

35mm: emphasis on
approach to
cinematographic craft
in guadagnino's 'call
me by y...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* is a poignant realization of a unique coming-of-age story that centers around the love which blossoms between Elio, the 17-year-old son of an archeology professor, and Oliver, the 23-year-old graduate student that he invites over for the summer to assist him with his academic undertakings. Guadagnino collaborated with Sayombhu Mukdeeprom as his director of photography to helm the camerawork in this visual realization of Andre Acmain's novel of the same name. Mukdeeprom and Guadagnino shot the film using a single prime lens with a focal length of 35mm. Despite an acute understanding that a fair, visual realization of this text would demand a need to perform and capture continents of nuanced emotions, the pair saw it fit to proceed with a lens that granted only a single field of view; if a need for a wider field of view, or a narrower one, in the composition of a scene was felt, then the entire camera rig would physically have to be moved nearer or further away from the desired frame and composition. It is not uncommon for filmmakers to be equipped with dozens of lenses of varying focal lengths, however, being limited to one compelled the two to envision how the complexities of their characters, their desires, and their fears, could be compositionally framed and blocked in a way that would discourage the convenience of simply switching lenses to reach these objects.

The field of view that is captured by a particular lens can vary from an extremely wide field of view, to one that is extremely narrow. The human vision's field of view, for reference, is often slated to be around 50 mm. An attempt to understand Mukdeeprom and Guadagnino's decision to shoot the entire feature on a single Cooke S4 35mm lens may yield varying

interpretations. Regardless, it is important to note that being limited to a single focal length often leads to a dependence on an open frame composition. Scenes of open frame composition that oversee moments of personal discussion between Elio and Oliver are always warm and brightly lit, and constantly reiterate the feelings of unvoiced tension and a longing to comfortably speak, both hallmarks of their first meeting, as if to subtly remind us of this indelible weight. This ability to build, maintain, and reiterate a specific type of atmosphere simply through the repeated use of the similar compositions under identical lighting patterns, serves to demonstrate how the use of a single focal length may have encouraged a form of character expression and engagement through blocking, which may otherwise be taken for granted when afforded the luxury of multiple focal lengths.

Even a casual viewing of this film would allow one to see that more often than not, many scenes in the film tend to begin with a character, often Elio or Oliver, one of whom is near the camera, in a tight-shot or close-up, only to end up in the foreground, as the scene unfolds. This ' fluctuation' arises from the simple art of blocking, a technique where actors are pre-directed about the positions they are expected to occupy during the course of a scene, which can change just once during the course of an entire scene, or more than once. Elio initially finds Oliver to be an intrusive presence, but little comes in the way of the two befriending one another. Oliver is outspoken, charming, and in many ways, a stark contradiction to Elio's mellow, introversive self. The first act ends with a moment where the two are laying in a field of grass, looking at the sky above them, a development which

reduces Elio's vexed reception of Oliver up to this point, as red herrings that served to undermine and even disguise his feelings for him. Compositionally, this is the first scene in the film where they are both in a mid-close shot. Segues to scenes which follow from this point onwards, do not employ the 'fluctuation' that was observed up until that point; blocking wise, Oliver's position will never shift from a close-up to a figure in the foreground, as if a test of Elio's patience and commitment to veiling his feelings. This again serves to demonstrate how the art of blocking can yield results that may otherwise be simple, albeit uninspiring, in respect to an approach to the craft.

Call Me by Your Name is by no means the first feature to be shot entirely using a single prime lens. However, it is one of the few slow-burners of art-house cinema in recent times to achieve what many would call a feat. On the other hand, it demonstrates the encouragement and drive that such a limitation often places on directors, and specifically, cinematographers, to tell stories in a manner that audiences are not accustomed to experiencing. Mukdeeprom and Guadagnino's decision to focus on their approach to their craft, instead of merely the tools at the disposal, allowed them to reach for more with less, without giving away signs of compromise.