

Fierce Light: When Spirit Meets Action NFB

Scenes of violent street protests tend to capture the attention of the news media during major political summits. Is aggression the only meaningful method of activism in a world in which people feel detached from world leaders, though? That is a question asked by Canadian independent filmmaker Velcrow Ripper in his latest documentary, *Fierce Light*. Fueled by the belief that another world is possible, acclaimed filmmaker Velcrow Ripper takes us on a global journey tracing spiritual activism's historical roots and capturing the powerful personalities that are igniting a new wave of spiritual action around the globe.

Velcrow Ripper has been directing fiction and documentary films since his teenage years and even his earliest productions had political themes. He is no militant, though. Inspired by such activists as Gandhi and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, he seems more intent on encouraging introspection than persuasion. *Fierce Light* exemplifies that. The film essentially chronicles Ripper's personal exploration of different methods of activism and raises more questions than it answers. His approach, combined with some beautiful and striking images from some of the world's most exotic places, makes *Fierce Light* feel more like *Baraka* than *An Inconvenient Truth* or one of Michael Moore's polemics.

Fierce light: when spirit meets action is inspired by the death of director Velcrow Ripper's friend, media activist Brad Will. Brad was shot to death in Oaxaca, Mexico while videotaping protests against State Governor, Ulises Ruiz, who employed violence in an effort to subdue a peaceful protest by striking teachers. From Mexico, Velcrow circumnavigates the world, asking how peaceful activism, which has inspired so much of his work, can still be effective in our ruthless socio-political environment.

Fierce Light focuses particularly on links between activism and different forms of spirituality. The people interviewed by Ripper, who include Thich Nhat Hanh, Desmond Tutu, Daryl Hannah, American civil rights activist John Lewis and Julia Butterfly Hill, cover a range of views on spirituality from traditional religious associations to the realm of what are often unfairly dismissed as 'New Age' ideas.

Fierce Light manages to offer a thorough and honest portrait of today's activists and what they should understand if they hope to move forward with any measure of success. The lesson that change will only occur if it comes from a place of compassion may sound hokey but it's true - as proof, one need only look as far as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

Fierce Light, subtitled *When Spirit Meets Action*, won the Special Jury Prize and the National Film Board Audience Award at the Vancouver International Film Festival. It was also an Official Selection of the Hot Docs International Film Festival in Toronto and the International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam.

Interview with Velcrow Ripper by Cinema Spy

Fierce Light is the second part of a trilogy that explores the power of peaceful action and progressive societies. The first in the trilogy was called *Scared Sacred* which is about maintaining hope in the face of crisis. The third part of the trilogy is called *Evolve Love: The Meaning is Life* and it's about the search for cutting edge evolutionary communities and individuals. It's the idea that we're in a kind of adolescent state. What does it take to get us to a global maturity and what does that look like?

This film is actually about this pairing of spirituality and action or activism. Activists actually have rejected spirituality. They tend to be quite in their heads. They know the facts and they'll drown you in facts and it's not alone always enough to sustain people. And also they drive on anger a lot as well, which also is not sustainable. So the spiritual sense for me is grounding it in compassion and really tapping into the power that has to propel us and make us care. The head alone isn't going to be enough. We need to get moved.

One of the roles of this compassionate activism or this shift in the way we create change is also to give us strategies for maintaining hope in the face of crisis. The other big focus of this compassionate activism that *Fierce Light* focuses on is a shift in activism to focusing more on what we're for than just on what we're against. So it's solution based.

The message of Gandhi and the message of Martin Luther King was that the most effective tool you have is your ethical integrity. And when you react with violence, you've lost that in the public eyes. We've had extreme examples of what you could call violent activism and it's called terrorism. It has not made this world a safer place. It just creates a cycle of violence.

I hope to help and be part of the movement that I think is the biggest project that's taking place on the planet right now: the movement from an industrial growth society — a life-destroying society — to a sustainable society, sustainable on multiple levels. A society of mutually enhancing relationships between each other and the planet, which I think is where we're going. That's the next step in our evolution is to get to that. Moving from the egocentric point of view to the world-centric point of view.

Velcrow Ripper's name is a nickname (his real name is Steven Ripper and his friends call him Crow) Velcrow: *I've found that my name serves as an excellent idiot filter. If someone is unable to get past something as simple as a name, which was given to me, and I've kept for some twenty years, then my message of radical inclusion has gone over their heads. The name itself comes from my punk rock days.*