

# SCREEN DAILY



## Atlantic.

8 September, 2014 | By David D'Arcy

**Dir: Jan-Willem van Ewijk. Netherlands-Belgium-Germany-Morocco. 2014. 94mins**

**In the visually stunning *Atlantic*, the ocean is frame, medium and subject. It is also the barrier to a Moroccan windsurfer who seeks a life beyond his impoverished village. Jan-Willem van Ewijk's hybrid feature in documentary style is a radiant essay and a reality check on the relative experiences of beauty.**

The hymn to the grace of windsurfing on the open ocean should find all sorts of exposure after a long journey on the festival circuit. The film's oblique and unique perspective on the immigration crisis on the high seas between North Africa and Europe will also help get it attention. *Atlantic's* long lyrical introduction as a ride on the wind into the open ocean belies the film's complexity. This is extreme sport with a conscience.

At its core is Fettah, a 30-something windsurfer, living at the water's edge, who befriends the Europeans who migrate annually to surf the big waves on Morocco's windy coast and leave gear behind for him when they depart. Too poetic and ethnographic for a conventional sports slot, *Atlantic* will win over audiences with its extraordinary cinematography by Jasper Wolf.

Fettah ventures miles offshore (as does Wolf's camera) and somersaults over enormous waves. He finds kindred spirits in that corps of white surfer-pilgrims from Europe. Van Ewijk and cinematographer Jasper Wolf find a dazzling aesthetic in their sport, which overlaps with the radiant beauty of the water. But *Atlantic* aims at more than a pure aesthetic.

This visual tour de force has a story. Fettah makes his meager living on the water, helping his father fish from a tiny boat. Desperately poor, smitten with the blonde girlfriend (Thekla Reuten) of a windsurfer comrade (played by van Ewijk), he sets out for Europe on a board with a sail.

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His journey ends in grim frustration - adrift without water, far from home. The Moroccan friend (and a host) to the outsiders who surf for fun is just another African when he sets out to reach another land.

*Atlantic* could have made its argument about the ocean as a boundless beautiful horizon and a unbreachable enclosure in a short film, but van Ewijk seizes on the feature length to explore the world of Fettah and his family, reflecting on their

decades of wisdom about the sea. The film also observes the young man's closeness to a young woman in the village whom he would have married, if he had an income and if he weren't dreaming of Europe.

Every shot in *Atlantic* carries the emotions of hope and longing, without pitying the man who sacrifices himself to the goal of reaching a place that, for better or worse, promises to offer more than home does. This every-athlete is also the every would-be immigrant - a different Moroccan from the one who drowns trying to make a similar journey, yet still doomed to a lower status because of his origins.

Logistics are extraordinary in *Atlantic*, even by the photogenic standards of extreme sports. Van Ewijk's team proves that this genre can be about far more than turning graceful somersaults in magnificent waves.

Production Companies: Augustus Film, Man's Film Production, Endorphine Productions

International sales: Fortissimo Films, [info@fortissimo.nl](mailto:info@fortissimo.nl)

Producers: Bero Beyer, Marion Hänsel, Fabian Massah

Screenplay: Jan-Willem van Ewijk, Abdelhadi Samih

Cinematography: Jasper Wolf

Editor: Mona Bräuer

Production designer: Karim Haffad

Music: Piet Swerts, Mourad Belouadi

With: Fettah Lamara, Thekla Reuten, Mohamed Majd, Boujmaa Guilloul, Hassna Souidi, Soufyan Sahli, Wisal Hatimi, Driss Hakimi, Jan-Willem van Ewijk