The Genealogy of A Marginalized Art Movement - The Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival

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Abstract

The 1980s brought forward movements such as advocacy for racial representation which led to the creation of numerous ethnic film festivals, one being the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival. This festival is a pioneer for the exhibition of Asian-created media art in Canada, providing an outlet for people of Asian descent to connect their heritage with North American culture and to shatter prejudices. At the same time, it allows Asian North American artists to gain visibility in the Eurocentric Canadian arts industry.

This research explores the history, key players, and unequal distribution of Asian ethnicities at the Reel Asian Film Festival over the years using a quantitative research method by examining how the festival has resolved those existing problems and set measures for change towards a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive event. By drawing from local media scholars and mainstream media outlets, an overview and motivation behind the festival are presented. In addition, through the review of over 20 years of festival program guides and compiling director ethnic data, the results demonstrated that while the early Reel Asian Film Festival mainly focused on exhibiting film and television works by East Asian artists, starting from 2010, media art by non-East Asian artists was also given more opportunities to be displayed at the festival. As Toronto’s premier arts festival, the advancement of the Reel Asian Film Festival will enable Asian artists to gain prestige in the Canadian arts community and disrupt the long-standing dominance of Eurocentric Canadian art.

Keywords: film festivals, representation, race, Diasporas, marginalization