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The **Austin Movie Blog** gives film news, views and reviews.

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Capsule review: 'Earthwork'

By [Jeanne Claire van Ryzin](#) | Friday, October 23, 2009, 04:14 PM

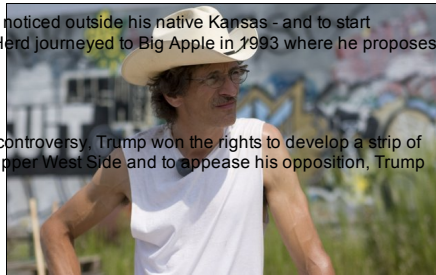
Where's there a will, sometimes there is art.

Written and directed by first-time feature filmmaker Chrii Ordal, the delightfully quiet and quirky "Earthwork" recounts the true story of Kansas artist Stan Herd (deftly played by John Hawkes) who sets out to transform a junk-filled lot in New York into one of his lush fields of crop art.

Riffing off the abstract art installations introduced in 1960s by artists such as Robert Smithson and Walter De Maria, Herd combined the cerebral genre of conceptual earth art with his downhome upbringing on a Kansas farm to come up with his own take on the earth-shaping art genre.

Herd used plants and field crops which he carefully cultivated to create massive mostly figurative artworks that could really only be seen from the sky.

In an effort to get his work noticed outside his native Kansas - and to start monetizing his efforts — Herd journeyed to Big Apple in 1993 where he proposes to create one of his giant earthworks on property owned by Donald Trump.



After a decade of heated controversy, Trump won the rights to develop a strip of land along Manhattan's Upper West Side and to appease his opposition, Trump offered to sponsor an art project on the property before construction started.

To win the commission, Herd offers to fund the project himself and just ask Trump for access to the site. But that means Herd must leverage the Kansas home he shares with his wife and child, risking everything for the chance to get his art seen.

Once in New York, Herd finds himself alone in his endeavor. But soon enough a passel of homeless men who live in nearby abandoned train tunnels takes an interest in Herd's project and eventually becomes his earnest but motley crew of assistants.

A character piece more than anything else, Ordal's compact film nicely avoids imposing any grandiose summations about Herd or his art work or even the nature of art itself.

Hawkes captures Herd's unsophisticated yet headstrong character, delivering a convincing portrait of a man somewhat naive but nevertheless fiercely driven whose sheer force of will leads him on.

(Hawkes honed his acting chops right here in Austin's theater community of the early and mid 1980s, most notably with "In the West" a critically-acclaimed collage of monologues inspired by the Richard Avedon's photographic portraits of Westerners.)

Ruination may threaten Herd as he forges ahead with his most unlikely New York public art project. But like Voltaire's Candide, he chooses to simply, and



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- ▶ Mama Drama
- ▶ No Limits
- ▶ Of Sacred and Secular
- ▶ Postcards
- ▶ Salsa Verde
- ▶ Salud
- ▶ Season for Caring

cheerfully, cultivate his own garden.

'Earthwork'

Written and directed by Chril Ordal
USA, 98 minutes

Screenings: 6:30 p.m. Oct. 25 at Bullock Texas State History Museum, 1800 Congress Ave. 7:15 p.m. Oct. 27, Arbor Cinema, 9828 Great Hills Trail. Q-and-A with the director following each screening.

Image: John Hawkes as artist Stan Herd. Photo by Hometown Collaborations.

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By shannon

October 26, 2009 10:50 AM | [Link to this](#)

i saw it. was awesome. inspirational. not your typical movie with the traditional, happy ending, but lots of substance and struggle, and very real, human relationships. A+.

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