

# 2025 Extended Reviews

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## **Turn Up The Night**

*The lead performance of Turn Up The Night, delivered by K Cody Hunt, carries a great energy about it - providing a solid ground with which to elevate the project to a very strong and well-rounded atmospheric piece. This is further made concrete by the direction, which is often balanced and well-nuanced. This indie film is, overall, a well-measured and reflective piece.*

*While this is a far cry from Oliver Stone's The Doors, the film shares a similar self-awareness of its genre, exploring the entertainment industry's impact on people and the profound shifts it brings as they mature—an experience viewers are likely to share with the characters.*

*It's difficult to determine whether Turn Up the Night is a spoof or a pastiche, influenced largely by the seemingly 'of-the-era' wigs and the strong spotlight lighting. However, despite this challenging blend of possible interpretations, the film presents a strong mix of characters, naturalistic dialogue, and a tone of sincerity and solid intention.*

## **Fool with a Gun**

*Fool with a Gun presents a noir world with a surreal twist. The camera angles, which are the highlight of the short film, expressively reveal the shape of objects. Perhaps most prominently, the gun is shown at an angle. The dynamics of the short film visually are exciting and engaging. They often reveal care for depth of field and guide the audience through visual cues to interpret the narrative—much like a silent film.*

*The acting, which is always on point, provides a glimpse into the character's psyche and the standard footprint of noir narratives: a sense of danger and crime.*

*Overall, the short, perhaps at times, leans too heavily on the one-man show. It excels as a micro project that could be fleshed out more through interactions with other characters. The minimalism, though, is exciting to see, much like the works of Jim Jarmusch.*

## **A BAD, BAD DAY**

*With a bold choice of image ratio, A Bad, Bad Day hits the nail on the head of a retro indie production, recalling the visual treats of Clerks. Like Clerks, it has a central character who is comically facing the demise of their personhood—or at least a version of it (perhaps in that regard, it is more like Chasing Amy).*

*Overall, the film benefits from its strong sense of locale and the many moments where we are given glimpses into Jalen Snowden's Murphy, who travels through a terrain of urban spaces and people of these local social 'clicks'. On this, the film truly excels, as it celebrates its strong understanding of authenticity and the circumstances that Murphy lives in.*

*The best compliment one can give this short film is that it demands a sense of time and mood that is unfamiliar in short films and feels more fitting for a feature film. Jalen Snowden's style and approach are definitely those of a director already working in the fashion of a feature film.*

### **The Back Garden**

*Directing duo Pat Bradley and Melanie Gretchen give us a glimpse into the world of secrecy and tense discussions around the interactions of a few individuals who carry a lot of power.*

*Melanie Gretchen's performance, which embraces substantial tonal shifts, provides a strong backbone to the film. Her reactions and dynamics with other characters unfold the narrative and the risks of the situations these individuals face.*

*With long takes, and intense use of sound, the film reveals itself as a darker tone by the end of the short film.*

*The highlight of this production though is its production values, which embrace the space as a varied presentation of different times of day – heightening to its dark broody conclusion by the end of the short film. A tighter edit, and perhaps even a strong sense of genre, would have elevated the production even further.*

### **Viaticum**

*With bold black and white photography and a memorable score – which accentuates the emotional undertone of the project, Viaticum is a comical film with the highest of elevated presentations: a comical priest-led short film.*

*With several key ensemble performances, which help provide a great sense of comedic timing and dynamic performances of several caricatures, the film is a memorable and enjoyable treat – the kind that can be presented in crowd settings for a successful, comical reaction.*

*While many shots provide great order to the people and objects in the frame, at times, the lighting overshadows some areas, making it harder to understand the entirety of the performance. Overall, though, this is a minor hiccup in a very well-rounded film.*

*Another strong element is the script, which seems to be perfectly attuned to the genre's requirements: it is intriguing, familiar and very inviting. The use of a priest and a man confessing, though typical of a deathbed setting, is elevated and made fresh with the keen direction explored in this short film.*

*A feature effort is now on the menu.*

# Extended Reviews – 2024

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## **Open Your Eyes**

*Samantha Scaffidi's atmospheric film focuses on the psychological turmoil experienced by a woman being pressured into an uncomfortable mental space. The film's strongest hand is served with the interpersonal relationships of the characters, and the carefully composed cinematography, which alludes to a touch of Ari Aster's Hereditary.*

*Ella Loudon and Daisy Bevan's performances reveal more interpersonal tensions as the film expands. The past trauma clashes with the violent present, making the film a sort of crescendo of fear of self-harm and vulnerability.*

*The film's strong direction overrides the need for genre-specific outcomes, serving more of an experience than a character-driven film. Overall, this is a memorable and impressionable piece as short films go. Highly recommended.*

## **A QAnon Christmas**

*First off – the poster of this film is fantastic. There's texture here, and comical elements such as the bump on the tongue. It is enticing – unique and memorable.*

*The film's CGI animation appears detailed enough, with a sort of slowed movement, that it mimics claymation – it is, thanks to these fine-tuned touches, interesting to look at... carrying a finer feeling for artistry than most animated films produced using 3D renderings that we have seen. Likewise, the 2D animation sequences appear fresh, and authentic – boasting a Michel Gondry feeling of handmade quality.*

*The rest of the film, which is presented in yet another format – black and white – carries the audience's attention largely through the comedic movements of the camera and engaging script. The colour scene adds a fourth element of contrast, really boasting this film as a blend of techniques and visions of cinema.*

*Overall, the script and performances are quite engaging. It is a very well-produced short film, one that perhaps only slightly struggles with its wide shots, which appear to be produced on too wide a lense.*

*It is largely quite great, and highly entertaining – a proper film that will be worthy of being recommended to viewers.*

## ***Daniel Came Home***

*The short vaguely mixes an artful avant-grade style (black and white, focus-play, double exposure and SFX) and dramedy to evoke a sense of time, doom and mortality.*

*The film's props (the door sign, the party sign, the carpet) evoke an unusual feeling of modernity in what appears to be a mostly retro-based short film. This however is perhaps more of a pain of the digital film arena – things are perhaps a tad bit too sharp... and something like Film Convert might help enhance the film's style.*

*The performances, the concept and the overall delivery though is very well done. The film is blunt about trauma, and the sort of snake-eating-its-own-tail element of the fable of: a certain type of upbringing may result in pain.*

*The director's strong sense of timing, and the crescendo ending very much feels like a filmmaker who, with the right film elements (which will help elevate the film's technical style) is ready to progress into feature filmmaking and distribution.*

*All in all this is a solid short film, and one that has a strong and impactful ending.*

# Extended Reviews 2023

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## **Bad Day for Contemplation**

*A strong and unusual runtime for a short (perhaps a bit long, but not long enough to be a feature), this film showcases a divide of people in a prison space. The claustrophobia is heightened even further by the narrative splintering, which uses colour (much like Traffic) to highlight the different abstract layers of time.*

*The ensemble cast showcase a particular feeling of tension between these individuals, highlighting the film's use of dialogue and circumstantial specificity of space – where the positioning of people forces confrontation and danger.*

*The day-for-night at times becomes too dark, hiding characters from sight. The use of digital colouring as well highlights the visual effects of the film, perhaps making a slight distance between the audience and the content.*

*Ultimately the best thing about this short is its unique content. We have not had a mob lead riot in a prison setting ever in the festival, making this short film an often unspoken story. One which must happen in prisons. This scale is impressive in the indie scene.*

## **What You Can't Promise**

*With a strong eye for composition, and very strong lead characters, this film excels at exploring several dramatic turns within a strong cinematic space. Taking a page out of Ingmar Bergman's style – the film is set within a small country house, one which is disrupted by the arrival of 'the other'.*

*Employing modern narrative techniques of time jumps, the film quickly propels its narrative into an emotional state of disarm. A man and a woman quickly lose ground in their interactions, and consequences become a reality.*

*Sharp, clever and very engaging, this short has the feeling of a well made wine – it will age well, and will be savourful.*

## **Love and Doom**

*Love and Doom provides new territory in the micro budget output. Though it is very much a throwback to other black and white American Indie outputs, it explores this space with a new double layered element: the Goth culture and the modern digital age generation.*

*Sadly, I fear this film won't be seen as widely as it should be. It is a precise project, with strong dialogue, a distinct directing style and some very engaging caricature performances. There's much to admire, much to enjoy and above all it is an entertaining art house effort – something that is quite rare these days.*

### **Psychiatric**

*Despite a complication of alternative narratives being intertwined through audience interaction, Psychiatric at its core is an impactful drama about chance and choice. Where circumstances become dire, people's freewill becomes perhaps the defining idea of their persona... but, at the hands of the audience, we are perhaps exposed to the idea of biased choice. Where if an audience member chooses option A, it is probably because they believe it to be the right choice based on their programming of life.*

*The film's strengths lie in its consistent technical configuring, whereby the acting and photography is consistent enough to feel that all options made by a spectator are actually the only ones available.*

*As video game and films merge, in terms of narratives, this film excels in using technology for its advantage.*

### **Decay**

*Almost reminiscent of a Ken Loach film, Decay focuses on the individual at risk. We see Vartika from within her perspective, quickly taking on her fears of a stalker and the dangers of such a life on the edge. There's also an added element of feminism here, as the film understands the feminine danger of being desired by someone who wouldn't accept a rejection.*

*The film's dark photography, considered movements and strong understanding of editing, provides a bold feeling of tension within the filmic form. We, like Vartika, are at a point of knowing and feeling time and how each movement may lead to our demise.*

*As independent feature films go, Decay has a lot to offer. A unique locale, a strong protagonist character and an awareness for filmic tools. All in all – the production values are really great, and the film is a very impressive effort.*

### **The Rabbit Died by Duane Michals**

*Duane Michals wanders back in time to tell a tale of a woman in a critical point of her life. The scenario is greatly framed, and is the strongest asset of the film – but added to this is a fantastic vintage feeling, which is established through the photography and lighting.*

*With a strong ensemble, and authentic costumes, the piece plays out in a period piece style – it is fashionable in terms of how it is made in that context (i.e. a period drama), but also somewhat theatrical. This is a strange film on that front – what with its blending of mediums.*

*When the curtain finally falls, this feels like a one-act drama. A part of me wonders if, after all these years, Duane has a feature in him... and strangely, this short feels the closest to that. There's a real sense of tension and verisimilitude in this content. It feels important.*

### ***The End by Duane Michals***

*At 91, Duane Michals is continuing to intrigue the world with his whimsical observations of our world. In this short film, he is playing the lead in what appears to be the final moments of a gentleman's life. The setting is the interior of a cafe, and there's a nicely used newspaper as a prop – I mention this because it appears almost as a metaphor for one's life: a page-turning item that is easily disregarded when the time is up.*

*The photography is often sharp and very clean, which is largely built around a third-wall dialogue. It is revealing too that this photography is so digital – capturing the image in such an observation perspective almost recalls the 90's output of Hal Hartley. The dialogue is quite similar in a way – often poetic, and full of life.*

*Overall, the short film is a great moment – a captured gesture of one's thoughts and the philosophy around the situation.*

### ***Fall Down Go Boom by Duane Michals***

*With this comical slapstick routine, Michals presents a surreal world where one can trip, and fall down into the ground? – and then become a printed outpouring print of ink that extends forever.*

*Much like the impressionistic impact on art – in which the technique was suddenly revealed in the art world (where form had been hidden to the spectator through perfected blends of colour representing light), Duane seems hellbent on revealing the filmic technique of photographic content and the materials that can be edited.*

*Accompanied by an authentic plonky piano tune, the short appears as a kind of throwback to the silent era, though done so with a digital polish and contemporary city setting. For the few seconds of surrealism that it is, this is quite a great experience to be had.*



### **BoOzy' OS and the Cristal Gem by J.K. Arsyn**

*What is BoOzy? It is a wild film that's for sure. There's a whole heap of voice noises and fun sugar pop animation. To be honest, this is one of the most fun animation films we've had at TMBT – and it is full of references to a variety of video games, specifically the types that we have seen in the last twenty years... making this, in a macro level, a presentation of what is loved and remembered within the recent-past contemporary era.*

*The post-modern interpretation of so many presentations of information is very interesting. The borrowing of the H.U.D. systems of mise en scene adds to the film's sense of confectionary – that being of an animation that comes across as a delightful croissant full of whatever flavor you want.*

*Perhaps the only downfall is the extravagant characterisations featured in the short. The male lead appears quite odd, and perhaps even caricature-esque. Bottom line though, this is a wonderful production.*

### **Makina by Zef Cota**

*Makina starts as your typical urban story made by film enthusiasts. It has a grim tone, and the lead character looks very miserable. However, this isn't a bad thing. But rather a compliment – Cota and his team hit the genre so well that it actually is very much a typical urban story... only, unlike the regular demographic that delivers these shorts to us, this one actually appears to be slick, dark, and impactful.*

*The performances are nicely paced, along with the music and editing, which carefully pull the narrative along. There is a lot of class in this formula though, as the production feels much more expensive than what has been reported to us. It is precise, and very glossy... almost like a high-end production straight off of HBO or one of those cop/crime films made in the 2010's (I say 2010's as there haven't been much well-made films of this kind since 2020).*

*There's only one question remaining: Why is Cota making short films? Why is he not working on features yet?! This is clearly a talent that deserves the larger arena.*

### **The Ghost in The Machine by Duane Michals**

*Collage, montage, and poetry collide in this photo journal which captures the construction of the human body as well as the rather blunt nature of our mortality. To Duane, his vessel is being recalled – and the foundation for a beautiful self-reflexive poem... but this film, much like the transition from montage to text with music, is almost recalled: the photographic image is taken away and replaced by text.*

*The nature of communication featured in this short film is very interesting. It is first images, and then words. The linguistic presentation also unlocks a character: the filmmaker himself, and his words are lyrical and artistic. We have a person who describes the essence of his life in his writing on the screen, but also in its medium presentation is allows us to see who he is: he is an artist who is dedicated to sounds, images, and words. He is someone who can capture the essence of his world within these presentations.*

*It is intriguing in design and impactful in delivery. It is personal, intimate, and uniquely Michals.*

# Extended Reviews 2022

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## ***I Am Not a Hero by Henry Colin***

*With an interesting use of black as a key palette – much like the work of the late Joel Schumacher – this film chips away at intimate spaces and the unnerving psychological space of mounting pressure.*

*Several highlights of this film are largely honed in by the intimate spaces we inhabit – the careful minimalist lighting which often just touches characters, revealing their items and emotions (with some great facial acting from the lead male – Nick Piovesan), this becomes a very memorable effort from the COVID filmmaking moment.*

*The final act of the film, during which tensions rise, reveals the underpinned style of the film. It is here in director Henry Colin that drives the film away from the core character thread we had originally encountered into a different motif: that of the person in an exhausted, almost non-communicative state of anxiety. This final turn, largely shaped in an almost primitive film form, is the most unique memorable moment of the film – though the only downside is that it is centered around a topic that so many other filmmakers had indulged in over the course of the last few years.*

*This is a great debut feature film – and we are excited to see what else Colin makes next... because this is clearly just the beginning!*

## ***Hairy by Maximillian Aguiar***

*Hairy might be on the most ambitious indie films we've ever seen. At 2hours 30mins (well, basically) – and a comedy – this is a surprising effort from any entrant. It is in black and white, and quite snazzy with its presentation – intimate and character-driven (almost like a Mike Mills film).*

*The biggest upside of this is the character interactions. They feel authentic, and character-appropriate (as in, not contrived), and the use of locale is also quite interesting – as the film navigates the spaces from the perspective of its lead – making it natural and personal.*

*The downside is perhaps the actual pace. However, this is really a matter of taste. The film in its character and scenario feels smore like an American indie film – perhaps even a mumblecore film... but the mise en scene presentation and the tone feels at times more like Art House. The combination is unique and original... often very engaging, and perhaps only at times odd.*

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### ***The Bench by Jon Pegg***

*At 36 minutes, the runtime of the short film is quite odd. It isn't so short that it would be a punchline... but it isn't long enough to be a feature film. It has a particular Abbas Kiarostami conceptual style to it – a locale we can't escape, talking characters locked into social spaces, the constant referral to social interactions via technology – and an unseen element of the story (the world away from the park).*

*The core highlight of the film though is the cast of characters who linger by the bench. They interact with one another with a strong community wave of ideas. It is probably a theatrical concept at its base level – but definitely becomes elevated and quite well-rounded in this cinematic setting thanks to the use of natural light, strong use of natural sounds, and clean editing.*

*The philosophical discussions, which often drift into a character's internal arcs of desires and pursuits, allow for the film to become an elevated representation of regrets and the remaining opportunities the older generation can have. It's charming, moving, and quite special as it gives a voice to an often neglected generation who don't get to enjoy technology. Ultimately, the sour drama becomes a comedy and becomes an expressive and engaging film to watch.*

*I'd love to see this filmmaker perhaps pursue a serial-styled project in the future (when handling this kind of plot) – or a larger feature project. As this doesn't quite feel quite fitting for a short film (which is a compliment – it is too textured for the short film format chosen).*

### **Untitled by Joseph Thomas**

*'Untitled' comes with a great feeling of intimacy and internal consciousness – the lead actor, who is also the writer and director, has successfully produced a project that is almost entirely an evidence piece of the old-world cinema theory of the 'caméra-stylo' ("camera-pen").*

*The tight frames and the intense black and white photography all evoke the vibes of Aranofsky's debut Pi... but it also feels quite remote from this – a smaller more intense project that involves a personal story of artistic struggle (one greatly enhanced by the auteur's own authorial presence of such a struggle).*

*There is a strong sense of time, however, and perhaps with such a limited myopic topic – the 20-minute runtime can be felt at times.*

*Overall the project treads a covid lockdown vibe without the artistic limitation of such a theme, and is perhaps more in line with the Maya Deren films, though somehow very literary at the same time; rather than the plain avant-garde.*

## ***Shadows of the Dust by Ali Matlock***

*Shadows of Dust has a very bold sense of color with its setup – we quickly move from blue to red and then a natural lighting rigs. I have to add, it is an impressive touch here at the start to have the soundtrack merge into the radio playback. It shows great care for detail in a short film that many don't bother with.*

*Ultimately, as the plot evolves, this short film becomes like the opening of one of The X Files. This isn't a bad thing. The familiar ground of a couple out on the road and something unexplained happening to them is one of the best tropes of the sci-fi genre. There is even a hint here.... if one was to extend the runtime further, this could form its own little 'world' of narrative, like the works of Ray Bradbury (thinking mostly of The Twilight Zone here).*

*Above all though the short film has a solid consistent production value. At no moment does it falter and become unappealing or unconvincing. And this is really key when producing a film of this nature – that the cast, the photography and the edit are all solid enough to make the heightened plot believable. Ali Matlock and his team should be above all commended on this... the sheer believability of the project is present and dangerous.*

**Search for:**

# 2021 – Extended Reviews

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## **A Still Year by Jonathan Beckett**

*Most short films tend to develop their plot basis around a certain situational crux that simply revolves a revelation that begins and propels characters to a point of no return. I say this on the basis of short films with a particular reason – most shorts don't have endings, and most importantly, they don't have the 'and then' plot beat of a feature film. And what is unique with A Still Year is its against-the-grain narrative beats... the POV perspective, one which is both a narrative device an empathy triggering tool is the complete opposite design of a short. Here we are hinted at the plot element of that 'revelation', but it is also irrelevant, as time simply moves on and our experience (like in a feature) revolves around the 'and then'.*

*Simply put, A Still Year is perhaps more of a filmic object than a narrative piece. And this is a very unique and important thing to celebrate. Jonathan Beckett may be unaware of his work, but without a doubt – Abbas Kiarostami's cinema, in which the affixation of a camera inside of a car, the faces of a film audience, or the capturing of stagnant European sites... where these images, moments of light and space become almost 'cinema-in-progress pieces'... is a rare and very special space to be working in.. and is the same sort of brain wave or form of communication that Beckett is exploring.*

*I have perhaps over-pressed this reference to Kiarostami, but it comes with great care – most filmmakers rarely find the ability to step back from their material and capture simple life items that together, in a particular perspective, become a cinematic experience. Beckett has done this – he has placed us in his literal shoes... but also done so in a way that space, time and the human experience becomes an object of the technical filmic space. It is quite luxurious for a short film.*

*PS. Congrats on the very believable arm shots of reaching for a phone with the camera as eyes.*

## **The Candidate by**

*The women of Altindağ – what fantastic performances! – in all seriousness, the team here seems to be always on point. As the camera hits them, they are in mid performnce. They are in real life... and the camera does a great enhancement for this – the faces are clear, often we are moving towards them... we are invited to observe and see the micro reactions of each character. It is engaging and interesting to watch thanks to these performers and of course the way they are shot.*

*The eyes and edits of Altındağ's world in The Candidate is perhaps one of the cleanest photographically and warmest of tones. The image is often nicely balanced with color and professionally polished. If it lacks anything, it is the wildness of an unusual filming style.*

*The situation of The Candidate is really that of a teasing, alluring and intense series of moments. We are invited into space and quickly wiped through a variety of intimate spaces that are threatening and genre friendly (ie something people really enjoy – Gothic horror). The sense of time is in fluid movement... there is a great sense of momentum here. If anything, one feels almost at threat, or perhaps the 'mercy' of the filmmaking team. You the audience are expected to enjoy and keep up with the shape of this film... but it is a delicate dance, and we are the ones quickly thrown out of the circle... we must endure as we trip up, enjoying the sheer presentation and balance of skill at play.*

### ***I Wanna Do Christmas With You (Again) by Alex Urquhart***

*Alex Urquhart has a secret that he might not know.*

*You see, the music video I Wanna Do Christmas With You (Again) is very charming... It has a great aesthetic, and a pop filled retro vibe – like, this is a sort of 1990's almost boyband charm. It's got the static, the props and the grooves to be self aware, comical and almost like a kind of humanist take on the sub-genre of music videos – the 'breakup' song (or 'make up?'). This is, in its totality, what Alien was to Dark Star's take on sci fi... only, in the context of postmodern music videos.*

*But, again, that's not the secret that it holds.*

*Also, before hitting the secret twist tool – it is worth adding that the video has a solid photographic value to its content. This is to say that the photographic value is quite filmic and nicely created. The lighting really shines here – it feels both 'real' and gritty, but also creative. But now there's an additional secret – the cream of the whole process: Alex Urquhart himself. The song isn't the big stealer of the show, but rather Urquhart's performance itself. He shows himself to be a very versatile performer, mainly balancing the blank expressions of having being dumped with the self awareness of the camera's gaze that makes for a secret layering of the video's quality. Urquhart delivers what the video needs: the seed of star quality.*

*Personal side – I'd love to see Urquhart play a serial killer in an apartment block, a tutor with a desire for a married woman and a cowboy who is getting teased for his inability to stay on any horse (they all kick him off).*

### ***Oh Jeff! by Chris Rourke***

*Chris Rourke, Daniel Parquor, and Kyle Strang have written a fairly strange little monster – the kind of monster that well bites your ass and then asks you how it felt. I say this because the film is perhaps one of the most accelerated plots that delve into the surreal subgenre of comedy with such great pleasure. In an unlikely twist, more like a horror film, there's a sort of burnt flavouring of cult practice in this film. It is the kind of film that walks a thin line between comedy and surreal horror... but the comedy, to me, feels as if it is the bigger tip.*



*All in all, the implemented foundation of dark tones and obscure characters is largely elevated and brought to life by the caricature performances delivered in this project, as well as the fluid photography that helps the project become engaging and memorable.*

*Perhaps the only unhappy thing is its runtime. It isn't short enough to be an easy one to consume, and it isn't long enough to be a feature... and well, and this is a strange remark to make, but this isn't a show – and it somehow feels like it could have been one of these things. It could have been a tighter, easier and more punchy short... a longer, more drawn out character driven mad-hat event (ie *Inland Empire*) or a recurring web series fully fledged and strangely altering (ie fluid plots, fluid characters). I guess the real takeaway is this – the tone is lovely and there (i.e. present, and unique)... but perhaps the format is still yet to be perfected by this team. Only more from them will reveal this, and one can easily get excited about what might follow.*

### ***The Truth About Us by Jason White***

*Have you seen Game Night? – Yes.*

*Did you like Game Night? – Yes.*

*Do you like character based films? – Yes.*

*Do you like indie films? – Yes.*

*Then this film is for you.*

*The Truth About Us recalls the 90's/00's world of Neil LaBute. There's a small cast, a tight intimate space and a cut throat moving plot. There isn't a world of politics or social mobility in this film, but there are people under attack. There's a moral undertone here, one of a writer going 'in these situations even the wrong seems right, and the right seem wrong.' The study of human nature is in full swing here.*

*The cast are really solid, carrying the dialogue forward content through the paces... the camera work though is perhaps not the most expressive, and this is where I'd suggest one needs to focus in the future – how can one elevate the content to become more cinematic with the photography.*

*At the end of the day this is a very solid feature film, and one that is well worth its \$8,000 budget – i.e. it is money well spent and quite engaging for its content.*

### ***Zaara by Hassan Raza (second review)***

*Zaara Aslam is an incredible heroine. Her scene: a sheltered, overbearing and overprotective home environment. Her world: stunning black and white photography, bold and realistic performances, and of course – a strong visual coherent understanding of sequencing (i.e. shot A to B to C is very smooth).*

*The lead performance by Sonera Angel (as Zara) is quite moving. She navigates the space with a careful physic, bringing Zara to life. And the photography almost mirrors this – becoming often a dance of reverse-perspective (i.e. how people view Zara and how she sees or looks around). The anticipation of the film's overall arc builds with Angel's performance, as she attempts to overcome her struggles, our interest rises.*

*The only real remark I can make now, which comes with a very strong impression, is this: Zaara is one of the best film entries we've had this year (submitted only for a film review). Had it competed in TMBT, we would have awarded it something (this is for sure). Hassan Raza is a real*

filmmaker with a distinct voice and clear visual story. We can't wait to see him make more, and hope he makes a feature film soon.

### **Velvet Crush by Michael Boston**

*Velvet Crush* is a wonder of a film. For one, it comes loaded with some incredible casting – mainly Dani Savka and the director himself, Michael Boston. The pair seem to know two key things when it comes to making a seriously entertaining film: film acting is all about the eyes – and if you are trying to convince an audience of a false reality, you (ie the performer) have to be completely convinced by your own performance when in a scene.

The film opens with some stunning night time walks. This is after some almost *Blue Velvet* pastiche velvety opening credits. There's something about this sequence, and even the premise, that is very 90's. Then we get a touch of voyeurism... It almost feels like a mid-career John Waters film... the Waters with solid photography, impressive genre blending and a nightcap of comedy to send you swinging down the roads... basically – this is a stylish hoot.

The one beautiful thing about running this festival over the course of five years becomes quite obvious in this film. We know Boston and his films well. We've seen him do a variety of genres and we 'get' what he's doing here. He's an author with a wicked sense of humour, one laced with real personality clashes and textures... it's all a bit seductive really.

### **Zaara by Hassan Raza**

The melodrama of *Zaara* is a strange combination of old and new. At its heart though, in my eyes, it feels more of an old school retro drama than a more modern thing. This isn't due to its black and white photography – but rather its carefully composed shots, feminist characterisation and the strong presence of a style that consistently recalibrates the film's core ideology within a Sirkian type of frame. It recalls Sirk's *All I Desire*, for me at least...

Of course, though, the film isn't a pastiche of Sirk. Nor is it a very aware film in terms of film references. This is the modern part of the film... there's style, there's a vision... but it is also its own thing. The sheltered life on the edge of becoming a boiling plot feels very much like a Jafar Panahi motif – of course, here it is the UK setting and a Middle Eastern family clashing with the customs of the West and of the so-called 'other'. The ethics are blurred of course, and the painting of the Western men is quite interesting – are they perhaps more of a disruptive force than the parents? Perhaps both parties are wrong, and it is the future generation that shall be wiser? – these are of course, as I said, very modern ideas... and ones that would not be present in a Sirk type homage.

So, all in all – this is a great blend of the old and the new. Black and white photography with careful composition and strong themes from the almost old Hollywood finish appears to be packaging new 'modern issues' – or perhaps rather engaging in ones that still remain quite on the cusp of everyone's political discussions... this film is talking about the 'present moment is what I mean.

*The performances almost follow suit – the older performers have great gravity in their physical performances, whilst the young use their faces and expressions to tell us more about how they feel.*

*This is a highly recommended film – and a fantastic debut by its director. In fact, one gets excited at the thought of the potential feature film that Raza must be working on!*

### ***Big Trouble in Seattle by David Fowler***

*At just over an hour, Fowler's film is quite the epic. For starters, the setting is a genuine character... And I mean this with intent, as many indie films fail to use their locales as a kind of backdrop, often taking a back seat as a background that the film is set in. Here Seattle is lush, alive and dangerous even.*

*Furthermore, his use of cast, characters, and multilateral dialogue scenes is quite skilled... Almost evidence of his potential for great TV. Though, might I add – I prefer film, and Fowler does a great job in this medium here.*

*Knowing his age doesn't help. Mr. Fowler is still a young director, and the project is a great bit of work... What I mean regarding this is really simple – I'm somewhat jealous (in a healthy way) that I didn't make this film at Fowler's age. I wish I'd had the intuition, knowledge and resources to do this kind of film.*

*If distribution has not been secured, then an introduction must be made. This film is a distributor's delight – its genre is clear, distinct and the cast all seems to be having a swell time playing with the appropriate archetypes.*

*Highly recommended, this indie endeavour welcomes one simple regard – where is the next film due? And is it even bigger?*

### ***Geneva Jacuzzi's Casket by Chris Friend***

*One of the things I've really enjoyed in the last few years is the digital playfulness that music videos have grasped – especially those that have encountered the fantasy and fantastical opportunities that digital filmmaking provides. One such examples is the work of Grimes – her music, her persona and especially her videos inhabit worlds and characters entirely unique to her work... And so, it comes with great excitement to say that Chris Friend's work on this particular whacky music video is no different.*

*Heads buzz, the digital atmosphere engrosses, hypnotises and we are victim to its wonders – both as consumer and users, as we are... After all... Watching this digital video on a variety of*

*digital screens. The world is alight with colour, music and character – the use of close up is especially rewarding, even unusually so for a music video (it's quite cinematic).*

*All in all, this is a perfect little trick of digital editing and performance. The world, though artificial, appears real. Real. Or is it reel? ☐*

### **CHAMP 5 by Paul Gatto, David Jester and Kathleen Strouse**

*From the small communities to the grand victories, Champ 5 has a fantastically 'old school' tale to tell. Now, to be clear – by 'old school' I am not actually referring to the charming gang of golden age interviewees... but rather, the style of the film. It is rare these days to find documentaries on bygone subjects that take great care in finding the character within the landscape from which it comes from, but also framing it within the context of the 'personal'. At least, to me – it feels as if we have entered a new age of consumption when it comes to documentary-style video... those Facebook scroll videos of 'famous person do this, or quaint person does that... someone has a hobby you will find interesting...' – rarely do these videos contain the individual really... they instead, in the worst way possible, have a simplified individual framed within a sort of quirky space. That is not what CHAMP 5 provides, and that is why CHAMP 5 is eh champion!*

*Humanist elements aside, the film carries a great understanding of the key technical elements of filmmaking. The pace is never compromised, and the photography is well balanced with a tight edit. If anything – CHAMP 5 could be expanded to a feature.... but that's a tale for another day.*

*Overall, the intimate tales of these individuals, framed within the carefully designed documentary, which captures the bygone era mostly through memorabilia and the 'persons' telling the tales, helps solidify the film as almost a kind of time capsule. Not a capsule of the past, but rather of these individuals' recollections of the past.*

*Ultimately the film is intimate, personal and above all memorable.*

### **MAGDA by Dimitris Galatas, Fragkiskos Arapai**

*I remember day trips with a tour guide I took as a child – they had the potential to be quite frightening, walking in caves and wandering down dark passages... and then, of course, there were the activities – those bloody 'team-building tasks. And here we have a short film that is well just about that... given, now that I live in the city, I rarely think about these sorts of 'trust' based spaces in the rural setting. So, put your blindfolds on and get ready – MAGDA is here.*

*The short overall is quite great. It actually has a great balance of performance, an awareness of space, and above all: an awareness of 'the way of nature. By this, in my mind, I mean it both in*

*terms of the environmental space: humans appear almost as intruders here in the forest, and the actual act of animal nature – the carnal act of killing.*

*There's one flaw to this project really: it isn't a feature. It could be one, it could be built bigger: think Chernobyl Diaries – the film could introduce us to the team, how they came about this journey and how they all met... then the horror, then a survivor and how they escaped or failed to do so. There's plenty of room here to bulk it all up.*

### **Distance by Richard Schertzer**

*'Distance' carries a great sort of Stephen King vibe. The film is set in the rural outskirts and follows a kind of survivor plot – or at least a version of it. Of course, many of these kinds of films have arisen since the arrival of Covid, in fact... I think we have about 5% of entries be these sorts of films each season now. However, one must say the following – this is no regular run of the mill 'we are living in a pandemic and reflecting on life film'... this is largely thanks to Schertzer's very mature character set up, the smart dialogue, and above all: the delicate naturalistic dialogue and physicality presented by the actors.*

*Space is greatly used as well. Framing often positions at a smart angle to highlight the natural beauty of the locale, and furthermore – the film's plot includes this as part of its narrative device, which further enhances the impact of this plot element (the journey).*

*The downsides: the opening credits are indulgent. The closing credits could do with a bit more detail – a better font, less large. Overall though, the film is really quite nicely stylized, and a great offering during these strange times.*

### **Project Bau by Sajan Jose**

*The thing I love about Project Bau is the personal journey being told to us. At its heart – it is very much just that: a personal, a single individual's journey... a being. Not a toy, not a genre... but an individual.*

*There is a grand location for which the cinematography awes and sweeps around. It is a heartfelt backdrop to our lead character, Peter, an elderly man taken with a dog. The lead performance here is key – he is a rough man aware of his delivery, and does so with a kind of ballet strike – the physical and sounds are real and part of the dance of life.*

*The tension is light-handed and very easy – we know what we are supposed to feel and we feel it. Likewise, the sense of culture is engrained in the locale and the personas presented – this is an individual tale of struggle and survival, but also of the mind and the apt nature of a single person's determination to survive.*

*The film itself is a well-polished endeavor. some of the grading at times is a bit indulgent, but this is also overall forgiven by the film's own subject nature – it is a tale of a man in the final bloom of his being, and it is here that of course roses would smell more like strong roses than just a plain flower. Likewise, and perhaps by the time we reach the final sweeping camera angle, the film has reached a kind of Douglas Sirk height of melodrama: the world is beautiful, a playground only loved and devoured by those who can find love and an appetite in life for themselves.*

# Extended Reviews 2020

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AUTUMN 2020

## ***Am Rande der Zeiten* by Jörg Reichlin**

*Provincial for the most part, Am Rande der Zeiten carries a certain charm which is often neglected in indie films – the personal, the introspective journey... it is also the vagabond genre here – the film is a journey to a world we (city folk) don't get to see often, and more so – the relationship dynamics explored are of a particular locale – they are virtually linked (the conversations via video calls are an echo of the new 'world' media forms entering the old ones); and there is the 'human' link – the in-person meetings in the dark, by the fire.*

*Overall – the film carries a solid sense of film technique, but perhaps lacks a sense of genre. It is never quite dramatic enough to be a drama, not intimate enough to be a character-driven film... and clearly not a horror, comedy or science fiction flick.*

*All in all, from the approach of an art-house palette, Jörg Reichlin does succeed in making one clear defined object: the film is a very cinematic experience. Time and space are largely explored and devoured. And there are many moments to make you chuckle and enjoy the bemusement of the scenario. It is here that the film strives for pleasure, and is by nature successful: the film is a cinematic sweep of ideas, moments and memories formed and forgotten. It is a rich experience that is not one singular thing, but multiple entities... like perhaps, the feelings and experiences of its lead poet.*

## ***The Eve* by Luca Machnich**

*The Eve has a particular 'classic' feeling to it. The film excels on its design properties: slick photography, skilled editing, and a consistent corny tone.*

*Also, the mise en scene is well organized. Almost like something Wes Anderson would have thrown together...*

*Overall, The Eve has a certain sort of 'ageless' pre-digital feeling. The plot is quite simplistic – a fantastical take on Christmas. I'm surprised that it hasn't (from what I know) been expanded into*

*a feature. The short feels like a successful nod towards the expansion. It is, after all, a very well-executed short film. Unlike most short films, with The Eve – you can see the money that was spent... though, I should add at this point, that I am personally shocked that the short film cost as much as it did.*

*Family minded, the film has a very solid festival-friendly approach to its content... something which is greatly exemplified by the fact that it is from 2015, and has over in the last six years collected a total of 499 awards.*

*As a fun viewing experience, and one which has now tipped closer to ten years of age instead of zero... I guess all one can say is 'it is worth your time' and deserves to be watched.*

### **CHAMP 5 by Paul Gatto, David Jester, Kathleen Strouse**

*From the small communities to the grand victories, Champ 5 has a fantastically 'old school' tale to tell. Now, to be clear – by 'old school' I am not actually referring to the charming gang of golden age interviewees... but rather, the style of the film. It is rare these days to find documentaries on bygone subjects that take great care in finding the character within the landscape from which it comes from, but also framing it within the context of the 'personal'. At least, to me – it feels as if we have entered a new age of consumption when it comes to documentary-style video... those Facebook scroll videos of 'famous person do this, or quaint person does that... someone has a hobby you will find interesting...' – rarely do these videos contain the individual really... they instead, in the worst way possible, have a simplified individual framed within a sort of quirky space. That is not what CHAMP 5 provides, and that is why CHAMP 5 is eh champion!*

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*Ultimately the film is intimate, personal and above all memorable.*

### **The Colour of Spring by Paul Andrew Kimball**

*Alexa Morden's performance in The Colour of Spring is actually quite a fantastic thing... and I start this review highlighting it with particular reason – indie films rarely suffer from a sort of*



'clash' when it comes to casting, because really – they often just don't have many good actors. Morden is one of these... and in fact, perhaps to the film's disadvantage... because, with her opening scenes we are linked to her... but then, when Jamie Muscato appears, the film shifts in tone and gravitates to him. In reality – both of these performers have done a great job here, and so has Paul Andrew Kimball – a director who has clearly reached that 'top' range of indie work.

It is, however, from a distance – and from my own opinion, that Muscato and Kimball are on a level entirely their own making. There's a sort of spark that goes off when we are fixed on Muscato. When he is bored of listening to someone else on the screen or is waiting for another actor to perform one of their threatening rants... the film of clings on him. This is again, not to say his peers are not up to scratch, but perhaps to highlight that this pairing of director and actor seems to be that 'elevated' dynamic that usually only occurs at the higher budget end of the industry – I'm talking about the Depp/Burton and Wahlberg/Berg pairings (there are many).

OK, so casting rant over.

This film is shot in a beautiful black and white palette. It has that almost European feel of the grand filmmakers of the past (Godard, Bergman... even perhaps a hint of that Woody Allen moment: *Stardust Memories* and *Shadows and Fog*). Long story short: This is a prime cut of indie filmmaking. It should be admired, and encouraged... can we please have some more sir?!

### **Paradox by Diego Cowks**

The fundamentals of filmmaking are greatly explored in *Paradox* – there is an acute awareness for sound, colour, edit, shot composition, the effect of sequence building and so on. Overall, it carries itself as a very well rounded project and has a very specific genre flavour – which is something many indie films tend to miss.

The hiccups are simple: the film relies too much on its overly digital ending. The setup, which recalls a sort of *House of Wax* vibe is quickly thrown out in lieu of a digital nightmare... *Black Mirror*, and its sister films and TV shows, have clearly over infused our current aesthetical style, and *Paradox*, paradoxically, provides that reality in just a short film.

The upsides are even simpler: fun self-awareness, strong performances, and a strong sense of efficiency – with a short run time of just four minutes, *Paradox* is like a speedy bag of sweets... likewise, the project is consistent quality throughout the entirety of the film... again, this is something indie films often stumble on. All in all – *Paradox* is a sour and sweet bitter infused delight. Get crunching!

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SPRING 2020

Regular Reviews:

***In Place of my Thumb by Joseph Lawson***

*Taking stand up monologues into the digital era, Lawson tries to do something that's quite hard to do – make something very singular, very performative, work in the cinematic space. In truth, the result is a real mixed bag... a part of me recalls Sally Potter's Rage here – it has that sort of similar post-modern feeling to it. But also, it doesn't have the boredom of Rage... instead, it has something else – a flatness. This isn't a cinematic story.*

*The personalities on show are the greatest strength. Lawson really knows how to deliver the comedic roles in a mix bag variety of low budget scenarios with wigs and different backdrops. It isn't like your standard Youtube clip though... there is a sense of a more personal story here, something a little more intimate than a Youtube channel rant.*

*Bottom line – this film is very insular and singular. That isn't necessarily a bad thing... but it is very restrictive in terms of its scope of what it offers an audience, as well as what it offers the creators behind it. At the end of the day though one highlight is true – Lawson is quite a showman, and it feels like a fantastic effort to show off his acting abilities all on his lonesome.*

Expedited Reviews:

***The Jersey Connection: S2 Premiere by Tim Firtion***

*I am writing this review before we've started the judging process of this month... and I say that as a keen side note – as I'm being proactive and forward-thinking for a change. But it also comes with this side remark and is one that I hope Tim Firtion takes as the compliment it is intended to be... Peter Greene's performance in this episode of The Jersey Connection is just brilliant... and when our jury does get to the stage of making their nominations for our current cycle, I will be insisting on them to consider Greene's performance as almost essential. It is bold, it is better than any acting I've seen in a web series (that memory can recall) and it is played brilliantly opposite Greene's co-star, Dairius Elliott – who is level headed, striking and engaging.*

*Right, some more details – the show is gritty... and the photography matches this tone brilliantly. There is a feeling that this is a 'live or die' scenario, and it is further punctured by the harshness of the image, the almost CCTV digitalisation of it all. There's basically a lot of texture.*

*The two handler that this episode is is quite delicious might I add. It is rare that web series bring focus to performance and minimalism, and even more rare that they rely so heavily on actors to carry the content. There's no genre mishap here, it is pure pulp.*

### ***Married and Loving It! by Ryan McDonald***

*The greatest strength of Married and Loving It! is perhaps its balancing act of camera whip setups and the constant attacking performances. Overall, the film's design – which allows for these constant confrontations, both in the technical side of the film's camera movements and the personas in the text, is a particular shape of American cinema which remains mostly untapped by the micro-budget world.*

*The highlights: the script, the cast that really pulls through for the writer's main objective: people living together, through good or bad... the slight downside: too much of the same thing happens in this feature. There's shouting, there are couples on edge and there's us – the witness of the whole attack. It feels like a constant loop of the same scenes at times.*

*The real take away of Married and Loving It! though is the forefront presentation of a bold dramatist. With more 'filmic' scenes, and less theatrics, this sort of filmmaker would be bound to make a very moving and captivating drama... but for now, this is more Sidewalks of New York, and less She's the One (excuse the Edward Burns comparison, but he is great).*

### ***It's Here by Michael Davis***

*Davis brings his own flavour of the creature feature in this delightful short. The performances here, which really are quite key in terms of the 'selling' of the idea and world are brilliantly on point. Also, one should note that the performances are slightly enhanced by the fact that they are remote and on a video chat system... a remark I wouldn't dare make for most of these quarantine shorts, which are more hindered than improved by the conditions of self-isolation filming.*

*The creature feature itself – well, the core concept is quite fun. There's a taste of The Ring here, and even a kind of throwback to the urban haunting horror... those kinds that really had their key*

*moment in the mid-90-s until the early 2000s... so, really, in a long-winded fashion I am saying: it is great to see this retired version of the subgenre, and Davis does this sort of film's style brilliantly.*

*Perhaps, the only real complaint one has is the length... there's plenty of room here to expand the story, and to add more to it. It is an exciting concept and has a simple but very effective tone. The film itself is so very consistent in quality that in truth there's not much to say.*

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WINTER 2020

Regular Reviews:

### ***Duck Egg Blue by Margaret Kane-Rowe***

*The script is punchy, the photography is well designed and often slick, and the whole thing feels like a great device for a very skilled cast – the lead, played by Colin Walsh, is a complete scene-stealer. It's mainly thanks to his emotional level of being both present and trauma filled. One should actually note Maureen O'Connell's performance as well, something our fest judges failed to acknowledge. O'Connell is quite comical and sharp – she'd make a fantastic lead for a feature film, a sort of like Maggie Gyllenhaal character film (at least in my eyes).*

*Overall though, the film has a great tone. It's consistent, engaging and emotionally divisive – characters (or the actors rather) live in their moments, all of which appear part of a 'world' rather than be an artifice where actors puppet their way through the script. All in all – it's something which shorts often fail to pull off.*

### ***Prize Board by Chris Bowers***

*Prize Board has a certain 'Welcome to Me' vibe about it. Which is great really, as I think very few films have dealt with the nature of reality TV in a comical way... which is strange really, as reality TV is a genre that is ripe for parody, comedy and self-aware narratives.*

*My only gripe with this project? – it's perhaps a bit fatty. The plot loses its punch with repetition and the boldness of the concept wears off with overly-detailed-steps... but, I should add, that is perhaps more of a comment than a complaint. As, the film could make quite a great shorter short, or perhaps a more robust film (ie feature)? – it sort of sits between the two right now and struggles to maintain itself as either.*

*The cast seems game for the laugh, and though some of the CGI is at times not convincing, its also part of its self-aware charm, like an SNL skit you can sit back and giggle at. All in all, Prize*

*Board is winner of the post-reality or hyper-real world we now inhabit with game shows, reality TV and comedy skits all mixed together.*

### ***Beneath by JJ Perez***

*JJ Perez does a great job here at balancing the coming of age genre with the horror genre. It's got a fantastic use of locations, its ensemble cast (which at times makes me feel like we're watching one of those Stephen King adaptations) and also, perhaps most importantly, budget. Overall, the film could have done with more money – but that's not a complaint, but just a plain compliment – there's clearly talent on board here both in the cast, the crew and the general atmosphere to be had with this project. Like, imagine this as a Netflix teen film – it would be watched by the thousands and enjoyed appropriately.*

*Overall, my only complaint beyond the budgeting might be that the film could have turned up the creativity. Like, we could have less-generic plotting, and less generic camera angles... but, again, some of these things I acknowledge are budget-related, as locations are sparse and master & coverage means you've got what you need in the bag.*

*My biggest compliment I can make – I'd have been quite satisfied with myself if I'd made this film. So, bravo to all involved!*

*PS. actually, upon revisiting this film, I have to say – this is quite a great ensemble of actors, especially the youngsters, who seem really to put both feet in and do all they can to make it seem real.*

*Expedited Reviews:*

### ***The Confined by Christopher Picone***

*With a sort of American Horror Story – Season 2 vibe about it, this 'return to the institution of horror' horror contains the simple elements for a really solid basic premise. The performances featured, the lead three that is, do somewhat lean towards this... they clash, they bicker, but they are also bubbly and prone to being very entertaining. ...but this short does also have its major flaw that trips up the entire confined plot – the projected image is not believable. All in all the short film's tension gives way when the reality slips up and causes the film to trip over itself. For what it is worth, shy of the digital projection snafu, I'd rate this as quite a solid horror film. The opening titles are cheesy (in the best of ways) and the location is spot on.*

### ***The Magic Watch by Richard Schertzer***

*With The Magic Watch, Schertzer revives the black and white stills of La Jetée. Both are confined to their worlds – one a 1962 sci fi post-war mirror, the other a kind of urban hangout of concrete and social interactions. Whilst La Jetée speaks of time, space and the impact of mankind's carnage, Schertzer's film talks of civilisation, congregation and order. Both films thrive*

on the mechanisms of film as an artefact that can be manipulated through careful editing... though, *The Magic Watch* is more intriguing here, and less romantic than the older and more classical *La Jetée*.

***Bubble* by Richard Schertzer**

Simple, and very reminiscent of *The Red Balloon* (1956), this film derives simple pleasure from the idea of sight, sound and movement. The flaw of course, and perhaps the only one that can really be felt is this – the bubble never looks real, and of course – *The Red Balloon*'s charm did include that one finite element of pre-CGI cinema: 'how did they shoot this?' *Bubble* is a fun one minute of joy, and reminds its viewers of the importance of observing simple and singular 'events' within the world we inhabit.

## *Extended Reviews 2019*

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### **AUTUMN 2019**

***The Curtain* by Erkut Altındağ**

The stage is set and the actors are ready – but the performance is not what we would expect. Right from the start, this feels like a sort of offhand Luis Bunuel production, or perhaps a tough more Jafar Panahi... all in all, its greatest strength is its self-aware cast, who play the material in a sort of 'straight' way, as well as enhance it with a sleight of hand in terms of comedy.

It's fault is perhaps the photography. This isn't to say that it is bad, but rather that it is simple and lacks the style and technique to elevate the project into a refined sense of perfection.

Overall, the project is a great ensemble piece, the type that has long faded from screens: the talkies. This is a quick whip series of scenes and speeches which entangle the protagonists into a variety of scenarios and circumstances which are entertaining to watch unfold.

### ***The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: The Musical by Santina Vendra***

The imagery here is beautifully designed... but the animation is so minimalistic that it is hard to draw out any sense of story. The music is constant and is the same throughout – though that isn't to say that it isn't well performed and arranged... it's just a bit repetitive for a 'musical' film. This would have been a far more interesting musical if the project had been done with actual actors, or even 'moving' animation.

There's a real sense of forgetfulness on part of the filmmaking team on this front – they've forgotten the importance of the moving image art and what it can unlock in its audience. All in all this is an enjoyable video for the background, but I'd hate to recommend it as 'foreground' viewing... I guess that is to say – the music is nice to listen to, and the images are nice to see on occasion; but I wouldn't give it your full attention.

### **SUMMER 2019**

#### ***Anywhere Is Here by Ian Lettire***

Anywhere is Here has a great look to it. For one, the flashbacks are carefully blurred, and the 'present' action, carries a great sense of realism through their digital dithering and textured pixelisation. It is, aesthetically, a very pleasing film, one which carries a great sense of consistency and filmic language, though not too stylised or excessive.

Likewise, the casting of the film, and the script for that matter, often underplays the project's concepts. It is a minimalist film, one that attempts to make the most of what it has... all the while, doing its best to avoid any sense of overreaching and exposing what it 'doesn't have'.

All in all, quite believable and enjoyable... shy of the project's biggest flaw – the shoot out. Though this is done with a great understanding of matting techniques and the digital layering of particular practical effects, there's a real sense that this sequence is a little out of place, a little

too 'brash' for the film's established sense of stillness and 'classical' Hollywood shots (Master and coverage). The action here, which includes a sniper, is too fast and too wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am. It's a small dent though, in what is otherwise a nicely decked and polished vehicle.

As the old saying goes: Thank you, more please.

### *ἀλήθεια* by Thotti Cardoso

So I do have a bit of an axe to grind with this film. It isn't anything to do with its whacko content... no, because that is the highlight really... but the issue I have is quite big – polish. Regardless of the budget, the scale or even approach, the film suffers at the hands of no self-control when it comes to polish. The titles – shabby. That gun – sharpie. That ceiling lighting – too simple. And that's it really.

The film does hit some great moments, mostly for its evocative nutso images – the surreal type that recalls early Tarsem films, like *The Cell*. Only, the plot doesn't really carry these ideas through to anything too meaningful (unlike *The Cell*, which ruins viewers with artful moments stored in a horror chiller box).

The composition, of the scenes, is often the strongest arm in this project – there is a sense of an artist here. The position of the camera is often imaginative, and exciting.

Overall – a bit of a mixed bag. Some strong elements, and ones that, in the right plot, would make for a very unique and bold film style.

### *Don't Tell Father* by Jimmy J. Carter

Photographically speaking, *Don't Tell Father* is one of the strongest entries we had this season. And, had it been entered into competition, we would have probably given it a few awards.

With its golden hues and dusty textures, all I keep thinking about is *The King of the Hill*. A great, but so underappreciated, a feature film made by Steven Soderbergh in '93. Like Soderbergh's film, *Don't Tell Father* has a 'bygone' but very modern feeling. Soderbergh's film was obviously a



period piece but had mechanisms in it which made it a very 'modern' cinema film... and the same, almost in reverse, occurs here – *Don't Tell Father* is a very classical film in terms of its design, but also a very modern story. Heck – there's a whiff of that 'classical' Eastwood direction here... or Frank Capra. Something slick, but hearty.

As you can tell, the film is quite robust... and appreciated by this reviewer. The largest highlight, beyond its overall technical strengths (which include a very solid ensemble) is Daniel Fitzgerald, whose performance sort of really hones in the whole thing... he is the heart of the project.

All in all – just plain superb. I wish I'd had made this film – and compliments don't come better than that.

### *Charlie by Jacqueline Kerr*

Here in the UK we have a sort of phone advert (I think it is for a phone service – if I am wrong, well then the ad doesn't work), which is about a white sheet ghost hosting a party. I always liked this ad, and I liked it for the same reason that I like *Charlie*. It has nothing to do with the white sheet, but rather the narrative which has been built around the quiet character of the afterlife.

However, whilst dabbling on this ad, one has to note one distinct reason *Charlie* is better than a multimillion advert. The ad is shallow, and *Charlie* does, with its ending, hint at the idea of death 'growing around us'. It isn't seen, or even heard really, but in this little short film... *Charlie* makes a friend with another 'dead one', and as a viewer – and the thought that occurred to me was that *Charlie* had to wait for another to join him on this same 'plane'.

Well, whether this philosophical thought was intentional or not by the filmmaker, it has a way of making the short film seem more weighted and more impactful. It is suddenly sad, despite being comical with its sheeted actors. It is, along with this narrative, quirky in design, and reminiscent of Wes Anderson's light quicky touches... but it is done in a way that isn't 'in homage', but is rather quite classy and slick and its own thing. Bravo!

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**SPRING 2019**

### *July 15th by Kristian Comer*

*Considering how much of this film is dialogue, the persistence of keeping it silent is somewhat perplexing, especially given the sheer loss of performance value within the actors, all of whom seem to be doing a fine job expressively through their dialogue.*

*Given this is a silent, one that simply subtitles without intertitles, a viewer is somewhat thrown into a weird modern/old confliction. The film is neither new – as it is using the medium of the old, but then it isn't a reproduction of the old style. So, it just generally feels a tad bit confusing.*

*All of this aside, the music is quite nice. And the edit keeps a nice pace throughout the whole project. I guess, when all things are said and done, the project lacks a clear sense of style, but not tone.*

*Perhaps with the next project, Comer could explore either an outright pastiche silent or a more modern film style... rather than mix the two together in a confusing fashion.*

### *The Alliance 2019 Robert L Butler*

*There's a hell of a lot of lighting snags in The Alliance. A lot of the film feels poorly lit, or rather – cheaply shot with wides that just cover a space that's using 'natural' lighting... though, not in the same way some cinematographer use natural light. The camera in this is never placed in a position to be advantageous towards the light source. Because of this, it often feels very TV like and uncinematic. It is a room that requires some improving on.*

*And there's the edit. It's style changes. Sometimes its quick, other times it's indirect and a little generous with the time spent on certain points of focus.*

*However, that double kick in the teeth aside, this is a very fun project. It's well written, and there's a genuine sense of the ensemble characters at play here. They keep it going. There's also a feeling that the locales are quite 'real', and that the film is placed in some sort of filmic world.*

*For all of its issues on the technical side, most of which are budget related, The Alliance is a great starting project. One can feel as if this is headed somewhere. Or that the people at hand are heading somewhere... basically, it is a great little indie film that shows promise of future projects with more technique. Plenty of heart here though.*

### *Darkus Buckerbergius by Schikhur*

*Is it a comedy? I'm not sure. Is it a farce? I'm not sure. Is it a political drama with a surrealist twist to get the message across? Not sure.*

*Darkus is a strange little short. In fact, I wouldn't have been too surprised if the whole thing had been turned up a notch. Had rock music blasting and strange looped editing that would have further fizzled and made the film seem organic and dangerous.*

*Bottom line is this – the film's technique is good, and the acting and script were fun to observe. There was a feeling that this was the product of a single artist, and that this was their vision. That's a refreshing thing here, especially with most short films being quite generic in terms of their subject choices and filming styles.*

*At the end of the day, this isn't the best film... but it is at least one made with a genuine original grain in it... and that element is massively recommended to all!*

### *An Auspicious Effort by Deniz Uymaz*

*An Auspicious Effort is one of the best short films I've seen this year.*

*Its photography is delicious. It is aware of its locale, and in such a way that it is more than just an exotic locale... it is home, and it is a danger and peace for its characters. The town is to a degree, like its community, a breathing part of the film. We feel it, the heat and the atmosphere. The sound is crisp, but also dynamic enough to provide a sense of texture and reality. There's a great sense of weight to these things.*

*The performances, the script, the direction and the overall tone, which is maintained very well for the entire length of this short, are just superb.*

*This is basically just grand.*

*As the old saying goes – Thank you, more, please!*

## *Shadow In The Mirror by Ron Foley Macdonald*

*Ron Foley Macdonald writes and directs Shadow In The Mirror – an eerie, self-contained, isolating, creepy, snowy, strange and wonderful thriller.*

*There are windows. They look out, but we are looking in. The house looks warm, but one can't help and wonder – is it?*

*Sandesh Motwani steals the show. She's got this great energy about her. Her work is dynamic and well timed. And so is Macdonald, whose film seems entirely encapsulated with her. In fact, one can't help but feel that perhaps the two are intertwined – that they are as equally sharp and tone sensitive as each other. Together, this little dance of danger is fulfilling and very enjoyable as a viewing experience.*

*I kept thinking of Atom Egoyan whilst watching this film. That's a massive compliment coming from me. The Canadian auteur is often overlooked, and his style – which often is built around a sort of post-Lynch Lynch narrative device of mystery and chaos a memory and calm spaces is quite fantastic. Shadow In The Mirror has a taste of this – it is a sort of experiment in terms of minimalism, as well as a dark and intrusive film that focuses on isolation, individuals in the harsher outskirts of non-city life, and the psychology of these varying elements.*

*The only small remark I have that isn't positive is this: the film, with its edgy narrative and idea, didn't seem to let its style get out of control. We never really felt the tone shift into something more than what it established.*

*This is at the end of the day a very competent film, and quite recommendable... and bound to be followed with more edgy and enticing projects from Macdonald, who has a great eye for detail, textures and tones.*

## *Is Love Enough? by Eric Weber*

Allison Broucek carries *Is Love Enough?*. I mean, there's also the nice music, and the odd interesting shot. The makeup is also quite noticeable, mainly for the 'black lip' effect, which is rare in films.

Overall though, the short doesn't seem to carry much polish in its mindset, which forces one's viewing experience to highlight the lack of detail. For one, there's the shaky wobbly camera work. It neither contains handheld footage (ie. an intentional motion of 'looking'), nor does it contain any sense of real stillness from which the movements arise. Instead, it just sort of wobbles .

Likewise, the insertion of the daydreaming shot of Garrett Thierry contains a real lack of attention to detail – I mean, man... why oh why would you just screengrab his IMDb Pro account and pretend that the IMDb Pro logo is part of your intended visuals?!

– I somewhat doubt IMDb cares, but copyright alone becomes complex at this junction, not to mention that as a viewer, the idea of realism is completely lost through this poorly edited graphic.

The film as a whole is quite unsatisfactory. It is hard to get over the lack of detail. It feels as if the team behind this project rushed the basics, and spent too much time on the wide strokes of just shooting the project.

The positives – the characters and their interactions as a whole were interesting, and with a little more care, the next project might be delightful.

### *anexperimentalviralvlog – the movie remix # ! by Vasco Diogo*

Vasco Diogo is mad. In the best of ways. This vlog, which he claims is remixed is well, edited into madness. Absolute madness.

There is a chorus and a sort of weird echo through this whole thing. It is best described as a meditation on lunacy or dreams or whatever. It is barmy!

The actual performance elements of this vlog, the score and art direction (both of which really highlights the sense of a retro art house cinema), tend to remind me of the Danish poet Jørgen Leth, who famously shot Andy Warhol eating a hamburger 1982. It is this, Diogo's performance, which is the best part of the project, and is the true highlight.

*I'd struggle to describe this as something one should share. It is hard for me to interpret if this was just experimentation set around video form or perhaps a joke about vlogs.*

*It is, nonetheless, very strange.*

### *It's Over by Salena Katiyar*

*Salena Katiyar's bittersweet short is well... I want to say a rom-com style, but it actually like a very flat comedy with a romantic drama element. But it is shot with a rom-com look. There is a glossy image and a simple pattern of master and coverage. These two parts clash, for better or worse. As for the script, in an almost contradictory sense, is a potboiler. All these parts clash but also come together in a cohesive skit routine. All in all, there's a whiff of Roy Anderson's uncomfortable comedy here; as well as that very English stiff lip comedy. It's brash with its atmosphere in the best of ways... and well, comedically satisfying (not dramatically).*

*The performances, like the script, are edgy for the genre type. Hayley-Marie Axe is especially great. And well, Gary Beardsmore's Alex, with his eat-friendly ending, is quite humorous. The other supporting parts help fill in the gaps, but could have been more comedic or at least more 'arc' driven (they don't seem to have much going on shy of acting as part of the scenario).*

*All in all this is a great little skit of a short, but it could do with more texture to elevate itself above the average joe shorts.*

## **WINTER 2019**

### *The Perfect Murder by Vikkram Chandirramani*

*The Perfect Murder, though a drama, carries a great comedic punchline. We, as viewers, are lead to believe that this struggling actor has found himself in a sticky situation with his wife and his fling. The whole narrative, built on this idea of someone who has indulged a little too much of course, is brought to a complete simmer with the film's concluding moment – how the perfect murder is pulled off.*

*This aside, the film is quite well delivered. The photography has a few moments of great beauty and the two lead actresses seem to be playing off each other (even though their screen time is apart). As a cinephile, I have to immediately draw a comparison here with the duality of the lead female performances with the 1977 masterpiece *That Obscure Object of Desire*. Vikkramm Chandirramani does a great job here of creating a similar feeling to Luis Buñuel's film.*

*The film's strongest suit is in its overall arc, and the ability it has to polish off its qualities with slight self-awareness to its understanding of being a drama that contains comedy. The only improvements one can make beyond this is to improve on the overall style of the project and allow a cinematic language to further develop and shape the content at hand.*

*All in all, this is a great fun project – and a film worthy of a viewing!*

### *Roadside Assistance by Ali Matlock*

*Roadside Assistance comes with a certain 'unpacking' quality. I say this in the sense of how a film, or any work of art, has the ability to extend itself beyond its casual linear context. In this case, there's the obvious gritty plot (your usual horror 'encounter' premise), and then, along with this, the film comes loaded with a variety of extensive tools – the mode of survival, the role of survival and of course, the social and economic context of survival.*

*In this little short film, we are provided with the relatable couple, the usual 'on the road' duo. But their pairing, which is thrown into conflict within this journey and their interactions with a stranger, evokes a certain lamentation over death, and the fight to escape mortality.*

*The film's overall grasp of its technical aspects is all moderately placed within the film's handling of the budget. The photography, editing and design are comfortably sharp and well attuned to the audience's desires. I'd love to see Ali Matlock make a feature film, one with a bigger budget. He carries a great sense of style, and there's no denying that he would make a great genre director.*

*I could in fact, histrionics aside, see Matlock and his team as one of the Dark Castle Entertainment horror film production teams who once helmed the genre in the 2000's. Their work here, with its almost modern-Gothic feeling, feels equal to those film titles.*

## *Blackbetty by Marco North*

*Blackbetty should have been entered into our competition – why? Because it would have lapped up some noms and even a few wins. Well, at least this is my opinion.*

*The project comes packed with some forceful and impressively designed shots. Often these images are high in contrast and boldly done. Along with this, there is a real sense of the locale and space which the project inhabits, both on-screen (the actual places it is set within) and off-screen (the psychological rendering of daydreaming, cinematographic spaces and our placement within these). These elements, in totality, have a fine balance of how cinematic storytelling works, and how the edit can be used to enhance this further.*

*The music and acting are fairly consistent, and likewise, the script seems to tread a comfortable understanding of itself, as well as the exploration of the project's themes and overall idea of movement (mainly explored through the project's shifting locales, the pivotal character of each narrative, and the splicing of these things together).*

*My only gripe – and it is one that many will read and stammer over, is that this actually felt more like a film than a web series or new media video project. And because the project's form is the latter two, and not the former, I can't help but feel that it didn't live up to its own fantastic qualities. But, please note – I am a snob. A total film snob.*

*PS. Fantastic opening credits. Can other web series have credits like these please?!*

## *Old Girls on The Road by Tracey Walker*

*The fantastic charm of Old Girls The Road is served up quite fantastically within this single episode – Ms. January.*

*The presenters, both of whom carry a certain energy and passion for their subject, narrate and carry the show predominantly. Despite the guests and the cars, the 'real' show is the hosts. They have a great world view and hunger to share it with us (the viewers), and furthermore – the age difference between the duo makes for some fun interaction in a sense of a character clash which isn't competitive, but rather engaging and fun.*



*The photography varies its qualities, but overall captures the talent within a fantastic sense of speed and framing (in the sense of how it is collated together), and the music tends to simply enhance this further – acting more as a lubricant than a solo piece (not a complaint might I add). These two elements could be a little slicker really. But it isn't a real axe to grind either.*

*The best part of the show though (shy of the presenters, as discussed above) is the combination of its edit, and the varied locales. There is a real sense that the subject matter at hand, and the journeys undertaken by this documentary team, who are bringing something to the screen we haven't seen before (ie – this isn't some slappy macho car show). It is something fun, fresh and well edited. It's fast, slick – but also tonal, and has a real sense of what makes itself enjoyable and when one needs to move on.*

*All in all – just fantastic really!*

### *Jesus Rides A Harley by Michael Boston*

*With Jesus Rides A Harley, Michael Boston delivers a knockout combination of a comedic ensemble, and well – his own lead performance as this sort of wonderboy miracle spinner!*

*The film's structuring, which is greatly enhanced by a rule-breaking plot, shifts its core focus of what is presumably a romantic comedy into a surreal fantasy like a comedic voyage. It smells a bit like a John Hughes high school film in this sense, whereby the encapsulated genre and presentation are actually just a fantastic character study that includes some heartwarming messages and overall showstopping set pieces.*

*The only real flaw here is the cinematography, which is paired with its editing. Both at times feels a bit at odds with the content, often flexing their technical muscles in the wrong direction (the edit a tad fatty, and the cinematography featuring some fancy throwaway moments that feel more dramatic than comedic).*

*Issues aside (as they are minor remarks), this is yet another fantastic effort from a team that have delivered time and time again. It is a real joy to see Mr. Boston and his teams work on an on-going basis. And one can only wish that he'd get a chance at making a feature film... one that contains some of his stable characters, insights into the human psyche and textured locales.*

## *Yort by Duane Michals*

*With a sort of Guy Maddin by way of digital distortion, comes another wild adventure from Duane Michals – Yort!*

*What a delightful magic lantern styled presentation. For one, we have the circular frame, which is in itself an underappreciated film form, which Michals fully utilises to evoke a real sense of nostalgia and format. This is further enhanced by the post-production effects, which distort the film's colours, its opacity and overlay. Furthermore, the film's adventurous journey is used as a sort of backdrop to a series of homemade locales and some 'slight of hand' puppeteering.*

*The film's only real core is its lack of a character, though it gasps full of energy and caricatures within its mirror of wild distorted attractions.*

## *You or Me by Yana Zinov*

*The core mechanics of You or Me is its concept of duplicity – a fine trick for low scale short films, and a fantastic tool with which to minimise a film's overall expenses and production conflicts.*

*The technical tools at hand though, these being the overall stylistic and operational choices made by director Yana Zinov, seem to be an odd balancing act of style and overindulgent delivery. There is a great sense of space, and more so of a stylistic vision, but it rarely seems to veer into a cinematic realm, often finding a comfort amongst the simple TV style of master and coverage rather than something more unusual and 'edgy'.*

*This isn't to say that the film isn't well made – it is, and very consistently so... but it often lacks a feeling of being richer than the content at hand: an unwanted guest invading one's personal space, psyche and life.*

*In a vague sense, the film is a very confident piece, and one which seems to elevate above the average short film produced... however, in a sort of self-aware motto – the film never steps too far away from its core concept of being a combination of two staged performances combined as one with a psychological twist. In a sense, we've seen this before... though, perhaps, it has never been done with such a glamorous location or chutzpah since Fight Club.*

## *Abra Cadaver by Duane Michals*

*Duane Michals' is back with a mystery box this time – Abra Cadaver. It is perhaps one of the most bizarre shorts we've ever had, mainly because it is so self-aware that one almost feels like the film is a joke of itself than in itself. But it is also mighty creative and has a feeling of the bygone – a celebration of past time practices of magic, gatherings of magic, and well, the showmanship of the 20th century.*

*The main premise seems to revolve around a gathering of magicians, or performers (one has to consider the magic show as a bit of a farce really), who have a series of 'deaths' occur. The whole thing is a bit of a 'sight of hand', though not so much in terms of the magical practices, but rather that of cinema itself. The theatrical presentation, headed by Michals himself, is brought forward by the idea of him as a sort of host for the film. The kind of eyeglass that moves through space and somehow is incorporated into all of the drama and mysticism.*

*The only real flaw of the film is the film technique. Little care is given to the style of filming, and the photography at times veers off into that early digital look of the 2000's, rather than say the current decade. Though of course, with such an experimental subject matter, digital 'looks' become a part of the style, and are perhaps intentionally flat in lighting and a bit staged.*

*All in all, as ever, Michals' work here is at the very least intriguing, and memorable. I'm still not sure what it is that we've seen... but it is a delight just the same.*

## *The Little Chapel by Richard Schertzer*

*Richard Schertzer's The Little Chapel is a short horror delight. First off, the short has this fantastic establishment of the old chapel – it's presentation is made within a series of opening montage shots with the credits, all of which seem to hint at that B-Movie base, one which is further enhanced by the film's simplistic 'gotcha' plot. Overall, the film's eerie locale and the way with which it is captured is the strong suit of the production overall.*

*The minor hiccup that really hits The Little Chapel is its lack of plot, or perhaps, the impact of what it has plot-wise. The chapel as a cage is a fantastic idea, especially considering the stigma dogmatic practices can evoke in people and societies, but all of that is ignored in terms of*

*opportunities here... and the simple supernatural building plays out instead, or does? The film ends as a sort of punchline to its own genre, so – I guess to a degree the film might be in itself a sort of parody of horror films, rather than say a pastiche of one. The confusion around this, and what the film is trying to say is somewhat embedded in the film's plot. In terms of beats, more time is given to credits than the film's dialogue, character or purpose.*

*Overall this film is a micro short, and one that can be enjoyed as such. With a bit more wit and atmosphere, it would serve as either a fantastic premise for something that Funny or Die would make, or perhaps a Crypt TV production.*

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## AUTUMN 2018

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### ***Kibbles by Mauro Paolino***

*Marco Gambarini's script of Kibbles is quite edgy, and likewise, the film's performers are edgy in turn, for mostly delivering a project which is both self aware, and well – exploitive of digitalness and the generation inhabiting that particular world. It is very much an examination of addiction in the digital era as it is perhaps a rendering of communication forms turned sour. Together, the combination is quite a harsh depiction, and carries an air of HBO's Girls in its tasteful distastefulness.*

*Mauro Paolino's handling of the material, carefully distancing our approach to the core characters, though also affording a sense of intimacy with them, balances the film's almost Gregg Araki feeling of 'living on the edge of change'. The film is mostly shot in a traditional manner, and carries its subjects as such: everything is serious, and well mounted. The shift from interiors to exteriors, with the growing escape which the characters feel, helps to enhance as well as elevate the film – we are being presented here an idea, an execution of the notion, and the presentation matches these things thoroughly, whereby the form is intertwined with the film's subject and presentation.*

*The film is perhaps hindered only slightly by its length. The concept here is perhaps bigger than the chosen plot which presents it. There is perhaps a 'take' on this material which could aspire to the grandness of say the likes of Xavier Dolan's Mommy, which examined the impact of a potential bill against the people of Canada (needless to say the bill never occurred in real life). So, yes – though this plot would never have provided for a feature, the core concept would have. But, then again, the serving here is a very enjoyable viewing experience, and is never laboured... so, all in all, it is a great short film with a fairly complex and interesting subject matter.*

### ***Eclipsed by Aditya Chowdhury***

*There is a real digital sense of poetry to Aditya Chowdhury's Eclipsed – it is almost as if the film were made as part of the Hong Kong New Wave boom, or by some sort of experimental American auteur. For one, there is the actual usage of the medium, which in this case is a careful balancing act of incorporating the digital storm of mini DV and the gracefulness of sharp editing, a voice over incorporating thoughts, and the film's overall embrace of its locale, which recalls a certain sense of urbanisation clashing with the rural.*

*To me the film recalls a particular Ye Lou film – Suzhou River. Like Suzhou River, the 2000 reworking of Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo, Eclipsed is a mirage of a locale, the dreams and lives lead by a few individuals, and the reflection these persons have on a changing landscape and film form. Both Suzhou River and Eclipsed portray film as a double laced system: it is both of the cinematic world (an artificial space in which the characters inhabit and move), as well as a realist docu-dream-drama space (this being the world which the viewer is thrown into as a voyeur through the consumption of the character's inner thoughts of the space they exist in, and the act of capturing it).*

*Academics aside, and compressions aside... Eclipsed is a very complex cerebral project. One which is bound to be misunderstood, interpreted and consumed in a very particular fashion. It isn't a narrative based on the form of characters 'doing' things, or even action, but rather that of reflection, enhancement and inner turmoil. It is great at what it does, but is quite simply put very personal in its taste, and unlikely to appeal to all.*

### **UNS by Singh Sahab**

*UNS, Singh Sahab's true love story, is a fantastic rendering of compassion, humility, and a community brought together, and then torn apart, but the coming together and disruption of a couple who face a great many adversities in their life.*

*Reviewing the film solely on its story purposes would be somewhat redundant, as the project as a whole carries itself with such ease in terms of being a fantastic plot to tell through cinema, that there's basically nothing to talk about on that front. Yes, the film could have rendered the romancing, the marriage and the death at the end as a slightly more concise and deliberate event, but all in all... the viewing experience is only ever enhanced by its details, and not hindered. So, there is basically no room for excess in this. There is no real fat in the film.*

*Like the masterful joys and pains of the story, UNS' actual technical scope is impressive. For an indie film, the producers provide a health scope of both rich colours, textured photography and tactile production values. There is a real sense of realness, as well as cinematic richness in the*

film – and it is mostly showcased within the production design and cinematography, both of which are on top form here.

The closing remark would be really to commend the film's most challenging element – representation. The director, writer and the two leads go to great lengths to make their subject matter realistic, as well as approachable, and it is greatly commendable to see an independent film bring focus to a story of this nature, rather than say the fictional reworking of gangs and prostitutes.

At the end of the day, I am fairly jealous of this film. And as a filmmaker, writing a review of someone else's film, it would serve as only the greatest compliment – I wish I'd made this film.

### **1,2,3 Once Again by Vasco Diogo**

The most impressive element of Vasco Diogo's 1,2,3, Once Again is its experimental handling of time, film form and interpretation. Like Andy Warhol's early filmic work, Diogo almost redirects the notion of what is a linear and non-linear sequence of information within the filmic world, and how this information may be interpreted and presented in self-serving and contradictory fashions. The added element here, of course, is that the film's core characters are Alzheimer patients and that the sessions we are sitting in on are meditative, and almost like the film, exist in a very primitive notion of sounds, images and cues.

Diogo's film, like Warhol's though, suffers the same moment of hubris. It overuses its experimental form, and much like the likes of the endless Chelsea Hotel of the 1966's Chelsea Girls, this film alludes to the idea of order, but also the defragmentation of it for the sake of an experience that might not be all that pleasant to sit through or experience. Having said that, the core reason I draw so many parallels between Diogo and Warhol, is since Warhol (and perhaps Jonas Mekas), few have made films in this fashion, and one's point of reference is entirely limited to the filmic history which is often intertwined with non-film locales such as the art gallery or art house film theatres where viewers come and go freely.

Ultimately the film is not hindered by its mindscape... it is, as Warhol's work was, the making of its own mindset. Avoid of sounds and experiences. Here we have looping, which is accompanied by unusual rewinding, organ notes and momentary discussions of names, places and beings. Perhaps, in all its copious ebbs and flows, one is able to experience the similar meditative confusion which Alzheimer suffers have to live with day to day.

### **In Union and Death by Santiago Niembro**

*The internal histories presented within the arc of In Union and Death are well developed, culturally rich, and inhabit a richness which encapsulates both the impact of the story, as well as the successful tropes of the dramatic film. The main concept, which sees the bringing together of two worlds in lieu of a family memorial for Day of the Dead, is a simple concept, and somewhat reminiscent of the French New Wave films, which often saw a simple divisive story which would allow for a 'real time' narrative to play out. It is both movingly done here, and impressively so – thanks to the nuanced performances and warm tones of the Mexican locale.*

*Overall, the technical side of the production seem almost clashing – the photography is great, though the grading is a tad accidental (I would recommend investing in FilmConvert, and transferring the film into Fuji to help enhance the film's sunset scenes). Likewise, the soundtrack features some prominent sounds, and mood filled tunes, but is poorly mixed when it comes to the dialogue, often throwing the dialogue to the left or right of the sound design, instead of in an appropriate 'center'.*

*At the end of the day the project is very moving, and quite impressive, and one can't help but celebrate and recommend the project's bold inclusion of familial generations which encapsulate turmoil, social and economical context and above all – character. Kudos to all those involved!*

### **Kommando 1944 by Derek Quick**

*Built with an impressive eye for period piece detail, as well as an awe inspired concept for a short form narrative story, Kommando 1944 bares its teeth quite bravely, and gnarls at its peers. As a short film, it feels mighty majestic – loaded with Spielberg bursting lights, and deep emotional truths within the character arcs. Though, a little caricatured in terms of its depictions of American soldiers and evil Nazi soldiers... there's no denying that the actual project presented a story that has been neglected within film beforehand, in what feels like a very lean presentation of said narrative.*

*Overall the technical aspects of the film perhaps outshine the cast, though all deliver quite impressive tones and consistent quality. There is a real sense here that everyone involved had 'bought' in to the project, and were willing to do the gritty deed of making sure they delivered the project to a particularly high standard. At this point it is really best to hat tip the top end of the crew (aka the muscle), as producers and directors delivering this sort of outcome are often the ones doing the pushing and pitching from behind the scenes.*

*There is an added sense of the personal in this short, which is perhaps what raises it above its peers. There is a feeling that the filmmaker not only wanted to deliver this project in an appropriately well finished presentation, but also felt a certain amount of pride towards the*



project. For this, again, one must hat tip the whole affair. As producing the likes of *Kommando* 1944 in a personal frame, one which feels like the sort of super version of a 'show and tell' tale from an American history book is both applaudable, and impressive.

### ***Before Night Comes by Joaquim Pavão***

*With visuals reminiscent of Tarsem's work (in particular *The Cell* and *The Fall*), *Before Night Comes* bursts onto the screen with a variety of beings crawling out of the ground in the dead of night. I mean, wow! What a fantastic opening, what a delicious way to hook your audience and get them all ready and anticipating the wild world to follow.*

*Sadly the overall effect drifts away from the initial genre impressions, and leans more towards the likes of Tarkovsky – which isn't to say anything negative, as the project delivers its poetic and very somber material with style, consistency and various technical elements which are delicious to consume.*

*Of course one can't help but feel that with its near 30 minute runtime, that the locale of mud, straw and sand sort of wears thin after a while. And though the performances are very impressive... the whole thing eventually starts to feel a bit like Anthony Minghella's staging of *Play* by Samuel Beckett. Again, this isn't to say a bad thing really, but rather one can't help but feel of immediate academic strings which the film is similar to.*

*Ultimately, with so many objects in mind, the project is quite fantastic. As a viewer I kept trying to pin down what it reminded me of, mainly because it is such an unusual and poetry laden project. It is an unusual object, and when it comes to consuming film, it is the sort of material one can't help but cherish and enjoy as it is such a rarified thing.*

### ***Death Lay Here by Richard Schertzer***

*The film opens with an ambient track and voice over work – it's all very eerie and quite fun... and this tonal mood continues through the opening credits, which consist of statues... the problem though, which arises here, is the filmmaker's choice of font – it feels out of place and a bit cheesy. Likewise, the dialogue scene that follows is mixed in stereo, with the audio shifted to one side. However, from here on out the film is a fine fun affair – it feels like the sort of schlock that was present in drive-ins in the US during the late 1960's and 1970's, and it is a mighty expressive and stylised affair!*

*The main performances are quite well balanced, and one must note the film's persistence in its*

*pacing, which is quite effective. Likewise the use of variety locations, which Charlie runs through are quite well presented, and framed with an attentive eye.*

*The end of the film feels a bit muddled, what with its overlong whiteish credits, and random insert of titled information at the very end (some reordering should be applied here!).*

*All in all though, Death Lay Here feels like a great short film, the type you'd come across on Facebook as part of the CryptTV selections. It isn't high budget, but it is an enjoyable ride – which is all that really matters at the end of the day.*

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## **SUMMER 2018**

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### ***Follow the Crows by Alex Secker***

*The highest advantage of Follow The Crows is the film's ease of production – there's a sense, with its post-apocalyptic presentation, that the film is both leaning successfully into the film's obvious 'the-end-is-nigh' genre of stark landscapes, strange personas and darkly graded locales.*

*It's this element which is both delivered with a solid grip, that both makes the film easy viewing, and a slightly wounded beast – as it is, deliberately or not, victim to its own generic use of this overused genre. What will inevitably bring viewers will also lose them – we've seen too many films of this sort.*

*That all been said and done, the film boasts a strong third act – the actors, in particular, Max Curtis and Daniella Faircloth, bring a certain delicacy to the material at hand, and even more so, the bold editing techniques used to enhance the film's grittier scenes, together forming an above average hat tip to the end of the world scenario based films.*

*Though it isn't exactly Luc Besson's Le Dernier Combat, or even the Pastor brothers' Carriers... but it is still quite a fantastic indie post-apocalyptic film!*

### ***Blue Skies on Mars by Brian Lutes***

*Having gotten used to Brian Lutes' period piece frock events, this film – Blue Skies on Mars is a delightful surprise.*

*For one, the film is quite lengthy, but it handles its understanding of pace as well as it does genre, which is quite fantastic. Likewise, the cast, which consists of a large ensemble of unusual faces, boasts an array of emotions, acting techniques and a variety of characters which cement the film's almost novel-like structure of grandness.*

*The photography, like the edit, often tends to lean towards the more technical hand of things. We have deliberate cuts, which often enhance the pacing, but also careful framing – a love scene is minimised to a dialogue scene, making the whole thing a very gestural event, in line with the Classical Hollywood types of film classics.*

*The film, as a whole moving force, feels quite ageless, or perhaps aged in the more filmic sense of the word – an epitome of 'old school' indie filmmaking at its best.*

### ***Prisoners of Time by Brian Lutes***

*The positives of Prisoners of Time most definitely outweigh its flaws – the film is a conceit of both historical storytelling, mostly focussed on Willis James, a soldier whipped into a past era through a bit of fantastical time travel, and a mileage of genre and filmic techniques.*

*The strong hand, as ever with Brian Lutes' films, is that the overall project hinders off its sense of realism, which he delivers with a strong suit of both production values and bold performances – often enhanced by the feeling of a very authentic text filled with impressive character based dialogue. The weaker offering though is the film's conception: the concept is fantastically large, and the budget at times can't really carry its weight without looking a bit too cheap and 'indie'.*

*All in all, though the film's construction, most specifically its period pieces and photography, tend to allow the material to become authentic with its texturing, and enticing to watch. Also, one should add – this particular project by Lutes is more emotionally driven than his previous, and shows an alternative approach to storytelling, moving him away from his usual 'survivors' story, and towards a more mature 'fighter' and world-building narrative.*

### ***Lost in Apocalypse by Sky Wang***

*Blazing with an assortment of lush filmic techniques, Sky Wang's feature effort Lost in Apocalypse feels like a fantastic weekend romp of a film – the type that demands to be viewed with a loud head banging volume, on a big screen, and a sharp eye!*

*The story is a little murky, mostly balanced between the workings of a police team that end up in a violent scenario of a 'kill or be killed' situation... a kind of a safe genre play. The acting, much like the film's plotting, tends to tread on the safer side of things, moving from being the realist*

*inner psychological workings of various people, or the more generic handling of the materials. On a similar note, the music tends to play it safe.*

*Ultimately though the film does bolster some amazing qualities – the production values, the ease with which the scenes fold into each other, and the overall coherent vision. It is here, in the overall macro view of the film, that one can't help but admire Sky Wang's efforts with *Lost in Apocalypse*, and well, his overall approach to filmmaking as an entertaining art form.*

### ***Love Ghost – 9mm by Rituparno Maity and Finnegan Bell***

*This violent trippy music video is a treat full of animation tricks, high production values and a creative understanding of visual motifs.*

*All in all, with its short runtime of just under 3 minutes, the video packs in some surreal vortexes, for which the inner mind and thinkings of its lead character, are explored in a thorough approach. It is this, along with its understandings of its intended narrative, that one can find 'beauty in the darkness' that is this narrative.*

*The directing duo Rituparno Maity and Finnegan Bell ultimately excel in understanding the workings of both their story (centered on alienation, violence and social anxiety).*

### ***The History of Everything Circa 1993 to the Present F/K/A Kissy Cousins Monster Babies and Morphing Elvis by Wayne Keeley***

*'The History of Everything Circa 1993 to the Present F/K/A Kissy Cousins Monster Babies and Morphing Elvis' – I mean, for starters, what a title. But yes, moving on from that mouthfull of a name, this film is, as its title might indicate, absolutely bonkers in the best way possible.*

*Watching it, at the start, I actually couldn't believe it was real.*

*After getting past the over-used Star Wars titles I was surprised to find an exquisitely authentic 90's office, VHS look and snappy dialogue. I'm not sure when this was shot, as it is too perfect to believe it to be a set... so I have no real understanding of it if it is from the 90's or a period piece. Nonetheless, it is all a bit sharp and fabulous with its energy.*

*The hop in time, when the film becomes digital, is a momentary adjustment... but all in all *The History of Everything Circa 1993 to the Present F/K/A Kissy Cousins Monster Babies and Morphing Elvis* is quite a fabulous indie construction, and Wayne Keeley, his cast of acutely-on-the-edge performers, and the wizard editors of this retro mirage should celebrate their film, its style and what a convincingly wild film they've thrown together.*

*Now excuse me, I have a downtown office to visit, where I'll be pitching a film about producers in the 90's.*

### **141 A.D. – Mission in Dacia by Octavian Repede**

*Though tight in budget, which is most evident during its battle scenes, 141 A.D. – Mission in Dacia carries itself with a great style and class. For one, the photography is often creative, and not restrictive to standardised composition choices, but is, at all times, an effective 'classical' look, one which recalls both traditional art forms of painting, as well as the more classical sense of Hollywood filmmaking which often carried period piece films in the 1940s to glory.*

*Though the performances range from being quite on point to being somewhat underbaked, the overall cast is often quite convincing in its portrayal of a period long gone, and more so, the physicality of such a time, where the body was challenged by nature. Likewise, the score, which relies heavily on sound samples, dips in and out from being a classy act to cheesy. Though I should add, both balancing acts performed here are better than your average joe film that we have to look at in this particular genre, and the film seems to be somewhat aware of its own genre, which allows it to become quite an enjoyable affair – a kind of 'this is the drum track, here are the soldiers, and we expected it in this film!'*

*Though it is far from becoming a 'classical' film, or even a cult favourite, it does carry the makings of a filmmaker – Octavian Repede, who one day has the ability to rise and extend what he has started here, as it feels very much like a budget constraint which has caused some of these hiccups, and not so much the film itself or the genre at hand.*

### **Ming... Voice of Deception by Brian Lutes**

*'Ming... Voice of Deception' isn't your average joe indie film. In fact, even in the realm of period piece war films (which, with being a UK based festival we seem to get a lot of these), the actual picture is above average. This is mostly through the filmmaker's apt eye for detail, the realistic, and often sharp, characterisations, and the harsh textured applied to the picture, be it in the grit of the scenes themselves, or the fundle of mud, dirt, rain and sweat.*

*Lutes' war film leaves little to critic in a bad light, mostly as the film gleams with a bold consistency to its period piece allure. The streets seem authentic, and shy of one dinner scene in a restaurant, where the plates seem to pristine, the entire production boasts an almost similar quality to the wonderful 'old school' films of this ilk – the likes which have been absent from the screen for decades (though, *The Sea Wall*, with Isabelle Huppert, still feels a close by memory).*

*All in all the film's only flaw is perhaps its budget, not so much the use of it, but rather the restriction it has forced upon its team at hand. The lush serving of this film does feed the appetite, but at times one wishes the kitchen had access to more cream with which the project could have been whipped into a delicate sweetness. It's a delight through and through all the same.*

### ***The Percy Harris Story by Brian Lutes***

*Though there are some issues here, the image itself isn't wonderful – the camera work is at times a little haphazard, and the actual tonal side of the light and colour is often undermanaged, and inconsistent... one can't believe the sheer creativity and scale Brian Lutes has brought to the screen in *The Percy Harris Story*. Because, in truth, pushing aside the qualms with the film's 'look', it is actually a pure pleasure to see this film.*

*For a mere budget of 10k, the film is slam dunk bold. It has that rich flavouring of deep turn-of-the-century Gothic tales, all the while balancing the film's thrill ride with some meaningful dialogue, calmer quaint sequences. It's also thematic, which is a rare thing in films made for these scales.*

*The film's first quarter, which mainly is built around a nighttime incident, which leads on to what feels more like a survival route of a film: a journeyman moves through a constantly shifting and challenging terrain, which encapsulates some fantastic locales. And by the final note of the film, which focuses mostly on the idea of the sacrifices made by people in these harsh times, is heightened by the inclusion of flashbacks, and a seasonal footnote of snow. Though there aren't many standout performances here, these scenes tend to cement the film's overall standard, which is quite solid, and reminiscent of those 'classical' film types mostly exercised in the 1990's by Jon Amiel in *Somersby* and Michael Mann with *The Last of the Mohicans*.*

*All in all it is quite a fantastic indie film.*

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**SPRING 2018**

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### ***Futureworld by Christopher Angus***

*Futureworld might not be the most glamorous animation film, but it is quite a sophisticated little thing. It has that double levelled material – it is both thoughtful and artful.*

*Though the actual length, and perhaps even the scope of the story Christopher Angus weaves is restricted by his film's budget and production scale, one can't help but love and admire the effort here... in fact, I'd welcome the idea of a feature film made by him, or even a serialised show.*

*For some reason its quirky darkness reminded me of the 'good old days' when Cartoon Network was edgy, but also kid friendly, with classic shows such as Courage the Cowardly Dog and Scooby Do. All in all this Futureworld short is a great throwback to those particular punches of animation stories, and one that should pave the way to many more!*

### ***Lazarus' Resurrection Won't Do Any Good by Clodoaldo Lino***

*Quite frankly – this is hands down one of the most bold art directed short films I've seen through my festival work, and I must say it is a very fantastical presentation of such a lavish vision. In fact, this is the key element of excellence within this project, along with the actor's performances, which are as convinced of their situations as any could be.*

*The overall plotting, and the structure of the film's narrative, is rich with poetry, and is perhaps at times bordering on indulgent with this front. Perhaps a more restrained narrative would have meant a more flowing picture, but that is really just a minor qualm.*

*Likewise, the only really inconsistent element of Lazarus' Resurrection Won't Do Any Good is its actual technical presentation. The film as a whole seems to ebb and flow from having some beautiful shots and crisp sounds to some less enjoyable ones, making it all fuzzy. Pushing this aside though, the actual project is very well delivered, and one can't help but adore the film's style, content and wild nightmarish vision.*

### ***Bench by Charles J. Ouda***

*OK, a flattering review of this nature has to be kept short, otherwise it reads nauseously. Here we go: performances were all on point and quite fantastically nuanced, the camerawork could have been more creative... but lets be honest, it was beautifully done and consistent, the script was original, engaging and interesting, the actual direction and use of cinema was overall quite sharp and 'to the point'.*

*Had Charles J. Ouda submitted his short into our competition category it would have eaten up quite a few categories... all in all, this is a rarefied beast – a short film worth your viewing time, and an enjoyable experience.*

*Congrats Bench team!*

## ***Drilling Holes into the Sun by People A Sponies, Philip Nguyen and Brett Herman***

*People A Sponies, Philip Nguyen and Brett Herman have compiled a variety of great dancing showcases, sandwiched with poetry and creative editing.*

*The actual arc is a mess, and I'm not entirely sure the purpose of the characterization, but what one can highlight is the film's technical artistry, which seems to have a real rich flavor for careful framing and creative shots.*

*There's also the music – which is quite eclectic, and varied to a satisfying level which manages to avoid a bored continuum of a single style or sound.*

*All in all its quite impressive, and the performers, along with the well managed technical mechanisms, keep the film's length quite balanced and well toned.*

## ***Aconcagua by James Kellett Smith***

*The main difficulty with 'explorer' documentaries usually is their lack of force or direction. It is usually just a simple chop collection of various holiday shots and 'funny' glimpses into the lives of said back packers, and very little awareness for the length of the film, its tone or the audience's interests.*

*Thankfully James Kellett Smith's Aconcagua isn't quite that. Its more of a 'step by step' journey, and instead of showing us picturesque shots like a dull BBC nature documentary, his short is more to do with the practical elements of the exploration and the journey involved with it.*

*Overall the camera work is quite consistent, and the editing of the whole project is quite nicely done. The only hiccup really is the sound of the interviews, which is a tad too 'laptop' than a clean sound.*

*The project is reminiscent of some of Werner Herzog's icy documentaries, such as Bells from the Deep (1993) – minus the religious poetry.*

## ***Aliens With Knives by Struan Sutherland and Nicole Steeves***

*Struan Sutherland and Nicole Steeves write and direct this comedy science fiction romp. It's a delight really, reminiscent of Tim Burton's early comedies, such as Mars Attacks!*

*At its core there's much micro budget wizardry going on here, and a lot of 'oh well, its just a comedy' factor. Like, lets be honest – there's no real issue with the aliens looking bloody ridiculous... because the plot is just that. And there's no real issue with the production values being standardized, but nothing special, because at the end of the day the film's main ploy is to be enjoyed as entertainment and not some over baked art house comedy, like say The Seventh*



*Seal. Though I still do love The Seventh Seal, but its a very stuffy affair, and it takes itself far too seriously.*

*Aliens With Knives is a fantastic presentation of what happens when people who enjoy being funny shoot a film and present it to you. With more funds, and more glamour, the team will find the mega audience that they deserve!*

### ***Creepy Crawling by Chelsea Comeau***

*With Nick Piovesan's consistent performance, and the well paced filming methods used with great care in Creepy Crawling, Dillon Garland's script is brought to great life through Chelsea Comeau's direction.*

*The film as a whole reminded me a great deal of those 'visiting' town films, in particular the likes of Jason Reitman's films, such as Men, Women and Children, and Young Adult. Like with Reitman's films, through Creepy Crawling's world, we are invited to witness both the life of a single family unit, as well as the locale, community and cultural behaviors of this locale. It's very detailed, and quite sharp in terms of its observations and highlights.*

*The cherry on the top of the whole affair is really the film's consistent delivery and understanding of its own material. So many independent films, and filmmakers, stumble over their own comprehension of their material, the goals they set themselves, and what it is they can produce. Comeau and her team balance it all so very well.*

### ***Nature by Richard Schertzer***

*Nature doesn't provide much in the terms of a filmic experience, shy of the chiming music and ordered nature shots... and well, the credits, which bookend the film. Overall, the film is a nice series of shots which describe, or capture, the natural space with which the camera scans or shoots. The film itself is rather short ended there in terms of its content, and the music is very 'midi' sample file.*

*There isn't much to complain about though, as it is completed with a steady hand of competence, and it is overall quite consistent with its presentation... just ultimately one can't wish for more from a film – be it a narrative, character or even some sort of message (say like – Gus Van Sant's Mansion on the Hill).*

### ***Afrit by Richard Schertzer***

*Lets get one thing straight out on the table – the acting in this ain't wonderful. And even more so, the music is fairly irritating... though it is at least fitting for the film's 'gotcha' tone of grimy Gothic horror silents.*

*The photography, and the editing for that matter, is consistent, and though one can't really shelve much of a complaint in its way – there is a comment to be made about the film's very much expected handling of scenes, all of which feel cookie cut in terms of the 'conventional ways' of filming.*

*Little is done in the way of trying to mix things up here, or show a little bit of uniqueness, and much like Richard Schertzer's previous effort in this season (Nature, see above), the lack of any sort of real narrative seems to leave much to be desired.*

*In terms of handling of the genre though, Afrit does a steady job of playing up the horror motifs of what reminded me of the likes of 70's exploitation films which often opened with those 'stalker' scenes.*

*All in all, much has been left in a bit of a mess here... though, I do want to say this – there is a slightly raw element to this project which hints at a potentially great taste... it just requires Schertzer to go deeper into his own world and create something a little more 'him', than simply exercise standard filmic filming modes. Once he drifts into his own world, and provides us with a view point from which we are able to enter it (a unique perspective), then his work will be much more appealing.*

### ***Interruptus by Duane Michals***

*Duane Michals' Interruptus is a scarecrow of a film. And I mean that it the literal way – its a visceral standing object that gawks at on lookers... or perhaps it is us that gawks at it.*

*All in all the short is quite well executed, and tastily experimental. Like with Michals' previous work, there's a very thin plot here: a woman walks in on (who I presume to be her partner) busy getting it on with another bloke.*

*At moments the film recalls some sort of porn plot, but it is ultimately a different idea here: the idea of time, duplicity and perhaps the ebbs and flows of how action often cause reaction and so on. At least, that's how I've read it with the double exposure. But it could be more than that, it could actually just be about the act of watching, and then the medium with which we watch... and the eventual filtering and playform digital media provides itself in: cue Instagram and Snapchat rant.*

*All in all Michals' has served an impressive little object here, like the scarecrow analogy – the film could stand comfortably in a public space playing on a loop, forever condemning the couples to argue, move and physically respond to the reality of being caught in the warm up act.*

### ***People Eat People by Duane Michals***

*Fantastic moments of duality are explored in People Eat People... and what's even more refreshing is that Duane Michals' unexpected drift towards a narrative based form of film here. Even more so, the camera work is often smooth, or at least perspective based, rather than say an observational one (a method he often expresses). Though, I should note – it turns out this film is older than his recent films!*

*Not that I don't like his heavy experiments. In fact, I welcome Michals' work as a constant distraction from the heavy formulated entries our festival often provides.*

*Not that said formulated films aren't enjoyable. They are.*

*But variety is the spice of life.*

*The film itself concerns a couple, and a letter. Like many love stories found in melodramas from the 1950's in American cinema, this one has a bitter taste to it to do with infidelity and unhappiness, insecurities, and so on. The film's short run time keeps it to a very punchy length, and allows for the kaleidoscopic images to cascade to a concluding note of reflection.*

*One should add a note about the two performers, Whitney Harris and Derek Stratton, who do a great job with delivering the drama, face contortions and agony of their short roles.*

### ***Destiny by Vikkram Chandirramani***

*With Destiny we open on Tanya and Richa, who are exchanging romance gossip. It seems Tanya has been keeping her latest love affair secret, but in fact she is simply disinterested in it. Or perhaps she is weighing its value. Her opinion of it all is intertwined with Richa's questioning... all in all, the opening scene provides a backdrop for the film's overall arc, which focuses on missed opportunities and online dating.*

*The greatest strengths of this short film though are mostly its depthful characters, and the actors who provide some stilted realism to them. It is thanks to this solid grounding that the film avoids becoming a cliché rom-com short, and furthermore, and overworked stylisation of one.*

*The ending of the short becomes somewhat muddled, with the remediation of a wedding video confusingly appearing as a cinematic sequence watched on a laptop screen... which sadly*

*aborted the film's overall realism. But hey ho – a bit of a cheesy ending never hurt anyone, and this particular flaw isn't exclusive to Destiny, but is instead very much a present thing in most films made by large studios.*

*All and all, Vikkram Chandirramani and his team deliver quite an impressive film, and it is one which has solid footing for a future step – Chandirramani definitely has the makings of a feature film within his characters alone.*

### ***We Need To Talk by Robert L Butler Jr***

*Robert L Butler Jr's We Need To Talk is a feisty dramady headed by a fantastic performance by Butler himself.*

*One though must immediately highlight the film's somewhat dated feeling – which is mostly provoked by the naughties styled photography of video recording. I don't know when miniDV became dated, but it truly has entered that retrozone now, and is unavoidably out of style. Regardless of the film's technological 'look', or rather its mechanical exercise of this, the actual imaging isn't all that bad. Though some lighting, and a few more creative coverage could be exercised. Most of the film is very character focused, placing the camera in these 'long take' vantage points.*

*However, despite my throwing rocks at the film's look or its technology, I must return to the original remark – this is a solid dramady with a very strong performance by Butler himself. One can't help but wish to see another project made by him, one which would hopefully see him move away from the safety zones of simplistic theatrical filming to a more cinematic space, in which his work will eventually be elevated to a particular classier level, which he all so obviously deserves!*

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**WINTER 2018**

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### ***Holy Spirit (Directed by Mike Baran)***

*The opening scene of Holy Spirit is quite fantastic, and features an almost Claude Chabrol quality to it – sweeping shots of the countryside expand before us, a car travels heading somewhere, a few dramatic cuts, and a child before the image of Christ. This opening sets the tone of the film. Furthermore, this scenario helps establish the most successful element of Holy Spirit, which is its high polished images: the sequencing of which often build on a strong array of locales, bold iconography, and thematic elements.*

*There's also the keen use of sound, which is fantastically balanced between being comically musical, and cleanly delivered dialogue, which thanks to the actors is well textured.*

*On the flip side though the film seems to lack much of any real emotional depth, this in part due to its handling of comedy and other genre cues, such as thriller and action motifs. Whilst some characters are likable, most aren't. Furthermore, the film only seems to touch of its contextual set up – often dipping in with a soft touch in order to establish something, but never going into too much detail truly make it authentic. A part of me feels like the film somewhat lacked a tension which would drive the film forwards, one which was more forceful than its pastiche 'beloved public figure turned killer' plot.*

*None of this results in an exception film, nor does it result in a horrible one. Ultimately, Holy Spirit is a well executed film, and is perhaps best understood as an exercise in style over substance – which is completely recommendable.*

### ***The Guitar (Directed by Michael Boston)***

*For the most part, The Guitar, sails as one of the more polished and strong short film efforts we have seen here at TMBT Film Awards.*

*The fall though with this short is quite a minor one – excess. There's an excess in content for a short film in my opinion – too much scale, and too many plots, for this runtime (Boston clearly is gearing up for a feature level now).*

*And perhaps, the second fault – no offence to Michael Boston with this, but its inability to measure up to, or be of the same flawless delivery of his previous submission to us – Dress Rehearsal.*

*Here though, unlike Dress Rehearsal, there is a specific dynamic between people. A community of sorts gather around Leo, a thin homeless being with a fantastic musical skill. It is a fantastic dynamic, and shows a real concern and understanding for the growing disassociation society has between those who 'have' and those that 'don't have'.*

*Though most of the film's plot line tends to surround subplots, it is the dynamic between son and father, or perhaps socially comfortable persons and pariahs – that drives the film's success. One must add a commendation to Raquel Gallego, whose photography really helps capture a disenchanted locale, and a worn and tattered person in the centre of this landscape.*

*Michael Boston does here what he did in Dress Rehearsal in essence: he delivers a quality product steeped in a rough urban heart.*

## ***The Somnambulist (Directed by Duane Michals)***

*Duane Michals is back at it in the surreal powerhouse (we previously saw his glove fetish a few months ago). This time the focus seems to be very much on the circumstance of time, and its passing. An elderly man walks through an apartment opening rooms into metaphorical memories. The film on the surface sounds fairly shallow, but its strongest asset is its form: a steadfast dreamscape of moments intercut, almost like a silent film, overpower the first third of the film.*

*Here, almost like Ingmar Bergman's opening for Persona, we are provided with a kaleidoscope of images which recall an earlier primitive form of cinema.*

*Though the editing of the film tends to be quite stylized to perfection, the budget of this project, as well as its overall execution, seems to lean heavily on the audience being forgiving towards this in lieu of its unusual template.*

*Where Michals' previous short presented to us bolstered with a fairly original story, this one doesn't – the scenes which make up The Somnambulist strongly recall the dream walks of Sophie Barthes' Cold Souls, as well as the classic Being John Malkovich, but unlike those films, fails at the glossy delivery, or the blatant bold answer to a character's existence.*

*Having said all of that, one has to admire Michals' consistent surreal tone.*

## ***The Radicalization of Jeff Boyd (Directed by Uwe Schwarzwald)***

*With a budget of \$35,000, Uwe Schwarzwald has done a great job with The Radicalization of Jeff Boyd. The film feels quite well rounded in terms of consistent image and performance quality, the script too seems to be quite well adjusted to its genre and tone, which slides along as one would hope to see in a production of this calibre. The cast, who carry quite a large array of characters, keep the film's pace alive, most of whom have a great vocal gusto, which elevates the viewing experience.*

*The main fault of the film is its photographic style, and its particular choices in terms of frames and editing though, all of which tend to render the film's style into the look and 'feel' of a TV show. This is mostly because of the cookie-cut routine of master and coverage, as well as the all too predictable repetition of particular scenes in terms of their determination: enter character x, x and y talk, y leaves. This isn't to say that the film isn't good, in fact – it is in a sort of a way a compliment: Schwarzwald and his team have managed to produce work at such a consistent level, and with such a consistent vision, that the film itself slips away from any creativity that one*

would wish for in terms of the cinematic space. To achieve this level of consistency is hard, and quite rare in low budget films.

Overall the experience perhaps feels a tad dated, like a Hong Kong cop film which circulated just before the Hong Kong New Wave, *The Radicalization of Jeff Boyd* feels as if it belongs to a bygone era of film that no longer really exists in film (and perhaps does in TV). There's a definite 80's vibe about the film, be it in terms of its open thought-experiment plot line of politics mixed with social justice, or just the film's tone and delivery. Overall it is quite satisfactory, and perhaps only looked upon with a harsh eye by those hardcore cinephiles that want more in terms of film style.

# 2017 extended reviews

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## END OF 2017

### **Endless Mike (Rick Masi)**

*The main issue one has to take with Rick Masi's Endless Mike is mostly its 'talking heads' model. The characters, which are nicely shot in black and white, seem almost like idle characters – locked in position and talking, or thinking. Obviously, when considering this type of cinema one must recall the likes of Jim Jarmusch, in particular the likes of Coffee and Cigarettes and Night on Earth, which Masi does seem to hit well in terms of a similar reference. he [Masi] has a great knack for circumstantial dialogue and steady performances which encapsulate a tone of character based fiction.*

*Overall the short, with its 30 minute runtime, feels quite heavy in terms of its attention span, and would perhaps be better suited for a different medium, such as theater or a radio show, where a steady run of dialogue in this nature would be welcomed with more of an embrace than say a criticism.*

## LATE SUMMER

### **Stoning The Jasmine (Zaina Deeb) – script**

*The main problem with Stoning the Jasmine is embedded within the script's scale and objective, both of which are lacking in the awareness of the current film marketplace. In terms of scale, the script remains quite affordable – but unnecessarily minimalist in terms of its own vision, all the while, returning to the issue of an objective, the main plot's buildup towards the prosecution and punishment of individuals though is topical, is also somewhat dated, when considering that the realities of such Middle Eastern societies and their systems have already been sprawled on screens through the likes of Homeland etc.*

*Overall, the writing is concise, and often feels as if it has been comfortably balanced between the ideas of commerce, and artistic drama. With an appropriate edit, the chosen direction of either side though might provide more clarity to the tone, and a stronger sense of direction.*

*Under the right production circumstance, and a strong team behind the project, this film might be really great in terms of its marketability, and entertainment.*

### **What is Real (Duane Michals)**



Duane Michals' *What Is Real* is very much a delightful exercise in 'imaginative loss'. A narrative of objects is displayed here, like the work of experimental filmmakers who explore the capabilities of the 'persistence of vision'. We are shown the sight of fading objects, and their physical interaction with the very capable lead, Derek Stratton, who appears to be moving through a time-shifting space, haunted by the past/present/future parallels of the plot.

Viewed from a post-modern point of criticism, the film holds much credit in the context of the works of Michael Snow and so on. Ironically though, and the overall unexploited 'strength current' running under the film's surface, is the unexplored potential for a more literary form of dialogue, one which would attain the humorous, and more intellectually challenging, plotting of Franz Kafka types of narrative. That's where this filmmaker's skills might really shine if further pushed.

Overall, a really enjoyable film of bizarre scenes, nicely balanced between the escapist mode, and the aesthetics of digital clarity.

### ***In Through the Night (Josiah Cuneo)***

There is a difficulty in Josiah Cuneo's *In 'Through the Night'*, and it is one which really does jar through the entire experience: why are we restricted so heavily?

Much admiration must be felt towards the poetry of the short – the dancers, the reading of a story/poem, and the intimate nature of observing a woman applying make up in a mirror, who ignores the on-going dancing movement of various individuals. But, as an audience member, I was baffled by the experience. Not so much the arty nature of the piece, or even the lack of a narrative or character – as these things are not essential for a good dance film (ie Wim Wenders' *Pina*)... but I was thrown by the scope, which is very limited in terms of its scale.

What came before the story? What happens after? If the dancing was accompanied with music on its own, one would simply label this as a music video... which then begs the question: where does a film draw its difference between moving art, and film?

Perhaps the answer is far more complex than I'd like to get into with this review, but on the sheer 'overhead' level of thinking, for one, it is to do with perspective. Film has a perspective from which it tells its story, and in the case of this film, we do have the lead female as a point of view, but it is a complex presentation, as our perspective within the film of this persona is limited – short, tightly shot and unknowing, rather than say limitless, present and widely covered. And further to that point, the ending, which sees her enter a surreal dance movement, one which she 'disappears' into, is shot with such precision, and edited in a series of short glimpses; which in some shape or form, equates to emptiness in terms of cinematic satisfaction. There is what to enjoy here, but not enough to rave about this 'starter' course of a film.

### **Soft Sun (Mohsen Shwady)**

*The sun is hot, and yet the actor's pits are dry. Clearly something is a bit awry here. Two men climb and struggle for survival. If it wasn't for the lacking in realism, this duo would mirror the two Gerry's of Gus Van Sant's Gerry.*

*However, this film is more of a kind of M.C. Escher impression – there is no real sense of physical space which follows our laws of existence, let alone any social or images of civilization (shy of the armchair sitting up on a hill top of sand, and well, the various hip attire worn by everyone).*

*Mohsen Shwady's Soft Sun is a weirdly Pier Paolo Pasolini effort. It has an all too familiar surreal terrain: the desert, the dangerous garden of earthy things, a hunt for survival. Perhaps what isn't here is the brutality which Pasolini demanded his silent beings to suffer. Though, on that note, there is an almost old school religion struggle embedded into Soft Sun's story – it is a fable of fate and fight, just one that isn't so frightening.*

*For a short film shot for \$4,000, one might expect more. Some dialogue for one, an interaction, and a cause and effect plotting. Much is left to the imagination here, and one can't help but feel that it lacks context to make the surrealism feel more 'real'. But, there is no denying that the visuals are beautiful, and though the performances are short on the notion of depth, they are consistent and engaging for the length of the short narrative film.*

### **EARLY SUMMER**

#### **Tales of Darkness (Rick Masi)**

*Tales of Darkness is a film focused on 'love', or, at least, the affection of two individuals for one another. The film does, in a certain way, feel more of an early Jim Jarmusch film- in the sense that the film is about one thing on a certain level (say a hit man), but is in truth, like all Jarmusch efforts, is about a few core themes: boredom, life goals, forgiving the past. I guess what I mean is that overall the film sets out to do one thing, but through its nature... ends up doing another thing.*

*Rick Masi's script of Tales of Darkness is probably on the better side of the project's positives. It is a very ambitious one in terms of tone, and offers much room for the actor's to develop their psyche... and the two actors whose performance we do feel the most after all, those of Will Nemi and Melodie Roehrig, vary a lot in terms of range, pace and velocity. Which, again, like the script, is a good thing.*

*The photography overall feels quite minimalist, and considering the budget of \$60, I'm sure it was. The grade, which is quite heavy on the contrast, brings a certain plump and bold element to the film's look, and there's no denying that this element is somewhat advantageous – as the film feels 'more arty' than it probably cost. Though, some more restrained camera movements, and finer framing, would elevate the film quite a bit.*

*Overall, there isn't anything really all that negative in this film, though, in terms of a film viewer, it does leave one hoping something a little more specific in terms of its pacing.*

### ***Thick Air (Meredith Dobbs)***

*Writing this review after the awards season has completed is almost like a bit of a 'cheat operation', as I know the film fared well at TMBT film awards with three wins. And it was a rightful set of wins. The film isn't a poor effort. Sure, there are issues in it, it isn't exactly the fastest moving, and perhaps would have fared better as a slightly smaller packed shorter, or a small feature (around that sweet spot of 70 minutes). There are minor sound issues, but these, along with the pacing, are minor considering the budget and scale of the project.*

*In truth, with characters like these, who wouldn't want to spend more time with them. Meredith Dobbs' short is a well packed piece, in terms of who is in it, and how we observe them. It is often heartbreaking to watch, specifically in terms of how Mary Rose Naoum's persona, Samantha, and her interactions with Michael Lopetrone' August. The two almost become blind to the simple council of 'what you need, or what you want, was always right before you.' That rhetoric which has kept the Bridget Jones' franchise afloat. Also, one should add, the two pair up brilliantly in terms of chemistry, and the ability to play off of one another... the project, like Naoum and Lopetrone's performances, is a well oiled balancing act.*

*Overall, it might not be the film people would immediately think 'I want to see that', but in truth, compared to many of the entries one has to suffer (and enjoy, there are plenty to enjoy) at the helm of acting as a judge for one festival, and a festival director... Thick Air stick with you – and is rather hard to dismiss as anything forgettable, avoidable or, painful to watch. I'd happily watch it again, and would recommend it to others, and well, frankly – will look forward to seeing more from Dobbs, who's one of my new favorite micro budget filmmakers.*

### ***Barback (Matteo Valentini)***

*Written with a certain amount of style and clique, in terms of its scope, Barback, an unproduced script by Matteo Valentini, provides ample quantities of humor, circumstantial crime and a taste for the 'bold' when it comes to characters and their personal arcs.*

*The script's flaws however are held mostly in its overall arcs, which often yield varying lengths of scenes, and exposition in dialogue scenes which go on far too long... it is here that the script needs work, and could do with being honed in on more in terms of its marketability, or even genre.*

*Having said all that, the script isn't a film, and like all scripts, is nothing more than a blueprint. With the right cast, and creative crew, this script could be elevated to what would be a great character study film, one set within the heart of a pub's underbelly, it's comical characters, and the social commentary the type of this film would be concocting through its existence.*

### **Lilt (Josiah Cuneo)**

*Sneaking into the dressing rooms, whilst stepping into a random conversations about prep work and storms, music and print making, there is a sense that this film is a focus of finely weaved threads: so, imagine a cloth, a even better, a knitted bed sheet... and if one was to zoom in, and focus on one area of this cloth, you would see just a mirror image of this film – a series of tightly weaved arcs, sequences and movements.*

*The problem however, with the film, and whilst continuing on the subject of my metaphor, is the nature of weaved narratives and the sequences which make them up, is that of the arcs. No matter how much emphasis is put on the individual weaving, the overall image, tone, and 'feelings' overall, is that it all becomes a tad repetitive, and somewhat meaningless, when viewed from a distance.*

*Ben Van Berkum brings a certain energy to the film, as does Malin Barr, who's wide-eyed performance provides much heart and resonance to the material at hand. And it is, overall, well produced – the photography leaning more towards the docu-styled drama than the artful type (which is reminiscent of Altman's 'shoot and observe' techniques, which are great), and the music, which is a friendly tune, appears throughout to provide some timing to the piece.*

*Overall, the film 'feels' quite comforting... but is, perhaps, at times flawed by its narrative's feeling of 'self familiarity' with its own content, but held together by its form and style.*

### **City of My Heart (Kostas Petsas)**

*Kostas Petsas' City of My Heart comes loaded with an eclectic variety of city sounds, spaces and time edits. The short, though extremely minimalist, and experimental in form, is a well rounded narrative of poetry surrounding Madrid – the only main character in the film.*

*Personas, living and moving through the space of the city, are often glimpsed as passing faces, often appearing on screen for a moment or two – highlighting the emphasis on the 'time capsule'*

type of narrative this film is. It is, also, in a sort of way, a film about the motion of objects: where one object begins, moves, and affects another by being in direct contact with the other object, and so on. Madrid, in a sort of way, is both the oyster shell here: the one containing the pearl and biology of a living and breathing animal, and at the same time the prisoner of it's own design – by this, I am attempting to emphasize the self imposed restrictions which hinder City of My Heart.

The highlights of the film's techniques mostly lay within its editing, which seem to find a certain pace to the materials which it collates, as well as the film's photography, which like the editing, is quite creative – though at times too similar to tourist photography, rather than say Godfrey Reggio types of city images of opulence and culture's documented.

All in all, this is a fun experiment, and for its length, it never really becomes too slow or challenging a view.

### **The Pleasures of the Glove (Duane Michals)**

Duane Michals' short film, 'The Pleasures of the Glove' is a surreal short film, one which utilizes a variety of skills at hand: silent cinema (specifically leaning into the comedic side of slap stick comedy), double exposure, and film 'time' in order to translate the narrative of connection through a glove.

The film, somewhat reminiscent of 00's Art House European films, such as the works of the late Abbas Kiarostami, and the rare efforts by Michelangelo Frammartino, when considering the digital applications of the film's technologies. Michals' project is more of movement, incident and 'capturing' of time and space, than say the incidents of narrative cinema... and like the aforementioned Juggernaut filmmakers, presents a 'relic' form of film – the impression, rather than the story.

The music, which accompanies the film's dreamlike narrative allows for a specific elevation of the material, enhancing it with a particular 'hand made' texture. It is this aspect of the film which is perhaps the strongest, as it feels as if it were 'made for purpose', and retains a flavoring of the project's NYC life – it feels as if I can taste the dust in the studio recording the wooden claps. Furthermore, on the subject of authenticity – the performances delivered by the two leads, the unnamed 'Patrik and Ellen', are somewhat enigmatic, and overall quite convincing, full embraces of their surreal applications at hand, as well as their nude convictions in delivering the film's narrative uninterrupted, and unfiltered.

At times the film leans towards being more of a gimmick of the past, a kind of shape-shifting memoir, one which leaves a passive viewer unaware of its points of reference... all the while polarizing and projecting an ideal of broken language, and a past version of cinema. Overall, it is compelling, whilst at the same time alienating.

## **LATE SPRING**

### ***The Date (2017, Michael Beddoes)***

*From the outset, Michael Beddoes' short film – 'The Date' seems like an innocent comedy. A young lady is sent to the bar on a blind date to meet 'tits and ass' Toni.*

*Overall, the film is produced at a very high level of technical gloss, but is internally conflicted – the film's 'straight misinterpreted as gay' feels at times a tad politically deaf in terms of its message, or perhaps even tonally muted. Likewise, before Maddie (played greatly by Melissa Clements) meets Toni, she is told her date is a 'tits and ass' seeker, and immediately becomes self-conscious, thinking she won't 'fit the bill'. Obviously, by no means do I wish to project onto Maddie and her character, but I am somewhat saddened by her self evaluation at this moment – as the film, at this point, felt like a far cry moment from passing the Bechdel test.*

*It does however pass it a in a sort of way... this of course being in its ability to use Charly as the butt end of every Maddie and Toni joke – avoiding the 'women talking about men' moment.*

*Charly is clearly a fiasco character, one who is both 'loved' and hated by her peers.*

*It is a comedy first and foremost. And it is often comedic – as in, it actually provides genuine laugh-out-loud moments, and has a good pace about it. There's no denying the energy which its cast has thrown in – most of whom attempt to fill the screen with a certain warmth and liveliness. However, one can't help but feel that the filmmakers at hand seem rather too comfortable tugging jokes at the 'straight' perspective of lgbt dating in the city, the behavior of women tearing each other down in an office environment, and tying up the last messy 'goodnight kiss' arc – a moment which feels like a very awkward situation everyone involved would probably wish to avoid in real life.*

### ***The Living Room (Screenplay by Matteo Valentini)***

*At its current state, 'The Living Room', a script penned by Matteo Valentini, is an ambitious, and perhaps overfilled feature project. The reason it is ambitious isn't because of its scope of desire to tell a large story, but rather because of how it extends its very short narrative into a much larger thing – a whopping 137 pages.*

*Overall, the first quarter feels like a tiresome and very vulgar hang out of two male protagonists spouting sexist remarks – Jay and James are shallow, and forever at each other's throats. They sit around discussing who they want to fuck, or who they've fucked, and so on.*

*At 40 pages in, a far too late remedy is introduced – new characters. From here on out the script*

*attempts to find some heart. But it is often an odd mix of interesting character dialogues and circumstantial spats.*

*The script does go to much length to maintain it's constant 'punchy' dialogue. It often becomes overused.*

*However, with the introduction of a few new scenes outside of these very confined rooms, and the reduction of the vulgarity of the characters, heading towards a more balanced set of arcs, this script may become reminiscent of Doug Liman's Swingers. Making it brash, bold and very daring. An edit though is needed, as 130+ pages is too long for a film of this nature.*

### **War In Heels (2017, Trent Cliffe and Lily Connor)**

*The great thing about War In Heels is its script. Penned by Trent CliffeWriter and Lily Connor, the dialogue for the first three minutes is very smooth, and runs at a steady pace. The last phone call does sadly feel like a quick wrap up sentence though – another jolt of exposition.*

*The performances which Amy Elizabeth Price and Genevieve Brock delivery help to heighten the film's strengths, often playing off each other and building the scene to its final 'reveal'. It is thanks to their chemistry, and the chemistry which fills their character's with angst, that allows this film to feel engaging – even when we are locked in the car with them with a single long take.*

*Overall, this short, which appears more as a short sketch than a film, suffers at the hands of its minimalism the most. It is under developed in terms of tone, theme or any sort of cinematic language. Of course, that isn't to say that the 'aha' moment at the end wasn't welcomed... but one can't help but feel that overall the project could have been taken further, and developed into a more rounded 'filmic' experience. What follows this one scene of chatter among women heading out to the 'stakeout', or what came before it – triggering the need to stalk someone, would have allowed for more cinematic development in terms of pacing and narrative devices. Ultimately, expanding the film would have reduced the overall feeling of a theatrical set which haunts this film – it almost feels like two actors on a stage sitting in chairs talking.*

*Having said all that, this little super-short is very pleasing. It is easy to watch, and a wonderful 'starter' project. Wanting to see more is really just a compliment, as the film at hand feels like a charming appetizer for future projects.*

### **Dress Rehearsal (2017, Michael Boston)**

*What is most surprising about Michael Boston's 'Dress Rehearsal' is its heart. And I say that, or rather write it, with complete belief in it. 'Dress Rehearsal' has more heart in it than most short films, and furthermore, when compared to the majority of entries presented to us on a seasonal*

*basis, I can immediately pin it as one of the most interesting character studies I have seen in ages... and one of the most impact filled.*

*Yes, it is about an actor, and traditionally that would be a major turn off (as there are far too many shorts and webseries focused on that particular persona type), but here, for the first time in a long time, I was presented with an actor's tale that was cinematic, engaging and flipping heartfelt.*

*The film focuses on Abner, who inadvertently is offered to audition for a part which requires him to research and attempt the 'method' process of acting as a transsexual. He goes about it with care, shaving, and dressing up. Almost like Mel Gibson at the start of 'What Women Want'. Only, instead of a bathtub shock that leads to romance, this film takes a much darker turn.*

*The film wholeheartedly embraces its narrative, balancing comedic characters, and their minor subplots, which help nuance the overall script, with rough and tumble LA types, capturing some underbelly issues of the city – race, sex workers, the system of policing, and the fame hungry community. This is done all the while capturing the city, and the slum like alleyways, in a series of lush textures, with a thematic tone, which appears present both in the edit, cinematography and score.*

*All in all, captivating, moving, and memorable.*

### ***Thirst (2017, Kevin Singh)***

*The most admirable thing about Kevin Singh's Thirst is its scale. Shot in an almost Steven Soderbergh Traffic nature, the film reels off of its violence, and divides itself into sections of color coded sequences. The issue here though, and I don't mean anything too harshly but it, but the film is by no means equal to Traffic.*

*Though there are plenty of characters to keep the ball rolling in terms of attention span, the film's arc is entirely glued around its violence, incidents of fear, remorse and throw-away ethics. Sadly, it is here that one feels the weakest joint in the project – there is a true lack of realism to the production; one which is so overbearing, the film itself becomes more of an imitation of American war films, than one in their image.*

*This is in part due to the locale of the production. Though it is often well disguised in terms of technology and decor presented within the film's mise en scene, it does however become clear through the casting of native South African actors that these are not Americans, nor are these 'terrorist' military bodies genuine. It may be dubbed to hell and back, but the film still tastes a little too foreign to be American.*



Furthermore, whilst on the note of lacking realism, there's one giant hole one can't help but point – the film, much like many American blockbuster efforts, seems quite comfortable with depicting foreign militia as dangerous men with mustaches. It is on this note that the film fails to discover its strongest potential – which of course would have been to challenge the stereotyped images of the Middle East, something that the European production of *Essential Killing* relished in.

Returning to the due praise however, there is no denying that this film was overjoyed with its scope – and it is a bold one. There are many shots which depict a waterless desert, and night scenes dipped in beautiful blue hues. It is however a shame that the film didn't think more of its own script and content, as it is there, with a stronger understanding of character and plot, that a concern for a narrative's realism would have been won, and that a gem might have been found.

### **Free Fallers (2017, Rick Masi)**

I'm not sure of the length of the opening titles of *Star Wars*, nor do I really care. The opening sliding words here, presented in a homage to *Star Wars*, are a tad long winded, and actually are unnecessary – as the exposition in the dialogue, and the general material of the project, are stronger than the scrolling words which open the film. That however, is the only real issue I take with the film.

The sound is clean, and the photography is consistent, allowing for the regular painful 'indie' technical work to fade away... meaning, one can watch the film without any sort of discomfort. Sure, with both elements of the film – that being the nature of sound and image, one could have hoped for more creativity – but this is a comedy after all, and style isn't entirely necessary.

The strongest strength of the film is its use of characters, with its 'film production' ensemble, the film unfolds as a series of revolving door scenes, comedic and typical of the indie film production moments (I've lived through those kind of shoots, and I know many others who have). The strongest part to this cast is really the pumped 'ac-tour' Steven Didas, and soundie Kevin Sampson, as their performances lean more towards naturalism with their characters, rather than caricatures.

Overall, it is the script which helps to string the project together, as its overall arc of a film being made becomes an excuse to explore various scenes of social interaction. It is here, with the humanist narrative – a kind of expression of how we work in a social construct: our interactions with each other, treatments of one another, and opinions of those interactions; that provide the film with a unique quality. It becomes a kind of reminiscent throw back towards a Rainer Werner Fassbinder styled narrative, and it is where I'd recommend Rick Masi travels to next, as his comedy is good... but not as good as his potential for character studied dramas.

## **SPRING**

### ***Hair Cut Man, Hair Cut Woman (2017, Jason Britski)***

*Within film, this being the concept of it as a medium, a concern for genre, narrative and character has often overtaken other paths of the product's potential. And it is with experimental film, the type which expects viewers to sit back and enjoy and experience which washes over them; where we are able to find some of these particular often unexplored paths of film.*

*With Jason Britski's 'Hair Cut Man, Hair Cut Woman' we are able to experience just that. The film is a moving post card, a kind of triptych image of passing moments explored within Thailand. Yes, perhaps the city is the core character, and the narrative is that of a videographer travelling and exploring the space which they are now inhabiting, but much like Werner Herzog's work in the 1970's, specifically the likes of 'Fata Morgana' (1971), Britski's film is perhaps more about dreams, dreaming and the nature of daydreaming whilst watching moving pictures, and the attributes which film provides for such dreaming, which take the forefront of our experience of the film. Furthermore, the film, with its quick paced editing, the shifting and sliding shots which often escape the viewer, trigger a thought within ones own mind's eye – this being of the present, past and future moments, and how we might experience them.*

*This film, with its grainy expression of video texture, allures to a bygone taste of film – the type of the home movie, developed over time, and rarely screened at gatherings. It might not be the most polished form of cinema, but it sure is one of the most exciting expressions of pure cinematic language.*

### ***Clever Girl (2017, Joe Zappa)***

*With the webseries format, it is very hard to evoke style, or even evoke emotion. It is often a simple one note exercise, much like TV shows, whereby a story is delivered in small bite sizes, easy for consumption. Rarely, does a webseries show open with conviction to its tone or content, but 'Clever Girl', by Kip Bennett and Joe Zappa does just that.*

*The first episode opens boldly, and with a streak for the emotional side with the reveal of the dead body, but also the establishment of its genre style – the thriller mode.*

*Much like David Lynch's earlier work, there's a touch of the film noir here, one which appears only in the context of the show's overarching tones, and flavor of characters/narrative style. A particular shot of note, which emphasizes this, appears at the end of the opening credits, where the camera slowly moves in towards a victim, sliding towards the shadows of the room. Likewise, the ending, where we witness a body's wounds, we move around observing the flesh from a very*

particular perspective, and interpret the material both in a critical context, as well as an emotional one; similarly to the way in which Dorothy Vallens' body is depicted in 'Blue Velvet'.

Overall, the show outlives its own Americana, including a European flavor when it comes to how its story is delivered – the voyeurism, the teacher/student complex (perhaps this is just how I've interpreted the show though). There's something quite arty here, one unfamiliar when it comes to comparing this webseries with other shows currently present online. It is this ultimately which makes it above average, and memorable.

### **Edna's Dearest Secrets (written by Ozge Gozturk)**

'Edna's Dearest Possessions' is a very specific type of narrative – one focused on the decisions which a single individual will enact in order to determine their future, and in turn, the future of the next generation.

This particular 'dilemma' form of narrative, which is very much about the debate of ethics and social issues is of importance, but does in turn, lack a particular amount of detail – the characters are often caricatures, instead of actual 'beings' who act and speak beyond their simplified roles' dialogue (ie, the doctor is just a doctor, he is not explored further than that, the couple too, are just a couple, they don't explore their individuality beyond a mere surface of a few scenes).

Overall, the script is well thought out, with the plotting of its story points clearly established, and leading its reader through the motions which are faced by the couple who are considering giving up their unborn child. There's also no denying that this particular piece would be quite rewarding to actors, easy to produce on account of its low budget, and not far from becoming fantastic.

The script, or perhaps its story, could be polished even further with a distinct directing style when brought to the screen. It is here, with the finer paint brushes of production, that one may be able to elevate the already well established and thoughtful script to a higher level of excellence.

## **WINTER**

### **Running For Pride-A Cross Country (2016, Alec Douglas)**

There is a great feeling of brotherhood to Alec Douglas' 45 minute documentary Running for Pride-A Cross Country. The people we meet, their stories, and the experiences shared with us of the cross country courses which they run, slowly builds a very particular welcoming and engrossing community. We care about them because they are real, unlike the people we see in 'reality TV'.

*Though the film could have done with a stricter edit, and perhaps even a slightly stronger visual style, it remains a very humanistic depiction of youth – it is unadulterated, unrehearsed, and like most American things which delight the rest of the world, genuine.*

*It's on that note that I'd like to make a genuine remark – yes, the short does have a few issues, but, when compared to other documentary short films made for this budget, it goes without saying that we would have awarded this effort had it been entered into the competition. It is a wholesome tale, and it is told with so much conviction and friendship, that one can't help but feel for a moment as if we were part of the running team; or at least a member of the team which cheer them on.*

### ***The Last Dream For The Moon (2016, Octavian Repede)***

*There is something very unusual, and original, about The Last Dream For The Moon. The film, part documentary and part fiction, blends its editing into a sequence of montages; almost in throwback motion towards the soviet mode of filmmaking – which is incredibly fitting considering the space race plot.*

*The film's form, which would drive a feature film viewer insane, finds a perfect home here. After all, the short film format is incredibly fitting for an experimental effort like this one.*

*It is a forward motion collage of ideas, ones which expand outward into various sheets of time. Deleuze would be very proud of this filmic effort. It is interesting to consider that this mode of filmmaking could only exist at the point which we are at now – with 100 years of film history, we are now seeing filmmakers embracing various modes of film language, and mixing them. It is hard to describe this film effectively because of this, it is several things at once, and feels incredibly fluid.*

*There is a second element at play though, one which really does demand recognition, the film is fantastical with its plot line. The narrative presented unravels its perspective, and allows it to be reshaped accordingly; often finding various tones, and shapes within the film's arcs. It is here that the film's script, penned by the director, finds its strongest suit – it is a film which embraces and acknowledges the fact that it is a film. A kind of Guy Maddin meets Jean Luc Godard voyage for the nostalgic viewer.*

### ***Kata Muktu (2015, Brian K Palmer)***

*With a kaleidoscope opening, Brian Palmer's Kata Muktu feels like a throwback to the era of filmmaking where primitive subjects, ones which are based around the ideals of the mystic and unknown reigned. Though, as much as I'd love to simply paint the film just as a past-time filmic experience, it is much more than that – it is a rural reflection, one which considers life before*

*Facebook and internet feed living, and also acts at its peak as a comedy about living a non-nonsensical humanistic life.*

*The highlight of the film is Palmer himself, appearing in a mostly silent role, he depicts the epitome of a good comedic silent star – he goofs around, marches in his terrain, and acts as an old character actor would have (by old I mean the type from the 40's and 50's Hollywood turn).*

*The film overall though does trigger a simple thought: What would we love to see next?*

*Personally I'd suggest a turn towards a horror, or some other goofy genre film that could be parodied. The film, on that front, does feel like a great starter project, one which is beginning a post-modern conversation as to what it is, and what it isn't in terms of its form. It would be great to see that further developed in a future project.*

*The only downfall Kata Muktu really holds is its plot: the film is at times quite slow, and also tends to lack a clear vision as to where it might be headed. The closing note though, of making 'love and not war' seems really timely with our current turmoil internationally, and one can't help but feel a simplified story like this, with a sweetened message at the end, is quite appropriate and welcomed.*

# Short Film Reviews

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## LATE SUMMER 2016

### **Ghost Nets (2016, Mark Bousfield)**

#### **Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)**

*With the opening moments of 'Ghost Nets' focusing on the small tensions between siblings, the film establishes its early on set of 'blood thicker than water' paradox. This paradox being that the film's conclusion recoils to a survival mode – one which is similar to the notions expressed within this first scene: how does the idea of 'self' survive scrutiny? How does civil society behave? How does one behave in the company of 'the other'? What is an 'ethical' murder?*

*In the positioning of the film's leads, that being between Neal and Jack, the tension amounts to the ideals of what makes one a man, or perhaps – 'masculine'. Similarly, the trio camping out on the shore, and the gun wielding stranger, compute a particular ethical outlook at the concept of living conditions, how does one keep themselves safe, and at what point does one 'act' in order to save them and their loved ones.*

*At its core, the film appears as a science fiction venture. Perhaps its the digital titles, sweeping camera angles, and the sound design, but to me the film became just that – an allegory of what is alternate to our world. And in doing so, in my mind, 'Ghost Nets' drifted out of the apolitical sphere of emotional drama, and moved into a more amplified commentary of what makes us human.*

*And here in lies the best moment of the film, which highlights this verbose thesis of mine – the closing scene. From moving in towards the car on a wonderfully smooth shot, we turn away from the arguing couple towards our enigmatic Joe Sowerbutts, who moves out of the light, and towards the darkened woods.*

*There, in the darker shades, we observe his dismantling of the sordid items which have caused so many rifts in the last few days of his life, as well as his own humanity. With an overlaying track, a song which highlights the new 'drifter' status of Neal, we watch a new vagabound human emerge, one lost in the shadows, one obsessed with the past, or perhaps one with an uncertain future they will forge for themselves. What is certain at this point isn't so much a plot notion, but rather a few very clear cinematic agenda: this short film is a well written, and a well executed project, one which allows for thematic issues to rise to the surface, and a project entirely unique to its perspective and message; which is incredibly rare for the normal 'one tone' short films. Mark Bousfield should be headed to feature filmmaking by now, as he's somewhat outgrown the short medium in the best of ways.*

### **The Weekend (2016, Dennis Cahlo)**

### **Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)**

*With a formalist edit 'The Weekend' appears as yet another rehash of The French New Wave motif of bite sized narrative points streamlined into a style and cinematic plugging of 'essential moments' in life. And yet, despite its outset design, the film retains some of the best re-vamped FNW (acronym for French New Wave) tones one can imagine.*

*Gone are the pastiche throwback references which Jean Luc Godard's 'Breathless' suffers too heavily with, gone are the Truffautesque focus on meaningless and sexist female starlets, and how destructive they can be... here, in The Weekend, be it an effort on part of Dennis Cahlo to rework the FNW film model, or not, is a new FNW film.*

*One quite suitable for the contemporary viewer: its slick, its aptly made, and its moving. To me, this little short, be it by design or intent, is a complete new vision of all the good things about the FNW films; minus the French language (because, lets be honest, that is part of what made those films so cool).*

*Cahlo breathes fresh air into the domestic quarrels and unexpected encounters of strangers, his actors deliver defined performances, the editing is jumpy and plump with texture, creating oodles of meaning in seconds, and above all, there's a certain naturalism to its stagy nature – almost as if Cahlo has managed to reduce Une Femme est une Femme into a bare charming short. Considering its budget, it is a fantastic little gem.*

## **EARLY SUMMER 2016 Reviews**

### **Extra Time (2016, Caris Rianne)**

*The strange thing about short films is once you've seen a random sample of about 100 of them from the same regions in the world (specifically western ones), all within a month or two, you become somewhat desensitised. They blur together covering several familiar themes: loss, fleeting romance, chases, escapes, survival, growing up and so on.*

*The special thing about Extra Time is just this – we have seen this film already. And yet, we haven't, because it isn't the dynamic which makes the theme new, or how the story is told to us in terms of plot... but rather how it is told to us in tone. This is what makes this particular take on the divorce 'growing up' story new.*

*Extra Time has been directed incredibly well by Caris Rianne through the sheer multilayered character relations which she employs. We have access to the family, the sibling, the father, the friends, and all within a few moments, we learn how they interact with one another, who does what and why. And this notion of detail is explored in other elements of the film – we have a very careful set of camera angles, edits are sparing and selective, and music comfortably enhances the film's motifs.*

*The only criticism due isn't a technical one, or even a negative one really, but – at times the film did feel rather 'short'. The director, the cast, the team overall had achieved a great engaging effort here, one that they had perhaps outgrown by the end of the production. Perhaps a feature,*

*or a more challenging short, will be their next step; as it is the one they are definitely ready for, having succeeded in making a fantastically engaging and warming short film already.*

### ***Dark Clouds Far Away (2016, Ian Lapworth)***

*Ian Lapworth's 'Dark Clouds Far Away' is a documentary focusing on one family's experience of dementia, specifically that of Lapworth's mother, Beryl.*

*The film's portrayal of the disease is quite carefully presented, balanced off of the memories discussed and presented to the viewer.*

*Stylistically the film is quite bare, reminiscent of avant-garde cinema – presenting its information as a series of episodic slide shows accompanied with a voice over and the occasional clip.*

*The difficulty of course of judging a film of this nature, as well as making it, go hand in hand. It is near to impossible to not remain unbiased to the content, rendering all viewer's sympathetic; and this is in part the wonderful portrayal of Lapworth's relationship with his mother – it is a raw film experience, personal and intimate.*

### ***Imitation is Suicide (2016, Julian Davis)***

*With its youthful 'outsider' take on the online era, 'Imitation is Suicide' approaches its story with a simplistic silent film.*

*This form though isn't an imitation. Though many short film directors often start with silent efforts in order to avoid large scale productions, here it is quite the opposite – extras pass on by with phones in hand, and the need for inter-personal dialogue just isn't necessary as we have entered the information age of text typing and image swiping. Taking a step further, the film's urge to maintain a simplified communication of its story, without much convoluted character development or contrived situations, allows it to become rather similar to those much loved film efforts of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. This is not to say that it is a classic, however – it isn't an imitation of the current mode of filmmaking.*

*With its idyllic photography, and careful cuts, the film coaxed its viewers towards the single note function of the short's narrative – finding another person like you.*

*Thankfully this early effort from its young director, Julian Davis, isn't as preachy as the 'anti-internet age' efforts of Jason Reitman's 'Men, Women and Children'; and is a wonderful beginning towards what could develop into a well rounded filmmaker. The next step would be of course to use sound, to hear our characters speak, and to understand a bit more of what they think beyond their urge to read.*

## ***SPRING 2016 Reviews***

### ***Carthage (2016, Peter Vaughan)***



### **Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)**

*So he's stuck in purgatory? Unable to escape the carefully framed corners of the dark studio carefully lit with overheads, side lamps and dangling bulbs? I think we've seen this film before. Or have we?*

*I know over the course of my time working in film I have read many scripts with a similar plot, I've seen many films much like this one in terms of narrative, and have considered many of these kind of films rather pastiche. Though of course, they are all supposed to be parodies. But yes, they are pastiches of a particular type of aesthetic: the ideal of hell, the vision of an inescapable space... however, here's the punch line, Peter Vaughan's direction of this particular version of this vision is quite special. Though it does feel very compact due to its particular budget, it is also something quite brilliantly envisioned. There's a breath to the visuals, the cutting between them in particular is quite slick and effective, and they all come together to form a coherent slippery vision of the 'underworld'.*

*– heck, it even includes a sheep!*

*It isn't the blooming white space in 'Under The Skin', or even the dingy passages the so-called alien of that film lures men into, but this is a fair effort into that kind of vision; and a respectable start from which Vaughan is bound to build on with his later efforts.*

### **Amoo Nowruz (2016, Farkhondeh Torabi)**

#### **Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)**

*Farkhondeh Torabi's 'Amoo Nowruz' is a delightful mixed media animation inspired by one of the ancient Persian tales about a woman waiting for her love's return.*

*One of the most prominent elements of this short is its rather post-modern appeal – it is an old tale using some of the most distinctive silent film traits originating from the turn of the century, all the while performing the film in a digital matrix which is very much of our 'current' mode of image processes.*

*Here, the lead character, a lively daydreaming woman who is both large and thin, depending on where she stands, counts down the days, and prepares everything she can think of for the arrival of her man; only to then fall fast asleep upon on the promised date, and miss his appearance.*

*The tale though is both mystical, and much like many early animation exploits by Disney, a careful balance of realist and situational ethics. Though of course, the latter observation could be of my own projection, but personally I believe one could argue for this perspective, this female directed effort feels to me like a wonderful modern-feminist take on an tale: leave the woman to do all the house work chores, and she will only greet you with her snores.*

*The best bit of the film is its final reward to the viewer, much like the lead character, we feel rather exploited by the entire affair, all of this waiting and preparing, and they don't even see each other? Not to fret though, a rather wonderful reward arrives at the final turn, and the film becomes a wonderful dreamy effort.*

## **ALBA – Yesterday Belongs To The Dead (2016, Nicolás Olivera)**

**Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)**

*‘Alba’ by Nicolás Olivera is somewhat of an acted out documentary. Using what I assume to be untrained actors predominantly (in particular for the children), the film relies heavily on the political play of ‘what is real?’, ‘what is ethical?’, and most importantly in my opinion – ‘what is ethical cinema when it is unreal?’*

*At first, I was under the impression that the film was supposed to be a fictional take on the material it wanted to present, a kind of docu-drama style, but its photography lead me astray to think it was a political comedy, or even some sort of dark satire. That its well framed and stylish looks were a parody, instead of say a pastiche.*

*And then, with a second viewing, I came up with a better reading, which I felt better suited to the film: this is more of a docu-ethics-drama film. It appears to us slightly more polished than a documentary, there are no ‘to camera’ speeches or shaky camera work, however the ‘voice’ of the material is that of a documentary posing some sort of ethical dilemma which as viewers we are challenged into exploring through the perspective of a witness.*

*Furthermore, the ethics game imposed on the audience is that of asking us to believe something which is real in circumstance to be also real at playtime with children. Without the much needed filmic realism, this message becomes somewhat lost. Without the rougher look which is needed to make such a story appear ‘real’ to the viewer, or perhaps an even more polished effort, the lack of a reason behind its filmic stylisation becomes quite apparent; the film becomes purely academic in my eyes. It feels like an exercise in learning about these people living in these circumstances, rather than say sympathising with them, or wanting to explore the story they have to tell.*

*On the plane of academia the film sours, it becomes a coherent Brecht like piece, reminiscent of the playwright’s German depression era effort ‘Whither Germany?’ from 1932. It is moving nonetheless, aesthetically taught, and a lesson we should listen to. However, by no means does ‘Alba’ reach the emotional class of other filmic efforts depicting ‘realistic’ events, such as ‘Elephant’ by Gus Van Sant; the type of realist cinema which shocks and moves its audiences deeply.*

## **PAGES 321 PART-1 (2016, Dir. Anugat Raj)**

**Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)**

*Like with Darren Aronofsky’s ‘Pi’, or even David Cronenberg’s reworking of William S. Burroughs’ ‘Naked Lunch’; ‘PAGES 321 PART-1’ drifts in and out of being a work of part quasi-intellectual rambling, part character study and part art house romp.*

*The main issue here though is unlike the larger pieces produced by those previously mentioned heavyweight filmmakers is – this is merely a short film. Without the longer length to explore the style, or the pace with which to allow the audience to become attuned with its particular vocabulary and tone, we are somewhat lost as to what we should be taking away from the film as it hurdles towards its conclusion with quite a dreamy pace.*

*Not all though is at fault though, the performance delivered by Saurav Khurana is quite noteworthy – he's restrained and physically bound to his character's psychological state. Keshav Gupta and Aakash Rajput's photography is slick, and very bold for a throwback effort towards the more avant garde black and white look, reminiscent of the early Hollywood 'film noirs' which flooded into France past the Vichy era. And lastly, Anugat Raj's script and direction are well attuned to the material.*

*For me the highlight of the film was the exterior shot, the only one we are allowed – a brief moment where our character stands out on a balcony, and is surrounded by the image of his neighbours. The distance which unfolded here, revealing a layered background and foreground, provided an escape from the all too familiar white walls, an escape from the stuffed turtle that had died, and a much needed moment to clarify which 'world' it was we were viewing this film in.*

### ***The Dead Bird (2014, Damien Overton)***

#### ***Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)***

*With its children's book type voice over, angst youngsters and warm Australian vistas, The Dead Bird by Damien Overton is a spiderweb of multi-layered plots which carefully unfold using a beautiful cinematic language – the type of cinematic language which is usually avoided when making short films due to it being too complex or too intimidating to short film audiences.*

*Overton's efforts here are particularly of note, as he does not shy away from making something entirely unique and well rounded in just a few minutes.*

*The performances in the film are of special note: Alexander Gavioli's clear voice, often barked at Ryan Lights' Nick, keep a steady bolt on the tension building beats. There's a particular harsh physicality to his movements, he seems almost caged within the frame, forever forcing the camera to follow him, and capture his speed. It's a refreshing delivery, a far more realistic one than the traditional wooden movements often found in film.*

*Similarly, Lights' face carries all of the frustrations and inner psyches of a fairly robust variety of emotions his character lives through. He slips in and out of different tones, and helps balance the film's harsher notes with a particular softness to his delivery.*

*The photography, editing and pace of the film is also of special interest – the film finds a certain comfort within its timing, all the while configuring a delicate filmic 'world'. Considering Overton's previous dramatic efforts, a fresh faced filmmaker who has previously been stuck within the limiting space of theatre, it's easy to spot that he has surely found some structural freedom within the images of cinema. He jumps from space to space, flips in and out of various time structures, and enjoys the full benefits of a Deleuzian time structure spun out of his rich short script.*

*The film conveyed multiple strands of thoughts – pain, love, loss... and furthermore, it compiled these themes into separate narrative strands which interweaved through particular character relationship dynamics: the father and his sons, the runaway and his lover, the dead birds and the youngsters. Its a complex piece, provocative, and especially memorable.*

## ***WINTER 2016 Reviews***

### ***A Place To Lay Your Head* (2014, Dir. Simon Adegbenro)**

Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)

Steve Look's Hitchcockesque thriller, 'A Place to Lay Your Head', is a great example of minimalist film-making. Set within one house, run by a killer, we explore the rooms scene by scene, unveiling the space. Its pace, subjectivity, and overall editing choices aid in its building of tension which reach a climax of a love versus ethics clash.

Reminiscent of 'Frenzy' (1972, Alfred Hitchcock), the film neither places the audience within a sympathetic or empathetic position with its lead; but – instead, we are levelled at a point of view with the witness, it is here, in the cinematic space of observer that we are shown the events as if we were in the room, inspecting the blow by blow occurrence.

What makes this film unique is its engagement with the current political tides of localised issues within the constantly expanding city scope: crime, over population, small living spaces. Furthermore, as the final murder is ensued, we reach a new progressive vibe towards love within the city – are we to be victims in the plight of unethical metropolises?

Perhaps the truth lies in the overriding vibe that the film is more of a parody than a pastiche, less political, and more satirical of our social structures, rules and moralistic ideas of what makes a victim a victim, and a murderer a murderer.

### ***Last In First Out* (2015, Dir. Henry Stephens)**

Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)

It's easy to watch films today whilst twiddling on your phone. The characters talk, announce as what and who they are. Where we are meant to look, what the meaning of a scene is, and how it all comes together is all part of the 'talkies' era that set in at the end of silent cinema. And it is an era we are stuck in still today, even perhaps at the most heightened state that it has ever been with the increase of phone conversations and news-broadcasters announcing all sorts of information in action and thriller films.

However, what we have here is a silent film. A contemporary silent. One which utilizes the skills and language of our current story telling arcs, as well as the ones originating from the bygone era of silent cinema. Whilst watching this film you can't look at your phone, nor can you ignore the content on screen and just 'listen'. You have to keep your eyes on the screen, just like our forefathers of film audiences used to.

What writer/director Henry Stephens has achieved is to authentically rewind the clocks for 'Last In First Out', and return to the 4:3 ratio, the black and white chiaroscuro, and altering image frame rates of the flicks. Furthermore, the language of the film, its steady shots, and careful editing of shot/reverse shot help tell the story through images. Perhaps though, the most important element of this short though isn't its nostalgic form, but its pure heart. Like a Chaplin picture, the struggle of class, money and power rise to the top, and reveal the essence of what early films were all about. We have a story, some clear cut characters and a struggle for survival; just like the early cinema which Stephens attempted to capture, his film becomes more of a

*social commentary than just a meaningless reworking of past techniques. And that is what pure film is all about – the perspective one can take on whilst watching a film, the experience we are able to share, and the human story it can tell when we concentrate.*

***Temporary Discomfort* (2014, Dir. Simon Adegbenro)**

*Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)*

*Enigmatic codes fill the opening scenes of ‘Temporary Discomfort’. We immediately open the short film with Derek as he checks in at a hotel. Our locale for the short is temporary – Derek does not live here, but there is purpose behind his visit.*

*Moments later Derek visits his old neighbour and asks ‘how are you?’, and receives no response. He then asks and is granted entrance into a room of someone he once knew, only to lie down.*

*We aren’t told what the significance of these moments are, but the reality is of their cinematic worth – we are here to decode the film, follow the trail of ideas and pursue the truth. It is this kind of cinematic storytelling which keeps a viewer’s interest: moments which are strung together as pictures rather than a picture book full of dialogue telling us what we should know and understand. The best element of this short is Adegbenro’s self restraint here, the plotting and use of narrative development feed the audience’s craving for information and atmosphere.*

*With nuanced steady camera angles, which restrict the audience’s point of view, the carefully crafted shots help align us with the perspective we’re suppose to take: an importance of time, space and circumstance become clear. Their length is also of particular interest, they often force us to observe Angus McGruther and Judith Shoemaker stuck and unable to escape; somewhat reminiscent of the motel ending of Vincent Gallo’s ‘The Brown Bunny’.*

*As the final turn is revealed, ‘Temporary Discomfort’ underplays itself. If the last plot point was at all predictable, it was also inevitable in the way simplicity is elevated and stylised intimately in this well produced short film.*

## **END OF 2016**

**Northern Lights by Nicholas Connor ([Link](#))**

There is a particular style to Northern Lights, its a cool film – and I don’t mean that in the celluloid nuevo of the French New Wave sense, but rather that being of it being cold. Yes, this film is very clinical, precise, and cool film. It brushes over you like a cold breeze, a very British one. This is in part because of the crisp photography, leaning more towards the Kubrick look of space, than say the grainy greasy one of Scott’s Alien. Obviously, in saying this, I know that this isn’t a film set in space, and rather one which takes place in interiors on earth... mostly.

Part of its rehearsed feeling, and precision, is due to its very youthful cast, which seemingly seem to be suffering at the hands of anxiety, and realism, as kids this age are rarely actually

played by people their own age on screen; instead, casting wise, these roles are reserved for 30-something year-olds impersonating youngsters – making this experience fairly unique. Kids, by Larry Clarke, feels like an example which ties with this, only that film was a dirty 90's socio-politics film. And this isn't.

Its on this front that the film excels, it is the work of a younger generation of filmmakers, one which has yet to really find their voice or spokesperson (I mean, we have yet to have had the next wave of Lena Dunham and Xavier Dolan arrive), and in turn, one can't help but encourage this effort, as it is one which would have required a lot of patience and persistence.

The film is delivered in completion, its slick and visually classy. It does lag a bit, plot wise, but it makes up for it with sheer cognitive ingenuity around the anxiety images of smoke riddled poses, ones which evoke a Lana Del Rey meets David Lynch dreamscape.

### **An Old Man by Manoj Murali** *\*not selected for competition*

An Old Man by Manoj Murali is a solid effort. The film itself is fairly well constructed, the family depicted appearing realistic and well captured. However, the image and sound are the issue at hand here – the film appears to be dubbed, making the experience somewhat off putting. There is much to be merited on the film's overall style, but it falls short beyond its basic technical elements, as the dubbing and over glossed image make it seem foreign and unnatural to the viewer. It is a shame though, as the ending is very moving, and appears to provide the viewer with a meaningful story which should be told.

## **EARLY SUMMER 2016**

### **Writer's Cramp (2015, Darva Campbell)**

Like with the opening of Douglas McGrath's Infamous (2006), which captures the club scenes of a bygone celebrity hang out spot, Darva Campbell's Writer's Cramp has a lush and bold period piece setting. Yes, the budgets of these two films aren't at all similar, nor is the subject at hand... but there is a familiar plush flavouring.

In a sense, when analysing film as a medium, there has been a particular loss of plushness in recent years. Rewinding, historically film's advent of colour and sound produced the glorious musicals, where colour, technicolor in particular, became a palette for the imagination, and so did the stories which came through that era. But what we have now isn't so much that, a set back by the digital era of 'sharpness' and well balanced hues has meant a goodbye to the 1950's reverb of colour which haunted celluloid right up until the end of the late 2000's.

Rarely did films delve into that era – the camp and glossy pop flavours. And even recent titles, which captured these tastes, were sporadic to say the least. And yet, here, far out into indie land we have an offering.

It isn't perfect, and it is perhaps long at times, but Writer's Cramp is a fine attempt at trying to be ambitious beyond one's means of production, it has it all – colour, plump, black and white sequences, mysterious characters... almost like the unfolding of a Guy Maddin film, we get to sit back and transcend into a different mode of storytelling missing from our current input of cinema. It probably won't earn the exposure it deserves, but perhaps it will land Campbell the audience she needs in order to finance another effort through one of those crowdfunding ventures.

### **Zeitgeist Protest (2016, Christophe Karabache)**

There is something quite perverse about Zeitgeist Protest. Bit by bit we explore the mind of a man lost in the past terrors which haunt him. The film feels perhaps a tad exploitative of its topic, or is it perhaps our fascination with the topic which is being exploited? It doesn't matter.

The issue at hand isn't a discussion about film ethics really, nor is it a dilemma about the difference of spaces: the film's space, our space, the space between us and what we are watching. These thoughts are triggered however, and it is all thanks to Christophe Karabache's film. Here he leans his camera in and out of spaces, moving slowly in, or away. He is a skilled director, one reminiscent to me of Semih Kaplanoğlu, the highly regarded writer/director behind the Yusuf Trilogy.

The film sporadically looks like it might cheer up its topic, but that hope is swiftly turned away by the arrival of even more turbulent times. Sex and violence merge, and a burst of images which appear unfiltered and unadulterated occur. This film isn't here to flatter upon its topic, but instead set a tone and a mood around the experience which is to be had when living with trauma. It is a skilled film, full of psyche and smartly layered thoughts embedded in a rich variety of locations and a small, but effective, cast.

Had this film been in competition (it was only entered for a review), we would have definitely loved to see where our Jury placed it, and if it would have won any awards. It is at the end of the day a provocative watch.

## **SPRING 2016**

### **This Little Piggy (2014, Tristan Barr)**

*Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)*

There's no denying Tristan Barr's skill as a filmmaker – his film is slickly shot with a particular glossy image, one which maintains its quality and endurance throughout the picture, there's the editing – a sombre scene slips into a violent one with ease, and then there is the 'quartet' of performances – a pitch perfect ensemble which together push the script into realistic ambience and a particular noteworthy class of style.

'This Little Piggy' is a fairly impressive debut as a feature, and there is many scenes of note, personally I found the beach scene and drug purchase scenes the most prominent of all, especially when placed side by side in my mind: they appear well rounded, and well formed, and yet so different in terms of their tone and style. Its as if these moments have been collaged together in order to make a well rounded film.

For some reason the film reminded me of two pictures in particular, the first being quite dark – David Cronenberg's 'Spider', where a character spins out of control in a web of his own making, and the second is the more recent comedy Paco Cabezas' 'Mr Right', which focuses on the funny/not-so-funny killer lovey dovey couple. Perhaps what I'm trying to get at with this side track is the highlight of Barr's skill, the one part which makes his film more interesting than most indie offerings: his film is a hybrid of various tools, but instead of simply copying, or re-compositing various attributes, he has managed to create a new creature; trotters and all.

What I'd love to see next is actually a less stylised piece, one stripped of the make up, and up close and frank with its characters. I suspect that's what Barr's true value lies – his ability to create interesting and believable performances in unlikely, or slightly removed circumstances.

### **Shades of Darkness (2015, Ian Adema)**

*Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)*

The main issue with 'Shades of Darkness' isn't how its made, but rather its mode of storytelling. For me, the film lacked any sense of realism, and in turn became a very stunted film, relying too much on its evident stylisation to ever become convincing as a 'real' film world. This isn't though a point of complaint, as the performances, and casting in particular, were quite sound. If anything, they were a little original – avoiding the traditional casting choices all indie films falter to – the so-called up-comer 'model' type. It is also quite a commendable front of this side of things as being a fairly mixed nationality film.

Furthermore, the music seems to keep the film afloat, offering many themes which remind the audience of the film's genre base, and offers a kind of rhythm to the chaos.

All the same though, had this film been presented as say a comic book, or even a painted graphic novel, I think it would be stunning. It has the depth of story, style and tempered modes of various genre tones to be a great page turning affair. It just doesn't fare all too well as a film at this stage.

### **Exit Thread (2015, Paul Andrew Kimball)**

*Written by Ben Rider (Festival Director)*

'Exit Thread' felt to me like a throwback to a different mode of storytelling within the main body of what I've grown to expect of low budget independent films. Part John Ford community film, part 1940's Melodrama – probably most like 'Letter From an Unknown Woman' (1948), and lastly, part early moralist thriller about lies, people's intentions and humanist behavioural traits.

Its flaws lie in the heavy handed script, which often is delivered with a theatrical flair, and appears more staged than stylised. The realism seems to dip in and out of these heavy worded scenes, often appearing natural, other times moving towards the more surreal Guy Maddin type... without the pastiche look of the era it most reminds us of though. But in here lies the end of the complaints from my side of things.

The film is shot with a careful hand, kudos should be given to Paul Andrew Kimball for his well thought out framing devices, and furthermore, the often bold choices to dim light scenes, and allow for spaces to be filled with a Joel Schumacheresque black, should be commended on. Also, Hilary Connell shines, offering a variety of tones in her performance which appear both genuine and hurt-filled. There is no doubt in my mind that she 'felt' those tone changes when she took on the shoes of her character.

Like the tension between Camela Soprano and her priest whom she loves dearly, this film touches on the unfilled fantasy fuelled affairs characters living in dramas are so prone to spin. It isn't necessarily the most original take on this narrative, but it is a fantastic 21st indie rendering of it; flaws and all.



**Teenagers** (2009, Paul de Métairy) *\*not selected for competition*

The main problem with 'Teenagers' is the main premise being somewhat hard to recognise. The film, written and directed by Paul Verhoeven (not to be mistaken with 'the' Paul Verhoeven of 'Basic Instinct' and 'Zwartboek' fame), focuses on a political fight between youths and terrorists, but it is really hard to tell – the whole thing is rather muddled in its delivery. The film's main subject is disguised by many layered faux-documentary stylised moments, confusing the viewer into believing that the picture is a Derek Jarman type.

It is however, a reminder of the lost performers often ignored by filmmakers: children. The film is somewhat reminiscent of the turn of the century photography fad which focused on the day-to-day lives of rural children versus those city folk: it would capture the harsher physicality of rural life, their chores and work, their daydreams, their games, and so on. It perhaps captures the so-called 'teenagers' with the best regard here, their characters are complex, or at least appear to be, and are given plenty of screen time to experiment with a variety of tones and acting styles. On that front, the film excels... perhaps more so than it should.

This element though is the only one which really makes this film interesting, once one is able to get over the elaborate experimental style, the heavy music, and unclear filming methods – the film manages to simply lull its viewer into feeling they are being made to watch a very long 'youth' production, the type which fill sports halls every festive season in schools.

It is neither note worthy or memorable in terms of its cinematic efforts, and rather hard to sit through for its entire length. Perhaps halved, the film would have been an easier picture to sit through.

Please note: Paul Verhoeven is the former name for filmmaker Paul de Métairy. See IMDb for details <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1344670/>.