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FEATURE



Glory Hole-lelujah: Guy Maddin's glorious brings some trusty perversion to Images

Burned upon the brain

Experimental film festival deserves our awe

BY JASON ANDERSON April 01, 2009 21:04

Images just wouldn't be Images if it didn't include a movie about a haunted glory hole. This is exactly the sort of cine-delirium — glimpsed in Guy Maddin's contribution to the opening program — viewers demand from Toronto's festival of experimental film. Those who venture into the many host venues will be rewarded with sights that truly deserve their awe, be they as horrific as the ulcerous

mouths in Mika Kiburz's brilliantly bent short *Cleopatra's Teeth*, or as exhilarating as the god-fearing Americans going hog-wild with rented machine guns in *O'er the Land*, Deborah Stratman's survey of fervent patriotism and latent psychosis in the USA.

The 22nd annual Images, running through April 11, has a typically varied program. Its slate of special events is likely to peak in freakitude with *Feedback Loop*, which combines multi-projector film works by Ben Russell and Karl Lemieux with live contributions by three Montreal sound artists. (It happens April 10 at the Theatre Centre.) The majority of screenings are PWYC and new installations by the likes of Harun Farocki and Gunilla Josephson are equally accessible in local galleries. Those in need of other points of entry need only refer to this primer on Images' most essential sights and sounds.

NOTES ON COMPOSING: FIVE COLLABORATIONS IN FILM AND MUSIC

Commissioned by Images in partnership with Continuum Contemporary Music, this project paired five of the country's best film and video artists with composers of comparable dexterity. The results make for a remarkably strong opening program for Images. Violinist Malcolm Goldstein performs solo live accompaniment for Daichi Sato's *Trees of Syntax*, *Leaves of Axis*, a mesmerizing sequence shot in Montreal's Mount Royal Park.

Clive Holden's *2 Cameras @ Sea* is an affecting and lyrical work by the maker of *Trains of Winnipeg*. Vera Frankel's *Once Near Water: Notes from the Scaffolding Archive* uses a Greenaway-like conceit and playful graphics to explore urban space. As for Maddin's *Glorious*, the trusty perv's visions of gangsters and glory holes are made extra-zesty by Richard Ayers' blustery music.

April 2, 8pm, Isabel Bader Theatre

LOUISE BOURQUE

Featured in Images' Canadian Artist Spotlight, the Acadian-Quebecois filmmaker works her alchemy on weathered stock. The results have a personal stamp that separates her from her fellow found-footage resurrectionists. With Bourque working over the same images until they've almost slipped off the print altogether, shorts such as *Imprint* and *Self Portrait Post Mortem* are haunting ruminations on themes of identity, memory, family and home.

April 5, 8:30pm, Workman Theatre

O'ER THE LAND

A voyager at the experimental fringe of documentary film, Chicago filmmaker Deborah Stratman has made an extraordinary body of unclassifiable works. Her latest 52-minute piece collects serene 16mm shots from un-serene settings, including a high-school football game, a gathering of Revolutionary War reenactors and a gun fair. Rarely since Werner Herzog's *Stroszek* has there been such a keen-eyed portrayal of all-American madness.

Part of On Screen 2, April 6, 7pm, Workman Theatre

BERNADETTE

An unofficial companion piece to Steve McQueen's *Hunger* (out April 10 in Toronto), this superb 37-minute work by Scottish artist Duncan Campbell pays tribute to another icon of the Troubles. Bernadette's subject is Bernadette Devlin, a young agitator who became a crucial figure in Northern Irish politics of the early '70s. Campbell's film charts the development of her persona via arresting archival audio and video. The final sequence takes matters in a wholly unexpected direction.

Part of On Screen 5, April 7, 9pm, Workman Theatre

HOTEL DIARIES

Recorded in a series of hotel rooms between 2001 and 2007, this collection of video diaries by British filmmaker John Smith comprises a droll and astute running commentary on life in the Bush/Blair years. Smith's contemplations on hotels are departure points for more troubling thoughts about Abu Ghraib, and Hamas. Rarely does this weary traveller forget what's going on beyond the false comfort of the rooms.

April 11, 3pm, Workman Theatre

CHELSEA GIRLS AND MORE!

The bounty of On Screen riches continues with Chelsea Girls, Althea Thauberger's homage to Warhol's ode to Factory life, albeit with the setting changed to a Victoria, B.C. housing project. (It screens as part of On Screen 6, April 9, 7pm, Theatre Centre.) Equally vital among the shorts selection is Jim Trainor's cryptic 'toon The Presentation Theme, which emphasizes the Oedipal undercurrents within a series of Peruvian myths. It's included with Mika Kiburz's archeologically themed and indescribably odd Cleopatra's Teeth (April 5, 6pm, Workman Theatre).

A German-Indian artist who's been very productive during his residency in Toronto, Oliver Husain is not to be outdone — his short Mount Shasta (in On Screen 3, April 6, 9pm, Workman Theatre) combines a performance by local pop maverick Mantler with a trompe l'oeil-laden puppet show by figures clad entirely in white. I can safely say you've never seen anything like it, which is why you should make sure to see it.

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