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## Creators using green solutions instead of harsh chemicals to develop video footage

GILLIAN FRANCIS

For Elian Mikkola, Finnish-Canadian film producer and director, art and nature have always been intertwined.

Part of this natural connection means using eco-friendly products during film production, and Mikkola has spent years experimenting with different techniques.

Mikkola, who uses they/them pronouns, has created an all-natural homemade liquid solution that can be used to develop video footage in dark rooms.

Representing a national, eco-friendly movement that encourages analog filmmakers to adopt greener habits, the Regina-based artist was driven to find a unique, foolproof recipe that would help cut back on the harmful chemicals used in filmmaking.

“The process is kind of haunting because you know that you’re working with these highly toxic liquids and splashing around with them,” they said in an interview Tuesday.

Mikkola’s recipe — dried dates, fresh oregano, washing soda, Vitamin C powder, salt and water — is a homemade alternative to mass-produced chemicals, which are used extensively in film production and can be harmful to human health and the environment.

Mikkola uses the solution in their darkroom to enlarge film negatives, before placing them in a moving image projector. The process puts the film producer at ease, adding that with more traditional methods, “you have to be so aware of these health risks that you’re dealing with and putting your body in to danger.”

Mikkola said the recipe is one of many viable options and that other creators have used alcohol, grape juice, hyacinth, anise and blackberry in their potions. The defining compound that makes each of these ingredients work is hydroquinone, an organic water-soluble chemical that reduces certain solid materials.

Gerald Saul, film professor at the University of Regina, another proponent of eco-friendly practices, is interested in learning more about homemade production solutions, so he can ensure the safety of his students.

As a professional who has worked with harsh chemicals for over 20 years, the long-term, negative impact of such chemicals is his primary concern. Although he has never suffered from any ailments himself, he has colleagues who have.

Glacial acetic acid, a liquid-production agent, is corrosive and has been known to cause skin cancer and chronic rashes. Al-

kali-based developing powders can cause anemia in people who are exposed to the substance for long periods. These products can also cause birth defects in fetuses, when pregnant women come into contact with them.

But he’s equally concerned about the disposal of these products. He’s found few removal services, all of which are costly. Saul explained that expense drives people to cut costs by disposing of products down the drain, where they eventually end up in lakes, rivers and oceans.

Saul has experimented with the Caffenol Process, the first eco-friendly developing agent ever created, using coffee grounds. He’s also interested in using sea water as a salt-fixer. These methods have helped to ease his conflicted conscience, torn between a love for his craft and a love for the environment.

“Reconciling that has been difficult. How much harm should I be doing in the pursuits of this artist-

ry?” he queried.

These methods of production are catching on. Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative is running 48 Hour Film Frenzy this weekend, an event which challenges contestants to create a short analog film in two days, this time, utilizing eco-friendly production solutions.

Jacob Farrell, programming co-ordinator for Sask Filmpool, said Frenzy is making a return in this province after a hiatus of some 20 years.

Only the Saskatchewan event will have the eco-friendly component — a first.

The event is part of a larger, worldwide, 48-Hour Film Frenzy, which was originally developed by two Americans based out of Washington D.C. In Canada, a panel of judges will examine all the films and pick two winners from each province, with work to be screened at the Toronto International Film Festival next year.

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