

Festival Review

Meena Karnik

Flying Broom Women’s Film Festival Ankara 2019 Exciting and Enriching Experience



Mania holding the Fipresci certificate with the juries, the organizers and the participants

“We are the grand daughters of those witches from the past, witches on the flying broom” - This is how the young girls from the organizing committee of the ‘Flying Broom International Women’s Film Festival’ in Ankara described themselves. Feminists to the core,

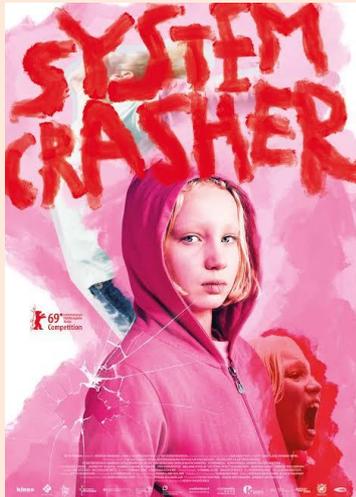
these young girls along with the veterans had complete clarity on the focus of this festival. Aware of the political atmosphere in their country, they never once showed any sign of fear or submission. They made the atmosphere electric, positive and full of energy.



Sarah (director Chaos) and Mania (director A Moon For My Father)

This was the 22nd year of the festival. The coming together of festival programmers from 5 continents for a four hour long session made the festival unique. They discussed the problems while organizing a women's film festival, the challenges they face and the way forward. There was Ghais from Creteil, Paris who is a part of Creteil International Film Festival which has been the pioneer since 1978. Leslie from Canada, Dorris and Omella from Lebanon, Floriane Kaneza from Rwanda Ana castro and Rita Capucho from Portugal, Antonella from Chile, Nicola from Marseille and our very own Nupur Basu and a few others. Also, there was an acting and film making workshop for the young girls in Ankara who participated in large number. A five minute film made by these girls was shown at the closing ceremony.

This year the festival had 1721 entries from around the world by women directors and 140 out of them were selected for screening. The Fipresci competition had 12 brand new films and documentaries shot in 2018 and 2019. It wasn't possible to watch many films apart from those in the competition, though we, Kristin Aalen from Norway and Sarah Skoric from Belgium as my co-juries, did manage to see a few. One must mention here that the task of the juries becomes very difficult when you need to judge a feature film and documentary simultaneously since the genre is diagonally opposite. How does one compare fiction and fact? Apart from this small hitch, the experience was both enriching and exciting. The range of subjects presented from a woman's perspective made interesting viewing.



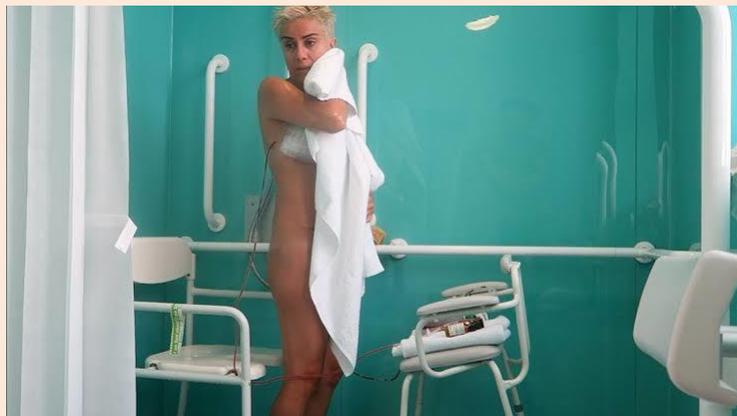
Stills from System Crasher

‘Journey to a Mother’s Room’ from Spain showed the relationship between a mother, who has lost her husband recently, and her daughter who wants to go to London and explore a new life. The mother is clinging to her daughter, taking care of all her necessities while the daughter doesn’t wish to feel guilty of having dreams that don’t include her mother. A soft and simple film, director Celia Rico Clavellino gives justice to both her protagonists.

‘System Crasher’, a term used to describe children who break every rule, by Nora Fingscheidt from Germany was about a little girl with uncontrolled energy. The best thing about this film was the nine year old Helena Zengel whose portrayal of this violent girl was so powerful that the shortcomings, and there are quite a few, take a back seat. Director Sarah Fattahi is from Syria and has taken refuge in Austria. Her film ‘Chaos’ was a sort of cinema that one hopes to find in a festival. It is always a pleasure to watch a film where the director has experimented with the format or storytelling. The effort may not always be successful but then that’s not even important. Her film is

about three women from three different cities. One lives in Damascus and has completely isolated herself. The second woman has left Damascus because of the war and is now settled in Sweden. She has locked herself up in the company of her paintings. And the third woman has landed in Vienna, unsure about her future but relates with the ghost of a woman poet who had fled Austria after the Second World War. Their conversations reveal their inner feelings, their struggle to cope with the outer world. Michela Occhipinti's 'Flesh Out' was another film that generated some heated discussions between the director and the audience, some among them were directors themselves. This Italian director dwelled upon a custom in Mauritania where a girl is fed throughout the day so that she gains weight to

beautiful
parallels
between
fed before
slaughter
forcibly
is all too
though the
imagery is



Stills from A Moon For My Father

be a
bride. The
drawn
goats well
the
and a girl
made to eat
obvious

beautiful. The main problem with the film is that the 'exotic east' is seen through the eyes of a westerner and made for the eyes of westerner.

The two documentaries that stood out from the lot were Barbara Miller's 'Female Pleasure' and Mania Akbari's 'A Moon For My Father'. 'Female Pleasure' portrays five brave and courageous women who fought to break the taboos of the patriarchal society. Deborah Feldman is born in a Hasidic family, a Jewish religious group. Married very early, she couldn't cope with the ultra religious surroundings, left US with her small son, shifted to Berlin and found a

new life. Her autobiography 'Unorthodox : The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots' tells the story of this self determined woman. Leyla Hussein, herself a victim of female genital mutilation (FGM) has started an NGO to bring awareness not just among the girls but also boys who should know what their sisters and mothers have to go through. Rokude-nashiko is a Japanese artist who makes art by making cast of her vagina, has been arrested by the police for obscene art and has always fought her way through. Doris Wagner who as a nun was raped by a priest, tried hard to get justice, left the church and is married today with a kid. She too has penned her journey. Vithika Yadav is the head of 'Love Matters India' which counsels on love, sex and relationships. Her face off with Hindu fundamentalists and the calm way in which she handles their banter shows her strong will. These women have experienced public shaming, threats and prosecution and have stood firm against all odds. Their stories narrated in a simple and straightforward manner give a strong and positive message.



Still from Female Pleasure

But the film that stood out and was awarded by the Fipresci, Mania Akbari and her partner Douglas White's 'A Moon for My Father' was an outstanding depiction of the directors' journey. Mania has been

forced to remove her breasts after stage four cancer. And now she is in the process of sculpting her body. But the process is as much emotional as physical. Hailing from Iran, she remembers Shah's regime. She has experienced the oppression of his religious rule, along with the haunting memories of Iran-Iraq war. The sculpting is a revolt of a mind along with the body. A multilayered depiction, it is a very personal journey that moves and stuns you at the same time. Douglas, a sculptor, on the other hand also talks about his father's death, his journey, his experiences, though his story isn't as strong as Mania's hence is shadowed in comparison.

The documentary comprises of difficult conversations between Mania



Nicola talking at the session for festival programmers

and Douglas, and how they plan to encounter their fears. But not once do they sound pitiful. The characters come across as fierce, independent and vivacious. The documentary is brave and the battle at times is bold. It is a different kind of storytelling, the duo is experimenting with the images but not once does

a frame looks out of place or irrelevant. The changing graffiti on the walls in Iran, the sculptures on the beach, a duck ducking a crow make for a visually powerful documentary that underlines the text, not wavering from the narration.

The decision to award this documentary was not very surprisingly unanimous.

Meena Karnik is a Member of the Fipresci-India.