

BY VIVIENNE NILAN

A preview of treats in store from Ecofilms

Festival scheduled to run from June 22 to 27 on the island of Rhodes

A sample of films scheduled to screen at Ecofilms on Rhodes this summer demonstrate the festival's ongoing commitment to movies that delight, inform, inspire and occasionally enrage.

"Muto," an animated short from Argentina that has attracted millions of hits on YouTube, is a seven-minute tour de force of continuous transmutation. We see a brick removed from a wall and a hand reaches through the gap, followed by a man, who undergoes a dizzying series of rapid-fire mutations. The filmmaker, who goes by the name of Blu, deploys street art and animation to play with notions of cannibalism, rebirth, metamorphosis and the use of public space.

Japanese director Masayuki Kojima uses animation very differently in "The Piano Forest," which garnered the Japanese Media Art Festival's 2008 award for an animated film. Ravishing images of nature alternate with everyday scenes focusing on two boys who come to music by different paths. This growing-up story contrasts the emotional, untutored playing of Kai, a rebel mocked at school for his poverty and his mother's job at a sleazy bar, and the academic style of Shuhei, driven to strive for perfection by ambitious, well-heeled parents.

Three documentaries illustrate the diversity on offer at Ecofilms. A dilapidated red sedan ambles toward us along a dusty road in the first scene of "The Peddler," a feature-length film from Argentina. The scene evokes cinematic predecessors, where a mysterious stranger arrives in town, often trailing strife. This stranger is a benign presence, however. At 67, itinerant filmmaker Daniel Burmeister has made around 60 movies. Directors Eduardo de la Serna, Lucas Marcheggiano and Adriana Yurcovich record the making of one film, from Burmeister's arrival in a village where he negotiates with the mayor to make a film in exchange for food and accommodation, to the screening of the finished product.

Watching Burmeister enlist aid, cajole locals into performing, improvise, repair equipment, engage the village in a communal project, act, direct and film, prompts reflections on art as an accessible shared process. The moment when a white sheet goes up on the wall of the church hall and the screening begins conjures up the old-fashioned magic of cinema.

"Kypseli" is a Greek short made by the City of Athens's Cultural Organization about a densely populated Athenian quarter whose



Blu's animated short 'Muto' plays with shapes and ideas that unravel, mutate and transmutify almost faster than the eye can follow.



Itinerant filmmaker Daniel Burmeister, on the job in 'The Peddler.'



Kai plays for an enraptured audience in 'The Piano Forest.' [2007 Makoto Isshiki / THE PIANO FOREST Film Partners]

Growing up
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name means beehive. Through the perspectives of three residents, it traces Kypseli's evolution from a quiet neighborhood with flower-filled gardens to a bustling hub where apartment bustings soar, often to illegal heights, but which retains a sense of neighborhood.

"Bananas!" is a classic campaigning commentary of the sort that nails injustice. Directed by

Swedish documentarist and investigative journalist Fredrik Gertten, it follows a court case involving 12 Nicaraguan banana plantation workers who sued Dole Food Company and The Dow Chemical Company. The plaintiffs claimed they became infertile due to Dole's continued use of the pesticide DBCP (dibromochloropropane) on banana plantations in Nicaragua, even after the chemical was banned in the US in 1977, when workers handling it in California were found to be sterile.

Gertten's film takes up the story where Los Angeles-based Cuban-American attorney Juan Dominguez goes to Nicaragua to register clients. Though he plays the white knight in Nicaragua, Dominguez is an unabashed ambulance chaser in Los Angeles, where his eye-catching outdoor advertisements invite members of the Latino community who want to make personal injury claims after accidents on a no-win, no-fee basis. We hear the plaintiffs talk of how sterility has blighted their lives, then see down-to-earth attorney Duane Miller go head to head in court with Dole's elite counsel and win. Big business doesn't cave in easily, and the ruling has been challenged.

Dole filed a defamation suit against Gertten, who was forced to screen "Bananas!" out of competition at the Los Angeles Film Festival but you can watch it at Ecofilms.

Ecofilms, an international festival of films and visual arts on the island of Rhodes, runs June 22-27. Admission is free and there are open discussions with filmmakers.