East European Film Bulletin

EDITORIAL

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Editorial

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Last month, EEFB was at the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) to cover the event for the third time in a row. While we welcomed the jury's founded decision to award *Child's Pose* by Romanian director Calin Peter Netzer with the festival's main prize, there were also far less agreeable aspects to this year's edition which shouldn't be ignored.

True to the Festival's tradition, political cinema dominated the 2013 selection. This feature, once seen as the single weakness of the festival, has long become constitutive of its profile. This is hardly surprising: with around 400 films screened a year (in comparison, the Cannes Film Festival selects under a hundred films a year – this includes the parallel selections of the Critic's Week and the Directors' Fortnight), a theme seems necessary to create a recognizable selection pattern. The historic focus on sexual minorities is thus supplemented by a preoccupation with films that uncover social, political and economic hardship. This in itself is creditable: cinema can and should play a humanitarian role in and outside the place where it originates. But there are problems that go hand in hand with the Berlinale's obsession with political correctness. Firstly, the political quota visibly harms the artistic quality of the selection which, at the Berlinale, is notoriously low for a festival of its prestige and scope (for this problem to be fixed, the number of films would surely have to be reduced, too). Secondly, many countries which lack a contemporary film language use the "political ticket" to get into international festivals by allocating funds to films which are prefabricated for the Western festival circuit (*Cirkus Columbia*, *In the Land of Blood and Honey*, *Ordinary People*). Not only does this bolster the development of cut and dried styles – it also hinders those who are trying to counter this development from making films (of course, we must also blame filmmakers for exploiting this constellation, but in the end it is festivals like the Berlinale that create the demand). Finally, the reserved and uncritical stance of political festivals towards some of the topics discussed can mis- or underrepresent the problems which it hopes to address (*Before the Rain*, *In Bloom*, *Maradona by Kusturica*).

EEFB received an invitation to the press meeting of SHOOTING STARS 2013, a series of events co-hosted by the European Film Promotion and the Berlinale which aims to promote upcoming acting talents. As indicated on the front page under her name, one of the actresses selected for this year's program originates from the Republic of Kosovo. This information about the personal background of the actress was complemented with an appendix that stated that "this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence." In many ways, this note is typical of the Berlinale, a context in which EU-inspired political correctness dictates the rhetoric. Evidently, the organizers wanted to comply with the international recognition of Kosovo without angering those who don't, an attempt which points to an evident contradiction. If the Berlinale accepts the challenge of becoming a truly political festival, it should learn to be more critical and literate when it comes to political questions. *In Bloom*, a Georgian Berlinale entry, shows either how little programmers expect from "political" films, or how little they understand of the politics of countries represented at the festival. If the Berlinale is really committed to its philosophy, this should also show in the way it handles selections: if a country's filmmakers lack both artistic vision and films with a truly critical stance, selecting less, or even no films, may be a more productive means of supporting that country.

In spite of these problems, there are, it seems, three factors which preserve a certain quality standard. Firstly, the reliance on an independent jury. Secondly, the immense reputation which, though not fully deserved, constantly draws in a dozen of high-quality pieces. And thirdly, the great and diverse community which travels to Berlin to take part in an event which creates opportunities for a great deal of people and organizations – including EEFB. On this more positive note, we invite our readers to visit our Berlinale page which features all our reviews and interviews from this year's edition. This month, we conclude our coverage with a review of *For Marx...* by Svetlana Baskova, whom we also *interviewed*. Also from the Berlinale, Colette de Castro's analysis of Hermann Kosterlitz's *Peter* which was screened in the Retrospective section.

We continue our focus on Hungary with another critical study of a Miklós Jancsó film. Moritz Pfeifer discusses Existentialism in his 1964 film *Cantata*. Finally, Alina Popescu reports from Romania about *Chasing Rainbows*.

EEFB editors
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