



THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY

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# GUARDIAN

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## The snow globe

Year-end thoughts from the Bay Area's contingent of Sundance-bound filmmakers

**AS THE REST** of us look back at the past year in film, some local filmmakers are looking forward to the next year in film – because their movies are going to play at the Sundance Film Festival in January, then conquer the world. Here's what seven of the nine Bay Area filmmakers included in the festival have to say about the cinema of 2004. (Susan Gerhard)

### Henry S. Rosenthal,

Producer, *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*

#### Top five films

1. *The Brown Bunny* (Vincent Gallo, USA, 2003). Vincent Gallo's minor masterpiece with not a frame out of place to my eye, easily takes my top pick for the year.
2. *End of the Century: The Story of the Ramones* (Jim Fields and Michael Gramaglia, USA, 2003). As an aging punk who loved and even opened for the Ramones back in the day, I felt this revelatory film was made just for me.
3. *Jandek on Corwood* (Chad Friedrichs, USA, 2003). While not a great film, the ethos behind this chronicle of the mysterious Texan who'd never been captured by a camera was enough to win me over. It's just too bad for the filmmakers that Jandek chose to perform live for the first time just after the movie was completed. A sequel is no doubt in the works.
4. *Bukowski: Born into This* (John Dullaghan, USA, 2003).

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Another worthy entrant into the Bukowski canon, but I could have done without Sean Penn and Bono weighing in.

**5. *One Night in Paris*** (Red Light District Video, USA). In this age of obsessive documentation, despite the repressive times in which we live, the definitions of celebrity are changing. Soon every personality will have his or her media exposure broken down from G to XXX. Anyone want to come over and see my Meryl Streep tape?

## Jenni Olson

Cowriter-codirector, *The Joy of Life*

Well, I gotta say the year in cinema was pretty good for me personally. The process of making and completing my first feature was tremendous. I'm having a hard time remembering any actual movies I saw. For some reason the only thing that comes to mind is that awful Richard Gere-Jennifer Lopez thing, *Shall We Dance* – which I truly enjoyed despite the fact that it's a horrendous movie.

In my write-up for the *Bay Guardian* last year, I focused entirely on thanking all the programmers of our local independent movie theaters. I want to reiterate my gratitude this year – with a special appreciation of one of my longtime heroes, Anita Monga. The local film community came together in a tremendous show of solidarity to defeat Proposition L in November. But on the very day of the big preelection No on L press conference, Monga (one of the most esteemed art house programmers in the country) was sacked by the owners of the Castro Theatre. A few weeks ago the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Ruthe Stein revealed the true colors of the Castro's new Los Angeles-based programmer, Richard Blacklock. Citing the first film booked on the next calendar (Strand Releasing's *Head-on*) as evidence he's committed to continuing to show queer films at the Castro, Blacklock was taken to task by Stein, who pointed out that though the film is distributed by Strand (noted for its gay releases), it's not at all gay-themed. Needless to say, this kind of ignorance doesn't bode well for the future of one of our city's most valued cultural treasures. The Nasser family owns this wonderful building, which is so much more than just a movie theater. They must now also own their responsibility to the community. Here's hoping they rise to the occasion.

## Eric Escobar

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Writer-director, "One Weekend a Month"

The Grand Lake Theater in Oakland makes me proud to be an Oakland filmmaker. Every few weeks, in black, plastic letters, the marquee shouts out a new message to me: stolen elections, repressed CIA reports, grubby Halliburton money grabs, outrage against the (still) illegal war in Iraq.

The cinematic response to the war has been inspiring. From watching Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* to powerful antiwar short films on the festival circuit and Web, I'm more convinced than ever of the important role film plays in turning tides.

During the current political era, art needs to engage our minds and provide us with opportunities to think new thoughts. This year Canadian animator Chris Landreth challenged us to reexamine the role of artists in society in his 3-D animated documentary short "Ryan." The film is a beautiful tribute to animator Ryan Larkin's genius and a story of how the profit motive can grind down an artist's spirit. Landreth, along with so many filmmakers in 2004, harnessed the new tools of digital filmmaking to create revolutionary art.

## **Mark Becker**

Director, *Romántico*

### **Top five docs**

**1.** *Être et avoir (To Be and to Have)* (Nicolas Philibert, France, 2002). One of my favorites of all time. Amazingly evocative filmmaking. I love films about regular (not famous) remarkable people.

**2.** *Control Room* (Jehane Noujaim, USA).

**3.** *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster* (Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky, USA). I saw it at Sundance with a bunch of Metallica fans in attendance. Lots of head movement all around me. I don't like the music, but I wasn't ready for it to end after two and a half hours.

**4.** *My Architect: A Son's Journey* (Nathaniel Kahn, USA, 2003). The scene in Bangladesh was absurdly poignant.

**5.** *Lost Boys of Sudan* (Megan Mylan and Jon Shenk, USA, 2003)

– which I worked on but still love without bias, I think.

## **Bryan Boyce**

Director, "America's Biggest Dick"

Now that the staff who made the Castro my favorite theater have departed under bad circumstances, I'd like to present a list of 11 cinematic peak experiences I've enjoyed there over the past 10 years. Thanks for all the light and shadow.

1. *Sherlock, Jr.* (Buster Keaton, USA, 1924) with live music by the Club Foot Orchestra
2. *I Am Cuba* (Mikheil Kalatozishvili, Soviet Union/Cuba, 1964)
3. *Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1954)
4. *The Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio De Sica, Italy, 1948)
5. *All about Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, USA, 1950) with Winona Ryder sitting right behind me
6. *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1958), restored
7. Nature documentaries by Jean Painlevé with live music by Yo La Tengo
8. *Godzilla* (Ishiro Honda, Japan, 1954), restored
9. All eight hours of Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom* parts one (1994) and two (1997)
10. *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, U.K./USA, 1968), restored
11. *Sudden Fear* (David Miller, USA, 1952)

## **Dayna Goldfine**

Codirector, *Ballets russes*

For me, cinema 2004 has been particularly gratifying because it's felt like the year the documentary really came into its own as a film form theatrical audiences seek out. *Spellbound*, *Capturing the Friedmans*, *Bukowski: Born into This*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *The Fog of War*, *Super Size Me*, *Dig!*, *Riding Giants*, *Touching the*

*Void, Metallica: Some Kind of Monster* ... the list goes on. Each of these documentaries proved as gripping, smart, and entertaining as any fiction film I saw this year. As we prepare to release our fifth documentary after nearly five long years of labor, I feel particularly optimistic about this wacky art form that I've been engaged with for the past 16 years, and I'm looking forward to spending many happy hours in 2005 ensconced in various movie theaters watching the next crop of documentaries hit the screens.

## **Dan Geller**

Codirector, *Ballets russes*

*Dig!, The Story of the Weeping Camel, The Five Obstructions, Touching the Void* – these movies packed a wallop of story, intensity of character, visual immediacy, surprise, and, thankfully, they made it hard to tell pure fiction from pure documentary. They were movies that swept me deeply into different worlds and other minds. Did it matter who was an actor or who might have been acting out in front of the camera? Whether they were shot with tiny budgets and tinier cameras or with big cameras and piles of cash (at least mounds of it from my perspective), it didn't matter, as each of these movies yoked style to substance and lit up the screen with the best of what cinema has to offer. When I exit a theater thinking, "I wish I could make something that good!" I know why I'm in love with the medium.

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