

continent to nurture one another in an industry that usually views them as outsiders. However, the festival doesn't generate enough buzz in the multicultural capital of Canada. Furthermore, Toronto film festivals take place in the downtown core, where clubs and restaurants are readily available for the press and attendees alike. Not the ReelWorld and despite a good mix of films at this year's festival, it is still

perceived as a mainly black film festival. More marketing and a better location would help matters and artistically ReelWorld's mandate remains unclear. Two major features—the riveting *Midnight Fly*, directed by Jacob Cheung, and Aparna Seu's *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer*—were made in Hong Kong and India, two of the biggest film markets in the world. Shouldn't ReelWorld lend a voice to filmmakers of colour who don't

get a break from the white mainstream? If so, then why program purely foreign films? Leave that to the Toronto International Film Festival.

I would like to see ReelWorld flourish, but it appears it has to endure more growing pains before it takes the film industry by storm.

Allan Tong is a Toronto-based filmmaker and freelance journalist.

Images

FESTIVAL

(4/10-19/03) BY ALLAN TONG

The 16th annual Images Festival ran in downtown Toronto from April 10 to 19. It's the artsy-fartsy festival: right-brained, underground, non-linear and *definitely* not Hollywood. These films ("movies" sounds inappropriate)—whether long or short, projected in cinemas or galleries—are about texture and aesthetics, not characters and stories. Music video producers and television-commercial houses mine this festival for new visual styles and innovative filmmakers, turning today's avant-garde into tomorrow's coffee commercial.

The opening night film was the trippy Japanese anime *Tamala 2010: A Punk Cat in Space*. From the first frame, *Tamala* sucks the viewer into a dazzling universe rendered in black and white but feeling as vivid as colour. We follow a cute, little feline who travels in space, sleeps a lot and casually drops the word "fuck" in the middle of sentences. The story has something to do with Catty & Co., a conglomerate that controls 96.72 per cent of the world's GDP, but is secretly an ancient cat cult. Detailed visuals hold our interest for most of the film but the story is a mess.

The acclaimed *Decasia* by American Bill Morrison is a disturbing pastiche of decaying nitrate films accompanied by a swirling dissonant symphony (scored by Michael Gordon). The images themselves are banal (i.e., children walking with nuns, people waltzing), but the overall effect is gripping. However, this 67-minute film is unrelied by any rise and

fall in dynamics, visually or musically, and overstays its welcome halfway.

The artist spotlight fell on Germany's Harun Farocki, whose impressive oeuvre was awarded a mini-retrospective. Farocki's documentaries chronicle the post-war psyche of Germany. *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* is a dry, yet disturbing 1988 study of Auschwitz. *How To Live in the German Federal Republic* from 1990 is the closest Farocki will ever get to a comedy. The film stitches together 30 scenes from instructional films about how to properly behave in public. The most striking scene was of a teacher repeatedly chastising a little boy for not looking at the street before stepping off the curb; very German. The vintage *Inextinguishable Fire* consists of Farocki



tamala 2010: a punk cat in space



tamala 2010: a punk cat in space

reading testimonials from Vietnamese napalm victims. Some 19 years later, Spalding Gray would attempt something similar in *Swimming to Cambodia*: delivering a static monologue, but adding music, lights and visuals.

Most Canadian films were shorts. Worth noting was award-winner *Post Mark Lick* by Sonia Bridge, a sumptuous four-minute concoction of old postage stamps assembled in “photo-gram” animation. Michael Steechy’s *Bubble Canopy* is an enchanting two films in one of spinning moiré patterns. Benjamin Ramsay’s *I Am a Boyband* is a homoerotic send-up of the Backstreet Boys et al. All featured good musical soundtracks.

Egoyan presented *Kalachnikov*, which suffers from the same criticism levelled at his film *Ararat*: that the massacre is told secondhand, keeping the audience at a cold distance. More personal was *Trying to Be Some Kind of Hero*, in which Canadian filmmaker Lester Alfonso returns to his Filipino roots to discover the true identity of his World War Two American G.I. father. Though competently told, *Hero* offers nothing new in terms of visual style or structure. It’s a straightforward video and feels out of place at Images.

The excellent *Brief Crossing* by France’s Catherine Breillat (*The Fat Girl*) suffers the same problem. It’s a

The Mediatheque Lounge across the lobby offered welcome relief from the sterile surroundings of the Innis Town Hall. Run by Toronto’s multimedia/art-happening collective, Instant Coffee, Mediatheque allowed people to stroll in, select a festival film on VHS and watch it on one of several monitors planted around the room illuminated by a spinning mirror ball. Many festival films originate in art galleries where the artwork is part of a larger milieu. Similarly, Mediatheque allowed the viewer’s eye to casually leap from one artwork to another, inviting comparison and contrast with other viewers.

The saving grace of the cavernous Innis Town Hall, however, is it allows musicians to accompany a film live. The highlight of the festival was Mark Hosler, who delivered an entertaining two-hour show and tell of his underground prankster band, Negativland. The San Francisco band is infamous for parodying corporate ideology through music videos, inspiring headlines and lawsuits (U2 sued them for parodying “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For”). Toronto new music ensemble, GUH, followed by performing experimental jazz to Méliès’s *A Trip to the Moon*, Kenneth Anger’s *Rabbit’s Moon* and other short films. At Latvian House, closing night’s mix of Sammo Hung’s martial arts flick, *The Prodigal Son*, with hip hop spun by DJ IXL and DJ Excess dazzled the audience.

Allan Tong is a Toronto-based filmmaker and freelance journalist.



post mark lick

Disappointing was the Canadian premiere of *I Love The Sound of the Kalachnikov*, *It Reminds Me of Tchaikovski*. Though it was named the festival’s Best International Video, *Kalachnikov* unsuccessfully straddles the line between personal film and documentary as it chronicles the “dislocation” of its author, Philippe Khazarian, and that of his people after the 1915 Armenian genocide. Atom

European art film stuck in the middle of an experimental film festival. There’s no doubting the power of this feature, which follows an affair between an embittered, older Englishwoman and a 16-year-old French boy as they cross the English Channel by ferry. But as a linear, character-based picture, what is *Brief Crossing* doing at Images?