

= Helen Lee ( director ) =

Helen Lee ( Korean : ?? ? ; born circa 1965 ) is a Korean @-@ Canadian film director . Born in Seoul , South Korea , she emigrated to Canada at the age of four and grew up in Scarborough , Ontario . Interested in film at a young age , she took film studies at the University of Toronto and , later , New York University . While in university she was influenced by gender and minority theories , as reflected in her first film , the short Sally 's Beauty Spot ( 1990 ) . While continuing her studies she produced two more films before taking a five @-@ year hiatus to live in Korea beginning in 1995 . After her return , she released another short film and her feature film debut , The Art of Woo ( 2001 ) . She continues to produce short films , although at a reduced rate . Lee 's films often deal with gender and racial issues , reflecting the state of East Asians in modern society ; a common theme in her work is sexuality , with several films featuring interracial relationships .

= = Early life = =

Helen Lee was born in Seoul , South Korea , around 1965 , but came to Canada when she was four , a year after her parents . She was raised in Scarborough , Ontario , having moved there in the mid @-@ 1970s . As a child , she became interested in black @-@ and @-@ white films from the Golden Age of Hollywood . She later wrote that the 1960 film The World of Suzie Wong spoke to her racial identity as an Asian Canadian , an experience she found to have influenced her filmmaking ; excerpts from the film were included in her first short .

Lee began her tertiary studies at the University of Western Ontario , taking business , before transferring to the University of Toronto ; there she majored in English literature and film studies . By 1989 she was attending New York University ( NYU ) , studying under Homi K. Bhabha , Faye Ginsburg , and Mick Taussig , with a scholarship . During this period she was influenced by Trinh T. Minh @-@ ha 's paradigms on women and ethnicity , as expressed in the 1989 book Woman , Native , Other : Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism ; these were later expressed in Lee 's first film . She later described Minh @-@ ha as at one point being her " ultimate role model " .

= = Early film career = =

Lee made Sally 's Beauty Spot , a 12 @-@ minute long short film focusing on a mole on her sister 's right breast , for a film editing class at NYU in 1990 . For the film she used a second @-@ hand Bolex camera and edited it with a Steenbeck editing suite . She later recalled that she recorded the film while in her pyjamas . The production cost a total of \$ 4 @,@ 000 . Fellow Canadian filmmaker David Weaver described it as sexualizing Sally 's body , something that Lee had not intended . The film was first screened at the Festival of Festivals in Toronto . After graduation , Lee spent time as a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art before returning to Canada .

In 1992 Lee made the forty @-@ minute long film My Niagara , which featured scenes shot in Japan that were reminiscent of home movies ; the effect was obtained by filming in Super 8 Kodachrome , then transferring it to 16 mm film . Filmed in Etobicoke , Ontario , at the childhood home of co @-@ writer Kerri Sakamoto , the film detailed a young Asian @-@ Canadian woman living alone with her father after the death of her mother . Scenes were also shot at the R. C. Harris Water Treatment Plant in Toronto . Fransisca Duran in LIFT writes that the film , which had a budget of \$ 80 @,@ 000 , had a theme of cultural displacement , and Lee states that My Niagara was well received . That year she also released the three @-@ minute To Sir With Love .

After My Niagara , Lee took a position as a director observer on the set of Atom Egoyan 's Exotica , while led her to enrol with the Canadian Film Centre ( CFC ) . Meanwhile , she worked as a film and music critic for Now and extensively wrote about films for other publications . She took further studies at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Banff , Alberta , before returning to the CFC as a director residency . She continued to be involved with the American company Women Make Movies , a distributor of feminist media , which she had become involved with while at NYU .

In 1995 Lee released the 26 @-@ minute long Prey , starring Adam Beach and Sandra Oh ; she

described the film as a " cross @-@ cultural comedy " . The film , which followed a young Korean woman who falls in love with a drifter , was a collaboration with Cameron Bailey and dealt with themes of racial differences , immigration , and social class . The Canadian film critic and experimental filmmaker Mike Hoolboom compared the themes to those of the 1989 Hollywood film *Do the Right Thing* , writing that had short films been respected it would have been a watershed mark . That year she also released the three @-@ minute *M. Nourbese Philip* . She then took a five @-@ year hiatus , which she spent in Korea .

= = Post Korea = =

In 2000 Lee released the 22 @-@ minute short *Subrosa* , following a woman 's search for her mother in Seoul . Intended as a prequel for an undeveloped film entitled *Priceless* , the film was shot in several formats with a fifteen @-@ person crew , hurriedly recording scenes in public locations . It extensively used character @-@ centred shots , leading to what Lee described as an organic understanding of the character . It also featured on @-@ screen sexual intercourse , framed in a medium shot , which Lee intended as a sign and not simply a sex scene . Although *Priceless* , meant as a sequel to *Subrosa* , went through more than thirty drafts , it was ultimately cancelled despite interest from Alliance Atlantis and Citytv .

Anita Lee , co @-@ producer of *Priceless* , then suggested that Helen Lee make *The Art of Woo* , a romantic comedy sponsored by the Canadian Film Centre ; it was Lee 's feature film debut . Starring Adam Beach and Sook Yin Lee , the film followed a Korean @-@ Canadian art dealer who finds herself interested in a native artist but considers him unworthy as he is poor . Released in 2001 , the film was " slashed " by critics . For example , Jonathan Crow , writing for the Rovi Corporation , found the film " less fun and less accomplished than a third grade theater production " . However , its soundtrack ? by Ron Sexsmith and Kurt Swinghammer ? won a Genie Award for Best Achievement in Music ? Original Song . That year she also released the three @-@ minute *Star* .

After *The Art of Woo* , Lee announced that intended to adapt Kerri Sakamoto 's novel *The Electrical Field* and a " romantic thriller " . However , neither film has yet been released . In 2002 she showed the video installation *Cleaving* at the Werkleitz Biennale in Germany . She married around 2008 , and that same year released the short *Hers at Last* , about the interactions of two women in Korea . The short was premiered at the Seoul International Women 's Film Festival as part of an omnibus entitled *Ten Ten* , in celebration of the festival 's tenth anniversary . The omnibus also featured works by fellow directors Byun Young @-@ joo and Lee Su @-@ yeon .

= = Themes = =

Race , gender issues , and racial identity often feature in Lee 's works . The main characters , up through *The Art of Woo* , are Asian women that are " caught up in some cross cultural encounter " . She writes that she attempts to address these issues through her films in non @-@ didactic ways , such that the " racial melancholia ... are like seepages in the more obvious dramatic or comedic content " . She contrasts her films with the 1993 drama *The Joy Luck Club* , which she considers a film with obvious , easily consumable , ethnic content . She considers the stereotype of Asian women as seductresses , either demure " lotus blossoms " or vociferous " dragon ladies " , to be a degenerative one which is " sometimes extremely offensive " , but one that has " a cultural memory that demands [ the viewer 's ] attention . "

Lee 's works often include elements of sexuality in their characterizations . She writes that the main characters of *My Niagara* and *Subrosa* reach a greater understanding of themselves and their relationships after sexual encounters . She considers sex as " never the culmination or end point " , but a signifier for intimacy . As such , she feels that the more intimate aspects of sex are best conveyed wordlessly , through how it is presented , although she concedes that " talky sex " can be appropriate for romantic comedies .

= = Filmography = =

All of the below are short films unless noted .

Sally 's Beauty Spot ( 1990 )

My Niagara ( 1992 )

Prey ( 1995 )

Subrosa ( 2000 )

The Art of Woo ( 2001 ; feature film debut )

Hers at Last ( 2008 )