

ENCORE

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MALTA AND GOZO



ARTS COUNCIL
MALTA
STRATEGY 2025

THE THREE PALACES
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ADDRESSING SUSTAINABILITY, THROUGH FILM

ALPENLAND - Austria 2022

AHEAD OF THE LAUNCH OF THE SECOND EDITION OF THE EUNIC MALTA EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL, LISA GWEN, DISCUSSES THE RELEVANCE OF THE MEDIUM OF FILM WITH H.E. ERIKA BERNHARD, TO PROMOTE THE THEME OF SUSTAINABILITY

Film is possibly the most complete of art forms. Stimulating all the senses simultaneously, via an experience that can be enjoyed while being seated in the comfort of your home or within the environs of a movie theatre.

The moving image can transport spectators into alternate, parallel or surreal worlds. It can propel them into the future, give them a glimpse of the past or even conjure complete figments of the imagination. Moreover, the moving image has become a universal 'language' that unifies, defies, celebrates, informs and educates. Irrespective of the point of departure, film communicates, visually; yet it also combines the written word, through translation and subtitling, making film, universal.

And yet, context, subject and thematic, play an all-important role, in determining the aesthetic, plot or even narrative of any given film. A clear case in point is the distinction between American movies and European film, which is often, a distinction between

multi-million dollar, action or blockbuster movies, vis-a-vis on-a-budget independent, art-house cinema, which generally relies on EU funding through co-productions, for instance. European film remains highly underrated, as well as under-appreciated when compared to the storytelling prowess and rich narratives locked within the continent.

Which is why European film festivals - irrespective of scale - possess a high degree of relevance. This became palpable during a conversation with Austrian Ambassador to Malta, H.E. Erika Bernhard, who is directly involved in the organisation of the second edition of the EUNIC Malta European Film Festival. Scheduled to take place from October 12 to 16, at Spazju Kreattiv - which is also sponsoring partner

- the festival showcases feature-length and short films, as well as creative documentaries. This edition will also present a series of seven shorts by Maltese youths in collaboration with Aġenzija Żagħżagħ, which is being dubbed: *Young people in the spotlight*.

The platform organising the festival may be little known on the island, as yet. The EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC), is a European-wide network of organisations engaging in cultural relations, which has as many as 133 clusters across 103 countries worldwide. The EUNIC Malta cluster, set up a little over a year ago, comprises several embassies, together with the Italian Cultural Institute, The British Council and Arts Council Malta. Collaborating in the organisation and programming



L-OMBRA DEL GIORNO - Italy 2022



ROUGE - France 2020



THE BLACK PEBBLE - Malta 2022



LIVING WATER - Czech Republic 2020

of this year's festival are as many as 10 partners, including the embassies of: Austria, Spain, Poland, Hungary and France in Malta; the Italian Cultural Institute, British Council, Arts Council Malta, Alliance Francaise de Malte and the Czech Cultural Centre.

Yet, the significance of this young platform lies not only in the strength and vision of its partners, but also in the promotion of strong European values. So much so, that the thematic of this year's festival is sustainability. Broad and weighty as this term may be, it fits squarely within the United Nations' 2030 agenda, which lists 17 goals that actively take into account the "three dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social and ecological", Ambassador Bernhard explained.

Expanding on the theme's grounding framework and importance, she proceeded by emphasising that these three dimensions further contributed to social equality, education, health as well as the

fight against poverty. "Sustainability offers so many opportunities; it's not just a challenge. It will also contribute towards the betterment of society. This (sustainability) is a major subject, that one cannot tackle in isolation." This much has proven true, also within the collaboration of this initiative and the participating partners of the Malta cluster. But not only... Ambassador Bernhard is also full of praise for the support received by Maltese authorities, most especially the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government, which are jointly responsible for the organisation of the launch this October.

As with last year's festival debut, the EUNIC Malta Cluster is again collaborating directly with Spazju Kreattiv and the St James Cavalier Cinema - which is the only art-house cinema on the island. Last year's edition showcased the Sundance-winning film, *Luzzu*, directed by Alex Camilleri, among many other titles. And although the shortlist of films for the 2022 festival

has yet to be finalised, the information and synopses confirmed so far, is more than promising. Among the certain titles, is the 2019 10-minute short with no dialogue *A sunny day* by Faouzi Bensaidi, which deals directly with the impacts of climate change and the survival of humankind. Another film dealing with climate change is the short, 2016 *documentary Kokota: the islet of hope* directed by Craig Norris which, as per synopsis, "introduces viewers to the resilient people living on the front lines of climate change and explores how these unlikely heroes have managed to innovatively adapt to a warming climate while reforesting their island".

The French offering deals with pollution, head on; titled *Rouge*, and directed by Thomas Lilti, this film premiered in 2020, and follows the story of Nour and a young journalist investigating waste management at a chemical plant. The two gradually discover that this factory is hiding many secrets, including polluting discharges, doctored medical records and hidden accidents.

The Austrian submission – a documentary which debuted this year – is titled *Alpenland*. Directed by Robert Schabus, the movie's website describes it as featuring "one of the most spectacular landscapes at the heart of Europe"; this documentary revolves around "the people who live there, who have a very special bond with their habitat despite the tough conditions they often face". Closer to home, from Italy, comes the 2022 film, *L'ombra del giorno*, directed by Giuseppe Piccioni. The film is essentially a love story, between Luciano and Anna, which is set against the backdrop of fascist Italy in the 1930s. The German submission, in collaboration with the Goethe Institut is the award-winning 2021 film titled *Toubab*. Directed by Florian Dietrich, the film follows the story of two petty criminals, facing the threat of being deported back to Senegal.

The full film schedule will be available in the coming weeks on: www.kreattivita.org; attendance to the film festival will be free of charge.