

## Synopsis of the Films of the Festival Session One (May 2011)

### **"Look Both Ways" by Sarah Watt (Australia)**

On a Friday after a horrific train crash, three newsmen in Adelaide must take stock: Nick, a photojournalist, learns he has cancer; Andy, a writer with two children who has a bad relationship with his ex, learns his girlfriend Anna is pregnant; Phil, an editor, realizes he's missing his children's growing up. That afternoon, Meryl, an artist who illustrates sympathy cards and constantly imagines disasters, witnesses a train accident kill a man...

### **"Bright Star" by Jane Campion (New Zealand)**

The drama is based on the three-year romance between early 19th century English Romantic poet John Keats and fashionable Fanny Brawne. The two lovers were engaged in passionate, overwhelming relationship. When Keats fell ill, the two young lovers faced no marriage but separation. In Keats' own poignant words, "forever panting and forever young."

### **"Fire" by Deepa Mehta (India)**

Ashok runs a family business that sells takeout food that also has a video rental store at the side. Ashok's extended family includes his wife Radha, his brother Jatin, their ailing mother Biji and their manservant Mundu, all living under the same roof. Jatin, at the insistence of Ashok and their mother, Biji, agrees to marry the beautiful Sita in an arranged marriage, although he is actually in love with Julie, a Chinese-Indian. Both marriages in the family turn out to be emotionally empty, without love or passion and circumstances bring together Radha and Sita emotionally...

### **"Silent Waters" by Sabiha Sumar (Pakistan)**

Set in 1979 Pakistan, General Zia-ul-Haq has imposed martial law and, within a few months, the country is decreed a Muslim state. Ayesha Khan, a well-adjusted woman in her forties, devotes her life to the education of her eighteen-year-old son Salim, in the little village of Charkhi, in the Pakistani Punjab. Salim is a quiet dreamer, but the fast moving political situation fills Ayesha with anxiety, since her son is changing out of all recognition into a militant...

### **"Shadow Magic" by Ann Hu (China)**

Beijing, 1902: an enterprising young portrait photographer named Liu Jinglun, keen on new technology, befriends a newly-arrived Englishman who's brought projector, camera, and Lumière-Brothers' shorts to open the Shadow Magic theatre. Liu's work with Wallace brings him conflict with tradition and his father's authority, complicated by his falling in love with Ling, daughter of Lord Tan, star of Beijing's traditional opera...

### **"Temptation of a Monk" by Clara Law (Hong Kong)**

Near the beginning of the Tang dynasty, in 7th century China, General Shi Yan-sheng is tricked into leaving the crown prince unguarded, who is murdered by one of his brothers, who then becomes the emperor. Shi retreats to a monastery, perhaps to hide, perhaps to plan a coup. In the abandoned monastery, an aged abbot schools him with practical, earthy teachings...

### **"Shilalipi" (The Inscription) by Shameem Akhtar (Bangladesh)**

It is a docufiction on Selina Parvin, a journalist, writer and literary editor. Selina Parvin was killed by the collaborators of the Pakistani army on 13th December 1971, just a few days before the Liberation of Bangladesh on the 16th December. Her body was found along with other martyred intellectuals in the killing field of the Pakistani army at Rayer Bazar. The film retraces the life of Selina Parvin and the turbulent times in which she lived and which led to the Liberation War and the subsequent Independence of Bangladesh at the cost of the millions of lives like that of Selina Parvin.

### **"Shadhinota" ("A Certain Liberation") by Yasmine Kabir (Bangladesh)**

Gurudasi Mondol gave herself up to madness in 1971, during the Liberation War of Bangladesh, as she watched her entire family being killed by the collaborators of the occupying forces. Thirty years later, Gurudasi continues to roam the streets of Kopilmoni, a small-town in rural Bangladesh, in quest of all she has lost; snatching at will from strangers and breaking into spaces normally reserved for men. In her madness, she has found a strategy for survival. In Kopilmoni, Gurudasi has attained near legendary status. Through her indomitable presence, she has kept alive the spirit of the Liberation War.

### **"Shesh Kritto" ("The Last Rites") by Yasmine Kabir (Bangladesh)**

It is a silent film that depicts the ship-breaking yards of Chittagong, Bangladesh - a final destination for ships that are too old to ply the oceans any longer. Every year, hundreds of ships are sent to yards in Bangladesh and thousands of people come to these yards in search of jobs. Risking their lives to save themselves from hunger, they breathe in asbestos dust and toxic waste. The elemental struggle between man and metal figures throughout the film, as men carry the weight of steel ropes over their shoulders, pull huge parts of the vessels inland, and bear great metal plates. It is an allegorical portrayal of the agony of hard labour.

### **"Un nombre de Mujer" & "Female Alchemy": A Video Symphony in Seven Movements both films by Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez (Cuba)**

Dinorah de Jesús Rodríguez is a Miami-based Cuban film/video artist working with various manifestations of projected imagery. Juxtaposing hand-crafted 16mm film with video, installation and performance, her collage works have been exhibited internationally in film festivals, museums, galleries, TV, outdoor projections and on-stage collaborations. "I create time-based moving collages made of hand-crafted film, video, text, performance, installation, music and/or audio effects. My passion is subliminal manipulation via the power of embedded single frames and the classic use of cinematic cues, such as music, lighting and montage. My pieces often include snippets of vintage commercials, cartoons, pornography and movie trailers to initiate subconscious discourses that deconstruct and recycle programmed emotional and moral responses to mass media."

### **"Talentine" by Yasmin Ahmad (Malaysia)**

A music teacher, who is herself a great performer, is organising an inter-school 'talentine'. Through the days of auditions, rehearsals and preparations, running up to the big day of the contest, the characters get embroiled in a world of heightened emotions - ambition, jealousy, human comedy, romance, heartbreak - all of which culminate in a day of great music and performances. "The idea behind 'Talentine' was that as humans, we have to go through a lot of pain and some measure of suffering before we can reach greater heights."

### **"Make a Wish" by Cherien Dabis (Palestine)**

A young Palestinian girl wants to buy something very special, but she cannot because she does not have enough money. And when she finally manages the money, she buys it at her heart's content: a birthday cake for her martyred father.

### **"Amreeka" by Cherien Dabis (Palestine)**

A drama centered on an immigrant single mother and her teenage son in small town Illinois.

### **"Two Women" by Tahmineh Milani (Iran)**

The film charts the lives of two promising architecture students over the course of the first turbulent years of the Islamic Republic. Tahmineh Milani creates this scathing portrait of those traditions - aided by official indifference - which conspire to trap women and stop them from realizing their full potential; the inclusion of frank depictions of domestic violence was hailed by many as a breakthrough in dealing with a long taboo subject.

### **"Woman on Top" by Josefina Torres Benedetti (Venezuela)**

Brazilian chef Isabella Oliveira moves to San Francisco when her husband Toninho, frustrated by her motion sickness, cheats on her. To mend her heart, she makes an offering to Yemanjá, the goddess of the sea. The goddess responds: Isabella no longer loves and the fish in Bahia no longer bite. Stricken, Toninho heads north to get her back...

### **"The Headless Woman" by Lucrecia Martel (Argentina)**

While driving home by herself, Veronica hears the ring of her cell phone and is momentarily distracted from the road. Suddenly she feels a thud and her head is thrust backward, then forward onto the dash. Whether or not she has hit something, a dog or a person, is unclear because the woman is frozen into inaction for what seems to be an eternity...

### **"Frida" by Julie Taymor (U.S.A.)**

"Frida" chronicles the life Frida Kahlo shared unflinchingly and openly with Diego Rivera, as the young couple took the art world by storm. From her complex and enduring relationship with her mentor and husband to her illicit and controversial affair with Leon Trotsky, to her provocative and romantic entanglements with women, Frida Kahlo lived a bold and uncompromising life as a political, artistic, and sexual revolutionary.

### **"The Silences of the Palace" by Moufida Tlatli (Tunisia)**

As Alia, the daughter of a beautiful servant Khedija, grows up in the Kings Palace at the end of the French colonial rule in Tunisia, she realizes the sexual favours required of her mother and other servants. It depicts the oppressive nature of the male-dominated palaces and the price that women servants had to pay...

### **"Mansfield Park" by Patricia Rozema (Canada)**

At 10, Fanny Price, a poor relation, goes to live at Mansfield Park, the estate of her aunt's husband, Sir Thomas. Clever, studious, and a writer with an ironic imagination and fine moral compass, she becomes especially close to Edmund, Thomas's younger son. Fanny is soon possessed of beauty as well as a keen mind...

### **"Under the Same Moon" by Patricia Riggen (Mexico)**

The film tells the parallel stories of nine-year-old Carlitos and his mother, Rosario. In the hopes of providing a better life for her son, Rosario works illegally in the U.S. while her mother cares for Carlitos back in Mexico. Unexpected circumstances drive both Rosario and Carlitos to embark on their own journeys in a desperate attempt to reunite...

## **Session Two (June 2011)**

### **"Yes" by Sally Potter (England)**

Yes is a love story between She (Joan Allen, stunning in the role of a lifetime) and He (Simon Akbarian). She is married (to Sam Neill, who manages to play both boorish and sympathetic), a scientist, and Irish-American, living in London - a city Potter loves to photograph and whose different, colliding cultures she conveys superbly. He is Lebanese, working as a chef in London. She meets He. Love ensues.

### **"Morvern Callar" by Lynne Ramsay (Scotland)**

Following her boyfriend's suicide, supermarket clerk Morvern Callar passes off his unpublished novel as her own. With the money her boyfriend left for his funeral, she leaves Scotland for Spain where she travels with her closest friend. The journey prompts a series of internal and external transformations for Morvern - ones which bring to light her experiences of grief, memory, freedom, and desire.

### **"In A Better World" by Susanne Bier (Denmark)**

Anton is a doctor who commutes between his home in an idyllic town in Denmark, and his work at an African refugee camp treating the victims of a murderous militia. In these two very different worlds, he and his family are faced with conflicts that lead them to difficult choices between revenge and forgiveness...

### **"Antonia's Line" by Marleen Gorris (Netherlands)**

In an anonymous Dutch village, a sturdy, strong-willed matron establishes and, for several generations, oversees a close-knit, matriarchal community where feminism and liberalism thrive. The matriarch, Antonia, looks back upon her life, the generations of family and friends gathered around her table, and ponders the cyclical nature of time...

### **"Blood Feud" by Lina Wertmüller (Italy)**

Titina Paterno, a widow in a small coastal town in Sicily, goes insane after the death of her husband. She cannot stop telling whoever wants to hear her that Vito Acicatena, the fascist bigwig of the region was the one responsible of the crime. Justice, alas, will not do anything to punish this criminal, but Titina, in her own way, will be Vito's worst nightmare. When a leftist lawyer, Rosario Spallone, sees Titina, it is love at first sight...

### **"The Good News" by Helena Taberna (Spain)**

A young priest arrives in his first assignment to a small parish serving a working-class village in the north of Spain in 1936. He is a witness of the military uprising that precipitates the Spanish Civil War and, moved by his faith, he stands up to defend his people. The loneliness haunting him brings Miguel close to Margari, a young schoolteacher...

### **"Cherry Blossoms" by Doris Dorrie (Germany)**

Trudi and Rudi live in a small Bavarian village in Germany. When Trudi learns that her husband Rudi is dangerously ill, she suggests visiting their children Franzi and Karl in Berlin without telling him the truth. As their children don't care much about their parents, Trudi and Rudi go to the Baltic Sea, where Trudi suddenly dies. Rudi is thrown out of gear, even more when he learns that his wife wanted to live a totally different life in Japan...

### **"Bang Bang Wedding!" by Christine Crokos (Greece)**

This film is about everything you wouldn't want in your wedding day! Four different stories are cleverly mixed. The scenario, casting, beautiful views of Crete, and nice cinematography are the treats the audience is offered with.

### **"The Ascent" by Larisa Shepitko (U.S.S.R.)**

Two Soviet partisans depart their starving band on a short march to a nearby farm to get supplies. The Germans have reached the farm first, so the pair must go on a journey deep into occupied territory, a voyage that will also take them deep into their souls.

### **"27 Missing Kisses" by Nana Dzhordzhadze (Georgia)**

The summerly adventures of teen Sybilla, who falls in love with a middle-aged father, while being romanced by his teen son. The film unfolds at an easy pace which allows the character of Sibylla to fully develop and for the supporting characters, particularly the women, to fully reveal themselves. It is a film full of varying emotions but never descends into gratuitous sentimentality.

### **"Copying Beethoven" by Agnieszka Holland (Poland)**

A fictionalized account of the last year of Beethoven's life. Vienna, 1824: in the days before the first performance of the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven needs help with copying out the charts, so a promising student of composition, Anna Holtz, 23, is sent to assist him. She not only aids the transcription of the notes, she provides guidance from the orchestra pit as Beethoven conducts the work's debut...

### **"Lourdes" by Jessica Hausner (Austria)**

In order to escape her isolation, wheelchair-bound Christine makes a life changing journey to Lourdes, the iconic site of pilgrimage in the Pyrenees Mountains. The plot exhibits a genuine empathy for the core tenets and consequent outward trappings of Catholicism.

### **"The Book of Mary" by Anne-Marie Miéville (Switzerland)**

Anne-Marie Mieville, a frequent collaborator and partner with filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard (who also penned the wonderful "First Name: Carmen" and, was the one who edited "Hail Mary"), and made this piece about a daughter named Mary and her parents, who are in the middle of their marital troubles, and at the start of the film are in a bind - will they split for falling out of love, or stay for their child?

### **"Chaos" by Coline Serreau (France)**

It is a story about a bourgeois couple, modern yet conventional. One night by accident, a young sex worker, Malika, barges into their lives. Hounded down, beaten up, threatened, she will continue to struggle, with the help of a well off lady, first for her survival - her resurrection - then for her dignity and freedom.

### **"The Captive" by Chantal Akerman (Belgium)**

It's an adaptation of Proust's "La Prisoniere" (Book Five of "In Search of Lost Time"). Set in Paris, France, it is a serious tale of a tragic and dysfunctional love. It is a sort of psycho-epistemological inquiry that asks: How can we know another?

### **"Upperdog" by Sara Johnsen (Norway)**

As young children, half-siblings Axel and Yanne are adopted to Norway. They are separated on arrival. The sister Yanne remembers their journey to Norway, but has no idea where her younger brother might be now. Her desire to be united with her brother sets in motion a chain of events which throws many people into emotional turmoil.

### **"The Mermaid" by Anna Melikyan (Russia)**

The fanciful tale of an introverted little girl who grows up believing she has the power to make wishes come true. She must reconcile this belief with reality when, as a young woman, she journeys to Moscow and grapples with love, modernity and materialism.