

HOT DOCS 2017 REVIEW: MORE ART UPSTAIRS

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Filmmaker Jody Hassett Sanchez takes moviegoers behind the scenes of the highest paying art competition in the world. Eclipsing more artistically prestigious prizes in Hong Kong, Berlin, New York, and Paris, the otherwise unassuming ArtPrize in Grand Rapids, Michigan awards almost half a million dollars in prize money at the end of their city-wide exhibition. Some of the money is earmarked for a prize determined by a professional jury, while the rest is awarded as a result of online balloting from exhibition goers. With so much money on the line, the artists – some humble, everyday people, others brimming with desperation and hubris – try to curry favour with the public, leading to a competition where anything can and has won the top prize.

More Art Upstairs is a fascinating microcosm of the modern art world played out over the course of a single event, told through the eyes of sometimes flustered organizers and passionate artists all vying for notoriety and validation. The main question here is whether or not the general public can be counted on to understand great art. Theory would suggest that if someone were to have a strong, emotional reaction to a piece that would constitute a work of art. But what if the art in question can be seen by a trained eye as cheesy or gauche? Does that make the art any less valid?

Supremely entertaining throughout and building genuine tension as the competition nears its conclusion, Sanchez has made a crowd pleasing film with **More Art Upstairs**, but one that also slyly asks the viewer to think critically about what they're seeing. I'll be fascinated to see what viewers of the film think will win the competition, and their thoughts about the entire experience at the end of the movie.

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