

Heather Conn Explores the Art of Being an American through Cinema

May, 2008



The Exchange Visitor Program is pleased to announce Heather Conn as May's Exchange Visitor of the Month. Each month, we select an exchange visitor who has made an effort to get involved in his/her community and explore American Culture.

If there's one person who has thoroughly explored American culture through cinema, it's Heather Conn.

Conn, a native of British Columbia, is a trainee at Sierra Magazine in San Francisco. A veteran movie buff, Conn has attended dozens of film festivals and has been a movie fan all her life. From Vancouver International film festivals, which she has faithfully attended for 20 years, to film festivals in Toronto, Conn knows the ins and outs of movie magic.

Here in the U.S., Conn has attended independent film festivals, the Asian film festival, Buddhist film festival, Tiburon film festival and the San Francisco International film festival. And she doesn't just screen films, she occasionally reviews. "Since being in San Francisco, I have reviewed the environmental DVD Garbage Warrior for the website of my host company, Sierra Magazine."

One of the wonderful things about movies is that its value, beauty and significance all lie in the eye of the beholder. For Conn, movies not only are made to be enjoyed, but also to be appreciated in a cultural context. Movies bring people together and help us understand certain cultural nuances and values of the country in which they were filmed.

"I think that the kinship of movie fans and filmmakers overrides nationality," Conn said. "Watching U.S. films-documentaries, in particular-enables me to see how Americans view their nation, culture, and leaders. It enriches my viewpoint on issues from the Iraqi war to presidential candidates. I have met lots of interesting people at film festivals and have enjoyed hearing the U.S. filmmakers speak at screenings. I particularly enjoyed the San Francisco film festival screening of the documentary 1,000 Journals. A San Francisco graphic designer sent blank journals around the world and invited people to write, draw, and add whatever they liked within them, then return them to him. The

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designer spoke after the screening and invited the audience to leaf through two of the original journals that had been in many countries. I really enjoyed that and the sharing of creativity."

Much like food, art speaks its own universal language through sound, action and imagery. And although watching a movie may be an independent activity, talking about the movie afterward is not. Conn connects to her community through the cinema. If you have a hobby or passion, share it with your coworkers and ask them to participate. You might be surprised by the friends you make along the way and the people who share your interests.

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