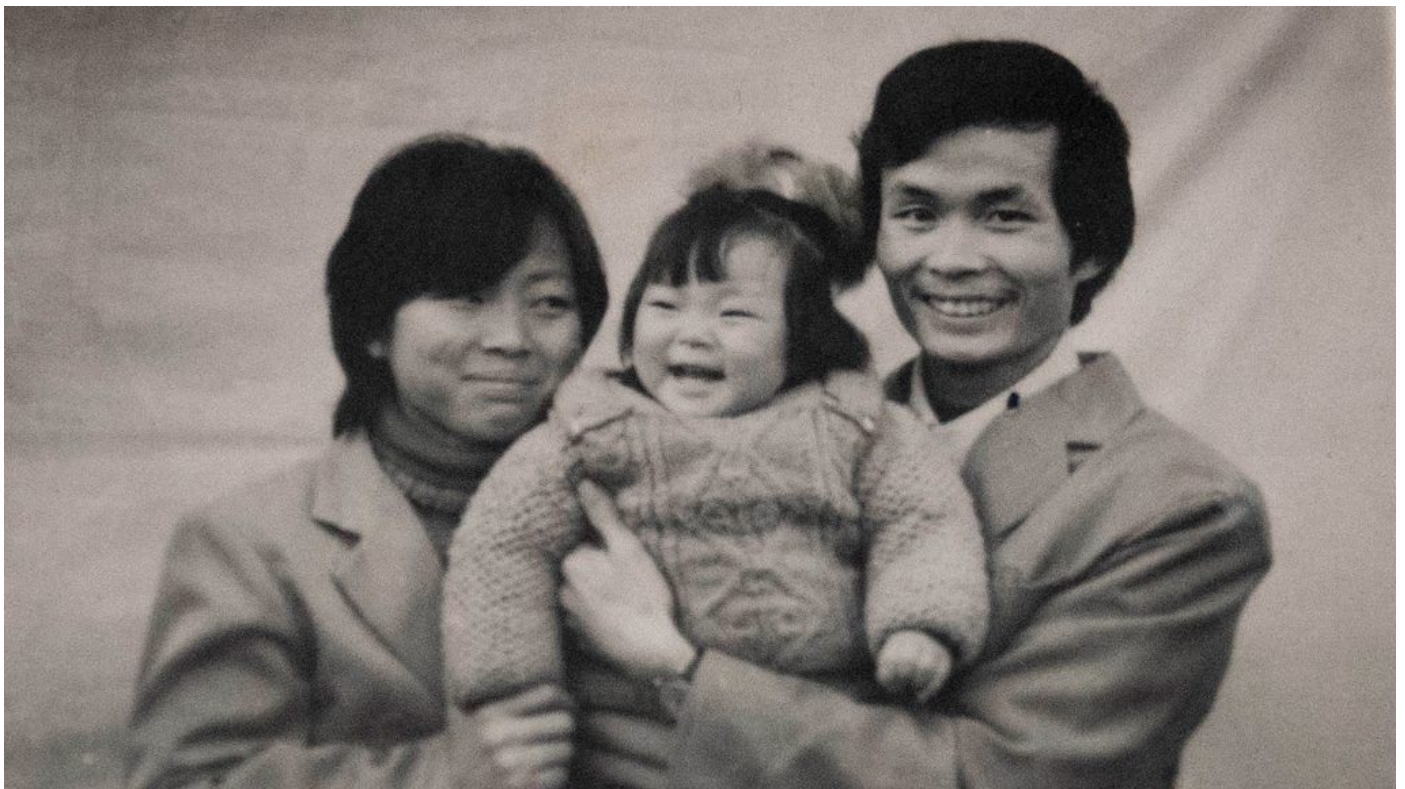




Montclair roots of DOC NYC, turning 10



A scene from "One Child Nation." COURTESY DOC NYC

DOC NYC

10th anniversary, Nov. 6-15

136 feature-length documentaries (28 world premieres), more than 300 films and events

DOC NYC PRO: 8-day series of panels and master classes

Visionaries Tribute honoring Martin Scorsese and Michael Apter for lifetime achievement

Dedicated to the late D.A. Pennebaker

*IFC Center, SVA Theatre,
Cinépolis Chelsea, NYC*

Venue details and times at docnyc.net

By GWEN OREL

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Making “[One Child Nation](#)” was dangerous.

Director Nanfu Wang had to be careful to stay under the radar, and not attract government attention as she made her documentary about China’s One Child Policy, which lasted from 1980 to 2015 and made it illegal for a couple to have more than one child.

Wang was rewarded with a grand jury prize in documentary at the Sundance Film Festival in 2019. Now it’s on the “The Shortlist” at DOC NYC, a list of 15 films that executive director Thom Powers and artistic director Raphaela Neihausen think of as their top picks of the year.

The documentary film festival began yesterday, Nov. 6, and runs through Friday, Nov. 15, at several theaters in the city. For the full event schedule, visit docnyc.net.

Powers and Neihausen, a married couple who live in Montclair, founded DOC NYC 10 years ago.

“We are definitely a film festival family,” Neihausen said with a laugh. Her son Bez and DOC NYC are the same age. “I have a human child and a festival child.”

The couple founded DOC NYC with another Montclairite, John Vanco, general manager of the art house movie theater the IFC Center in New York.

And Wang has become a Montclairite too: she moved here a few months ago, lured in part by Neihausen.

“She’s part of the Brooklyn-Montclair documentary film migration,” Neihausen said.

She and Powers moved to Montclair in 2012 to work for the Montclair Film Festival during its first three years.

While they have since moved on to focus on other projects, both often collaborate with MFF.



Raphaella Neihausen and Thom Powers. COURTESY RAPHAELA NEIHAUSEN

The couple met at a documentary film festival in Germany in 2007. Neihausen was presenting her first documentary, “Miss Gulag,” about a women’s prison in Siberia, and its annual beauty contest. Powers had been a director too.

Having a background as makers of documentaries guides their work as producers of the festival.

This year DOC NYC has over 300 films and events, including 28 world premieres out of 136 feature-length documentaries. It also has a longer timespan than ever before, 10 days instead of eight.

Among its features is DOC NYC PRO, an industry conference with eight days of panels and master classes for professionals and aspiring pros; a Masters section focusing on nonfiction auteurs including Barbara Kopple (“Desert One”); “Green Screens,” a section of environmentally focused films; “Food for Thought,” focusing on culinary stories; and “Investigations,” focusing on nonfiction investigative films. Overall there are 21 curated sections, including two feature competition sections.

The festival honors Michael Apter (“7 Up” series, “Coal Miner’s Daughter”) and Martin Scorsese (“The Last Waltz,” “Boardwalk Empire”) at its Visionaries Tribute awards ceremony, and overall it is dedicated to the late documentary filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker (“The War Room,” “Don’t Look Back”).

Pennebaker, who died in August at age 94, is important to all documentary filmmakers because he not only helped invent the documentary style, but also the very tools of documentary, Powers said.

“He was part of a group that fashioned the cameras that, for the first time, filmmakers could go into the streets and record synchronous sounds with portable cameras. We take that for granted now, because we have that power with smartphones.”

[READ: DOC NYC; UNRWAPPING PRESENTS IN DOCUMENTARY FILM](#)

[READ: MONTCLAIR FILM HOLDS DOCUMENTARY WEEKEND](#)

As always at film festivals, many of the directors and subjects will appear at screenings for Q&As. Robbie Robertson will be present for the screening of opening night film, “Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and The Band,” about the influential musicians. Director Ebs Burnough will appear for a Q&A after “The Capote Tapes,” a portrait of Truman Capote with André Leon Talley, including never-before heard recordings.

Powers and Neihausen have loved growing the festival, and coming up with new ideas for it.

“Last year we added ‘40 Under 40,’ for people under the age of 40 we think of as the most promising,” Powers said.

Neihausen added that she would love to add “40 Over 40,” to highlight people who come to film later in life.

“For me, documentary films are a way to experience parts of the world, meet different characters I’ll never get to meet, visit different places I’ll never get to travel to, and experience different ideas that may not have come to me in other ways,” Powers said.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

One of the directors who will be present at the festival is Wang.



NANFU WANG

Her relationship to DOC NYC is special: when she was a graduate student at NYU in 2012 she volunteered to work as a videographer at DOC NYC, so she could attend panels and see films for free.

Wang had come to the United States from China in 2011 to study at Ohio State University.

“Prior to that, I had not seen documentaries, I didn’t know the medium existed,” Wang said by telephone on her way to a film festival in San Francisco. She knew making films about real people, that could have an impact, was something she wanted to do. She continued her studies at NYU’s journalism school.

“One Child Nation” is her third film, co-directed and produced with Jialing Zhang.

It was not easy, Wang said, citing China’s severe censorship and surveillance. She had to be careful to keep her crew and subjects safe.

The film has not been shown in China: the government censors information related to it, she said. It has been shown in Hong Kong, and elsewhere throughout the world. People in China know of it, through friends who study abroad, she said.

Throughout the process, she asked women about their experiences during a time of forced abortions, forced sterilizations, government kidnappings, human trafficking and forced adoptions.

She grew up under the policy. It was after she had her own child that she began thinking about state control of childbirth, she said in the press notes for the film. She reached out to Zhang, whom she knew from grad school, who also had grown up under the one-child policy. One thing also hugely present in the film is the way the propaganda affected everyone and continues to affect people in China.

Wang herself believed all the pro-one-child policy propaganda and did not question it until she had left, she states: "I would sing the propaganda songs, I would participate in events that the Communist Party organized, I was a student leader in the university back in Shanghai, and I worked for the university, and I would even do propaganda work for them, writing propaganda articles for them."

And later, after she'd left China, she wondered how she could have been so ignorant. In the film, she allows the propaganda to speak for itself, almost like a character.

"I hope the film will be seen by current students, people who want to make films," she said. "I want them to know that the path of becoming a filmmaker is hard but not impossible."

Filmmaking, Powers said, quoting critic Roger Ebert, is "a machine that produces empathy.

That's what it's all about."