AFI FEST 2021: Strong Female Leads

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

The AFI FEST 2021 program is filled to the brim with powerful, outspoken, and resilient women characters in both shorts and features. These women go beyond the classification of mother, daughter, sister, or wife â?? some band together to form a Christian girl gang (MEDUSA), others bond over the shared desire to express their struggles through making films (CINEMA SABAYA). In each, you will find not a one-dimensional stereotype but a fully realized, complex human being. Whether the strength is quiet, as in VERA DREAMS OF THE SEA and PRAYERS FOR THE STOLEN, or boisterous, as in UNCLENCHING THE FISTS and HOLY EMY, the women in these films are not to be messed with.



ALI & AVA

Ali and Ava each live lonely lives in North Britain. Ali, a British Pakistani, is a former DJ turned compassionate landlord who meets Ava, an Irish-born schoolteacher and single mother of five while picking up one of his tenantâ??s children from school. Despite their differences, sparks start to fly. As Ali and Avaâ??s relationship grows deeper, the shadows of their emotional turmoil and societyâ??s expectations of them build as well. Can they find a way to keep their love alive?

This contemporary working-class romance â?? filled with rich and tender performances from Claire Rushbrook and Adeel Akhtar â?? is a charming and heartwarming portrait of love, beauty, and acceptance. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 7:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



AL-SIT

In a cotton farming village in Sudan, Nafisa has a crush on Babiker, but her parents have arranged her marriage to Nadir, a young Sudanese businessman. Can Nafisa choose for herself? Screening as part of Shorts Program 5. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 13, 4:45 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 11, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



ARE YOU STILL THERE?

On a hot day, Safaâ??s car battery dies, leaving her stranded in a strip mall parking lot. When her mom arrives, the two struggle to jump-start a car. Screening as part of Shorts Program 3. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 9:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 11, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



BRUISED

World Premiere

Jackie Justice (Halle Berry) is a mixed martial arts fighter who leaves the sport in disgrace. Down on her luck and simmering with rage and regret years after her fight, sheâ??s coaxed into a brutal underground fight by her manager and boyfriend Desi and grabs the attention of a fight league promoter who promises Jackie a life back in the octagon. But the road to redemption becomes unexpectedly personal when Mannyâ?? the son she gave up as an infant â?? shows up at her doorstep.

Marking the directorial debut of Academy AwardÂ® winner Halle Berry, BRUISED is a triumphant story of a fighter who reclaims her power, in and out of the ring, when everyone has counted her out. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 13, 7:30 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



CINEMA SABAYA

Rona is teaching a film class to a diverse group of eight women. The class becomes the catalyst for deeper discovery as these women bond over their shared experiences. While completing the exercises and assignments, the issues of modern-day Israel and Palestine are exposed, leaving the students no choice but to acknowledge and confront them. Inspired by writer/director Orit Fouks Rotemâ??s own experiences as a teacher, the film provides no easy answers to the complex circumstances these women face. The film moves effortlessly between the weight of the conversations and the genuine joy of this unlikely community. CINEMA SABAYA is as complex as it is powerful â?? a feat for a first-time director â?? and shines a light on how unifying art can be, even in the most contentious of situations. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 3:30 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



EL CARRITO

World Premiere

Nelly slogs through another unsuccessful day of street vending in Queens, New York. Determined to improve her circumstances, she makes a risky business decision that ends in misfortune. Screens as part of Shorts Program 4. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 13, 2:15 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 11, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



GOOD MADAM

South African auteur and AFI FEST alum Jenna Cato Bass (HIGH FANTASY) delivers a haunting, psychological thriller steeped in remnants of postcolonialism and apartheid. Tsidi (Chumisa Cosa) and her daughter must move in with her estranged mother, Mavis (Nosipho Mtebe), a domestic housekeeper who has worked for her â??Madamâ?• Diane since Tsidi was a young girl. While living in Dianeâ??s large and foreboding house, Tsidi is appalled with her motherâ??s extreme dedication and servitude even after all these years. Gradually, Tsidiâ??s daughter and then Tsidi herself become submissive to the whims of the rarely seen Madam. Co-written and produced with collaborator Babalwa Baartman, Bass employs stylish imagery and an ominous tone to bring this chilling narrative to life. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 13, 5:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



HAPPENING (Lâ??Ã?VÃ?NEMENT)

Following the theatrical screening, watch a special conversation with director Audrey Diwan moderated by AFI FEST Programmer Julia Kipnis.

In Audrey Diwanâ??s Golden Lion award-winning feature adapted from Annie Ernauxâ??s autobiographical novel, Anamaria Vartolomei delivers a breakout performance as Anne, a young woman studying literature in 1960s France. While on the path to sexual liberation, Anne discovers that she is pregnant â?? an occurrence her friends liken to a death sentence in a country where abortion is stigmatized and illegal. Determined not to let her life and academic ambitions be derailed by an unexpected pregnancy, Anne desperately searches in secret for a solution to her predicament. Anchored by supporting turns from Sandrine Bonnaire (VAGABOND) and LuÃ na Bajrami (PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE), this poignant and timely film does not shy away from the brutal realities many women must endure when left without a choice. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 9:30 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



HOLY EMY

North American Premiere

Largely keeping to themselves after their mother is forced to leave Athens and return to the Philippines, Emy and Teresa live a simple, quiet life centered around attending mass, working in a fish market, and avoiding the locals. But soon the outside world encroaches as Teresa begins seeing a Greek co-worker and Mrs. Christina, their motherâ??s former boss, lures Emy into working as a caregiver, a ruse to tap into Emyâ??s very unique, and very ancient, gifts. When Teresaâ??s boyfriend sees Emy crying tears of blood, she runs the risk of her abilities being exposed, sending her on a shocking trajectory in this whip-smart feature debut â?? a potent and visceral tale of race, class, and tradition filtered through the body and social horror â?? from filmmaker Araceli Lemos. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 14, 7:30 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



HUDAâ??S SALON

Following the theatrical screening, watch a special conversation with director Hany Abu-Assad moderated by AFI Festivals Programmer Eric Moore.

HUDAâ??S SALON centers on the complex friction in the West Bank between the Palestinian resistance and the Israeli occupation. In this tense and harrowing drama, Reem, mother of a newborn baby and wife to a distrusting husband, gets her hair cut at Hudaâ??s Salon one fateful day. There, Huda blackmails Reem into betraying their Palestinian community by providing intel to the Israeli Secret Service. The very next day Huda is found out by the resistance and Reemâ??s blackmail photo is discovered. So begins the parallel narratives of Hudaâ??s interrogation and Reemâ??s search for a way to escape her fate. Masterfully crafted by the renowned, Academy AwardÂ®-nominated filmmaker and FEST alum Hany Abu-Assad (OMAR; PARADISE NOW), HUDAâ??S SALON reveals with disturbing candor the plight of Palestinian women striving to survive while being trapped on all sides. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 10:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



LINGUI, THE SACRED BOND

Following the theatrical screening, watch a special conversation with director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun moderated by AFI FEST Programmer Julia Kipnis.

In a complex story of generational struggle, Amina is exiled from her family for being an unwed single mother. She lives on the outskirts of Nâ??Djamena with her now teenage daughter, Maria. When history repeats itself and Maria is expelled from her Islamic-based girlâ??s school after discovering she is pregnant, Amina is forced to revisit her own life journey. Despite abortion being illegal in Chad and forbidden in Islam, Maria is decisive about ending the pregnancy and Amina is determined to support her no matter the cost.

Acclaimed director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun returns to AFI FEST with a powerful and vivid story of two women on a journey together, navigating the complex and fragile fabric of female support within a patriarchal society. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 11, 7:15 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



MEDUSA

Anita Rocha da Silveira (KILL ME PLEASE) returns to AFI FEST with MEDUSA, a modern horror-satire that fiercely critiques evangelical fanaticism in Brazil which draws eerie comparisons to American society. Mariana (played with verve by Mari Oliveira) is part of a Christian girl gang that roughs up women they deem to be sinners and posts humiliating videos of their repentance to social media. Mariana is on a mission to find the ultimate sinner, Melissa, a liberated woman whoâ??s gone missing. MEDUSA pays homage to Argento-esque supernatural horror and is a clever play on tropes surrounding the eponymously fabled creature. With an infectious score and a vibrant aesthetic, da Silveira continues her streak of merging the darkly morbid with the sublimely feminine. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 13, 8:30 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



MEMORIA

Colombia Official International Feature Film OscarÂ® Submission

While visiting BogotÃ¡, Colombia, Jessica (Tilda Swinton), a Scottish orchid farmer grappling with deep existential unease, becomes tormented by a sound only she can hear: the heavy thud of a falling metal ball. But when a sound engineer recreates the noise, Jessica finds that communicating the unplaceable sound in her head does not mitigate her own intense feelings of displacement. Continuing to seek answers, she travels to the mountains to meet with an archeologist researching ritual deaths, but an encounter with a local fisherman instead suggests she look to the skies and the land for answers. Inspired by the filmmakerâ??s own experience suffering from â??exploding head syndrome,â?• MEMORIA is confounding and transfixing, an intriguing addition to the filmography of Apichatpong Weerasethakul (UNCLE BOONMEE WHO CAN RECALL HIS PAST LIVES) and a deserved co-winner of the Jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 14, 2:45 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



ONLY THE MOON STANDS STILL (æ??æ??ä¾•æ?§)

Three generations of Chinese women say goodbye to their family ballroom dance studio. Executive produced by Lena Waithe, starring Shirley Chen and Mardy Ma. Screens as part of Shorts Program 3. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person as part of Shorts Program 3 | November 12, 9:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 11, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



PARALLEL MOTHERS

Spanish auteur Pedro AlmodÃ³varâ??s latest film follows two women Janis and Ana (both single mothers) from the moment they give birth to two daughters. Janis is thrilled by her accidental

pregnancy, seeing it as perhaps her last chance at motherhood, while the adolescent Ana is scared and traumatized by the ordeal.

AlmodÃ³var masterfully weaves the drama of these two women around the complexity, anxiety and passion that comes with motherhood. With the birth of their daughters, Janis and Ana have a unique link and are drawn closer by the lack of support from others in their world. But this bond unravels in complicated and surprising ways that neither of them expected. PARALLEL MOTHERS is a powerful exploration of how generations and families are held together amongst the greatest challenges. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 13, 2:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



PETITE MAMAN

After the death of her grandmother, eight-year-old Nelly goes to her motherâ??s childhood home as her parents sort through the estate. Nelly explores the nearby woods where her mother, Marion, used to play as a child and finds the tree fort sheâ??s heard stories about for years. After Nellyâ??s mother suddenly leaves the next morning, Nelly meets a girl her own age in the woods, building a fort. Following her masterpiece film PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE, CÃ©line Sciamma crafts an enchanting and poetic coming-of-age story. Modest and poignant in its approach, PETITE MAMAN beautifully explores grief, memory and imagination through a childâ??s eyes. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 13, 1:15 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 13, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



PRAYERS FOR THE STOLEN (NOCHE DE FUEGO)

Mexico Official International Feature Film OscarÂ® Submission

Neorealism is at its grittiest in this devastating narrative debut from documentary filmmaker Tatiana Huezo (TEMPESTAD). Ana lives in the mountains of Mexico where the violence of the drug cartel looms in the background and forces a rotation of teachers to flee from danger. When a local girl suddenly disappears, Ana and her two best friends must cut their hair short and wear baggy clothes to avoid being kidnapped. Despite this constant threat, the girls grow up together in a refuge of nature. Actresses Ana Cristina OrdÃ³Ã±ez GonzÃ¡lez and Marya MembreÃ±o give gripping performances as the protagonist at different ages. Huezo crafts a tour de force that is bold and uncanny in its depiction of girlhood in the menace of modern-day. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 14, 4:15 p.m.| Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



SALES PER HOUR

SALES PER HOUR tells the story of a young woman who faces a moral dilemma when she witnesses a sexual encounter at the clothing store where she works. Screens as part of Shorts Program 3. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 9:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 11, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



SANDSTORM

Zara shares a sensual dance video with her virtual boyfriend, who blackmails her. She begins her search for the strength to reject the confines of a patriarchal society. Screens as part of Shorts Program 2. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 6:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 11, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



A SUMMER PLACE

On the day of Tinaâ??s birthday, she is ready to give up on everything until an extraordinary encounter changes her life. Screens as part of Shorts Program 1. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 3:00 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 11, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



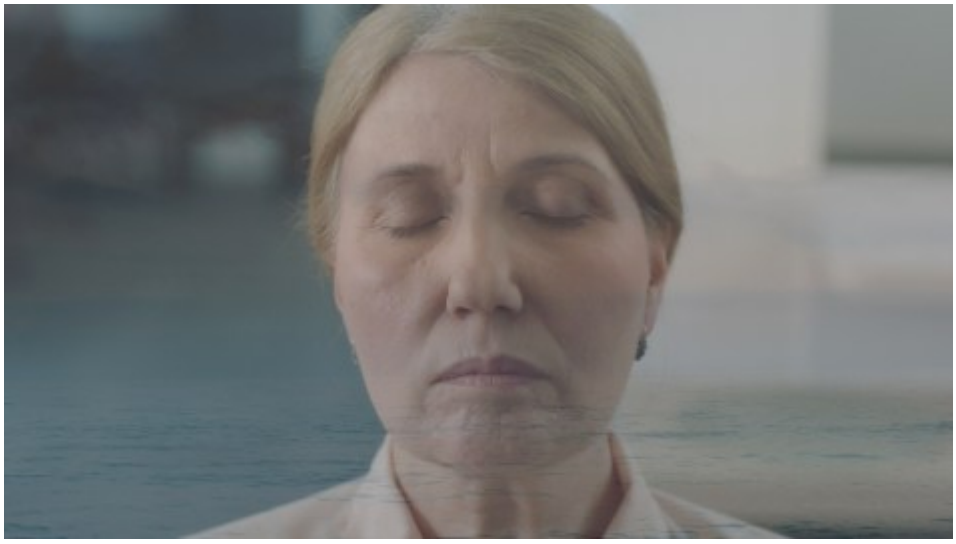
UNCLENCHING THE FISTS (RAZZHIMAYA KULAKI)

Russia Official International Feature Film OscarÂ® Submission

Following the theatrical screening, watch a special conversation with director Kira Kovalenko moderated by AFI Festivals Programmer Malin Kan.

In a remote North Caucasus mining town, Ada is coming of age in a deeply dysfunctional family isolated by the men that surround her: a clingy younger brother, a detached older brother and an ailing, demanding father. Having suppressed her own needs and enduring physical pain to the point of desperation, the welcome attentions of a local boy present the possibility of new experiences, and a potential escape. However, as Ada gets a taste of a better life, family tensions mount and her desperate urge to break free conflicts with a deep distrust of others and the increasing demands of a tyrannical father. A worthy recipient of the Un Certain Regard award at the Cannes Film Festival, Russian newcomer Kira Kovalenko delivers a raw, visceral experience, and the film is filled with harshly beautiful performances certain to leave audiences shaken and moved. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 12, 9:45 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



VERA DREAMS OF THE SEA (VERA ANDRRON DETIN)

North American Premiere

Following the virtual screening, watch a special conversation with director Kaltrina Krasniqi moderated by AFI Festivals Associate Programmer Cedar Sherbert.

Unassuming sign language interpreter Vera (Teuta Ajdini) lives a quiet life alongside retired husband Fatmir in their modest Pristina apartment. Happy to be a vessel for others to navigate the world, her hopes for her daughter and granddaughterâ??s future are intrinsically linked to the familyâ??s newly valuable country house. But when her husband takes his own life and his cousin Ahmet begins insisting that Fatmir had promised him the rural home, Vera suddenly finds herself trapped in a deeply patriarchal culture where the word of men is final. Unyielding to increasingly violent pressure, Vera discovers how deep the corruption in menâ??s hearts can run, as well as the strength to stand her ground in this taut drama from director Kaltrina Krasniqi. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 13, 7:30 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)

Virtual screening available beginning November 13, 12:00 p.m. PST | Buy Virtual Ticket(s)



THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD

Norway Official International Feature Film OscarÂ® Submission

Julie is experiencing an existential crisis of life and love. Sheâ??s altered her career path a handful of times and begins dating Aksel, an older and successful graphic novelist. As time goes on, Julie bristles against his need to settle down. When Julie crashes a party one night, she meets the charming and equally carefree Eivind and throws herself into a new relationship with vigor.

The latest film by Norwegian filmmaker Joachim Trier (THELMA, LOUDER THAN BOMBS) is a wry and at times melancholy romance, portraying a young woman navigating her way through her evolving identity, happiness, and mistakes. THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD reminds us how quickly life can pass us by and to make the most of every opportunity in it. Learn more about the film.

Screening in-person | November 11, 9:15 p.m. | Buy In-Person Ticket(s)



With health and safety being a top priority, AFI FEST 2021 will require all festival-goers who attend in-person events and/or screenings to be fully vaccinated. Learn more about AFIâ??s annual film festival celebrating the best in global cinema at FEST.AFI.com.

Individual tickets and passes to AFI FEST 2021 are currently available on FEST.AFI.com. AFI Members receive exclusive discounts and benefits to the festival. To become an AFI member, visit AFI.com/join/.

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(Sourced from: AFI News)

Category

1. television

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