

his subculture, hisses, "Today sexual preference, tomorrow a tattoo." There's also the loveliest mother-daughter coming-out scene in lesbian cinema history (not too sappy, I promise).

Honestly, *Kissing* is not the perfect lesbian film. It's more like the perfect gay film for straight people to help them feel more comfortable with the whole thing.

But it's witty with moments of graceful insight, and the characters are endearing. It's very much worth leaving your too-high expectations at the door.

—LB

Iris

Based on John Bayley's two books of posthumous memoirs about his wife, the late novelist Iris Murdoch, Richard Eyre's film features impressive performances by Kate Winslet, Hugh Bonneville, Judi Dench and Jim Broadbent as, respectively, the young and old Bayley-Murdochs.



Kate Winslet play the young Iris Murdoch

Iris (now playing at Fox Tower Cinemas) shifts evenly through time, from Murdoch's twilight as an Alzheimer's sufferer to her collegiate days of courtship with Bayley. They are depicted here as charmingly eccentric, smart, sometimes contentious old English goats whose love for the literary life is all-consuming. A beautiful sequence featuring the elderly couple shopping at a modern supermarket while theorizing about philosophies of life is both funny and revealing; the film would have benefited from more such well-constructed scenes.

On the days-gone-by front, Winslet is completely winning, as usual. She also bears an amazing resemblance to the young Murdoch, a woman of intellect who, socially speaking, was—with her open bisexuality and regular practice of free love—something of a more pleasant and less selfish version of Anais Nin. (Murdoch's great 1967 novel, *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, is a rarely acknowledged landmark of literature with its rich, emotionally complete homosexual characterization).

—CM

However beguiling the players, though, *Iris* ultimately fails to achieve real impact. It evokes the feeling that we're treading much too lightly over the complex story of this venerated novelist, her degenerative disease, her struggles with love and lust, and her challenge as a woman to be taken seriously as a writer. All is included, but nothing seems genuinely explored. Eyre's aim seems to have been precision and completeness rather than feeling or perspective, as if his movie project was merely a fact-finding mission.

The actors consistently beat Eyre's overly timid atmosphere to convey some energy and immediacy, and they alone make this a film worth seeing. Murdoch's memory and estate might benefit from the fact that *Iris* will introduce her work to a new audience, but she doubtless would have been bemused at best by Eyre's silver-screen tiptoeing.

—Christopher McQuain

Burnt Money

Nene and Angel are a pair of bank robbers known as "the twins" operating in Argentina circa 1965. Their symbiosis extends to their sex lives, and the *Bonnie and Clyde* anti-hero glamour is cemented when we discover their bad-boy danger: Nene is a hard-bitten ex-con, and Angel is tortured by voices in his head.

After a big job goes wrong and police are killed, the lovers find themselves on the lam. In true noir fashion, they're eventually done in by a dangerous dame, in this case a beautiful prostitute.

Director Marcelo Pineyro and writer Marcelo Figueras have created a sensuous, overheated riff on what we're told in the end credits is a true story. The staging of the final showdown with the cops makes for a disappointingly flaccid ending; it's all straightforward action-movie blare, which seems like a complete failure of nerve when contrasted with the slow simmer preceding it.

Up to then, however, Pineyro maintains a tense, dark and extremely sexy (although not very P.C.) tension that will be both familiar and welcome to anyone who enjoys the grimly thrilling, unrestrained, erotic atmosphere of the great noir pictures. (*Burnt Money* plays March 29 to April 4 at Cinema 21.)

—CM

Experience the experimental

Nathaniel Dorsky's name isn't automatically associated with those of his predecessors, queer creators of avant-garde short film like Kenneth Anger (*Scorpio Rising*) and Jack Smith (*Flaming Creatures*). The work of this artist—who was born and raised in New Jersey, joined New York City's mid-'60s experimental film juggernaut and now lives and works (along with fellow filmmaker and his partner of 25 years, Jerome Hiler) in the creative hotbed of San Francisco—lacks the confrontational "edge" associated with more storied and well-known underground gay cinema.

Anger and Smith were staunchly Western filmmakers, exuberantly playing with and desecrating pop culture symbols as an act of defiance. In comparison to theirs, Dorsky's work could be described as Eastern-contemplative and anti-symbolic, more concerned with images themselves—the actual tangibility of texture, light and color—than their subjective implications.

Four Wall Cinema's *Luminous Motion: The Silent Films of Nathaniel Dorsky* isn't a retrospective and doesn't include his earliest trilogy—1964's *Ingreen* and *A Fall Trip Home* and 1965's *Summerwind*—which recounts his childhood and

adolescence as well as his struggle with then-taboo homosexuality. Instead, the program concentrates on three of his more recent films, *Variations*, *Arbor Vitae* and *Love's Refrain*; none is more than a decade old, and they uniformly reflect a formalist, purist, non-narrative sense of the visual.

It's a more complete and serious version of *American Beauty*'s plea to "look closer." The 1999 Oscar winner's emblematic existentialist image of a floating plastic bag was, in fact, an homage to Dorsky's work.

His films are gorgeous, colorful scrapbooks of the beauty to be found in the juxtaposition of everyday images and ridding those images of their narrative baggage so we can appreciate the immediate curiosity and strangeness of each isolated object. Dorsky's work might be formal in intent and rigorous in execution, but it's also quite literally "feel good" cinema—after a viewing, our visual palette is cleansed, our perspective altered to something approaching serenity.

—CM

LUMINOUS MOTION: THE SILENT FILMS OF NATHANIEL DORSKY plays 7:30 p.m. March 18 and 19 at Four Wall Cinema, 425 S.E. Third Ave.

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