

Shortsfest: 'Eye and Brain Candy'

by Andrew Travers, Time Out Staff Writer

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Filmmaker **Douglas Sloan** recognized the iconic photograph. Everybody does. You know it, too: the one of the man with his hands bound behind his back, about to be executed, standing in a Vietnam street, bracing himself in the instant before he's to be shot in the head by a uniformed general.



But you probably don't know the story behind the riveting photo, its misunderstood legacy, and how it forever altered the lives of the man who took it, Eddie Adams, and the man who pulled the trigger, General Nguyen Ngoc Loan.

That story plays out over 17 breathless minutes in Sloan's new documentary, **"Eddie Adams: Saigon '68."**

The movie is among 80-plus playing at AspenFilm's 22nd annual Aspen Shortsfest, which begins Tuesday, April 9, and runs through next weekend at the Wheeler Opera House in Aspen and Crystal Theatre in Carbondale. This year's international slate of offerings run from two minutes to 40. They include comedy, animation, documentary and drama. Some are made by broke young Ramen-eating film students, others star Oscar-winning Hollywood actors.

Sloan, whose **"Elliott Erwitt: I Bark at Dogs"** won the festival's **Best Documentary** prize last year, returns for his third Shortsfest with the highly anticipated "Eddie Adams."

"The Aspen Shortsfest is the best of its kind," he says. "The curating and the jury's selection of what they put on screen is eye and brain candy. It's rare at these kind of festivals that the minority of things don't rate, and the majority of them are great. It's normally the other way around."

Fact

Sloan has made five short documentaries about photographers over the last six years, as he's tried to find the right subject for a feature-length film. He believes Eddie Adams is the one, he says.

"Everybody knows that photograph, but nobody knows the photographer," Sloan explains.

Adams, who died in 2004, refused to talk about the photo that won him the 1969 Pulitzer Prize and that helped turn public opinion against the Vietnam War. He wouldn't even let it hang at the prestigious workshop named in his honor in upstate New York.

As Sloan's film details, Adams, for one, didn't think it was a good picture and, additionally, was aghast at the way it was exploited after its publication. While it's become known for documenting an atrocity in an atrocious war, Adams didn't see it that way. He knew General Loan, and believed he was doing his duty by killing the man in the photo, who was a wanted assassin.

"Photographs do lie," Adams concluded in his journal, which is read dramatically in Sloan's documentary.

Adams was supportive of General Loan in the decades after the war, as he went on to become a celebrity photographer. The film details a visit Adams paid to the disgraced Vietnamese veteran late in life, when he was running a pizza shop in Virginia.

During the course of his research on Adams, Sloan interviewed colleagues who knew Adams in Vietnam and after — some of the preeminent journalists of our time — including **Morley Safer, Bob Schieffer and Peter Arnett.**

Their filmed recollections and Adams' cantankerous, self-critical voice in his journal make for a vivid story that will change the way you see that infamous photo, and maybe the way you look at media as a whole. That, Sloan says, is the point.

"We're becoming an increasingly visual society and being fed all these images unfiltered," Sloan says.

"We're a visually illiterate society right now. It's becoming more important, from a societal view, to understand the context of what we're seeing before we make a judgment call."

Shortsfest is among a few film festivals where "Eddie Adams" will screen as Sloan seeks funding to make it into a feature that will blend documentary with fictive recreations. The Briscoe Center for American History, at the University of Texas, last month signed on to finance part of an "Eddie Adams" feature.

"As optimistic as one can be in this business, I think we're going to be successful in getting some funding and making this into a feature length piece," Sloan says.

**Eddie Adams: SAIGON '68 screens Friday, April 12 at the Wheeler 8:30pm
Sunday, April 14 at the Crystal in Carbondale.**