9 April 2019

**Of Animals and Men**

**International documentary film competition at the 59th Krakow Film Festival.**

**An Israeli lawyer defending Palestinian terrorists, a Serbian writer acting as a spokesperson to the Aborigines, Polish refugees who find shelter in Africa and to top it off stories about humans and animals who share one fate. Each year, the Krakow Film Festival international documentary film competition showcases the most electrifying stories and the most fascinating protagonists from all over the world.**

"Several of the competition documentaries is sure to complicate the viewer's image of the world. Their subject are the walls that we put up in our own heads, the life that we live in the shadows of gone wars and the resurrected ghosts of our past - sometimes scary, sometimes grotesquely funny. In our competition we’ve found a place both for the films of masters as well as works of the debutantes, the observation of reality and creative documentaries, as well as a completely new genre of documentary" comments Anita Piotrowska, the Festival's selector.

The competition selection includes two Polish productions. The first will open this year's Festival. "The wind. A Documentary Thriller" directed by Michał Bielawski observes how the destructive wind blows trough Podhale and disrupts the life of its inhabitants, influences the wellbeing animals and leaves lasting wounds in nature. The second Polish title "Of Animals and Men" directed by Łukasz Czajka, is a dramatic story, full of fascinating archive materials, following the Żabińscy, a married couple who hid over 300 escapees from the Jewish ghetto in the Warsaw Zoo. They gave them shelter until the break of the Warsaw Uprising, when the house of wild animals stopped being an asylum to the debased, Jewish human wrecks.

The Israeli films have a strong representation at this year's Festival. "Advocate" (dir. Rachel Lech Jones, Philippe Bellaiche) is a film portrait of an exceptional lawyer, who devoted her whole professional life to the fight for human rights. Lea Tsemel, an Israeli woman, have been endangering her own life as well as the lives of her family for the past 50 years with her tireless court defense of Palestinians accused of being terrorists. Unes, the protagonist of the "Around The Bed of A Dying Collaborator" (dir. David Ofek, Tal Michael) is considered to be a traitor by his kinsmen, just like Lea. Years ago he brought shame to his Arab family when he agreed to co-operate with the Israeli secret service. In the face of death he struggles with fear, shame and guilt.

In turn, the protagonist of the " Mussolini's Sister " (dir. Juna Sulieman) has lived for so many years, that her biography could be shared among several Arab women. Although she lives enclosed in four walls, she is still trying to control the world. The old lady from Nazareth has not yet said her final word and she presents her own, only right views trough the lens of her granddaughter.

The mayor of the Calabrian city Riace in the document " But Now Is Perfect " (dir. Carin Goeijers) found a way to deal with the depopulation of his town: he allowed for the refugees to settle there. When the authorities stopped financing his model project it led to the destruction of the newly created community. One of the tragic victims of this change was a young Nigerian woman. In "The Border Fence", directed by the outstanding Austrian documentary filmmaker Nikolaus Geyrhalter, we get to see the picturesque and idyllic Tyrol, which became the scenery of changes taking place in today's Europe in connection with the closing of the border between Austria and Italy, to stop the influx of refugees. From the relations of the inhabitants of this region as well as the tourists, emerges an image that is quite different from the media reports.

Jonathan Kolodziej Durand, director of the documentary " Memory Is Our Homeland " tells a story about refugees from a different perspective, set in another era, with the help of unpublished archives and personal film diaries. He sets out with a camera on a journey, filled with mystery and insinuation, following in the footsteps of his Polish grandmother, one of the millions deported to Siberia during the Second World War and one of the tens of thousands who traveled through half of the world in order to find shelter in Eastern Africa. Nowadays, on the outskirts of New York, among the tons of used plastic, other emigrants live their lives. They are a couple of outcasts, heroes of the " The Fourth Kingdom" (dir. Àlex Lora Cercós, Adan Aliaga), who did not fulfill their "American dream". Working on waste segregation, they wonder about the nature of the Universe, they reminisce about their weaknesses and failures, they nurse homeless kittens and ... they still dream, accompanied by the theater scenes of a troupe the Children Theater.

The dirty, rubbish filled streets of Calcutta are the living space of other eccentrics. "Pariah Dog" (dir. Jesse Alk) shows several caretakers of Indian street dogs. A sad but at the same time uplifting world emerges from these kaleidoscopic images. Serbian writer Sreten Božić is a bit of a different weirdo("Wongar" dir. Andrijan Stojko), who looks after six tamed dingo dogs and looks for close contact with nature and those who have left, away from the hustle and bustle of civilization.

"Kabul, City in the Wind" (dir. Aboozar Amini) is one of the most troubled cities in the world, that tries to live normally despite it all. In parallel threads, we meet Abas' driver, whose bus is often broken, and two boys who have to deal with their father's absence. This contemporary portrait of Afghans corresponds in a very exciting way with the world of American veterans of the war in Afghanistan, whose stories are filled with pain and trauma that we will encounter in the movie "Stress" directed by Florian Baron.

A 30-year-old man from a small village in the north of Iran is the hero of the movie "A House for You" (dir. Mahdi Bakhshi Moqadam). In spite of life tragedies, fatal illness and bankruptcy, he makes new, life-changing decisions. The protagonists of the Argentine documentary " Cerro Quemado " (dir. Juan Pablo Ruiz) embark on a journey in search of their grandmother and mother - the last settler of an abandoned region and rediscover their Inca roots on the forgotten lands of their ancestors.

"Heat singers" directed by Nadia Parfan follows a thermal energy enterprise from Ivano-Frankivsk, which cares about the cultural needs of its employees. Once a week they can break away from their daily routine, dilapidated infrastructure and strenuous clients to take part in the company's choir rehearsals. The folk and patriotic songs that they sing become a bridge between the past communist era and the new political and economic reality. They help to ease the shock of transformation and allow them hyst ti be with each other – just like in the good old days.

Krakow Film Festival is the only festival in Poland included in very prestigious group of festivals qualifying for an Academy Award Oscar in the category of full-length documentaries. It is also a part of renowned group of festivals recommending full-length documentary films for the European Film Awards. The festival is accredited by the FIAPF and the EFFE Label.

List of films qualified for the documentary competition:

● “Adwokatka” / “Advocate”, dir. Rachel Leah Jones, Philippe Bellaiche, 110’, Israel, Canada, Switzerland, 2019

● “Chór ciepłowników” / “Heat Singers”, dir. Nadia Parfan, 64’, Ukraine, 2019

● “Czwarte królestwo” / “The Fourth Kingdom”, dir. Àlex Lora Cercós, Adan Aliaga, 83’, Spain, USA, Mexico, 2019

● “Dom dla ciebie” / “A House for You”, dir. Mahdi Bakhshi Moqadam, 70’, Iran, 2019

● “Granica” / “The Border Fence”, dir. Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 112’, Austria, 2018

● “Kabul, miasto na wietrze” / “Kabul, City in the Wind”, dir. Aboozar Amini, 85’, Holland, Afganistan, Germany, Japan, 2018

● “Miasto psów” / “Pariah Dog”, dir. Jesse Alk, 77’, USA, 2019

● “Naszą ojczyzną jest pamięć” / “Memory Is Our Homeland”, dir. Jonathan Kolodziej Durand, 90’, Canada, 2018

● “O zwierzętach i ludziach” / “Of Animals and Men”, dir. Łukasz Czajka, 55’, Poland, 2019

● “Przy łóżku kolaboranta” / “Around the Bed of a Dying Collaborator”, dir. David Ofek, Tal Michael, 51’, Israel, 2018

● “Siostra Mussoliniego” / “Mussolini's Sister”, dir. Juna Sulieman, 71’, Israel, 2018

● “Spalone wzgórze” / “Cerro Quemado”, dir. Juan Pablo Ruiz, 63’, Argentina, 2019

● “Stres” / “Stress”, dir. Florian Baron, 83’, Germany, USA, 2018

● “Teraz jest świetnie” / “But Now Is Perfect”, dir. Carin Goeijers, 55’, Holand, 2018

● “Wiatr. Thriller dokumentalny” / “The Wind. A Documentary Thriller”, dir. Michał Bielawski, 75’, Poland, Slovakia, 2019

● “Wongar” / “Wongar”, dir. Andrijana Stojković, 60’, Serbia, 2018

The 59th Krakow Film Festival will take place on May 26 - June 2, 2019

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