

Some Directions in World Cinema

7th Scandinavian Film Festival L.A.

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New Windows

One of the most pervasive tendencies in filmmaking observable in the festival circuit this year has also been one of the most important ones, and one hardly likely to disappear. With globalization has come an internationalization of film production that takes new turns every day. As young independents study abroad at film schools, labs and workshops, as they compete to attend international co-production meetings to find partners and funds, and as they return home to make their first features with cast and crew from a variety of countries, more than the glamorous Hollywood-style location shooting is taking place.

New themes, forms, and styles are filling our screens, and for the most logical reasons they encompass the predicament of being "at home among strangers, a stranger at home." It's as if the newest lenses have been jumping into the world hopper, and given a good whirl, are landing in places they've never quite seen before and, with new technologies, are tapping skills and resources they never imagined...

Meanwhile for seven years the Scandinavian Film Festival of Los Angeles has given considerable visibility to a new generation of film authors working outside the impressive Dogme movement of the last decade. Josef Fares has brought his own Lebanese culture to the Swedish screen with his empathetic comedies, *Jalla!* and *Kops*, and this year with the sober and piercing *Zozo*, unforgettable for Imad Creidi's magnetic performance in the title role, loosely autobiographical of the writer-director, and Fares' own flare for a magical-real poetics of war and ethnocentrism. At the same time, Sara Johnsen's *Kissed by Winter* from Norway is no less artful in its more oblique yet impacting approach to these same themes but with the focus on the northern psyche...

In Her Eyes

Sara Johnsen's introspective debut, *Kissed by Winter*, opens with long shadows of tall firs falling over twilight snow. It's a place where distant cultures cross each other with tragic blows to the heart. Victoria, a doctor

who has failed to take stock of her little boy's symptoms of leukemia, flees her home and husband in Sweden to the hinterland of northern Norway after her son's death.

But there an Iraqi boy's body is found encrusted in a bank of snow, and soon the mystery consumes all the village: the police who question Kai, the local snowplow driver, to investigate possible manslaughter; the dead boy's immigrant father, who fears he'll be blamed as an inadequate provider and over-stern disciplinarian when it looks like a suicide; and the boy's mother, who seeks to persuade everyone, including herself, that it was an accident.

In one of the film's memorable shots, white snowflakes whirl aimlessly across a black screen. Victoria, once challenged by her career, now seeks refuge from her recurring family memories with medical alcohol. And Kai, who isn't sure himself what he might have done with his snowplow in the dark of night, finds sanctuary in Victoria, who appears to welcome a partner in guilt until she intuits his innocence. But what of the hints of foul play?

Ultimately Victoria is handed the deceased boy's journal from his mother, which allows the doctor to ponder her own son's drawings and notebook and begin the process of mourning. But of course Victoria is not alone in her grief. If she has lost her boy, the snowplow driver has just been left by his wife, and the Iraqi refugees, with the death of their son, seek only to return home with the corpse of the boy who, just days ago, took flight into the night sky over a grand ski jump with the news of a love left behind who had since chosen someone else.

What is most compelling in this fractured and carefully stitched narrative is the skilled interlacing of parallel projections among characters who, while suspicious of others, share a common grief in their experience of death and disorientation, exile and defeat. Sara Johnsen delivers a taut film by disclosing information no sooner than the characters themselves are able to face their feelings, buried as they may be in their need for love.