

GANGSTERISM

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Daniel Turner

What have these genres meant to me, and how can I think with them?¹

There are few filmmakers working today, who are more committed to the inordinate possibilities of the cut and the transformative power of montage than Isiah Medina. Since he burst into the collective consciousness with his 2015 film *88:88*, he has quietly been building a collection of idiosyncratic, formally arresting and uniquely current films, that move through mathematical theorems, ideological concepts and generic forms with the fleetness of thought in motion.

However, Isiah Medina's cinema is not merely a cinema of thoughts, rather, it is cinema as thought and thus filmmaking as thinking. This commitment to, and manifestation of, cinema-as-thought undergoes manifold revolutions, diversions, and variations of form across Medina's already extensive body of work, from the dizzying intellectual montage of *Inventing the Future* (2020) to the retooling of the heist film in *He Thought He Died* (2023), both of which screen as a part of our retrospective of Isiah Medina's work in February.

His latest film, *Gangsterism*, continues this exploration and retooling of classic cinematographic forms, as he interpolates the gangster picture (exemplified by the likes of Howard Hawk's *Scarface*) with that most cinematographic of genres – the film about a film. Centred upon gangster-cum-filmmaker Clem (the excellent Mark Bacolcol) who is simultaneously collecting debts to fund his next film and attempting to track down who is leaking his work online, *Gangsterism* exists as much in this simple plot description, as it does in its perpetually oscillating rhythms and its dissections of the economics, moral codes (or lack thereof) and day to day realities of making cinema in 2025.

Irony laced missives and grandiloquent aphorisms abound but there's an unignorable depth and currency to their often po-faced delivery and how Medina interweaves these pronouncements on everything from the pitfalls of institutional funding to re-evaluations of the Western, into a larger exploration of his and our present.

Medina describes his approach to genre as 'an excuse in a way to think through a sort of tradition of forms, to experience my thinking through other people and other thinkers, and see how far we can take it.'² *Gangsterism* marks a continued commitment to this approach, which when combined with Medina's utilisation of montage, creates a truly remarkable work that is constantly recalibrating itself and you as a viewer.

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^{1,2} Quotations from Against, and Beyond the Present: Isiah Medina on 'Gangsterism,' Part 1 by Phil Coldiron (28 August 2025)