

FANTASTIC 7

2026

**TAKASHI
MIIKE**

FANTASTIC
GODFATHER
2026



© K. Kurigami



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MARCHÉ DU FILM
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SITGES
INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC
FILM FESTIVAL OF CATALONIA

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CHALLENGES OF THE GENRE CINEMA



Guillaume Esmiol

Executive Director of Marché du Film - Festival de Cannes

Each year since its launch in 2019, the Fantastic 7 showcase has been a must-watch event on the Marché du Film calendar, spotlighting the most promising talents in fantastic and genre cinema.

Thanks to the continued support of Sitges Film Festival, this initiative brings together a vibrant mix of investors, distributors, and passionate genre film lovers! This year again, we are proud to support these creative ideas and give them the visibility they deserve through this special showcase.

So get ready to discover this year's exceptional works-in-progress and join us for a new edition of Fantastic 7!



Mònica Garcia Massagué

**Foundation General Manager,
Sitges – International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia**

In the current landscape of film production, fantasy genre cinema stands as the last stronghold firmly anchored within the industry, whether in a latent and secure form or through outright triumphs. This is evidenced by the recent Academy Awards, where a film like *Sinners* made history with a record number of nominations. This phenomenon invites reflection on where the stories of the future will come from: while *Sinners* can be read as a contemporary homage to *From Dusk Till Dawn* by Robert Rodriguez, now celebrating its 30th anniversary, the industry is beginning to explore new languages emerging from vertical formats such as YouTube and TikTok. At the same time, new narrative settings are taking shape within the digital ecosystem: liminal spaces, synthetic worlds, and hybrid realities that are redefining not only how stories are told, but also where they are imagined from. In the following pages, you will find a preview of seven proposals that will shape the most immediate trends in our industry.



Bernardo Bergeret

Founder Ventana Sur – Blood Window

Fantastic 7 is back, stronger and bolder than ever. Not even the challenges of a global pandemic could slow its momentum. Over the years, it has evolved into a true powerhouse of genre cinema, consistently delivering original, high-quality projects that showcase immense talent.

From haunting pasts to dystopian futures, these stories traverse time and space, exploring diverse worlds and pushing characters—and imagination itself—to their absolute limits, in both form and substance. Fantastic 7 continues to prove that creativity knows no bounds.



JAPAN MADNESS AT FANTASTIC 7

In an art form as demanding as filmmaking (both financially but also in terms of coordinating large crews of professionals), a director's primary goal must be to bring every project to fruition, whether they're the ones he proposes himself or those that find their way onto his desk. In this way, he must build a filmography, a collection of opportunities not squandered, where his own vision shines through. An unmistakable voice, a personal, inalienable hallmark.

At present, between short films, feature films, TV series, and music videos, Takashi Miike's filmography includes nearly 150 titles. And it's very likely that by the time you've finished reading this, that number will have grown by at least a couple of entries. Thirty-five years of experience have led him to build one of the most prolific filmographies in film history, and the best part is that his art shows no signs of running out of steam (as evidenced by the film with Charli XCX he has scheduled for next year).

Over three decades maintained at an infernal production rate, during which such seminal titles as *Audition*, *Ichi the Killer*, *The Happiness of the Katakuris*, *Visitor Q*, *Gozu*, *Crows Zero*, *13 Assassins*, *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, *First Love*, etc... have all made their mark... When the world was just beginning

to allow itself to be seduced by the latest wave of J-Horror, he had already set the standard; when we were wondering if video games would ever merge with cinema, he came up with the solution (just as he did with the transition from anime to live-action); when we were rediscovering 3D, he used it to revisit the sacred works of Masaki Kobayashi...

From the liturgical precision of the chanbara to the wildest space adventures; from studio commissions to projects that can only spring from radically auteurist pursuits. Always with the same energy and commitment; never knowing, from the start, where these forces of nature are going to take us. To a yakuza thriller, perhaps, or maybe to haunted house horror, or courtroom dramas, or a noodle western, or gloriously absurd comedies, or eccentric superhero movies... With no frontiers, no fear of losing control, no limits that can contain a cinema that screams at the top of its lungs whenever it sees an opportunity, and that, consistently, knows no taboos.

If you've ever had an intrusive thought that you wanted to banish from your mind, out of fear it would overwhelm you or simply because it made you uncomfortable, take comfort (or tremble) knowing that Takashi Miike has almost certainly already included it in one of his infinite films.

A conversation with

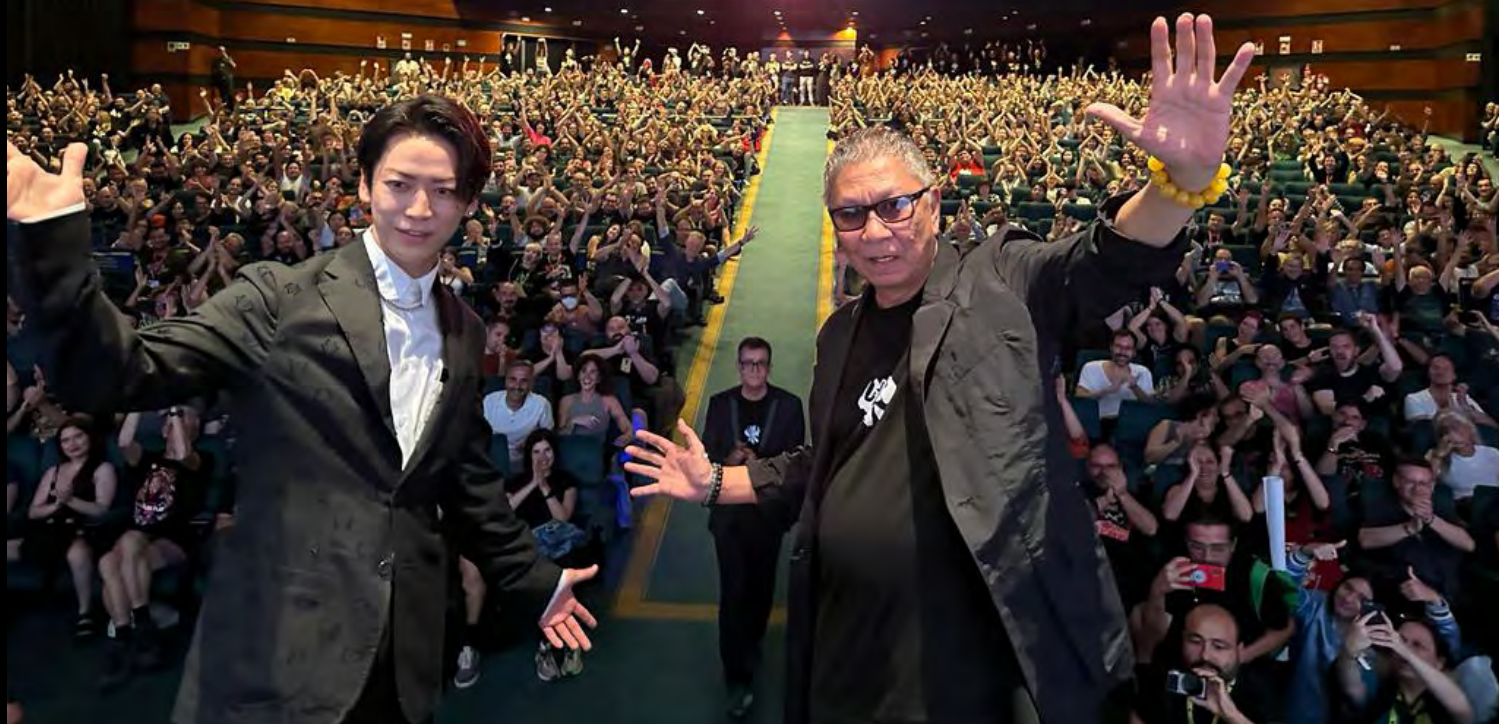
Takashi Miike

GODFATHER OF FANTASTIC 7, 2026

**“FREEDOM IS
THE GATEWAY”**

On the occasion of his appointment as godfather of the upcoming edition of Fantastic 7 at the Marché du Film- Festival de Cannes, Takashi Miike reflects on a singular filmmaking trajectory defined by creative autonomy, radical experimentation, and an unwavering devotion to cinema. From his formative encounters with popular genre icons to his unlikely entry into the industry and subsequent evolution into one of the most prolific and boundary-pushing directors of contemporary Japanese cinema, Miike articulates a philosophy rooted in freedom, discipline, and total submission to the film itself. This interview traces the origins of his relationship with the fantastic, his working ethos, and his expectations for a new generation of filmmakers shaped by the limitless possibilities of the digital age.

TAKASHI MIIKE | Godfather of Fantastic 7, 2026



Official presentation of *Lamberjack the Monster* at the 2023 Sitges Film Festival.

ORIGINS

Your cinema often feels shaped by formative shocks and unexpected encounters. If you look back, what early images or experiences first fractured your perception of film and opened the door to something more radical?

For a boy born in 1960, movies meant anime, *Godzilla*, and *Gamera*.

My first encounter with a foreign film came when my father—unusually—invited me to a local theater to see Steven Spielberg's *Duel*. As I recall, it was released theatrically only in Japan. I was ten years old. After the screening, my father, who loved movies, muttered, "It didn't cost much, but it was interesting." That single remark had a profound impact on my life. It taught me that the power of a film is not determined by its budget. Soon after came the arrival of Bruce Lee. I began saving my allowance to go to the movies.

In high school, I encountered *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, which shattered me. That said, I never once thought about becoming a film director or working on set at the time. For a boy who had repeatedly been let down by dreams and aspirations, that was only natural.

So why did I enroll in a film school (Yokohama Academy of Broadcasting and Film)? The answer is simple: there was no entrance exam.

In reality, I hardly attended. Two years passed as

I spent my time working part-time jobs and riding motorcycles. Meanwhile, the serious students were preparing their graduation films.

BECOMING A FILMMAKER

Your path into filmmaking was anything but conventional—almost accidental. Looking back, do you think that unexpected beginning ultimately gave you a greater sense of freedom as a director?

As I mentioned, while my classmates were busy with their projects, the school received a job request for an assistant director.

School staff: "All our students are busy with their graduation projects. We have no one to recommend." The requester, apparently desperate: "Then introduce me to someone who doesn't even come to school." School staff: "...There is one." That was the moment I became useful to someone for the first time.

From then on, I spent ten years working as an assistant director—serving the film and the director—and learned the fundamentals of filmmaking.

Eventually, I was asked to direct. Of course, it was an ultra-low-budget project. But in exchange for the limited budget, I was given freedom. And freedom is the gateway to fantastic cinema.

THE FANTASTIC AS TERRITORY

You've described freedom as intrinsic to low-budget filmmaking. Would you say that the fantastic genre, in your work, emerges precisely from that space of constraint turned into creative possibility?

I do not live for myself, but for the film. For me, cinema does not exist for my future—it is absolute.

Desires such as wanting recognition as a director, becoming famous, or making money have faded away. I devote myself completely. I become a slave to the film.

PHILOSOPHY OF CREATION

Your films often place characters under extreme pressure, where something latent seems to emerge. What draws you to these moments of intensity, and what do they reveal to you about human nature?

When people are cornered—when they are pushed to the edge—dormant strength awakens.

THE FUTURE OF THE FANTASTIC

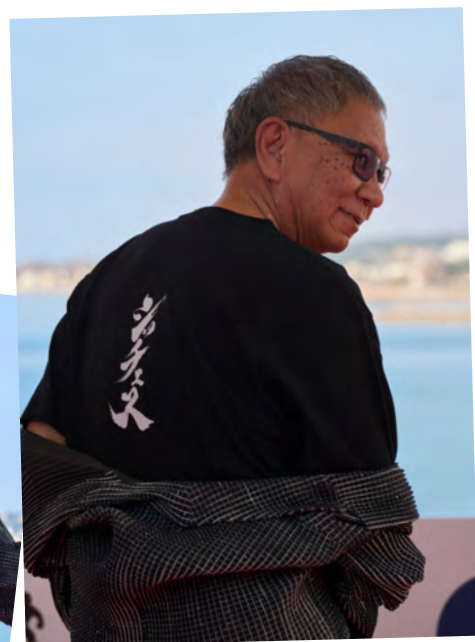
As godfather of Fantastic 7 at the Marché du Film, what kind of cinema would you like to see emerge from the fantastic in the years to come?

I have great expectations for the next generation of filmmakers who have been immersed in the digital ocean since birth.

I want them to create films we have never seen before. I look forward to encountering something truly shocking—like the impact Bruce Lee suddenly had on me as a boy.



Takashi Miike received the Time Machine Award at the 2003 Sitges Film Festival.



Photocall for *Lumberjack the Monster* at the 2003 Sitges Film Festival.

5 Out of More Than 100

Greatest hits to get to know the madcap and hyper-stimulating world of Takashi Miike



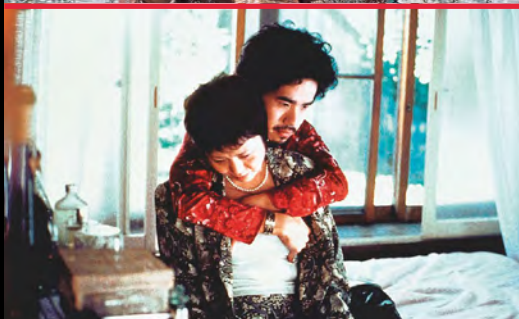
Audition

Quite possibly the film that best encapsulates the virtues of Takashi Miike's filmmaking. A key entry in the J-Horror canon, this portrayal of Eihi Shiina's tortuous life journey could be seen today as the chillingly prophetic (and lucid, within the madness in which it unfolds) testimony of a historical moment when the precarious balances of power between men and women are on the verge of being blown to pieces.



Ichi the Killer

A key film to understand, first of all, how Takashi Miike is truly in a class of his own when it comes to working on the transition from manga (in this case, based on material by Hideo Yamamoto) to live-action feature film. And second, to immerse ourselves in the bloodbath of one of the spectacles that best conveys the impact of early 21st-century cinematic ultra-violence.



Visitor Q

Pure discomfort made into a film. Dysfunction as an aberrant energy that makes us tick. Not a single one of the situations it gives us access to is exactly pleasant... and even so, it's impossible to stop revisiting it. An uncompromising exploration of the violent and sexual impulses that lurk in every home; in a society where its inflexibility in both forms and relationships is the perverse vestige of the work of a parasite that has surely infected us as well.



13 Assassins

Nearly half a century after the original film directed by Eiichi Kudo, Takashi Miike joins the remake frenzy, taking the opportunity to showcase himself as one of the most versatile directors on the world stage. Meticulous when it comes to respecting the liturgies of the chanbara genre; bold in his daring use of CGI... masterful in his planning and delivery of a final climax with a sustained, adrenaline-fueled crescendo that makes this piece an unmissable action movie classic, whether traditional or modern.



First Love

After practically three decades in the business, it's still possible to fall in love with Takashi Miike for the first time... and, in the process, to be swept away by the irresistible force of a filmmaking style that revels in collision; with bodies slamming into each other, and, in the same spirit, with genres colliding as well. At the time of the release of this blend of thriller and romantic drama, the person directing it is 59 years old, but his vital signs are worthy of the raging youth of his zany protagonists.

JAPAN, FANTASTIQUE TERRITORY (2020-2026)

The Japanese film industry successfully weathered the COVID-19 pandemic through a strategy of internal resilience that resulted in a self-sufficient industrial approach, focused on the performance of productions within its own domestic market. International distribution was thereby relegated to a complementary role which, nevertheless, has yielded notable successes for certain anime productions and, especially, with the impact in the United States of *Godzilla Minus One* (Takashi Yamazaki, 2023), which was the confirmation of the international resurgence of kaiju eiga, driven both by the popularity that American productions and streaming series brought to this genre and by the renewed determination of the Japanese industry to assert its cultural heritage and lay claim to the ownership of its charismatic characters.

In the post-pandemic landscape, Japanese fantastic films have dominated the domestic box office, particularly through the language of anime, with massive hits such as *Jujutsu Kaisen 0* (Gekijô-ban *Jujutsu Kaisen Zero*, Sunghoo Park, 2021), *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba - The Movie: Mugen Train* (Gekijô-ban *Kimetsu no Yaiba Mugen Ressha-hen*, Haruo Sotozaki, 2020), which grossed over 360 million dollars nationwide, or *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba - The Infinity Train* (Gekijô-ban *Kimetsu no Yaiba Mugen Jô-hen*, Hikaru Kondo & Haruo Sotozaki, 2025), which has added more than 136 million dollars at international box offices to its over 250 million dollars in Japan, reaching a total of 739 million dollars, a record for a Japanese production driven by the international distribution model centralized by Crunchyroll through Sony Pictures International. Live-action fantastic films and horror movies, on the other hand, have made a more timid appearance at Japanese box offices, though with some outstanding examples such as the aforementioned *Godzilla Minus One*, the live-action *Tokyo Revengers*

(Tsutomu Hanabusa, 2021), the mystery film *A Strange House* (Junichi Ishikawa, 2024), the *tokusatsu* reboot *Shin Ultraman* (Shinji Higuchi & Ikki Todoroki, 2022), or the video game adaptation *Exit 8* (Genki Kawamura, 2025), perhaps the Japanese horror film that has performed best in the domestic market this decade.

Anime: The Driving Force Behind the Fantastique Genre in Japan

To regard recent anime blockbusters as products that are typical of the fantastic film circuit is, to say the least, reductionist. The success of these films can be attributed above all to a transnational fan phenomenon with a consumer logic that goes far beyond traditional genre classifications. Besides the aforementioned *Jujutsu Kaisen 0* and the *Demon Slayer* saga, as well as the phenomenon *Chainsaw Man - The Movie: Reze Arc* (Gekijô-ban *Chensô Man Reze-hen*, Tatsuya Yoshihara, 2025), an eloquent example is the *One Piece* series, with its endless catalog of references of all kinds, and which has also been a hit on the big screen this decade with *One Piece Film: Red* (Wan Pîsu Firumu Reddo, Goro Taniguchi, 2022). The same can be said of classic series such as *Detective Conan*, *Mobile Suit Gundam*, or *Doraemon*, which continue to enjoy success in theaters with diverse themes and are open to widely varied genre developments.

However, alongside these anime franchises, there is a more auteur-driven approach where the fantastique perspective is indeed a deliberate choice. The most obvious case is that of Studio Ghibli and, more specifically, Hayao Miyazaki, whose latest work, *The Boy and the Heron* (Kimi-tachi wa dô ikiru ka, 2023) proved to be not only an extraordinary, animated film but also a masterpiece of the fantastique genre. It was the first original anime production to reach number one at the North American

JAPAN, FANTASTIQUE TERRITORY

box office and grossed over 167 million dollars worldwide, crowned with the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2024, the second for Miyazaki following *Spirited Away* (2001).

Mamoru Hosoda's calling for genre has been evidenced by his most recent films, such as the highly successful *Belle* (2021), a virtual-reality take on *Beauty and the Beast*, or the more controversial *Scarlet* (Hateshinaki Sukâretto, 2025), while in the case of Masaaki Yuasa, that same fantastic impulse reached its zenith with the exceptional *Inu-Oh* (2021), one of the best anime films of the decade so far, which unfortunately did not have the impact it deserved. Undoubtedly, the anime creator who has best combined a fan-oriented, auteur-driven approach with a fantastique vision has been Makoto Shinkai, who, following the phenomenon *Your Name* (2016), added another hit to his repertoire this decade with *Suzume* (2022), with a worldwide box office total of nearly 320 million dollars, making it the fourth highest-grossing Japanese film in international history, and cementing a blockbuster animation model capable of generating a devotion that transcends the usual anime circuits to connect with a broad international audience. This model has also been joined by female filmmakers, a rarity in Japanese animation, with the coming-of-age fantasy *The Colors Within* (Kimi no iro, 2024), with which Naoko Yamada adds to the imaginary of her intimate journey that began with *A Silent Voice: The Movie* (Koe no katachi, 2016).

Live-Action films, J-Horror, Kaiju Eiga and Other Usual Suspects

The phenomenon of live-action films —real-life cinematic adaptations of major anime or manga hits— seems to have waned somewhat in contemporary Japanese filmmaking, although several examples related to the fantastic genre, and especially science fiction, have held their own at the Japanese box office and have even achieved a high level of international sales or commercialization on streaming platforms. For example, *Tokyo Revengers* and *Ruroni Kenshin: Final Chapter* (Rurôni Kenshin: Sai shûshô – The Final, Keishi Otomo, 2021), both split into two feature films, have achieved great success with their domestic releases, though they have not been able to avoid controversy and even criticism from fans regarding aspects such as the cast or the portrayal of their universes in live-action. A special mention must be made of the boldness of *Cells at Work!* (Hideki Takeuchi, 2024), a sort of delirious journey through the interior of the human body based on the manga by Akane Shimizu, previously adapted into an anime series that began in 2018.

The so-called J-Horror —the movement that, in the wake of the global impact of *The Ring* (Ringu, Hideo Nakata, 1998), established a style of psychological, atmospheric, and supernatural horror recognizable worldwide— refuses to fade away as a productive label. Although it

may be less relevant at domestic box offices now, this subgenre still carries considerable weight in international sales and shows a tendency to explore new themes while defending the stylistic elements that brought it so much success in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Its classic masters —Hideo Nakata, Takashi Shimizu, and Kiyoshi Kurosawa—continue to contribute ideas through television and even film, with the aim of renewing this genre through a blend of old themes and contemporary approaches, as is the case with *The Forbidden Play* (Kinjirareta asobi, Hideo Nakata, 2023), *Homunculus* (Homunkurusu, Takashi Shimizu, 2021), *Immersion* (Takashi Shimizu, 2023), and *Sana: Let Me Hear* (Ano ko wa daare?, Takashi Shimizu, 2024). Of the three, Shimizu has proven to be the most faithful to the codes of classic J-Horror, as evidenced by some of his latest films: *Suicide Forest Village* (Jukai Mura, 2021), *Ox-Head Village* (Ushikubi Village, 2022) and, above all, *Sana* (Minna no uta, 2023), his work that has had the greatest impact outside Japan so far this decade and which is on its way to becoming a cult classic.

The Boy and the Heron proved to be not only an extraordinary film but also a masterpiece of the fantastique genre.

Meanwhile, Kiyoshi Kurosawa has recently returned to the horror genre with two works that rightfully rank among the very best in the pantheon of contemporary Japanese fantastique: the short film *Chime* (2024), a perfect complement to his masterpiece *Pulse* (Kairo, 2001) about an unexpected apocalypse that emerges from everyday life, and *Cloud* (Kuraudo, 2024), which explores new forms of anxiety and horror arising from contemporary social behaviors —in this case, internet consumption— with a curious apocalyptic slant. This Japanese maestro continues to forge a unique path, imbuing almost all his works with that strange trademark that unexpectedly connects with the characteristics that are unique to the fantastic genre —as can also be seen in *Serpent's Path* (2024), a remake of his own 1998 film— while maintaining, at the same time, an international prestige that is backed by his constant presence at the major film festivals that make up the global circuit.

The recent cult following of early J-Horror itself, as well as V-Cinema —horror, action, violent and erotic films produced between the 1980s and the early 2000s for direct release on home video— has given rise to a “micro-fantastique” genre with strong appeal for the genre circuit. A standout in this category is Kenichi Ugana, the director behind the surprising *The Curse* (2025), as well as extremely personal and weird productions such as *The Gesuidouz* (2024), *We Are Aliens* (2024), *I Fell in Love*

JAPAN, FANTASTIQUE TERRITORY

with a Z-Grade Director in Brooklyn (2025), and *Incomplete Chairs* (2025). Along similar lines are films such as the *Baby Assassins* trilogy (Beibī warukyūre, Yugo Sakamoto, 2021–24) or the adrenaline-fueled revenge movie *Ghost Killer* (Kensuke Sonomura, 2024), with clear echoes of V-Cinema. It is also worth noting the emergence of an unexpected female filmmaker in this territory, namely the influencer Yuriyan Retriever with her surprising *Mag Mag* (2025), which paves the way for the presence of female directors in Japanese genre filmmaking, following the precedents set by Shimako Sato and Kei Fujiwara in the 1990s or, more recently, Mari Asato and Lisa Takeba.

Within this minimalist, low-budget format of filmmaking, the mark left by *One Cut of the Dead* (Kamera o tomeru na!, Shin'ichirō Ueda, 2017) is particularly significant. Its formula—a shoestring budget, an ingenious premise pushed to the limit, and a tone that swings back and forth between humor and genre—has spawned a line of offspring that, paradoxically, has veered more towards science fiction than horror. This is demonstrated by the stimulating *Beyond the Two Infinite Minutes* (Dorosute no

The Japanese film industry successfully weathered the COVID-19 pandemic through a strategy of internal resilience.

hate de bokura, Junta Yamaguchi, 2020), *Mondays: See you this Week* (Mondays: Kono taimu rūpu, jōshi ni kizukasenai to owaranai, Ryo Takebayashi, 2022), and *A Samurai in Time* (Jun'ichi Yasuda, 2024), all of which have gained significant international recognition.

Beyond nostalgia or a defense of certain formats, the Japanese horror genre has found its most innovative offerings at the intersection of three spheres: video games, social media, and contemporary horror manga, inherited from a legendary auteur such as Junji Ito. Yūta Shimotsu surprised audiences with the unsettling *Best Wishes to All* (Mina ni ko are, 2023) and, above all, with *New Group* (2025), possibly one of the best genre films of the last five years in Japan: a horror film in keeping with the TikTok era, featuring images derived from Junji Ito's universe and tributes to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, in a feast of geometric horror and bloodless body horror. In a similar vein but on a bigger budget, *Exit 8* (Genki Kawamura, 2025) brilliantly adapts a video game by Kotake Create in a repetitive, yellow-hued sonic nightmare—with Ravel's Boléro playing in the background—that has achieved considerable success in Japan and notable international distribution thanks to its screening at the Cannes Film Festival. With this, the Toho company demonstrated its dual commitment: on the one hand, this avant-garde horror movie by Kawamura; on the other, a more classic Gothic horror with the remarkable *Dollhouse*

(Shinobu Yaguchi, 2025), which was also well-received at specialized international film festivals.

Another of Japanese cinema's historic subgenres, *kaiju eiga*, continues to enjoy a remarkable vitality in the current decade. Already bolstered by the artistic and commercial success of *Shin Godzilla* (Hideaki Anno & Shinji Iguchi, 2016), this subgenre was further reinforced following the 70th anniversary of the legendary *Godzilla* (Gojira), celebrated with the release of a restored version of the 1954 original directed by Ishirō Honda, and culminated in the premiere of *Godzilla Minus One*, the biggest international hit in Toho's saga, with worldwide box office takings of over 113 million dollars—57 million of which came from the U.S. market—and winning the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects in 2024. The magnitude of this phenomenon has led to the new instalment, once again directed by Yamazaki under the title *Godzilla Minus Zero*, becoming the most eagerly awaited Japanese film of 2026. In the wake of this international resurgence of *kaiju eiga*, related subgenres such as *tokusatsu* and *yokai horror* have also regained ground, with notable films such as *Shin Ultraman* (Shinji Higuchi & Ikki Todoroki, 2022) and *The Great Yokai War: Guardians* (Takashi Miike, 2021).

Horror in contemporary Japanese cinema tends to blend naturally with the mystery thriller genre, as is the case with the big hit film *A Strange House* (Junichi Ishikawa, 2024), which draws on the supernatural investigations that are so popular in Japan today, Don't Call it Mystery: the Movie (Misuteri to Iu Nakare, Hiroaki Matsuyama, 2023) or Masquerade Night (Masukarêdo naito, Masayuki Suzuki, 2021). Also belonging to this hybrid territory is the revenge thriller *Lumberjack the Monster* (Kaibutsu no kikori, 2023) by the iconic Takashi Miike, where the director of *Audition* allowed himself a break from his frenetic television activity in recent years to return to a more recognizable generic style.

The landscape of contemporary Japanese fantastic filmmaking is rounded out by active efforts at restoration and preservation of film heritage by studios including Toho, Kadokawa, Nikkatsu, and Shochiku, which have revived films from genres such as *kwaidan eiga*, *kaiju eiga*, Toho's science fiction, *Nikkatsu Noir*, and *Roman Porno*. Anime has also benefited from this policy, with continuous revivals of Studio Ghibli's filmography and classic works such as *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988), *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995), or, more recently, *Angel's Egg* (Mamoru Oshii, 1985) and *Ninja Scroll* (Yoshiaki Kawajiri, 1993). A task that confirms that the Japanese industry, while producing new fantastique genre works, actively preserves and champions the memory of those it has already created.

ÁNGEL SALA & JORDI SÁNCHEZ-NAVARRO

8TH - 18TH OCTOBER 2026

SITGES

59TH INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC
FILM FESTIVAL OF CATALONIA



SITGES - INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL OF CATALONIA

About SITGES

SITGES – International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia is the number one fantasy film festival in the world and is considered the film event with the greatest international impact for the fantastic genre industry. With a solid experience, the Sitges Festival is a stimulating universe of encounters, exhibitions, presentations and screenings of fantasy films from all over the world.

The Festival wrapped up its 58th edition setting a new audience record; consolidating its position as a worldwide benchmark when it comes to supporting both emerging and more seasoned talent, and bringing together a selection of films and activities that are ideal for collectively celebrating our love and devotion to fantastic films.

Thanks to the attendance of big-name artists and to industry initiatives that continued to strengthen the productive framework where the most audacious projects flourish, Sitges once again excelled not only as a magnificent celebration of genre moviemaking, but also as one of its main catalysts.

About our choice: *Dead Ground*

Dead Ground (original title *La zona oscura*) stands out as a project that engages with the fantastic genre through a contemporary lens, exploring landscapes in transformation marked by tensions between past and future. Rooted in a compelling blend of folk horror and science fiction, the narrative unfolds around ecological disruption and ancestral forces awakened by technological intervention, articulating a conflict between progress and memory. The project is driven by filmmaker Marta Medina del Valle, whose singular voice has been shaped through her work in documentary and film criticism, and whom the Sitges Film Festival actively supports as emerging talent within its WomanInFan program. In this sense, the film exemplifies the growing relevance of stories that confront present-day dystopias, placing the viewer within a recognizable contemporary horror that resonates with real anxieties. By delving into themes of displacement, belonging, and fractured roots, it taps into a collective unease about the erosion of identity and the transformation of the spaces we inhabit.



SITGES

INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC
FILM FESTIVAL OF CATALONIA

2026

59TH EDITION

8TH-18TH OCTOBER

sitgesfilmfestival.com

DEAD GROUND

When a man vanishes after returning to his home village, his pregnant girlfriend discovers that all its inhabitants are disappearing.



Héctor is a Spanish engineer living in Paris who left his hometown as a teenager after his parents died in a strange accident. When the company he works for sends him back to his village to fix the data center they've built nearby, his pregnant girlfriend, Héléne, travels with him to support him in this trip back to his roots. There, he finds that the few remaining villagers are fighting to shut the project down, as it is causing blackouts and drying up the river and the crops. When Héctor suddenly disappears, Héléne discovers that the data center has awakened something ancestral that may be the cause of the people's vanishing.

ORIGINAL TITLE: **La zona sombra**
TITLE IN ENGLISH: **Dead Ground**

DIRECTOR: **Marta Medina del Valle**
CAST: **TBC**
GENRE: **Folk Horror, supernatural, mystery**
NATIONALITY: **Spain**
LANGUAGE: **Spanish, French**
PRODUCERS: **LAZONA**

STATUS: **Script**

BUDGET: **2.2M**





SPANISH KALEIDOSCOPE
NEW SPANISH FANTASTIC FILMS

LA ZONA SOMBRA

MARTA MEDINA DEL VALLE

PRODUCED BY

LAZONA



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GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

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Check out the latest **Catalan genre films!**



icec.cat/CF_genrefilms

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السينمائي الدولي ٤٧



47TH CAIRO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL

11TH - 20TH NOVEMBER 2026



CAIRO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

About CIFF

Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF) is one of the oldest and most prestigious festivals in the Arab world and Africa, showcasing diverse global cinema while championing regional voices. Embracing all genres, CIFF celebrates genre films that push artistic and narrative boundaries, fostering dialogue between mainstream and independent filmmaking, and highlighting the richness of Arab and international genre cinema.

About our choice: *Rock, Paper, Sea*

Cairo International Film Festival is proud to support The Cairo International Film Festival (CIFF) has strategically selected *Rock, Paper, Sea* for the prestigious Fantastic 7 program at Marché du Film (Cannes) because it represents a sophisticated evolution of regional genre cinema. While the project is rooted in

the Drama and Animation genres, its inclusion in a platform dedicated to fantastic and genre-leaning films highlights its innovative narrative structure.

The film distinguishes itself by blending a coming-of-age journey with a high-stakes mystery. The project employs magical realism and psychological tension. This genre-bending approach allows director Randa Ali to explore heavy themes of alienation and the "weight of adulthood" through a stylized, imaginative lens that is visually and tonally distinct from traditional social realism.

Furthermore, the choice reflects CIFF's commitment to elevated genre filmmaking in the MENA region.

By championing *Rock, Paper, Sea*, CIFF presents a project that is both culturally specific and globally resonant, proving that Arab genre films can compete on the most elite international stages.

ROCK, PAPER, SEA

On Egypt's Mediterranean coast in 2001, Maha, a wildly imaginative 11 year old girl, embarks on a summer-long quest to solve the mystery behind her father's absence, leading her to face the unspoken complexities of adulthood.



ORIGINAL TITLE: **Ser Ekhtefaa' Baba**
TITLE IN ENGLISH: **Rock, Paper, Sea**

DIRECTOR: **Randa Ali**

CAST: **TBC**

GENRE: **Drama, Family Drama, Mystery, Surreal**

NATIONALITY: **Egyptian , Greece**

LANGUAGE: **Egyptian Arabic**

PRODUCERS: **Norah Elkhateeb**

STATUS: **Late Development script**

BUDGET: **832K USD**



Rock paper sea is set in the summer of 2001 by the Egyptian Mediterranean, we follow Maha, an 11 year old girl with a wild imagination who learns that her beloved father, who she shares her love for writing and drawing with, will not be returning home for her birthday as he's stuck in an oil rich country. Maha spends the summer searching for answers to the secret behind his disappearance. Her quest in finding him leads her to new discoveries about friendship, girlhood and the complexities of the adult world.



BUCHEON INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL 2026.7.2—7.12



BUCHEON INTERNATIONAL FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL

About BIFAN

Celebrating its 30th anniversary, BIFAN is the definitive heart of Asian genre cinema. For three decades, it has championed horror, sci-fi, and fantasy, driving the genre's dynamic growth. Now, BIFAN transcends traditional boundaries by integrating AI and cutting-edge tech. Under "Stay Strange, Stay Curious," we invite global creators to redefine the future of cinema.

About our choice: *Last Mankind*

Director HUH Gun, who has demonstrated his talent through a wide range of short films, takes on post-apocalyptic science fiction in his first feature-length genre film, *Last Mankind*. While inheriting the traditional narrative framework of the SF genre, he crafts a distinctive mise-en-scène with his own unique tone and texture. In particular, the film's technical ambition—seamlessly combining analog methods with VFX and AI technologies—stands out as the most compelling reason for BIFAN to support and recommend this project.



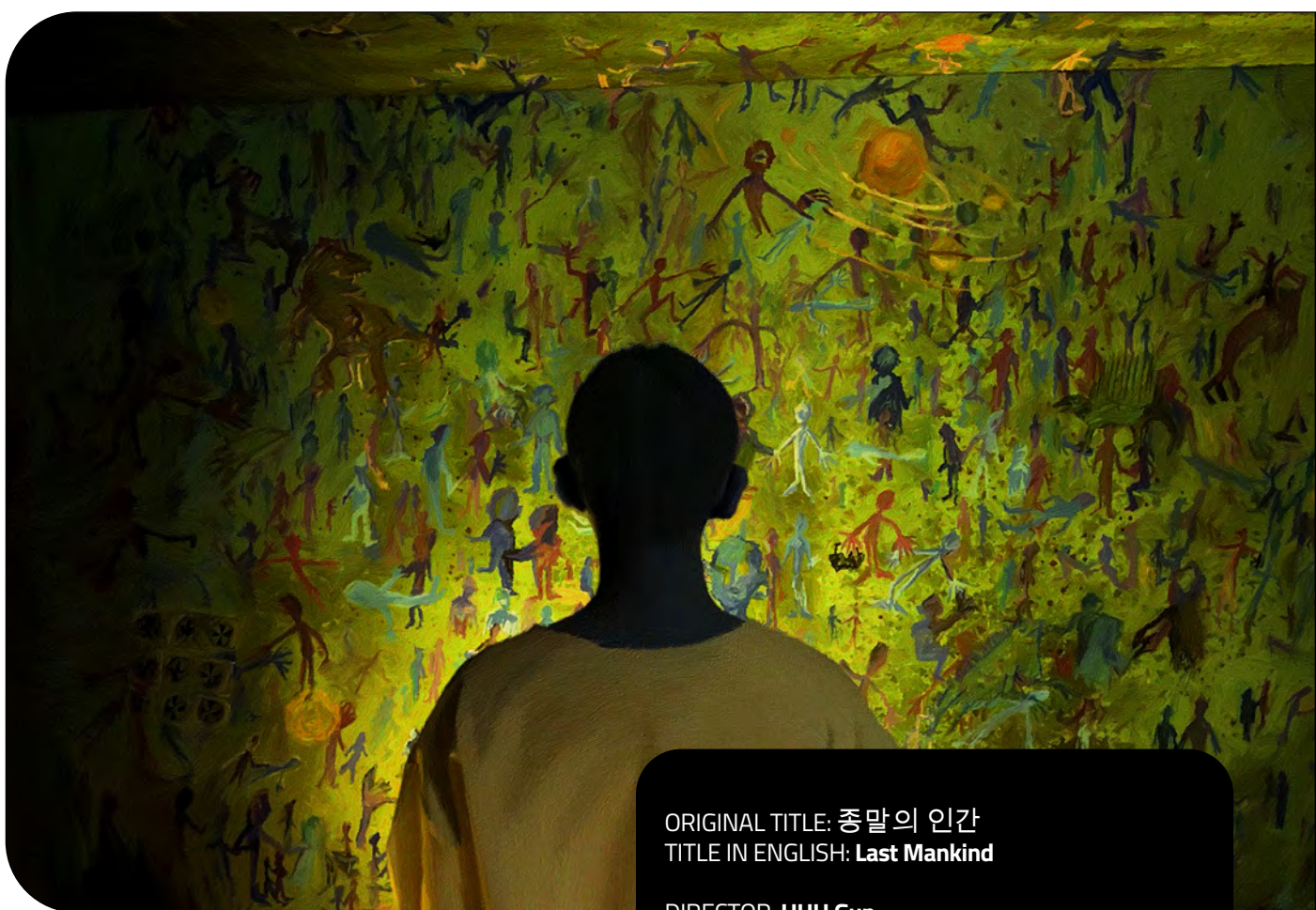
**New Era.
New Skin.**



**부천국제판타스틱영화제
BUcheon INTERNATIONAL
FANTASTIC FILM FESTIVAL
2026.7.2—7.12**

LAST MANKIND

After a mass extinction caused by air pollution, Sina lives trapped in a bunker, enduring her father's brutal experiments in hopes of breathing in the outside world. One day, a survivor from beyond the bunker, Taeo, appears.



After air pollution wipes out all life on Earth, bioengineer Dae-seung lives in a bunker with Sina, whom he subjects to brutal experiments to create a human who can survive outside. When a survivor, Taeo, appears and vanishes, Sina discovers she is only an experiment and escapes in search of freedom.

ORIGINAL TITLE: 종말의 인간
TITLE IN ENGLISH: **Last Mankind**

DIRECTOR: **HUH Gun**
CAST: **YANG Seok-hee, CHO Seong-ha, YOO Jae-sang, JUNG Seo-yeon**
GENRE: **Fantasy, Science Fiction, Post Apocalypse**
NATIONALITY: **South Korea**
LANGUAGE: **Korean**
PRODUCER: **Korea National University of Arts**
STATUS: **Post-production**

BUDGET: **USD 300,000**



FICG

41

Festival Internacional
de Cine en Guadalajara
Film Festival · México ®

17 — 25 abril, 2026 · April 17 — 25, 2026



GUADALAJARA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

About FICG

The Guadalajara International Film Festival (FICG) stands as Mexico's premier cinematic event and the one of the most important platforms for Ibero-American cinema. As a founding member of the Fantastic 7 alliance, FICG proudly champions genre filmmaking (horror, sci-fi, fantasy, and thriller) celebrating daring visions from Latin America and beyond where imagination breaks all boundaries.

About our choice:

Metalheads VS The Witnesses

FICG selects *Metaleros contra testigos de jehová* for its fearless fusion of genre energy and cultural specificity. A raw, darkly comedic vision that weaponizes metal music against dogma, this project embodies the audacious storytelling we champion, where Latin American voices redefine genre cinema with irreverence, identity, and unapologetic attitude.

41° FESTIVAL DE CINE INTERNACIONAL EN GUADALAJARA



CHILE INVITADO DE HONOR

 **FICG**

17 - 25 abril, 2026

METALHEADS VS THE WITNESSES

Four wannabe metalheads travel to a remote desert town to shoot their first music video, only to become the prime suspects in a series of brutal disappearances after unknowingly crossing paths with a dangerous religious cult.



ORIGINAL TITLE: **Metaleros vs Testigos de Jehová**
TITLE IN ENGLISH: **Metalheads vs The Witnesses**

DIRECTOR: **Wicho Rivera, Cabe Tejeda**
CAST: **TBC**
GENRE: **Horror comedy**
NATIONALITY: **Mexico**
LANGUAGE: **Spanish**
PRODUCERS: **Hiram Chaparro**

STATUS: **Financing**

BUDGET: **1.8M USD**

Ángel, Mishiko, Daniel and Mike, four aspiring metalheads, travel to a remote town to film a music video in a house marked by a brutal murder. Upon arrival, they encounter door-to-door preachers. Soon, townspeople begin to vanish under violent, mysterious circumstances, and the band becomes the main suspect. To survive and clear their names, they must confront a hidden cult and complete the most grotesque and blood-soaked video of their lives.

HKIFF | HAF

Hong Kong – Asia Film Financing Forum
香港亞洲電影投資會



HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

About HKIFF

Founded in 1976, the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) is Asia's premier cinematic event — a charitable, non-profit, and non-governmental organization dedicated to discovering and promoting creativity in film art and culture. Through its industry-focused sidebar, HKIFF Industry, the festival supports filmmakers with comprehensive services and global opportunities: from project development (Film Lab) and securing production and post-production support (HAF), to showcasing works-in-progress internationally (HAF Goes to Cannes)

and strategizing the distribution of completed films (HKIFF Collection). The recently launched Genre Initiative is HKIFF Industry's latest project market effort, aiming to spotlight and support innovative genre filmmaking.

About our choice: *The Veil*

It is a compelling horror story intersecting superstition and fraud, with a visually captivating symbol in the title object, a lace veil, operating as a symbol of the divider between falsehoods and truth, and of life and death.

2026.9—12

CALL FOR ENTRY

HKIFF

The Hong Kong International Film Festival

HKIFF INDUSTRY PROJECT MARKET

In-development (IDP) & Work-in-progress (WIP) Feature Film Projects

- Live action
- Animation
- Genre



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HKIFF 香港國際電影節協會
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FILM FESTIVAL SOCIETY



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THE VEIL

A religious cult with fake possession rituals spirals into darkness when the pastor's daughter is truly taken by an entity, forcing her brother to choose between blind faith and a terrifying freedom.



In a cult profiting from staged exorcisms, darkness descends when the pastor's daughter becomes genuinely possessed, forcing her brother to confront his father's authority. As the siblings navigate possession, secrecy, and repressed desire, psychological and carnal horror blur the line between ritual and reality. **THE VEIL** explores Brazil's spiritual landscape through faith, repression, liberation, family, and the cost of breaking inherited cycles.

ORIGINAL TITLE: **O Véu**
TITLE IN ENGLISH: **The Veil**

DIRECTOR: **Gabriel Motta**
CAST: **TBC**
GENRE: **Drama, Horror**
NATIONALITY: **Brazil**
LANGUAGE: **Portuguese**
PRODUCERS: **Aletêia Selonk and Gabriel Motta**

STATUS: **Financing**

BUDGET: **US\$940,000**

SXSW. FILM & TV FESTIVAL




SXSW FILM & TV FESTIVAL

About SXSW Film & TV Festival

The SXSW Film & TV Festival celebrates raw innovation and emerging talent from both behind and in front of the camera. Featuring provocative dramas, documentaries, comedies, genre standouts, and more, the festival has become known for the high caliber and diversity of films presented, as well as its smart, enthusiastic audiences. On the genre front, SXSW has hosted the world premieres of *Evil Dead Rise*, *A Quiet Place, Us*, *Immaculate*, *Late Night With The Devil*, *Oddity*, and *Everything Everywhere All At Once*.

About our choice: *The Coward at Kettle Creek*

When the SXSW Film & TV Festival programming team first saw Jake Kuhn and Noah Stratton-Twine's *The Peril at Pincer Point* we knew we were only getting a preview of what these two inventive filmmakers were capable of. It's a smart, creative, subversive, inventive film that announces them as two keen-eyed filmmakers with a depth of knowledge about film and a pure passion for independent filmmaking. Their new project, *The Coward at Kettle Creek*, sounds like yet another bold new vision for them, and we can't see what kind of genre hybrid they create with its fantastic premise.



Photo by Tico Mendoza

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**SXSW.
FILM & TV
FESTIVAL
↙**

THE COWARD AT KETTLE CREEK

After drunkenly invoking a duel with the most monstrous outlaw in the West, a simpleton turned local hero has ninety minutes to overcome his almost guaranteed execution.



ORIGINAL TITLE: **The Coward at Kettle Creek**

DIRECTOR: **Noah Stratton-Twine & Jake Kuhn**

CAST: **TBC**

GENRE: **Comedy, thriller**

NATIONALITY: **English**

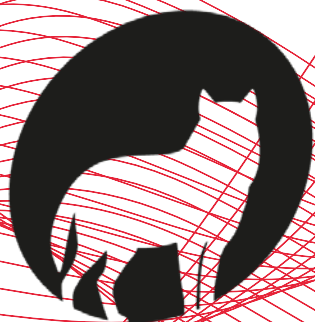
LANGUAGE: **English**

PRODUCERS: **Dashiell Upton & Lev Petrov
(Right-O Films)**

STATUS: **Script**

BUDGET: **Financing**

Roy Bound, a timid and deeply cowardly horticulturist, longs only for a quiet, unremarkable life but finds himself thrust into unwanted attention after a drunken night he barely remembers. He wakes to discover he has somehow challenged the feared outlaw Lee "Guarantee" Garrett to a duel, and the town now celebrates him as a hero. Unable to escape the mounting pressure and expectations, Roy spends his final hours desperately trying, and failing, to avoid the confrontation. His lack of skill and growing panic drive him to self-sabotage, but his efforts only push him closer to the inevitable showdown. When the duel ends with Garrett dead and Roy presumed killed, he survives in secret and ultimately chooses to disappear, embracing the legend built on a version of himself he never truly was.



PÖFF

BLACK NIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL



PÖFF - TALLINN BLACK NIGHTS FILM

About PÖFF

Black Nights Film Festival (PÖFF) is one of the biggest film festival in Northern Europe, and the only FIAPF-accredited competitive feature film festival in the region. The 30th edition will take place from 6-22 November 2026.

PÖFF features a special genre section, Midnight Shivers and organizes the Haapsalu Horror & Fantasy Film Festival (HÖFF) in May. PÖFF showcases genre films in the main competition programs and across all Industry branches. For 12 years already, we host the last cycle of European Genre Forum - a training programme for debut genre filmmakers run in collaboration with Amsterdam Imagine and Fantastic Zagreb Film Festivals.

About our choice: *Ting*

The second feature of director Maximilien Dejoie is set against the background which is echoing back uncannily today, Spanish flu and the First World War. Told from the perspective of a young heroine, *Ting* is a story of reconciliation with traumas which should never appear again, but always do. When the familiar world falls apart, a personal coming of age journey takes the shape of dark fantasy.



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PÖFF - TALLINN BLACK NIGHTS FILM

TING

In war-torn Europe, a young orphan's grief takes shape as a terrifying creature.



Northern Italy, 1918. As she tries to escape from an institution for war orphans, Marilì forms a bond with Ting, a dark and unsettling creature born from the traumas of the First World War. After finding her father again - a deserter doctor scarred by the conflict - Marilì realizes Ting's sinister intentions. To protect what she holds most dear, Marilì will have to confront her past and face the monstrous presence that has crept into her life.

ORIGINAL TITLE: **Ting**
TITLE IN ENGLISH: **Ting**

DIRECTOR: **Maximilien Dejoie**
CAST: **Mariandrea Cesari, Stefano Cassetti, Mina Kavani, Michele Ronco, Irene Vetere, Camilla Brandenburg, Federico Tolardo, Pia Lanciotti**
GENRE: **Dark fantasy**
NATIONALITY: **Italy, UK**
LANGUAGE: **Italian**
PRODUCERS: **Roberto Cavallini & Wilfried Gufler (Albolina Film), Mattia Puleo (Cinefonie), James Heath (Randan)**

STATUS: **Post-Production**

BUDGET: **3M EUR**

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Julia Sofía Vega

Latin women filmmakers behind the camera

Julia Sofía Vega is a filmmaker, screenwriter, and photographer from Rosario, born on August 24th, 2000. She holds a bachelor's degree in Film Directing and Audiovisual Production from Rosario.

Her debut feature film, *Mariela & el Cadáver* (2024), which she made as her thesis project, premiered at the 2024 Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre Film Festival and has screened at various national and international festivals, where it has garnered awards and accolades. The film is scheduled for theatrical release in the summer of 2026. For this work, she received the Best First Feature Award at the Rosarigasinos Awards.

In 2021, she directed *Liminal Space*, a dreamlike horror short film selected for the Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre festival and winner of multiple awards. Her first short film, *Película Indie* (2019), is an experimental comedy that has also garnered several awards and been selected for numerous festivals.

In the film industry arena, she has been honored at Ventana Sur, where she picked up three awards for her projects in development, including the Fant.Latina Award and the FanPitch Award at the Sitges Film Festival, thereby consolidating her international reputation in genre filmmaking.

In addition to her work as a director, she is also a photographer and audiovisual producer, working across various disciplines within the sector. She teaches photography and video classes and is the co-founder of an on-camera acting workshop, where she incorporates her experience in directing, staging, and working with performers.

She is currently continuing to develop her career as a director, focusing on fantastic and horror genre films, promoting new projects in international markets, and establishing herself in the contemporary auteur film scene.

Julia Sofía Vega and the Unique Female Gaze in Latin American Horror

From an almost instinctive calling to a firm dedication to contemporary body horror, this Latin American filmmaker maps out a creative journey marked by the need to externalize both the uncomfortable and the visceral. Julia Sofía reflects on her early experiences behind the camera, her influences — from Julia Ducournau to Yorgos Lanthimos — and the challenges of creating from a woman's perspective in the film industry. Her upcoming project, profoundly psychosexual, confirms an auteurist vision that

understands horror as a space to explore the intimate, the political, and the unsettling.

First Steps as a Filmmaker

The truth is, I've wanted to be a filmmaker for as long as I can remember. There wasn't any one specific film that marked that moment, but rather something much earlier, almost instinctive. There are VHS recordings from when I was very young where, when I was barely a year old, I was already asking for the camera and insisting on using it.

Anecdotally, when I was 2 or 3 years old, and still speaking rather poorly, I would ask my parents to turn the camera's viewfinder so I could see myself on the screen. I would say "COSEL," which was my way of saying "closer."

In that regard, you could say I started directing at age 3, giving my parents instructions. There isn't any one film in particular; it was just something that was always there.

Horror: A New Territory

To be honest, it all started without me even realizing it. First, I made a short film that I conceived from a surreal approach, without fully realizing that I was working in the horror genre. That short film ended up being selected for the Buenos Aires Rojo Sangre festival.

Then I met Nicolás, my business partner and friend, a huge movie buff and genre fan, who definitively opened the door to that universe for me. We attended the festival together, and there I discovered that horror wasn't just what I already knew, but a territory where you can talk about anything — including the rawest and most taboo topics — in an indirect way.

I think there was also a turning point when I saw Julia Ducournau's *Titane*. That's when I completely fell in love with this genre.

It was kind of a reverse process: I





started from further ahead and worked my way back, first connecting with contemporary cinema and then gradually approaching the classics.

Influences

My influences are extremely diverse. There are certain figures who have had a more direct impact on me, such as Julia Ducournau, Ari Aster, and Charlie Kaufman in the realm of surrealism, as well as Yorgos Lanthimos, whom I consider to be one of the greatest directors of our century.

And then there are many other influences that appeared along the way, but these are some of the ones that have shaped my imaginary the most.

Catharsis as a Creative Force

Generally speaking, what drives me is something much more uncomfortable: a kind of inner rottenness that I need to externalize because, otherwise, I feel like it's eating me up.

For example, when I started writing the project I'm currently developing, I was going through one of the lowest points in my life. I felt as though my very flesh was rotting away as I lived, and writing was a form of healing. In that regard, when everything you're experiencing is so skin-deep, writing becomes a way to put things in order, to keep from getting overwhelmed, but also the place where ideas begin to take shape.

Of course, there are also more concrete triggers: images, photographs, or scenes that appear and spark the question, "What would happen if...?" And you build on that. But in my case, the core is always tied to a need for catharsis.

There's also a reaction to what makes me uncomfortable in life, in society, and in what I see around me, which drives me to talk about certain things, even if only indirectly.

Aesthetically, there are other influences that also come into play. For example, I made a short film inspired by the backrooms, a very popular Internet phenomenon, which I used as a vehicle to tackle the protagonist's childhood traumas.

In short, my creative process combines that inner need to release something that weighs heavily on me with external stimuli that gradually shape the narrative.

LATIN WOMEN FILMMAKERS BEHIND THE CAMERA

Female Creators in Fantastic Genre Filmmaking

Ever since I embarked on my career, there have been situations that today I might consider “minor,” even though they really aren’t. I’ve had colleagues, including people who, at the time, I considered friends, constantly underestimate or criticize me.

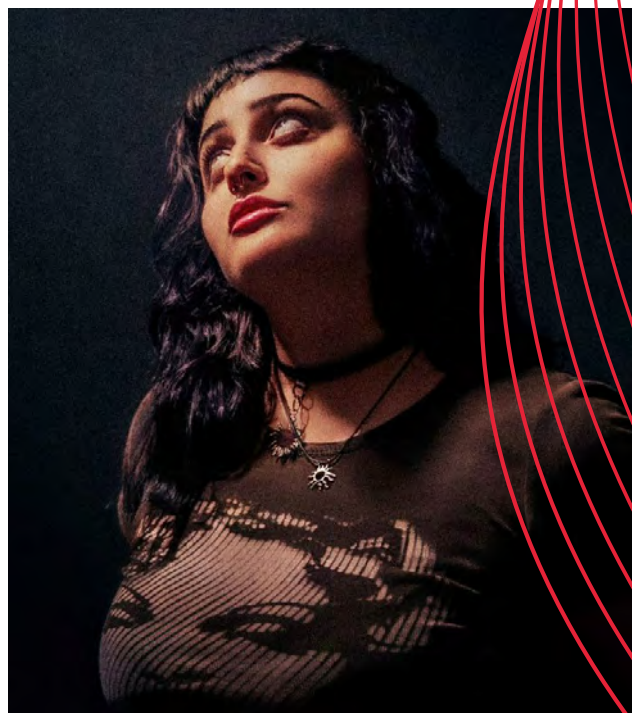
As a result of that, and also from conversations with other women, I sense a very particular kind of pressure: as if everything we do has to be impeccable, extraordinary, as if we have to make the absolute most of every opportunity because it’s not easy to get to where we are, especially as a Latin American woman.

Based on my experience, throughout my career I often felt that much more was expected of me: greater attention to detail, greater creativity, greater proficiency in general, while the same demands were not imposed on my male colleagues. At the same time, much of that criticism came from people who didn’t work with the same intensity or the same level of rigorousness that I demanded of myself.

Uncomfortable situations also arise in the industry. Sometimes you go to work simply to do your job and find yourself faced with sexually aggressive comments, innuendos, or inappropriate attitudes from people who are oblivious to the discomfort they cause and with whom you still have to share a workspace.

I also perceive differences in terms of access to opportunities. In my city, we’ve never won a municipal award for production, while so often, the same names crop up again and again.

Creatively speaking, there’s also a noticeable gap: when stories written from a woman’s experience are



presented, there are aspects that aren’t always fully understood. On the other hand, when that conversation takes place with a female producer, the understanding is completely different.

That said, I’ve also been fortunate enough to come across people who have stood by me, including very solid groups of women and also men who have placed their trust in me as a director, screenwriter, and creator. All things considered, I feel that certain doors have opened for me, and I appreciate that as well.



Upcoming Project

The project we’re currently in the process of developing is called *Necesito que me amen* (I Need to Be Loved). It’s a surreal body horror story and, with the script already well underway, I’d even say it’s a film with a psychosexual tone.

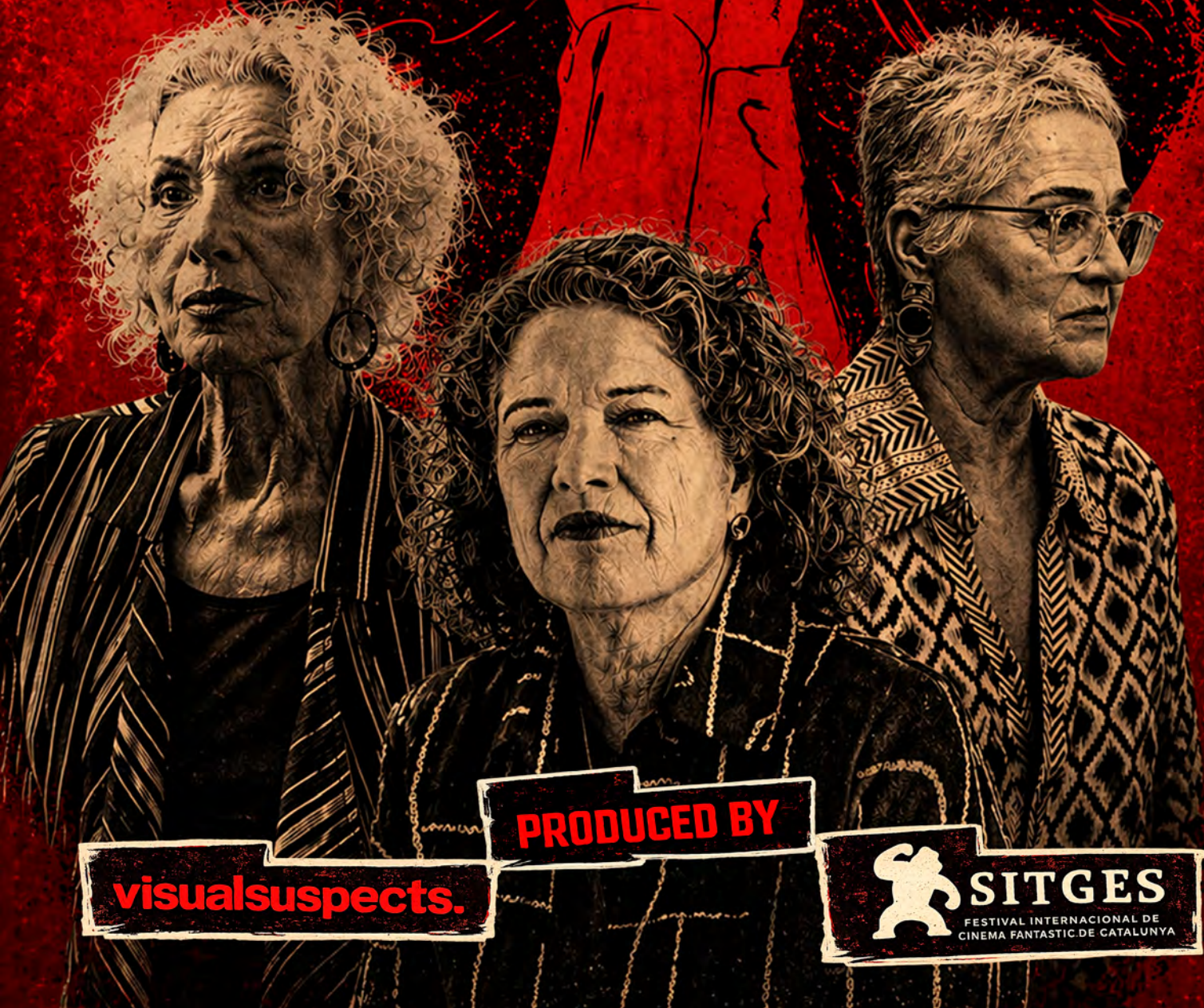
The story revolves around a woman who feels invisible, deeply marked by a need to be seen and validated. She works at a botanica, making statues of virgins, which reinforces her connection to the idea of purity and her sense of not belonging.

As her need grows, she begins to make increasingly more extreme decisions in a desperate attempt to be transformed and find her place. The film plays with the distortion of reality and the boundaries between what she imagines and what is actually happening.

At the same time, it also explores her relationship with the Internet and webcam chat rooms, and how that search for validation ends up becoming something more and more complex and dark.

WOMAN IN FAN

A DOCUMENTARY
DIRECTED BY
**MONICA
GARCIA MASSAGUE**



visualsuspects.

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