The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Italian Film Festival Full of Ambition and Frustration

By Melissa Purkiss

April 10, 2013



Italy is famous for its appreciation and creation of fine arts, so the arrival of the 16th N.I.C.E. (New Italian Cinema Events) Festival in Moscow this week, sounds like something worth celebrating.

Yet, the overriding atmosphere at the festival's opening on Wednesday was one of frustration at the current state of the Italian, and global, cinema industry and its lack of opportunity for young talent.

The festival's main goal is to promote new homegrown talent in acting, directing and writing. But in spite of initiatives like N.I.C.E. to raise the profile of new Italian cinema abroad, it seems there are problems on Italy's own doorstep that must first be addressed.

According to actress and first-time director Valeria Golino, Italian mass culture prioritizes mindless entertainment and, therefore, stacks the odds against serious aspiring filmmakers.

"People have been 'diseducated' to watch movies where they don't have to think. They don't want to have to think. It's boring to them," she said.

And the problem doesn't end here. It's a vicious cycle cemented with a lack of interest from funders and distributors in the cinema industry. People are discouraged from pushing boundaries and are instead forced by funding restrictions to play it safe and sacrifice creativity, effectively censoring themselves.

Galino said Italy must realize the significance of culture as its main export before the problem can be solved.

"Italy needs a wake-up call to see that's what we are: our culture, our beauty, our style. This is what we have. We don't have petroleum," she said.

Naum Kleiman, director of the State Central Museum of Cinema in Moscow, added that the problems of new directors both in Italy and Russia face are similar, with the main focus falling on entertainment rather than real engagement.

And it seems that engagement is lacking not only in the content of stories, but also in the funding and marketing of festivals like N.I.C.E.

"The problem is that the distribution is terrible," Kleiman said. "Of course we don't have enough money to advertise like they do in Hollywood, but N.I.C.E. is something that has the potential, with good distribution, to be very popular."

Indeed, the potential of a project like N.I.C.E. is in no doubt, with viewers also benefiting from seeing new and challenging films they otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to watch. Question-and-answer sessions after films also allow and promote discussion of the issues they have raised. Golino, whose short film "Armandino and the Madre" is featured at the festival, said that seeing the reception of her work in a completely different culture is very exciting.

"I am curious — how will they react to something that to me is so organic?" she asked.

The festival takes place from April 10 to 16 in the movie theaters Formula Kino Gorizont, located at 21/10 Komsomolsky Prospekt, and 35MM, located at 47/24 Ulitsa Pokrovka. For listings see www.formulakino.ru and www.kino35mm.ru

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