

LETTERS FROM HOME

Directed and produced by Mike Hoolboom. 1996. 15 min. 16mm.

Based on a 1988 speech given by AIDS activist Vito Russo, *Letters From Home*, Mike Hoolboom offers an achingly personal report from the frustrating, ferocious and too often funereal front of the war on AIDS. Using stock footage in fresh contexts, sound snatches from Leonard Cohen and Billie Holliday and testimonials about life with the HIV-virus (including one by Hoolboom himself which exposes the hypocrisies of response to this affliction), *Letters From Home* is an impassioned investigation of the politics of disease. It is also something more. If a full comprehension of life includes the recognition of death's constant presence, even in our death-denying culture, *Letters From Home* offers a cogent, courageous rendering of this notion. It also demonstrates again that the penetrating and poignant films of Mike Hoolboom comprise one of Canadian cinema's most compelling illuminations of those ephemeral outlines of perception we call life and death.

NOT KOKURA

Written and directed by Steven Haworth. Produced by Steven Haworth, Catherine Beilhartz and Byron Lamarque. 1996. 9 min. 16mm.

On August 10, 1945, the skies were cloudy over the Japanese city of Kokura, the second city targeted for nuclear attack after Hiroshima. As a result of this cloud cover, the alternate target, Nagasaki, was chosen instead and annihilated. Although atomic bomb imagery never ceases to be viscerally terrifying, its overuse as a metaphor has rendered it rather banal. Not here, not in this film. Vancouver-based Steven Haworth's *Not Kokura* is an intelligent and harrowing re-visitation to the appalling dawn of the nuclear age. Framing his multi-layered evocation of post-atomic consciousness of the mid-20th century with the haunted voice over of Manhattan Project leader, Robert Oppenheimer, Haworth reconstructs famous sequences from aftermath footage of Nagasaki using actors who adopt the same positions as victims in the original footage. The scars are unseen now, suggests this bold section of the film, and are carried around in all of us. Haworth displays a visual authority and inventive approach to a subject too often trivialized by earnest seriousness or, more often, by the fetishization of apocalypse.

LODELA

Written and directed by Philippe Baylaucq. Produced by Ioland Cadrin-Rossignol for the National Film Board of Canada. 1996. 26 min. 35mm.

Even while perilously close to extinction, the NFB still delivers fine films. Not since Norman McLaren's *Pas de deux* has Canadian cinema rendered as brilliant a fusion of dance and film as Philippe Baylaucq's spectacular *Lodela*. Inspired by the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the oneiric obsessions of Carl Jung, and the art works of Willima Blake, *Lodela* is no New Age, nebulous invocation of a crystal-induced spiritual nirvana. Shot on both 35mm and video, it is a stark, high contrast, black-and-white examination of the intersections to life and



Photo courtesy of the NFB

Philippe Baylaucq's *LODELA*

death, male and female, matter and spirit. This is a rigorous, tough-minded film about the struggle of opposites. The dancers, the lithe and explosive duo of José Navas and Chi Long, are separated, integrated and separated again through the film's obscure and affecting narrative of life and death (the title is inspired by the French phrase, *l'au-dela*, meaning the hereafter). Beyond this extraordinary merging of the two art forms based on motion, Baylaucq has created a film which, like all great cinema, is a striking negotiation between darkness and light.

ONE DAY I STOOD STILL

Written and directed by Valerie Buhagiar. Producer by Valerie Buhagiar and Rudolf Blahacek for Out of the Blue Productions. 1996. 11 min. 35mm.

In addition to her impressive work as an actor in the films of Bruce McDonald (*Roadkill* and *Higway 61*), Valerie Buhagiar has demonstrated her skill as a filmmaker. In her short, *The Passion of Rita Camilleri*, the tale of a young girl and her test of faith, Buhagiar offered ample evidence of her skill directing actors. *One Day I Stood Still* is something else entirely. Within its allusive narrative strands of feminine fantasy and power, this film is a poetic, romantic and engaging exploration of a troubled figure stranded between nature and civilization. As a woman stands at a subway stop, she dreams of arresting time and moving through it more gracefully. While the film's sense of magic is occasionally a bit forced (particularly in a scene with a married couple on fiery stilts), *One Day I Stood Still* is nonetheless an accomplished, absorbing work by a talented filmmaker. ■