



Finland Antti Selkokari

In a whirlwind year for Finnish film production, there were 31 film premieres, of which 24 were features and seven were feature-length documentaries. The output was exceptionally high compared with previous years, when the number of productions varied between eight and twelve. This upward curve is explained by the rise of production subsidies channeled through the Finnish Film Foundation. As a result, Finnish films enjoy a total market share of just under 20 per cent. The overall number of admissions for domestic films is expected to be 1.3 million, a decline over previous years, surprising many in the industry.

The most popular domestic release of the year was Swedish director-on-loan Anders Engström's **The Kiss of Evil** (*Vares – pahan suudelma*), which premiered in January and went on to attract a large cross-over audience, racking up 200,000 admissions. A detective thriller based on a local bestselling pulp novel by Reijo Mäki, it featured private eye Jussi Vares handling cases, with a steady supply of damsels and drinks always close to hand. The film's production company, Solar Films, is focusing on the international cinema and TV market with a collection of six films based on Mäki's novels. The films will be directed by Engström and Lauri Törhönen.

Statistically, the most impressive release of the year was Aki Kaurismäki's **Le Havre**, attracting 150,000 admissions. There is little doubt that the positive publicity the film attracted following its screening at Cannes helped. Kaurismäki's story of a young illegal immigrant befriended by a man who shines shoes in the eponymous French port once again highlighted his skill as a filmmaker whose stories resonate universally.



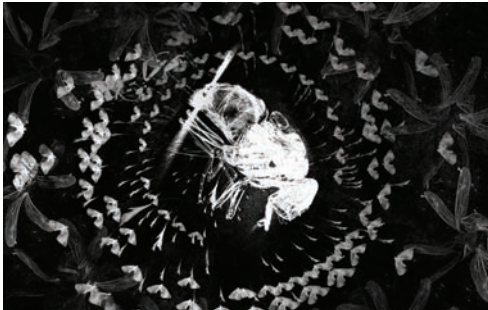
Aki Kaurismäki's **Le Havre**

A documentary of note was **Battle for the City** (*Taistelu Turusta*) by the veteran documentary filmmaker Jouko Aaltonen. He collated impressive footage of the urban landscape in Turku, the former Finnish capital, where a group of businessmen, politicians and architects have combined their mutual interest in redesigning the area, resulting in the loss of historic buildings in favour of a business-oriented utopia. Aaltonen mixes contemporary footage with archive recordings in order to tell the sad story of how progress developed in so many Finnish towns.

Ville Jankeri was one of the year's most impressive new directors. **Sixpack** (*Pussikaljaukokuva*) chronicled events surrounding three young men adrift in their neighbourhood, Kallio. The former proletarian quarters are now occupied by eccentrics who prevent the trio from leaving. It is based on the first novel by Finnish literary phenomenon Mikko Rimminen.

The quantity of films did not translate into better quality across the board. This may account for the decrease in audience attendance. The most depressing proof of this were a number

of travesties that focused on or around the subject of celebrity. Elias Koskimies's **Dirty Bomb** (*Likainen pommii*) is a foul-mouthed black comedy in which a music company is desperately searching for a teenager they can transform into a pop sensation. Tuomas Summanen's **Risto** features a celebrity actor who is paralysed in an accident, but when he witnesses how much he can make from his disability, he conceals the fact that he has made a full recovery. Both features fell very short in their attempt to satirise the media. Ultimately, they appeared as little more than extended episodes of a TV sitcom.



Hannes Vartiainen and Pekka Veikkolainen's **The Death of an Insect**

One of the most beautiful and well-traveled films of the year was an experimental short, **The Death of an Insect** (*Erään hyönteisen kuolema*), by Hannes Vartiainen and Pekka Veikkolainen. The eight-minute film combines animation techniques from stop-motion to the 3D modelling of scanned insects and is intoxicating in its sweep. A pleasure to both the eyes and ears – the impressive visuals, in which an insect melds into a DNA spiral and other such wondrous images, is accompanied by Joonatan Portaankorva's jazzy score – it has been an international festival favourite since it made its domestic debut in late 2010.

If the art of film was not always evident throughout the year, the year in Finnish film ended on a high note with the return of Taru Mäkelä and **The Storage** (*Varasto*), her first film in twelve years. It follows a cunning sales girl in a paint shop and how she entraps one of the warehouse workers. The film successfully



Taru Mäkelä's **The Storage**

combines romantic comedy with the current fears over unemployment. Based on a novel by the Finnish cult writer Arto Salminen, it reflects his morbid sense of humour, which has gained him a reputation as a particularly acrid social commentator.

The year's best films

Le Havre (Aki Kaurismäki)

The Storage (Taru Mäkelä)

Battle for the City (Jouko Aaltonen)

The Death of an Insect (Hannes Vartiainen and Pekka Veikkolainen)

Sixpack (Ville Jankeri)



Jouko Aaltonen's **Battle for the City**

Directory

All Tel/Fax numbers begin (+358)

Finnish Film Foundation, Kanavakatu 12, FIN-00160. Tel: (9) 622 0300. Fax: (9) 622 0305.

ses@ses.fi. www.ses.fi

ANTTI SELKOKARI is a film critic and journalist, who lives in Helsinki.
