

A Fish-eye View

Against a backdrop of social struggles, the 15th edition of the Pecheurs du Monde International Film Festival was successfully held in Lorient, France

The 15th Pecheurs du Monde film festival took place from March 19 to 26, 2023, with many spectators and exhibition visitors participating across seven municipalities in France. The strike against the government project on retirement and the anger of the fishers fighting for their existence did not undermine the event's success. The lives of fishers, it appears, do interest the public indeed.

At the festival, those who know the sea intimately were given the chance to speak about it. The topic 'Land and Sea: What Future?' showed how much the quality of marine waters depends on the quality of rivers and land-based pollution. Through 41 films from 21 countries, the audience was able to see, hear and share moments of life, as well as the fears and hopes of the people who make a living from the sea. The debates at the festival highlighted the importance of fishing in the local economy.

Two juries—one comprising fishers and film professionals, the other young students—awarded prizes to two feature films and five short films from seven countries. Apart from the plunder of anchovies for fishmeal for industrial aquaculture, a topic that is not tackled in the film, Peru has a large fishing economy that feeds its population. The documentary *Bruma* by Jose Balado Diaz from Peru is "a beautiful tribute to fishing in the north of Peru". Both the juries awarded it the top prize in the feature film category. Three particularly striking scenes in the film show the loneliness of the fishermen waiting in the open sea, the landings on the crowded beach, and the filleting and drying of the catch by the women.

A special award was given by both juries to *Austral* by Benjamin Colaoux of Belgium, in which fishermen from Cape Horn share their life stories and their knowledge of the sea. For centuries they have struggled against harsh natural

elements, and many of them were lost to the sea. The filmmaker shares his fascination for their choice of life.

The award for short films went to *The Bayview* by Daniel Cook from Scotland. In it, an old lady welcomes into her house fishermen from all over the world (Africans, Filipinos, etc.) who are waiting to embark or work off the coast of Scotland, a real lesson in hospitality. The youth juries and the audience chose *Stolen Fish* by Gosia Juszcak, a UK/Spain/Poland production that deals with the plundering of fish in Gambia, the catch getting diverted to provide fishmeal for industrial aquaculture in China and Europe. This food grab from the global South ends

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up in misery and migration. With no future for them there, young people have no option. The theme of this film was echoed in *Poisson d'Or, Poisson Africain* by Thomas Grand and Moussa Diop, a documentary discovered by the Festival in 2018 which, since then, has been rewarded with nearly a hundred first prizes in festivals around the world.

The youth jury awarded a special prize to *Senegal Mbour, les Grandes Pirogues* by Christian Lajoumard from Senegal. It describes the ballet of large pirogues in search of small pelagic fish with their seines. It raises the importance of fishing as a livelihood threatened by international and financial pressures.

The Fish War: Battle in European Waters by Philippe Lespinasse won the schoolchildren's prize. The film questions the purpose of fishing in the

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context of the Common Fisheries Policy in Europe: should fishing feed people or supply industrial fish farms? In order to continue to have quotas for cod in Norway, the European Union grants licences to catch hundreds of thousands of tonnes of pelagic fish to feed salmon farms in Norway. This film is available for free for a few weeks on the KUB platform, along with two other films from the official selection, *Dremmwel* by Pierre Vanneste and *Le Bateau de Mon Pere* by Cyril Berard.

A special award was set aside at the festival to highlight the role of women in the fisheries economy. The Chandrika Sharma Award, created to honour the memory of the late ICSF Executive Secretary who passed away in 2014, was given to the short film *Invisible Faces, Inaudible Voices: Women and Aquaculture* by Kiran Mittal. This film, produced by ICSF, analyzes, with accuracy and sharpness, the changing role of women in aquaculture with the development of shrimp farming. While there are positive consequences for them, all of them do not benefit equally and the environmental effects are worrying. The film was screened at a special session with the Canadian film

Femmes Capitaines by Phil Comeau. Other films, such as *Rio De Voces*, also provided a large forum for women's voices. Finally, two feature-length fiction films, *Grand Marin* by Dinara Drukarova and the Italian cult drama *Stromboli* by Roberto Rossellini (1950), made powerful references to the lives of women among fishermen.

The festival organized a Youth Forum laying the foundations for a new approach to addressing current issues facing the fishing industry. All over the world, there are fewer young people in the fishing industry: how can we get them interested? Above all, the aim of the forum was to free up young people to speak out on the theme 'Fishing is my job, yes, but...'. *The Long Coast* by Ian Cheney features beautiful portraits of fishermen and fish farmers (men and women) from Maine in the US.

Future of fishing

In small groups, the young fishermen in training were able to talk about their concerns and wishes for the future of fishing in front of active and retired fishermen as well as before representatives of fisheries committees. In the end, the forum contributed to a

convergence between young people and professionals of the sea, an experience that will likely be repeated.

A special session of the 'Fishing Tomorrow' cycle addressed the challenges for the boats of the future: how to adapt them to energy requirements, to the need for safety at sea, and the need to respect biodiversity. Fishers, researchers and industrialists testified to the vitality of the research undertaken to fish with less impact on the environment and with greater respect for biodiversity. In addition to these sessions, numerous film screenings took place in schools and colleges. Students were also able to visit the port facilities.

The festival paid tribute to Emmanuel Audrain, a filmmaker and friend of the festival who has made several sensitive and moving portraits of fishermen. He showed extracts from films celebrating the human values upheld by these characters. In 2006, he had transmitted the message of scientists who warned about the disappearance of fish resources. An exhibition entitled *Le peintre, le poète, la mer* (The painter, the poet, the sea) and a film, *Le Chant des mers* (The song of the seas) by Christophe Rey recalled the life and message left by Alain Jegou, a fisherman from Lorient, a poet and well-known writer and one of the founding pillars of the festival.

The film *Des sauveteurs et des hommes* by Thierry Durand, screened in the presence of many volunteers, was quite moving. The screening of Cyril Berard's film *Le Bateau de mon Pere* (My Father's Boat) was an opportunity to evoke the problems of fishermen in the north of France, facing both the Brexit policy and competition from foreign fishing fleets, which led a young fisherman's father committing suicide. Alain Pichon's film on the history of the sardine canneries in Brittany, *Les conserveries, de l'atelier à l'usine: 1930-1960*, skilfully made from old films gathered by the Cinematheque de Bretagne, provided an opportunity to show the evolution of the industry, born in Brittany, which went on to mobilize hundreds of women.

Being open to the world is the major strength of the Lorient film festival, which has never ceased to assert the essential role of fishworkers in feeding the populations, particularly in the

global South. By addressing the public, the festival contributes to raising awareness about the role of fishers in ensuring food security, the urgent need to ensure greater justice in trade, and the need to safeguard the marine environment by directly involving the coastal populations dependent on it. The issue of a democratic management of marine spaces and fisheries still needs to be studied in greater depth.

Emphasis was placed on the campaigns that blame fishers for destroying the marine environment, thus leading to their own ruin. It is time to distinguish between marine areas that are subject to careful management in collaboration with scientists and those that fall prey to resource plunderers, particularly in Africa and Latin America, due to the lack of control and law enforcement at sea.

By highlighting the theme 'Land and sea: What Future?', the festival recalled that the threats to the oceans are essentially due to land-based pollution, which accelerates climate change with its effects on acidification and the increase in sea temperature.

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It is, therefore, vital and a priority to eliminate all the chemical, plastic and waste pollution on land that ends up in the oceans.

Story of Adyar River: Pollution and Floods in India by Siddharth Muralidharan shows how poor management of wastewater destroys the ecosystem. *Acting for Biodiversity: Sentinels of the Mediterranean* by Felix Vigne suggests ways forward.

As these films proclaim, it is time to assert that the future of marine life and the sustainable management of fisheries resources by fishers go hand in hand. "To change reality, you need to know it and be able to imagine another world." That's the purpose of such films and of the Lorient Film Festival. Let's hope filmmakers from all over the world will continue to share their films with us so that the people of the sea can live on! 🌊

For more



Picturing the Coast

https://www.icsf.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Sam_88_art15_Cinema_Jacques_Cherel.pdf

The 15th Pêcheurs du Monde film festival, Lorient, France, 19 to 26 March 2023

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