

A Moon For My Father: Rediscovering The Body and The Mind



A Moon For My Father (2019) by Mania Akbari and Douglas White awarded the best film by Fipresci Jury in the 22nd Flying Broom International Women's Film Festival held from 23 to 30 May 2019 in Ankara.

Compelling images. Courageous stand. Honest commentary. That, in a nutshell, is Mania Akbari and Douglas White's 75 minute documentary *A Moon For My Father*. Mania has been forced to remove her breasts after stage four cancer. And now she is in the process of sculpting her body. But the process is as much emotional as physical. Hailing from Iran, she remembers Shah's regime. She has experienced the oppression of his religious rule, along with the haunting memories of Iran-Iraq war. The sculpting is a revolt of a mind along with the body. A very personal journey that moves and stuns you at the same time. Her partner, Douglas White, a sculptor, on the other hand also talks about his father's death, his journey, his experiences, though his story isn't as strong as Mania's hence is shadowed in comparison. The documentary comprises

of difficult conversations between Mania and Douglas, and how they plan to encounter their fears. But not once do they sound pitiful. The characters come across as fierce, independent and vivacious. They are two artists, sculpting their work around death.

When his father died in Australia, Douglas says, he had come across a fruit bat at his funeral. He believes the rubber he has used in his work resembles the wings of the bat. Mania, on the other hand, is dealing with more physical pain. She has had to go through a breast implant surgery, during which she discusses the latex and the rubber industry with the images that powerfully capture the soul of her narrative. It does not end here. After having her ovaries removed, Mania goes for IVF pregnancy because the doctors feel it would help her body fight the cancer. One is carrying death in her body; the other is mourning the death of a parent. Together they sculpt their way through life miraculously.

The film starts in 2013 when Mania gets her-

self photographed and readies for the implants and ends in 2018 with the birth of their little baby boy. The movie is brave and the battle at times is bold. It is a poetic diary, with both the partners contributing their experiences with a larger socio-political context making it a multilayered documentary. Mania has also managed to juxtapose her journey with the



anti-hijab protests that happened in Tehran in the recent past. Disregarding the gaze of men, some women threw their hijabs and dared the government to arrest them, indicating it isn't just the body, but also the mind they want to control. Getting rid of the veil is as much about gaining control of the mind as it is about the body. She describes how these women stood on the concrete electricity meters built on the

road and how, as a counter, the government constructed a metal cover, which again was defied by the women by constructing wooden platforms on it for them to stand. Mania jokingly says, 'it is a collaborative sculpture between the people and the government'. She also seems amused at the artificially enhanced breasts producing milk for the little one and talks about those feelings.

It is a different kind of story telling, the duo is experimenting with the images but not once does a frame look out of place or irrelevant. The changing graffiti on the walls in Iran, the sculptures on the beach, a duck ducking a crow make for a visually powerful documentary that underlines the text, not wavering from the narration. Mania and Douglas have avoided even the slightest of melodrama in their story telling. They talk about their experiences in a matter of fact manner, making their lives more compelling and heart warming at the same time. Especially with Mania, whose trauma could easily have stirred the emotions of the audiences. She shreds the inhibitions about her body, discovers herself and in the process lets the audience discover her.

(Meena Karnik is a Member of the Fipresci-India)