

Nantes 2003

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THE FESTIVAL DES 3 CONTINENTS

celebrated its 25th anniversary from 25 November to 2 December 2003 in the Atlantic city of Nantes in Western France with a wide choice of films from the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. From Argentine, *Los Guantes Magicos (The Magic Gloves)* by Martin Rejtman and *Ana y Los Otros* by Celina Murga and from Cuba *Siete Dias, Siete Noches (Seven Days, Seven Nights)* by Joel Cano represented Latin America where film production is not very vibrant for the moment. On the other hand, the Asian continent was in the forefront with a wide selection that included films even from Malaysia, Pakistan or Kazakhstan, countries that are not household names at film festivals.

Kazakh filmmaker Nariman Turabayev's first feature, *Malen'kie ljudi (Ordinary People)* followed the day to day existence of two young men from Almaty, the Russian Max and the Kazakh Beck, both of them misfits in their own way in a rapidly changing economic system. Malaysian Ho Yuhang's *Min* was the story of a young Chinese woman adopted by a Malay family, who decided to search for her birth mother going on a journey that was metaphorical as well as literal. Sabiha Sumar's Locarno winner, *Khamosh Pani (Silent Waters)*, interwove the tragic events of the partition of India in 1947 with those of the repressive regime of the president General Zia in seventies Pakistan (not so alien to present conditions in the area), confirming that religious intolerance is never confined to one particular place and one specific time.

Japanese Ryuichi Hiroki's *Vibrator* was simply a very beautiful film about the fragility of the human psyche, about loneliness and pain and about tenderness, which can be found in the most unexpected places if one can open one's arms to receive it. In an inter city truck that Hiroki uses as the 'stage', two characters, a freelance writer who has cut herself from society mainly due to the voices she keeps hearing in her head and a dropout truck driver with bleached blond hair and a few piercings around his body created an atmosphere of profound intimacy as the outside world (signs, houses, shops, arcades and pedestrians) passed by. The CB radio, the truck's vibration, the songs on the radio (including a favourite Pat Boone number, *April Love*) sometimes accompanied and other times overcame the dialogue. Although the story ended where it began, neither one of the two characters was the same as before embarking on the strange journey, nor the audience for that matter.

From Taiwan, Tsai Ming-liang's *Bu San (Goodbye, Dragon Inn)* had all the qualities of this original filmmaker previous work and even more as if he keeps pushing the cinematic conventions to the limit with each film. Hardly anything happens in this film except that it rains incessantly as in all of Tsai's films. The dialogue is confined to not more than five sentences. The first time someone speaks, it is to say: 'I am Japanese.' The answer is 'Sayonara.' What better way to express the alienation of these two characters who are too guarded to break away the walls of emotional protection they have built around them? As a young woman with a lame leg climbs the stairs up the room of the projectionist, the audience can feel the pain the exertion causes her each time she lifts her leg although she seems nonchalant through out the film even when she sees that the protagonist does not touch the food she leaves for him. In a very daring moment, when the audience empties the old, decadent theatre one by one until no one is left, the camera freezes creating uncertainty among the 'real' audience whether that is the end. One person gets up, the others follow. Tsai waits for a very calculated amount of time to move the image again.

In the Out of Competition section, Iranian Abolfazl Jalili's autobiographical film, *Abjad (The First Letter)* showed in a direct and bold fashion how authoritarianism and repression can stifle creativity in the young. Another film in his section, Kerala's *enfant terrible* Murali Nair's *Arimpara (A Story that Begins by the End)* was a social satire just like his previous films, *Throne of Death* and *Dog's Day*, in the depiction of a once wealthy landowner's transformation from a happy family man to an elephant, all because of a black mole that appears under his lower lip and grows and grows.

Two films about Afghanistan were shown in the section Regards Pluriels. *Osama* by Sedigh Barmak about a young girl who dresses as a boy to find a job to support her family during the regime of the Taliban was well

shot but it did not add anything of its own to myriad of Iranian films on similar topics. *Nilofar dar Baraan* (*Nilofar in the Rain*) by Homayoun Karimpour was simply bad, a cliché melodrama with an inconsistent plot that seemed to try to bank on the current media value of the subject.

A novelty to the program this year was the introduction of a section of documentaries in and out of competition with noteworthy entries such as Cambodian Rithy Panh's *S21, the Khmer Rouge Death Machine* and Iranian Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's look at presidential elections and how they affect the young, *Our Times*.

Following the recent popularity of Bollywood, with films such as *Devdas* making it to Cannes film festival, Nantes organisers seemed to have felt the necessity to put it all in perspective. *Bollywood Before and Now* section showed the three versions of *Devdas*; Pramatesh Chandra Barua's 1935 version, Bimal Roy's 1955 version and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2002 version. *Mother India* (1957) by Mehboob Khan, *Mughale Azam* (*The Grand Mughal*, 1960) by Karimuddin Asif and *Pakeezah* (1972) by Kamal Amrohi, were other delights in this section that offered those with a strong back to sit through their long hours a feast rare to find.

The festival celebrated its 25th anniversary with landmark films from its past, screening Souleymane Cisse's *Baara* (1977), Lino Brocka's *Manila in the Claws of Light* (1975), Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's first film, *Kasaba* (1997) among others.

A special section devoted to the origins of the Chinese 5th generation presented landmark films such as Fei Mu's *Springtime in a Small Town*, Wu Tianming's *The Wild River*, Chen Kaige's *Big Parade* and Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum*.

Central American selections, Home videos from Nigeria, Homage to Algerian Television and last but not the least, a comprehensive homage to Brazilian Humberto Mauro were other sections that were on the menu for Nantes's loyal audience that queues in front of the theatres year after year, rain or shine, seeking something different than the usual multiplex fare.

References

AWARDS

Fiction

Golden Montgolfier: *Siete dias, siete noches* (*Seven Days, Seven Nights*) by Joel Cano (Cuba)

Silver Montgolfier: (*Khamosh Pani* (*Silent Waters*) by Sabiha Sumar (Pakistan)

Best directing award, tribute to Jacques Demy: *Bu san* (*Good bye, Dragon Inn*) by Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan)

Special Jury Award: *Min* by Ho Yuhang (Malaysia)

Best actress: Shinobu Terashima in *Vibrator* by Ruychi Hiroki (Japan)

Best actor: Erjan Bekmuratov in *Malen'kie ljudi* by Nariman Turebayev (Kazakhstan)

Young Audience Award: *Bu san* (*Good bye, Dragon Inn*) by Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan)

Audience Award: *Khamosh Pani* (*Silent Waters*) by Sabiha Sumar (Pakistan)

Documentary:

Golden Montgolfier : *Tiexi Qu* (*West of Tracks*) by Wang Bing (China)

Audience Award: *Gift of life* by Wu Yii-Feng (Taiwan)

Author Information

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