



Austria Gunnar Landsgesell

What turned out to be quite a successful year for Austrian filmmakers had, at the same time, a genuinely schizophrenic feel to it. While audiences for domestic films passed the million mark for the first time at the national box office and films by Austrian filmmakers attracted acclaim at film festivals, politicians appeared to have lost interest.

The Austrian film industry is small, with filmmakers working under precarious and fragile conditions, while their producers are almost entirely dependent on public funding. 2009 saw another appeal to the authorities for tax incentives in order to boost the annual production, although these cries appeared to fall on deaf ears. The budget for film production is always scarce, so when the subsidy of the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) was cut dramatically, the treasury promised to step in by establishing a film fund similar to the German Federal Film Fund (DFFF). As yet, that fund has yet to materialise. But there are hopes it will emerge in 2010.

The serious condition of the Austrian film industry notwithstanding, the filmmaking scene seems not only to have preserved its identity, it has experienced a watershed in creative activity. After bringing home the Oscar for the first time (for *The Counterfeiters*) in 2008, Austria was once again nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film Academy Award. Götz Spielmann's *Revanche* was not only a great success, it also confirmed the artistry of the so-called Nouvelle Vague Viennoise.

With his ninth Cannes Festival entry, Austrian director Michael Haneke finally won the Palme d'Or for the German-Austrian co-production,



Michael Haneke's Palme d'Or winner, **The White Ribbon**

The White Ribbon (Das weiße Band).

Christian Berger, one of the most outstanding Austrian cinematographers, brought a stark beauty to Haneke's extensive portrait of rural life, with clear, crisp imagery, often in long shot, accentuating the characters' relationship with the world around them.

Jessica Hausner, clearly influenced by Haneke's work, advanced her own personal style of storytelling with **Lourdes**, which was in competition at the Venice Film Festival. It is about a woman who is miraculously healed at the famous French destination for Christian pilgrims. The film rejects spectacle,



Shirin Neshat's **Women Without Men**

any superficial visual style and defies simple explanation. Hausner instead focuses on the structural aspects of the place and the inner dynamics of the community of peripatetic miracle-seekers. The production collective Coop99, which Hausner is a member of, has collaborated on two other extraordinary projects: the impressive video artist Shirin Neshat's **Women Without Men** is a poetic fragment about subversion in Iran in 1953; while **Pepperminta**, by Swiss visual artist Pipilotti Rist, translates emotions into child-like colours. The latter is an anarchic piece, containing only traces of a narrative.



Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel's **La Pivellina**

Austrian films are often identified by a harsh realism, coolly portraying the daily life of the lower classes. Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel's **La Pivellina** features elements of this approach, but also goes against the grain. A variation on the docu-drama, it explores the life of a family belonging to a travelling circus, located somewhere on the outskirts of a city in Northern Italy. An abandoned child found on a playground is at the centre of this portrait of lives full of uncertainty, love and longing. It was awarded the Best European Film in Cannes' Quinzaine des Realisateurs and is an emotionally powerful companion to their earlier circus-based film, Babooska.

Israeli director Yoav Shamir's **Defamation** raises the provocative question of what form anti-Semitism takes in the 21st century. Joining the New York-based Anti-Defamation League (ADL) on their journey to Eastern Europe, Israel and other locations, Shamir



Yoav Shamir's **Defamation**

attempts to decipher the subtle differences that divide criticism of Israel and anti-Jewish, racist stereotypes. Like its subject, Defamation is a film on the edge. A similar investigative approach can be seen in Werner Boote's **Plastic Planet**, which looks at the wasteful use of packaging and its cluttering up of the world. Less an explorative documentary than one in which the director's opinion is, from the outset, firmly set in stone, Boote's style is not dissimilar to Michael Moore's combative, research-lite approach.

Michael Glawogger, who is known for such spectacular works as Workingman's Death and Megacities, oscillated once again between documentary and fiction with **Kill Daddy Goodnight** (Das Vaterspiel), an adaptation of the novel by Austrian author Josef Haslinger. Weaving three different narratives and timeframes together, it tells the story of three families and the guilt and anger that exists between fathers and sons. The spectre of fascism is the backdrop to this ambitious film,



Michael Glawogger's **Kill Daddy Goodnight**

Kurt Ockermueller's *Echte Wiener*

which goes some way to showing that even the most un-filmable of novels can be brought to the screen.

For 2010, we can expect more of the recently 'discovered' national comedies that accounted for the year's impressive box-office results.

Echte Wiener and **Kottan ermittelt** are spin-offs from television series that were extremely popular in the 1970s. However, it is unlikely the humour of *Echte Wiener* would travel well outside Austria's borders. It portrays the typical Viennese habitant: grumpy, offensive, naïve and as such, a funny character. The sale of 370,000 tickets made it one of the most successful Austrian movies in history.

Other projects include **Der Kameramörder** by Robert Adrian Pejo, which focuses on the impact on two couples of the appearance of a snuff film. And with **Im Keller**, notorious filmmaker Ulrich Seidl enters the cellars of private households, searching for the skeletons in the Austrian closet.

The year's best films

La Pivellina (Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel)

The White Ribbon (Michael Haneke)

Little Alien (Nina Kusturica)

Lourdes (Jessica Hausner)

Women Without Men (Shirin Neshat)

Quote of the year

'Austrian cinema lacks stars. Look at Cannes-winner Christoph Waltz (*Inglourious Basterds*). Quentin Tarantino has shown with this Austrian actor, how to create stars.' *Unknown producer in Vienna.*

Directory

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Jessica Hausner's *Lourdes*