

Published on February 4, 2010

Stephanie's Image at Opera Plaza Cinema Feb. 15-21

Missing Beauty

By Michael Fox



Her deglamorized, no-bullshit portrayal of a middle-aged single mother in grim financial straits earned Melissa Leo a Best Actress nomination for *Frozen River* (2008). The Oscar nod was also an acknowledgment of two decades of gutsy, gimmick-free character roles in movies such as *The Ballad of Little Jo* and *21 Grams*. A woman for whom acting — not stardom — is the Holy Grail, Leo took a central role in *Stephanie's Image*, San Francisco producer-director Janis DeLucia Allen's close-to-the-bone independent feature, as an ex-model whose mysterious murder propels a documentary filmmaker's search for the truth. JP Allen's sneaky-smart screenplay takes a thriller-slash-whodunit setup and spins a crafty yarn that plays with audience perceptions and expectations. A rare treat for awake-at-the-wheel moviegoers with a taste for puzzles, language, and high-level mindfucking, *Stephanie's Image* also showcases a wealth of breathtakingly fearless acting. As a further bonus, John Dilley's short film "How to Be Popular" and Robert Machoian and Rodrigo Ojeda-Beck's "Ella and the Astronaut" screen before the main attraction, and *Stephanie's Image* filmmakers attend tonight's screening.