

2023

Opening film

Wednesday 25 January

Munch, Dahlsbakken, Norway, 4

Edvard Munch was one of the most important artists in the period between the 19th and 20th centuries. His motif Skrik (The Scream), repeated in several techniques, became part of the 20th-century world subconsciousness – an image of fear and loneliness most people probably know, even if they have no idea who created it.

For Norwegian maverick auteur Henrik Martin Dahlsbakken, Munch was above all an outsider by choice. But this is merely one of his many sides. Munch was someone different to different people: skandalon, freethinker, sexual adventurer, bore, genius – you name it, someone saw it in him, usually with good reason. This made Dahlsbakken split the role of Munch over several actors, the same way that the character appears in different times.



Thursday

Another spring, Mladen Kovacevis, Servie, 4

In 1972, Ibrahim Hoti undertook the Hajj, travelling to Mecca on a spiritual pilgrimage. On the return journey, his bus made an unscheduled stop at the bustling Baghdad bazaar, where he bought gifts for his family. Within a day of his return to Kosovo, Hoti began to feel feverish.

Composed entirely of archival footage, and narrated by the burnt-in-memory clarity of Dr Zoran Radovanović, filmmaker Mladen Kovačević's piercing documentary recounts the harrowing days of the Yugoslavian smallpox outbreak from start to finish.

Very funny to see how Ibrahim is on national TV as the cause of the outbreak.

Friday

El Puno del Condor, Espinoza, Chile, 4 (with Jeroen)

Reliance on special effects is kept to a minimum, as Zaror and his co-stars are genuine practitioners of martial arts – and their well-placed fight scenes are stunning. Surrounding these spectacles is a colourful plot that self-consciously draws on Hong Kong classics and Chilean history and mythology, but also shows deep respect for the genre. Zaror plays twins, but sorting out good from evil, and knowing exactly who possesses the sacred book of their Master, will doubtless require several sequels.

Superposition, Lyngbye, Denmark, 5

Stine and Teit, your average urban middle-class artists and intellectuals, leave Copenhagen for the wilds of neighbouring Sweden's forest. Soon, they find out that something is strange there – most disturbingly – when their son Nemo suddenly thinks his mother isn't really his mother anymore. It becomes clear once Stine and Teit discover that they have neighbours who look exactly like them – mirror images made flesh and blood.

The subject of reflections and doubles is introduced in the film's first shot: a view of a lake landscape turned 90° so that the

water's surface runs vertically through the image's centre. Only once the shot gets tilted is it revealed which side mirrors which. Later, a mother and child are reflected in a glass door.

Saturday

By the shore and kabaret, VR show in Worm, 4

VR movies with underwater swimming colouring corals and the other one on a Japanese beach with a big dead whale.

Vera, Covi, Austria, 3 (with Yolanda)

The burdens of the rich and famous are expertly illuminated in this heart-rending story of Vera Gemma, the vulnerable, middle-aged daughter of Italian actor Giuliano Gemma. Raised in a cult of beauty, she has been exploited her entire life by both the film industry and the men she has loved. Ageing out of society's ideals of beauty, no longer rich and probably no longer employable as an actor, she hovers on the edge of the contemporary Roman glitterati. Blurring the line between reality and fiction, filmmakers Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel weave a tale of Vera's unlikely friendship with a small boy and his family.

Orgy of the damned, 2

a dream-like horror movie that is wordless but full of music and noises. Only possible to watch with beer late in the evening.

Sunday

Kira & El Gin, Marwan Hamed, Egypt, 4

Cairo, 1919. The Great War has left Egyptian soldiers of the Empire traumatised, the Spanish Flu has ravaged the country and nationalist leaders are being deported amid fervent protests. Unfazed by the tumult, Abdel Qader, an apolitical drug peddler known as the Jinn, continues to do business with the colonisers. But when injustice comes knocking, he finds himself joining hands with an underground resistance unit led by Ahmed Kira, a physician in the good books of the British. Great movie, with a lot of speed and action and nice over the top acting.

Follower, Nalawade, India, 4

Sraghu is a small-time journalist working at a radical online media outlet in the linguistically polarised town of Belgaum in Southern India. He doesn't mind the meagre pay, for he is committed to his cause, posting inflammatory, dubious content attacking his opponents. Objective news reports plant seeds of doubt, but he responds to this cognitive dissonance by redoubling his fanatical outpourings on the internet, with tragic consequences.

With a razor-sharp sense of place and culture, Harshad Nalawade's astute, compassionate drama *Follower* makes us intimate with the diverse sources of Raghu's radicalisation, relatively minor hassles in themselves, but all accumulating into a general feeling of being stuck in life.

La Paliasada, Sotnychenko, Ukrain, 3

Bit grim film about the execution by the state of a man in 1996.

Monday

Cairo Conspiracy, Tarik Saleh, Sweden, 5

The film centres on the election of a new grand imam through the Supreme Council of Scholars congregating at Al-Azhar University, one of the world's hubs of Islamic knowledge. Though the grand imam holds no political powers as such, he can influence governmental decisions through his announcements and rulings – so much so that these elections need to be controlled by the State's security services. But for whose benefit exactly?

When Colonel Ibrahim sends Adam, a novice on campus, out there to be his eyes and ears and, if necessary, his hands, we are left questioning: Which side and which faction is he really working for?

Dalva, Emmanuelle Nicot, Belgium, 5

Best film of the festival and winner of audience award.

Emmanuelle Nicot portrays the journey of a girl at the cusp of teenager-hood, Dalva, who must learn how to be a child again, after she's been taken away from her abusive father Jacques.

Eschewing the sensationalism typical of child captive cases, and drawing on her research in an emergency shelter for young victims of abuse, Nicot focuses on Dalva's confusion as she is abruptly severed from Jacques and lodged in a youth shelter. She enters this new world with outrage and resistance, struggling to come to terms with learning that the love she shared with her father was not what she thought it was.

Through Dalva, Nicot unveils a past of trauma, control and deceit inflicted by the young girl's father, who substituted his daughter for his estranged wife – the similarity in clothing becomes evident in a mother-daughter reunion.

Dalva's shift to life in a shelter is initially jarring, and adding to her alienation is the arrival of puberty, leaving her torn between clinging to her conditioning as an adult woman and the yearning to salvage the remnants of her childhood. Gradually, the support of her roommate, Samia, and a social worker, Jayden, undermines the illusions created by her father's manipulations, challenging Dalva's very idea of self and swaying her to reframe her life as she discovers her youth and the camaraderie of adolescence.

Kamli, Khoosat, Pakistan, 4

"Houses don't suffocate you; they protect you", says Sakina to her sister-in-law Hina, whose own experience says otherwise. After all, Hina has been leading an unfulfilling life since her husband's disappearance eight years ago, living under the same roof and subjected to the orthodoxy of the fanatical, visually challenged Sakina. But Hina begins to hope again when, drawn by the call of the forest, she falls into a lake and is rescued by a charming young photographer.

Pakistani filmmaker Sarmad Khoosat's Kamli develops this simple, fairy-tale premise into an affecting romantic melodrama that examines the role of tradition in shaping women's fears and desires. In the emotional economy of the film, happiness becomes a zero-sum game governed by the dictates of religion. Constantly juggling contrasting sentiments, Kamli makes us both

cheer for Hina in her search for love, and understand Sakina's cruelty as a product of deep-seated insecurity.

The film draws energy from the idioms of both realist drama and Bollywood musicals.

DemiGod: the legend begins, Wen-Chang, Taiwan, 3

a baroque puppet animation wuxia epic that synthesises traditional and modern storytelling techniques to sumptuous effect. It has everything: magic, madness, heaven, sin, love, treason, high emotion, heroic bloodshed and attractive-as-hell protagonists. All of which is integrated into an eye-popping, breathtaking world of kinetic action and bloody violence with the help of elaborate practical and special effects, bringing to life glove puppets from Taiwan's traditional theatre.



Blind Willow sleeping woman, Pierre Foldes, France, 5, with FEU

Adapted from Haruki Murakami's short stories, Pierre Földes' animated debut feature Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman sketches the lives of three Tokyo residents thrown into a whirlpool of anxiety and introspection following the 2011 earthquake in eastern Japan.

Dazed by televised reports of the disaster, Kyoko leaves her husband Komura to pursue a strange event that took place on her twentieth birthday. To make sense of her sudden disappearance, a stunned Komura drifts across the country from one acquaintance to another. Meanwhile, his elderly colleague, the timid Katagiri, is visited by a six-foot frog that seeks his help

to combat an underground monster and prevent an impending catastrophe.

Thursday

Untold Herstory, Zero Chou, Taiwan, 4

It's 1953 and martial law has been imposed on Taiwan. The White Terror period lasted over four decades, and was alert to slightest hints of dissent. This is a story of female 'thought prisoners' confined to Green Island, a penal colony off Taiwan's eastern coast, who couldn't stop thinking. They're only let out of their barracks to sit through 're-education' classes and carry out hard labour. When authorities start forcing prisoners to 'volunteer' to demonstrate their dictated patriotism – requiring signatures in blood, anti-communist tattoos upon their bodies – rebellion begins to intensify.

Nostalgia, Martone, Italy, 4

Middle-aged Felice has returned home to Naples after 40 years abroad. He struggles with his mother tongue and doesn't recognise figures from his youth, but Rione Sanità, the neighbourhood he grew up in, hasn't changed all that much. Sandwiched between the catacombs and the Camorra, life here is lived among the dead. To start anew in this country that he still considers home, Felice feels the need to reconnect with Oreste, a childhood friend who is now a mafia boss. That does not end well.

La Montana, Osorno, Mexico, 2, with Jeroen

What happens when you put 7 Zapatista's with some German lefties on a boat? A boring movie with many discussions that go nowhere.

I can't stop biting you, Mamoru, Japan, 4. With Jeroen

the film portrays the four, very different teenage members of a 'Blood Donation Club', schoolgirls who have alienated themselves from the dreary, conformist pack through their unusual obsession – regular blood donations. Into their lives crashes the dangerously beautiful Mai Vlad Transylvania, a vampire 'teenager' who happens to be unable to attack humans. A mix of satire,

mystery, cartoonish frenzy, delightful goofiness and teenage drama



Friday **Skazka, Sokurov, Russia, 4**

In *Skazka*, Alexander Sokurov weaves digital magic to create a phantasmagorical vision of the Afterlife, worthy of Dante. But wait: are we in the limbo of Purgatory, or a paradoxical Paradise reserved for notorious men of world history? Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler, Churchill and more: all are present and accounted for. Since they exist only as archival media images, each figure comes in a serial set.

In the blackest of political comedies, these fallen men beg, in turn, to be let through Heaven's Gate – but the angels who peek through never open wide. Little wonder, as the former leaders wander listlessly, bitching (in a Babel of multiple languages) about each other's clothes, hair and hygiene.

A light never goes out, Tsang, Hong Kong, 4

Introduced in the 1920s and boosted by post-World War II economic growth, vibrant neon lights have become not only a hallmark of Hong Kong's prosperity but also a vital part of its identity. The past two decades have seen them removed and replaced by cheaper and ecologically friendlier LED signs. This move stirred reactions of all kinds and *A Light Never Goes Out* is one of them.

Anastasia Tsang's feature-length directorial debut opts for a gentle, intimate angle. Centring on the widow of a Hong Kong neon-sign artist, who is determined to step into her husband's shoes and overcome any obstacles to recreate a legendary neon sign that has been demolished,

The Whale, Aronofsky, USA, 4

Charlie is a writing instructor, well-liked by his students, though they have never seen him. His classes take place via Zoom, never with the camera on, and always with some throwaway excuse as to why. The truth is that Charlie is a recluse and his class III obesity poses grave risks to his health. Living in a remote house in Idaho and mourning the loss of his partner, he receives few visitors apart from his nurse friend, a door-to-door evangelist, and, one day, his petulant and estranged teenage daughter. As the source of Charlie's pain becomes apparent, so does the clarity of him being in absolute control of his destiny.

Surprise movie with penelope Cruz, L'immonate, Italy. 1-

As tradition prescribes, the IFFR shows every year a terrible movie to show what we miss during the rest of the year. As to the reviews a tender, intensely personal portrait of dysfunctional family in 1970s Rome. But Penelope Cruz's performance as Clara, an unhappily married mother of three coping with mental health issues will cause you mental problems as well if it were not for her beauty.

Saturday

Orpheus in love, Axel Ranisch, Germany, 5

Orpheus in Love is a singular piece of musical theatre cinema. Structurally a musical or operetta, it features famous opera tunes paired with modern classical ballet choreographies. The story of young, multi-job hassled Nele, her dream of opera stardom, and her love for dancer Kolya feels in its razzmatazz mix of realism and kitsch simultaneously closer to Flashdance (1983; Adrian Lyne) and the average Lady Gaga music. Great!

Lola, Legge, Ireland, 4

The ingeniously low-budget Irish sci-fi film LOLA has fun with all of that, but also investigates darker, more global questions like: what if Germany had won World War II?

Pieced together in dazzling 16mm as an imaginary collage of interlocking audio-visual documents from the 1940s, Andrew Legge, directing his debut feature, conjures the lives of two gifted and lively sisters, Thomasina and Martha. Left to their own devices as children, the pair has managed to create a machine that receives media broadcasts from the future. In their personal, cloistered, punk paradise, they embrace the rebellious styles of an age to come – The Kinks, David Bowie – but also discover, when military personnel move in, that history is a dangerous game to toy with. The ultimate question becomes: if mass media can change the world, can cinema miraculously restore it?

Inu-Oh, Masaaki, Japan, 5

Wow! A cultural revolution is afoot in 14th century Japan. Tomona, a blind priest and biwa player, and Inu-Oh, a descendant of respected Noh performers forced to hide his physical appearance from the world, join hands to break away from the customs of their guilds and write the songs they want. In this, they find inspiration in the fallen soldiers of a decisive 11th century battle whose events continue to plague the ruling shogunate. As the two musicians enrapture the population with their trailblazing performances, the old guard moves to clamp them down.

Veteran animator Yuasa Masaaki pushes his tendency to commingle realism and fantasy to its limits, reimagining the two dissident artists as modern-day rockstars producing elaborate

light-and-sound shows in front of a crazed, shrieking audience in period costume.

One Win, Sokurov, Yeon-Shick, Korea, 4

Let the enthralling match sequences toss you onto the court and into the heat of the volleyball game. Meet the two league outcasts: Kim Woo-jin (Parasite's Song Kang-ho, as fantastic as ever) who now can't even coach kids nor the whole women's volleyball team, Pink Storm. They've been brought together by an eccentric super-young entrepreneur, who needs a super-underdog story to play his super-PR game. Little does he know that this might be the best smash pass of his life.

Showing up, Reichardt, USA, 3

Artist Lizzy struggles with life.