

Anna Feder's favorites are films about films

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ABSTRACT

In picking her top docs, Feder, who has been associate director of the Northampton Independent Film Festival and director of the Boston Underground Film Festival and is now a programmer at the Boston LGBT Film Festival and the director of programming in the Visual Media Arts department at Emerson College, includes films about films or about the act of filmmaking.

FULL TEXT

Anna Feder has a taste for meta. In picking her top docs, Feder, who has been associate director of the Northampton Independent Film Festival and director of the Boston Underground Film Festival and is now a programmer at the Boston LGBT Film Festival and the director of programming in the Visual Media Arts department at Emerson College, includes films about films or about the act of filmmaking. All are movies that make the mind work while dazzling the eye.

Lost in La Mancha (2002)

You'd think that by now filmmakers would know enough to not try adapting Cervantes's "Don Quixote." Where do they think the word quixotic comes from? The great Orson Welles tried and failed, as did the manically brilliant Terry Gilliam -- the latter's every absurd mishap and folly recorded in Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe's "Lost in La Mancha." "To this day I have nightmares of the moment when all the film gear floats away in a freak flash flood while filming in the desert," says Feder in an e-mail. "My dreams are haunted by Gilliam's howl at the darkening skies. This is the movie that convinced me that I may not be cut out for the stress of being a director."

Room 237 (2013)

Rodney Ascher's investigation into a world of cinema conspiracy theorists combines wacked but compellingly detailed analyses of Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining" with scenes from the film. "I found the construction thoroughly hypnotic," Feder comments. "The first response is disbelief at the bizarre theories (e.g., it's Kubrick's attempt to work through the guilt of helping to fake the moon landing footage). Then you settle in to the beauty of film clips stitched together with the impassioned voice-overs explaining a seductively insane take on 'The Shining.'"

The Act of Killing (2013)

Few in the West know much about the genocide of hundreds of thousands in Indonesia in the '60s. Far from being brought to justice, the perpetrators have prospered and revel in their bloodthirsty memories. Harvard documentarian Joshua Oppenheimer gave one of the most notorious the opportunity to make a movie about his deeds, and the result is a horrifying movie within a movie that is like "Salo" directed by Ed Wood. "I'm still eager to see the final product," says Feder ruefully. "The main sidekick is dressed in drag and performs in elaborate musical numbers."

Jodorowsky's Dune (2014)

"Another film about a film that wasn't," is how Feder describes Frank Pavich's documentary about mystic Mexican movie maker Alejandro Jodorowsky's efforts to adapt Frank Herbert's sci-fi epic (David Lynch would end up with the job, a debacle that perhaps deserves its own movie). "Pavich's film sells you on Jodorowsky's vision through animated H.R. Giger [the designer behind 'Alien'] storyboards and the casting of Orson Welles, who was enticed by the services of his favorite chef. But the excesses of this vision were its downfall."

Illustration

Caption: Warner Brothers Drafthouse Films AP

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