Documentary
Educational Resources

New Releases | SPRING 2009

Living at Risk: The Story of a Nicaraguan Family
by Alfred Guzzetti, Susan Meiselas, Richard P. Rogers
color, 59 min, 1985

Living at Risk takes us inside Sandinista Nicaragua five years after the revolution that overthrew the dictator Anastasio Somoza. Subtitled "The Story of a Nicaraguan Family," the film centers on five brothers and sisters who commit themselves to remaining and working with the revolutionary government in various professional capacities: medicine, community organizing, agricultural reform. Set at the height of the war waged against the Sandinistas by the American-backed counter-revolutionary army, this valuable documentary provides a dimension lacking in other films about Nicaragua: a sense of the fabric of everyday life, of the ways in which perpetual danger and tension are incorporated into the ongoing vital routines of doing one's job, raising one's family, going to market, finding entertainment, treating the sick, feeding the hungry. Level-headed and deeply felt, *Living at Risk* conveys above all an impression of quiet, believable heroism, most vividly in a dramatic sequence of a doctor delivering a vaccine to a remote village where his predecessor was recently executed by the counter-revolutionaries.

Ngat is Dead: Studying Mortuary Traditions
by Christian Suhr and Ton Otto
co-directed by Steffen Dalsgaard
color, 59 min, 2009

What do anthropologists mean when they claim to study the cultural traditions of others by participating in them? This film follows the Dutch anthropologist Ton Otto, who has been adopted by a family on Baluan Island in Papua New Guinea. Due to the death of his adoptive father, he has to take part in mortuary ceremonies, whose form and content are passionately contested by different groups of relatives. Through prolonged negotiations, Ton learns how Baluan people perform and transform their traditions and not least what role he plays himself. The film is part of long-term field research, in which filmmaking has become integrated in the ongoing dialogue and exchange between the islanders and the anthropologist.

Returned: Child Soldiers of Nepal's Maoist Army
by Robert Koenig
co-written by Brandon Kohrt
color, 30 min, 2008

Imagine being forced to leave your family and fight in war you don't understand - and you are only eleven years old. Sadly, for many of these child soldiers in Nepal this is a reality and the peace process has not solved their problems. These children quickly discovered that the return home is even more painful than the experience of war. *Returned* follows several Nepali child soldiers including Asha, a young Nepali girl, who was sent home from the Maoists' People's Liberation Army after the ceasefire. Asha joined the Maoist army when she was 14-years-old. For this young low caste girl, joining the Maoists was a pathway to a future with education and employment. Despite two years on the frontlines, her biggest concern was what would await her when she returned home - would she turn to commercial sex work, become a domestic slave, or would she be banished from her home and forced into marriage? *Returned* weaves the voices of Nepal's child soldiers, organizations working to help them, and military leader's from Nepal's opposing forces, who answer challenging questions about their use of childen as warriors.

For Our Street Family
by Jennifer Wolowic
color, 34 min, 2008

Revolving around a teen drop-in center called Planet Youth, the film explores the pain of stereotypes, the importance of peer support, and the ambivalence towards identity experience by a group of First Nations teens in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Begun as a participatory photography group self-portrait, the film expands to capture the youths' difficult challenges with racism, abuse, and foster care, while exploring the teens' resilient playfulness and why they are a "street family." *For Our Street Family* provides the opportunity to finally listen to a group parented by bureaucracy and ignored by the public.

Yindabad
by Mariano Agudo & Roi Guitián
color, 55 min, 2007

The Narmada Valley Development Project was created during the late 1960s to construct 30 large scale dams, 135 medium-size dams and more than 3000 small-size dams in the Narmada River in central India. Since its inception, over 2.5 million people have been displaced by the flooding of forests, cultivatable land, and villages. The affected people, the local Adivasis, have struggled against this project for 20 years, fighting for fair compensation and the relocation of their homes. As the cement walls stop the water that used to bring them life, the river floods these indigenous people for the sake of the city and development. Adivasi women have gained consciousness of the dimensions of the problem and while fighting for the conservation of their culture, they have become main characters in this unequal fight. *Yindabad* shows this struggle from their viewpoint: from the riverbank, where the danger of rising water is a constant threat to the relocation process, and from the slum of the Indian metropolis, where the fight continues, and poses an alternative solution to this destructive development scheme - local instead of global development, and self-management instead of government control. The situation in Narmada Valley is an example of one of the biggest wars of the 21st century: water management and control of natural resources.

Plastic Flowers Never Die
by Roxanne Varzi
color, 34 min, 2008

The Iran–Iraq War was the largest mobilization of the Iranian population, achieved primarily by producing and promoting a culture of martyrdom based on religious themes found in Shii Islam. Khomeini made it clear the war was a spiritual one that the people, and not a professional army, would fight. It would be a war of good against evil, of spirit against military might, where a human wave of believers would form a wall of defense against the Iraqis. Over 800,000 people died. As an Iranian-American who was born in Iran, anthropologist, writer and filmmaker Roxanne Varzi spent twelve years researching and writing about post-Revolution public culture in Iran and found that the war with Iraq was omnipresent. She spent a year speaking to ideologically driven mural painters, museum curators, war vets and other cultural producers alongside the secular youth who were meant to consume the culture created by the government. The result is an experimental documentary and meditation on the aftermath of the war, and especially the mourning after.

Three Art Makers
by Robert Gardner
color, 48 min, 2009

This special edition DVD combines three of Robert Gardner's films on artists at work, complimented by a 16 page full-color booklet containing photographs and personal reflections written by the filmmaker.

The Great Sail (10 min, 1966) - Alexander Calder's *La Grande Voile* was erected on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology campus in 1966 with the artist directing the work. As the spectacular steel forms of this monumental stabile rise, it is filmed with time lapse and verite photography. One can see that the structure owes its spare elegance to the precision of its design and constaruction. Calder remains absorbed in quiet concentra-tion as skeptical students and bemused bystanders observe the somewhat improbable event. This film has never before been available on DVD.

Dancing with Miklos (28 min, 1993) - While watching prolific Hungarian filmmaker Miklos Jancso make his political thriller, *The Blue Danube Waltz*, Robert Gardner begins to film. Jancso's style seeps through to the documentarian's factual eye to create more than a behind-the-scenes exploration; it's an insightful, eloquent, and entertaining tribute from one filmmaker to another.

Good to Pull (10 min, 2000) - This short video is about a collaboration between the artist Michael Mazur and his master printer, Robert Townsend, as they work on a suite of etchings drawn from the celebrated monotypes Mazur made for Dante's *Inferno*. The monotypes were published in an earlier collaboration between Mazur and Robert Pinsky, the poet and translator. The etchings will become part of a remarkable history of similar undertakings by such other illustrators as Botticelli, Blake, Doré, Lebrun and Phillips. As seen in the literary magazine AGNI #68.

They Turned Our Desert Into Fire
by Mark Brecke
color, 88 min, 2007

Reporting the devastation, forced displacement, and genocide in Darfur should be a story with daily coverage. Mere mention of the word "Darfur" should set off a passionate exchange, or at least the question, "What can be done?" Unfortunately, the people of Darfur struggle with a problem common to so many victimized by geo-political realities: how to overcome the willful indifference of powerful government and media interests who find their story unimportant or merely inconvenient. With images and first-hand accounts, filmmaker Mark Brecke shares his experience of the Darfur crisis with Amtrak train passengers journeying eastward on a three day trip to Washington D.C. Their reactions, interwoven with hard facts and expert opinion, raise the central question in *They Turned Our Desert Into Fire* - "Why does the public not understand the severity of this crisis and how can the world continue to do nothing?" In addition to the film and a slideshow of Brecke's photographs, this DVD also contains the short film *War as a Second Language* (27 min., 2002). Mark Brecke culled from 15 years of newsreels, documentaries,and raw footage of the Vietnam War to create an audio track which he then juxtaposed with moving and still images he shotin Vietnam and Cambodia in 1995. Tourists replace soldiers and the audio design becomes a haunting and evocative narrative about history and the legacies of war.

!KUNG SHORT FILMS

color & black and white, 161 minutes, 2009
by John Marshall

Between 1950 - 1958, John Marshall made four expeditions to film the Ju/'hoansi (a group of !Kung Bushmen) of the Nyae Nyae region of Namibia (then South West Africa). Marshall and his family, who together undertook an extensive multi-disciplinary study of Ju/'hoansi, spent the greatest amount of time with the people of /Gautcha, including ≠Oma, !U, Tsamko, N!ai, and /Gunda. During this time, Marshall shot over 300,000 feet of 16mm film (157 hours). He later produced a total of 23 films exclusively from this footage. 15 of these are short films that Marshall referred to as "sequence films." Each focuses on a single event, providing the viewer a brief introduction followed by an uninterrupted sequence. Although Marshall recorded some sync sound between 1955 and 1958, sync recording in the field was difficult and cumbersome. As a compromise, Marshall made non-sync recordings at the time of filming and later joined this audio to the edited films. Soundtracks were sometimes enhanced with additional ambient sound or sound effects recorded after the fact. This method allowed Marshall a major innovation in ethnographic and documentary film - his subjects could speak for themselves, often accompanied by subtitles. These shorts were intended as educational films, to be viewed multiple times and with the aid of a study guide. The introduction to each film might identify major characters, outline the basic plot, or offer background information about the event to follow, but then viewers are left to experience the film for themselves, to form their own impressions of what is happening and why. Of course, the films have proven to have a life well beyond the classroom. They are intimate portraits of the daily life and ritual life of ≠oma and his band during the 1950's. Rich in ethnographic detail, the films' beauty and high emotional content are indicative of the close bond that Marshall had formed with his subjects - a bond that would last all his life.

This collection combines fourteen of Marshall's short !Kung films onto two newly remastered/re-authored DVDs, complete with a full-color booklet containing photos, writings, and additional information about the series.

Disc One:
A Curing Ceremony (8:24)
Group of Women (5:07)
A Joking Relationship (12:42)
N/um Tchai: The Ceremonial Dance of the !Kung Bushmen (19:44)
The Melon Tossing Game (14:52)
Lion Game (4:33)
An Argument About a Marriage (18:45)
Men Bathing (13:44)

Disc Two:
Playing with Scorpions (4:28)
A Rite of Passage (14:44)
Debe's Tantrum (8:22)
The Wasp Nest (12:47)
The Meat Fight (14:12)
Baobab Play (7:54)

Postcards from Tora Bora
by Kelly Dolak & Wazhmah Osman
color, 87 min, 2007

At the height of the Cold War, the Osman family frantically escapes from Afghanistan while leaving almost everything behind. In the ensuing chaos, their only suitcase, filled with family photos, is stolen. Now after two decades of living in America, Wazhmah Osman, a young Afghan-American woman returns to her childhood home. Armed only with rapidly fading memories, she recruits some unlikely and reluctant guides to put together the pieces of her past. On an alternately sad and humorous quest, she encounters confused cabbies, the enthusiastic former minister of the tourism bureau, a museum director that archives land mines, and a group of angry street vendors. As Wazhmah desperately searches for any tangible evidence of her former life, the journey leads her to many unexpected places. Amidst the rubble and destruction, she finds her estranged father who in the aftermath of war choose his country over his family. On the road, Wazhmah frequently finds herself at a strange intersection where cultures clash, identities are mistaken, and the past violently collides with the present.

The Auschwitz Dialogues
by Marian Ehret
color, 60 min, 2007

In the small Polish town of Oświęcim - more notoriously known by its former name, Auschwitz - a team of young filmmakers find themselves caught amidst a conflict between Jewish Holocaust survivors and the town's Polish inhabitants, who struggle to define its modern day identity. While the Jews want to defend their right of memory connected to the sites of the camps, the Poles just want a normal life. Is it really that simple? Do Jewish Holocaust survivors have the right to dispel the Polish inhabitants of apartments on the camp's grounds by force? Or do the Poles have the right to locate their settlements and wheat fields above the ashes of tens of thousands of gassed and burned Jews? At the center of the conflict is the town's mayor, who thinks himself of as a martyr, but also finds himself in a small private war with the local museum. To many of the town's residents, this museum seems to be an instrument of Jewish power. The conflict affects many levels of society, from the town's inhabitants and their visitors, to Vladimir Putin and the residents of a local homeless shelter.

The Professional Foreigner: Asen Balikci and Visual Ethnography
by Rolf Husmann and Manfred Krüger
color, 60 min, 2008

Asen Balikci has been a leading figure in making ethnographic films for many decades. In a series of talks between Balikci and filmmaker Rolf Husmann in different locations, the life and work of Asen Balikci are shown and discussed: the film takes us from Asen's youth in Istanbul to his career in Canada where he became famous for making the Netsilik Eskimo Series, to filming in Afghanistan and then turning to two other activities of his: as a networker for the Commission on Visual Anthropology (CVA) and as a teacher of Summer Schools in Siberia and Bulgaria. His film work among the Bulgarian Pomak and his ongoing work in Sikkim (India) conclude the film which is not only the portrait of a famous expert in Visual Ethnography, but also more generally touches upon vital issues of ethnographic filmmaking.

Tehran Has No More Pomegranates
by Massoud Bakhshi
color, 68 min, 2008

Director Massoud Bakhshi and crew are on a mission to make a film about their hometown, Tehran, but have hit a wall and must explain to their overseers at the Documentary Film Center why the film will never be completed. They decide to investigate the city's past in order to better understand the reason for their predicament. What follows is a sarcastic and comic narrative about Tehran's transformation from a small village into a megapolis of increasing urban mess, pollution, inadequate housing, class gaps and the fatal destiny of its delicious pomegranates. Made over the span of five years, *Tehran Has No More Pomegranates* is both homage to what Tehran is and a lament for what it could never be.
It archives never before seen footage from 120 years of Iranian history and places it against images of modern Iran. The film is, as the introduction declares -"a musical, historical, comedy, docu-drama, love story, experimental film" that uses style and subject to capture the chaotic and paradoxical soul of one of the most wonderful cities of the world. It is a treasure awaiting for those who believe that non-fiction can come in many guises!

Imagine a School... Summerhill
by William Tyler Smith
color, 67min, 2008

In 1997, Tony Blair's New Labor government took steps to improve standards in education. Ironically, this would threaten the existence of an unusual little school in Suffolk called Summerhill... So begins an extraordinary documentary about an exemplary school in England, in which the students, the staff and a few formidable barristers take on OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) and Tony Blair's Labor Government to fight for its existence and the lifeblood of alternative education throughout the world. It was a fight that not only saved the prestigious institution, but proved the very educational principals on which the school was founded. In the process, some remarkable young people were given a chance to see how they had grown within Summerhill's unique democratic system and an up close lesson in modern government.

Stories from Myanmar
by Lindsey Merrison
color, 188 min, 2008

Since its inception in 2005, the non-profit organisation Yangon Film School has brought together experienced filmmaking tutors from around the world and young Burmese men and women with some prior experience in the media for residential training in all aspects of filmmaking - from screenwriting to editing - with particular focus on documentary. DVD 1 contains the work of 12 new participants from The Art of Documentary Filmmaking Beginners Workshop 2007, who were given the opportunity to grapple with the technical, artistic and ethical aspects of the genre by producing their own short documentaries on the topic of children in Myanmar. The body of work on these two DVDs bears witness to a growing nucleus of talented young Burmese filmmakers who strive to create challenging work in an environment notorious for discouraging independent media. Their films provide a hitherto unseen window on the lives of ordinary people in Myanmar.

Documentary Educational Resources is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1968 and incorporated in 1971 for the purpose of producing and distributing cross-cultural documentary film for educational use. We were early innovators in developing 16mm film and media based curriculum for classroom use. Our company focus, then and now, is to support filmmakers who have long-term commitments to the people that they film. We find that filmmakers who work collaboratively with their subjects produce film with integrity.

It is also our focus to distribute media that has the power to overcome barriers to cross-cultural understanding. Media can be the first step in growing sensitivity and awareness of other cultures. This in turn may lead to tolerance and acceptance and eventually give way to appreciation and admiration of other cultures.

Our archive is one of the most historically important resources of ethnographic film in the world today. In 1975 DER co-founders John Marshall and Timothy Asch were key figures in establishing the Human Studies Film Archives at the Smithsonian Institution and their bodies of work are among the most significant ethnographic collections within the HSFA. We continue to collaborate with the Smithsonian on the use of our films for research. Our films have been screened everywhere, from villages and refugee camps in Africa, Native American reservations, to classrooms, museums and theatres worldwide.

If you have further questions please visit our website

www.der.org

Or contact us by email, fax, phone or mail

Phone 1 (800) 569-6621 or 1 (617) 926-0491
Fax 1 (617) 926-9519

Documentary Educational Resources
101 Morse Street
Watertown, MA 02472

Cover image:
Returned: Child Soldiers of Nepal's Maoist Army
by Robert Koenig and Brandon Kohrt (pg. 2)

massHUMANITIES
A Commonwealth of Ideas

MCC
massculturalcouncil.org

Booklet design by Frank Aveni, all contents © DER 2009