

2009 Wisconsin Film Festival, Day Four: As the snow flies

by Ellen Meany

on Monday 04/06/2009 08:04:50

Nothing more Wisco than a blizzard in April, but clutching a handful of festival tickets, we bundle up and get moving. We like it here, remember? The snow never materializes in any significant way, but birds and buildings do, memes that have popped up in all the movies we've seen this weekend.

The Bartell is our first stop, for *Wings of Defeat*, which plays to a packed house. In the film, Risa Morimoto tells the story of Japanese suicide bombers in World War II. Talking with the gentle old men who were compelled to serve yet had somehow survived, Morimoto highlights their incredible humanity.

Kamikaze (commie-kahzuh) translates as "divine wind," and was a made-up word meant to conjure mythic status. The stories are sad, the war propaganda outrageous, and the message emphatically anti-war. We somberly file from the theater when it ends. *Wings of Defeat* will get a national audience when the PBS series *Independent Lens* broadcasts it in early May.

Julius Shulman

We move down the hill to the Wisconsin Union Theater, where an artsy crowd assembles for *Visual Acoustics: The Modernism of Julius Shulman*. We're early in, and get a good seat in the center of the main floor. I chat with Arnie and Claudia, who are at their third and final movie of the weekend. They offer praise for the Chuck Close documentary and Muslim comics film they'd seen. They talk of friends who've committed to six or eight films. They agree it's a great event for Madison. The audience cheers heartily as the promo reel winds down and the film begins.

Julius Shulman is a fascinating man. *Visual Acoustics* is a resplendent film that celebrates his architectural photography career spanning more than seven decades. Shulman's images helped to shape the careers of some great architects, including Richard Neutra, Rudolph Schindler, and Pierre Koenig. His story is joyful, the pictures incredible, the cinematography seamless. *Visual Acoustics* was featured on NPR's *Morning Edition*, on March 26.

A break at the Shamrock

We've got an hour before our final movie, so we stop in at the Shamrock for a burger and beer. The bartender passes us a baggie full of cool film-fest buttons. We take off for Monona Terrace, braving a beastly wind. At least the line's inside here.

Graphic art

Milton Glaser: To Inform and Delight opens with the prolific graphic artist sketching a rooster with color pencils in his flirtatious personal technique. The film's title emerges from the words "form" and "light." His gracious philosophy flows from the start of this story.

Glaser is known for many images including the "I Heart New York" symbol (for which he received no compensation), and the wildly colorful Bob Dylan silhouette which my sister and I rassed over when it came with *Greatest Hits Vol. 1* from the Columbia Record Club. (The poster is hanging in her house right now.) That was right around the time our town's tiny Grand Union redesigned under Glaser's simple, shopper-friendly direction. That corporate rebranding forever changed the way supermarkets are set up.

Glaser wouldn't like that my sister and I fought. The film shows how his design pursuits evolved as an expression of his benevolence. He's a sweetheart who proudly calls himself a teacher, and he truly loves his hometown. For us, the film fest ends on a happily creative note.