

FACING REALITIES: Dialogues in Boston Documentary Filmmaking *A Film Screening Series*

First Screening: Gardner and Gillooly

The pairing of Robert Gardner's *Forest of Bliss* and Jane Gillooly's *Today the Hawk Takes One Chick* reveals two filmmakers committed to imbuing the documentary form with their own distinctive visions.

Robert Gardner's impact on the documentary film is profound. 1964's *Dead Birds* has been inducted into the Library of Congress's National Film Registry as one of America's most important films, and its poetic chronicle of the Dugum Dani culture in New Guinea opened the door for lyrical, personal filmmaking within the world of the nonfiction film. 1974's *Rivers of Sand* continued an evolution in his filmmaking style, as Gardner's work became increasingly minimalist, using the power of images, sounds, and rhythmic editing to create evocative cinema.

Forest of Bliss is perhaps the apotheosis of his film style and life's work. A masterpiece that envelops the viewer in the world of Benares, India, Gardner places the viewer in this environment without overt explication, and without the traditional simplifying guideposts of reportage (titles, translations, etc.). Watching, listening, looking for clues, searching for meaning, viewers find that meaning and a remarkable film experience through the richness of the filmmaking, and, as Gardner evokes it, the sublime yet brutal power of nature and the city of Benares.

Jane Gillooly's *Today the Hawk Takes One Chick* is likewise the culmination of an evolving filmography. Balancing a commitment to emotional authenticity and a sensorial, textural style driven by striking images, sounds, and a musical approach to editing, Gillooly's work continues to surprise as she crosses new boundaries and confronts new subjects with her distinctive vision.

1994's *Leona's Sister Gerri* revealed a compassion for and deep understanding of the complexities of human emotion. The documentary was hailed as one of the "Best of P.O.V" in 2007, and shows the filmmaker's almost uncanny ability to find the heart of a story, and to allow its beat to drive the rhythm of the film's every sight and sound. As co-producer and co-writer of 1998's "Theme: Murder", with Martha Swetozoff, Gillooly revealed enormous capacity for capturing the complexities of real characters on film.

In 2000 *Dragonflies, The Baby Cries* premiered at the Museum of Modern Art and The Film Society of Lincoln Center's "New Directors/New Films" festival, showing Gillooly's skills at creating dynamic images and evocative atmospheres. The film inspired the renowned Alloy Orchestra to compose a score for "Dragonflies," and performances have brought the filmmaker and the musicians praise around the world.

Today the Hawk Takes One Chick draws on all of this experience, and is Gillooly's finest work to date. Traveling to Swaziland, Gillooly chronicles the near-apocalyptic reality of a society decimated by AIDS. Eschewing a traditional journalistic style, the film boldly wraps the audience in the textures of this devastated culture, and refusing to simply the roots of this continuing trauma, captures the complexities of Swaziland's current state.

Finding the perfect balance between the poignantly lyrical and the brutally direct, by film's end Gillooly has crafted a great film that haunts the viewer with its refusal to offer false hopes, tidy resolutions, or anything closely resembling a happy ending. The openness of the film's conclusion is ultimately the most respectful choice for Swaziland's people, and a sign of the filmmaker's true understanding of their dire situation.

Gardner and Gillooly come from different generations, have different perspectives on filmmaking, differences in style, differences in their intentions and their choices. However, these filmmakers share vitally important connections. They are both uncompromisingly committed to their own visions and share a passion for the power of cinema in its purest state: sound & images.

Forest of Bliss and *Today the Hawk Takes One Chick* reveal these filmmakers' gift for bringing the textures of their filmed worlds to life. By making consistently bold choices, and with their deep respect for the subjects they record, they grapple with reality in the world and shape it according to their unique vision.

These films have much to say as individual works of art, and seen together, we hope they will spark new ideas, pose new questions, and evoke the extraordinary history of Boston's documentary tradition, which continues today.

Peter Dowd
Consulting Curator

[\[back to home\]](#)