

Truth and Reconciliation

program one

Truth

Sunday, September 9, 2007 — 3 pm — Headlands Center for the Arts
presented in association with Headlands Center for the Arts

Truth and Reconciliation is a two-part series of short and feature-length films created primarily by current and alumni artists in residence of Headlands Center for the Arts.

2005 Headlands alumnus Jeanne C. Finley's *Lost* (made with John Muse) combines an excerpt from the audio diary of an Army Chaplain serving in Iraq, who must reconcile his soldiers' justifiable shooting of an Iraqi man with the dismal reality that the dead man's widow and children now face, with a serene and foggy landscape symbolic of its narrator's clouded perspective. 2007 Headlands Artist in Residence Magnus Bårtås' series of short documentaries, *Who is...?* reenact their subjects' eclectic biographies in large and small detail, their histories translated from memory by the filmmaker from conversations many years earlier. 2004 Headlands alumnus Ramin Bahrani's 2005 feature *Man Push Cart* tells the story of a Pakistani coffee-cart vendor in New York City, played by an actor whose own biography overlaps substantially with the fictional narrative. (Anuradha Vikram, Headlands Center for the Arts)

Lost (2007) by Jeanne C. Finley and John Muse; digital video, color, sound, 4 minutes, tape from the makers

Lost combines a segment of an audio diary by Chaplain Major Eric Olson with a single, evolving shot of a former military base where dense fog obscures and reveals details of the landscape. The original video footage reframes the moral ambiguities of the diary segment, which chronicles what Olson calls "a very legitimate shooting" of an Iraqi by American soldiers and their efforts to assist the Iraqi's widow. (Jeanne C. Finley)

Who is...?

Man Push Cart (2005) by Ramin Bahrani; screened as video, color, sound, 87 minutes, tape from

"In Ramin Bahrani's film, *Man Push Cart*, Ahmad (Ahmad Ravsi), a former Pakistani pop star, works as one of the city's many pushcart vendors. You never think, when you see those shiny silver carts on every street corner, of how they get there. The vendors who are lucky enough and have enough money for a truck tow their carts, but many more, like Ahmad, push and pull their carts to their designated corner themselves. Bahrani talked in an interview with New York Magazine about watching the city's pushcart vendors and being reminded of Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which Sisyphus is condemned to endlessly push a boulder up a mountain, only to have it roll back down. The endless rhythm of Ahmad's days—take the train from his tiny Brooklyn apartment to Manhattan, pick up his cart, pull it—through dangerous New York City traffic—to his corner, then spend the day selling coffee and bagels to hurried New Yorkers, having only the most miniscule shreds of actual human interaction with the occasional friendly regular, then haul the cart back, only to start all over again the next day. Bahrani shows us Ahmad struggling with his cart again and again, establishing a rhythm for the film that mirrors the monotonous parade of days that is Ahmad's life.

"Ahmad's life is bleak, and newcomer Ravsi portrays him perfectly, radiating quiet despair. His wife died a year ago and he is separated from his young son, who is being raised by his in-laws, because his apartment is too small and he can't take care of him while working all day. Once a very popular pop star, he is now reduced to selling pirated DVDs on the side and accepting demeaning odd jobs from Mohammad, a wealthy Pakistani who lives in the neighborhood. Mohammad is one of those

slippery, successful fellows who is condescending without being aware of it. When he realizes who Ahmad is, he seems to take great pleasure in this former flavor of the month doing menial jobs for him, even as he makes empty promises to help Ahmad restart his musical career.

“Also in the neighborhood is Noemi (very engagingly played by Leticia Dolera), a Spanish girl working her relatives' newsstand down the street, and there is chemistry between Noemi and Ahmad from the first time they meet. Ahmad is still grieving his wife, though, and is so mired in desolation, which he buries in the comforting rhythm of the hard labor of his job, he barely notices—at first. Noemi and Ahmad become friends, and maybe they'll become more, but then Mohammad steps in with his cash and opera tickets and party invites and second home in upstate New York to woo her. Ahmad is reluctant to try to go after her himself, in part because of his dead wife, and in part because he feels he can't compete with Mohammad's bank account. Noemi isn't a shallow girl, however; she sees through Mohammad's smooth moves and into Ahmad's heart, but he can't seem to get enough momentum going to pursue her.

“*Man Push Cart* is a beautifully executed film. The stunning cinematography shows off the new, crisp and clean New York, and the city is almost used as a character in and of itself in the film—the guys at the produce stand, the garbage man, the customers, the vendors, even the taxis and buses Ahmad must navigate his cart through, all playing their parts in the ceaseless play that is life in the city that doesn't sleep. This is a painstakingly rendered film about perseverance in the face of emptiness and seemingly insurmountable odds, and yet it isn't a cliched, all's well that ends well film. Ahmad perseveres, yes, but will things ever get better for him? Bahrani, thankfully, avoids the temptation to give us a phony, heartwarming conclusion to Ahmad's difficult life; he leaves that question unanswered, as it is probably unanswered for many of the real pushcart vendors (and other people droning away in the service industries, serving people who largely ignore the humanity of the people waiting on them) out there.” (Kim Voynar, “Sundance Review: *Man Push Cart*,” *Cinematical*, www.cinematical.com/2006/01/20/sundance-review-man-push-cart/)