

Praise for SeeThink Films

DARKON

EFILMCRITIC.COM

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VARIETY

ALICE NEEL

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The New York Times

Alice Neel "achieves the documentary format's basic goal of illuminating history while also demonstrating, through filmmaking choices, how an artist's style reveals his or her personality."

NEW WORLD ORDER

WIRED

Alternately amusing and poignant, *New World Order* peels back a layer of mystery to show the conspiracy theorists' strange world.

Los Angeles Times

New World Order, an “unexpectedly affecting, nonjudgmental documentary by Luke Meyer and Andrew Neel.”

EFILMCRITIC.COM

Darkon

Reviewed by Scott Weinberg

03/14/06

"Welcome to Medieval Baltimore!"

★★★★★ (Awesome)

SCREENED AT THE 2006 SXSW FILM FESTIVAL: We all wear masks, play games, and assume roles when certain situations arise. Whether you act like a corporate suit in order to earn your weekly paycheck, dress up like a stormtrooper for Halloween, or paint your face for a football game, you're a role player. The guys who play **Darkon** are big-time role-players, too, and they seem to have a blissfully good time while doing it.

"Darkon" is a LARP game, LARP being the acronym for Live Action Role Playing, which is a lot like Everquest or Ultima, only you play it with your own body and homemade weapons instead of an Xbox or a computer screen. At first glance, the **Darkon** dudes seem a little ... odd. But you know what's also a rather odd game? Bowling. Both activities require teamwork, practice, and offbeat clothes -- but only one of 'em lets you swing a sword at your next door neighbor while collecting gold pieces that you can exchange for magic spells and armor upgrades. So yeah: the game of **Darkon** looks a little bit strange to the uninitiated. But thanks to directors Andrew Neel & Luke Meyer, you can now become one of the initiated -- and have a wonderfully entertaining 90 minutes at the same time. **Darkon** takes you inside the game as it's played by a bunch of passionate and excited Baltimorians, and the filmmakers approach the game (and its players) with such a objective air of respect that it's tough not to get sucked right in. Walking into the screening, I was afraid **Darkon** would be one of those "let's laugh at the geeks" docos (not unlike some of the **Star Wars** / **Star Trek** ones I've seen), but those concerns melted away after about 4.2 minutes. The gamers themselves seem a passionate and articulate group, and their opinions on how we all live in our own particular fantasy worlds are as insightful as they are correct. **Darkon** works as a fascinating and colorful documentary about an endearingly bizarre game *and* as a "can't wait to see who wins" sports film. (And as a nifty little comedy, too, actually.) As Neel & Meyer introduce us to an eclectic crew of Darkoneers, the game suddenly doesn't seem so "weird" anymore -- plus these are some seriously likable fantasy geeks we're visiting with here. Interesting enough for being an intro to the world of **Darkon**, the flick earns some serious bonus points for treating its subjects with dignity, respect, and an appreciable sense of irreverence. The festival audience I saw the movie with seemed to be in strong agreement, as the screening was laden with hearty laughs, victorious cheers, and a few

enthusiastic rounds of well-earned applause.

"Darkon" is easily one of the documentary highlights of the 2006 SXSW Film Festival, and I expect it'll earn a swell of grass-roots support not unlike those for "Murderball" and "Spellbound." The flick might not be destined for an Oscar nomination, but I'd bet big money it'll find loads of appreciative audiences on the festival circuit before some daring distributor takes a chance on this effortlessly excellent little flick. (Plus, doco Oscar noms are a freaking joke these days.)



Darkon

(Documentary)

By EDDIE COCKRELL

Posted: Mon., Jun. 19, 2006

An Ovie Entertainment presentation of a SeeThink, Ovie Entertainment production. Produced by Ethan Palmer, Tom Davis, Christopher Kikis, Thoma Kikis, Nicholas Levis, Cherise Wolas, Alan Zelenetz. Directed by Andrew Neel, Luke Meyer.

The same Maryland woods that yielded "The Blair Witch Project" now bring forth "Darkon," a clear-eyed and oddly touching docu about a gaggle of Baltimoreans who dress up in home-made medieval garb and chase each other around soccer fields and meadows. Pic won't come within galaxies of "Witch," coin, but this is a well-made and revealing look at an off-the-beaten-path American pastime that has fest and tube appeal.

Though never mentioned by name, "Darkon" falls under a phenom called LARP, or "live-action role-playing." It's a tradition known to outsiders primarily through Dungeons and Dragons, the inspiration for a number of Darkon players.

From among the many average types who blow off steam in this fantasy world, two leaders emerge. Skip Lipman is a stay-at-home dad whose supremely tolerant wife and children don't seem to mind that he moonlights as proud warrior Bannor of Laconia. As the pic progresses, Skip ... err, Bannor, schemes to defeat the forces of Keldar of Mordom (real world office drone Kenyon Wells, whose parents explain that in his youth their son "wasn't a people person").

Keldar's awfully good at rallying the troops, however, and the balance of "Darkon" features Bannor's increasingly disillusioned rabble-rousing -- inspired, per co-helmer Andrew Neel, by the filmmakers' presence -- against Keldar's land-grabbing ways to explore the interface between the dreary workaday world and the appeal of the game.

Subjects were apparently fearful the pic would cast them in an unflattering light, but that hasn't happened. Helmers' approach is respectful -- a shrewd decision that coaxes both humanity and humor from the proceedings.

Climactic confrontation takes place in and around the highly anticipated Citadel of Peace, which turns out to be a gray-painted plywood facade that the victors end up burning to the ground. It's never explained if they need permits for any of this.

Ultimately, their dedication, while unfathomable to most, is admirable. And Darkon clearly fulfills a need in the their lives. "Little world," Bannor tells one foe. "Just as real as big world."

Made over three years and distilled from 300-plus hours of footage shot in large part with a camera bought by Neel's mother, "Darkon" was by accounts a seat-of-the-pants operation that emerges a lucid and streamlined saga by virtue of good coverage and disciplined editing. Shrewd use of aerial footage and an overworked crane add to the pic's proudly threadbare sweep. Violinist Jonah Rapino, who also scores silent classics, has created an evocative score on par with any Hollywood fantasy.

Camera (color, DV), Karl Schroder, Hillary Spera; editor, Brad Turner; music, Jonah Rapino; sound, Raphael Laski. Reviewed on DVD, Sydney, Australia, June 15, 2006. (In SilverDocs, Silver Spring, Md. Also in SXSW, Hot Docs, Los Angeles film festivals.) Running time: 90 MIN.



Alice Neel

2007, Movie, NR, 82 mins ★★☆☆



Like MY ARCHITECT, Nathaniel Kahn's celebrated 2003 film about his father, the architect Louis Kahn, Andrew Neel's fascinating but troubling documentary about his famous grandmother is more than a mere biography of an important 20th-century artist: It's also an intimate portrait of a family

member that questions whether or not "great artist" and "good parent" can ever be combined in the same person. The painter Alice Neel dared to defy the conventions of a pre-feminist era to become one of the great artists of her generation, but not with an enormous emotional cost to her self and her family.

Using interviews with friends, art critics and, most importantly, family members, as well as clips from previous films made about his now-famous grandmother, Andrew Neel's documentary traces Alice Neel's story from her birth at the dawn of the 20th century, through her years as a struggling artist during the Depression and the equally lean postwar years. As she developed as a painter, she began to concentrate mostly on figurative portraiture — Alice Neel had a knack of finding the detail that would capture the individual as well as the tenor of the times -- and she eventually moved to Spanish Harlem so as to better capture the lives of the people who mattered most to her: the forgotten poor. Neel eventually found the recognition she craved -- she's now considered one of the greatest portrait painters of the 20th century -- but success came late and

throughout most of her career Alice Neel lived in poverty. Nevertheless, she remained smilingly obstinate in her refusal to compromise on her art, even when she found herself at odds with contemporary trends in modern painting and society's expectations of how a "good" wife and mother lived her life. This unwavering dedication to her personal vision and her determination to live and paint as she chose, however, had a downside and it's from Andrew Neel's interviews with his father Hartley Neel and uncle, Richard Neel, that the real heart of the film emerges. Richard and Hartley -- sons by two different fathers -- clearly resented the poverty and the lack of certainty and structure of the bohemian lifestyle, as well as the emotional neglect they sometimes faced as the children of a free spirit. Richard in particular felt the brunt of Alice's non-traditional approach to family structure when Hartley's father, a temperamental socially conscious documentary filmmaker named Sam Brody, began physically abusing him. Alice, regrettably, did nothing to stop it. (Interestingly, these bohemian children grew up to become steadfastly bourgeois professionals). The saddest story, however, involves Isabetta, the daughter Alice Neel had with her first husband, a Cuban painter named Carlos Enriquez. Knowing that she'd never be able to support a child on her own, she gave Isabetta to her husband's wealthy family when the marriage ended. The loss of her daughter resulted in a nervous breakdown for Alice, while Andrew Neel's interviews with Isabetta's children tell a tragic tale of abandonment, resentment, deep depression and eventual suicide. But, as Hartley Neel points out, had Alice satisfied the expectations society had of women during her lifetime, she might well have been a great mother, but never a great artist, something that was terribly important to her. He, like most everyone interviewed in the film, seems to realize what Alice Neel faced in her lifetime, and it's this sympathy — if not exactly total forgiveness — that makes the film so memorable. --*Ken Fox*

The New York Times

This movie has been designated a Critic's Pick by the film reviewers of The Times.

A Portraitist's Grandson Creates Her Portrait on Film

April 20, 2007

By MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

The fascinating documentary “Alice Neel” — a biography of this influential, emotionally troubled painter by her grandson Andrew Neel — could easily have been titled “Form Follows Function.” It achieves the documentary format’s basic goal of illuminating history while also demonstrating, through filmmaking choices, how an artist’s style reveals his or her personality.

Ms. Neel did striking work in the postwar era: haunting portraits that often focused on motherhood, abandonment and the survival of loss. (Her first child died of diphtheria, and her relationships with men — from driven fellow artists to itinerant drug addicts — ended badly, though they produced three more children.)

At the time Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art were so fashionable that portrait painters were considered nostalgia acts. Ms. Neel spent much of her adult life on welfare and was marginalized until the late 1960s and '70s, when the counterculture embraced her, and major museums began showing her work.

Her paintings rendered foreground and background in such markedly different textures that they might as well have been produced by two painters in

collaboration. This made her subjects seem to pop from the canvas and emphasized her humanistic approach to portraiture, which defined subjects' personalities with distinct colors and brushstrokes. Looking at her paintings, you sense roiling passion and combative intelligence held in check by discipline.

This movie reflects a similar mix of qualities. Mr. Neel juxtaposes relaxed interview footage and archival clips (including a black-and-white video interview in Ms. Neel's cluttered apartment, where she feeds pigeons outside her kitchen window) with more ragged, personal footage that reveals a filmmaker struggling to define an indefinable woman.

At one point Mr. Neel argues with his father, the physician Hartley Neel, on camera; at another he agrees to switch off his camera for privacy's sake, but instead just points it away and keeps the audio running.

The result is a film that seems more unfinished — and thus more present tense — than other examples of its type, and makes its subject, who died in 1984, seem very much alive.

Robert Storr, dean of the Yale School of Art, tells Andrew Neel that in Ms. Neel's portraits, "You're seeing time happen rather than seeing time stopped." The statement also describes "Alice Neel."

ALICE NEEL

Opens today in Manhattan.

Directed by Andrew Neel; directors of photography, Mr. Neel, Ethan Palmer and Hillary Spera; edited by Luke Meyer; music by Jonah Rapino; produced by Mr. Palmer; released by SeeThink Productions. At the Cinema Village, 22 East 12th Street, Greenwich Village. Running time: 82 minutes. This film is not rated.

SXSW: *New World Order* Illuminates Conspiracy Theorists

By Lewis Wallace March 14, 2009 | 12:18 am |



You've probably heard the conspiracy theories — the Bilderberg Group secretly runs the world, 9/11 was an inside job, a group of elites is working to establish a "new world order."

The documentary *New World Order*, which had its world premiere Friday at the South by Southwest film festival, offers an inside look at the people who dedicate their lives to investigating and spreading the word about such conspiracy theories.

The 83-minute movie, by directors Luke Meyer and Andrew Neel, who worked together on 2006's *Darkon*, focuses chiefly on Alex Jones (pictured), a documentary filmmaker and talk-radio host with a loud voice, an urgent message and, many times, a bullhorn in hand.

Jones, whose movies include such dire polemics as *Endgame: Blueprint for Global Enslavement* and *Dark Secrets: Inside Bohemian Grove*, certainly seems sincere enough as he tries to shine a light on the annual Bilderberg meeting, where world leaders meet in secret to talk about ... something.

As *New World Order* follows Jones and some of his fellow conspiracy mongers, it delivers a fascinating look at true believers who are desperate to expose the supposed sins of politicians and business chieftains. Without delving deeply into the conspiracy theories themselves, the movie introduces the real people whose lives are in some instances consumed by these exotic ideas.

The grim scenarios outlined by the conspiracy theorists are familiar to anybody with a yen for exploring the information rat holes so prevalent on the internet. One of Jones' cohorts calls the web the conspiracy theorist's best friend — the cheapest and easiest way to disseminate information that's ever existed.

Jones has turned his Infowars concept into a cottage industry. But the truly telling part of *New World Order* is its revealing depiction of the individuals who spend their spare time establishing alternative communities or burning DVDs to hand out at the World Trade Center site.

Alternately amusing and poignant, *New World Order* peels back a layer of mystery to show the conspiracy theorists' strange world. Meyer and Neel set out to make an even-handed documentary that lets Jones and his people speak for themselves, and they've succeeded. It's an interesting and compelling portrait of a thriving subculture.

Los Angeles Times

TELEVISION REVIEW

Review: 'New World Order' on Independent Film Channel



A documentary listens to believers in government plots and ill-intentioned cabals.

By ROBERT LLOYD, Television Critic

May 26, 2009

["New World Order,"](#) which premieres today on the Independent Film Channel, is a film about people battling with phantoms. They are volunteers in an "information war" who see as clearly, as John saw his four Apocalyptic horsemen and seven trumpeting angels, that 9/11 was an "inside job," that the military-industrial complex killed Kennedy, and that an international "power elite" is plotting to enslave us all, excepting for those it will kill outright.

They are hard to pigeonhole politically, these conspiracy adepts, trusting neither the "socialist Democrats" nor the "fascist Republicans" -- Ron Paul seems to be their man, if anyone is -- yet sounding as often like '60s leftist radicals as right-wing militiamen. They take the 1st Amendment as seriously as any card-carrying member of the ACLU, styling themselves muckrakers and speakers of truth to power, often through a bullhorn.

The man with the biggest bullhorn is [Alex Jones](#), an Austin, Texas-based syndicated radio host and maker of such films as "Endgame: Blueprint for Global Enslavement" (116 five-star reviews on Amazon.com) and "Martial Law 9-11: The Rise of the Police State," and the point through which all the strands connect in this unexpectedly affecting, nonjudgmental documentary by Luke Meyer and Andrew Neel. Meyer and Neel don't get in the way of their subjects; there are no talking heads or title cards to contradict their worldview, or even to put it in perspective, only the occasional collision of the theorists' certain knowledge with others' actual experience.

Hidden messages

Much of what Jones and his fellows and followers believe is, in a general way, hardly controversial: that the world is run by the few, not necessarily in the interests of the many; that there are things the government won't tell you, and things it just invents; that alternative media go where mainstream media fear to tread -- these things seem obvious to many of us. But whether 9/11 was a plot to bring on world government, or whether the government you already have has painted a red or blue dot on your mailbox to indicate whether you will be shot immediately or merely be sent to the "FEMA camps" when the American Armageddon arrives, well, that's a pale horse of a different color. (Still, you'll want to check your mailbox now.)

Jones is a self-inflating (though not charmless) showboat who gets energy from hearing himself speak; he has cast himself as the star and main target in a conspiracy thriller he sees following him everywhere: a shirtless biker hanging around the Washington Mall is certainly Secret Service; the fire alarm that goes off in his hotel can only be a "setup."

But many of his fellows and followers seem something closer to sad -- hurt, almost, by What They Know.

How they see it

If anything, "New World Order" plays as a bittersweet, all-too-human comedy. Like the pair's previous documentary, "[Darkon](#)," which looked at a self-described "full-contact medieval fantasy war-gaming group," it's a film about people who have found the thing that gives their lives shape and meaning, that corrals the world's random messiness into a unified theory of disaster. It does not make them happy, but the scales having fallen from their eyes; they are helpless to look away and too terrified not to speak out. Their zeal is literally missionary.

"This is more important than how much Britney Spears' hair sold for on EBay, 'Dancing With the Stars' or who's gonna be America's next idol," says one believer. "People think this is a joke. We're not a joke."