All about European film

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Giulia Privitelli *interviews* ***Sarah Chircop*** *about her experience on the jury that was in charge of selecting the winner of the Venice Days Award, part of the historic Venice Film Festival.*

Last year, I had the opportunity to take part in the 72nd edition of the Venice Film Festival as a 28 Times Cinema jury member â?? an initiative supported by the European Parliament. This initiative is now in its seventh year, and this yearâ??s Maltese representative was Sarah Chircop. In this interview, she shares her experience as this yearâ??s 28 Times Cinema and Lux Film Prize Maltese ambassador.

What is the 28 Times Cinema initiative and how did you come to know about it?

young people from every European country between the ages of 18 and 25 are selected and invited to Venice to experience the oldest film festival in Europe.

The 28 members essentially form part of a unique jury who are in charge of selecting the winner of the Venice Days Award. With each year, the initiative demonstrates a consistent interest in arthouse cinema and independent film by the younger generation.

I remember that you yourself had mentioned this initiative a while back, and encouraged me to apply through Spazju Kreattiv. In turn, I encourage every young cinephile who happens to be reading this to the same next year.

What was it like being part of this yearâ??s jury?

Well, the beauty of this jury is its versatility and diversity. We were 28 different people sharing different thoughts and ideas, different academic backgrounds and of course cultures.

And, the more time spent together and discussed as a jury, the more our differences were revealed, as well as our similarities. But all in all, I tried to keep an open and inquisitive mind, questioning as much as possible even though the days were long and tiring making it quite difficult at times.

But did you meet any other actors or directors as a 28 Times jury member? I remember exchanging a word or two with Elit Iscan from Mustang and Ondina Quadri from Arianna , as well as the director of Mediterranea, Jonas Carpignano at the Villa degli Autoriâ?¦

The red carpet was always rolling on star after star. I attended the premiere of The Bleeder, starring Liev Schreiber who was awarded the Persol Tribute to Visionary Talent Award 2016, which was cool.

But honestly, I was much more moved to sit in the same room as the directors of The War Show, this yearâ??s winner of the Venice Days Award, and to later meet the producers too. A personal favourite director, Luca Guadagnino, was also there with a film called Ombre dal Fondo and we did get to have the director of a film called Boys in Trees DJ at our closing party, which was crazy fun.

Apart from all the film-watching, naturally, celebrity-snooping and the parties, what other activities were you involved in throughout the two weeks of the festival?

Honestly, there were times youâ??d be at a panel and all you can think of is whether Cate Blanchett would be gracing the red carpet at some point. She didnâ??t, much to my disappointment.

bating, we also had to select and attend a workshop. I chose the Active Cinemagoers Workshop, led by Irene Angel, where we learnt what it takes to be an active cinemagoer and what is involved in organising a film festival through discussing renowned case studies and then working together to imagine our own festival.

Other workshops included Film Criticism, Radio Film Journalism, Seeing and Translating Cinema and Social Networks & Film Festivals. Besides these workshops, we also attended various panels on the

European Parliament, Virtual Reality, Biennale College Films, War on Screen and The Selection Process in Film Festivals. There was also the Miu Miu Womenâ??s Tales, where female filmmakers and actors discussed their work and experiences. Guests included actresses Juno Temple and Dakota Fanning.

Sounds like you had plenty to keep you busy! In fact, in a nutshell, what was a typical day for a 28 Times jury member like?

My day would always start withâ?¦ you guessed itâ?¦ an espresso. The hours of sleep I managed to rack up determined the number of these said espressos. But I loved waking up early to a hungover Lido and go about searching for a different bar to properly come to my senses. The croissant was as important, might I add.

Once the caffeine was in my system I would usually meet up with some of the group to get tickets for a film we wished to see out of the Venice Days selection then head to our first â??compulsoryâ?? screening of the day. Lunch was either a quick bite at the Lionâ??s Bar right in the heart of the festival area before heading off to a workshop, panel discussion or another film but sometimes there was also time for a sit down meal before resuming more movie-watching.

Once our compulsory activities were done for the day, weâ??d usually try to catch even more films, watch the celebrities gracing the red carpet and maybe even manage an Aperol spritz â?? and most of the time we did. The day almost always ended, at least for me, with an ice cream.

A post jury meeting.

Back to your role as jury member. What was the Venice Days selection like this year? Was there a unifying theme?

This year, 12 feature films were selected as part of the Venice Days programme; these were our priority and responsibility to watch and think about for jury discussions presided by Canadian artist, Bruce la Bruce.

As with each year, Venice Days aims to focus on the rich variety of different cultures and nations, to look both to the future and the past and allow for a young and curious audience to play an active role.

The Mississippi Mermaid was the star of this yearâ??s posters, stressing the achievements of women in the film industry today, while also presenting, and I quote: â??an emblem of an ever-changing cinema that stirs our emotions and fears instead of soothing us.â?•

The jury selected the Syrian film The War Show by Andreas Dalsgaard and Obaidah Zytoon as the winner of the award for this year. What was the juryâ??s statement, yours included, for choosing this film?

The War Show. Yes. Well, it was clear to most of us from the start that there was no real contender against this film. It provoked an impassioned response, to say the least, from the Jury. It presented sensitive and violent content in such an effective way yet it was not solely through its content that it won our vote but the way in which it was presented; through a series of powerful images portraying life and death.

Although some deliberated on whether it belonged alongside the rest of the Venice Days selection, which was comprised of narrative fiction features, it was ultimately recognised as an outstanding crafted piece of cinema. It succeeds in painting a truthful picture of the political and societal portrait of Syria and of â??a war which is defining a conflict of timeâ?•. It is with sadness that I urge all of you to experience The War Show, yet I fear the necessity of making another a film like this.

Political and social content is also central to the films presented for the Lux Film Prize which, I am to understand, you are also representing this year.

Yes. Toni Erdmann, As I Open My Eyes and Ma Vie de Courgette are the three finalists vying for the Lux Prize this year â?? all brilliant films in their own right. As a Lux Film ambassador, my role actually started once I returned to Malta.

Having represented Spazju Kreattiv, which manages Maltaâ??s only specialised art-house cinema in St James Cavalier, I am to promote these European films locally, while also contributing to bringing Europeâ??s cinematic soul closer to Europeans. The films are subtitled with the 24 official EU languages, enabling them to travel and be screened in more than 50 cities and 20 festivals across Europe.

The team's first day in Venice.

You speak of European film â?? how would you define such a film, if you could?

Through this experience, I have come to understand European Film as an art form which essentially tries to unite Europe by telling European stories, a form of cinema that focuses on cultural values and intercultural dialogue.

However, I feel that it is actually quite hard to rightly define European cinema and perhaps its nature is something free from the constraints of a technical description, but is rather something which should be left to be whatever it needs to be.

Would you say European cinema is sufficiently represented in Malta?

Spazju Kreattiv is part of the Europa Cinemas network and has recently launched their new cinema programme which includes quite a varied selection of films, including the screening of Lux Prize nominated films such as Lâ??Avenir which was actually one of the 10 shortlisted films for this yearâ??s Lux Prize.

This year, Spazju Kreattiv will also be participating in the first edition of European Art Cinema Day taking place today. There is also the Kinemastik Short Film Festival which promotes European Cinema and, of course, the Valletta Film Festival which debuted its second edition last June with a large selection of European as well as international films. I see this festival fast becoming one of the most attractive in the Mediterranean region.

Any final words to potential future Maltese 28 Times Cinema and Lux Film Ambassadors out there?

Just go for it. Itâ??s an experience that will truly stimulate your mind, enter your heart, and settle permanently into that cosy little home called memory. Letâ??s keep cinema alive and letâ??s keep European cinema the place to carry on recognising and celebrating different cultures.

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