



NY Documentary Film Festival: an International Celebration of Fascinating Stories

Benedetta Grasso (May 19, 2010)



Francesco Fadda, one of the organizers of New York Documentary Film Festival, describes this exciting upcoming event (May 26-30) in great detail, providing the background for a fascinating cultural event.

The documentary genre has always held an interesting place within the film industry. The task of "documenting" reality, in fact, can be very simple and at the same time it requires a lot of afterthought. It's also hard to define since it can be done in a variety of ways: a denouncing piece, a learning tool, a national geographic style journey or simply a person staring at a camera and telling a personal story. Ultimately, what a good documentary should always be about is capturing a piece of history, a slice of real life, a culture, a people. People in fact, different cultures and communities, are usually at the center of the best and most poignant and thought-provoking documentaries.

During the past decade there has been a rebirth of this genre. Something that has always attracted



a very limited public is now a much more established and appreciated kind of entertainment. Online archives such as Netflix have entire sections dedicated to documentaries that surprisingly attract even very young audiences; award shows such as the Oscars, Cannes or the Golden Globes have dedicated much more attention to the documentaries competing than they used to do in the past; film schools all over the world have increased or have created from scratch classes on documentary film-making and nowadays it's easier to just grab a camera and make a documentary, easier than making a narrative feature.

The genre has always been closely associated with something which, if not "avant-garde", is definitely less mainstream and it took archives such as the [Festival dei Popoli in Florence](#) [2] a lot of effort to preserve, promote, and study thousands of films by Italian and International artists. The Florentine archive has about 10.000 titles and it functions as a cultural center, organizing also courses, lectures and the most important documentary festivals in Italy and all over the world.

I-Italy had the pleasure of meeting with Francesco Fadda, who, for the past three years has contributed to make the name Festival dei Popoli known also in the United States and has helped to organize and expand a very fascinating event, now at its third edition: the [New York Documentary Film Festival-Festival dei Popoli](#) [3], organized with sponsors such as the PGA ([Producers Guild Association](#) [4]), [Anthology Film Archives](#) [5], the [New York Women in Film and TV](#) [6] and the [FitzGerald Foundation](#) [7] in Florence.

Francesco Fadda explained that the archive celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2009, since it was created in 1959. "The idea to bring it to New York came as part of a series of other cultural initiatives linked to the region of Tuscany. Among these events the Festival was going to be a somewhat "elitist" treat for a few aficionados but interestingly enough it was the thing that stood out while the others never fully made it to New York. It was a great success because it offered something that was missing. Paradoxically we felt that in a city like New York, where there is an incredible offer in the world of cinema and entertainment, there wasn't a Documentary Film Festival like this one. There are very specific reviews or festivals, on different topics, but ours is more generalized and open to a wide range of stories and countries.

"The selection process is very careful. We have a historical section, for example, "The feeling of being there" for which we chose some of the titles that celebrated the 50th anniversary of the archive. For our program we usually look for two directors, a man and a woman, with a relatively new film that has never been showed in the United States (Gianfranco Rosi, Enrica Colusso) and this year we also have a retrospective on Alessandro Rossetto under the section "Italian Chronicles". There are also artists from various countries and some great American directors such as Robert Frank."

"There is not a common theme but overall every story denounces something or brings something new to the surface. They are about real life. We are opening with Gianfranco Rosi and his documentary *Below the Sea Level* which is about people that at a certain moment in their lives find themselves lost and go live in the desert in California. In a way one could say these are stories about communities. In *Abc Colombia* we follow a group of little children that live by themselves. In *Closing*, which is about a hairdresser salon getting shut down and embraces the neighborhood around it.

What kind of audience do you find at your festival?

It's a very mixed audience of Americans, New Yorkers, Italians and various International people. Young and old. Overall these movies make you reflect and they expose you to a different point of view. What interests us is that the American audience is very involved and makes up the majority of our spectators. We benefit from archives like Anthology Film Archives that have already established an audience base. There are some similarities between the Festival and Anthology. Artists like Jonas Mekas in the United States that changed the avant-garde landscape in the same way the Festival was groundbreaking especially at its start in the 1960s in Italy.

Is there any difficulty?

The interesting thing is that our program is hard to define especially with the press. The name Festival might be misleading since it's more of a Film Review, a series of screenings but Festival dei Popoli was the original name of the archive and also we are not excluding that this might actually



become a festival venue. We might start with a single category or open it to young people with new initiatives. Maybe the hardest task is to get our name out there among the US organizations and audience.

Are the screenings followed by a Q & A?

yes, and there is a presentation at the beginning of the festival. The directors, when they are here in New York, are always available for questions and they create interesting discussions.

On May 27, 2010, at 4:30, at the Calandra Institute there will be a special event: a round-table where one can have the possibility to meet the directors which is particularly aimed at film students, students with a passion for cinema, young people interested in the arts but not only. Everyone who wants to know more about the background of certain documentaries or is interested in their production and development should come. The discussion will be moderated by Tanja Meding who is a producer of documentaries and has worked with PGA and the NY Women in Film and TV and Alessandro Rossetto, Enrica Colusso and Gianfranco Rosi will be present to discuss their films.

Is there a direct link between the Festival and the possibility of a US distribution?

There are some documentaries which have been considered for distribution although that is not the main goal of the festival. Last year the Italian film-maker Alina Marrazzi's movie was picked up by Women Make Movies, an independent production. Our "alliance" with PGA actually aims at these new possibilities and partnerships. The more we can connect with the US distribution the better, of course. There is a new series of events this year, following the Florentine edition which focuses on the market, the trade and production, where producers can interact with distributors.

Do you think that documentary is more established in the US?

In the United States you could say that documentaries are more widespread. There is definitely more distribution online or in the movie theaters. In Italy there is less choice of what is screened, since it's a smaller market and there is less knowledge of this genre.

Is there anything different about this 3rd edition?

The biggest news is that we are still doing this festival and it's becoming more and more successful. This year we are opening with an Italian artist while the past two years we paid homage to the country hosting us. Rosi (*Below Sea Level*) has lived for a long time in New York and the United States.

What is the approach towards different cultural contexts of the US audience?

Sometimes there are documentaries that are very specific to one country's reality or to the Italian historical framework and they become harder to contextualize; obviously they require more explanation. The audience though is usually very curious and we have had Q & As lasting for hours even until late at night. It's a great atmosphere for both the artists and the public. The movies are usually chosen because of their merit but we also pay attention so that they are not too obscure or hard to translate, not just in terms of subtitles.

What is the best aspect about being involved with this festival?

The best part is seeing the people following us and responding to our events. It gives us great satisfaction. When a movie is greatly appreciated it means that we did a good job choosing the program. It's also great to collaborate with Florence. We have become a team and it 's a great way to connect the two continents.

3rd New York Documentary Film Festival Festival dei Popoli

May 26 -30, 2010

[Anthology Film Archives](#) [8]

32 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10003

Directions: F, V to 2 Avenue-Lower East Side / B, D to Broadway - Lafayette / 6 to Bleecker Street.



Tickets are available at the box office only, \$9; \$ 6 for AFA members and free for NYWIFT and PGA members.

Related Links: <http://www.festivaldeipopoli.org> [2]

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Links

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[3] <http://www.festivaldeipopoli.org/en>

[4] <http://www.producersguild.org>

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