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Los Angeles Unified Film Festival

May 13, 2008



We recently had the opportunity to see films featured at the Los Angeles United Film Festival, held at the Fine Arts Theatre in Beverly Hills in mid-April. (Yeah, we're a little behind on our reviews.) The LAUFF showcases feature-length documentaries (that is, films at least 60 minutes long), and has sister festivals in New York and Tulsa. We saw two films, one about graffiti artists called *PIECE OF MIND* and another about an unusual preacher named *THE JESUS GUY*.



Evan Romoff and Keegan Gibbs directed *PIECE OF MIND*, an informative and interesting film that follows a loose-knit crew of four graffiti artists in Los Angeles. The film spends some time worrying over the usual question -- "is it art or is it vandalism?" -- but *PIECE OF MIND* is best seen as a celebration of four extremely talented folk artists, who make seriously beautiful paintings in public places. Their most provocative work -- if one is looking for provocation -- can be found in their additions to billboards throughout the city. According to a recent expose in the [LA Weekly](#), almost 4000 illegal billboards choke Los Angeles. Who are the bigger criminals -- corporations who cram advertising down our throats or taggers who mark up those billboards? Perhaps anti-billboard activists should give the list of illegal boards to these four artists -- the visual quality of the streets might improve.



Sean Tracey's *THE JESUS GUY* introduces us to a odd evangelist who wanders from town to town, barefoot and tunic-clad, looking a bit like James Caviezel in *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*. This committed Christian asks for nothing, eating and sleeping only when charity is offered. He is quite conscious of the life he has chosen for himself, and is both thoughtful and articulate about his actions, behaving more like a performance artist than someone who just stepped off the Ship of Fools. The director followed the peripatetic preacher for several years, recording the preacher's conversations with... well... anyone who would talk with him. (His visits with school groups are particularly surreal.) Despite his unusual presentation, he turns out to be a rather conventional Catholic, even taking a group of charismatic Christians to task for speaking in tongues. We also witness his rather annoying habit of referring to himself as "what's your name," launching many Groucho-Marx-like conversations

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with the people he meets. Q: "What's your name?" A: "What's your name." Q: "No, really, what's your name?" You get it. The film is primarily a portrait and an entertaining one, although the final significance of good old what's-his-name remains unclear.

Two for two. Not bad. If these films indicate the quality of the other films in the festival (and we have no reason to think otherwise), the LAUFF is certainly on the right track, with a promising future.

Posted at 12:48 PM by [rick](#)

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