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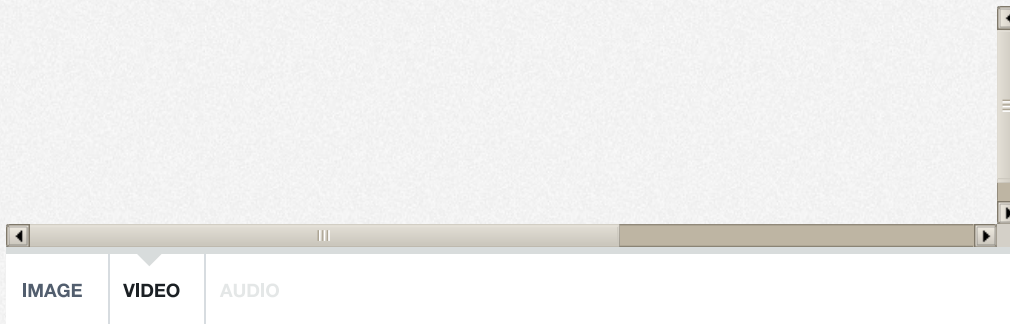
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Intercultural films celebrated at new festival

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A new film festival in Sydney aims to promote films and documentaries from several different cultures.

By Emmanuel Tsigas

A new film festival has kicked off in Sydney, touting an eclectic mix of both classic and recent releases from around the world.

The Sydney Intercultural Film Festival will screen 100 films, shorts and documentaries free of charge, while dozens more competing in an official competition will be ticketed.

The CBD's Belmore Park has now been dubbed "Cinema Park", with screenings, workshops and live performances unfolding over the next few days. More screenings will also be staged in some of Sydney's biggest multicultural hubs.

As Greg Dolgoplov correctly pointed out in [his opinion piece](#) on The Conversation, Sydney has become a bit bloated when it comes to film festivals.

SIFF's relations manager Aileen Beale acknowledges their mission is an ambitious one. The day before the festival launched organisers were still ironing out guest lists and venue details.

But with so many opportunities to see some candid features, documentaries and shorts for free, they're confident it will attract crowds - particularly families.

"This will hopefully be a blanket that runs out around Sydney," Beale said. "Free screenings everywhere will bring in many cultures and everyone can have a look at what everyone else is doing, which is generally the same kind of thing."

The free screenings include a selection of North Korean dramas and comedies spanning more than 30 years.

ANU's Dr Leonid Petrov helped festival director Seewoo Kim pick the titles, where glittering tributes to its regime abound.

"Filmmaking in any dictatorial regime is simply used as a tool for propaganda," Dr Petrov said. "One particular film, 'The Destiny of Keumhee and Eunhee', twin sisters are divided by the Korean war. One sister lives in poverty in the South, and another sister lives a happy life in the bosom of the great leader.

"People might find it a bit hard to absorb."

But Dr Petrov explained some serious concentration by audiences can reveal hidden messages.

"North Korean filmmakers have to live and work in very harsh conditions and circumstances," he said.

"They have to smuggle the humanistic idea in each film and wrap it up in some kind of ideological context."

A focus on Indian documentaries goes the other way.

Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar are two of India's most experienced doco makers.

They're presenting 9 titles (including one of their own, "So Heddan, So Hoddan") that addresses India's marginal communities.

"We have a film by a filmmaker who's a cancer survivor," Monteiro explains. "We have a film by a lesbian activist. People like the mentally ill, or the disabled, all these people face discrimination, and we thought it was important to celebrate the creativity and wisdom they have to share with us."

"They are not victims of their circumstances," Jayasankar said. "They're trying to live a life of dignity. That's the idea we're exploring."

SIFF's closing night feature will be "Forbidden Ground", a World War One epic by Australian actor, director and pyrotechnician Johan Earl.

A project that put all his skills to the test.


"We shot for 22 days for the battle sequences (and) another 4 or 5 days for the home sequences. For a war film that's pretty quick," he laughed.


"The rest of the time was spent in post production getting rid of Dubbo and making it look like France in 1916."


The winners of SIFF's official competition will be announced later this month.


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