

# The Montreal International Festival of New Cinema and New Media (10/11-10/21/01)

BY CLAIRE VALADE

This was a landmark year for many major Canadian film events. After the proper pomp and circumstance surrounding last year's Toronto International Film Festival's 25th anniversary and this year's Montreal World Film Festival's 25th edition, it was the Montreal International Festival of New Cinema and New Media's turn to celebrate its 30th anniversary with its own eclectic blend of funky style and highbrow programming.

Oddly, this year's film selection seemed set to a rather sombre mood. In fact, sandwiched between Québécois André Turpin's delightfully whimsical sophomore effort *Un Crabe dans la tête*, which opened the festival, and Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también*, the red-hot Mexican romp that closed the event, it did seem as if an unusual number of features delved into sexual, violent, perverse or simply weird and troubling territory. Not to be mistaken, many of these films were very powerful works such as Michael Haneke's Cannes winner *The Pianist* (France/Austria), a stark and disturbing plunge into a sado-masochistic relationship told with Haneke's characteristic detachment and clinical efficiency. Claire Denis's gory but strangely fascinating *Trouble Every Day* (France) was also an attention grabber. David Lynch was back in great form with *Mulholland Drive*, his latest twisted and hypnotizing phantasm, which played to sold-out audiences. Apart from these contemporary masters, a few startling newcomers also left their mark with equally destabilizing and grim works, such as Australian Andrew Dominik and his in-your-face, ultraviolent yet wickedly ironic *Chopper*, about a famous local serial killer/street philosopher, and France's Laurent Cantet who impressed both audiences and the feature film jury with his ascetic *L'Emploi du temps*, a remarkably non-judgmental and subtle piece of filmmaking painstakingly detailing one man's self-imposed double life and his inevitable descent into hell, which won the Louve d'Or, the grand prize of the festival.

Fortunately, there were also a few luminous and moving gems, even if their subjects were sometimes just as harsh or grave as the above-mentioned films. Canada's now famous Zacharias Kunuk and his acclaimed *Atarnajuat (The Fast Runner)* (the Festival's Prix du Public winner), is a strangely affecting film, if only for its well-paced elliptical narrative, its beautiful images and the window it opens onto Inuit culture. Up-and-coming filmmaker Bertrand Bonello also succeeded in making a touching film with *Le Pornographe* (France/Canada), thanks in great part to Jean-Pierre Léaud's irresistible charm and quirkiness. France's François Ozon gave the always exquisite Charlotte Rampling a sublime role as a grieving widow refusing to come to terms with her husband's disappearance in *Sous le sable*. *Ouarzazate Movie*, by Ali Essafi, takes a sarcastic and often hilarious look into the excesses of the film industry as seen from the point of view of the poor citizens of the Moroccan city of Ouarzazate, which has served for decades as the backdrop to many Hollywood and international epics.

Toronto documentarian Geoff Bowie offered a keen examina-

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tion of major filmmaker Peter Watkins at work in *The Universal Clock: The Resistance of Peter Watkins*. Frenchman Alain Escalle seduced everyone with his stunning 24-minute *Le Conte du monde flottant* (winner of the digital-work award), a poetic account of the bombing of Hiroshima, blending traditional 35mm filmmaking and high-tech 3-D animation. Canadian Stephanie Morgenstern impressed with her nostalgic and nuanced short film *Remembrance*, as did Brit Toby MacDonald with his brilliant short, *Je t'aime John Wayne*, a wonderfully delicious tribute to the French New Wave. Perhaps the most eagerly awaited film of the festival was Mohsen Makhmalbaf's timely piece *Kandahar* (Iran), starring Afghan-born Canadian journalist Nelofer Pazira who inspired the story and created quite a stir during her visit to the festival. A cinematic paradox, *Kandahar* examines a desperate, humanly unacceptable situation in a deeply moving, breathtakingly beautiful fashion.

The new media selection was just as strong. While the Media Lounge was packed every night for its now traditional "nightcap" events, many performances were also very well attended. Most noticeably, this year's winner of the new-media prize, Montreal-based artists collective [The User], continued to push the limits of technology in relation to artistic creation with their "Symphony #2 for Dot Matrix Printers." Steina Vasulka, subject of a well-deserved tribute for her pioneering work and founding, with her husband, Woody, New York City's legendary alternative art gallery The Kitchen, presented "Re\_Works," a selective retrospective of her work in video, installation and performance.

So, what is it exactly that brings important filmmakers, artists and newcomers as influential as Wim Wenders, Jacques Rivette, Abbas Kiarostami, Jonas Mekas, Béla Tarr, Albert Maysles, Monika Treut, Michael Snow, Nam June Paik, the Quay brothers, Werner Herzog, and so many others back to Montreal year after year? Perhaps it is the indelible feeling of belonging to one large happy family, which the festival has always created for its guests. Or, as Wenders himself put it in his preface to *Les Nouveaux cinémas*, the book of Jacques Dufresne photographs published to commemorate this 30th anniversary, it is because it's, quite simply, "the festival that cares."

TAKE ONE



Atarnajuat (The Fast Runner)