

Aesthetica 2017: Day Three

The middle day of Aesthetica 2017 is reported on by the Nouse team

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Image: Zarepta Film Production

Day Three at the Aesthetica Short Film Festival 2017 marked the halfway point for York's very own cultural hub, and it brought with it many more intriguing works of varying shapes and sizes.



Image: Llanbobl Vision & Rustle Up Productions

At the lighter end of the scale was **Comedy 5: Body Shock**. Within these shorts the collective theme wasn't exactly *Body Shock* but a lack of comedic consistency. All the shorts had one or two great jokes or set pieces, but overall were slightly lacklustre. *Paint* didn't land until the addition of "A True Story" in the credits and the best aspect of *My Best Friend is Stuck on the Ceiling* was the comedic timing and line delivery of the waiter. *Neckface* stood out as the short with the most vocal audience reception, and this was well deserved as it had the strongest and funniest concept. It was a shame when it descended into a more generic slapstick brawl by the end rather than sticking to the original premise. Collectively the shorts delivered on the promise of bodily humour, and did provide an entertaining evening – a chuckle is still a victory in the hard genre of comedy.



Image: Gracie Films & Icebox Productions

Things got heavier in **Drama 5: Into the Unknown**, however. All the shorts in this brilliant selection examined one of the most fundamental human emotions: fear. Whether it is fear of a future after the loss of a loved one in Adrien Cothier's heartstring tugging *Toby* or fear of a traumatic past, experienced by Eddie in *Pushing the Night Away* by Jade Aksnes, these films are enthralling because they delve deep into the parts of ourselves which we often have so little control over. Loss of control is a prominent theme in Daniel Sawka's *Icebox*, where the protagonist's utter powerlessness is so despairing that tears may be shed. Anthony Gonzalez plays a young boy on the run from criminal gangs in Honduras. He is caught at the border and detained by the US government in cells which resemble large chicken coops packed with other young children and teenagers desperate for a better life. The ending is far from hopeful as he is ruled as a criminal and put in a bus ready for exportation, sadly this hopelessness is an accurate depiction of the reality for those searching for a better life. Whereas *Icebox* is so world-encompassing, *Mine* by Matthew Jacobs Morgan is a beautifully small-scale and focused depiction of a real but splintered family. Struggling to connect with a child that is not biologically his, Joshua McGuire's character threatens to leave his partner. This genuine depiction of gay relationships shows that (surprise surprise) the heart of every relationship is essentially the same: flawed people that love each other. The anguish, pain and anger that comes from loving someone else so deeply is what makes this short ring so true. In the unknown post-apocalyptic world of Noémie Nicolas' *Sparta*, however, relationships are fractured to a point of no return. A young girl is travelling with her traumatised mother and mute little brother across austere wilderness in search of the sea. With nothing but the bags on their backs, a rifle and few other stolen bits and pieces, this small family is torn apart by the fear that the future they strive and hope for will never come. Beautifully shot and lacking a score, the wildness and stripped back vulnerability makes it hard to turn away from their desperate journey, always onwards.



Image: Amber Bemak/Nadia Granados

The day did of course also offer something different, for those who find traditional narrative filmmaking a bit dull. Innovative, shocking and ridiculous at times, the films of **Experimental 1: Frontiers** all live up to their classification. Whether it is glitchy naked women climbing a boulder to a Spanish karaoke version of "Don't Stop Believing" in *Borderhole* by Amber Bemak and Nadia Granados, or an exploration of the allures of virtual reality in *The Luring* by Alex Plumb, this selection was full of mystery and surprises. One of the most notable shorts was the identity-searching *Iconoclast* by Alex Haney. A mixed-race, trans and Jewish teenager desperately tries to figure out how to come to terms with his true self and how to go about presenting said self to the world. Sharp, striking and fast paced this 6.00 min short is memorable for its warped visual reality. Haney draws upon Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass" and creates a deeply touching film about feeling trapped behind the glass of a self that you no longer recognise. The much slower and pensive *Lifespan* by Jessica Bishopp reflects upon the concept of ageing today and in the future. Contrasting the sound of interviews with shots of towering council blocks, concrete car parks and

worn down British towns, Bishopp makes you think about what the world will really be like when centenarian is the norm and highlights the obstacles and innovations leading to this future.

To continue on the experimental side of things comes one of the festival's many Showcase Screenings, **Random Acts: First Acts**. Random Acts is Channel 4's short film strand, allowing for a variety of innovative and eccentric shorts. These shorts were all made by 16-24 year olds, just to make you feel worse about your own accomplishments, and each clock in at only three minutes and fourteen were shown in this showcase. It opened with *The Blackest Day* combines dance with a war film to depict the bond between soldiers and the trauma that they face. Beautiful and striking, it goes to show how important movement of both the actors and the camera are in film as here this is how the narrative is conveyed. But it wasn't all dance and musical numbers, *All that is* is a simple and short study on the subject of love. It's amazing, considering how long love has been a central theme of all works of art, that even a three minute short can open up a new angle; with short interviews across five people it's a touching and compassionate film rather than an overly sentimental one. More conventional narratives had their place here too - *Night Bus* is a little romantic film that alternates between animation and live-action, fantasy and reality, showing a new way to build on the love at first sight trope. With such a variety of films on display its fascinating to see how much story can be told in three minutes. As run times of major blockbusters grow longer and longer, it is fascinating to see the creative filmmaking that this time limitation creates, since it is through limitations that innovation thrives.

Another interesting day, then, and with 2 more remaining, plenty remains to be watched and discussed by the enthusiasts of York and beyond.



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