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Cinema Weekend: Message to Man Comes to Moscow's Screens

A chance to catch the best pictures from St. Petersburg's leading documentary film festival

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The 2016 documentary 'Manor' focuses on the inhabitants of a psychiatric hospital in Canada who are forced onto the streets. It is being shown in Moscow for the first time. **MESSAGE TO MAN**

Fans of auteur cinema have a feast of film to look forward to this weekend as St. Petersburg's most distinguished film festival, Message to Man, brings a selection of the best pictures from last year's event to the Karo 11 Oktyabr movie theater.

"Echo of Message to Man" began on March 2 with a screening of experimental shorts and will continue through Sunday, March 5, giving viewers an opportunity to see winning full-length documentaries and shorts in the international and national categories, including several Moscow premieres.

The most controversial of the screenings is the March 4 Moscow premiere of Norwegian director Paul Refsdal's documentary "Dugma: The Button," which follows four Al Qaeda suicide bombers in Syria as they go about their daily lives before being sent on their final mission.

"Watching this film destroys any stereotypes we hold about 'the enemy' – we see real people in front of us, with their fears, principles, joys and dreams," says Yevgenia Marchenko, one of Message to Man's team of curators. "It should be essential viewing for everybody."

"Dugma" is preceded by a screening of two films by young Russian directors: Mikhail Bushkov's "The Day Before Today," a short documentary about a taxi driver who rediscovers his childhood fascination with the cine-camera following an unexpected injury, and Nadya Zakharova's poetic "Fire," a series of short vignettes without dialogue that grows from its own rhythm and movement.

On Friday, March 3 at 8 p.m. viewers can see another Moscow premiere, “Manor,” a documentary about the patients of a psychiatric hospital in Canada on the verge of closure. Marchenko describes the film as a "lyrical and gentle picture" by a director who has known his subjects for more than 20 years.

Marchenko says that the strength of Message to Man, which takes place every year in September, is in the "unique selection of genres" it presents – it is not only a documentary film festival, but also features animation, short fiction films, and experimental pictures.

"The only thing that can distinguish one festival from another is the atmosphere and the program. We try very hard to work on both. Every year, alongside the already well-known hits and important films, we try to find new names," says Marchenko.

"Echo of Message to Man" concludes on Sunday with a screening of five short films that won awards in the international competition, featuring fiction, documentary and animated pictures from Russia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Poland and Chile/Lithuania/Denmark.

The Message to Man International Film Festival was founded in 1989. It is the oldest film festival in St. Petersburg and the third-oldest in Russia.

All films are shown in the original language, with English and/or Russian subtitles.

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