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A new and haunting perspective of the everyday Photo: Marklewisstudio.com

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A still clip from Mark Lewis` film trilogy Photo: Marklewisstudio.com

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## ***Cold Morning*: scenes from a city in film**

### **Canadian Mark Lewis explores Toronto's landscapes in a Hart House film exhibition**

**By: Kasia Swica, Staff Writer**

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Mark Lewis makes films that get inside your head. They are psychological thrillers that don't have any dialogue. They don't have any characters, either, or a plot for that matter. Yet they still hold the power to mesmerize and unnerve.

Over the course of his career, the internationally-renowned Canadian filmmaker has gained notoriety for his deconstruction of film and the manipulation of images. His works break cinema down into the basic fluid movement of the camera through a landscape. His latest exhibition, *Cold Morning*, is a series of short films about Toronto, and it gives me the heebie-jeebies.

Left entirely without characters, plot or even sound, Lewis' works force the audience to relate to the lens. He induces a subtle hypnosis through gradual pans, zooms, and dollies, creating a psychological bond with the city. This gradually heightened awareness of movement and space feels similar to a pensive walk though Queen's Park at dusk, or a night-time ride on a silent TTC bus.

In many ways, *Cold Morning* is like looking at the city through a window. Lewis has staged a series of shots where serendipity alone seems to guide the action as it unfolds. Says Lewis, "Everything I ever do that's good is by accident... You can't be an artist in film." He creates an appreciation for spaces that can be overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of life.

In "TD Center, 54th Floor" (2009) Lewis placed a camera dolly on the window ledge of the iconic skyscraper to overlook the downtown traffic. Although the image is staged and impersonal, it manages to impose feelings of nostalgia and personal discomfort. He choreographed an intimate moment of reflection but chose to stage it on a precarious perch above grey streets.

In the exhibition, Lewis also explores the classic rear projection technique, which blends pre-filmed shots with

in-studio acting. He combines matted shots of the skating rink at Nathan Phillips Square with in-studio actors skating in front of a bluescreen. The two cameras dolly and zoom back forth while the enamored lovers glide side-to-side across the screen. We choose to accept two conflicting visual images and blend them together into one pictorial space. The stylized image of love is noticeably fabricated. The effect induces a suspension of disbelief that is soothing, surreal, but also borderline sarcastic, and therefore disheartening as well.

Film is an ephemeral medium; its images evanesce at the same pace as life. We have a natural relationship with the lens because we are both bound by the flow of time. In *Cold Morning*, Lewis exploits this intimacy to highlight 'un-photogenic' areas across Toronto and in everyday life.

*Cold Morning* was commissioned by the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at Hart House and is currently on display at the Gallery until October 25th. For a retrospective look at Lewis' work, check out the Gershon Iskowitz Prize Exhibition this fall at the AGO.

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