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Arts & Culture Movie

The color purple: Filmmor Women's Film Festival begins today

When Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan fervently announced on March 8, International Women's Day, that Turkish women should bear at least three children in their lifetime, many women -- and men -- did not disguise their revolt at his sagacious solution to the supposed population decrease in the country. Speaking of revolt, the annual Filmmor International Women's Film Festival On Wheels has chosen to adopt the theme of "Women's History: Submission, Rebellion, Feminism" for their 2008 edition, which starts today at the Alkazar and French Cultural Institute movie theaters.



Aishah Shahidah Simmons

With a program consisting of a handful of films -- around 30 in total -- the festival was never a huge event. However, it's tight and concise scheduling allows audiences to discover a range of unique and powerful films directed by and about women. This year's selection includes Aishah Shahidah Simmons' "No For Sexual Assault," an 11-year journey depicting the struggle of African-American women against sexual assault; Eva Weber's documentary "Intimacy of Strangers"; Israeli Netalie Braun's "Metamorphosis," telling the story of four rape victims; Indian Paromita Vohra's "Q2P," which is a fascinating story focusing on public toilets to illustrate the outcomes of gender issues in India; Dutch Heddy Honigman's "Emoticons," a film that follows two young women striving to emancipate

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themselves via the Internet; French nouvelle vague diva Agnes Varda's "One Sings, The Other Doesn't," which happens to be one of the most critical films, depicting the women's movement of the late '60s; American Kay Sloan's "Suffragettes in Silent Cinema"; and, we can't forget, "Flowers for Simone de Beauvoir," which pays homage to the French feminist's works, along with her legacy to the women of the world.

The festival is also hosting numerous films from Turkish directors, including respected helmer Handan İpekci's latest release, "Hidden Faces." A compiled selection of Turkish shorts from young talents offers a breath of fresh air. This section includes titles such as "Control," "Muted," "La," "Powder," "Nobody's Pet," "Woman With the Movie Camera" and "Helin." Filmmor's own production "Purple Agenda," depicting the feminist movement and agenda in Turkey in recent years, will also be screened during the festival with the attendance of the collective of directors.

Breaking the 'rules of filmmaking'

Speaking about the current situation of gender politics in Turkey and how recent political controversies have affected Filmmor, festival director Melek Özman says the festival is determined to carry on with its own agenda of "making more women meet female directors' films" at every festival."

"As you know Turkey is a continuously changing country. You can never predict what tomorrow will bring; we're already used to that. As Filmmor, we believe that no matter what happens in the country, we have to continue our own activities and especially persist in organizing the festival each year," Özman said during an interview with Today's Zaman.

"It's really important for us that Turkish women are able to see the festival's films. Of course, we are open to male audiences, but this festival tries hard to create an opportunity for female viewers to watch films that they cannot normally access," she added. Fortunately, the festival's attendance numbers are rising each year.

Özman also said the festival is pursuing the notion of positive discrimination by only exhibiting films made by women. "As audiences, female and male, we are so used to watching a cinematographic language that has been passed down and implemented through the dominant

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male culture that we assume this must be the only acceptable language for film. As Filmmor, we are trying to break the commonly accepted rules of filmmaking by supporting women filmmakers who are searching for their own approach and style in the audiovisual sector, women who are searching for their own language," she explains.

Özman emphasized that the festival will be traveling to three more cities this year. After the festival's İstanbul run wraps up on March 22, the films will be shown consecutively in Eskişehir, Tunceli and Van in collaboration with local women's organizations. Özman and her team try very hard to make the festival films accessible to women that live in many regions of Turkey.

Özman also revealed an ironic anecdote: "Last year we were approached by a select number of male academicians who were arduously following and supporting our festival. They were rather insightful and intelligent. They told me proudly that they watched most of our films. I asked them what their mothers and wives were doing while they were seated at the cinema. They became increasingly silent when they realized that the women in their lives were probably cooking or cleaning for them. I told them, 'I'm really glad that you watched the films, but didn't you at least consider bringing your wives or mothers to the screenings?' Of course, then they started to think twice about what it really meant to support our festival."

Now it's time to give it up for the ladies and watch how the other half of the population perceives the world through a camera lens.

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