

55th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen
30 April – 5 May 2009
Five competitions featuring 133 films from 36 countries

New developments in the competition programmes

For its 55th edition, the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen has made some changes in its competitions. Debuting this year is the NRW Competition, featuring productions from the festival's home state of North Rhine-Westphalia. In another new programme called "Open Screening" Oberhausen now offers filmmakers whose works did not make the final cut for one of the five competitions the opportunity to present their works to the festival audience.

In the International Competition, the festival has loosened up its programming schedule a bit. Ten feature-length programmes will still be shown, but these will be someone shorter than before, with fewer films screened. "In a programme that brings together such a diverse array of works, our aim here is to give each film more space, which also gives the audience more time to let each production really sink in", festival director Lars Henrik Gass explains. Moreover, this year's International Competition will consist exclusively of films that are premiering in Germany, in order to ensure that more attention is paid to each work.

Total prize money bestowed in the competitions has now increased to 40,500 euros. Awards range from the 7,500-euro Grand Prize of the City of Oberhausen for the International Competition, to the MuVi Online Audience Award, for which the festival awards 500 euros. Award sponsors include the television stations ARTE and 3sat and, for the new NRW Competition, the NRW.BANK.

Number of submissions remains high

The number of works submitted to the festival remains at a constant high level. With 5,742 productions previewed from 91 countries this year, the number is nearly the same as in 2008 (5,840 titles from 87 countries).

International Competition

52 productions from 32 countries (62 productions from 42 countries last year)

Nine films less than in 2008 – this can be attributed to the reduced programme volume as well as the fact that five unusually "long short films" of over 30 minutes in length were chosen this year. The front-runner is the USA with eight nominees, followed by the United Kingdom with seven and the People's Republic of China with four productions. Two films from Germany are in the starting line-up for 2009: Carsten Aschmann's **Ketamin – Hinter dem Licht** and Michel Klöfkorn's **n.n.** Among the smaller film nations competing this year are Armenia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Lebanon and Chile. In fact, films from all five continents will be on view in Oberhausen in 2009.

"To our surprise, we saw some extremely good fiction films in the previews this year. Whether this signals a new trend remains to be seen", remarks competition director Hilke Doering. Fiction and animation predominate in the 2009 International

Internationale

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Competition, for example **He shang de ai quing** (Cry Me a River), the new fiction short by Jia Zhang-Ke, whose feature-length film **Still Life** won the Golden Lion in Venice in 2006. A series of established artists are also contending this year, chief among them Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Robert Frank, Victor Alimpijev, Josef Dabernig and Sun Xun.

The jury for the 2009 International Competition:

João Garção Borges, TV line producer (Lisbon)
Amrit Gangar, author and curator (Mumbai)
Angela Haardt, curator and author (Berlin)
Mike Hoolboom, filmmaker and author (Toronto)
Kathy Rae Huffman, curator and author (Berlin)

German Competition

25 productions (22 last year)

The author's film is booming in Germany, at least on the short film scene. "The balance has tipped: there are almost no film school productions in the German Competition this year", comments competition director Carsten Spicher. "Only four of the works come from independent production companies, which means that the overwhelming majority are author's films in the truest sense of the word, with the director not only writing and directing, but also producing." Furthermore, many of the films were sponsored by major institutions: six by the German State Minister for Cultural and Media Affairs, and four by the Film Promotion Agency (FFA). A total of 1,130 productions were previewed this year, almost 100 less than in 2008.

Despite the new NRW Competition, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia continues to be well represented in the German Competition. After Berlin, the centre of the German (short) film industry, which has 15 productions in the running, comes North Rhine-Westphalia with three works – including the new **Contre-jour** by internationally renowned artists Christoph Girardet and Matthias Müller. Additional highlights in the competition are two short films from the **Germany 09** compilation presented at the Berlinale: **Ramses** by Romuald Karmakar and **Erster Tag** by Angela Schanelec. "By nominating these works, we wanted to deliberately showcase them as outstanding short films that can by all means stand on their own merits", said Carsten Spicher.

Some familiar faces will return to Oberhausen in 2009, such as Lola Randl and Rainer Egger – who have added a new episode to their popular series centring on the character of Herr Karpf, this time with **Der Geburtstag** – along with Jochen Kuhn, Bjørn Melhus and Jörg Wagner. Oliver Pietsch has one work vying for the MuVi Award and one in the German Competition. And German experimental film legend Heinz Emigholz is showing a world premiere: **Zwei Projekte von Frederick Kiesler**.

The jury for the 2009 German Competition:

Maike Mia Höhne, filmmaker and curator (Berlin)
Rainer Komers, filmmaker (Mülheim a.d. Ruhr)
Isabella Reicher, author (Vienna)

NRW Competition

10 productions in two programmes

225 submissions were previewed for Oberhausen's latest competition, resulting in a programme that reflects the diversity of film production in North Rhine-Westphalia, including a few potential audience hits. With seven of ten nominees, Cologne is clearly the centre of filmmaking in the state, while the University of Applied Arts in Dortmund is also represented with two works.

Ensuring a quality programme are filmmakers such as Rosa Hannah Ziegler, who won the German Short Film Award in 2007 for **Cigaretta mon amour**, Eli Cortiñas Hidalgo, who was nominated for the same award in 2007, and Matthias Wermke and Mischa Leinkauf, nominees in 2008 – all of whom will be showing their latest works at Oberhausen.

"We are extremely pleased with the competition thus far and are looking forward to offering even more films made in NRW an international platform", remarks competition director Carsten Spicher. "We did find it surprising, though, that hardly any of the films take place in NRW. The filmmakers travelled instead to the USA, Cuba, Poland or Switzerland; only a single film, Dominik Leube's **DSW**, about tram-line workers in Dortmund, is set in NRW." Michael Koch's crime thriller **Polar** takes place in the Swiss mountains, Andrzej Król went to Poland to shoot **Birthday**, and Hannes Lang travelled as far as the USA to make **Leavenworth WA**, showing how a small American town makes a good living promoting itself as a typical Bavarian village.

The jury for the NRW Competition:

Gabi Hinderberger, Filmfestival Blicke aus dem Ruhrgebiet (Bochum)

Ute Mader, Kommunales Kino Leverkusen

Dirk Steinkühler, Filmpalette (Cologne)

Children's and Youth Film Competition

36 films from 17 countries (42 entries from 21 countries last year)

A total of 459 productions submitted to the International and German Competitions were previewed for the children's programme this year. Of all the countries represented, the Netherlands was at the top with seven films nominated, followed by Germany and the United Kingdom with six films each. Iceland, Israel and Armenia are among the smaller filmmaking countries that also made the cut.

Fiction films figure prominently here as well. And a noticeably high number of entries that address young people were submitted to this year's competitions. "We also had a large selection of animation for the youngest viewers to choose from, while we saw relatively few good films geared toward children aged eight to twelve", comments competition director Anja Schmid.

For the first time, the Children's and Youth Film Competition will show a programme for young people aged 16 and over. "For one thing, we simply saw a great many good films dealing with themes of interest to this age group – finishing school, entering the job market, what happens next. And for another, we intend in this way to extend our media education activities at secondary schools", said Anja Schmid.

The competition programmes are designed for all age groups from three to 18.

11th MuVi Award

12 candidates (as in 2008)

With 179 clips (180 last year) the number of submissions remained constant this year, but there are certainly some changes going on behind the scenes on the German video clip scene. "The music video is in the process of migrating to the Internet. With the exception of clips for really big-name stars like Fanta 4 or Die Ärzte, MTV and VIVA haven't been showing clips for a long time. What we're interested in, namely experimental work and new visual vocabularies, has migrated almost completely onto the Internet, where there are specialised websites and competitions, and where even the big labels are now putting songs by their artists online for free visualization by anyone", says MuVi director Jessica Manstetten.

Oliver Pietsch, the 2007 MuVi Award winner, has a clip competing for the 11th MuVi Award this year, as well as a short film in the German Competition. While directors like Pietsch or Michel Klöfkorn have made the move from the MuVi Award to the German Competition, Xenia Lesniewski took the opposite route. After taking part in the German Competition last year, she now has a clip vying for the MuVi Award. Luigi Archetti & Bo Wiget also return to the programme this year – with another loving, ironic reflection on the music business.

Starting 1 April 2009, viewers can go onto www.muvipreis.de to vote for their favourite clip to win the MuVi Online Audience Award. New this year is that all voters automatically have a chance to win a trip for two to Oberhausen to witness the "real" MuVi Award ceremony on 2 May 2009.

The MuVi Jury:

Elke Buhr, author (Berlin)

Diedrich Diederichsen, author (Berlin/Vienna)

Sasha Nixon, music video producer, Partizan (London)

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