

## “A Story Of Turtles – And Of A Budding Filmmaker”

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You might never look at turtles the same way again after viewing Eric Daniel Metzgar's strangely hypnotic film, "The Chances of the World Changing." It premieres tonight at 11 on PBS' "P.O.V." series.

Metzgar, a filmmaker from the Richmond area, spent two years following the saga of Richard Ogust, a New York writer who shared his loft apartment with 1,200 turtles, many rescued and some extinct in the wild.

Ultimately, forced out of his apartment and unable to create the turtle institute he dreamed of, Ogust had to give away his menagerie.

"The Chances of the World Changing" is Metzgar's documentary feature debut. He graduated from Mills Godwin High School in Henrico County in 1993 and the University of Georgia in 1998, where he studied journalism and wildlife management. He lives in New York.

Q. How did you go from journalism and wildlife management to making documentaries?

A. After college, I became deeply interested in expressing what I thought were my very important inner thoughts. So after I graduated, I directed a fictional film that I wrote, but it came out quite poorly. Around 1999, I moved to New York City and pursued a music career, which felt like a natural move because I'd been in bands forever. I recorded a few albums and toured a bit, then fled Manhattan in pursuit of a woman. After we broke up, I reassessed my life and came to the conclusion that documentary films seemed to encompass nearly all of my interests. So I moved back to New York and became an intern at a great documentary company for about a year.

Q. Richard Ogust's story seems like an unusual topic for a first documentary feature. What attracted you to it?

A. I was attracted to Richard's bursting life. I was attracted to the thousand animals in his home. Mostly, I hate cities, so naturally I love people who create jungles within cities. I needed to be around him. What he was doing made sense to me.

Q. Were you converted to turtles? There are a number of shots where the turtles seem to have definite personalities.

A. Yes, the turtles have personalities, just like dogs, kittens, people and ants. They learn. They're curious. They defend their existence. They fight. They communicate in ways we don't want to believe.

Q. This is labeled as a documentary, which means maintaining a certain distance, keeping your objectivity. Did you find that hard to do at any point?

A. I don't know what "documentary" means. If it means "maintaining objectivity," then this film isn't a documentary. I was a journalism major, but I'm not a journalist and I never will be. Objectivity, to me, is a mathematical concept, not a reality.

A filmmaker points a camera at a face and immediately a perspective is born. He asks a question to that face and his question is ripe with his own desires. Cameras are just eyes with a memory, and our eyes are choosy. We think we see everything, but I think we only see what we want to see. In other words, this documentary was handmade with the eyes.

Q. Tell me about the music score. It's so perfect for this production. It has a dreamy, underwater feel to it, as if you're swimming really slowly.

A. A great musician named Eric Liebman created the music for this film. His work is radical and strange, but soft. He drifts in and out of moods and sprinkles his compositions with notes I'd never think to hum. . . . His pieces ask me to focus on the screen, on the words, on the faces. For that reason, he's a director's dream.

Q. Is this a story about failure?

A. Every good story is about all things. There are no pure successes. What Richard did is: He tried. And we did our best to capture and share that effort with others, in hopes that it might inspire them. To me, the real failure is our species' raging needs, which result in the loss of animals, land and peace.