
NOLI: TOO LONG/TOO DIFFICULT/TOO RAW
MAY 2026

Introduction

Many thanks for joining us for the fifth edition of Noli at the Etcetera Theatre in Camden, London. Back on our rough bi-yearly schedule, 7 months or so on from our last edition in October 2025, we were shocked by both the sheer number and the quality of the films we received in our submissions call. Below and across the screening tonight, you'll find the best 12 of these- 165 minutes or so that suggests the worlds of short and amateur film-making are in much better health than they have been in quite some time. You'll find a mixture of new faces and old friends, all of whom we're delighted to welcome (or welcome back) to the Noli fold: this event is always about what can happen in the future, and more and more work is being produced because of connections forged between both those showing their films and those in attendance, which was always the ultimate aim we had in starting this festival, so please feel free to talk to your fellow attendees tonight or reach out to those whose work particularly excited you. We are aiming to return sometime in the winter - between late November and January - for our next edition.

As a special note, I'd like to thank James Learoyd for co-running this edition with me. James first showed his work with us at the third Noli, and since then has been an essential component in the growth of the festival, while serving as a great embodiment of our values and vision. His tireless work and enthusiasm has helped make tonight happen. Also thanks to my fiancee Holly, who helped pick up the preparations when I fell ill with a bad flu in the run-up to tonight, and has always offered great support to the festival - including helping out in the control booth tonight. On that note, apologies for any mistakes or poor writing in this magazine - I wrote my portions while still recovering! - Billy



Tonight's Programme

Film notes written by co-programmers **Billy Stanton** (B) and **James Learoyd** (J).
All timings approximate.

Part 1: An Ever-Spinning Wheel

If, as our editorial suggests, we are witnessing the birth of new developments within the history of cinema (or what we could conceivably call 'post-cinema'), then the first half of our programme tonight is designed to act like a modern version of a zoetrope, that spinning wheel that emerged just before the proper moving image itself, and bought a version of movement to still illustrations and photographs. Here, our zoetrope is no longer made up of static images, and all that we see seems to transform, mutate, remould and reshape itself as the wheel turns, offering, in the existence of each film that emerges before our eyes, a new form serving as an example of what potentially could be.

1) We Have No Eyes

An endlessly fascinating and rich work from a tried and trusted friend of the festival. This is a prime demonstration of what can be done in this new mode of film-making: direct, spare, thrillingly front-facing and brave in its exposure of self, it is also dense, allusive, mysterious and slippery. Profundity co-exists with the trivial, the drift of the universe with the hyper-focus of the individual. Enlightenment is countered by (self-)annihilation, freedom with the confines of an age that demands alienation, connection with loss and everything proceeds with the strange air of tragicomedy. Lynch wields the camera-stylo with verve, invention and wit; his film is open to all and constantly recalibrates our expectations and our understanding. This is something truly new- and so maybe we can kill that line about everything already having been done. Of the film's protagonist, we can perhaps say simply: 'Let us now praise obscure men.'
(Directed by Jamie Lynch, 35 minutes) (B)

2) Trotter

Trotter is filled with personal passion, exploration of political ideas, and a love for the medium it inhabits; and yet, it isn't constrained by the predications or standards of its animated format. This tale of a blank, dystopian working world – and the Kafkaesque transformation which takes place within it – is carefully designed and predetermined (as is the nature of animation) and yet is still messy and handcrafted in all the ways that matter. The filmmaking incorporates 3D computer-generated animation to depict this gloomy, uniform, monochromatic environment; stop-motion animation to represent the separation, both social and spatial, that our horse protagonist experiences; and finally, the dénouement of 2D, hand-drawn elegance – a transfiguration from visceral and ultra-textural self-awareness, to the liberation of flowing, flattering lines and shapes. There's also experimentation with low resolutions and varying frame rates, to further muddy the visual pallet. As is a common theme in our selection, its aesthetic is defined not by a single 'look' but by a melding of distinct styles and practices, resulting in a gleeful disregard for formal consistency.
(Directed by Annigje Peters, Manouk Moreau, 4 minutes) (J)

3) S.W.A.G (Something We All Got)

A collaboration between film-makers and musicians Leroy Da Silva and Cassianne Lawrence, S.W.A.G has the honour of being the first music film to play at Noli. S.W.A.G transposes the evocative 1930s juke joints of the southern US to contemporary London, celebrating black excellence and communality (hence the title, which reclaims the concept of swag from hyper-individualism to recontextualise it as something innate and universal). A technical marvel, the film draws on the history of hip hop on screen (the fish-eye lens of Hype Williams, the one-take style of Spike Jonze's video for the Pharcyde's Drop), but expands it outwards, creating a kaleidoscopic, almost psychedelic vision of belonging and celebration, so rich, detailed and pungent you feel you can almost taste, smell and touch everything on-screen. Dizzying, fresh and exciting, the film offers a new way of seeing and showing London that feels invigorated and invigorating.
(Directed by Cassianne Lawrence, 7 minutes) (B)

4) Wave 3 (Cancelled?)

Wave 3 (Cancelled?) introduces us to a cast of endearing nature and art-loving individuals, presented in a heightened, almost child-like fashion through a kaleidoscopic mixture of media. From fisheye lenses to drawings, 3-D printing to awe-inspiring wide-aperture photography, it playfully merges the handmade with the artificial; unfiltered imagination with technical prowess. The dry, sardonic voiceover extracts the humour from what exists in their idiosyncratic social surroundings. However, this is also an expression of deep affection for friends, lovers and mere acquaintances – all of whom are so unique that they could be the subjects of their own documentary, but that would be missing the point. What begins as pure absurdist whimsy concludes with a tone of trepidation and reflection. The film posits: by using one's own personal artform to interpret those you spend time with, are you "retreating to fantasy"? This is a multilayered and infinitely charming glimpse into a small circle of passionate people, and the creative psyche of the one who connects them.
(Directed by Edward Smyth, 5 minutes) (J)

5) Flodden Road

Margot's film 'Melvil' was one of the great discoveries of our festival last year, and an audience favourite, and we were delighted to receive this new film from her. A beautiful example of film-making on-the-fly, with characteristic care and tenderness shown towards the people at its heart, the work places its monologue centred around the passage between the 'provinces' and the city and the first encounters with the metropolis against images of tree felling, aircraft and glimpsed skyscrapers, always finding new and surprising rhymes and oppositions between word and image. What is created is an almost enchanted, Cocteau-ian realm in the suburbs of London, where destruction is reversed and nature restored as if to greet the new arrival with the promise of new beginnings.
(Directed by Margot Ladroue, 3 minutes) (B)

6) Terraforms

Terraforms straddles the line between objective, 'official' reportage and a surreal nightmare, a paranoiac vision of the British countryside as an alien space invaded and colonised by a sinister, shadowy combination of (potentially) corporate,

military-industrial or supernatural agencies, laying waste to sense, safety and even language itself. Shot on a shoestring budget, the film is a testament to the power and horror that can be generated through the force of a singular, controlled artistic vision and a mastery of mixed-medium craft. Some of the images here recall Fritz Lang in both their composition and the eerie suggestion of both immense, concrete presence and hollow, void-like non-presence. Be careful - this is the sort of work that lingers on the edge of the subconscious, and lays roots under our most pleasant perceptions.
(Directed by Hallie Halliday, 7 minutes) (B)

7) Fibers

There are few films like the deeply impactful Fibers which uses food to recount war and aggression – specifically the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 and the attacks on Artsakh. While she carefully prepares zhengyalov bread, we sit and listen to our subject candidly recall the terror of one particular bombing, and the harrowing activities of the Azerbaijani military – which, following this film's making, led to the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Artsakh in 2023. It's a film that confronts us with issues of forced displacement; urges us to examine the very recent past and consider its present relevance. Though it's also, artistically speaking, concerned with montage, digital textures and the strange filmic flow of time. Many audacious editing tricks and subconscious audio-visual connections are offered up to the viewer. By presenting such an unusual fusion of content and image, it leaves us pondering how easily lines can be drawn between the food and art we consume, and the cruelty omnipresent in our world. On a metatextual level, we can also question whether the filmmaker believes this is one way to get people to not turn a blind eye towards mass dehumanization. To present alluring imagery of consumables – a gorgeous cinematic conceit; an act of appreciation for one individual's craft and expression of their culture; and, perhaps, a subtle indictment of the watching public. We encourage you to check out Anna's website for more information on the creation of this film: https://annagrigorian.art/
(Directed by Anna Grigorian, 15 minutes) (J)

8) Can You Read, Lad?

Inspired by conversations heard by film-maker Toni Fifield while working in a newsagents, Can You Read, Lad is a disturbing, absurdist exploration of how hateful views become rooted though focused repetition and over-exposure in the media, overwhelming sense, reason and evidence. Our monologuing protagonist is not the illiterate and incoherent thug boogeyman, but a loquacious everyman, whose charming and personable qualities are balanced by something sinister and threatening as he insists upon his own version of reality. Executed with clear, calm control and anchored on a singular, powerful image, Can You Read, Lad demonstrates the potential low-budget film-making has to respond directly, intelligently and compassionately to the matters of pressing importance that more powerful institutions and media channels struggle to portray effectively.
(Directed by Toni Fifield, 5 minutes) (B)

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Part 2: Firmly In Place

After our interval, the second half takes two of our longest films and places them alongside two bite-size shorts for a final exploration of place. These films stop the spinning wheel of the first half of the evening, and dig deep into themes of space and setting as liberator or oppressor, passage and stasis, change and continuity and belonging and non-belonging.

9) Dementia: The Island Journey

I first met the director Rianna Patterson at another festival in late January, and was deeply impressed to hear of her methods and experience in making both this film and her upcoming documentary. A true model of remarkable self-sufficiency and drive, Rianna has created a truly impressive and complete film across international borders with limited resources, but much ingenuity, sensitivity and great humanity. Inspired by her grandfather's passing with dementia in Dominica, the film explores how a post-colonial society is organising and providing care and quality of life for its elderly population based upon its own models, fusing new thinking with traditional methods. As a portrait of a place that is rarely portrayed in British (or general western) media, it is illuminating, deeply valuable and very moving- a wonderful work of citizen journalism and activism.
(Directed by Rianna Patterson, 42 minutes) (B)

10) Days Off

Days Off is just about as no-budget as they come – and yet, without needing superfluous, expensive recording equipment, this phone-shot film is more complete and elegant a vision than most larger scale productions. We follow a woman on her day off who cannot seem to catch a break from an onslaught of domestic issues. This is a piece made up of genuine shots; inserts that reveal the next piece of information without being ostentatious, and simple, well-considered spatial geography. Incredibly inventive – and deceptively so – this is a snappy, directorially confident work of modern Social Realism – but with some true aesthetic experimentation and an endnote of sensory release. It's also refreshing to see a film about the situation of a struggling working person that's not made using insane budgets and corporate backing – or, for that matter, revels in the misery of what we're watching. These are trivial annoyances and practical failures that add up to a bad day off and thus reflects greater societal issues relating to the current state of Greece, its resources and the intense heat. The messaging is sincere. A self-contained, compact concept with an outstanding clarity of vision.
(Directed by Theodoros Thermos, Alexandros Konstantinidis, 6 minutes) (J)

11) Underpasses

A collaboration between multiple members of the Noli family, Underpasses has a simple premise: two people stood in a central-London underpass, with seemingly nowhere else to go, throw back and forth philosophical musings regarding life and existence within a troublesome city. There's a sense that this underpass is a form of refuge for our protagonists – whether it's from the weather (which they would rather check on their phone than observe themselves), the noise of endless "development", or immigrant-hating fascists that we know wander the streets. We open on images of the tunnel without our heroes, establishing the intentions of the

filmmaking. A focus on details and textures which are there to be contemplated by the spectator, but ultimately their meaning is not of great significance. We're here to derive something sensory from the environment, to consider the relationship between the sporadic camera and the textures it captures. The same can then be said about the words that follow; words that themselves are metatextually reflected upon towards the film's end. The camera has a mind of its own, at one point leaving our subjects to observe the glaring lights above – as if the camera itself, like our two characters, is desperately attempting to extrapolate deeper meaning from its surroundings. It is as much a successful comedy about the nature of interaction or small talk as it is an accurate microcosmic interpretation of our current hate-filled landscape. **(Directed by Billy Stanton, 8 minutes)** (J)

12) Displaced in Time

A beautiful and hypnotic film, Displaced in Time traces the recent history of film-maker Pariya Bakhshi's family through a collage-like assortment of Hi8 home videos, digital webcam recordings and 16mm contemporary footage. Presenting the image as a location where people, memories and relationships scattered by time, space and events can combine, recombine and dissipate, Bakhshi charts both the family's departure from Iran for Hiroshima, and then their own journey to Germany to study, all the time haunted by the impossibility of 'homecoming'. Deeply moving and overflowing with moments of intense and tender lyricism, this film is also a mature and profound exploration of the possibilities and limitations of the image and what it contains and excises.
(Directed by Pariya Bakhshi, 27 minutes) (B)



Dispatches From The Desk of Noli

May 2026: Flaubert's Dream

If we follow the thinking that the cinema was, ultimately, the art and history of the twentieth century - and there seems at this point little need to refute that - then the best of what we have seen across the first twenty-five or so years of the twenty-first century represents the search for, discovery of and first preliminaries in the constitution of a new form. We're predisposed to a certain pessimism in our thinking now- the reasons for this are numerous and inter-linked, but our general positions reflect well our subservience to the ideologies of major tech companies (whose leaders have been conditioned by a misunderstood education in science fiction to accept hyper-capitalist dystopia as the inevitable future), our mental and physical subservience to their products and the lingering traumas of the failed dreams of the previous century that still resound through our 'current events'. But there is a sense in which we may be well-placed to counter and oppose 'The AI Revolution(™)", and have genuine reasons for optimism. What we may have to sacrifice, however, is the idea of cinema as 'dream palace', as a source of great narrative, fantasy and national cultural coherence: the precision-tooled model of entertainment, the 'visual novel' or 'expanded stage-play' that became the default position and form of cinema for much of its history, is exactly that thing that exists in enough abundance and (by design) enough replicable potential to be repurposed and recreated by machines without human agency. What is emerging instead - and may stand ultimately as the (nameless) art of the new century - is a sort of 'scrapbook of the real'. The new art is fragmented, but only in the sense that is composed of individual fragments of the real and often freely mixes the digital and the analogue, high and low definitions, media and medium. This is not realism in the traditional sense, as too many of the fragments are deeply personal and invested with subliminal dreams, applicable only in certain places and certain times and certain circumstances, without the belief in a totalised, objective mundane singular reality that has been the guiding light of much art in the realist tradition. Instead, the 'wholes' formed by the collection of these fragments seem an attempt to respond directly to the transiency of the world, to establish small truths, to represent the impossible, overwhelming depth of the 'moment' (in macro and micro senses). Much of this work is political, but political in a way that makes it feel like a descendent of Cinema

Novo, invested with a belief that 'politics' is really a historical force that cannot help but be always present, always lurking, always shaping and reshaping and fragmenting and re-fragmenting whatever can be captured, portrayed, connected, remembered; whatever is thought of as 'the real'. These films are deeply individual, the perspective of their author ever-present and always guiding the development, but they open up in multiple other directions, making evident and clear the divergent meanings and representations buried within each image. Full of potentials and possibilities, these films are a new morality, each of them humanist because they are entirely concerned with the existence of the human in the moment and location of their creation - they are films that bear witness and remember, films that suggest the continuation of something always and somehow. The film-maker is now a strange kind of post-colonial explorer, navigating the images of the past and the present, and the terrain of the real - what remains of it - here and now. Is this the fulfilling of Alexandre Astruc's famous conception of the camera-stylo some seven decades on, or can we go back even further and suggest what we see now is the culmination of Gustave Flaubert's dream? For what did Gustave - that father of the cinema as identified by Walter Murch and Jacques Rancière and the creator of montage - envision, but a way of capturing the moment so intensely, so perfectly, with such awareness of and dedication to its unfathomable immensity, that it could reveal to us something of all of existence?
We believe that the films showing at tonight's edition of Noli all display - in their own ways - some of the traits, objectives and qualities of these new forms, this new 'cinema' (although this may well be a word we have to do away with). Within our lifespan of now almost 4 years, we have felt the shifts in the types of films that are being submitted to us and their concerns - we truly believe now, for the first time, that we are on the precipice of really exciting changes and developments in this art to which we have devoted much of our lives. For this to flourish, it is time to stop crying over the state of 'the industry', to wave it a final goodbye, and step forth into the unknown as new citizens of the world. We are all Corto Maltese now, and the lost continent of Mu is finally in sight.

- Billy Stanton

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TOO RAW.

NOLI



Contact Us
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We will return in Winter 2026/27- check our site for details

Front Cover: Detail from the promotional poster for Fantomas: The False Magistrate (1914)
Back Cover: The Sower by Jean-Francois Millet (1850)
Photography by Sheridan Seraphin