

ARTFORUM

Meeting Place

03.07.12



Barry Frydlender, *Flood*, 2003, color print, 49 3/16" x 7' 10".

EPOS, ISRAEL'S ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL of art film and film about art and artists, belongs to a small and exclusive club, of which FIFA, Montreal's International Festival of Films on Art, is the best-known member. This year, Epos's third, it clearly made its mark on the Israeli arts scene, hosting forty-nine films from seventeen countries and ten guest artists, drawing some twelve thousand spectators to the Tel Aviv Museum's new building at the center of Israel's culture kilometer. The festival's mandate: to acknowledge the international, to support the periphery, to elevate the local.

As the screened films conversed, a number of questions arose: Is the art/artist firmly resident in one place, one culture, one nation? What is the impact of itinerant artists, forging alliances that span national borders? Are filmmakers and artists negotiating new forms of community? Are filmmakers and audiences interested in "genius," "outsiders," "my life/my art," "buzz"? What Epos proposed was the possibility of entering into a meaningful intercultural meditation on the nature of artmaking. It was clear that the issue of "nation" was not at all as obsolete here as it is in certain artistic or political circles. Nation and community were core concepts, still perceived as relevant to imagination and key to understanding complex cultural structures. And so, Epos exists first of all for us, its audience, who packed the halls, who came

to have art experiences different from daily life, to view world arts without an airline ticket, to tell ourselves our own stories, and, as Polish filmmaker [Lech Majewski](#), auteur-in-residence, put it, “to spend time with artists.”

Majewski’s haunting visual style in *The Mill and the Cross*, his dense, layered cinematic meeting with Bruegel’s masterful painting *The Way to Calvary*, 1564, held its audience in thrall, and his discussion of the artistic team’s work on the film, three years in the making, was a highlight of the festival’s artists’ talks and workshops. Majewski’s description of the figures in the painting—“they don’t give a flying fuck about you”—could perhaps only be delivered before an open mike in a seminar room filled with young filmmakers. “Bruegel draws you in by ignoring you,” Majewski continued, “just as he hid his hero, Christ, covering him with daily life.” Astonished at discovering seven different junctions of perspective in the Bruegel, each with its own POV, he noted the 147 layers then needed to bring these perspectives together on a computer, and the nine months to complete the editing. It’s an electronic alchemy of the painting’s activities and atrocities, allowing a leap from *Mill* to Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others*, compelling us to acknowledge the shock and awfulness of both looking and looking away. *Mill* brought a unique Polish intensity to a country that carries its own founders’-generation baggage. Just as Bruegel created a Flemish Calvary, Majewski created a Polish Flanders, borrowing the film’s language from a Polish village whose citizens, ancestors of sixteenth-century immigrants, spoke a fossilized Flamand, now recorded. On what burial mound of Poland, I asked him, does your work on *Mill* rest? “Ultimately,” he said, “you carry your nation and culture’s inner landscape, so that if you haven’t sold your soul, you bring back the music of your formative years. You are from where you are from; it’s inescapable.”



Left: [Lech Majewski](#), *The Mill and the Cross*, 2011, still from a color film, 92 minutes.
Right: [Michal Rovner](#), *Makom II and Makom IV*, 2011. Installation view, the Louvre, Paris.
Photo: Ardon Bar-Hama.

— [Annabelle Winograd](#)