

LAWEEKLY



L.A. Film Fest 2014: A New Section of Films About Los Angeles

By Michael Nordine
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Los Angeles is one of cinema's most enduring geographical muses. Just ask the L.A. Film Festival, which has introduced a new sidebar consisting of 11 movies "set, shot or inspired by" the epicenter of the film industry. Called L.A. Muse, the program recognizes that there's something intrinsically cinematic about the porous borders separating one neighborhood from the next, ubiquitous palm trees, snaking freeways and anxiety over the supposed Big One.

Strangely, the connection to L.A. is either implicit or nonexistent in a number of these selections. *Holbrook/Twain: An American Odyssey* is about Hal Holbrook's perennial one-man show, and the performance for which he spends much of the film preparing is in San Luis Obispo.

See also: *The Ins and Outs of the L.A. Film Festival*



Echo Park

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Beverly Hills High Rap

Beverly Hills was ostensibly inhospitable to boom bap. In the mid-'90s pop culture pantheon, 90210 was renowned for Dylan McKay and Cher Horowitz. The imagination conjured palm trees, Porsches and digital wardrobe selectors. The reality, however, was way less reductive. There was no Peach Pit, but there was Larry Parker's...

May 28, 2014

5th L.A. Cop Lost

An off-duty Los Angeles police officer was killed today at nearly the same spot where Nicholas Lee died on patrol two months ago, the LAPD's Rosario Herrera told us. Chief Charlie Beck was en route to the scene of the the accident in the 1000 block of Loma Vista Drive...

May 9, 2014

Fallen Cop ID'd

The Los Angeles Police Department today identified the officer who died in an off-duty collision yesterday in Beverly Hills as Ernest L. Allen Sr., a 27-year veteran of the force. The 52-year-old Southwest Division detective was killed in almost the same spot as on-duty patrol officer Christopher Lee, who died in...

May 10, 2014

Gluten-Free Pasta!

Pasta is emblematic of our melting pot society. Enjoyed around the world in humble homes and the finest of restaurants, pasta transcends social, cultural and economic boundaries. But what if you're gluten-intolerant? As it turns out, gluten intolerance isn't just an American affliction. Gluten-free has become a huge movement in Italy...

May 8, 2014

Purple Train

The Metro Purple Line subway that, frustratingly, is a stub of a line that only goes to Wilshire Boulevard and Western Avenue in Koreatown, is now officially headed for Beverly Hills. While it might not be the "subway to the sea" once touted by former Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the extension to Wilshire...



Just as tenuously connected to the category are *Nightingale*, which explores a veteran's monomaniacal obsession with a fellow former soldier; the drug-addiction/demonic-possession parable *Inner Demons*; and *Dreams Are Colder Than Death*, a winsome meditation on the realities of being black in America 50 years after the March on Washington. That the setting of these films is incidental to the plot suggests either abstruse programming or the possibility that certain films just didn't fit anywhere else. (Four other movies — *The Ever After*, *Eat With Me*, *Supremacy* and *The Road Within* — couldn't be screened in time for this article.)

Damian John Harper's *Los Angeles* isn't set here either, but it best embodies the idea of the city as concept: nebulous and unknowable. For the impoverished residents of a village in southern Mexico, this city of angels represents both a distillation of the American dream and the fear that even their best shot for a better life might not be so great. L.A. is spoken of — often in the same sentence — as both a land of nonpareil economic opportunity and a jungle in which those who don't join a gang are killed. Everyone is either coming back from an extended stay here or dreaming of one day arriving; older members of the community who've been to Los Angeles seem just as mystified by it as the teenagers who've yet to cross the border.

The best film in the section, *Los Angeles* is a stark reminder that California Dreamin' is often just a dream — a rose-tinted ideal whose ability to get you through the day is offset by the fact that it may not exist.

L.A. represents a similar promise in Jessica Prediger and Jess Weixler's *Trouble Dolls*. The co-directors star as roommates who head westward after being evicted from their New York City apartment, initially as an escape but then as a potential windfall when they receive the opportunity to audition for a talent/reality show called *That Special Something*. Their whirlwind stay has less to do with the city itself than with working out their close-but-strained relationship, but the idea of L.A. as an escape from reality, however fleeting, is a staple of the genre.

A low-key romance starring Mamie Gummer and Tony Okungbowa, Amanda Marsalis' *Echo Park* is one of the more overt depictions of L.A. in the section. An early scene shows how driving here isn't just a means of getting from point A to point B but the way we take in and internalize our surroundings. Sophie's move from Beverly Hills to Echo Park is meant to represent an awakening, a shift from the superficial to the authentic and real—the latter represented by independent record stores, food trucks and neighbors who actually know one another by name.

Los Angeles is one of the most cinematically documented cities in the world, and yet such

In one film, a move from Beverly Hills to Echo Park is meant to represent an awakening.

May 22, 2014

More About**Amanda Marsalis****Beverly Hills (California)**

depictions of its neighborhoods remain relatively rare. Marsalis' portrayal of Echo Park feels lived in, offering a ground-level view that may not emphasize the typical glitz and glamour associated with L.A. but will certainly ring true with locals.

Hal Holbrook **San Luis Obispo**

The reason Sophie moves across town in the first place? A bad breakup: "He's in Beverly Hills and I had to put the entire Sunset Boulevard between us," she explains to her new neighbor.

Damian John Harper

be based in reality in order to be worthwhile and compelling.

The eponymous neighborhood isn't just the background here but the context for, and catalyst of, the entire narrative. "Echo Park is not reality," Sophie's jilted ex will tell her later, which is beside the point even if it's true: the movies have long shown that our perception of L.A. has never needed to

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