

Mothers

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Review of the film Mothers after the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival



Jasna Bogdanovska (photo by Denis Defibaugh)

Mothers, the newest film by the Academy Award nominated Macedonian film director **Milcho Manchevski**, is a daring, provocative, controversial film that explores the deepest human emotions: love and fear while searching for the truth in between the two.

Since his first film, the Academy Award nominated *Before the Rain* and followed with *Dust* and *Shadows*, Manchevski proved that he is not a film director that follows mainstream narrative cinema. This film is not an exception. With *Mothers*, Manchevski digs even deeper into experimental cinema and creates a web of symbolism and meanings that haunts the audience long after they watched the film. It is a deep, raw, intellectual and philosophical challenge with a lot of soul.

Mothers is set in **Macedonia**, but it is not a film about Macedonia. The microcosm -Macedonia is just mimicking the macrocosm- the world. It is made of three stories that explore the relationships between life and death, truth and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity. Each story is very different from the next, but they all are connected in the exploration of truth: Who is telling the truth? Who writes the truth and the history? Who gives birth to the truth? And is there a truth at all?



Ratka Radmanovic in "Mothers"

The first story is about two 9-year old girls that go to the police to report a flasher. In search of attention, the girls come up with a fictional story, which ends with an arrest of an innocent man. The obvious fiction becomes the truth in front of the law. The second story follows a film crew that documents the past through the life of the last two residents in a small village. The love triangle between the crew members and the relationship between the brother and the sister who are the last residents of the village, but haven't spoken to each other in years, explores how the personal truths become history. The third story is a documentary about a journalist who raped and killed middle-aged women who lived in his neighborhood. The fact that the killer was a journalist, adds a whole new symbolism to the concept of who is writing history. He was the main actor and the voyeur at the same time. Although this part is a documentary, which uses actual police footage, still it seems like it is the most fictional story of the three. The more information we get about the killings the blurrier the line between fact and fiction gets. The mother-complex he supposedly suffered from continues the thread of the previous two stories where the mother can be seen as a cause, effect or excuse.



Emilija Stojkovska and Milijana Bogdanovska in "Mothers"

In *Mothers*, as in the artworks of cubist artists, the elements are broken up, analyzed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form. Instead of depicting the theme from one viewpoint, Manchevski depicts it from a multitude of viewpoints.



Ana Stojanovska and Dimitar Gjorgjievski in "Mothers"

In today's technological world as we are bombarded with so much information, we tend to lose the ability to think deeply and to stay focused on one matter for a longer period of time. We want answers and we want them now, and of course the shorter they are the better. There is no shortcut or easy way to look at this film. Place, time or characters do not confine the story. It is as interactive as a film can get, without becoming a videogame. *Mothers* starts a dialog with each viewer, and as we watch, it becomes the story of our own individual truths. We make our own truth and we write our own history, and both begin and end with each of us. As artist Christian Boltanski once said: *"I want to be faceless. (With my art) I hold a mirror to my face so that those who look at me see themselves and therefore I disappear."*

This film will not give you refuge from reality, but on the contrary it will make you look at reality and oneself with eyes wide open. Each catharsis starts with facing one's fears. And *Mothers* is a great start...

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