

Light Work

Anderson native
Caleb Suttles made a
documentary film before
college. Now, he's honing
his craft at Savannah
College of Art & Design

/by Meaghan Walsh Gerard

When Caleb Suttles sees clothing, he doesn't just see fabric—he sees purpose. Suttles, a native of Anderson, is not a designer or clothier. He's a filmmaker, steeped in art at an early age, first at the Montessori School of Anderson ("The curriculum was student-led which gave me the time and support I needed to truly lay the foundation of my filmmaking aspiration," he says), then for a semester at Clemson University, and now as a student at Savannah College of Art and Design.

Suttles, 19, experimented with cameras and filmmaking at a young age. "When I was in elementary school, I would create stories and have my grandfather film me acting them out," he recalls. As a teenager, he continued to make amateur films and post them online, eventually finding virtual communities to share his art. "I am passionate about filmmaking for its unique qualities," he explains. "Film allows me to manipulate moving images of reality, and enhance them visually and sonically. I am a believer that we all can craft our own realities, but it is a skill a filmmaker must embrace. We must be able to imagine worlds that do not exist, futures that seem impossible, and potential in the most unlikely places," he says.

Suttles's first feature film, *Pre-Do: Foresight in 20/20*, which he made when he was just 17, earned him an invitation to present at TEDxGreenville in 2012. To create that documentary, he visited retirement communities and asked elderly people about their regrets, and, perhaps more important, what advice they would give teenagers today. "In my talk I described my belief that, without the intervention of the knowledge I had attained through the film, I might have settled for the situation I was in, and attempted, simply, to fit in. But instead I worked intensely on commercial video production projects, applied to



Film Sass: Suttles began experimenting with film in elementary school. His first feature film, *Pre-Do: Foresight in 20/20*, made when he was 17, earned him an invite to TEDxGreenville in 2012.

art schools, and began creating fashion films—even when it seemed futile. These things became my salvation," he says.

His forthcoming documentary, *Do or Dye*, is set to release in 2014 and will be a collaborative effort with the SCAD community. "I plan to crowd-source the funding and hopefully several tasks of a crew on the film; however, I will be writing, producing, directing, and editing the film myself," he explains. The film will focus on fashion and how people use it as a mode of expression—but also as a kind of armor. Suttles will highlight those who, he says, "boldly defy our culture's accepted mores, and defy traditional expressions of gender, appearance, and beauty." He is fascinated that fashion can so greatly affect one's outlook on life in general. When his mother battled breast cancer, Caleb saw her use clothing as a sort of protection, and as a new way of expressing herself. "It affected her physically, and she used fashion throughout that journey," he says.




Focal Points: (clockwise from top-left) Suttles was invited to present at Greenville's 2012 TEDx event; the filmmaker in profile; stills from films *Wonder*, *Beyond the Bend*, and *Cotton, Inc.*, respectively. To view more of Suttles's work, go to <http://flavors.me/calebsuttles>

"The film will be an exploration of the relationship between individuals in various misunderstood and disadvantaged situations and the fashion they employ as a tool of resilience and strength," says Suttles. He intends to follow these individuals as they navigate their "particular subcultures and ideally discover how fashion benefits their journeys in situations of sickness, poverty, exclusion, and discrimination." Suttles insists that the project will be seen through the lens of his "personal desire to express the benefits of an industry typically presented as harmful to self-confidence." In other words, presenting fashion in a way to make the audience feel better, stronger, and more connected.

Suttles has plenty of artistic partners to work with at SCAD in Savannah. Although he is enrolled in the film department, he is constantly collaborating with students in the fashion department. "Fashion has always been important to me," Suttles explains. "It is the physical embodiment of the message I am most devoted to, self-expression and self-actualization. Here, I have been able to connect with a community of fashion designers, filmmakers, and studio artists alike—all of whom are incredibly driven and inspire me to push forward every moment of the day." Suttles also says he is grateful that he has been able to immerse himself in foundation studies as well. "Everyone, even a film major, has to take drawing and color theory."

This means that all of the students he works with, no matter their discipline, have a common artistic vocabulary and basic knowledge.

Suttles intends to continue his collaboration with fellow students, with an eye toward making socially conscious yet commercially viable work. His most recent piece with a commercial bent is a competition film for Cotton, Inc. It features handmade clothing created entirely from cotton and exhibits both the fine detail of the construction along with its wearability.

Suttles contends that art should try to achieve something beyond the everyday. "I try to find visuals that are beautiful and jarring—something you're not used to seeing." It's about seeing beyond the obvious—and bringing life to life. 

TOWN

The Arts Issue

IMAGINATION TAKES ON
A LIFE OF ITS OWN



MAY 2013
TOWNCAROLINA.COM

Photograph by Paul Mehaffey



Under Cover

Among the challenges of producing *TOWN* each month is devising clever cover copy. For this issue, our homage to the Upcountry's faceted arts community, we settled on, simply: The Arts Issue. At the end of the day, the arts need no fills.

AWe considered "Art Meets Life." But beyond the cliché, the sentiment falls short. It implies that art is somehow separate from life—though life encompasses all and, I'd argue, is itself art in progress.

Still, we hold the arts in high esteem. We respect, and sometimes revere, artists for taking the world apart and reimagining it in fresh, thought-provoking ways. For capturing life's transience to satisfy, intrigue, and at times confound us—to move us, essentially.

Each issue of *TOWN* highlights the arts. You might even consider it an arts publication—*TOWN* is a community magazine, and the attention we lend to the arts speaks to our area's cultural values, which have helped to attract global business and put us on the national stage. An artistic community means more than a wealth of galleries or nonprofits. It's a collaborative of forward thinkers, insightful residents, and proactive leaders. While I gaze at the falls or bike the Swamp Rabbit Trail, I at times take this for granted.

What I hope you don't take for granted are the voices inside these pages. Our main features showcase artistry that is often left out of the spotlight. "Illustration Nation" (page 72) highlights four area illustrators whose fantasy worlds bring to life stories on the page and the screen. "Formal Arrangements" (page 80) features four Upstate florists who have created custom arrangements especially for this issue. The floral arts date back centuries and are more than a gesture for Mother's Day (May 12). May brings Cinco de Mayo (check out the guacamole story on page 94), and hold onto your hats for the Kentucky Derby. We have two stories devoted to the fastest two minutes in sports: "Riding High" (page 67) is a travel feature on Louisville, Kentucky. The city is packed with plenty to dig into beyond the dirt of Churchill Downs, and the Man About *TOWN* (page 60) dresses and drinks for the occasion. Also in this issue: a collegiate filmmaker, modern architecture, French pastries, absinthe, a field guide to Charleston (Spoleto Festival USA begins this month), and more. While we call your attention to select people, they're but a fraction of the talent around us, and within us. We each have the opportunity to draw out our own beautiful stories. Lives worthy of art, indeed.

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Meaghan is a writer, photographer, blogger, critic, and aspiring woman of letters based in Savannah, Georgia. She is also currently working on her first novel. You can view, read, and comment on her work at mwegard.com.

A Connecticut native, Kate found her way to the South and is currently a senior studio art major with a concentration in graphic design at Furman University. She has been working with *TOWN* as a design intern this spring and plans to pursue a graphic design career in Greenville after graduation in May.

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