

And, Cut!

Unsung Heroines of Moviemaking

by Stephanie A. Blanchard



Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio in James Cameron's 1997 film, *Titanic*, Copyright © 2012 Paramount Pictures, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Still by Merie W. Wallace

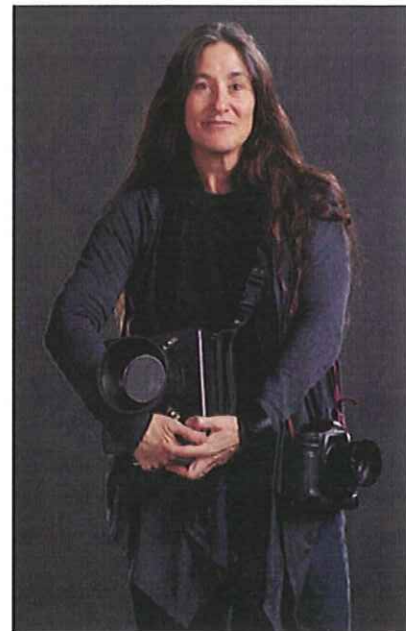
Moviegoers tend to focus on the actors, so the talent behind the scenes often gets overlooked, but Hollywood film sets host complex operations with hundreds of staff, some of whom are stars in their fields. Two such professionals worked on the Terrence Malick film, *The Tree of Life*, which got three Oscar nods—for Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Picture—at the 2012 Academy Awards. Merie W. Wallace, an accomplished still photographer, shot all of the photos used in marketing the film. And three-time Oscar-nominated costume designer Jacqueline West designed the film's costumes. (She got Best Costume Design nominations for *Water for Elephants* in 2011, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* in 2008, and *Quills* in 2000.)

Film-Set Photographer Merie W. Wallace

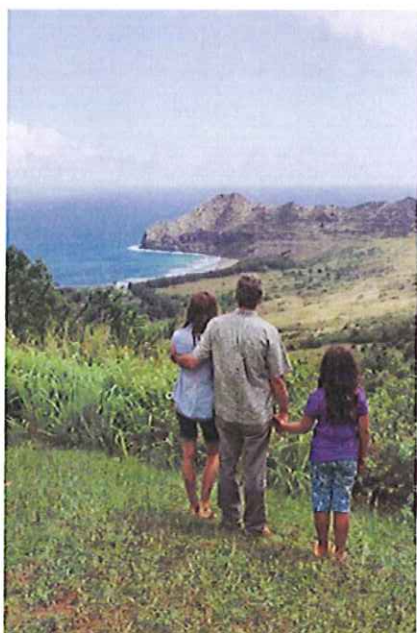
Merie has photographed on the sets of others of Terrence Malick's rank, some of the world's most famous directors, including Sam Raimi, James Cameron, and Clint Eastwood. Her work appears on movie posters and other advertisements across the globe. She captured Jack's (Leonardo DiCaprio) undying love for Rose (Kate Winslet) in the *Titanic* stills, Maggie's (Hilary Swank) inherent determination in *Million Dollar Baby*, and recently, Matt King's (George Clooney) life in *The Descendants*, which won the 2012 Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar.

Although working on a movie set sounds glamorous, it's hard work. Merie puts in

twelve- to fifteen-hour days, and film customarily lasts at least eight weeks. location conditions can be harsh. When she was photographing on location for another Terrence Malick film—the 2005 historical drama *The New World* that stars Colin Hanks and Christian Bale—Merie found herself in the woods and swamps of Virginia. During the filming of *Titanic*, she wore a wet suit up to her neck in water. No matter how difficult the locations and conditions can be, Merie says, but she has to carry a lot of equipment. “I have two or three lenses, a vest, a hip belt, a blimp (so I can hide the camera). As soon as I leave something behind, what I need,” she says, comparing the weight of one lens to “something loaded for hunting.”



Above, another still taken during the filming of *Titanic* (Copyright © 2012 Paramount Pictures, Inc. All Rights Reserved) by Merie, who is pictured at right in a photo of J. Biver. Below at right, Merie captured George Clooney and Shailene Woodley, also pictured with Amara Miller at left, in *The Descendants*, Copyright © 2011 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All Rights Reserved.



Despite her very visible equipment, Merie wears black and tries to make herself invisible, because she can't interrupt in-progress filming. Constantly focused on her job, she knows exactly when to press the shutter button. "Nobody calls for you. You have to stand and watch, and when it's your time, you have to *know*, and take cues. I wait for my moment," she says, and then, the second that an actor looks up, she's ready, because, "I'm in their eyes. It's instinctual."

As much as she loves her career, Merie has another passion—her family. She chooses to photograph just one or two movies a year so

that she can be with her husband and ten-year-old daughter. "It's been really important to me to balance my career. It's incredibly hard to do," she notes, working those extra-long days on the set, for months in a row. "I don't define myself by my job," she says, and stresses, "having a child is incredible." Merie's most recent project is photographing for Sam Raimi's *Oz: The Great and Powerful*, due for release in 2013.

Costume Designer Jacqueline West

Jacqueline has an impressive resume. Along with her Oscar nods, she won a Satellite

Award for *Water for Elephants*, and Sier Award for *Benjamin Button*. And prior to signing costumes for films, she was a fashion designer with her own boutique in Berkeley, California.

She joined the movie business in 1990 when director Philip Kaufman asked her to serve as his artistic consultant during the filming of *Henry & June*. Following that project, she designed all of the costumes for Kaufman's 1993 film, *Rising Sun*, and for *Quills* in

Though her costume commitments vary, Jacqueline says she typically works on t



Above, Laramie Eppler, Jessica Chastain, and Tye Sheridan, and below, Brad Pitt with Jessica Chastain in *The Tree of Life*, Copyright © 2011 Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Stills by Merie W. Wallace and costume design by Jacqueline West.



films per year, and takes time off between to “rest and recharge.” She describes herself as a “method costumer,” a nickname she says Brad Pitt gave to her, as he’s a method actor.

When starting on a new movie, Jacqueline begins by reading the script several times to “really know the characters inside out,” she says. Then, she spends long days researching. “After doing solid research, choosing fabric, and constructing, you’ll know when you hit the character,” she notes, “They dress themselves.” When choosing costumes, she thinks deeply about the character, to get to the point of knowing, “there are only certain

things he or she would wear.” Before designing, Jacqueline takes into account the movie’s time period, a character’s economic and occupational circumstances, and his or her personality.

Ten to twelve weeks before filming begins, Jacqueline preps for the movie, and then stays on set until it’s finished shooting. “I can never let it go. I really need to be on set,” she says, for when things come up, such as needing to make adjustments. Jacqueline created the wardrobe for *The Tree of Life* in just eight weeks, and with a small staff.



jacqueline, photo by Merie Wallace

world. She especially liked Istanbul, a location for the film *Argo*, a feature film directed by Ben Affleck and due for release in 2012. It’s “a beautiful place,” she says of Istanbul, “moody and inspiring.” The