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FESTIVAL. Marseille: FID, the life of forms

Posted on September 27, 2022 by [Alice Leroy](#)

The FID Marseille may present itself as the “Marseille Film Festival”, but the film awarded by the jury of the international competition this year is a square documentary: *The Unstable Object II*, 3h30 of patient and silent observation of technical gestures, machinery, cadences and mechanical ballet in three factories. Its director, Daniel Eisenberg, continues a project begun with another triptych (already rewarded in 2011 at the FID), which explored as many eras of industrial history through a car factory, a watchmaking workshop and a cymbals. The economy of these gestures and technical knowledge is available this time through a hyper-technological company that designs medical prostheses in Duderstadt, a traditional glove factory in Millau and an industrial jeans factory in Istanbul. The three strictly equivalent parts, the scrupulous duration of the static shots, the elaborate architecture of the frames, or even the quiet silence of the film, everything here is a matter of formalism, not insofar as this would exclude the material and social reality of work (in the Turkish company as in the German one, the employees working on the design in the offices and those on the production in the workshops clearly do not belong to the same circles), but insofar as it designates cinema itself as a form of work, between craftsmanship and industry, standardized and specialized gestures, subject to the same technical and material

developments. To consider the project of *The Unstable Object I & II* as an archeology of labor gestures at the dawn of the 21st century, one is tempted to see in it a reflection on the "unstable" nature of cinema, in its technical apparatus as well as in its formats, and it is not insignificant that Eisenberg declined his work in a series of facilities for other viewing experiences. There is in the dialectic operated here neither value judgment nor testimony of any alienation, simply a relationship to the materiality of the gestures, to their historical contingency, as if these already constituted an archive. The recurring motif of the hands through these three spaces, human hands, mechanical arms, or even casts and prostheses, therefore functions as a leitmotif of this attention to gestures and the forms they create through repetition and technicality.

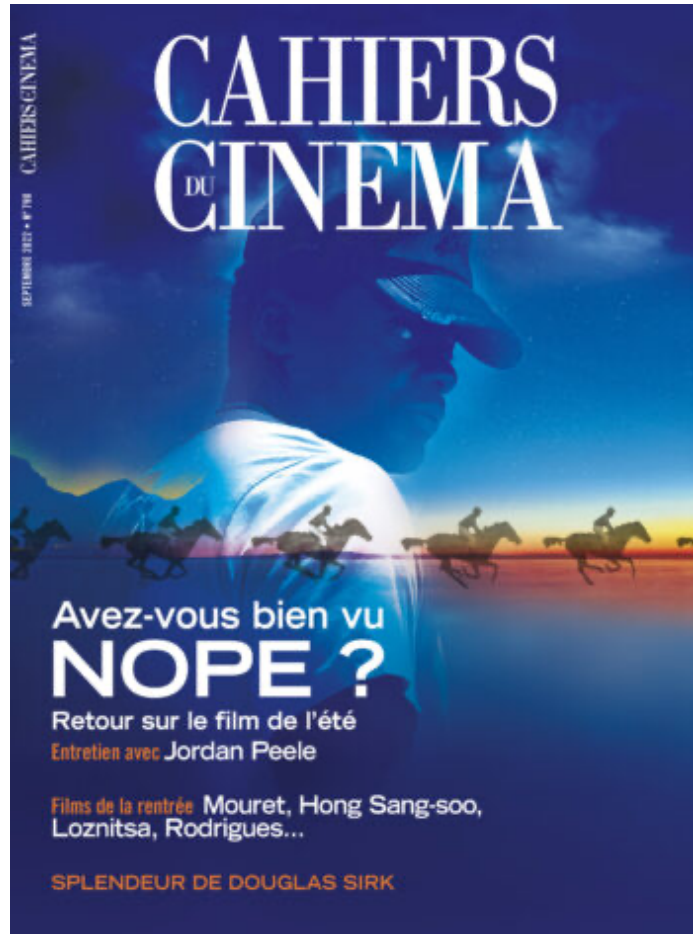
Same formal radicalism, although opposed in all respects to that of Eisenberg, in the film by Narimane Mari, Grand Prix of the French competition. Film-tomb, artist portrait and love letter, *We had the day, good evening* jumbles up the small bits of daily life of a couple on the verge of being separated by death. Michel Haas, whose presence has been part of the filmmaker's films since their meeting, seems inhabited by a cheeky vitality that is all the stronger as the disease diminishes it. Serious and light, covered with quotes that act as fetishes against death, the film seems to be written against the fatality of the present, as if the editing, an operation less technical than magical, ensured an unbreakable link between the living and the dead. A form is only a way of founding a reality and making it exist beyond the disappearance of those who shaped it. There is no writing at the FID, documentary, fiction or essay, which does not resist the singularity of the looks: *I also like politics*, listening to the stories of each other unraveling the good intentions of the fantasies and realities that come into play in the reception of refugees; or that they are tied to an autofiction like the brilliant *Passage du col* by Marie Bottois, where the filmmaker's own body, filmed in Super 8, becomes the experimental subject of an IUD insertion in a staging entirely directed by herself, while a "vulva fitting" reconnects with humor and wisdom with the feminist heritage of the MLAC films.

Colonialism, father of all (j)u)m(e)aux

Among the most fruitful paradoxes of these impure forms, literary borrowings undoubtedly contribute to the densest objects of this selection. Let us cite three of them, which everything opposes if not their literary breadth. *A Vida São Dois Dias* by Leonardo Mouramateus, a metaphysical and humorous soap opera, plays on narrative conventions and Gombrowicz-style doubles to invent an *ad hoc* universe. Rómulo and Orlando, the two twins embodied by the same actor in this melancholy farce, each maintain an antagonistic relationship to space (Brazil and Portugal, not yet healed from a colonial history) and to darkening political times. Halfway around the world, *A Tale of Filipino Violence* by Lav Diaz, presented by its author as a cine-novel (*sine-nobela*), is composed as a long prose poem. Punctuated by the repetition of a melancholy song by a demented woman – one of the archetypes of Diaz's cinema – this tragedy of history is inspired by a short story by Ricardo Lee, *Servando Magdamag*, whose hero, like *War and Peace* of Tolstoy, too naive then too lucid to fight, learns to lose what he has always possessed. We are in 1974, two years after the promulgation of martial law by the dictator Marcos, whose armed men have invaded the hacienda of Servando. In Diaz's film, Servando also has a twin brother, the bloodthirsty Hector, who has chosen blind violence, as if bestiality and madness were the only possible responses to the violence of history. Finally, *Conquest*, an extraordinary chronicle by Franssou Prenant of the colonization of Algeria from 1830 to 1848, combines images of contemporary Algeria shot by the filmmaker with fragments of literary and colonial archives, the cruelty of which is all the less bearable when it emanates from the stories of the victors. Here again, form constitutes the essence of this work, whose anachronistic montages of images and texts read off-screen testify to the fact that the past never ceases to act in the present.

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September 2022 – n°790 – DIGITAL

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