

## Norwegian Film *Blind Spot* Announced as Best Film of the 20th Bratislava IFF 2018

*Bratislava, December 6, 2018*

The 20<sup>th</sup> edition of the Bratislava International Film Festival took place between 29 November and 3 December 2018 in Bratislava cinemas Mladost' and Lumière as well as three cinemas outside of the Slovak capital: Artkino Metro in Trenčín, Kino Mier in Modra and Kino Záhoran in Malacky. Just as its previous years, the festival brought a wide spectrum of films regarded as the best and most remarkable from last year's production in world cinema. The Prize for the Best Fiction Film went to the Swedish director Tuva Novotny and her debut *Blind Spot*. The festival audience also selected their winner, *Rafiki*, a film about forbidden love in Kenya.

The closing ceremony of the Bratislava International Film Festival 2018 was hosted by the "festival presenter" Bibiana Ondrejková, who has been its part since the very beginning. In her own words, "ever since its establishment the Bratislava IFF has been developing the identity of a young cinema festival. For 20 years, it has been discovering and bringing future stars of contemporary film as well as reflecting society-wide, political and global events." The festival held onto this message even in its jubilee 20<sup>th</sup> edition.

For several years the programme of the Bratislava International Film Festival has worked on a curatorial principle, while part of its sections always focuses on new themes. This year the topic of women's position in society and film was given special position, reflected in the section **Lexicon: Female Gaze**. "The past year has been – not only in the cinema – the year of #MeToo, and that is partly why we've decided to reflect on the status of women in society and cinema. We have chosen the topic of female gaze as opposed to the male gaze, identified by the film theorist Laura Mulvey. In the section we give space to women authors, we try to bring attention to the female experience, which is – in film as well as the society – often overlooked, reflect on how women were and are depicted in film and remind that there is no such thing as male and female genres," say the curators of the section, festival programmer Tomáš Hudák and documentarist and director of this year's festival spot Ivana Hucíková. "It is, however, not just about this one section. Five out of the eight films in the Fiction Competition have been shot by female directors and even other sections will present films disrupting the male gaze hegemony."

The Lexicon: Female Gaze section was also reflected in the festival campaign. Its official spot is a half-minute video montage of films directed mainly by women filmmakers. Their protagonists are women of different colour, appearance, age, and character in various life situations. In the background, we can hear the voice of the musician Katarzia asking: "Do you think we can't change anything, because we're just women?" The lyric is an excerpt from the song *Dolls Are Killing Each Other*, found on her new album *Antigona*, on which Katarzia (Katarína Kubošiová) cooperated with Pjoni (Jonatán Pastirčák). The poster was designed by the graphic designer Marián Preis.

In the end, the "female gaze" triumphed as the winner of the Fiction Competition. The Prize for the Best Fiction Film went to *Blind Spot* (*Blindsone*, 2018), written and directed by the Swedish filmmaker Tuva Novotny.

The winners of the four statutory prizes were decided by the **Fiction Competition Jury** consisting of the artistic director of the International Film Festival for Children and Youth Zlín Film Festival **Markéta Pášmová**, the Macedonian journalist, film critic, festival selector and FIPRESCI member **Gena Teodosievska** and the popular Slovak actor **Marián Mitaš**. The jury consider *Blind Spot* "an exceptional, yet upsetting story, precisely set from an acting point of view, that begins naively, filmed



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*in a single cinematographer's shot", which "leaves us breathless with each upcoming sequence and ends with a disturbing atmosphere and uncertainty. There is no room for lack of emotion, however, the authors of the film take away our right to an explanation. Teenagers and their secret world, so distant from us, is that all we take notice of? This contemporary expression of film aesthetic tackles the most essential in the audience, which binds the camera's observation and the leading protagonist into one and the feeling lingers on."* This moving drama, filmed in one take lasting the entire 98 minutes, addresses mental health issues among Norwegian youth. The film follows a mother struggling to understand the crisis her daughter is going through and its effect on the entire family. The director Tuva Novotny, who is a daughter of the Czech filmmaker David Jan Novotný, expressed her gratitude via a video call: *"I feel very honoured that the main prize of your festival was awarded to **Blind Spot**. I am, of course, flattered, but I also find it very important and beneficial that through this decision we can spread a relevant message – the importance of suicide prevention and treating of mental illnesses. I'm very happy to have received this prize. I'm hoping and looking forward to maybe introducing my next movie together with you as well."*

This year the members of the Fiction Competition Jury decided to award a **Special Mention** for *"the minimalist approach towards another still unaccepted state of being in love with the same sex, a bold quest for a kindred spirit, a journey in search for a normal day-to-day life of a gay couple in a small town of the underprivileged and strongly Catholic Guatemala, makes this film unusual and brave."* The authors of the film *José* (Guatemala, 2018), director Li Cheng and co-author and producer George F. Roberson, accepted the award in person. The duo of filmmakers have already visited the festival with their debut *Joshua Tree* (2014). The producer of the film expressed cordial gratitude and remarked: *"As filmmakers and citizens who care about the state of affairs, we look at this world and know we should do something. Our first film was written and realized by just the two of us. We had no idea if anyone would ever see it or whether festivals would accept it. It was four years ago that Mr. Nenad Dukic discovered us and invited us to Bratislava. Our film was included in a section with several films that had succeeded at a number of major festivals – including Cannes and Venice. Here we had the opportunity to meet with many people, receive encouragement, recommendations and inspiration – and that is why 4 years later we succeeded in making another film and here we are today, with you and our second debut."* The filmmakers presented the Bratislava audience with a story about the life of young José from lower middle-class in one of the world's most dangerous, religious and impoverished countries, Guatemala, whose intense relationship with Luis brings along love, passion, homosexual desire, pain and self-reflection.

The **Prize for the Best Director** was awarded to **Meryem Benm'Barek** for her film *Sofia* (France, Qatar, 2018). The jury agreed that *"the director constructs well-defined characters that follow situations similar to those in Greek tragedies, through which she portrays an entire social and political milieu: everyone is content except the one concerned with justice and thus is left out of the game. So is the story in this Moroccan film, where everyone calculates with their own faith as well as with the faith of others for a greater good, for the bigger picture. Sophia is seemingly lost and lonely; she accurately calculates her steps and gains the trust of those she needs to count on. Funny at times, sad on occasion, this human drama where the meaning of the female and the male principle opens numerous issues and closes certain dilemmas as well."* The film tells the story of a 20-year-old Moroccan woman trying to locate the father of her yet unborn child in order to avoid persecution by the authorities. The director thanked the audience through a video call: *"I would like to thank the members of the jury as well as the management of the festival for choosing my debut feature film, a film made by a young director. Unfortunately, I cannot be with you tonight, but I wish you a very pleasant evening."*



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The **Prize for the Best Actor** went to **Aset Imangaliev** for his portrayal of the main protagonist Karabas in ***Suleiman Mountain*** (d. Elizaveta Stishova, *Suleiman gora*, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, 2017). The film explores the relationships between the hard-drinking gambler Karabas and his young pregnant wife as well as his ex-wife, who has managed to find their long-lost son. The unusual family must decide if they are to co-exist or part ways forever. Some wounds are just too hard to heal – even if you believe in the magical power of Suleiman Mountain. The jury commented on their decision as follows: *“a character placed not as a leading and rather as a negative character from early on in the film, quickly becomes the main character with its unimposing cunningness. He changes his mood towards his two partners, his son and towards others, for that matter, with incredible ease. He is a liar and a thief, a sly adventurer, used to getting his own way with tricks, what, however, changes in the last scene. A character that every great actor would love to portray.”* The prize was accepted by the director of the Russian Centre for Science and Culture in Bratislava Pavel Lisicyn, who – on behalf of the main protagonist – expressed his gratitude and wished the festival all the best in its future years.

The **Prize for the Best Actress** was awarded to **Christine Sønderris** for her performance in ***Cutterhead*** (d. Rasmus Kloster Bro, Denmark, 2017). The Danish actress played the role of Rie, female PR coordinator dealing with the promotion of what seems to be a perfect project, sucked into an unexpected turn of events. Among other things, the film reflects the topical issue of migrant workers. In the words of the jury: *“life in Denmark goes on with incredible easiness. Even when there is a problem, it is expected to be dealt with. This is how the character of the leading actress in the film Cutterhead was constructed. She fearlessly goes underground to witness the digging of the new tunnel in the Danish underground. The fire brings together two migrants, one from Croatia and another from Eritrea, who shake the ground from underneath her feet, both literally and symbolically. From an acting point of view, it is an amazingly built character of patience and dignity in the most difficult moments, yet with a will and determination of a winner. A wonderful character and an exquisite actress who is expected to continue to surprise.”*

Apart from the main jury, the Fiction Competition films were evaluated by two other independent juries – **FIPRESCI Jury** and **Student Jury**, which both decided on their winner.

This year's **FIPRESCI Jury** consisted of the following established film critics: **Bettina Hirsch** from Germany, **Viera Langerová** from Slovakia and **Michele Sancisi** from Italy. In their words: *“using vibrant cinematography and the energetic rhythms of 90s house music to directly oppose its bleak setting of a grey post-Soviet era, the FIPRESCI Jury has selected the Belarussian film **Crystal Swan** (d. Darya Zhuk, *Khrustal*, Belarus, Germany, USA, Russia, 2018). This feature debut of young female director Darya Zhuk is made with talent and promising professional skills. Crystal Swan is a fascinating study of the post-communist youth.”* Set in the 90's, the film tells the story of a young Belarussian DJ Evelina (Velya), who is trying to obtain visa and make her American dream come true. The award was received by the film's producer Valeri Dmitrotchenko, who thanked his *“dream crew – the talented women”*, who created this film: director Darya Zhukova, co-writer Helga Landauer, director of photography Carolina Costa and everyone else who helped in its making.

The **Student Jury** consisted of **Gabriela Tuchyňová** – graduate of bachelor studies in directing and screenwriting of feature and documentary film at Tomáš Baťa University in Zlín, currently studying directing of feature films at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, **Dominika Jarečná** – member of the Giornate degli Autori jury at the Venice IFF 2018 and ambassador of the LUX Prize for the years 2018-2019 and **Jakub Kňážko** – ardent admirer of visual arts and student at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication in Trnava. **Student Jury Award** went to the film ***Blossom Valley*** (d. László Csujá, *Virágvölgy*, Hungary, 2018) with the following reasoning: *“The film caught our attention with the natural treatment of the topic of parenthood by the protagonists, who at first glance seem*

*unable to create ties suitable for an upbringing of a child. It has thus created a contrast to the current state of the family and posed a question of whether a change isn't due. We appreciate the casting of actors, the visual rendition and the use of loving humour."* The prize was accepted by the director László Csujá and the director of photography Gergely Vass, who presented the festival audience with a story about young lovers on the run, their desire for freedom and their own place in the sun.

Throughout the festival, the viewers could also vote on their favourite film. Unlike the other juries that rated eight competition films, cinema visitors could choose their front-runner from all six programme sections of the 20<sup>th</sup> Bratislava IFF: **Fiction Competition** – presenting first and second feature films of aspiring filmmakers, **Cinema Now** – focusing on contemporary world cinema, **LUX Prize** – presenting three nominees for the prize bestowed by the European Parliament, **Made in CZ/SK** – included on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Czechoslovak Republic, highlighting the continuous collaboration of Slovak and Czech filmmakers, **Lexicon: Female Gaze** – curated section aiming to discuss the imbalance of power in film, dominated by the male gaze, and the **Junior** section – designated primarily for the youngest festival visitors. Based on the cast votes, the Bratislava IFF Viewers' Choice was won by Wanuri Kahiu's second feature film **Rafiki** (2018). **The Old Man & the Gun**, directed by the up-and-coming star of independent American cinema David Lowery, came second and **At Eternity's Gate** (2018) by the renowned filmmaker Julian Schnabel ranked third.

Festival visitors could also meet and discuss ideas with several filmmakers who came to Bratislava to introduce their films in person, such as the director **Marios Neocleous** (*Pause*), director **László Csujá** and director of photography **Gergely Vass** (*Blossoming Valley*), director **Li Cheng** and producer **Georg F. Roberson** (*José*), or director **Olmo Omerzu** (*Winter Flies*). The invitation was also accepted by several Czech filmmakers: directors **Tomáš Bojar** (*Breaking News*) and **Šimon Šafránek** (*King Skate*), the delegation of the film *Talks with TGM* – director **Jakub Červenka**, as well as his Slovak crew ensemble – the exceptional actor **Martin Huba**, co-producer **Alexander Smík** or the renowned make-up artist **Juraj Steiner**. Student films were also presented by their directors – students as well as fresh graduates of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava: **Daniel Rihák** (*Trip*), **Marek Fischer** (*Vampire Sushi*), **Marek Jasaň** (*Journey*) and **Michal Baránek** (*Therapy by Travelling*). Interesting personalities and views of current domestic and world cinema were also present at the festival's accompanying events.

In the words of Gena Teodosievská, a member of the Fiction Competition Jury, *"this is a festival of small films with a huge reach. And that's exactly what we'll take from it when we return home."* Besides exceptional and valuable films, festival visitors could also enjoy this year's inspiring accompanying programme. The issue of the female gaze was reflected not only in one of the main sections of the festival Lexicon: Female Gaze, festival spot or the overall visual identity, but also in the discussion **"I just popped out to get some tangerines... but Bohéma was hosting a party with a discussion"**, organised in cooperation with the online film magazine Kinečko. Hosted by its editor-in-chief Eva Križková, the discussion was held with the film professionals Jana Vlčková (editor), Radka Šišuláková (director of photography) and Barbora Námerová (screenwriter).

Thanks to the cooperation with the Slovak Film Agency (SFA), the visitors could join a panel of lectures and discussions on the topic of **Green Screen – greening of the audiovisual industry**. The ample attendance proves that Slovak film professionals are far from oblivious to the issues of ecology and want to learn. The project Green Screen, part of the Interreg Europe programme, deals with sustainable development of the audiovisual sector and aims to lower the carbon footprint of European film and television production. The project seeks to help change the routine practice, introduce environmentally friendly methods into the production of audiovisual works, convince local



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film and television productions about the economic benefits of using this approach, and create a good example for other creative industries. Tim Wagendorp, sustainability coordinator at the Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF), tried to motivate filmmakers to introduce ecologically sustainable processes into their production, the zoologist Pavel Ballo (TANAP) gave answers to the question **Who owns the Tatra skies?** and Jopy Hečko (SKYEYE) spoke on the topic of creating dynamic film footage from bird's eye view in the lecture **Use of drones for film purposes.**

The Bratislava International Film Festival does not forget about its youngest members of the audience either. This year it organised a charity screening of the (not only) children's film ***Mimi & Líza: Christmas Lights Mystery*** by the Slovak animators Katarína Kerekesová and Ivana Šebestová. The collected admission was used to support the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union White Crayon, which improves the lives of those who have found themselves in a difficult life situation.

The Bratislava International Film Festival acts as a platform where the general viewing public, cinephiles as well as film professionals from Slovakia and abroad meet and interact. Ever since its establishment in 1999, it has been developing its identity of a young cinema festival and event aiming to discover new names and future stars of contemporary film.

20<sup>th</sup> Bratislava International Film Festival spot:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jB6YHU\\_OIMY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jB6YHU_OIMY)

For the latest updates on the programme of the 20th Bratislava International Film Festival, please visit our official website at [www.bratislavaiff.sk/en](http://www.bratislavaiff.sk/en) or our official Facebook account at [www.facebook.com/bratislavaiff](http://www.facebook.com/bratislavaiff).

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**20th BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**  
**29 November - 03 December 2018**

**Kino Lumière, Kino Mladosť**  
**Kino MIER Modra, Kino Záhoran Malacky, Artkino METRO Trenčín**

Main Organiser: **Partners Production**

The Bratislava International Film Festival is held with the generous financial support of: **Slovak Audiovisual Fund, the Bratislava Self-Governing region**

Main partners: **Slovenská elektrizačná prenosová sústava, Transpetrol**

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