William Sorochan's

Chimera

Chimera is an interesting departure from the acceptable norms of documentary filmmaking. It presents a traditional theme (the search for one’s cultural identity) and reinvests it with a unique visual language that gives the film broader scope and wider meaning. While not entirely successful, the film's virtues outweigh its flaws. Director William Sorochan is an interesting addition to the Canadian film scene.

Chimera is a 103-minute experimental documentary that, at its best, is reminiscent of the works of Michael Snow and James Benning. The film is made up of 47 stationary sequences, each lasting from one to two-and-a-half minutes, exploring man's relationship with his environment. The film was shot in rural Alberta over a six-month period in 1986.

Due to its unique form, the viewer goes through numerous emotional responses towards the images presented - joy, sadness, intrigue, boredom, frustration, action. One of the film's flaws (or virtues) is that you can never pigeonhole where the director is coming from. This is somewhat irritating when viewing the film but adds to its resonance and power when looked back upon. The soundtrack accompaniment is Bach's The Well-Tempered Clavier as performed by Glenn Gould, and it is here where the film becomes problematic. Bach's intellectual approach is at odds with the emotional imagery, creating an irritating paradox which detracts from the final presentation. One feels that the director felt obliged to add this soundtrack and the viewer can sense the unquietness in this marriage. The flow is truncated, it's too heavy-jerky for immediate acceptance, resulting in an alienating effect. However, this effect may have been imposed by the filmmaker for a reason, which, if true, adds to the enigmatic nature of the work.

The film's strength is its visuals. and it is for them the director should be commended. Each sequence is carefully balanced and framed for maximum emotional response. The prairies, always somewhat stereotypically portrayed as loving sunsets and waving fields of grain, are depicted in a natural, straightforward manner which echoes pretty pictures and relies on truth (both ugly and beautiful) to communicate the unique beauty of this region of Canada. It is this aspect of the work that tends to bring across the emotional understanding that the director tried to express. It is in his images that the director creates a dialogue with his viewer, never degreasing to unnecessary stagnation or preaching. The film is full of cinematic wonders and it's unfortunate that the uncertain structure of film and music takes away from this virtue.

The film is somewhat similar in the visual aspects to the works of the great American film director Anthony Mann; it will be interesting to see if Mann's emotional manipulation of images can be duplicated by this director if he decides to embark upon narrative filmmaking

Chimera lives up to its enigmatic title. There is a lot to belittle, yet, it's hard to get the beauty of this film out of your head. The more you think about it, the more you forget about disliking this film, concentrating more purely on the warmth the film successfully conveys. It might be best classified as a minor work from a potentially major artist.

G. H. Lavery  


Jack Huggins is Mr. Nobody in Lyn Wright's film about elderly abuse

Lyn Wright's

The Elderly at Risk

Mr. Nobody and A House Divided are the first two films in Lyn Wright's trilogy about the abuse of the elderly produced by the National Film Board. As North America grows, and as the baby boomers grapple with their own aging and dying parents, the elderly are emerging from the long shadows of the North American youth culture.

Mr. Nobody is Jack Huggins, a recluse and eccentric. We first see him slowly hobbling up a steep concrete sidewalk. It's a long walk as he moves through patches of sun and shade. He advances towards us framed on one side by lush greenery and a flower bed; on the other by an endless row of cars parked against the curb. Finally, he turns to take his last few steps, the most difficult ones, to the front door of his home.

Jack Huggins' life has been difficult, much like the walk we just witnessed. After many years of caring for his aging and ailing parents, Jack is on his own, ready for some relief. Instead he is faced with a barrage of well-meaning but misplaced intervention for refusing to conform to our notion of 'the golden years.' Jack has a hobby. He collects things. He spends hours roaming the city streets and parks searching for discarded treasures. He does this in spite of warnings by nurses and doctors that he must stay off his swollen and infected feet. He rescues abandoned cats and kittens. He also rescues discarded junk: old radios, TV sets and other electrical appliances.

He collects much more than he can deal with. His home becomes a storehouse packed with boarded items from bottles and papers to television sets and pieces of wood. Neighbours concerned about the fire and health hazards call in the Health Department. Jack is slapped with cleanup orders he can't or won't comply with. Finally, he is shipped off to a hospital where he is forcibly sedated and certified incompetent. To top it all off, his estate is taken over by the Public Trustee.

"I never owed a cent," Jack protests, "and now I'm being treated like Mr. Nobody. Just Mr. Nobody out on the street."

The film raises interesting questions about public care. To what extent does society have the...
responsibility or the right to intervene when an individual neglects his or her own welfare? How does one determine neglect and who does the determining?

If the film can't answer those questions, at least it opens a door for us into the world of the elderly. By the end we know that Jack is a treasure - a quietly committed character with a refreshingly independent spirit.

Jack, without family support, desperately found an ally in Senior Link, a neighborhood organization which arranged a lawyer from the Advocacy Centre to go to bat for him.

For the elderly in A House Divided, the family was the problem. The film tells four stories of elderly abuse within the family. In the first, the distinction between the abuser and the abused becomes blurred. A long-suffering 65-year-old daughter 'gets along' for many years with her aging mother whom she loves dearly and has taken into her home. The relationship changes when the caretaker is pushed beyond the limits of her endurance. Love turns to hate and outside help is necessary to bring some balance back into the family.

Financial abuse is the topic of the second episode. The father, completely disabled after a severe stroke, survives only because of the constant care of his wife. Their children convince them they should pool their life savings and buy a large house where they can all live together. When the diverging needs of the two families bring the situation to a crisis, the financial arrangement they have entered tears the family apart. The older couple are not allowed to go their separate way because of the son-in-law's intransigence. What starts as a dispute over food becomes a monster. Unfortunately, we never see the end.


Vancouver was treated to a curated showcase featuring one program of films and another of videos.

Titled 'In Abeyance' - meaning, in the absence of - and organized thematically around this concept, the programs were put together by Mara Insel (film) and Paul Wong (video). And although the two curators each interpreted the concept slightly differently, the essential aim of each seems to have been to give a presence to otherwise marginalized voices.

The film program featured 12 films, three of which were excerpts from longer works, and was described generally as being 'important questions about the representation of an experience of loss, alienation or social tragedy.' Janis Lundman's L'Anse Ano operates very effectively within this context.

This eight-minute film successfully conveys the horrific story of the 1980 Semiahmoo Indian millings in which members of the El Salvadoran army massacred the inhabitants of a refugee camp. As the narrative becomes more obscure with details, the juxtaposition of the past who imagery, devoid of people, assumes a kind of unanticipated grotesqueness and reflects the lack of photographic documentation of the incident.

Justin Hall's Our Rafaths, described as 'a cultural memory of St. John's, Newfoundland... depicting the original architectural monuments of the city.' Without people, but attempts and achieves a much different effect. This film was the most powerful in the program and best exemplifies some of the strongest qualities of the work shown - the use of tonalities and textures. On Rafaths also made good use of the relationship between sound and image with its appropriate, music soundtrack, and the emotional attachment of the film never deteriorated into sentimentality.

CINEMA CANADA

IFVA Film and Video Showcase

venues for the work of independent film and video producers are generally scarce in this country, especially compared to those available to more commercial productions. But during this year's Independent Film and Video Alliance annual general meeting in early June.

IFVA Film and Video Showcase

Punk hairstyle 'statement' from Joseph Sarahan's Rise and Fall of an Empire

Calvin Wharton •

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