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### ZOOM!: back from the future

Mike Walsh

Our story so far: 4 years ago in a land called South Australia, there emerged an exciting new initiative to encourage emerging filmmakers—the Filmmaker of the Future (FOTF) prize and it involved giving all the development money to one lucky bugger. We now move forward to 2003. The FOTF award is an old initiative, the young filmmakers are still as emergent as they ever were, and the FOTF is now history.

The ZOOM! craft awards for short filmmaking have continued on a more modest basis, augmented by a Best Film Award, and ensconced in the Adelaide International Film Festival.

While the FOTF failed to launch anyone into the feature film firmament during its 3 years of existence, the presence of follow-up films by 2 of its 3 recipients showed that these filmmakers still had a future, even if it wasn't The Future.

The best news among the films was the continued good work from Tamsyn Lewis and Shalom Almond, who took out the FOTF 2 years ago. Their follow-up, *Brushstrokes*, was the strongest film in the competition. The fact that it was the most expensive to produce seems encouraging to me. These young women have shown that they know how to find money and spend it so that it shows onscreen. This is an achievement that needs to be praised in an Australian cinema too full of moral victories that no one ever watches.

Admittedly, the film has a story from 1965 (should the emerging artist stay in Oz or leave for the Big Time in London?), but the resolution of this theme is handled with both force and intelligence. The filmmakers know how to work with professional actors, cinematographers and designers: a true sign of emergence.

Matthew Phipps, winner of the inaugural FOTF, scooped the pool with 4 awards (including Best Film) for *Quarter Mile*. Its narrative is staged across several planes, juxtaposing the romantic attachment of a man with an intellectual disability to a prostitute, with his fantasy reworking of events and a symbolic transformation of his desires to his favoured arena—the drag strip.

Alice Teasdale's *Still Life*, awarded Best Screenplay, had a similar feel, as it centred on the bathos of its protagonist's life. While very handsome, it's another in a line of films about how deadly boring it is to work in an office. This is starting to look a bit elitist now ("I'm an artist, surely Centrelink can't expect me to do this?").

Jessica Asz' *Kylie Divine* is also built around a rather generic story, this time concerning the misadventures of a young woman meeting her boyfriend's parents. Throwing enthusiasm and well-crafted energy at the viewer, it manages to stave off our awareness that it lacks ambition. You can see the punchline coming a mile off, but somehow that adds to its charm.

Perhaps because the awards were positioned in the middle of a festival full of bold and diverse international films, I left ZOOM! with a renewed sense of the conservatism of local filmmaking. The previous issue of *RealTime* (53) contained the first half of Peter Sainsbury's critique of a deeply internalised lack of daring in Australian cinema [see p15 for part 2]. For all the achievements of young local filmmakers shown at these awards, there was nothing to prove Sainsbury wrong. Perhaps the future belongs to those who can get their plot points in a row.

Finally, these occasions which try to reposition the makers of short films as "emergent filmmakers" are affairs of fleeting self-congratulation. It's nice to eat the little spring rolls and see people you know get some acknowledgment, but it's also a bit like trying to build the house from the roof down.

Emerging filmmakers will have little or nothing to emerge into, unless there is a sound industrial structure to sustain an industry. The first question isn't "how do we get films made?" but rather "how do we create a sustainable distribution infrastructure so that a need for films exists?" Perhaps we should introduce arts administrators to people in the Australian Wool Board so they can have a conversation about a history of schemes that ignore demand and address only supply.

ZOOM! SA Shortsfest Awards, Adelaide International Film Festival, Feb 28-Mar 7