

## Real reels

>> **Great non-fiction filmmaking at the eighth annual Rencontres internationales du documentaire**

by **MATTHEW HAYS**

This year marks the eighth edition of Montreal's growing documentary film fest, RIDM. This important showcase for non-fiction filmmaking keeps getting better, with organizers scheduling a broad range of documentaries from around the world. At a time when feature-length documentaries are gaining greater traction at the multiplex, RIDM curators remind us that lower-budget and short docs are every bit as vital. The RIDM will also be hosting a number of tributes and master classes as well.



**UGANDA'S UNWANTED: Lost Children**

Showing us a slice of Iraq we're not seeing on the nightly news is *The Tenth Planet: A Single Life in Baghdad*. Directors Melis Birder and Simon Kerr focus on one young woman, Kawkab, and her dreams and hopes for the future. There are fascinating details here, as well as Kawkab's statement of support for Saddam. From another war-torn part of the world comes *Lost Children*. Here, Ali Samadi Ahadi and Oliver Stoltz point their camera towards the children of northern Uganda. Many have been abducted and forced to be part of a militia, tortured and abused into states of submission. Some of these children manage to flee their persecutors, and this film documents their attempts to be rehabilitated after surviving their severe traumas.

### Suicide solutions

An unusual take on Middle Eastern conflict arrives with the highly praised NFB production *Zero Degrees of Separation*. Filmmaker Elle Flanders examines the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the prism of two queer



couples, one gay, one lesbian, each couple mixed (one Israeli, one Palestinian). The director illuminates the unique struggle each couple faces, loving across such massive cultural and political divides. As one lesbian states in the movie, "George Orwell, in his wildest dreams, could not imagine a place like this." Another film from this region is Anat Zuria's *Sentenced to Marriage*, a doc about Israel's archaic laws surrounding divorce. There is no civil marriage in Israel, nor civil divorce—instead, women wishing to end their marriages are beholden to fundamentalist courts that the women profiled in this film see as hopelessly misogynist. Zuria profiles several women who are desperate to escape the men they once wed.



### **TAKING-HIS-OWN-LIFE STORY: The Self-Made Man**

There appears to be a burgeoning sub-genre of documentary films that revolve around suicide, with new entries screening at this year's RIDM. Fernand Melgar will screen his *Exit*, a doc about Switzerland's incredibly liberal views on assisted suicide. There, ending your life as you see fit is entirely the choice of the individual, and groups like "Exit" help people do just that, if they are facing a degenerative illness or severe disability. In *The Self-Made Man*, filmmaker Susan Stern raids her family home-movie vault to explore the suicide of her father, Bob Stern. At 77, he learned he had operable cancer, but opted instead to take his own life after leaving a videotaped testimonial as to why he did so.

## **Mohawks, masters and materialism**

Filmmaker Tracey Deer delves into what it's like to grow up Mohawk with the NFB film *Mohawk Girls*, with profiles of three teen girls expressing their thoughts and experiences about growing up aboriginal. Helene Klodawsky recreates the life of slain Sri Lankan human rights activist Dr. Rajani Thiranagama in *No More Tears Sister: Anatomy of Hope and Betrayal*. A doctor, mother and tireless activist, Thiranagama was murdered at age 35 after years of struggle against tyranny and oppression in her native Sri Lanka.

According to a study done by the London School of Economics, the most contented group of people on this planet live in one of the poorest nations, Bangladesh. With *The Happiest People in the World*, Bengali



filmmaker Shaheen Dill-Riaz decided to return to his native country to explore this overwhelming conundrum: How is it that a country where people are forced to live in squalid conditions somehow also sustains a population that professes to be happy? A documentary that forces the audience to rethink notions of personal happiness, material wealth and human values.



**SLICE OF IRAQ: The Tenth Planet:  
A Single Life in Baghdad**

As well as screenings, the RIDM is presenting a series of forums on issues ranging from right-to-die campaigns, aboriginal struggles in filmmaking, the crisis in Haiti and the ethics and aesthetics of editing. RIDM will hold several master classes in which experts will impart their extensive knowledge of their filmmaking practice, including Claudio Paziienza (Ya Rayah, Mic Mac), Velcrow Ripper (Lanterns of Memory, Is This Your House?) and Carole Laganière (Vues de l'Est, Country).

**RIDM screens until Sunday, Nov. 20. Tickets and info: 844-2172  
or [www.ridm.qc.ca](http://www.ridm.qc.ca)**

[>> Movie Listings](#)

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