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Busan Welcomes Two Icons of Korean Cinema

Screen star Ahn Sung-ki and director Im Kwon-taek arrive at BIFF to announce their latest project — the duo's seventh collaboration and the celebrated helmer's 102nd film

REVIEWS



Tukubayeva attempts to find her birth mother.

Nagima

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bleeding contractions, Nagima returns to blank-faced mode as she and her voluble prostitute neighbor Nina (Galina Pyanova) accompany Anya to the hospital.

As Anya dies after giving birth, Nagima is jolted, albeit

just slightly, from her impassivity, as she seeks out her biological mother. But that reunion ends sourly: her mother demands to know why Nagima wants to “ruin her life a second time” by coming to her farm and then urges her to look up her own medical records in order to understand the bizarre randomness of life.

While the pessimism doesn't offer that much comfort for the viewer, Issabayeva has made *Nagima* artistically coherent with the static camerawork from Sayat Zhangazinov.

Devoid of histrionics or excessive exposition, the film offers a sharp and sober contemplation about life, with the fleeting appearance of oppressors (such as the medical staff who at first refuse to treat Anya because of her lack of identification documents, or the employers and landlords exploiting the young women) just enough to provide a backdrop for the struggle of these extremely disfranchised (undereducated, kinless women) characters.

So it is that *Nagima* comes with its longueurs, but it still offers a captivating, bravely claustrophobic look at young lives going nowhere.

Gala Presentation

Cast Dina Tukubayeva, Galina Pyanova, Mariya Nezhentseva

Director Zhanna Issabayeva // 80 minutes

Drift

A vaguely unstructured exercise in visual storytelling anchored by a strong central performance

BY ELIZABETH KERR

The modern ruins of post-communist Romania form the backdrop for a man's quest for redemption and, possibly, punishment following his wife's death after a long illness in Benny Vandendriessche's *Drift*, an esoteric and somewhat opaque meditation on loss and grief.

Beginning with typically Scandinavian aesthetic defined by a dour, snowy palette — despite being a Dutch/Belgian co-production — the film jumps back and forth through time as we learn what takes The Drifter (Dirk Hendrikk) from seemingly contented Everyman to transient loner on the verge of madness.

The films begins with the man literally drifting at sea and is followed by a history of how the stray dogs that populate Romania got there. The animals then serve as the backbone of an

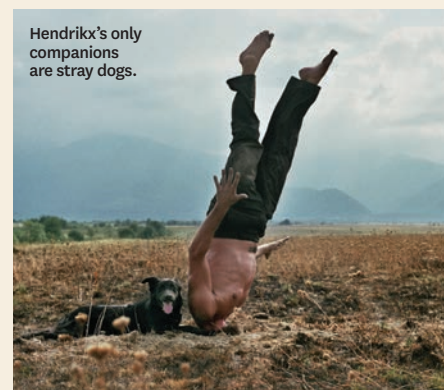
extended metaphor likening The Drifter's increasingly untethered, roaming existence as he is slowly coming to grips with the loss of his partner with the marginalized dogs that become his only companions.

The disjointed, almost picaresque narrative comes together slowly and silently as the true nature of The Wife's (Lieve Meeussen) death becomes clear.

Though the wife remains a mystery, Vandendriessche does a superb job of realizing a comfortable, healthy relationship between the two, making his grief palpable.

Hendrikk and Meeussen have a playful, comfortable dynamic that makes their devotion to each other clear in just a few scenes. That's unsurprising given the majority of *Drift* is told through its visuals and the sometimes vivid and evocative photography by Carl Rottiers, with Hendrikk's committed performance frequently coming to the rescue when the film borders on hysterical.

Even at a brief 80-odd minutes, *Drift* boasts an awful lot of filler, as sequences drag on and on, giving rise to the idea it would be a better medium-



Hendrikk's only companions are stray dogs.

length film than feature. Nonetheless Vandendriessche — who is an accomplished commercial and music video director in his native Belgium — has a sharp eye for image and an appreciation for unconventional composition and use of off-screen space that ultimately helps make The Drifter's headspace believably scattered and flirting with utter disintegration — if not wholly relatable.

Flashforward

Cast Dirk Hendrikk, Lieve Meeussen, Constantin Cojocar

Director Benny Vandendriessche
No rating, 83 minutes