



Tracking Shots

'Sweet Land'

by Rob Nelson

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**Written and directed by
Ali Selim.**

A plot-driven *Days of Heaven* set mostly in rural Minnesota circa 1920, this gorgeously realized romance by first-time feature maker Ali Selim

follows a German mail-order bride (Elizabeth Reaser) and her intended, a Norwegian-immigrant farmer (Tim Guinee); the two slowly fall for one another while working on the land and against their insular Lutheran community's ample prejudices in the wake of World War I. But *Sweet Land* is equally the story of a filmmaker in love with his actors and his material. Directing with a light comic touch and a palpable affection for the characters, Selim draws pitch-perfect acting from a large cast (John Heard, Ned Beatty, Alan Cumming, Alex Kingston, and Lois Smith) and achieves breathtaking levels of color and clarity from old-

fashioned 35mm, whether focusing on his spirited heroine's alabaster skin or framing the couple's tiny farmhouse against an expanse of blue sky and gently swaying grain. The film's penny-pinching period re-creation convinces so fully that Selim seems to turn back the clock on the regional American indie too. Yet the tale of economic stratification and postwar intolerance is nothing if not timely.