

Impressions of Mirrored Landscapes: a film by Roy Cross.

I have followed the progress of Roy's newest film since it's onset over two years ago. As I recall, it began as a tribute to the Saskatchewan landscape and light in all it's diversity. Over the ensuing months, I have caught momentary glances of the work in progress as Roy's ideas and approach developed. Last week I was honoured to be one of the first people to see the film complete.

The film is non-narrative, a series of images all found and captured around this province. I knew that Roy had been concentrating on landscapes all this time so when the film began, I expected to see landscapes. That is what I saw. However, what I saw was more than just scenery. I have had a growing fascination with the Saskatchewan landscape for many years. In that time, I have sat on many a hill-side, dirt road and farmer's field simply watching the world. Roy's film captured me immediately by taking this exact approach. By altering the running speed of his camera or by optically printing his footage later, he imparts to the audience a view which, on one hand, is unrealistic, but on the other hand imparts a greater feeling of being there. Filmmakers and photographers must be careful because just as a camera can bring out the exotic in a landscape, it may also turn the world into a mundane place. When I sit on a hill-side and look out at a field of wheat, my eye, like a camera lens, sees the wheat. Unlike the camera, my mind edits the picture, selects bits and pieces, speeds some up, slows some down and composes its own music for the occasion. Using the camera like a brush, Roy made it do what he felt his mind would have done in each situation. He feels that each scene could only have been shot one way, the way he did.

The film had three purposes; to break down the popular myth that Saskatchewan is nothing but boring wheat fields; to contrast form and content, eventually merging the two as in the memorable step printed mustard field scene; and to discover, without showing any presence of people, why people live here. Roy was successful in all three of these goals. The film was process oriented, working without a script in an almost primal manner. Roy developed with his film and through the process, found the answers to his questions.

The images are accompanied by a musical soundscape constructed by Jim Schuett. Many low budget films (both narrative and non) are hurt by a poorly thought out scores. Not so with this film. The sound accentuates the mystique of many of the images by, as Roy described to me, the percussion instruments playing the melody. Roy told me he and Jim met when Jim walked in the door of the FilmPool and, after a one or two line life story synopsis, said that he wished to make music for film. Roy was impressed with Jim's attitude and confidence, so the partnership was struck.

I met Jim Schuett, by pure chance, on Halloween night and we discussed this film. Jim had worked out the entire score from a videotaped copy of the film. He, as I, was greatly impressed by the power and beauty of the images when finally seen projected on a large screen. If there is a problem with the sound, it lies in the inadequacies of the technology. The sound, as originally engineered, contained a large tonal range. The finished track is 16mm optical which, by its very nature, loses much of the low end, the bass sounds, and increases the high end. Unfortunately, budgets in films such as these will not allow remixing to occur. Personally, I did not feel that the sound was lacking in any way, being as I was, unaware of what was missing.

The only presence of human beings in the film is a optically printed snippet of a photographer in front of a sunset. This image re-occurs throughout the picture.

About half way into the film, another aspect of it became apparent to me. The film is not really about landscapes at all. It is about the sun. It seems as if all of the landscapes are but pictures painted by the Saskatchewan sun. It is as strong a character as any played by an actor in any film. The film, from that point on, became a sun worship piece. A quest for the sun; a quest for fire. The land is lost beneath a bath of light and shadow and colour and reflection. The presence of a person as a photographer/cinematographer becomes less and less consequential in this vast scheme of things. The world we live upon is merely a casual play-thing of the sun that rules us. Fire, an extension of the sun, destroys uncontrollably. Finally at the end, Roy must himself choose, via his optical printer, who the star of the film is; the lone photographer or the omnipresent sun. Back and forth the camera moves; the contrasts increase until there is no shadows left. Back and forth until the lens finally

comes to rest on the blazing fury of the setting sun.

Roy, as anyone who has ever met him will attest, is a man of strong opinions. One would logically assume his films to carry some of this as well. Mirrored Landscapes, though one of the strongest portraits of Saskatchewan light and land I can recall seeing, disappoints in not being an extension of Roy, of not being a scathing criticism of people, art, society, politics and automotive technology. My experience with Roy is that he is strongest when in a social surrounding. He would never back away from an argument or fail to compliment people and work he admired. I have respected his opinion, even when (especially when) it has conflicted with mine. I expected to see some of that on the screen. I wanted to be able to love and hate the film. I wanted to be able to agree with some of it and disagree with other parts. As it is, I enjoyed and admired it. I wish to see it again. I believe it will impress many people from in and out of this province and elevate their opinion of our landscape. Roy told me that he feels that he should have a greater presence of people in his films and I agree. I applaud this film and thank him for making it. I wish him all the luck in his next film.

16mm, 18 minutes, colour, sound

Producer/director: Roy Cross

Sound: Jim Schuett

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