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Small But Mighty Telluride Film Festival Brings Out Best Of The Best

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

By Howie Movshovitz

The Telluride Film Festival is small. It runs only three and a half days over Labor Day weekend, tucked into that box canyon. Yet many people consider it the best film festival in the world.



The Telluride Film Festival takes place over Labor Day weekend.
Telluride Film Festival

The festival makes smart selections of new films. It shows remarkable restorations of older films and for the most part the audience at Telluride is there to appreciate good work, whether old or new, and without the distractions of celebrity events, awards or most of the other nonsense that plagues many

festivals.

Even so, to leave Telluride thinking about seven legitimate masterpieces is beyond wonderful. If I put the superlatives aside, film after film came along to provoke talk about film, about the world and human life, amazement at some of the best work there and delightful argument about films that were not universally loved.

For me â?? and no one can see even half of the films in the schedule â?? the best were: Guillermo del Toroâ??s *The Shape of Water*; Paul Schraderâ??s *First Reformed*; *The Insult* by Lebanese filmmaker Ziad Doueiri; *Faces Places* by the 89-year-old French master Agnes Varda and the 33-year-old photographer JR; the banned Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulofâ??s *A Man of Integrity*; *Wonderstruck* by Todd Haynes; and *Human Flow*, a documentary about refugees by the wonderful Chinese activist artist Ai Weiwei. As the films rolled out during the festival, it was hard to believe that so many could be so good, but thereâ??s only time to talk about a couple of them this week.



Credit Pouyan Behagh / Courtesy of Telluride Film Festival

In Mohammed Rasoulofâ??s *A Man of Integrity*, Reza raises fish on his farm. He doesnâ??t know it yet, but someone with local power wants his land. Suddenly his irrigation water is cut off and then his pond is poisoned. A lot of Iranian film works on this incremental growth of trouble. Bit by bit, the situation grows worse. Complications pile up one at a time. Eventually Rezaâ??s wife, a school teacher, gets involved, and the question is how long can this family hold out against the constant and ever-increasing pressure of corruption, before they either give up and abandon their farm, or they join the matrix of corruption that seems to cover the entire country.

A Man of Integrity pictures a society dominated by illegitimate authority and thorough religious hypocrisy. Rezaâ??s struggle grows exhausting and there is constant temptation to give into it, to go along and to get by.

Itâ??s also a mystery how Mohammad Rasoulof managed to shoot the film. His movies cannot be seen in Iran. At times, it seems he is at least allowed to shoot these films that can never be seen in his own country. At other times you wonder how great is the danger he faces simply by having a camera in his country.



Credit Human Flow / Ai Weiwei

The miracle of *Human Flow* â?? and I mean miracle â?? is that while Ai Weiwei films thousands and thousands of refugees all over the world â?? those coming to Europe from the Middle East and Africa, as well as Rohingya fleeing Burma, Latin Americans entering America and others â?? these human beings never feel like a shapeless mass. The film makes you understand that the word refugee distracts us from the actuality of what is happening.

Ai Weiwei shows masses of people, but then close up portraits of individuals. Refugees are children, women and men, individual human beings with their personal histories and existence. Even in the most ghastly camps wracked by the depression of dislocation and other miseries, kids manage to find something to play with, something to keep themselves human. Itâ??s a devastating documentary, but itâ??s at the same time alive with the realization that every human being matters; abstractions and group nouns fall short.

And then there is Wonderstruck, which left viewers sobbing at the sight of such beauty.

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Category

1. television

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