

Cannes 2015: Edinburgh's Avaritia and Catching up with Un Certain Regard



Walid Salhab's *Avaritia*, playing in the Cannes Court M trage

The rain finally came today – albeit just a little drop, but it was great to feel something that wasn't searing heat on my Scottish skin! The past few days have been rather hectic, hence the lack of updates but a plethora of reviews!

Cannes has managed to maintain its great output of films over the past few days (let's pretend that *The Sea of Trees* never happened) and it looks like there's still more to come as we continue on till the end of the week. Highlights of the past few days were, undoubtedly, the gorgeous return to form for Disney/Pixar with *Inside Out* – a colourful film with great heart. On the more serious side of things, the big talk of the festival remains *Carol*, the Todd Haynes directed feature with Oscar-worthy performances from both the divine Cate Blanchett and her understated, underrated co-star, Rooney Mara. Word on the Croisette is that the duo could both be awarded the Best Actress prize at Sunday's official ceremony. I guess we'll just have to wait and see!



David Pablos' *Las Elegidas* / © Gregory Smith

Whilst I've been wrapped up in the big, competition movies, I took the time to catch two films playing in the 'Un Certain Regard' category – a selection of work from lesser known filmmakers but deserving their own special prize. The first was a harrowing drama about human sex trafficking in Mexico. Playing here as '*Las Elegidas*' but known internationally as

The Chosen Ones, it was another tough watch. Instead of being visceral with its depiction of the situation, it deals with it in an affecting, inspired manner. The lead, young Nancy Talamantes, is nothing short of sublime; carrying this rather grim film on her shoulders. Despite its subject matter, Las Elegidas managed to be one of the smartest and most thoughtful dramas I have seen thus far.



Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Cemetery of Splendour

There was controversy surrounding the return of young Taiwanese director Apichatpong Weerasethakul. His last film in the festival, Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, won the prestigious Palme d'Or in the main competition; rendering him one of the biggest names in Asian cinema. His latest feature, Cemetery of Splendour, was relegated to the Un Certain Regard section with much backlash from critics and film writers. The film follows a lonely, middle aged woman tending to a soldier suffering from the mysterious disease known as 'sleeping sickness', and how she becomes entangled in a dream like, spiritual world with the man in numerous forms. It's a slow, meditative piece of film making, often veering slightly too close to the imaginary line of quietness to become static. But there is one thing no one can deny, and that's the immense talent and imagination that Weerasethakul has. Personally, I'm quite glad Cemetery of Splendour got placed in Un Certain Regard. It gives the film a chance to shine in a year where the competition is brimming with very strong contenders. Definitely one to watch out for!



Walid Salhab's Avaritia

Elsewhere in the Palais, I ran into a welcome memory of Edinburgh with the filmmakers behind Avaritia, a gorgeous piece playing in the Short Film Corner. Inspired by the economic crash of 2008, director Walid Salhab and his

producers Robert Welsh and Roslyn Campbell have spent seven years planning Avaritia, eventually filming it in the winter of last year. The inspired short looks at the relationship between man and money, and how the latter can easily get in the way of what's important.

I managed to catch a glimpse of the film earlier today in the Palais, and it's nothing short of spellbinding. Presented in beautiful black and white, it looks as though it came straight from that often overlooked filmic era of the 1920's. Producer Robert doubles up as the lead star alongside young Scottish talent Sarah Elizabeth Mills. The two actors were put through their paces with long shoots in the cold Scottish winter. The method in which the film is made has made it stand out amongst its competitors at this year's festival. A beautiful mix of three mediums (live action, animation and stop-motion), its characters glide from the screen as they seemingly skate across busy Edinburgh streets. Avaritia reminded me greatly of a calm, less obscure Sylvain Chomet piece. Impeccably detailed and meticulously shot (the finished film was made up of over 7,000 still images), it shows dedication and passion beyond anything that could be shot on today's digital, camera phone methods. Salhab's method of film making is wonderfully romantic.



Avaritia's Walid Salhab (Director), Roslyn Campbell (Producer) and Robert A. Welsh (Producer/Actor). Oh, and me.

I had a chat and a coffee with the three crew as we walked down the Croisette; discussing films and the industry. It was great to finally meet people from Scotland in a mobbed city that's full of unidentifiable chattering voices. I'm incredibly glad that the film is doing well, too!

Why not have a look at the trailer below, it really is fantastic!

[Avaritia \(Official Trailer\)](#) from [walid salhab](#) on [Vimeo](#).