



72nd IFFMH: Initial highlights of the programme

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The International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg (IFFMH) is entering its 72nd edition this year from 16 to 26 November. The festival audience will once again be able to catch the German premieres of films by talented international directors. Initial highlights of the programme include fascinating films from Nepal, Singapore, China, Italy, Germany, North Macedonia, Canada and the United States. In addition, the 72nd IFFMH is welcoming back Goran Stolevski, the recipient of last year's Newcomer Award, as a member of the international jury and the director of two new films in the programme.

In the international competition: uncompromising depictions of society, grandiose dreamscapes and extreme cinéma du corps

In the international competition *ON THE RISE*, first and second works by talented up-and-coming international directors are once again waiting to be discovered by audiences as they celebrate their German premiere. These are stories of fantastic journeys, complex relationships and human despair and desires.

Sean Price Williams is one of the leading cinematographers in New York's independent film scene. Now he's making his debut as a solo director with an enchanting and fast-paced motion picture titled *›The Sweet East‹*, a modern interpretation of *Alice in Wonderland* that reflects the psychological, social and political fragmentation of the country he calls home. A young runaway encounters various subcultures on the US East Coast, from neo-punks to white supremacists, from hysterically over-the-top leftist artist types to fundamentalist Muslims. It's an uncompromising look at the underbelly of US society.

From New York's underground scene to the streets of Rome: Alain Parroni's feature-film debut, *›An Endless Sunday‹*, evokes the nostalgic effect of classic Italian cinema. Parroni focuses on the everyday lives of three millennials who wander aimlessly through the outskirts of Rome, alternating between despair and a zest for life. The three lead actors, Enrico Bassetti, Federica Valentini and Zackari Delmas, deliver a powerful portrayal of the final phase of their youth. *›An Endless Sunday‹* is an unforgettable, heavy-handed punch in the gut using grandiosely original and idiosyncratic imagery. In Venice, the film has just earned the Special Jury Prize in the *Orrizonti* section as well as the *FIPRESCI* Award.

In contrast, American director Lucy Kerr's *›Family Portrait‹* paints a tragicomic picture of the day-to-day lives of an extended family in Texas as it almost imperceptibly transcends the boundaries of time and space, of dreams and reality. At a family reunion on a Texan estate, Katy's mother suddenly disappears without a trace. Director Lucy Kerr, born in Houston in 1990, depicts the search



for the missing woman as a psychological journey, giving it a wonderfully elegant touch that is, at times, practically soaring.

In ›Dreaming and Dying‹, awarded best debut film in Locarno, Nelson Yeo from Singapore offers a superbly magical and whimsical tale about the silent regret of only ever having one life to live. The film begins serenely as three individuals arrive in a seaside town for a class reunion, but turn out to be the only people who have come. Soon, very real desires come to the surface and the film increasingly blurs the line between dreams and reality. Amid fantastical apparitions, director Yeo repeatedly finds moments of lightness and casual humour. In powerful images, he tells of an impossible love, of talking fish and of a couple's painfully familiar long-term relationship.

›Touched‹ by Claudia Rorarius is also about approaching someone in an emotional and especially a physical way. With a photographer's eye and contrary to the conventional standards of beauty, the German director depicts bodies as they are. In this extremely intense film, two outsiders are caught up in a maelstrom of mutual dependency, humiliation and domination as they push themselves to their own limits and beyond. The two lead actors were each named best young actor in Locarno.

This year, IFFMH once again includes discoveries from countries whose cinema is not widely familiar in Germany. ›The Red Suitcase‹ by Fidel Devkota is a fantastic portrayal of the growing political and economic insecurity faced by youth in present-day Nepal. The driver of a pick-up truck leaves Kathmandu airport on a two-day journey to bring an international delivery to a remote mountain village while a lone figure slowly makes his way along a country road, wheeling a small red suitcase towards the same village. In the long fixed shots and immersed in the misty scenery of Nepal, ›The Red Suitcase‹ acquires a mystical and poignant momentum. Not least, its thoroughly unconventional narrative style gives us a deep insight into another culture.

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES: Exposing the dark underbelly

In the PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES section, the IFFMH presents current works by established filmmakers who, in the view of the programme team, explore or even push the boundaries of the medium of film in an original way. Further German premieres include Goran Stolevski's ›Housekeeping for Beginners‹ as well as entries from China and Canada that offer impressive aesthetics and spellbinding narratives.

›Only the River Flows‹ (2023) is the third feature film by Chinese director Wei Shujun, who was born in 1991. This is a visually striking, emotionally complex and extremely suspenseful film from China about a serial killer. Ma Zhe, team



leader of the local detective squad, begins his investigation. But what initially appears to be a routine case that soon leads to an arrest turns out to be a great mystery. As in classic Hollywood film noir, Wei Shujun creates an unmistakable atmosphere of impenetrable darkness, light and flowing water everywhere. Shot on grainy 16mm stock, this film looks as if it was made in the era in which it is set, namely in the 1990s.

The Canadian director Pascal Plante, born in 1988, also deals with the dark underbelly of the human condition and is wholeheartedly absorbed in the perspective of his female protagonist. A young woman is an observer at a trial for the murder of three girls. A strange resemblance to one of the girls leads her down a dark path in search of the final piece of the puzzle. Pascal Plante's third feature film, ›Red Rooms‹, is a murder mystery that progressively turns into a nerve-racking psychological thriller.

Goran Stolevski: IFFMH award-winner on the international jury

Last year, Goran Stolevski received the IFFMH Newcomer Award for his feature-film debut, ›You Won't be Alone‹ (2021). This year, the Australian-Macedonian filmmaker returns to the IFFMH as a member of the international jury.

Stolevski's films are intricate compositions of great beauty and poignant energy. His third feature film, ›Housekeeping for Beginners‹ (2023), which he wrote, directed and edited, is being screened as a German premiere in the PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES section. Set in North Macedonia, this drama tells the story of Daria, who never intended to be a mother, but is compelled by external circumstances to raise her girlfriend's two daughters. This film portrays family ties that transcend kinship and traditional role models, thus challenging our conventional way of looking at things.

All of the films described here are German premieres.

Images

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About the IFFMH

The IFFMH has been a unique platform for cultural, social and political dialogue via the art of film since 1952, making it the longest-running film festival in Germany after the Berlinale. The central aim of the IFFMH is discovering and promoting talented young film professionals from all over the world. The 72nd IFFMH will be held in Mannheim and Heidelberg from 16 to 26 November 2023. The complete festival schedule will be announced in late October.



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