

Melbourne
International
Film Festival

2023 Year in Review

MIFF

Introduction

Welcome to 2023. What times we live in – but what a difference film can make.

This year, the Melbourne International Film Festival was more than a mere celebration of movie-making. With the film industry burning, wallets hurting and algorithms churning, the 71st edition of MIFF continued to fly the flag for the survival, for the thriving, for the necessity of cinema that matters – and for the profundity of welcoming people, again, to the movies.

At over 275 films, over 50 MIFF Play titles, over 40 films straight from Cannes and over 70 countries represented across the program, MIFF this year was an immensity of film. After opening with the MIFF Premiere Fund-supported *Shayda*, the celebrated debut of Victorian filmmaker Noora Niasari, we also launched the Music on Film Gala of Paul Goldman's *Ego: The Michael Gudinski Story* in world premiere, a loving portrait of the titular music industry impresario and, through him, the very story of Australian music itself. We then drew the curtain with our Closing Night, Australian-premiere presentation of Molly Gordon and Nick Lieberman's *Theater Camp*, a hilarious mockumentary set among the aspirational world of low-level community theatre – a movie that celebrates the strange tics of the creative spaces we inhabit.

Elsewhere, we welcomed year two of the Bright Horizons competition, a jaw-dropping line-up of emerging international and Australian filmmaking. Ramata-Toulaye Sy's beautifully affecting *Banel & Adama* was awarded the \$140,000 Bright Horizons Award – one of the richest film prizes in the world – by an esteemed international Jury. Our MIFF Awards also continued to expand in their recognition of exceptional screen practitioners with the establishment of our First Nations Film Creative Award, presented in collaboration with Kearney Group (awarded to Adrian Russell Wills and Gillian Moody for *Kindred*) and the continuation of our major Blackmagic Design Australian Innovation Award (awarded to Soda Jerk for *Hello Dankness*).

We celebrated the 10th anniversary of our Critics Campus program, which offers incredible professional development opportunities for emerging film and arts critics within the festival. Our special Critical Condition retrospective saw a range of internationally and locally attending critics guest-curate a stunning selection of films, all wrapped in conversation and debate. Alongside this special program, the festival presented dedicated retrospectives on Safi Faye, the pioneering Senegalese director, as well as an expansive program of resplendently blood-soaked new restorations from horror master Dario Argento.

MIFF continued to expand and enhance the way we welcome audiences in 2023, presenting festival seasons outside of Melbourne in seven different country-Victorian locations as well as an at-home festival-highlights program screening Australia-wide via our MIFF Play streaming platform. In 2023, the festival also offered an array of sensory-friendly screenings and a significant d/Deaf-led event alongside the presentation of a range of captioned and audio-described sessions.

Across 25 days of film, MIFF is its own world. It is one built around the world of cinema, built by the ideas and the imaginations of artists and audiences everywhere, and from the collisions – of creativity, of conversation, of the love of cinema – that bring Melbourne alive every August.

What a thrill and a privilege to once again share the stories and successes of MIFF in 2023. Our gratitude to staff and volunteers; for the ongoing support of our festival partners and contributing filmmakers; and for all of those people, especially, who continue to find wonder on the screen, in the company of each other, here at MIFF.



Al Cossar
Artistic Director



Victoria Pope
Commercial Operations
Director

MIFF 2023 Overview

18 days in cinema

10 days online

11 metropolitan venues

7 regional venues

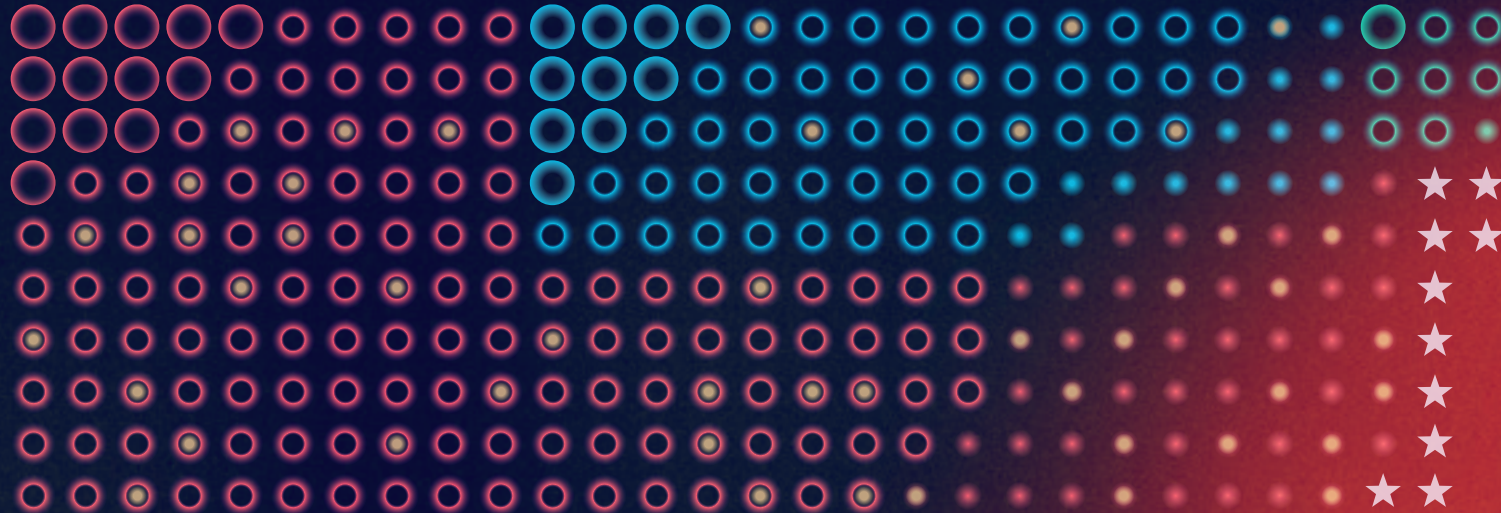
Australia-wide streaming

6 MIFF Talks

133 festival guests

8 MIFF Ambassadors

191 features 75 shorts 9 XR works

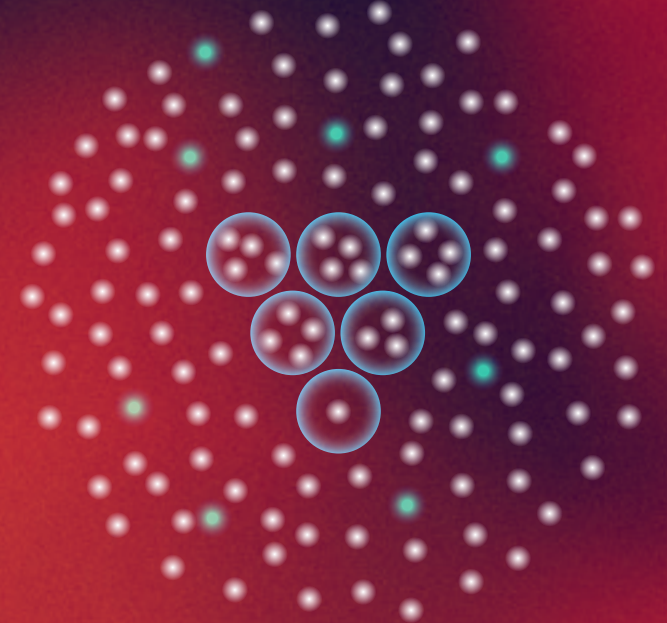


25 world premieres

158 Australian premieres

49 titles direct from Cannes

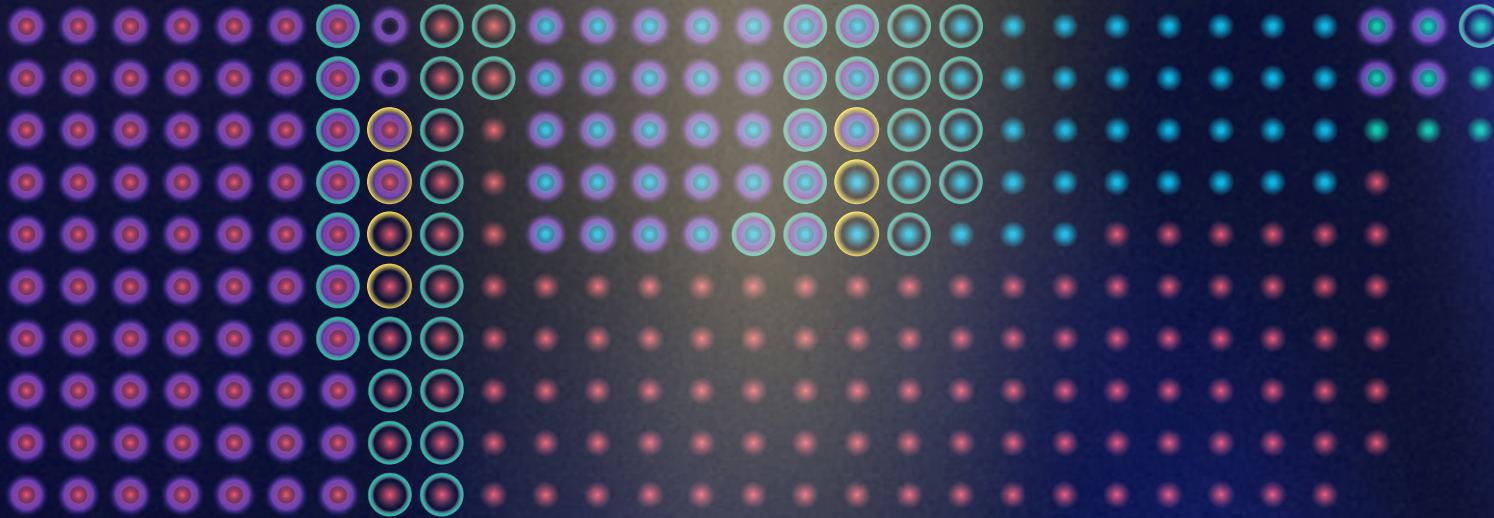
10 galas and special events



MIFF 2023 Overview

- **18% Australian content**
- **8 First Nations–led projects**
- **112 titles with one or more female directors**

71 countries
59 languages



12 sessions with audio description

8 sessions with open captions

91 100%-subtitled films

**16 venues with step-free
and wheelchair access**

6 Auslan-interpreted events

6 sensory-friendly sessions

MIFF Awards



In 2023, MIFF offered a total prize pool of over \$300,000 across a suite of six award categories.

Returning for its second year and supported by the Victorian Government through VicScreen, the flagship **Bright Horizons Award** celebrated filmmakers on the ascent. The winning film, as chosen from within the Bright Horizons film competition, received a \$140,000 prize – one of the most substantial film prizes in the world.

The **Blackmagic Design Australian Innovation Award** recognised an outstanding Australian creative within a film playing in the MIFF program with a \$70,000 cash prize.

The 2023 recipients of these two awards were chosen by a distinguished jury of industry figures: jury co-presidents Saul Williams and Anisia Uzeyman, co-directors of last year's Bright Horizons Award-winning *Neptune Frost*; revered documentarian Alexandre O. Philippe; former *Caméra d'Or* winner Anthony Chen; and Indonesian director Kamila Andini.



BRIGHT HORIZONS AWARD
Banel & Adama (France/Senegal)
Director: Ramata-Toulaye Sy

SPECIAL JURY MENTION
Tótem (Denmark/France/Mexico)
Director: Lila Avilés

OTHER NOMINEES
Ama Gloria (dir. Marie Amachoukeli)
Animalia (dir. Sofia Alaoui)
Disco Boy (dir. Giacomo Abbruzzese)
Earth Mama (dir. Savannah Leaf)
How to Have Sex (dir. Molly Manning Walker)
Inside the Yellow Cocoon Shell (dir. Phạm Thiên Ân)
The Rooster (dir. Mark Leonard Winter)
Shayda (dir. Noora Niasari)
The Sweet East (dir. Sean Price Williams)



BLACKMAGIC DESIGN AUSTRALIAN INNOVATION AWARD
Soda Jerk
Co-directors – *Hello Dankness*

OTHER NOMINEES
Andrew Robinson (lead VFX supervisor – *Mercy Road*)
Jeni Thornley (director – *Memory Film*)
Nathan Jurevicius (production designer – *Scarygirl*)

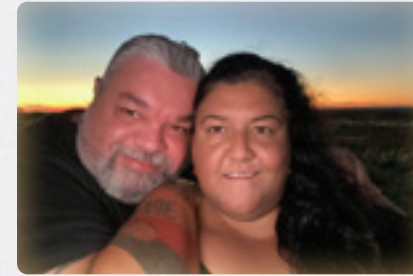


Inaugurated in 2023, the **First Nations Film Creative Award**, presented in collaboration with Kearney Group, recognised an outstanding Australian First Nations creative within a film playing in the MIFF program.

The recipient was awarded a \$20,000 cash prize and \$25,000 worth of financial services with Kearney Group, and was selected by a jury of celebrated Australian First Nations creatives: Yidinji, Meriam woman and esteemed actor and director Rachael Maza AM; Yorta Yorta, Wurundjeri (Woiwurrung) acclaimed screen and stage practitioner and Birrarungga Film Festival Artistic Director Tony Briggs; and Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung artist, academic and director Tiriki Onus.

The **Audience Award** crowned 2023 viewers' favourite title from the festival, as determined through public votes.

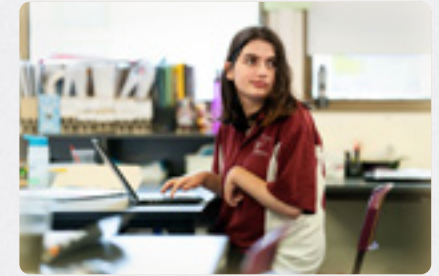
Elsewhere, the 62nd **MIFF Shorts Awards** celebrated the best in short-form filmmaking (head to page 17 for more information), while the **MIFF Schools Youth Jury Award** – which recognised the best title from the MIFF Schools program, as selected by young jury members Han Nhi Ngo, Jasmine Lane and Emile Feik – was bestowed on Thomas Charles Hyland's *This Is Going to Be Big*.



FIRST NATIONS FILM CREATIVE AWARD
Adrian Russell Wills
and Gillian Moody
Co-directors – *Kindred*

OTHER NOMINEES

John Harvey (director – *Katele (Mudskipper)*)
Lelarnie Hatfield-Yasso, Aunty Nicky Hatfield and Margaret Hornagold (screenwriters – *Generations of Men*)
Derik Lynch (director – *Marungka Tjalatjunu (Dipped in Black)*)
Tyson Mowarin and Mark Coles Smith (director and featured subject – *Keeping Hope*)
Douglas Watkin (director – *Rebel With a Cause: Neville Bonner*)



AUDIENCE AWARD
This Is Going to Be Big (Australia)
Director: Thomas Charles Hyland

OTHER TOP-VOTED FILMS

Sunflower (dir. Gabriel Carrubba)
Godless: The Eastfield Exorcism (dir. Nick Kozakis)
Australia's Open (dir. Ili Baré)
The Rooster (dir. Mark Leonard Winter)
Past Lives (dir. Celine Song)
Perfect Days (dir. Wim Wenders)
Birdeater (dir. Jack Clark and Jim Weir)





“For me, winning Special Mention in the Bright Horizons competition was really important, helping to give strength to first- or second-time filmmakers like me. MIFF has a great trajectory – it’s one of the most amazing cinema programs of the world. It’s also so beautiful to understand that there is a huge cinema audience at MIFF, making a unique and loving experience. I really feel like a capybara! In good cinema hearts.”

Lila Avilés
Director, *Tótem*



“Being awarded the Blackmagic Design Australian Innovation Award isn’t just an incredible recognition of our weirdo work; there is also a very real material aspect to this award that will honestly be transformative for us. Most of all, it will make possible our next film – a big gay feature we’ve been working intensively on, but didn’t know until this very moment how we would keep going without some kind of miracle windfall. So we are incredibly grateful to MIFF and Blackmagic for being that miracle.”

Soda Jerk
Directors, *Hello Dankness*

Economic Impact

\$9.6M economic impact to the City of Melbourne

For every \$1 spent by a MIFF audience member while attending a MIFF event, a further \$2.63 was spent in the broader economy on items such as transport, accommodation, shopping, food and beverages.



PROGRAM

IMPACT

SUPPORT

Story of the World

In 2023, MIFF screened
films from 71 places of origin.

Afghanistan

Angola

Argentina

Australia

Austria

Belgium

Bosnia and

Herzegovina

Brazil

Bulgaria

Cameroon

Canada

Chile

China

Colombia

Congo

Croatia

Czech Republic

Denmark

Egypt

Estonia

France

Georgia

Germany

Greece

Hungary

Iceland

India

Indonesia

Iran

Ireland

Italy

Japan

Jordan

Luxembourg

Malaysia

Mexico

Mongolia

Morocco

Netherlands

New Zealand

Niger

Nigeria

Norway

Palestine

Papua New

Guinea

Peru

Poland

Portugal

Qatar

Saudi Arabia

Scotland

Senegal

Serbia

Singapore

Slovakia

South Africa

South Korea

Spain

Sri Lanka

Sudan

Sweden

Switzerland

Taiwan

Tanzania

Thailand

Tunisia

Türkiye

UK

Ukraine

USA

Vietnam

First Nations

MIFF honours the 60,000-year legacy of First Nations culture and storytelling on this continent through proudly showcasing the best screen stories by and about Indigenous Australian and other First Nations peoples.

The 2023 festival was particularly momentous as it unveiled the First Nations Film Creative Award, presented in collaboration with Kearney Group – a watershed prize that recognised an outstanding Australian First Nations creative within a film playing in the MIFF program.

One of 2023's standout titles was *Kindred*, co-directors Adrian Russell Wills and Gillian Moody's autobiographical story about the complexities of being an Aboriginal child raised in a white world. Also a heartfelt celebration of friendship, unconditional love and resilience, it went on to become the inaugural First Nations Film Creative Award winner.

Elsewhere in the program, *Keeping Hope* followed Nyikina actor and MIFF Ambassador Mark Coles Smith as he visited communities across the Kimberley to investigate the high rate of suicide among the region's young First Nations men. The four-part *Rebel With a Cause*

recounted the work of four First Nations trailblazers: senator Neville Bonner, magistrate Pat O'Shane, radio host Tiga Bayles and poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal. *The Coolbaroo Club*, restored by the National Film and Sound Archive, chronicled how a haven of Indigenous dance and activism arose from segregated postwar Perth. First Nations experiences were also depicted and documented in the short films *Generations of Men*, *Katele (Mudskipper)* and *Marungka Tjalatjuni (Dipped in Black)*, the last two of which won the VicScreen Erwin Rado Award for Best Australian Short Film and the Award for Best Documentary Short Film, respectively.

Meanwhile, First Nations stories from beyond local shores were told in *Gush (USA)*, *The Buriti Flower (Brazil/Portugal)*, *Abebe – Butterfly Song (Australia / Papua New Guinea)*, *Eureka (Argentina/France/Germany/Mexico/Portugal)*, *Sorcery (Chile/Germany/Mexico)* and *Fighting Looks Different 2 Me Now (USA)*.



Women in Film

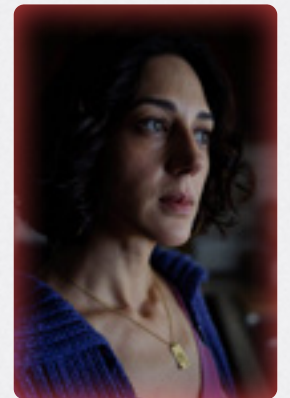
Gender is a central concern of MIFF's program, which in 2023 included 112 films with at least one female director – amounting to 40 per cent of the entire slate.

Significantly, seven of the 11 films nominated for the festival's flagship Bright Horizons Award were helmed by women – including the strongly female-driven stories *Earth Mama*, *Animalia* and *How to Have Sex* – while half of the nominees for the Blackmagic Design Australian Innovation Award were female creatives. Women filmmakers emerged victorious in both award categories: Ramata-Toulaye Sy took home the former for her haunting fable *Banel & Adama*, while punk-art duo Soda Jerk were awarded the latter for their satirical cinematic remix *Hello Dankness*.

The 2023 festival opened with the accomplished feature debut from MIFF Accelerator Lab alumna director Noora Niasari, *Shayda*: a moving story of resilience and the strength of a mother's love. Supported by the MIFF Premiere Fund and executive-produced by Cate Blanchett, the film starred Cannes Best Actress winner Zar Amir-Ebrahimi in the lead role, alongside local talents Leah Purcell, Jillian Nguyen and Rina Mousavi.

Five of this year's best-performing titles centred women either on or behind the screen, or both: *Past Lives*, the highly anticipated feature debut of playwright-turned-filmmaker Celine Song, starring Greta Lee; *May December*, a perfectly camp character drama starring Julianne Moore and Natalie Portman; *Anatomy of a Fall*, Justine Triet's Palme d'Or-winning courtroom drama with Sandra Hüller as its lodestone; *Showing Up*, director Kelly Reichardt's fourth collaboration with actor Michelle Williams; and *The Eternal Daughter*, the Gothic coda to Joanna Hogg's *Souvenir* films, in which Tilda Swinton plays both a mother and her middle-aged daughter.

Several of 2023's sold-out films were female-driven: *Scrapper*, Charlotte Regan's touching Grand Jury Prize-winning debut; *Theater Camp*, an uproarious mockumentary co-directed by Molly Gordon; *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*, Anna Hints's intimate account of Estonian sorority; *Bad Behaviour*, Alice Englert's whip-smart feature debut starring Jennifer Connelly; and the documentary profiles of *Sex and the City* costume designer Patricia Field (*Happy Clothes*) and musicians Joan Baez (*Joan Baez I Am a Noise*) and Judee Sill (*Lost Angel: The Genius of Judee Sill*). The festival also screened a retrospective of films from the late Senegalese filmmaker Safi Faye.



LGBTQIA+

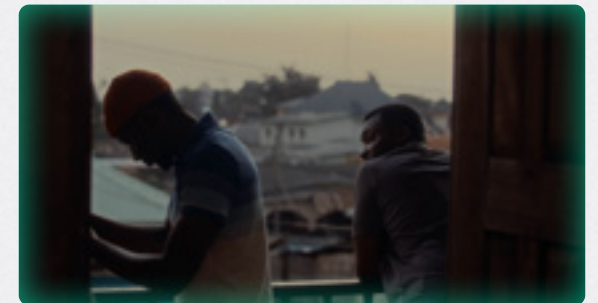
Stories by and about members of the LGBTQIA+ community were once again a highlight of the festival, which presented audiences with the humorous and the heartfelt, the tumultuous and the transformative, as told by queer filmmakers from Australia and abroad.

MIFF audiences' appetite for LGBTQIA+ stories was evidenced by the fact that the 2023 festival's second-highest-grossing non-gala title was *Monster*, Hirokazu Kore-eda's Cannes Queer Palm-winning story of unexpected friendship. Alongside this, the Melbourne-set queer coming-of-age drama *Sunflower* was the second-highest-voted film in the running for the MIFF Audience Award. Screening alongside these celebrated films were two other winners of queer-themed prizes: *All the Colours of the World Are Between Black and White*, which won the Berlinale's Teddy Award, and *Marungka Tjalatjunu (Dipped in Black)*, which won the Teddy Award for Short Film; both enjoyed equally energetic take-up from MIFF viewers.

The many shades and hues of the LGBTQIA+ community were represented in the diversity of titles across the 2023 program. Ethan Hawke and Pedro Pascal played reunited lovers in Pedro Almodóvar's sensual queer western *Strange Way of Life*, while Rainer Werner Fassbinder's iconic final film, *Querelle*, ravishingly adapted Jean Genet's homoerotic classic. *Blue Jean* recounted a lesbian teacher's double life in Thatcher's England; *Shut Eye*, a young woman's perilous obsession with a female ASMR streamer; and *Femme*, a drag queen's decision to turn the tables on his homophobic attacker. And while the Berlinale Silver Bear-winning *20,000 Species of Bees* depicted the trans experience through the eyes of its nine-year-old protagonist, *Mutt* captured

a young trans man's travails reconciling his present and past.

On the documentary front, *Little Richard: I Am Everything* offered a rollicking deep dive into a rock 'n' roll figure whose queerness was hidden in plain sight. *It's Only Life After All* chronicled how two childhood friends became lesbian icons as folk-rock duo Indigo Girls. *Casa Susanna* revisited the titular clandestine refuge for transgender women and cross-dressing men in the 1950s and 60s USA. And *Mast-del*, which went on to win MIFF's Best Experimental Short Film award, was a queer feminist account of forbidden desire, memory, revolution and cinema.



Festival Guests

What is a film festival if not a celebration of the moving image on and beyond the screen and a coming-together of cinema's luminous talents and most ardent fans?

In 2023, MIFF returned to form and rolled out the red carpet for a glittering array of directors, creatives and actors from all over the world, who appeared in pre-film introductions, post-film Q&As, panel discussions and special events. In total, MIFF welcomed 133 festival guests.

Perhaps the most anticipated name in this year's program, Celine Song (Canada / South Korea) graced Melbourne's theatres to present her tender drama *Past Lives*, whose screenings were complemented with a dedicated MIFF Talks event. The festival was also attended by Bright Horizons jury members Saul Williams (USA), Anisia Uzeyman (USA), Kamila Andini (Indonesia), Anthony Chen (Hong Kong) and Alexandre O. Philippe (USA) – the last two of whom had films in the 2023 slate – as well as competing directors Lila Avilés (Mexico), Mark Leonard Winter (Australia), Molly Manning Walker (UK), Noora Niasari (Australia), Phạm Thiên Ân (Vietnam), Savannah Leaf (USA) and eventual winner Ramata-Toulaye Sy (Senegal/France).

Among the international guest contingent were directors Alice Englert (New Zealand), Annick Daigneault (Canada), Aziz Zoromba (Canada), Christoffer Guldbrandsen (Denmark), Martine Asselin (Canada), Mel Eslyn (USA) and Visakesa Chandrasekaram (Sri Lanka); actor Pierre-Yves Cardinal (Canada); musicians George Telek (Papua New Guinea) and Scott Kannberg (USA); and critics Guy Lodge (UK), Kelli Weston (USA), Michael Koresky (USA) and Nick Pinkerton (USA).

Meanwhile, representing Australia were filmmakers Alex Proyas, Cameron and Colin Cairnes, Robert Connolly and Soda Jerk; actors Hugo Weaving, Mark Coles Smith, Jillian Nguyen, Remy Hii and Lily Sullivan; musician Mick Harvey; Paralympian and advocate Dylan Alcott; and a plethora of other local talent.



Access

12 sessions with audio description

8 sessions with open captions

91 100%-subtitled films

As part of its commitment to facilitating all film lovers' access to quality cinema experiences, MIFF expanded its range of accessible services across the festival: from open captions, audio description and widespread wheelchair access, to sensory-friendly and crybaby sessions.

In 2023, MIFF presented a number of films with open captions and audio description, Auslan-interpreted talks and events, and hearing loop and assistive listening devices. Step-free and wheelchair access was also available across all metropolitan venues and several regional venues, which additionally accommodated guide dogs, assistance dogs and companion cards. Capping off the year's accessible options – and building on MIFF's objective to 'meet audiences where they are' – MIFF Play returned with a selection of films available to stream Australia-wide.

Along with an open-captioned and audio-described Music on Film Gala (*Ego: The Michael Gudinski Story*) and an open-captioned Closing Night Gala (*Theater Camp*), MIFF 2023 broke new ground with:

- The unveiling of a Deaf-led screening of *The Tuba Thieves*. Matching filmmaker Alison O'Daniel's desire to reframe cinema from a d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing perspective, the session featured an introduction and post-film discussion from a panel of Deaf filmmakers and artists. These were conducted entirely in Auslan, with spoken-English interpreters present, while the film itself screened with open captions.

6 sensory-friendly sessions

1 crybaby session

16 venues with step-free and wheelchair access

- The offering of haptic vests for the XR work *In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats*. When worn, these vests created the physical sensation of sound on the body, enabling an immersive experience for those living with hearing loss or who are d/Deaf.
- The holding of an Open Audio Description session of *Memory Film: A Filmmaker's Diary*. For this session, the audio description track played aloud through the cinema speakers over the film score and sound design to allow barrier-free enjoyment for blind and low-vision patrons as well as seeing audiences.

After their success in 2022, sensory-friendly screenings – which focus on adapting the cinema environment and preparing patrons through pre-show resources – returned in 2023, allowing audiences to choose from six film options, including the Berlinale Golden Bear-winning documentary *On the Adamant* and the visionary rotoscoped romance *White Plastic Sky*. A crybaby session, catering for parents and carers who wish to enjoy the festival in a baby- and toddler-friendly environment, was also offered for *Fairyland*, a heartfelt father-daughter story set against the backdrop of queer liberation and the AIDS crisis.

6 Auslan-interpreted events

6 venues with assistive listening

4 venues with hearing loop



MIFF Premiere Fund

Supported by VicScreen, the MIFF Premiere Fund co-finances new quality Australian theatrical (feature-length narrative and documentary) films that premiere at MIFF. The fund is a strategic minority supporter of a range of films and seeks diversity of filmmaking teams and film genres on the slate.

The Premiere Fund's 15th annual slate of 'stories that need telling' were:

- MIFF Accelerator Lab alumna director Noora Niasari's **Shayda**, starring Cannes Best Actress winner Zar Amir-Ebrahimi, which was MIFF 2023's Opening Night Gala title and a Bright Horizons competition entrant. Following its screenings at Sundance (where it won the Audience Award) and MIFF, the film went on to win the CinefestOZ \$100K Film Prize – the sixth time in 10 years that a Premiere Fund film has had this success. *Shayda*'s dream run continued with selections at Locarno, Toronto and London, and with the news that it had been selected as Australia's official submission for the Academy Awards.

- Actor Mark Leonard Winter's feature directing debut **The Rooster**, starring Hugo Weaving and Phoenix Raei, which was also selected for MIFF's Bright Horizons competition.
- Thomas Charles Hyland's **This Is Going to Be Big**, which took home the 2023 MIFF Audience Award and MIFF Schools Youth Jury Award.
- Ili Baré's **Australia's Open**, a documentary exploring how the Australian Open grew into one of the world's 'big four' tennis Grand Slams and did so against the backdrop of Melbourne's own development from back-water to global city.
- Jeni Thornley's **Memory Film: A Filmmaker's Diary**, a poetic documentary composed entirely from the feminist director's three-decades-long super-8 archive.



Of the 95 Premiere Fund-supported films screened thus far at MIFF:

- 33% had female directors and 64% had female producers
- 34% portrayed culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, 14% of which had CALD creative principals
- 20% featured First Nations characters and/or themes, of which 8% had First Nations creative principals
- 19% had LGBTQIA+ characters and/or themes, of which 24% had LGBTQIA+ creative principals
- 52% highlighted disability and/or mental health issues
- 48% were helmed by first-time directors
- 26% were directed by Accelerator Lab alumni
- 42% secured elements of their financing via 37°South Market

MIFF Shorts

Spanning 75 films, the 2023 MIFF Shorts program was presented across 12 packages and included animation, documentary, experimental, and Australian and international fiction shorts, as well as special suites of works from Canada and by famed auteurs.

These films competed for the MIFF Shorts Awards, one of the most highly regarded and longstanding short-film competitions in both the Asia-Pacific region and the Southern Hemisphere. The competition is Academy Awards®, BAFTA and AACTA accredited.

The 62nd MIFF Shorts Awards were presented by Campari and, with thanks to the festival's Shorts Awards partners, the eligible shorts vied for a total prize pool worth over \$50,000. In 2023, the jury consisted of filmmaker Alena Lodkina; curator and artist Kate ten Buuren; and Good Things Productions' Head of Production and Partner, Virginia Whitwell.



“Getting noticed in the film industry can be difficult, but receiving the Award for Emerging Australian Filmmaker has been great exposure for me and the short. I'm very grateful for that ... I'm now on people's radar in the industry that I otherwise would not have been and am making connections with people who will be able to help in the next stage of my career.”

Annelise Hickey
Director, *Hafekasi*



City of Melbourne Grand Prix for Best Short Film

Fighting Looks Different 2 Me Now (USA)

Director: Fox Maxy

VicScreen Erwin Rado Award for Best Australian Short Film

Katele (Mudskipper) (Australia)

Director: John Harvey

Award for Emerging Australian Filmmaker

Annelise Hickey (Australia)

Film: *Hafekasi*

Award for Best Fiction Short Film

I Promise You Paradise (Egypt/France/Qatar)

Director: Morad Mostafa

Award for Best Documentary Short Film

Marungka Tjalatjunu (Dipped in Black) (Australia)

Directors: Matthew Thorne, Derik Lynch

Award for Best Animation Short Film

27 (France/Hungary)

Director: Flóra Anna Buda

Award for Best Experimental Short Film

Mast-del (Iran/UK)

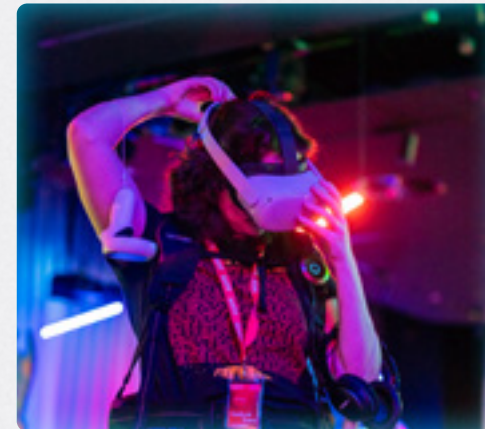
Director: Maryam Tafakory

MIFF XR

Sitting at the intersection of film, visual art and gaming, MIFF's XR program has established itself as fertile ground for exploration and innovation – for audiences and artists alike – and expands our notions of filmmaking and storytelling.

MIFF presented its first virtual reality (VR) program in 2016. Since then, the festival has presented a compelling selection of immersive 360-degree work and was rebranded MIFF XR (extended reality) in 2021 to encompass augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR) alongside VR.

In 2023, the MIFF XR program was held in two stages at ACMI's Swinburne Studio. During Phase One (8–15 August), audiences enjoyed eight award-winning works from across the globe, including *From the Main Square*, which won Venice's Immersive Grand Jury Prize, Annecy's Festivals Connexion VR Award and NewImages' Grand Prize; and *The Man Who Couldn't Leave*, awarded Venice's Best Immersive Experience. Over MIFF's final four days and in partnership with Now or Never, Phase Two unveiled the IDFA DocLab Award-winning *In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats*.



MIFF Talks

MIFF Talks events complement and expand on the themes, ideas and talent attached to various films in each year's program. These discussion-based offerings feature a range of local and international guests, from filmmakers and academics to critics and commentators. The 2023 slate was presented by the University of Melbourne.

Castlemaine: Meet the Filmmakers

Geraldine Hakewill
Mark Leonard Winter
Noora Niasari
Ian White

MODERATOR: Lisa Skerrett

Consuming Culture

Julia Busuttill Nishimura
Michael Sun
Kelli Weston

MODERATOR: Brodie Lancaster

Eyes on America: From Documentary to Satire & in Between

Mel Eslyn
Christoffer Guldbrandsen
Nick Pinkerton
Soda Jerk

MODERATOR: Alexei Toliopoulos

In Conversation: Celine Song's *Past Lives*

Celine Song

MODERATOR: Santilla Chingaipie

Power Shift: The Future of Seeing

Noora Niasari
Jason Raftopoulos
Ben Joseph Andrews
Radha O'Meara

MODERATOR: Duncan Caillard

Something in the Water: New Australian Horror

Cameron and Colin Cairnes
Jack Clark
Nick Kozakis
Jim Weir

MODERATOR: Sally Christie



MIFF Regional

3K total regional viewership

7 regional venues

74 sessions

8 sessions with guests in attendance

19 features

6 shorts

MIFF Regional screens a selection of festival films in regional centres across Victoria. In 2023, there were seven partner venues: Capitol Cinema (Warrnambool), Paramount Cinemas (Echuca), Peninsula Cinemas (Rosebud), The Pivotonian (Geelong), Star Cinema (Bendigo), Sun Cinema (Bright) and Theatre Royal (Castlemaine).

The 2023 MIFF Regional slate included features such as *Blue Jean*, *Scarygirl*, *Scrapper*, *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* and *You Can Call Me Bill*; the gala titles *Shayda*, *Ego: The Michael Gudinski Story* and *Theater Camp*; the *Australian Shorts* package; and the MIFF Premiere Fund titles *This Is Going to Be Big*, *The Rooster*, *Australia's Open* and *Memory Film: A Filmmaker's Diary*.

Audiences were also treated to two special events: the Orchestra Victoria co-presented *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*, a reimagined take on F.W. Murnau's 1922 vampire classic held at Bendigo's Ulumbarra Theatre; and the festival's first ever regional MIFF Talk, 'Castlemaine: Meet the Filmmakers', which took place in the eponymous town.



MIFF 37°South Market

Held during the opening days of the festival, MIFF 37°South Market is a screen content development and financing event. It facilitates creative and commercial connections at multiple points in the intellectual property (IP) value chain by enabling invited buyers and financiers to source, acquire, develop and finance screen content slates via individually tailored diaries of bespoke meeting and networking opportunities with producers.

In 2023, Australian and New Zealand screen content producers (mostly with script-stage projects) once again met with local and international screen content co-financiers/buyers in various contexts – including one-to-one meetings, roundtables, informal networking sessions and festival functions – to deepen and broaden their screen financing contacts and advance their projects' financing. There were also screenings of completed film projects seeking sales and/or distribution from streamers, distributors and sales agents, and producers were additionally able to source new content to develop via meetings with book publishers, rights holders of other IP, and writers, directors or creatives.

In total, 37°South welcomed 65 financiers and buyers, including sales agents, distributors, streamers, networks and gap funders, with attending execs from the likes of Plan B, Tubi, N9ne Studio, Architect, Amazon Prime, AMC/Shudder, Archstone, Bankside, Charades, Disney+, eOne/Sierra-Affinity, Kismet, Miramax, Red Sea, Grandave Capital, Level K, Roadshow, Stan, StudioCanal, TriCoast and XYZ.

139 producers

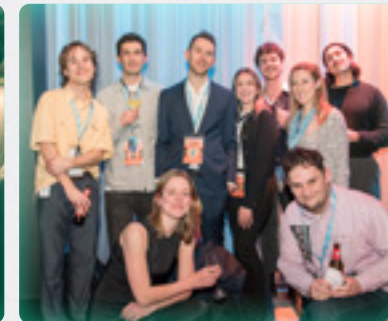
65 financiers/buyers

88 writers/directors/creatives

34 publishers

23 other IP rights holders

3.5K meetings



MIFF Accelerator Lab

Accelerator Lab is an annual MIFF initiative that supports promising emerging filmmakers in their transition to feature/longform filmmaking and showcases new Australian and New Zealand shorts. Through participation in a five-day intensive program of workshops, panels and more with international and Australian industry heavyweights, filmmakers gain a greater understanding of the dynamics and possibilities of longform filmmaking.

A cornerstone of the program is to inspire and invigorate the creative development of the participants' current projects. The overarching theme of Accelerator Lab is to encourage participants to go out and make their next film, focusing on collaboration so that they may be committed and strategic – and consider every avenue available to achieve their goals.

The program's 19th iteration was comprised of 24 panel discussions and presentations by Australian and international industry heavyweights such as: Sally Caplan (former Screen Australia Head of Content); Guy Lodge (*Variety*); international financiers Film-Seekers, N9NE Studio and Yellow Veil Pictures; festival directors from both Sundance and Berlin; top talent agency Shanahan; ANZ distributors Madman, Sharmill, Roadshow and Umbrella; inclusion experts Bus Stop Films;

executives from screen agencies Screen Australia, New Zealand Film Commission and VicScreen; production companies Fremantle and Good Thing; and Accelerator Lab alumnus directors Justin Kurzel (*Nitram*), Noora Niasari (*Shayda*), Goran Stolevski (*Of an Age*), Aaron Wilson (*Little Tornadoes*), Anthony Chen (*The Breaking Ice*), and Cameron and Colin Cairnes (*Late Night With the Devil*, who delivered – alongside sound designer Emma Bortignon – an editing class on their film). Also speaking were directors Paul Goldman (*Ego: The Michael Gudinski Story*) and Jeni Thornley (*Memory Film: A Filmmaker's Diary*) as well as actor-turned-director Mark Leonard Winter (whose film *The Rooster* anchored several sessions, including an acting class with actors Hugo Weaving and Phoenix Raei that ran as part of four 'Accelerator Lab: Behind the Scenes' ticketed sessions).



Critics Campus

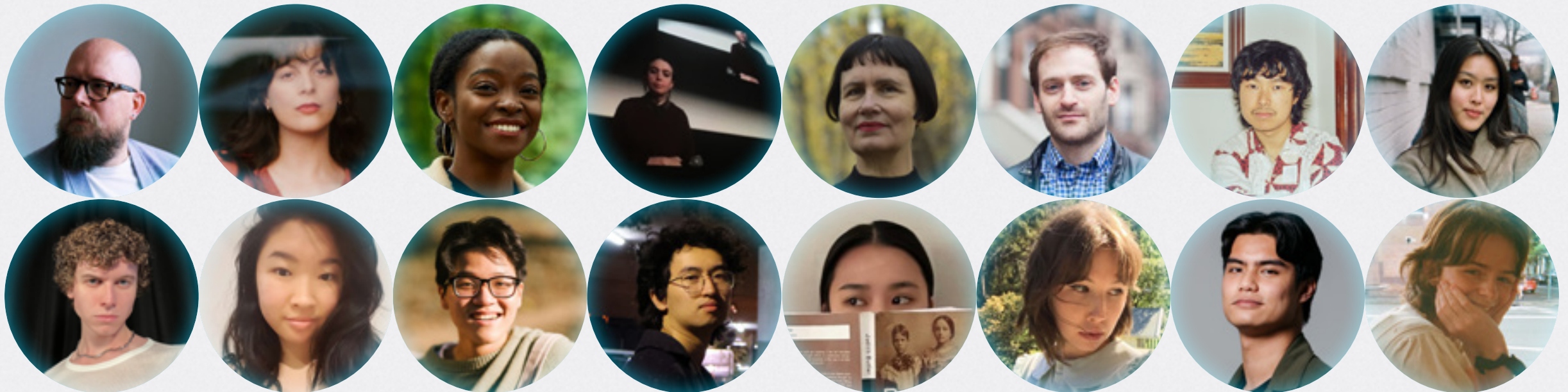
Established in 2014, Critics Campus is MIFF's intensive week-long lab of panels, workshops, mentoring and writing, designed to provide emerging Australian screen critics a unique professional-development platform to nurture their talents in a live festival setting.

In 2023 – which rang in the program's 10th iteration – MIFF welcomed another culturally and gender-diverse cohort of eight emerging critics, who received tutelage from a stellar line-up of local and international speakers and mentors. To mark this milestone edition, MIFF also presented the commemorative film strand *Critical Condition*: a retrospective of forgotten gems, cult oddities and misunderstood masterpieces whose reputations were resuscitated by critics.

The members of the 2023 cohort were Charles Carrall, Christy Tan, Đặng Tùng Bach, Eric Jiang, Erika Lay, Indigo Bailey, Kevin Bui and Lauren Collee. As part of the program, each

participant was paired up with an established critic: Guy Lodge (*Variety / The Observer*), Michael Koresky (*Museum of the Moving Image / Reverse Shot*), Keva York (*ABC Arts*), Michael Sun (*The Guardian / ABC Arts*), and freelancers Kelli Weston, Philippa Hawker, Isabella Trimboli and Phoebe Chen.

As well as one-on-one mentoring, the program included panel discussions and workshops featuring some of the best international film critics, scholars and programmers – several of whom were former Critics Campus mentors – from such outlets as *Vulture*, *New York Magazine*, *Letterboxd* and the *Los Angeles Times*.



MIFF Schools

7 films

35 schools

1.2K students

MIFF Schools is an initiative that aims to enrich the cinema experience for younger viewers.

The 2023 slate was curated with a view to presenting high-quality, diverse films in some of the languages commonly taught in Victorian schools – French, Mandarin, Japanese and Spanish. The films were also selected for how well they addressed the Victorian Curriculum's Arts, Humanities, Science and Languages learning areas, as well as themes and issues relevant to the Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding, and Personal and Social capabilities.

In 2023, teachers and their students had the option of either attending an in-cinema session (Melbourne only) or streaming the film from their classroom (Australia-wide). Each film was also complemented with a free curriculum-aligned webinar by visual-analysis expert Dr Josh Nelson, which gave teachers additional resources, strategies and ideas for how best to incorporate that film into their students' classroom-based learning.



Out-of-Season Offerings

While MIFF is best-known for its activities during the festival period – from the First Glance announcement in May to the Closing Night Gala in late August – the festival also hosts and co-presents a number of events and initiatives across the year.

Each event has its own flavour and take on filmic festivity, but all of them further MIFF's mission of delivering unforgettable screen experiences, nurturing audiences and strengthening relationships with partners, filmmakers, local communities and the screen sector.

MIFF Summer Residency
2 feature films
Bunjil Place
9 December 2022 & 21 January 2023

MIFF Circle screening: *The Whale*
Cinema Nova
1 February

Glenroy Film Festival
7 feature films
Merri-bek City Council
25–28 May

MIFF Circle screening: *The Rooster*
Palace Como
28 June

One Song: The Music of Archie Roach
1 feature film
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
5 July

MIFF Encore Screenings
3 feature films
ACMI
October–November

MIFF Circle screening: *Priscilla*
Kino Cinemas + Cumulus Upstairs
28 November

VCA Film and Television Graduate Season
39 short films
MIFF Play
1–15 December

End-of-year screening: *Banel & Adama*
Cinema Nova
12 December

MIFF Member preview screenings
Various titles
Various venues
Year-round (monthly)



PROGRAM


IMPACT

SUPPORT


Audience / Demographics

145.5K 
total viewership





87% metropolitan Melbourne
7% regional Victoria
4% interstate

- 37% from NSW
- 36% engaged with MIFF for the first time

19% 
new audiences

- 58% under 25
- 36% from interstate



33% earn over \$100K annually




72% employed
full-time or part-time,
or self-employed

15% retired

6% students


58% female

51% aged under 45

19% speak a language other than English at home*

*The most commonly spoken languages are Mandarin, French, Cantonese, Spanish, Greek, Italian, German and Japanese.

Audience / Satisfaction



94%

highly likely to return
to MIFF in future years



Quality of films on offer
97% satisfied

Range of films on offer
96% satisfied

Customer service received
97% satisfied

Digital platform
87% satisfied



Audience / Behaviour

IN CINEMA

84% watched with others

Groups (3+) watched more films than singles or couples

Audiences watched an average of **4.5 films**

Over-65s watched an average of **6.1 films**

Under-25s and 25–34s watched an average of **4.4 films**



KEY MOTIVATIONS FOR ATTENDING MIFF

to experience something new

Over-65s more motivated by experiencing something new

to watch a specific film

Under-25s more motivated by watching a specific film before it releases in Australia

to experience culture

35–44s more motivated by experiencing culture

to be entertained

ONLINE

67% watched with others

On average, in groups of 2.3 people

Audiences watched an average of **2.6 films**

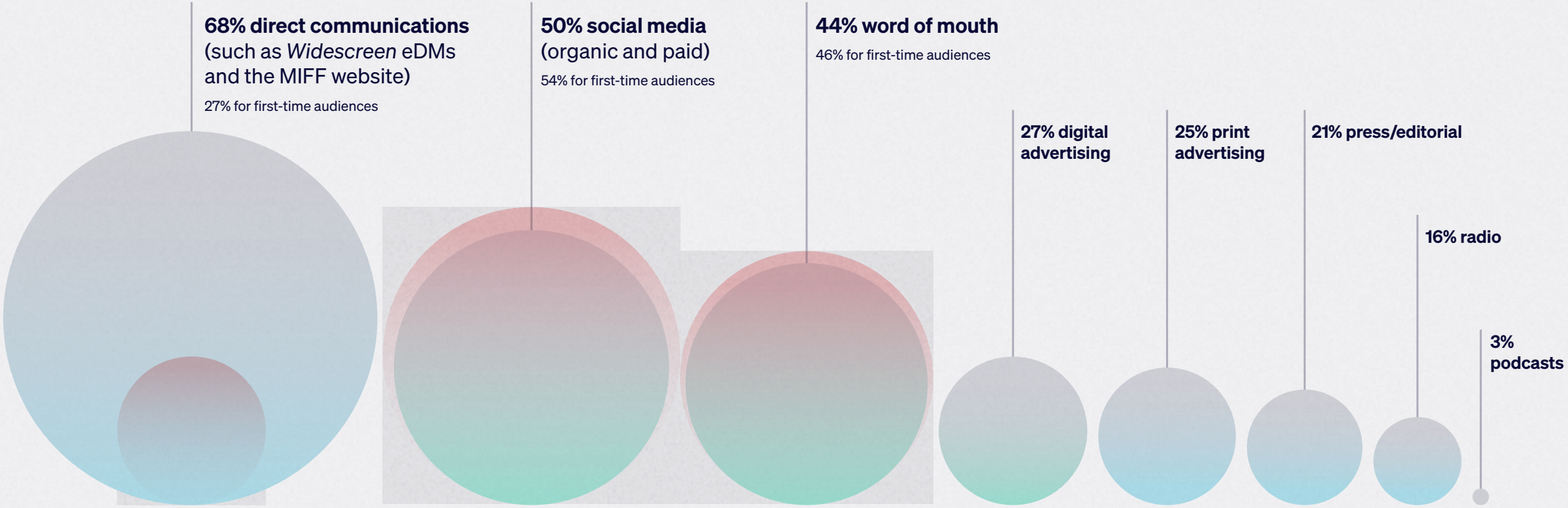
55–64s watched an average of **2.8 films**

Over-65s watched an average of **3 films**



Audience / Sources of Awareness

NOTE: Total response percentages exceed 100% as respondents were permitted to select multiple sources of awareness.



Strongest sources of awareness about MIFF

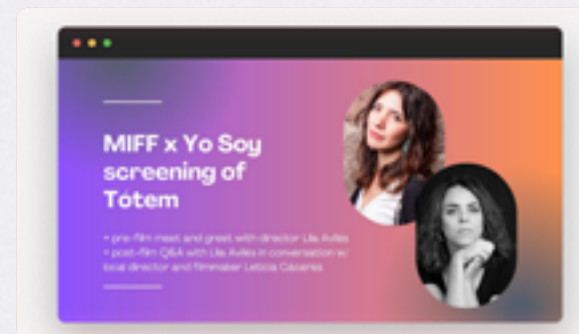
- Audiences aged 18–44: social media, digital advertising, organic and amplified word of mouth
- Audiences aged 45–65+: direct communications, press/editorial, print advertising, radio advertising
- Audiences engaging with MIFF for the first time: social media, amplified and organic word of mouth, direct communications

Audience Development

MIFF has always prided itself on being a festival for everyone. Building on its access services catering for the d/Deaf and disabled community (see page 15), regional screenings (see page 20) and out-of-season events (see page 25), MIFF embarked in 2023 on the task of audience development to better engage those who might otherwise experience barriers to attendance.

During the initiative's inaugural year, identified audience segments included First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), migrant and youth. To engage these communities, MIFF worked with several organisations that served as 'sociocultural bridges': ACMI First Nations Film Club, Immigration Museum, Multicultural Arts Victoria, *Liminal*, Yo Soy, SIGNAL, cohealth Arts Gen and Arts Access Victoria. These relationships were formed prior to the festival's commencement, allowing feedback and active collaboration to inform delivery. What resulted were a suite of exciting projects: film recommendations on MIFF's in-house publication, *Revue*; meet-and-greet events with filmmakers; co-presented post-film Q&As; and generous ticketing giveaways.

Recognising that barriers can be as much economic as social, MIFF also offered discounted ticketing in the form of community tickets and Blaktix, and introduced the U26 Membership (see page 35), which was available exclusively to young attendees.



Social Media & Website



182K eDM subscribers

36.4% open rate

11.7% click rate (CTOR)*

*open and click rates well above industry average



4.3M website page views*

1.1M website sessions

582K unique website users

*miff.com.au only



77.3K Facebook followers

353.7K peak daily reach



33.2K Instagram followers

82.8K peak daily reach



5.3K LinkedIn followers



764 Letterboxd followers



32.9K YouTube subscribers

33.1M YouTube views in total

1.5M YouTube views in 2023



52.2K Twitter followers



698 TikTok followers

229K reach

Publicity

“Fierce drag queens, fighting siblings and twice the Tilda ... Melbourne’s glittering showcase of homegrown cinema and international hits returns.”

FLICKS

“Ranging from daringly subversive esoterica to audience-friendly heartwarmers ... A festival rich in revelations.”

VARIETY

“Perfect for a winter night out, MIFF is packed with everything from engrossing documentaries and insightful speakers to anticipated blockbusters and plenty more.”

**URBAN
:LIST**

“This year has seen an unprecedented amount of stunning directorial debuts, ushering in a slew of new voices in the cinematic space, and meaning the program is more diverse than ever.”

InStyle

“Why spend just over a week worshipping the silver screen, as most film festivals do, when you can stretch the in-cinema celebration out to more than a fortnight, and throw in over a week of online viewings as well? That’s Melbourne International Film Festival’s approach.”

**CONCRETE
PLAYGROUND.**

2.9K pieces of media coverage
6B total reach
\$56.1M estimated PR value

“For its 71st year, the festival promises more of what we’ve come to expect (and look forward to): the best of cinema from around the world, highly engaging documentaries and festival circuit favourites.”

BROADSHEET

“The Melbourne International Film Festival is back in 2023 for its 71st year ... There’s so much to see, it’s hard to whittle it down to a manageable list of can’t-miss movies.”

TimeOut

“*Ego* is both a rollicking personal story of the one-man music promoting machine and a rip-roaring record of the artists he helped rocket to the top of the charts.”

SCREEN hub

“Year on year, MIFF’s beloved Music on Film line-up delivers fascinating backstage stories and documentaries to a city that loves music almost as much as it does film.”

beat

“A deeply engrossing, gradually escalating drama about a mother and daughter rebuilding their lives ... [*Shayda*] is a resounding achievement, and [Noora] Niasari an exciting new voice in Australian cinema.”

**The
Guardian**

PROGRAM
IMPACT
SUPPORT

Membership

Community is the essence of MIFF, which is proud to have cultivated one of the most vocal, informed and passionate audiences of any festival, anywhere. MIFF Members once again supported the festival in droves – queuing outside cinemas and filling up their wishlists – while also enjoying their usual membership privileges: discounted passes and tickets for all festival sessions, year-round parking discounts through Secure Parking, and concession entry to MIFF’s range of cinema partners. Those in the Deluxe Membership tier also retained access to the unlimited program-wide Festival Passport.

As part of MIFF’s commitment to growing its audience base, 2023 saw the introduction of the U26 Membership: a special tier exclusively available to cinema-goers under the age of 26. This tier conferred all the benefits of a standard membership as well as unlocking the exclusive U26 Pass (three off-peak sessions at a discounted price). Significantly, 94 per cent of U26 Members were first-time MIFF Members.

1.7K Members total

198 Deluxe Members

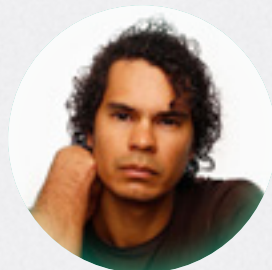
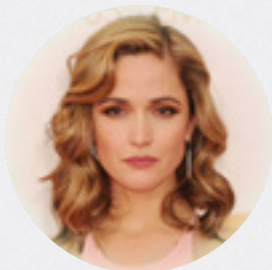
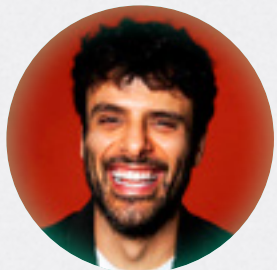
241 U26 Members



MIFF Ambassadors

In 2023, MIFF once again welcomed a number of filmmakers, actors and creatives to join the festival as Ambassadors. Hailing from all over Australia, MIFF Ambassadors ensure the festival is a truly national celebration of film and the moving image, and are united by their passion for MIFF and all that it does.

- Fayssal Bazzi
- Julia Busuttil Nishimura
- Rose Byrne
- Mark Coles Smith
- Robert Connolly
- Rachel Griffiths AM
- Justin Kurzel
- Leah Purcell AM



MIFF Circle

The MIFF Circle is the festival's philanthropic giving group. Since its inception in 2020, MIFF's donors have been the festival's lifeline, especially through a period of unprecedented challenges. Their astounding support remains integral to MIFF's success and growth as one of the biggest and best film events in Australia, for which MIFF is immensely grateful.



Major Supporters

The Phyllis Connor Memorial Trust
Susie Montague

Platinum Patrons

Jane & Stephen Hains
Ray Montague
The Pratt Foundation
The Sun Foundation
Ricci Swart AM

Gold Patrons

Greg Basser & Kiera O'Neill
(Gentle Giant Media Group)
Paul & Samantha Cross
Constellation Creatives
Zahava Elenberg & Justin Abrahams
Rosemary Forbes & Ian Hocking
M. A. Johnston
Konfir Kabo & Monica Lim
Joel & Yael Pearlman
Jo Plank
Stephen & Sheryle Rogerson
Drake Storm
Krista Vendy & Brett Rogers
Paul & Sarah Wiegard

Silver Patrons

Jane Allsop
Jim & Angela Andreadis
Ling Ang
Ying Ang
Mike Baard
Dr Angela Baker
Bill Beck & Gilda Howard
Sally Caplan
Kath Chambers & Ken Connor
Cheryl Chan
Josh Chye
Dr Megan Clark AC & Trent Hutchinson
Bernie Clifford

Peter Cole
Claire Dobbin AM
Niels Endres
Iona Goodwin
Adeline Hiew
Greg Hughan
Tamara Joyner
The Hon. Dr Andrew Lu AM
& Dr Geoffrey Lancaster AO
Brad Macdonald
Pamela Macklin & Vic Zbar
Nancy Margaret
Vlad Mijic

Natalie Miller AO
Traudi Moon OAM
Evan Mynard
Vic Pope
Joel Rembach
Sage Foundation
Martina Schaefer
Anna Schwartz
Anne & Michael Smith
Pinky Watson
Lou Weis & Kim Kneipp
Teresa Zolnierkiewicz

Partnerships

From sold-out sessions to snaking queues, MIFF's memorable 71st edition could not have been held without the tireless work, generosity and support of the festival's Partners.

Much like in previous years, audiences were treated to a lively selection of Partner collaborations, offerings and experiences, including film presentations, activations, custom content, top-notch food and beverage, and generous competitions, promos and giveaways. Highlights include the return of the Campari Cinema Lounge and the always-popular Food & Film program.



“We’ve been delighted to partner with MIFF during the past two festivals. With thousands of people settling in to enjoy hundreds of films from Australia and around the world, we know we have an opportunity to connect through our shared values of a fair and inclusive society.

As Australia’s first customer-owned bank and a certified B Corporation, we use money as a force for good to help create a world where people and the planet thrive. MIFF audiences are filled with people we want to invite to join this story. In turn, we’re so proud to help continue MIFF’s 71-year legacy of creativity, impact and inspiration.”

Nicole Hunter
Head of Marketing
Bank Australia

PRINCIPAL GOVERNMENT PARTNER			MAJOR GOVERNMENT PARTNERS						LEARNING PARTNER		
MAJOR PARTNERS											
PARTNERS											
VENUE PARTNERS											
MEDIA PARTNERS											
INDUSTRY & CULTURAL PARTNERS											
KEY SUPPLIERS											

Board & Staff

MIFF Board

Teresa Zolnierkiewicz – Chair
Mike Baard
Sally Caplan
Cheryl Chan
Josh Chye
Ben Kay
The Hon. Dr Andrew Lu AM
Tim McGregor (retired)

MIFF Staff

Management

Al Cossar – Artistic Director
Mark Woods – Industry Director / Executive Producer (concluded 15 Nov 2023)
Victoria Pope – Commercial Operations Director
Amanda Sole – Finance Manager

Programming

Kate Fitzpatrick – Programmer
Kate Jinx – Programmer
Mia Falstein-Rush – Program Manager
Liam Carter – Program Coordinator
Mark Jakowenko – Head of Guest Services & Special Projects
Roan Johnson – Guest Services Manager
Luke Goodsell – Critics Campus Producer
Tom Noble – Guest Coordinator
Lachlan Sleight – XR Technical Coordinator
Gisselle Gallego – Programming Assistant
Danielle Goder – Critics Campus Intern

Marketing & Communications

Olivia Simon – Head of Marketing & Communications
Adolfo Aranjuez – Publications & Audience Development Manager
Elwyn Murray – Graphic Designer
Sophia Petropoulos – Marketing Campaign & Projects Coordinator
Jasmine Penman – Digital Content Coordinator

Partnerships

Sarah Wild – Head of Partnerships
Georgina Wills – Partnerships Manager
Saoirse Johnston-Dick – Partnerships Coordinator
Phillip Pitsillou – Partnerships Assistant

Philanthropy

Brad Macdonald – Head of Philanthropy & Festival Development
Sophie Scott – Philanthropy & Membership Coordinator
Hannah Attwood – Philanthropy & Membership Intern

Finance & Administration

Cecily Wallace – Accounts

Systems & Ticketing

Jaymie Bandrowski – Head of Systems & Ticketing
Bonnie Perry – Box Office Manager
Nick Turner – Data & Ticketing Manager
Jordan Willis – Data & Streaming Coordinator
Rosie Hazell – Ticketing Coordinator

Operations

Erin Hutchinson – Head of Operations
Georgia Byres – Operations Manager
Chris Elliott – Technical Manager
Chiara Gabrielli – Venues Manager
Grace Packer – Volunteers Manager
Melanie Dimattina – Events Manager
Angela Lillyman – Assistant Venues Manager
Keir Aitken – Assistant Venues Manager
Tom Middleditch – Access Coordinator
Ida Talback – Events Coordinator
Gina Cameron – Events Coordinator
Sarah Alkemade – Print Traffic Coordinator
John Hewison – Technical Production Coordinator
Vidhi Vira – Events Intern

MIFF Industry

Eddie Coupe – Industry Programs Manager
Scott Joblin – Industry Programs Officer
Andrew Goode – Industry Programs Coordinator
Anthoula Ververis – Industry Projects Coordinator
Claudia Nankervis – Industry Programs Administrator
George Samios – Industry Programs Assistant Administrator

Publicity

Common State