



“Last Things” Takes a Hard — and Soft — Look at Rocks

NEWS

January 26, 2023 2:02 PM



PARK CITY, UTAH — JANUARY 23: Director Deborah Stratman attends the 2023 Sundance Film Festival “Last Things” premiere at Egyptian Theatre on January 23, 2023 in Park City, Utah. (Photo by Momodu Mansaray/Getty Images)

By Peter Jones

Not many stories are told from the point of view of rocks. Leave it to filmmaker Deborah Stratman to take us on a journey through the secret life of one of Earth's primordial wonders.

Last Things, which premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival, is an entirely unique and experimental documentary that ventures into the light, sound, shapes — and even lives — of the rocks we see every day, everywhere from atop age-old mountains to the frames of modern landscape design. A Q&A took place after the screening.

“You could pick it up and put it in your pocket and it’s a completely alien time scale,” Stratman says of the rocks we take for granted. “It could be hundreds of thousands of years old. They’re like time travelers.”

As the film points out, some of those random stones that we sit on, kick, or skip across ponds have “raindrop autographs” older than the pharaohs.

Through a collage of dreamscape imagery and scholarly commentary, Stratman makes the case for rocks as living things, a part of the biosphere we live in, and with whom we share a symbiotic relationship. By way of her free-form film style, the director effectively brings the stones to life. There are moments when you almost see faces on the film’s passing cast of minerals.

Last Things makes its scientific, almost PBS-style case for the underappreciated rock while also throwing stones of artful impressionism, recalling the minimalist underground work of Stan Brakhage or even the mesmerizing existential trip of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

In Stratman’s vision and language, molecules and electrons speak to each other, and beginnings and endings are not so dissimilar, especially when it comes to our fragile third stone from the sun.

“Last things can be first things, thank goodness,” she says. “And it was a little struggle for a bit with the title because it seems so definitive.”

Although the director says her film was triggered by “low-grade terminal anxiety about being in the midst of the sixth great extinction,” **Last Things** is not as bleak as all that.

“It was bizarrely hopeful for me. It put my anxiety around our species and other species dying off in context,” Stratman says of her multilayered film.

Last Things was also an opportunity for the geologically fascinated director to “seriously geek out over minerals.”

“I’m just kind of really into rocks,” she says.

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