

INFO FIPA 5

News from the 20th International Festival of Audiovisual Programs in Biarritz, January 23 to 28, 2007

FILM LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Revitalizing a mummified industry

At Fipa, fresh voices speak out for a new Egyptian cinema. They are competing in several categories: drama, short works, young artists. Without inhibitions, they delve into complex subjects.

With a blockbuster debut, Egypt makes its mark on Fipa. This powerful and innovative Egyptian presence on the international stage announces a renewed commitment to creativity and independent filmmaking. For Egyptian Hala Galal, jury member, director and producer, "it's a wonderful opportunity for Egypt, a country that has chosen to remain in isolation; it's good for art, for humanity, and for the fight against intolerance." The evolution can be attributed to the emergence of young Egyptian artists.

They are coming from the High Cinema Institute of Cairo, premier school of the Arab world, and recently from private and independent ventures. According to Galal, the productions are stepping off the beaten "official paths" and tired "commercial stereotypes" into new artistic territory. They are electing themselves to the margins of cinema by avoiding the conventions of the dominating Egyptian film industry. She believes

these original young artists express a "fresh-view" of the subjects they cover. "Making a film," confides Mohamed Kamel, director of the short film *Bouret El Bahr*, "is like offering a piece of cake to humanity or communicating with all people."

He thinks the new generation wants to "transform" the cinema offered by the Egyptian production and distribution companies. Galal laments, "they cut off the region, it's dangerous for the film economy and for the youth that are deprived of a connec-

tion with the rest of the world."

Mohamed Salah, only 27 years old, comes from an independent film school in Alexandria. He describes his low-budget drama *Goozor* as "outside of the system." As for Mohanad Hassan, animator of the short film *Nour*, felt free to portray any subject, in his animated film.

In Egypt, censorship can sometimes come more from the traditionalist society than from the government. Certain themes like prostitution or religion can't be treated directly. This could explain why some directors choose animation. "The situation in Egypt is complicated," explains Galal, "It's very difficult to make a film expressing oneself and without stereotypes if one wants to make a living." Proud and enthusiastic to see the Egyptian works represented at Fipa, this Egyptian jurywoman supports these "very courageous" young innovators who dare to make films "from the heart."

Translated by Joanna Freudenheim

Mohamed Kamel, Mohamed Salah and Mohanad Hassan, the male half of the Egyptian delegation.



REVIEW

Snowing on the Flames

What distinguishes the ally from the enemy? This is the question posed by young Mikhaïl Segal, who presents us with a remarkably just film.



Adrian Topol (Franz) and Svetlana Ivanova (Polina).

"Franz + Polina" is not a war film. However, although it is not exploited as a vulgar and dramatic element, war is indeed present.

The film opens with anticipation, with the suspense of the SS, who occupy the village of Byelorussia, receiving the order to hold their actions. The everyday life of living together slowly untangles the tension imposed in the time of war.

Specifically, this film is an adaptation of a short story by Ales Adamovitch, a writer who himself lived through the war. This partially explains the accuracy of certain scenes of this film, posing the universal question: how to fight against someone who has become a companion?

Beyond the script itself, Mikhaïl Segal reveals that his characters have their own difficulties, having been severely battered by the war: a belief almost nipped in the bud.

Tenderness and monstrosity

The somber mood reflects the narrowing scope of possibilities. The viewer hears the falling of snow and the crackling of fire. He smells the humus of the soil. The camera rolls on the natural scenery and then freezes on the images of the characters, stuck in the mire, as soon as the battles of war begin once again.

Despite everything, Franz and Polina keep their calm and keep their breathing steady. Mikhaïl Segal, who also worked for the promotion of the film, is keen on the images characterized by their discreetness and modesty. In addition, the sound of the film is not to be missed. The young Russian director is clearly marked by his experience of music composition. This, added to his studies of film direction, offers a brilliantly orchestrated interpretation.

The light is modest, the soundtrack delicate, the dialogues parsimonious and just. An unexpected tenderness is felt from this decidedly intuitive and sensitive first film.

Translated by Heidi Kim

BEHIND THE SCENES



Philippe Claude: a directing projectionist

A piercing blue stare and a strong jaw make up a soft yet tanned face. In the Bellevue auditorium, from behind the projector, Philippe Claude mans the show. A technician for Fipa, he also directs documentaries. Not even with light circles under his eyes that speak of fatigue, with a partner he works on screenings from 9a.m. to as late as 11p.m., will he deny the pleasure he gets from this experience. "I'm learning a lot about my profession," he says from a closet-sized projection room. "I'm not above keeping a hand in the basic technical elements, I enjoy it." He is modest, and yet there would be no show without him. Immediately following the interview, he is already on his way to work on his documentary. A decidedly visionary projectionist.

Translated by Joanna Freudenheim

Superheroes, our "superfriends"

Arturo Perez Torres, whose last documentary *Wetback* took prizes at many festivals, offers *Super Amigos*, an exciting hybrid work.

In Mexico, wrestling is almost a religion, and professional wrestlers are landmarks in the cultural landscape of the country, a microcosm of the tensions in the ever-changing world. Starting out as wrestlers in the ring, some of these athletes also wrestle social issues.

The film opens on the first page of a comic book, featuring American-style graphics reminiscent of the 1960s and 70s. A frame depicting Mexico City fades into a live shot of the megapolis, pushed by a rock beat. The opening sentence, "reality begins when we choose to believe," comes to life.

Crusade of the masked avengers against inequality

Every mask has its purpose, every superhero has his superpower, his expertise. The film *Super Amigos* is the account of the fights of Super Barrio against property-holders, of Fray Tormenta against misery 2000, of Super Gay against homophobia, of

Ecologista Universal against pollution and finally of Super Animal against bullfighting.

Much like the obstinate wrestlers, Director Arturo Perez Torres strongly keeps shape and purpose from beginning to end, alternating between controlled editing of filmed sequences, animated segments and comic strips.

Life is a wrestling match, fought in the great ring of the modern city.



The dialogue bubbles act as comments on daily Mexican life, and as time indicators. They propel the narration, thus underlining the never-ending nature of this struggle. The invigorating music is driven by leitmotifs, indicating landmarks and announcing the arrival of each protagonist.

The deliberate balancing of disparate

elements wins over even the most suspicious of audiences, so much that they seem ready to fight alongside these cape-clad figures. The situation is a bit surprising. A masked graffiti artist who fights for equal housing rights? Another who defies toreadors in an arena? Yet as the film marches on, these scenes seem to become normal.

Extraordinarily ordinary

The shifting perspective brought up by the documentary guides us towards a new country: Utopia. The colorful inhabitants are not wrestlers-turned-superheroes; rather, they are men conscious of their civic responsibility. After *Super Animal* plays a funeral march on the piano, an ultimate impulse leaves the film unresolved. Utopia is possible: "a time will come when people realize that anyone, with or without a mask, can also do great things (Subcomandante Marcos)."

Translated by Anna Cumbie

ROLLING

Cash for French filmmakers

Never before has so much funding been consecrated to cinematographic and audiovisual production by the Commission Nationale du Film France.

The organization, present at Fipa for the first time, revealed "an active stance" for which General Delegate Patrick Lamassoure congratulates himself.

Over the last five years, the Film France network (made up of 34 members scattered throughout metropolitan France, Corsica, Réunion and Guyana) has increased funding threefold. In 2005, the network raised their financing to 44 million euros. Approximately 24 million went to full-length films and 20 million to other genres such as short films, series, documentaries and animated films.

These programs claim to be as broad as possible. Few criteria have been established except for the program's requirement that at least one French producer be involved in the project, "...and still not always", explain round table participants. In addition, approval by the CNC (Centre National Cinématographique) is required in all regions, except Ile-de-France. And of course the funding is only available to professional filmmakers.

Scouting; a directory of technicians, actors or extras; help with administrative tasks and availability of archives: Film France helps filmmakers save their precious time and gives a head start with local networking. Even that which the best search engines cannot find, this organization serves on a platter. Looking for a Franco-Japanese actor living in New York, with a scar on his cheek? Film France guarantees success.

Too good to be true? The archive service could undoubtedly benefit from further development. In any case, the results are more than encouraging. In 2005, between productions and coproductions, France produced 240 films, a historical record.

Translated by Anna Cumbie

CLOSING TIME

An unexpected Fipa ending

The docu-drama planned for the closing ceremonies has been cancelled. Reflections on a controversial film.

The closing ceremonies at Fipa are usually an opportunity to put the spotlight on an audiovisual accomplishment. At this, Fipa's 20th anniversary, the audience witnesses a dramatic turn of events: Philippe Dutilleul's *Tout ça ne nous rendra pas la Belgique* has been taken off the program in the middle of the festival. On December 13, 2006, this docu-drama was shown on RTBF, a public channel in Belgium. Posing as a televised journal, it simulates the disruption of Belgium with an announcement of secession made by Flanders. We know just how sensitive the subject of secession is in Belgium. In the media as well as among politicians, the production has stirred up a collective protest. It has even provided the grounds for legal proceedings concerning multiple infractions of audiovisual legislation and violation of the journalistic code of ethics.

Sparking off a debate

"I had no intention of causing something like this, none at all...I'm not a revolutionary," said Dutilleul to *Le Monde* on December 21. According to Dutilleul, his approach was only meant to stir up discussion. His gamble obviously paid off; the flashy separatist attempts shown in the film have certainly provoked discussion. What's more, the film's form has also triggered criticism. The presentation

of this docu-drama in the guise of a televised newspaper could have definitely led to a confusion of genres, which would pose an ethical dilemma.

Producer of this docu-drama, the RTBF would have learned of the film's showing at Fipa after the fact and decided to forbid its screening; as a result the management at Fipa had no other choice but to cancel the screening of the film tonight.

Around Biarritz, there's a feeling of disappointment in the air; some have even spoken of censorship. Nevertheless, the management has confirmed that another film will be shown, but we'll have to wait until the curtain rises to find out which one.

Translated by Kitt Squire

Philippe Dutilleul's *Tout ça ne nous rendra pas la Belgique*.



SPOTLIGHT ON

Short Programs:

Christoph Rainer's *Drake* is visually pleasing and has a gem of a script. Consisting of only one continuous shot, this short film is set on the side of a deserted road. A car stops. The cries of cicadas flood the ear, and the sun creates shadow-puppet silhouettes, but the white-hot sky won't hesitate to cast some light on these characters. A must see!

This afternoon at 4:00 p.m., at Cinema le Royal. Ali Benkirane's short film *Casa* brings us all the way from calm to violence. We're told the story of Saïd, young Moroccan who leaves his village to work, and, above all live freely, in Casablanca. However, the promised land of success does not live up to his expectations, and the lessons it teaches him are those of violence and solitude. A short film definitely worth seeing.

Today at 4:15 p.m., at Cinema le Royal.

Aspects of French creation:

L'embrasement is Philippe Triboit's made-for-TV movie. Tenderhearted, it covers the accidental deaths of two adolescents that eventually triggered the french riots of 2005.

Today at 4:15 p.m., at the Gare du midi.

Round Table:

The culturally active audiovisual commission SACD presents never before seen projects from authors, screenwriters, and directors, who will pitch subjects that are close to their hearts. The discussion is reserved for professionals. Today at 10:30 a.m., room Vague5, Bellevue casino.

Translated by Kitt Squire

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