

Altered states of animation

Unique technology makes Richard Linklater's latest movie a fine piece of cult artwork

MOVIE REVIEW

'Waking Life'

★★★★☆

By Alix Kerl
Oregon Daily Emerald

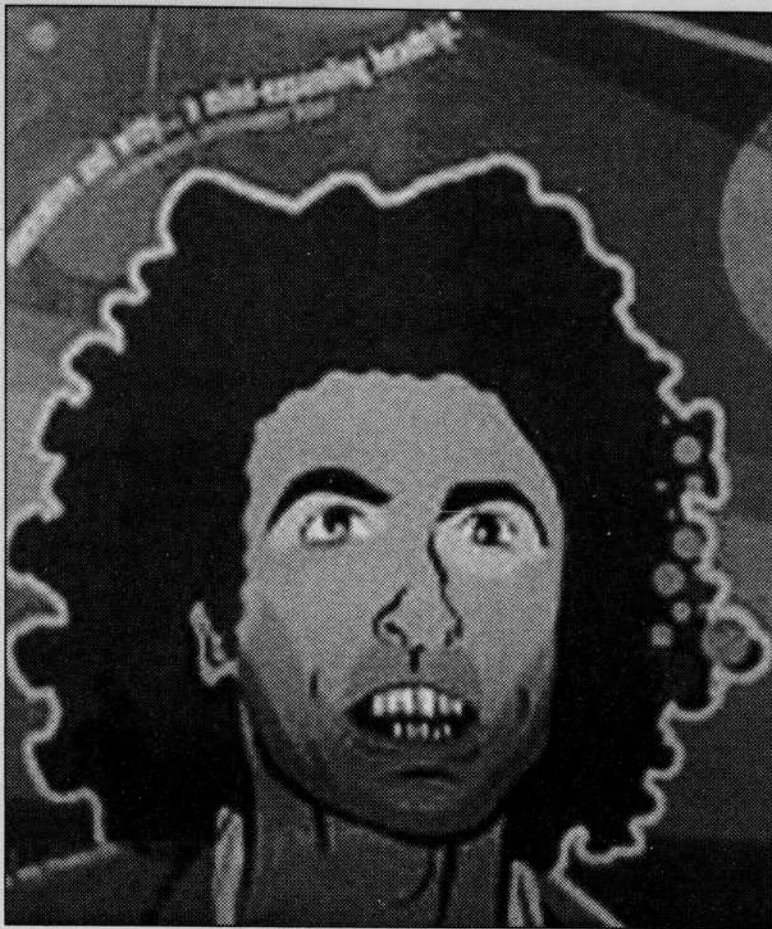
Some people insist that the best way to watch "Waking Life" is in a chemically altered state. That might be a good way to absorb the series of philosophical monologues given by jostling cartoon characters, but chemically altered state or no, it's best to go in with no prior knowledge of the film. The surprise of the first viewing is one of the more wonderful things about it.

Let's just say that reality is unsure in this new movie from writer/director Richard Linklater, who also wrote and directed "Tape" and "Dazed and Confused." "Waking Life" is a painterly, philosophical dreamworld. And it is cool. This film is already becoming a cult classic — and that means no one really cares if I like it or not. And because I don't know much about philosophy, I'll leave interpretation to the philosophers.

Let's talk about the burning question on everyone's mind: How did they make it?

The film was originally shot digitally with Sony handheld cameras using with living, breathing actors. (Yes, that's Ethan Hawke you spot behind the moving painted mask, and Julie Delpy also plays a part.) The protagonist is played by Wiley Wiggins (better known as Mitch Kramer from "Dazed and Confused"). But these characters really only provide voices and a basis for the movements.

The innovative look of the movie comes from technology developed by animation director Bob Sabiston, which allowed artists to digitally draw over the live action



Courtesy photo

in the film. Sabiston affectionately calls his technique "interpolated rotoscoping." This means that animators only draw lines every third frame or so, allowing the software to fill in the holes by smoothly stretching individual brushstrokes across a range of frames. This saves time and makes the animation smoother.

The technique uses Quicktime, an Apple program that translates digitized video and audio into application programs. Sabiston's software allows animators to separate and overlap segments of a scene and run them in different Quicktime films. This is what creates the vomit-inducing rocking of the film.

While this alone makes the movie unique, Linklater employed a different artist to animate each character, about 30 in all, to create

a constant morphing of styles and splintering of visual effects.

Producers say that the movie was filmed with the animation technique in mind.

"We also wanted each scene to have a distinctly different style, so we could give the animators a variety of material to work with," said producer Tommy Pallotta in an interview with www.directorworld.com.

While each minute of the film took over 250 hours to animate, it was a bargain compared to other animated films — Disney and Pixar movies cost from 10 to 15 times as much to make.

This movie is rated "R" for language and some violent images.

E-mail reporter Alix Kerl at alixkerl@dailyemerald.com.

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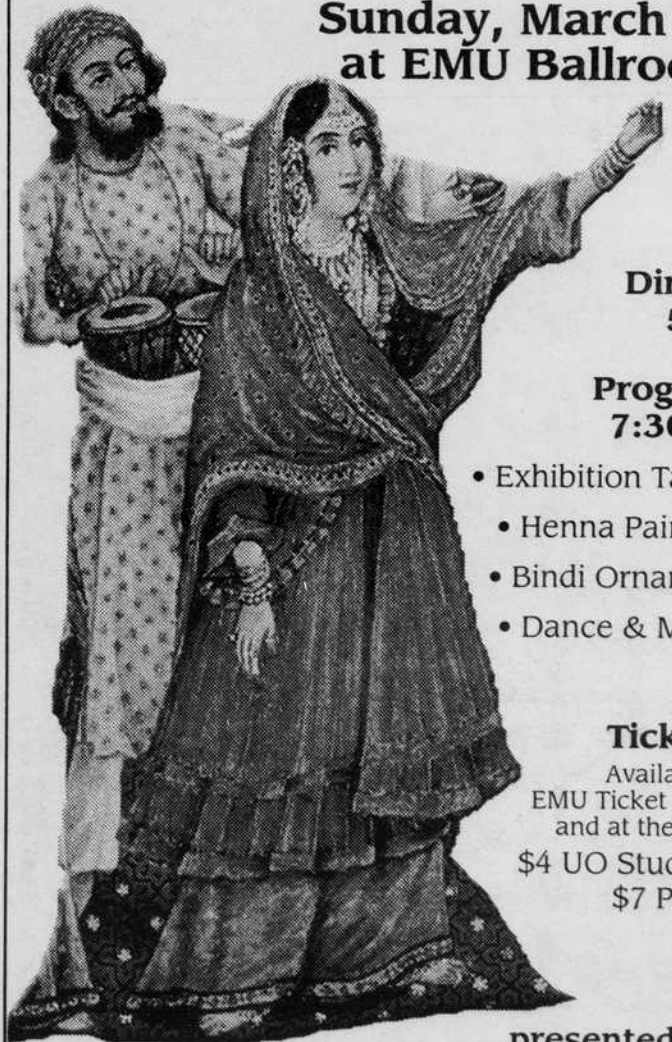
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