

SAN SEBASTIAN REVIEW DAILY



Anecy Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION

SULTANA'S DREAM

VERDICT: Spanish director Isabel Herguera's exhilarating and imaginative animated tale 'Sultana's Dream' about a roving artist is sparked by real-life Bengali feminist thinker Rokeya Hossain and her 1905 story about Ladyland, a country run by women.

Deborah Young, September 25, 2023

Call it utopian sci fi, or the fertile cross-pollination of women thinkers across time and space, but *Sultana's Dream* (El sueño de la sultana) takes the audience on a

fantasy journey that is as delightful as it is educational.

This animated feature film, Spanish director Isabel Herguera's first long-form work, is inspired by a story of the same title by Muslim teacher and writer Rokeya Hossain (1880-1932), born in Bengal and buried in the courtyard of a school because she was refused the Muslim cemetery. After catching attention in San Sebastian's Official Selection, it is bound to spread its wings over festivals and art houses, following in the footsteps of such feminist animation classics as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2007) and Yonfan's

Continues next page

OFFICIAL SELECTION

KALAK

VERDICT: A deeply damaged Danish man relocates to Greenland in a bid to escape childhood sexual trauma in Swedish director Isabella Eklöf's bleakly compelling drama, which is based on real events.

Stephen Dalton, September 25, 2023

Opening with a chillingly banal depiction of incestuous paedophile abuse before touching on obliterating depression, drug addiction, serial infidelity, postcolonial trauma, suicide, murder, and a grisly animal attack on a young girl, *Kalak* is a compellingly grim slab of classic Nordic glumcore, but admittedly not a great date movie. Building on her prize-winning debut feature *Holiday* (2018), Swedish writer-director Isabella Eklöf again takes a nuanced look at sexual assault and its aftershocks here. This difference this time is that she is adapting somebody else's work, the 2007 autobiographical novel by Danish-Norwegian author Kim Leine, who shares screenplay credit.

World premiering in competition in San Sebastian this week, *Kalak* is a handsomely crafted co-production between Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Greenland and the Netherlands. The story's

Continues next page

Now Taking Reservations.

AFM23

OCT 31 - NOV 5 / SANTA MONICA

Sultana's Dream from page 1

No. 7 Cherry Lane (2019).

Herguera and co-screenwriter Gianmarco Serra tell their fantastic stories through the eyes of a young back-packing artist and filmmaker, Inés, whose trips between Spain and India form the backbone of the film. The fact that every face in the film is colored a warm, rich brown underlines the universality of this story and the connection between Europeans and Indians of different races and religions – it's a story exploring men and women, after all.

Initially, Inés goes to Ahmadabad to see her eccentric lover Amar, an artist whose impulsive spontaneity often leaves her on her own. In one sequence she dons a white headscarf to visit a mosque with him, but he gets distracted playing with some children and she finds herself surrounded by a wall of hostile-looking men, then by a sea of identically masked women cradling infants. One of them identifies herself as a Frenchwoman and hands her a business card, on which is written Attorney; the woman claims she has found freedom

[***Full review, click here***](#)

Kalak from page 1

unsparing bleakness will doubtless limit its potential audience appeal, but high-calibre performances, thoughtful treatment of serious themes, and visually stunning Greenlandic locations are all strong selling points. There are moments of levity and beauty in

mark, notably his sexually abusive father Ole (Soren Hellerup). Outwardly, he appears to have made a success of his adult life, sharing a warm family nest with his supportive wife Lærke (Asta Kamma August) and two pre-teen children. But his damaged, needy nature keeps drawing him into high-risk



San Sebastian International Film Festival

the darkness here, elevating Eklöf's emotionally charged psycho-drama above the usual glut of misery porn that typically score festival slots before disappearing into art-house obscurity. Leine's fame and acclaim in Scandinavia could also help boost the film's regional prospects.

Kalak mostly takes place in the former Danish colony of Greenland at the dawn of the 21st century. Jan (Emil Johnsen) is a nurse on the run from his painful childhood in Den-

situations, working through his past trauma on some level through a series of messy sexual entanglements with Greenlandic women, which Lærke initially tolerates with infinite good grace.

Immersing himself in the local language and customs, Jan dreams of becoming a "Kalak", a slang term for "real" or "dirty" Greenlander, which can be both insult and compliment. With the decades-deep

[***Full review, click here***](#)

Attend IDFA this year!

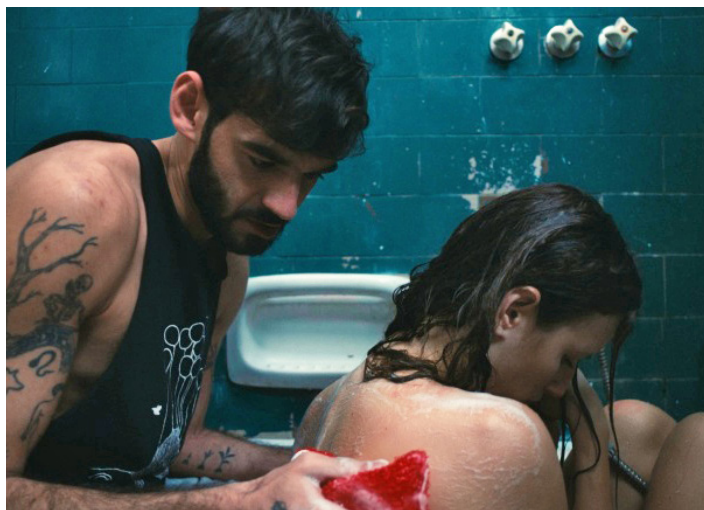


8 – 19 November 2023

International
Documentary Film
Festival Amsterdam

VERDICT SHORT

SINGLE LIGHT



San Sebastian Film Festival

VERDICT: A young woman must deal with the physical and psychological bruises of a sexual assault in Shaylee Atary's powerful dramatic short.

Ben Nicholson, September 25, 2023

The eponymous 'single light' in Shaylee Atary's potent drama is both literal and allegorical.

The film follows less than 24 hours in the life of Lali (Yael Elkana) from a nocturnal walk home, during which she is sexually assaulted by a supposed friend, to the following day and the implications of the attack. In the Tel Aviv back alley in which Lali is raped, she stares, unable to move, up at a bright light casting a lurid pall over the events. The next day, she attempts a similar strategy of dissociation to attempt to save herself from the pain of having to process what has happened to her. It's a bracing, authentic and keenly observed depiction of a tragically common ordeal.

The rape sequence itself is handled delicately, initially shot in a long locked-off take that emphasises Lali's vulnerability and isolation as her friend tries to take advantage of her lack of sobriety before forcing himself on her. With the attack in progress, the camera cuts to a close-up of Elkana's performance, her determinedly blank stare as she tries to separate mind from body and escape the experience of the assault.

Elkana is brilliant when she portrays Lali during the following day, teetering on the brink – resolutely trying to brush off the impact of the events, snapping at her caring housemate Ori (Ben Ze'ev Rabain) when

[Full review, click here](#)

FILM IT IN SARAJEVO

30% CASH REBATE



SARAJEVO
CITY OF FILM

unesco
Member of
the Creative Cities Network



Grad Sarajevo
City of Sarajevo



Ministarstvo kulture i sporta
Kantona Sarajevo



SCREEN
DOLLARS

EVERYTHING about the MOVIES

Profiles of Top Stars and
Filmmakers

Upcoming Movie Releases

Trailers, Film Clips and Videos



Find Out More

www.screendollars.com



The Match Factory

PERLAK

AFIRE

VERDICT: Christian Petzold is in top form with this intimate summer drama that quietly builds to an unexpected, heart-wrenching finale.

Jay Weissberg, February 22, 2023

“Generosity” isn’t a word one usually thinks of using about Christian Petzold’s films. His characters are always complex yet often too pent up to generate warm feelings on top of our sympathy. *Afire* is an exception, a supremely generous film that accords even its main character, a sullen young writer stymied by his constitutional inability to see rather than merely observe, a perhaps undeserved measure of grace. The director’s latest marks a welcome return to a more contained, intimate story in which the world’s catastrophes, here represented by devastating forest fires, lick around the edges, creating an atmosphere of approaching danger threatening to interrupt four young people in a summer home by the sea. *Afire* doesn’t play with narrative forms and its references are the here-and-now; it surprises in ways that feel right each time, and it quietly builds to a thoroughly unexpected, heart-wrenching finale. After several strong yet not wholly convincing films, Petzold delivers a work likely to make art house box offices glow.

His most recent muse Paula Beer is the film’s emotional core and he clearly adores how her every glance seems suffused with intelligent kindness. She’s not seen right away, and in fact her first appearance on screen is fleeting and at a distance, but the red of the simple summer dress she invariably wears becomes a welcome eye-catcher each time the color is

[Full review, click here](#)



Venice Film Festival

PERLAK

EVIL DOES NOT EXIST

VERDICT: Starkly opposing views of nature collide in Ryusuke Hamaguchi's 'Evil Does Not Exist' which, despite its portentous title, is simplicity itself and in a minor key after 'Drive My Car'.

Deborah Young, September 4, 2023

After the narrative brilliance and moral complexity of *Drive My Car*, winner of the Academy Award for best international feature film in 2022, auteur Ryusuke Hamaguchi takes a step back to admire the landscape of his native Japan in an enigmatic story about environmental conservation and humankind's relationship to nature.

Evil Does Not Exist (*Aku wa Sonzai Shinai*) feels something like an interlude between big films and may disappoint or puzzle fans of his previous work with its deliberate camerawork, slow pace and ordinary characters who live close to the land in a forested area close to Tokyo. What is exceptional is that the last five minutes change everything, revealing the subtle meaning Hamaguchi has been circling around up to then, and this final scene is guaranteed to furnish lively dinner conversation as viewers try to puzzle out its ambiguities. Not to spoil the surprise, but like *Drive My Car*, the writer-director seems happy to let individual film-goers finish the story for themselves.

Evil was originally conceived as a silent work to accompany *Gift*, a live score performance composed by Eiko Ishibashi, then subsequently was rolled out as a narrative film in its own right. Its close symbiosis with the music, however, is very evident from the opening tracking shot moving steadily through a forest of fir trees, with the camera pointed at the sky and tree-

[Full review, click here](#)

THE FILM

VERDICT

"Where The Acquisition Process Begins"

Tearing up the script with unfiltered podcast conversations from around the world with TFFV's Matt Micucci. Each episode of the SHOWCAST brings the listener behind the scenes of film festivals and markets everywhere with candid conversation about the industry and personal lives of SHOWCAST's guests.

FESTIVALS & MARKETS



Matt Micucci is Podcasting
Live from SSIFF Now

Matt@TheFilmVerdict.com

ELGOUNA
FILM
FESTIVAL
مهرجان الجونة السينمائي

CINEMA FOR
HUMANITY

6TH EDITION
13-20 OCT 2023

