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MOVIE REVIEW

Alternatives to the Multiplex in 'The World According to Shorts'

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

Sidelined at film festivals and ignored by most moviegoers, short films are often slighted as little more than the training wheels of the film industry. Yet mastering the form demands technical and narrative skills most feature directors lack, and for audiences exhausted by today's bloated extravaganzas, "The World According to Shorts" is an eclectic palate cleanser.

Addressing topics as diverse as aging, marital sex and the fantasy lives of children, this six-film sampling offers a variety of moods and styles. The primary-hued "La Perra," directed by Hugo Maza of Chile, is a delightfully perverse tale of a stale married couple whose maid is their unwitting aphrodisiac, while "United We Stand," by Hans Petter Moland of Norway, is a witty and graceful metaphor for the emergence of young ideas from old habits.

In Adam Guzinski's powerful "Antichrist" — a Polish ["Lord of the Flies"](#) — a group of ragamuffins plays increasingly dangerous games, and in Jane Malaquias's "Old Woman's Step," the buttery light of a Brazilian fishing village accompanies an old woman as she sets out to sell a chicken.

For animated and experimental films, shorts programs offer a way to reach beyond specialty audiences. Both genres are represented here, and both are intimately concerned with the pleasures and pains of the flesh. The Australian director Daniel Askill's "We Have Decided Not to Die" is a visually stunning imagining of human rituals, but it's the German Andreas Hykade's animated western, "Ring of Fire," that will really mess with your head. As a pair of frustrated cowboys trail beckoning women and pulsing vaginas across a Dali-esque landscape, the wonderful world of Disney seems a million miles away.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SHORTS

Opens today in Manhattan.

A program of short films produced by Jonathan Howell: "La Perra," written (in Spanish, with English subtitles) and directed by Hugo Maza; "We Have Decided Not to Die," written and directed by Daniel

Askill; “United We Stand,” written (in Norwegian, with English subtitles) by Are Sjaastad and directed by Hans Petter Moland; “Antichrist,” written (in Polish, with English subtitles) and directed by Adam Guzinski; “The Old Woman’s Shop,” written (in Portuguese, with English subtitles) and directed by Jane Malaquias; “Ring of Fire,” written and directed by Andreas Hykade. Released by New Yorker Films; at the Quad Cinema, 34 West 13th Street, Greenwich Village. Total program running time: 95 minutes. These films are not rated.