

## FILM COMMENT

# The Best Short Films of 2023

By [Leo Goldsmith](#) on December 15, 2023

One of the benefits of the streaming-industrial complex and its rapacious and insatiable lust for *content* is that short films suddenly have a noticeably more robust presence in the landscape of global cinema. Shorts often have been regarded as serving one of two functions: vehicles for the modernist obsession with newness and innovation (as if experimental filmmakers were really just frustrated tech bros); or little proof-of-concept seedlings, fundraising warm-ups that show that their makers can one day direct a “real movie.” But this wider visibility builds the case that the form perhaps can be deployed and appreciated for its own sake—as a more accessible and less capital-intensive mode of filmmaking that’s free of the formal constraints and commercial demands typically placed on feature films.

That this work also tends to exist online in proximity to a wide range of vernacular internet practices and platforms is significant, too. Those wedded to the idea of the short film as the domain of artists’ film and video might bemoan this collapse of context, waxing nostalgic about the aesthetic coherence and genre purity of the historical avant-gardes. But the increasingly sprawling and global world of short films—both online and offline—has engendered something more valuable: an accessible, dynamic, and intractable zone of output that isn’t defined by geography, critical discourse, or particular demands for formal novelty.

Assaying this vast and unmanageable sphere of production is obviously an impossible task in any year—and anyone laying claim to having seen a representative portion of it is probably lying. Nevertheless, here—in no particular order—are 10 short films that were the strongest, strangest, and boldest I saw in 2023.

*Abattoir U.S.A.!* (Aria Dean, U.S.)



Aria Dean's video enlists 3D computer graphics to render the empty interior spaces of a slaughterhouse—an eerie venue for a reverie on industrial labor and mechanized death.

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