

SEPTEMBER 12, 2005

## The Haunting

The festival's become ever-more mainstream over the years, with big U.S. studios and stars now hogging much of the attention.

But brush aside the hype and it's still clear that TIFF organizers are still among the most sensitive programmers in the world, seeing film as an artistic medium as well as a billion-dollar business.



The most overt -- and my favourite -- example of that this year is Saskatchewan artist Graeme Patterson's *Ghosts of Woodrow*, a collection of four short films being run today and tomorrow at the Church of the Redeemer, at the corner of Bloor and Avenue. Patterson's medium is stop-motion animation -- think back to those old Christmas specials, or more recently, Nick Park, also at TIFF this year. But *Ghosts'* tale is universal, not specific. In essence, it's an elegiac lament for the passage of the rural lifestyle -- the kind lived by Patterson's Saskatchewan farmsteading grandparents -- as it was subsumed by the great wash of modernity that urbanized our societies and left countless family farms desolate and abandoned.

How is that captured in animated shorts? Well, with difficulty, surely. But Patterson creates a sly, affecting juxtaposition between three romantic, mythologizing pieces -- complete with folksy, electro-polka soundtracks -- and their foil, a pair of drudgerous films that depict his elderly grandparents at play.

One shows the elderly couple playing horseshoes; the other has them bowling. Only silence, apart from the dull thuds of the games themselves, accompanies their repetitive motions. The sense is of time being burned, empty hours and days and years whiled away.

But the other three, *Romancing the Farm*, *Monkey and Deer* and *Lafleche vs. Woodrow, 1972*, depart into whimsical fantasy and the romance of the rural: intelligent, sociable wildlife; the harmony of man and beast on the farm (tempered by a modern farmer's perplexity at the introduction of computers, seen above); and, of course, a hockey game with the home side winning (after many dropped gloves, it examination of a death of the way of life. I'm sure that's how it felt for his grandparents, as the only life they knew evaporated before their eyes.

In any case, it's open all day Tuesday, and well worth seeing. Adding to its worth (and rarity): It's completely free.

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Murray Whyte trawls this year's festival in search of hidden gems, industry manoeuvres, the odd, the interesting and the naked - and anything else he can cram into TIFF's 10 days of glossy mayhem. Seen something worth talking about during this annual gathering of the glitterati? Tell us about it by leaving a comment.

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