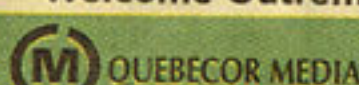


# MIRROR

Welcome Outremont to the left-wing fold!

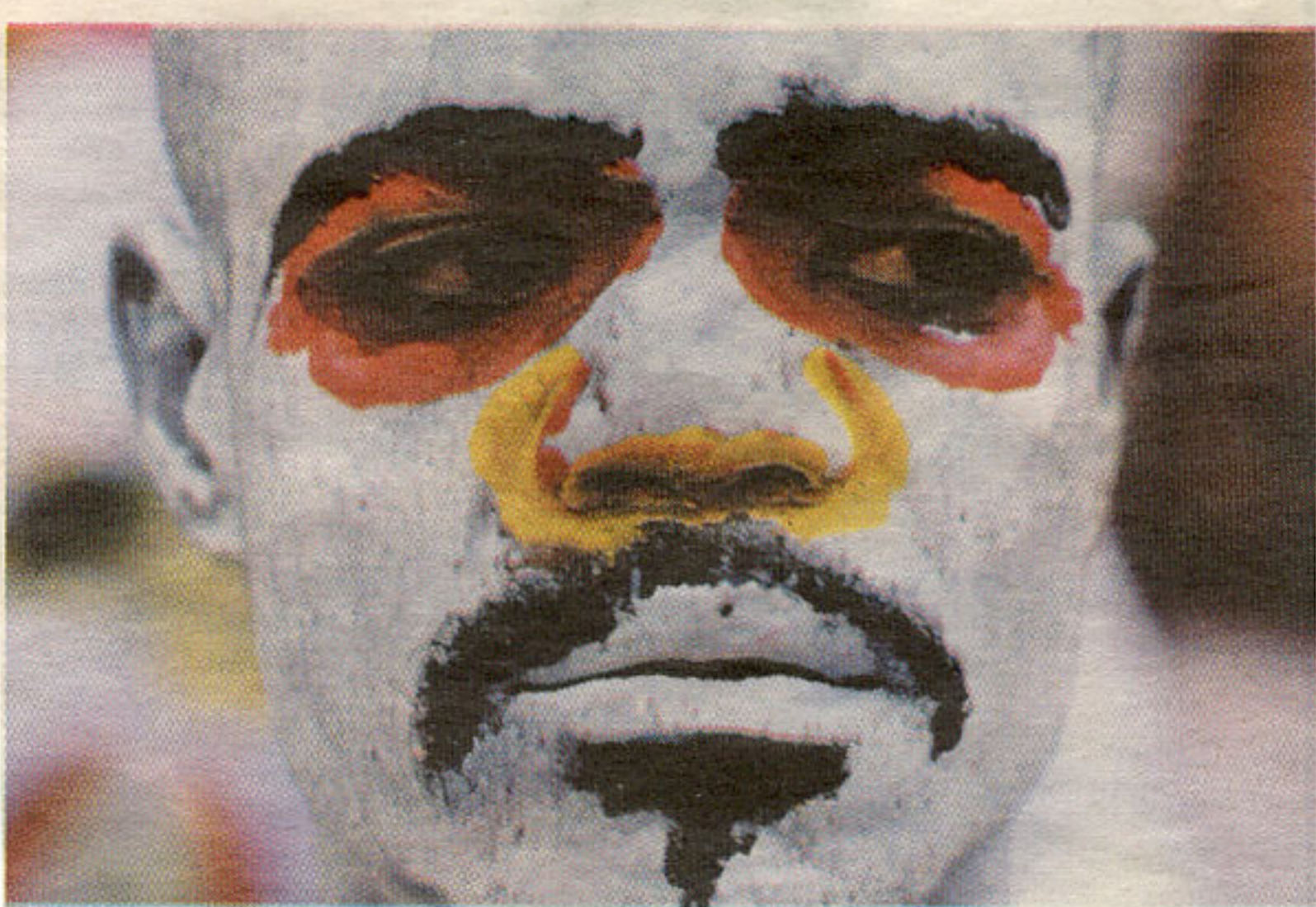


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MONTREAL MIRROR SEPTEMBER 20 - SEPTEMBER 26 2007

## Sweet and sour

At the third Montreal Haitian film fest, the focus is on the sugar industry



BITTERSWEET PORTRAIT: *Haiti, mon rêve, mon amour*

by MALCOLM FRASER

Three years strong, the Montreal Haitian Film Festival is a junior contender among the city's veteran fests, but offers a distinct program aiming to show off the diversity of this beleaguered, much misunderstood nation. Representing a small but culturally rich community—you know it's a tight-knit scene when the president of the festival also acts in one of the featured films—the selection sheds light on the country's social issues and features some films highlighting the Montreal-Haiti connection.

The festival has a strong social conscience, and this year is putting a lot of weight behind raising awareness of a little-known issue: the plight of migrant Haitian workers in the sugar industry of the neighbouring Dominican Republic. Far from the eyes of blissfully unaware tourists, thousands of these workers toil in sugar plantations known as *bateys*, under working conditions that the festival and its featured filmmakers are unafraid to call slavery.

No fewer than six documentaries on this topic are presented at this year's fest. The most high-profile is *The Sugar Babies*, by Cuban-American director Amy Serrano. Narrated by popular Haitian emigrée author Edwidge Danticat, it focuses on the lives of the children born of the sugar workers, who aren't recognized as citizens by either country. U.S. director Bill Haney's *The Price of Sugar*, narrated by Paul Newman, tells the story of a priest who discovers the horrors of the plantations when he's assigned to a parish where many sugar workers live. In *Big Sugar*, noted Canadian documentarian Brian McKenna sheds light on the history of the sugar industry itself.

The remaining sugar films, Gérard Maximin's short *Batey Zero* and Michel Régnier's hour-long *Sucre Noir* and short *Grande Saline*, are screened in the same program. Régnier's films have the

somewhat depressing distinction of being the first films made on the topic...in the 1980s. The fest is also mounting a photography exhibit on the *bateys*, Céline Anaya Gautier's *Slaves in Paradise*.

Other documentary features include Claude St-Rome's lyrical portrait of the country, *Haiti, mon rêve, mon amour*, Mario Delatour's *Un certain bord de mer*, about the history of Haiti's Arab community (who knew?), and Rod Paul's *Falling Haiti*, which documents the U.S.-supported 2004 coup against President Aristide, drawing parallels to the other, better-known current U.S. interventions in other countries' affairs.

Apart from these bittersweet reflections, there are also a number of fiction features being presented. In tribute to actor François Latour, who was murdered in Haiti last year, the fest is screening one of his best-known films, Raoul Peck's *L'homme sur les quais*. Other fiction selections include Montreal-Haiti drama *Amours, mensonges et conséquences*; *Vers le sud*, a story of female sex tourism based on a novel by Dany Laferrière and starring Charlotte Rampling, and *Le président a-t-il le sida?*, a tale of romantic treachery set in the Haitian music business. The closing film of the fest is the world première of the Haitian drama *Le chauffeur*, the story of a woman who begins a secret affair with her mother's driver. Director Jean-Claude Bourjolly will be in town for the screening of the steamy romance.

A program of shorts spanning all genres rounds out the programming. Aside from a celebration of the Haitian community, the fest is also a perfect opportunity for curious non-Haitians to get a more complete picture of what the country is all about. ■

THE FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DU FILM HAÏTIEN DE MONTRÉAL RUNS THROUGH SEPT. 23. FOR MORE INFO SEE WWW.FESTIVALFILMHAÏTIEN.COM