



Twin Film Festivals Come to Silicon Valley

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The UNAFF and SVJFF bring movies from around the world to the South Bay

October 18, 2017 by Richard von Busack



Daniel Radcliffe plays a man out of his element in the new movie 'Jungle,' one of many films showing at both the UNA and SVJ film festivals.

The United Nations Association Film Festival deserves all due respect — "Respect" is the theme for the outstanding event's 20th-anniversary program, sponsored by a group dedicated to the U.N.'s goals.

Director Sue Williams' documentary *Death by Design* is of much local interest. It's all about the art of downstreaming—literally. It details the fouling of water in China with hazardous waste from chip manufacturers and circuit board producers. Williams has made five previous documentaries on the state of China. Here she visits the real-life version of the orphanage scene in *Blade Runner 2049*, where children,

racked with lead and cadmium poisoning, are pulling apart junked computers. Other workers nearby smelt the toxic crap over open fires.

Ted Smith of the Silicon Valley Toxic Coalition here calls high technology "a resource suck"—a vortex of almost instantly obsolete phones and electronics, contributing to the annual 3 million tons of e-waste the U.S. tosses annually. Of that amount, only about 15 percent is properly recycled.

This mess is China's problem, not ours, yes? Indeed, it is the problem of China, where a fifth of the arable land has been tainted by the production and demolition of electronics. Sadly, the lead particulates fly into the clouds and come down on our side of the Pacific, like a ghost of that machine you threw away.

There is some hope. In one interview, Paul Maher of Ireland's iameco, touts his company's repairable, wooden-framed, and good-looking computer built without carcinogenic PVCs or heavy metals. It is designed to last at least twice as long as the current lifespan of the average computer—which is only three or four years.

Speaking of ill winds: Andre Singer's *Where the Wind Blew* regards the aftermath of nuclear testing in seemingly deserted parts of the world. "The Polygon" in Kazakhstan was the old Soviet Union's favorite nuclear testing range. Downwind is what's been called "the sacrifice zone," a cancer cluster in which birth defects are frequent. Interviewed are anti-nuke activists, including Karipbek Kuyukov—who was born without arms but became a serious watercolorist,

wielding a brush held in his toes—as well as the severely disfigured Berik Syzdykov. Singer also visits St. George, Utah, where some of the cleanest-living Mormons in America were irradiated by fallout from Nevada's Mercury test range.

Regan Hines' *Incarcerating US*, describes how the Land of the Free ended up with 2.3 million souls in jail. Mandatory sentencing, federal spending on prisons and prosecutors, and creative interpretations of conspiracy laws, made sure low-level weed peddlers were treated like high-level criminals.

Other matters considered by the U.N. film festival include a documentary on the first female Cherokee chief, Wilma Mankiller; a profile of the Colombian village of Jerico, *The Infinite Flight of Days*; and *A Thousand Mothers*, regarding a Myanmar-based Buddhist nunnery.

Meanwhile, the 26th installment of the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival also opens this weekend. It's slated to run from Oct. 21 to Nov. 12 at the AMC Saratoga 14 and the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center in Palo Alto. Here are two dozen films, many local premieres, and a free program. Opening night has Harry Potter star Daniel Radcliffe in the Amazonian adventure *Jungle*. The closer, *Ben-Gurion, Epilogue* includes recently discovered footage of the last interview with the first prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, conducted back in 1968. Ben-Gurion's grandson Alon will be in attendance for the screening.

In between are revivals of some Jewish-themed films that didn't get enough attention, including the comedy *The Woman's Balcony* (Oct. 30), *Menashe* (Oct. 31, Nov. 7), about a New York Orthodox Jew facing life after the death of his wife, and Richard Gere as a hapless hustler in *Norman: The Moderate Rise and Tragic Fall of a New York Fixer*.

There's also one that pretty much got the attention it deserved, *Past Life* (Oct. 29). Israeli workhorse director Avi Nesher has a pair of sisters (Nelly Tagar, Joy Rieger) investigating the mystery of their father's survival during the Holocaust. Nesher piles it on sky-high. One despondent character calls God a dramatist incapable of tone, a writer who over-relies on coincidence. On the contrary, what could be said about Nesher's script is what is usually said about the Holocaust: calling it a failure of the divine ignores the fact that it was really a failure of man.

United Nations Associations Film Festival

Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival

Various dates and venues

unaff.org

svjff.org

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