



Katy Chevigny '82

Documentary filmmaker; founder, Arts Engine

Katy Chevigny founded Arts Engine, Inc. (and its predecessor, Big Mouth Productions) with over fifteen years of experience as a documentary filmmaker, entrepreneur, and nonprofit manager. Today, Arts Engine develops innovative strategies to amplify the social impact of documentary film. Prior to founding Arts Engine, Katy worked for a video advocacy company in Chicago. She moved to New York, confident that the vision she shared with her co-founder would be unique: women owning a documentary filmmaking company. Today, women still rule at Arts Engine, which has expanded to include an array of programs that “don’t just make films, but also expand the reach and impact that documentary films should have.”

Its projects include one of the first online film festivals—the Media That Matters Film Festival (www.mediathatmattersfest.org)—as well as the community website MediaRights.org, which has a database of over 6,000 social issue documentaries. Katy co-directed (with Kirsten Johnson) *Deadline*, an Emmy-nominated documentary about the capital punishment system in Illinois that premiered at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. The film won the Thurgood Marshall Journalism Award and a CINE Golden Eagle Award, among others. In an unusual arrangement, *Deadline* was broadcast in its entirety in a two-hour prime-time special on NBC in July 2004.

Through Arts Engine's film production branch, Big Mouth Films, Katy produced the award-winning documentaries *Innocent Until Proven Guilty*, *Nuyorican Dream*, *Brother Born Again*, and *Outside Looking In: Transracial Adoption in America*, and executive-produced *Arctic Son*. Big Mouth's films have been shown in theaters, on HBO, Cinemax and public television and at film festivals around the world.

Chevigny also directed and produced *Journey to the West: Chinese Medicine Today*, a documentary about traditional Chinese medicine in China and the United States.

She most recently directed the documentary *Election Day*, which premiered in March 2007 at the South By SouthWest Film Festival in Austin, Texas and will show at the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival in New York in June and eventually air on PBS. The piece, an experiment in *cinéma vérité*, documents the events of November 2, 2004, starring citizens from the Florida panhandle to the South Dakota plains, "making the most of their right to vote."

MCS has had a huge influence on Katy's work. She adopted many of the core values of MCS, among them social justice, self-expression, and tolerance—which are the threads she believes to be necessary to weave stories into good documentary films. Katy remembers learning about, and understanding, social justice from Chris Iijima and his emphasis on self-expression, especially in writing and in music. Through his own gifts, Iijima strengthened his students' beliefs in their abilities to fuse social justice and the arts—without the burden of "choosing" a career. She fondly recalls Iijima's only trip to Japan as the jumping off point for his incorporation of art and culture in film into the curriculum, awakening her awareness of film as a powerful medium of communication.

My own grandmother would be proud that my great-grandson can attend a school like this one. We have come a long way from the Atlanta of my grandmother's time. Now I see a little boy who comes to a school where he is learning to understand everyone, and all his classmates are learning to understand him. That makes me proud to be associated with his school.

Lena Horne (2000)
Singer, MCS grandparent,
accepting the "Living the Dream"
Mentor Award