

"Membership Missive" from Gerald Saul

Originally published in Answer Print, the newsletter of the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers, spring 2012 issue, pages 15-16.

As a frequent entrant but infrequent attendee of the \$100 Film Festival, it was delightful to have the time this year to come to Calgary and see these collections of new and innovative films. I found the work on the screen to be generally very inventive and though provoking. However, the true impact of a festival of this nature is not measured in my reaction but in the reaction of the audiences for whom this is a new experience, who have preconceived notions, or perhaps no notion, of what art cinema is. To consider these issues, I have tried to look at the festival and festival films through the eyes of others.

On the second night of the event, I brought my niece and her friend along. To them, this was a radical new venture and the work was nearly impenetrable. This is not a bad thing, simply a normal and expected stage anyone must overcome when facing the unexpected. In this regard, the venue aided these newbies to relax and make an attempt to engage. While I personally yearn for the ramshackle back room screenings, climbing over broken bikes or mouldering couches to try to find a seat which isn't blocked by pillars or upended Steenbecks, the openness of a college classroom gives less hard-core audiences a sense of belonging and instills the idea that this may be a learning experience. I cannot say that they enjoyed every film, but they are enlightened and perhaps more prepared for next time.

Another, far more unexpected, person impacted during this festival was someone who was not even in the audience, my brother-in-law. The film Someday, All Of This Will Be Yours by Adam Huggins and Illana Fonarirov impressed me. Not so much by its pleasingly rough but overly loose and uneven hand-processed style, but by the openness of the viewpoint. We like to think that artists are unprejudiced and that art events are about tolerance, but when these filmmakers admitted (on screen) that there might be two sides to the story about the oil sands and pipelines, I could feel a shudder move through the room. The next day, I broached this topic with my brother-in-law whose career is based in oil pipelines. It was clear that he shared the same viewpoint of artists that I did, that they would take a biased and radical anti-oil standpoint without compromise (although I believe he considered that a failing rather than a strength). He was intrigued by the ideas within Huggins and Fonarirov's film and this led to him and I having a satisfying conversation about the relationships between art, oil, and human nature.

Film reverberates beyond the rooms they are shown in, beyond the people in their direct line of fire. The images and ideas imprint upon us and change us. When we change, so does the world.