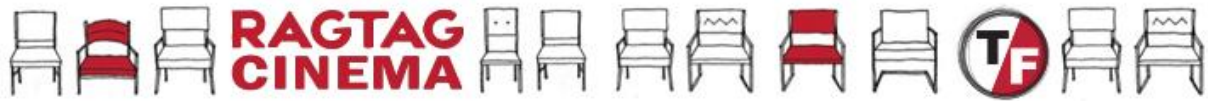


RAGTAG FILM SOCIETY



TRUE/FALSE FILM FEST 2021 FEATURE FILMS (TTF denotes inclusion in Teleported True/False)

All Light, Everywhere | Dir. Theo Anthony; 2021; 106 min (United States)

How is the act of observing politicized? Weaponized? This question reverberates throughout this prismatic essay film from T/F alum Anthony (*Rat Film*, T/F 2017). The history of surveillance is extensive—from the early methods of charting the movement of the sun to the evolving use of body cam technology in police departments. Displaying a flair for creative juxtapositions, Anthony whisks us from a community meeting in Baltimore that pits concerned citizens against a technocratic monitoring scheme to the halls of the Axon corporation, where the tools of observation and subjugation (cameras and Tasers) are produced side by side. As the film skillfully connects the dots, we are forced to consider the unblinking eye of surveillance as a weapon of racial injustice. **(AC)**

Delphine's Prayers | Dir. Rosine Mbakam; 2021; 90 min (Belgium)

In a messy but bright bedroom, Delphine, a Cameroonian transplant in Belgium, shares her compelling and heart-wrenching story. Lighting a cigarette, Delphine recounts her life of hardships and moments of love. Beginning with the tragic death of her mother, she tells of the sexual exploitation she endured in Cameroon and her current, unfulfilled marital life in Belgium. True Vision Award recipient Mbakam grants her subject the space to reflect upon the trauma she's survived. Oscillating between humorous and playful to staggeringly painful, the conversation maps the intersections of gender, race, class, and displacement. Mbakam is no distanced observer, but an equal participant, co-crafting a narrative. Through this palpable intimacy, we are privileged to bear witness to the undimmed light of Delphine. **(AC) TTF**

Dirty Feathers | Dir. Carlos Alfonso Corral; 2021; 75 min (United States/Mexico)

A deeply poetic portrait of the unhoused surviving on the periphery of El Paso. While some of that city's unhoused community are welcomed into the OC (the Opportunity Center for the Homeless), the film introduces us to those who aren't—many of whom struggle with severe addiction and mental health issues. Soon-to-be father Brandon makes a bed for himself and his pregnant wife, meditating on his dream of opening a soul food restaurant. The prophetic words of Ashley, a teen girl who's found her purpose and chosen family on the streets, punctuate the bleak hardships with spirituality and hope. Photographer-turned-director Corral handles each story of grit and grace with a close-up openness that reveals the intimacy and respect he and his subjects share. **(AC)**

Faya Dayi | Dir. Jessica Beshir; 2021; 120 min (Ethiopia/United States/Qatar)

Khat is a mildly narcotic evergreen shrub native to East Africa, chewed for centuries by Sufi Muslims in their religious meditations ... and now traded as a cash crop. *Faya Dayi* presents a luminous portrait of the flowering plant and the commerce-driven culture that surrounds it. The euphoric excursion takes us through khat fields and factories in the highlands of Harar, Ethiopia, and introduces us to a pair of brothers who contemplate a better life. Enchantment abounds in this dreamlike, immersive film, as Beshir weaves together a tapestry of intimate stories and lyrical sequences. The lush black-and-white cinematography blends lived experiences with illusory reverie and allows the mythic undertones to rise to the surface. This is a beguiling debut feature that marks the arrival of a major new talent. **(AG)**

From the Wild Sea | Dir. Robin Petré; 2021; 78 min (Denmark/Ireland)

Along the shore, beachgoers watch in awe as an uncaged and anxious seal fidgets its way back into its natural habitat. Although happy to return home, its life in the ocean remains a day-to-day battle, with ferocious storms, pollution, and propeller boats all contributing to the demise of aquatic species. *From the Wild Sea* is told from both human and animal perspectives and shot on the shores of the North Sea during the coronavirus pandemic. We follow field support officer Dan Jarvis as he navigates the stormy coast of Cornwall. His vision of the future is somber, as is that of his close collaborator James Barnett, a veterinarian whose pathological research focuses on the consequences of environmental pollution. Petré keeps the impacts of climate change ever present, as her calm, dispassionate lens witnesses the captivity and release of marine wildlife ... and the people who attempt to protect it. **(AG)** *Preceded by "Fire Season" (Dir. Quinn Else; 7 min.) TTF*

The Grocer's Son, the Mayor, the Village and the World | Dir. Claire Simon; 2020; 110 min (France)

It's film festival season in the picturesque French village of Lussas, where farming and filmmaking drive commerce and culture. Tënk, a new subscription based digital platform, hopes to usher in a new wave of documentary viewing. The mastermind behind the Tënk platform is film aficionado Jean-Marie Barbe, who has taken up operations in what used to be his family's grocery store. The initiative is a labor of love for the passionate and optimistic Barbe and his team. 2017 True Vision honoree Simon delivers a condensed spinoff of her nine-hour opus, *The Village*, in this even more exhilarating pilgrimage to the small-scale utopia of Lussas. Ask yourself: Does this radiant statement about small towns and the beauty of imagining an alternative way of life feel familiar? **(AG)** TTF

Homeroom | Dir. Pete Nicks; 2021; 90 min (United States)

Nicks has been honing his craft for years, exploring institutions throughout Oakland, California. From his debut, *The Waiting Room* (T/F 2012), to *The Force* (T/F 2017), Nicks has repeatedly demonstrated his ability to catch lightning in a bottle by being in the right place at the right time ... and having the patience and skill to capture what transpires. *Homeroom* completes his hometown trilogy, introducing us to the senior class of Oakland High School as the 2019-20 school year begins. Loaded with dramatic irony, we watch these kids experience a brief flourishing of normal life before one calamity after another takes hold of the narrative. But these resilient teens don't give up easily—their organized engagement inspires, and helps us envision a future to which these young people will lead us. **(DW)**

Inside the Red Brick Wall | Dir. HK Documentary Filmmakers; 2020; 88 min (Hong Kong)

Amidst the chaotic swirl of protests that erupted in Hong Kong in 2019, student activists face off with police to maintain their democratic freedom from mainland China. Our filmmakers (who are not named to protect their identities) embed with students at Polytechnic University, which becomes the site of a particularly reckless and dangerous protest. Activists blast anti-police songs from their position—the police fire back with witty songs of their own. These frenzied interactions quickly escalate into an astounding and wildly lopsided 13-day standoff between the determined activists and police forces. Like the actions themselves, this film is a uniquely collective experience, providing a multiplicity of perspectives from behind and outside the blockade. As the police press in, the dizzying handheld shots and frenetic pace launch us into the center of this action to restore democracy. **(AC)** *Preceded by "Club Quarantine" (Dir. Aurora Brachman; 7 min.). Presented by the Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy*

No Kings | Dir. Emilia Mello; 2020; 85 min (Brazil)

The warm sun shines on the Brazilian waterfront, with the smell of salty ropes and rotted jackfruit permeating the air. In the isolated but self-sufficient Caiçara community, fishermen repair their nets by hand while Lucimara, a precocious, determined young girl, leads her friends to a tide pool to see what

they can catch. This gauzy, sensuous debut from filmmaker Mello explores this secluded and diverse village, with residents descended from indigenous people, escaped African slaves, and European pirates. With her inquisitive lens, Mello is very much a part of this film, receiving poems from the vibrantly smiling Ismail and being peppered with questions about her heritage by Lucimara. The Brazilian government looms just offscreen, creeping in to modernize the Caiçara, but the residents of this seaside hamlet remain committed to stewarding both land and sea. **(AC) TTF**

Petit Samedi | Dir. Paloma Sermon-Dai; 2020; 75 min (Belgium)

With tenderness and gentle humor, first-time director Sermon-Dai finds her subjects close to home. In a small Walloonian village, we meet Damien Samedi, a genial presence and on-again, off-again heroin addict. Damien maintains a quiet existence, racked with shame by his inconsistent attempts at sobriety but hoping to shield his family from the neighbors' scorn. Ysma, Damien's caring and at times overbearing mother, is stretched thin by her desire to help her son kick the habit and move forward with his life. Their codependency wobbles between endearing and toxic; Damien reliably checks in on Ysma each week while his siblings tend to their own lives, and Ysma relishes the opportunity to help Damien fill out job applications. It makes perfect sense that this lovingly observational take on the complicated beauty of family comes from one of their own. **(AC)**

Rock Bottom Riser | Dir. Fern Silva; 2021; 70 min (United States)

As rivers of lava weave a molten web across the islands of Hawaii, a pulsating electronic beat grounds us in the age of technology. In his feature debut, experimental film veteran Silva playfully teases out surprising connections between humankind, geology, and the cosmos, composing an anti-extractive riff on Hawaii's checkered history. Tourism churns the capitalist machinery of the island, while native Hawaiians contemplate the most effective means to stave off sprawling development and the effects of climate change—might Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson help? As another telescope is proposed on the sacred grounds of Mauna Kea, unchecked scientific advancement becomes the new colonialism. Simon and Garfunkel's refrain “I am a rock, I am an island” is re-imagined in this dazzling exploration of the push-and-pull between the natural world and our desire for unlimited knowledge. **(AC)**

Sabaya | Dir. Hogir Hirori; 2021; 75 min. (Sweden)

The al-Hol refugee camp in northeast Syria has fallen under the control of Daesh (aka ISIS). There, hidden from the world, women and girls from the Yazidi ethnic minority of northern Iraq are kept as slaves. But a small group of activists, led by the mild-mannered Mahmud and his friend Ziyad, are working to change that. Their heroism, alongside that of the young women who voluntarily reenter the camp to help those still trapped there, forms the heart of this incredible film. The action is immediate and riveting, whether we are looking through a camera hidden inside a chador or riding along in a high-speed van chase as bullets whiz by the windows. This is a film that shouldn't exist in the world, that should be too difficult and dangerous to make. But thanks to Hirori and his subjects, we are granted a window into their precarious world. What we do afterward is up to us. **(DW)**

Songs that Flood the River | Dir. German Adolfo Arango; 2021; 75 min. (Colombia)

Oneida was a child when she learned how to sing “alabados,” traditional funeral songs used by Black communities in Colombia to secure their safe return to the realm of the souls. When she was eight years old, a snake devoured her left leg, leaving her to spend the rest of her life in a village set deep in the jungle. Then, as an adult, she survived the 2002 Boyajá massacre that decimated her community. Refusing to submit to the multiple traumas, Oneida fights her fears by writing songs that use the melody of alabados over lyrics that illuminate her reality. Her scars are the source of her strength, and her songs are the voice of thousands that fight for peace in one of the longest conflicts in modern history. Director Arango presents an elegiac feature debut that embraces its role in collective healing. **(AG) TTF**

Summer of Soul (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised) | Dir. Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson; 2021; 120 min. (United States)

In the summer of 1969, the nine-week Harlem Cultural Festival created stimulating, inspirational, and stirring experiences for the Black and Brown communities of Harlem—then it was all forgotten. First-time filmmaker Thompson resuscitates a lost archive and invites attendees of the landmark festival to recall and recapture their soulful memories. Thompson leads viewers into a sonic time machine with appearances from Sly and the Family Stone, Nina Simone, and a vivacious 19-year-old Stevie Wonder, to name a few. This vibrant revival is a substantial document of Black cultural history brimming with joy and memories nearly lost. The spiritual possession of Black music acts as motif as we witness the onstage energy reflected in the faces of the captivated audience. More than a film about music, *Summer of Soul* highlights how the Harlem Cultural Festival provided a vital diversion from the tumultuous chaos of America. **(AG)**

This Rain Will Never Stop | Dir. Alina Gorlova; 2020; 103 min. (Ukraine/Latvia/Germany/Qatar)

Scattered across Ukraine, Germany, and Kurdish Iraq, the Suleyman family initially fled Syria during the civil war only to encounter new conflicts and unwelcoming neighbors. Youngest son Andriy unsteadily navigates his new home in Ukraine, working as a Red Cross volunteer and helping those affected by the military conflict. Despite the rewarding work, his feelings of displacement are only exacerbated by visits to his extended family, until an untimely death sets him on a journey to return to his unstable homeland. The cyclical nature of war permeates this emotionally arresting film, with Andriy acting as our resilient guide. And while the elliptical storytelling brings into focus the recurrent fighting that upends families, director Gorlova gives us moments of joy and connection that offer hope for peaceful days ahead. **(AC) TTF**

The Two Faces of a Bamiléké Woman | Dir. Rosine Mbakam; 2018; 76 min. (Cameroon)

Rarely has a filmmaker burst onto the international scene with a debut feature as assured and self-aware as this. Seven years after leaving her native Cameroon to study film in Belgium, Mbakam returns, accompanied by her young son. Meeting up with her mother in Tonga, her birth village, she is surrounded by the women who raised her, immersed in their daily tasks and inundated with stories of their lives—from arranged marriages gone awry to bitter conflict with the French colonizers. Impressively, Mbakam neither looks down on nor idealizes the women we meet. Instead, her level gaze helps us imagine a new model of collaborative nonfiction, a reordering of the power dynamic between filmmaker and subject. Mbakam’s eye for detail never blinks—even as she questions her own role in the community and the advantages (and disadvantages) of her new home in Europe. **(DW) TTF**

Users | Dir. Natalia Almada; 2021; 103 min. (United States)

Is technological progress inevitable? Does it isolate us or bring us together? Familiar questions, maybe, but the asking has never felt as perceptive, nor as breathtakingly well-composed, as in this new film from the brilliant Almada. Twisting the form of the essay doc like a pretzel, Almada finds the human core amidst the clutter of technology. Her children act as the jumping off point for this far-ranging exploration of whether tech is an expression of our humanity or, perhaps, the harbinger of its destruction. But Almada is no Luddite—rather, her patient ruminations return answers that, fractal-like, evoke new questions and fresh journeys. It’s best not to come to this film seeking solutions—the voyage itself might be all you need. **(DW) Preceded by “.srt” (Dir. Africanus Okokon; 9 min.)**

TRUE/FALSE FILM FEST 2021 SHORT FILMS *(All shorts programs screen in person and as part of Teleported True/False)*

.srt | Dir. Africanus Okokon; 2020; 9 min.

A staggering 16mm performance film that confronts the far-ranging effects of colonialism.

The Bodies | Dir. Eloy Domínguez Serén; 2020; 11 min.

The controlled chaos and joy of Carnival in Galicia just days before pandemic lockdown.

Brontosaurus | Dir. Jack Dunphy; 2020; 8 min.

An abandoned love affair leads a man to a toy dinosaur.

Club Quarantine | Dir. Aurora Brachman; 2020; 7 min.

Finding community and connection amidst the pandemic by way of a queer Zoom dance party.

The Cut | Dir. Zac Manuel; 2020; 7 min.

The rituals of a Black barbershop in New Orleans transform in 2020.

Das Spiel | Dir. Roman Hodel; 2020; 17 min.

Another day at work for a soccer referee.

Department of Injustice | Travis Wood & Chloe Gbai; 2020; 6 min.

What would a phone service for accountability regarding police violence sound like?

Fire Season | Dir. Quinn Else; 2020; 7 min.

Technology filters our relationship to climate change in subtle and dangerous ways.

The Flooded House | Dir. Lucía Malandro; 2020; 14 min.

Decaying footage of a past life in Uruguay helps piece together family trauma.

The Golden Buttons | Dir. Alex Evstigneev; 2020; 20 min.

Russia's paramilitary networks begin at a boarding school for boys.

Halpate | Dir. Adam Piron & Adam Khalil; 2020; 14 min.

A Seminole Tribe in the Everglades carries a collective memory of alligator wrestling.

Homage to the Work of Philip Henry Gosse | Dir. Pablo Weber; 2020; 22 min.

Our historical fascination with artifacts spirals into some truly unexpected locales.

The I and S of Lives | Dir. Kevin Jerome Everson; 2021; 7 min.

A black man on roller skates glides around Black Lives Matter plaza.

Lemongrass Girl | Dir. Pom Bunsermvicha; 2020; 17 min.

Superstition surrounds the production of a film in Thailand.

Maat Means Land | Dir. Fox Maxy; 2020; 17 min.

A refreshingly fearless collage-like juxtaposition of the digital and physical worlds.

My Own Landscapes | Dir. Antoine Chapon; 2020; 18 min.

Navigating military training and post-traumatic stress through video game development.

O arrais do mar | Dir. Elisa Celda; 2020; 18 min.

A traditional form of fishing takes place during the nighttime as hookups happen along the shore.

Red Taxi | Dir: Anonymous; 2020; 14 min.

Taxi drivers in Hong Kong and mainland China discuss the 2019 protests. (Plays in Shorts: Sturgeon 73)

The Rifleman | Dir. Sierra Pettengill; 2021; 18 min.

The volatile history of lobbyist and NRA leader Harlon Carter as told through meticulously researched archival material.

Spirits and Rocks: An Azorean Myth | Dir. Aylin Gökmen; 2020; 14 min.

A Portuguese town weathers cyclical natural disasters through spiritual traditions and resilience.

The Truth About Hastings | Dir. Dan Schneidkraut; 2021; 10 min.

Marjorie's 93rd birthday descends into darkness.

VO | Dir. Nicolas Gourault; 2020; 17 min.

How does human error figure into self-driving cars?

Why Don't You Eat More? | George Du & Sinclair Neff; 2020; 4 min.

A vulnerable self-portrait of body image and masculinity.