



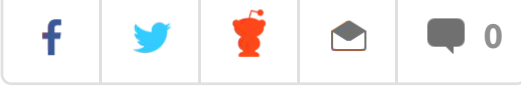
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DOXA film Shooting Indians: A Journey With Jeffrey Thomas explores the (mis)representation of Indigenous people in photography

by Hina Imam on May 10th, 2019 at 12:06 PM



Shooting Indians follows the journey of Iroquois photographer Jeffrey Thomas, his quest to document Indigenous people, and his creative process.

The title Shooting Indians is double-edged and instantly demands attention. At first glance, "shooting" reminds one of the many atrocities committed against Indigenous people in Canada.



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In a phone interview with the Georgia Straight, Zool Suleman, curator of the Longing and Belonging: 1990s South Asian Film and Video program at the DOXA Documentary Film Festival discussed about some of the themes present in the documentary.



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Indian filmmaker Ali Kazimi came to Canada to study film in the '80s. He had two things on his mind: he was grappling to understand contemporary Indigenous culture in Canada, and he also needed a subject for his thesis.

Then he met Jeffrey Thomas, an urban Iroquois photographer—in short, the perfect subject. And thus began a decadelong project. The film follows the journey of Thomas his quest to document Indigenous people, and essentially his creative process.

Early on, we find out Thomas wanted to be a photographer ever since he saw pictures taken by Edward Curtis, an early-20th-century white American photographer who was renowned for his images of Indigenous people in America.

"There was a big rush for photographers to come in and to preserve the things that they destroyed—that their culture destroyed. I think Curtis was indicative of the attitude at that time of coming in and preserving reminisces of this [Indigenous] culture," says Thomas.

Though we see only glimpses of Kazimi, one can feel the resonance shared between the filmmaker and his subject. They come from completely different parts of the world and cultures, yet they bond over similar lived experiences.

It is poignant to watch Thomas learn about his culture and (mostly) unlearn its portrayal through the white gaze. "There wasn't a history of Aboriginal people photographing themselves during that period of time, the early 20th century. Instead, they had photographers like Curtis," Thomas says.

This conflicted relationship with Curtis is an integral part of the film—on one hand he is inspired and extensively examines the late photographer's work about Indigenous people in North America, recognizing how there is little or no documentation otherwise.

Suleman added, "The idea of an Indian who is born in India and this misnamed, entirely misframed Indigenous person having that conversation is what makes Shooting Indians such a relevant film today."

Shooting Indians: A Journey With Jeffrey Thomas screens on Friday (May 10) at the Cinematheque as part of the DOXA Documentary Film Festival.

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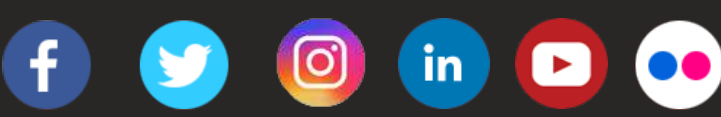
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