

European Union Film Festival India
November 2020
I'll Be Your Mirror

"Reality is the law from which one cannot escape with impunity," wrote Antonio Pietrangeli, master of post-war Italian cinema and author of the iconic *I Knew Her Well (1965)*, among the masterpieces of European cinema which we will rediscover together at the 25th online edition of the European Union Film Festival in India.

One of the most active proponents of the renewal of Italian cinema in a realistic key, since the early 1940s, Pietrangeli underlines the artistic value of cinema, not as a contemplative art but as an active tool that "not so much soothes as it awakens, not so much empties as it enriches, not so much provokes ecstasy as it provides stimuli and determines actions, which, even if only internal, are no less important".

In the ideal dialogue beyond the geographical and temporal boundaries that we have tried to weave through the selection of this year's EUFF India, our thoughts turn to Satyajit Ray's poetic and necessary cinema of the soul, which we will pay homage to with the second chapter of the Apu Trilogy, the seminal **Aparajito** (1956).

Pietrangeli's message echoed in me like a mantra as I worked to select the films for this current edition, and today, it seems to me to take on an even deeper meaning, not only with respect to cinema.

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives all over the world and we're all in this together. People in different geographical, social, cultural and political contexts are living the same experience, facing the often tragic consequences of this pandemic.

The cultural and creative sectors are among the most affected by the current crisis, due to the sudden and massive loss of opportunities, affecting the more fragile players in particular.

However today, more than ever, the importance of cinema for our societies is evident, as it helps us make sense of this pandemic. Sharing art in all its forms, even virtually, has been and continues to be the main and most powerful way to stand united beyond all borders, to continue sharing our humanity and our fears as well as our hopes about the future.

Due to the current pandemic and to social distancing health measures, we are no longer sharing the festival experience the way we used to do. Some festivals have been cancelled, others are reorganised virtually. Although we really miss the traditional cinema going experience and look forward to returning to theatres the way we used to, as it always happens, when something is lost, we can also learn a lesson for the future.

"I'll be your mirror
reflect what you are
in case you don't know
I'll be the wind, the rain and the sunset
the light on your door
to show that you're home (...)"

Lou Reed, *The Velvet Underground*, 1966

Thanks to the popular nature of cinema, one of the most immediate and democratic art forms we can enjoy, the fully virtual European Union Film Festival in India aims to be a magic mirror we can get through together, reflecting the different faces of our time. This Festival will showcase the variety and the complexity of the European Union's culture through innovative film programming, opening a door to further fruitful human and cultural relationships with India and the extraordinary wealth of its millennial culture.

Playing on cinema's essential tension between form and content, reality and fiction, past and contemporaneity, EUFF India will be a journey into history and into the everyday life of people and countries, where the particular becomes universal, constantly poised between pain and joy, frustration and ecstasy, fear and courage.

A journey through time and space that will allow us to open windows on intercultural dialogue in terms of human rights, gender equality, migrations, employment and inclusion, the coexistence of religions, environmental issues and climate change.

Spread through four sections, the films of EUFF aim to show us the similarities and differences between countries, communities and generations, problems and conflicts, but also people's shared and specific aspirations or projects, in EU countries as well as all around the world.

Based on the idea of cultural *métissage*, **Eurorama: European Cinema Today** is a multiform and mottled mosaic of films by award-winning directors from all around the EU, offering us burning cinematic substance to get closer to the meaning of life. These independent, offbeat voices and unusual perspectives look with wide-open eyes at the realities of the European Union, embodying its values as sanctioned by the second Article of the Treaty on European Union: respect for human rights, for freedom and equality, for democracy and rule of law, and the rejection of any kind of discrimination.

Masters of European Cinema: No moment other than this one, where a global pandemic is forcing the pace of life and of our movements to slow down, could be more propitious for immersing ourselves in the visionary gazes of outstanding authors of cinema's past, who seem to dialogue each other through the voices of their unforgettable female characters, revealing deep connections to our present.

From the faces and places of the personal, lyrical and political cinema of Nouvelle Vague author Agnès Varda (**Cléo From 5 to 7**, 1962), to the subversive power of the unconscious imaginary and the radical critique of social hypocrisy of Luis Buñuel (**The Exterminating Angel**, 1962). From the rigorous and rebellious existentialism of Rainer Werner Fassbinder (**Ali: Fear Eats the Soul**, 1974) combining poignant intimacy with a social critique of the mechanisms of human exploitation, to the social, moral and political urgency of Antonio Pietrangeli's cinematographic work (**I Knew Her Well**, 1965), perfectly balancing the experience of neorealism with the popular and satirical form of the "commedia all'italiana" while focusing on the changing role of women in society.

From Krzysztof Kieślowski's close-ups on the astonishing beauty of a surviving and resistant human being (**Three Colours: Blue**, 1993), to Miloš Forman's talent for storytelling, always poised between farce and drama, imbued with universal metaphors for social and political aberrations as well as

with the vibrant sensitivity of outsiders, up to the philosophical inquiry of Ingmar Bergman's cinema, his aesthetic representation of the empty mystery of life, of the abyss of interiority and of the sublime hell of human relationships (**Persona**, 1966).

Poetry on Screen: Satyajit Ray and Chaitanya Tamhane is the EUFF's tribute dedicated to Indian cinema, an idyllic journey through time as on the Ganges, between a philosophical dimension and a sharp view of reality. On the one hand, we have the 1956 middle (master)piece of Satyajit Ray's legendary *Apu Trilogy*, **Aparajito**, an iconic coming-of-age story told through an unforgettable and poetic portrait of India, where everyday life matches the imperturbable beauty of human and natural architecture, and the universal feelings of human beings, always poised between joy and sorrow, echo through the inexorable cycle of life. On the other is Chaitanya Tamhane's **Court** (2014), a search for the meaning of life torn between the aspirations of the human soul and the slight and ineluctable concreteness of existence in its daily minutiae, an investigation into the relationship between the social roles we embody and the vagueness and inconsistency of the human being, and the important, universal political issues of freedom of speech and freedom to be.

Climate change: 6 shorts of Interdependence Last but not least, we felt the need to continue highlighting environmental issues through a cinematographic perspective. Facing environmental change through a new awareness of the need for an ecological vision of existence is one of the crucial challenges of our times. The dramatic and urgent environmental crisis we are going through requires a new human and civil awareness of the damage man has done and continues to do to the ecosystem — everyone's home — in which we live. Only a global, very fast, radical and no longer delayed act of love, respect and collective intelligence — the inspiration behind many of the short films presented in this selection — will be able to restore the laws of our planet, our home, and perhaps save it.

Our hope is that this virtual EUFF will contribute to make the film sector a key agent of dialogue, especially in the current challenging situation where culture and creativity have become more important than ever. Cinema is a mirror where we can look into each other's eyes, consciously, full of desire to get to know and to feel one another, without fear.