

FIRESIDE STUDY

A film-artist's vision of life, death and impermanence

Film: **Ceasing**

Director: Tina Gonsalves

Introduction:

Ceasing is a meditation on life and its essential mix of the physical and the spiritual. It captures the wonder, pain, renewal, suffering, and mystery of being human. *Ceasing's* great appeal is that it suggests so many things, leaving the way open for many different interpretations. Here is one such interpretation.



Key issues:

Film-artist Tina Gonsalves' visual poem centres around a single male figure. As he uncovers his torso, he uncovers what it means to be human. The following are some of the issues raised by Tina's exploration.

Body and soul: Our lives are both physical and spiritual. As flesh and bone we are impermanent, even ghostly. *Ceasing* visually blends the impermanence of the physical with the ongoing nature of the spiritual.

Replication: We see the man turning around *repeatedly*, suggesting things happen more than once. The surreal imagery of many hands, suggests we turn our hands to many things. Like the many-armed Hindu gods, the artist has chosen to poetically express this spiritual man-being as having divine qualities.

Eyes: Are eyes a window to the soul? From infancy, we connect most of all with faces and eyes. Perhaps eyes have a special significance in both the seeing *out from* and *in to* a human being's spiritual life.

Trapped in a body: Some images of the man were stifled, contorted, presenting an image of the way our spirits at times feel trapped in 'vessels' of flesh & blood. In 'jars of clay' as biblical writings suggest.

The scientist: Analysis of parts and names is one way we attempt to come to terms with what life is. We name, dissect, break-down and critique everything into manageable parts. This too is a limited project of what can be done to understand the human condition.

Oxygen, like fire to the body: Oxygen is a physical necessity of life, but is also what causes the most destruction to the body's cells, breaking them down over time like fire. *Ceasing's* fire scene ushers in the portion of the film which explores death.

Death: What does it mean when we die? Voices give some suggestion of the artists' vision... "No language, nothing. No memory. No childhood. No famine." *Ceasing*. Everything stops when life finishes. Or does it?

The vision is primordial, fluid, essential. An old man, a baby; lightness, darkness; the redness of blood. It ends as a wrapping up. The man who first revealed his inner self by removing his shirt now appears to be putting his shirt back on, covering up once again. But wait – it is another uncovering – the shirt is coming off. Life goes on. The mystery continues.

Suggested questions:

- What's your first reaction to this film? Are you struck by a coherent essay or a series of impressionistic images?
- Is art a revelation? What do artists (especially video-film artists) have in common, if anything, with the writers of sacred texts and the prophets of old?
- Why do you think artist Tina Gonsalves calls this piece "Ceasing"?
- Is it significant that Tina chose a male form – old man, young boy – a over a female?
- Has this short film challenged you to re-consider any aspect of life and its meaning? If so, how?