

# RAGTAG FILM SOCIETY



## TRUE/FALSE FILM FEST 2019 FEATURE FILMS

### **Amazing Grace | 2019; 87 min.**

In 1972, having topped the pop charts with a series of hits, Aretha Franklin returned to her family's gospel roots. She held two concerts of the most deeply moving spirituals at a Baptist church in Watts, a California neighborhood still recovering from the riots six years earlier. Director Sydney Pollack was hired to document the shows, but he neglected to bring the clappers to mark the sound. As a result, the footage sat unused for more than 40 years. Just months after Franklin's death, this film is finally being seen, and it's an unforgettable testament to her musical influences and legacy. The camera pans across the ecstatic audiences and then returns to Aretha's soaring vocals. It makes for a raw, exalted performance, buoyed by the Southern California Community Choir and jubilant attendees taken over by the spirit. (PS)

### **American Factory | Dir. Julia Reichert & Stephen Bognar; 2019; 115 min.**

Dizzying, hilarious and devastating, this tale of two factories makes for a landmark story of workplace anxiety. Directors Reichert and Bognar have spent a decade documenting the plight of Ohio's factory workers, and their dedication pays off when they are given astonishing access to Fuyao, a Chinese auto glass manufacturer, as it revives a shuttered General Motors plant in Dayton. At first, their cameras capture a classic fish-out-of-water, culture-clash story. We watch as American Fuyao workers visit the Chinese headquarters, discovering Chinese workers' far deeper (and sometimes surreal) levels of commitment. The filmmakers refuse to cast anyone as hero or villain, including billionaire owner Cao Dewang, who muses on whether his factories have ruined the environment. The story deepens into a penetrating examination of the U.S. blue-collar workforce as it cedes its place to an increasingly powerful China. (PS)

### **APOLLO 11 | Dir. Todd Douglas Miller; 2019; 93 min.**

Fifty years ago, more than a million spectators gathered to watch the launch of the first manned trip to the moon. It was less than a decade after President Kennedy declared that the U.S. would be "landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth." Director/editor Todd Douglas Miller's film spectacularly stages Apollo 11's launch, peers intimately over the shoulders of the engineers in NASA's Houston control room, and hurtles through space before relaying Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin's historic first steps on the moon. Each tactical maneuver and video transmission is breathless proof of collective action by a united nation. Assembled wholly from 70mm footage filmed during the mission, this time capsule immortalizes the Apollo 11 mission as a heart-pounding thriller. (AS) *Presented by Veterans United Home Loans*

### **Caballerango | Dir. Juan Pablo González; 2018; 60 min.**

A man disappears in the Mexican state of Jalisco under the watchful eye of its inhabitants. *Caballerango* retraces the trail of his ghost and contemplates the last day anyone saw him. Nando was the youngest apprentice of his father, Jose, a lifelong horse wrangler. The film's magnificent, melancholic tone forms the backdrop for interviews capturing familial loss and longing. This chorus of voices also tenderly explores the community's daily rituals. Evocative cinematography grasps the landscape, the ranches, and the pair of white horses to which Nando and his father tended, painting an eerily patient portrait of an inexplicable tragedy. The film harnesses an ethereal sensation around a mysterious incident that shook this small town. Director Juan Pablo González investigates this moment of grief and grapples with his own feelings of bereavement. (AG)

**Celebration | Dir. Olivier Meyrou; 2018; 73 min.**

Beyond the glamour and flashing lights of the runway, the house of Yves Saint Laurent is the epitome of opulence. Olivier Meyrou was given total access to film from 1998 to 2001, but after its sole screening in 2007, Pierre Bergé, co-founder and the puppet master behind the curtain, sued to suppress the film. Freed from legal constraints after Bergé's recent death, *Celebration* dives into the day-to-day activity of the renowned couturier. Meyrou lifts the veil on the YSL myth through the final years Saint Laurent led his eponymous fashion house before retiring in 2002. A chain-smoking Saint Laurent ponders his artistic measurements while Bergé oversees each thread with a meticulous eye. (AG) *All screenings preceded by a provocation from Ricardo Dominguez. Supported by the Cultural Service at the Consulate General of France in Chicago*

**Chez Jolie Coiffure | Dir. Rosine Mbakam; 2018; 70 min.**

Filmmaker Rosine Mbakam is invited to step inside a Brussels salon, Jolie Coiffure, where shop owner Sabine consoles some customers, provides others with support in intimate relationships, and even gets one a job. Sabine is hardworking, charismatic, and adaptable to her work's shifting environment. The women who work and are served here come from Cameroon. Not only a salon, Jolie is a safe space, where the patterns of the African hair-braiding techniques are a daily ritual. The world outside is an alarming touristic haven where tensions mount and onlookers gaze through the glass windows in the market. This warm-hearted observational chamber piece features an engaging community of characters, most notably a gizzard salesman whom Sabine advises. But it's the relationship between director Mbakam and Sabine that elevates this charming vignette. (AG)

**Chinese Portrait | Dir. WANG Xiaoshuai; 2018; 79 min.**

One of China's most celebrated and influential fiction directors, Wang Xiaoshuai (*Beijing Bicycle*, *Chongqing Blues*) makes place-based films that are a reflection of the country's rapid changes and sociopolitical upheavals. His first documentary is a national portrait gallery filled with paintings that move and watch us watching them. Filming over the course of a decade, Wang observes his country with deep reverence and concern. (He even appears briefly on screen, standing in Tiananmen Square.) The Chinese title, *My Lens*, is also a nod to changes in filmmaking—film changes to digital as the country itself lurches into the future. The long shots dwell on an astounding range of subjects, encompassing rural schoolchildren, factory workers, engineers, miners, farmers, bustling night markets, and many of China's ethnic minorities. Dancers wait to take the stage, and men wash their feet in preparation for prayer. We are gripped by their stares, reminding us that we are with them in this world. (LK)

**Cold Case Hammarskjöld | Dir. Mads Brügger; 2019; 123 min.**

It's been many years since we've heard from Danish enfant terrible Mads Brügger, last seen smuggling blood diamonds in *The Ambassador* (T/F 2012) and infiltrating North Korea in *The Red Chapel* (T/F 2010). This muckraking journalist is back with his most ambitious, sophisticated and problematic film yet. In 1961, U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash while traveling to a ceasefire negotiation in the Congo. The death has since been a source of conspiracy theories, with many believing he was murdered but no consensus on the murderer or their motive. Aided by private investigator Göran Björkdahl, a dogged and perhaps irrationally persistent Brügger attempts to find an answer. What begins as an engrossing if somewhat trivial murder mystery explodes into something unfathomably chilling. (CB)

**The Commons | Dir. Suki Hawley & Michael Galinsky; 2019; 71 min.**

Between 2017 and . . . just last month, the Confederate monument debate has raged at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The statue in question is "Silent Sam," erected in 1913 by the Daughters of the Confederacy in concert with university alumni. Like the controversial Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville, the monument serves as an everyday affront to black people on campus. Directors Suki Hawley and Michael Galinsky capture the raw immediacy of the unfolding drama, including protests and counterprotests, as tensions ratchet ever higher. But *The Commons* offers something far deeper: The filmmakers build a convincing, transcendent elegy for the loss of civil public dialogue in society.

Plays with “The Changing Same” (dirs. Michèle Stephenson & Joe Brewster, 22 min.), which follows Lamar Wilson as he runs 13 miles retracing the terror of the 1934 lynching of Claude Neal in the Florida Panhandle. (PS)

**Dark Suns | Dir. Julien Elie; 2018; 151 min.**

Epic in scope, Julien Elie’s investigation into drug-related violence and the disappearance of women in Mexico starts with interviews with journalists, lawyers, judges, and the mothers of the disappeared. The accumulating testimonies, photographed in an immediate and starkly striking black and white, reveal not only a vast network of gang violence but also large-scale state-sanctioned suppression of justice. Rather than seeking resolution for individual women, the film powerfully reckons with how one continues living in a toxic nation where journalists, human rights advocates, and even priests are murdered with impunity. Tackling these questions with bravery and determination, Elie illuminates what is already being done to stop the violence, uncovers the unseen, and excavates that which must be forced back into consciousness. (AS) *Supported by the Consulate General of Canada, Chicago*

**The Edge of Democracy | Dir. Petra Costa; 2019; 120 min.**

Known for intimate personal stories, Petra Costa ambitiously tackles the deepening political crisis in Brazil, her home country. She brings the knotty history to life through charismatic figures, including the fallen steelworker-turned-president Lula, the fiery representative Eduardo Cunha, and the newly elected authoritarian Jair Bolsonaro. The crazy ride to Bolsonaro’s ascent—terrifying to gay and indigenous communities—is marked by incendiary speeches, number-fudging, a marauding judge, an economic meltdown, and a coup. Costa illustrates the country’s widening political divide through her own family—her parents have a revolutionary history, while her grandparents are members of the conservative elite. At one point, deposed president Dilma Rousseff rides in the back seat with Costa’s mother. Those troubled by our own democracy’s fissures or attuned to the warning signs of fascism will find plenty of resonance. (PS) *Presented by The Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy*

**Finding Frances | Dir. Nathan Fielder; 2017; 84 min.**

In his landmark television series *Nathan For You*, Canadian transplant Nathan Fielder concocts absurd, brilliant, and dubious schemes to help the mom-and-pop shops of Los Angeles. Over the years, he’s convinced a moving company to sell its labor as a new exercise fad, a realtor to rebrand herself as a broker of ghost-free homes, and a coffee shop to open under the name Dumb Starbucks. In *Finding Frances*—now shown at True/False in its full theatrical cut—Fielder’s show gets upended when a former collaborator named Bill Heath, a professional Bill Gates impersonator, asks for Nathan’s help in tracking down the one who got away. With the hopes of offering closure, Fielder heads to Heath’s Arkansas hometown in search of a woman Bill hasn’t seen or spoken to in 50 years. While Nathan’s methods can be outlandish and hilarious, the journey leads us to startling places, as we find ourselves peering at the soul of a mysterious and tormented old man. Following the screening, Fielder will screen never-before-seen footage from the project. No recording allowed. (CB) *Supported by the Consulate General of Canada, Chicago*

**The Game | Dir. Marine de Contes; 2018; 53 min.**

After a searching bird’s-eye view of the Gascony woods, we are dropped onto the forest floor. The camera burrows through near-endless trenches as enigmatic figures engage in a mysterious, dying practice among the disappearing timber. They wander tunnels, construct pulleys, whisper to one another, and wait—director Marine de Contes never tells you more than you need to know. *The Game* is a gem of observational filmmaking, letting the audience pick up clues while subtly exploring the way cultures and rituals naturally vanish. Plays with “Crannog” (dir. Isa Rao, 13 min.), set in a storybook sanctuary, an animal hospice two hours south of Glasgow where Alexis Fleming tends to all creatures great and small. (KS) *Supported by the Cultural Service at the Consulate General of France in Chicago*

**The Grand Bizarre | Dir. Jodie Mack; 2018; 61 min.**

Wizard Jodie Mack (*Dusty Stacks of Mom*, T/F 2014) sprinkles pixilated dust on the experimental doc form, creating something that feels altogether new. Ostensibly a grand, colorful tour of the world’s great textile traditions, *The Grand*

*Bizarre* becomes an idiosyncratic, celebratory investigation of the patterns of human inventiveness. It's also a tactile immersion into the artistic process itself, guided by Mack, a charming maximalist seemingly in love with life. Her enthusiasm is infectious as she places tapestries out in the streets and then inventively constructs layered soundscapes (including her rhythmic, sample-crazy music-making—you'll love her use of the Skype dial-up sound). Those who give themselves over to the film's antic charisma will come away full of its eye-popping treatment of language, map-making, and all manner of code, color, and design. Presented on 35mm. (PS)

**Home, Sweet Home | Dir. ISE Shinichi; 2018; 110 min.**

Director Ise Shinichi's peerless documentary lovingly chronicles 35 years of his niece Nao's life with her older brother, parents, and friends. Because of a disability, doctors did not expect Nao to live more than 20 years. Shinichi documents the unexpected steps of her story, from when Nao was 8 to the present, with a keen eye for gestures and a strong sense of rhythm. The film moves beyond mere advocacy to create a complex, moving portrait of the manifold ways each member of a family affects the others. After years of being taken care of through bouts of epilepsy, Nao ends up encouraging and supporting her own mother, ending an uplifting film that advocates for us all to find our own ways to flourish. (AS) *Presented by Boone Supported Living*

**The Hottest August | Dir. Brett Story; 2019; 92 min.**

Set in a sizzling New York City, *The Hottest August* is Brett Story's visionary look at a culture on the precipice as both climate change and disaster capitalism eclipse our future. Despite an edgy undercurrent of anxiety, the film locates a warm humanity in interactions with a cross section of New Yorkers expert at "rolling with the punches," as one Staten Island couple says outside of their garage. The rich set of characters includes a futuristic Afonaut, Hurricane Sandy holdouts, a Zumba instructor, and 1920s-style dancers who could be deckhands on the Titanic. While this smart, incisive essay taps into passages by Zadie Smith, Karl Marx, and Annie Dillard, Story's presence can be felt strongly throughout: she acts as free-ranging poet/meteorologist with a farsighted ability to forecast our uncertain destiny. (PS) *Supported by the Consulate General of Canada, Chicago*

**Island of the Hungry Ghosts | Dir. Gabrielle Brady; 2018; 98 min.**

The burning of ghost money perfumes the air on far-off Christmas Island where Poh Lin Lee, a trauma therapist, lives on the island with her husband and daughters. While Lee helps detained immigrants work through their trauma, migrating crabs freely move from the jungle to the ocean, coddled by locals who gently rake them from the path of oncoming vehicles. Lee's therapeutic work, which is filmed in a uniquely intimate way, and her mediation between the unhappy spirits and the detainees take a toll on her relationship with her family. Director Gabrielle Brady conjures a poetic darkness that evinces a confrontation of nature and human suffering. (AG)

**Knock Down The House | Dir. Rachel Lears; 2019; 85 min.**

What's more important: charismatic political candidates or the behind-the-scenes machine that works to elect them? *Knock Down the House* gives us both, breathlessly following a new breed of politician alongside a tireless collective of activists enraged by the state of American governance. In St. Louis, Cori Bush speaks eloquently about justice. Nevada's Amy Vilela offers visions of an equitable health care system. And West Virginia's Paula Jean Swearingen promises a new kind of coal country. And, thrillingly, we get to meet 2018's breakout star, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, aka AOC, the gifted newcomer from the Bronx. She is an unforgettable cinematic underdog, confiding her fears of failing her supporters, overcoming nerves at a debate practice, and, in a moment that will have audiences cheering, unexpectedly beating her big-money opponent. "In order for one to get through," AOC reminds us, "100 of us have to try." (PS)

**Landless | Dir. Camila Freitas; 2019; 110 min.**

Far from mainstream media attention, the Landless Workers Movement in rural Brazil has, for four decades, defiantly organized farmers who seek to lead self-sustainable lives. The LWM occupies land that lies fallow because of corporate loopholes, allowing these farmers to feed their families and communities. Director Camila

Freitas, whose family raises organic crops, spent years deeply embedded with formidable farmers who, stymied by an uncaring legal system and bankrupt owners, are taking matters into their own hands. The film deftly moves through tactical meetings, provides a present-tense look at protests, and lives and dreams with the occupiers—arguing for and celebrating a vision of back-to-the-earth activism that permeates the everyday. Freitas' beautifully lensed scenes offer an insider's point of view of the encampment as a place of refuge and equality. (AS)

**Let It Burn | Dir. Maíra Bühler; 2019; 82 min.**

This alluring excursion inside the social hotel Parque Dom Pedro, a converted hostel in São Paulo's Cracolândia neighborhood, introduces us to a strung-out community. Rescued from the streets by some idealistic activists, these addicts—full of heartache, heartbreak, and loneliness—take elevator joyrides and sometimes engage in lovelorn knife fights. They are an affectionate, supportive group—occupants light each other's crack pipes in communal confab, and together they enjoy the sounds of Millie Jackson. Sometimes impassioned exchanges between the residents result in interventions. Then *Let It Burn* pivots into a musical, as occupants perform heartfelt songs conveying a world where life feels intense and disorienting, violent and beautiful. Melodies reverberate from the rooftops, burning and yearning in tandem with discord and discourse. (AG)

**The Magic Life of V | Dir. Tonislav Hristov; 2019; 85 min.**

We first meet V—a sociable, confident young woman comfortably at home in vivid live-action role-playing (LARP) scenarios. V travels to far-flung places, first enrolling as a student at Poland's College of Wizardry and later joining a monster-slaying militia in the Bulgarian countryside. But "V" is just a front for the cautious Veera, who is still processing trauma from her abusive father. In her day-to-day life, Veera lovingly takes care of her brother, Ville, who has an intellectual disability. When Veera introduces Ville to the world of LARPing, *The Magic Life of V* transforms into a powerful look at fantasy's ability to help us cope with real-world trauma. Director Tonislav Hristov's camera becomes an important part of the process, as we realize how the film itself is an ingeniously designed vehicle for Veera to LARP her own life. (KS)

**Midnight in Paris | Dir. Roni Moore & James Blagden; 2019; 75 min.**

In the week leading up to prom seniors at Flint Northern High School chatter about their plans and get ready for the big night. The woebegone school band provides the soundtrack, the cast is full of cheeky characters, and the filmmakers spend far more time outside of school than in. On prom day, some students' procrastination causes other ones to break down, and after the spirited prom night, during an after-party, the ghost of proms past makes a humorous appearance. Shot in 2012, two years before the water crisis, this charming and festive film is by filmmakers James Blagden and Roni Moore, who grew up in Flint, Michigan. Their film is both a corrective of the media narrative of life in Flint and also a delightful romp through halcyon days. It will simultaneously make you nostalgic for high school and be thankful that those days are over. (AS)

**Midnight Traveler | Dir. Hassan Fazili; 2019; 87 min.**

Forced to flee Afghanistan after the Taliban called for his death, filmmaker Hassan Fazili recounts his shame: He's no longer able to provide for his family and feels responsible for their harrowing journey. This confession is one of many indelibly personal moments in Fazili's film that, in addition to providing the most powerful first-person look at the global refugee crisis, showcases the manifold ways our world can grind down on a person's humanity. Armed only with cellphone cameras, Fazili; his wife, Fatima; and their two young daughters, Nargis and Zahra, document their three-year-long search for asylum and unexpectedly upend many tenets of documentaries about refugees. The existence and completion of this intense, beautiful film speak as much to the necessity of the documentarian impulse as to the bravery of its filmmakers. (AS) *Presented by The Crossing*

**Mike Wallace is Here | Dir. Avi Belkin; 2019; 86 min.**

The epitome of the brash, merciless investigative reporter, Mike Wallace lived his life on the air. A workaholic with a Bogart-like charisma, Wallace defined himself through tough questioning that cut to the chase. This transcendent celebrity profile, with its access to vast amounts of footage from his 60-year career on TV, moves from his groundbreaking *Night Beat* show to the launch of *60 Minutes* in 1968 to a dangerous trip to Vietnam, interviews with Reagan, and the investigation that began the unraveling of the cigarette industry. *Mike Wallace is Here* (supposedly the four scariest words in the English language!) explores the nature of ego, drive, and accomplishment, revealing what made the man such a force, whether talking to Johnny Carson, Barbra Streisand, or Ayatollah Khomeini. At its best, the documentary feels like it's being narrated from inside Wallace's head, and throughout it offers a thrilling review of a half-century of world history. (PS)

**Mr. SOUL! | Dir. Melissa Haizlip & Sam Pollard; 2018; 115 min.**

From 1968-73, American television pioneer Ellis Haizlip produced and hosted the variety show *SOUL!* as a showcase of the vibrant Black Arts Movement. The revolutionary show offered an unflinching, unfiltered celebration of black music, performance, literature, and politics. *Mr. SOUL!*, a labor of love by Ellis' niece Melissa Haizlip, captures a combustible moment through urgent black voices, including Kathleen Cleaver and The Last Poets, who had few other options for national exposure. We meet featured guests—Earth Wind & Fire and a young Patti LaBelle, to name a few—at the start of their celebrated careers. The film invites us into a groundbreaking phenomenon, from its initial conception to its final broadcast, including the very public battle to keep it on the air amidst a shifting political landscape. (AG) *Presented by Fresh Ideas*

**The Naked Room | Dir. Nuria Ibáñez Castañeda; 2013; 70 min.**

This year's True Vision Award recipient, Nuria Ibáñez Castañeda, films her second feature entirely within a children's therapy office in Mexico. Ibáñez Castañeda's intimate, unobtrusively tight camera sinks into the background as the kids' stories and struggles with trauma pierce your soul. Anger, abuse, sadness, and abandonment trickles out of their eyes and into broken sentences as they're prodded by the doctors. Their faces—as memorable as any classic portrait—reveal their vulnerability and serve as a mirror to contemporary Mexican society. Their suffering, however, also has given these remarkable children a clarity and wisdom beyond their years. This anthropological depiction of the adolescent mind and its struggle for survival challenges the core of our neurotypical ideas of courage. (SA)

**N/N: Atman | Dir. Pirjo Honkasalo; 1997; 76 min.**

The final film in *The Trilogy of the Sacred and the Satanic*, *Atman* is a spectacular epic across India, all documented on stunning 35mm. When his mother dies, a devout Hindu man named Jamana Lal begins a 3,000-mile journey in her honor. The destination is the holy city of Haridwar, but to get there, Lal, a 35-year-old whose legs have been paralyzed since childhood, must travel up the Ganges River. He is joined by his brother and his wife as well as by director Pirjo Honkasalo and her small, intrepid crew. Midway through, a miracle occurs, as Lal crosses paths with a kindhearted woman named Shanta. *Atman* blossoms into a love story for the ages. (CB) *Screens for free as a part of the Neither/Nor Film Series. Neither/Nor is presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.*

**N/N: Mysterion | Dir. Pirjo Honkasalo; 1991; 94 min.**

*Mysterion* begins on an early-morning bus ride, as we follow a haunted young woman, Külliki Rannu, on her way to Puhtitsa, a Russian Orthodox convent located in a polluted corner of northeastern Estonia. Life at Puhtitsa is filled with backbreaking labor, as women of all ages shear sheep, till the land, make clothes, and build gigantic stacks of firewood. But they also find space for prayer. Over the course of this gentle, transfixing film, Külliki and director Pirjo Honkasalo gain the trust of Puhtitsa's nuns, discovering what they left behind but also what they've gained along the way. (CB) *Screens for free as a part of the Neither/Nor Film Series. Neither/Nor is presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.*

**N/N: Tanjuska and the 7 Devils | Dir. Pirjo Honkasalo; 1993; 80 min.**

One day, 10-year-old Tanjuska suddenly stops speaking. Her hardworking parents are at a loss. Doctors offer no hope, so they turn to Father Vasili. Vasili is a terrifying exorcist who flings holy water at his congregation with reckless abandon. Vasili claims Tanjuska has seven demons living inside her. Desperate, Tanjuska's father brings his daughter to live in Vasili's compound (located just down the road from *Mysterion's* Puhtitsa convent). In one of the most harrowing documentaries ever made, director Pirjo Honkasalo silently observes what transpires. (CB) *Screens for free as a part of the Neither/Nor Film Series. Neither/Nor is presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences.*

**No data plan | Dir. Miko Revereza; 2018; 70 min.**

This unconventional Amtrak journey from Los Angeles to New York starts with director Miko Revereza ("Disintegration 93-96," T/F 2018) describing how his undocumented mother has two phones. The one with "no data plan" is only used for calls about immigration. With this premise, Revereza builds mystery, combining his own journey with his discovery of his mother's affair with a much younger man. His trip floats through dream states and into a fugitive state of mind, weaving together an ingenious mix of captions, subtitles, interviews with friends and family, and kinetic observational footage shot on and in between trains. Even as it travels cross country, the film dismisses false promises of freedom and movement and evocatively conveys the particularities of Revereza and his family's precarious existence, especially after a close encounter with Border Patrol. *No data plan* is a poignant and furious expression of the cinema of resistance from a notable first-time feature director. Plays with "I Signed the Petition" (dir. Mahdi Fleifel, 10 min), in which the director agonizes over his act of signing a petition asking Radiohead not to play in Tel Aviv in support of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement against Israel, calling an acerbic and honest friend for advice. (AS)

**'Now something is slowly changing' | Dir. mint film office; 2018; 105 min.**

The provocative *'Now something'* pierces the heart of the Western world's therapy culture, asking whether we are transcendence-seekers or just prey to modern-day snake-oil salesmen. Its questions ricochet from ASMR "tingleheads" making hushed videos to Biodanza studios where dancers attempt to reach liftoff. At one seminar, we learn that in the Netherlands, 10 churches close down every week because of a decline in the devout. What is it that chases so many to seek self-improvement? Can we find a new perspective through intervention? This sly, sardonic film leaves open the possibility that great wisdom can be mined from coaches preaching a left-field approach to one's issues. Or perhaps it suggests that obsessive self-help offers a pale replacement for religious traditions. Clearly, today's hollow men are "still looking for a sense of purpose" and will go to great lengths for redemption, grace, or maybe just temporary relief. (PS)

**One Child Nation | Dir. Nanfu Wang & Jialing Zhang; 89 min.**

This explosive, revelatory look into China's one-child policy peels away decades of propaganda and indoctrination through the lens of its people. Co-director Nanfu Wang takes us on a monumental odyssey across China, beginning in the rural village where she grew up. She investigates the songs, paintings, and graffiti that propagandized the one-child policy and are woven into every fabric of society, bleeding into the background like a scar that won't heal. From there the film bursts outward, as Wang points her lens to the officials and midwives who executed the policy through forced abortions and sterilizations. On a path toward reconciling these painful stories with Wang's own lived experience, the film starts digging, revealing countless ripple effects and illustrating the harm of Western cultural stereotypes of China. This unflinching dive into a nation's past and present leaves us questioning everything. (SA)

**Our Time (Nuestro Tiempo) | Dir. Carlos Reygadas; 2018; 177 min.**

The natural world looms large in the films of Carlos Reygadas. A maverick who knows how to overwhelm the senses, Reygadas films his latest on his own ranch, where bulls roam the landscapes, threatening to charge the camera at any given moment, and the sky is so vivid that when met with clouds, you feel as if rain could start pouring into the theater. After ambling around the stunning landscapes, *Our Time (Nuestro Tiempo)* ultimately settles on an engrossing narrative, as it thrusts us into an almost unbearably intimate love story. Poet-rancher Juan (Reygadas) and ranch manager Esther

(his real-life partner/artistic collaborator Natalia López) are experimenting with an open marriage. One day, the oddly charismatic, buffoonishly American cowboy Phil (comedian Phil Burger) visits their idyll, and chaos ensues, as all parties struggle mightily to communicate. (CB)

**Over the Rainbow | Dir. Jeffrey Peixoto; 2019; 71 min.**

Imagine a film about the Catholic Church made in the third century or a portrait of the Amish premiering at the turn of the 18th. The Church of Scientology is in its infancy as a religion, and while it has aptly been the source of intense public scrutiny, few outsiders have approached its believers with a modicum of respect. Director Jeffrey Peixoto spent half a decade earning the trust of his subjects—both inactive and active members of the Church—and in his mesmerizing and startling debut, he has transformed their testimony into a haunting meditation on humanity and its relationship with faith. Distinguished by both its compassion as well as its command of the cinematic language, *Over the Rainbow* is an unsettling, unshakable viewing experience. (CB)

**Reason | Dir. Anand Patwardhan; 2018; 235 min.**

In 1948, Hindu nationalist Nathuram Godse fired three bullets at the nonviolent Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, killing him instantly. Seventy years later, it is Godse's ideology, not Gandhi's, that runs the country. It's easy to imagine this frightening reality as a source of paralysis, but in this unsentimental, tenacious documentary, director Anand Patwardhan puts his life on the line to explain how his country's relationship with reality has shifted so radically. Masterfully shuffling between past and present day, Patwardhan's unflinching camera carefully reveals the ideological viruses festering in his society. He trains us to find truth in a sea of propaganda. And truth, however it is recorded, is a beautiful thing spoken by the heroic, shattered only by murder. *Reason* is a staggering and insightful work of reportage, a brave and vital masterpiece. (CB) *There will be a 15 minute intermission. Q&A with reception follows in the Bingham Gallery.*

**Segunda Vez | Dir. Dora García; 2018; 94 min.**

Dora García (*The Joycean Society*, T/F 2014) pays tribute to the late Argentinian psychoanalyst Oscar Masotta, who transformed his writings into a megaphone to protest fascism and promote expressions of liberation. García re-creates Masotta's enigmatic work in different settings, from his home country to Europe, where he was forced into exile. In one "happening," García assembles two groups on a cliff top, with different understandings of why they are there, and we slowly come to understand how a theater director can elicit, from a group of actors, the same level of terror associated with fascist police states. Increasingly making her intentions clear, García explores the troublingly thin line between true and false during a harrowing interrogation scene. *Segunda Vez* radically reimagines the biographical profile, shedding all clichés in favor of an immersive film that's elusive, visceral, and deeply relevant. (PS) *All screenings preceded by a provocation from Rashayla Marie Brown.*

**Shorts Program: Tea 65 | 65 min. various directors**

Dark, private spaces are illuminated in these five standout films. In the collaborative ethnography *The Harvesters* (dir. Derek Howard, 6 min.), three Maasi men from Kenya show us how to stage and harvest honey from a tall tree. The magical *Djo* (dir. Laura Henno, 12 min.) centers around a man and his uncanny, profound love of a wild dog. In *Ghosts of Sugar Land* (dir. Bassam Tariq, 21 min.), a group of Southeast Asian Muslim friends from Sugar Land, outside of Houston, gets rocked by a young convert named Mark. *Vever (for Barbara)* (dir. Deborah Stratman, 12 min.) rekindles pioneering woman filmmaker Maya Deren's voice, texts, and thoughts and merges them with an unfinished film from Barbara Hammer, through the hand of Deborah Stratman. *Goodbye Thelma* (dir. Jessica Bardsley, 14 min.) is a chilling stunner about the fear of men and the outdoors, transforming the 1991 movie *Thelma & Louise* for its own purposes. (AS)

**Shorts Program: Tequila 62 | 62 min. various directors**

Filmmakers repurpose archival remnants and interrogate social status in these four short films. The first up is *Lasting Marks* (dir. Charlie Lyne, 14 min.), profiling a group of gay men whose consensual acts in an abandoned watchtower



become a cause célèbre in 1980s England. A different archive is mined in **Black 14** (dir. Darius Clark Monroe, 14 min.), a sociological study examining media coverage of a 1969 racial protest by members of the University of Wyoming football team. Moving in the present day, Alison Nguyen crashes together cult-produced media and religious iconography in her heterogenous essay film, **every dog has its day** (6 min.). In **The Men Behind the Wall** (28 min.), Israeli director Inés Moldavsky presents a surprising series of portraits of Palestinian men, culled from Tinder dates. (AS)

**Shorts Program: & Tonic 67 | 67 min. various directors**

The difference between what is seen and unseen drives these five films, from which our eyes will never recover. In Nastia Korkia's **Dramatic and Mild** (6 min.), museumgoers wait in a long line to get into an exhibition of a Kandinsky painting that has finally been returned to Moscow, where they are surprised by a peculiar security guard. Celebrated photographer Sohrab Hura combines an uncanny short story with an ingeniously paced edit of his own photographs and salvaged images of India's rising violence in **The Lost Head and the Bird** (10 min.). **Vesuvius at Home** (dir. Christin Turner, 14 min.) features a fantastical spiral of time from the filmmaker's re-enactment of a 25-year fascination with a false Pompeii. **Walled/Unwalled** (dir. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, 20 min.) is a piercing performance that takes down the impenetrability of walls and borders through sound, leading into **Due** (dir. Riccardo Giacconi, 17 min.), a nightmarish exploration of Milano Two, a "ghetto for the rich" created by disgraced former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi as an early experiment in mind control. (AS)

**The Tightrope | Dir. Nuria Ibáñez Castañeda; 2009; 80 min.**

A bare-bones outfit of five family members tours Mexico in a ramshackle traveling circus; the applause is sparse and the money sparser. With an observational but unmistakably artful touch, director Nuria Ibáñez Castañeda makes the entire experience palpable: the greasepaint and sawdust and the weird charms and unique loneliness of the circus' marginal, tumbleweed existence. In the midst of all manner of difficulties, the daughter, Jaque, attempts to balance her attraction to the spotlight and her loyalty to her family with her new husband's mounting frustration with the performer life. (This, and not the high-wire act, is the title's reference point.) Dariela Ludlow's restless camera work perfectly evokes Jaque's disequilibrium in this vividly textured elegy, one that handles its thematic riches with a grace, theatricality and precision worthy of its title. (KP)

**Treasure Island | Dir. Guillaume Brac; 2018; 97 min.**

Summer fun vibrates throughout the hazy vastness of Treasure Island, a water park on Paris' outskirts. As young people climb forbidden fences and jump from bridges, a night watchman monitors the park's boundaries and administrators calculate the flow of patrons. Brac has spent two films ingratiating himself with park management, which has allowed him access beyond the norm. As he leisurely roams the landscape, director Guillaume Brac crafts a film that it, like its subjects, as wild and free as the summer breeze. *Treasure Island* is a cinematic marvel, capturing simple jubilation, exotic revelations, and forays into the unknown. (AG) *All screenings preceded by a provocation from Jenn Takahashi. Supported by the Cultural Service at the Consulate General of France in Chicago*

**Untitled Amazing Johnathan Documentary | Dir. Ben Berman; 2019; 91 min.**

The Amazing Johnathan, a left-field Vegas entertainer with a rock 'n' roll swagger, has been given just a few months to live. Years later, he's self-medicating and still standing. Just as Johnathan announces his Farewell Tour, filmmaker Ben Berman plucks the fallen star from a virtual waiting room of potential documentary stars, but Johnathan proves less than compliant. Specializing in outré bits like popping out his own eyeball, Johnathan's magic illusions are shot through with comedy; he also wrote the book on practical jokes. So how much of his relationship with Berman is on the level? The tour triggers a twisty-turny, cat-and-mouse, hall-of-mirrors, inside-out, funhouse game between subject and filmmaker. As the absurdities pile up, the documentary industry—opportunistic, exploitative, amoral—reveals itself as chasing its own tail. Nothing is as it seems. Nor is it otherwise. (PS)

**Up The Mountain | Dir. ZHANG Yang; 2018; 126 min.**

The artist Shen Jianhua has fled Shanghai to take up residence in a picturesque mountain village, near the shores of Erhai Lake in Dali. There, he plays host to an apprentice, his young family, and a group of unconventional acolytes, including grandmothers from the Bai ethnic minority, whose colorful outfits match the eye-popping saturation and energy of their folklorist paintings. ZHANG Yang's film brings forth the beauty of the everyday in a rural China, revealing the inexorable cycle of life in a rapidly modernizing country. His complex characters populate a film whose every frame is rendered as poetically and carefully as the artwork its subjects painstakingly create. Shen welcomes a new child, his apprentice proposes to his girlfriend, and the grandmothers renovate their ancestral homes in anticipation of future in-laws. A rare glimpse into remote China, both *Up the Mountain* and its stable of folk painters imaginatively preserve an endangered culture in real time. (AS)

**A Wild Stream | Dir. Nuria Ibáñez Castañeda; 72 min.**

One day, Chilo arrives on an isolated beach in the Sea of Cortez. It looks like paradise, but wading through the water with a distant look on his face, Chilo is adrift. He befriends Omar, the one man who calls this place home. A philosophical fisherman, Omar patiently teaches Chilo how to work the water. When the sun sets, the two gather in Omar's shack and drink late into the night, baring their souls to one another, dipping their toes into vulnerable waters. It is a miracle how T/F 2019 True Vision recipient Nuria Ibáñez Castañeda found a way for her observational camera to seamlessly enter this beautiful, delicate, and ambiguous relationship. There is no denying the staggering intimacy suffusing her film, the electricity that exists between these two men, or the overwhelming emotions generated by their journey. (CB) *Presented by Restoration Eyecare*

## SHORT FILMS

**Black 14 | Dir. Darius Clark Monroe; 2018; 14min**

An archival sociological study examining media coverage of a 1969 racial protest by members of the University of Wyoming football team. (*Plays in Tequila 62*)

**The Changing Same | Dirs. Michèle Stephenson & Joe Brewster; 2018; 21 min.**

Every year in the Florida Panhandle, Lamar Wilson runs 13 miles retracing the terror of the 1934 lynching of Claude Neal. (*Plays before The Commons*)

**Crannog | Dir. Isa Rao; 2018; 15 min.**

Alexis Fleming tends to all creatures great and small in a storybook sanctuary, an animal hospice two hours south of Glasgow. (*Plays before The Game*)

**Djo | Dir. Laura Henno; 2019; 12 min.**

A man named Smogi professes his profound love for a wild dog. (*Plays in Tea 65*)

**Dramatic and Mild | Dir. Nastia Korkia; 2018; 6 min.**

After waiting in a long line to get into the the exhibition of a Kandinsky painting that has finally been returned to Moscow, would-be viewers are surprised by a peculiar security guard. (*Plays in & Tonic 67*)

**Due | Dir. Riccardo Giacconi; 2017; 17 min.**

A nightmarish exploration of Milano Two, a "ghetto for the rich" created by disgraced former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi as an early experiment in mind control. (*Plays in & Tonic 67*)

**every dog has its day | Dir. Alison Nguyen; 2019; 6 min.**

Cult-produced media and religious iconography crash in this heterogenous essay film. (*Plays in Tequila 62*)

**Fainting Spells | Dir. Sky Hopinka; 2018; 11 min.**

The ethnopoetic journey of an imagined myth for the Indian Pipe Plant used by the Ho-Chunk to revive those who have fainted. *(Plays before a TBA audio documentary)*

**Ghosts of Sugar Land | Dir. Bassam Tariq, 2019; 21 min.**

A group of Southeast Asian Muslim friends from Sugar Land, TX, outside of Houston, gets rocked by a young convert named Mark. *(Plays in Tea 65)*

**Goodbye Thelma | Dir. Jessica Bardsley, 2019; 14 min.**

A chilling stunner about the fear of men and the outdoors, transforming the 1991 movie *Thelma & Louise* for its own purposes. *(Plays in Tea 65)*

**The Harvesters | Dir. Derek Howard; 2017; 6 min.**

Three Maasi men from Kenya show us how to stage and harvest honey from a tall tree in this collaborative ethnography. *(Plays in Tea 65)*

**I Signed the Petition | Dir. Mahdi Fleifel; 2018; 10 min.**

After agonizing over his act of signing a petition asking Radiohead not to play in Tel Aviv in support of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement against Israel, the director calls an acerbic and honest friend for advice. *(Plays before No data plan)*

**Lasting Marks | Dir. Charlie Lyne, 2018; 14 min.**

A group of gay men and their consensual acts in an abandoned watch tower become a cause celebre in 1980s England. *(Plays in Tequila 62)*

**The Lost Head and the Bird | Dir. Sohrab Hura; 2018; 10 min.**

Celebrated photographer Sohrab Hura combines a uncanny short story with an ingeniously paced edit of his own photographs and salvaged images of India's rising violence. *(Plays in & Tonic 67)*

**The Men Behind the Wall | Dir. Ines Moldavsky; 2018; 28 min.**

A surprising series of portraits of Palestinian men from an Israeli director who found her subjects through Tinder. *(Plays in Tequila 62)*

**Vesuvius at Home | Dir. Christin Turner; 2018; 14 min.**

A fantastical spiral of time from the filmmaker's re-enactment of a false Pompeii, from her twenty five year fascination. *(Plays in & Tonic 67)*

**Vever (for Barbara) | Dir. Deborah Stratman; 2018; 12 min.**

Pioneering woman filmmaker Maya Deren's voice, texts, and thoughts merge with an unfinished film from Barbara Hammer, through the hand of Deborah Stratman. *(Plays in Tea 65)*

**Walled/Unwalled | Dir. Lawrence Abu Hamdan; 2018; 20 min.**

A piercing performance that takes down the impenetrability of walls and borders through sound. *(Plays in & Tonic 67)*