

Russia's 'Cinetrain' Participants Reap Awards, Screenings Planned

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Members from both "Zima" and "Green Serpent" crews standing alongside their film posters as they represent the Cinetrain group in Switzerland.

Short documentary films "Zima" ("Winter") and "The Green Serpent: of Vodka, Men and Distilled Dreams" reaped awards at Switzerland's Locarno Film Festival after the crews completed a lengthy trek across Russia's east at the beginning of the year.

The "Cinetrain" participants were a group of documentary filmmakers from 16 different countries who spent this January traveling across Russia making the documentary shorts, loosely based on stereotypes about the country.

"Almost 3000 short films were submitted to Locarno, out of which only 25 were selected for the international competition ... and 'Zima' took two awards out of three for this competition!" Cinetrain said in an excited statement released on their website.

"Zima" explores the trials of a Russian winter with a grim sort of acceptance, focussing the narrowly trodden line between life and death. The reality it depicts is neither glamorized nor heartfelt, but serenely accommodating — sometimes brutally so — of its simple occurrence.

"I've been told that human beings can get used to anything, and it's scarily true," Cristina Picchi, director of the "Zima" short told The Moscow Times shortly after returning from her journey at the beginning of the year.

The festival jury were equally impressed with her vision. "As the members of the Locarno Jury said: 'Zima' isn't documentary nor fiction, it's a beautiful work of art," Cinetrain said.

"Zima" took two separate awards at the festival, scoring both the Pardino d'argento for best short film and Locarno Short Film nominee for the European Film Awards.

Screenings of the film have been scheduled for St. Petersburg and Montreal, with "Zima" being shown at the Message to Man Film Festival in Russia's "northern capital," being held between Sept. 21 to 28, and another screening is planned for the Festival du nouveau cinOma MontrOal, held between Oct. 9 to 20.

"The Green Serpent: of Vodka, Men and Distilled Dreams" was the other short by participating director Benny Jaberg. It was awarded with the Boccalino film critics prize at Locarno Film Festival for best short film.

Its tagline declares that the film traces "the thin line between transcendental inspiration and bleak visions evoked by the spirit of vodka."

The film itself could not be entered for the Pardi di Domani competition as Jaberg had already directed a feature-length film; the award is only applicable to "young independent auteurs" or film school students who have not yet attempted to create a feature-length picture.

However, "the art director of the festival liked the movie so much that they decided to select it out of competition in the Fuori concorso section," Cinetrain said.

"Chance has nothing to do with it, and that talent will always find its way," Cinetrain said.

While Locarno drew to a close Aug. 17, the European Film Academy Short Film 2013 is to be presented on Dec. 7 at the 26th European Film Awards Ceremony in Berlin.

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