

GstaadFilm

Bill Viola wrote that 'the natural landscape is the raw material of the human psyche'. Set against an awe-inspiring backdrop of mountains and glaciers, GstaadFilm has, over the course of three events, achieved a highly individualised festival identity arising directly from its roots within a particular community and from its distinctive geographical location. Providing audiences and artists with a perfect miniaturization of all aspects of the festival experience, a single programme of screenings, repeated over the course of two days, highlighted fifteen films from national and international contributors.

The selected work ranged from the immersive minimalism of water borne flower heads in Yvonne Christen Vagner's gently flowing *Upsla* (2005) to the ingenious low budget charm of Frieda Schneider and Isabel Robson's Bollywood homage *S.B.B. Swiss Bolly Bahn* (2005). Elsewhere, Anton Hecht's use of a segmented screen in *One Note* (2007) skilfully foregrounded the interplay between aural and visual composition by means of a spatial arrangement of figures, each rendered visible as they realised a single instrumental line within a musical score, while Mai Yamashita and Naoto Kobayashi's *Infinity* (2006) made use of a single static camera position, distorting the frame rate of repetitive everyday movement, and matching its hyper-kinetic quality with the graphic simplicity and gradual emergence of a piece of land-based art. Alistair Ruff's *Reduction* (2007) pared down temporal progression to a series of still images, reconfigured at dizzying speed as passage through contemporary cityscapes from London to Ulaan Baator, while Christopher Steel's cumulative layering of sound and image in *Tube* (2004) and *Beltane* (1997) constructed finely-wrought filmic worlds, atmospherically situated outside of a conventionally linear time frame. For the festival's first prize winning entry, access to tiny increments of information, amassed through aural and visual channels, required a drawing in of attention. Rosella Biscotti's impressively assured *Il sole splende a Kiev* (2006), set subtitled voices against an otherwise darkened screen, building and developing as the work progressed into a subtle interweaving of soundscape and archive footage, which combined to create a resonant and compelling viewing experience, reflective of the nature of the filmmaking process itself.

Festivals are truly collective endeavours which require the input of organisers over many months of planning; of artists, making and submitting work, often in isolation, and of the audiences who complete the circuit to bring an event fully to life by their attention and response. I came away from Gstaad with a great deal of new footage and new ideas, and feeling that all of us had been involved in something very worthwhile.



Series of stills from *Splice*

Chirstinn Whyte recently completed doctoral research into choreographic practice for screen at Middlesex University, London. Her work can be accessed online at <http://www.shiftwork.org.uk>