validation and a vote of confidence for potential supporters and funders. On a creative level, participating in the labs was also a fantastic experience.

CR: *How did it feel when you received your first recognition as a filmmaker?*

Colella: Films are like theories or ideas throughout the long process of making them, so when all the hard work is done and you finally have something real to show people, it's great (and a huge relief) to get positive feedback.

CR: *Do you think being a woman in the film industry has helped or hindered you?*

Colella: I used to think it wasn't a hindrance, but in the more mainstream or commercial realm, I think unfortunately it is.

CR: *Do you feel your education and upbringing had a big impact on your success in the film industry?*

Colella: Definitely. I feel filmmaking uses every ounce of my education and experience, both of which I continue to use every day.

CR: *Who would you say was your greatest influence?*

Colella: One important influence was a film teacher I had in college, Raúl Ruiz. He's Chilean, based in Paris, and though he's not well known in this country, he's made over 100 films. He introduced me to the idea that traditional narrative structure should be subverted.

CR: *How did you develop the idea for your first feature film, Tax Day?*

Colella: Most of my films have been developed through a process of collecting bits and pieces of ideas for scenes, characters, dialogue, themes, locations, etc., over a period of time. Eventually a story, structure, and the central themes emerge. A new script I just wrote is a loose adaptation of a novel, so instead of starting with my own collected ideas, I started with the book as source material.

CR: *Do you often act in your own films? Do you feel it brings you even closer to the project, especially in its directing?*

Colella: I acted in a short I made, *Statuary*, which was fun, but difficult in terms of focusing on my performance. I had just a brief appearance in *Tax Day*, and shot an even quicker cameo for, *Stay Until Tomorrow*, but then cut the scene I was in! I like acting, but on top of directing, sometimes find it difficult to do both jobs optimally.

CR: *Do you have a specific style of directing or do you conduct yourself differently for each individual film?*

Colella: The stories and style of my films have been quite different, but there is probably something in the themes or point of view of the writing that they share in common. Each project has had needs specific to the material, so it has felt fairly distinct from the others in terms of process.

CR: *I noticed your most recent film, Stay Until Tomorrow, has certain parallels to your life, such as speaking Italian and traveling. Was this film crafted with your experiences in mind or mainly fictionalized with a few personal anecdotes?*

Colella: The events are completely fictional, but of course mixed into fiction come some of my facts, facts of people I know, things I've heard about, complete fabrications, etc. – it's all fair game when you're writing.

CR: *Has being able to speak two other languages besides English helped you greatly in your work?*

Colella: Not greatly in work perhaps, but in life, yes. I like to travel, and to be able to communicate with people in other languages. We also shot for a week in France on my last project, so of course French was useful.

CR: *Do you ever get writer's block when working on a script?*

Colella: I let scripts come together in their time, so I don't think I've experienced writer's block.

CR: *Are there any specific steps in the filmmaking process that are especially important to follow for first time filmmakers?*

Colella: I think it's especially important to develop a vision of the film as strongly as possible ahead of time. You have to completely love a project to be happy about devoting so much time, energy, and resources to it.

CR: *Which of your films would you say is your favorite production?*

Colella: I don't have a favorite, but I'm extremely excited about my new script.

CR: *In mainstream cinema many movies are being remade into new versions for younger generations. Do you feel that the creative vibe is being lost in the film industry and people are no longer coming up with their own ideas, but taking and reforming others? And do you think this loss of creativity could be revamped through the mainstream showing of more independent films by new, fresh voices?*

Colella: Absolutely!