

Filming passages in African cities

Interview with Habiba Djahnine

What makes the competition different?

The short film project competition “Filming passages in African cities” is special because, for the winners, it will be followed by design workshops that will lead to the production of the selected projects.

Whether fiction, documentary, animation or experimental video, the selected projects will be supported and followed up, from writing right through to implementation.

The idea is to encourage the emergence of fine projects on the theme of passages and to offer their creators the opportunity to see them produced.

Collective experience is always fruitful. It is a way to form networks and create communities in this field where beginners always find it hard to get support in developing their skills.

In what way is the question of passages an essential issue for African cities?

“21st-century passages: A challenge for all the world's cities.” That is the introduction to the call for applications we launched in January 2015.

Why is it an issue particularly in African cities? Let me start by defining what a passage is. Passages are first of all physical spaces: tunnels, bridges, walkways, urban cable cars, escalators... Sometimes pleasant, attractive, smart, interesting, but usually gloomy, uncomfortable, even dangerous...

The passage raises questions about the city and how it works, cinema acts as a passage from the concrete to the sensory.

Big cities change constantly, to the point that we sometimes don't really realise what we need, what has changed, what we find an obstacle and what makes life easier.

As an essential transitional link within the wide spaces of the city, passages – whether formal or informal – provide a way to think about these spaces of transition or indeed to imagine them... to measure their importance or to observe their uses.

What films and writings might the entrants draw upon?

Wings of Desire, Wim Wenders, 1987

Studies on Paris, André Sauvage, 1928

Lisbon Story, Wim Wenders, 1994: sound passage.

Breathless, Jean-Luc Godard, 1960

Tahia ya didou!, Mohamed Zinet, 1971

And many others whose titles can be found at <http://passages-ivm.com/fr/article/films>

What will be the selection criteria for the projects?

This interview gives me an opportunity to announce that we have decided to broaden the selection criteria. The entrants can be photographers, sound engineers or film editors. The important thing is that they should be involved in projects relating to the world of the image.

The other criteria are as follows:

- Enter the competition by submitting a film project on the theme of passages in African cities.
- The film must not be longer than 10 minutes.
- The applicant must be resident in one of the project's partner African countries (Algeria, Morocco, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Benin, Mozambique).
- The applicant must already have completed one film or photographic project or have taken part in such a project as a sound engineer, editor...
- Applicants must be under the age of 35

How did you select the structures that will manage the production workshops for the selected films?

During the preparation phase for the competition project, I contacted several organisations, associations, festivals, film schools to introduce the project. The entities that have become partners in the project were those which quickly express an interest and wanted to be involved. What links all these structures is experience in sharing knowledge and a desire to form networks to generate dynamics.

Do you think that there will be enough entries?

From experience, I know that continuous communication is needed. Apart from the main central communication, which IVM needs to do, every partner in the project needs to maintain multilevel communication, in every one of the countries involved in the project.

Information has already been spread through email and on social networks, but that is not enough. Each of us needs individually to contact people who might potentially enter, to organise information events where applicable to help some competitors to apply.

I have already received a dozen or so emails from the different countries, asking for additional information. I am happy to answer any questions.

How will the workshops be run?

Once the entries are in (deadline April 15), an international jury will select the projects, 2 to 3 per country.

A design workshop will be held in each of the member countries, with the following timetable.

May: Writing workshop

June to August: Development and locations

September : Rewriting and shooting

October to November: editing and postproduction.

How will the completed films be screened?

At the beginning of 2016, there will be a public screening at the international Passages conference. At this event, a final jury will be formed to award top prize to one of the films in the collection.

We will publish a “box set” of all the films produced in the course of the project.

In 2016 and 2017, and even beyond, we will distribute the films in the different partner countries. International film festivals will be able to select the films individually or the entire collection.

What is it about this project that is close to your heart?

The pan-African dimension of the project is an opportunity. It is important for me to develop collaboration with different dynamic bodies working in the field of cinema and education. To share our experiences and develop methods in common.

In another respect, a collection of films on the theme of “passages” is a powerful and fruitful idea. It will undoubtedly give us a picture of the changes our countries are going through, of the transformations in urban areas. I am very curious to see what creative ideas young filmmakers will come up with around this theme, which simultaneously combines and crystallises so many factors: social, architectural, urbanistic, aesthetic, etc.

What advice would you give these young filmmakers?

The applicants need to be aware that what we want from them is an idea for a film, a proposal that will be developed and given concrete form at the design workshop.

The most important thing is that they should be motivated and use their imagination.

I am certain that some very fine projects will emerge.