



MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01am WEDNESDAY 5 APRIL 2017

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES FIRST FILMS FOR 2017

The 64th Sydney Film Festival today announced 28 prominent new films to be featured in this year's 7-18 June event, and the first of over 150 Festival guests: award-winning British filmmaker Nick Broomfield, director of the hotly anticipated Whitney Houston documentary *Whitney 'Can I Be Me'*.

Also revealed in advance of the full program launch of 200+ films on Wednesday 10 May is a new Festival location: Randwick's iconic Ritz Cinema.

"These films bring together thousands of talents and perspectives from across the globe, to create a lens - a way of looking at and experiencing aspects of the world and ourselves," Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley said. "And it's as entertaining as it is enlightening."

"From the view backstage with Whitney Houston to the view from the top in Mountain or An American Werewolf in London viewed through the windscreen of your car, the 2017 Festival is a collection of film from every angle, from everywhere, for every kind of film lover."

Leading the pack...

Leading the titles announced today in the Festival's sneak peek is high-profile documentary *Whitney 'Can I Be Me'*, Nick Broomfield's never-before-seen backstage look at the height of six-time Grammy winner Whitney Houston's stardom. Also topping the list are non-traditional horror *A Ghost Story*, starring Oscar winner Casey Affleck (*Manchester by the Sea*) and Rooney Mara (*Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*), and Filipino independent filmmaker Lav Diaz's haunting drama *The Woman Who Left*, winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

Industry masterclass guest

The first of many Festival guests to be announced is award-winning filmmaker Nick Broomfield (*Whitney 'Can I Be Me'*) who is renowned for his iconoclastic documentaries *Kurt & Courtney*, *Biggie and Tupac*, *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*, *Soldier Girls* and the dramas *Battle for Haditha* and *Ghosts*. He will also be presenting an industry masterclass at the Festival.

True stories

Highly anticipated true stories include Oscar-nominated *I Am Not Your Negro*: a timely perspective on race in America using the words of James Baldwin narrated by Samuel L. Jackson. Controversial post-apartheid South African first lady Winnie Madikizela-Mandela gets an extensive portrait in *Winnie*, and *Rumble: Indians Who Rocked the World* is a celebratory examination of Native American musicians and their role in the development of American popular music. Ethan Hawke and Sally Hawkins (*Happy Go Lucky*, SFF 2008) star in *Maudie*, based on the life story of Canada's best known folk artist Maud Lewis.



New films from Australia and New Zealand

Closer to home, the Festival will premiere the new Australian feature ***That's Not Me***, a hilarious local indie with a strong Australian cast including **Isabel Lucas** and actor-writer-producer **Alice Foulcher**. ***Mountain*** is a new documentary from acclaimed Australian director **Jennifer Peedom** (*Sherpa* – SFF 2015) with a score created by Richard Tognetti and performed by the Australian Chamber Orchestra. Controversial documentary ***The Opposition*** is finally screening at Sydney Film Festival after being suppressed by a court order last year, as well as ***Spookers***, a look into the inner workings of the Southern Hemisphere's largest horror theme park and the tight-knit New Zealand family who run it.

New venue

In 2017 the Festival will continue to bring films from the world's top film festivals to venues across Sydney including for the first time at Randwick's **Ritz Cinema** – celebrating its 80th birthday this year. **The State Theatre, Dendy Opera Quays, the Art Gallery of NSW, Event Cinemas George Street, the Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace Cremorne, Dendy Newtown, Casula Powerhouse, and the Skyline Drive In Blacktown** return as official festival screening venues. An expanded virtual reality program will also pop up at the **Festival Hub** at Sydney Town Hall premiering cutting edge films.

Horror at the Drive In

Of the 28 films announced in the preview, 14 are new features and 13 are new documentaries, including 16 Australian Premieres and one retrospective. The retrospective being cult classic Oscar-winning horror comedy ***An American Werewolf in London***, directed by **John Landis** (*The Blues Brothers*), screening under the full moon at the Skyline Drive In on Friday 16 June.

Big festival winners

Prestigious new features included in the preview are Amat Escalante's imaginative drama ***The Untamed***, which won the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival for Best Direction. **Cristian Mungiu's** tale of moral compromise, ***Graduation***, won the filmmaker the Best Director Prize at Cannes 2016, and Afghanistan's first female director Shahrbanoo Sadat's debut feature ***Wolf and Sheep*** won the Art Cinema Award at Cannes Directors' Fortnight. Documentary prize-winners include *Nowhere to Hide* (main award-winner at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam), and three winners from the 2017 Sundance Film Festival; *Winnie*, *Motherland*, and *Rumble: The Indians Who Rocked the World*.

Quirky hits

Other feature highlights include delightful family animation, the Oscar-nominated ***My Life as a Zucchini***, voiced by **Ellen Page** (*Juno*), Nick Offerman (*Parks and Recreation*) and Will Forte (*Saturday Night Live*), and Malaysia's answer to *Kill Bill*, ***Mrs K***, with an all-star cast including Hong Kong's leading lady **Kara Wai**, Taiwanese rockstar **Wu Bai**, and martial arts film legend **Lau Wing**.

Outstanding documentaries

Outstanding documentaries remain essential to the Festival, and this year's program has many award-winners and enthralling themes from factual filmmakers around the world. ***Untitled*** is the final film of the late **Michael Glawogger** (*Whores' Glory* - SFF2012), created after his death by collaborator **Monika Willi**.

Slovenian metal band Laibach and their Latvian-Norwegian film crew get unprecedented access into North Korea in ***Liberation Day***, and *Hoop Dreams* director **Steve James's** David vs Goliath tale ***Abacus: Small Enough to Jail*** is a story about America's financial crisis that actually manages to paint a bank as the small guys.



The Festival is supported by the NSW Government, through Screen NSW and its tourism and major events agency Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney.

The full Sydney Film Festival program will be announced on Wednesday 10 May at 11am.

Note: Flexipasses and subscriptions to Sydney Film Festival 2017 are on sale now. Please call 1300 733 733 or visit <http://www.sff.org.au> for more information.

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*****Sydney Film Festival Press Pack and Images Available [HERE](#)**

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From **Wednesday 7 June to Sunday 18 June 2017**, the 64th Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, red-carpet openings, in-depth discussions, international guests and more.

Sydney Film Festival also presents an Official Competition of 12 films that vie for the Sydney Film Prize, a highly respected honour that awards a \$60,000 cash prize based on the decision of a jury of international and Australian filmmakers and industry professionals. Previous Sydney Film Prize winners: *Aquarius* (2016); *Arabian Nights* (2015); *Two Days, One Night* (2014); *Only God Forgives* (2013); *Alps* (2012); *A Separation* (2011); *Heartbeats* (2010); *Bronson* (2009); and *Hunger* (2008).

The Festival takes place across Greater Sydney: at the State Theatre, Event Cinemas George Street, Dendy Opera Quays, Dendy Newtown, Skyline Drive-In Blacktown, Art Gallery of NSW, Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace Cremorne, Randwick Ritz, Casula Powerhouse, the Festival Hub at Sydney Town Hall and SFF Outdoor Screen in Pitt Street Mall.

The Festival is a major event on the New South Wales cultural calendar and is one of the world's longest-running film festivals. For more information visit: www.sff.org.au.

The 64th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW and Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney. The Festival's Strategic Partner is the NSW Government through Destination NSW.

DOCUMENTARIES

ABACUS: SMALL ENOUGH TO JAIL

Director: Steve James | USA | 2016 | 88 mins | In English, Mandarin and Cantonese with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

Award-winning US documentarian Steve James (*Life Itself* SFF 2014) is in top form in this captivating story of the only bank indicted following America's 2008 financial meltdown. The Abacus Federal Savings Bank in New York's Chinatown is one of America's smallest banking institutions. Shanghai-born Thomas Sung founded it in 1984 to provide his community with loans, a service routinely denied by other banks. Now 80, Thomas runs the company with the help of his three hard-working daughters. In 2010, the bank noticed irregularities in its mortgage books, and reported the matter to authorities. A lengthy legal battle ensued, driven by the New York District Attorney Office, and an eye-opening story of discrimination unfolded inside and outside of the courtroom. As the film suggests, perhaps Abacus wasn't 'too big to fail', but rather, 'small enough to jail'.



I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO

Director: Raoul Peck | France, USA, Belgium, Switzerland | 2017 | 93 mins | English | Australian Premiere

Narrated by Samuel L Jackson, this mesmerising Oscar-nominated film channels the impassioned words of writer James Baldwin, one of the most incisive commentators on race in America. People's Choice Documentary Award-winner at Toronto, Oscar-nominated and a box office success in the US, *I Am Not Your Negro* takes as its starting point notes for a book Baldwin intended to write about the lives and assassinations of his friends Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and Medgar Evers. That unwritten book finds life in this remarkable film which melds Baldwin's unpublished writing (powerfully narrated by Jackson), archival footage of his eloquent analysis of the times, and contemporary Black Lives Matter protests. Haitian Peck (*Lumumba; Moloch Tropical*, SFF 2010) is a stridently political filmmaker and here his profound and poetic cine-essay is, as *The New York Times* describes it, "life-altering".

LIBERATION DAY

Directors, Screenwriters: Morten Traavik, Ugis Olte | Norway, Latvia | 2016 | 100 mins | In English, Korean, Norwegian with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

The bizarre but true story of a controversial art metal band heading to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to perform deadpan cover versions of *The Sound of Music*. When the news broke that the cult Slovenian group Laibach would be taking part in North Korea's 70th anniversary celebrations of their liberation from Japanese rule, the western media had a field day. The band and its entourage arrive in Pyongyang, amid accusations of fascism, to a chilly reception. A tricky start, but manager and co-director, Morten Traavik, is undeterred, as he faces a late venue change, rabid censors, and an uphill battle to delivery a 21st century gig on out-dated equipment. Featuring a sonorous version of 'Do-Re-Mi' and a contentious adaptation of a beloved Korean folk song, this documentary is by turns illuminating, comic and absurd.

MOTHERLAND

Director, Screenwriter: Ramona S. Diaz | Philippines, USA | 2017 | 94 mins | Tagalog with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

A vibrant, Sundance award-winning Filipino documentary filmed in the busiest maternity hospital in the world, that reveals an overcrowded, hectic and yet profoundly humane environment. Mothers, daughters – and the occasional father – cram the corridors of Manila's Dr. Jose Fabella Hospital. The ward is frenetic: hundreds of beds are strewn with mums and their carefully labelled new-borns. Birth control is frowned upon in this underprivileged, predominantly Catholic community; even unmarried teens and 20-somethings with six kids are reluctant to use it. Resources are limited so, in lieu of incubators, the hospital has adopted Kangaroo Mother Care. Parents are obliged to snuggle their premature babies to their chest, 24 hours a day, until they reach an optimum weight. The camaraderie and openness of these resilient mothers makes Ramona S. Diaz's film enormously engaging and gratifyingly uplifting.

MOUNTAIN

Director: Jennifer Peedom | Australia | 2017 | 90 mins | English

An epic cinematic and musical collaboration between *Sherpa* filmmaker Jennifer Peedom and the Australian Chamber Orchestra, that explores humankind's fascination with high places. Fellow collaborators to this unique project are British writer Robert Macfarlane (author of the award winning *Mountains of the Mind*) and leading high altitude cinematographer Renan Ozturk (*Sherpa, Meru*). Richard Tognetti's recorded score is stunning; soaring as the camera climbs vertiginous slopes or swoops across rocky peaks. With all this earthly beauty, it's hard to believe that only three centuries ago, the idea of conquering a peak was considered crazy. Mountains were once solely places of peril, not beauty. The absorbing narration traces our modern day fascination – our irresistible and sometimes fatal attraction to the dizzying heights. Peedom's follow-up to *Sherpa* (SFF 2016) is a suitably uplifting, symphonic ode to high places.



RUMBLE: THE INDIANS WHO ROCKED THE WORLD

Directors, Screenwriters: Catherine Bainbridge, Alfonso Maiorana | Canada | 2016 | 103 mins | In English and French with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

A stomping tribute to Native American musicians, crammed with concert footage, which celebrates their weighty yet unheralded contribution to music, from Hendrix to Metallica. Bainbridge and Maiorana's Sundance winner kicks off with the thumping riffs of Shawnee guitarist Link Wray's 1950s classic 'Rumble'; a track that E. Street Band's Steven Van Zandt tagged "the theme song of juvenile delinquency". We hear how Native American musicians and rhythms influenced the South from North Carolina to the streets of New Orleans. Fascinating interviews and archival clips tell stories of music greats like jazz singer Mildred Bailey, guitar genius Jesse Ed Davis, and Native Canadians Buffy Sainte-Marie and The Band's Robbie Robertson. Executive produced by Apache guitarist Stevie Salas, this engaging documentary expertly reveals how Native American musicians are consistently left out of the story.

SPOOKERS

Director: Florian Habicht | New Zealand, Australia | 2017 | 84 mins | English | Australian Premiere

If you've ever wondered what possesses someone to work as a creepy clown or zombie bride and scare the hell out of theme park visitors, then *Spookers* has the answers. Located on the site of a former psychiatric hospital near Auckland, "scream park" Spookers has been scaring the living daylights out of visitors since 2005. Dressing up and playing psycho clowns, corpses and chainsaw-wielding maniacs is all in a day's work for Spookers' talented and super-enthusiastic performers. But what draws someone to this line of work, and what are their own fears, hopes and dreams? The answers are revealing, funny and sometimes deeply moving. Complete with beautiful fantasy sequences and made with a huge heart, *Spookers* is another feather in the cap of gifted Berlin-born, New Zealand-based filmmaker Florian Habicht (*Pulp*, SFF 2014). If ever there was a Freak Me Out "family film," this is it.

THE OPPOSITION

Director: Hollie Fifer | Australia | 2016 | 74 mins | In English and Tok Pisin with English subtitles

A David-and-Goliath battle over a slice of Papua New Guinea paradise, Hollie Fifer's documentary finally reaches our screens following court action in Australia. The setting is the stunning peninsula of Paga Hill on Papua New Guinea's Port Moresby harbour – the paradise everyone wants to claim. Joe Moses, leader of the Paga Hill settlement, must save 3000 people before they are evicted. Battling it out in the courts, Joe may find his four generation-old community replaced with an international five-star hotel and marina. In telling this probing story, the film highlights the massive gap between law and justice. Australian director Fifer's documentary was subject to an injunction last year, before a NSW Supreme Court ruling in favour of the production. The lengthy legal dispute raised questions about freedom of speech and the viability of independent filmmaking, quietly echoing Joe's own struggle to be heard.

UNTITLED

Directors: Michael Glawogger, Monika Willi | Austria, Germany | 2017 | 107 min | English, German with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

In 2014, award-winning director Michael Glawogger died tragically whilst filming. His long-time editor, Monika Willi, has crafted his final footage into a striking documentary. When Glawogger died, he was five months into a lengthy world trip. His intention was to film on his journey only what he experienced, with no expectations, restrictions, or predetermined topics. Glawogger, his cameraman and sound operator, shot in the Balkans, Italy and Africa, before the director succumbed to malaria in Liberia. Willi has created a unique film, using her colleague's arresting imagery - from rubbish billowing across an arid landscape to one-legged soccer players - and his personal diaries. The result is a beautiful, intimate work that resonates with Glawogger's preoccupations around personal freedom and exploitation, as demonstrated in *Workingman's Death* (SFF 2006) and *Whores' Glory* (SFF 2012).



WAITING FOR GIRAFFES

Director: Marco de Stefanis | The Netherlands, Belgium | 2016 | 84 mins | In English | Australian Premiere

An emotional story of collaboration and dedication set in a Palestinian West Bank zoo, which involves a cavalcade of animals, their devoted carers and enthusiastic visitors. We first meet the remarkable Dr. Sami, the Qalqilya zoo's veterinarian, on his way to work, carrying a cute pygmy goat in a cardboard box. He routinely cares for newly born animals at home. "I raise them like my own children," he tells visiting schoolkids. The zoo is a rare oasis for the local community, and given they cannot leave their environment; it is also their only opportunity to see the world's creatures. Unhappily, the beleaguered establishment is out-dated, cramped and penniless. Dr. Sami, with the enthusiastic support of his Israeli counterparts at the Jerusalem zoo, seeks international support and recognition. Perhaps in time, he'll even be able to replace the much-loved giraffes that, spooked by gunfire, died in the last intifada.

WHITNEY 'CAN I BE ME'

Directors: Nick Broomfield, Rudi Dolezal | UK, USA | 2017 | 111 mins | In English | Australian Premiere

A gripping documentary on the all-too-short life of powerhouse performer Whitney Houston from UK documentarian Nick Broomfield and music video director Rudi Dolezal. Broomfield (*Heidi Fleiss: Hollywood Madam*, SFF 1996; *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer*, 2003) and Dolezal bring us never-before-seen backstage footage from the height of Houston's career. Touching, intimate interviews with the star, friends and colleagues (including her real-life bodyguard), round out this impressive recounting of a life so promising, and ultimately so tragic. The film doesn't evade her drug taking, troubled marriage or rumours of her bisexuality, nor does it ignore her undeniable talent (including several music clips). The title aptly illustrates the film's resonant core: that of a remarkable talent from the 'hood, struggling to keep her identity in a world of compromises and demands.

WINNIE

Director, Screenwriter: Pascale Lamche | France, South Africa, The Netherlands | 2017 | 98 mins | In English | Australian Premiere

Winner of Best Director Award at the Sundance Film Festival, this is a fascinating portrait of South Africa's 'mother of the nation' Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Winnie's profile is very different from that of her revered husband of 38 years, Nelson Mandela. Her legacy is tinged with disgrace and controversy. Lamche's comprehensive documentary allows the now 80-year-old to tell her side of the story; including her involvement with the African National Congress, her militant activism, engagement with youth and women, and steadfastness during Nelson's long-years in captivity. Conversely, there's her purported involvement in the death of a 14 year-old activist, and fractious engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Featuring archival clips as well as interviews with diplomat daughter Zindzi, biographers, journalists, lawyers – and the fierce protagonist herself.

FEATURES

A GHOST STORY

Director: David Lowery | USA | 2016 | 87 min | English | Australian Premiere

Made in secret and on a micro-budget, *A Ghost Story* is a haunting and sparse love story starring Rooney Mara (*Lion*) and Oscar-winner Casey Affleck (*Manchester by the Sea*). Influenced by the work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Palme d'Or winner *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, SFF 2010), David Lowery's enigmatic film is built with a sparse narrative, minimal dialogue and a series of glorious images that convey great emotion. Affleck and Mara play a married couple who live in a cosy Texan home. When the man is killed, he returns to the house they shared as a spectral presence covered by a white sheet. The ghost watches his grieving wife as she lives on without him: what follows is a startling meditation on loss, grief, love and the passage of time.



AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

Director, Screenwriter: John Landis | UK, USA | 1981 | 97 mins | In English

The horror-comedy classic howls into Sydney in all its blood-drenched glory. Come and watch this delirious mix of gore and gags outdoors, while a full moon hovers over the city. It's one thing to be bitten by the travel bug and go backpacking around Europe for three months. It is quite another thing to be bitten by a mythical beast while hoofing through the English moors. So begins the genuinely frightening and extremely funny tale of American backpackers David and Jack. Once bitten, twice shy? Not on your life, as Londoners discover when the next full moon rises. But can lovely local nurse Alex (the divine Jenny Agutter) save the day? Written and directed by John Landis (*The Blues Brothers*) at the height of his powers, *American Werewolf...* set a standard for horror-comedy that's rarely been equalled. And the soundtrack totally, utterly, completely rocks.

GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

Director, Screenwriter: Francis Lee | UK | 2017 | 104 mins | English and Romanian with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

A sexually explicit romance about two sheep farmers in remote England that's earned favourable comparisons to *Brokeback Mountain*. Winner of the Directing Award at Sundance. Johnny works long hours on his family's remote hill farm. Isolated and frustrated, he numbs the daily frustration of his lonely existence with nightly binge-drinking at the local pub and casual sex. When Gheorghe, a handsome Romanian, arrives to take up temporary work on the family property, Johnny suddenly finds himself having to deal with emotions he has never felt before. An intense relationship forms between the two, which could change Johnny's life forever. Francis Lee's striking debut film employs near documentary elements, frank nudity, explicit sex scenes, and moving performances by its two lead actors to tell an ultimately optimistic and powerful story.

GRADUATION

Director, Screenwriter: Cristian Mungiu | Romania, France, Belgium | 2016 | 127 mins | Romanian with English subtitles

Winner of the Best Director prize in Cannes 2016, this gripping film by Romanian Cristian Mungiu is about a father's desperate actions to protect his daughter. Mungiu, who also won the Cannes Palme d'Or for *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007), takes a searing look at Romania's power systems, posing stark and resonant ethical questions. Eliza Aldea has a scholarship to study in the UK, but the day before her final exams she is attacked. Worried that his daughter will fail to get out of Romania, her father Romeo enters into a plan to protect his daughter's future, even though it involves manipulating the system and entering into a labyrinth of bribery. Shot and directed with Mungiu's signature control and grace, *Graduation* explores one of the director's favourite themes: how good people can find themselves perpetuating the rotten structures of society.

HOTEL SALVATION

Director: Shubhashish Bhutiani | India | 2016 | 102 min | Hindi with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

An old man drags his busy son to Varanasi so that he may die and attain salvation there in a comedy about death that, at heart, is a delightful, poignant celebration of life. Daya Kumar (Lalit Behl) believes that his end is near, so he tells his family that he wishes to die in the holy city of Varanasi, on the banks of the Ganges. The stubborn old man drags along his reluctant adult son Rajiv (Adil Hussain) and they check into the Hotel Salvation, where people come to die. But once there, Daya gets his lust for life back, making new friends with the other "dying" residents. Daya and Rajiv are forced to reconnect – both to each other and to the world around them. Described as an "arthouse take on the *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*", *Hotel Salvation* is a wonderfully accomplished film that captures the vibrancy and strangeness of Varanasi with gentle humour. It was awarded the UNESCO Prize at Venice for the film that best represents the values of peace and human rights.



MAUDIE

Director: Aisling Walsh | Canada, Ireland | 2016 | 115 mins | English | Australian Premiere
Sally Hawkins and Ethan Hawke shine in this true story of gifted, arthritic Canadian folk painter Maud Lewis and her unlikely romance with the reclusive Everett Lewis. Bad-natured loner Everett (Hawke) places an ad for a housekeeper and doesn't know what to make of the applicant. Maudie (Hawkins) is hunched over with hands gnarled by arthritis, but she's eager to take the unappealing job. Gruff and boorish, Everett treats Maudie poorly, but she patiently chips away at his tough exterior. Her arthritis makes painting difficult but it's liberating for Maudie; soon, she's painted every corner of their house, and her paintings develop a loyal following that leads to her eventual fame. Sally Hawkins is superb as Maudie in a performance that transcends the physical, while Hawke disguises his natural on-screen charm in an unusual and distinctive role. Joyfully showcasing the beautiful paintings of Maud Lewis, *Maudie* is a moving celebration of the power of art and a tender, complex love story.

MRS K

Director: Ho Yuhang | Malaysia, Hong Kong | 2016 | 96 mins | Cantonese, Mandarin and Malay with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

A wildly enjoyable Tarantino-esque martial arts thriller. Veteran Hong Kong action star Kara Wai returns in kick-ass form as a housewife taking on the underworld. *Mrs K* sees veteran martial arts star Kara Wai (*Dragon*) in her second come-back film with director Ho Yuhang (following *At the End of Daybreak*), alongside a cast of Asian cinema legends. Wai plays Mrs K, a former underworld player turned wealthy domestic goddess. When a stranger blackmails Mrs K about her past misdeeds she quickly gets rid of him, hoping it'll be the end of the matter. It's not – more unsavoury characters from her past show up and kidnap her daughter. Mrs K is forced out of her sheltered existence to punch and fly kick her way to redemption. With stylish action sequences, a touching story of familial loyalty and a luminous performance by Kara Wai, *Mrs K* is a thrilling, high-energy ride.

MY LIFE AS A ZUCCHINI

Director: Claude Barras | Switzerland, France | 2016 | 88 mins | The festival will screen the English version, and the French version with English subtitles

An Oscar-nominated Swiss-French stop-motion family animation that's realistic and life affirming, dealing with real issues in a way that doesn't patronise or traumatise its audience. When nine-year old Zucchini's alcoholic mother dies, he is taken to an orphanage filled with misfits who, like himself, have been dealt a rough hand by life. Little does he know, they will soon become his de facto family, from his crush Camille to the gentle father-figure policeman Raymond. Based on a best-selling young adult novel and adapted for the screen by Céline Sciamma (*Tomboy*, SFF 2011), *My Life as a Zucchini* is an unusual, affirming but honest film that calls on its young audience's ability to empathise with lives far tougher than their own. They'll come out heartened, strengthened and more resilient from the experience – and so will the adults who take them.

NOWHERE TO HIDE

Director, Screenwriter: Zaradasht Ahmed | Norway, Sweden | 2016 | 86 mins | Arabic with English subtitles

The top prize-winner at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam: four turbulent years in the life of resilient male nurse living in Iraq's 'triangle of death'. Nori Sharif works in a Jalawla hospital in central Iraq. When the US army departs in 2011, he's hopeful for the future: he has a valued job, a beloved family, and a place to call home. The arrival of the Islamic State (ISIS) changes everything. Kurdish-born director Zaradasht Ahmed filmed Sharif until it became too dangerous to stay, so he handed his equipment to his subject. Sharif's relationship to the camera quickly becomes confident, more intimate, as he seeks to make sense of his rapidly changing world. As the IDFA jury commented: "There are those films which are wonderful to see and there are films that the world needs to see. [*Nowhere to Hide*] is both of these things."



POP AYE

Director, Screenwriter: Kirsten Tan | Singapore, Thailand | 2016 | 102 mins | Thai with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

A downtrodden architect and his long-lost elephant take a road trip across Thailand to find their childhood home in this offbeat and very funny Sundance screenwriting award-winner. Once a cutting edge architect renowned for his progressive buildings, Thana is having a hard time at work and with his wife. Wandering the streets of Bangkok he comes across Pop Aye, the elephant he grew up with in rural Thailand. Thana promptly buys the elephant and the unusual pair set off on a road trip back towards the idyll of their home village. Along the way they meet fascinating characters, from a wild-haired man who seems to foretell the future to a transgender roadside bar singer. In her debut feature Kirsten Tan has total control, taking advantage of the beautiful scenery, wonderful actors and a charismatic elephant to tell a story that is unsentimental but genuinely moving.

SEXY DURGA

Director, Screenwriter: Sanal Kumar Sasidharan | India | 2017 | 85 mins | Malayalam, Hindi with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

With an improvised narrative and dialogue *Sexy Durga* cleverly contrasts the worship of goddesses with the treatment of women in Indian culture. Winner of the Rotterdam Tiger Award. An Indian woman (Durga) and man (Kabeer) are on the run, eager to catch a train out of Kerala. Two men offer them a ride to the train station, but what initially appears to be an act of kindness quickly turns nasty. Over the course of this long night, Durga will encounter a cross-section of male society, with little comfort on offer. Sasidharan juxtaposes this menacing tale with footage of a ritual involving the piercing of the skin and walking on hot coals, in devotion to Kali, a manifestation of the Goddess Durga. *Sexy Durga* is a powerful, chilling film that recalls the work of Michael Haneke in its claustrophobic air of menace.

SPOOR

Director: Agnieszka Holland | Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Sweden, Slovak Republic | 2017 | 128 mins | Polish with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

In a remote mountain town the hunters become the hunted in this Berlinale Silver Bear-winner by the great Agnieszka Holland (*Europa, Europa*, SFF 1991; *The Wire*; *House of Cards*). Janina (Agnieszka Mandat) is a retired engineer, astrologist and vegetarian, who is horrified by the hunting that takes place around her mountain village. The death of a local poacher sets off a mysterious series of events, and the grisly body count of local hunters starts to rise, as Janina tries to convince the police force that the wild animals are finally taking revenge. *Spoor* plays out as a fabulous fairy tale with a strident ecological viewpoint, and is infused with dark humour. Holland, a distinguished director of both cinema and television, uses the brilliant, forceful leading performance of Mandat to powerful effect in a film that both thrills and offers much to think about.

THAT'S NOT ME

Director: Gregory Erdstein | Australia | 2017 | 85 mins | English | Australian Premiere

An aspiring actor takes advantage of her identical twin sister's success and fame in this hilarious Australian indie influenced by *Girls* and *Bridesmaids*. Polly considers herself a serious actress, waiting for the role that best suits her considerable talents. But her acting dreams start to crumble when her identical twin Amy lands a lead role in an HBO show and starts dating co-star Jared Leto. A disastrous trip to LA does little to help matters, but the unbearable situation becomes a little better when Polly discovers that she can use her sister's celebrity to her advantage to get free clothes, free booze and casual sex. The consequences are very funny – and awkward. A very promising feature debut by Gregory Erdstein, *That's Not Me* is a clever, knowing comedy with a winning dual performance by Alice Foulcher.

THE UNTAMED

Director: Amat Escalante | Mexico, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Switzerland | 2016 | 100 mins | Spanish with English subtitles | Australian Premiere



A creature of another world unleashes people's base sexual impulses in this imaginative meld of social realism and erotic sci-fi which won the Venice Silver Lion for Best Director. Following on from his harrowing 2013 crime drama *Heli*, which won Best Director at Cannes, the talented Amat Escalante has changed tack completely in this unique, category-defying film. At its centre is young mother Alejandra, who is raising two boys with her boorish husband Angel. All is not well with this family, but the arrival of the mysterious Veronica brings promise of a solution to all their problems: in an isolated cabin there is something not of this world, something irresistible that's able to provide both matchless pleasure and devastating pain. Filled with indelible images, and with Escalante brilliantly in control of every moment, *The Untamed* is provocative and singular.

THE WOMAN WHO LEFT

Director, Screenwriter: Lav Diaz | Philippines | 2016 | 228 mins | Tagalog and English with English subtitles

The Venice Golden Lion-winning epic from Filipino master Lav Diaz (*From What Is Before*, SFF 2015) explores a woman's quest for revenge following her unjust 30-year incarceration. Lav Diaz is known for his very long narrative films that reflect on the history of the Philippines and the effect on its present. In *The Woman Who Left*, over nearly four hours Diaz focuses on Horacia (Charo Santos-Cancio) who has spent 30 years in a women's prison for a murder she didn't commit. Unexpectedly released, Horacia finds her country outside the prison walls has changed drastically – her family has scattered, and the nation is terrorised by kidnappings and government corruption. A humane meditation on forgiveness and a criticism of systemic inequality, shot in rich, saturated black and white, *The Woman Who Left* is testament to Diaz's uncompromising and beguiling artistry.

WOLF AND SHEEP

Director, Screenwriter: Shahrbanoo Sadat | Denmark, France, Sweden, Afghanistan | 2016 | 86 mins | Hazaragi with English subtitles | Australian Premiere

This debut feature by a groundbreaking Afghan woman director, a Cannes Directors' Fortnight-winner, is an extraordinarily daring and rare view of Afghan rural life and mythology. Winner of the top prize at Cannes Directors' Fortnight 2016, *Wolf and Sheep* is set in rural Afghanistan, where simple village life is enlivened with stories of mystery and imagination. Our view into this timeless community is through its children, who mimic the adults in their gossiping and lewd language. Boys and girls don't mix but, defying the rules, outsiders Qodrat and Sediqa develop a beautiful friendship. Using a cast of non-actors, Sadat has created a unique view of Afghanistan replete with all the mundanities and difficulties of life, but also with myth and magic: tales are told of a wolf who walks on two legs, discarding its skin to emerge as a beautiful green fairy.