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Date: Thu, 24 Jul 2008 23:53:03 -0500
From: Lisa Stone <lstone@saic.edu>
Reply-to: outsiderart@yahoogroups.com
To: outsiderart@yahoogroups.com
Subject: [outsiderart] response to Phyllis, A Man Named Pearl

Hello Phyllis,

I hope when you said "my reportage" you didn't mistake me for the reviewer, I'm just the sender of the review. A friend forwarded me the review from Variety. Having previously sent an announcement of the film to the list (which I haven't seen) I thought I should send the review, which described it as a thin, predictable documentary.

Pearl Fryar is an amazingly original artist/plantsman. His historical narrative (if you hang around and talk with him) reveals diverse experiences of the type that would be difficult to synopsise in anything less than a top notch, in-depth, nuanced documentary: the racism he experienced in the military, Woodstock Nation (he was there and it was a defining moment), the racism he experienced in Bishopville, South Carolina, and his discovery of a means of expression that became a true artistic path. A critical aspect of the focused intensity of his garden work is that it created a forum for Pearl to communicate his history and experiences to a very broad audience. As a conversation, a backdrop to the scope of his work.

Lisa

Quoting Phyllis Kind <phylliskind@phylliskindgalle ry.com>:

>
>
> I have not seen the film you speak of, Lisa and Don, but I have visited
> Pearl Fryar and I must say your reportage made me very sad.....I had to
> excavate the positive elements about Mr. Fryar How awful that these film

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> makers and the many interviewees in Bishopville have trivialized his
> work and ironically enough but not unexpected, is his embracing and
> total unawareness of the "put down" that's going on.
> What this artist has done IS ART-inventive and actually most
> magical. HE HAS made sculpture defying and controlling nature by virtue
> of his own laborious and patient process.
> "Yard of the month", indeed! Foey on the Chamber of Commerce" and. the
> makers of the film. They should have had more respect...

>

> Phyllis

>

>

>

>

> Lisa Stone & Don Howlett wrote:

> > Pedestrian docu, which opens July 11 at Gotham's Angelika Film Center

> > prior to limited rollout, lets plenty of grass grow under its feet.

> >

> >

> > New U.S. Release

> > A Man Named Pearl

> > (Documentary)

> > By RONNIE SCHEIB Variety

> >

> >

> > A Shadow Distribution release of a Tentmakers Entertainment

> > production. Produced, directed by Scott Galloway, Brent Pierson.

> >

> > With: Pearl Fryar, Metra Fryar, Ronnie Williams, Reverent Jerome

> > McCray, Polly Laffitte, Tom Stanley, Jean Grosser, Ennis Bryant, Betty

> > Scott.

> >

> > No doubt Pearl Fryar qualifies as a highly original topiary sculptor,

> > an inspirational human being and a credit to his community. But after

> > hearing this refrain from his neighbors, his pastor, his curator, his

> > friends, his fellow artists, the mayor, the head of the Chamber of

> > Commerce, a nursery owner and assorted passersby for 70-odd minutes,

> > the message begins to pall, particularly since it is unaccompanied by

> > any visible style or overall aesthetic. Pedestrian docu, which opens

> > July 11 at Gotham's Angelika Film Center prior to

limited rollout,
> > lets plenty of grass grow under its feet.
> >
> > Fryar's backstory, unaccompanied by archival
footage or even many
> > photographs, stresses his humble beginnings: The
son of a North
> > Carolina sharecropper, he eventually moved to
Bishopville, S.C., to
> > work at a soda can factory. "A Man Named Pearl"
attributes Fryar's
> > topiary career to his difficulty, as an African-American
man, buying a
> > house in a white neighborhood, accompanied by the
racist remark that
> > black people don't keep up their yards (a point much
stressed in pic's
> > publicity materials, but greatly downplayed in the
docu itself). Fryar
> > set out to win the town's prestigious Yard of the
Month award, and
> > never looked back.
> >
> > Having no training in topiary gardening, and working
with plants from
> > the reject pile at the local nursery, Fryar
accomplished all kinds of
> > supposedly "impossible" things because, as he
himself succinctly puts
> > it, he had no idea they couldn't be done.
(Unfortunately, none of the
> > other 50 people who exclaim over the fact that he
was an autodidact
> > express themselves as wittily.)
> >
> > Pearl's garden now consists of 3½ acres of
extraordinary freeform
> > abstractions that attract visitors from around the
globe. Though
> > filmmakers Scott Galloway and Brent Pierson tarry
amid the flora,
> > following Pearl with his chainsaw as he climbs rickety
ladders or
> > trims trees by lamplight, their camera claims no
privileged freedom to
> > soar above or move through the three-dimensional
structures. Indeed,
> > pic looks very much like a protracted
man-of-the-week spot on a local
> > newscast.
> >
> > If the docu can claim an ethos, it may be that of the
small, sleepy
> > Southern town where everybody knows everybody,
one good deed can
> > blossom into many, and one story of hope can
inspire a generation.
> >
> > Given Fryar's charm, boundless energy and passion

for mentoring, the
 > > viewer has no problem believing in the far-reaching
 power of his
 > > positive example. This belief proves harder to
 swallow, though, when
 > > facilely translated into the Chamber of Commerce's
 "streetscape
 > > project" to attract tourists to Bishopville.
 > >
 > > Camera (color), J. Steven Anderson; editor, Greg
 Grzeszczak; music,
 > > Fred Story; sound (Dolby SRD), Jonathan Gaynor.
 Reviewed on DVD, New
 > > York, July 10, 2008. (In Palm Springs, Seattle film
 festivals.)
 > > Running time: 78 MIN.
 >
 >

Lisa Stone
 curator

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 Half the story has never been told-
 Bob Marley

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