



PRESS STORIES

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Focus on French Cinema:

A bridge between cultures

Feb 22, 2008



Filming *Cowboy*, with Benoit Poelvoorde, one of the films that will be screened at the Focus on French Cinema festival March 28-30.

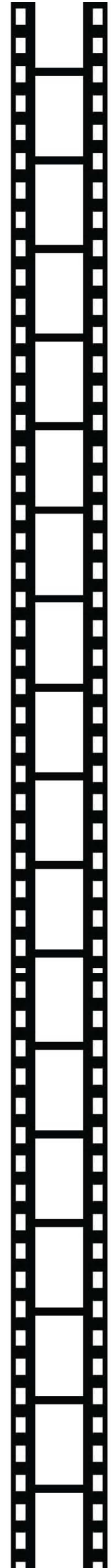
by **LOIS STREET**

Is film a fine art?

Certainement! say the French. They consider cinema the “seventh art” — a creative end in itself along with painting, literature, music, sculpture, architecture and dance. To illustrate the point, the Alliance Francaise of Greenwich, an organization that furthers knowledge of French culture through French language classes and many other activities, will present its fourth annual film festival during the weekend of March 28-30, at the Performing Arts Center, Purchase College, N.Y.

The festival, Focus on French Cinema, features 13 contemporary films (all with English subtitles) from France or French-speaking nations such as Canada (Quebec), Belgium, and countries that were former French colonies.

The festival will open with a surprise American premiere. The evening’s host, David Schwartz, chief curator of the Museum of the Modern Image, will moderate an audience talk-back with actors and directors after the movie. Festival-goers will then sample an assortment of French delicacies at the gala après-théâtre buffet dinner.





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On Saturday, a “Meet the Director” breakfast will provide further opportunities to chat up actors and directors. Among the films running on Saturday will be the intense police drama, *Counter Investigation*. Its director, Franck Mancuso, worked for 20 years as a police officer. Like HBO’s acclaimed series *The Wire*, this movie is “infused with a sense of reality through the past experiences of its creators,” said Dr. Anne Kern, assistant professor of cinema studies at Purchase College, and a board member of the Alliance. Purchase College, where the percentage of graduates who become feature film directors is among the highest in the country, partners with the Alliance in sponsoring the Focus festival.

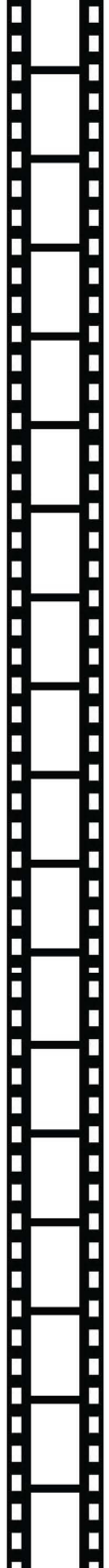
Sunday’s cinematic offerings will include *Cowboy*, a comedy about a mid-career journalist who has lost his path, and *Lady Chatterley*, a love story based on the second version of D. H. Lawrence’s novel. This “breathtakingly gorgeous and incredibly smart adaptation,” in Dr. Kern’s words, swept the Césars (France’s equivalent of the Oscars) in 2007, winning Best Film, Best Actress, Best Cinematography, Best Costume Design and Best Writing. To check out the nine other festival films, readers should visit focusonfrenchcinema.com.

Alliance president Renee Ketcham, a co-founder of the festival, has seen her “modest endeavor” grow impressively in four years — from a small crowd of 800 devotees watching DVDs to last year’s gathering of 3,000 film buffs catching their favorite flicks on 35mm.

“Our original thoughts were based on the humble dream of supporting the positive relationship between France and the U.S. at a time when the relationship was being tested,” said Ms. Ketcham, a Greenwich resident.

Dismayed by the French-bashing that broke out in this country after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Ms. Ketcham and other Alliance members looked for a way to offset the negative French stereotypes and clichés they saw and heard around them. They decided to use French films to enhance the public image of French language and culture because “everyone loves the movies,” Ms. Ketcham said. Film allows people “to think outside the box.”

The Focus festival shows only contemporary films. In order to “build a bridge of understanding...we had to show the culture of today, not yesterday,” said Catherine Lamairesse, Alliance board member and former president. Good movies “tell the same universal stories.” Using images, they provide “immediate understanding”





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regardless of language, said Ms. Lamairesse, who lives in Greenwich.



Rene Huppert in
Ivresse Pouvoir,
another film that will
be featured at Focus
on French Cinema.

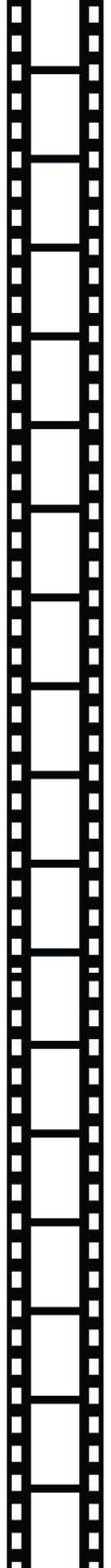
If cinema is as good a storyteller as any fine art, French cinema is among the best. France consistently releases more than 200 films per year — roughly double the output of other European countries including the U.K. And while French-speaking moviegoers love blockbusters, thrillers, and romantic comedies as much as any audiences, “French films often demand a lot of their viewers — they don’t assume we are passive, unthinking media consumers, just looking to be stimulated and satiated,” Dr. Kern said. “The same is true of all good films, no matter the country of provenance.”

Along with Alliance Francaise and Purchase College, sponsors of the Focus festival include French Feeling Films, an American company that distributes French movies.

For a list of films, directions, and other information, visit the festival Web site: focusonfrenchcinema.com.

Information is also available at:

Alliance Francaise of Greenwich
299 Greenwich Avenue (The Greenwich Arts Center)
Greenwich, CT 06830





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