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New Review

*The World According to Shorts*

Various dirs.. 2006. N/R. 95mins.

★★★★

As always, curator Jonathan Howell's compendium of shorts from around the globe (okay, half are from Europe this year) is, sadly, too short, but it succeeds in capturing the essence and range of the form nonetheless. Two masters of foreign cinema's heyday are evoked, in Jane Malaquias's "The Old Woman's Step," a shabby, frequently out-of-focus but achingly Bressonian study of rituals of kindness and sacrifice in Brazil, and "The Bitch," Hugo Maza's wry Buñuelian snapshot of the intersection of class loathing and desire in Chile.

The Australian "We Have Decided Not to Die," on the other hand, plays like a commercial with nothing to sell but its own precision pacing and mind-bending visuals (although director Daniel Askill is definitely someone to watch), while Adam Guzinski's "Antichrist," a keenly conceived refutation (I think) of religious mysticism and political fanaticism from Poland, is overlong and overwrought. "Ring of Fire"—a surreal German animated sex romp in the guise of a Western buddy movie—both rallies the bill and alters its tone, but Hans Petter Moland's "United We Stand" is the real keeper here: Undiluted metaphor from start to finish, it handily gift wraps the legacy of Norway's Labor Party in nine bittersweet minutes. (Opens Fri; Cinema Village.)—Mark Holcomb

