

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Journey into Humanity

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in front of a screen, looking at the photographs and answering questions about them, with the camera behind the screen filming through the photographs, via a semi-transparent mirror. The effect is profound, conveying a sense of Salgado reliving his experiences of capturing the images. Often he is quite moved as he describes the humanity of his subjects; we see that he is an artist but also a seeker, whose photographic images arise from a true ministry of presence with his subjects.

Salgado's work has famously been criticized by Susan Sontag and others for conveying the pain of others with a beauty that dulls the conscience, and the film has been criticized for not examining Salgado's work from that more critical lens. I didn't miss such a perspective -- and, indeed, I think such criticism misses an answer that is contained in the film itself. Salgado's photographs are the product of weeks and sometimes months spent with their subjects, often in countries beset by war or famine or tragedy. The artist creates a relationship with the people he pho-

tographs that enable him to capture their humanity in a way that would not otherwise be possible. They respond to the emotion and empathy which so clearly guide him, and he speaks reverently of them and of a sense that they "give" him the photo. Salgado has indeed become famous for photographing suffering, yet he has equipped himself to offer a voice to those who suffer and to convey what is deeply true and beautiful in their humanity. The fact that many may not have the capacity to absorb the impact of the images is indeed troubling, but cannot be the fault of their beauty.

The film also captures something important about Salgado's own trajectory. Years of photographing human misery have taken their toll, and particularly after spending time in Rwanda during the genocide, Salgado experienced a profound depression and stopped working for a time. Around that period, Lelia's inspiration and vision prompted the couple to embark on the gargantuan task of replanting the forest on Salgado's family's former ranch. What began as a family project became a massive ecological undertaking of successfully plant-



PHOTO BY SEBASTIÃO SALGADO/AMAZONAS IMAGES/SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

The humanity of people at the margins like these refugees pushed out of their Ethiopian villages by war and extreme drought are captured by acclaimed photographer Sebastião Salgado in his new documentary 'Salt of the Earth.' Salgado's collection of photos from 40 years of work around the globe make for a powerful, spiritual journey.

ing 2.5 million trees, bringing life where there was devastation. The resulting Instituto Terra has become the leading employer in the region, and out of that project, Salgado's artistic work has moved in the direction of photographing landscapes, wildlife, and human communities that continue to live in accordance with ancestral traditions and cultures.

I was struck by the lessons contained in the journey of this artist and his family. Compelled by an adventurer's spirit; by an intense interest in what moves humans to seek, to work, and to destroy; by an artistic gift; and by an intention to observe deeply and empathetically, Salgado has created a

body of work that challenges us to wrestle with the most profound questions of human existence. It makes sense to me that the trajectory of his work through death and devastation has moved him to engage in other acts of creation and to explore elemental expressions of life. And it makes sense that all

of it contains beauty.

Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. Her movie review column *Opinionated Judge* appears regularly in *The Portland Observer*. Find her movie blog at opinionatedjudge.blogspot.com.

Madcap Odyssey at Milagro

Portland's only Latin-American theater presents "American Night: The Ballad of Juan José," a sharp-eyed and sharp-witted comedy about a Mexican immigrant who dreams of moving to the Land of the Free.

Juan José studies fervently for his citizenship test, and his dream transforms into his obsession, launching him on a madcap odyssey through American past and present. Nine actors portray dozens of characters ranging from Abraham Lincoln to Joan Baez, exploring stereotypes and truth in this provocative and irreverent romp through U.S. history.

Written by Richard Montoya of the acclaimed comedy troupe, Culture Clash, and based on the controversial book, *A People's History of the United States* by



PHOTO BY RUSSELL J YOUNG
Ozvaldo Gonzalez in Milagro's production of "American Night: The Ballad of Juan José."

historian Howard Zinn, *American Night: The Ballad of Juan José* plays through May 23 at Milagro Theater, 525 S.E. Stark St.

Tickets start at \$24 with discounts for students, seniors,

veterans, and groups of over 15. For more information, visit milagro.org.

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