

Durakovo: Village of Fools

Contributed by Noralil Ryan Fores
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Photo Courtesy Sundance Film Festival

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An idyllic country setting, nestled outside of Moscow, Durakovo is all fields and castle. Inside lives autocratic, Orthodox businessman Mikhail Morozov, a domineering and stout god in his own mind who yearns for olden times of Russian monarchy. Enlisting men, women and children into his service, Morozov trains his crew of both willing and unwilling laborers in order to, as he magnanimously says, assist them in finding themselves. Pontificating on issues of democratization evil as well as spiritual wellness, Morozov lives by the code, 'God, tsar, and fatherland,' a mantra stated often and promptly followed by a three cheer flourish of "Hooray!" Were it not so terrifying from an individual freedom standpoint that Morozov is entirely earnest in his demeanor, the redundant "Hooray!" at least would be comical.

With little obstruction to her filmmaking, Kirtadze walks the ins and outs of Durakovo, observing without flinch Morozov and also speaking with his stoic workers. There's such artfulness to her creation, particularly in her collaboration with co-editor Rodolphe Molla, that indeed the situations seem fabricated. Clean cuts between different sides of phone conversations call into question the validity of time matches and consequently reliability of reaction on either side. A branch-off story with one discontent worker plays out almost too neatly for comfort, leaving one the impression Kirtadze in some way blatantly manipulated her material to suit her creative needs. Yet, despite this underlying suspicion about Kirtadze's process, it's difficult not to admire the moxy and cleverness of the doc that plays much more as a narrative. Borderline absurdist scenes of Morozov's hot tub hedonism and off rhythm cutting of rug pinpoint only the very best sense of egomaniacal tendency. Undeniably, Morozov is a captivating character study, even if he's easily seen by Western audiences as a minor leagues dictator.

A thought-provoking although sometimes rambling doc, Durakovo: Village of Fools may ultimately play better outside the US market. The prejudice of individual freedom here is so great that Morozov may appear to general audiences less laughable than detestable. Yet, the doc deserves traction as it plays with the country's worst fears, that individuals in fact don't want freedom at all.