

Art Theater Co-op to feature one-week festival of recent cutting-edge documentaries

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Urbana, IL—One week after its re-opening as the first cooperatively-owned art-house cinema in the country, the Art Theater Co-op is showing its commitment to acclaimed, cutting-edge cinema. From September 14-20, the theater will host the Dangerous Docs Festival, featuring five of this year's most highly acclaimed documentaries: *This is Not A Film*, *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*, *5 Broken Cameras*, *The Imposter*, and *The Island President*. Normal ticket prices apply, although the theater is selling festival passes as well in person at the theater.

The Art Theater Co-op is located at 126 W. Church St. in downtown Urbana. The theater's website is www.theCUart.com and you can also visit them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TheArtTheater.

Films were selected based on two criteria: critical response and challenging content. While many documentaries rely on a "talking heads" format – experts talking at the camera – these documentaries are all acclaimed works of cinematic art while offering challenging content. McCann suggests seeing more than one film in the festival: "There's a number of connections between the films: similar themes or predicaments or artistic questions."

The films are all acclaimed, each receiving at least a 95% "fresh" rating on critic aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes. "People hear the word 'documentary' and they reach for their pillow, and that's something I want to fix," McCann opined. "That response happens because a lot of documentaries are actually bad: they don't give you anything to look at, anything to feel. They don't feel like films, they feel like lectures." With the Dangerous Docs Festival, McCann hopes to change that reality by highlighting the documentary's potential for being just as engaging and pleasurable as normal movies.

Featured films include:

From Iran, *This Is Not a Film*. Originally released to the festival circuit in 2011, *This is Not a Film* is directed by Jafar Panahi, a successful Iranian filmmaker who recently received a six-year prison sentence and ban on making films or writing screenplays for 20 years. In defiance of the ban, Panahi recorded a video diary of himself under house arrest, making a work of art that asks about the boundaries of art under serious risk. The movie was finished, then put on a flash drive and smuggled out of Panahi's residence in a cake, after which it was delivered to Cannes Film Festival. Since then, the film has met with universal acclaim. The film currently has a 100% rating on Rotten Tomatoes (a critic aggregator site). *The San Francisco Chronicle* calls the film "an act of political defiance, a moving personal document and a meditation on what film is and can be."

Another film in the festival, *5 Broken Cameras*, shares an interest in filming as a political act. *5 Broken Cameras* started when Palestinian farmer Emad Burnat bought a camcorder to film his fourth son being born. Over the next five years, he ended up documenting—and participating in—nonviolent resistance in his home town of Bil'in. The film's title refers to the destruction of each new camera Burnat purchases. The film was completed with the assistance of Burnat's close friend, the Israeli filmmaker

Guy Davidi. "I hope the film generates empathy and understanding," McCann hopes, "but conversation about the film and our responses to it will be important toward that end."

Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry, directed by Alison Klayman, is a look at the hilarious and committed Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei as he works on public art projects and battles Chinese authorities. The most obviously fun film at the festival, audiences will get to know Weiwei, whose public persona is part dissident, part rascal.

The Island President watches then-President of the Maldives Mohamad Nasheed as he battles climate change and confronts the global power structure. Climate change is affecting the Maldives more obviously than most: the tiny island nation is losing more of its land to the rising seas every year. In one memorable scene, President Nasheed holds a press conference underwater to draw attention to his cause. The film contains a mixture of gorgeous cinematography (primarily located on the Maldives) and political observation. "There are a lot of documentaries about climate change," McCann admits, "but this is a special one, due to Nasheed's story and the gorgeous cinematography." Sometimes called the "Mandela of the Maldives," Nasheed's story, which includes years of imprisonment, is an inspiring model of commitment to doing what's right, a theme that crops up through the Dangerous Docs Festival.

The last film included is a bit different, McCann admits. *The Imposter*, directed by British director Bart Layton, is a gripping thriller about Frederic Bourdin, who impersonated a missing Texas boy in the 1990s. "It's definitely creepier than the other films, more like a psychological thriller, so I put it in the Late Night slot," he said, referring to the Art Theater's well-received Late Night movie slot, generally reserved for sci-fi and horror films and cult classics. But *The Imposter* has received the same glowing press as the rest of the films: the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote that "Layton's dazzling film is an exciting, edge-of-your-seat experience superior to any Hollywood mystery you're likely to see for a long time."

The Art Theater Co-op is selling passes to the festival: \$35 is a full-price adult pass; there are discounts for seniors (\$25) and students (\$30). The pass gets you into all films, but normal ticket prices apply, too, for those who won't see the whole line-up.

In the past few years, the Art Theater has grown its audiences and seen its business steadily grow. With the recent transition to a co-operative organization, the co-op has high expectations for the theater and its programming. "We're known as the place to see a movie in central Illinois," McCann says, "And most of that is programming. We offer high-quality films that people can't see anywhere else. And sometimes it's stuff no-one's heard of, but they trust the Art to bring in top-notch programming."

The Dangerous Docs Festival starts September 14. Please contact McCann with any questions at the.art.theater@gmail.com .