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Film festival

Passing the torch

Sep 18th 2003 | TELLURIDE, COLORADO
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TWO films, both deserving of popular and critical acclaim, stood out at the Telluride film festival earlier this month. "Reconstruction", which had earlier won a Camera d'Or at Cannes, is a stylish and contemporary exploration of love and trust. Alex (Nikolaj Lie Kaas) and Aimee (Maria Bonnevie), both entertaining doubts about their respective partners, meet for a night of passion. Upon waking, Alex's world has shifted subtly, yet with menace. The door to his flat is gone; his girlfriend Simone, his father and his friends claim not to know him. Only Aimee remains the same, and Alex must decide what is real. That Aimee and Simone are played by the same actress hints at his dilemma.

Christoffer Boe, the director, co-wrote the script with Mogens Rukov, his former teacher at that hotbed of contemporary Danish cinema, the National Film School of Denmark. But this is no Dogma film. Echoes of an Elizabethan fascination with the illusory lurk beneath the surface as David, Aimee's novelist husband, Prospero-like, writes Alex's and Aimee's story as it happens. Mr Boe cites Raymond Queneau's "Exercises in Style" as inspiration, so it is no surprise that the film has turned out to be a cool looping pastiche of cinematographic style that just manages to hold its disparate parts together.

"My Life Without Me", written and directed by Isabel Coixet, had among its executive producers Pedro and Agustin Almodóvar, who seem to be passing the torch themselves. In keeping with its suburban setting, the film sticks to a single narrative arc. Sarah Polley plays Ann, a young mother who discovers she has terminal cancer. Selflessly, at least in her eyes, she withholds this information from her loving

husband Don, her two little girls, and her bitter mother (a wonderfully dour Deborah Harry), and proceeds to make a list of ten things to do before she dies: make tapes for each of her daughters' birthdays until they reach 18; find Don a new wife that the girls like; make a stranger fall in love with her.

The list gives the film its dramatic *raison d'être*, and excellent performances from Polley, Mark Ruffalo (who plays Lee, the stranger from the list) and the supporting cast (including a dynamic Amanda Plummer) provide the force the film needs to rise above its own tragedy. But it is Ms Coixet's camera (she operated it herself), Jean-Claude Larrieu's cinematography, and Shelley Bolton's set design that truly delight. Look for green hospital chairs against a grey wall; the pink plastic bead curtain in Ann's and Don's tiny trailer home; the balletic movement of Ann and her co-workers as they clean the local university's hallways. A gem.

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