

# Robert Redford's Showcase of Indie Cinema



IRANIAN FILM: A scene from the thought provoking short by director Saba Riazi, "The Wind Is Blowing on My Street" Year 2011 Program Sundance Film Festival Category Shorts Competition Short Program 2. SABA RIAZI

## 'The Wind Is Blowing on My Street'

**SUNDANCE CONTINUED FROM B1** The media constantly assures us that Muslim women actually find veils and headscarves liberating or comforting in some way. However, one young Iranian woman cannot wait to tear it off once she is safely home.

This leads to some tense moments when she accidentally locks herself out of the family flat with head uncovered in Saba Riazi's short film "The Wind Is Blowing on My Street," which screens as

part of Short Program II at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.

Riazi's second-year NYU graduate school film tells a relatively simple story, but it raises a number of significant issues regarding the state of (perhaps not-so) contemporary Iran. Noticing her predicament, a young man of college age newly arrived in the neighborhood keeps her company, even though each passer-by is a very real cause for concern.

The misogynist implications of

a society that makes an uncovered head a legitimate crisis are inescapable. However, "Wind" clearly suggests that Iran will pay a heavy price for its extremism, precipitating a study-abroad exodus of its best and brightest students seeking escape from the regime's intolerance, like the film's two lead characters.

Yet, maybe the film's most telling commentary comes in the closing credits, where the lead actress is simply billed as "anonymous."

Riazi helms with a deft touch, in no way overplaying the potential menace of the situation, but never letting viewers forget the vulnerability of the young woman's position either. She also elicits some quite natural, down-to-earth performances from her principal leads.

A very good short film, "The Wind Is Blowing on My Street" is one of several bold Iranian-themed selections at this year's Sundance.



STRANGE TILES: A scene from the off-beat documentary by director Jon Foy "Resurrect Dead: The Mystery of Toynbee Tiles." STEVE WEINIK

## 'Resurrect Dead'

Criticized for his overly "metaphysical" approach, historian-philosopher Arnold J. Toynbee's writings fell out of favor with the smart-set in the 1960s. One mysterious urban propagandist has undertaken an unlikely guerrilla campaign to repopularize Toynbee's more outlandish speculations.

His cryptic tiles have baffled many and intrigued a hardy band of investigators, who try to crack the riddle of his identity in Jon Foy's documentary "Resurrect Dead: The Mystery of the Toynbee Tiles."

If you live in New York, Philadelphia, or a host of other cities in the Northeast and Midwest, you might have stepped on or driven over a Toynbee tile. The basic message reads as follows:

"TOYNBEE IDEA  
IN KUBRICK'S 2001  
RESURRECT DEAD  
ON PLANET JUPITER"

As if that were not weird enough, many tiles also feature sidebar tiles that rant against the government and media in terms sometimes approaching outright anti-Semitism. In other sidebars, the tilist claims sole responsibility for the Toynbees, despite their appearances across the country and in four Latin American countries.

For various reasons, the rag-tag group of Toynbee researchers takes him at his word, narrowing in on three marginalized Philadelphians as their prime suspects. While their

investigative process is often fascinating, Foy spends far more time than necessary introducing the self-styled Toynbee experts, particularly his central POV figure, underground artist Justin Duerr. Good for them for being intellectually curious, but they are not exactly enthralling on-screen.

At its best, "Resurrect" explores a fascinating intersection of outsider art and conspiracy theory subcultures. The pursuit takes them to some unlikely places, including the shortwave radio community, which is evidently still alive and broadcasting.

Yet, perhaps the weirdest surprise of the film is the extent to which the mystery man reasonably interprets Toynbee. Though the historian did not necessarily say it would happen on Jupiter, he did hypothesize on the future possibility of resurrection through the rejuvenation of dead molecules. (However, the Kubrick connection is something of a stretch.)

The Toynbee tile phenomenon is a great idea for a documentary, and it is cool that Foy retains some of the mystery surrounding the tiles. Though it could stand to lose about 10 minutes of Duerr's backstory, "Resurrect Dead" is still one of the more satisfying documentaries at this year's Sundance.

Joe Bendel writes about independent film and jazz and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, please visit <http://jbspins.blogspot.com>.



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