



**Nino Pezzella**

**Femminielli, 2001-2014, ITA, 16mm on DCP/BD, colour, sound, 113 min.**

**Language: Italian with english subtitles**

**Distribution: Complus Events**

**Prizes:**

2014 – Hessischer Filmpreis (Kategorie Experimentalfilm)

2015 – Preis der Deutschen Filmkritik (Bester Experimentalfilm)

Verband der deutschen Filmkritik

In the Spanish Quarter, right in the heart of the oldtown of Naples, there is still the phenomenon called the „Femminielli“. Men biologically, but similar to Drag-Queens embody a certain type of „Hermaphrodite-Cult“, with its rituals firmly in the tradition of the ancient past, which totally disappeared in the rest of Europe.

They fulfill several functions of society ranging from the profane to the sacrosanct. As fetish oriented harbingers of fortune they satisfy the heathen-cultural desire for expression of the subaltern proletarian. By means of their androgyny, they represent, in the eyes of their own environment, a traditional connection to the supernatural.

The Femminiello of Naples is not so much to be considered as folklore, but with its genuine and authentic theatrical and humorous form is rather of great cultural and aesthetic significance.

This experimental film documents the four Femminielli-protagonists by describing their personal circumstances. This is done by short intensive film cuts which depict many details of this cult and its social-cultural relevance. They embody a slowly vanishing antithesis to the current global-western oriented consumer- and communication society.

The most preferable stage for this film is the Spanish Quarter – where the Femminielli live – much avoided by the so called superior classes of Naples. This ancient „Hermaphrodite-Cult“ could maintain its natural breeding ground and be preserved by means of its architectural density and sociological structure – narrow alleys, mountains of rubbish, shrill daily noise, and black economy and crime.

This movie offers the viewer a new, expanded and surprising vista of the transgender world.

With his previous works (*Mia Zia*, 1989 *Cocullo*, 2000-2006), Pezzella accustomed viewers to devote their attention to ethnographic microcosms, where specific rituals and traditions are shrouded in the 16mm celluloid according to his arcane stance, which refrains from objectification. This concern is reinforced by immersing the viewer in visual rhythms, elaborated by a filmmaker for whom editing within the frames restores regular cadence. Inherent is a temporal discontinuity, that once passed through the same discontinuous psychological dimension endures a personal arithmetization. In both *Mia Zia* (1989) and *Cocullo* (2000-2006) the element of sound is occasionally used to intimate musical counterpoint as well as in consideration of the bold *phonè* which is not yet formalized for discursive purpose. The offering Pezzella introduces with his first feature film *Femminielli* (2001-2014), contains an anti-modernist filmic thought that does not attest to retreat even in the face of today's accelerated, hyper-technocratic ways. Rather than place his work within the context of documentary or docu-fiction practice, which employs key criticism of the main subject of the plot or lingers in the peaceful manner of socially correct, Pezzella raises the dose of the 'verbal' while simultaneously pulling apart the strategic opportunism of the media and dwells in the place where uncontaminated language is found in as much in dialect as within the most limited slang. Indeed, it would be necessary to speak similarly of *parlèsia* (a jargon derived from Neopolitan dialect), of the broader social group of the '*Vasci Napolitani*' (inner-city neighborhoods of Naples), or of the desire to diminish this dangerous vice: to control of "the immoral" customs of a proud and lascivious community which makes its voice heard. Ultimately, *Femminielli* is a little gem with little to envy of the purity of pre-packaged cinematographic nuggets that constantly flaunt their carats. Place it in an unassuming case as well, but preserve its raw poetry. (Piero Pala)

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