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# Italy Excluded from the Foreign Language Oscar Race

NATASHA LARDERA (January 22, 2012)



Emanuele Crialeses' story of immigration, *Terraferma*, is not a finalist in the selection of films to be presented in the Best Foreign Film category at the 84th edition of the Academy Awards. The director is cheerfully looking at the future while Italian filmmakers ponder what to do to seduce the American public.

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On January 24th, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences President's Tom Sherak and Academy member and Oscar-nominated actress Jennifer Lawrence will announce the final nominations for the 84th edition of the Academy Awards... as always there might be some surprises, good or bad, but one thing is for sure, Italy is not included in the final selection to be presented

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Terraferma, the Italian Candidate for Best Foreign

in the Foreign Film category.

*Terraferma*, Emanuele Crialeses' film on immigration set in modern day in Sicily, has just been excluded from the race. Indeed the Italian film is not one of the nine (on Tuesday they will become five) that will compete for the much coveted Oscar. The director himself, on the set of his new film, immediately replied "I am thinking about the future! I am in Brazil! My congratulations to all those who made it." Riccardo Tozzi, the film's producer, did not complain and simply had to say that "things did not go as we wished, despite all our efforts to promote our candidate in the US." "That's too bad," Paolo Del Brocco of RaiCinema added, "It is a wonderful film and in tune with the historical moment we live in."

Crialeses' film did not seduce the jury of the Academy or the American public, and the general idea we get from the Italian press is that the film did not make it because it has not been promoted properly not because of its quality. There has not been a strong

## Language Film



promotional campaign or a thorough distribution in the nation's movie theaters. In New York City's film school, New York Film Academy, during a class when asked about *Terraferma*, only a few film students (three) knew about it and mostly because of personal Italian connections.

Meanwhile, Italian cinema is extremely successful in other countries, such as France where *Gomorra* and *Il Divo* have won prestigious awards at Cannes. Questions are raised: is Italian cinema hard to be appreciated by American audiences?

When the film was presented at the Venice Film festival, the Hollywood reporter wrote "Riding the wave of Italian immigrant dramas that have been topical for years, writer-director Emanuele Crialesè's *Terraferma* is an unremarkable story flying a passionate moral banner.

The film contrasts Italy's traditional humanist values to inhuman new laws aimed at stemming illegal immigration and insists it's morally imperative to rebel against them. Its main commercial outlet will certainly be Italy, where the terrible clash between Italian law and "the law of the sea" will resonate the most." In just a few lines the topic has been labeled as "old," the story "unremarkable" and the film not "commercial" in other countries.

Or should we blame weak promotional campaigns? Or better yet, should we blame a lack of good luck? Or simply tough competition?

The last Italian film that made it into the final Oscar list was *Don't Tell* by Cristina Comencini, back in 2006. Through the history of the Academy Awards, Italy has received twenty seven nominations and won 12 awards. The last Oscar to an Italian film was awarded in 1999 to Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (nobody can forget the Tuscan director and actor, he also won an Oscar for Best Actor, jumping on the theater's seats when Sofia Loren read his name aloud).

The Academy has selected the following films/countries: the Iranian *A Separation* by Asghar Farhadi, (it has already won a Golden Globe), the Belgian film noir *Bullhead* by Michael R. Roskam, the Canadian *Monsieur Lazhar* by Philippe Falardeau, the Danish *Superclásico* by Christian Madsen, the German *Pina* by Wim Wenders, the Israeli *Footnote* by Joseph Cedar, the Moroccan *Omar Killed me*, by Roschdy Zem, the Polish *In Darkness* by Agnieszka Holland and the Taiwanese *Warriors in the Rainbow: Seeding Bale* by Wei Te-sheng.

Italy might be represented in other categories, as it is a strong country in more technical areas such as art direction, costume design and cinematography.



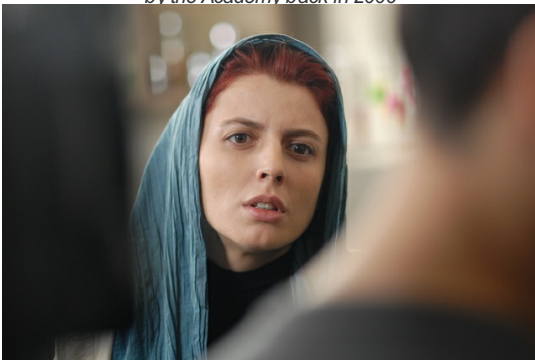
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by Emanuele Crialesè



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On January 23rd, 2012 Giuliano Lorenzini wrote

**Collaboration a must...**

I wonder if we should not speak in terms of (1) an initial grass-roots campaign, within the Italian-American community that, (2) evolves into a larger campaign. There are a number of outlets that can assist in this. Furthermore, there needs to be greater dialogue between RIA Cinema and the Italian/Italian-American cultural community in the United States.

For this to occur, however, other issues need to be remedied. The Italian-American community itself needs to come forth with a more informed discussion on such matters. It needs to know better its history and be able to discuss said history with the current events in Italy.

As a community, we need to be able to negotiate such issues with competence and depth, not through a facile nostalgia steeped in ignorance. The Italian-American community together—the economic, the industrial, the cultural, and the academic—must deal with these issues so that, in cases such as this wonderful film being ignored, it has the requisite knowledge and self-pride to be able to respond to the dominant culture, which regularly ignores such cultural products from Italy.

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