



MARCHÉ DU FILM
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

Variety

Cannes Frontières Selection

Date : 19/04/2024

Author : John Hopewell

Hollywood Legend Phil Tippett, RKSS' Anouk Whissell Bring Brand New Projects to Powerful, Rangy Cannes Frontières Selection (EXCLUSIVE)

"Sentinel," by Hollywood legend Phil Tippett, and "Sister Inconnue," the first solo directorial outing of RKSS' Anouk Whissell, could well be two highlights at a 2024 Cannes Frontières Platform that looks set to underscore the robust range of genre as it is embraced by Hollywood, big independents, horror devotees and auteurs alike.

Creator of creatures for "Star Wars" and "Jurassic Park," Tippett may have terrified more people than anybody alive. If a teaser is anything to go by, "Sentinel," a project, may well pick up on the style of 2021's experimental and nightmarish stop motion/animation "Mad God."

"Sentinel" features a battleground reminiscent of WWI hellish horror, giant bugs echoing "Starship Troopers," Tippett's last big job, attack droids and the statuesque figures of Osiris, Horus and Anubis, the last of which saves the hero, the gas-masked Sentinel, from a gruesome battlefield.

Sure to be a huge draw, an expanded version of an original "Sentinel" teaser will be presented at Frontières Proof of Concept showcase of projects, on Saturday May 18, producer Colin Geddes told Variety.

Another key Proof of Concept title may be "Sister Inconnue," asking what Anouk Whissell can deliver without her longterm creative partners at acclaimed Canadian writer-director trio RKSS ("Turbo Kid," "Summer of 84").

One answer is a ghost story of political point and female empowerment behind and in front of the cameras, originating in a legend born in the Acadian Deportation of 1755-1764, when some 14,000 settlers were forcibly removed by British troops from Acadia, in modern-day Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Maine. Thousands died in what is classed as a crime against humanity.

"Not only is it led by talented female producers, but ["Sister Inconnue"] also breathes life into a diverse array of strong female characters, both virtuous and villainous. It felt right; this film was destined to become a personal project for me as a solo writer-director," Whissell told Variety.

Buzz Titles, What Cannes' Frontières Says About the Genre Business

Organized by Montreal's Fantasia Intl. Film Festival in partnership with Cannes' Marché du Film, Frontières features seven titles at a Buyers' Showcase on Sunday May 19, focusing on films that are just finished or in advanced post-production.

Further titles sparking good word of mouth also underscore the huge breadth of current genre production, running a gamut of sober psychological realism ("Above the Knee"), fun gore ("Scared

Shitless”), social issue horror (“LandLord”), a coming of age creature feature (“Bug Boy”) and an upscale Giallo-esque slasher (“Dead by Dawn”).

“Frontières really shows that genre is alive and kicking. We’ve always known it, but the selection shows that genre can really go in every direction now,” said Annick Mahnert, Frontières executive director.

“Over the last five years, more and more filmmakers are using genre to tell a story that could be personal, or turn on some social horror,” she added.

“Genre has become more visible everywhere. Hollywood studios are now backing genre films. A24, Neon is doing genre as well,” Mahnert noted. Companies that never came to Frontières in the past are now interested in coming,” Mahnert also noted.

Frontières also highlights a new generation of emerging genre filmmakers instanced by Austria’s Capra Film production hub, led by director Peter Hengl and producer Lola Basara, at Cannes with “Bug Boy.” Among other emerging talents, “The Girl With the Green Eyes” is a banner feature from Rotterdam-based Make Way Film, founded by the energetic Monique Van Kessel, behind “Heresy” (“Witte Wieven”), well received at the Rotterdam Film Festival this January.

In the run-up to Cannes, none of the 13 Frontières Platform titles had sales agents attached, a huge draw, said Mahnert.

For the first time, the Platform will offer prizes, €6,000 (\$6,420) worth of services from Czech post-production specialist Studio Beep, for a winner from both Proof of Concept and at Buyers’ Showcase.

A drill-down on titles:

Buyers Showcase

“Above the Knee,” (Viljar Bøe, Varde Film, Norway)

Classic body horror: Obsessed with visions of rotting flesh, Amir wants to amputate his left leg, the film building up excruciatingly to a feigned “accident.” From writer-director-actor Bøe and the team behind the critically admired “Good Boy” (“creepy as hell,” said one reviewer). Starring Freddy Singh, who co-wrote with Bøe, Julie Abrahamsen, Louise Waage Anda and Viggo Solomon, the film “aims to resonate with audiences who appreciate films featuring the main character navigating psychological pressures and intense obsessions,” Bøe tells Variety.

“Dead by Dawn,” (Dawid Torrone, Larmo, Poland)

From Torrone, a director on Polish 2018 true crime series “Opowiem Ci o zbrodni,” a game of survival played between a group of young actors and a masked murderer as he plans to summon the Antichrist using an ancient ritual. “The theater becomes a stage to a deadly game where the line between hypnotizing performance and gruesome reality becomes ever so thin,” the synopsis runs. Lead produced by Poland’s Larmo, a “fast-paced and pulse-pounding murder mystery,” which makes for “an exhilarating ode to horror classics with a fresh, modern twist, blending terror, humor and Giallo aesthetics,” says Torrone.

“Delivery Run,” (Joey Palmroos, Arctic Renegades, Finland)

In the icy back-country of Minnesota, calm food delivery driver Lee is thrust into a high-stakes chase when pursued by a sinister snowplow driver, with no help in sight. “This project showcases the potent blend of passion and perseverance in filmmaking, drawing inspiration from Spielberg’s ‘70s classic ‘Duel’ with a modern twist,” says Finland’s Palmroos of his sophomore outing, after “5 Outlaws.” Aleksii Hyvärinen executive produces out of Finland’s Arctic Renegades.

"LandLord," (Remington Smith, Filmsmith Productions, Post 237, U.S.)

When a Black bounty hunter moves into a rundown apartment complex, she finds herself forced to protect an orphaned boy from the white vampire landlord. A second-rounder for Sundance Development Lab 2019 described by Smith as a social thriller. "Our vampire is using the complex to prey on people financially and physically in a way that I think will resonate with audiences. The personal and genre influences come through in the aesthetics, which offer a blend of Andrea Arnold's neo-realism + horror, and a sense of light vs. darkness," he told Variety

"Nesting," (Chloe Cinq-Mars, 1976 Productions, Canada, & Point Prod, Switzerland)

The directorial feature debut of Canada's Cinq-Mars, best known as writer of "The Far Shore," and one of the most solidly backed titles at Frontières. Following a harrowing hold-up, a new mother (Rose-Marie Perreault, "Fake Tattoos") neglects her baby and pursues an affair with an ex-lover, stirring up traumatic memories and weakening her grip on reality. "Nesting" shows "what it feels like to be a young, overwhelmed mother descending into a psychosis. I want the audience to experience with her how it feels. It's gradual. It's insidious. And it's inconceivable," says Cinq-Mars.

"Scared Shitless," (Vivieno Caldinelli, Canada,)

A comedic gore-fest creature feature when a plumber and his germ-sensitive son stumble on a genetically engineered blood-thirsty monster which has escaped into the plumbing system of an apartment building emerging from its toilets. The return of Canadian TV comedy director Caldinelli, behind the Elijah Wood-produced "Seven Stages" which bowed at Tribeca.

Proof of Concept

"Bug Boy," (Peter Hengl, Capra Film, Austria)

"For Samy, 14, puberty is proving difficult: He's an outsider at school, his parents can't help him and he's apparently turning into an insect...." "Based (vaguely) on Kafka's 'Metamorphosis,' 'Bug Boy' is a TikTok-infused body horror creature feature that turns a teenage incel into a teenage insect!" says Hengl. "We want to use both practical effects and macro footage of real insects to create a unique look at the transformations of puberty that is entertaining, scary, gross, and humorous."

"Cougar," (Jennifer Handorf, Graceless Productions,)

When Ollie accepts his boss's invitation to use her holiday cabin for his friend group's holiday, he never expected her to be there... or that asking her to leave would be deadly," the log line runs. "We're turning the cabin in the woods slasher genre on its head with a fresh interpretation from a female perspective," says creator-screenwriter Grace Sergeant. "This film explores beloved tropes through the female gaze of our knife wielding psychopath Camilla, in a satisfying and playful way, leaving the audience wanting more." Packed with "gleeful gore," adds director Handorf. VFX artist Daniel Martin ("Possessor" "Lords of Chaos") is on board plus 13 Finger FX an equity investor via its newly launched 13 Finger Films.

"The Girl With the Green Eyes," (Yfke van Berckelaer, Make Way Film, Netherlands)

Described as a dark fairy tale with magical realism, turning on Mara, 8, who finds a mysterious young woman in the lake behind her house. She believes her to be the Boezehappert, a mythical Dutch water spirit who has come to save her and her siblings from the terrifying monster that lives behind the red door in their house. "The story includes horrible real-life issues, but is filled with childlike wonder and the faith in all things magical," Make Way promises. Put through European Genre Film labs at Tallinn, Zagreb and Amsterdam.

"My Stalker," (Xavier Rull, Spain, Mexico, U.S.)

A rising young singer in the music industry is stalked by a mysterious and dangerous man who can possess people astrally. As she struggles to compose a new album, deal with the pressures of fame, and evade her stalker, she descends into a dark world where music, nightmares, and the supernatural collide, threatening everything and everyone around her. “‘My Stalker’ is a psychological thriller with an original high concept,” says Rull. “It explores the gradual descent of a girl into depression. Metaphorically, Stalker embodies this mental illness, an evil force that takes hold of you. It isolates you and finally consumes you. Stalker is a disease that enters Kat’s life, and she will have to learn how to live with it.” Co-written by Rull (“Crack in the Darkness,” “Blood Bonding”) and María Rocher, a writer on Rull’s “Exile,” the courted feature debut of a potential breakout talent from Spain.

“Ostrich Boy,” (Ricardo Bonisoli, Rooxter Films, U.S.)

Boasting an affecting one take shot camera test of the protagonist in a hoodie power-walking on a running machine, “‘Ostrich Boy’ is unique in that it covers serious themes in a fantastical way. The protagonist’s visual difference is one we imagined and because it’s not based on reality, it enables viewers to relate the character’s struggles to their own personal experiences of alienation and being different,” Bonisoli tells Variety. A semi-finalist at Los Angeles and Santa Barbara international screenplay awards and a Coverfly top 20 fantasy screenplay.

“Sentinel,” (Phil Tippett, Tippett Studio, Canada, U.S.)

The Sentinel, a soldier, is “plucked from a post-apocalyptic battleground by the god Anubis, launching an epic journey,” says the synopsis. Created, directed and written by Tippett, like 2021’s “Mad God” channelling a life’s work experience. “Everything changes when technology shifts. ‘Sentinel’ will be a composite of the history of cinema in a visual effects context, where we’ll be using stop motion animation, digital imagery and other experimental approaches,” says Tippett. “I want the visceral quality of ‘Sentinel’ to create the illusion of how the unconscious operates in a creative environment and a representation of dream worlds.”

“Sister Inconnue,” (Anouk Whissell, Maja Jacob Films & Sepia Films, Canada, Quebec)

In the cursed woods of French Cove, New Brunswick, two sisters fiercely battle against the malevolent spirit of the Headless Nun, intent on their demise. “The story takes place against the backdrop of one of Canada’s darkest eras: the Seven Years’ War and the Acadian Deportation—a time rife with division, violence, and pain,” says Whissell. “What sets this project apart from conventional haunted horror films is its historical context and its inspiration drawn from the folklore legend of The Headless Nun. I firmly believe that ghost stories and legends born from tragedy possess a unique allure for audiences.” Produced by editor Maja Jacob (“Tron Legacy,” “Oblivion”) and Tina Pehme and Kim Roberts at Sepia Films (“Cry From the Sea”).

Source : <https://variety.com/2024/film/global/phil-tippett-anouk-whissell-capra-film-1235976285/>