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Discovering Macaulay Discovering Itself

🕒 04/11/2016 04:22 pm ET | Updated Apr 12, 2016



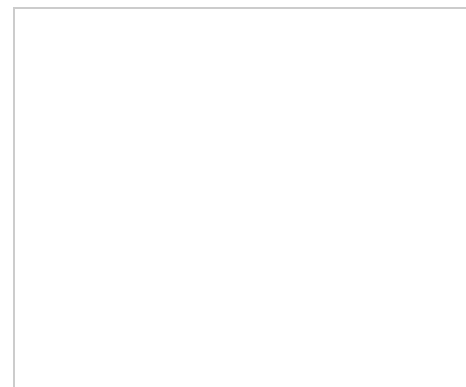
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 **The CUNY Film Festival at Macaulay Honors College**
The official film festival of CUNY's 24 college campuses

By Thomas Dyja

I have never directed a film, nor have I ever written, produced, starred in, lit or done the make up for one, so my qualifications for being a judge at this year's Macaulay Honors College Film Festival come down to having seen a lot of them in the last fifty or so years, starting with the first movie I have any conscious memory of watching—"A Taste of Honey," an English kitchen sink drama starring Rita Tushingham as Jo, a girl pregnant with the child of a black sailor who moves in with a gay design student. I was six at the time, home sick from Sister Bonita's class, and I found it all a fascinating if, needless to say, entirely puzzling entry into the grown up world, but also a wonderfully pure one. I had only the vaguest hints about what race and sexuality were all about then, leaving me to experience Jo's fear and Geoffrey's betrayal and their affection for each other on only the most essential human terms; they were all just people and I really really just wanted them all to be happy.

Mulling it all over through my fried bologna sandwich afterwards, I had no clue what to do with everything I'd just seen, but from that point on, movies were to me a vehicle for discovering people beyond the Northwest Side of Chicago; characters at first—Citizen Kane and Bonnie and Clyde; Peter Lorre in "M" (truly my parents paid no attention to what I watched)—but then more and more discovering the people behind the camera through their work, understanding that what I was seeing was a created vision of the world. Movies were now a way to climb inside someone else's brain and surrender to what they saw; at its best, an



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intimate, consuming, and thrilling experience.

The films at Macaulay certainly delivered on all three. But what made it most fascinating and ultimately joyful was the fact that all those brains I was climbing into, the people I was discovering, were young—students and recent alumni of CUNY’s honor college. And their movies gave me the chance to watch them in the process of discovering themselves. Polished works of art have their own well-traveled pleasures, but these were off-road adventures; bumpy, euphoric journeys of exploration by people just learning what they think of the world, and just learning how to express that. There were grand expeditions about life and death like “Unfinished,” a lush, ambitious drama about a young man coming to terms with his looming death, and “Those Below,” which followed another young man to the mine fields of Laos to find his father, and his father’s secret. But there were intimate pains and pleasures too; “J1” let us feel the loneliness of a Russian émigré adrift in New York, while the little gem “Makeshift Golf Course” showcased a Bronx man who creates his own improvised golf courses in the city’s forgotten green spaces. Films like “Rain,” “Anemone” and “Black Star” let us see emerging artists thinking, taking risks, and solving how to use the forms and tools of cinema and storytelling and visual art to make characters who live before and after the camera is on. “Transcriber,” one of my favorites, created secrets and stories and a nice final twist all within a suffocating science fiction world, part Borges, part “Twilight Zone.”

What all these young filmmakers shared, though, was honesty, and that’s what made me walk out smiling. They all seemed to share that innocent belief I had when I was six that movies are a way to discover people, and they believed that sincerely, without tricks, no matter what level of skill they’d reached as filmmakers. Macaulay and everyone involved with film at CUNY should be extremely proud.....

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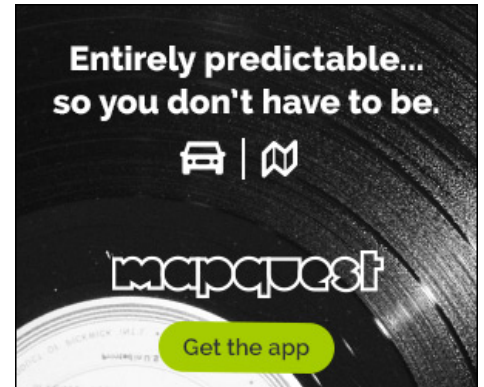
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