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#4

# NisiMazine

A Magazine Published By NISI MASA,  
European Network Of Young Cinema

Cannes

*Les Lascars*  
*In Focus: Woodstock*  
*Caroline Strubbe*

# editorial

by *Enrique Vivar*

Cannes is a fight. It's a long, unfair and exhausting battle against a tough guy: an unbeatable giant who, ironically, you always wanted to meet. Your adversary is a sixty-two-year-old piece of culture and if you are not a professional wrestler then you are definitely going to lose. In fact you are fighting with a myth: not a historical or cultural one, but a personal one. Although you can be hypnotized by the luxurious buildings and publicity banners around you, or feel seduced by the sound of the sea, Cannes is not a paradise. It is more than that. Cannes is real; the world

stops when this show begins, and your personal battle ends when all the lights turn on.

Cannes is a pagan spectacle and cinema is a God, but not the only one. Cannes is a sanctuary by the sea, and the sidewalks are full of pilgrims in the search of one instant of spiritual bliss. I wanted to join them, but, I've just realized... I no longer believe. I think it's a curious religion (or a curious God) because it constantly makes you observe the mechanism of its power. It's a big production machine at work. This machine sells prestige and produces art at

the same time. There are no secrets in this religion.

What's left, then? Many other things: success, exquisite films, esthetics manifestos, new filmmakers to be discovered, new talents to pay attention to, great comebacks, and ravishing performances. Tradition, contemporary spirit, the illusion of knowledge; this is the cinema business in its most elaborate form - and one of the most astonishing revelations I've ever had. I've suddenly grown up, older and wiser now, but as I said before, no longer a believer.

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Education and Culture DG

'Youth in Action' Programme



Demetri Martin (who plays the main character Elliot in *Taking Woodstock*) gets sporty

picture of the day

BY LUIS SENS



## Lascars: Round da way

Albert Pereira - Lazaro  
& Emmanuel Klotz (France) SIC

# film of the day

Based on a concept that its founders already had back in the mid 90s, when TV was degrading every form of street art and Jamel Debouze was not there yet, *Les Lascars* (*The Fellows*) finally managed to come out of the underground in 2000 when Canal+ aired its first season. After their original, very short format, founder *El Diablo* and his *homies* went on to a feature film. As usual, the voice actors have been selected from a hall of fame of French rappers and comedians - and even porn stars.

The passage from short sketches to a 90-minute feature film re-

presented a challenge. If the same priceless rhythm and intensity of the suburban anecdotes hasn't be maintained, the authors managed to stick to some ideological principals of the original series, which consisted of avoiding any political messages concerning racism, discrimination or other social themes that often come with the representation of the lower classes in cinema.

The first result of that choice is a chronicle-like aspect, with sharp representation of every cultural aspect of the ghetto, from the rap music to fast food; from the slang to the dreams of enrichment

(symbolized by the big cars, the mansions, the trips to Santo Rico and the new social status). At the same time, *Lascars* manages to avoid any glamorization or passionate defence of street culture.

However, these same aspects might be seen as a weakness of this portrait. If *Lascars* is funny and entertaining, and if its visual style is impressive, we could also mention that its irony does not imply any criticism at all. *Lascars's* approach to society is that of mere observation, in a mixture of elements that put everything on the same level: working as a policeman or selling drugs, having a

girlfriend or going out with porn stars. This cool ghetto talks about itself, but choosing mockery over reflection.

Finally, its humour and softness proves to be both its merit and its limitation. One could only wish that entertainment did not imply the absence of criticism (as political engagement does not necessarily mean seriousness). A portrait of the ghetto could surely manage to combine both of them.

by Maximilien van Aertryck  
and Bruno Carmelo

## review Jal Ajido Motamyunseo / Like you know it all

Hong Sangsoo  
(Republic of Korea) QR

by Natalia Ames

Hong Sangsoo is present at the Directors' Fortnight with his latest movie, *Jal Alyido Motamyunseo*, which displays spontaneous humour and autobiographical inspiration. The film is divided into two portions which correspond to two trips of the protagonist, a middle-aged Korean director who travels to a film festival as a jury and then to an island to give a lecture. While the first half is hilarious and strongly structured, the second half loses the shape and direction that the movie was pointing towards. This tends

to happen in Hong's movies, although in his best works he manages to keep the attention of the audience despite the change in the story.

In this film however, even if the first part has a strong content of self-mockery and funny criticism of the filmmaking career, the second part gets lost in redundant dialogues and situations that fail to add any more interest to the new story. Although Hong respects his personal style (including some elements he had used in his last movies, such as



the brusque zoom-ins and the voiceover), the fragmented narrative does not help to consider it as a completed work, leaving

us curious about what would have happened if the first half had developed more of its potential.



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## review Humpday

Lynn Shelton (USA) QR

Do-it-yourself cinema is a fast-growing movement, especially in America, where micro-budget filmmakers such as Joe Swanberg and his gang gather together to make their indie films. Lynn Shelton has one foot in this approach, stripping down her means of production to the fundamentals. The focus is on the characters: actors have the freedom to move within their cinematic personas and so deliver a more realistic performance. However, what sets Shelton apart is her ability to avoid the “mumblecore”, meaning that her dialogues have coherence and rhythm, with no gaps of intellectual insinuation.

Humpday is a funny buddy movie in which two school friends, Ben and Andrew, reunite for the first time in ten years. In between booze and over-excitement, they decide to have sex on camera. No, they are not gay. “This is beyond gay; it’s an

art project” for a porn film festival. Once the decision is taken, Ben has to tell his wife and the comic snowball starts to roll. It’s actually very amusing to watch two straight men trying to handle their masculinity and fear of taking the homosexual step. But what gives the final push is that for both men this experiment is a way of dealing with reaching their thirties, and whatever adjustments that age entails.

It must be the well-written script, but also the natural acting, which makes the characters so three-dimensional. Although even the digital feel of the image is handled in a way that never alienates, rather offering signs of intimacy. Considering the fact that humour is subjective and comedy a delicate genre to explore, Humpday succeeds in making you giggle with a warning: “Do not try this at home”.

by Eftihia Chatzistefanidi



## C'est gratuit pour les filles

Marie Amachoukeli & Claire Burger (France)

It's interesting to realise how differently directors make use of short films. While some use the format to experiment with shape or content, others see them as a portfolio; proof that they are ready to move on to bigger – and longer – projects.

*C'est gratuit pour les filles* belongs to this last category. Directors Claire Burger and Marie Amachoukeli focus on a socially-oriented cinema: our two protagonists are girls living in the suburbs, dealing with everyday problems and dreaming of a better future. If the content is clearly fictional, the language is closer to documentary: the camera shakes freely from one face to the other, following characters as they

move; there's no artificial light, the dialogues seem improvised; there's no psychologism or major dramatic conflicts.

If the cinema of Abdellatif Kechiche or the Dardenne brothers come to mind when watching this short film, it's not only as an inspiration: *C'est gratuit pour les filles* doesn't want to honour these directors, but be on the same level as them. Burger and Amachoukeli show that they are mature and ready to conquer features – whether we should consider that a “noble” use of short films or not. Let's wait for their next step.

by Bruno Carmelo



Cannes is the biggest film event of the year, but its American cousin, Sundance, has also been successfully discovering the best of cutting-edge talent. We asked John Cooper, the new Director of Sundance Film Festival, what made the French choose four of "his" films (*Humpday*, *Amreeka*, *I love you Philip Morris* and *Precious*) for this year's programme.

## John Cooper

Director of the Sundance Festival

### interview

#### Are you especially proud of this success?

Yes I am. It is always nice to have confirmation of my belief in these films. I also know these filmmakers so I am very excited to see what it does for their careers. I hope it means there is a place for these films on the global stage and not just the American scene.

***Humpday* is a buddy movie, *Amreeka* discovers America from a different point of view, *I Love you Philip Morris* provokes as a homosexual comedy, and *Precious* gives hopefulness to the outsiders of this world. Is the selection of those specific titles mostly based on their fresh, unique storytelling?**

Fresh unique storytelling is utmost. They are hardly classic genre movies, but they each play with these genres in inventive and creative ways. I guess what I am saying is these films are not as they seem at first look. One thing is true, even with their diverse budgets they demonstrate excellent filmmaking.

***I Love you Philip Morris* left Sundance without a distributor. Is it a sign of our times that a film starring Jim Carey and Ewan McGregor would struggle to find its way to Hollywood?**

Let's get real here. This is "one crazy ass" movie. I love it because it looks like other movies, even down to its cast (which was a brilliant choice) but it is really not at all like other movies when you get to its story and

style. This film is meant to keep you off guard, not allow you to become a complacent viewer. It is not a "sure thing" for a commercial venture. I strongly sense the filmmakers and stars knew this going in. Picking up films like this takes real courage and clear expectations.

**The 2009 Berlinale line up received mixed reviews and the Cannes programmers have been accused for gathering the "Dream Team" under its competition umbrella and, therefore, overshadowing new talent. Is there a happy medium?**

I didn't go to Berlin but for Cannes that dream team is hard to resist! Of course there is a medium, but a "happy one" does not sell papers, as they say. I feel for festivals that work so hard and find nothing but criticism. But I also believe in film criticism and consider it a necessary part of the fabric of what we do. For me - I choose to read criticism, try to see if there is any truth in it and make it part of what I think about when putting together the festival. My pet peeve is when journalists start summing up your festival before all the films have shown.

**This year Cannes is hosting films from countries that had to wait a long time to make an appearance on the Croisette, such as Malaysia and Greece. How important is diversity for a festival?**

I imagine other festivals feel as I do: we all desire diversity. We yearn for it. But you

also cannot sacrifice a level of excellence or you are letting down your audience. Festivals have to have very clear ideas of who their audiences are. This does not mean that we are not constantly striving to push the envelope every chance we get.

**You are attending "Meet the New Sundance" on the 17th of May at the American Pavilion. What should we expect?**

Trevor Groth has just been ap-

pointed Director of Programming. I want people to meet him and see us both in new roles. I want anyone who is interested to get to know us a little better, see that we are passionate people who believe in the bigger mission of the Sundance Institute... that art is vital to our society.

by Eftihia  
Chatzistefanidi

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# Woodstock

## in focus



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### Legacies of Woodstock

Peace. Love. Understanding. Finding the three golden words of the hippy era in cinema is easy, if you search for them in films following the standard Hollywood recipe: the hero falls in Love, faces a conflict, then comes to Peace with all of the problems and finds a greater Understanding along the way.

It's a little harder though to see any cinematic heritage of Woodstock and its time which is in any way comparable to its enormous, ongoing musical influence. Except for a few legendary documentaries - such as Michael Wadleigh's Oscar-winning 'Woodstock' from 1970, Woodstock has remained a virtually unwritten chapter of film history, until now. Ang Lee's 'Taking Woodstock' is the first major feature film about Woodstock ever to be selected for Cannes.

So what about the lasting ideological impact of the Woodstock era on cinema?

The immediate ending of the Vietnam War was a shared goal for the Woodstock hippies. When it finally did end, the trauma of the war was left to settle for a while - with the exception of the patriotic *Green Berets* of 1968 - before reaching cinemas in the years of 1978-9, with Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, Hal Ashby's *Coming Home*, and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. With them, a new approach to war movies grew stronger. Coppola's heroes were disillusioned souls lost in the psychedelic jungle of war, chasing enemies amongst and inside of themselves, rather than a foreign threat. Since then, quite a few war-glorifying films

have still reached the big screen, but their opposites have also - caressing the peace message by, for example, focusing on the cruel creation of war machines, as in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*.

The war in Iraq took a faster lane to the cinema than its older war brother. And in films like Brian de Palma's *Redacted* and Paul Haggis' *In the Valley of Elah*, the ties to the Vietnam films of the late 70s, in the sense of war criticism and self-awareness, are strong - themes also evident in last year's Cannes-competing *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Folman.

Enough about war, what about freedom and love? Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* from 1969 is probably the most famous hippy film of all time, but it wasn't the first one. Two

years earlier, before *Easy Rider* and the orgies of Woodstock, the Swedish film *I Am Curious (Yellow)* by Vilgot Sjöman was banned from the cinemas of Massachusetts for being pornographic. With sexual liberation as one of its main themes, Lena and her boyfriends try outdoor sex in a tree and in front of the Royal Castle in Stockholm. From a feminist point of view, part of film's reality is still not outdated. The free love movement still challenges, and attitudes towards sex in movies keep changing - although John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus* wasn't banned from the cinemas of Massachusetts.

And finally, understanding? Well, the message is easy - there are only three words to remember. Try imagining. Come on, it's easy if you try.

by Moa Gestrand

### Taking Woodstock *Ang Lee (USA) OC*

No matter how much all the people staying during these days in Cannes are cinema fanatics, only the most known names provoke real queues. Ang Lee is one of these names, together with Lars von Trier,

Quentin Tarantino and Francis Ford Coppola, to quote a few. So far *Taking Woodstock* is - after *Tetro*, the one which has awoken the most expectations.

As a matter of fact, at the same

time as there are really good films in the parallel sections which aren't receiving the attention they deserve (*Air Doll*, *Huacho...*), it's quite surprising that films like *Taking Woodstock* are in the Competition. Nothing about Ang Lee's latest work is surprising; it's just a rather banal movie made without too much thought, which talks about the genesis of this popular music festival. Structured as a classical comedy and including all the genre's script-related conventions, in the end only one or

### review

two beautiful scenes succeed in transmitting the spirit of the era - almost just as Antonioni did in *Zabriskie Point*, but without the core.

Whilst it will probably collect a substantial sum at the box office, it's an easily forgettable movie. At least we are still left with the element of mystery: waiting for the next idea from such a versatile filmmaker.

by Andrea Franco



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# Caroline Strubbe

Director of *Lost Persons Area*, SIC

## portrait

Photo by Luis Sens

Flemish director Caroline Strubbe has had a very successful career making documentary and fiction shorts, commercials and educational films for over twenty years. Her short film *Melanomen* won several prestigious prizes at a number of festivals in 1993, and her mid-feature silent film *Taxi Dancer* got several awards as well. But having her first feature film *Lost Persons Area* selected for the hallowed Critics' Week at the biggest, most glamorous film festival in the world... is another thing entirely.

*Lost Persons Area* is a film about a dysfunctional family: Bettina and Marcus arouse great passions in each other, but they don't pay too much attention to their daughter Tessa, who wanders off and collects junk whenever she can. When the new Hungarian engineer Szabolcs becomes entangled in their lives, tragedy is bound to strike.

Strubbe studied at the Escuela Cinematografica in Barcelona, led by Spanish director Hector Favor. She describes her experience there as a real turning point: "I had been educated by nuns and suddenly I was living in abroad in a big city where I knew no one. It was the most important year of my life. I love discoveries and change, it felt like a liberation. I was happy to finally take my place in the world and to discover that making films could

become a reality." It seems that this sense of personal freedom is something that she has tried to maintain ever since.

After the success of francophone Belgian cinema in last year's Cannes lineup (*Eldorado*, *Rumba*, *Private Lessons*, *The Silence of Lorna*), 2009 it seems to be the turn of works from Flanders, three of which are selected: *Altiplano*, *The Alasness of Things*, and Strubbe's *Lost Persons Area*. Although, there's no real collective aspect or particular movement in Flemish cinema right now, according to Strubbe: "Flemish cinema has been called very diverse. Just look at our architecture: hundreds of houses in all these different styles. Right now, you can see Flemish films in all sorts of genres. There's no unity in the style."

Displaying a strongly individualistic spirit also in other aspects of her life, she affirms, "I don't think of myself as being linked to anyone because of the shared territory, language or blood relations. I don't trouble myself with my heritage at all, I'm not connected to people just because they're my family or because we've been born in the same country. You can see that in my movie: it's situated in a no-man's land and the girl doesn't have any connection with her parents. It has to do with the cast of *Lost Persons Area* as well."

As a matter of fact though, putting together the cast for the film was, unexpectedly, one of the most special experiences Strubbe had in her years making films. "For instance, when I met Sam for the part of Marcus, he told me he could relate to the story because his father had been a pilot, just like mine. It turned out that our fathers served together in Canada thirty years ago. My father actually gave me a slide which shows them posing in front of a jetfighter."

Indeed it seems that the deeply personal is an integral part of the entire filmmaking process for Strubbe, and she admits to finding an important element of catharsis in it: "Making films is

a must for me; it helps me deal with unresolved emotions and impressions. It's a cliché, but for me, it's partly therapeutic. I don't find directing itself particularly interesting; it's a necessary evil to let me tell my story. Now that the film has been finished, I feel liberated from the past. I can finally live again."

Her advice for budding filmmakers is true to her values of being sincere to oneself and, above all, independent: "Make everything you do personal and real. Look within, that's the only way you'll ever be able to distinguish yourself from other people. Combine your trade with another artistic discipline so you're not too dependent and vulnerable."

So how is she dealing with the big event that is Cannes? Well, this is one filmmaker who is taking her latest success entirely in her stride, and her plans for the festival are fairly simple: "The film has just been completed and I'm very tired. I hope the weather will be nice and that I'll be able to swim in the sea."

interview by  
Jessica Hartman

text by  
Luuk van Huët