

# PLACE



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13 ESSAYS  
13 FILMMAKERS  
1 CITY

FEATURING ESSAYS BY

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# FOREWORD

Winnipeg has been a meeting place for thousands of years. It has long been a common ground for the coming together of different peoples and different cultures, a place for the sharing of ideas and goods. Winnipeg did not become this place, but rather this was the place that became Winnipeg. To this day, the heart of Winnipeg remains at the point of confluence where the Red and Assiniboine rivers meet, the very place that gave birth to this identity and just a few blocks away from the Winnipeg Film Group.

For many, Winnipeg is a most unexpected location for a unique filmmaking culture to have developed. Indeed, this city offers film little financial viability, and among the ranks of the poorly paid artist, filmmakers remain among the worst paid of them all. Yet, in spite of the many inhospitable conditions—including our legendary weather (or, perhaps, because of this; after all, willingly spending years and decades in a place with weather akin to that of Siberia speaks to a different kind of character)—Winnipeg has developed a strong filmmaking identity that is connected not by any one aesthetic or form, but instead by the personal interconnections that exist among filmmakers. And this has been one of the most important successes of the Winnipeg Film Group.

Over three and a half decades, the Winnipeg Film Group has evolved into an organization renowned for the dense and diverse artistic nature of the filmmakers at its core, starting literally as a small “group” of aspiring filmmakers connected only by the desire to make films, who in turn built a greater community of filmmakers. This creation, this community, was very consciously created to be devoid of the systems of bureaucratization that demand homogeneity, but instead was lovingly hand-crafted over time like an evolving work of folk art; and in coming to be in this way facilitated room for the new and the unforeseen.

In other centres, there are film “schools”: real post secondary institutions to teach the art and craft of film, and groupings of individuals that crop out of dense experiences studying together and who build practices with strong commonalities—the Escarpment School (arguably the most influential “school” in English Canada), Loop, Double Negative... But in Winnipeg, there is only the Winnipeg Film Group. Period. To support all the variations of independent filmmaker that might exist—narrative, experimental, transgressive, documentary, animation and multiple evolving hybrid forms. And, in needing to be so many different things to so many different people over decades, it has evolved a chameleon-like identity, where somehow all the differences of being are the very essence of its identity.

Winnipeg’s isolation and its small population in comparison to the metropolises of other parts are also key ingredients to what the Winnipeg Film Group has become, because there is not just a community, but a community that has an intimate memory of its past. In other places, filmmakers might be forgiven for not knowing the oeuvre of other local filmmakers who have emerged before them, but in Winnipeg the sense of what has come before will always inform the work that will come next; what has been achieved and accomplished is important, but is always of the past. It is for this reason that even as outsiders try to define and label Winnipeg’s filmmaking aesthetic as one type of “school” or another, those emerging out of the realm of the unknown are already working beyond what is most easily visible to re-define this identity—it is always strong, and it is always something unexpected.

The thirteen filmmakers featured in this book are all filmmakers with strong connections to the Winnipeg Film Group who have worked in independent feature film: from John Paizs and Guy Maddin, who were central to the formation of

the “legend” of the Winnipeg Film Group and the prairie post-modern aesthetic; to technical formalist Jeffrey Erbach, whose transgressive content coupled with his artistic mastery pushed the Winnipeg Film Group right out to the edge of controversy; to Winston Washington Moxam, whose work brings greater attention to issues of race and racism within Canada; and to other infinitely talented filmmakers including Norma Bailey, Sean Garrity and Greg Hanec. Though each of the filmmakers represented in this book is unique, connected with the others by no individual single aesthetic, all are indeed connected by a proximity of location that invariably causes one to influence another, much like a bleeding at the edges—the influence of place.

Alas, as any selection process will, there are many accomplished Winnipeg filmmakers who have not been included in this book simply as a matter of logistics; however, this sample provides an overview of different eras and aesthetics that have had their place here, and possibly even re-introduces some of the lesser-known accomplished filmmakers among the titans of the Winnipeg Film Group.

*Place*, the book, has been the loving creation of many, but most importantly has been guided into being by Monica Lowe. Monica’s tireless effort to usher this book into existence is a significant contribution to ensuring that filmmakers—the artistic forces behind film—remain at the centre of consciousness in understanding the filmmaking community that has come to exist here in Winnipeg.

Cecilia Araneda, Editor

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*This book is dedicated to  
the spirit of independent filmmaking—  
past, present and future.*



