



## Better Things

**Duane Hopkins**

UNITED KINGDOM, 2008  
English

93 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **UK Film Council/EM Media/Wellington Films/Third Films**  
Executive Producer: **Christopher Collins, Peter Carlton, Lizzie Francke, Paul Trijbits**

Producer: **Samm Hailay, Rachel Robey**

Screenplay: **Duane Hopkins**

Cinematographer: **Lol Crawley**

Editor: **Chris Barwell**

Production Designer: **Jamie Leonard**

Sound: **Douglas MacDougall**

Music: **Dan Berridge**

Principal Cast: **Rachel McIntyre, Emma Cooper, Liam McIlpatrick, Che Corr, Freddie Cunliffe**

Production: **UK Film Council, 10 Little Portland Street, London W1W 7JG United Kingdom. T (44-20) 7861-7536 isabel.davis@ukfilmcouncil.org.uk**

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This daring first feature, deeply inflected by the United Kingdom's visual arts scene, takes well-worn themes of alienation, youth addiction and emotional isolation and remakes them as minimalist, overlapping tableaux. Every segment has the integrity of a painting or short installation, and each scene exudes a certain completeness, boasting an emotional intensity and precise design all its own. Hopkins is a talented photographer, and his highly acclaimed short films anticipate his – and cinematographer Lol Crawley's – aesthetic choices in *Better Things*.

Much of the story follows Rob, a teenager whose girlfriend overdoses on heroin. As his brother and other friends sink into opiate lethargy, Rob considers options for escape. At the same time, a young woman named Gail tries to overcome agoraphobia and an addiction to romance novels. And the Gladwins, an elderly couple, come to terms with betrayals that occurred earlier in their relationship. Although situated near one another, the characters barely overlap, their stories connected more through metaphor than interaction.

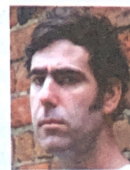
Because the film's plotlines are familiar, Hopkins has enormous freedom to explore oblique narrative strategies. The story moves forward by a whisper, a gesture or unexpected events, such as a relative's arrival. *Better Things* is packed with characters, and shifts among their personal journeys to create fertile associations and connections.

The characters' dalliances with drugs are rarely for pleasure, but rather to dispel the

unpleasant sensation of waiting for something to happen. The interspersing of an elderly couple's story into the mix reveals how the decisions of youth play out in unexpected ways later in life. This approach adds layers of meaning to the film and provides a bitterly ironic reading of its title.

Hopkins grew up in rural England, and one senses his familiarity with the land's beauty, hardships and culture. He devotes most of his filmmaking energy to capturing the atmosphere and particular face of the film's Cotswolds locations. The colours he evokes are breathtaking: misty greens and reflected greys cast an eerie sense of claustrophobia over an otherwise gorgeous landscape in this patient, observant film.

### ■ Noah Cowan



**Duane Hopkins** was born in the Cotswolds in southern England and studied painting and photography. He has written and directed the short films *Field* (01) and *Love Me or Leave Me Alone* (03). *Better Things* (08) is his feature film debut.

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