

Saving Atlantis ★★★

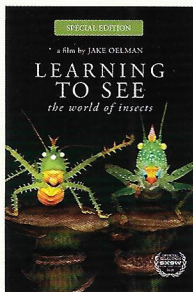
(2018) 75 min. DVD: \$50 (\$125 w/PPR): public libraries; \$295 w/PPR: colleges & universities. DRA. Collective Eye Films. Closed captioned.

Filmmakers David Baker and Justin Smith's documentary examines the disturbing decline of the world's coral reefs (and their associated aquatic ecosystems, which hold 25 percent of marine life) due to global warming. The crisis is exemplified in a most alarming manner by the epidemic "bleaching" of Australia's iconic Great Barrier Reef, where even subtle rises in temperatures have wreaked havoc on sensitive algae that coexists in symbiosis with coral-building animals. Pollution and overfishing also endanger reef communities, although some of the economic victims of reef die-offs cited here are the tribal fishermen of the tropics, who have lived for generations off the bounties of reefs that are now deserted by fish. Among the solutions suggested are training indigenous shoreline people in ecology and healthy sustainable practices, and propagating corals from special reefs (there are a few) that have somehow naturally evolved resistance to all the toxins that humanity produces. Still, despite these few glimmers of optimism, a melancholy sense hangs over this film that a jewel of the oceans is being lost, perhaps irrevocably. Offering a powerful environmental wake-up call, this is recommended. Aud: C, P. (C. Cassidy)

The Secret Life of Materials ★★★1/2

(2017) 60 min. DVD: \$24.99 (\$199.99 w/PPR). Dreamscape Media. Closed captioned.

In the past, humans employed traditional materials to build homes, create structures, and develop objects. Today, materials scientists in Europe are drawing from nature and using their ingenuity, determination, and skills to create new products and processes. Interested in trying new technology, a traditional violin craftsman decides to make a violin out of thermal plastic polymer with 3D print technology, although he wonders whether he can replicate the strength, resonance, and sound of the traditional spruce wood (the violin maker's story unfolds throughout the film). In Sweden, a scientist applies the principles of photosynthesis to successfully create a solar cell using plant pigments instead of silicon. In Italy, scientists successfully test a bionic arm with the capability to sense touch; for the hand to distinguish between hard and soft objects, electrodes are implanted on nerves in the arm that send signals to the brain. In Cambridge, a scientist—who is also a DJ—utilizes nano carbon ink to produce interactive album covers that allow individuals to hear sound when they touch the paper. And another scientist works with the fashion industry to



Learning to See: The World of Insects ★★★1/2

(2016) 69 min. DVD: \$19.95, Blu-ray: \$24.95. FilmRise (avail. from most distributors).

The dull title of this amazing documentary doesn't begin to do justice to the real story it tells. Back in the early 1990s, American psychiatrist Robert Oelman left the U.S. and moved to Colombia on little more than a whim. At age 52, Oelman survived the country's drug cartel wars and a couple of muggings to establish a small compound in Cali, where he began photographing wildlife. Unhappy with the blurry results of his shots of hummingbirds, Oelman devoted himself to figuring out how to capture beautiful images of all kinds of Amazon rainforest critters. After mastering the technical side, he turned his attention to the region's insect world, going deeper and deeper into the rainforest spread over Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador to find obscure species. With his trusty assistant Christian Lopez, Oelman—over years of travel with oodles of patience—caught remarkably sharp, close-up shots of thousands of insects, some previously unknown. This film devotes a generous amount of time to Oelman's historic transition to Colombia, and to his adventures trekking deep into an Amazon forest under constant threat from illegal logging and clearing. Oelman laments these shortsighted, venal practices that are decimating animal (and insect) species, comparing such shortsightedness to removing bricks from a collapsing wall. Directed by Oelman's son, Jake Oelman, *Learning to See* gives the viewer a sense of investment in the photographer's work, as the elder Oelman and Lopez endure hardships to create a visual record of the remarkable variety of insects in the massive Amazonian world. Extras include additional scenes, a "making-of" featurette, the music video "All of It," and panoramics and slides. Highly recommended. Aud: C, P. (T. Keogh)

develop a material that conforms to the body and changes color as the crystals in the fabric reflect light. One of the most interesting segments involves an Italian scientist at the Center for Integrative Biology who works on reactive materials that he hopes could ultimately enable structures to be self-producing and self-repairing (a student teams up with him to develop the "amoeba shoe," which will adjust and adapt to the runner). An incredible showcase for wonderful innovations, this is highly recommended. Aud: J, H, C, P. (T. Root)

Woman and the Glacier ★★★

(2016) 56 min. DVD: \$375. DRA. Grasshopper Film. PPR.

Lithuanian director Audrius Stonys's artful documentary prioritizes intriguing visual imagery over conventional voiceover and intertitles. In the Tian Shan mountain range straddling Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Xinjiang in northwest China, Stonys captures the rhythms of life in a harsh environment as ruddy-faced climatologist Ausra Revutaite goes about her daily routine in the absence of human companionship, something she has done for 30 years. She climbs rocks, stockpiles potatoes, takes measurements of various kinds, records data in notebooks, and naps at her desk. The terrain that surrounds her Soviet-era structure is rocky, barren, and isolated, but she is accompanied by a black dog and a gray cat (when they aren't wandering the grounds alone, the two animals tear into each other in a way that seems rather vicious). With few exceptions, this is a quiet

film that emphasizes natural sounds, such as wind, footsteps on gravel, and the dripping of melting ice (a wistful, minor-key score adds to the contemplative mood). Sometimes the filmmaker leaves his human subject behind to explore the ice-crystal-encrusted caves and other features of the area (as the temperature rises, the ice cracks and water flows down the mountains). From time to time, he also cuts away to a white-haired man in a black appliquéd jacket playing a mandolin-shaped instrument. Towards the end of the film, Revutaite departs—presumably for good—and two loud tourists arrive to stomp around and take photographs. It's clear that an era has come to an end in this film that plays more like a tone poem than a conventional documentary. Recommended. Aud: C, P. (K. Fennessy)

Qi Gong for the Arms, Wrists, and Hands

★★★1/2

(2018) 45 min. DVD: \$29.95. YMAA Publication Center.

Many people suffer pain from repetitive motion, arthritis, and tendinitis in the arms, wrists, and hands, which this exercise program addresses by focusing on flowing movements to relieve discomfort and restore energy. Taken from Chinese medicine, Qi Gong is an ancient set of movements designed to strengthen and energize the body and calm the mind. "Qi" stands for energy that is inside