

Short Takes

By Tom McSorley



The Stone of Folly

2002 9m prod Sweet Thing Productions, p/d Jesse Rosensweet, sc Jesse Rosensweet, Alastair Dickson, ph Jeremy Benning.

Jesse Rosensweet's assured debut animated film is a story about having rocks in your head. (Where does that expression come from, anyway?) It's also, atrociously and hilariously, about how to get them out. Inspired by the Hieronymus Bosch painting, *Removal of the Stone of Folly*, it's the story of a doctor in a decidedly dank medieval hospital who is in the process of, er, surgically removing a stone from the skull of an unfortunate patient. The methods are crude and, surprisingly enough, very effective. So, too, is the method of disposal of the stone once it has been extracted. Rosensweet's fictional world is populated by ingeniously devised animated figures, is a gorgeously rendered palette of greys, blacks and reds, and his *mise en scène* in miniature is worthy of comparisons to the imaginative dystopian fantasies of Terry Gilliam. While its music is a bit ostentatious and its meaning more than a tad obscure, *The Stone of Folly* is an impressive and inventive piece of puppet animation. Winner of a Jury Prize at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival (indeed, awarded by a jury that included no less than the luminary likes of Martin Scorsese, Tilda Swinton and Abbas Kiarostami), *The Stone of Folly* also rather riotously announces the arrival of a substantial new talent to the top ranks of contemporary Canadian animation.

Short Hymn_Silent War 03

2002 24m prod Canadian Film Centre, p Sandy Reimar, Kate Kung, d Charles Officer, sc Charles Officer, Tomai Kobayashi.

Told almost entirely without dialogue, *Short Hymn_Silent War 03* is an emotionally charged tale of the fateful intersection of two black families devastated by an inadvertent and fatal shooting in an apartment-block stairwell. The victim's mother, his widow and baby, and the mother of the young man who fired the gun all mourn and ponder their loss, seeking a way to come to terms with the seemingly hopeless cycle of violence in their community. Although it does dramatically register a serious social

concern, this film is not merely another exposé on the problems of blacks in urban Canada. It is much more. Officer plays with narrative chronology and structure, making temporal braids out of the interconnectedness of past, present and future in startling ways. While the incorporation of home movies of kids pretending to shoot one another is denotative and redundant, Officer's other stylistic strategies (such as interior monologues of the mothers and the deceased) are effective and impressive. Revealing cinematic influences as diverse as Ingmar Bergman and Clement Virgo, *Short Hymn_Silent War 03* is a work of considerable accomplishment and originality. Especially compelling is the film's defiant denouement, which contains both anguish and hope, and a brave return to that broken world where all this sadness began.

Flux

2002 8m prod NFB, p Marcy Page, d/an/sc Chris Hinton, ed Hannele Halm, mus Lance Neveu.

Are male animators at the NFB having mid-life crises? Given the anxieties evident about aging and parenting in recent films from the storied Film Board, such as Cordell Barker's *Strange Invaders* and now Chris Hinton's *Flux*, it looks like the terror of time's finitude is a cold stare coming out of their animation stands. In Hinton's latest, we witness the passages of two generations of a squiggly family's life in just under eight minutes: childhood and parenthood, adolescence and leaving home, death and burial, and a return to parenthood and childhood by the next generation. Rendered in a kinetic stylistic combination of childlike line drawings and splotches, not unlike the work of Paul Driessen, Hinton's energetic and amusing work expresses the awkwardness, fear and odd joys of life's temporary and chaotic journey. It's not a new idea, certainly, but it is timeless. Of course, we all know that life is hard and then you die. As *Flux* ably demonstrates, however, that doesn't mean you can't go down swinging. For its anarchic and arresting animation style, *Flux* captured the award for Best Narrative Short Film under 40 Minutes at the recent Ottawa 2002 International Animation Festival.