

Focus on Styx

11-07-2018



The device refers to documentaries, but **Wolfgang Fischer** (director of the psychological marine-themed thriller *What You Don't See* ^[1], 2009) creates a very well-composed allegory in *Styx* ^[2] – presented at the Berlinale ^[3] in the Panorama section, where it got the Europa Cinemas Label – a punchy, sober, moral and oh-so-current commentary on the state of our terrifying and polarised world.

After a magnificent prologue in which two agile monkeys dart about freely in an urban setting (with a majesty that would make most parkour fans envious), followed by a violent accident and blinding lights in the night, Fischer's naturalistic and immersive approach allows us to accompany Rike (**Susanne Wolff**), a first-aid doctor, aboard her sailboat as she sets sail from Gibraltar on her dream holiday to a tropical island in the Atlantic. In her company, between the ropes, the audience can enjoy the sound of the sea, as well as life both above and below the water, but viewers will soon become aware of the power of the waves encroaching on this delicate vessel.

The director conjures up a scene – in what initially and mistakenly appears to be realist cinema – of open-air claustrophobia, in which the main characters are the sailor herself, the radio giving her instructions and a young African teenager who attempts to jump from a boat loaded with distressed migrants onto Rike's boat, causing her to fish the exhausted body out of the water and revive him while the emergency services she has alerted (and who take their time showing up) order her not to intervene, in a crescendo of cruel excuses: her safety must come first, her individual presence will cause panic among those drowning, and the fact that the man on the radio doesn't want to lose his job.

The confrontation between Rike and young Kingsley will be torn in multiple directions by their conflicting positions – in which the rescuer is placed in an unbearable moral situation, and in

utter disarray and helplessness, while human beings die before her very eyes. What is playing out here is nothing less than the greatest modern tragedy, the apotheosis of inhumanity, the utter indifference of society. What *Styx* presents us with – at times so directly that the urgency of the situation is almost tangible – is the unbearable schism that has developed between two worlds: the one for which the sea evokes paradise, and the one for which it is a river of hell. The one where all other needs are forgotten in the sheer battle for survival, and the one for whom signing a form is more of a categorical imperative than the lives of other human beings.

Styx was produced by the Berlin company Schiwago Film [4] in co-production with the Viennese outfit Amour Fou [5]. Beta Cinema [6] are handling international sales.

[7] [7]

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Links

[1] <http://cineuropa.org/f.aspx?t=film&did=144081>

[2] <http://cineuropa.org/f.aspx?t=film&did=346217>

[3] <http://berlinale.de/>

[4] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=prodcompany&did=113636>

[5] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=prodcompany&did=22604>

[6] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=intsale&did=23770>

[7] <https://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=300>