

# True/False film fest: Our beautiful, perilous state



Illustration of burning building from "The Illinois Parables." (Deborah Stratman)



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**I**ll have more on this Monday, when I file a True/False film festival wrap, but you should know this, at least: Deborah Stratman, an associate professor at the University of Illinois-Chicago's School of Art & Art History, has made a beautiful ghost of a film about her home state called "The Illinois Parables."

It's a 60-minute poem, shot on 16 millimeter film, exploring an almost comical breadth of the state's history of natural and human-made disasters; religious and ideological intolerance, spanning the Mormons to the Chicago police's dealings with the Black Panthers; atom-splitting; and the way a landscape reveals its current history while concealing its former self. That makes "The Illinois Parables," divided into 11 discrete but not tidy sections, sound like an ambitious blur.

But it's not; it's right next door to that. Stratman makes intuitive and delicate connections between her subjects, often letting a dense and rather brilliant sound design lead us into the woods and out again.

The film premiered earlier this year at the Sundance Film Festival, and Stratman just sort of laughed about that notion when we talked after the first, warmly received True/False screening Friday.

Huge and easily distracted by shiny things with straightforward narratives and amiable stars, Sundance has never been conducive to appreciation of smaller, less commercial, more experimental work. "Let's just say audiences weren't ready," she said, laughing. True/False is many things, and many of them veer toward the mainstream and the populist, but clearly there is room for work of this order, and of this quality.

Among the Chicagoans here in Columbia this weekend, checking out the movies, are Northwestern University's Block Museum media arts curator Michelle Puetz, and Block Cinema's film program coordinator Justin Lintelman. "We're looking for documentaries to show," Lintelman said.

He and Puetz responded well to Stratman's bracing cine-essay. It's likely that "The Illinois Parables" will pop up on Block Cinema's spring 2016 calendar.

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