

Hollywood Reporter- 'Atlantic.': Toronto Review

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Courtesy of Toronto International Film Festival

The second feature of Dutch filmmaker Jan-Willem van Ewijk sends an enigmatic Moroccan fisherman on a windsurfing trip to Europe

A lovesick Moroccan fisherman in his thirties decides to windsurf to Europe in *Atlantic.*, the second feature of Dutch investment banker-turned-director **Jan-Willem van Ewijk**. Gorgeously photographed by cinematographer **Jasper Wolf**, the film provides a real sense of space and being lost in the great (and wet) wide open, though in terms of character, there's only a vague and very arty outline where a living and breathing human being should be. On account of its unusual and intriguing set-up and immersive visuals, the film managed to sneak into the lineup of the recent Toronto Film Festival, though Fortissimo will have a hard time selling this beyond the usual festival suspects.

Fettah (played by windsurfer **Fettah Lamara**) is the adult son of a fisherman from the southern Atlantic coast of Morocco. As it slowly emerges from a whispery and pretentious voice-over — almost as pretentious as that full stop at the end of the film's title — and what little dialogue the film has to offer, Fettah misses his late mother and falls one-sidedly in love with the bottle-blonde Alexandra (**Thekla Reuten**), the girlfriend of Jan (played by the director himself), a Dutch tourist who's renting a room at the home of Fettah's family and who, like Fettah, is besotted with windsurfing.

That's basically it in terms of plot. A basic skeleton is provided by van Ewijk and editor **Mona Brauer**'s decision to chronologically follow Fettah's trip north along the Moroccan coast and then onto the wide-open ocean (some 180 miles) as he struggles with the elements, with his equipment and with a certain loneliness, which might be relieved by a passing fisherman who'll happily share his sardines with him. Several dreams and memories serve as flashbacks to fill in some missing bits and pieces of the story, though the all-present voice-over more often than not remains enigmatic. It takes a long time to figure out the identity of Wisal, to whom Fettah addresses himself several times, for example, and sentences such as "Who are you beyond the horizon and why do you have such power over me?" provide a sense of being artfully vague and affected but no real poetry or psychological insight.

Even more problematic is the fact that the answer to this question, as well as the many others that Fettah asks himself, aren't even clear at the end of the film. The windsurfer's ostensibly chasing an idea of Alexandra, but the quiet if obviously resourceful and resilient Fettah hardly seems delusional enough to want to attempt the near-impossible and defy nature simply to be on the same continent as a woman who might remind him of his mother but who's already taken and lives somewhere unknown.

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, it's all the things that *Atlantic* is not that are refreshing. It's not simply a story of a man whose brain has been taken over by his penis, nor a tale of an African immigrant escaping to Europe in the hope of a better future. It's also not a realistic survival-at-sea story a la *All Is Lost*, or a fantasy-filled one, a la *The Life of Pi*. But the fact that it's almost impossible to pin down what it actually *does* want to be doesn't help matters — quite the contrary, as its arty longueurs and vague faux-philosophizing only seem to underline how shallow and devoid of meaning the entire enterprise is if one starts

listing the very few concrete elements that the film provides. The fact that Lamara is such a blank slate doesn't help either.

Thankfully, the gorgeous cinematography provides plenty of eye candy, with masterful overhead shots and plenty of between-the-waves action that showcase Lamara's windsurfing prowess. A few shots annoyingly draw attention to the camera operators as they bob on different waves than the subject they are filming but overall, *Atlantic* provides a you-are-there sensation that very few films set on vast expanses of water can rival. **Mourad Belouadi**'s songs provide some welcome local flavor without becoming too clichéd, though the same cannot be said of **Piet Swerts**' score, which aims for something transcendental but includes some very odd passages, notably a bit with what sounds like a choir, which very inappropriately threatens to turn Fettah into a kind of Christian martyr in a wetsuit.

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

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

Director: Jan-Willem van Ewijk

Screenplay: Jan-Willem van Ewijk, Abdelhadi Samih

Producers: Bero Beyer, Marion Hansel, Fabian Massah

Director of photography: Jasper Wolf

Production designer: Karim Haffad

Editor: Mona Brauer

Music: Piet Swerts, Mourad Belouadi

Sales: Fortissimo Films

No rating, 95 minutes