

IN FOCUS

Five films in different stages of production. **By Mary Glucksman**

The Afterlight

“It’s a moody, atmospheric drama that’s also a mystery and, I think, a new way of telling a story,” says Craig Macneill about *The Afterlight*, a first feature he co-wrote and co-directed with Alexei Kaleina. The film tells the story of a young New York City couple who make an ill-advised move into an abandoned farm country schoolhouse, and, says the writer-director, “calls for the audience to participate by drawing its own conclusions as the film progresses.”

Macneill, 32, grew up in Massachusetts and Virginia and studied film with Stan Brakhage at the University of Colorado at Boulder, graduating in 1999. His short *Late Bloomer* played 20 ‘05 festivals, including Sundance, and is available on IFC.com and through Netflix on the compilation *The Shortstack*. Roy Scheider was attached to his planned first feature, *Winter Sea*, a 2006 IFP market screenplay entry, but financing was tough. Macneill and Kaleina, 28, a Bennington College grad he met at the wedding-video studio they both worked at, decided to then write a much lower-budgeted feature. “We knew we wouldn’t have much money, and decided to work around what we had,” says Macneill. “A friend of ours owned an abandoned farm with a schoolhouse and three-story barn surrounded by a dense forest. Our characters and story were directly inspired by this unique place.”

The HD-shot *Afterlight* lensed for three weeks last fall in Walton, New York, with additional scenes filmed in Connecticut and New York City. Zoe White, a camera assistant on films like *Starting Out in the Evening*, makes her feature cinematographer debut. “She apprenticed with Newton Thomas Sigel on *Superman Returns*,” says Kaleina. “We wanted the dark green lushness of summer in the country and the humidity of the landscape within very precisely framed compositions, and she was able to capture that.” The film stars Michael Kelly (*Loggerheads*) and model Jicky Schnee (*Dedication*); Rip Torn and Spanish actress Ana Asensio also appear. The filmmakers are editing themselves while raising post funds.

BOHICA

“It’s about men at war, but not the current war or even necessarily modern war — the is-



CRAIG MACNEILL AND ALEXEI KALEINA / THE AFTERLIGHT.

sues are the same ones we’ve dealt with since we were throwing rocks and spears,” says producer D.J. Paul (*Melvin Goes to Dinner*) about *BOHICA*, his first film as director. The gallops-humor drama is the story of four Army reservists sent behind the lines to guard a radio tower in a seemingly desolate part of the Afghan desert. They are bored silly after a long day of horsing around when enemy soldiers materialize unexpectedly. “There are no interiors in the entire film, so the [reservists] are exposed literally as well as figuratively — they have nowhere to hide,” says Paul. The debut screenplay by Joseph “Bo” Colen draws on his six-year stint in the Air Force. “He walked into my office as a thirtysomething-year-old intern in 2004 and said he needed a job,” says Paul. “A year later he handed me a script with some of the most authentic voices I’d ever [read], and we worked on it for a year and a half. I hadn’t intended to direct, but when I realized I wanted to and floated the idea, my producing partners were enthusiastic.”

A native New Yorker, Paul studied philosophy as a Brown undergrad and spent college summers interning for producer Jerry Weintraub and completing NYU’s intensive Super 16mm production course. He then spent three and a half years as a Wall Street bond trader. After a chance invitation to observe weekend shoots on *Spanking the Monkey* in 1993, he quit his job to produce his first feature, *The Pompatus of Love*. He’s spent the last decade in L.A. balancing feature projects like *Melvin* with TV and Digital TV comedy specials like

the *Comedians of Comedy* series.

The digital *BOHICA* shot last summer in L.A. County’s Agua Dulce with Michael Hardwick (*Channels*) as d.p. “There had been massive brush fires there in 2005 so I thought it might work but what I found was beyond any expectation,” says Paul. “We ended up shooting on 1,000 acres that looked exactly like what we saw researching images of Afghanistan.” The film stars Adam Rodriguez (*C.S.I. Miami*), Brendan Sexton III (*Boys Don’t Cry*), Kevin Weisman (*Alias*) and Nicholas Gonzalez (*The O.C.*). *BOHICA* — that’s a soldier acronym for Bend Over, Here It Comes Again — world premieres at the Atlanta Film Festival mid-April; as a producer, Paul’s also on the spring festival circuit with Michael Blieden’s medical marijuana comedy-doc *Super High Me*.

How I Got Lost

“It takes place between September 11 and the blackout two summers later when people my age on the cusp of beginning a life and a career became a kind of lost generation,” says Joe Leonard, 28, about *How I Got Lost*, the feature version of his award-winning NYU film program thesis short. The film is a drama about two twentysomethings, a disillusioned Wall Street banker, and a would-be novelist working a newspaper sports beat on the road looking for truth and answers. “They had such big plans — everything was mapped out,” says Leonard. “Now their plans are shattered. It doesn’t look like their dreams can