

# Powerful beyond measure

## *The Gates of Heaven*

Directed by Lucy Lee  
 Narrated by  
 Margaret Robertson  
 Instinct Media, 2004  
 Showing at Portland's  
 Hollywood Theatre

### *By Josephine Bridges*

*The Asian Reporter*

**P**ainterly and mystical, *The Gates of Heaven* is less than two minutes long, but it leaves an impression that lasts well beyond the viewing.

Lucy Lee's animated film is based on a Chinese myth about a waterfall known as the Dragon Gate. Here, carp who succeed at leaping up the hundred-foot cascade, which plunges "more swiftly than an arrow shot by a strong archer," turn into dragons. This is a simple enough premise, except that the carp are afraid "not that they are inadequate," but of something far deeper and stranger. And, although one of them is caught in a raptor's talons as it tries to scale the wall of water, it is not the drama of predation that stirs fear in the carp.

Margaret Robertson has one of those spellbinding voices that would make an insurance policy sound riveting, but the spare and lyrical text, adapted from Nichiren Daishonin's 13th-century work and the poetry of contemporary writer Marianne Williamson, gives the



**GATES OF HEAVEN.** Lucy Lee's animated film, *The Gates of Heaven*, is based on a Chinese myth about a waterfall known as the Dragon Gate. The film is one of 62 included in the 2005 Portland International Short Short Film Festival showing at Portland's Hollywood Theatre. (Photo courtesy of Instinct Media)

narrator an ideal opportunity to strut her stuff. Sounds of percussion, strings, and water weave in and out of her words.

Lucy Lee's images, hand painted on computer, are as dazzling as real life. Her water, light dancing on its shifting surface, shimmers, churns, and bubbles above the carp in all their spotted, whiskery, gape-mouthed glory. Her trees and mountains pay homage to Chinese brush painting. A violent spidery interlude played out on ice at the edge of the basin where the carp swim is as exquisitely lovely as it is downright frightening.

"As far as this film goes,"

says Lucy Lee, "it's not an easy world to be jumping in, it's dangerous to jump and it's dangerous to stay where you are. But our worst enemy is ultimately our own attitude."

*The Gates of Heaven* is one intense little film, and while it leaves the viewer wanting more, it is exactly the right length. This is Lucy Lee's eighth short film, and she is clearly a pro. In addition to running a production company in London, the filmmaker also teaches animation all over the world. It is a joy to know that we will see her influence on many films to come.

Lucy Lee's tale of carp on

the threshold of transformation is one of 62 films included in the 2005 Portland International Short Short Film Festival showing at the Hollywood Theatre, located at 4122 N.E. Sandy Blvd. in Portland.

The festival takes place on October 21 and 22 at 7:00pm and 9:10pm, with a different line-up of films at each showing. You'll be able to see *The Gates of Heaven* at 9:10pm on Friday, October 21.

For information, call 281-4215, or visit <[www.hollywoodtheatre.org](http://www.hollywoodtheatre.org)>, <[www.lucyleefilms.co.uk](http://www.lucyleefilms.co.uk)>, or <[www.zonkerfilms.com](http://www.zonkerfilms.com)>.