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#5

Cannes
NisiMazine

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European Network Of Young Cinema



*Whisper with the wind
In Focus: Brotherhood
Nassim Amaouche*

editorial

by *Laura Talvet*

During the two festival weeks in Cannes, it's often difficult to distinguish cinema from real life, and vice versa. While newcomers are overwhelmed by the experience of their lives becoming cinema, for those who already have their place on the red carpet, life is nothing but cinema. Dressed in white satin and jewels while watching a film about Middle Eastern immigrants' daily misery or the hopeless world of Aboriginal youngsters, they are participating in a true cinematographic scene in itself. In fact, a deep, unanimous

sigh filled the spacious salle Debussy, full of journalists and professionals, when the video showing this year's superb jury divas smiling to a million admiring eyes was cut off before the beginning of the opening film. One could ask if there is any borderline between cinema and real life, after all. Cannes' bubbling atmosphere shows that there is none. At least not around the Palais.

Introducing his first full-length feature in the Un Certain Regard section, Australia's rising star Warwick

Thornton mentioned he couldn't think of anything sophisticated enough to welcome the audience. Until he finally admitted that life was more important than cinema but that in his case, cinema had saved him from falling apart. The huge applause after the screening proved that his message was understood. The whole desirable and glamorous fantasy world of Cannes can indeed provoke a confusing perception of reality, yet it can also change lives. And luckily, even save some of them.

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Waiting for the stars

picture of the day

BY LUIS SENS

film of the day

Sirta la gal ba Whisper with the wind Shahram Alidi (Iraq) SIC



A ramshackle car moves slowly along a dusty old road. The day is beginning to die, and the clouds are getting darker and darker. The only sound you can hear is the whisper of the wind. The landscape seems remote and we think we are in some kind of no man's land, lost in time and memory. But no, we are in one specific place: Iraq. And perhaps because we know (or barely know) of the terrible events in its recent history, we realize that on this desolated road the world ends.

Behind the wheel of this car there is an old man, whose blue eyes are full of sadness: infinite sadness. At one moment he closes his eyes to rest for one second, but we know

that he will never truly rest again. He has seen too many things during his life: war, young people killed, families turned apart, and mothers crying out their souls, invoking an improbable return of their sons. He has witnessed the unbearable and cannot forget. He is damned; cursed, because he is a survivor, carrying the weight of his country's history deep in his soul.

A speakerphone over the car is pointed towards an indifferent sky, transmitting other people's messages, lamentations, and personal prayers. These are letters that cannot be written but only cried out to the world; and this is the job of the old man, to record

messages, undertaking some kind of infernal duty – for we must remember that hell is only on earth. These deserted cities are not only found in Iraq, but around the world where armed conflicts have left people helpless. To confess the pain is a way to find some relief.

At the beginning of the film a text explains about the ANFAL genocide during the regime of Saddam Hussein in the eighties, during which almost 182 000 Kurds were exterminated. Men were buried alive in mass graves and women were abused and sent to labour camps or brothels, leaving their homes, cities, and history behind. This film is almost like a letter to the survivors of these horrors

(who also had to suffer two more decades of mass destruction, only with a bigger enemy: America). What is so touching about it is the use of the landscape and natural elements to express the suffering through poetry. It's interesting to observe the consequences of war and how it affects places. There are presences and absences living together; screams and silences meet in one single space, exposed to the wind that carries unanswered prayers for the lost ones, impossible to stop human yearning. This attention to the emotional landscape seems to say that time passes, and dust may cover the scars, but pain always remains the same.

by Enrique Vivar

review

Mal día para pescar Álvaro Brechner (Uruguay/Spain) SIC

Mal dia para pescar works just fine as a visual journey through the colourful landscapes and small towns of South America – but it's no *The Wrestler*.

Story-wise, the road leads nowhere. The sharply dressed Italian manager Principe Orsin and former world champion wrestler Jacob van Oppen hopelessly chase their lost fame and glory by travelling around South America, visiting 27 nameless towns, with van Oppen as a washed-up circus attraction,

lifting car tyres and beating the shit out of the fortune-seeking locals who challenge him.

Van Oppen is chubby and unpredictable, suddenly jumping into a fountain, swimming and laughing, or crying and sobbing in church. Supposedly, all the fighting has turned him into a big child. But we don't really get to know him, or his manager Orsin.

In fact, all of the characters – from the local strongman to the editor of the local newspaper



– are stereotypes, like cartoon figures. Maybe the director is doing this deliberately as a reference to the fantasy world of wrestling. But in that case I'd

rather go and see a really good cartoon.

by Moa Gestrand



review

Daniel y Ana

Michel Franco (Mexico) QR

Inspired by actual events that occurred in Mexico, *Daniel & Ana* recounts the painful story of two siblings from a wealthy family who are kidnapped for a few hours. They are forced to perform sex in front of a camera (apparently they were caught by a mafia dedicated to the clandestine trade of pornographic material which is distributed via the Internet) and then released to live forever with this disturbing experience in their minds, trying to protect themselves only with silence.

The film brings up this dark story because it's necessary to understand that this kind of sexual violence is a common practice and thus, public awareness is required. Even more so when it involves criminal activities such as child abuse or blackmail. But beyond this genuine concern and some interesting notes on upper-class behavior in contemporary Mexico, this is not a compelling film, because of the weakness in its conception.

No density in character development and an unnecessary detachment of emotions in order to avoid sensationalism; all resulting in a never fully explored subject. The key for emotional distance is an accurate observation (which this film lacks), the one that could dissect a society without mercy and show how it operates. There is also a visual code: a cold, elegant, geometrical use of spaces and framing (which this film tries).

Daniel & Ana works best when it forgets this distance and presents tragedy in capital letters, suggesting that a leak of incestuous and repressed sexual desire has been set free and exposed to daylight. That's why those grey clouds constantly appear over the city like contained tears or a storm about to break out. Good intentions, but not daring enough; this means heavy subject matter but trivial filmmaking.

by Enrique Vivar



MOSCOW CO-PRODUCTION FORUM

From 20 to 22 of June 2009, within the Moscow International Film Festival, the Moscow Co-production Forum will take place. The Forum will become a traditional event of the Moscow International Film Festival. The Forum is focused on producers, distributors, representatives of state and private funds, investors and sponsors, working in the sphere of co-production in film industry. Forum giving participants the opportunity to present their ideas to a number of potential partners during the next forum events:

Co-production and film financing strategies - round table discussions.

Co-production projects pitching.

Film rights market - «Books & Films».

The key Forum event - co-production project's pitching.

Currently, the projects are under selection, the dead-line for applications - May 25, 2009.

The Forum presentation will be held within the Russian pavilion program at the International Cannes Film Festival - May 18, 2009.

Additional information

www.moscowfilmfestival.ru



Slitage / Seeds of the fall

Patrik Eklund (Sweden)

Lagom is a Swedish word without an equivalent in any language. *Lagom* is neither too much nor too little, it's sufficient, it's adequate, and sometimes - as in *Seeds of the Fall* - it's pointless. Patrik Eklund's second short to be selected for Cannes is not a bad movie. It's *lagom*.

Seeds of the Fall is a cute tale of... yes, what exactly? An excavator drives through the wall of a house, entering the bedroom of an old couple and disrupting their bedtime quarrels. The incident also involves the neighbouring, younger couple, since the excavator kills their beloved cat Jamiroquai.

The aftermath reveals a few secrets and leads to the two couples trying to find a somewhat unusual solution together. Eklund tells his story with a subtle, slightly surreal use of humour, in a Roy Andersson-kind of way, and focuses on small details. He also adds the theme of problematic sex lives, a cover of Massive Attack's *Teardrop* and a reference to the sexual fantasies in *American Beauty* - without making the 17 minutes feel overcrowded.

You get a few laughs along the way, but this kind of small town story has been told in this kind of way many times before. And, of course, there's only one Roy Andersson.

by Moa Gestrand

Juan Antonio Bayona

Godfather of the Semaine de la Critique

Spanish filmmaker Juan Antonio Bayona (34), who with his opera prima, *The Orphanage*, obtained international recognition, was selected - together with Juan Carlos Fresnadillo (*28 weeks later*) - as the Godfather of the Semaine de la Critique; an important assignment which has the main function of introducing a new talent to the world. Gabe Ibañez (38), with his film *Hierro*, was the choice of young talent for this year.

What did you especially like in *Hierro*?

I met Gabe Ibañez after watching his short film *Máquina*, which I found fascinating. From that moment, I started to be on his trail, because I noticed his huge sensory capacity. I thought that he had the makings of a cineaste. When I finally saw *Hierro*, it lived up to all my expectations.

Being a movie that you are sponsoring - together with Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, which points has it got in common with your own cinema, or your way of thinking about cinema?

We belong to a very eclectic generation of filmmakers who grew up watching a lot of American and European cinema, so we try to keep the best of both cinematographic typologies. But it is quite difficult to try classifying us because Fresnadillo and I are actually very different.

How was the selection process? How many films did you watch?

We were looking for a film which was able to represent the kind of cinema we both do, so the selection finally got reduced to just a few titles.

Did the organization set any requirement about how the movie had to be?

They agreed with the idea that we should represent a whole generation of Latin filmmakers but they didn't set any kind of requirement, they gave us absolute freedom.

Did you both completely agree about the final decision?

Yes, yes, absolutely. Juan Carlos and I watched all the films that fit with our way of making and thinking about cinema - we also tried to watch in film format as many movies as we could, and we agreed completely. Besides, the Semaine de la Critique is one section which seeks to introduce new talents, and both of us think that Gabe Ibañez shows promise.

Hierro has lots of similarities with *The Orphanage*: a mother who suffers the loss of a son and who denies the truth because it's so harsh to face; did you like *Hierro* because of this?

When we made *The Orphanage*, we were faced with that problem. Scary movies deal with the same topics, but further than that they don't look similar at all. Gabe Ibañez's capacity to transmit emo-

tions and sensations is really huge, I'm pretty sure that he's going to get people talking.

In *The Orphanage*, you decided to make an open ending, letting the spectator decide by himself. What do you think about the way that Gabe Ibañez has settled his story?

I think that his option is as suitable as mine. The dialogue that arises between the movie and the spectator is very interesting, and it's the director who gives the guidelines. Gabe Ibañez's ending is very coherent.

Almodóvar and Amenábar aside, it seems that the Spanish movies which are reaching more international audiences are the horror or fantasy ones. What do you think about this last genre in particular?

This genre, by its own characteristics, doesn't have any kind of restriction. It isn't limited by reality, so there's a place for everything. Even in fantasy movies, the plot doesn't always look fantastical. And that's something that joins all the people we work with.

by Andrea Franco

Brotherhood

in focus

So far, the parallel competitions of the Cannes film festival have shown a considerable number of films on the crisis. Not the economic one, but that of individuals, who are anyway probably the best reflection of the social situation. Three films in particular represent this idea: *Tetro*, *The Misfortunates* and *Eastern Plays*. If the baroque sophistication of Coppola's film has nothing to do with the funny portrait of *The Misfortunates*, and if the latter is far from the realistic approach of *Eastern Plays*, they prove to have close similarities in terms of their subject: the troubled relationship between brothers. As societies are gradually losing their values, these films turn to one institution that has always represented stability: the family.



from *Eastern Plays* © Waterfront Films

Tetro and *Eastern Plays* each tell stories of two brothers who, after a long separation, have to put up with their differences. The brothers of *The Misfortunates* may be extremely close to one another, but this reference does not contradict the previous ones; on the contrary, the three films all choose as their theme an abnormal family relationship, whether due to an exaggerated proximity or distance.

The protagonists are all unhappy with their lives. They don't like their jobs, their love relationships are ephemeral, and they don't feel like they are understood by their close ones. Family, work and love: our sad characters fail in all of these domains. As a matter of fact, failure is the real subject of the films, as it provides all of the conflicts that will determine the story and sets the aesthetics that each director finds best to illus-

trate solitude or instability (the dramatic photography of *Tetro*, the shaky camera of *The Misfortunates*, the steady and silent shots of *Eastern Plays*).

If these men have their problems, these only reflect the issues of their own families. These films attack the solid and traditional idea of the patriarchal family by pushing it to its limits: the mothers are passive and helpless, the fathers are tyrannical, and the children are obliged to follow rules that do not correspond to their beliefs. "Times have changed", the films seem to say, and the models that suited other generations might no longer fit the new ones. No wonder the narratives choose teenagers who cannot recognize themselves in their parents; no wonder the "honour of the family name" appears as something so old-fashioned and inadequate.

We could also notice in the three films a deep sociological and psychological determinism. Kids who are raised in a troubled environment cannot escape from being disturbed themselves; boys who witness scenes of violence and drug consumption are likely to go through similar situations. History itself has proven that these ideas are not as functional as we would imagine, but representing personal problems as a mirror of the family or society indicates how strongly the directors seek to attribute a cause for the feeling of crisis.

Is there a solution for such a dark portrait? If the films do not present an easy alternative for the characters, at least they provide them with the ability to channel their feelings. It's not surprising to see that the element chosen by all of them to relieve the suffering is art. The protagonist in *The Misfortu-*

nates exorcises his past by writing about his own experience; Itso, from *Eastern Plays*, finds peace in drawing; and pretty much all the characters of *Tetro* express their feelings through music, literature and theatre.

The choice of brothers as main characters of these films proves to be symbolic of what these directors wish to express. The topic of brotherhood allows them to explore the ruins of the family, of masculine leadership, of role models. One scene from the beautiful *Eastern Plays* could perhaps sum it all up: when two brothers are confronted, after one being responsible for the aggression of the other, they silently stare at each other; their scars still visible on their faces. And nothing else needs to be said.

by Bruno Carmelo

Le Nouvô Cosmos: a neighbourhood bar nestled in the heights of Belleville, in the shadow of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste church. From this animated, typically Parisian bistro, emanates a light feeling of elsewhere; a discrete promise of escape. Perhaps even some features reminiscent of Kabylie (a northern region of Algeria), given the Arabic connotations discernible in the interior. A regular in the 20th arrondissement, Nassim Amaouche seems to know of quite a few other nice spots in this corner of the capital. Surely because he still lives there today, a little further down the hill. He mentions that he's a resident of "social housing", as if wanting to suggest that, despite his "[satisfied] desires in cinema", he's not entirely removed from his modest roots.



Nassim Amaouche

Director of *Adieu Gary*, *SIC*

Born in Sèvres in 1977 into a "lower middle-class family" (his father a craftsman, his mother a secretary), Nassim confesses that he had to construct his cinephile culture on his own. And he still gives the impression of being a latecomer. It was only in 2000, after sociology studies in Paris, that he joined film school, moving at first into sound engineering, or more accurately, music... "A little by chance" then, he ended up joining the ranks of the Directing section. It was a good thing he did: his short *De l'autre côté* was superb and toured around many festivals. Awarded the Prix découverte de la critique, this family portrait earned him a trip to Cannes in 2004 for the Semaine de la Critique - something to make his parents even more proud. Five years later, he's happy to return, of course, but a little anxious about the public reception of *Adieu Gary*, his first feature. If

worried though, this contender for the Camera d'Or is no less curious; impatient to discover the other films selected such as *Altiplano* and *Ordinary People*. Not forgetting that between Nassim's two Cannes experiences, he completed another short: *Quelques miettes pour les oiseaux* (2005), a remarkable travel chronicle filmed in Ruwayshed, a Jordanian man's land next to Iraq. It was an exercise in how to become conscious of the double power of the camera: at once a tool for conserving fragile traces of life and symbol of a thirst for freedom which could prove to be risky, but necessary.

Cultivating certain recurring themes in each film: the "family unit [as] bridge between the intimate and the universal", father-son relationships, "double identities" (of social class and ethnic culture), Amaouche has above all the courage to hone a universe situated

at the border between social realism and poetry. The very same location as that of *Adieu Gary*, the former working-class city of Lafargue, in the Ardèche, which seemed to him the quintessence of this dream-like mundanity. A veritable cinematic décor in its brute form, this "ghost town", composed today of one deserted street, encapsulates an atmosphere reminiscent of a Western. Actually, being so concerned with "paying very special attention to the images", Nassim regrets a little not having been able to dedicate more time to his actors: from the most hardened professionals, Jean-Pierre Bacri and Dominique Reymond, to the novices - although no less sublime, Mhamed Arezki and Sabrina Ouazani (also seen in the work of Abdellatif Kechiche).

Impatient to get stuck into writing his next feature, this young dad is nevertheless going to give himself time to experi-

ment with a return to his most intimate creative resources: his family. Nassim will return to short documentaries in search of his father's house in Petite Kabylie, which was bombed during the war. He'll film to excavate the pieces of buried treasure, hidden recollections, and remains of forgotten history. Without quite knowing why, it makes one think of the work of cineastes such as Khalil Joreige and Joana Hadjithomas. Cited by Nassim himself, other references abound - including *Le train sifflera trois fois*. He has already begun to take flight in the tradition of these determined and inventive filmmakers; humanistic and sincere, attuned to their time, their society and its ills, even though implacably "sensitive to the poetry [...] of reality". If Nassim means 'Zephyr' - that soft and warm western wind - in Arabic, Cannes can sometimes give you wings.

by Emilie Padellec

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