

CanDocs

edited by Laura Turek

BRITISH COLUMBIA

— Katherine Dodds



Paris Stories, The Fiction of Mavis Gallant

Paris Stories

Paris Stories, The Fiction of Mavis Gallant tells the story of Canada's famously "unknown" writer. One of *The New Yorker's* most frequently published short story writers, Gallant often appears in anthologies of great American writers. A Montrealer who has been living in Paris since 1950 yet writes in English, Gallant has devoted 60 years of her life to the craft of the short story. Both proper and radical, Mavis Gallant is an iconoclast.

It was Gallant's absolute dedication to her work that drew producer/director Lynn Booth to explore her life. Says Booth, "Mavis arranged her entire life so that she could write." She adds, "It wasn't always easy for a woman of her era to accomplish what she did." Gallant has survived for years on her writing without publishing a single novel. She was recently awarded the PEN Nabokov Award for lifetime achievement.

A Make Believe Media Production. Produced and directed by Lynn Booth. In production for broadcast on BRAVO!, TV Ontario, Access, Knowledge Network. With funding from the Canadian Independent Film Video Fund, CTF, and BC Film.

Breaking Ranks

When Jeremy Hinzman crossed the border to Canada on January 3, 2005, he became the first US soldier to desert to this country since the Vietnam War. As he waits for Canada's refugee board to decide his fate, other US soldiers are following his path. *Breaking Ranks* is a feature length documentary about these American soldiers seeking refuge in Canada, this time from fighting the war in Iraq.

Heroes or cowards? That old question plays out ominously in an era of globalization, terrorism, and the ever more fraught relationship between the US and Canada. Writer/director Michelle Mason wonders how the film will be received on both sides of the border. "It's a challenging time, and Canada as a society is changing. The issue of desertion calls into question the very idea of a 'voluntary' army. So many young soldiers joined the military to go to school, to get medical care for their families. And now the US is not living up to these soldiers' own ideals." What remains to be seen is how Canada will respond.

Screen Siren Pictures in co-production with the National Film Board. Produced by Trish Dolman and Leah Mallen (Screen Siren) and Tracey Friesen (NFB). Director/Writer Michelle Mason. Associate Producer Jeff Schutts. In production this summer. Seeking US and Canadian broadcast pre-sales.

Dirt

What is dirt and who is dirty? These are the earthy questions that director Meghna Haldar is digging into. The idea for the doc came to her mind as she was traveling from Texas to Canada. "I saw a lot of construction," says Haldar, "and at every one of the sites, workers were wearing outfits that made them look like they were out to conquer space. It made me wonder what it was that they were protecting themselves from." She notes that while health issues are valid, her vision will illuminate the muddy waters of cultural difference. "I grew up in India and there, women and children work in construction. And they don't have all that protective gear."

Now wrapping up the second stage of development, the film will be a personal journey, an essay that will excavate the layers of meaning from this primal topic. The very stuff of gods and humans, our concepts of dirt define the dividing line between civilized and primitive, culture and nature, and that which is revered or reviled. Says Haldar, "The way we treat dirt

is the way we treat each other." The film will include animation, stock footage, as well as new material.

In development with the NFB. Producer Tracey Friesen. Director/Writer Meghna Haldar.

Genocide – A Three-Part Exploration

Producer, director and writer Erez T. Yanuv Barzilay, who began his media career as a TV journalist, has been driven to explore the topic of genocide for over a decade. "I was born in Jerusalem," says Barzilay, "and I have no answer for the situation I see worsening in Israel and Palestine." He was working for an Israeli TV station in 1992, when he was one of the first journalists to travel extensively in war-torn Cambodia.

For this documentary series, Barzilay is drawing examples from the aftermaths of the genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and Sudan, all places he has repeatedly visited over the years. There are signs of hope in the recovery efforts of people in these places of devastation. He adds, "in particular what is happening in Rwanda, against all odds, is unbelievable. This is my life's work right now—each case of genocide has a message for humanity. With the documentary series I'll try to figure out these legacies. Ultimately my hope is to offer some ways to prevent the next genocide from happening."



It's not an easy goal to achieve. And it's a hard topic to sell to broadcasters. Barzilay originally received development funding for the Cambodia project from the NFB and the United Nations Associations in Canada. Now he's seeking funding for the three-part series that will concentrate on signs of hope in these places, through stories of children. He's interested in alternative funding opportunities, perhaps with stakeholder groups dealing with the issue of genocide, as well as alternative grassroots distribution options that the new cross-platform future may offer.

A Shai Lah Production. Produced and directed by Erez T. Yanuv Barzilay. Contact info@shailahproductions.com