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15-07-2018



When *Of Horses and Men* [1] debuted in 2013 – winning the New Directors section at San Sebastian and receiving a very positive reception at a host of other festivals – the Icelandic director's gift for *mise-en-scène* and intelligent humour seemed obvious. Well, said first impression was correct, because his second feature film, *Woman at War* [2] – screened in competition at the 57th Critics' Week [3] as part of the 71st Cannes Film Festival [4] – is nothing if not brilliant confirmation of the fact. The film is indeed an excellent and very dynamic balance of several genres: comedy and drama, hectic and suspense-filled action and detachment with a touch of fable, very strong realism regarding the fight against the climate imbalances caused by man and the deep connection with the ancient wisdom of the body and Viking power. In short, a feminist film, not lacking material for reflection in a very entertaining package that doesn't take itself too seriously.

Everything starts with a pair of feet on the ground, immersed in the extreme isolation of a (sublime) Icelandic moor, Halla (**Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir**, who carries the film brilliantly on her shoulders) – a small fifty-year-old woman – carries a bow and fires an arrow, launching a cable over the immense power lines that striate the landscape. Moments later, she short-circuits an entire aluminium smelter on the other side of the island before running away, hunted by a police helicopter, which she shakes off with the unexpected assistance of a farmer cousin (**Jóhann Sigurðarson**). We soon learn that this is our heroine's – the real Amazonian ecologist and professional singing teacher – fifth go at this. Portraits of Gandhi and Mandela adorn the walls of her apartment in a city that she travels by bike, and where she meets up with her twin sister and yoga teacher Asa (played by the same actress). But Halla's clandestine fight against polluting multinationals is turned upside down by some unexpected news: an adoption request she made four years ago has been accepted and a little Ukrainian orphan is waiting to be picked up in the Ukraine. Our intrepid and very

methodical "mountain woman" (the nickname given to her by the media) decides to make a big splash whilst the authorities pursue her on charges of terrorism...

Perfectly employing his country's natural setting, Benedikt Erlingsson shapes a breathless, physical and brilliantly-structured film, in which drones and sheep cross paths in the wake of its protagonist, ultra-determined in the defence of her ideal. Both a message and a call to civil resistance in order save nature from industrial greed, *Woman at War* does not bother with psychological quibbles, but instead gets straight to the point by dramatising its purpose with a trio of musicians who accompany the action as it unfolds. A small stylistic coquetry which, despite not being annoying, could have been a tad more limited, but does not, however, detract from this pleasing film's very positive impact, both in terms of content and form.

Produced by [Slot Machine](#) [5] and [Gulldrengurinn](#) [6], in co-production with [Solar Media Entertainment](#) [7], [Köggull SF](#) [8] and [Vintage Picture](#) [9], *Woman at War* is being sold internationally by [Beta Cinema](#) [10].

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[1] <http://cineuropa.org/f.aspx?t=film&did=243837>

[2] <http://cineuropa.org/f.aspx?t=film&did=351981>

[3] <http://www.semainedelacritique.com/>

[4] <https://www.festival-cannes.com/fr/>

[5] <http://cineuropa.org/id.aspx?t=prodcompany&did=38170>

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