

PERCHE' GLI ARTISTI SONO ARTISTI?

Una serie di film indaga la creatività in tutte le sue sfaccettature; il rigore, il genio e la sregolatezza, il successo, il complesso rapporto con il mercato di alcuni importanti artisti dei nostri tempi.

Hunger

directed by Steve McQueen, 2009, 97'.

With the exception of Julian Schnabel, visual artists have had a tough time at the cinema, but like the American painter before him, Britain's Steve McQueen beat the odds with the award-winning *Hunger*. In his visceral depiction of a political hunger strike, McQueen emphasizes specific moments over plot mechanics. Guard Raymond Lohan (Stuart Graham) serves as a guide into the hell of Belfast's Maze Prison, circa 1981, where Bobby Sands (Michael Fassbender in a remarkable performance) and his IRA brethren hunker down in blankets, since they refuse to don uniforms and can't wear their own clothes. They dump food on the floor, smear waste on the walls, and sleep with maggots in protest against their conditions. Even after moving the prisoners, the mistreatment continues, so they step up their campaign. It's no way to live, and it isn't easy to watch, but McQueen provides a reprieve through Sands's riveting conversation with Father Dominic Moran (Liam Cunningham), a scene his backers pressured him to cut, but the filmmaker wisely stood firm. In his director's statement, McQueen says he wanted to "show what it was like to see, hear, smell, and touch in the H-Block." Because he avoids editorializing, it's as easy to condemn his subjects for their naïve idealism as it is to admire their singularity of purpose. Art background aside, McQueen clearly knows his U.K. film history, and appears to have spent time with the works of Alan Clarke (specifically *Elephant*) and Stanley Kubrick (see *A Clockwork Orange*), who share his fascination with the abuse of power, the horror of sudden violence, and the splendor of the static shot.

Gerhard Richter Painting

directed by Corinna Belz, 2011, 97'.

Gerhard Richter Painting offers rare insights into the artist's work. In quiet, highly concentrated images, the film offers a fly-on-the-wall perspective as Richter exposes his studio and working process for the first time in decades. Belz captures the 79-year-old artist in all of his intensity, providing a striking and intimate exposé into the artist's working environment and his celebrated approach to painting.

Olafur Eliasson : Notion Motion

directed by Jan Schmidt-Garre, 2010, 90'.

This portrait of the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson (b.1967) introduces his work and aesthetic theories as it documents one of his largest exhibitions ever, Notion Motion in Rotterdam. Since the early 1990s Eliasson has built up an incredible oeuvre of abstract rainbows, sunsets, waterfalls, scent walls, mist, shafts of light, and periscopes. His work navigates between natural phenomena and technology, and he aims above all to make spectators aware of their perception. Eliasson is currently exhibiting in a high-profile show dedicated to his work at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art.

Sol LeWitt: Wall Drawings

directed by Tom Piper, 2010, 55'.

As one of the leading figures of minimalism and conceptual art, Sol LeWitt redefined art making by emphasizing the idea behind a work rather than its execution. During the four decades of his career, LeWitt produced more than 1,200 remarkably complex wall drawings using a deliberately limited repertoire of lines and geometric shapes. Sol LeWitt: Wall Drawings focuses on a posthumous, grand-scale retrospective of 105 of these works, which opened in 2008 for a 25-year run at one of MASS MoCA's old mill buildings in North Adams, Massachusetts.

Joan Mitchell: Portrait of An Abstract Painter

directed by Marion Cajori, 2010, 58'.

This film portrays a painter who died in 1992 but whose reputation is still growing. As we get further from the Abstract Expressionist period and the macho myths that defined it, we are able to see more clearly the merits of some of the painters who were outside the canon. Joan Mitchell moved to France in the 1960's, and she continued to develop her art outside the New York hothouse. Some of her greatest work came towards the end of her life in the 1980's and 90's, and we see that here. Her best paintings, such as the Grande Vallee series, rank with the work of people like Kline, de Kooning, and Sam Francis.

Chuck Close, 2010,119'

directed by Marion Cajori, 2010, 119'.

Marion Cajori's magisterial documentary on renowned painter Chuck Close, begun in 1993 and finally edited just before the filmmaker's 2006 death, unerringly focuses on the two most elusive qualities central to any portrait of an artist: process and context. Close's work, featuring huge human faces deconstructed from blown-up photographs, some self-portraits and others of fellow artists, allows Cajori to conjure an endless hall of mirrors that gives the term "talking heads" a whole new meaning.

A walk into the sea: Danny Williams & the Warhol factory

directed by Esther B. Robinson, 2007, 78'.

A Walk into the Sea: Danny Williams and The Warhol Factory is director Esther Robinson's personal inquiry into the truth behind her Uncle Danny Williams' mysterious 1966 disappearance. Virtually unknown today, Danny was Andy Warhol's lover, and a promising young filmmaker. The discovery of 20 never-before-seen films William's made during his time at the Factory-- and whose many subjects include Andy Warhol, Edie Sedgwick, Paul Morrissey, Brigid Berlin, Billy Name and what may be the earliest known footage of the Velvet Underground-- reveals a luminous talent and a stark gap in the historical record. Combined with Robinson's intimate interviews of surviving Factory members, the film gets beyond the icons and quietly dismantles the Warhol myth-making machine, allowing a deeper examination of the human fragility on which Andy Warhol's empire was built.

Alice Neel

directed by Andrew Neel, 2010, 81'.

Alice Neel (1900-1984), one of the great portrait painters of the 20th century, reinvented the genre by expressing the inner landscape of her subjects, who included luminaries such as Andy Warhol, Bella Abzug, and Allen Ginsberg as well as her neighbors in Spanish Harlem. Made by her grandson, Andrew Neel, this very personal film captures her struggles as a female artist, a single mother, and a painter who defied convention. With unlimited access to photos, video, art, and letters, Neel reveals a portrait of the artist consistent with the themes of intimacy, family, and survival that were so central to her work.

Black white + gray: a portrait of Sam Wagstaff and Robert Mapplethorpe

directed by James Crump, 2007, 73'.

Yale-educated and born with a silver spoon in his mouth, Sam Wagstaff's transformation from innovative museum curator to Robert Mapplethorpe's lover and patron is intensively probed in Black White + Gray. During the heady years of the 1970s and 1980s, the New York City art scene was abuzz with a new spirit, and Mapplethorpe would be at the center of it. Wagstaff pulled him from his suburban Queens existence, gave him a camera and brought him into this art world that seemed to be waiting for him, creating the man whose infamous images instilled emotions ranging from awe to anger. In turn, Mapplethorpe brought the formerly starched-shirt preppie to the world of drugs and gay S-and-M sex, well-documented in his still-startling photographs. Twenty five years separated the lovers, but their relationship was symbiotic to its core, and the two remained together forever. The film also explores the relationship both men had with musician/poet Patti Smith, whose 1975 debut album "Horses" catapulted her to fame.

Jack Smith & the destruction of Atlantis

directed by Mary Jordan, 2005, 98'.

This documentary defies the definition of same; it is as if it is consumed by the very spirit of the artist who is its subject. I believe this is due to the fact that the power of Jack Smith's performance art is such that it imbues everyone and everything it touches with his mystique, aura, and ambiance, and conversely anyone or anything that touches his art in turn crosses the threshold into Smith's totally unique plane of existence, astoundly elevated level of comprehension, and utterly original manner of expression. This is indeed a three-fold classic: its consistently masterful visual presentation, its exhibition of keen historical understanding, and its deeply appreciative embrace of its subject raise it to an extremely high level in the biographical documentary arena.

The cool school: story of the Ferus art gallery

directed by Morgan Neville, 2010, 86'.

The cool school is an abject lesson in how to build an art scene from scratch and what to avoid in the process. The film focuses on the seminal Ferus Gallery, which groomed the LA art scene from a loose band of idealistic beatniks into a coterie of competitive, often brilliant artists, including Ed Kienholz, Ed Ruscha, Craig Kauffman, Wallace Berman, Ed Moses and Robert Irwin. The Ferus also served as launching point for New York imports, Andy Warhol (hosting his first Soup Can show), Jasper Johns, and Roy Lichtenstein, as well as leading to the first Pop Art show and Marcel Duchamp's first retrospective. What was lost and gained is tied up in a complex web of egos, passions, money, and art. This is how LA came of age.

Picasso and Braque go to the movies

directed by Arne Glimcher, 2011, 62'.

Produced by Martin Scorsese and Robert Greenhut and directed by Arne Glimcher, *Picasso and Braque go to the movies* is a cinematic tour through the effects of the technological revolution, specifically the invention of aviation, the creation of cinema and their interdependent influence on artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. With narration by Scorsese, and interviews with art scholars and artists including Chuck Close, Julian Schnabel and Eric Fischl, the film looks at the collision between film and art at the turn of the 20th Century and helps us to realize cinema's continuing influence on the art of our time.

Next: a primer on urban painting

directed by Pablo Aravena, 2005, 50'.

Next: a primer on urban painting is a documentary exploration of graffiti-based visual art as a world culture. The filmmaker profiles the art form in nine countries including USA, Canada, France, Holland, Germany, England, Spain, Japan and Brazil. A combination of verite moments and interviews with painters, "writers", designers, documentarians and other participants within the subculture, the film conveys the dynamism and creative brilliance of this important emerging artistic movement.

Bruce Nauman: Make Me Think

directed by Heinz Peter Schwerfel, 1997, 70'.

Starting in the 1960s in the Bay Area, artist Bruce Nauman made sculptures from nonart materials like dirt, neon, polyester resin and burlap. With a fertile, almost frenzied creativity, Nauman also pioneered video installations and body art. Now something of a recluse, living in New Mexico, Nauman continues to exert art-world influence. Last year, UC Press published a comprehensive volume about his early period, *A Rose Has No Teeth*. The book, however, lacked a companion DVD—too much of Nauman's art depends on time and movement to be captured in static illustrations. *Bruce Nauman: Make Me Think*, a 66-minute 1997 film by Heinz Peter Schwerfel, now available from Facets, provides that missing link. The documentary, filmed at a Nauman retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art and several European museums, provides a wide-ranging selection of Nauman's sculptural investigations and his seminal videos. In one video, the artist carefully applies paint to his face and manipulates his cheeks, mouth and eyes; as one of the narratives intones, we are seeing "the self-consciousness of a young artist who wants to become his own sculpture." Some of the videos deliberately pummel the viewer: an upside-down spinning head screams over an ear-shattering electronic background. The infamous *Clown Torture* video satisfies our secret hatred of Bozo but is nearly unwatchable, which was part of the point. The best sequences show Nauman's wonderful neon sculptures in which the brightly flashing words produce oddly affecting alternating phrases like "run from fear, fun from fear." A wall of neon lights up with single variations on the dictate "to live" until the whole piece winks on at once in a spectrum of colored language. The film, taking its cue from Nauman's own style, captures its talking heads in various video-bank arrays mounted in an abandoned warehouse.

What About Style? Alex Katz: A Painter's Painter

directed by Heinz Peter Schwerfel, 2008, 56'.

This documentary sums up the art and life of Alex Katz. This is an especially good film if you are an artist, it shows many views of Katz in the studio painting and in the field working on reference pictures and drawings. Overall I gave this documentary four out of a possible five stars, wish it was a bit longer (run time is 56 min.s), I would also like to have gotten a better understanding of his artistic process. One of the best features of the documentary is seeing footage of a landscape, for example a dock on the sea, then the director fades the documentary into Alex's take, a painting which is flat and realistic. The setting of the film is mostly in Maine, where Alex and his wife spend the summers; he also has a SoHo loft where his main studio is at and you get to see most of his painting take place.

Richard Tuttle: Never Not an Artist

directed by Chris Maybach, 2005, 32'.

Richard Tuttle's extraordinary work has exuded vitality and energy for over four decades—a remarkable feat, particularly since his art is so modest, vulnerable and daringly simplified. An elegant iconoclast who never hesitates to take risks, Tuttle uses frail and transitory materials such as plywood, tissue, wire, cloth—even shadows—to create entire worlds of thought, while challenging the 'super-size' aesthetic with his minor-scaled works. From his early years as assistant at the famed Betty Parsons Gallery in New York to his major retrospective launched in San Francisco in Summer 2005, Tuttle's commitment to the small, the anti-heroic, the barely visible, has inspired generations of younger artists to follow one's own personal vision. Filmed in New Mexico, New York, San Francisco, Miami and Los Angeles, this engaging production takes viewers into the studio and life of a most distinctive artist, while exploring issues of commitment, communication and controversy, the relationship between size and value, the language of materials and learning how to "see" art. Featuring Richard Tuttle, Marcia Tucker, Madeleine Grynsztejn, Roy Dowell, Connie Butler, Herb & Dorothy Vogel, Angela Westwater and others.

Our City Dreams

directed by Chiara Clemente, 2008, 85'.

The documentary "Our City Dreams" profiles five visual and performance artists - Swoon, Ghada Amer, Kiki Smith, Marina Abramovic and Nancy Spero - who have their homes and studios in New York City. Each of them comes from a different part of the world and each is at a different stage of her career and life. Director Chiara Clemente spends not much more than a few moments with each of the women as they dabble in their work and chat about their backgrounds, the struggles they've had to overcome as women artists, and their individual views on art.

Who the #\$&% is Jackson Pollock?

directed by Harry Moses, 2007, 74'.

This film just tickled me; delightfully done with a light touch, it pits a down-to-earth dumpster-diving trucker named Teri Horton against a pretentious boatload of art world snobs, and she proves (in the words of a famous author) that they don't know their scrotums from Kentucky-fried-chicken. The film stands up well as a documentary, covering a lot of ground to interview witnesses who knew Pollock, as well as forensic, art, and legal experts. Bottom line is that the fingerprint and other physical evidence pointing to the authenticity of the painting is just overwhelming; if this were a murder case, there would be more than ample evidence to send someone to the electric chair. The only thing standing between Ms. Horton and \$50,000,000 (the estimated value of the painting if it were deemed authentic) is a bunch of arrogant blowholes who can't utter a single coherent or persuasive sentence in support of their position that the painting is a fake. If I ever had any doubts about the credibility of the art world, this certainly settled the issue once and for all. As for Teri, a phenomenally feisty, if complicated and self-destructive woman, she makes one of the most interesting lead characters I've encountered in fact or fiction.

Rem Koolhaas: a kind of architect

directed by Markus Heidingsfelder and Min Tesch, 2010,98'

Rarely has an architect caused as much sensation outside of the architecture community as Rem Koolhaas. His outstanding creations such as the Dutch Embassy in Berlin, the Seattle Library, the Casa da Musica concert hall in Porto, and the Guggenheim Heritage Museum in Las Vegas are working examples of the Dutchman's visionary theories about architecture and urban society.

Koolhaas' work is as much about ideas as it is about constructing buildings; he is equally celebrated as a writer and social commentator, his 1978 publication *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* is heralded as seminal text on modern society. For Koolhaas what is essential is not to create individual masterpieces, but to provoke and excite through the wide range of his activities.

Rem Koolhaas - a kind of architect is an engaging portrait of a visionary man, which takes us to the heart of his ideas. The filmmakers have made a visually inventive thought provoking portrait of the architect, prompting Rem Koolhaas to state "*it's the only film about me that I have liked.*"

Visual acoustics - the modernism of Julius Shulman

directed by Eric Bricker, 2010,83'.

Narrated by Dustin Hoffman, *Visual acoustics* celebrates the life and career of Julius Shulman, the world's greatest architectural photographer, whose images brought modern architecture to the American mainstream. Shulman, who passed away this year, captured the work of nearly every major modern and progressive architect since the 1930s including Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, John Lautner, and Frank Gehry. His images epitomized the singular beauty of Southern California's modernist movement and brought its iconic structures to the attention of the general public. This unique film is both a testament to the evolution of modern architecture and a joyful portrait of the magnetic, whip-smart gentleman who chronicled it with his unforgettable images.