Acropolis Cinema Presents

Isiah Medina’s

88:88

March 11, 2016 ~ 7:30 & 9:00PM ~ Echo Park Film Center
ABOUT THE FILM

One of the most rapturously acclaimed and hotly debated experimental films in recent years, Isiah Medina’s incendiary debut fearlessly pushes the aesthetic constraints of the cinematic medium by reengaging the nascent potential of its fundamental tools. A feature-length montage film in which untold hours of footage of the director’s family and friends is stitched into a panorama of fleeting images, sounds, and sensations, 88:88 refines the Canadian director’s early experiments with audio-visual disunity by expanding its coordinates beyond the confines of the impressionistic and into the realm of the purely visceral. As playful as it is provocative, the film confronts issues of poverty and racial injustice with a formal arsenal radical enough to reframe such matters as points of philosophical integrity as much as moral responsibility. Fresh off its premiere in Locarno and subsequent stops at the Toronto and New York film festivals, 88:88 arrives in Los Angeles for a pair of screenings sure to incite and inspire in equal measure.

65 minutes // Canada // 2015

STATEMENT FROM DIRECTOR ISIAH MEDINA

The title of the film comes from not being able to pay your bills, and when your electricity, water, heat, etc, gets cut. Later when you are able to pay again, the digital clocks in your home flash 88:88, --:--, -. There is no given, and even if when in poverty you can say "I have nothing", to be completely clear, this nothing is itself not given. So poor, even nothing itself is not given. So we need a new name of nothing. Our own name, to be able to begin. And that name for us was 88:88.

It is important for us to link poverty to the beginning of thinking. To be nothing, to count as nothing in the world is enough; in fact the great philosophical systems of the Western tradition begin with nothing, from Plato/Socrates ("All I know, is I know [the] Nothing), to Descartes' subject naming the nothing that it thinks, to Hegel's Logic beginning with being and nothing.

To gain traction, we need a moment of subtraction, and from the name we chose, we must rigorously follow the consequences. With nothing, we can begin thinking. If philosophy thinks the cut of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True, we try to find it in the world, in the frames of politics, art, and science, with love as a category that is a moment of reflection, cutting diagonally through the three.

To put it in a way that's much too abbreviated: the movie begins black, then with the only thing I would know in that I'm making a movie, I'm shooting. The next frame is my friend watching that exact frame on a smaller screen. The change of size from frame to frame allows us to begin to see a diagonal, like the squares of the 8 to a larger square, and then we cut to a diagonal produced by Anne looking at me when I was looking at her through my phone. From this diagonal we go to the diagonal of the Lumière brothers, a train, and without a future, my
friend Kieran improvises on fatalism and suspension. We have to match this improvisation with Anne explaining a math proof to me. Which is then opposed by Erik's poem. And we follow each consequence.

If philosophy begins with Plato, with mathematics' interruption of the poem, and we then see that philosophy is conditioned by what is outside of it, and it is not only art and science, but also love and politics, then this nothing is a situated nothing. In a cut we present nothing. The cinema allows us to invent a space where the four conditions can interact and show us a new vision of what we are living.

And it is lived. There is no fiction in the movie, only the present. This all happened to us as it was being filmed. When we meet on our free time, all we know is this: we will make cinema together. There is some 'staging': perhaps only the handcuff scene cutting to P or non-P, and a masked woman. But the handcuff scene deals with negation, and the masked woman has her hands up wearing an armband of an invented political group. But what is more documentary than negation, what's more documentary than political invention? Than intervention? We need to document intervention.

If someone writes a poem, maybe that is fiction, but I doubt it. I love everyone in the movie, people love each other in the movie, and that's documentary. To put it simply: we exist, we thought with each other, and organized happenings of love, politics, science, and art, as it intersected our lives. We organized it around the cut. The cut presents the present. We cut across represented identity to see a shared present. In this disciplined control of time, we can always return to our thoughts.

The point is we find reconciliation. Yes, we accept the suspension, the cut, of 88:88—it is never a question of going back to the cycle of regular time. It's not simply about finding representation of our identity inside a cycle. Infinity is not this never ending cycle but the very cut that ends repetition, ends what is not infinite, but (inde)finite. We don't immediately change something. The present, the presentation of the present is the opposite of immediacy. We reconcile ourselves with the suspension of 88:88, with poverty, etc. Change is when the very form of change changes. We find what is outside us, this 88:88, this externality, is already an answer; we weren't asking the proper question. With the proper question, the proper name of nothing, the immanent normativity is decided, there's a decision, and we begin, and follow by rationally cutting our true lives together.

Normativity is not just in our minds. It's "out there"—the 88:88 wasn't wrong only in regards to my own life in the world, the clock was "wrong" with regards to itself, this counting of time. It's not that our ideas are wrong and reality is right, and our ideas do not fit; sometimes reality is wrong about itself, and doesn't fit its own idea of itself. 88:88 is a flash of that, a name of that, and we just follow the consequences, point by point.
REFLECTIONS

“While the cinema of realism prides itself on taking “show, don’t tell” to its limit, this maxim nonetheless conceives of the world in the terms of a fixed narrative waiting for one of two potential expressions (i.e., “showing” and “telling”); narrative is figured as documentation, and it niggles in the way that sublimated objects tend to. Medina’s first feature, 88:88, is, among many other things, an act of criticism regarding this tradition of quality. His is instead a cinema of the cut, of difference, of reconsidering every assumption of more than a century’s worth of filmmaking. In practice, this means that each relationship available to the cinema must be rebuilt; nothing will be taken for granted within the frame. If there are narratives, they will not be simply given and accepted; they will appear as the product of careful study of the relations of the world, which Medina examines and expresses through the logic of rhythms...This is work concerned with cinematic thinking as the basis for everyday philosophy. It is thinking done under the signs of Epictetus and Spinoza; it is cinema done under no sign but its own.” –Phil Coldiron, Cinema Scope

“James Benning’s movies pose an idealistic challenge, a spur to unattainably pure observation...Harking back to the actualities of early, pre-story cinema, it extends their direct gaze—exploring the properties of both the world and our perceptual apparatus, typically with a static camera—into increasingly extreme duration.” –Nick Bradshaw, Sight & Sound

Upcoming Events

April 12, 2016 ~ James Benning’s measuring change
The new film from one of the icons of experimental cinema.

Time: 7:30pm
Location: Art Share L.A.
Address: 801 E. 4th Pl, Los Angeles, CA. 90013

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