

‘Grand Paris Texas’ takes another look at the real Paris, Texas, and its old theater

By [Jeanne Claire van Ryzin](#) | Wednesday, September 8, 2010, 03:50 PM



The town of Paris, Texas, gained a certain level of international recognition thanks to Wim Wenders' acclaimed 1984 feature film 'Paris, Texas.' (Mega-band U2, for example, noted Wenders' movie as inspiration for album 'The Joshua Tree'.)

Yet ironically, the town itself didn't really benefit. Wenders' film never filmed in Paris, Texas — the place is only alluded to in the moody story of a drifter trying to reconnect with his long-absent wife and son.

Hence, whatever cinema celebrity the little Northeast Texas city might have gained was ultimately tangential.

In 'Grand Paris Texas,' a 54-minute film by Austin-based artists Teresa Hubbard and Alexander Birchler, the residual resonance of Wenders' movie in Paris takes center stage.

The film screens Thursday night for free at the Paramount Theatre courtesy of Lora Reynolds Gallery. After the screening, Hubbard and Birchler will be joined by Blanton Museum director Ned Rifkin for a public conversation.

At the center of the film — which was commissioned by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth when the pair of internationally acclaimed artists had a major exhibit there in 2008 — is the Grand, a time-weathered, bird-infested abandoned movie theater in downtown Paris. Hubbard and Birchler shared some insight into the making of their film.

American-Statesman: In a previous interview, you said that you are both interested in how a story can be pieced together and then pulled apart. How does that happen in 'Grand Paris Texas?'

Alexander Birchler: The Grand Theater has been shut down for more than 15 years and has been home to generations of pigeons and other wildlife. No one had been inside the building since the cinema was closed. When we first got permission to go enter the building, when we stepped inside, we knew immediately we needed to film the Grand and that we wanted to use the abandoned cinema as a way to explore obsolescence. Our film has three interwoven parts. One part follows a film crew while

they venture inside to film the theater interior. Another part incorporates interviews with Paris residents who offer reflections about cinema, filmmaking, and what movies mean for them in their specific lives, in their specific town. The third part explores the actual town versus the projection in our minds triggered by the more famous city Paris, France, and by Wenders' film.

How does the idea of absence function in 'Grand Paris Texas'?

Teresa Hubbard: When the Grand Theater closed it was supposed to be temporary. People expected the theater to open back up, but it just never happened. Film reels, films and projector lenses were simply left out on table tops. Potted plants, lunch menus and cigarettes are still there on the manager's office desk as though he and everyone else would return the next day. But they didn't. The place is held in that void, like a photograph, frozen. I think that the void functions in a kind of perverse state of endurance.

Tell us about some of the people you interview in the film.

Birchler: During the course of about a year, we made numerous research trips to Paris, and during these trips, we spoke to a lot of fascinating people. One of the first people we met was Marcus Roden, a funeral director. Over the course of his long and successful career in the funeral business, Marcus has buried most of the people who lived in Paris, as well as most of the people who worked at the Grand Theater. Marcus compared the similarities between directing a funeral and directing a film. Early on, we strongly felt like these conversations, in some form, needed to be interwoven into the structure of the film.