

Preview: Aesthetica Short Film Festival 2017

[Izzy Moore](#) looks to the return of one of the biggest events in the York filmgoer's calendar

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Image: Aesthetica Short Film Festival

From 8th to 12th of November the Aesthetica Short Film Festival returns, bringing a range of creative visions and opportunities for the artistically inclined. Whether you fancy yourself as a film critic, or a film maker, these kinds of festivals should be an important feature of your calendar. Short films in particular, especially when delivered through the festival's "screening" structure of showing around 6 films per slot, provide a rapid slice of a director's, writer's and actor's creative expression and style, and a range of visions in a very short amount of time. Undoubtedly this is an incredibly useful experience if you are looking to develop your own style, an eye for criticism, or if you're pressed for time but still want to see a range of high-quality craftsmanship.

By its nature, however, the festival can seem overwhelming – the scope of events and films on offer, as stated by the ad campaign highlighting "18 venues. 300 Films. 5 days." Certainly last year when I offered to cover the festival for *Nouse* and then actually saw the quantity of short films on offer, I balked slightly. There doesn't seem to be enough time to properly get to grips with what the festival can offer. Luckily, I am here to somewhat deconstruct the festival and give some simple suggestions for getting the most out of it.

The festival has two major components: Screenings and discussion based events.

As previously referenced, the festival presents screenings separated based on genre and loosely centred around a particular theme. These screenings contain 6 short films shown back-to-back, and form the heart of what the festival offers. Importantly, most of these "genre screenings" have repeated showings across the festival and in different locations, too. For example, in the comedy category one screening is based around "Odd Couples" and has one screening per day Wednesday to Sunday each at a different location. Other categories include Thriller, Dance, Documentary, Animation and Drama. Despite these categories, genres do of course intersect, so you'll come out of a thriller laughing, or an animated short in tears. On a side note, if you browse the online programme and discover a specific film you were *just born to see*, but can't make any of the screenings there is the ASFF Videotheque which gives all festival pass holders access to the entire official selection in Explore York. Last year I desperately tried to use this

resource, this year I plan on spending substantial time procrastinating in the Videotheque.

Alongside the genre screenings there are also more specialised showings, including Showcase screenings and guest programmes. Showcase screenings are hosted by various companies or organisations and the short films centred around a clear theme or issue. After the screening there's a panel exploring the core issue in question. For example, The University of the Arts London is presented "Creativity vs Commerciality" includes 9 short films and then a Q&A exploring this pertinent issues facing today's filmmakers. This structure is consistent across the other Showcase screenings and they provide an opportunity to explore issues that interest or would be useful to your own film making- for example London College of Fashion is presenting a screening called 'How to get ahead in Fashion Film' - which I'm sure does exactly what it says on the tin. Or if you want to take a female-centric peek at up-and-coming directors, then the Female Directors' Showcase by Creative England promises 'imaginative and compelling stories' capturing 'England's distinct and diverse landscape.'

Guest programmes are screenings curated by external groups, the Iris Prize Festival being one of them. If seeing the most award winning and credited films is part of your festival ambitions the previous winnings screening would probably suit. Another good way to see the highest quality of films is through the opening night - although I'd argue there's much to gain merely from experiencing the breadth of short films, as most will be of high quality curated by Aesthetica prior to being shown anyway. This year held in CityScreen Picturehouse this ticketed event presents the best films of the festival. It's a fairly convenient way to get a snapshot of what the festival offers. Alternatively, if you are like myself and forgot to buy a ticket to the event... on Friday morning in York Theatre Royal there'll be a repeat screening of the opening night showcase.

This brings us to the second component of the festival. Those pesky panels and ticketed events. Joking aside, panels provide insight into the industry, some are even present opportunities for networking and drinks - non-alcoholic drinks too, as a fair few of these discussions are labelled "Morning Coffee". Held in City Screen's Basement bar each morning has a different topic linked to the film industry, including different methods of funding short films, and new technological advancements which are transforming films and the process behind them. Other ticketed events include Masterclasses with impressive names from the industry including Anne Edyvean Head of BBC Writersroom and Jaime Estranda-Torres (who has previously worked with Kubrick and Herzog). So if it's the technical side of film you're interested in, the festival can provide you with some great chances to quiz the experts, and more generally expand your understanding of film, and what it takes to break into the industry.

There are of course other events occurring at Aesthetica, the closing night, a few parties and chances for networking, but I'll let you discover those for yourself in the online programme (<http://www.asff.co.uk/downloads/E-Version%20ASFF%202017%20Programme.pdf>). What I can't emphasise enough though, is the contradictory nature of film festivals. You might go in with a plan and certain expectations of what you want to see, but really it's the unexpected finds which really create a memorable experience. I'd still vouch for approaching the festival with somewhat of a plan- at least take a look at the programme and find a few things that spark interest- but be open to new visions, alternative cinematography, different genres. The real beauty of Aesthetica and other short film festivals (or even short films in general) is that you are supposed to be overwhelmed and exposed to lots of different ideas and creative visions in a very short space of time. You'll feel like a proper critic by the end of it too (at least I did) as you'll quickly learn what you enjoyed, what you hated, but more importantly what made an impression. It's not entirely about seeing the best of the best, although that's very easily achieved if that's your goal, it's more about engaging with multiple creative voices, and among them finding your own.



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