

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Imbalance: Feature Documentaries

Adam Leipzig · Monday, September 13th, 2010

Every art form, except one, has a specific quality-to-audience ratio.

The more good music, the more people dance. The more good books, the more good readers. It's the same for video games, visual art, performing arts, and for movies.

But one art form doesn't operate by this rule.

What's the exception?

Feature documentaries.

I was reminded of this fact today at [WestDoc](#), the annual conference for documentary filmmakers in Santa Monica. It was full of people, some of whom I know do very good work. Work that's increasingly important as television and cable news channels devote less resources to in-depth explorations of our world, and print journalism is treading water. But feature documentaries are not being seen.

There are more good docs being made today than ever before. Each year at [Sundance](#), for example, the quality of the docs far outstrips the overall quality of the narrative features. But while the number of excellent docs has grown, the audience for them has apparently shrunk to microscopic scale.

I say "apparently" because, with the crisis in film distribution, it is difficult to tell what audiences really want. (Audience hunger is limited to what's put before them on the table.)

But at this point, feature docs exist in an inverted world of huge supply and negligible demand. Never in the history of any creative movement has this imbalance been so extreme. Or so deleterious for the artists and the society at large.

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