

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An independent film club based in Chelmsford

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The Salt of the Earth

Dir: Wim Wenders/Ribeiro Solgado. France/Brazil/Italy. 2014. 110 mins.

Sebastiao Solgado is a world-famous photographer whose work has chronicled most of this planet's humanitarian and environmental catastrophes since the 1960s. He has worked in over a hundred countries, notably with Medecins Sans Frontieres, and has captured horrendous, and beautiful, images from the vast Brazilian gold mines of the Serra Pelada ("I have travelled to the dawn of time" he said of them), to the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s and the famines of the Sahel.

He was born and raised on a Brazilian farm and Sebastiao's father only managed to pay the costs of his university education (he studied to be an economist) by cutting down and selling the trees on the farm, ironically rendering the land virtually infertile and useless. This was something which Solgado would try to remedy in later life – he was 72 in February this year – and he has set about recording some of the world's pristine, wild flora and fauna in his latest work. In 1967 he married Lelia Warnick, who has supported him throughout his photographic career: they had two children, one of whom co-directs this film. His attempts to record humanity's barbarism is behind him: "we humans are a terrible animal... our history is one of war" he says in *Salt of the Earth*. Given the current state of play in the Middle East, as just one example, his camera could still, arguably, be usefully employed. But he has done his bit, and his desire to turn away from the traumas of past experiences and enjoy a more tranquil old age is understandable. In this masterful film, Solgado's images are truly stunning, almost sculptural, seen on the big screen, and the viewer may well be left to wonder at how much human misery can give rise to such imposing 'art'. Part of a long tradition, from Hieronymus Bosch, to Goya, to Picasso and even the Poets of the First World War.

Wim Wenders is noted for some major documentary films in his later career. Most notably there was the collaboration with Ry Cooder and hitherto forgotten Cuban musicians, *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999). Then *Pina*, about the dance choreographer Pina Bausch, and two films about blues and rock musicians, *The Sound of a Man* (2003) and *Ode to Cologne* (2002) respectively. But even in his early work, Wenders' style was to 'record' and 'document'. *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty* (1972) was a seminal example of the German New Wave, while *Kings of the Road* (1976), simply and honestly observing a peripatetic film projectionist and his assistant travelling from one small German town to another, convinced me that the *raison d'etre*, of a 'Film Society' – as we called them in those days – was to show films just like that! Unfortunately, the other two films in the trilogy, *Alice in the Cities* (1974) and *The Wrong Move* (1975), never did get shown. Is there still time...? But I would argue that CFC has done justice to two of Wenders's greatest films: *Paris, Texas*, which we screened in 1984, and *Wings of Desire*, shown in 1987.

The Salt of the Earth was screened at last year's ICO Viewing Sessions on the South Bank, where I saw it and was completely gripped and overwhelmed from start to finish. Based on the reaction slips given in at the end of the film, it was the most 'popular' with the ICO audience, polling 89%, just one per cent more than Thomas Vinterberg's *Far From the Madding Crowd*. I hope you will share my enthusiasm. Please use your reaction slip to let me know!

Peter Bunyan

Our next screening is ***Kumiko the Treasure Hunter*** on Tuesday 22 March