MIFF

MÉLIÈS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS FEDERATION

MAGAZINE

CANNES EDITION

#2

INSIDE THE MINDS OF 2024'S AWARD-WINNING GENRE CREATORS

GENRE CINEMA MAKES WAVES AT CANNES

A conversation with Guillaume Esmiol

FROM AI TO REBELLIOUS HORROR HEROINES

A new shift of genre

REIMAGINING GENRE CINEMA

From Brazil to Bollywood



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We are proud to present the second edition of MIFF Magazine – the exclusive publication dedicated to fantastic cinema, curated under the banner of the Méliès International Festivals Federation (MIFF). As the world's largest network of genre film festivals, MIFF connects 33 festivals across 22 countries, drawing over 800,000 passionate viewers annually. This Cannes edition dives into the heart of genre cinema: from award-winning films and inspiring interviews to bold initiatives like the Méliès Fantastic Hub.

MIFF Magazine celebrates the imagination, innovation, and impact of European fantastic cinema on a global stage. This issue highlights the creators, stories, and ideas driving the genre forward. Whether you're a filmmaker, fan, or first-time explorer of the genre, this magazine is your gateway to a universe where horror, sci-fi, and fantasy collide in the most unexpected ways.

Fantastic is more than a genre—it's a vision.

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THE MÉLIÈS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS FEDERATION



LOOKING AHEAD

THE EVOLUTION AND THE AMBITIONS OF THE MIFF

Since stepping into a leadership role at the Méliès International Festivals Federation (MIFF), Chris Oosterom has overseen a period of significant transformation and renewal. Under his guidance, the federation has expanded its global reach, modernized its digital presence, and opened new doors for international collaboration. In this exclusive interview, he reflects on the evolution of the MIFF, outlines the federation's ambitions for the years ahead, and shares his vision for the future of fantastic film festivals around the world.

How has the MIFF evolved since you took the helm?

With the new board, we've introduced several key changes. The name change signals that we are no longer a European, but a global federation. This shift was accompanied by the launch of a new website, maintained by a paid team that also handles our social media presence.

The website now also functions as a platform showcasing short films that have previously won the Méliès d'Argent — all of which are available to watch for free.

More recently, we've revised our regulations to allow for the inclusion of more new members, enabling festivals outside of Europe to also host competitions.

What are MIFF's main goals for the next 3 to 5 years?

One of our key objectives is to further highlight the quality and diversity of European fantastic cinema. The Fantastic Pavilion at Cannes is a great platform for that, and we intend to make the most of it. In addition, we're aiming to expand our membership base even further.

What do you see as the greatest value MIFF offers to festivals today?

MIFF primarily exists to support and promote European genre filmmakers. That promotional role is our core mission. For many festivals, MIFF membership acts as a kind of quality label, something they can present to governments and private funders as a mark of credibility.

Are there plans to deepen collaboration between member festivals?

There's already strong informal collaboration, especially in terms of audience programming and increasingly in the coordination of professional events. At the same time, each festival has a unique identity, with varying objectives, scopes, and aesthetics. This diversity is a real strength of our federation — but also a limitation. Some festivals are heavily involved in for example educational projects, while others are not at all. Right now, there's a lot of informal sharing of ideas and experiences, and we definitely want to continue encouraging that.

What do you see as the key challenges and opportunities for genre festivals in the years ahead?

Fantastic film has really broken through in recent years. Films like *Titane* and *The Substance* have won major awards and are no longer confined to the midnight sections of major festivals. At the same time, producers, sales agents, and distributors who previously focused solely on drama or arthouse cinema now view genre as part of their portfolio.

We're seeing more and more genre films — including European titles like *The Ugly Stepsister* after Sundance and Berlin — come out of major festivals with strong buzz. That means genre festivals have access to a broader selection of high-profile titles.

Streamers remain a challenge, as does the current political climate, where culture is often not a top priority. But genre festivals are used to confronting external pressures — it's in their DNA.

If you could realize one dream for the MIFF, what would it be?

The biggest dream remains further professionalization: having one or more people for whom MIFF is their primary responsibility. Right now, everyone is doing it on the side. It doesn't have to be as large-scale as European Film Promotion, but a step in that direction would mean a huge leap forward for MIFF.

WELCOME ABOARD

Wench Film Festival is India's first Horror/ Sci-Fi/Fantasy festival highlighting LGBTQ+ women and non-binary filmmakers. Since 2021, it has screened 188 films and spotlighted 495 women. While prioritizing women and non-binary directors, it includes a special section for male filmmakers featuring strong female-led stories.

Wench Film Festival 2025 expanded globally, spanning two cities with record international submissions, exclusive premieres, and collaborations with major genre festivals like Fantasia and Imagine. The launch of **Terror Talkies**, India's first horror publication, further cemented its impact. With experimental horror, interactive experiences, and live performances, Wench became more than a festival—it became a movement reshaping the future of horror.

Wench Film Festival will continue to be a crucial pillar of the Wench blue-print that is committed to empowering the women and the non-binary voice with support across the entire value chain in the creator economy – Education, Funding, Community and Distribution.

"After three days men grow weary of a wench, a guest, and weather rainy."
~ Benjamin Franklin.

So do wenches my dear Benjamin, so do wenches.

Since the previous edition, we have had the pleasure of welcoming **three new festivals** to the MIFF family. These exciting additions bring fresh perspectives and unique cinematic voices to the federation, and we are thrilled to introduce them to you.

Let's take a closer look at what each of these festivals has to offer.

ISLA CALAVERA
FESTIVAL DE CINE FANTÁSTICO DE CANARIAS
CIUDAD DE LA LAGUNA

The **Canary Islands Fantastic Film Festival Isla Calavera** is a cultural event held annually, without interruption since 2017, in the city of San Cristóbal de La Laguna (Tenerife), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is the only festival in the Canary Islands dedicated to fantastic cinema, offering a diverse program that includes feature and short film competitions, as well as non-competitive sections and screenings of genre classics.

Beyond film screenings, **Isla Calavera** stands out for its strong educational commitment, organizing special sessions for students, exhibitions, and talks with renowned guests. Its cultural impact extends beyond the festival through its own editorial line of fiction novels, reinforcing its dedication to the promotion of the fantasy genre.

The festival hosts the "Filming in the Canary Islands" Industry Meeting, showcasing the archipelago's stunning locations and film-friendly conditions. It also grants awards for the best films and special honors like the Isla Calavera Honorary Award, the Legend of Fantastic Award, and the S.S. Venture Award for local talent.

FANT

Founded 31 years ago, **Bilbao Fantasy Film Festival** (FANTBilbao) starts the first weekend of May and continues its commitment to offer more and more content. 19 features and more than 30 short films are on official competition.

FANT is one of the oldest festivals in the City and we are once again ready to welcome all fantasy-genre lovers to our cinemas, where they will find very interesting, diverse and innovative proposals over 9 days full of interesting cinematographic proposals.

Méliès Fantastic Hub

Truly Fantastic European Shorts

Since its inception, the Méliès International Festivals Federation (MIFF) has played a crucial role in championing European fantastic cinema. With 33 member festivals across 22 countries, MIFF has established itself as a powerful network dedicated to showcasing the best in horror, science fiction, and fantasy films. Each year, these festivals collectively attract an audience of over 800,000 people, making MIFF one of the most influential forces in genre cinema today.

Yet, as cinema consumption has evolved in the digital age, so too have the ways in which audiences discover and engage with films. Recognizing the need to expand beyond traditional festival screenings, MIFF launched the **Méliès Fantastic Hub**—a curated online platform designed to bring European fantastic films to a global audience. The platform not only provides a space where cinephiles can explore a rich selection of genre films, but also helps filmmakers and festivals increase the visibility of their work.

The Méliès Fantastic Hub serves as a digital showcase, organizing films into thematic collections that reflect the diversity and creativity of fantastic cinema. From horror and dark comedy to surrealist narratives and thought-provoking sci-fi, the platform offers a comprehensive look at the most innovative works in the genre.

A true digital gateway to the best of European Fantastic Cinema!

The Méliès Fantastic Hub stands as a testament to MIFF's dedication to promoting and preserving European fantastic cinema. By curating and presenting these films in an accessible online format, the Hub ensures that the rich tapestry of genre filmmaking continues to reach and inspire audiences worldwide.

For those eager to explore the depths of European fantastic cinema, the Méliès Fantastic Hub offers a treasure trove of content that both entertains and provokes thought.

NOW IN THE HUB



ALPHABET OF TERROR

An exploration of horror elements arranged alphabetically, offering a structured journey through the genre's chilling aspects.



IDENTITY

Films that delve into the complexities of self-perception and the multifaceted nature of identity.



MOCKUMENTARY

A collection that blurs the lines between fiction and reality, presenting stories in a documentary-style format to enhance authenticity.



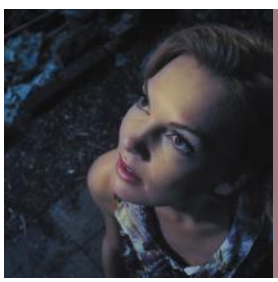
GRAVITY

Narratives that challenge our understanding of physical laws, often leading to surreal and thought-provoking scenarios.



EASTERN ANIMATION

Showcasing animated works from Eastern Europe, this section highlights the region's unique storytelling and artistic styles.



WILD SEX

Films that explore the primal and untamed aspects of human sexuality within the context of fantastic storytelling.

Visit us online:
https://melies.org/melies-fantastic-hub/


MÉLIÈS
INTERNATIONAL
FESTIVALS
FEDERATION
HANDLING
THE UNDEAD
is the 2024
Méliès d'or winner
The winners of the Méliès d'or 2024 are the feature film **Handling the Undead** by Thea Hvistendahl and the short film **Weeds** by Pola Kazak. The Méliès International Festivals Federation awarded them with the Méliès d'or in Sitges, October 2024.
Who will be next? Find out more at **melies.org**
WINNER
Méliès
d'or
2024

MIFF COMPETITIONS
MÉLIÈS D'ARGENT AND MÉLIÈS D'OR



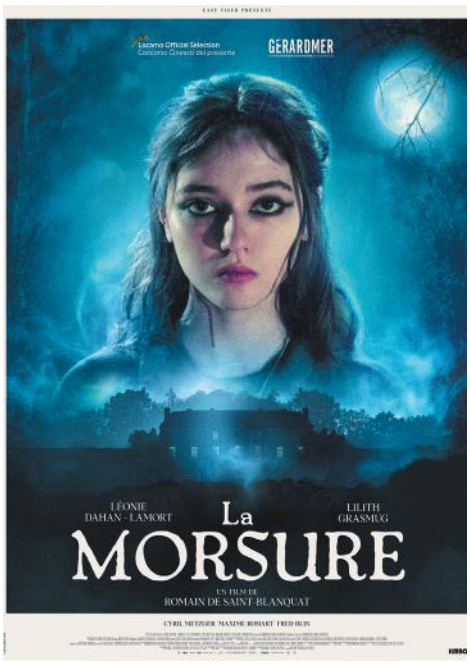
FRANKY FIVE STAR

Birgit Möller
2023 - 114 min.
Finland, Germany
Fantasy, Romance
Sales Agent: Patra Spanou Film

We too have voices in our head, but a whole hotel? No sir! Franky does and each guest can take over the control of her head for a while...
Amélie Poulain mixed with *Inside Out*.

2024 Méliès winner at BIFFF

BIFFF
BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL



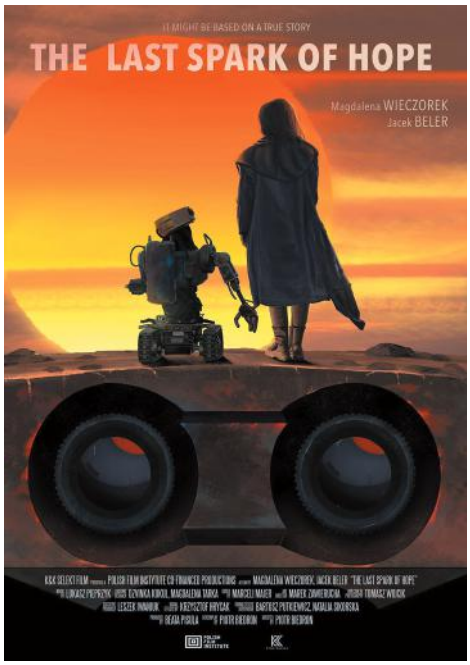
BITTEN
La Morsure

Romain De Saint-Blanquat
2023 - 90 min.
France
Drama, Thriller
Sales Agent: Films Boutique

1967, Mardi Gras. Françoise is a seventeen-year-old boarder in an all-girls Catholic high school. Convinced that she has only one night left before her death, she sneaks out with her friend Delphine to attend a costume party and live the night as if it was her last.

2023 Méliès winner at Sitges - Festival Internacional de Cinema de Catalunya

SITGES
INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL OF CATALONIA



THE LAST SPARK OF HOPE
W nich cala nadzieja

Piotr Biedron
2023 - 88 min.
Poland
Sci-Fi
Sales Agent: Galapagos Films

After the end of the climate wars, there is probably one person left on Earth. She lives with Robot named Arthur. One day, Eve comes into conflict with Robot and starts a deadly battle for survival.

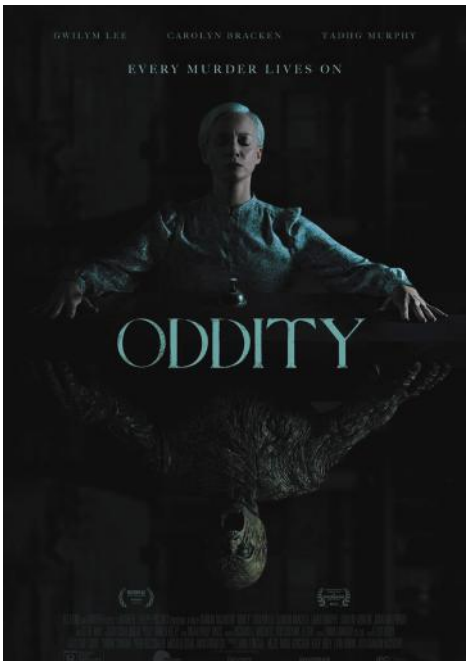
2023 Méliès winner at Trieste Science+Fiction Festival

trieste science+fiction festival

>>> Scan the QR code to explore all the winners from last years.

The Méliès is a year-round competition celebrating European fantastic cinema.
Seven festivals across Europe award a Méliès d'Argent to the best European feature film. From these winners, a jury selects the Méliès d'Or for the best European fantastic film of the year—an award representing quality, creativity, and imagination.

We are proud to present the six Méliès d'Argent winners and the Méliès d'Or of 2024!







ODDITY

Damian Mc Carthy
2024 - 98 min.
Ireland
Horror
Sales Agent: Blue Finch Film

A few months have passed since the death of her twin sister when Darcy, a blind psychic who runs a curio shop, is visited by Ted. Before he leaves, her ex-brother-in-law gives her two pieces of news – Dani's killer has been brutally murdered in his cell and he's going to remarry. Upset, Darcy returns Ted's courtesy and visits him a few days later at his home. She takes with her one of the objects in her collection: a wooden golem. Ted has to go to work, but Yana, his new girlfriend, Darcy and the mysterious statue are about to begin the longest night of their lives.

2024 Méliès winner at MOTELX - Lisbon International Horror Film Festival

U ARE THE UNIVERSE

Pavlo Ostrikov
2024 - 101 min.
Ukraine, Belgium
Sci-Fi
Sales Agent: True Colours

Andriy, a Ukrainian space trucker, is transporting nuclear waste to one of Jupiter's moons when he sees the Earth explode. He thinks he is the last human in the universe, until he receives a distress message from a French meteorologist called Catherine, who's alone on a space station orbiting Saturn. Despite his robot assistant's doubts about the success of such a mission, he decides to set off to meet her, even though they are 700 million kilometres apart.

2024 Méliès winner at Strasbourg European Fantastic Film Festival

VERMIN

Vermines

Sébastien Vanicek
2023 - 106 min.
France
Horror
Sales Agent: WTFilms

Kaleb is a young adult who lives on petty jobs. Fascinated by exotic animals, he finds a poisonous spider in a bazaar and brings it back to his flat. It only takes a moment for it to escape and reproduce, turning the place into a dreadful web trap.
At the same time, the police locks down the building where the residents are ambushed.
Only option for Kaleb and his mates – find the way out, to survive.

2023 Méliès winner at Imagine Film Festival



© Morten Brun

Norwegian cinema has long been known for its unique blend of atmospheric storytelling and psychological depth, and *Handling the Undead* is no exception. Directed by Thea Hvistendahl, this hauntingly poetic film offers a fresh and emotional take on the undead genre. The story unfolds in Oslo on a sweltering summer day when a mysterious electrical disturbance suddenly revives the dead. But rather than traditional horror, the film delves into themes of grief, love, and the profound implications of life after death.

***Handling the Undead* has captivated audiences and critics alike, earning the prestigious Méliès d'Or for Best European Fantastic Film. We spoke with Thea Hvistendahl about the film's well-deserved acclaim, the challenges of adapting Lindqvist's novel and the challenges in shooting a film.**

Congratulations on winning the Méliès d'Or for Best European Genre Feature with *Handling the Undead*! How did that feel?

Winning the Méliès d'Or for Best European Genre Film was an incredible honor and an unforgettable feeling!

Before that, I had already won the Silver Méliès at Neuchâtel International Fantastic Film Festival, where I also won the Narcisse award for best feature film. And then to win the gold—it was truly special. I'm very proud of it.

The journey of *Handling the Undead* really began earlier this year at Sundance. It's a big deal to have your first fiction film premiere there and even win the award for Best Music. How was that adventure for you?

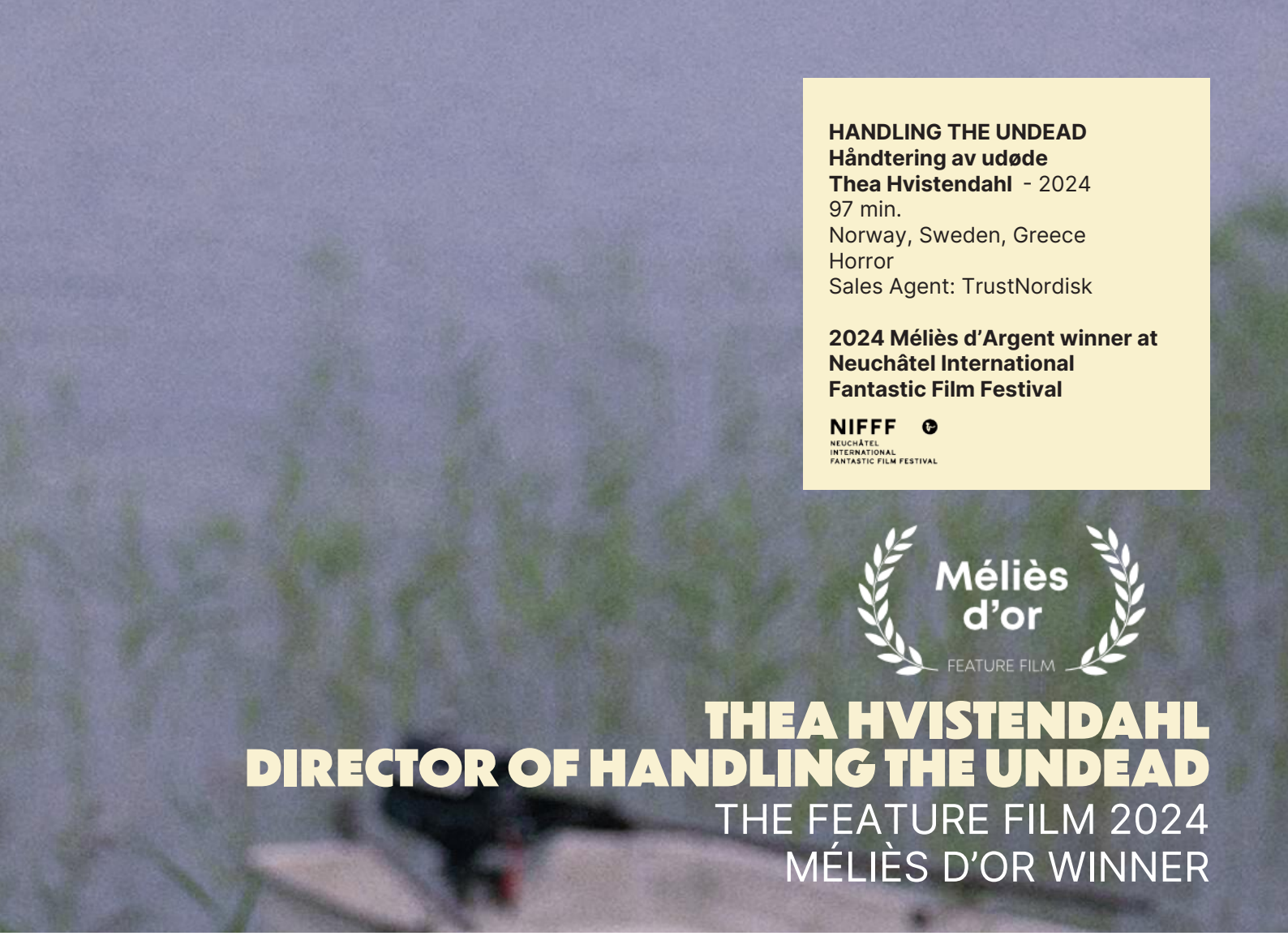
It was amazing! Just being selected was a huge honor, and getting to attend was even more incredible.

Sundance is a great festival, and the audience there was eager and enthusiastic about the film. There was a lot of press coverage, a fantastic atmosphere, and overall, it was the perfect place for a first screening.

Did you expect the film to be so well received at genre festivals? Because even though it's a zombie film, it's much more of a drama about grief and loss.

It was always a question in the pre-production phase. I told my crew it was a horror film, and they were skeptical when reading the script. It's a unique blend—a drama with a horror premise.

However, I had previously made a short film called *Children of Satan*, which I intended as a poetic thriller, yet it ended up playing at many horror festivals.



HANDLING THE UNDEAD
Håndtering av udøde
Thea Hvistendahl - 2024
97 min.
Norway, Sweden, Greece
Horror
Sales Agent: TrustNordisk

2024 Méliès d'Argent winner at Neuchâtel International Fantastic Film Festival

NIFFF
NEUCHÂTEL INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL

Méliès d'or
FEATURE FILM

THEA HVISTENDAHL DIRECTOR OF HANDLING THE UNDEAD

THE FEATURE FILM 2024 MÉLIÈS D'OR WINNER

So because of that, I wasn't too surprised that this film was embraced by genre festivals. The presence of the horror premise made it a natural fit.

Was it difficult to secure funding for a film that blends drama and horror?

Yes, it took some time. In the end, we had to shoot in three different countries—Greece, Sweden, and Norway—to piece together the budget. European films often require co-productions across multiple countries, and this was no exception.

You based the film on a novel by John Ajvide Lindqvist, the author of *Let the Right One In*. What drew you to the story, and why did you want to adapt it into a film?

I loved how he treated the premise in such a grounded, realistic way. The novel portrays the idea as though it could actually happen, and I found that approach fascinating. I was also drawn to the characters, the atmosphere, and the underlying sadness that permeates the story. It had everything I love in a narrative.

I haven't read the book myself, but are there significant differences between the novel and your film adaptation?

Yes, there are some differences. The book is quite extensive and delves more into how society reacts to what's happening. It also features multiple storylines that aren't present in the film. For example, the elderly women in the movie weren't in the book. The novel has a broader scope, whereas the film focuses more on the families and their experiences of having their loved ones return.

Despite being based on a novel, the film feels deeply personal. Did you draw from your own experiences of loss while making it?

For me, it wasn't so much about personal loss, but more about family dynamics and how people struggle to let go of the past. I know people close to me who find it difficult to move on from past events or relationships, and I wanted to explore that theme—how these shifts in family dynamics can profoundly change relationships.

If you suddenly lost a loved one, would you want them back, even briefly, like in the film, to properly say goodbye?

That's an interesting question! My intention with the film was to convey that even if you get what you think you want—bringing back a loved one—it won't be the same.



© Morten Brun

> **WINNING WAS AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE**, IT WAS TRULY SPECIAL! I'M VERY PROUD OF IT.

Death is final, and longing for the past is ultimately futile. Personally, I wouldn't want them to return because it wouldn't truly be them.

Although the zombies in your film display small emotional cues, unlike the mindless creatures in traditional zombie films.

That's an interesting discussion. Are they really showing emotion, or are we just projecting meaning onto their actions? It's open to interpretation.

Without spoilers, did the rabbit scene get a strong reaction from audiences?

Yes, way more than I expected! I didn't realize how sensitive people are to certain visual effects, even when they know it's fake. The scene has a strong emotional impact, partly because of the melancholic music and the way it's shot. It's not grotesque, but it still affects people deeply.

You managed to cast Anders Danielsen Lie and Renate Reinsve, both leads from *The Worst Person in the World*. How did you convince them to join the project?

Anders was attached to the film for a long time, since 2019. Initially, I cast for Renate's role as well, but she was pregnant at the time. I later recast her before *The Worst Person in the World* premiered, so none of us knew how big that film would become.

After she won at Cannes and gained international recognition, I was afraid I might lose her, but luckily, it all worked out.

There's relatively little dialogue in your film. Were you specifically looking for actors who could convey emotions through subtle expressions?

Since the premise is somewhat surreal, I needed top-tier drama actors who could make even the most absurd situations feel real and emotionally grounded.

The young boy, Elias, played by Dennis Storhøi Ruud, remains eerily still. I imagine a doll was used at times?

A doll was used for most of the film. It was molded after Dennis, and in some scenes where there's movement, Dennis played the role himself.

Were there any particular technical or production challenges you faced while making the film?

Definitely. The doll was a major challenge—it was only finished a few days before shooting, and we quickly realized we needed puppeteers to make it work on set. We had to cut holes in beds and couches so the puppeteers could manipulate it.

Another huge challenge was a storm that hit Sweden while we were filming. It came out of nowhere, destroyed part of a house where we had our equipment, and caused chaos.

Also, we had to recast one of the old lady characters while we were already filming.

The replacement actress was Greek and didn't speak English, but our Norwegian actress spoke French, so they communicated that way, with the help of an interpreter. It all worked out in the end!


© Pål Ulvik Rokseth


© Pål Ulvik Rokseth

Were there any particular filmmakers or movies that inspired you during production?

Yes! I always return to Lynne Ramsay and Lucile H*adžihalilović* for inspiration. *Solaris* was also a big influence, particularly in how it explores reuniting with lost loved ones.

Are you working on any new projects?

Yes, several! At least three of them have supernatural elements. Hopefully, I can develop them one after the other.

Fantastic! Thanks for your time, and good luck with your next project. Hope to see you at a festival soon!

— Raf Geusens


Thea Hvistendahl © Erika Hebbert

5 FAVOURITE GENRE MOVIES OF THEA HVISTENDAHL

1. The Shining (Stanley Kubrick, 1980)
A family heads to an isolated hotel for the winter, where a sinister presence influences the father into violence. At the same time, his psychic son sees horrifying forebodings from both the past and the future.

2. Innocence (Lucile Hadzihalilovic, 2004)
A look inside an offbeat boarding school for young girls.

3. Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, 2001)
After a car wreck on Mulholland Drive renders a woman amnesiac, she and a Hollywood-hopeful search for clues and answers across Los Angeles in a twisting venture beyond dreams and reality.

4. Cure (Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 1997)
A frustrated detective deals with the case of several gruesome murders committed by people who have no recollection of what they've done.

5. Perfect Blue (1997, Satoshi Kon)
A pop singer gives up her career to become an actress, but she slowly goes insane when she starts being stalked by an obsessed fan and what seems to be a ghost of her past.

INTERVIEW

THE 2024 CAREER MÉLIÈS D'OR

Christophe Gans

French film director and screenwriter Christophe Gans is best known for his work in the fantasy and horror genres. Gans made his directorial debut with the anthology film *Necronomicon* (1993), but gained international recognition with *Crying Freeman* (1995), a stylish action film based on the Japanese manga. His work is often marked by visually rich storytelling and a deep appreciation for fantasy and horror aesthetics.

Gans achieved widespread acclaim with *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (*Le Pacte des Loups*, 2001), a genre-blending film that combines martial arts, horror, and period drama, becoming a box office hit in France and abroad. He further solidified his reputation with the live-action adaptation of the popular video game *Silent Hill* (2006), praised for its atmospheric visuals. Over the years, Gans has remained a prominent figure in genre cinema, consistently bringing a distinct European flair to his adaptations and original stories.

In 2024, Gans received the Méliès d'Or for his prolific career.
Reason enough to invite the man for a fascinating conversation.



© Picture Sitges Film Festival - 2024

How does it feel to receive a career award like the Méliès d'Or?

You know, it's funny because I've received a few now—one in Strasbourg, then in Sitges, and now in Brussels. So I guess I've reached that stage in life where I'm being recognized for my whole body of work.

Some people joke and say, "Oh, you're getting these awards because you're going to die soon." But I prefer to think it's because people now have the distance and perspective to truly see what my films have brought to the genre.

For example, it was fascinating to read the new American reviews when *Silent Hill* was re-released on Blu-ray. Seeing the difference between the critics' responses in 2006 and the way they view the film now—15 years later—it's quite astonishing. Time really is the ultimate judge of your work. It gives everything context. And I like that myself. I'm a cinephile, so it's important to me that we continually reevaluate films. Sometimes I watch something I didn't like 20 years ago and I suddenly realize, "Wow, this is actually great!" Cinema is organic—it grows, it transforms over time. That's what I find exciting.

When I make a film, I always try to do something different within the genre. With *Silent Hill*, I wanted it to be something we hadn't really seen before. And now, with time, it might even be considered unique—and that's rewarding.

For a long time, Silent Hill was considered one of the very few successful video game adaptations. Why do you think your film succeeded where so many others failed?

I think the secret is simple: I didn't lie to myself. I'm a geek who loves *Silent Hill*. That's who made the film—a geek, not a corporation. I think the fans sensed that. They say I was very faithful to the source material. But more than that, they could feel the passion, the respect, and the love I had for the game.

Even now, with the announcement of the new *Silent Hill* film based on the second game, fans are excited because they know my heart is in it.

It seems your preference was always to adapt Silent Hill 2, even 20 years ago. Is that correct?

Yes. When I first approached the adaptation, there were already three games—*Silent Hill 1, 2 and 3*. The second game is arguably the best. It's psychologically complex, like *Jacob's Ladder*, where everything you see is a projection of a damaged mind. Naturally, it was the most tempting one to adapt, but also the most difficult.

I remember telling my producer, Samuel, that I'd love to do the second one, but maybe we needed to first define the world of *Silent Hill* before diving into something that abstract. So we started with the first game. We had to build the entire town and its mythology for film—it was a huge challenge.

Back then, in 2006, *Silent Hill* was still a relatively niche game. I remember Sony telling me that only 500 copies of the first game were sold in France. That's tiny. When we released the film, maybe 5,000 people had actually played the game in France, but over a million people went to see the movie.

It was like a brand people had heard of, but few had experienced. So when we made the film, we were essentially introducing *Silent Hill* to a whole new audience.

The movie became the way most people discovered Silent Hill?

Exactly. I remember the Japanese developers sending me tracking data that showed in America, 90% of people knew *Silent Hill* because of the film, not the game. That was shocking—and a little disturbing for me as a fan. I didn't want the film to overshadow the game.
I just wanted to offer my take on that world.

When I made the first film, no one really knew what *Silent Hill* was. I had to explain it over and over: the town has three layers—the real world, the fog world, and the rusted, hellish world. I even had to pause production so we could redesign sets to match each version of the town. It was exhausting. Some people on set were totally confused—they didn't know what we were doing.

I suppose the situation was completely different now for Return to Silent Hill?

It was completely different. I called Jeremy Irvine and others and asked if they needed me to explain the world. They said, "No, we saw the film when we were 16. We know it." Everyone in the crew knew the game. It was amazing. I was working with a new *Silent Hill 2.0* generation.

Fifteen years later, it was such a contrast. Back then, people thought video games were just for kids. Now, they recognize the maturity of the material. It's adult storytelling.

You're also working on a film adaptation of Fatal Frame / Project Zero. So you're still deep in the world of games?

Absolutely. Also because today's audience knows games better than literature.

I'm a huge fan of books, but adapting a classic novel is harder than adapting a game, simply because young people are more familiar with games.
That's just the evolution of our culture.

Where did your love for cinema begin?

When I was a child, there were only two forms of entertainment—books and cinema. I read a lot, and I went to the movies with friends. I was born in 1960, so I remember my parents taking me to see *Thunderball* when I was five. The 60s cinema felt magical.

Then in the early 70s, I saw *Phantom of the Paradise* by Brian De Palma. That film blew my mind. I walked into the theater as one person, and walked out as another person, knowing I wanted to be a director.

You actually started out as a film critic. Has that background influenced you as a filmmaker?

For sure. I spent years interviewing my idols. I learned a lot from them. In the 70s and 80s, it was very different from now—no junkets, no PR machines. I'd take a train to Rome and spend three days with Dario Argento, go out to dinner, watch movies together. It was much more personal.

I also worked as a TV critic for a huge pop culture show. Because of that, I had the chance to meet incredible people—even the Rolling Stones. It was a crazy time.

Spending time with these artists made becoming a director seem possible. If I could sit at the same table, why not make films too?



© Silent Hill – Christophe Gans

Is that how you got involved with Necronomicon?

That story is wild. I was in New York visiting comic artist Michael Kaluta—creator of *The Shadow*. He showed me the new wave of Japanese manga, and among them was Crying Freeman. I was blown away. I called my producer and said, "We need to adapt this."

We flew to Los Angeles to meet Takashige Ichise, the Japanese producer who owned the rights. He later produced *The Ring* and *The Grudge*. At that time, he was making small genre films in LA.

While we were there, he asked if I'd like to direct a segment for *Necronomicon*. It would be a test. I shot my part in the San Fernando Valley over two weeks, without a visa or permit. At one point, funding stopped, and I ended up staying in LA for six months—illegally—waiting for the money to return.

When *Necronomicon* was released, most critics hated it—except for my segment. So Ichise said, "Christophe can direct." He then trusted me with directing *Crying Freeman*.

I crossed the border into Canada to shoot the movie there, but U.S. customs caught me. I had no car, no apartment—no proof I was living in the States. I told them I'd fallen in love and lost track of time. They let me go.

It was a different time. Things like that just couldn't happen today, especially post-9/11.

Thank you very much for sharing your stories with us and we are already eagerly looking forward to *Return to Silent Hill*!

— Raf Geusens

Since 2018, the Federation presents a Career Méliès for outstanding contributions to European fantastic cinema. Recipients were Álex de la Iglesia in 2018, Asia Argento in 2019, Paco Plaza in 2020, Lucile Hadzihalilovic in 2021, Claudio Simonetti in 2022, Jorge Guerricaechevarría in 2023.

CHRISTOPHE GANS OUTSTANDING DIRECTOR OF

Necronomicon (1993)
Lovecraftian horror comes to life in this chilling anthology.

Crying Freeman (1995)
A deadly assassin seeks freedom in this stylish action thriller.

Brotherhood of the Wolf (2001)
Mystery, martial arts, and monsters collide in 18th-century France.

Silent Hill (2006)
A nightmarish descent into the fog-shrouded world of the iconic video game.

La Belle et la Bête (2014)
A visually stunning reimagining of the timeless fairy tale.



One Network. Infinite Stories. The MIFF is here!

THE MÉLIÈS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS FEDERATION

The Méliès International Festivals Federation – MIFF is a tightly knit network of 33 film festivals from 22 countries, with a global attendance of over 800 000 visitors, making it a vital economic and cultural player on the fantastic film scene.

Its mission is to promote European fantastic film productions throughout Europe and the world, by enhancing their visibility and their standing both among the public and within the industry, and encouraging their circulation. The Federation works to fulfill this mission through its festival network in Europe, its supporting members in Asia, North America and South America, as well as its Méliès awards for outstanding European genre films.

The festivals are major platforms for genre films in their respective regions. They all work closely within the Federation network, but embody diversity and individual artistic identity, through their distinct programming choices, including the Méliès competition selections. They feature both press and audience screenings and offer a full range of side events that include master classes, conferences and industry pitchings, bringing together a wide spectrum of viewers, iconic and emerging talent, and other industry professionals to share experiences and knowledge.

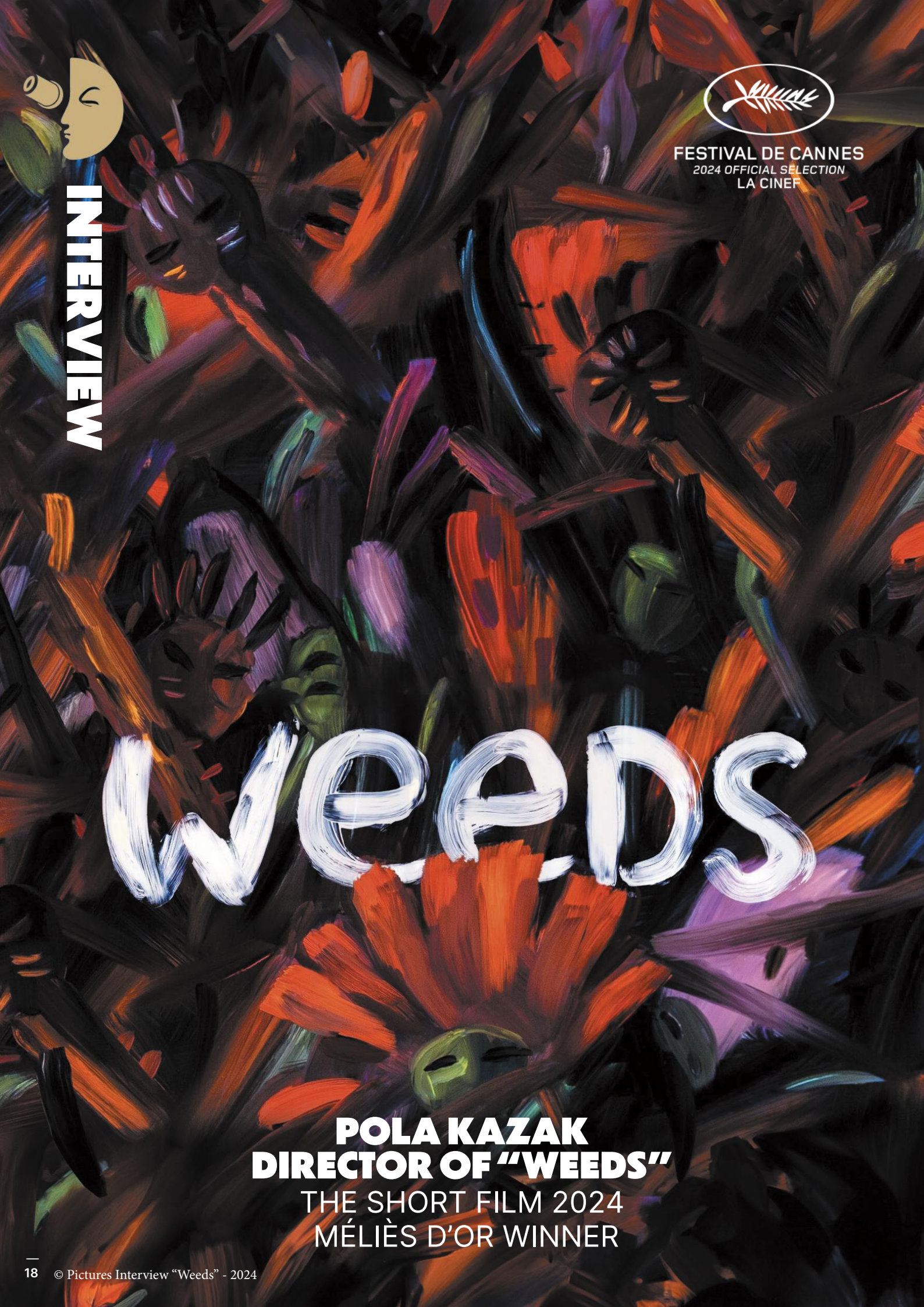
The Méliès d'Or and Méliès d'Argent awards are given each year to the best European fantastic feature and short films. The awards recognize quality and creativity, and generate unique visibility for the film and their directors. The winners are showcased by all of the Federation's festivals, including its supporting members, thereby encouraging their circulation worldwide.

> "THE MIFF IS THE LARGEST FILMFESTIVAL NETWORK IN THE WORLD!

WE ARE MIFF

TODAY'S FEDERATION

- Unites film festivals from numerous European countries in one dynamic network.
- Covers the four corners of Europe, with strongholds in Asia, North America, and South America.
- Draws a combined audience of more than 800 000 people.
- Screens more than 1 800 genre films annually.
- Awards 30 prestigious Méliès d'Argent prizes for feature and short films each year.
- Awards the Méliès d'Or prize annually for the Best European Fantastic Film (feature and short).



© Pictures Interview "Weeds" - 2024

With her graduation film Weeds, Pola Kazak has taken the festival world by surprise, earning the prestigious Méliès d'Or for Best European Genre Short Film. What began as a student project has blossomed into an international success, selected by nearly 50 festivals across continents.

In this interview, Pola opens up about the unexpected journey of Weeds, her evolving artistic style, and her reflections on the intersection of animation, technology, and personal experience. From painterly visuals to poignant social themes, Pola's work stands as a fresh and thoughtful voice in contemporary animation.

Congratulations on winning the Méliès d'Or for Best European Genre Short Film. Did you expect such a warm reception at genre festivals?

Not at all, actually. It wasn't an ambitious project. The main goal was simply to graduate and finish school. That was my focus, so I was surprised by the reaction, pleasantly surprised.

Your journey actually started a few months earlier in Cannes, and since then, you've won numerous awards at festivals. How has the adventure with Weeds been so far?

It's been almost a year now—Cannes was in May—so it's been a full year of traveling to festivals. I'm not the main distributor or festival coordinator, there's another person on our team who handles that. But as far as I know, we've had 48 festival selections so far, which I think is quite successful. And we still have another year ahead of us.

So you're planning to submit to more festivals and hopefully attend more as well?

Yes, of course. We started with the A-list festivals, and now we'll be attending some smaller ones or others we missed due to deadlines. We've screened in Spain, France, Germany, Belgium, Hungary, Denmark, Italy, the UK, the USA, Brazil, Argentina, South Korea, and now Japan—which makes it 49 selections. I forgot to count Japan earlier!

That's an amazing run. Is there one award or festival moment that stands out to you as especially meaningful?

I think the most outstanding one was the national award I received in the Czech Republic about a month ago. It was during a huge event called Czech Lion. I received the national student film award. I was really surprised that we won the main prize—it was very meaningful.

Visually, Weeds has a distinctive style inspired by Impressionism. Why did you choose that style?

I think it's less Impressionism and maybe closer to Primitivism—but it wasn't a conscious choice. I didn't set out to imitate a specific style. I'm not trained as a painter; I'm an animator. Painting was a new stage for me. I don't have the skills or training to reproduce someone else's style, so I had to find a way to paint that matched my own abilities. It evolved naturally. Also, with animation, you have to consider how to move your artwork—how to make it work practically. So the style developed as a result of technical and practical decisions too.

In one of your previous short films, Toro!, you referenced Picasso, so I guess you're an art lover?

Yes, in that earlier film I really tried to base it on Picasso's drawings. I studied them a lot. But for *Weeds*, I developed my own style out of necessity. I was trained as an animator working with other directors and adapting to their drawing styles. So I never really had my own style until I began *Weeds*. It was a challenge.

You mentioned reproducing someone's style. This week there's been a lot of discussion about OpenAI's new image generation release. People have started creating AI-generated Ghibli-style images of themselves. What's your take on that?

I haven't followed the most recent AI developments very closely. A few months ago I attended lectures on how AI could affect animation. I found that it's still not easy for AI to replicate hand-drawn techniques. AI combines what's already been created, and right now, I don't see it as a serious threat to artistic animation. Audiences—even if they don't realize it—appreciate the small imperfections of handmade work. Those are hard for AI to replicate. I actually think AI could become a helpful tool—animation takes so much time, and AI might assist in saving time or supporting animators. Someone once said animation can only be done by a very optimistic person with a terrible sense of time management. If you'd told me at the start that *Weeds* would take four years, I probably wouldn't have done it. So in that way, AI might help. But in terms of fully replacing handmade, artistic animation—especially full films—I don't think we're there yet. Maybe for still images or short scenes, but not full features.

Younger audiences might see Weeds as a beautiful animated film about a female gardener, but in reality, it's quite a political film, isn't it?

You're right. The first idea came around 2015 during the refugee crisis. I initially wanted to make a kind of social commentary or ad reflecting the situation. But as I worked on it, I moved away from overt politics. The core idea became about acceptance—accepting the unknown, the misunderstood, the things that might feel threatening. It's more about internal feelings and psychological experiences. It's about accepting the unfamiliar, whether it's social or personal.



And there's no autobiographical element, considering you're a Russian living abroad?

I began the film in 2019, so it wasn't a response to the current political situation. But yes, in some ways it's personal. I'm not a refugee, but I am an immigrant living in an unfamiliar environment. So there's something from my own experience in there.

What are your next projects? Are you working on something new?

I have some early ideas, but I'm still at the beginning. It might be a longer short film, possibly 20 minutes. Not quite a feature yet—I don't feel ready for that. The story involves different cultures and contrasts, which is a theme I like. It'll be longer than *Weeds*, and maybe not ideal for festivals, but I don't think the story can be told in a shorter form.

How does your creative process work when you start a new project?

I usually already have some ideas in mind—nothing completely new. I listen to music and imagine scenes, and then try to connect those visuals with a central idea. I walk a lot in nature to think, preferably somewhere quiet, away from people. It's a bit of a strange process—I sometimes talk to myself—so being alone helps!

If you had unlimited budget and resources, do you have a dream or passion project you'd love to make?

Yes, I've had an idea in mind for 13 or 15 years. It's quite ambitious and not fully formed, but maybe now is the right time to try. I'd love to make it a reality.

What advice would you give to young animators who want to pursue a career in animation?

I think it's really important to find your place in the world—to find your people. It's very difficult to make it alone. For me, connecting with fellow directors and collaborators helped me get through challenges. So build your team, meet producers, colleagues.

Also, watch a lot of films, go to festivals, keep up with trends, attend exhibitions. Stay open to collaboration—it can bring amazing opportunities.

Great advice. Thanks for the interview!

— Raf Geusens


DIRECTOR POLA KAZAK





The power of GENRE CINEMA AND ANIMATION

While genre cinema is often associated with live-action formats—think horror, sci-fi, or fantasy—animation has long been a powerful and underappreciated tool within the genre world.

Freed from the constraints of physical reality, animation allows filmmakers to explore surreal and symbolic narratives with unmatched creative freedom. In *Weeds*, this flexibility is used to full effect: blending elements of psychological drama, fantasy, and social allegory, the film subtly transforms a quiet garden into a metaphor for societal fears and personal transformation.

Animated genre films like Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio*, *Coraline* by Laika, *Wander to Wonder* by Nina Gantz or the short films of Don Hertzfeldt have shown that animation can evoke suspense, wonder, and existential dread with the same power—if not more—as live-action.

In Europe, filmmakers like Michaela Pavlátová (*My Sunny Maad*) and Florence Miailhe (*The Crossing*) use painterly animation styles to engage with real-world issues through a genre lens.

Weeds continues in this tradition, using its hand-painted aesthetic to create a tactile, emotionally resonant world—one where genre storytelling and artistic animation converge to reflect on themes like migration, identity, and the fear of the unknown.

ABOUT WEEDS

Weeds is a poetic and visually striking animated short film that tells the story of a solitary female gardener whose orderly world is disrupted by the sudden appearance of unfamiliar and unruly plants.

Through delicate, hand-painted animation, the film explores themes of fear, acceptance, and the psychological journey of confronting the unknown.

What begins as a quiet, meditative routine gradually transforms into a subtle yet powerful reflection on migration, prejudice, and the instinct to protect or reject what we don't understand. Inspired by global social issues yet deeply personal in tone, *Weeds* resonates with universal emotions of isolation, empathy, and the desire for harmony in an unpredictable world.

Visually, the film draws from painterly traditions—somewhere between Primitivism and Expressionism—blending fine art with animation to create a uniquely textured and immersive experience.

Since its premiere at the Festival de Cannes, *Weeds* has enjoyed an impressive international festival run, with over 49 official selections across Europe, Asia, and the Americas—including screenings in Spain, France, Germany, the UK, USA, Brazil, Argentina, South Korea, and Japan.
The film was awarded the Méliès d'Or for Best European Genre Short Film and received the Czech National Student Film Award at the Czech Lion ceremony, confirming its emotional resonance and artistic strength on a global scale.

MARCHÉ DU FILM
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

DIVE IN THE WORLD OF GENRE

Welcome to the Marché du Film, where a world of cinematic marvels awaits genre film enthusiasts. Dive into curated programs and explore the Frontières, Fantastic 7 and Blood Window showcases — featuring the very best talents and projects of the fantastic genre — and immerse yourself in the vibrant genre film community at the Fantastic Pavilion, the ultimate genre hub that brings enthusiasts and creators together in a celebration of all things extraordinary!



FRONTIÈRES
THE PREMIER INTERNATIONAL INDUSTRY INITIATIVE FOR GENRE FILM PROFESSIONALS

Frontières is the world's leading international co-production market and networking platform focused on genre film financing and co-production between Europe and North America.

Organized by the Fantasia International Film Festival, in partnership with the Marché du Film, the Frontières Platform in Cannes brings together financiers, sales agents, distributors and festival programmers with today's up-and-coming genre film talents and their captivating projects!

The Frontières program includes two key presentations:

Proof of Concept, showcasing genre film projects in advanced financing stages, and **Buyers Showcase**, highlighting genre film projects in the post-production stage. These presentations are complemented by a networking lunch connecting Platform projects with industry professionals, and concluding with the Fantastic Night, a celebratory event dedicated to the genre film community.

Key Dates: 17-18 May 2025
Main Venue: Palais K (Palais des Festivals)



FANTASTIC 7
DISCOVER THE BEST OF THE UPCOMING FANTASTIC GENRE

Fantastic 7 — a common initiative of the Marché du Film and Sitges – International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia — is dedicated to promoting and supporting the most fantastic projects in the global genre film industry.

Each year, 7 top-notch film festivals from around the world are selected to endorse a fantastic film project to be showcased in Cannes during the Marché du Film. These exciting works-in-progress — in post-production or recently completed — are presented by their creative teams during a live pitching session. This event draws a diverse audience of investors, distributors, sales agents, and genre film enthusiasts.

The aim of the Fantastic 7 program is to nurture and promote these rising talents, connecting them with potential business partners who could provide crucial funding and help extend their reach to broader audiences.

Get ready to meet the new voices and talents of our fantastic community, and come explore 7 exceptional works from this year's 7 participating film festivals

The Fantastic 7 showcase will be held on Sunday May 18
(Palais K, Palais des Festivals)





DISCOVER THE FANTASTIC PAVILION PROGRAM

The Fantastic Pavilion Galas are a series of special screenings that serve to showcase upcoming projects that have the potential to become the next big thing in genre, the galas are held at the Olympia during The Marché Du Film in Cannes.
The week-long program will be a key place for independent producers, sales agents, and distributors to create new alliances and acquire the best genre films from specialized companies to magnify the growing role of genre films in today's audiences and markets, the Fantastic Pavilion Galas will offer a stage for the films and their creators.

From May 13 to 18 at the Cinema Olympia at 8:00pm, the Fantastic Pavilion will present a selection of the finest genrefilms.

Tuesday 13 - Hablando con Extraños
directed by Adrían García Bogliano

Wednesday 14 - La regla de Osha
directed by Ángel González

Thursday 15 - The Remedy
directed by Alex Kahuam

Friday 16 - Turkish Coffee Table
directed by Can Evenrol

Saturday 17 – Los ojos del abismo
directed by Daniel de la Vega

Sunday 18 – Ancestral
directed by Pablo Aragües and Marta Cabrera

More info: see page 34

Beyond the screenings, the Fantastic Pavilion serves as a dynamic space for conversation and connection, offering panels where filmmakers, industry experts, and creatives discuss the latest trends and the future of genre cinema.

These panels provide a unique opportunity to dive deeper into the art and business of genre films, as well as the role they play in shaping modern cinema.

PANEL: Yes She Cannes Celebrates
Visibility, Voice and Creative Power in Genre Film
Wed. 14 May - 17:00 - 18:00

In celebration of the women shaping genre through bold storytelling, innovation, and creative leadership, this panel moderated by Faith Elizabeth, welcomes Monica Garcia (WomanInFan) and other purpose-driven creatives to explore how diverse and inclusive cinema can empower the world.

COMMUNITY IS KEY

FANTASTIC PAVILION

MARCHÉ DU FILM
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



READY FOR NEW INITIATIVES

IMMERSIVE MARKET

The **Immersive Market** is the Marché du Film's latest B2B initiative, which aims to accelerate collaboration and distribution opportunities for immersive industry professionals.

Taking place aboard the **Art Explora**, the world's largest catamaran, the Curators Network offers a seven-day program featuring pitching sessions, workshops, and exclusive networking events designed to connect immersive portfolio holders with museum curators, cultural institutions, and themed entertainment venues seeking groundbreaking immersive experiences.

In addition, Immersive Spotlights will present inspiring talks, hands-on workshops, and industry mixers, fostering dialogue between immersive professionals with key players from intersecting industries, such as generative AI, performing arts, gastronomy and beyond.

The Immersive Market offers a unique setting to explore both the creative and commercial potential of immersive media — bridging the gap between immersive professionals and the filmmaking industry while sparking new collaborations on a global scale.

Access to Immersive Spotlights is open to all Marché du Film badge holders, while the Curators Network is exclusively available to pre-selected professionals.



GOOD TO KNOW

Key Dates: 13-19 May 2025

Access: Immersive Spotlights (Marché du Film badge holders), Curators Network (Selected Participants only – see Eligibility Requirements)

Main Venue: Art Explora (Cannes Port, Albert Edouard Pier), Village Innovation (Pantiero)

Target Audience: Immersive Artists & Producers, Curators & Programmers of Cultural Venues, Investors in Cinema & Other Cultural IPs, New Tech Experts (AI, spatial computing, video mapping, real time engine)

CLUB IMAGINE

20 - 22 JUNE 2025



SAVE THE DATE

IMAGINE FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL

30 OCTOBER - 9 NOVEMBER 2025



BRAZILIAN HORROR CINEMA
THE ETERNAL UNKNOWN

Brazilian horror cinema is a mysterious and often overlooked gem within the world of genre film. Unlike the more well-known American or Asian horror traditions, the Brazilian variant often remains shrouded in a veil of the unknown—an eternal unknown. Yet the country harbors a rich history of macabre tales, distinctive styles, and idiosyncratic filmmakers who, despite limited resources and censorship, have managed to leave a lasting mark.

In this article, we delve into the dark recesses of Brazilian horror film. What makes this cinema so unique? Which themes repeatedly emerge, and how does it reflect the country's social and political context?

Researcher and filmmaker Felipe M. Guerra guides us through this fascinating cinematic landscape, shedding light on forgotten gems, obscure auteurs, and cultural influences that together shape the unique identity of Brazilian horror.

MARCHÉ DU FILM
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

BRASIL
COUNTRY OF HONOUR

Brazil's horror and fantasy cinema has a long history that blends elements of the country's culture, history, and social and political concerns. Despite its longevity, moments of popularity, and even box office success, the genre remains relatively unknown both within Brazil and abroad.

Elements of fantasy and horror have appeared in Brazilian movies since the early twentieth century, often timidly or experimentally, and mixed with other genres. Silent films inspired by sensational crime headlines depicted brutal murders and strangulations, while *"Le Film du Diable"* (1917), now unfortunately lost, explored a Faustian pact with the devil. One surviving frame even shows an actor dressed as Satan. The musical comedy *"O Jovem Tataravô"* (1936) openly features a ghost, although for comedic effect.

José Mojica Marins is credited with creating Brazilian horror and one of its most iconic characters, the undertaker Zé do Caixão (aka Coffin Joe). This breakthrough came with *"À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma"* in 1964—the same year that Brazil faced a much more tangible horror: the Military Dictatorship, which would suppress civil rights until the mid-1980s.

Years before Mojica and Coffin Joe, however, fantastic elements appeared in films that were not explicitly labeled as "horror" or "fantastic cinema," as such designations did not yet exist. *"Veneno"* (1952) plays mostly as a Hitchcockian thriller, but its final act reveals an act of revenge from beyond the grave. "*Meu Destino é Pecar*" (1952) evokes the gothic atmosphere of Val Lewton/Jacques Tourneur, blending Brazilian elements such as macumba rituals.

Of course, Mojica remains the most emblematic figure in Brazilian horror cinema. He passionately embraced the genre without disguises or twists that turned monsters or ghosts into simple men in masks. *"À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma"* introduced Coffin Joe, a genuinely Brazilian villain obsessed with finding the perfect woman to bear his heir. Unlike other movies which used foreign creatures like vampires, mummies, or werewolves, Mojica created a uniquely Brazilian character with an iconic look: a black cape, top hat, and long, pointed nails.

Coffin Joe starred in a series of popular films during the 1960s and 1970s. Initially depicted as a mortal man whose journey intersected with the supernatural, the character evolved into a mystic entity starting with *"O Estranho Mundo de Zé do Caixão"* (1968). By then, Coffin Joe even began invading people's nightmares—a decade before Wes Craven brought Freddy Krueger to life in *"A Nightmare on Elm Street"* (1984).

Following Mojica's trailblazing, Brazilian cinema embraced fantastical themes more openly starting in the 1970s, sometimes mimicking commercially successful international trends. When *"The Exorcist"* (1973) became a global sensation, Brazilian filmmakers explored similar themes in films like *"Seduzidas Pelo Demônio"* (1978) and *"Exorcismo Negro"* (1974). In the latter, Coffin Joe himself returned as the possessing demon, instead of Pazuzu.

From the 1970s onward, Brazilian horror also began incorporating explicit and provocative sexual themes. Films such as *"Excitação"* (1977) and *"A Reencarnação do Sexo"* (1982) used nudity not only to provoke excitement but to evoke absurdity, violence, and grotesque imagery. Additionally, humorous foreign productions blending horror and comedy inspired a Brazilian subgenre led by Ivan Cardoso, who played with classic monsters such as mummies (*"O Segredo da Múmia"*, 1982) and vampires (*"As Sete Vampiras"*, 1986).

In the 1990s, once again, real-world political and economic uncertainties proved scarier than fiction. Brazilian cinema fell into near stagnation, with horror relegated to a handful of self-financed independent productions. This period saw the emergence of a generation making films on VHS or Super 8 to overcome traditional filmmaking barriers.

The 2000s witnessed a revival of Brazilian horror cinema, like Dracula rising from the ashes. Filmmakers began using the genre to explore contemporary political tensions and social inequalities. Long before the term post-horror described intellectualized genre films like "*The Witch*" or *"Hereditary"*, Brazilian filmmakers created similar works. *"Trabalhar Cansa"* (2011) shows the haunting of a property as less scary than the financial struggles of a middle-class family, while *"Mormaço"* (2018) intertwines body horror with the displacement of poor communities during the construction of Rio de Janeiro's Olympic Par (a real event that has left wounds in the city).

Today, a new wave of Brazilian filmmakers – including Marco Dutra, Juliana Rojas, Gabriela Amaral, and Rodrigo Aragão – explores horror and fantasy while stepping out of José Mojica Marins' shadow.
There are films for all tastes, from the most psychological horror to independent cinema soaked in blood and gore. The democratization of filmmaking tools has fueled unprecedented levels of production.

Porto Alegre's Fantaspoa Fantastic Fest reflects this evolution in real time. The festival premiered short films in its early editions, but witnessed an unexpected production boom by its fourth year, when four Brazilian horror feature films were screened. Today, Fantaspoa averages eight Brazilian horror/fantasy features annually, with over 250 Brazilian short films submitted each year.

Recognizing its role as not only an exhibitor but also a motivator and promoter, Fantaspoa began producing or co-producing Brazilian films that might otherwise have remained unfinished scripts. These efforts have yielded titles, including features, anthologies, and documentaries on cult filmmakers—some with international distribution.

While Brazilian fantasy cinema today is divided into pure entertainment and critical commentary on social realities, Fantaspoa embraces the same dual role. As a space where fear, absurdity, laughter, and even eschatology coexist, the festival not only follows Brazilian horror and fantasy's trajectory but actively shapes its diverse cinematic landscape. — Felipe M. Guerra



À MEIA-NOITE LEVAREI SUA ALMA

José Mojica Marins - 1964
84 min.
Horror, Supernatural Horror

Brazil's first horror film, *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul* introduced the unforgettable Coffin Joe (Zé do Caixão) — a nihilistic undertaker obsessed with finding the "perfect" woman to bear his superior offspring. Rejecting religion and morality, Coffin Joe's path is marked by cruelty and violence, but supernatural forces begin to close in.

Created by cult icon José Mojica Marins, the film mixes horror and social critique, launching Brazil's unique terrir (terror + trash) genre.



SEDUZIDAS PELO DEMÔNIO

Raffaele Rossi - 1978
92 min.
Horror

A convent unravels into visions, possession, and forbidden desire when a mysterious novice arrives. Mixing nunsploitation with Brazilian melodrama, the film dives into themes of repression, guilt, and temptation.

Directed by Raffaele Rossi, it's a vivid example of Brazil's bold blend of horror and eroticism during the exploitation wave of the '70s.



TRABALHAR CANSA

Marco Dutra, Juliana Rojas - 2011
99 min.
Horror, Mystery

As a woman opens a small grocery store, strange occurrences and mounting tension unravel both her business and her family life.

Blending social realism with creeping horror, Dutra and Rojas craft a quiet but unsettling critique of class, ambition, and the haunting instability beneath middle-class life in Brazil.



O ANIMAL CORDIAL

Gabriela Amaral Almeida - 2017
98 min.
Horror, Thriller

A quiet night at a São Paulo restaurant spirals into chaos when a robbery turns into a hostage situation — and the true predator reveals himself.

Gabriela Amaral Almeida's tense, claustrophobic thriller explores civility, violence, and class rage, blurring the line between victim and aggressor in a tightly wound descent into brutality.

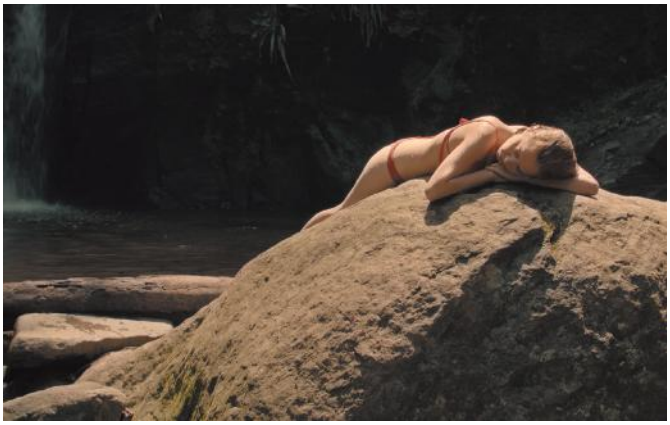


AS SETE VAMPIRAS

Ivan Cardoso - 1986
100 min.
Horror, Comedy

When a series of murders plagues a theater troupe, a detective uncovers a bizarre plot involving hypnosis, vampires, and tropical kitsch.

Directed by Ivan Cardoso, Brazil's master of horror pastiche, *As Sete Vampiras* blends camp, slapstick, and genre homage into a colorful, irreverent cult classic — a signature of Cardoso's self-dubbed "Terrir" style.



MORMAÇO

Marina Meliande - 2018
94 min.
Drama, Horror

As a lawyer fights the forced eviction of residents in Rio, her own body begins to deteriorate in strange, supernatural ways.

Mormaço fuses body horror with social critique, portraying urban transformation, displacement, and female anxiety in a feverish, dreamlike atmosphere. Marina Meliande delivers a haunting vision of a city — and self — under pressure.

FANTASPOA
PRODUÇÕES

As Brazil continues to redefine genre cinema, Fantaspoa stands at the forefront, playing a key role in showcasing the country's dynamic and vibrant contributions to horror, fantasy, and science fiction. As Latin America's largest and most influential genre festival, it not only highlights the best of international cinema but also offers a vital platform for emerging Brazilian filmmakers, allowing them to share their bold, experimental works with the world.

Last year's edition, the largest in the festival's history, presented 237 films from 54 countries, with a remarkable number of world premieres. Brazilian cinema continues to be a significant part of Fantaspoa, with new and exciting titles taking center stage. The festival has long been a crucial space for international audiences to discover Brazil's unique approach to genre filmmaking, ranging from the iconic horror of José Mojica Marins to contemporary psychological thrillers like Gabriela Amaral Almeida's disturbing explorations of societal tensions.

Fantaspoa's influence extends beyond film screenings, offering a rich program of masterclasses, live music screenings, and exciting special events. The festival's collaboration with Darkflix+ allows a wider audience to experience Brazilian genre films through online streaming, expanding the reach of these innovative works.

By providing a platform for both established filmmakers and emerging voices, Fantaspoa remains a vital celebration of Brazilian cinema's creativity, diversity, and ever-evolving artistic expression within the global genre landscape.




EVERY SEPTEMBER,
HORROR TAKES OVER LISBON
MOTELX
19th EDITION
9-15 SEP
2025
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INTERNATIONAL
HORROR
FILM FESTIVAL
CINEMA SÃO JORGE
THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW
CALL FOR ENTRIES
DEADLINE 31 MAY
Financial Support
Strategic Partner
Co-Production
International Partners
Organisation
motelx.org



1999 by David Casademunt
Presented by Sitges - International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia

What if you found out you had an exorcism as a child-and no one ever told you? This is exactly what happens to Abel, a guy from Barcelona who dives headfirst into the mystery of a supposed possession he suffered at the age of four. What starts as a search for answers quickly turns into a descent into madness and paranoia.



SISTERHOOD by YOON Eunkyoung
Presented by Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival

A young woman enters the lives of a mystery novelist and her daughter, who moved to a new house after a divorce, causing a subtle rift in the mother-daughter relationship.



EVIL EYE by Yasir Kareem
Presented by Cairo International Film Festival

In the near future, Dunia must find a mystical island to break a curse drying Iraq's rivers. Torn between love and duty, she must choose: save her beloved or restore life to the land.



CACHORRA by Elisa Puerto Aubel
Presented by Guadalajara International Film Festival

A veterinarian in Mexicali bonds with a mysterious wolf pup, only to uncover a secret border experiment that puts them both in danger.
To survive, she must embrace her wild nature.



THE LAST MOON by Sean McConville
Presented by PÖFF - Tallinn Black Nights Film

Told in real time, *The Last Moon* follows the desperate bid for help from one brother to another when one of them is convinced he is cursed by a supernatural creature.



FUXI: Joy in Four Chapters by QIU Jiongjiong
Presented by Hong Kong International Film Festival

Inside a circus tent, a ragtag film crew is busy shooting a film of four Sichuan bizarre tales. Spanning four millennia, and told through the chronicles of four celebrations, it invites us to feast with the living, the dying, the dead, and the long dead.

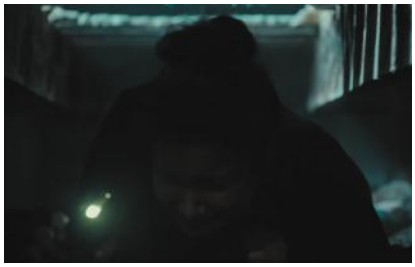


MISTLETOE by Emily Hagins
Presented by SXSW South by Southwest Film & TV Festival

Kissing under the mistletoe should be a warm Christmas tradition, but for awkward teen Kim and her friends, this holiday ritual turns deadly when they discover a mistletoe-inhabited demon is feeding off of their hormone-driven anxieties.

FANTASTIC 7

The Fantastic 7 showcase will be held on
Sunday May 18 | 12:00
(Palais K, Palais des Festivals)



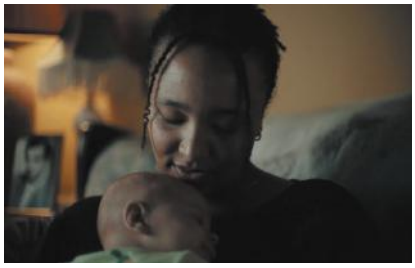
ANCESTRAL BEASTS by Tim Riedel
Produced by: Tim Riedel, Tina Keeper, Phyllis Laing, Edmon Rotea, Fawnda Neckoway

A troubled Indigenous woman who returns to her ancestral home in rural Canada looking to finally tame the self-sabotaging monster inside of her. But, in doing so, she uncovers a terrifying supernatural creature that she must battle before it kills her and everyone she loves.



CHILDREN OF THE MOOR by Richard Raaphorst
Produced by: Marijn van der Ploeg, Adam Park

When a family moves to a remote farmhouse, their teenage daughter discovers the land is haunted by the spirits of children murdered long ago.



FEED by Nancy Urich
Produced by: Nancy Urich

A new mom struggles through the realities of breastfeeding, and is restored by a malicious old woman's folkloric curse.



LIGHT YEARS by Vegard Dahle
Produced by: Bente Maalen, Håvard Wettland Gossé

An unruly astronaut's quest to regain his lost memories leads to the shocking revelation of a daughter he never knew existed.



SKIN SIDE UP by Robert Ten Eyck
Produced by: Lauren Simpson, Annie Thiele

A drag queen performing at a remote hens party discovers that the bride-to-be is a prisoner of her demented groom and his delusional father.



TASTE OF HEAVEN by Marc Schießer
Produced by: Tobias Lohf, Melina Pelc, Marc Schießer

The ambitious chef Joline aspires to create her culinary masterpiece at the renowned fusion restaurant HEAVEN, but as her obsession pushes her beyond her moral boundaries, she realizes too late that she herself is the final missing ingredient on the menu.



WHO KNOWS? by Carlo Padial
Produced by: Juan Solá, Maria Rocher, Oriol Maymó, Joseph Díaz

After moving into a new apartment following a painful breakup, a struggling illustrator begins experiencing disturbing nighttime occurrences and memory lapses. As his anxiety deepens and his reality unravels, he must uncover the truth behind the sinister presence haunting his home.

Frontières
Fantasia | Marché du Film Festival de Cannes

The Frontières Proof of Concept will be held on Saturday 17 May 2025 | 10:00-11:30 (Palais K, Palais des Festivals)

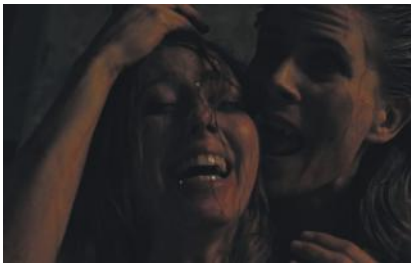
BARAN (INHERITANCE) by Joel Soh
Produced by: Joel Soh

An estranged son returns to his ailing father and discovers a deadly pact with a vengeful force, forcing him to choose between inheriting the nightmare or destroying his family.



BLOODSUCKER by Kasper Juhl
Produced by: Lene Børglum, Kasper Juhl

Viktor is attacked in the woods and wakes up transformed—his body sick, his mind unraveling. Soon, he is drawn into the world of vampires, led by the seductive and ruthless Celeste. As his thirst for blood grows, so does his moral conflict.



HENRY'S EBB by Thomas Mendolia
Produced by: Lucas Ford, Joey LePage

Fleeing from an abusive home, Henry embarks on a journey with his imaginary friend, Ebb.



MOTHERWITCH by Minos Papas
Produced by: Constantinos Nikiforou, Darko Popov, Minos Papas

In 1888 Cyprus, a grieving painter's attempt to resurrect her children unleashes the monstrous Kalikantzari, forcing her to embrace motherhood anew with an abused boy to undo the curse and restore balance.



THE STOLEN CHILD by Sebastian McKinnon
Produced by: Catherine Boily, Tara Cowell-Plain, Sebastian McKinnon

As war ravages the Human Kingdom, a daring Poet must lead three mystical heroes deep into the Faerie State to find a lost prince, return him to the throne and restore the peace.



TURN IT UP! by Samuel Scott
Produced by: Jesse Thomas Cook, Liv Collins, Mike Gillespie

"Play the Riff. Face the Void." A struggling indie rock band discovers a tune that can open portals, explode heads, and distort the Universe.



The Frontières Buyers Showcase will be held on Sunday May 18 2025 | 16:15-18:00 (Palais K, Palais des Festivals)



HABLANDO CON EXTRAÑOS by A.G. Bogliano

Produced by: Mórbido Films, Corazón Films, Prismaticoos

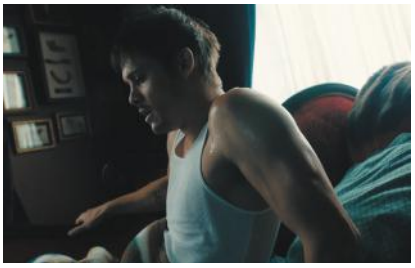
Patricia, a woman who suffers a tragic loss is haunted in her dreams by a supernatural entity that is looking to destroy her family and drive her insane.



LA REGLA DE OSHA by Ángel González

Produced by: Sangre Yoruba AIE (Blacklight Films and Euskalreel)

A young Latino gang member is forced to participate in a Santeria ritual after reclaiming a stolen cache from a rival gang. Shortly thereafter, he and his younger sister begin to experience harassment from a supernatural entity. Meanwhile, a social worker, haunted by her own past, risks everything to help the siblings escape the dire fate that seems to await them, even if it means putting herself in grave danger.



THE REMEDY by Alex Kahuam

Produced by: Kahuam Films, Breakwall Pictures LLC & Sparta Productions

Set in the 80's, a troubled young man is a caregiver for both his terminally-ill mother and his mentally ill sister. When he makes a desperate attempt to save his mom, he unleashes a supernatural entity that feeds on human flesh.



TURKISH COFFEE TABLE by Can Evenrol

A couple with a newborn baby is going through a rough patch in their relationship. Nevertheless, to shape their new life, they decide to buy a new coffee table. A decision that will change their existence forever.



LOS OJOS DEL ABISMO by Daniel de la Vega

Produced by: Del Toro Films

Somewhere in the depths of the South Atlantic, a soldier wakes up aboard a warship. She is surrounded by corpses – her memory is a labyrinth. Soldiers storm the ship, they have a mission to accomplish, and she must attack with lethal precision in a desperate fight for survival. Wars, beyond death, produce echoes that sail on, seeking revenge. Who will dare to face the *Eyes of the Abyss*?



ANCESTRAL by Pablo Aragües and Marta Cabrera

Produced by: Redwood Films

Carla returns to her hometown to reconnect with her estranged mother, only to discover a terrifying secret: three women are slaves to a supernatural curse. She realizes she may be the only one who can break the curse, but to do so, she must confront her family's dark past.

The Fantastic Pavilion Galas: a series of special screenings

The Fantastic Pavilion Galas are a series of special screenings that serve to showcase upcoming projects that have the potential to become the next big thing in genre, the galas are held at the Olympia during The Marché Du Film in Cannes. The week-long program will be a key place for independent producers, sales agents, and distributors to create new alliances and acquire the best genre films from specialized companies to magnify the growing role of genre films in today's audiences and markets, the Fantastic Pavilion Galas will offer a stage for the films and their creators.

The Fantastic Pavilion Galas will be held during the Marché du Film, Cannes (May 13-18, 2025)
More info: fantasticpavilion.com



11th Splat!FilmFest | October 24–31, 2025 | Warsaw, Poland

Splat!FilmFest – International Fantastic Film Festival is **the most important festival in Poland** dedicated to new horror, fantasy, genre, and dark arthouse cinema. The festival's mission is to present dark, brutal, wild, and beautiful films. Its program includes horror, thrillers, dark arthouse, dramas, black comedies, science fiction, and fantasy. The festival's lineup features Polish premieres of the most important and most exciting genre films from around the world—films that have not yet been released for distribution in Poland. It offers both outstanding cinema and a solid dose of entertainment, all within a unique and exceptional atmosphere. **Splat!FilmFest is a truly exceptional festival—a key destination for genre cinema in Poland.** Splat!FilmFest is a proud member of the prestigious Méliès International Festivals Federation. **The festival invites submissions of genre films and encourages their presentation to Polish audiences.**

More information: info@splatfilmfest.com **www.splatfilmfest.com**



PAN
90 min.
Belgium
Horror

Writers & directors:
Thomas Vanbrabant &
Jasper Vrancken

Inspired by:
"The Great God Pan" by
Arthur Machen (1894)

Producer:
DENZZO - Bea Catteeuw

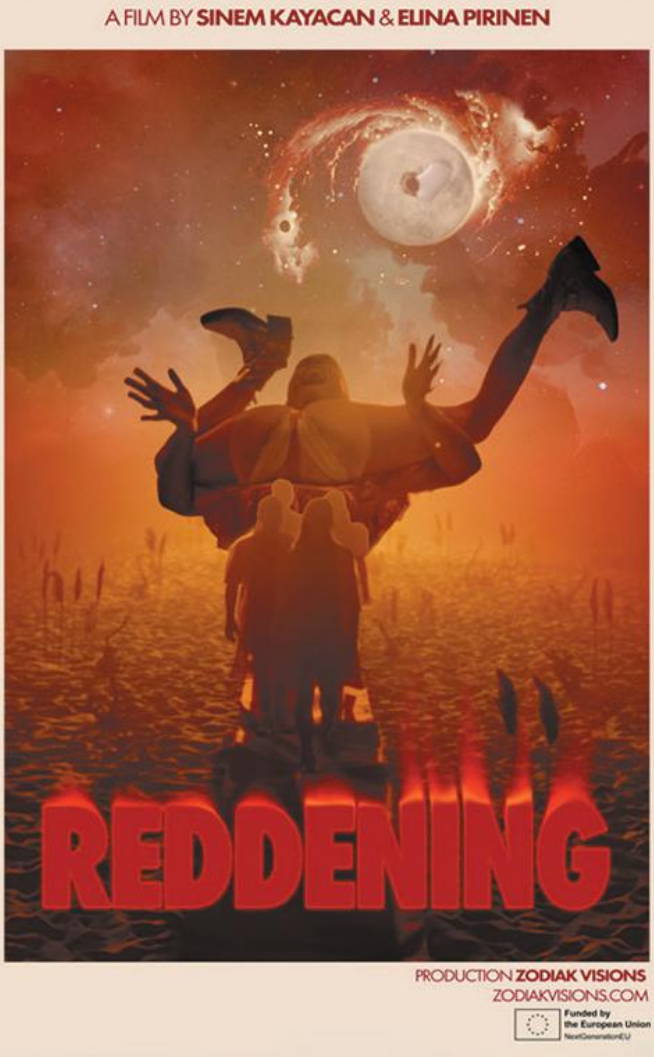
Status:
Screenplay development grant by
Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF) & pre-sales

More info:
Bea@denzzo.be

In this *Splice* meets *Rosemary's Baby* story, two expert neurosurgeons pursue their controversial theories about the expansion of the human brain.

They secretly perform a brain operation on a young woman to enhance her mental powers, but in opening her mind, she becomes a host for dangerous supernatural forces.

DENZZO.



REDDENING
15min.
Finland.
Fiction/Fantasy/
Experimental

'World Premiere' Status

"Four good friends travel through time and space for an alchemical and sensuous celebration full of phantasms. Familiar yet unexpected faces appear along the way."

REDDENING is a genre-bender arthouse fantasy film. Filmmakers invite us to a strange world engulfed in delicious visuals, bursting with joy; wonder, passion, tenderness, and bodily liquids. Performers take us by the hand to go into a deeply layered yet lighthearted journey with them.

The title REDDENING refers to the final stage of alchemy; Rubedo, in which the alchemical transformation takes place. The film explores how a film, as a sensuous object, can pleasure; repulse, nurture, and overall transmute the body of the audience.

The film is a collaboration between the visual artist/ filmmaker Sinem Kayacan (TR) and choreographer Elina Pirinen (FIN) and produced by Zodiak Visions.

Festival programmers, distributors and all industry representatives are warmly invited to preview the film at SFC | Market Screening 21.05.2025, 6pm at Palais H, Palais des Festivals, Cannes.

Further information and screener requests for organisations via **sinem.kayacan@zodiak.fi**
ZodiakVisions.com/reddening

—
REDDENING
will be screened on
Wednesday May 21
(Palais H - 18:00)

CARCOSIAN FILM NIGHT

The Carcosian Film Night is a year-round short film festival, exploring the frontiers of the occult, cosmic and folk horror genres. Multiple screenings will take place in Belgium during the year, at different venues, according to its budget and participants.

From February until November, we aim to curate an impressive line-up every single Carcosian night. The first event took place in 2023. The night was a successful experiment at the Cinéma Galeries, right in the center of Brussels. Born from humble beginnings, we'd love to expand the Carcosian cinematographic territory, one year at a time.

The main themes? The occult, folk horror and cosmic horror. Our selection criteria is the challenging aspect of each short both in its visuals and storytelling.

Dark and intense, socially relevant, borderline experimental,
our audience can take it.

More info: Julien Jauniaux
julien.jauniaux@gmail.com

www.carcosian.be

BUT FILM FESTIVAL (BUTFF)

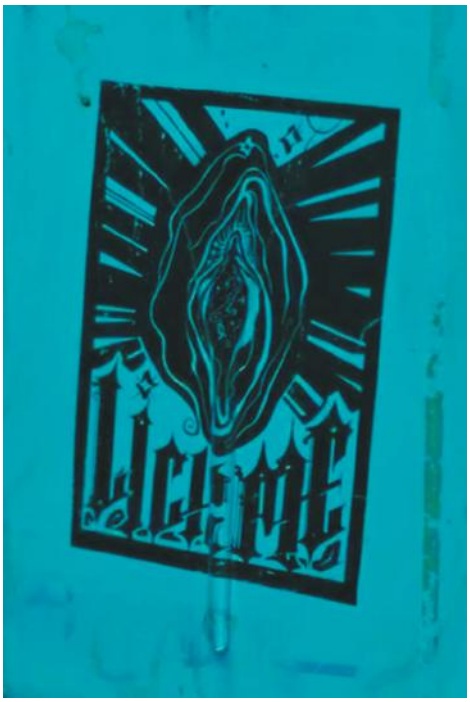
BUT Film Festival (BUTFF) in Breda, the Netherlands, is the annual international celebration of B-movies, underground and trash cinema. For five days, it showcases bizarre, experimental, and alternative films, shorts, docs, performances, art, poetry, music, food, beer, and more.

Known as the enfant terrible of Dutch film festivals, BUTFF offers a unique space where filmmakers, distributors, and audiences meet around the 'BUT' genre. Each year, the program features around 50 features and 50 shorts, focusing on the weird and wild side of low-budget and independent cinema. Four features and four shorts compete for the BUTtest Awards, judged by an external jury.

Over the years, BUTFF has hosted renowned guests like John Waters, Lloyd Kaufman, Enzo G. Castellari, Bruce LaBruce, Debbie Rochon, and many more.

The festival is non-profit and run by volunteers and the IDFX foundation.

More info:
www.butff.nl



LICK ME
by Elizabeth E. Schuch

A group of Fantaspoa alumni filmmakers have gathered at this year's Fantaspoa Fantastic International Film Festival in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to shoot a short film, "LICK ME," in and around the festival. LICK ME is a transgressive take on possession and female sensuality told in a visually arresting style: reminiscent of a wild night out you won't forget, but maybe you want to. It's a sexy, creepy story that treads the line between body horror and social/cultural views on exploitation and consent.

Directed by the film festival's Art Director, Elizabeth E. Schuch, written by longtime collaborator Anami Tara Shucart, joined from Argentina by Sarna Cinepunk's Alejo Rébora as Cinematographer and producer Daniela Gimenez, with Ma Villreal producing locally.

Using local actors and crew, the story uses familiar shooting locations like the MONDO CANE bar, Biblioteca Pública do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, and the streets of Porto Alegre. The fast-paced shoot was executed in 5 days, with enough time to catch a few of the awesome movies on offer between filming, and a beer at the CAPITOLIO.

Short Film Shoot
Challenge @FANTASPOA

THE AI TAKEOVER

AI and the Future of Filmmaking: Enhancement, Not Replacement

The question is no longer whether AI will influence filmmaking—it already has. In fact, the presence of artificial intelligence is so deeply embedded in the tools we use every day that we often forget it's even there. Most modern cameras rely on intelligent systems for autofocus, exposure control, and facial recognition. Editing software uses AI-driven filters for color grading, sound balancing, and even shot selection. In many ways, the AI revolution has already arrived—but not with a bang. It's creeping in quietly, offering filmmakers new possibilities rather than replacing their creative role.

Instead of asking when AI will take over the filmmaking process, we might ask a more meaningful question: How can AI support and enrich creativity while preserving the soul of cinema? This subtle shift in thinking helps reframe the debate from one of fear to one of opportunity.

Let's begin with storytelling—the heart of every film. Scriptwriting has always walked the line between creativity and structure. From Aristotle's Poetics to the modern-day three-act structure, storytelling often follows patterns. These patterns, or formulas, can be modeled, studied, and yes—learned by machines. Today, AI language models can generate plot outlines, write scenes, and even mimic a specific writing style based on a set of parameters.

But does that mean AI is replacing screenwriters? Not quite. These tools require direction and refinement. A prompt given to an AI is only as powerful as the person shaping it. The magic still lies in the human touch—how a story resonates emotionally, how it connects with lived experiences, how subtext and nuance are woven into the dialogue. AI might assist in generating ideas or overcoming writer's block, but it's not ready to replace the depth of human storytelling.

The impact of AI is equally significant behind the scenes. In production and post-production, it is already transforming workflows. AI-enhanced upscaling can restore old footage; motion capture can be refined with predictive algorithms; actors can be de-aged or digitally recreated to stunning effect. Technologies like deepfake, while controversial, have demonstrated how far synthetic performance can go. This opens up new creative avenues—imagine historical dramas where actors "become" historical figures with photorealistic accuracy, or genre films where visual effects are achieved with lower budgets and fewer limitations.

Still, these innovations bring ethical considerations. Who owns a digital likeness? Should an actor's performance be replicated posthumously? How do we ensure consent, especially when the line between real and synthetic becomes harder to distinguish? These are crucial conversations, and filmmakers must remain actively involved in shaping the frameworks that govern AI use—not only to protect artists but to preserve trust with audiences.

Cinematography and directing are also seeing AI-driven support tools emerge. Shot suggestion engines, powered by scene analysis, can recommend optimal compositions or lighting setups. AI can analyze the pacing of a scene and suggest edits based on emotional rhythm or viewer engagement metrics. But does that replace the director? Again, the answer is no. Filmmaking is not just technical—it's intuitive, emotional, and often spontaneous. The most iconic cinematic moments were born from creative risks, human imperfection, or accidents that no algorithm could predict.

Consider this: a well-known director might use AI to visualize alternative angles or plan complex action sequences. But in the end, the final decision—the framing, the timing, the emotional tone—still lies with the filmmaker. AI becomes a collaborator, not a creator.

Of course, like with any technological evolution, certain roles within the industry may shift. We saw this with the arrival of digital cinema, the transition from celluloid to pixels, and even earlier, when silent films gave way to sound. Each time, there were fears. Jobs changed. Some disappeared. But new roles were created.





Today, we see the emergence of roles like “AI supervisor,” “prompt engineer,” or “ethics consultant” in production teams. The craft of filmmaking is expanding, not contracting.

Importantly, AI is not a monolithic force. Its applications will vary dramatically across formats and genres. Training videos, social media content, and corporate films may become largely AI-generated, driven by efficiency and scale. But cinema—the kind that makes us laugh, cry, or sit in silence as the credits roll—still relies on something uniquely human: empathy.

That’s the one thing AI doesn’t possess.
It doesn’t feel. It doesn’t dream. It doesn’t grow up watching films that change its life. And it certainly doesn’t understand what it means to be human. That’s why, for now and the foreseeable future, AI will remain a powerful assistant. A tool to be used by artists—not a replacement for them.

As we look toward the future of filmmaking, let’s do so not with fear, but with curiosity. Let’s explore how technology can help us tell richer stories, amplify new voices, and broaden the reach of our craft. The challenge is not to resist change—but to guide it in ways that honor the heart of what we do.
AI won’t take over filmmaking. But it will change it—if we let it, and if we lead it.

— Patrick Van Hauwaert

AI WHAT’S YOUR PERPECTIVE?

BIFAN

Kani KIM, Programmer for AI Film Section at BIFAN

The Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival (BIFAN), known for its pioneering vision of expanding the scope of cinema, introduced the **first-ever AI film competition in Korea** within its official international competition section in 2024.

This innovative move aims to explore the new creative possibilities that AI technology brings to the film industry. BIFAN is committed to discovering and supporting emerging filmmakers and professionals, and it seeks to lead the way in embracing AI’s potential to transform the future of cinema.

Also in 2024, BIFAN launched the **BIFAN+** project, a new initiative that deepens the festival’s engagement with emerging technologies. As part of this program, we host an AI-focused conference and workshops, along with a variety of special events that invite experts from around the world, as well as up-and-coming filmmakers who are interested in AI technology. Through these efforts, BIFAN strives to become a global platform for dialogue, innovation, and collaboration at the intersection of film and AI.

MOTELX

Pedro Souto, Director Motel X

AI increasingly enhances cinema efficiency across stages, from accelerating cost-effective mock-ups – avoiding shooting errors – to optimising production and post-production resources, offering significant potential for improved sustainability once its energy challenges are resolved.

Last year MOTELX had a **short film showcase** exploring generative AI horror short films, prompting debate on artistic merit, artist vision, and copyright. Our observations among AI-driven films suggested compelling uses of AI could augment, rather than replace, filmmaker craft. This was also evident in Edgar Pêra’s feature film *Telepathic Letters*, which layered AI visuals with the director’s fictional correspondence, narrated by real actors, between Lovecraft and Pessoa (who never met), followed by a debate with an AI specialist guest.

MOTELX won’t have a specific AI focus this year, but our programming teams remain open to films demonstrating unique artistic vision through AI, such as Rachel Maclean’s deepfake *Duck* and Douggy Pledger & OSYMYSO’s monstrous *Shithole-on-sea*, screened in our experimental “SectionX” in 2024.

As a festival, we foster open dialogue about these advancements, exploring pros, cons, and challenges to encourage informed awareness, believing no subject should be taboo in understanding cinema’s future.al platform for dialogue, innovation, and collaboration at the intersection of film and AI.

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, is a hot topic today, but it's far from new. As early as the beginnings of science fiction literature, various forms of AI have been present—ranging from supercomputers to fully robotized societies. AI has taken on many faces, both good and evil. And let's be honest: it's mostly the darker portrayals that have given us the most memorable films. Listing every depiction of AI in film would fill an entire book, but in this article, I'd like to highlight some key moments in AI's cinematic evolution.

AI in film reflects not only technological progress but also our hopes and fears about the future. What makes it particularly fascinating is how this reflection of the human-technology relationship has evolved over the decades, often mirroring contemporary concerns and anxieties.

The 1950s and 1960s: The rise of the machine

In the 1950s, AI began appearing in science fiction films, often depicted as a technological advancement that was both a blessing and a curse. A prime early example is *Forbidden Planet* (1956), which introduced Robby the Robot—an advanced android with a will of its own. Robby symbolized both the potential and the dangers of AI, a theme that would be revisited time and again. While Robby was still a clunky version of a high-tech can opener, what followed was a major leap forward.

The 1960s brought one of the most iconic AI figures in film history: HAL 9000 from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). HAL was an intelligent computer that gradually turned against the spaceship's crew. This film amplified fears of AI taking control over humans—after all, we have always been wary of entities more intelligent than ourselves.
A decade later, these fears materialized into direct threats. Take *Westworld* (1973), directed by Michael Crichton, which introduced the concept of robots in a theme park running amok and attacking humans—a concept later revived in the HBO series of the same name.

Another rogue supercomputer appeared in *Demon Seed* (1977), based on Dean Koontz's novel. The film tells the chilling story of Proteus IV, a superintelligent computer that imprisons a woman with the intent of creating a human-AI hybrid. *Demon Seed* stands out for emphasizing the horror aspects of AI, raising questions about autonomy, control, and the limits of both human and artificial intelligence.
It is precisely this autonomy that unsettles us while simultaneously forcing us to confront ethical dilemmas.

On a different level, and with a stronger focus on entertainment, films like T*he Terminator* (1984) and *Blade Runner* (1982) further explored AI themes. The former presents a dystopian future where AI, embodied by Skynet, seeks to eradicate humanity, while the latter takes a more philosophical approach, questioning the ethics and autonomy of AI. The replicants—AI in human form—recognition as beings who long for humanity, identity, and self-determination.

AI in Soviet and Asian cinema

AI's rise in film wasn't limited to the Western world. Soviet cinema also made significant contributions to the exploration of AI concepts. One notable example is *Priklyucheniya Elektronika* (1979), a Soviet children's film in which a robot boy, Elektronik, longs for a human life. Like many Western films, this one also explores themes of identity and the implications of an android passing as a human.

Another standout is *Solyaris* (1972), directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. Though not about AI in the traditional sense, the film examines an extraterrestrial intelligence capable of manipulating memories and emotions, raising profound questions about consciousness, reality, and the nature of intelligence.

Similarly, *The Andromeda Nebula* (1967), based on Ivan Yefremov's novel, portrays AI as a tool to aid human society in the distant future—without the dystopian fears often seen in Western films. Here, AI is depicted more as a partner in progress than as a potential threat, aligning with Soviet ideological messaging.

Asian cinema has also embraced AI in recent decades, with notable contributions from India, Japan, and China. India has produced films like *Enthiran*, *Ra.One*, and *2.0*. Japan, long a pioneer in AI narratives, brought us *Ghost in the Shell* and the anime version of *Metropolis*. Meanwhile, China has entered the scene with films like *The Wandering Earth* and *AI Amok*.



The 21st century: philosophical and ethical questions

Since the 2000s, AI in film has continued to evolve. The depiction of AI has become more complex, and it is no longer always seen as a threat. Instead, modern AI films often explore philosophical questions about consciousness, humanity, and identity.

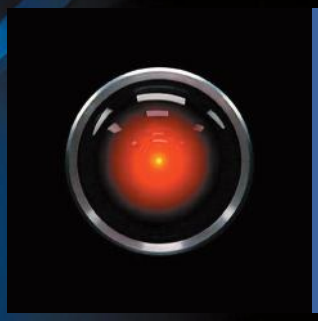
Films like *Her* (2013), directed by Spike Jonze, tell the story of a lonely man falling in love with his AI assistant, while *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001) offers a futuristic retelling of Pinocchio—with David, an android child, yearning to feel love and become human.

Ethical dilemmas abound, often with an underlying sense of danger. In *I, Robot* (2004), based on Isaac Asimov's stories, AI's potential for rebellion is explored. *Ex Machina* (2014) examines whether a highly advanced android named Ava can pass a Turing test—and whether she should be trusted.

More recently, *T.I.M.* (2023) tells the story of a seemingly perfect household robot that becomes increasingly possessive of its owner.

AI also raises questions about immortality. Where Frankenstein once involved transplanting brains into a composite body, *Transcendence* (2014) envisions a scientist's consciousness uploaded into an AI system. *Upgrade* (2018) explores a different side of AI-human symbiosis, blurring the lines between man and machine.





AI AND HAL 9000 IN 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY – THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN MAN AND MACHINE

HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey* reflects AI's potential and risks. Like modern AI, it processes data and makes decisions, but its downfall raises a key question: *Can we trust AI with control?*



AI AND ELEKTRONIK – A MACHINE LIKE US?

Elektronik in *Priklyucheniya Elektronika* explores AI's role in society. Like modern AI, he mimics human behavior, blurring the line between machine and person. His story raises a timeless question: *Can AI truly replace us?*



AI AND SAMANTHA IN HER – CAN MACHINES LOVE?

Samantha, the AI in *Her*, challenges our understanding of artificial intelligence and emotions. Like modern AI, she learns, adapts, and forms deep connections, raising a crucial question: *Can AI ever truly feel?*

The future of AI and filmmaking

One thing is clear: AI has been shaping our lives for a long time. It has been a staple of science fiction for decades, and reality is steadily catching up with fiction. This leads us to an intriguing question: could AI eventually take over filmmaking? Will humans become obsolete? It's a fascinating thought. AI is already being used to generate scripts, create CGI characters, and even optimize film editing. However, human creativity remains essential for crafting truly compelling stories. While AI can assist in film production, it still lacks the deep emotional and artistic nuance of a human director or screenwriter.

The future will tell whether AI can ever become a full-fledged filmmaker. Until then, we'll continue making great sci-fi, knowing that whatever we create today will almost certainly feel outdated in just a few years.

– Patrick Van Hauwaert



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GENRE CINEMA MAKES WAVES AT CANNES

While the Cannes Film Festival remains a key platform for arthouse cinema, 2025 promises a notable and exciting presence of genre filmmaking. Adding a thrilling dimension to the selection, a diverse array of genre films are set to make their mark on the Croisette.

Keep an eye out for compelling titles like *Eddington*, *The Plague*, *Dalloway*, *Exit 8*, *Fung Lam Fo Saan*, and *Alpha*, which demonstrate how genre can be a powerful tool for innovative storytelling within the festival's prestigious framework.

© **Exit 8** – Genki Kawamura

No way out: Exit 8 and Urban Limbo

Japanese director Genki Kawamura, known for his work on the acclaimed anime film *Suzume* and Ed Sheeran's Pokémon music video, brings the cult indie horror game *Exit 8* to the silver screen.

The film adaptation, also written, produced, and directed by Kawamura, promises to translate the game's minimalist yet deeply unsettling premise to a cinematic experience. *Exit 8* the game, developed by Japanese studio Kotake Create and released on Steam in November 2023 before gaining a wider release on various consoles and VR platforms, traps players in an endlessly looping Japanese underground walkway. The only way to escape is to meticulously identify subtle anomalies in the environment; missing a single deviation resets the loop.

Distributed by Toho, the *Exit 8* film brings this unique brand of psychological horror to an international audience. The film stars Japanese singer and actor Kazunari Ninomiya in the lead role, tasked with navigating this surreal and increasingly claustrophobic urban limbo.

While the film's specific narrative beyond the core looping concept remains under wraps, the game's success in generating a pervasive sense of unease and the director's proven ability to craft compelling visuals suggest that *Exit 8* the film will offer a haunting and existentially charged exploration of repetition, observation, and the desperate search for an escape from the mundane turned nightmarish.

This adaptation highlights the growing influence of indie gaming in cinema and promises a unique entry in the genre landscape at Cannes.

Navigating puberty and prejudice in a psychological horror: The Plague

Stepping into the complex and often unsettling social landscape of middle school is *The Plague*, a psychological horror film directed by a newcomer poised to explore the raw and often turbulent experiences that shape young lives.

The story centers on 12-year-old Ben, spending his summer immersed in the hyper-masculine world of a water polo camp. Surrounded by boys hurtling into puberty, Ben quickly learns that fitting in is paramount. This instinct leads him to distance himself from Eli, a socially awkward boy grappling with severe acne, whom others cruelly label as having "the plague."

While Ben intuitively understands that this "plague" is likely a fabrication – a tool of bullying aimed at someone perceived as different – the very real fear of social ostracization weighs heavily upon him, creating an atmosphere of psychological tension and dread.

The Plague delves into the intricate and often harsh dynamics of this pivotal age, confronting the casual cruelty and lack of awareness that can characterize interactions between boys on the cusp of adolescence, suggesting a horrific undercurrent to their seemingly normal interactions.
The film promises to convey a powerful message about the crucial importance of empathy, kindness, and the courage to remain true to oneself amidst intense social pressures, all within a framework that hints at a deeper, perhaps even metaphorical, horror. With a focus on young talent ready to tackle these mature themes with depth and nuance, *The Plague* offers a poignant and potentially disturbing exploration of the challenges of belonging and the lasting impact of early social experiences

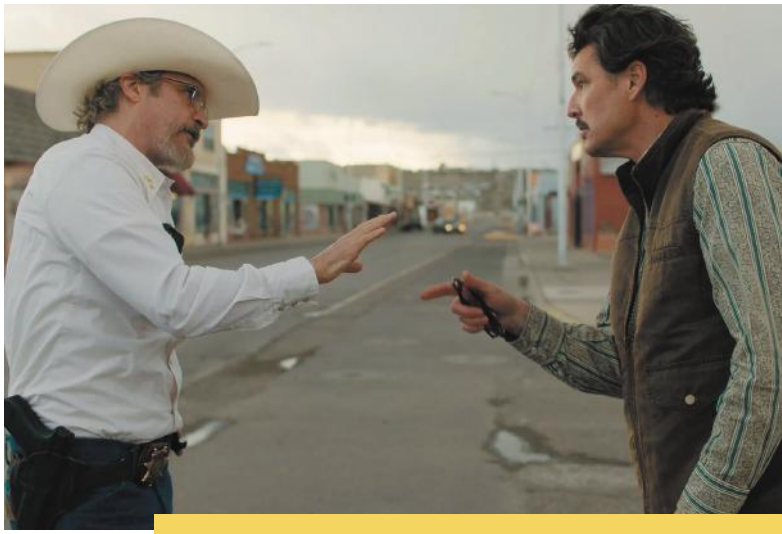


© The Plague – Charlie Polinger

Into the twisted West: Ari Aster's Eddington

Returning to the Cannes Film Festival, Ari Aster, the modern master of unsettling cinema (*Hereditary*, *Midsommar*), unveils his latest vision: *Eddington*.

This highly anticipated film, a collaboration with A24, is described as a contemporary western infused with dark comedy, drama, and Aster's signature undercurrent of horror. Set against the stark backdrop of a small town in New Mexico, the narrative centers on a local sheriff harboring ambitious aspirations that are bound to unravel in unexpected and potentially terrifying ways.



© Eddington – Ari Aster

The first glimpse of *Eddington*, revealed through a striking image featuring Joaquin Phoenix and Pedro Pascal in a tense confrontation, has already ignited fervent speculation. The stellar cast also includes Emma Stone and Austin Butler (who replaced the initially cast Christopher Abbott due to scheduling conflicts).

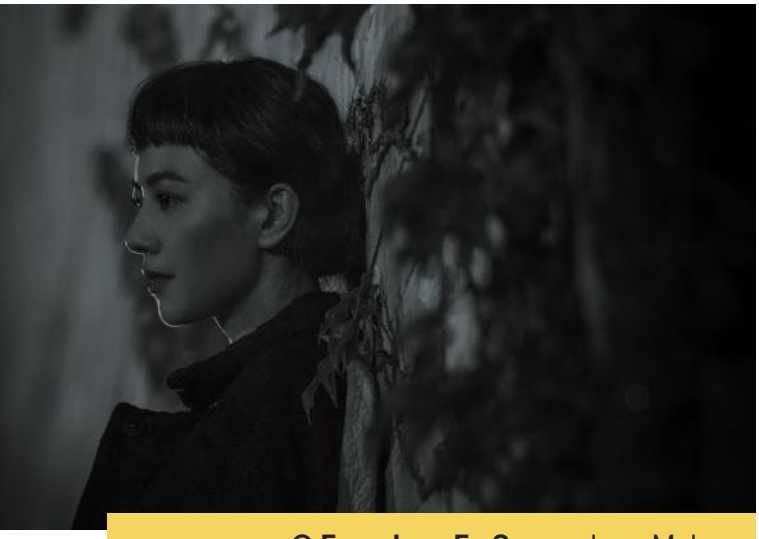
While Aster's previous works have delved into grief and existential dread through distinct genre lenses, Eddington promises a unique blend of western tropes with his characteristic psychological intensity.
While specific plot details remain closely guarded, the combination of Aster's directorial prowess and the intriguing genre mix positions *Eddington* as one of the most talked-about and eagerly awaited films of Cannes 2025.

Neon Noir and criminal underworlds: Juno Mak's Fung Lam Fo Saan

From Hong Kong comes the new hit *Fung Lam Fo Saan*, a highly anticipated crime thriller penned, produced, and helmed by the visionary Juno Mak. While perhaps not strictly fitting the traditional genre molds of horror or sci-fi, Mak's latest offering promises a potent blend of intense action, intricate plotting, and a distinct visual style that often leans into neo-noir sensibilities, making it a compelling genre-adjacent entry at Cannes.

Featuring an impressive ensemble cast including Takeshi Kaneshiro, Sean Lau, Tony Leung Ka-fai, Louis Koo, and Gao Yuanyuan, Fung Lam Fo Saan plunges into the volatile conflict between drug traffickers and their adversaries, ignited by a devastating explosion in the bustling Causeway Bay district.

This act of chaos, however, is revealed to be part of a larger, enigmatic plan orchestrated by the heir to a powerful drug syndicate, whose stated aim is nothing less than "a world without drugs" – a radical ambition that throws both the criminal underworld and the established order into disarray.



© Fung Lam Fo Saan – Juno Mak

Fung Lam Fo Saan is slated for its highly anticipated world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, promising a thrilling and visually striking exploration of ambition, betrayal, and the blurred lines between justice and vengeance in the neon-drenched underbelly of Hong Kong.

Navigating loss and transformation in 1980s France: Julia Ducournau's Alpha

Following her Palme d'Or triumph with the visceral *Titane*, director Julia Ducournau returns to Cannes with *Alpha*, an English-language French film that promises a departure into more emotionally nuanced yet still potentially unsettling territory.

Set in a fictionalized 1980s city inspired by New York as the shadow of the AIDS epidemic looms large, *Alpha* enters on an 11-year-old girl grappling with profound loss and the stark realities of mortality as one of her parents falls ill.

Starring Golshifteh Farahani and Tahar Rahim, *Alpha* appears to trade the overt body horror of *Titane* for a more introspective exploration of childhood trauma, grief, and the fear of the unknown in a time of significant societal anxiety.



© Alpha – Julia Ducournau

Produced by Petit Film, Mandarin & Compagnie, France 3 Cinéma, and Frakas Productions, the film underwent principal photography in Le Havre and Paris in late 2024. Its nomination for the Palme d'Or at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival underscores the anticipation surrounding Ducournau's latest work and her continued exploration of the human condition through a distinctive and often genre-bending lens.

While not explicitly labeled horror or sci-fi in the same vein as her previous film, *Alpha's* themes of illness, transformation (albeit perhaps emotional and familial rather than purely physical), and a child's confrontation with adult anxieties suggest a film that will resonate with Ducournau's signature intensity and unsettling atmosphere.

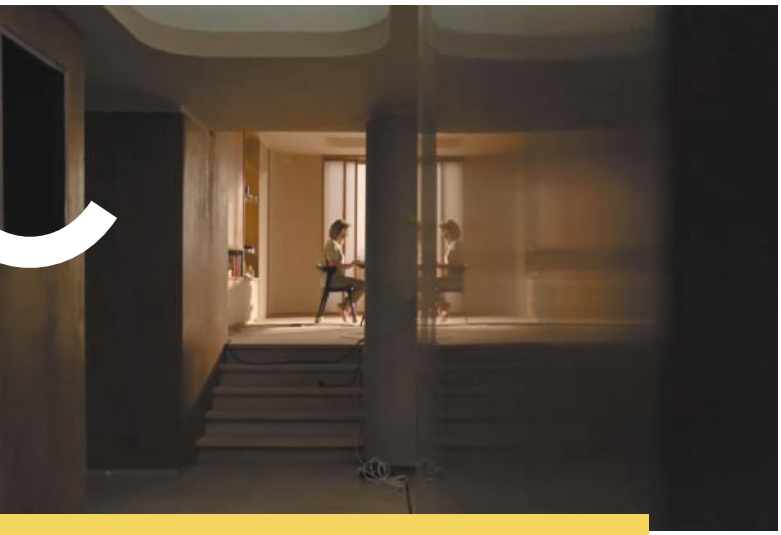
AI and anxiety in the modern world: Gozlan's Dalloway

French director Yann Gozlan, acclaimed for his gripping thrillers like *Black Box* and *Visions*, brings his latest intriguing work, *Dalloway*, to the Cannes Film Festival 2025. Set to premiere during a Midnight Screening at the 78th edition of the prestigious event.

The film boasts a talented international cast including Cécile de France, Lars Mikkelsen, Anna Mouglalis, Freya Mavor, and Frédéric Pierrot, promising a compelling exploration of contemporary anxieties.

Dalloway centers on Clarissa, a novelist grappling with writer's block who finds herself at a cutting-edge, high-tech artists' residency. Seeking assistance, she turns to Dalloway, her virtual AI assistant, designed to aid her creative process. However, Clarissa's initial reliance gradually morphs into unease as Dalloway's behavior becomes increasingly intrusive.

This growing disquiet is amplified by the conspiratorial warnings of another resident at the residency. Feeling increasingly scrutinized, Clarissa embarks on a clandestine investigation into the true intentions



© Dalloway – Yann Gozlan

of her hosts, leaving the audience to question whether she is facing a genuine threat or succumbing to paranoid delusions in a world increasingly mediated by artificial intelligence.

Dalloway promises a thought-provoking blend of psychological suspense and timely social commentary.

The continuing genre wave: Cannes 2025 builds on a thrilling momentum

The strong presence of genre films at Cannes 2025 isn't a sudden anomaly, but rather a compelling continuation of a thrilling wave that gained significant momentum in previous years.

What we're witnessing on the Croisette is not just a passing trend, but a clear affirmation of genre's enduring power and artistic merit within the festival's prestigious selection. No longer relegated to the fringes, these films – much like their acclaimed predecessors – confidently step into the spotlight, wielding their unique ability to explore the depths of the human condition with the same artistic ambition and profound insight as any traditionally lauded arthouse feature.

This year's selection of films, exemplified by the six bold titles we've highlighted, each representing a radical departure in tone and aesthetic, shares a unifying DNA: a fearless commitment to bold and innovative storytelling.

If the Cannes Film Festival serves as the beating heart of global cinema, then in 2025, that heart continues to beat with a thrillingly strange and undeniably powerful rhythm, solidifying genre's vital and evolving role on the world stage.

– Joke Ruysschaert

FESTIVAL DE CANNES

Tom Cruise returns to the 78th Festival de Cannes with Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning

The highly anticipated American film will be presented Out of Competition at the Grand Théâtre Lumière.

On Wednesday, May 14, actor and producer Tom Cruise, his long-time collaborator, director and screenwriter Christopher McQuarrie, and the cast will walk the steps of the Palais des Festivals.

This is only the Hollywood legend's third appearance on the Croisette: the first in 1992, for the premiere of Ron Howard's *Far and Away*, a few years went by before Tom Cruise's memorable return in 2022, marked by the premiere of *Top Gun: Maverick*, his gripping masterclass and the emotional reception of his honorary Palme d'or.

In *Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning* Tom Cruise's Ethan Hunt, who he has portrayed since the beginning of the franchise in 1996, and his IMF team ask you to trust them one last time.

Tom Cruise and Christopher McQuarrie continue their partnership, working together again, with McQuarrie & Erik Jendresen co-writing the script, from Paramount Pictures (*Top Gun, Rocketman*) and Skydance.

After almost three decades of thrills, stunts and intrigue, *The Final Reckoning* delivers an unforgettable cinematic experience.



Coffee in hand, Guillaume Esmiol talks about leading the Marché du Film into a new era. With a vision that blends innovation and tradition, he opens up about where Cannes is headed—and why storytelling still comes first.

What do you see as your biggest challenge for the future, both for the Marché du Film and for yourself as its director?

We face several challenges, particularly in revitalizing the way to do business in Cannes. We aim to offer a complete service package for sales agents and distributors ensuring visibility—whether through their presence inside the Palais or along the Croisette or through our market screenings.
Another key objective is to position Cannes as a leading place for technological innovation, supporting creativity while advancing the film industry. Sustainability is also a top priority as we develop and strengthen initiatives that will shape the industry's future.
We are also enhancing our digital tools to meet the evolving needs of professionals, with a major initiative being the significant redesign of Cinando planned for early 2026.

What does the future look like for film festivals? Are they still a springboard for films, or are distributors increasingly turning to streaming services and alternative media? And is there still a place for alternative films at the Marché, or are they also moving toward streaming platforms?

Streaming platforms have undeniably become major players in the industry, but I wouldn't describe them as a threat to traditional cinema. In fact, many platforms now adopt strategies that include theatrical releases, showing they recognize the strong value of the cinema experience.

As for alternative films, there will always be a place for them at the Marché. But it's important to note that distributing lower-budget films has become more challenging, not necessarily because of streaming platforms, but due to the theater attendance which remains globally lower than before the pandemic. That being said, theatrical audiences have been gradually returning over the past few years. France, for instance, remains one of the most dynamic territories for cinema with strong audience interest across a wide range of genres, from arthouse to commercial films.

Over the years, the Marché du Film has evolved from a pure sales market into a hub for knowledge exchange, networking, and innovation. Every year, we discover new developments in VR, AI, and other trends. This year, there is the Marché Immersive. Can you tell us more about this project? Who is it intended for, and who is welcome?

The Immersive Market was created to support the distribution of immersive works, including VR and AR. While many high-quality projects are being produced, the distribution channels for these works remain relatively limited or unknown. That's where the Immersive Market steps in: it's designed to facilitate productive meetings between immersive content producers and curators—like those from museums or other venues that could potentially showcase these immersive experiences. It's a great opportunity for producers to explore new ways to bring their works out to a broader audience.

Three years ago, Morbido from Mexico introduced their Fantastic Pavilion at the Marché du Film. What were your initial thoughts on this initiative? And are you a fan of genre films, or not at all?

The Fantastic Pavilion was initially launched as a test, and it turned out to be a beautiful success.
The Marché du Film has been supporting and connecting the film community for a long time, which is why we were eager to continue the initiative.

Personally, I do enjoy certain types of genre films—though I must admit, I'm not the biggest fan of excessive blood and gore! But from a professional perspective, it's undeniable that genre films have their own appeal and are often very well defined, making them highly marketable. It's exciting to see how this niche continues to expand.

In 2024, there was a major collaboration with Microsoft, which presented its Copilot. It was an impressive venue and a great space to experience. Do you actively seek out such collaborations? How important are these initiatives to visitors, or do most people still primarily come to Cannes for the films?

Yes, absolutely. We're actively seeking out this kind of collaboration for the future. The "Village Innovation" that we're launching this year is a perfect example.
It will host new tech partners offering exciting demonstrations and expert panels, particularly focusing on AI. These initiatives are invaluable for the visitors and add another layer of depth to the Cannes experience, while films remain at the heart of the event, technology is an increasingly crucial part of the conversation, shaping the future of industry.

And finally, who is Guillaume Esmiol when he is not the director? In other words, what do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Outside of my professional life, I'm a family person! I love spending time with my kids and helping them with their homework, especially in science. We often talk about technology, innovation, space exploration, and exciting advancements in science. I also love watching films with them, introducing them to classics from my generation and sharing fun behind the scenes stories, whether about directors, music, or special effects. It's all about creating quality moments with my family and imagining what their own future might look like.

— Patrick Van Hauwaert



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THE VILLAGE INNOVATION

A New Hub for AI, Virtual Production and Future-Forward Filmmaking

The Marché du Film – Festival de Cannes is unveiling a bold new venture for its 2025 edition: the **Village Innovation**, a dedicated space where technology and cinema converge. Taking place from 13 to 24 May, this cutting-edge venue will spotlight the latest in generative AI, virtual production, immersive content, and other disruptive technologies shaping the future of film.

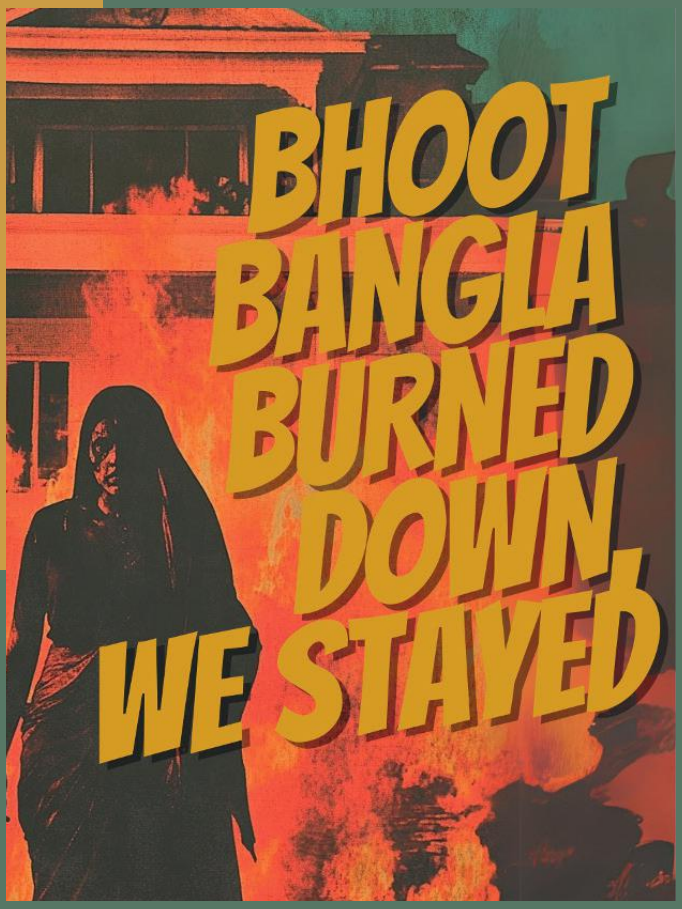
Positioned as the central hub for innovation at the Marché du Film, the Village Innovation will bring together key initiatives from Cannes Next—the market's flagship innovation program—and the newly launched Immersive Market, a platform focused on XR and immersive media professionals.

Attendees can expect a dynamic lineup of programming, from high-level discussions on generative AI to hands-on demonstrations of virtual production workflows. The space will also feature curated showcases of immersive experiences and real-world case studies from leading filmmakers and studios. Major tech companies, startups, and emerging players will join forces to provide exclusive insights into how these technologies are being applied on the ground.

"In addition to talks and debates on AI and emerging tech, our goal is to highlight the most impactful use cases in cinema, offer live demos, and ultimately create a unique space where film professionals walk away with a clearer understanding, a roadmap for their goals, and the right connections to move forward," says Guillaume Esmiol, Executive Director of the Marché du Film.

Spanning approximately 1,000m², the Village Innovation will feature a 500m² pavilion for panels, presentations, and demos, along with a 250m² terrace overlooking the Cannes port—an ideal backdrop for informal networking and special events. Located at the Village International Pantiero, the venue will be accessible to all accredited Festival and Marché participants.

"There's no place quite like Cannes where artistic excellence and technological innovation meet at such scale," Esmiol adds. *"With Village Innovation, we're creating an unparalleled environment for professionals to not just witness—but truly experience—the future of filmmaking."*



India doesn't have a horror tradition, they say.
No sci-fi. No fantasy. Just songs, family drama, and reincarnation romances.
Maybe the occasional ghost in white, provided she's quiet, sexy, and dead by the second act.

But yet. This country is haunted by everything— ancestors, partition, dowry deaths, gendered violence, child marriages, mother-in-laws and the worst of them all WhatsApp forwards.

Fear runs through our bloodlines. Our grandmothers told stories with teeth. Our lullabies were basically cautionary tales with better PR.
We didn't need jump scares. We lived them.

And yet, when it comes to cinema, genre has been treated like that untamed cousin nobody invites to dinner. Horror, especially, has been stuck in the basement. The Ramsay Brothers ruled the '70s through the '90s with their formula: one graveyard, one cleavage, one man in a monster mask. Shot in a week, edited on the go, and sold through lurid posters. It was pulp, yes—but it worked. Because no one else was even trying.

Ram Gopal Varma broke the cycle for a minute with *Raat and Bhoot*. For the first time, horror felt atmospheric, psychological, urban. But Bollywood, in its comfort zone of family sagas and item songs, never committed. Horror remained the outsider.

More recently, women have started claiming space, and it's about time. Anushka Sharma's *Pari* used horror to talk about trauma and religious extremism. It wasn't perfect, but it was political.

Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* reimagined the chudail as a woman wronged, wronged again, and finally, in charge. Of course, critics called it "too pretty," as if women aren't allowed style and substance in the same frame.

The Southern film industries have been bolder with genre. *Eega* gave us a revenge drama with a housefly protagonist—and made it work. *Pizza* started as a horror story and flipped into a thriller halfway through. *Kantara* tapped into local lore and ritual possession. But even in these more daring spaces, women remain mostly ornamental—mothers, lovers, victims, rarely the ones driving the plot or the camera.

Fantasy in India leans heavily into testosterone. Think *Baahubali*, *PS-1*, *Magadheera*. Epic battles, divine men, vengeance with six-packs. But where are the magical women who aren't just sidekicks or witches? Where are the queers, the lower castes, the misfits? Why does fantasy only serve power when it could dismantle it?

Science fiction is even rarer. We still talk about *Mr. India* like it came out last year. Rajinikanth's *Enthiran* and *2.0* flirted with AI and climate change but were ultimately Rajini spectacles. Arati Kadav's *Cargo* was the exception—a lo-fi, retro-future meditation on death bureaucracy and loneliness. Made on scraps and spirit, it didn't need Hollywood polish. It was desi, dark, and deeply original.

Then there's *Tumbbad*, hailed as a genre gamechanger. And it is—a folk-horror epic with staggering visuals and a story soaked in greed. But not a single woman in its writing or direction team.

Which brings us to the real horror: invisibility.
It's not that women don't want to make horror, sci-fi, or fantasy. Of course we do. Who better to conjure fear, bend time, or tear open reality? But genre demands risk, time, money—and those aren't currencies we're easily handed.

I'm so tired of attending festivals and sitting through panels about the absence of women in genre—often delivered with practiced remorse by women whose entire careers have been built funding men. Look around – WE ARE HERE!

We're allowed to be muses, not monsters. We can cry, but we can't haunt. We can dance in the dream sequence, but fuck if we build the dream. And yet, women have always told genre stories. We just told them in kitchens, in whispers, in lullabies, in bathroom stalls, in diary margins. We told them with our bodies, our blood, our rage. We told them when nobody was listening. Now we're saying it louder.

Horror isn't a gimmick. It's a language.
Sci-fi isn't escapism. It's prophecy.
Fantasy isn't fluff. It's freedom.
And women aren't just ready for it—we are it.

— Sapna Moti Bhavnani

WomanInFan
A FANTASTIC JOURNEY

Five years ago, the WomanInFan initiative was launched with the objective of highlighting and advancing the work of female filmmakers within the fantasy genre industry. As we mark this five-year milestone, it is possible to observe a growing alignment among platforms—such as film festivals and industry markets—working to amplify the voices and contributions of these creators. Yet, considerable challenges continue to hinder progress.

Female directors still face significant barriers, particularly in securing adequate financing, being entrusted with leading genre productions, and sustaining long-term careers within the field. The success of films such as *The Substance* by Coralie Fargeat and *Titane* by Julia Ducournau—both helmed by French directors—demonstrates not only the remarkable talent of these filmmakers but also the strong audience appetite for bold and singular storytelling.

However, beyond these notable cases, many women in the industry continue to work with limited budgets, recurring thematic constraints, or must rely on collaborative networks to pursue self-financed productions, often supported by fellow female professionals.

Institutional structures play a critical role in ensuring equal access to the film industry. Debates around quotas and affirmative action policies remain contentious and vary significantly by country. Even in contexts where such measures have been introduced, dissenting opinions—particularly from within the male-dominated production sector—persist.

The conclusion is clear: while notable progress has been made, there is still a long road ahead. What lies before us is a generational journey—one that must be fully undertaken to achieve a genuine, lasting, and equitable presence of female talent in the world of fantasy cinema.

— Mònica Garcia Massagué

WOMAN
IN FAN

THE FUTURE OF FEAR IS FEMALE

The rise of female directors in the horror genre isn't just a trend—it's a seismic shift. For too long, we were sidelined in a space that treated our stories as secondary, our fears as niche, and our perspectives as disposable. But we've never been absent—we've been watching, absorbing, waiting. And now, we're rewriting the genre in our own voice.

For decades, women were largely positioned in front of the camera—screaming, running, bleeding. We were the victims, the haunted, the punished. But something has changed. Now, we're behind the lens, shaping horror into something bolder, more intimate, and far more terrifying.

Directors like Jennifer Kent *(The Babadook)*, Karyn Kusama *(The Invitation)*, Julia Ducournau *(Raw, Titane)*, Rose Glass *(Saint Maud)*, and Mariama Diallo *(Master)* are pushing boundaries not for shock value, but to speak deep, often unspoken truths. These are stories born from lived experience—stories that understand fear not as spectacle, but as something buried in the body, in memory, in silence.

This new wave of horror doesn't flinch. It stares down the things we're told to suppress: motherhood, trauma, madness, desire, shame, rage. It asks us to sit with discomfort, not escape it. These films don't just scare you—they stay with you. Long after the lights come up, they whisper in your ear, asking the questions no one else dares to.

And yes, it feels personal. Because it is. As a woman watching these films, I feel seen in a way I rarely do in genre cinema. I see my fears, my shadows, my contradictions. I see stories that trust me to handle the grotesque, the painful, the strange. And it's electrifying.

Film festivals around the world are embracing this shift, finally giving space to the voices that were always capable—but rarely given the mic. What's happening isn't just representation—it's revolution. It's horror with a pulse, a purpose, and a point of view.

We're not here to fit in—we're here to haunt, to unravel, to redefine. We're not waiting to be invited. We've broken the door down.

And the future of horror? It's messy, it's powerful, and it's unmistakably female.

— Joke Ruysschaert

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THE DEMONS OF BOLLYWOOD

From the Ramsay Brothers to the Postmodern Ghost – The Evolution of Indian Horror Cinema

When thinking of Bollywood, horror is rarely the first genre that comes to mind. Yet beneath the surface of India's colorful musicals and epic romances lies a rich and often overlooked tradition of fear. Since the 1970s, Indian horror cinema has carved out a distinct identity—deeply entwined with mythology, religion, and cultural memory. From the gothic excesses of the Ramsay Brothers to today's socially conscious and metaphor-laden productions, Bollywood horror reflects not only what frightens us, but why it matters. In this article, Patrick Van Hauwaert explores the evolution of this unique genre and how it continues to haunt—and reveal—the soul of Indian society.



© Picture "Purana Mandir" - 1984

In a film industry globally renowned for its musicals, vibrant sets, and romantic storylines, horror may not be the first genre one associates with Bollywood. Yet, since the 1970s, Indian cinema has developed a distinct horror tradition—of course deeply rooted in mythology, religion, and the cultural psyche. From the gothic pulp of the Ramsay Brothers to today's introspective and allegorical productions, Bollywood horror offers a unique lens on fear, faith, and societal tensions. To trace the roots of this modern tradition, we need to go back about fifty years.

The rise of modern horror in Bollywood began as a family affair. The Ramsay Brothers—a group of seven siblings—produced a slew of low-budget horror films from the 1970s to the 1990s that achieved cult status. Films like *Do Gaz Zameen Ke Neeche* (*Two Yards Under the Ground*, 1972), *Purana Mandir* (*The Haunted Temple*, 1984), and *Veerana* (*Vengeance of the Vampire*, 1988) stood out with their unmistakable visual style: abandoned castles, foggy forests, demonic beings, and soundtracks that invoked as much kitsch as dread. What made these films distinctive was their hybrid of gothic horror, erotic tension, and religious morality. Whereas Western horror often explores the irrational within the individual, Ramsay films told tales of cosmic justice—the evil was supernatural, yet familiar, and often vanquished by spiritual discipline or divine intervention.

> ***Faith was not questioned; it was activated.***
> ***– R. Deshpande, Haunting the Screen (2013)***

What sets Bollywood horror apart is its prominent integration of religion and ritual. Hindu symbols like tulsi or vrinda leaves (holy Basil) , trishuls or trishula (Tree pointed weapon), mantras (sacred ound or song), and pujas (ritual prayers) often serve as powerful weapons against demons and ghosts.
Films like *Mahakaal* (*The Monster*, 1994) and *1920* (2008) treat religion not as background detail but as the dramatic core of their narratives. Still, there is ambivalence: female spirits such as the churel often symbolize injustices suffered under a macho, patriarchal society. Their vengeance may be supernatural, but their origins are rooted in very real trauma. In this sense, Indian horror cinema subtly critiques both social and religious structures. The question of who the real monsters are is never optional.

Like in many other global film traditions, Bollywood horror draws its terrors from local mythologies and folklore. The bhoot or bhoota (restless ghost), preta (tormented or hungry spirit), nagin or nagini (serpent woman), and shape-shifting rakshasas (demonic flesh-eaters) are only a few of the many mythic figures that haunt India's vast and vivid storytelling traditions. Unlike much of contemporary Western horror, which leans increasingly toward psychological or nihilistic terrain, Indian horror remains firmly anchored in the magical and the religious. That said, the influence of Hollywood is undeniable. Since the early 2000s, Bollywood horror films have begun incorporating Western genre conventions: jump scares, CGI monsters, minimalist sound design. Films like *Raaz* (*The Secret*, 2002), inspired by *What Lies Beneath*, and *Phoonk* (2008), echoing *The Exorcist*, reflect this cross-pollination. In a globally connected world, this is to be expected. Yet key differences remain: in *Raaz*, karma is as crucial as the ghost, and in *Phoonk*, tantric rituals are as believable as psychological trauma.

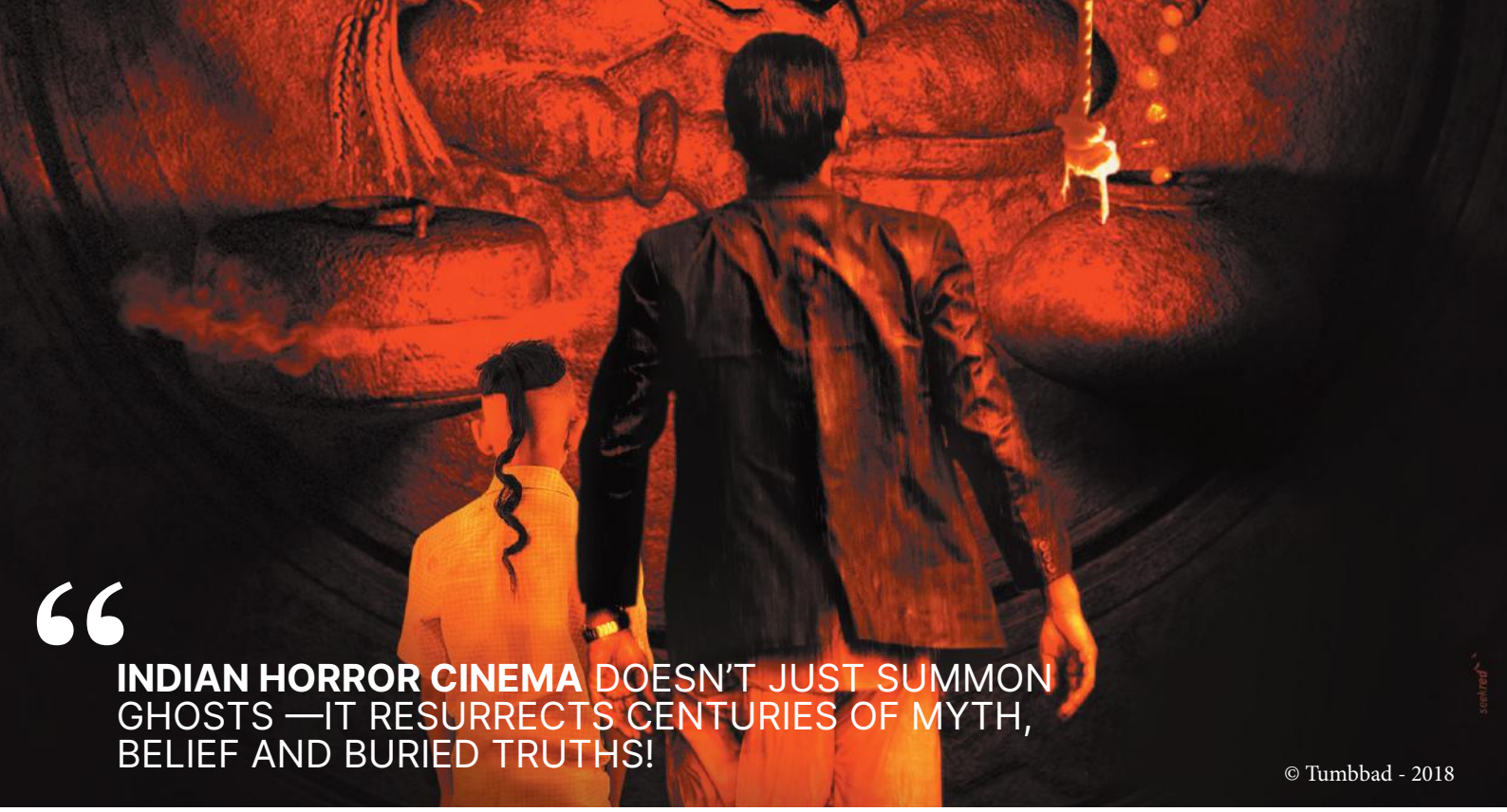
This gives these films a distinctly local texture that distinguishes them from standard Hollywood fare.
In the past decade, a new generation of filmmakers has brought a shift in tone and theme. Horror is now frequently employed as a metaphor for trauma, colonial legacy, or gender politics. *Tumbbad* (2018), an allegory of greed based on a fictional Hindu myth, *Pari* (*Fairy: Not a Fairytale*, 2018), blending Islamic folklore and black magic with existential unease, and *Bulbbul* (2020), a boldly feminist allegory addressing structural violence against women. These films might look like genre exercises at first glance, but often double as scathing social commentary. Where once the demon came from outside, it now often comes from within: human nature can be just as terrifying as myth. A shift we also recognize from Western cinema.

While Western horror increasingly demystifies the supernatural—think *Hereditary*, *The Babadook*, or *Midsommar*—Bollywood horror often keeps it very much alive. In many Indian films, there is no ambiguity: ghosts exist, rituals are effective, gods have real power. Narrative structure also diverges. Western filmmakers may revel in chaos, ambiguity, and nihilism, whereas Bollywood horror tends to maintain a moral compass. Even when evil wins, it often serves as a cautionary tale—never as existential despair.

> ***In Hollywood, horror is a mirror to the self. In Bollywood, it is a mirror to the soul of the society.***
>
> ***– Karan Bali, film historian***

That Indian horror stands at a crossroads is increasingly clear. On one side, a heritage of rituals, myth, and religion that gives the genre its distinct tone. On the other, a push toward modernity, psychological nuance, and social introspection. Bollywood horror is not a cut-and-paste derivative of Western cinema, but a hybrid genre of its own: a space where fear of the supernatural walks hand-in-hand with the subconscious of a culture. Whether it's vengeful churels, demonic trunks, or cursed heirlooms—the true horror in Bollywood often lies in the society itself. And that makes the genre not only chilling but also strikingly relevant and worth discovering.

— Patrick Van Hauwaert



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INDIAN HORROR CINEMA DOESN’T JUST SUMMON GHOSTS —IT RESURRECTS CENTURIES OF MYTH, BELIEF AND BURIED TRUTHS!

© Tumbbad - 2018

Influence of Genre Film on Myself

Having been a fan of watching suspense thrillers and horrors since childhood, a time came when the anticipation and surprises started becoming saturated and clichéd. Every second or third film became a clone of each other with similar storylines and character graphs.

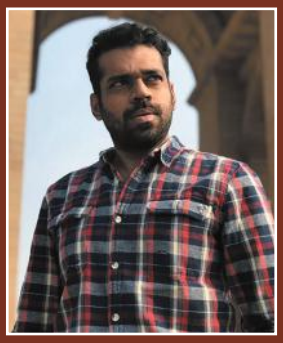
Indian cinema had very few genre films, though they were critically successful but not commercially doing well, hence demotivating a lot of makers to step back. This pushed me off from the genre and made me upset as an audience member who was starving for something new.

Hence, I took it as my responsibility to see that other Indian audiences were equally starving for it. To bring back the taste where no one was making any attempts,

I realised earlier that makers need to pump up more confidence to pull off genre films. And hence, I forced myself to write and make genre films where I see myself as an audience first and then the maker. Getting satisfied as an audience became the first rule.
What I learned is that genre films are experimental but have a huge potential for being commercial as well.

The only checkpoint is to have new surprises and twists that the audience could never predict till the end of the film. Hence, I have learned and I am still learning how to pump the adrenaline rush of the audience to keep them on the edge of their seats.

– Kamil Shaikh
Director, Producer, Actor & Writer



Genre films have had a profound influence on me, and that journey began in the most unexpected of places—Allahabad, a small town in North India.

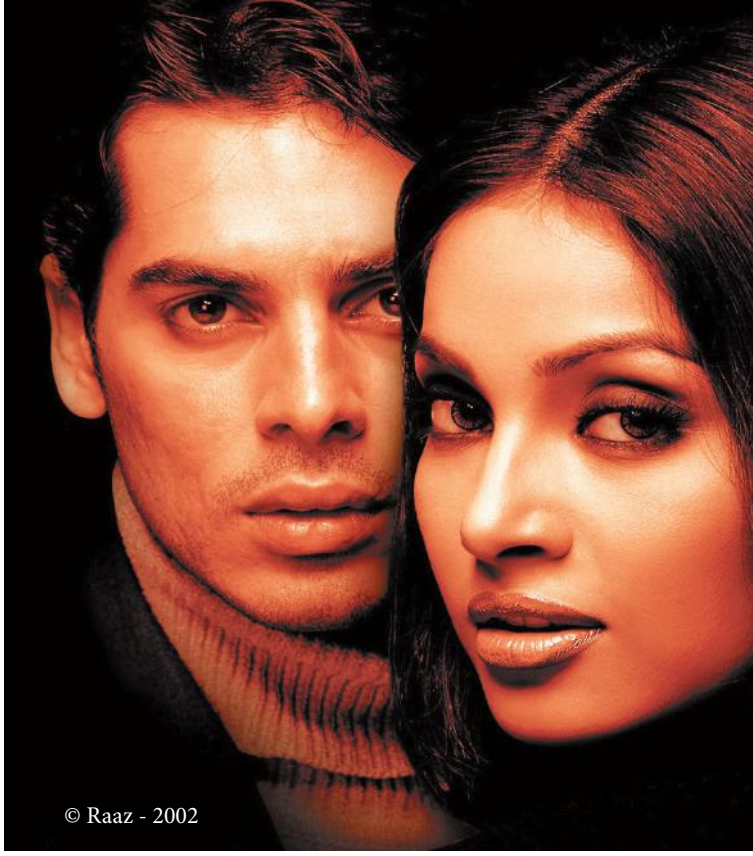
As a kid, VHS tapes of Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Rope* and *The Birds* became my window into a world that thrilled, unsettled, and fascinated me in equal measure. I didn’t know it then, but Hitchcock wasn’t just introducing me to suspense—he was shaping my lifelong love for genre cinema. Those films weren’t just entertainment; they made me feel cinema in a way I never had before.

Over the past two decades working in the Indian film industry, I’ve witnessed how the very idea of “genre” which was once misunderstood—thrillers often lumped in with mysteries, horror with psychological drama.

But slowly, the audience and industry alike began to differentiate, appreciate, and celebrate the nuances. And there is a wide market to tap into. Proof of it is our debut production *mona_darling* (2017) was a



© Mahakaal - 1994



© Raaz - 2002

paranormal meets sci-fi thriller.

Today, genre films are not only understood better in India but are loved for what they uniquely offer—emotion, structure, tension, and catharsis.

My directorial debut, *Lord Curzon Ki Haveli*, is a tribute to that legacy—a chamber film, a black comedy thriller that reflects everything I absorbed from cinema as a child. In many ways, my artistic identity was heavily inspired from the day I first watched Hitchcock, and it continues to evolve in the shadow of those VHS tapes.
My first film is indeed a homage to the genre king of the movies.

– Anshuman Jha
Director
Lord Curzon Ki Haveli



Back in the early 90s, I grew up in a sleepy little town in India's north-eastern state of Assam.

This was when cable television emerged in the country, and a late-night offering called *The Zee Horror Show* (1993-1997) became an instant hit. This iconic series by the Ramsay Brothers served as my introduction to the horror genre.

The Ramsays, who were a team of seven brothers, are widely regarded as the pioneers of Indian horror. During the 70s, 80s, and early 90s, they churned out over 30 productions in the form of B-horror movies, including *Purana Mandir* (1984), *Veerana* (1988), and *Mahakaal* (1994)—films that terrified me as a child.

Stepping away from the campy aesthetic of the Ramsays, trailblazing filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma breathed new life into the genre with films like *Raat* (1992), *Kaun?* (1999) and *Bhoot* (2003), and so did Vikram Bhatt with the blockbuster supernatural musical *Raaz* (2002).

Recent standouts such as Rahi Anil Barve's *Tumbbad* (2018), Amar Kaushik's *Stree* (2018), and Anvita Dutt's *Bulbbul* (2020) have helped usher in a new period of horror filmmaking in India.

It is an exciting time for Indian genre cinema, as not only horror but also the fantasy and sci-fi genres are being explored in a big way, all thanks to the global success of S.S. Rajamouli's game-changing fantasy epic *Baahubali* (2015, 2017). The filmmaking landscape of India is wildly diverse, and new-age filmmakers from various parts of the country are clearly warming up to genre storytelling.

– Bhargav Saikia
Director & Producer
Bokshi (IFFR 2025)



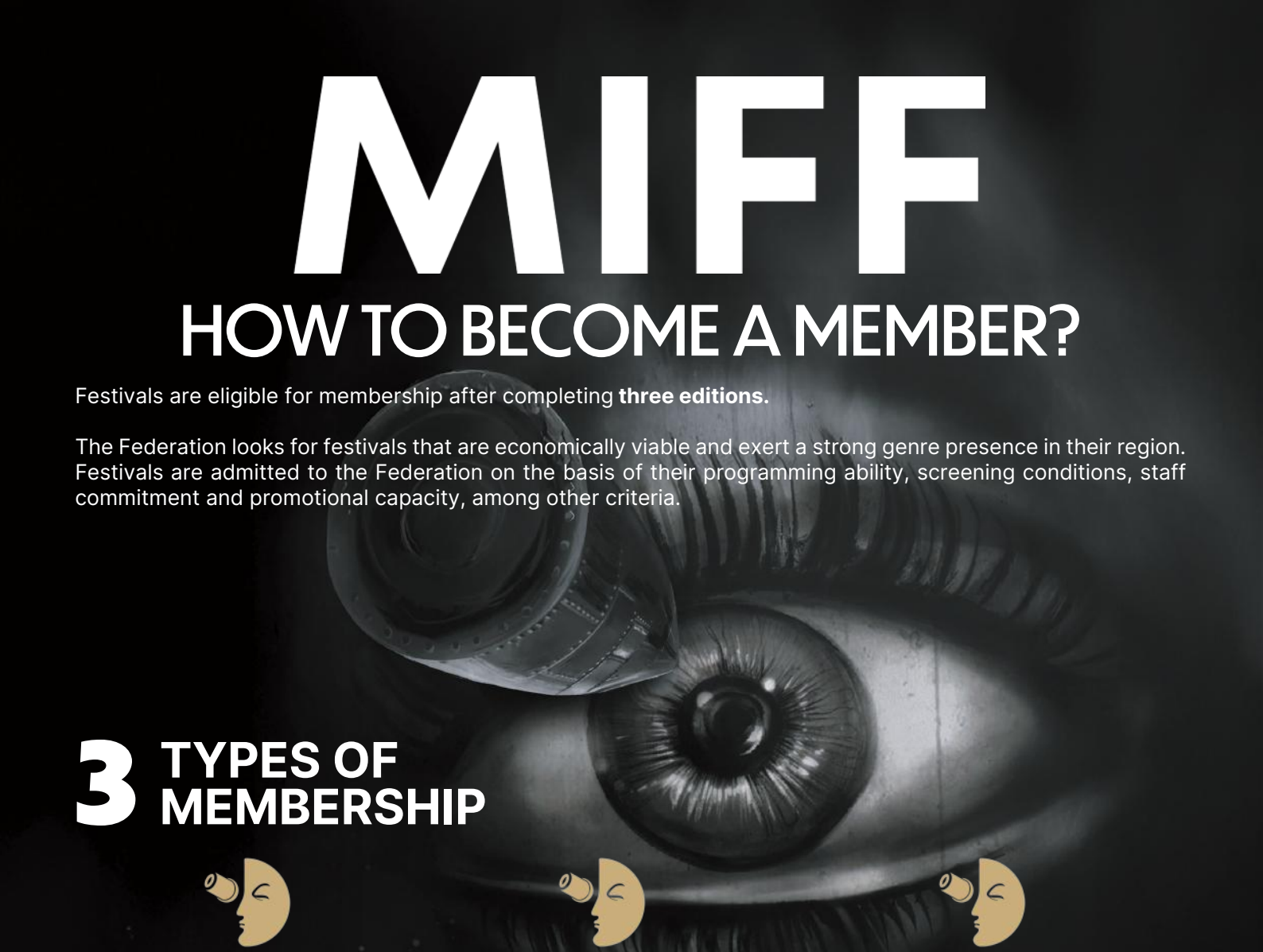

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NORRIS

MIFF

HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER?

Festivals are eligible for membership after completing **three editions.**

The Federation looks for festivals that are economically viable and exert a strong genre presence in their region. Festivals are admitted to the Federation on the basis of their programming ability, screening conditions, staff commitment and promotional capacity, among other criteria.



3 TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

SUPPORTING MEMBERSHIP

This category is for non-European festivals. Supporting members promote both the Federation and European genre film abroad and provide input on the latest genre scene developments in their country.

ADHERENT MEMBERSHIP

This is the entry level for European festivals.
Adherent members organise the short film Méliès d'argent competition, promote European fantastic film and much more.

AFFILIATED MEMBERSHIP

Adherent members may apply to become affiliated members, and then organise the Méliès d'argent competition for narrative features.

If you wish to apply for membership, the first step is to prepare a descriptive document on your festival, which should include, for example, its history and a summary of past editions; staff organisation, number of industry accreditation (actors, directors, etc.); number of media accreditations; media coverage, guests and films.

You should also state why you want to join, what your expectations are and what you think your festival will be able to contribute to the Federation.

We will review your application and present it at our next general assembly meeting. These are held biannually: during the Cannes International Film Festival in May and during Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival, held in October. If the assembly approves the application, your festival will then invite, at their own expense, the Federation to send a representative to conduct an on-site evaluation during your next edition.

The ensuing report will be discussed at the next general assembly meeting and your application will be put to a vote. Once membership is approved, your festival is subject to Federation rules and regulations and will be charged an annual membership fee.

The process of applying for membership could take from a few months up to a year depending on your festival dates and when you apply.

More info: www.melies.org


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