

Manchevski: Interested in reality and the portrayal of it

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After being shown at festivals on three continents, Milcho Manchevski's fifth feature film *Bikini Moon* will have its Macedonian premiere at Skopje's Millennium movie theater on March 22.

Bikini Moon is a US-German-Canadian co-production, and it was fully filmed in New York. Its world premiere was at the film festival in São Paulo, Brazil, and it was first shown to the US audience at the Cinequest festival in San Jose, California. It received the Jury's Special Award at the Fantasporto festival in Portugal. It was screened at Belgrade's FEST at the end of February; it will be shown at the Sofia film festival this week, and following the Macedonian premiere on Thursday, the film will begin playing in the Millennium movie theater in Skopje.

In his interview with MIA, Manchevski speaks about the subject matter and the filming of *Bikini Moon*, which is being promoted as a dark modern fairy tale set amidst a fractured ideal of family. His next film, *The Willow*, will be a European co-production, Manchevski says, and it will be cast in April.

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Does *Bikini Moon* spotlight the freedom the modern age has taken away from us, considering you have said you were inspired by the ubiquitous filming and exploitation of people by the media and the social networks?

The film is, first and foremost, a psychological portrayal of a woman who is charismatic but also has mental issues. We draw on the experiences of Iraq veterans. Looking at the big picture, *Bikini Moon* asks how the media—for instance, a documentary—influences the truth it documents.

Instead of merely witnessing and registering it, it influences what it records – which creates ethical problems. I am interested in the relationship between reality and the portrayal of it.

It is being promoted as a faux-documentary, conceived as a film within a film. Would you please tell us more about this moviemaking approach?

For me, the formal aspect is always central; often, the form will generate an idea for a film. Sometimes it is a fragmented story (as in *Dust*), sometimes it is a combination of a documentary and fiction (as in *Mothers*), sometimes it is a triptych with a circular plot (as in *Before the Rain*), sometimes it is mixed media (as in *Thursday*) or time freezing (as in *The End of Time*).

The idea for *Bikini Moon* came to me when I thought, "What would happen in the minds of the audience if they were watching a documentary and in one moment things started happening that couldn't possibly be true?"

During filming, we tried really hard to make the takes, editing, and plot the same as those in *cinéma vérité* documentaries of the 1970's in which events are documented accurately and without any embellishment. That's why *cinéma vérité* movies are not easy to watch, but they carry considerable weight.

Cineuropa's movie critic described it like this: "Manchevski's directorial approach is so convincing that it is hard for the audience to pull themselves away from perceiving it as a 'documentary'. And when the unexpected and beautifully executed fantastic elements kick in at the end of the film, turning all expectations upside down, the viewer leaves the cinema both emotionally fulfilled and with a lot of food for thought."

What about your experimental short *The End of Time*, which won a prestigious award at last year's Aspen festival in the USA? Is it still making the festival rounds?

The End of Time continues to travel. It has already screened at thirty festivals worldwide and won four awards. Next week it will be shown at the Vilnius film festival. The director of the festival described it as "a brilliant short film – simple, yet unpredictable, mysterious, shocking, and so powerful."

We will show it along with *Bikini Moon* as a gift to the Skopje audience. It is only five minutes long, and I filmed it in Cuba. It began as an experiment, and it turned out to be an emotional experience.

After these two international co-productions, you will again receive funding from the Macedonian Film Agency for your upcoming movie *The Willow*. Will you please share something about the subject matter, the cast, and the filming of your sixth feature film?

The Willow recounts two and a half love stories spanning four centuries. As always, I don't "portray" anyone. Instead, I tell stories about people and create a work where emotions matter most. Visually, *The Willow* is full of contrasts, but the story contains numerous repetitions and thematic refrains.

Unlike *Bikini Moon*, it will be a European co-production. I am looking forward to working again with some of the creative collaborators I've worked with in the past. We will cast the movie in the spring.

Source: MIA

Hatka Smailovikj

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