

Arkhaios Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Film Festival Hilton Head, South Carolina, 23-25 October 2014

<http://www.arkhaiosfilmfestival.org/>

Arkhaios is the creation of avocational archaeologist Jean Guilleux who noted that while there are over a dozen archaeology film festivals in his native Europe, North America has only one: The Archaeology Channel International Film and Video Festival in Eugene Oregon (TAC). Guilleux's five-year plan is to see if he can generate enough interest and support for an on-going annual Archaeology film festival in the Eastern US. For the first Arkhaios in 2013 Guilleux rented a slate of winning films from the TAC film festival and solicited films specifically about South Carolina heritage and archaeology, but this year's Arkhaios was a juried competition. Guilleux's criteria for films are that they must be of high intellectual merit, well produced and of interest to both general and academic audiences. He also tries to balance the program so that excellent smaller films are not overshadowed by big budget ones, and he reserves three hours (one hour per day) of the festival for films about South Carolina. Entries were solicited in February and a screening committee made up of film makers, historians, ethnographers, archaeologists and writers/journalists selected seventeen films from the forty that were submitted for consideration. A separate jury of similar composition voted on the winners in four categories. There was also a Founder's Award for Public Archaeology and audience members voted for their favorites each day. The winners in all categories were announced at the end of the festival.

The films featured nine countries and covered a variety of archaeological and heritage topics. Many of the films were introduced by their directors or other people involved in them. Admission was free so the audience was an eclectic mix of people with varied interests in archaeology and history, some of whom stayed for the whole festival, while others came to see specific films.

The jury's Grand Prize winner this year, was *The Lady of Cao*, directed by Jose Manuel Novoa, about a spectacular Moche elite burial from Peru, and an honorable mention went to *Ramesses II: The Great Journey*, directed by Valerie Girie and Guillaume Hecht. Both of these are big, slick films with reenactments and computer generated imagery, the type of films that are likely to be shown on PBS. For my taste they were among the least interesting of the festival's offerings. Tellingly, *Cao* was only second runner up in the audience favorites on the day it was shown, while *Ramesses II* did not figure in audience favorites at all. The award for the best Cultural Heritage Film went to the superb *Agave is Life*, directed by Meredith Dreiss and David Brown, a film about the many uses of the Agave plant and its place in Mexican heritage. An honorable mention went to *The Fuentiduena Apse: Journey from Castile to New York* directed by Christopher Noey, a fascinating film that chronicled the emplacement of the Spanish Medieval apse at the Cloisters Museum in New York in 1957.

The award for the best Archaeology film went to *Dance of the Maize God* directed by David Lebrun, which looked at how painted Mayan vases have been giving insight into Mayan court life and cosmology. The film also gives even-handed documentation of how the vases figure in the lives of the looters, dealers, academics and many others through whose hands they pass.

Finding Clovis, directed by Steve Folks, Won both an Honorable Mention for the best Archaeology Film and the Arkhaios Founder Award for Public Archaeology. This film is about Topper Site in South Carolina where Albert Goodyear's on-going

work has recovered Clovis and earlier artifacts, as well as evidence supporting the theory that a comet wiped out the Clovis culture.

The award for the Best South Carolina Heritage Film went to *Discovering Dave* directed by George Wingard and Mark Albertin, which is about an enslaved potter who worked in Edgefield, South Carolina in the 1800s where he signed his name to his pots and sometimes inscribed them with poetry. Two films directed by Jamie and Christie Koelker, *Pottersville: Home of Alkaline Glazed Stoneware* and *Horse Creek Valley: A Tale Worth Telling* were also situated in the Edgefield region and provided excellent context for the film. *Pottersville* was one of the little gems of the festival. It follows archaeologist George Calfas as he directs the excavation of a groundhog kiln and truly captures the decision making process in Archaeology. The honorable mention in this category went to the audience favorite *Hilton Head Island Back in the Day* directed by Butch Hirsch. This film tells the story of the African American community on Hilton Head Island through the reminiscences of its elders. This was the last film shown at the festival, and the house lights come up on an audience filled with people who had been featured in it. The short film *Finding Freedom's Home* directed by Carol Poplin provided background to Mitchellville, the freedman's community that figured prominently in *Hilton Head Island Back in the Day*.

One of the audience favorites that did not get picked by the jury was *The Renaissance of Mata Ortiz*, a beautiful film about how a friendship between self-taught potter Juan Quezada and anthropologist Spencer MacCallum revived the art of pottery making and saved a dying Mexican town. Although Quezada's original pots were close copies of Casas Grandes ceramics, his work and that of the many other villagers who were inspired by him have evolved into their own spectacular art forms.

I sincerely hope that Jean Guilleux has found his audience and that we can look forward to many more years of Arkhaios. The venue was the charming Coligny Theater, a single screen movie house located in a pleasant beachside shopping center. Screenings took place from 1:00 – 6:30 pm giving festival-goers plenty of time to enjoy the many amenities Hilton Head has to offer on a warm, Fall weekend.

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