

To Memory, Poetry...and the Future

Although this year's edition of the much-lauded *Pêcheurs du Monde* film festival in Lorient, France, had to virtually reinvent itself, the outcome was a rich and intense experience of visual delight

The 12th edition of the *Pêcheurs du Monde* film festival, traditionally held in Lorient, France, could not take place in 2020. Despite the COVID-19 crisis, however, the festival took place in 2021 in another form—acquiring a greater influence since its audience grew from 3,000 spectators in theatres to more than 20,000 worldwide. Half the selected films were presented on a free distribution platform, Kub, supported by the Regional Council of Brittany. All the films in competition have been

the La Rochelle Film Festival for almost 40 years, directing it after 2001. The *Pêcheurs du Monde* Festival is one of the most important events in France.

This year was a bit special; the festival had to reinvent itself because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At first we were a bit disappointed not to live this cinematic experience physically. But the 'virtual' adventure was so rich and intense that we came out of it delighted and grown. The first part of the adventure consisted of watching the selected films—eight feature films and three short films—each on our own, with regular joint debriefings and without any ranking at this level. It is true that this part was a little frustrating at the beginning; we lived these viewings, alone in our living rooms, kitchens or offices, locked up with these works and the feelings they evoked in each of us.

In the end, it was more than interesting because we came to the debates and deliberations with our own totally objective and personal points of view, shorn of any external influence. This resulted in long, lively evenings of virtual debate and exchange, rich and extraordinary, which we all remember very fondly. We also got to know and appreciate one another through exchanges that in these difficult times proved priceless.

Different views

We realized we had analyzed these films with totally different views, influenced by our life experiences. With his experience as a man of the sea, Bruno is very sensitive to the marine atmosphere, to the technical transcriptions and to the living conditions of the men and women of the sea. Virginie is an activist committed to these same men

screened; the others will be screened in various communes of the Lorient agglomeration by the end of September. In this article two of the four members of the jury, representing the fishing world, talk about their experience.

This year we had the privilege of being selected to be part of the jury of the *Pêcheurs du Monde* Festival. Our modest curriculum vitae led us to represent and express the voice of fishworkers during the deliberations with the other members of the Jury (Férid Boughédir, president of the jury, and Prune Engler) from the world of cinema. Among the other jury members, Férid Boughédir, a Tunisian, is considered his country's greatest director. He is a regular on the juries of major festivals such as Cannes, Berlin and Venice. He was also the director of the Pan-African Festival of Carthage. Prune Engler worked for

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DANI DRUMOND



A scene from *Carne e Casca* (Flesh and Pearl) by Daniel Drumond. In a city in Brazil, with polluted waters, a shellfish fisherman fights for the survival and future of his grandchildren

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and women and to the defence of their environment. Prune and Ferid are film professionals, awake to the beauty of the images, to the contemplation, to the poetry, to the technical skill, and to the possible manipulation of the images in order to pass on a message. While the debates were lively and some points of view differed, we all shared a common sensitivity to the struggles of these men and women, to the stories that have touched our humanity. We were also all very attentive to the accuracy of the work, the technical skills and the way in which these stories were delivered to us by these films.

This led us to be unanimous in choosing the feature film for the World Fishermen's Festival Award, a film that tells the story of a dramatic and important event in our history and heritage. This film brings to life the drama of the sea with a certain accuracy and emotion. In *'Tuna Boats in the Storm'*, Alain Pichon of France makes us experience the storm that took so many lives, not through the depiction of pictures but by relying on precious testimonies and by bringing paintings to life. It was, therefore, not difficult to reward the extraordinary work of this

director who made us live through the events that cost the lives of so many very young sailors who embarked on the tuna boats of Southern Brittany.

Over 200 fishermen, often members of the same family, and many boys as young as 12, disappeared during this terrible storm in 1930. This was at a time when there were no means of communication, and the instruments for sailing were rudimentary. This is no longer the case today, although storms can still endanger the most powerful boats, especially when abandoned fishing gear gets caught in the propeller and the boat becomes unmanageable, as shown in a film that won an award at a previous festival (*'Men of Storms'* by Frédéric Brunnquell). In the countries of the Global South, in Africa or Asia, the lack of means of communication and access to weather forecasts often confronts fishermen with situations similar to those of European fishermen at the beginning of the 20th century.

Slavery at sea

We were all touched by the film that narrated the struggle of a Thai woman fighting against the little-known but very real scandal of slavery at sea where lives

are shamefully stolen and destroyed by unscrupulous men and a globalization that often forgets the fate of those who feed us. Fortunately, this woman is fighting bravely and has found the resources and a dedicated team to carry out her fight. With the help of former, often mutilated, slaves, she is looking for those who managed to escape and took refuge on forgotten islands in Indonesia and have made a life for themselves far

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from their original families in Burma. She is also fighting for compensation for disabled survivors. We can only hope that this courageous film will help raise awareness on the issue.

We were particularly touched by this film because, at the moment, the detractors of our profession are fighting a wrongful battle, at a time when the scandal of these illegal practices deserves the mobilization of everyone. (For more than a year, fishermen in the Bay of Biscay have been under pressure from the environmental group Sea Shepherd because of the dolphins that get caught in fishing nets, particularly in winter. Sea Shepherd, with the support of other NGOs, is calling for a four-month halt to fishing, with the more distant goal of a total ban on fishing to protect the dolphins. Virginie Lagarde and Bruno Claquin are involved on a daily basis in the advocacy of fishermen and are working to find solutions to reconcile fishing and dolphin protection.) We are quite sure that Chandrika Sharma would have approved of the choice of award for this film (the Chandrika Sharma Award for 'Ghost Fleet' by Shannon Service and Jeffrey Waldon of the US).


Among the short films, we were also unanimous on the deeply moving story of a man who fishes in difficult conditions, in the middle of the city, for a few precious kilos of mussels that allow him to survive with his family in a Brazilian shanty town, soon to be choked by the shells of those same mussels eaten in restaurants. 'Chair and Pearl' by Daniel Drumond, a film from Brazil/France, was challenging enough to win

the World Fishermen Film Festival Prize in the short film category.

Finally, the Special Mentions spring from our common desire to reward the work of memory and the poetic images of Guiana (Guyana, located in the northeastern corner of South America) cut off from modern times and the perpetual changes of society ('Eaux Noires' by Stéphanie Régnier of France, which won a Special Mention in the feature film category). In the heart of the Amazonian forest, descendants of slaves live peacefully by raising zebu cattle. The women contribute to their subsistence by fishing. The winning film is a poetic testimony to a fragile but resilient society that survives thanks to its culture of respect for the exuberance of nature.

We also wanted to underline the courage of a woman who fights in a fishermen's slum in Lagos, Nigeria, so that women can exist and express themselves in a world where men remain all-powerful and where the feminist fight to be waged is just colossal ('Mrs F' by Chris van der Vorm of The Netherlands, which won the Special Mention Chandrika Sharma Award). The Audience Award for 'La Saison des Tourteaux' came later and we liked it because it completed our 'cast'

Rich experience

Being part of the jury for the 2021 Pêcheurs du Monde film festival has been an extremely rich experience, constructive and fascinating for both of us, children of the maritime world, who are sensitive not only to current struggles, but also to memory and poetry, and to the amazing discoveries that await future film lovers. 

For more

Festival international de films - Lorient: Pêcheurs du Monde
<https://www.pecheursdumonde.org/>

Hope, Despair, Courage
https://www.icsf.net/images/samudra/pdf/english/issue_83/4436_art_Sam_83_art15_Review_Alain.pdf

The Many Lives of Fishers
https://www.icsf.net/images/samudra/pdf/english/issue_81/4387_art_Sam_81_art4_Lorient_Film_Festival_Alain_Le_Sann.pdf