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FEBRUARY 12, 2019 5:10PM PT

Berlin Film Review: 'Retrospekt'

By **JESSICA KIANG**

With: Circé Lethem, Lien Wildemeersch, Martijn van der Veen, Teun Luijkx, Lottie Hellingman.
(Dutch, Flemish, French, English dialogue)

1 hour 41 minutes

The most daring stylistic flourish in [Esther Rots'](#) forensically first-person, raw-nerve drama seems at first like a mistake. Over crisp images of a happy Dutch family — bearded Dad, his pregnant, laughing wife and their blond, tousle-haired daughter driving around in a well-kitted-out camper van — a baritone sings a comic operetta, in English, about bathrobes, kitchen counters and home juicers. “In this neat and tidy little liiiiife ... she is a neat and tidy little wiiiiife,” he booms to jaunty, parping tubas and pompous, martial percussion. The absurd, baroque stylings of Dan Geesin’s compositions are so incongruous with the pictures, it seems possible it’s the sound leaking in from the screen next door.

But while we never quite get over this dislocating effect — nor are we ever sure how closely we should be parsing the lyrics for clues to our protagonist’s state of mind — we’re not supposed to: “Retrospekt” goes further with the idea of schism than most thematically similar films about psychological breakdown. Distilled into Circé Lethem’s rock-solid performance as the traumatized Mette, Rots’ intelligent, ferociously empathetic but deeply unsentimental portrait doesn’t just use fragmentary images, nonlinear editing, and the deliberate rupture of the past into the present to evoke the smash-and-grab effect of deep shock. It also suggests, with this droll Gilbert & Sullivan-style

running commentary, that there's a part of Mette's psyche that is trying to knit the narrative of her life back together from all the tangled skeins in her mind, and perhaps it takes this bouncy, unserious form because Mette, though injured, frightened, guilt-ridden and suffering, is not without a sense of humor.

The primary drive is to have us experience a kind of cinematic PTSD alongside present-day Mette. As editor, Rots shreds together "Mette-after," hospitalized with a stitched-up gash on her head and a tendency to look for the word "Thursday" and find "coffee" instead, with "Mette-before." The earlier version may ostensibly be a caregiver and the lynchpin of a stable family unit, but she has dark, unacknowledged instincts for which the film is not afraid to hold her to account, even as she shies away from doing so herself.

There's a hint the trouble arises partly out of Mette's boredom during her second maternity leave, her midlife unfulfillment, and perhaps even a mild dose of postpartum depression. Escaping the tranquil confines of her comfortably modernist home (favored by the clean lines of DP Lennert Hillege's cool-toned photography) she goes for a visit to her workplace, a center for victims of domestic abuse. She displays a very relatable frisson of disappointment that her temporary replacement is doing her job so well.

But she also overhears that there have been developments in one of her old cases. Outside any official capacity, she contacts Miller (a firecracker turn by [Lien Wildemeersch](#)), a mercurial young woman trapped in an on-and-off-but-always-toxic relationship with her violent boyfriend, Frank (Teun Luijkx). Miller, or Lee Miller "like Man Ray's muse!" as she introduces herself theatrically, is undoubtedly the victim of that form of Stockholm syndrome that

affects battered wives, but she is also fundamentally unbalanced and a little in love with the havoc that her high-drama relationship can wreak.

She swears that this time she's done with him for good, if only she could find a safe place to lie low for a spell. With Mette's husband (Martijn Van Der Veen), who would certainly not approve of this dangerous young woman being around his children, away on business, Mette brings Miller to stay with her awhile.

The film achieves well its ratcheting structural tension, as the hospitalized Mette reluctantly picks her way through the rubble of her broken memories toward the point of impact.

At the same time it's a clever refocusing: putting complicated, multifaceted women back at the center of a domestic violence narrative that might have more safely portrayed them as saintly victims. And it is also a psychologically rich profile of a strangely co-dependent female relationship and of the pathology not just of abuse victim Miller but of Mette. There's a kind of Munchausen syndrome at work, with Mette's own sense of self somehow wrapped up in the deeply ego-driven idea that she's able to "fix" those less capable — if anything the shock when this belief is revealed to be ill-founded is just as traumatic as her physical injuries.

It is not an easy watch, and the arch contrast between the intelligent seriousness of the themes and that frankly wacky soundtrack may prove off-putting for those who like their films to occupy one register alone. But it is also a truly risky stylistic choice that Rots, in only her second feature, commits to completely, making "Retrospekt" a fascinating experience of cinematic dysphasia.

Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Forum), Feb. 11, 2019. Running time: 101 MIN.

Production: (Netherlands-Belgium) A Rots Filmwerk and Column Film production in co-production with Serendipity Films with the support of Het Nederlands Filmfonds and Netherlands Film Production Incentive. (Int'l sales: Rots Filmwerk, Amsterdam.) Producers: Hugo Rots, Esther Rots, Gijs van de Westelaken, Chantal van der Horst. Co-producer: Ellen De Waele.

Crew: Director, screenplay: Esther Rots. Camera (color, widescreen): Lennert Hillege. Editor: Esther Rots. Music: Dan Geesin.

With: Circé Lethem, Lien Wildemeersch, Martijn van der Veen, Teun Luijkx, Lottie Hellingman. (Dutch, Flemish, French, English dialogue)



WHAT'S ON

FEATURES

IN PRINT

10 films worth queueing for

Titles from this year's lineup we've already seen and loved.

By David Mouriquand and Paul O'Callaghan

AMAZING GRACE (C) Unseen for decades at the behest of its subject, Sydney Pollack's spine-tingling 1972 concert film captures late Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin at the height of her performing powers, and receives an extremely belated European premiere in this year's Out of Competition strand.

A COLONY (UNE COLONIE) (G) This Canadian standout from the Generation section is Geneviève Dulude-De Celles' assured debut feature. It's an authentic story about fitting in at a difficult age, bolstered by note-perfect performances from a cast of young newcomers.

THE CROSSING (GUO CHUN TIAN) (G) Bai Xue's first feature sees a 16-year-old starting to smuggle goods across the transit zone between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. It's a deftly balanced coming-of-age story that avoids well-trodden tropes.

HANNAH (H) Charlotte Rampling wows in Andrea Pallaoro's under-seen 2017 drama, which won her the Volpi Cup for Best Actress in Venice. She plays a woman driven into an austere existence as she shoulders the sins of her recently-incarcerated husband. Impactful and unmissable.

THE LAST TO SEE THEM (*Gli ultimi a vederli vivere*) (F) The opening credits of this bold drama reveal that the protagonists, an unassuming rural Italian family, will soon be murdered by home invaders. The film follows them as they unwittingly fritter away their last hours on earth, with increasingly nerve-shredding results.

MID90S (P) Jonah Hill makes the leap from schlubby screen star to sharp-eyed auteur with his surprisingly great directorial debut, a nuanced portrait of listless teens with shades of Larry Clark's *Kids* and a killer soundtrack.

NEVER SLEEP AGAIN (NIE WIEDER SCHLAFEN) (R) A true hidden gem unearthed for this year's Retrospective, Pia Frankenberg's 1992 feature is an immersive, wryly amusing account of three women wandering around post-wall Berlin, trying to figure out exactly how they're meant to feel about the newly reunified nation.

RETROSPEKT (F) This Belgian-Dutch co-production is an elliptical, timeline-hopping puzzle box which deals with domestic abuse and sees a woman recovering her memories following an accident. It's as inventive as it is thought-provoking.

SHOOTING THE MAFIA (P) Veteran documentary filmmaker Kim Longinotto has devoted her career to championing heroic women. Her latest feature profiles fearless octogenarian Letizia Battaglia, whose jaw-dropping photography exposed the atrocities of Palermo mobsters.

WHAT SHE SAID: THE ART OF PAULINE KAEI (P) A no-brainer for nostalgic cinephiles, this inspiring doc celebrates the legendary *Im* critic by blending evocative archive footage, slick movie montages and reams of Kael's sublime, punchy prose.



WHAT'S ON

FEATURES

IN PRINT

◀ The Exberlinale Blog: Investigating identity ▶

BY CAMERON COOK FEBRUARY 14, 2019

With Juliette Binoche heading up this year's Competition jury, it makes sense that her latest star vehicle, Safy Nebbou's scattershot romantic *Who You Think I Am* would be shown out of competition. Rumours circulating before the festival suggested a lukewarm entry, programmed to appease one of the festival's main celebrity draws. Oh, how wrong those rumours were. Is *Who You Think I Am* a perfect film? No. Do the characters handle traumatic situations in a manner that feels even vaguely credible? They sure don't. But is it one of the most enjoyable, satisfying, and downright thrilling movies I've seen all week? Absolutely.

In this instant camp classic, Binoche plays Claire, a 50-year-old university professor involved with a scorchingly attractive younger man. When he repeatedly gives her the cold shoulder after their lovemaking sessions (against giant glass windows overlooking Paris, of course) she creates a fake Facebook profile, masquerading as the demure and coquettish Clara, a 24-year-old fashion intern, and begins to stalk her lover's friends. Thus, she meets Alex, her boyfriend's roommate, who quite inexplicably falls intensely in love with Clara through FB Messenger and phone conversations alone. Never mind that millennials never call anyone and that reverse Google Image Search exists—the film just asks you to accept that a middle-aged woman who doesn't have an Instagram account could successfully catfish a (scorchingly attractive, again) young man armed with nothing but desperation and a burner iPhone 5.

Be prepared to suspend your disbelief further, because from this one simple concept *Who You Think I Am* weaves an incredibly intricate and ever-expanding web of twists and turns that will leave you scratching your head in the most gratifying way possible. Claire tells her story in flashbacks during visits to her new psychiatrist (a superb Nicole Garcia), who gradually becomes just as incredulous and confused as the viewer, as Claire and Alex spiral further and further into their psychosexual abyss. The film evokes Paul Verhoeven at his most Verhoevenesque, where the ends of the story truly justify the means, and characters are forcibly pushed to the limits of their credibility to deliciously dramatic effect.

A much more sombre and gripping tale of identity and deception is woven in Dutch director Esther Rots' eerie drama *Retrospekt*. Told in two intersecting halves that rush towards each other (think an understated, European *Memento*) the film tells the story of Mette (Circé Lethem), a headstrong and charming social worker at a domestic abuse organisation. One timeline follows Mette directly after the birth of her second daughter; the other depicts her daily life after a serious accident, and the trauma she endures while living in a rehabilitation centre. In between, Mette takes in Miller (Lien Wildemeersch, magnetic in her first film role) a young domestic violence survivor fleeing her abusive and unpredictable husband. Mette willingly lets Miller take over her life, and an unstable bond begins to form between the two women.



Mette, confined to the rehabilitation centre, doesn't remember her accident, and the film uses clever directing, editing, and musical techniques to mimic her confusion and anxiety (one scene in which the camera continuously bumps against her, breaking the fourth wall, had multiple audience members squirming in their seats). The score is also notable in a strange, unsettling way—composer Dan Gessin uses operatic, disjointed baroque pieces that directly narrate the events transpiring onscreen, incredibly specific but also weirdly incongruous with the images. It's a daring choice and completely leftfield, but works to drive home the idea that something is fundamentally not quite right with Mette's situation. **Retrospekt** is the kind of sleeper hit that's a best case scenario for the Berlinale's Forum section: experimental enough to appeal to intellectual moviegoers, but not obtuse to the point of losing anyone who isn't a hardcore art film fan. As the reasons behind Mette's mystery accident become clearer and clearer, **Retrospekt** maintains its low-budget suspense, keeping you on the edge of your seat to the very end.



ALLIANCE OF
WOMEN FILM
JOURNALISTS

With its world premiere at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival, Dutch filmmaker Esther Rots' sophomore feature *Retrospekt* is an extraordinary accomplishment and one of the standouts of this year's Contemporary World Cinema program. The film begins humbly enough and – based on the plot synopsis alone – indicates at first what might be a relatively pedestrian drama about a domestic violence counsellor who loses sight of the boundaries between her professional and personal life when she invites a client into her own home. What this summary misses, however, is the deeply thoughtful and formally ambitious way that Mette's story is told, both through Rots' own deft and masterful directorial hand and grounded by an incredible performance by Circe Lethem as the complex central character.

Weaving back and forth in time, we meet Mette at different stages of the film living through two initially distinct storylines told out of chronological order. In one, she is bored and frustrated with what she feels is forced extended maternity leave, inflicted on her by a husband she feels has dismissed her career over his. The second is even more grueling as she is shown recovering both physically and emotionally in rehab after a serious accident, the cause of which becomes clear as the film moves forward and the two narrative threads intersect.

Tying the two together is Lee (Lien Wildemeersch), a woman who has experienced the long-term effects of domestic violence at the hands of her partner but has fallen through the cracks of the system. At first, the film appears almost ambivalent to Lee's plight, but as the story becomes more complex it is revealed that Lee is far from a two-dimensional stereotype of what might be commonly conceived to be the 'typical' victim of domestic violence: she is flawed, she is contradictory, she is erratic, and she even has criminal tendencies in which she involves Mette's young daughter.

Rather than demonizing Lee, however, what *Retrospekt* achieves with such impressive confidence is a powerful critique of Mette's own saviour complex: at the heart of the film lies not an attack on Lee (impressively, it underscores how she can be both complicated and a victim) but on Mette's own arrogance and her fundamental assumption that she is somehow immune to the grim, brutal reality that women like Lee and her other clients face every day.

Rots is unrelenting in her clarity and focus on the minutia Mette's story, and the scenes where she struggles to grasp the severity of her misjudgement as she works through the simultaneous heartbreak and banality of rehab are in their own way as difficult, upsetting and as thought-provoking as the actual scenes of domestic violence themselves. *Retrospekt* is a challenging film that refuses to take the easy way out in its deep dive into this urgent and topical subject, and its adamant rejection of cliché and stereotype in favour of exploring contradictions and complexities make it challenging yet important viewing experience.

Alexandra Heller-Nicholas



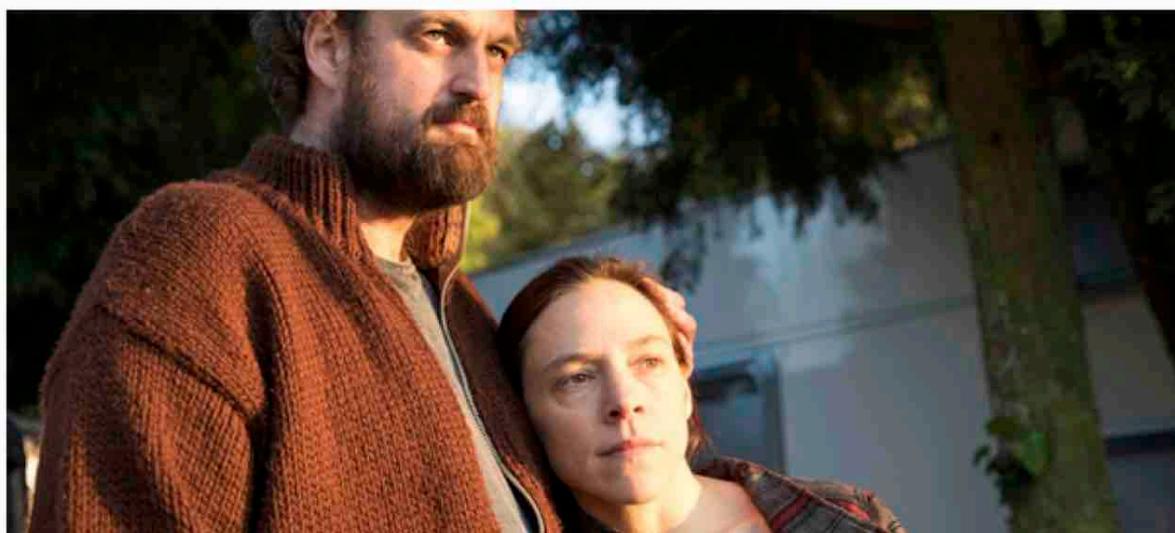


RETROSPEKT (2018) **** TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL 2018

September 9, 2018 Posted by: Filmuforia

No Comments

Category: Arthouse Competitions Drama Festivals TORONTO film festival WOMAN DIRECTOR



Dir.: Esther Rots; Cast: Circe Lethem, Martijn van der Veen, Lien Wildermersch, Teun Luijkx; Netherlands/Belgium 2018, 101 min.

Esther Rots' follow-up to *Can Go Through Skin* is a portrait of psychological self-destruction told through three time-lines keeping the audience enthralled but also questioning the role of its plausible characters.

Mette (Lethem) is a busy working mother who runs a domestic violence support centre while coping with the latest addition to her family, a daughter Michelle. Her marriage is under strain with her husband Simon (van der Veen) often away on business. Aware that Lee (Wildermersch) is also having trouble with her violent boyfriend Frank, she invites the young woman to help in the centre and stay with her during one of Simon's long absences. Needless to say, Frank finds out where Lee is hiding and when Simon returns on the same night, confrontation in unavoidable and tragic consequences ensue leaving Mette wheel-chair bound but paradoxically bringing her closer to her estranged father – who is also in a wheelchair and suffering from dementia. The pair chatting to each other in their wheelchairs, is one of the highly symbolic scenes of this affecting indie features from the Dutch writer and director.

DoP Lennart Hillege deftly manages two different styles: from hyper-realism to women-in-peril scenes where the traumatise Mette, tries to get her mind around what really happened. The continuously changing time-frames help to crate an atmosphere, where the truth – *Rashamon*-style – becomes more and buried in an ecliptic avalanche questioning our initial perceptions of the protagonists during the course of the narrative. With its score of Brecht-like songs by composer Dan Gesin, *Retrospekt* is a haunting and enigmatic character study. AS



‘Retrospekt’ Traps Us in the Prison of a Fractured Mind

I can’t think of a better term to describe Esther Rots’ *Retrospekt* than her own: “sensory cinema.” We get a feeling for what this means during the opening scene as Dan Geesin’s score and Bas Kuijlenburg’s booming operatic baritone drowns out the action onscreen with English lyrics telling a story of which we’re not yet certain is even worth our attention. We don’t know these characters beyond visible traits: a pregnant woman, her husband, and their young girl packed up in an RV heading to who knows where. What this marriage of sight and sound conjures within becomes all we really have to decide to invest in this strange puzzle or frantically seek a quick escape. Hopefully you’ll choose the former because the subsequent ride is worth it.

The woman is Mette (Circé Lethem), a domestic abuse counselor who takes her job very seriously not only because of what it provides her clients, but also how it defines her identity. Her husband is Simon (Martijn van der Veen), by all accounts a loving, supportive husband whose job needs defending whenever it’s mocked or belittled by comparison. The reason this would happen stems from his worrying that their daughter Harrie (Felice and Frederique de Bruijn) is having a difficult time adjusting to her new baby sister. Simon wants Mette to take another three months maternity leave to supervise this adjustment while he goes out of town for work despite the fact her absence sacrifices women desperate for assistance and his “only” postpones numbers someone else can calculate.



You may be saying to yourself, “Wait. You said Mette was pregnant. Where’d the new baby come from?” Why express the notion of “sensory cinema” on a scene-by-scene basis when you can wrap the entire film in that aesthetic instead? Rots therefore chose her title with purposeful intent as everything presented is revealed as memories revisited

in retrospect. If I'm being completely honest, though, I'm not sure these memories are even wholly real in the sense that they're experienced as flashbacks from some fixed point in time. The way I see it, we're trapped within the prison of Mette's fractured mind as she struggles to find meaning in actions leading towards a tragic accident that might have been prevented if only she had the knowledge hindsight now provides.

Except this incident left her with incalculable physical, psychological, and emotional trauma. After watching that happy family on vacation at the start, we're taken to an altercation between Mette and an abusive man waiting for his wife amongst the changing rooms of a department store. It's a harrowing experience to witness, one that finds her tripping over her words when recounting it to her husband. He cracks a joke and suddenly we're sent down a spiral of anxiety triggered by the return of Kuijlenburg's voice and an almost hyperventilating rhythm to the imagery before a jump cut sends us towards two futures: one of Mette jogging post-birth and another of her bruised in a hospital bed. Now begins an ever-shifting loop as she furiously attempts to remember.

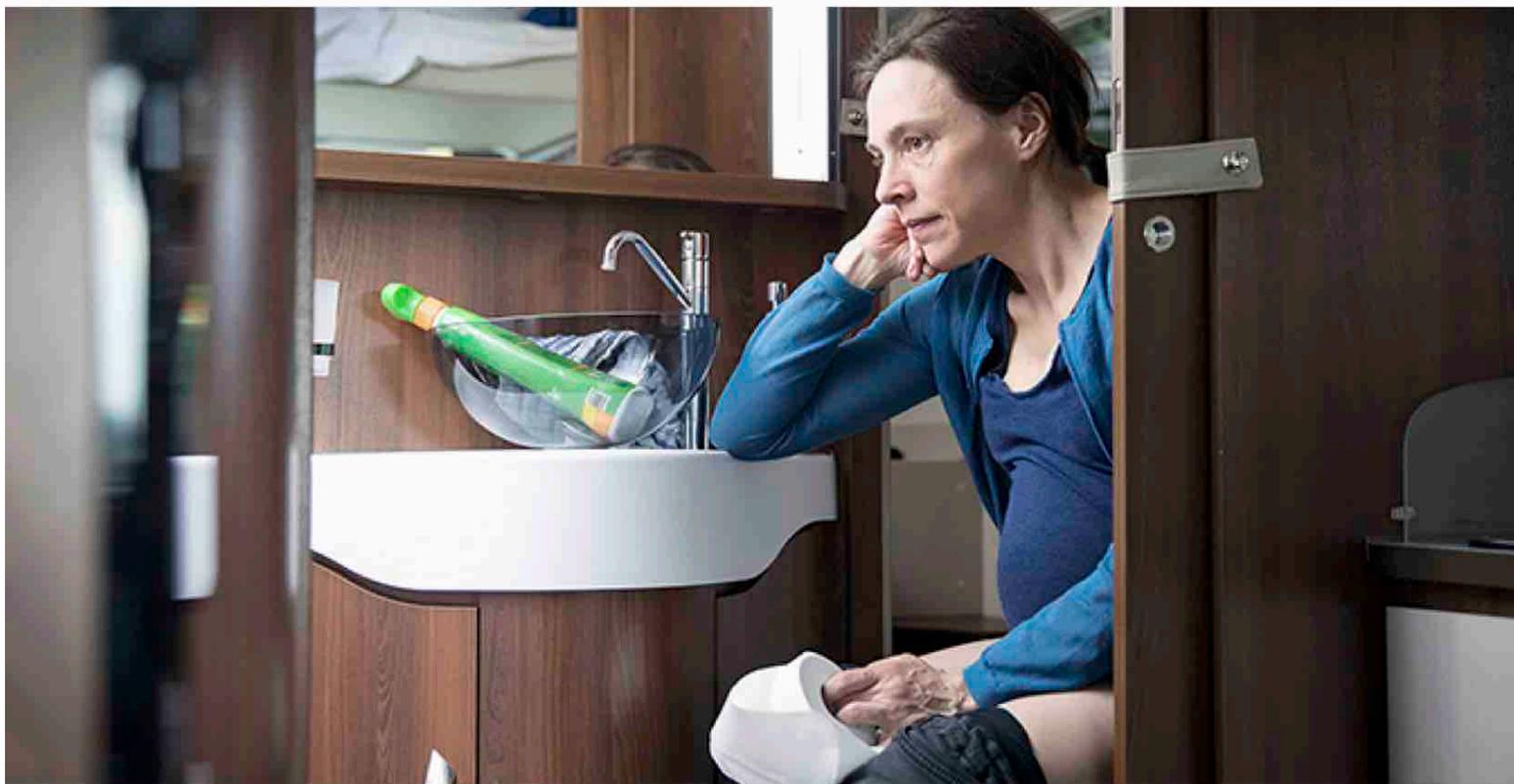


Was that anxiety spiral simply the product of her adrenaline wearing off or was it Mette's mind recalling the fact that this is where everything started? This was the moment that could have proven the risk she takes at work despite now having children. This was the moment she could have seen the flippant disregard for her wellbeing Simon possessed whether they knew it or not. If she had feared what occurred in that fitting room rather than brushing it off as an anecdote to tell her client/friend Miller (Lien Wildemeersch) — who was struggling to leave her abusive man behind — maybe the nightmares to come would have been prevented. That panicked Mette wasn't therefore on vacation, but a present-day Mette looking back and horrified at what she missed.

Retrospekt is a series of these types of dual moments existing as both past and present, lesson and regret. It constantly asks questions by showing us the aftermath of scenes we've yet to experience as though each traumatic moment of confrontation at the hospital drags Mette down below her mind's inherent defense mechanisms to prompt a suppressed memory it may not be ready to handle. Who was in the car? (What car?)

Why is Miller demanding she remember? (At this point we've never even met Miller.) Where's Harrie and why hasn't Mette seen her since the accident? (Could she be dead?) These dreadful scenarios haunt us because we're helpless to do anything but wait as the truth of what occurred slowly comes into focus against the off-putting opera.

It really is an experience like no other with each shift in time proving just as easily overlapped as shown in sequence. Heightened states of emotions conjure amplified confusion, the painful moments of pointed inquisition after the accident jumbling Mette's thoughts in a similar way to her words. Things get so uncomfortably severe that the camera will sometimes push in with a violently swift jolt of contact, scaring her to tears. All these external forces are colliding to metaphorically shake her awake while her brain remains determined to fend off such horrors until she's better healed. Sex becomes equivalent to abuse as sound is drowned out into electronic noise with pleasure and desperation converging through the physicality of the act. Everything is a provocation, everything steeped in terror.



Lethem delivers a revelatory performance moving back and forth between joy, laughter, frustration, and despair. The jumbled narrative often shows how friendships progressed before learning their rocky starts, recovery before rehabilitation. It's a choice by Rots that consistently reminds us how appearances never supply the whole story. A smile is just as easily a mask as a genuine expression of happiness or love. Too often we watch both Lethem and Wildemeersch turn on a dime to move from contentment to paranoia, their safety forever in flux at the hands of predators and temperamental men devoid of the patience or understanding to rise above gross generalizations. To look back on one's mistakes is to too often acknowledge how blinded we are to dangers we easily recognize in others.

Written by Jared Mobarak on September 23, 2018

Film-Tipps und Kino-Highlights für die 69. Berlinale

Retrospekt

Darum geht es:

Mette hat ihr zweites Kind bekommen und ist in Elternzeit. Sie vermisst ihren Beruf als Sozialarbeiterin für Opfer häuslicher Gewalt, fürchtet durch ihre Pause nicht mehr gebraucht zu werden und sucht daher den Kontakt zu einer ehemaligen Kundin. Sie nimmt sie gegen alle Vernunft und ohne ihren Mann, der sich auf Geschäftsreise befindet zu informieren, bei sich auf, als diese vor ihrem gewalttätigen Ehemann fliehen möchte. Die Situation eskaliert, als sich letzterer seine Frau zurückholen will. Mette ist davon besessen, sich um diese Geschichte zu kümmern und lässt alle Risiken für ihre eigene Familie außer Acht.

Was du zum Film wissen musst:

Konstruiert als Mosaikfilm mit nicht-linearer Erzählung fordert „Retrospekt“ den Zuschauer sehr und macht die Leiden der Protagonistinnen fast körperlich erfahrbar. Der Schnitt ist schnell, die Musik dominant und das Bild in kräftigen Farben gehalten. Die Niederländerin Esther Rots zeigt ihren ersten Langfilm in der Sektion Forum. – TV



Esther Rots thematisiert im Forum-Beitrag „Retrospekt“ die Angst, nach Ende der Elternzeit nicht wieder in den Beruf zurückzufinden. © Sofie Silbermann

STAGE AND SCREEN

Theatre, film and music reviews – strongly opinionated!

Retrospekt

(Forum / Netherlands, Belgium / Director: Esther Rots)

A casual day out shopping turns into a highly dangerous confrontation when a young woman comes across a case of domestic violence and decides not to look away. In the claustrophobic environment of a fashion store's fitting room, the fear in actress Circé Lethem's (who pulls off a masterful performance here) face, the paralysis that grips her body are the culmination of a frighteningly intense opening scene and foreshadow the rest of the film.

Her character Mette is actually a professional counsellor for abused women. When on parental leave, she decides to help one of her ex-clients – a decision with catastrophic effects. The viewer has to put the story together themselves as director Esther Rots tells in a fragmented way, connecting scenes from different time periods, creating gaps for the viewer to fill.

BERLINALE 2019: DAY 5

By Sascha Krieger

Slowly a picture emerges – for us as for Mette whose own process of remembering becomes part of the film's fabric. Illustrating songs and drum beats are laid over scenes, removing them from reality, giving them a dream-like or nightmarish feel.

A sense of dread creeps in as relationships become unstable over the threat – or the memory of violence. To this, Mette's complicated psychology is added, an increasing obsessive desire for self-worth and a fear of not being needed. Communications break down – in the past, the present and between them.

As Mette is struggling back into life, it has broken into pieces. Just like the film doesn't, she cannot piece it all together. There will remain gaps. Gaps left by violence and the question what the right thing to do might be, how to live one's life right. Gaps that show in Lethem's face, in its despair, its confusion, its nervousness, its fear, its emptiness.

Questions that have more than one answer in this film, or none. **What remains is a masterful and devastating collage of life as a broken mirror. And what it shows is hard to forget.**

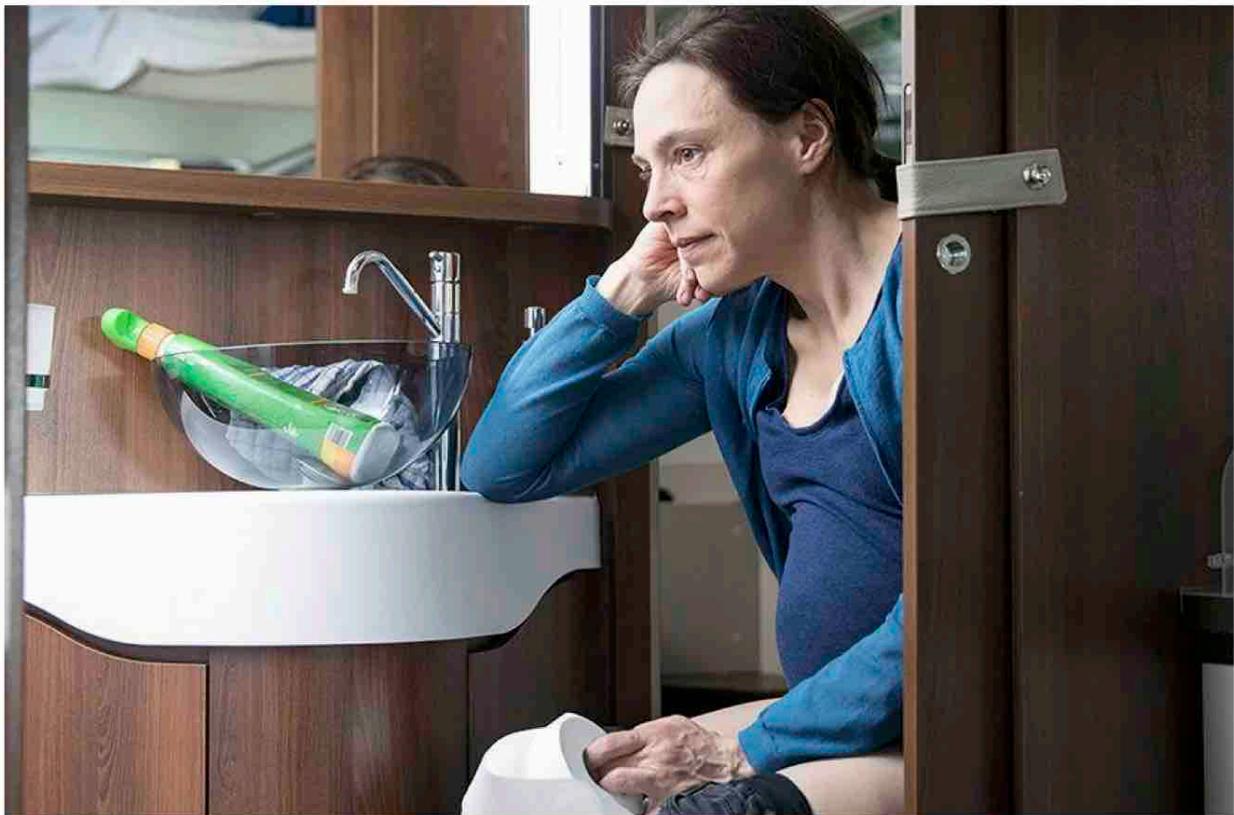
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TIFF review: Retrospekt

Puzzle-like psychological drama about a domestic violence support worker is moody and powerful

BY **JOSE TEODORO**

AUGUST 31, 2018 5:15 PM



RETROSPEKT CWC D: Esther Rots. Netherlands/Belgium. 101 min. Sep 8, 2:45 pm, *TBLB* 4; Sep 10, 9 am, *TBLB* 4; Sep 16, 3:15 pm, *Scotiabank* 8. See [listing](#). Rating: **NNNN**

With its teasingly puzzle-like non-chronological narrative, an unkind viewer could regard Rots's second feature as a chilly exercise in stylistic flash. But this moody drama about a domestic violence support worker who becomes precariously involved in a client's plight features elements that elevate it above the schematic.

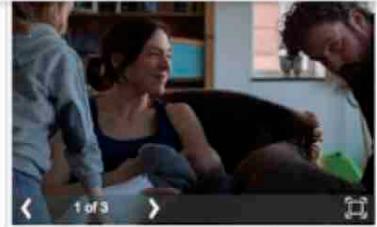
Circé Lethem gives a masterfully graded performance as a working mother besieged by violent threats, manipulation and debilitating trauma, while the film's carefully arranged ellipses smartly mirror the disjointed patterns of its heroine's damaged psyche.

Composer Dan Geesin also deserves a shout-out for supplying a series of songs that envelope certain fraught scenes with a patina of eerie, arch lyricism.

TORONTO 2018 Contemporary World Cinema
Review: *Retrospekt*

by VASSILIS ECONOMOU

© 11/09/2018 - TORONTO 2018: Dutch director Esther Rots delivers a fragmented, elliptical fairy tale set in the present day, about a hurting heroine who must survive looking back on a traumatic event


trailers & videos

international title:	Retrospekt
original title:	Retrospekt
country:	Netherlands, Belgium
year:	2018
directed by:	Esther Rots
screenplay:	Esther Rots
cast:	Teun Luijkx, Circé Lethem, Nele Hardiman, Matthijs Ten Kate, Lien Wildemeersch, Martijn van der Veen

Dutch director Esther Rots delivers a fragmented, elliptical fairy tale set in the present day, about a hurting heroine who must survive looking back on a traumatic event

Vassilis Economou

Dutch filmmaker **Esther Rots'** first short films, *Play With Me* (2002) and *I Sprout* (2003), competed at the Cannes Film Festival, while her debut feature, the elliptical drama *Can Go Through Skin* [+] (2009), premiered in the Berlinale Forum. After a nine-year break, Rots has written, directed, edited and co-produced *Retrospekt* [+], her sophomore feature, which has had its world premiere in the Contemporary World Cinema section of the 43rd [Toronto International Film Festival](#).

While Mette (**Circé Lethem**) is enjoying her holidays with her husband Simon (**Martijn van der Veen**) and her five-year-old daughter, she witnesses a violent dispute between a couple. Despite the fact she is pregnant, she decides to intervene. After an accident, Mette is in a rehabilitation centre, and she is in fact in a wheelchair when Miller (**Lien Wildemeersch**) pays her a visit. She insists on convincing her to testify against Frank, who is responsible for her paralysation. Mette, who is on maternity leave, has constant arguments with Simon about whose duty it is to raise their baby, as he prioritises his job over everything else. She feels neglected and lacks empathy towards her newborn baby. Mette dreams of being a tram driver. As a domestic-violence counsellor, she realises that the centre can't protect one of her clients, Miller, who is being abused by Frank. Mette decides to host Miller despite the possible catastrophic consequences.

These are the main jigsaw pieces of the fragmented and elliptical story contained in *Retrospekt*, which is told in a non-linear and non-chronological order. A random selection of crucial stages in Mette's life are depicted on a blank, retrospective canvas, where past memories and present-day events are scattered all around her. The main storyline is divided into two interconnected parts that narrate proceedings in a reverse

time lapse, leading up to a cathartic ending. Through Mette's face, brought to life by a subtle performance from Lethem, the various periods of her life intertwine in a perplexing but well-structured jigsaw puzzle. She struggles to find a reason to exist, forced to deal with motherhood, work issues and her role as a wife, all at the same time, though none of these elements can offer her a purpose in life. When all control is seemingly lost, she withdraws into herself psychologically, striving to find her inner self and successfully rehabilitate. This is also the point when *Retrospekt* goes beyond a merely personal illustration of Mette's story and reaches out to a wider audience through its various parallelisms.

The experience is enhanced by what Rots describes as sensory cinema. Through her method, in which the visual aspect is deliberately confusing and initially incoherent, the director aims to offer an interpretation of her heroine's life events by putting her feelings on display. She also engages the viewer, inviting him or her to be part of this process of exposure, thus bringing both the audience and the protagonist into the same emotional space. The blend of reality and illusion, along with the depiction of Mette's subconscious thoughts, is illustrated by **Lennert Hillege's** whirlwind-like camerawork, while **Dan Geesin's** haunting sound design in conjunction with his eerie operatic pop songs and music serves to bridge the disjointed elements of the story.

Rots succeeds in creating an absurd, poetic fairy tale, which, despite being immersed in tragedy, retains a sense of humour. Her film, set in a realistic but somewhat blurry everyday environment, prompts the viewer to let go both emotionally and mentally.

FILM FESTIVALS / TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

RETROSPEKT [2018]: 'TIFF' REVIEW

The sophomore film 'Retrospekt' of Esther Rots is a pulsating time ticking bomb, brewing with mystery and anxiety, waiting to take you off guard. It is baffling and equally thrilling.

[Nafees Ahmed](#) / © September 16, 2018 / 0 Comments

Share it:

The sophomore film 'Retrospekt' of Esther Rots is, a pulsating time ticking bomb, brewing with mystery and anxiety waiting to take you off guard. It is baffling and equally thrilling. Shown from the perspective of the lead protagonist, we inhabit Mette's (Circé Lethem) consciousness and see the events in the film unfolding through her fractured memory. Though it sounds like a gimmick in the blurb, it never appears as one.

The non-linear narrative never feels disoriented in time and space, rather we experience the trauma and pain of Mette's psyche, and gradually piece together each part of the intricate puzzle. Esther's meticulous writing and commanding direction invest us emotionally in Mette's retrospection of the event leading to the catastrophe that damaged her psychologically and physically, leaving a permanent scar on her subconscious.

Mette is a domestic violence counsellor and a mother going through an eternal crisis of purpose of existence while on a maternity break. She is driven by the passion to help women embroiled in domestic abuse even if that means putting herself at risk while she is pregnant and helping a woman from her abusive husband. It irks her to be away from the work and her frustration is apparent in her feeling of helplessness that emotionally perturbs her. Esther thoughtfully injects the hypocrisy and prejudice in the society that takes women granted for the motherhood.

The dilemma of the purpose of existence intensifies, and it hit hard when the argument takes an ugly turn with her husband, Simon (Martijn van der Veen), who doesn't agree to take leave for their newborn second child. This crisis tempts her into grabbing on an opportunity when it knocks on her door. She extends her help to Miller (Lien Wildemeersch), her former client, and give her shelter in the house without putting a thought to it.



Soon she finds herself in the middle of chaos, she loses control of her situation. The delirious and unpredictable behaviour of Miller and her toxic relationship with boyfriend, Frank, put Mette in a fractious position. The looming threat of Frank spying on Mette's home put everyone at the risk. The whole frantic state snow bowls in a direful accident that changes the course of Mette's life. It is in these moments of solitude; she retrospects her life leading to how she has turned now. The effort to recall the past makes her flurry and brings a tsunami of pain clear in the montages of her daily routine.

Esther deftly plays with the irregular time jump to evoke the inherent pain of memory loss, and Circé Lethem's agile and believable performance further bolsters it. The absurd and sinister sound design along with the fable-like music add an extra dimension to the whole frustrating time jumps and memory loss gamble. The songs are used to the great effect as they further help to understand the psyche of Mette's trauma and accentuate a parallel emotional narration.

Nafees Ahmed

CINEMA AXIS

Retrospekt is an engrossing film from dutch filmmaker Esther Rots. The story focuses on a domestic violence case worker who gets heavily involved in the life of one of her victims, and there's a distinctly dark undertone throughout the film.

Published by Derek Jacobs



TIFF 2018: Retrospekt

POSTED ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2018
BY DEREK JACOBS IN REVIEWS, TIFF
1 MINUTE READ

The story is structured like a temporal jigsaw puzzle, darting around in a non-linear fashion. But, it is thoroughly clear that the case worker (played by the marvelous Circé Lethem) has suffered a debilitating injury at the hands of someone in her life. One of the most consistent methods for determining where you are in the story is by identifying the extent of the heroine's injuries and mental state.

One issue that often crops up with a story where the audience essentially "knows" the climax is that you can lose any sense of mystery or suspense. This is not the case with *Retrospekt* because there is always the task at hand of piecing the story together, of uncovering a new clue. There's some danger of this becoming gimmicky, but it is executed well in this film.

In addition, there is a clear reasoning behind this stylistic choice, made clear in a few key sequences: the disjointed narrative mirrors the main character's own state of mind throughout the film.

Due to both its subject matter and the challenging narrative structure, *Retrospekt* isn't an easy film to watch. But, due to the strength of the acting and storytelling, it is an enjoyable experience.



Berlinale 2019 Review: *Retrospekt* (Esther Rots)

Cédric Succivalli
February 12, 2019



A fragmented look at a woman who is both losing her grip on an unraveling life, and in retrospect trying to figure out if it could have been prevented, Esther Rots' sophomore effort **Retrospekt** is a film that requires hard work from the viewer, and work that might not pay off completely, at that – though undoubtedly a rewarding experience. Jumping back and forth to moments before and after a traumatic event in the protagonist's life, **Retrospekt** often bewilders an audience that tries to make sense of it all and might zone out before the 100-minute running time is over. Yet, nine years after her stunning debut **Can Go Through Skin**, Rots shows that battered and bruised women, both literally and figuratively, are again an inspiration for a psychological analysis of the human mind.

Domestic abuse counselor Mette (Circé Lethem, in a strong performance of great range) is dedicated to her work, perhaps even too much so. Married to Simon (Martijn van der Veen), she has a young pre-teen daughter, Harrie, and a new baby girl. When Simon's job requires him to leave the country for a long period of time, he expects Mette to take an extended maternity leave to help adjust Harrie to the idea of having a baby sister. During this period, and unbeknownst to Simon, Mette's client and friend Lee Miller (Lien Wildemeersch) moves in with her, hiding from her abusive partner.

Meanwhile, car accident victim Mette is recovering from a trauma that has affected both her body and her psyche to a great extent. Working through her physical limitations is hard and her husband Simon's visits are an emotional and psychological drain. Yes, this is the same Mette. Her friendly banter and warm friendship with another patient cannot hide the fact that she is struggling. With the aftermath of the accident, with getting used to the idea of a radically changed life, but also with the large 'what if' stomping through her mind. What path led to this tragic incident, and could she have prevented it? Or was she maybe the cause of it?

In two clear chronological paragraphs it all looks simple, but Rots tells Mette's story in a jumbled roller coaster of emotions and flashbacks, shards of memory trying to trace a narrative along with Mette's efforts to find hers. We are as much in the dark as she is while she tries to glue together the shattered fragments of her life leading up to the traumatic event. Postnatal depression, an uncooperative husband, a manipulative friend

dealing with her own abuse. And in the midst of it all, Mette frantically working to keep it all together and to put it all together. **Retrospekt** slowly reveals its story as the before and after converge into the final scene (not counting a short epilogue) showing us what actually happened and where blame may ultimately lie. But the blame game is not the game Rots is playing.

What she aims at is showing how easy it is to fall into the trap of trust. Trust in a husband, trust in a friendship, trust in the way things appear to be, trust in one's own strength. Trust until it is too late and everything starts to fall apart, because we have been deluding ourselves that we have it all under control while we can so easily slip into the mistakes of others, mistakes that we can recognize in them but not in ourselves. Happiness is hard to find in Rots' world, as was the case in her debut. It is therefore interesting to see **Retrospekt** bookended by its most blissful scenes, scenes that indeed start and end the narrative, although one has to wonder if the joyful conclusion is real or just in Mette's head.

Retrospekt's structure, or perhaps more fittingly 'destructure', does not make for an easy viewing though, and when it finally reaches the conclusion it is somewhat unsatisfactory because the execution is messy and hurried. It seems Rots is more interested in the process of dealing with trauma, and her approach to that is a very sensory experience, with sound design and camerawork often a reflection of Mette's state of mind. The baroque pieces of opera that serve as chapter demarcations are an unfortunate choice, and while Lethem delivers exemplary work the rest of the cast is not as strong. The most disappointing aspect of **Retrospekt** is that by putting the event that the whole film paradoxically centers around all the way at the end and then shortselling in this fashion, the director robs the film of the catharsis that it was clearly building towards. Trapped in the way the film's narrative mimics the emotional and psychological state of its protagonist, in itself a laudable and successful approach, the ending that should be a bang becomes a bit of a whimper. Still, **Retrospekt** shows Rots' talent for visceral and intelligent cinema, and while it requires stamina, the film is a fascinating look into trauma and people's inability to see the danger in themselves.



Actrice Circé Lethem wint internationale Angela Award voor 'Retrospekt'

🕒 november 27, 2018 📁 Binnenkort, Nieuws, Prijzen

Een mooie prijs voor Circé Lethem: zondag won ze op de slotavond van het Subtitle European Filmfest de Angela Award voor haar uitzonderlijke vertolking in de film [Retrospekt](#).

Retrospekt, de film waarvoor ze de award kreeg, is een psychologisch drama geschreven en geregisseerd door de Nederlandse **Esther Rots**. Lethem speelt de 37-jarige Mette, een patiënt in een revalidatiecentrum. Hoewel ze gedeeltelijk verlamd is en haar spraakvermogen deels verstoord, is haar scherpe geest ongeschonden. Druppelsgewijs krijgen we een inkijk in haar geest, en wordt onthuld wat haar overkomen is.

Wat Circé met haar rol doet, afwisselend in het Nederlands en het Frans, liet ook op de première op International Film Festival van Toronto een sterke indruk na. *'Lethem's performance is powerful and affecting'*, lezen we, maar even goed wordt er van *'marvelous'*, *'magnetic'* en *'masterful'* gesproken.

Retrospekt kwam tot stand met de steun van het VAF/filmfonds van minister van cultuur Sven Gatz, en wordt verwacht in 2019.



Retrospekt 2018 Directed by [Esther Rots](#)

A cheerful pregnant woman on holiday with her husband and child encounters violence that lead to her demise.

[CAST](#) [CREW](#) [DETAILS](#) [GENRE](#)

Drama

101 mins More details at [IMDB](#) [TMDB](#)

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[Review by Michael Sicinski](#)

This is a film for which I have quite a bit of grudging respect. It's gutsy. It bats for the rafters. And unlike several other critics, I personally think that Rots' biggest artistic gamble -- having a mostly realistic film underscored by an English-language operatic score that serves as narration -- sort of works, in that it lends *Retrospekt* a layer of much-needed absurdity. (It's worth noting that she uses the device quite a bit better than Kornel Mundruczo did in *Johanna*, the only other time I've seen it deployed in such a manner.)

As Mette, actress Circé Lethem gives it all she's got. But Mallory Andrews and Mike D'Angelo are right. The scrambled chronology only serves to make Mette's accident into a phony withheld event that we can intuit almost immediately, and Rots implicitly makes Mette's mental disability into a punishment for bad decisions. Even more than this, *Retrospekt* seems to posit that Mette, a woman whose job is to counsel women in domestic abuse situations, has gravitated toward that career as a result of her own mental illness, particularly her boundary issues.

Combine this with the way Miller (Lien Wildemeersch) is characterized -- as a damaged user who will always return to the unhealthy relationship eventually -- and you have a film whose very plot thrives on horizontal violence, and a tacit pronouncement that the whole situation is a rotten liberal scam. Do-gooders are really narcissists, and lower-class trash are beyond help anyway. Perhaps this conservative message is highly radical in Rots' home context.

I think we can file the Dutch film *Retrospekt* alongside the works of Ruben Östlund (Swedish liberalism is a massive hoax) and Cyril Schäublin (Swiss people have it so good they have become zombies) in a new, burgeoning category. I have often claimed that one good working definition of "art" is a statement against the prevailing orthodoxy of the times. As an American, I only wish I had Dutch, Swedish, or Swiss "problems" to contend with.

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Berlin Film Festival Film

Berlinale 2019: 'Retrospekt' is Downright Irresponsible

by Redmond Bacon · February 11, 2019 · 0

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The perils of always trying to do the right thing are brutally examined in *Retrospekt*, a domestic violence drama with shades of John Cassavetes. Taking morally tricky subject matter and running it through the narrative ringer, it's a complicated and provocative work that's unlikely to gain many supporters. While excellently acted and ambitiously edited, its message leaves a sour taste in the mouth that is hard to shake off.

The story starts with the heavily pregnant Mette (Circé Lethem) trying on new trousers in a shop, when she hears another woman being physically abused in the stall opposite. She tries to comfort the woman, but the man returns and is verbally aggressive. Mette tries to tell her husband, Simon (Martijn van der Veen), about it, before suffering one of many mental breakdowns we will see throughout this movie.

This early scene tells you everything you need to know about Mette: she cares, and this will be her main downfall. Taking three months maternity leave to take care of her second child while her husband jettisons around Europe on business, she can't stop thinking about one of her clients at the Domestic Abuse center, a Flemish woman named Miller (Lien Wildemeersch) who lives in constant fear of her estranged husband. Mette

invites the unstable woman to stay over, but almost instantly gets into trouble when the woman tries to call her husband over. This leads to a devastating set of events explicitly telegraphed from the very start.

Told before and after this questionable decision (surely the Dutch authorities can organize a shelter?), the jerky narrative reflects Mette's own mental state as she desperately tries to remember what led her to this unfortunate position. The editing helps to create a sense of mania, often cutting to events as they are happening. It creates a great sense of onward momentum, never letting the audience breathe, but this manic tone can be hard to sustain over an entire movie, especially as we know what will eventually happen to Mette. *Retrospekt* appears to take delight in its own cruelty; why bother, it asks when these women don't want to get better?

This worldview is complemented by the strange soundtrack (featuring original tracks with baritone and soprano singing, tuba, timpani, and clavichord) lending an ironic, surreal element to Mette's otherwise harrowing experience. Totally left-field, it's a great example of how music can completely transform how one views a film. Additionally, the sound design, full of low-rumbling tones, sudden jerky noises, and high-pitched ringing, helps to stress Mette's shattered mental state.

Nonetheless, we never really get into what drives Mette, as if she's afraid to confront it herself. It's evident that she has her own mental issues and maybe her own history of abuse, but these are never explored in much detail. Lethem goes for broke in the central performance, able to convey fear, resilience, and vulnerability often within the same facial expression. Yet, she deserves a story that empathizes with her character instead of setting her up for an artificial fall with a soundtrack that treats it as a lark. The discrepancy between performance and execution is disturbing.

What are we supposed to think of Mette's behaviour? On the one hand, the illogicality of her actions speaks truer to real life than conventional decision making, as high-pressure situations can always cause people to act in the strangest of ways. On the other hand, certain events make it look like she is being blamed for her own goodness. Is this message — don't try and stop domestic violence from happening because you could get hurt yourself — really worth promoting in a world where women are still killed daily by their aggressive husbands? Without offering any smart alternatives, *Retrospekt* crosses over into potentially dangerous territory very quickly. At its very worst, it's downright irresponsible.



'Retrospekt' is Downright Irresponsible

Movie title : Retrospekt

URL : <https://www.goombastomp.com/berlinale-2019-retrospekt/>

Movie description : 'Retrospekt' is a non-linear domestic violence drama which unwisely suggests that women are sometimes responsible for the violence of men.

1.5



Credits

Directed by Esther Rots

Written by Esther Rots

Starring Circé Lethem, Martijn van der Veen, Lien Wildemeersch

Music by Dan Geesin

Cinematography by Lennert Hillege

Country: Netherlands | Belgium | 2019

TIFF World Premiere : Retrospekt

9/13/2018



***Retrospekt* is a non-sensical, sensical psycho drama about a Domestic Violence Support worker**

started as an innocent act of kindness that turns quickly into a whirlwind of life altering events.

The Power of Sound

Director of Sound, Dan Geesin, refuses to let sound design take a back seat in *Retrospekt*. Instead, the audience quickly becomes hyper aware of the sounds that are integral to the fragmented storytelling. It brings hyper realism to the key moments where Mete experiences anxiety, paranoia, anger, sadness, resentment and shame. As if we are eerily forced into experiencing exactly what Mete feels, the audience is never left unsettled.

The Story

Mete (Circé Lethem) is many things. She's a mother, a wife and has a strong passion for her job at a Domestic Violence Support Centre. She struggles to keep it all together when she is forced to take maternity leave while kindly taking in Lee Miller (Lien Wildemeersch), a troubled woman who has an aggressively abusive husband. With every advancing moment deeper into the fragments that make up the life of Mete the audience is plunged into what

The Soundtrack



When asked about the choice in soundtrack (which is heavily opera based) Dan and Esther said:

“In this film, on one hand we were looking for social realism on issues of domestic struggle and on the other hand we were looking for a theatrical absurdity in life. Almost like making fun of the human struggle with extreme angles. We wanted to mesh the realism of images and sound and it ended up being dislocating...disturbing.”

Dan also adds:

“The music drives the idea and feeling of a fairytale. The operatic music is romantic, absurd and dramatic. It narrates a parallel emotional development and creates distance where either the audience or Mette need a little space or hindsight. “

Emphasis on Motion

In several instances in the film, when Mette is forced to think about the decisions she made that led up to the accident, or the mere notion of being rehabilitated, we are visually jolted forward with abrupt camera movements that simulate a very forceful and uncomfortable motion. These moments are crucial in putting physicality to the mental barricades Mette experiences.

The Relatability Factor

Retrospekt is so over sensitizing that it's easy for the audience to understand Mette's fleeting emotions as she rushes through life. The sporadic memories and constant choppiness in event timelines are based on the flexibility of the way the film was made. Because both Dan and Esther were involved in the film's development process all the way through, it helped build overall control throughout the scenes.

Speaking about whether the film was made chronologically or in separate instances, Dan said:

"We work on a parallel trajectory, both Esther and I work on the same material over the same time, but we use it in different ways."

"Dan already does music while the film is recording, I am then influenced by the music while we are filming; which makes it flexible." Esther added. "We start editing with the music sometimes, or maybe in the middle. It's a completely different experience every time."

"There's a sort of bleakness and decadence in chopping it up in editing." Dan added.

Why You Should See It

Although a little short of a two-hour film, *Retrospekt* is bound to keep the audience on their toes with the ever-so-real experience of being immersed in the traumatic memories of Mete. A fresh take on what it means to be successful as a woman, while struggling with the dangers of domestic abuse, *Retrospekt* is a fresh take on non-linear storytelling.

FESTIVAL REVIEWS

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TIFF 2018 Review: RETROSPEKT (Netherlands/Belgium 2018) ***1/2



Puzzle-like psychological drama about a domestic violence support worker.

Retrospekt by definition is the Dutch word meaning the series of events that occurred in the past. Director Ether Rot's RETROSPEKT cleverly puzzles together a timeline-jumping narrative of protagonist Mette's relationship to work, life, and motherhood culminating in catastrophic events.

In many films, a non-chronological narrative is chosen at the director's whimsy but in this film there is a reason for it. Mette (Circé Lethem) has undergone an accident that has jolted her memory and psychical condition. The story unfolds just as she is fitting her past together. It is an intricate puzzle narrative where the stakes only escalate with every new shard of revelation. Mette is happily married and works in an abuse shelter. They have a new baby added to the family.

When she takes in an abused victim into their home, disaster occurs. Rots has created a scary suspensor made even more tense from her jump-timeline tactic coupled with the perfectly eerie soundtrack of operatic screeching songs by composer Dan Geesin.

Gilbert Seah

Cinemablographer

A Canadian Film Review Site

TIFF Review: 'Retrospekt'

Retrospekt

(Netherland/Belgium, 101 min.)

Written and directed by Esther Rots

Starring: Circé Lethem, Lien Wildemeersch (Miller, Lee), Martijn van der Veen (Simon)

Programme: Contemporary World Cinema (World Premiere)

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Courtesy of TIFF

Audiences seeking a healthy dose of WTF needn't look any further than *Retrospekt*.

Posted by [Pat Mullen](#) at 9/12/2018

This Dutch oddity is a true original. One might classify it as the first arthouse domestic violence musical, but that doesn't really fit the bill since nobody belts a tune onscreen in *Retrospekt* even though the soundtrack is layered with peculiar original songs that twist the story in myriad ways. It might sound disrespectful; it might sound stupid; it might sound awful, yet *Retrospekt* somehow works thanks to the fearless audacity with which writer/director Esther Rots pulls it off.

Retrospekt is a dense psychological puzzle and Rots has a lot of fun inviting viewers to piece it all together. One should be advised from the outset that the pieces don't really fit, but that's exactly the point. Memory is an elusive and fleeting thing. Add trauma to the mix and one can only tell a story through fits and starts, fragments and repetitions, coughs and sputters. When words don't really make sense, one has to sound them out and find a rhythm for sentiments that can't otherwise find expression.

What this whole introduction of gobbledygook means is that life doesn't make any more sense in retrospect. Rots lets the audience experience the jumble of memories as Mette (Circé Lethem, who is absolutely sensational) tries to recall the events that put her in a hospital with limited mobility, impaired speech, and other serious physical and psychological damage. The origin of the ordeal is unclear, but one can assume that the scene with which *Retrospekt* begins is an underlying catalyst to the incident. A very pregnant Mette witnesses an altercation at a department store dressing room in which she sees a man berate and abuse his wife. Mette, who is later revealed a domestic violence support counsellor, tries to intervene and the man puts her in her place. Shaken, the altercation begins a kaleidoscopic series of encounters with toxic violent men and women who refuse to be victims.

The shards of memory twist and change shape as Rots reveals the other pieces of the story. Mette, now deflated and with a young baby, has taken in a survivor of abuse, Miller (Lien Wildemeersch), who comes to the office in search of shelter from her volatile boyfriend. As Miller visits Mette in the hospital post-accident and as Mette tries to mend Miller's confidence pre-accident, *Retrospekt* circles around the truth of what happened. Countless scenarios arise as one turns over each fragment of the film and considers it. The scenes with Mette's travelling husband, Simon (Martijn van der Veen), himself a bit too hot under the collar, build suspense and misdirection as one wonders about Mette's (in)ability to live the same advice she gives to women at work every day. It isn't easy to escape abusive men when they're as ever-present as they seem to be in this corner of the Netherlands.

The glue to all these shards is the kooky soundtrack of songs by Dan Geesin. These humorous refrains offer some much-needed levity to the story as deep voices and sing-song cadences comment upon Mette's faulty memory and the bad things men too often do to women. These songs sometimes punctuate the film with bright pink title cards, drawing out the absurdity of the situation while giving Mette the extra nudge to loosen her memory. How can anyone laugh in face of so much senseless violence? Then again, what other option does one have while trying to make sense of it all?



“Retrospekt”

16 FEBBRAIO 2019

CONVENZIONALI

LASCIA UN COMMENTO



di Gabriele Ottaviani

Alla Berlinale, in Forum, Esther Rots, le cui opere hanno preso parte anche ad altri festival, su tutti

Cannes e Toronto, dirige **Retrospekt**, coproduzione tra Paesi Bassi e Belgio con Teun Luijkx, Circé Lethem, Nele Hardiman, Matthijs Ten Kate, Lien Wildemeersch, Martijn van der Veen e molti altri, che narra in maniera sensibile, lirica, ellittica, non lineare né cronologica, anzi, ribaltando sovente il tempo e i nessi causali, frammentata, dolente e intensa, che induce alla riflessione, all'immedesimazione e all'empatia, la storia di una donna che, seppur incinta del suo secondo bambino, e benché si stia rilassando in vacanza insieme a marito e figlia, non esita a intervenire quando assiste a un violento litigio che coinvolge una coppia, pagandone le conseguenze... Da vedere.

What the press said after the TIFF screenings:

- Audiences seeking a healthy dose of WTF needn't look any further than RETROSPEKT.
- This Dutch oddity is a true original.
- really an experience like no other
- a pulsating time ticking bomb, brewing with mystery and anxiety waiting to take you off guard.
- baffling and equally thrilling
- meticulous writing and commanding direction
- a haunting and enigmatic character study
- RETROSPEKT traps us in the prison of a broken mind
- Moody and powerful
- the film's carefully arranged ellipses smartly mirror the disjointed patterns of its heroine's damaged psyche.
- Engrossing
- RETROSPEKT goes beyond a merely personal illustration of Mette's story and reaches out to a wider audience through its various parallelisms.
- Rots succeeds in creating an absurd, poetic fairy tale, which, despite being immersed in tragedy, retains a sense of humour.
- the first arthouse domestic violence musical
- fearless audacity
- dense psychological puzzle
- Rots has a lot of fun inviting viewers to piece it all together.
- RETROSPEKT is so over sensitizing that it's easy for the audience to understand Mette's fleeting emotions
- bound to keep the audience on their toes

And about the soundtrack:

- Composer Dan Geesin also deserves a shout-out for supplying a series of songs that envelope certain fraught scenes with a patina of eerie, arch lyricism.
- absurd and sinistral sound design along with the fable-like music
- the kooky soundtrack of songs by Dan Geesin ... humorous refrains drawing out the absurdity of the situation
- perfectly eerie soundtrack of operatic screeching songs

And about Circé Lethem's performance:

- absolutely sensational
- masterfully graded
- revelatory
- agile and believable
- the marvellous Lethem
- the subtle performance from Lethem