

Films from Latvia

Feature, 35 mm/DCP, 1:2.35, colour, Dolby Digital, 90', 2012, Latvia



People Out There

ЛЮДИ ТАМ

Directed by **Aik Karapetian**

Jan, a guy in his twenties, and his friend Crecker, are involved in several crimes in their neglected suburb of the city. After meeting the “golden youth” beauty, Sabina, he looks for a fresh start in downtown circles, but finds contempt. His hopes for love, compassion and opportunity are dashed by the even more ruthless rules of the bourgeois, and all he can count on is himself.



People Here

Dita Rietuma

P *People Out There*, undoubtedly, is one of the latest films created in Latvia that has been voiced the loudest. Various contributing factors grant this film its originality. They urge us to also deeper understand the notion of “national cinematography” in a variety of interpretations and to think about what “national cinema” means in the beginning of the 21st Century – the era of globalization. Moreover, what is national cinema, when referring to small European Union state cinematography like that of Latvia – with its population of a mere 2 million (62% Latvian).

Aik Karapetian (1983) is the youngest film director in the history of Latvian cinematography, who has succeeded in obtaining state financing (financial support from the National Film Centre) for the realization of his creative project. *People Out There* is also the first film in

Latvia created with state-support that is filmed in the Russian language – its characters, the inhabitants of Riga’s “suburbs”, speak Russian. (In the film, only a few words are spoken in Latvian. It is the fight episode, when the film’s main characters, Cracker and Jan, kill time by committing the usual robbery – this time their victim is a Latvian boy). Karapetian was born in Armenia, but grew up in Latvia, studied art history at the Art Academy of Latvia and film directing at the Latvian Academy of Culture. He speaks fluently in Russian, Armenian and Latvian, and his view of the determined aspects of reality in Latvia is unusually multifaceted and therefore also special.

The director’s conceptual choice to film in Russian created rather controversial publicity during the film’s premiere in Latvia. Latvia’s reality is a bi-national society that is vivid proof of the failure of integration policy; moreover, because of the limited film financing in Latvia since it regained its independence in the early 1990s, the

fact that feature films, created in Latvia, have to be in Latvian has been self-evident. However, Aik Karapetian’s work stands above this cultivated “national fervour”, because it has logically and convincingly brought a layer of reality into the Latvian cinema experience that has actually been ignored by feature film creators until now – the experience of Latvia’s Russian-speaking people. Precisely, the experience and world view of this certain part of Latvia’s Russian-speaking population.

The film’s main character, Jan (Ilya Shcherbakov), and an old man known as his grandfather (Eduard Murashov), live in one of Riga’s “new suburbs” – that is, a crowded labyrinth of new buildings built in the socialism era in the area of Purvciems. Jan and his friend Cracker entertain themselves with petty hooliganism and robberies – these young men don’t have jobs and they don’t even try to find any work. However, each of them does have a dream; Cracker dreams of going off to London, land of fortune, though he has never been there, and Jan finds his “dream” in one of the “glamorous” new building projects, where he had once entered to relieve himself – he notices a young woman, a girl, whose clothes and poise testify to her place in society and



Director’s Note

People Out There

For my debut movie in full-length format, I have chosen the crime drama genre.

The story takes place in the suburban areas of Riga. These areas have post-Soviet architecture that can also be found in other European cities, not only in previous Soviet block countries. It was very important for me to avoid local identification, and that is why I chose to tell a universal story, which could be understood by an audience from another country even if they don’t know anything about the

history of this specific region.

The title of the film, *People Out There*, describes the audience’s distanced attitude towards the characters, who are the kind of people – young hooligans and thieves – that each of us tries to stay away from.

I was not so much interested in emphasizing a criminal aspect in the film, but in depicting the actual problems of the new generation that tries to find their place in this world by doing not as they want, but as they can.

Aik Karapetian

Producer's Note

About Language and Cinema Language

Latvia is a small country. Of its 2 million inhabitants, 40% speak Russian. When we began work on this film 4 years ago, Latvia, just as the rest of the world, was hit by the economic crisis that nearly led this country to bankruptcy. Immediately after the economic crisis, we couldn't even have imagined that a domestic policy crisis would follow, one that would seriously aggravate the national language's position, i.e. the Latvian language, against the role and usage of the Russian, which is the largest minority language in Latvia.

This affected our work directly, because this is the first feature film created with state funding that is entirely in Russian – without any specific contexts, simply because that is the natural environment in which the story takes place.

In 2012, just 12 days before the

first screening of our film, heated debates on the language issue were at their peak, so much so, that we were faced with a national referendum to vote for or against Russian as a second official language. Accordingly, this film, made in Russian with the help of state financing, received an unexpectedly large response in the media. Truthfully, no one was talking about the film itself, but rather about politics. We could only joke about it, saying that the national language referendum is our film's advertising campaign's most extensive marketing plan.

As a result, Latvian still remains as the sole national language in Latvia. Nevertheless, many Russian-speaking people, who don't usually watch Latvian films, came to see this film – maybe that is a valuable step in the direction of cultural integration.

There are no politics in our story, even though they seeped into its context unwillingly. That is why I would like to thank the National Film Centre for daring to support our idea in creating a Latvian film in the language of Latvia's largest minority, and for bearing severe national media criticism along with us, the film creators. I am grateful for the courage and the ability to distinguish between the language of art and that of political context and speculation.

Consequently, political fervour has settled, but the film continues its way to the viewers, and I am pleased that we have been able to speak in the language of film imagery – a language that tells the story about People, regardless of the language they speak in.

Roberts Vinovskis

her belonging to a completely different social circle. Jan's fate will bring him together with this woman, Sabina - the daughter of a popular religious preacher - several times. He provokes these encounters himself and, unable to give them an edge of "romance" (Sabina ignores him), he tries to attest himself criminally by exposing his feelings to violence.

In the film, Jan's and his friend's experiences and romantic quests are interpreted as destruction and self-destructive experiences. Jan's character is the "key" to the film – a grown man with the face of an innocent child, who lives with the notion of a nonexistent mother or true family, but constantly humiliates the only person close to him – his grandfather, a former scientist. Jan is characterized by feelings of loneliness and woundedness, which he is only able to communicate as an escalating aggression – with a chain of criminal events that he gets pulled deeper and deeper into. Aik Karapetian, who is also the script writer for the film, has succeeded in creating Jan as a convincing, psychologically motivated and, at the same time, recognizable image of reality. (Jan also bears a cinematographic likeness to the character in Francois Truffaut's film *400 Blows* - here already in adult form.) Jan, Cracker and his sister Ilona, who works for Chocolate, the owner of a sex-chat business (another colourful character in the film), seem absolutely

organic "products" of a blockhouse environment - a rare quality in Latvian cinema that the director has achieved by filming non-professionals, as well as new talent from St.Petersburg and other yet unknown actors. There is no reason to consider *People Out There* to have the markings of a so-called "chernuha" (the slang term used for the popular post-Soviet cinematography direction in the 1990s, when movie theatres were filled with films containing crime genre features about criminals and the degrading social environment).

Though there are also elements of crime genre in Karapetian's film, *People Out There* is first and foremost a precise fixation of the results of certain social processes. However, the claustrophobic world in which the film's characters live, is not only the "blockhouse" effect, but also their own personal choice and personal value system (a new *tachka* - car, a BMW of course, a profitable virtual sex business, etc.). In turn, Jan's personal drama - his stinging "orphan" feeling of having grown up without a mother and his readiness to attract attention to himself even in an aggressive manner, is both the experience of this particular character, and perhaps a metaphorical message about the way Russian-speaking youth in Latvia feel about themselves.

Nevertheless, Aik Karapetian's film does not make use of unambiguous ac-



cents (blaming integration policies, the environment, changes in the social system that "threw" many of Latvia's inhabitants - both Russian and Latvian, out of their comfort zone). The film's setting and the dynamics of the personalities of its characters are self-sufficient, their behaviour – sufficiently motivated to perceive *People Out There* as a convincing psychological drama with elements of criminal genre. The director looks at the film as a reflection of his generation's – the twenty-year-olds - confusion and sense of the world. Karapetian has converted these feelings into a commended cinematographic quality, - as claimed by the director himself: "*People Out There* is neither about *Purchik* (slang term for the Riga suburb where the film takes place), nor Russians, nor Latvians. This neighbourhood is like the inner world of the film's characters, an allegory in which they try to find their identities and their place in this life." And there is no doubt that *People Out There* is a film about the people here – in Latvia today.

Films from Latvia



People Out There

The film's visual approach offers the viewer to experience the film, but at the same time to feel the emphasis on the existing disassociation; it is as if a view is generated from the outside onto a different reality, just as Alice in Wonderland, or angels that have descended on earth (a similar spacial feeling is created in some episodes of Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire*). Here is Aik Karapetian's setting –

he addresses uncomfortable moral issues, but carefully avoids ready-made recipes, preferably leaving the viewer face to face with the alarming ethical situation and giving the viewer the option to choose – to break out in disappointment or to forget or review one's existential reference points.

The film *People Out There* is Aik Karapetian's debut feature-length film. A highly anticipated debut... it is quite evident, that Aik Karapetian treats cinema just as he would a serious test, raising the bar high. He is not interested in petty tasks. Karapetian has enough talent and ambition to solve major challenges.

Dmitrijs Rancevs, *Kino raksti*, 1(35)/2012

If we are looking for an analogy to a provocative social cinematographer in the world, then Aik Karapetian (finally!) is the first in Latvian feature film territory to address similar themes as those of French director Mathieu Kassovitz in his world famous black-and-white film *Hate/La Haine* (1995).

One must praise the perfect selection of characters in the ensemble of film actors – such expressive faces, «hoodlums» and «deadbeats» that one does not often see in cinema, and furthermore, almost all of them – both professional actors and non-professionals – exist organically in the film. And all the characters possess a rare screen quality – they are just as revolting as they are attractive.

Normunds Naumanis, *Kultūras Diena*, 06.03.2012

People Out There is a long awaited breath of fresh air on the Latvian film scene. Aik's work is a vivid example of a director's talent – it is bold, provocative, masterfully executed, with particularly dynamic film editing and a hypnotizing soundtrack. The director's work is noticeably influenced by French extremism – anger, violence and hopelessness.

Liva Pētersona, *Diena*, 06.03.2012



FILMOGRAPHY

Feature: *People Out There* (Cilvēki tur) 2012

Short fiction: *Disgust* (Riebums) 2007

Aik Karapetian, Director

Born 10 July, 1983, in Armenia, but raised and educated in Latvia. After having received his MA degree in film directing from the Latvian Academy of Culture, Aik Karapetian went on to study at the Académie Internationale des Arts ESEC in Paris, from which he graduated in 2008.

At the Latvian National Film Festival, *Lielais Kristaps 2007*, his short film *Disgust* was awarded the title of Best Student Film. The jury then made a special exception and included the film in the Professional Category, where the film also received a prize and nominations for both Best Short Film and Best Supporting Actress. In 2011, Aik directed "The Barber of Seville" at Latvian National Opera, which was awarded Best New Production of the season. The next opera is William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, to be premiered in 2013.

People Out There is Aik's debut as director of a full-length feature film. Another feature-length project, a horror film titled *The Man in the Orange Jacket* (M.O.J), will be released in autumn 2012.

English title People Out There

Original title Люди там

Genre Crime/drama

Length 90'

Format 35 mm

Screening Format DCP; HDCAM

Screen Ratio 1:2.35

Colour colour

Sound Dolby Digital

Dialogue Russian

Country Latvia

Year of Production 2012

Director Aik Karapetian

Screenplay Aik Karapetian

Cinematographer Jānis Eglītis

Production Designer Henrijs Deičmanis

Costume Designer Lote Eglīte

Makeup Artist Maija Gundare

Original Music Elviss Zants, Kristaps Krievs

Sound Ernests Ansons, Verners Biters

Editor Tamber Tasuja

Main Cast Ilya Scerbakov, Semen Serzin,

Mikhail Razumovsky, Eduard Murashov,

Viktoria Kondratenko

Producer Roberts Vinovskis

Production Company Locomotive Productions

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