

'The Killing of Two Lovers' with Cinematographer Oscar Ignacio Jiménez



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The Killing of Two Lovers (2021), written and directed by [Robert Machoian](#), follows David ([Clayne Crawford](#)) who desperately struggles to keep his family of six together amidst a painful separation from his wife, Nikki ([Sepideh Moafi](#)). Despite David and Nikki giving each other permission to see other people during their separation, David struggles to come to terms with this reality and grapple with his wife's new relationship. The film is a powerful and poetic commentary on the emotional pain and relentless stress a separation can place on both an individual and their family.

The display of David's emotional journey is aided by the beautiful framing established by the film's Director of Photography Oscar Ignacio Jiménez. It's evident that Oscar took careful consideration about creating a visual experience for the audience that provided them with an inside view of David's constantly evolving internal state, one that could be described as a slow burn towards ever-

hardening anger, resentment, and despair. Oscar's approach to cinematography in *The Killing of Two Lovers* plays a powerful and integral role to the development of each character throughout the film, setting a new standard for what a director of photography can achieve with just framing alone.

Many have taken notice of Oscar's incredible work over the years, including the prestigious ASC which honored him with the 2020 ASC Heritage Award for his work on *Gather* (2018). Other notable work of Oscar's includes *The Minors* (2019) and the highly anticipated film *The Integrity of Joseph Chambers* (release date TBD).


Yet, it's his most recent work on *The Killing of Two Lovers* that is receiving the highest praise. The film, which was nominated for the 2021 Film Independent Spirit John Cassavetes Award, won the Jury Award for Best Narrative Feature at the 2020 Atlanta Film Festival and was honored with a premiere spot at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival. It looks like wherever Oscar goes, success seems to follow.

Oscar, along with writer-director Robert Machoian, and Sorø Films have come together to produce a film that beautifully captures the emotional toll a separation can place on an individual and their family. This is Oscar Ignacio Jiménez's journey as the Director of Photography on *The Killing of Two Lovers*.

Let's go back to the very beginning to when you first became involved in the project. What drew you in and made you say to yourself, "I have to do this."

There were many factors that drew me to the project - Robert and I had just finished our first collaboration on a short film during the summer called *The Minors* and the experience was very positive. I admired the way he told films and

his process for collaborations was something I yearned - so working with Robert again on a project was a no brainer. Getting that film into the Sundance Film Festival which was pretty cool too. I was nearing the end of my undergrad studies and looking for more projects that could push my career where I wanted to go which it included shooting a feature within a year or two.



When you were first handed the script, was it at that moment you began to plan your shots?

I am admittedly a very slow reader and it takes me a while for words to cultivate in my brain. Even now after a couple projects it super rare for shots to formulate evolve in my head - but we did take influence from what we did with The Minors with the use of static shots. Especially since the film had a very modest budget we immediately knew coverage was not going to be an option. The geography of the film made sense and shots started to form when Robert and I visited the location in Kanosh - he had envisioned the opening shot of David running from outside Nikki's bedroom window to his father house (where he now lives) as a one shot and I thought it was brilliant! We had visited influences from photographers and independent filmmakers such as Todd Hido, Barbara Loden, Chantel Ackerman, and Bela Tarr. We also discussed about the film as a compilation of a family album which cemented the idea of going for composed static frames.

Can you describe your process while working with writer-director Robert Machoian? How much direction did he give you, what did that look like, and how did you then make it your own?

Robert in the initial meeting gave me his influences for the film and emotional beats he wanted to cover. After *The Minors* he mentioned the short film version of the script which is the climax in this film and mentioned how he wanted to feel like. After looking through some photographs I got a good sense of what the film should feel like and then he left me to achieve it however technically I felt compelled to do it. It was both liberating and frightening how much liberty I got to choose in focal lengths, lights, exposure, angles. However in the beginning I always made sure for him to check the frame before we began rolling and then after two days I felt very comfortable checking less with him since he had a lot on his plate. He would always tell me - "I trust your instincts so just do what feels right" I primarily stuck to two focal lengths and our lighting package was very small that I got into a rhythm of what equipment we needed to use.

How did you go about preparing for each scene? Did you storyboard far in advance, discover it in the moment, or did you go with another method?

We talked about each scene before we shot and I would watch the blocking to figure out where the camera would go. Robert has a little note book that he used to storyboard but it was mostly to inform shot size. On set I would use his shot size list and then on set find the right focal length to keep the vision align and consistent throughout the film.

Composition is used heavily in the film, especially to inform the audience about the ongoing internal battle within David. What ran through your head when framing those key shots for the film?

There geography of the location worked into our advantage - we were lucky to have soft winter light to help compose for wide shots. We knew going into the film we wanted wide shots so that was decided and cemented from the beginning. But something that evolved was how exposed the characters are in the frame - it felt like their dirty laundry was exposed to the community which I feel is like common in small towns that everyone know everyones business. So the wide frames again felt very appropriate for the film.

What would you say was the most difficult shot to get in the film and how did you go about achieving it?

The most difficult shot I was trying to wrap my head around was the opening bedroom scene. We needed it to match our morning scene when David runs back to his house after escaping from Nikki's window. The shot was influenced by Todd Hido's portraiture of soft light pushing through. We only had a 2.5K Senior LED light to do the heavy lifting but we couldn't put the light exactly where we wanted since there was a shed about 2 feet from the window. We had to get inventive and then had to further diffuse and cut the light to make it feel not lit but real morning light. After quite some time I think we nailed it and had to do very little for the other shots in the space - which one ended up being on the poster. So to say I feel proud about the shot is an understatement. It also cemented the idea that I don't need much to create something I am proud of.

What was the most unexpected shot you achieved that wasn't at all planned for?

Our first day of shooting I understood it would just take place in one location which was a hobby store where David buys rockets for a scene right before the climax. After we wrapped the location I remember the producer saying - "OK great we wrapped early lets head out to Kanosh for some extra shot" To me I was scared since I didn't plan for anything else and mostly used the day to help me get adjusted into the project. When we got to location I was asked to find some shots that felt right - I saw a hill that looked over a junk yard that David was supposed to clean for another scene at Ms. Staple place and thought I think that could work. I called Robert to see if it felt right gave me the green light - and I thought to myself "man I got lucky". Also another shot that was planned but turned out different was a bit after the climax when David drives into a field after he passes out driving - as he drives of the camera goes a little dutch and I

just remember telling Robert - "thats the shot" - to me it added another layer to the scene.

How close does the final cut match up to your initial vision for how the film would look? Are there any positive differences in the end that you didn't expect?

We didn't have many shots for the film so I for the most part remember every shot and set up we did and saw roughly where the pieces fit together. Because we didn't have much coverage either, the rhythm was familiar when I saw the edit. However seeing sound and color come together - it became a very ethereal experience watching the film for the first time at our premiere. That along with the audience reaction was incredibly surreal.

If you had to go back and re-shoot the entire film again, is there anything you would do differently based on what you learned this first time around?

I don't think I would reshoot the film any differently - I honestly am super proud of the team and how the film came to life with its limitations. The film has its own personality and doing anything different would only take away at this point. I definitely learned a lot but it's not to change this film but to learn how to apply for any other situations I come across for the future.

What do you hope audiences take away most from the film?

I hope the audience feels something after watching the film whether they connect with David, Nikki, Derek or the kids. I love the humanity portrayed in the film and think we could connect with one of the characters. In the macro scale I hope independent cinema doesn't disappear and that this film could inspire other filmmakers to create personal stories told in a unique voice. These are the types of films I gravitate towards and hope to continue working in.

The Killing of Two Lovers was acquired by NEON in the fall of 2020 and is currently [available VOD](#). For more information [visit here](#).



LISTEN TO OSCAR IGNACIO JIMÉNEZ ON THE SORØ FILMS PODCAST

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