



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

MOTHER VERA (15)

Director: Cécile Embleton, Alys Tomlinson

UK, 2024, 1 hour 31 minutes, Belarusian/French/English + English subtitles

In *Mother Vera*, we follow a young Belarusian Orthodox nun on the precipice of a profound transformation to her life. Her inner conflict is reflected powerfully in the cinematography – exquisitely captured in a notably meticulous style. “*The camera is close when it needs to be but often focused on a detail, such as hands on a rosary or the surroundings, including religious iconography or the texture of a horse’s coat that help us to feel Mother Vera’s place within these spaces*” (**Eye for Film**). It is gently reminiscent of the kind of compassionate lens we have seen previously in the work of Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky.

This BFI London Film Festival Grierson Award-winning documentary came about when directors Cécile Embleton and Alys Tomlinson were working on a photographic project in Poland. They stumbled upon “*this incredible, charismatic, enigmatic nun*” and “*were immediately drawn to her*” (**The Upcoming**). They took her photograph, conversed with her about her life, and felt compelled to capture what they could of it. Filming in the strictly regulated monastery proved complicated, particularly with a subject that, while “*fascinating*,” could be “*flighty*,” “*difficult*” and “*unpredictable*” (**The Upcoming**). They were also filming in -20°C, and wrestling with pandemic-related issues.

The film forms part of Tomlinson’s largely photographic project *Ex Voto*, a “*visual divination of belief*” evoking the “*silence and stillness of belief*” (Sean O’Hagan).

Critics have praised Mother Vera’s ability to “*enrobe its audience with a still beautiful landscape*” in this “*atmospheric monochrome portrait...in the freezing winter snow.*” (**Franglais27 Tales/Dog and Wolf**).

Notes compiled by Sarah Nicol (Community Engagement Coordinator)

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