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Requiem For The Dead Forest

By [The Editor](#) on May 14, 2014

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Requiem For The Dead Forest – A Powerful Narrative Of Images And Sound

By Mike Archer. The rich history of art house films, which tend to operate at a deeper level than dialogue and offer up their message and meaning through the contrast and juxtaposition of colour, sound, landscape and texture, is on brilliant display in the film "Requiem For The Dead Forest," by Fraser Valley filmmaker Vidas Rasinskas.

Cover Photo: Still from the movie *Requiem For The Dead Forest* (Keneesh-Brenda Pierre).

Relying solely on image and sound, Rasinskas opens the film with powerful music and wildlife images revealing a natural world which is in balance. Bright colours and evocative music provide a perfect backdrop to the compelling images of mother deer and bears with their offspring. The birth and rebirth of spring and the changing of the seasons provides a start to the voyage and a hopeful, happy beginning. Left to its own devices, nature exudes calm, peace and a predictable, hopeful and reliable pattern.

The arrival of the white woman in the movie provides a stark change to modern, urban surroundings and a complete change of colour and tone. While not in a hurry, she is on a mission of some sort and we are startled by the bothersome sounds of what turn out to be the squeaky wheels of a wheelchair inhabited by an aboriginal woman who is clearly following her.



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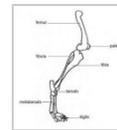
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Still from the movie (Dalia Klimaite-Stolpner).

Silent, Powerful Relationship Between The Two Protagonists

Through the two protagonists, a story about the relationship between white, Western civilization and its destructive impact on nature, is juxtaposed against a parallel story of a broken aboriginal culture and its deeper understanding of the natural world.

The relationship between the two characters is perfectly shown through the aboriginal women's passive but relentless pursuit of the white woman. She is never threatening, never aggressive – merely a constant, annoying reminder who adds tension and confusion to the story.

When the white woman faces her follower, she does so in a non-aggressive fashion but the conflict between the two is palpable.

The relationship between white woman and environment changes gradually and becomes more revealing and complex as her story progresses. Vivid imagery provides clues to the messages and many meanings in the film.

Two horses: one white, one brown, feed themselves from the same field, and depend on the same grass to survive.

In her increasingly hurried and unsettling path through the modern world the white woman walks through a bleak landscape, usually surrounded by a thick fog, filled with industrial wreckage, broken buildings, piles of wrecked cars and other debris of the modern city.



Still from the movie (Keneesh-Brenda)

Images And Music Tell The Stories

One example of the effective use of scenery is the speeding train, which is used as a backdrop during one scene in the white woman's voyage. Once that backdrop disappears we are left with a new backdrop of a boat, which was hidden by the train. Both provide important clues to the woman's growing understanding of her fate and that of the world around her. The mood is set by a lack of colour, unsettling music and scene changes which, while never sudden, nonetheless add stress to the viewer by becoming more and more unpredictable and unpleasant as the story progresses.

Rasinskas explores his other protagonist's story – that of the aboriginal woman – by following her on a separate path through the woods, in her wheelchair. While the use of the wheelchair, especially in the frustratingly difficult dirt and mud of the forest, provides its own tension, the aboriginal woman seems always to be at peace with her surroundings.

Despite the difficulty of pushing herself through the grass, gravel and sand of the non-urban landscape through which we follow her, she appears, if not content, at least resigned to her fate. The theme of rebirth is revisited when she manages, despite her obvious handicap, to rescue a fish and provide it with new hope by bringing it back to its natural environment.

The techniques used by Rasinskas to set the mood, announce changes in the story line, and focus the viewer's mind on the images and the action at hand is skillful and adroit. The use of colour and an almost complete lack of colour and bleakness to set the tone for the different scenes is subtle but powerful.





Still from the movie.

An Artist Painting His Picture

These are all the traditional methods of helping the viewer through the story and making sure the viewer notices important changes but Rasinskas uses them to powerful effect so that, on an almost subliminal level, the artist paints his picture, tells his story and brings his message home in a seemingly effortless and unobtrusive manner.

Rasinskas' use of colour; his careful setting of scenes using the environment at his disposal helps tell his stories at a deeper level. The manner in which Rasinskas positions the aboriginal woman's wheelchair so that it appears to be sitting upright while the background landscape is on an almost unnoticeable slant; the use of one branch to almost appear to tighten around the white woman's neck as she navigates the dead forest – these are subtle but sublime moments of storytelling.

Perhaps one of the most powerful uses of imagery and contrast to tell the story can be found in the comparison between the bleak, cold and unforgiving surroundings of the dead forest and the images from modern, urban city life. Both backdrops are filmed in colour but there is almost no colour in the landscape – a key message of the film.

While the aboriginal woman's story is always adorned with deep rich colour, the white woman's story is typically adorned with a bland, lifeless and disturbing lack of colour.



Still from the movie.

Possibility Of Spiritual Redemption

While the film tells a story of death, destruction and a deep sadness, the protagonists, while clearly affected by their stories, are not left completely without hope. The white woman's eventual understanding of the opportunity for and possibility of spiritual redemption and rebirth is powerfully driven home as all of the imagery, sound, colour and mood change in her story with a powerful use of scenery and location which leaves the viewer surprised, perplexed even, but ultimately hopeful.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of Rasinskas' success in using all of the tools at his disposal to tell

the different stories in the film and intertwine them to a successful conclusion is that, once the film is done and it's messages and meanings digested, it is hard to imagine how dialogue would have done anything but detract from the storytelling.

The forest may be dead but there is still hope for its revival.

In His Own Words

An Interview With Vidas Rasinskas

Abbotsford Today: Why were you inspired to make this movie?

Vidas Rasinskas: *I should say that there were several inspirations and the reasons for creating the film. As usual, the reasons were initially quite practical. It started several years ago, when the script for the movie 'Requiem for the Dead Forest' did not yet exist and I was working intensively and building my plans to start a two-hour-length feature film called 'One of Two'. The script for the movie and the detailed project plan was fully accomplished and a few film producers from the US expressed their interest to co-produce the film.*



Screenwriter and Film Director Vidas Rasinskas.

They started taking steps towards the production of the film, however, due to the economic situation, it was never started. Interestingly, the events featured in the script that looked quite impossible five years ago appear to have been a prediction and have become even more topical today.

At the time, when I lost my last hope of starting 'One of Two,' I received an offer from European feature film producers to take part in an international film project consisting of several short to mid-length-films on the environmental theme, all produced in different countries by different directors and crews.

"In addition to the environmental theme I wanted to talk about the ecology of human soul, the sense of guilt and spiritual recovery that brings piece of mind after the long and disturbing journey towards the confession."

Of course such idea made lots of sense to me at that time, as I believed that short or mid-length film was less expensive to produce and it was more likely that the entire project would actually be accomplished. We were the first to submit our script and it was kindly accepted with very positive comments.

Unfortunately, a few months of waiting brought another disappointment: the project was put on hold for reasons outside of my control. I grew tired of relying on someone else and decided to start on my own with the support and resources I have, with no outside help.

"I feel like sometimes words just aren't enough to create the right mood. I believe that the true power of cinema art is in visuals or language of visuals, but not words."

The project would never have been accomplished without the support of my wife, and our friends who sacrificed their weekends and their personal time to make this project happen. It is truly hard to express how grateful I am for their commitment and time.

Although the destiny of our natural environment is extremely inspiring and important to me, in addition to the environmental theme I wanted to talk about the ecology of human soul, the sense of guilt and spiritual recovery that brings piece of mind after the long and disturbing journey towards the confession.



It took almost two years to complete the project and the inspiration has grown throughout the project, beginning every new day on the set, with our little crew, and with every new piece of edited scene. I used the language of symbols in the film to tell my story, however, I like when the audience has their own interpretations. Symbols allow flexibility in the understanding of the film by evoking feelings in the minds of individuals based

on their own personal lives.

I believe, in this way, the process becomes more personal and touching and that inspires me even more.

I would like to think of 'Requiem for the Dead Forest' as a piece of art and believe that the spectator of the film will be provoked to become a little bit of an artist himself just by watching the film. Even if he or she sneaked into the theater to hide himself from rain, I hope the film will touch them. I wish I could know all versions of interpretations from the audience after they see the film. Often the interpretations of the spectator speak about the great creative talent in understanding cinema arts and can highly impress and surprise the film director.

AT: Is it your preferred way to work using image and sound rather than image, sound and dialogue?

VR: *It depends on what it is. My other not yet produced screenplays and my movie 'Wooden Staircase,' do have dialogues, however, I don't really like 'hiding' protagonists behind words and, if I feel like I can avoid words, I'll do so. I like 'holding' the protagonists quiet before they even say a word and by using close-ups to reveal the inner condition of a character and the overall mood of the scene. I believe that this works much better than words.*

Hermann Hesse wrote: "Words do not express thoughts very well. They always become a little different immediately after they are expressed, a little distorted, a little foolish."

I think nowadays film directors use way too many 'empty' words in their films. It's as if they are hiding their lack-of-things to say behind dialogs. I've also seen many films with strong and meaningful dialogues, but I feel like sometimes words just aren't enough to create the right mood.

I'm a strong believer that the right imagery, combined with the right sound, can touch much deeper than any combination of words. I believe that the true power of cinema art is in visuals or language of visuals, but not words. I try to make each and every frame of my movie meaningful and belonging to the structure of the film as an irreplaceable part of it. It is similar to a brick that belongs to a building and is a part of its entire carrying structure.

Cinema art was born without words and I notice signs that on the peak of its evolution, it may be coming back to being wordless, only on a totally different, much higher artistic level.

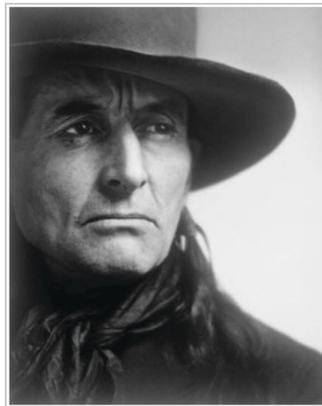
AT: The film shows a very unique, deep and complex understanding of Canada. How were you able to learn so deeply and in such a meaningful way about the attachment of North American aboriginal people to the environment?

VR: *It's a very simple and yet extremely complex question at the same time and I'm happy you asked it.*

"I have always felt a deep respect to North American aboriginal people, the true landlords of this continent."

As a kid and a teenager, I liked everything related to North American aboriginal culture. I read all the books and watched all the movies that were available to me. I was so in love with all of it that, if I'd had the opportunity, I'd probably be like Armand Garnet Ruffo's protagonist [Grey Owl](#), Archie Belaney.

I have always felt a deep respect to North American aboriginal people, the true landlords of this continent, who had lived in full harmony with Mother Nature before we Europeans set foot on it.



Portrait of Grey Owl (1936), by Yousuf Karsh

We wanted to take it all, to conquer it and to exchange it for progress no matter what. And, so we did. When I think of a parallel with nature's destiny all I can come up with is the aboriginal people.

In addition I would like to mention my great appreciation and my deep respect to Keneesh-Brenda Pierre of Sts'ailes Indian Band, who took the part of the American Indian Woman in the film.

It was a great pleasure to know and work with her and a truly eye-opening and educating experience to learn how devoted and sanctifying a person can be to her family, her native band and her nation. She was an invaluable gemstone to the film and a true example for all of us to say the least.

AT: Is there anything you would like to add?

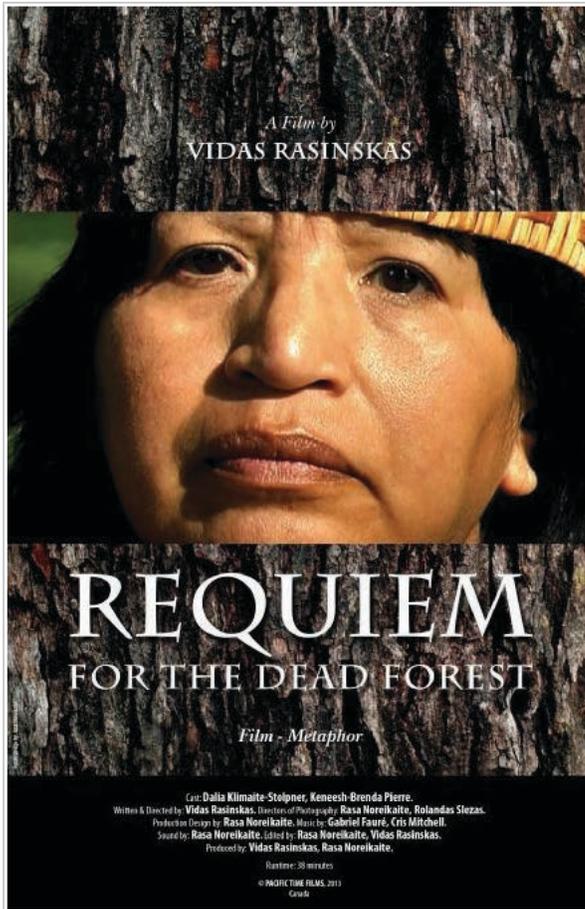
VR: I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to the actresses and the crew. My special thanks to Dalia Klimaite-Stolpner (The White Woman); Keneesh-Brenda Pierre (American Indian Woman); Rolandas Slezas (DOP); Cris Mitchell (Composer); and Rasa Noreikaite (DOP, Editing, Production Design), my great support and companion who has worn a number of different hats in order to complete this project.

Without your invaluable work I wouldn't have been able to accomplish what I've accomplished.

For more on the film and Pacific Time Films click [here](#).

Cinema Expert and Researcher Irene Green wrote a review for the film Requiem For The Dead Forest. You can read it [here](#).

The film is listed on [imdb.com](#)



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Requiem For The Dead Forest Rolandas Slezas Sts'ailes Indian Band ticker

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About The Editor

Mike spent 20 years in the newspaper business as a journalist, editor, sales manager and publisher before moving into public relations and business consulting. In 2008 he became founding editor of the Abbotsford Post and he is co-owner of Today Media Group. Mike graduated from the University of Alberta in 1970 with a BA in Political Science and Economics and has since pursued graduate studies in both Federalism and Journalism. He has a Diploma in Web Design from Academy of Learning.

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