

CITIZEN ARCHITECT

Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio

PRESS INFORMATION FOR *CITIZEN ARCHITECT*

CONTACT INFORMATION

Sam Wainwright Douglas
BIG BEARD FILMS
4805 Red Bluff Rd.
Studio C
Austin, Texas 78702
USA

Office Phone: 512.385.4400
Mobile: 917.856.8451
sam@bigbeardfilms.com
sam@citizenarchitectfilm.com

www.citizenarchitectfilm.com
www.bigbeardfilms.com

RIGHTS AVAILABLE:

Currently scheduled for national broadcast on **PBS** (America's Public Broadcasting System) in summer 2010. All other rights and territories are available.

SHORT FILM SYNOPSIS

In 1993 the late architect and MacArthur Genius Samuel Mockbee started the Rural Studio, a design/build education program, in which students create striking architecture for impoverished communities in rural Alabama. Guided by frank, passionate interviews with Mockbee, ***Citizen Architect: Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio*** shows how a group of students use their creativity, ingenuity and compassion to craft a home for their charismatic, destitute client, Jimmie Lee Matthews, known to locals as Music Man because of his zeal for R&B and Soul records. The film reveals that the Rural Studio is about more than architecture and building. Mockbee's program provides students with an experience that forever inspires them to consider how they can use their skills to better their communities. Interviews with Mockbee's peers and scenes with those he's influenced infuse the film with a larger discussion of architecture's role in issues of poverty, class, race, education, citizenship and social change.

CITIZEN ARCHITECT

Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio

1 PAGE FILM SYNOPSIS:

Citizen Architect: Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio is a 60 minute documentary film on the late architect Samuel Mockbee and the radical educational design/build program known as the Rural Studio that he co-founded deep in poverty-stricken Hale County, Alabama. Awarded a **MacArthur Foundation “genius” grant** and the **American Institute of Architects’ Gold Medal Award** for his work at the Rural Studio, Mockbee was an artist, builder and educator who instilled his passion and philosophy in those he believed will become a new generation of “citizen architects.” *Citizen Architect* explores the effort by Mockbee to infect architecture’s future practitioners with the knowledge and passion to improve their community’s quality of life by putting compassion and ethical responsibilities at the heart of their design.

Aptly named Rural Studio because of its remote location in West Alabama, the program invites Auburn University architecture students to leave behind the typical academic setting to live and work together in the classroom of the community. The students design homes and neighborhood buildings that reflect the needs and wants of their underserved clients—many of whom don’t have indoor plumbing or a proper roof over their heads. With minimal funding, the students build their designs, relying mostly on donated and locally salvaged materials that keep costs low and the environmental impact negligible. The result is graceful, clever and often stunning structures that provide shelter for the body and soul while fostering a healthy dialogue between disparate groups of people whose assumptions about race, class and economic disparity are upended by the experience.

Citizen Architect is guided by frank, passionate, never-before-seen interviews with Mockbee that provide context and insight for the story of Jay Sanders, a young Rural Studio instructor, and a group of 20 year-old students he leads in crafting a custom home for their charismatic, destitute client, Jimmie Lee Matthews. Known within the community as Music Man because of his obsessive passion for soul music, Jimmie Lee maintains a healthy zeal for life, blasting R&B from his collection of used stereos and boasting that he “ain’t never met a stranger!” His infectious, optimistic attitude despite decades of difficult living rubs off on the students as they form a strong bond with him throughout the film. The story unfolds during the year after Mockbee’s untimely death from leukemia as the Rural Studio struggles to maintain the guiding spirit of its founding father.

Citizen Architect is a rich, probing film that supplements this first-hand footage with perspective from architectural heavyweights and artists who share praise and criticism of the Rural Studio, including **Peter Eisenman, Michael Rotondi, Cameron Sinclair, Lori Ryker, Hank Louis, and Steve Badanes of Jersey Devil**. The film follows up with Music Man, Sanders, his students and other Rural Studio graduates to see how the program has affected their lives. Through scenes with architects such as Hank Louis of Design/Build Bluff in Utah and Cameron Sinclair of Architecture for Humanity, who have founded similar design/build programs, *Citizen Architect* captures the ripple effect that the Rural Studio continues to have throughout the profession.

Mockbee and his team are the avatars for a new generation of architects and designers committed to putting social and environmental responsibility at the forefront of their practice. In a time when people feel increasingly overwhelmed by the social ills surrounding them, *Citizen Architect* is proof that there is ample opportunity to take a simple idea, coupled with creativity and dedication, to affect positive change in our communities. This film offers a dialogue about what it means to be both a successful professional and a responsible member of society—ultimately arguing that the latter is essential to the former.

CITIZEN ARCHITECT

Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio

DIRECTOR FILMOGRAPHY

As Director:

Citizen Architect: Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio (2010)
The Holy Modal Rounders... Bound To Lose (2006)

As Producer:

Near Life Experience (2006)
Raise The Roof (2003)

As Editor:

Along Came Kinky: Texas Jewboy for Governor (2009)
Near Life Experience (2006)
Left of the Dial (2005)
Raise The Roof (2003)

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Sam Wainwright Douglas – Director/Producer

Sam Wainwright Douglas, a graduate with honors from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in 1998, has been working in documentary film and television ever since.

With fellow filmmaker Paul Lovelace, Sam made the feature length documentary *The Holy Modal Rounders... Bound To Lose*, which chronicles the surreal saga of the infamous bad boys of folk, The Holy Modal Rounders. The film covers the band's bizarre history and follows this dysfunctional family of musicians as they ride a popular resurgence toward their unpredictable 40th anniversary concert.

Sam was also an editor for *Left Of The Dial*, a feature documentary about Air America Radio that was broadcast on HBO in March and April of 2005 and is now available on DVD. He also edited a short documentary produced by the Anti-Defamation League, which won a 2005 Telly Award. In 2006 he edited and co-produced *Near Life Experience*, a feature documentary about Dan Asher, a New York artist who struggles daily to overcome his autism in order to create striking art works. In 2002 Sam edited and co-produced *Raise the Roof*, an award-winning documentary on Irish traditional music, which played several festivals and aired on the BBC and RTÉ.

Sam has taught film and video editing in the Department of Radio Television Film at the University of Texas, and he recently edited *Along Came Kinky: Texas Jewboy for Governor*, a film due out next year on musician/writer/raconteur Kinky Friedman and his independent run for governor of Texas in 2006. The film premiered at the 2009 South by Southwest Film Festival.

Dutch Rall – Director of Photography

Dutch Rall is a 3-time Emmy-winning producer, director, cinematographer and editor for America's Public Broadcasting System (PBS). He has traveled the world as a sound man for bands and musicals, lectured for the National Press Photographers Association and was the winner of the World's Smallest Film Festival, the very first competition for video on mobile devices. His commercial work includes shooting for AT&T's Olympic campaign. He has produced a number of performance films for various dance companies for which he was recently awarded the Austin Critics Table Award for best video design. His first independent feature film, *The Incurable*, is wrapped and will be represented by House of Film at Cannes' Marche du Film 2010.

CITIZEN ARCHITECT

Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio

Jack "Jay" Sanders – Producer

Jack "Jay" Sanders received his Masters of Architecture from The University of Texas and his Bachelors of Architecture from Auburn University. At Auburn, he studied with Samuel Mockbee at the Rural Studio where he completed his senior thesis, *The Newbern Baseball Club*. The project represented the Rural Studio at the 2002 Whitney Biennial in New York. Sanders' work at the Rural Studio is featured in *Proceed and Be Bold: The Rural Studio After Mockbee*, published by the Princeton Architectural Press, and has been exhibited worldwide.

Founder of Design Build Adventure, Sanders recent works include CO2 LED, a large-scale temporary public art project installed in Arlington County, Virginia in the summer of 2007. Sanders is also collaborating with Liz Lambert of Bunkhouse Management and Lake/Flato Architects on El Cosmico, a residential/hotel/performance-space village in Marfa, Texas. Recently, Jack was a lecturer in architecture at the University of Texas

Sarah Ann Mockbee – Producer

Sarah Ann Mockbee is currently the development manager at the Austin Film Society. Before that Sarah Ann worked in the development office at KUT, the National Public Radio station in Austin, TX. She began her career in radio during her senior year of college as a production intern at WNYC, the NPR affiliate in New York. After graduating with honors from Barnard College at Columbia University, Sarah Ann worked as a researcher for Air America Radio and then found her way back to WNYC as part of their Communications Department. She is the second oldest of Samuel Mockbee's four children.

Jeff Fraley – Executive Producer

Jeff Fraley was recently the Executive Producer for the PBS documentary *Recapturing Cuba: An Artist's Journey* and *Unconventional: The Story of the Barnett Shale* for NBC. He was the producer of *Ride Around the World*, an IMAX film tracing the history of the cowboy back to its origins in Morocco. He also produced *Making The Modern*, a PBS doc about renowned architect Tadao Ando and his work on The Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth, TX.

SAMUEL MOCKBEE BIOGRAPHY

Samuel Mockbee

Dec. 23, 1944 – Dec. 30, 2001

Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee dedicated his life, as a teacher and as an architect, to creating architecture that not only elevated the living standards of the rural poor but also provided "shelter for the soul." Mockbee was so committed to this pure act of service that, in 1991, he abandoned a full-time architectural practice with Coleman Coker and the firm Mockbee Coker Architects to accept a position at the Auburn University School of Architecture. It was there that he and long time friend and Auburn professor D.K. Ruth conceived of and founded the Rural Studio.

A fifth-generation Mississippian, Mockbee was born on December 23, 1944 in Meridian. Upon graduating from high school and before beginning the formal study of architecture, Sambo served two years in the U.S. Army as an artillery officer at Fort Benning, Georgia. At the conclusion of his armed service commitment, he enrolled at Auburn and graduated from the School of Architecture in 1974.

He returned to his native Mississippi in 1977 and established a reputation for outstanding design through the utilization of local materials to create a work based upon derivations of

CITIZEN ARCHITECT

Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio

vernacular imagery. In 1990, he was selected, along with his partner Coleman Coker, by the Architectural League of New York to participate in their prestigious Emerging Voices Series. In 1993, he was awarded a grant from the Graham Foundation for work under the title "The Nurturing of Culture in the Rural South: An Architectonic Documentary." Mockbee garnered worldwide media attention in the 90s, and he has been featured prominently by the popular and the professional media, including ABC's Nightline, Oprah Winfrey, CNN, CBS, PBS, The New York Times Magazine, People, and countless architectural publications.

In 1998, Mockbee was diagnosed with leukemia. After a strong and near miraculous recovery, he went on to accept awards and recognition for his work including the first-ever National Building Museum's Apgar Award for Excellence in 1998; selection as one of five finalists for environmental, social, and aesthetic contributions by the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in a White House Ceremony in 2000; the Mississippi Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts in 2001; and, most notably, inclusion as a MacArthur Foundation Genius in 2001.

Seven days after his 57th birthday, Mockbee passed away from complications with his disease. His work was featured in the Whitney Museum of Art 2002 Biennial, and Mockbee posthumously received the 2004 Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects, their highest honor.

In addition to Auburn, Mockbee taught at Harvard, Yale, Berkeley, and the University of Virginia. His wife, Jacquelyn Johnson Mockbee, resides in the home Mockbee built for his family in Canton, Mississippi. They have four children: Margaret, Sarah Ann, Carol and Julius.

References:

Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio: Community Architecture, Samuel Mockbee, David Moos (Editor), Gail Trechsel (Editor), 2003-11-01, Birmingham Museum of Art. ISBN 093139452X

FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT:

Throughout the 90's the Rural Studio garnered recognition from around the world, landing it in the 2002 Whitney Biennial in New York and eventually winning Samuel Mockbee a MacArthur Genius Grant and a posthumous Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects in 2004. Through lectures at distinguished universities and institutions, articles in countless publications, and appearances on numerous television programs, Mockbee and his Rural Studio team were the avatars for a new generation of architects and designers committed to putting social responsibility at the forefront of their practice. But, despite the growing number of stories about the Rural Studio in the mainstream media, the true experience and spirit of the program had not been conveyed.

Mockbee knew he had to find the right people to reveal the essence of the Rural Studio with sensitivity, humor, and vigor. In 2000, noting the value of exclusive footage that was being captured by Jay Sanders, who at the time was a recent Rural Studio graduate hired by Mockbee to teach there, Mockbee pushed for me to collaborate with him. Mockbee was a family friend and his artistic passion and desire to make the world a better place had a profound impact on me at a young age. Having seen some of my short films, Mockbee liked my sensibility, so he pushed me and Jay to pursue a documentary that would provide a more thorough and illuminating exploration of the Rural Studio.

Jay's footage provides an unprecedented, intimate insider's view of Mockbee's time at the Rural Studio that has never been seen before. And, the footage that I shot over the course of

CITIZEN ARCHITECT

Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio

a year with Jay and his students building a house for Greensboro, Alabama resident Jimmie Lee Matthews, known locally as Music Man, provides an unprecedented, insider's view of a Rural Studio project from start to finish. Along with this special footage, *Citizen Architect* takes advantage of several hours of frank, passionate interviews that I shot with Mockbee under a shed in his front yard where he painted during the balmy summer months in Canton, Mississippi. The interviews were conducted a year before Mockbee's untimely death from leukemia in December 2001, and they reveal Mockbee discussing his work and the Rural Studio in an uninhibited, conversational manner that has also never been presented to the public.

This documentation of Mockbee at the height of his work with the Rural Studio combined with the other elements of the film (current interviews with contemporaries, follow ups with alumni) weave together a story that expresses the progressive mission and inspirational power of the Rural Studio.

Jay and I have a very personal stake in this film, but what makes it even more personal for me is the fact that Mockbee's middle daughter, Sarah Ann, is my wife. We had met when Mockbee was still alive. So, this is a family affair, and I believe between the three of us, we've made a film that proudly presents Mockbee's legacy.

Sam Wainwright Douglas
Director/Producer