

Live and In Person at the Tivoli Theatre!

So Late So Soon

**With Special Guest Host,
Director Daniel Hymanson**

Monday, February 7, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Keith Uhlich | Hollywood Reporter | Not Rated | 71 Mins.

Documentary filmmaker Daniel Hymanson joins the After Hours Film Society to host a screening of his first feature, *So Late So Soon*, a charming character study that captures the hardships of aging and the beauty of an enduring companionship. Originally from Chicago, Daniel has received support from Oscilloscope Pictures, IFP, the Illinois Arts Council, Kartemquin Labs, and the Sundance Documentary Film Institute and has been named one of the “25 New Faces of Independent Film” by Filmmaker Magazine. The New York resident was recently selected for DOC NYC’s 40 Under 40 List.

Living the art life means being constantly open to the muse. Amenable to the possibility that you might one day be inspired — as Chicago artist Jackie Seiden is in the opening scene of the bittersweet, True/False-premiering documentary *So Late So Soon* — to use dental floss to string up a cow figurine in the kitchen of your own home.

That house, where Jackie has lived for decades with fellow creative Don Seiden (her husband of half a century), is a quirky, colorful locale out of a Wes Anderson fantasia. The walls are painted bright whites, blues and pinks. Suitcases, dolls, plastic bags and other random objects are laid out in eye-catching symmetrical patterns, while a life-size rhinoceros that Don constructed out of welded steel, aluminum foil and duct tape hangs out in the couple’s slightly overgrown garden.



Early on, director Daniel Hymanson films Jackie (his former art teacher, who he’s known since he was 3 years old) in a diorama-like composition as she dances around the living room to Sade’s “Smooth Operator.” It’s one of the few moments, appropriately so, where eccentricity is overemphasized. That ’80s-era needle-drop aside, most of the 70-minute movie plays out sans any musical accompaniment. So we become attuned to the rather eerie ambient hum of the world Jackie and Don have created for themselves, an idiosyncratic life they’re now struggling to maintain.

Getting old, as Jackie and Don would have it, is part of their overall project. More than once they talk about the impermanence of the materials they use. One day, their art will cease to be, as will they. That Zen pronouncement doesn’t make the day-in/day-out drudgery of aging any easier. Stairs are harder to take. Tempers flare up much more quickly, in one case over a tube of toothpaste, in another over the couple’s long-ago marriage ceremony when Don froze while speaking his vows.

The past occasionally intrudes via archival video and photographs, almost all shot by the couple themselves and presented without much in the way of context. It’s really more about conjuring a mood. About revisiting auras and energies that have since been lost or weakened. Here we see camcorder footage of a dynamic Jackie gallivanting around a room with a group of children, her stamina seemingly boundless as she inspires her charges to follow their every artistic impulse. We also see a much younger Don in a local news report as he creates that foil-and-duct-tape rhino, flexing the materials with a vivacity that now eludes him.

Time is running out, but in many ways it has already passed the couple by. A scene in which Jackie visits a roller rink at which she used to be a staple is particularly sad. She sits on the sidelines, greeting well-wishers and staring regretfully into the middle distance, knowing full well that to step on the rink would be to tempt fatal injury. And late in the film, after Don nearly faints at home, the couple discusses what to do next (wait and see? go to the hospital?) in the devastatingly recognizable way of people trying to avoid a point of no return.

Hymanson embedded himself with the Seidens, on and off, for about five years, and the intimacy and trust he attained shines through. He’s not an invisible presence (at one point, Jackie turns to camera to discuss an evasive mouse that’s like a cheeping Moby Dick to her whimsy-prone Ahab). Yet it’s clear he became an essential one — another vehicle through which this loving, complicated couple could artistically enshrine their lives. By all evidence, theirs is an existence that, if not completely full, came very close to it.

TIVOLI THEATRE

5021 Highland Avenue | Downers Grove, IL

630-968-0219 | www.classiccinemas.com

\$7 After Hours Members | \$11 Non-Members



Monday, February 28, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Robert Abele | Los Angeles Times | Not Rated | 92 Mins.

Gorgeous, humbling, looking out-, up- and inward, the documentary “The Velvet Queen” is the rare nature film about not only beauty and beasts but also the very human urge to make sense of our place in it all.

The film is three-way French collaboration wherein wildlife photographer Vincent Munier guides writer Sylvain Tesson on a trip into the Tibetan highlands, filmed by Marie Amiguet (a cinematographer making her feature debut co-directing with Munier). It starts as a quest for the elusive, endangered snow leopard but settles gracefully into an appreciation for the journey and any and all wonders it uncovers: a silhouetted yak in the moonlight resembling a monster from a child’s dream; swirling high-altitude mist that suggests the mountain is breathing; a richly furred Pallas’ cat whose halting movements approaching its prey might make it the best red-light-green-light player ever.



Tesson’s narration and florid commentary provide a few background facts in the early going. He’d long admired Munier’s photography and films, and it turned into a friendship. Now he’s trailing this nature obsessive into cold, arid, picturesque plains, shadowy valleys and rocky elevations where — as Munier likes to

point out — they wouldn’t be the only ones doing the watching. (A droll opening shows two local nomads sitting outside the base hut, waiting for the men’s return from one of their excursions, dryly wondering if a pack of wolves ate them.)

Patience is Munier’s abiding principle, which is why his article of faith is in the well-chosen blind, a concealment spot where he’ll happily stay for brutal lengths of time until creatures make their appearance. Or not. Fully accepting that he’s the vulnerable stumbler into conditions and spaces typically inhospitable to humans, Munier still finds spiritual worth in going a day without any sightings. What matters is being present to nature’s breadth as a way of pushing back against what he sees as humans’ ecologically detrimental indifference to their surroundings. It makes him as excited noticing a cave’s polished rock wall, damp prints and mossy strands, which indicate a bear’s onetime habitat, as he is seeing the bear in the flesh. (And they eventually do during one of their stakeouts, which is a thrilling moment.)

The snow leopard, meanwhile, is whispered about as if it were the alluring suspect in an existential noir. Munier says he once photographed one without realizing it, his viewfinder attention drawn toward centering a perched falcon — only years later did he notice the leopard peering over a nearby ridge, blended into the terrain. That image from his archive (which we get to see) is indeed a stunning example of hiding in plain sight, and it helps train our eyes for later instances of camouflage and emergence, when Amiguet’s camera is fixed on a craggy hillside, and Munier is informing us of a creature’s presence. In these moments, “The Velvet Queen” can feel like a series of paintings that occasionally come to life.

Tesson’s soft-spoken musings, pulled from his notes, are a more scattershot element. Sometimes they’re wonderfully evocative of his companion’s philosophy of loving the Earth through looking deeply at it, and what it feels like to see these harsh landscapes and their inhabitants as Munier does. Sometimes they’re a tad overwrought as cosmic commentary, as when he says, “Prehistory wept, and each tear was a yak.” The more psalm-like accompaniments outweigh the purpler prose. (Tesson’s writings on the trip were published as “The Art of Patience: Seeking the Snow Leopard in Tibet.”)

The key takeaway is that “The Velvet Queen” feels like a humane adventure, not some patronizing tour of the wild. No spoilers, either, on whether their search yields the desired glimpse (a “tail end?”), but then again, when was a detective story about the arrest, or a road-trip movie about the destination, or a fable about the moral? This benevolent hunt along stunning peaks and vast plateaus is rich with animal majesty and unspoiled geographical magnificence. And most important, it never feels like simply waiting for something. In French with English subtitles.

Please enroll me as a member of **THE AFTER HOURS FILM SOCIETY**. This annual membership entitles me to mailings, discounted admissions, and special group benefits.

- \$25 Individual
- \$45 Family
- \$75 Sponsor
- \$200 Corporate
- \$500 Founder

Make check payable to **THE AFTER HOURS FILM SOCIETY** and send to P.O. Box 5266, Wheaton, Illinois 60189.

Name: _____ New Member Renewal
 Address: _____ Apt. # _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Phone: Preferred: _____ Other: _____
 E-Mail: _____ E-Mail Newsletter as a PDF

THE AFTER HOURS FILM SOCIETY is a not-for-profit organization. Thank you for your support!

FLEE

Monday, March 14, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Roxana Hadadi | RogerEbert.com | Rated PG-13 | 90 Mins.

Early in the extraordinary documentary "Flee," its subject is asked to define the word "home." Lying back on a tapestry-covered day bed, his eyes closed, he replies, "It means someplace safe."

The argument could be made that all national borders are arbitrary. People have fought over them, and people have died for them, but—who made them? The power to concoct a line that keeps some inside and others outside is rare and rarified, and the inclusion vs. exclusion that is established by that geography has in turn shaped the world. A country can be a home, and a home can be erased, and the aching, lovely "Flee" trafficks in the space between belonging and wandering.

Evocatively animated in a style that is visually sparse but emotionally vibrant, with a strong sense of motion and interiority, "Flee" is written and directed by filmmaker Jonas Poher Rasmussen. As a teen growing up in Copenhagen, Denmark, Rasmussen became friends with a similarly aged Afghan refugee named Amin. Amin had fled Afghanistan after the Mujahideen grew more powerful during the First Afghan Civil War of the 1980s and 1990s, and arrived in Copenhagen alone. The two became friends, staying in touch as Rasmussen pursued filmmaking and as Amin pursued his doctoral degree. When they reconnect for the documentary "Flee," it's as adults ready to look back upon the past with a mixture of honesty, wistfulness, and resignation (from Amin) and curiosity and patience (Rasmussen). "This is a true story," an intertitle states at the beginning, and the film honors the weight of that statement with an engrossing story that is as unflinching as it is—through a tremendous amount of human will—hopeful.

"Flee"'s setup is straightforward, with Rasmussen guiding Amin forward in conversation, but the approach is never simplistic. The men's friendship and familiarity with each other allows for a level of intimate expression that gives the film its simultaneous specificity and approachability. Scraps of memories are sometimes all we have of the people we loved and lost, and Amin compiles them together to speak about his deep bond with his family, his struggle to reconcile his sexuality with his conservative cultural background, and the trauma of being stateless. Each of his accounts starts the same way, with an animated version of Amin—brown-skinned, close-shaved, with a beard, a gold chain, and a world-weary look—laying down on a couch, staring ahead, and gazing directly toward us. That perspective of Amin looking up and us looking down creates a balance in which we're an active participant, and as Amin slides into memory and transforms into a younger version of himself, we go too. (There are many reasons to pair "Flee" with this year's other refugee-focused film "Limbo," and their shared experimentation with the liminal quality of time is a primary one.)

Back to Afghanistan, where Amin's happy childhood (flying kites with one of his brothers, spending time in the kitchen with his mother) is upended by civil war and by his father's disappearance after being taken by the Mujahideen. The outlines of grey collapsing buildings and beige running civilians shift and melt while resistance fighters appear as solidly black, scratchily-shaded-in forms, both in contrast to Amin's brightly dressed relatives and cozily decorated family home. To Russia, where Amin spent dreary, tedious years as a teenager: The color palette desaturated, the movement in these characters diminished, their facial expressions dampened. Back to present-day Copenhagen, where Amin's boyfriend Kasper hits the walls and boundaries Amin has built around himself. And, slowly, to another version of Amin's past that Rasmussen, through gently guiding questions, steadily unravels. "I just need to get one thing straight," Rasmussen asks, and the pause he takes in between that statement and his following query is a whole world of poised possibility.

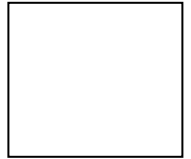


Where "Flee" then goes reveals a number of bleak truths about the gap between the "first" and "third" worlds and about the desperate measures people will risk for the chance at a "better" life. Refreshingly, "Flee" also makes space to consider what "better" means and by whose standards we assign that designation. What does living one's truth matter if we're all alone in the process? What vulnerability can we choose to allow ourselves, and what grace? A number of animated standout scenes drive these ideas home: a harried walk through a forest, its trees so tall they infringe upon the night sky; a claustrophobic, vertigo-inducing scene in a container truck, our perspective spinning around to survey the tight quarters; a meeting between a boat of refugees and a boat of tourists that is harrowing and heartbreaking in the contrasting expressions on these people's faces. When "Flee" slips from animation to live action, it's Rasmussen's reminder of the reality of this story, and when he includes the arguments between himself and Amin about the direction of the documentary, that's reality, too.

"We miscommunicate," Amin says of a conversation he had in his adolescence with an Iranian man speaking Farsi while he, an Afghan, spoke Dari, but that statement is broader than two people and two languages. What are all the ways we fail to, or refuse to, understand another person? How does that decay into violence, into dehumanization, into negligence, into war? And when those gaps are fixed, what joy, what acceptance, and what love can be found? "Flee" asks those questions and then listens to their answers with open ears, open eyes, and an open heart, and the documentary is one of this year's best.

In Dari, Danish and Russian with English subtitles.

*Please join us for our thought provoking
post screening discussions!*



Post Office Box 5266
Wheaton, IL 60189

Phone: 630.534.4528
Info@afterhoursfilmsociety.com
www.afterhoursfilmsociety.com

AFTER HOURS GOES GREEN!

Now you can receive the latest information
about AHFS events in your email!

If interested, just send an email
with your name and email address to:

info@afterhoursfilmsociety.com

and say, "Sign me up!"



So Late So Soon

"A warm, intimate portrait of two outsiders."

Steven Saim, *The Movable Fest*

Monday, February 7 at 7:30 pm

"Informed by majesty and wonder, *The Velvet Queen* reveals the humane in nature."

Robert Abele, *Los Angeles Times*

Monday, February 28 at 7:30 pm



FLEE

"Flee expands the definition of
documentary."

Hollywood Reporter

Monday, March 14 at 7:30 pm