

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

5-16 JUNE 2024

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES FIRST FILMS FOR 2024

The 71st Sydney Film Festival today announced a sneak peek of 17 new films and events to be featured in this year's 5-16 June 2024 Festival. The announcement is in advance of the full program launch on Wednesday 8 May.

"This first look at the 2024 program delves into the profound and the peculiar, from remarkable true stories to works of fiction and ingenious hybrid films that land somewhere in between," **Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley** said.

"This selection, though diverse in setting and scope, reveals some common themes: resilience foremost amongst them. These films offer a taste of a Festival program rich with discovery and insight, poised to captivate and inspire."

Two new Australian films having their world premiere feature in the Festival's first drop. ***In Vitro*** is the highly anticipated feature from directors Will Howarth and Tom McKeith (*Beast*, SFF 2016) and stars Ashley Zukerman (*Succession*) in an Australian sci-fi mystery thriller set on a remote cattle farm in the near future.

In ***The Pool***, director Ian Darling (*The Final Quarter*, SFF 2019) paints a cinematic portrait of a year in the life of the iconic Bondi Icebergs, the pool and the people who cherish it.

Will Howarth, Tom McKeith and Ian Darling will attend the Festival to present their films.

From New Zealand comes the directorial debut of actor Rachel House (*Hunt for the Wilderpeople*), ***The Mountain***. Executive produced by Taika Waititi, the film centres on three children discovering friendship's healing power through the spirit of adventure as they trek through spectacular New Zealand landscapes. The film will be eligible for the recently announced First Nations Award, offering the largest cash prize for First Nations filmmaking in the world.

International festival prize-winners in the first release of films include winner of the Golden Shell for Best Film at San Sebastián, ***The Rye Horn***, a story of a rural Galician midwife who flees after an illegal abortion goes awry.

Winner of the Special Jury Prize at Venice, legendary filmmaker Agnieszka Holland's (*Europa, Europa*, SFF 1991; *Spoor*, SFF 2017) refugee thriller ***Green Border*** raised the ire of some Polish politicians and inspired protests before setting a box office record.

Pepe won the Silver Bear at Berlinale 2024. The film tells the true-ish story of Pepe the hippo who broke free of Pablo Escobar's private zoo, featuring narration from the multilingual hippo himself.

Explanation for Everything is a Hungarian satire about the culture wars where a student accidentally becomes a figurehead for the right when he is embroiled in a national scandal. The film won the Orizzonti Award for Best Film at the Venice International Film Festival.

Explanation for Everything director Gábor Reisz and ***Pepe*** director Nelson Carlo de Los Santos Arias will attend the Festival to present their films.

One of the hits of Berlinale 2024, **Sex** follows two married and ostensibly heterosexual chimney sweeps who are unmoored when one of them sleeps with a man and the other begins to question the recurring dreams he's been having about David Bowie.

Another offbeat tale in the Festival line-up is documentary **The Contestant**, an incredible true story of a TV contestant left naked in a room, unaware his months-long challenge was being broadcast to millions via a Japanese television show. The film's director Clair Titley and the contestant himself Tomoaki Hamatsu (aka Nasubi) will attend the Festival as guests.

Gastronomes and enthusiasts of kitchen-centric storytelling will find their appetites whetted by the Festival's initial film offerings. **Menus-Plaisirs – Les Troisgrs** sees Festival favourite Frederick Wiseman (*City Hall*, SFF 2021) return with a mouth-watering epic set in a three-Michelin-star French restaurant. From Mexican director Alonso Ruizpalacios (*A Cop Movie*, SFF 2021), **La Cocina** stars Rooney Mara and Raúl Briones in a comedic drama set during the hectic lunch rush at a New York restaurant. **House of the Seasons** is an intergenerational family saga set in a tofu factory in Daegu, Korea. The film was an award-winning highlight of the Busan International Film Festival.

Stories of resilience feature with two documentaries. **COPA '71** presents the untold story of the 1971 Women's Soccer World Cup and exposes systemic sexism with governing bodies determined to undermine women's soccer. **The Battle for Laikipia** explores the tensions in Kenya's Laikipia region among herders, landholders, and conservationists against a backdrop of drought, politics, and colonial history.

A special film and live music event not to be missed, **Hear My Eyes: Hellraiser** will give audiences the opportunity to experience Clive Barker's 1987 extra-dimensional horror classic, re-scored live by EBM explorers Hieroglyphic Being and Robin Fox, and a synched laser-art show at City Recital Hall.

Other highlights announced today from filmmaking luminaries include Olivier Assayas' (*Irma Vep*, SFF 1997; *Personal Shopper* SFF 2016) most personal film yet, **Suspended Time**, about art, memory, and love in the time of COVID; and Oscar-nominated Pawo Choyning Dorji's **The Monk and The Gun**, which takes place in rural Bhutan during the lead-up to his country's first-ever election.

The full Sydney Film Festival program is announced on Wednesday 8 May 2024.

Flexipasses and subscriptions to Sydney Film Festival 2024 are on sale now.

Call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au for more information.

Follow Sydney Film Festival: [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Youtube](#)

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Matt Fraser, Director of Communications

E: matt@originalspin.com.au M: 0401 326 007

Sanika Karnik, Communications Advisor

E: sanika@originalspin.com.au M: 0466 635 010

Amber Forrest-Bisley, OS Director

E: amber@originalspin.com.au P: 8065 7363 M: 0405 363 817

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

EDITOR'S NOTES

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From Wednesday 5 to Sunday 16 June 2024, the 71st Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, red-carpet openings, in-depth discussions, film guests and more.

Sydney Film 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 sff.org.au.

The 71st Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney.

FEATURES

EXPLANATION FOR EVERYTHING

In this clever satire about the culture wars, a Hungarian student is embroiled in a national scandal when he fails his exams, accidentally becoming a figurehead for the right.

On the brink of his final high school exams, Abel is struggling to focus. His loving parents are supportive but also pressure him to perform well. But Abel is hopelessly in love with his best friend, the studious Janka, and incapable of concentrating. When he freezes during the oral component of the history exam, a Hungarian nationality pin he's absent-mindedly wearing sets off an absurd series of events that come to obsess a nation. Director Gábor Reisz, in expressing deep concern for his bitterly divided country, depicts a scenario that plausibly and frighteningly could take place in many countries in the world.

GREEN BORDER

Legendary filmmaker Agnieszka Holland's gripping refugee thriller raised the ire of some Polish politicians and inspired protests on its way to a box office record. Special Jury Prize, Venice.

Set along the border between Belarus and Poland, Holland's (*Europa, Europa*, SFF 1991; *Spoor*, SFF 2017) striking black and white film looks at how refugees, lured by false promises, fall under the control of callous border guards and sinister politicians. *Green Border* follows a Syrian family that comes into contact with a young border guard and an activist determined to help. Oscar-nominated Holland's brilliant direction (in collaboration with associate directors Kamila Tarabura and Katarzyna Warzecha) vividly conveys the terrible moral quandaries faced by these individuals in this urgent film of great political and artistic impact.

HEAR MY EYES: HELLRAISER

Experience Clive Barker's 1987 extra-dimensional horror classic, re-scored live by EBM explorers Hieroglyphic Being and Robin Fox, and a synched laser-art show at City Recital Hall.

Hellraiser brought the horror genre out of the slasher era and into the realm of emotionally complex dread. A family with secrets. A mystical puzzle box. And a group of sadomasochistic beings threatening to break free from the mouth of hell. For this special event, *Hellraiser* gets a live rescore by Chicago's Hieroglyphic Being aka Jamal Moss. He's a man known for his intense psychedelic music, taking his cues from house, industrial, avant-jazz and noise. And he's composing alongside laser and audio artist Robin Fox, bringing his epic lasers for full sensory overload! One for EBM heads and Pinheads alike. A special film and live music event not to be missed or forgotten.

HOUSE OF THE SEASONS

A tofu factory in Daegu, Korea, is the setting for this tender, moving, and funny inter-generational family saga – an award-winning highlight of the Busan International Film Festival.

As summer arrives, the entire Kim clan gathers for the annual ceremony dedicated to the ancestors. As they bicker and argue over cooking methods, the hierarchy quickly becomes clear. When young Seong-jin finally arrives from Seoul, where he's pursuing a career in acting, all attention is diverted to him – the golden grandson expected to continue the family's legacy and take over the tofu factory. But Seong-jin has plans for his future that disrupt the familial order. As the seasons pass by, the family must contemplate their changing world in this extraordinarily confident debut by director Oh Jung-min.

IN VITRO

Ashley Zukerman (*Succession*) stars in a gripping Australian sci-fi mystery thriller set on a remote cattle farm in the near future.

With cattle production devastated by ecological disasters, Jack (Zukerman) and his wife Layla (Talia Zucker) are conducting biotechnology experiments at their isolated property. While Layla longs for the return of their son from boarding school, Jack carries out research he hopes will save his family from financial ruin. This meticulously written and brilliantly performed feature from Aussie directors Tom McKeith and Will Howarth (*Beast*, SFF 2016) takes unpredictable turns as gloomy skies gather and the couple's relationship begins to strain. Strikingly filmed on the eerily dry Monaro Plains of NSW, *In Vitro* is claustrophobic, suspenseful and scarily believable.

LA COCINA

Rooney Mara and Raúl Briones star in this intense comedic drama set during the hectic lunch rush at a New York restaurant, from Mexican maverick Alonso Ruizpalacios (*A Cop Movie*, SFF 2021).

The Manhattan restaurant The Grill has a capacity of hundreds and a massive international staff to match. Over a very frantic lunch period, cash goes missing from the till. The undocumented cooks are the immediate suspects – Mexican Pedro (Briones) prime amongst them. Charming, rebellious and ambitious, he's in a relationship with American waitress Julia (Mara), who faces a personal crisis of her own. As matters culinary, political and personal clash, things come to boiling point. Brilliant performances, a fervent political message and directorial flair combine in an explosive, provocative film.

THE MONK AND THE GUN

Bhutan, 2006, and the country's first democratic election is on the horizon. But trouble may be brewing when an elderly monk requests two guns. The latest charmer from Oscar-nominated Pawo Choyning Dorji.

Dorji's (*Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom*) Telluride-selected, delightfully droll and slyly satirical film takes place in rural Bhutan during the lead-up to his country's first-ever election. A trial run with fictional parties is planned to introduce voters to the concept of democracy. But when a dedicated young monk is asked by his elderly lama to bring him two guns before voting begins, it seems trouble is in store. A cavalcade of characters and misadventures ensue, in a tale as suspenseful as it is winning.

THE MOUNTAIN

Rachel House (*Hunt for the Wilderpeople*) makes her directorial debut with this riotous and colourful drama about three children discovering friendship's healing power through the spirit of adventure. From executive producer Taika Waititi.

The fearless and determined Sam is a young Maori girl on a mission to win her battle with cancer. She hopes to find strength under the watchful eye of Taranaki Maunga, or Mountain, and so embarks on the adventure of a lifetime. Sam meets some ragtag misfits along the way – the lonely yet adorable Mallory, hoping to find friends, and the fierce Bronco, a runaway from a father who is too busy to notice him. As they go off-the-beaten track, trekking through spectacular New Zealand landscapes, the trio learn the magic of adventure and true connection.

PEPE

The true-ish story of Pepe the hippo who broke free of Pablo Escobar's private zoo, featuring deeply philosophical narration from the (multi-lingual) hippo himself. Winner, Silver Bear, Berlinale.

In one of many quixotic decisions, drug lord Pablo Escobar illegally imported a number of hippopotamuses for his private zoo in Colombia. Pepe is the descendant of these pioneer "cocaine hippos", becoming the first African hippo to ever roam the Americas after breaking free. Alongside his story, the film explores the lives and stories of people Pepe meets – from a Colombian fisherman and his irate wife to a Namibian tour guide. Technically audacious, playfully integrating fiction and non-fiction and in various media, *Pepe* is quite unlike any film you'll see this year.

THE RYE HORN

A rural Galician midwife flees after an illegal abortion goes awry in this elemental, visually ravishing exploration of bodies, motherhood and female solidarity. Winner, Best Film at San Sebastián.

In 1970s rural Galicia, the beauty of the golden rye fields belies a hidden desperation. Removed from modern medicine and steeped in strict social mores, the women of an isolated fishing village give birth in extreme agony. Some are compelled to pluck a fungus from the swaying rye for use in infusions that induce abortions. Midwife María spends her time helping mothers-to-be, even as it draws suspicion from the community. When disaster strikes, María must escape to Portugal via an old smugglers' route, dependent on the kindness of other women. Director Jaione Camborda's unsparing but vividly immersive film won the top prize at the San Sebastián International Film Festival.

SEX

When a modern-day chimney sweep has sex with a man whose chimney he's, ahem, cleaning, then tells his wife and his colleague, each is forced to question the quirks of sexuality.

One of the hits of Berlinale 2024, *Sex* climbs atop the high-rises of a Norwegian city to survey the quizzical contemporary landscape of sex, in which monogamy and fluidity make for uneasy bedfellows. Two married and ostensibly heterosexual friends are unmoored when one of them sleeps with a man and the other begins to question the recurring dreams he's been having, in which David Bowie gazes at him longingly. Dag Johan Haugerud's film is funny but also sincere and compassionate, playing out in a series of long, winding, highly articulate conversations. They're captured by a camera that is fittingly unrestricted, floating between characters mid-scene.

SUSPENDED TIME

Olivier Assayas (*Irma Vep*, SFF 1997; *Personal Shopper*) returns with a delightful semi-autobiographical film about art, memory, and love in the time of COVID. The director's most personal film yet.

As the world goes into COVID lockdown, film director Paul (Vincent Macaigne) and his music journalist brother Etienne (Micha Lescot) take refuge in their childhood home along with their respective partners. In this idyllic countryside home, filled with familiar objects, the brothers must negotiate living together again as the world beyond the house becomes increasingly unstable. Assayas himself narrates, based on his own diary, reflecting on his childhood, his relationship with his intellectual parents, and his deep connection to his childhood home. The result is playful, whimsical, filled with crêpes and charm.

DOCUMENTARIES

THE BATTLE FOR LAIKIPIA

A powerful film set in Kenya's spectacular Laikipia region, home to traditional herders, wildlife conservationists, and white pastoralists; a place where drought, politics and colonial history collide.

Samburu cattle herders have lived in the region for centuries. Many white landholders were born and raised here. But, after months without rain, once amicable societal relationships are fracturing. In the past, Indigenous herders would have roamed far seeking food and water. But white landholders have erected fences across traditional grazing routes and employed armed guards to protect their property. As the drought deepens and election rhetoric fires up the community, tension escalates. Over five years, Kenyan director Peter Murimi and Greek filmmaker-journalist Daphne Matziaraki skilfully documented this complex, increasingly violent situation, with unresolved colonial legacy meeting climate change head on.

THE CONTESTANT

The incredible true story of a TV contestant left naked in a room, unaware his months-long challenge was being broadcast to millions via a Japanese television show.

In 1998, a budding actor nicknamed 'Nasubi' auditioned for a popular TV producer. Successful, he was led into a room, ordered to strip, and tasked with entering magazine sweepstakes to win what he needed to survive – food and clothing included. Nasubi's expressive face endeared him to viewers, but the hapless contestant was unaware that his every move was being filmed and aired live, and he'd become a mega-celebrity in Japan. With footage from the show and contemporary interviews with Nasubi and his producer, director Clair Titley uncovers the truth behind one of the most extraordinary events ever broadcast, a harbinger for today's reality television.

COPA '71

The rip-roaring story, shamefully untold for decades, of the 1971 Women's Soccer World Cup, revealed by the awe-inspiring players who competed in the trailblazing tournament.

Why haven't we heard about this global sporting contest, one of the first of its kind, that attracted over 100,000 fans to Mexico City's Azteca Stadium? Because the players were women, and soccer has long been a man's game. Rachel Ramsay and James Erskine's film sets out to put the record straight – super timely given the sport's newly minted popularity. Interviews expose systemic sexism and the governing bodies determined to undermine women's soccer. Threaded throughout is long-lost footage from the 1971 competition, so you can cheer with the crowd as these inspiring but disregarded pioneers step onto the world stage.

MENUS-PLAISIRS – LES TROISGROS

Festival favourite Frederick Wiseman (*City Hall*, SFF 2021) returns with a mouth-watering epic set in a three-Michelin-star French restaurant.

Wiseman shifts his exquisite gaze from US institutions (*Ex Libris – The New York Public Library*, SFF 2018) and Parisian cultural life (*La Danse*, SFF 2022) to the world of French gastronomy. The Troisgros family restaurant in France's Rhône-Alpes region, founded in 1930, has grown into a huge operation. Wiseman captures it all: from the vast kitchens, budding chefs, dedicated local providores and super-efficient waitstaff to the well-heeled patrons. Michel, the third generation to head the restaurant, is preparing to hand the baton to his son. Wiseman (now 93) delivers a luscious and hypnotic portrait of an enduring institution on the verge of change.

THE POOL

A spectacular cinematic portrait of the iconic Bondi Icebergs – the pool and the people who cherish it – from *The Final Quarter* (SFF 2019) director Ian Darling.

Breathtaking footage and a quintessential soundtrack are woven into a meditative and poetic story. Icebergs is the most photographed pool in the world – an inviting destination for everyone from locals to tourists, beginners to competitive lap swimmers. From sunrise to sundown, rain or shine, we meet the diehard regulars recalling tales of Icebergs past and present. Darling and his team, including DOP Ben Cunningham, editor Sally Fryer and sound designer Paul Charlier, have crafted an evocative, joyous and beautiful picture of a beloved place and its community.