

Industrialization of Short Films or Gatekeeping?: Tracing the Two Models of Film Festivals, in the case of Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival 2023

by Enes Akdağ

Short film festivals/corners and short film platforms are becoming increasingly commodified. Among them, Flagship [Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival](#) has stood out since 1979, regarded as the Cannes Film Festival for short filmmakers/audiences since 1979. In 1986, it expanded its influence by launching a short film market that welcomed accredited professionals with representatives from buyers, distributors and sales agents, including Cannes, Mubi, Toronto IFF, Canal+, Arte, YouTube and Vimeo (Boyce, 2023).

This blog post explores how the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival might be encapsulated in line with Mark Peranson's two models of film festivals: the audience festival and the business festival. As Pearson reminding us, "most festivals fit somewhere in the middle, combining elements of both types. It's also the case that festivals can move from one column to the other, typically the second to the first" (2002). Using the 45th edition of the festival, held in 2023 as a case study, I examine how Clermont-Ferrand, as the first short film festival to feature a market and a leading representative of European short films.

One of the ongoing debates within the European Union's festival circuit is whether short film festivals truly reflect the EU's motto of the "unity in diversity". Whether such unity is limited to EU Borders? A great majority of short film festivals are either genre-specific (animation, horror) or thematic (LGBTQ+, women, child, and youth). As Al Dawood (2022) ascertains "each festival strives to be distinctive and specialized," which is why short film festivals "do not seek out similar films". Thus, short film festivals are also audience-specific and audience-oriented.

In this context, Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival is a game changer. Evolving from a university film festival to the world's largest short film festival, Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival greatly accelerated the industrialization of short filmmaking. Its inclusive and multilayered programming notably supports film material from European Council member states and former Francophone colonies, reflecting both a regional and postcolonial perspective.

[Clermont-Ferrand's programming structure](#) is divided into four sections: screening events, official selections, curated programs, and invited programs. Screening events involve ceremonies (opening performances, partner prizes, and closing shows) and special programs. For example, the 2023 edition featured a curated retrospective titled "Bloody Night is Taiwan", helmed by Taiwanese director Su Hui-Yu. Other special programs (Thrills, Decibels, Looking Back, Audio Description) spotlighted filmmakers from EU countries like Belgium, France, Spain, and Germany. Official selection programs are divided into three sub-categories: competitions, young audience, and out-of-competition. A total of 220 films from 65 countries were selected for screening in 2023 (Clermont-Ferrand Committee, 2023).

The three categories in the official competition are International, Lab, and National (French) Competition. The Lab competition showcases experimental shorts or non-genre short films. Particularly notable for its thematic boldness and diversity in terms of filmmaker identity (gender,

ethnicity). International Competition does not necessarily “select the best films in terms of techniques and quality, but rather diverse films that provide a balanced representation of international, gender, and ethnic perspectives” (Al Dawood, 2022). While curated programs give space, mostly non-EU member countries’ cinema legacy (Taiwanese in 2023), invited programs host European Audience Film Awards and film school dossiers.

Clermont-Ferrand is internationally the most reputed short film festival, to the extent that the audience will see anything that has been branded by the festival and not complain (Peranson, 2002, p. 28). It is also premiere oriented, provides maximum interaction with sales agents in the market, and showcases appealing retrospectives for non-EU filmmaking. Marijke De Valck posits that each festival “reproduces” independent filmmakers or auteurs, with prizes and recognition bestowed on them that create and/or confirm the status of these filmmakers; “film festivals also reproduce their own audience” (2014). Clermont Ferrand has given space to more diverse filmmakers and audiences than any other short film festival, a space where art is intrinsically industrial.

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