

# Rotterdam 2005

By Ron Holloway

Spring 2005 Issue of KINEMA

## ROTTERDAM INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2005

In case you have not already noticed, then take note of the new Amnesty International Jury on the festival circuit. And take note especially of the DOEN Award for the "Best Film Related to Human Rights" - awarded for the third time by the Amnesty International Jury at the 34<sup>th</sup> Rotterdam International Film Festival (26 Jan to 6 February 2005). A prize with a 5,000-Euro purse, plus (if possible) an art-house distribution release in the Netherlands, the DOEN Award was launched by the Netherlands chapter of Amnesty International to assure a wider audience for the winning film. To some extent, this particular Amnesty International Award was catapulted to festival prominence when Leo Hannewijk, programming director of the Film by the Sea Festival (see special section in KINO 82), entered the picture to arrange for a preselection of important human rights films. In other words, he preselects a bundle of key films from the program of the already existing Rotterdam festival, earmarks them for the attention of an Amnesty International Jury, and then powers the entire event with media coverage through six days of intensive viewing and discussion.

The trick - if it may be called that - was to find a competent jury that could appreciate the range of cinematic art as well as comprehend the complexities of human rights issues. This year, Kasia Kimpel (AI Netherlands) and Tamsin Campbell (jury secretary) coordinated a jury lineup that included the following: Dutch actress Renée Soutendijk (president), active in Unicef and Medecins sans frontières; Lulu Ratna (Indonesia), the director of the Jakarta International Film Festival; Wilf Mbanga (Zimbabwe), writer and journalist campaigning for press freedom and human rights in Zimbabwe from his exile in London; Pawel Pawlikowski (Poland), documentary and feature film director whose films include the multi-awarded *The Last Resort* (2000); and Ron Holloway (USA-Germany), editor of KINO German Film and International Reports. It goes without saying that, with four films a day to view, jury members had to hang together like glue throughout an intensive five-day schedule - not an easy job for Pawlikowski, whose latest film *My Summer of Love* (UK) was running in the festival, nor for Lulu Ratna, who presented an experimental short film in the Indonesian program at Rotterdam.

Contending for the DOEN Award were eleven entries produced in 2004, many of which had been previously programmed at major film festivals. For reasons that barely need explanation, the films that drew the most jury attention came from Iran: Hassan Yektapanah's *Dastaneh nataman* (*Story Undone*, coproduction with Ireland and Singapore), Bahman Ghobadi's *Lakposhtha ham parvaz mikonand* (*Turtles Can Fly*, coproduction with Iraq), Asghar Farhadi's *Shahre ziba* (*Beautiful City*), and Mania Akbari's *Beest angosht* (*20 Fingers*).

*Story Undone*, previously a competition entry at the Locarno festival, was awarded this year's Amnesty International Prize. As the title hints, Hassan Yektapanah's second feature is a film about filmmaking - in particular, about the problems of *not being able to film* illegal emigrants in Iran. When a young, green-eyed documentarist fresh from the film school sets out with his cameraman to challenge government censors by shooting a documentary about illegal emigrants on their way to the border to Turkey, the pair run headlong into an understandable reluctance on the part of the fugitives to be filmed at all. One obstacle leads to another - until the danger of the venture not only ingratiates the documentarists with the fugitives, but it also challenges the professed ideals of the would-be filmmakers. The twist at the end, when the border is reached, underscores the universal danger of fugitives the world over, for it offers multiple reasons why they feel compelled in the first place to illegally cross borders in quest of freedom and fulfillment.

By the same token, Bahman Ghobadi's *Turtles Can Fly*, set on the Iranian border to Iraq, depicts the frightening realities of handicapped children struggling to survive in a refugee camp. Led by a resourceful youngster named "Satellite," who constructs dishes from discarded equipment for villagers, they carve out a meagre but dangerous living by dismantling landmines left over from the Iraqi-Iranian war. A sensitively narrated and curiously poetic film, *Turtles Can Fly* well deserved its Special Mention by the jury.

Of the four entries shot in Africa - Ousmane Sembene's *Moolaadé* (*Protection*, Senegal), Fanta Régina Nacro's *La nuit de la vérité* (*The Night of Truth*, Burkina Faso-France), Daoud Aoulad Syad's *Tarfaya* (Morocco), and

Ian Gabriel's *Forgiveness* (South Africa) - Sembene's *Moolaadé* also received a deserving Special Mention. A hard-hitting statement on the appalling village practice of circumcising young girls in a controversial "cleansing ceremony" that could easily end in death, *Moolaadé* affirms that the 81-year-old Sembene is still an African director in top creative form. Another African film, equally worthy of recognition, was Nacro's *The Night of Truth*. Shot in an unnamed country of French-African heritage, where religious and nationalist interests still divide the country despite efforts of opposing military and government leaders to put an end to a tiresome and bloody conflict, the film is impressive for its striking widescreen cinematography (cameraman Nara Keo Kosal) in depicting the horrific side of the recent ethnic conflicts in Black Africa. Rwanda, in particular, comes to mind.

Although two entries were listed as European productions - Saverio Costanzo's *Private* (Italy) and Nadya Derado's *Yugotrip* (Germany) - the former is set in Palestine on the Israeli border, while the latter focuses on the ethnic conflict in Bosnia from memory perspective of an emotionally afflicted youth now living in Berlin. *Private*, previously honoured with the Golden Leopard at the 2004 Locarno film festival, is a remarkable debut feature that takes the pulse of a Palestinian family living in an occupied house located between an Arab community and an Israeli settlement. As much fiction-documentary (by virtue of a hand-held camera that picks out telling details of the occupational experience) as it is psychological drama (the family members take contradictory positions on what to do about the Israeli soldiers upstairs in the house), *Private* is the kind of "border film" that crawls under your skin as the surrealist tale unfolds with all its peculiar ironies. It, too, well deserved its Special Mention by the jury.

Last, but not least, there was Whang Cheol-Mean's *Frakchi* (*Spying.cam*), the South Korean entry. Bypassed by the AI jury for recognition on the grounds that you cannot award every worthy film in sight, *Spying.cam* was fortunately awarded the FIPRESCI (International Critics) Prize at Rotterdam. An independent DV production shot with a Sony video camera, *Spying.cam* (as hinted in the title) chronicles the day-by-day friction between two men of opposite temperaments in a barely furnished, sweltering hotel room as they await further instructions via a call on their mobile phone. To while their time away, they reinterpret Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment* in a role-playing game of one-upmanship. Eventually, we discover that the younger, more intellectual type is a protected witness, while the other, an older man with macho instincts, emerges as a policeman who doesn't much like his job and particularly dislikes being couped up. Then tension mounts when the heat (both physically and psychologically) of oppressive confinement, as well as the slow passage of time, becomes an unbearable burden. Later, when the pair exit into the bitter cold of a winter landscape, when the protected witness is driven to an isolated rendezvous in the mountains, the spying game appears to be over - save that the victim has apparently turned the tables on his tormentors by secretly filming the last fatal moments of his forced captivity.

## References

### AWARDS

#### **Amnesty International DOEN Award**

*Dastaneh nataman* (*Story Undone*, Iran-Ireland-Singapore),  
Hassan Yeptapanah

#### **Special Mentions**

*Private* (Italy), Saverio Costanzo

*Moolaadé* (*Protection*, Senegal), Ousmane Sembene

*Lakposhtha ham parvaz mikonand* (*Turtles Can Fly*, Iran-Iraq), Bahman Ghobadi

## Author Information

Ron HOLLOWAY (1933-2009) was an American critic, film historian, filmmaker and correspondent who adopted Europe as his home in the early fifties and spent much of his life in Berlin. He was an expert on the

study of German cinema and against all odds produced, with his wife Dorothea, the journal *German Film*, keeping us up-to-date with the work of directors, producers and writers and the showing of German films around the world.

In 2007, Ron Holloway and his wife were awarded the Berlinale Camera Award. Ron also received the Bundesverdienstkreuz (German Cross of Merit), Polish Rings, Cannes Gold Medaille, the American Cinema Foundation Award, the Diploma for Support of Russian Cinema and an honorary award from the German Film Critics' Association.

Ron was also a valued contributor to *Kinema* for the past fifteen years.