

## Aesthetica 2017: Day Four

Aesthetica hits full swing as the weekend arrives and the films keep coming

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Saturday. The weekend. Suddenly Aesthetica becomes a new beast altogether. Those queues, the disappointment of inevitably not getting into 1331 because you didn't turn up well in advance - all these things that used to only happen in the evenings take over now the general public is free of work and unleashed upon the festival. The films themselves do nothing to change, however, with Aesthetica 2017's strong selection continuing in force.



Image: John Fortson

First off, **Family Friendly 2: All the Same ... Completely Different** was a bit of a mixed bag. Despite being advertised as suitable for ages 8+, these were certainly no "children's films". Among them were Victoria Fistes' *Being Earnest* and *Listen* by Niko Mikadze, both exploring the lives of children living with disabilities. Fistes' film is an animated interview with Earnest, a young boy explaining how blindness affects the way he sees the world; *Listen* on the other hand is a drama about a young deaf boy and his mother, who is desperate for him to get his hearing back so he can hear himself play piano. The film is about never giving up and comes to a dramatic conclusion, though perhaps not as tear-jerking as Mikadze meant it to be, where the young boy finally hears his mother's voice once again. John Fortson's *Rated* was similarly enjoyable but never quite hit the mark. Its brilliant premise follows a family as they wake up one morning to discover that all adults have a rating out of 5 stars hovering over their heads. While being well-acted sporadically very funny, its muddled conclusion seems to imply that this rating system that forces people to feign niceness to get 5 stars is a good thing and beneficial to society. Special mentions go to *Lil Buck with Icons of Modern Art*, an inspiring dance short created by Andrew Margetson, and Tal Amiran's *Sand Men*, a documentary following various Romanian immigrants telling their stories of hardship as they try to make money by sculpting sand dogs on London's high streets. The real standout short for the selection, however, has to be *The Nightmare on Deskteeth Street* by Dylan Holmes Williams. Utterly bonkers and impossible to explain, the film left the audience laughing incredulously through the credits and into the next film. The highly-stylized tale of a man on the hunt for his exquisite red boots, narrated in an extremely dramatic voiceover by the pilferer of the boots himself is what short film festivals are about: unexpected and sumptuous hidden gems.

The laughs would flow too in **Comedy 2: Nice Work**. I started off with Ben Steiner's brilliant

mockumentary *Clanker Man*. The shaky handheld camera follows Terry, working at his day job and mundanely complaining about government cut backs. What makes this seemingly boring film so great is Terry's job itself – to make all the annoying and mysterious background noises that busy cosmopolitans take for granted: a profession dubbed “clanking”. Much laughter ensues as Terry demonstrates how to unrhythmically bang on metal piping, strategically place a creepy doll in some bushes, or scream into the night like he's being murdered. In the same vein of taking mundane work and placing it in unlikely situations, *Deux Dollars* (Two Dollars) by Emmanuel Tenenbaum hilariously depicts workplace cruelties and the cut-throat environment which leads a group of co-workers to exclude the main character from their jackpot winnings in the lottery syndicate just because she forgot to pay in her two dollars when she was sick. James D'Arcy's first foray into directing made him one of the biggest names at the festival. Sharp and witty with a surprising ending *Chicken/Egg* was a lighthearted conman romp, reminiscent of BBC's *Hustle*. Nikolaj Coster-Waldau (*Game of Thrones*) plays Kenneth, an out of luck conman who calls upon the help of his nephew, a children's magician, to keep him on the straight and narrow. The clever script and hilarious giant chicken costume immediately get the audience on board as the film builds perfectly to the surprising but satisfying conclusion.



Image: Westminster Film School

On a more serious note was the quite wonderful and fascinating selection of documentary shorts in **Documentary 4: Time Stands Still**. Alongside a lengthier, intriguing piece on the lives of modern-day monks in Sean Parnell's *The Abbey*, is the similarly meditative *Little Bucharest* by Sam Geyskens. Presenting a brief window into the lives of Eastern European truck drivers as they spend long stretches away from home whilst working to feed their families, it is emotional in its depiction of a father missing his children and the sheer loneliness that workers sometimes cannot escape. It also, not for the first time in the festival makes comment on Romanian economic problems. Alongside the longer works is a brief performance piece by artist Jeremy Hawkes, who decides to let his Parkinson's disease be seen in the art creates when he stops taking his medication. The most heartfelt and emotional works in this fine selection come in Dionne Rayner's *Boi* and *Dial-a-Ride* by Tom Huntingford and George Cowie. The former, focusing on the topic of transgenderism through the stories of three subjects is the real tear-jerker, honest and nuanced in its look at the issue, just like good documentaries should be. *Dial-a-Ride* is funniest of the bunch, with its story of a bus service in the Brecon Beacons that provides a lifeline for the elderly inhabitants of Wales' rural areas. The passengers have many a tale to tell and plenty of wit, attaching the audience to them immediately. It is perhaps most deeply felt when the camera is on the driver, whose life is lived through the lives and deaths of his passengers.

With a fairly traditionally-made selection of documentaries, something a bit off-the-wall could be found in **Artists' Film 4: Something Better Come of This**. One of the selections for the opening night and the pick of the bunch here was Baptist Peneticobra's *For Real Tho*. Self-aware to the extreme, the film shows a group of young actors and filmmakers talking to the camera about the film they are making and you are watching. Mocking the conventions and even the very idea of cinema, it may not be to everyone's taste, but it is inventive, funny and fascinating if only if for its original premise. In comparison to the fantastic script of *For Real Tho* is the wordless and lengthily-titled *Annabelle, Barbra, Becky, Alexis, Krystle, Ellen, Olive, Eve and Kirsten, Not Stumbling, Sliding, Sinking, Falling or Oblivious* by Marloes ten Bhömer and Noam Toran. Visually compelling in its prolonged focus on a woman's feet, it references cinematic history's portrayal of female characters in peril. Similarly interesting is Chiemi Shimada's *Fragments*, which pieces together an unexplained death through individual shots of a 1940s-style dollhouse. Chilling and striking in its style, it perhaps best sums up what this strand of shorts is about.

Saturday also saw one of the many Showcase Screenings taking place at the festival, The Northern Film School's selection and panel discussion on **Death to the Script: Long Live the Image**. Now, killing the script seems controversial when it comes to the process of filmmaking. It's like building a house without a blueprint. The topic is therefore automatically intriguing. During the event, compiled of a screening followed by a discussion panel with speakers associated with the Northern Film School, focused on fiction and documentary films. Among the films screened were particularly outstanding ones such as Julian Alexander's *Léo*, Joel Raine's *How can I lean on you if you're sideways*, Josiah Williams' *Heart of the House* and *Some Body* by Francesco Puppini and Matteo Palmas. Interestingly, throughout the panel it becomes clear that there is no single interpretation of the panel's title. "Death to the Script" as pointed out by one of the speakers, could be associated with the lack of a writer's influence once he or she has sold the script. From that moment, it is up to the director to bring the story to life, even if it is different from what the writer had originally envisioned. As the panel progressed it was also discussed how a bad script does not necessarily mean a bad film and vice versa, giving hope and leverage to some of the film students out there. "A script can be anything - anything you want it to be," claimed Andi Osho (stand-up comedian and director of *Amber*). Perhaps this has to do with the evolving fluidity of filmmaking and the moving away from a conventional structure. We, as the new generation, are encouraged to be pioneers, to have an alternative approach, to bring something new to the table. Authenticity on its own was heavily discussed during the panel - "Documentaries are driven by something much more authentic than drama." In other words, plots of films within the drama genre are sometimes recycled, whereas a documentary filmmaker is forced to go out in the world and find something new to make a film about. The panel was a success in creating a genuine dialogue between the speakers and the audience rather than an advertisement for an institution like some other panels.

Informative, entertaining and challenging, then. Not an unusual day for Aesthetica. With just one day remaining, so much will be left unseen that we must be truly grateful we have such a diverse range of styles and opinions on offer in York.



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