

My name is Ken Bawcom. I was on the Ann Arbor Film Festival screening committee for 18 years. I was also involved in programming. My first AAFF was in 1967. I have a wide and varied taste in film, from film noir to Marvel Comics films to films like Terrence Malik's "Tree of Life," and Werner Herzog's "Cave of Forgotten Dreams." And, of course, I love experimental film.

What sort of film is appropriate for the AAFF? It is primarily an avant-garde and experimental film festival. I have some personal criteria, but nothing is set in stone.

Narrative films - The AAFF doesn't show a lot. We all grew up on them, on TV and at the multiplex. Probably most of us like at least some of them. But most of them, even quite good ones, aren't appropriate for the AAFF. What sort of narrative film is appropriate? Unusual films, with an unusual premise, quirky films, films about topical issues, films from another culture, POV films, and of course films with experimental elements. Some of these sorts of narratives will be appropriate for the AAFF.

Documentaries - PBS shows a lot of great docs, POV and Independent Lens are great series. IMO, if it has been shown on PBS, or was produced by PBS, and therefore will be shown, we probably shouldn't program it. PBS will give it a lot more exposure than we can. That said, there have been independently produced docs that we programmed, which were later shown on PBS. I consider that a feather in the AAFF's cap! So, what's appropriate for the AAFF? Dull, talking heads docs—probably not. These are all in the AAFF's milieu:

- docs on unusual subjects, with an unusual POV
- cinema verité and its siblings, observational cinema and direct cinema
- short, humorous docs (a favorite of mine)
- docs from third world countries, from or about other cultures
- experimental docs, or docs with experimental elements.

Animation - The AAFF gets a wide variety of animation, in many genres and techniques, from traditional cel animation, scratch animation, sand animation, single-frame animation, and varieties of computer animation to unique forms you probably haven't seen before. All can be appropriate, if they go beyond the ordinary.

Experimental film - By definition, more subjective than the other genres, and the most underappreciated genre. They are almost never seen outside of festivals like the AAFF. The most idiosyncratic genre. A film loved by one viewer may be hated by another. What one finds stunningly beautiful, another may find boring. I just try to be open, let the film affect me, and take me where it will. Then, I assess its attributes—assess if and how it affected me. But that's usually just a formality; I know whether I liked it or not. That's based on how engaging and affecting I found it.

Some general comments. One hopes all screeners have good taste, but we all have our OWN taste. One needs to try to recognize good films that just don't appeal to their taste. Give a film a chance. One of my AAFF favorites, "Hauling Toto Big," I wanted to take off after 5 minutes, but I didn't. It was programmed, and awarded. If you get drowsy, or are otherwise distracted, it's time to stop.

We all like to see a well-crafted film, and most of those programmed will be well-crafted. But to me, a film with a good, original idea, even if not perfectly executed, can transcend the higher production values of a less inventive film. I include populist, grassroots, homemade sorts of films, which were common in the early AAFF. Finally, there are always far more films deserving to be programmed than there is time to fill. So, don't be hurt if some of your favorites aren't programmed, but don't be afraid to vote for something you think deserving.