

COMMENT & DEBATE

Eyes on Ice:

Greenland Eyes International Film Festival in Berlin

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Greenland and film. In the course of the preparations for what was to become *Greenland Eyes*, a film and culture festival which took place at Arsenal Cinema and Humboldt University's Nordeuropa-Institut in April 2012, we as organisers were regularly confronted with two reactions to our endeavour. An incredulous or curious question: 'Is there really something like Greenlandic film?' Or: 'Oh right, *Nanook of the North*!'

Those remarks already point in the direction of what was at stake in the context of this project: the specific and asymmetric relation between film *about* and *from* Greenland, shaped by centuries-old imaginings of a deserted, remote and sublime place and its exoticized inhabitants. In short: yes, there is film from Greenland, and no, *Nanook of the North* was not shot in Greenland, but in the Canadian Arctic. The bigger picture was explored by the *Greenland Eyes* film programme at the renowned Arsenal Cinema, in accompanying courses for MA students of Scandinavian/Northern European Studies, and by the symposium *Greenland Film in Context* during the festival week (April 24-30, 2012). We were happy to welcome an audience of curious Berliners, students, colleagues, journalists, and Greenlandic and international film makers who took the chance to network and to mark Greenland's position on the Berliners' mental map.

The 'Greenlandization' of Berlin had actually already started in 2010, when a group of students and lecturers from Nordeuropa-Institut travelled to Nuuk and Ilulissat and met colleagues from the University

GREENLAND EYES

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

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APRIL 24th - 30th 2012
Kino Arsenal, .HBC & HU Berlin

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Poster Designer: Netta Mattila / Photographer: Rie Neuchs

of Greenland, Ilisimatusarfik. Courses on Greenlandic literature, politics and film have ever since met a growing interest on the part of Berlin students for Greenlandic culture.

In line with this transdisciplinary approach, *Greenland Eyes* focused not only on contemporary film, but aimed at embedding film and film history in a larger medial and cultural context. At the opening, a storytelling performance by actress Makka Kleist followed a screening of *Faith, Hope & Greenland* by festival co-director Ivalo Frank, a film which presents some protagonists of today's cultural scene in Nuuk. During the festival week, visitors to Arsenal Cinema were also able to see Julie Edel Hardenberg's exhibition of glossy film posters: *Sapiitsut/Heroes*. Only the films don't exist. Yet. And the depicted Greenlandic heroes are to be found in everyday life and in ordinary jobs rather than in the glamorous film business. So far.

Late-night entertainment at *Greenland Eyes* consisted of a retrospective of classical European films from the 1910s and 1930s which imagine Greenland as a snowy desert. One curious example is the rare German silent movie *Das Eskimo-Baby* from 1918, starring Asta Nielsen as an inuk who accompanies polar scientist Knud to his family in posh Grunewald and stirs up Berlin high society in slapstick scenes. *SOS Iceberg* from 1933 presents the controversial German film maker and actress Leni Riefenstahl as a pilot who attempts to save her polar explorer husband from collapsing glaciers. Here, the representation of Greenland as a sublime backdrop for Westerners' undertakings is supplemented by a primitivistic view of inuit culture.

Back to 'reality'? The history of documentaries about Greenland is dominated by films from abroad, focussing on landscape, nature and a supposedly exotic indigenous culture, and thus by images of icebergs, seals and inuit. In contrast to this tendency, *Greenland Eyes* presented documentaries made by or in cooperation with Greenlanders which put today's Greenland in an international perspective and present Greenland's history, urbanity and Greenlandic youth culture. In *Silent Snow*, for instance, co-author and narrator Pipaluk Knudsen-Ostermann traces the origins of Arctic pollution in different places in the globalized world. *Nuuk Nuann* (Lovely Nuuk) follows charming teenager Esther on her everyday journey through her hometown. Inuk

Silis Høegh presented *Why we Fight*, a part of his larger performance project *Melting Barricades*, where a newly founded Greenlandic army strives for world domination – an amusing examination of Greenland's postcolonial situation. One of the festival's special treats, shown for the first time outside Northern Greenland, was the documentary *Aulahuliat* (Moving Images, 2003) by amateur photographer, hunter and activist Uusaqqak Qujaukitsoq. A collage of personal and rare film images, it tells the story of the inhabitants of Thule who were displaced to make way for the Thule Airbase and whose case Qujaukitsoq took all the way to The Hague.



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Compared to the number of documentaries and of films from overseas, the Greenlandic film scene and number of Greenlandic feature films are still small, but growing by the day. The question of the origin of films about Greenland was thus supplemented by the question of who Greenlandic films are made for. Currently the only film production company in Greenland is Tumit Productions, which showed its feature films *Hinnarik Sinnattunilu* (Hinnarik's Dream, 2010) and *Qaqqat Alanngui* (The Shadows in the Mountains, 2011), a comedy and a horror film respectively. Both films have been hugely popular with the Greenlandic audience. As film producer Aká Hansen pointed out at the symposium, urbanity, global youth and pop culture as well as entertainment with a local relevance and recognition value are of more interest to the younger generations of Greenlanders than a quest for ethnic and historical roots. Another immediate success with the *Greenland Eyes* audience was *Tikeq, Qiterleq, Mikileraq, Eqqeqqoq* (Forefinger, Middle Finger, Ring Finger, Little Finger, 2008) by Ujarneq Fleischer, debatably the first Greenlandic feature film, a fast-paced no-budget coming-of-age story that was subtitled especially for *Greenland Eyes* and had never been shown outside Greenland before. Sundance hit *Nuummioq* (Someone from Nuuk, 2009) and the French-directed *Inuk* (2011) aim at an international audience, linking globally valid topics, genres and aesthetics to specific Greenlandic conditions.

With its two panels of Greenlandic and international scholars, filmmakers and experts exploring the asymmetrical relationship between 'Film ABOUT Greenland' and 'Film FROM Greenland', the symposium *Greenland Film in Context* at Humboldt University aimed at deepening our understanding of continuity and change regarding historical representations of Greenland and contemporary Greenlandic film production. Summing up the experiences of a week jam-packed with film, art, conversations, discussions and encounters, if we take into account the entertaining and problematic features of the history of Greenland film, we are all eyeing not only the Greenlandic ice, but a bright future for Greenlandic film and culture.

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