

## **Pebbles Underground (Summer Edition 2026): Retentive Movement Program Review**

*By Imbi Männik*

The Retentive Movement Program is an eclectic delectable box full of surprises featuring eight short-films from around the world - offering something for everyone.

For lovers of retro aesthetics, Telle's *Victorias* (Germany) delivers a surrealist experience where 1950s glamour meets science fiction, complete with giant bugs and UFOs. The cinematography, costuming, colour grading, and set design masterfully evoke a nostalgic '50s atmosphere. Frame by frame, it transports the audience into a mythical, bizarre wonderland. Debates over AI in filmmaking aside, there is something undeniably captivating about the craftsmanship in *Victorias*.

If you have an appetite for raw, thought-provoking, and avant-garde experimental cinema, two pieces stand out. Scofield's *A Nature Documentary Act I: Elements of Decomposition* (USA) and Siu's *The Eagle & The Deer* (UK) will certainly satisfy your craving. Scofield's imagery is both ethereal and transcendent. Their multimodal approach utilizes mixed media and

repurposed, discarded materials to ethically convey powerful messages about the natural world. Meanwhile, Siu cleverly combines lighting, makeup, editing, reflections, and a running spoken-word poetic monologue to create a deeply evocative piece.

If dance tickles your fancy, the program offers two distinct highlights. Turlykhanova's *Dayshift* (USA) is a short narrative with a playful touch of burlesque, while Casal's *Ancestral Shadows* (USA) is a delightful arthouse piece that fuses spiritual themes with classical choreography. In *Dayshift*, a cleaner's routine morphs into an elegant dance. Turlykhanova eloquently captures the rhythm of the movement, including a striking sequence where the camera itself emulates a whirling dervish. *Ancestral Shadows* is set in a stunning, historic New York building. This architectural beauty adds a sense of grandeur and a haunting quality to the narrative, which follows three sisters journeying through the shadows of their ancestors.

Turning to pressing social issues, Azadpour's *Dark Orange* (Iran) brings vital awareness of domestic violence to the fore through a powerful animation (content warning for this one: sensitive themes). Coupled with a chilling score, this urgent work transcends individual trauma to spotlight a systemic global crisis.

For an out-of-the-box experience, Pan's delightfully bizarre film *What does the tree stump hold for me?* (China) combines contortionist body movements, evocative landscapes, and food, with eerie soundscapes that are guaranteed to give you goosebumps.

And lastly, for both the sporting and theatre enthusiasts, Magri's *HigH* (Italy) is a thrilling crossover between sport and the arts. The film captures the fluid athleticism of a pole vaulter and the grit (yet vulnerability) of a street dancer on a construction site, building dynamic, circus-like suspense.

This multifaceted short-film program delivers a captivating mix of advocacy, eccentricity, and kinetic art, offering something for every type of viewer. Ultimately, this diverse and unique collection spans a wide emotional spectrum, ensuring that no matter your mood, there is a piece here that will resonate with you.