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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: Bert Haanstra's *Glas*

Course Title: World Documentary

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Name of the Department: Film Studies

Bert Haanstra's *Glas*

Bert Haanstra's *Glas*, a 1958 short documentary on glassmaking in the Netherlands, which, as of this writing, mentions that the film "is often acclaimed to be the perfect short documentary." Just the sort of thing you'd want to take with a grain of salt, right? But if you watch *Glass* itself, which won the 1959 Academy Award for Documentary Short Subject.

Prashant Parvatneni at The Essential Mystery calls *Glass* "at once a passionate celebration of human labour and craftsmanship and a biting critique of the mechanistic mass-production of objects. On the very surface this documentary can appear as a demonstrative film keenly elucidating the very basic processes that go into the making of handmade glassware and juxtaposing it with the process of bottle-making in a mechanised factory. Yet this very juxtaposition coupled with a Haanstra's strong stylistic intervention takes the film into a polemical space." Taking a slightly different tone, Colossal's Christopher Jobson highlights the jazz of the traditional half, and the "whimsical score of more synthesized music" in the modern half. "Also," he adds, "there's a ton of great smoking!"

Jobson doesn't mention that these guys also somehow manage to keep smoking even while blowing glass — an impressive feat indeed, and just one of the impressive qualities on display in *Glass*' brief runtime. Eventually, the footage turns back from the factory to the workshop, and soon it begins oscillating between the two, cutting to the jazzy rhythm and even making the machines and workmen into musical instruments of a kind. The Dutch glassmaking industry has surely changed in the past half-century, but students of Dutch film can't ignore the work of Haanstra, who in addition to this and other documentaries short and long, directed features including *Fanfare*, still one of the most popular films in the Netherlands ever. But as any film historian might suspect — and here comes another bold claim — *Glass* will outlive them all.

- Winner of the 1959 Academy Award for Best Short Documentary.
- Bert Haanstra's *Glas* compares hand-made craft with automated production in this industrial film with a bebop heart.
- A 10-minute dialogue-free piece, this lyrical documentary proves a surprisingly hypnotic watch, with its rich visuals and playful edit perfectly combining with a lively Jazz score.
- Originally commissioned to create a promotional piece for Royal Leerdam Glass Works, Haanstra agreed to make that film on the condition that he could also produce an accompanying short after being inspired (and somewhat amused) by the mechanized production line within the factory.
- Narratively loose and feeling like its story structure is more akin to the composition of the Jazz tracks featured on its score
- *Glas* isn't a film that exactly feels like it fits perfectly with the "narrative-first" approach we often follow on Short of the Week.
- More observational and abstract than a lot of the work we feature on our platform, Haanstra's short might not feature a particularly memorable plot, but at a time when the portrait/profile documentary is a hugely popular approach in the field, the influence of Haanstra's *Glas* has never felt more prominent.

Reference:

www.google.com