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## What a European film festival means nowadays. In Lecce.

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Arriving in Lecce in the second week of April means being caressed by the rays of the springtime sun and breathing in the scent of bougainvillea flowers. It also means immersing yourself in the local atmosphere full of joyful people sat in bars and on restaurant terraces, and being bewitched by the baroque style and the colours of the city.

But being in Lecce also means letting yourself get carried away by the enthusiasm of the people of all ages, from 15 to 80 years old, who show up at the Cinema Massimo, from the early morning until late in the evening, to watch both classics and brand-new premieres from all over Europe.

The gamble paid off for the European Film Festival in Lecce, which has now reached its 20th edition, as it has clearly won over its audience. The programme is very demanding, both auteurs and directors are always in attendance, and the guests are true icons of European culture and cinema. These are just some of the reasons why it is of utmost importance to carry on promoting and celebrating European cinema.

It is thanks to the meticulous and tireless film scouting activities of director Alberto La Monica and his team that the city is able to revel in the presence of auteurs and national film industries that the locals would not normally have the chance to come into contact with. This leads to a mutual enrichment: on one hand, the festival has the merit of being able to preview exceptional movies, and on the other hand, it has the potential to attract auteurs and guests who, thanks to the locations, food and hospitality, fall head over heels in love with the city and, indeed, the whole region.

The magic of the festival's formula lies in the fact that:

It does not underestimate the public like television does. It leads its audience by the hand down a path filled with film discoveries, which tell of an unknown Europe.

It sparks debates and dialogue between the auteurs and the audience; in this way, local students can feel closer to their peers who appear on the screen and who hail from a host of different countries.

It generates and fuels emotions that only a shared journey in a dark movie theatre can create.

And this ?formula? is all the more magical given that it operates in accordance with the definition of European cinema, which is so tough to describe: it could be defined as a 28-sided prism made up of as many different national film industries. But this would unfairly exclude films and auteurs from Serbia, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, Iceland and Switzerland, to name but a few, which have full citizenship and should therefore legitimately be part of this European heritage.

Therefore, instead of talking about a prism, we should perhaps define European cinema as a disco ball from a 1980s club.

This is exactly what European cinema does: it reflects and represents the peculiarities of many different countries in this part of the world. It highlights the characteristics of societies we do not know so well, giving us hints and clues so that we can recognise ourselves in there somewhere. It invites us to open the ?closed door? to our European neighbours and walk through it.

Unlike US cinema, European film does not always have a happy ending; it helps us to reflect on our daily challenges; it does not hide people?s differences, but rather it highlights the reasons why we should stick together. Instead of building walls, or reinforcing borders, cinema builds bridges. Emotional bridges, bridges that link our common history and our personal stories. It makes us feel more united and, above all, more European.

The Lecce film festival has been among the firsts to collaborate with and host the LUX FILM PRIZE. This year again, Woman at War [1], The Other Side of Everything [2] and STYX [3] have been screened to an enthusiast audience.

### Gallery Images:



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**Links:**

- [1] <https://luxprize.eu/movies/2018/woman-war-kona-fer-i-strid>
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