

# SHORT FILMS INSPIRED BY RUSSIA'S LONG HISTORY OF CINEMA

A selection of Russian short films at the Ajyal Film Festival introduced audiences to new talent coming from the country. The films reveal contemporary social concerns, and hark back to the lineage of Russian cinematography

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**“Hide and Seek” by Anastasia Ostapenko is a coming of age story, in which we meet a young boy playing under a bed, with a very sweet orange light that transforms the scene into a fairy tale setting.**

THE sixth edition of Ajyal Film Festival in Doha last week hosted a unique section entitled ‘Made in Russia,’ under which six Russian short films that reflected the country’s cult filmmaking trends as well as the interconnection between culture and society were screened

“MADE in Russia” section at the sixth Ajyal Film Festival in Doha

last week showcased short films from new talent in the country. Russian cinema hardly needs any introductions, but the presenter did name a few influences before he launched the films, including

Andrei Tarkovsky and Andrei Zvyagintsev.

The first one, “Hymns of Muscovy” by Dimitri Venkov owed little debt to either, as it was very

much its own thing. The film starts with very atmospheric music and an upside down shot of one of Moscow’s imposing imperial buildings. For the first few seconds you think it will be a gimmicky video that relies on the beauty of Russian architecture but the camera keeps moving, and the blue sky under the buildings’ roofs keeps expanding and expanding to the point where the viewer loses touch with the

ground altogether, and starts looking at the buildings as vessels floating in the wide sky. The music becomes even more redolent of sci-fi themes, and the imperial and Soviet buildings you are looking at turn into fulfilled promises of an era of Soviet engagement with space. In the 1960s, and indeed in Tarkovsky’s “Solaris,” the future is imagined as one where we would be living in space. But the future is here, and we are still very much living in congested cities— but Venkov reimagines, liberates the city from the earth, and we very much get the feeling that the buildings we are looking at are space stations. The long Soviet blocks with identically measured windows unmoored from the earth, floating upside down in an ever-expanding blue space are the very image of the space ships we know from sci-fi films. The solemn hymn we’ve been hearing as we watch the camera move in this skyline, it turns out, is a reworking of the Soviet Anthem, and so the whole film itself becomes an homage to the dreams of high-Sovietism, here brought to us by placing the camera at an unexpected angle, an apt metaphor for revisionist readings of history.