

**INTERVIEW WITH MELANIE HO '18, WRITER AND DIRECTOR  
OF "DO NOT SWALLOW", CO-WINNER OF THE  
UCHV SHORT MOVIE PRIZE 2018**



**UCHV:** Where are you from, and what is your major?

**MH:** I am from Jacksonville, Florida and am majoring in East Asian Studies with a focus on Gender and Sexuality Studies.

**UCHV:** When did you start making movies and how did you come to make "Do Not Swallow"?

**MH:** I became interested in filmmaking after producing a documentary for Purcell Carson's class, *Documentary Film and the City*. Since then, I tried making my own independent and collaborative documentaries, one of the most recent being "Bronzeville | Little Tokyo", a film that examines the space of Little Tokyo in downtown Los Angeles and how artists of color have come together in documenting—through multi-faceted, interactive, and groundbreaking artistic forms—the little known history of when Little Tokyo was once Bronzeville.

Every year, my friends and I have been telling each other that we need to do this or we need to do that. For example, creating a YouTube channel and vlogging. But since a few of us are now seniors, we really needed to act on it! So, we started to hold weekly meetings, writing and planning ideas for new films and other multimedia projects that we wanted to pursue. "Do Not Swallow" came from one of these meetings, somewhere along the lines of me stating that queerness seemed as suffocating and lonely as eating a bowl of cereal. We hope to make more iterations of "Do Not Swallow", using the same writing but portraying different feelings and visuals.

I want to continue creating films that are thoughtful and centered on marginalized voices and experiences that aren't often given the space to do so in our current media.

**UCHV:** What was your budget?

**MH:** \$0! We took an Uber to the mall and started experimenting from there.

**UCHV:** Could you briefly describe the process you went through/difficulties you had in making "Do Not Swallow"?

**MH:** "Do Not Swallow" is an experimental short that explores the feelings of female sexual coming of age, through a lens of queerness. There is a discomfort in what we find comfortable, and food is used as a tool in understanding where we fit in a world that is constantly in motion around us.

This film is special to me because it is shot entirely on an iPhone and GoPro. To an extent, this has reassured me that filmmaking is accessible. It's also one of the first videos I've created that deviated from documentary, something that I'm more comfortable with. That being said, "Do Not Swallow" definitely made me excited to try out different forms of filmmaking and storytelling.

Equating cereal to queerness is something that is both broad and specific. To make sense of this initial thought, we brought these topics into a conversation, understanding the underlying feelings and the causes of them. Sexuality, coming of age, and food all came up in our conversation, so we decided to get creative!

Editing the footage together was difficult yet quite liberating. Interestingly enough, "Do Not Swallow" has taught me a lot about narrative filmmaking, especially when it came to the edit and being intentional with the images seen and sounds heard in collaboration with the writing.

**UCHV:** Any final thoughts?

**MH:** I am very grateful to UCHV for their time and opportunity to create! I am blessed that my close friends are also my collaborative partners. Thank y'all for trusting in our ideas and bringing them into existence! I am excited to create much more in the future.