



The Latvian centenary in cinema and its Femmes Fatales



Zane Peneze

Kristīne Matīsa



Agnese Zelčiņa

From the left:
Ilona Brūvere,
Ināra Kolmane,
Dzintra Geka,
Anna Viduleja,
Roze Stiebra,
Kristīne Briede,
Kristīne Želve

The cinema industry in Latvia is preparing for fireworks in 2018 – like a present for the country's 100th birthday, the National Film Centre of Latvia has established the *Latvian Films for Latvia's Centenary* programme to

create sixteen new full-length films in a variety of genres. Feature films, documentaries and animated films. Entertaining family films, significant historical studies and screen adaptations of classic literary works. Together, these films will go on to mark a certain Latvian style in filmmaking.

But one thing is already clear, even before the films have been finished – female power is a force to be reckoned with in Latvian cinema. Latvia does not need to introduce a system of quotas, such as the Scandinavian countries have done, in order to help achieve gender balance in an industry that has, from Hollywood to Bollywood, traditionally been dominated by men. But not in Latvia. Eight of the Centenary films are directed by women, some of them just making their debuts in cinema, others with considerable experience in filmmaking. ▶

DZINTRA GEKA

Documentary film
Kurts Fridrihsons

Dzintra Geka has devoted her career to commemorating the victims of the 20th-century deportations to Siberia, and in her newest film she focuses on one such deportee. It was precisely for the strength and breadth of his spirit that the artist, non-conformist and spiritual teacher Kurts Fridrihsons was imprisoned in the Gulag. He had been active in the so-called French Group, a group of artists in the 1950s who met on Monday evenings in an atmosphere not unlike the French salons to discuss art, culture and events in the “free world”. The Soviet

regime, however, considered this group dangerous and arrested many of its members. With his unique charisma, Fridrihsons served as an example and an inspiration to many who found it difficult or impossible to accept the Soviet system.

KRISTĪNE ŽELVE

Documentary film
Mērijas ceļojums
Mērija's Journey

Director Kristīne Želve is holding a crown in her hands, an ethnographic copy of a traditional bride's crown from the region of Kurzeme (Courland). The crown is one of the countless valuable cultural objects

that Mērija Grīnberga, the hero of this film, saved from destruction during the Second World War. At the time, she volunteered to accompany a shipment of valuables from Latvian museum collections to Germany. There she protected them and eventually returned to Latvia with all seven train cars full of the objects. Grīnberga received no recognition for her selfless accomplishment and her belief in the mission, only mistrust and suspicion from the authorities. In this documentary, which contains some dramatised elements, Želve attempts to solve a detective story involving risk and fearlessness that no one knowingly sought.

KRISTĪNE BRIEDE

Documentary film
Baltijas jaunais vilnis
Baltic New Wave

With her thorough research, director Kristīne Briede hurries to meet the old masters of Baltic documentary cinema, the people who discovered a new language of cinema and a new way of thinking. Their resulting poetic documentary cinema style also became known much further afield. Some of these innovators have already passed away, some are still making films, but together they form a complete entity. And to explore this unique space, Briede and her team have used Ptolemy's Map as a guide. The map is used both in

a literal sense (documentary filmmaker and sometimes theoretician Herz Frank published a book by the same name in 1975) and figuratively, referring to the ancient Egyptian-Greek astronomer's map of the world. Frank compared his predecessor's map with the script of a documentary film – he wrote that Ptolemy did not know that the earth was round and drew the contours of the continents according to stories told by seafarers, but Columbus and other explorers nevertheless used his approximate map to travel the world.

Regarding the older generation of filmmakers, Briede reminds us that each one of her film's heroes had

a woman by his side. These women were often unknown to movie-goers, but they served as a filmmaker's closest and most important adviser, assistant, consultant and critic, all in one person.

ILONA BRŪVERE

Documentary film
Ievainotais jātnieks
The Wounded Rider

Director Ilona Brūvere holds a framed certificate of donation that was awarded to citizens who gave money in the 1930s for the construction of Latvia's most important monument, the Freedom Monument. The statue of a female figure holding three stars in her uplifted arms will no doubt



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have been seen by almost every tourist who has spent the briefest of moments in central Riga. Between 1932 and 1935 the Latvian people donated two million lats to support the creation of this symbol of freedom by sculptor Kārlis Zāle, only to have that freedom taken away from them for fifty long years a very short time later. In this film about Zāle, Brūvere masterfully combines archival materials with elements of drama, leading the viewer into a different world, a world in which history comes alive.

INĀRA KOLMANE

Feature film *Bille*

In our toy-overloaded world it is difficult to imagine

what life was like for a young girl in the years before the Second World War. She is taken to a toy store with great hopes of finally getting a real doll, but she returns home with only a doll's head – her mother will sew a body for the doll from rags and remnants of cloth. This episode from Ināra Kolmane's film shows the harsh reality of her main hero's childhood. The girl is cared for but not overly loved; she is poor but not as uncultured and ill-bred as her relatives make her out to be. Bille is offended, and she wishes to break free from this cramped and frosty world. And she will succeed – this we already know, because the film is a screen adaptation of an

autobiography, the childhood memories of the well-known Latvian author and poet Vizma Belševica (1931–2005).

ROZE STIEBRA

Animated film

Saule brauca debesīs

The Sun Rides up into the Sky

Several generations of Latvian children have grown up with Roze Stiebra's animated films. She is the founder of hand-drawn animation in Latvia, and her talent has managed to hold the attention of young and old audiences alike, even into the computer age. For Latvia's centenary she is making *The Sun Rides up into the Sky*, an on-screen parable about the victory of

light over darkness. For Stiebra, this light is symbolised by a small mirror, round as the sun. In the film, the daughter of the sun (representing Latvia) is born into light, but Selēna, the ruler of the darkness, steals the little girl. Only humans can help her. Finally, freed by the masked mummers, Latvia blossoms like a beautiful and eternal flower.

MADARA DIŠLERE

Feature film *Paradīze '89*

Paradise '89

A folding bed, flowery dresses and hushed conversations among the adults about a possible war – such are the childhood memories upon which young

director Madara Dišlere bases her film about the late 1980s, the period of reawakening for the Baltic States that was a significant time in the recent history of both Latvia and Europe as a whole. In the shadow of Latvian and world politics, the little cousins “play adults” by drinking bitter coffee, trying on their mothers' lipstick and worrying about whether their parents will divorce. But when the situation becomes truly serious, they are ready to fight, to do everything (in a child's understanding) to secure the freedom of Latvia.

ANNA VIDULEJA

Feature film *Homo Novus*

The palette of painter Normunds Brasliņš, given to her by Prof. Kristaps Zariņš at the Art Academy of Latvia – it is with such authentic contemporary objects that film director Anna Viduleja enriches her screen adaptation of Anšlavs Eglītis' novel *Homo Novus*, which tells about the life of artists in 1930s Riga. It is a humorous story about bohemian life in the interwar era, illustrating the different fates of two artists: the slide of the rich, genteel heir into idleness, and the triumph of the poor, hard-working artist. The story also contemplates the power of an artist's creative spirit, which is as relevant an issue today as it was in the past. ■



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