

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Los Angeles Dance Shorts Film Festival

Sarah Elgart · Wednesday, July 10th, 2019

This year, I was honored by an invitation to be the first judge for the **Los Angeles Dance Shorts Film Festival (LADSFF)**. I attended the festival last year as a filmmaker, with my own short “Ghost Story,” and was immediately impressed by the accessibility and easy going feel of the evening.

Founder and Executive Director Nicole Manoochehri is a dancer and dance filmmaker in her own right. Now in its third year, **LADSFF** has happened the past two years at Mimoda, a dance studio in mid-city Los Angeles with a lovely casual restaurant, Paper or Plastik Café, attached. New this year, Manoochehri brought in Olivia Mia Orozco as Festival Director to expand their mission of *“gathering creators and lovers of screendance in one place to celebrate dance film and inspire each other.”*

The way it’s set up, you have to enter from the restaurant to get into the studio. As such a casual crowd ambles in, glasses of wine in hand, settling in to their seats enthusiastically to see about a one and a half to two hour show of fifteen international dance shorts all under 10 minutes in length. The presence of the café aligns perfectly with Nicole’s vision to keep an intimate and laid back feel to the festival.



A moment from the singular & powerful film MASS.

Dance films are such a niche genre of filmmaking—mostly wordless, narrative, conceptual or abstract films, with few funding sources existing to underwrite them (albeit many more outside of the US)—and they rarely find distribution or make any money when they finally do get made. So consequently audiences that come to see them are mostly die hard screen dance aficionados or laypeople who are open to the potential for the kind of visual and metaphoric power and poetry that happens at the intersection of dance and film.

While the festival proper receives submissions from all over the world, this year included an eclectic round up of films from 8 different countries, each one very different from the other, a couple of films which I had seen before and many others I had not. It was a daunting task to be the sole judge, and I had a bit of a conundrum in choosing a winner. As with any viable art form, dance films are *so subjective* that what I like may differ wildly from the next person. For one thing, my aesthetic preference veers in general towards European films, and for another, having watched thousands of dance films for upwards of twelve years I am probably a harder nut to crack. In any case, this year, instead of choosing one “Pick of the Fest” winner, I convinced Nicole to let me

select two.



A moment from the film *Anima*.

One of the winners was the French film **MASS**, a strong and singular film directed by FULLE. **MASS** was notable for having apparently been shot in a single-take inside of a giant warehouse, which must have taken a good deal of rehearsal for camera and bodies. For me the film was appealing in part because it was so imperfect and gritty looking, really not employing any formalized movement, but rather a mass of pedestrian movers and movement. With all the pushing and pulling and looks of angst or confusion on the faces of the 40 or 50 individuals, **MASS** seemed to me to reference the issue of immigration, and in that way was timely and powerful. The film's biggest issue was that there were few to no people of color. Nevertheless I found it beautiful and moving. You can watch a trailer for **MASS** here:

<https://youtu.be/6udV2wLcolo>

My second selection for winner of "Pick of the Fest," heralding from China, was **Anima**, directed by Matthieu Belin. **Anima** is an elegant film—a NOWNESS pick—that singles out four beautiful looking people on a rooftop overlooking Shanghai. The lighting, the palette and muted grays of the sky and buildings are gorgeous, and it weaves together contemporary and gestural movement with cool edits that respond to abstract cords of the music. As per the liner notes "*Anima is a visual narration taking place in between the open sky and the far views of a cityscape in Shanghai, which carries in its womb an infinite of untold stories.*" It uses the body and dance as an art form to explore the "*domain of human emotions.*" This is in effect, what dance films are all about, so no wonder it works.

**Los Angeles Dance Shorts Film Festival** is a dance film festival with an international reach and a homegrown heart. In addition to their annual festival they occasionally hold free community events. Look for **LADSFF** next year and follow them at @ladanceshortsfilmfest

*Enjoy.*

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