

FOR THE LONG HAUL

View of love from the road

Truckers unload thoughts for Montague artist's film

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When some people think of truckers, they usually think of gruff, burly men.

But what do truckers think of love? Montague artist Lea Donnan of Montague headed to the Whately Diner with a camera to find out.

"They were great," said Donnan of the subjects in her short film, "Truckers on Love."

"They were really open to talking about love. They were great philosophers; they were poetic.

"A lot of them really understood love and were able to share it in a way that was really surprising."

She said she didn't expect them to be so funny, moving or profound in their views on love.

"I think I was able to show these guys are poetic and wise and have something to share," Donnan said.

The Whately Diner, for a brief time, becomes a home for truckers, she said. It's a place to have a meal, take a shower and park their truck to sleep, Donnan said.

She said she thought the trucker's unique lifestyle of constantly being on the go would provide a unique perspective on love.

"I guess I can relate to people on the road a lot. I grew up all over the world. When you're constantly on the move, you get kind of lulled into a meditative state. It gives you the opportunity to think about life in a way you don't usually do."

As the movie opens, the screen is dark, except for a few red taillights glowing in the distance and flashes of white and yellow from center and sidelines of the highway.

The film switches between the view from the cab of a tractor-trailer to the diner parking lot where truckers stand in front of their rigs and define love, offer love advice and tell stories of the love they experienced.

Cut between these stories are shots from the cab of the truck as it rolls along

the highway, the camera panning highway, plazas and blurry exit signs.

All through the movie, truck engines hum in the background.

Donnan stays out of the movie, except for occasional glimpses of the shadow of her hair or the shadow of her tripod and sometimes her voice faintly in the background.

Not everybody she approached was eager to talk, she said.

"Some were really aggressive, some were really shy.

"Some wanted to talk to me too much. It was hard to get rid of them." Some of these over-eager drivers turned out to be the best subjects, Donnan said.

"There were some really funny guys. If they had radio shows, I would listen to them all the time. A lot of the guys ended up giving me relationship advice after the interview ended."

The project started four years ago using equipment from Amherst Community Television. Eventually, she mastered the editing technique well enough to buy her own digital camera and do the editing on her laptop.

On Friday, she screened the movie on the wall of a trailer in a parking lot.

A grant from Northampton Arts Council is helping for the installation. In the future, she said she hopes to also show the exhibit closer to home, perhaps in Montague.

As part of the installation, she set up blankets, designed to create a warm place to sit while watching the movie. Donnan sees other connections between truckers and blankets.

"Also, the blankets create a nesting space for a machine that's on the road a lot of the time," she said.

"People make the blankets for someone they love; truckers are often (doing their job) for someone at home."

Donnan collected these handmade crocheted blankets at tag sales and thrift stores.

"There's something so beautiful about being able to find in a thrift store something that's been abandoned that had so much love put into making it. It's beautiful and sad."

Donnan said she originally planned the piece as a poem, with each person speaking only one line. After filming, however, she decided to show more than just a line from each.

The poem was to be part of a three-part series on love, truth, and beauty. "I never made it past love because it was such a fertile ground."

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Recorder/Paul Franz
Lea Donnan of Montague sits inside the Whately Diner. Donnan has made a short film, "Truckers on Love." She shot much of the movie at the Whately Diner.

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