and closes his eyes. The film cuts abruptly to the bed of a truck ferrying heavily armed militiamen dressed for battle. We're back in the fragile quasi-metaphoric space of the opening: Are they Mark's dream? Is he their prey?

Up to this point, Minervini has collected a lot of talk of American politics: from Mark himself (on Obama: "Stupid-ass nigger. Done nothing for the country. Make the blacks proud. What the blacks didn't know was that he's fucking the blacks over"); from his niece ("I wish Obama would stop being so self-centered"); from drunken neighborhood elder, Jim (on Hillary: "A woman always runs the man anyway . . . They the ones that run the world anyway . . . they got more power than you"). But here the film moves into more openly politicized terrain. "We are not here to be a political statement," says one burly ex-soldier to a group of weekend warriors readying themselves to fight back against the coming storm, not quite recognizing a certain irony. "We are here 'cuz of today. What is today?" he asks with tears in his eyes—the Fourth of July. (What follows is Minervini's only somewhat deck-stacking cut to a bunch of folks partying lewdly in the river—the freedoms they're worried about losing seem in full swing here.) Love of country is strong in these groups of and they're where the film's title comes from: Mark told Minervini about "the other side" of his community, i.e. those folks legally able and financially well-off enough to bear arms. There is no love lost for the Obama administration, or likely any administration for that matter.

This section, unlike the intimately focused first half, has the ramshackle feel of regional documentary built around place, like a more chilling, weapons-heavy version of Les Blank's *Always for Pleasure*, Robert Downey Sr.'s *Rittenhouse Square*, or Ricky Leacock's seminal *Les oeufs à la coque de Richard Leacock*. We move quickly from one character and situation to another, see scenes that are vaguely connected, and generally cycle through another segment of the West Monroe milieu. It culminates in a group of men exploding a junked car in a field with semi-automatic weapons. Before destroying it, they put an Obama mask on a figure in the driver's seat; the torched car is the film's last image. Given the current rise of Trumpism nationwide, it's tempting to tie exactly these kinds folks to the big orange bandwagon, but what's important about Minervini's film *politically* is that he links this brand of American revanchism not to a particular candidate but to a geographically predicated and economically defined ideology of isolation simmering unto paranoia. The people we see in both sections of the film aren't a new creation of contemporary politics; their forbears likely would have raised a frothy syllabub or two to patriots lost fighting Shay's Rebellion. Remember as well that *The Other Side* takes place in a state that made a former Ku Klux Klan grandmaster a top contender for its governorship.

Documentarians are under no responsibility to inform their subjects that their core beliefs are largely nonsense ("The U.N. will be here soon!" one man warns), and save that one suspicious edit, Minervini casts no winking asides at his audiences regarding his subjects, though it's doubtful he sees the world the same way. His film quietly argues that their feelings are real, and worth some understanding, even if we might find them distasteful. The bifurcation of *The Other Side*, then, is one of its canniest strategies: Minervini has convinced us through the story of Mark and Lisa to care for this place and these people. And if we can care for a couple of drug addicts trying to get clean and stay together, why not others who live near them and share many of their views?

But what of all this is *real*? Some of the first half? All of the second half? Perhaps the whole thing. Perhaps none of it. Does this question even matter in the wake of a film that's shown so much so well? ◆

## Coming soon to Acropolis

- *Low Tide* + *Stop the Pounding Heart* (Dir. Roberto Minervini, 2012/2013)—June 21 at Brain Dead Studios
- *Coming to Terms* + *Blue Strait* (Dir. Jon Jost, 2013/2015)—June 22 at 2220 Arts + Archives with Jost and James Benning in person
- *What You Gonna Do When the World's On Fire?* (Dir. Roberto Minervini, 2018)—June 23 at Brain Dead Studios
- *Measures for a Funeral* (Dir. Sofia Bohdanowicz, 2024)—Los Angeles premiere, June 29 at 2220 Arts + Archives with Bohdanowicz in person



# Acropolis Cinema presents:


June 15, 2025 – 2220 Arts + Archives

# ABOUT THE FILM

In an invisible territory at the margins of society lives a wounded community who face the threat of being forgotten by political institutions and having their rights as citizens trampled. Disarmed veterans, taciturn adolescents, drug addicts trying to escape addiction through love; ex-special forces soldiers still at war with the world; floundering young women and future mothers; and old people who have not lost their desire to live. Through this hidden pocket of humanity, renowned documentarian Roberto Minervini opens a window to the abyss of today's America. 92 min.

Q&A with Roberto Minervini and *Screen International* critic Tim Grierson to follow the film.

## The Other Side
## by Jeff Reichardt

*The following is an excerpt of an article originally published by Reverse Shot, May 11, 2016*

Trying to pin down what *The Other Side* is feels less fruitful than probing how and why. Is the fourth film by Italian-born filmmaker Robert Minervini, which looks deeply into the lives of Mark Kelley and Lisa Allen, two amphetamine addicts eking out marginal existences and loving each other in a forgotten corner of northeastern Louisiana, and created by the filmmakers in close collaboration with their subjects, a fiction? Given the film's immersive realism throughout, and late-film breakaway from Mark and Lisa for a plunge into the world of paranoiac paramilitary groups operating in the same region, is it documentary of people and place? Or, by dint of operating along several modalities, sometimes at once, is it one of those ungainly, fashionable hybrids? See how quickly we've run into taxonomic cul-de-sacs?

*The Other Side* is a film that pushes back against the critical impulse toward definition and classification, and Minervini, with this slippery, unreconciled object that seems as much fact-threaded fiction and fiction-laced fact, has produced a destabilizing, resistant work. After the films of his Texas trilogy, which gradually shook off the trappings of American independent narrative cinema in favor of an increasingly fluid, liminal approach, *The Other Side* on its surface seemingly operates most immediately like "nonfiction" but complicates what that might mean at each turn. It's a political film—both in the focus on the particular views of the people it features and in its unclassifiable construction, which mirrors its subjects' desires to kick back against a perceived controlling force descending upon them from all sides. It's the kind of work that makes one wonder what the use value of terms like "documentary" and "fiction" is in this or any other moment.

There's a familiar filmic distance between the observer and observed that seems to all but evaporate in *The Other Side*. You've felt this distance while watching a movie, even if you've never thought much on it. The sense that what we're watching will only take us so far. That the action we're seeing on a screen in font of us is somehow over there. Cinema has always been a medium made up of events that once happened and has spent the better part of its existence trying to find ways to erase this fundamental spatiotemporal separation just enough to convince audiences to believe in its illusion are, while scrupulously avoiding that which would leave us, the viewer, exposed and uncomfortable. But on the whole, for all the theoretical discussions of its suturing qualities, cinema is still a medium that happens safely apart from us.

This distance is perhaps never more crucial than in the maintenance of the ruses underlying the practice of what we call "documentary." Broadly speaking, this is a genre based on the concept that a filmmaker has entered with a camera into the existence of a non-acting person who has allowed herself to be filmed. The camera becomes a window into that existence and the resulting product is generally consumed as if it were reality, but this assumption belies the constant series of negotiations between filmmaker and subject that lead to a set of images and circumstances that are allowable by the subject. In the making of most documentaries, there are things that are not to be filmed. And many of those crucial "private" moments that documentarians strive to capture are merely moments that are negotiated to be made "semi-public." The creation of a documentary is a transactional exchange, the terms of which the audience is generally not made privy. Every documentary is the record of a power relationship, and there are usually boundaries left uncrossed.

Minervini complicates our expectations of what can be shown in documentary not just by how he films, but what he's able to film and with whom. When we first meet Mark, after a mysterious prologue following several armed men in full camouflage gear stalking through a forest, he's lying stark naked on the side of the road at first light. Is he their prey? Are they his dream? As Mark wakes and walks towards somewhere, the camera follows him and we're forced to confront the nature of what exactly we're looking at. It seems unlikely that Minervini just stumbled across Mark naked by the side of the road, unlikely that he slept long enough for the filmmakers to catch him at multiple angles, in perfect morning light, without waking him. Similarly, Mark, once arisen, seems unsurprised by their presence and willing to let them tag along. Who is this present-day Adam, and where is his Eden?

This introduction, though filmed outdoors in a handheld, vérité style, using natural light, is too unlikely in its particulars to scan as any kind of direct cinema. However, it's followed by a sequence that feels more conventionally like a "documentary": Mark, now dressed, enters the home of his sister and nephew and the family members talk about their drug use habits. This discussion is intimate, and like the previous sequence, leaves the subjects exposed in certain ways. Yet, looking at it more closely, at the camera's short distance from Mark in his close-ups and the regular use of reaction shots, it too begins to feel like something rendered and captured in a collaborative fashion, even if we intuitively understand the meat of their conversation to be expressive of the reality of their lives. Mark, who has the overhanging brow and compressed physicality of Denis Lavant, and an impressive array of tattoos to boot, is by this point our clear entry point for this community (unidentified in the film, but West Monroe, Louisiana), which includes a few local coots never seen without a bottle, assorted other relations, his mother, frisky grandmother, and his fiancée Lisa.

When we first see him with Lisa, they're at a bar. The two canoodle lightly before beginning to kiss in a fashion that some might consider a bit aggressive for a public space. We can intuit from their eyes and slurred speech that they're drunk or high on something or both. But in Lisa's stream of words to the more taciturn Mark there's unexpected romance: "Bitch, I love you," she says. More romantically: "I wish this night would never end, with me and you like this." Most touchingly: "I wish I could make all of your pain go away." They might be playing for the camera, or they might be too high to notice it's still there, but none of that matters as much as just how movingly, deeply *felt* her words seem. How deeply real.

Later in the film, we see them at night in their trailer. They're both naked, though this isn't the first time we've seen them nude together. They kiss for a bit, somewhat tentatively, and then all of a sudden they're making love, right in front of our eyes. Their act is obscured somewhat by the darkness, only Mark's back is awash with silvery light from the outside, but we know what's happening isn't faked, isn't for pretend, and are allowed to witness their sex until climax. In another scene, we see the pair naked again as Mark gently takes a hypodermic needle and shoots drugs directly into the veins on Lisa's bare breasts. Before Minervini's camera, this act reads as tenderly as an earlier sequence, set on New Year's Day, when the two walk to a river, strip naked for a swim, and Mark produces a ring and proposes.

It's worth remarking upon these moments of nudity and sex and drug abuse not because of their prurient qualities but because these are the kinds of things generally made off-limits to the documentary filmmaker—especially the private, non-performative sex act. Films that push at this same limit exist: see Michael Glawogger's *Whores' Glory*, Kazuo Hara's *Extreme Private Eros: Love Song 1974,* and Luc Moullet's *Anatomy of a Relationship*. But in Glawogger's film, his subjects are sex workers, they're just doing a job, and in the latter titles, physical intimacy in front of the camera is a function of openly self-reflexive play on the part of filmmakers who are also subjects of their films. What Minervini's accomplishing is somewhat different. When Mark and Lisa make love, they do so not because they've "forgotten" the presence of the camera, but because Minervini has insinuated himself so fully into their lives that they don't feel ashamed in front of his gaze. He's created a space where they choose to share their most private moments. His film is not about conjuring empathy for the downtrodden (a tricky task rife with the potential for condescension), but allowing his subjects agency in the filmmaking process.

Near the end of their section of the film, Mark and Lisa have a physical altercation and she storms out of the trailer. It's unclear exactly what has happened between them, and the elision of specifics by the editing feels pointed enough to wound. From the stubble growth on his face, it's clear that some time has passed between that event and when we next see Mark, suited, walking alone into the woods. He strips again, sits against a tree