

Vesoul 2012

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18th INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF THE CINEMAS OF ASIA (FICA) - VESOUL

The only Asian film festival in France that stretches the boundaries from the Middle East to the Far East and from Central Asia to China and India, FICA-Vesoul (14-21 February 2012), opened the curtain this year with the most recent film of renowned Japanese filmmaker, Koreeda Hirokazu, *Kiseki (I Wish)*, 2011) about two brothers separated after the divorce of their parents- one living with his unemployed mother and the other, with his bohemian musician father. Played with charm by two real life brothers, who are often more sensible than the adults around them, the film tenderly reflected the emotions of children, who are happiest when the family is together. The festival honoured Koreeda with the Golden Cycle, screening all his films including his documentaries such as *Kare no ina hachigatsu ga (August Without Him)*, 1994) about the first Japanese who publicly revealed that he was gay and HIV-positive.

Among the films in competition, *Dance Town* (2010) by Jeon Kyu-hwan (South Korea), the third leg of the trilogy that includes *Mozart Town* (2008) and *Animal Town* (2009), depicting the plight of a North Korean couple, blacklisted for watching porno privately was a strong film on loneliness and helplessness against forces bigger than the individual. The glamorous actress from Iran, Niki Karimi, who has shifted behind the camera and directed two noteworthy films, joined the competition with *Soot-e Payan (Final Whistle)*, 2011) exposing the archaic and inhuman laws and customs of her country, especially when women are in question. Playing the role of a documentarist herself, Karimi forms a special relationship with an emotionally damaged young woman who had been sexually abused and entwines her own destiny with hers, risking her comfortable middle class life.

Gelecek Uzun Sürer (Future Lasts Forever), 2011) by Özcan Alper, one of the representatives of the new generation of Turkish filmmakers who are directly political, is a film on language and collective memory. Alper's first feature, *Sonbahar (Autumn)*, 2008), which was shot mostly in Hemshin, an Armenian dialect spoken by a minority in Turkey that had converted to Islam in the 17th century, was the first feature in Turkish cinema that drew attention to eroding cultures and languages under the policies of the republic, which aims to unify its citizens under one nation, the Turkish.

In *Future Lasts Forever*, Hemshin is also spoken along with Kurdish, Armenian and Turkish. The plight of ethnic minorities, particularly Kurds, killed in thousands during the civil war that has been raging for over thirty years, is rendered through the observations of an outsider, an ethno-musicology student from Istanbul collecting elegies. *Nikini Vassa (August Drizzle)*, 2011) by Aruna Jayawardana from Sri Lanka was rather original with its focus on a businesswoman who owns a funeral home. Ostracized by the community for her profession, she leads a lonely life hiding her womanhood and sexuality behind a rigid mask. When she crosses the traditional gender-dictated line to actively seek a sexual partner, tragedy ensues. *Solnechniye dni (Sunny Days)*, 2011) by Nariman Turebaev from Kazakhstan was quite similar to his first feature, *Little Men* (2003) with its focus on aimless youth that are often the losers in an aggressive society; it also carried the influences of his master Darejan Omirbaev, particularly his early work such as *Kairat* (1992).

Kazakh cinema, which has been rather dormant following the New Wave that swept the steppes starting with the perestroika and reaching its heights after the fall of the Soviet Union, received an important focus at FICA with films from as early as 1938 until the present. *Amangeldy* (1938), considered as the first Kazakh film by historians, was a real gem. Directed by Moisei Levin from Leningrad (Saint Petersburg of today), produced by Lenfilm Studios, employing mainly Russian technicians but scripted by Kazakh Baimbet Mailin and Gabit Musrepov, with Kazakh actors singing in Kazakh despite the Russian dialogue, this propaganda film shows the triumph of a Kazakh leader, who, inspired by Lenin, leads a revolt against the landowners and forms an alliance with the Bolsheviks.

The Song of Abai (1945) by Grigori Rochal, the first film written, produced and directed in Kazakhstan and therefore considered by many as the first Kazakh national film, celebrated the friendship between the great Kazakh poet Abai Kounanbai (1845-1904) and an exiled Russian scientist. In the 1960s, during the

post-Stalinist political thaw, talented filmmakers emerged in Kazakhstan such as Abdulla Karsakbayev and Shaken Aimanov (Kazakh Film Studio carries his name today), each of whom celebrated childhood in his special way. The former's *Menya zovut Kozha* (*My Name is Kozha*, 1963), a highly enjoyable piece with energy was about a smart brat and the latter's darker film, *Zemlya Ottsov* (*Land of the Fathers*, 1966), influenced by the Italian Neorealism, is about the absence of a hero who died during the war and the attempts to create a new hero, although this approach also involves shortcomings.

During the 1970s and the era of 'renaissance' for the studio, epic films were popular, among which we saw Shaken Aimanov's *End of Ataman*, scripted by Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovski. From the Kazakh 'new wave', Rachid Nugmanov's *Igla* (*The Needle*, 1988), the turning point for Kazakh cinema that became a cult film, Serik Aprimov's *Qijan* (*Last Stop*, 1989), Ardak Amirkulov's *Otyrardyn Kuureu* (*The Fall of Otrar*, 1991), Ermek Shinarbayev's *Azghyin Ushtykzyn' Azaby* (*The Place on the Tricone*, 1993) and *Letters to an Angel* (2008), and from the younger generation, Guka Omarova's *Schizo* (2004) were some of the other gems that graced the Vesoul screens in this large retrospective comprising nineteen films. A round table held during the festival revealed that Kazakh cinema is now in a position to receive large government support. However, the present infrastructure is not sufficient to reap the benefits, hence the limited yearly production.

Another guest of honour was the Vietnamese Tran Anh Dung (who settled in France) with a showcase of all his films from *The Scent of the Green Papaya* (1994) to *Norwegian Wood* or *The Ballad of the Impossible* (2011), shot in Japan, adapted from Murakami Haruki's novel, equally sensual as his other films. The closing film was *Apart Together* by Wang Quan from China.

The festival has several juries awarding the films. The main jury was headed by Atiq Rahimi, award winning author and filmmaker from Afghanistan.



Figure 1: *Dance Town* by Jeon Kyu-hwan

References

AWARDS

Golden Cycle (Best Film):

August Drizzle (2011) by Aruna Jayawardana

Grand Jury (Sri Lanka) Award:

Dance Town (2010) by Jeon Kyu-hwan (South Korea)

Special Mention:

Niño by Loy Arcenas (Philippines) and
Future Lasts Forever by zcan Alper (Turkey)

NETPAC Award (Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema)

August Drizzle by Aruna Jayawardana (Sri Lanka)
Special Mention: *Return Ticket* by Teng Yung-Shing (Taiwan/China)

Emile Guimet Award (granted by the Friends of National Museum of Asian Arts of Paris)

Final Whistle by Niki Karimi (Iran)

INALCO Jury Award (granted by the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations, Paris)

Final Whistle by Niki Karimi (Iran)

Audience Award for feature film (granted by the city of Vesoul)

Khalifah by Nurman Hakim (Indonesia)

High Schools Award: *Final Whistle* de Niki Karimi (Iran)**Audience Award for documentary film** (granted by the Commune of Vesoul)

The Origins of the Apple by Catherine Peix (Kazakhstan-France)

Author Information

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