

# Films show connections among us all

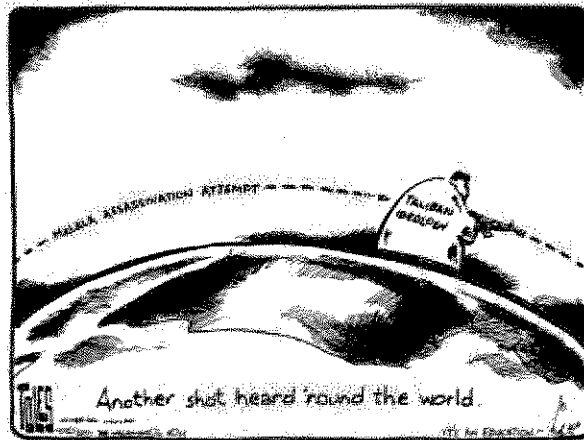
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Does art reflect reality, or is it the other way round? One thing about the art of film is undeniable: The up-close-and-personal tour of an experience other than our own — another time, another culture or even another style of relationship — inevitably brings us a step closer to seeing our own connection to the rest of humankind.



The Columbus ReelAbilities Film Festival, showcasing nine films over five days in a variety of venues, brings that up-close and personal tour into worlds, each involving disability of one kind or another and each enlarging particular facets of the human experience in ways that anyone can appreciate.

In *Warrior Champions* you'll meet four Iraqi veterans, now amputees, channeling energy into becoming serious athletes, striving to qualify for the 2008 Paralympics.

*Praying with Lior*, a film from Israel, unfolds the compelling story of a boy with Down syndrome who loves to pray, raising the question of who really talks to God.

*White Balance* is a coming-of-age tale featuring a competitive ice skater who is losing hearing and whose friendship with another adolescent and his own determination motivate him to defy advice that he get out of the game.

The films are from Belgium, Canada, China, Israel, the United Kingdom and the United States, and each introduces viewers to a class of people that, while being a part of our communities, is all too often invisible. They are dramas, comedies and documentaries; their casts and producers represent many countries and cultures and, of course, many disabilities, including autism, blindness, depression, Down syndrome, paraplegia and more.

The ReelAbilities Film Festival was born in New York and has been celebrated there for four years now. Last year, the festival traveled for the first time, when Cincinnati's Jewish Community Center brought it to Ohio. Since then, it has been in Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, Washington, D.C. and elsewhere, making Columbus the ninth city to showcase these amazing and artistic films.

Sponsored by the Saul Schottenstein Foundation, ReelAbilities is being hosted in Columbus by VSA Ohio, along with a laundry list of arts, advocacy and business partners.

Erin Hoppe, executive director of VSA Ohio, saw one of the films, *Ben X*, when ReelAbilities was held in Cincinnati last year. She immediately made the call to New York to bring the festival to Columbus.

Hoppe has made remarkable efforts to cover all bases in creating an event that is inclusive in every way. All venues are wheelchair-accessible. All films offer captioning or subtitles, and either live or recorded audio description. Each film is followed by a panel discussion of experts relevant to the film's content, and workshops on adaptive art materials, animation and more are planned.

The festival runs Nov. 3-7. Tickets to individual films are \$10 (\$25 for the Nov. 3 opening night, featuring keynote speaker Dr. Brenda Bruggeman and pianist Steven Yee), or a festival pass is available for \$75. For more information or to order tickets, visit [Columbus.ReelAbilities.org](http://Columbus.ReelAbilities.org) or call VSA Ohio at 614-241-5325.

Erin Hoppe left the Kennedy Center four years ago to take a job with VSA Ohio in Columbus, and says the job changed her life. The Columbus ReelAbilities film festival just might change your life, too.

*Deborah Kendrick is a Cincinnati writer and advocate for people with disabilities.*