

Aesthetica Short Film Festival: Day Two

ASFF is in full gear, showcasing films spanning from fashion to thriller and everything in between

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Still from *Eatnanvuloš lottit (Birds in the Earth)*, 2018. Directed by Marja Helander, Finland. Dance Finalist in ASFF 2018.

With an intrinsically personal theme such as **Drama 6: Hopes and Dreams** there is ample opportunity for touching character driven stories and this selection did not disappoint. The highlights came from a trio of films fronted by neglected female protagonists. In Megan K. Fox's *Calling Home*, Natalia Kostrzewa plays Dorota, a woman who has travelled across the world in pursuit of her dream to study fashion, but finds her path manipulated by an abusive partner. The depiction is sensitively done and the crumbling of Dorota's world, interwoven with childhood flashbacks of a more innocent time, really pack a punch. The character of Kate, played by Maimie McCoy, in Nessa Wrafter's *Early Days* is left similarly isolated as a mother whose mental state is overlooked by those around her after a traumatic labour. The jumpy editing gives the audience a sense of her panic and unhinged state of Kate and the visceral close ups of blood-stained instruments and human skin effectively reinforce the feeling of trauma.

Another performance that should not be overlooked is that of seven-year-old Sonya Markowsky as Sora in Takumi Kawakami's *Paper Crane*. Markowsky's subtle reactions are endearing and convey the sense of a child put under pressure from pushy parents. The film is visually stimulating and filmed at Sora's level, reflecting the sense of a suppressed childhood desire to explore. Andrew Muir also tells a story about a curious child, set during a Second World War flyover in *Turning Tide*. The film is a touching reminder of how generations of unprejudiced youth can be corrupted by atrocity. Kind hearted actions in seemingly hopeless situations are also explored in David Moody's *Camlo*. Though it could be argued that the

relentless bleakness of Camlo's monotonous existence is milked to the borderline of parody, the piece gives a social commentary particularly appropriate in a time of political uncertainty for immigrant families. *TNT Boxerstory* by Mark Gerstorfer also focused on the journey of a headstrong individual, and though the colourful, high contrast visuals and heightened sound effects created an appropriate intensity, the motives and morals were underdeveloped and ultimately felt a bit forced meaning the narrative fell flat. The category in general was more on the side of hopeless than hope in tone but, nevertheless, thought provoking viewing.

A more light-hearted contrast to the drama pieces came in the form of *Neko No Hi (Cat Days)* from Jon Frickey in the **Animation 4: Isolation and Confinement** category. A multi-layered piece with a charmingly simplistic animation style. *Neko No Hi* could be read as a social statement on the struggles of identity, an exposé on the problems of blindly listening to authority or perhaps simply a quirky comedy. However interpreted, the story developed nicely and left the whole theatre with smiles on their faces. This category also told some darker, real-life stories, notably Lynn Tomlinson's *The Elephant's Song*. The use of clay on glass and watercolour with stop frame editing created a sense of aged archive footage, an inventive depiction for the true story being told. The use of an anthropomorphised dog narrator singing a show tune about such tragic events forces the audience to question how such cruelty was ever viewed as entertainment – a very emotive and individual piece.

A lesser known injustice is also the focus of *Unkilled Chapter 1*, a documentary about the detention of migrants by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn. The minimalistic style creates a sense of the bleak limited existence of the migrants who are kept in 'temporary' detainment without knowing when or if they will be released. *True North's* animation, directed by George Bowler, is dark and sinister and perfectly uses the medium to capture a sense of the unknown of shadows with slithers of light reflecting the mix of sky, sea and the ship's occupants in a storm. Robin Tremblay's *FEAW* is hyper-realistic and tracks a journey through history into sci-fi possibility with an incredibly impressive visual flow, fully illustrating the possibilities of animation as a mode of storytelling. The final film is Yoni Goodman's *Adina E - Changing* in which we follow the journey of a runaway, leaving her urban environment and heading to the country. An unoffensive but pleasant piece, Goodman's short finishes a very diverse category nicely.

Meanwhile over at the cosy hidden cinema venue inside Grape Lane's 1331, there were some rather bleak offerings on show in **Drama 6: Choices**. Chief among these was Jeremy Comte's *Fauve*, following two young boys who are predominantly preoccupied with getting one over on each other. Comte's film has some gorgeous shots but, despite the incredibly sad direction it moves in, somehow lacks the emotional punch of the other shorts in this block. One film that does make its point in a moving and engaging way is *Counterfeit Kunkoo*, directed by Reema Sengupta. Set in Mumbai, it is a searing indictment of patriarchy in Indian society. This is anchored by a superb central performance from Kai Kusruti as Smita, a single woman who is refused a place to live because she is not married. The heartache continues in two tales of parent and child. *St Elmo* takes a raw if uninventive look at the loss of a parent, whilst *Generation Mars* is an intriguing tale as well as an emotional kick in the teeth. In the not too distant future, we are able to send people to Mars (but not bring them back) and therefore colonise it. How to pick the people to send up into space? In this day and age the answer is obvious: a reality show. Whilst far from subtle, it is a compelling, thoughtful watch.

Thankfully, there was some more hope and lightness elsewhere in this screening. Alice Cogin's sweet, uplifting film *The Finish Line* stars one of the festival's biggest stars in the shape of Dominic West. He plays a paraplegic man who befriends a charming boy with Down's Syndrome. It is heartfelt and well-suited to the short-running time. Rounding out the bunch is the entertaining oddity *The Stroke*. It is a wordless tale of an exacting, agoraphobic man whose world is challenged by the arrival of a cat. Set to music, this short is as much choreographed as it is directed, so props must be given to Morgane Polanski for producing one of the slighter, but most memorable films of the festival so far.



2 comments

Johanna Saper

9 Nov '18 at 1:43 pm

Very good review. She was able to compare with ancient practices the average person doesn't see.

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Harris Kliskey

10 Nov '18 at 12:58 am

AMAZING review! Sounds like lots of fascinating films.

[Report](#)

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