

Swiss Films – Half-Bitter And Sweet (English)

Trying to establish a picture of Swiss film-making today in the light of the past five years, you might come to the following conclusion – well aware, of course, that this is no more than a mind game: The average Swiss feature film of the early 21st century is a road movie produced with limited financial means and a hand-held (digital) camera, focusing on protagonists who, in encounters with the unfamiliar, agonise over their "Swissness" and their own state of mind. Political or historical issues are hardly raised – these are the remit of documentaries, a genre of traditionally high standing in Switzerland. Social themes are touched upon – if at all – through the fate of individuals. Nearly all the feature films on the programme shown in Copenhagen, including Peter Liechti's "Hans im Glück" (Lucky Jack), fit this pattern, though in certain cases it is more of an inner journey that is portrayed. In François Amiguet's "Au sud des nuages" (South of the Clouds), five taciturn Swiss set off for China on the Transsiberian railway. One by one, they abandon the journey owing to homesickness or other maladies – only one makes it through to Beijing. "Wenn der Richtige kommt" (When the Right One Comes Along) shows a cleaning woman from Mannheim travelling to the Turkish metropolis of Adana on the trail of a man she secretly adores, only to discover that her love is pure projection. In "On dirait le sud" (Back for More), a young man from Geneva travels to the south of France to win back his vanished wife and children. "Hans im Glück" director Peter Liechti portrays himself trying to kick the habit of smoking on hikes lasting several days. The protagonists of Greg Zglinski's "Tout un hiver sans feu" (All Winter Without Fire) and Stefan Haupt's "Utopia Blues" embark on journeys of the soul. Haupt's film spotlights a feverishly restless youngster struggling with himself and his environment, whereas Zglinski tells the story of a married couple thrown off track by an accident, and the time and distance it takes before they become close again. Even "War Photographer" by Christian Frei, a portrayal of photographer James Nachtwey, can be dubbed a road movie of sorts, since the director followed Nachtwey around on the latter's various photographic assignments. The Swiss short film scene on the other hand is currently bustling with creativity. Thanks to a number of schools for film-making set up by the state around 15 years ago, and the fact that technological developments have made film-making much simpler and less costly (and thus more accessible to non-professionals), a veritable boom has set in in Switzerland. Currently, there are some 150 short films produced in this country each year. The six shown in Copenhagen not only count among the most outstanding Swiss short films of the past few years, they also give a glimpse of the enormous variety, both technical and content related, inherent in Swiss short film making today.

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