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Mo' albums, mo' problems



PAUL
BLINOV

album about every state in America. These aren't four songs to a state, either. His last *Come on, Feel the Illinois!* sprawled more than 20 tracks long. I may be in Arts, but do the math yourself: that's about a thousand songs. Again, can anyone give us that much music without it containing unhealthy amounts of filler?

But that's not all for Sufjan. He isn't just adhering to the 50 States project. In addition to an outtakes album for *Illinoise!*, he's also released one non-50 states album, *Seven Swans*, two albums before the project started, and now a set of Christmas EPs, just in time for the holiday season. Christmas EPs? They're likely to collect dust for a good eleven months of the year.

At this rate, Sufjan could actually live a long life and still die before he finishes the 50 States project, assuming people are still listening then and he doesn't burn out before Hawaii and Alaska get their respective turns.

It's like there's an unwritten rule between indie artists and postsecondary students that states how musicians provide the whimsical, unhappy or ass-kicking soundtracks to our evolving lives in exchange for a paltry lump sum. However, every once in a while, a band comes along and stirs the pot with a double album, three albums in a year, or three albums in a year including a double album (I'm looking at you, Ryan Adams). While this may seem ideal—hey, more music!—multiple releases in a year fails in practicality. Artists are setting both themselves, and us students, up for a fall.

Abnormal amounts of releases have been happening all too often lately. An illustrative example would be Bishop Allen, a band from Brooklyn, New York. They're a young band, and they have a knack for writing some catchy tunes. However, they're apparently on a quest to bankrupt the students of the world by putting out one four-song EP a month for the entire year.

It's kind of a cool concept on the surface, but look closer: your typical album costs about \$20, give or take a few loonies. Twelve EPs at about five dollars a pop tallies up to \$60 for the whole deal. Could all this music be worth \$60? Maybe, but can a relatively untested indie band—Bishop Allen had just one album before embarking on this EP-a-month adventure—really give us 48 quality songs in a year? Can any established artist do that in such a rigid time constraint? Bishop Allen could have just plucked twelve or so of the best tracks they have and given us an amazing album at the end of the year. Instead, they decided to lighten our wallets and burden our ears with filler.

A more recognizable figure guilty of the same thing as Bishop Allen is Sufjan Stevens. He's currently working his 50 States project, writing an

And to clarify, ol' Sufjan's only written albums for two states so far, one for Illinois and one for Michigan. In total, he has seven releases to his name, and 48 to go. At this rate, Sufjan could actually live a long life and still die before he finishes the 50 States project, assuming people are still listening then and he doesn't burn out before Hawaii and Alaska get their respective turns. There's a difference between being prolific, and grabbing at my wallet like a zombie or telemarketer, and Sufjan's starting to cross over to the undead side of things.

Really, if these artists just took a bit more time between releases to cut out the filler, they'd be releasing consistent, quality music, and with enough time in between for us to scrape some money together and actually buy the damn release.

Painting honest *Landscapes*

Manufactured Landscapes

Directed by Jennifer Baichwal
Based on the photography of Edward Burtynsky
Opens 24 November
Garneau Theatre

MARIA KOTOVYCH
Arts & Entertainment Staff

Yellow is typically the runt in a box of crayons, always getting picked last in the game of favourite colours, but in Jennifer Baichwal's visually stunning documentary *Manufactured Landscapes*, the colour also appears in such an aesthetically pleasing way that you might just change your preference.

The film follows Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky to China, and later to Bangladesh, as he photographs the effects of industry and manufacturing on nature. The film, which won Best Canadian Feature at the 2006 Toronto Film Festival, is a paradox: it's a beautifully filmed piece that depicts Burtynsky's gorgeous art, but it also mixes in all that is *not* beautiful—pollution, garbage, scrap metal and environmental toxins.

Burtynsky visits coal mines, shipyards, scrap heaps and recycling yards. In Bangladesh, young men wade barefoot in oil waste. In another scene, a young Chinese child eats a bowl of food while a mound of scrap towers in the background. The toxic smells of a recycling heap practically float from the screen. A rusty orange stream winds through dry dirt. Metal scraps clang loudly when discarded.

Burtynsky's photographs, and the entire movie, shock and educate without preaching. The film depicts the problem without laying blame, but also without offering solutions. Burtynsky does, however, remark that as we destroy nature, we destroy ourselves.

Along those lines, we see how the Chinese workforce has transformed in response to urban migration. The film focuses on the manufacturing industry, the powerhouse behind the Chinese economy. Yellow first appears on each employee's uniform. Then there's a brilliant sea of yellow as many employees gather for a photograph on an endless stretch of road bordered by yellow buildings. A yellow line divides the road. This scene mesmerizes the eye, yet each individual quickly loses meaning. And this means a lot.

Baichwal devotes a lot of time depicting the working conditions in the Chinese manufacturing industry. Nothing more than cogs in the industrial machine, employees complete tedious, mindless, repetitive tasks. The dehumanizing conditions of the manufacturing industry are staggering.

However, the workers in this film don't plot any kind of Marxist revolution. Indeed, most of the workers speak very matter-of-factly about their jobs. One man says that he does his job "for his country." Perhaps these workers aren't alienated, but actually deceived, by the system. Perhaps they think they have no other options. The film allows viewers to draw their own conclusions. This is one beautiful feature of *Manufactured Landscapes*.

In addition to depicting workers' disconnect from their product, the movie also shows how we as consumers are disconnected from the products that we buy. The film follows the entire life cycle of a product, including material extraction, creation, consumption, and finally, waste. Each step is disconnected from the others, which makes a powerful statement.

This is a compelling documentary that speaks in a non-didactic tone, allowing the message to remain subtle. Baichwal doesn't present the issues in terms of right or wrong; she simply presents new ways of seeing the problems.



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