



For Immediate Release

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BIFF to screen stellar series of Documentaries

Competition promises to be stiff for this year's Best Documentary Feature award at the 12th Bermuda International Film Festival, with six outstanding films in contention. Tickets for the March 20-28 Festival are now on sale online at www.biff.bm and at the BIFF Box Office at 53 Front Street, Hamilton.

The six films come from the US (3), the Netherlands (2) and Egypt (1) and cover diverse subjects ranging from a Middle East women's TV talk show, life in two of Panama's poorest ghettos, last year's US Presidential election, American artist Cindy Sherman, and entrepreneurial garbage workers in Egypt to life in Faubourg Tremé, one of the oldest black neighborhoods in America and the birthplace of jazz and America's first civil rights movement.

Faubourg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans has already earned widespread critical acclaim and has won Best Documentary at both the San Francisco Black Film Festival and the Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival. It was also a Golden Gate Award winner at San Francisco International Film Festival 2008.

Beauty of the Fight, John Urbano's four-year story of the destruction of two Panamanian ghettos, was a selection at the San Francisco Independent Film Festival and the Cine Festival En San Antonio.

David O'Beirne, the Festival's programme director, commented: "We are delighted to have six very impressive and entertaining documentaries in our lineup. Films such as these reinforce how the documentary format retains the power to tell unusual stories that might otherwise not be told."

The six documentaries that will be screened are as follows:

Beauty of the Fight

(d. John Urbano, USA/Panama, 69 minutes)

The filmmaker took four years to record life in two of Panama's ghettos - Barraza and El Chorrillo. Photographer John Urbano and his crew filmed the on-going destruction of these two impoverished communities. Urbano approached the project with self-confessed naivety; he was clearly lucky to escape the first few days with his life. As the film unfolds we become aware, as he did, of the dangers that pervade this area and yet, as he points out, there is tremendous beauty too. A man is left homeless with nothing more than the clothes he wears but he creates and decorates a new home out of driftwood and flotsam on the beach. Even when the authorities have it removed, he rebuilds and seems happy, stating simply 'without a home you have no life'. The 'fight' is to survive, to have a home, to have a life. As for 'beauty,' Urbano finds beauty in abundance; from the smile of a little girl, to the ambition of a champion boxer, to the twinkling eyes of an old man. This is a gem of a film.

Dear Oprah – Non-Voting America's Wildest Dream

(d. Kasper Verkaik, Netherlands, 74 minutes)

One might feel a little jaded about the most recent presidential election. It's hard to imagine that there is anything left to tell about who said what, when, why and to whom – however this documentary is definitely worth viewing. In 2007 a small group of European filmmakers wanted to understand why so many in the USA did not vote when the result was to elect, arguably, the most powerful man in the world. As they track across the USA, it becomes apparent that the non-voters are the very people who would have most to gain by a change in leadership. It may be difficult to remember, but Barack Obama's biggest threat was the indifference to, and lack of belief in, the office of President on the part of his potential voters. While the film may not fulfil its ambition to identify the causes of non-voting (and it may not make contact with the elusive Oprah!), it is nonetheless a fascinating record of the year before Obama became famous, and of the efforts of ordinary people who helped create the change.

Faubourg Tremé: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans

(d. Dawn Logsdon and Lolis Eric Elie, USA, 68 minutes)

Hurricane Katrina demolished New Orleans in August 2005; estimates of fatalities range from 1400 to 10,000. This documentary refers to Katrina, but only in passing - it is really a record of the years before Katrina hit, of the people who lived in that city, how they arrived there, how they thrived there. The film centres on narrator, Lolis Eric Elie, a journalist who has set up home in the city. We meet the people in his street, the construction workers renovating his house, the characters in his area – there is a strong sense of community, fun and friendship. As we witness the innocence of New Orleans before Katrina, with marching bands, dancing girls and smiling faces, it seems reminiscent of the grainy black and white films of the late 1930s before WWII. As if to underline the point, Elie, at an early stage in the film, chillingly states that he does not know where many of the people in the film are now. We don't know either but in this poignant film, we gain a window to their world.

Garbage Dreams

(d. Mai Iskander, Egypt, 79 minutes)

Arabic with English subtitles

Although Cairo is a city of 18 million people, it had no city-wide waste disposal system for years. Instead, residents relied on 60,000 Zabbaleen, Egypt's indigenous garbage workers, to collect their trash. Long before recycling became trendy, the Zabbaleen were actively separating and recycling the tons of garbage collected each day to earn a living. These entrepreneurial garbage workers recycle 80% of the garbage they collect – arguably the world's most efficient waste disposal system. Over four years, filmmaker Mai Iskander followed three teenagers – Adham, Osama and Nadil – who grew up in this garbage village. We see the impact on their life when the city decides to replace the Zabbaleen by contracting with multinational garbage disposal companies. The change in policy threatens the Zabbaleen livelihood and the survival of the community. As this crossroad is reached, each teen must choose his future. More than a story about garbage, the filmmaker has created an intriguing, multi-layered film that observes the culture of the Zabbaleen and provides a window to their hopes, dreams and fears.

Guest of Cindy Sherman

(d. Paul H-O and Tom Donahue, USA, 89 mins)

Cindy Sherman is a well-known contemporary artist whose art primarily focuses on photographing herself in a series of different self-constructed persona of women that exist in film, magazine and history. Her work becomes a deconstruction of stereotypical public identities in the gaze of her audience - layers of identities one can strip off and put back on. The documentary is about Paul H-Q's 'Cinderella'-like encounter with Sherman and his consequent identity struggle. He loses his existing identity along with 'the shoe' during his relationship and fails to reinvent one that is compatible to Cindy's 'celebrity' existence. The documentary gives an authentic portrayal of New York contemporary art scene along with Sherman's work and the couple's relationship.

Satellite Queens

(d. Bregtje van der Haak, Netherlands, 60 minutes)

No, this is not about drag artists on a cable TV channel – *Satellite Queens* is a gem of a documentary which pulls you in as it unfolds the story of four Arab women who host Kalam Nawaem ('Sweet Talk' or 'Women Talk') – the most popular talk show in the Muslim world. We see how difficult it can be to discuss homosexuality, masturbation, terrorism, infidelity, love outside marriage and a host of other subjects in the ultra-conservative Middle East. The four 'Queens' have been brought together from different countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Saudi Arabia) to front the talk show, and they challenge each other as much as they do their audiences. The women display great courage as they venture into unexplored territory - would TV presenters in the West be so fearless if they thought gunmen could come knocking? And it is not that they are fearless; through their narratives it is clear they are aware, and wary, of the dangers. They push for freedom, for tolerance, and for understanding – but from an Arab perspective. Nothing is going to happen overnight but in its own good time.

Tickets to BIFF 2009 are now on sale at http://www.biff.bm/box_office/tickets.html as well as at the Festival's physical box office, at 53 Front Street, Hamilton (next door to MAC). Tickets for UnWrapped!, the Festival launch party featuring hot Manhattan band Peculiar Gentlemen and Sugar Shack Burlesque, will also go on sale on March 11.

The mission of the Bermuda International Film Festival is to advance the love of independent film from around the world, and create a community welcoming to filmmakers and filmgoers.

Media Contact:

Bermuda International Film Festival

Tel: 293-3456

Fax: 293-7769

E-mail: director@biff.bm