

EMBARGOED UNTIL TUESDAY JULY 14, 19:00

**MIFF 68½ TO PREMIERE KELLY REICHARDT'S HIGHLY ANTICIPATED 'FIRST COW'
BRINGING THE FESTIVAL TO A NATION-WIDE AUDIENCE FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME**

Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) has today unveiled the full line-up of films at MIFF 68½ – the inaugural online delivery of the country's oldest film festival. Encompassing **112** films – including **12** world premieres, **83** Australian premieres and **44** shorts – this year's program comprises films from **56** countries, with **49%** of all selected films having at least one female director attached to them.

Alongside this year's suite of films, MIFF also announced its 2020 Festival Ambassadors – an extraordinary group of creatives from within and outside the world of film, who will provide their picks of the program and drop-in along the way to host special events with filmmakers throughout the festival. MIFF is delighted to welcome: **Gillian Armstrong; Fayssal Bazzi; Jack Charles; Mirrah Foulkes; Hannah Gadsby; Rachel Griffiths; Justin Kurzel; Steven Oliver; Chris Pang; Aaron Pedersen; Stanislava Pinchuk; Remi Kolawole; John Sheedy; and Ben Shewry.**

Unveiling this year's program MIFF's **Artistic Director, Al Cossar** stated: "I'm delighted to say that, despite the extraordinary circumstances of 2020, MIFF's 'radical act' is to keep going and continue on our mission to bring you the world through unforgettable screen experiences. At MIFF, we are driven by a deep understanding that film has the ability to entertain, inspire, illuminate and empower audiences in a way that few other mediums can – qualities we welcome now more than ever."

In an enormous coup for Australian audiences, *MIFF 68½* presents the Australian premiere of revered auteur **Kelly Reichardt's *First Cow*** as the festival's Opening Night film. Once again training her perceptive and patient eye on America's Pacific Northwest, *First Cow* is Reichardt's unlikely story of friendship and free enterprise on the American frontier.

A taciturn loner and skilled cook (John Magaro) has travelled west and joined a group of fur trappers in Oregon Territory, though he only finds true connection with a Chinese immigrant (Orion Lee) also seeking his fortune; soon the two collaborate on a successful business, although its longevity is reliant upon the clandestine participation of a nearby wealthy landowner's prized milking cow.

From this simple premise Reichardt constructs an interrogation of foundational Americana that recalls her earlier triumph *Old Joy* in its sensitive depiction of male friendship, yet is driven by a mounting suspense all of its own. *First Cow* again shows Reichardt's distinct talent for depicting the peculiar rhythms of daily living and further cements her reputation as one of the most brilliant directors working today.

Benh Zeitlin's long-awaited follow-up to *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, ***Wendy***, screens as the festival's Centrepiece. A contemporary reimagining of *Peter Pan* set in the American south, the film sees Zeitlin focus his lens on Wendy (Devine France), as she follows Peter to a mysterious island to escape the monotony of her daily existence. Much like *Beasts* before it, *Wendy* is infused with a singular vision of fantasy and Terrence Malick-inspired imagistic style. Propelled by a spellbinding lead performance and a dynamic storyline that is environmentally charged and concerned with the conflict between innocence and ignorance, abandon and avoidance, *Wendy* will beguile audiences all the way to Neverland.

One of contemporary cinema's most exciting and awarded directors, the remarkable **Pablo Larrain** unites Gael García Bernal with striking newcomer Mariana Di Girolamo in ***Emma*** for the festival's Closing Night screening. Set in the vibrant dance world of the port city of Valparaíso, Chile, *Emma* is a reggaeton-fuelled, delirium inducing dance-drama about a couple falling apart after a failed adoption. Set to a throbbing electro-synth score by lauded Chilean-American composer **Nicolas Jaar**, Oscar nominee Larrain beautifully captures the turmoil of a character for whom the body is both a creative outlet and pressure valve.

Minister for Creative Industries Martin Foley said: "MIFF has thrilled, challenged and delighted audiences through more than half a century of change, and this year will be no exception. Congratulations to the team on yet another exceptional program of films – screening direct to our homes to keep us engaged and entertained when we most need it."

“Acknowledging the extraordinary circumstances faced by this year’s festival, MIFF Chair Teresa Zolnierkiewicz said: “MIFF 68½ is only made possible by the generous support of our government stakeholders, partners, founding MIFF Circle patrons, MIFF Members and the passionate and dedicated MIFF team. Thanks to their efforts, MIFF is now set to deliver a program of fresh and compelling films – films that are not available anywhere else – to audiences in their homes across Australia.”

“With MIFF 68½ we take the opportunity to meet audiences where they are; to be a responsive, relevant and innovative force for positivity and reclaim connection to our audiences in 2020,” explains Cossar. “Through this year’s program, we embrace an extraordinary array of film, across form and genre; as well as the incredible voices of filmmakers, from a diverse range of backgrounds. As ever, MIFF will celebrate anticipated festival blockbusters, breakthrough talents and emerging voices; restoration and retrospective work; and the brilliant local and global talents pushing forward the language and possibility of cinema.”

Representing the biggest films of the 2020 festival, Program Spotlights will roll out at specific session times right across the festival.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS

MIFF presents the winner of the 2020 Sundance US Grand Jury Prize for Documentary, **Boys State**. The Apple Original film chronicles an experiment in democracy as teenage boys from Texas compete in a large-scale re-enactment of representative government. Follow four of the boys as they ride the highs and lows of their campaigns in this funny - but never facile - film that exposes the fault lines in the greater system and suggests that, even amid a cavalcade of dirty dealing, it may still be possible for each side to meet in the middle of the divide. Directed by Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss (“The Overnighters,” MIFF 2014; “Speedo,” MIFF 2004), this political coming-of-age film presents the USA in microcosm; hopeful and disturbing alike.

Aubrey Plaza gives a career-best performance in **Black Bear** – a devious psychodrama about a creatively- blocked filmmaker who wedges herself between a squabbling couple. In search of inspiration, actor-turned-director Allison (Plaza) heads to the Upstate New York lakeside retreat owned by Gabe and Sarah. There, she finds the couple beset with mutual resentment, and decides to exploit their bitterness to fuel her own dried-up creativity. Fuelled by an intriguing, intelligent narrative puzzle that unpacks the murky line between representation and real life, director Lawrence Michael Levine’s film unfolds a dark game of manipulation.

Directed by the late, prolific film composer Jóhann Jóhannsson, **Last and First Men** adapts Olaf Stapledon’s apocalyptic 1930 novel into a breathtaking docu-fiction film portending humanity’s march towards extinction. Narrated by Tilda Swinton and shot in high-contrast black-and-white 16mm, Jóhannsson’s first and only film is a lucid meditation that undulates with contemplative foreboding, reframing vast Cold War–era brutalist sculptures as desolate, otherworldly landscapes from our distant future.

Taking love life advice from a beyond-the-grave-lesbian-activist-cupid begets some tricky situations in Monica Zanetti’s quirky and delightful **Ellie & Abbie (& Ellie’s Dead Aunt)**. Described by *The Guardian* as a “funny Australian teen queer rom-com exploring all of the awkwardness that comes with being a teenager,” *Ellie & Abbie* is feel-good story of coming out, coming-of-age and crushing hard.

SPECIAL PREVIEWS

Racking up an astonishing 36 awards on the festival circuit – including a nomination for Best International Feature Film at the 92nd Academy Awards – Jan Komasa’s **Corpus Christi** is the story of an ex-con who passes himself off as a parish priest. Inspired by real events, Komasa’s pensive drama about penance, motivation, morality and forgiveness is steeped in moral shades of grey, showing how the road to redemption is rarely straightforward.

Co-presented with NITV, **On the Record** distills the allegations against Def Jam mogul Russell Simmons – a #MeToo reckoning for Black culture, hip-hop and the music industry in general – into a highly personal account of the toll incurred on former Def Jam Records A&R manager Drew Dixon after speaking out. An intimate and forensic dissection of the allegations from Oscar-nominated directors Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, whose previous films *The Hunting Ground* (MIFF 2015) and *The Invisible War* have similarly exposed the toxicity of rape culture and sexual abuse.

AUSTRALIAN FILMMAKERS

In a world premiere, the festival presents Steven McGregor's ***Looky Looky Here Comes Cooky*** – a Raw Film and Tamarind Tree Pictures production for National Indigenous Television (NITV). Responding to the 250th anniversary of Captain Cook's landing, cheeky, acerbic and heartfelt host, **Steven Oliver** (2020 MIFF ambassador) invites audiences to experience the arrival of the HMB Endeavour through First Nations eyes. Filled with powerful performances from Indigenous artists including Trials, Birdz, Kev Carmody, Mau Power, Fred Leone, Alice Skye and Mo'Ju, ***Looky Looky Here Comes Cooky*** is fresh, funny and provocative; a rallying cry of resistance, survival and the power of connection to Country.

In Guatemala City, where 98 percent of homicides go unprosecuted, German Cabrera has devoted his life to capturing crime footage for news outlets and police – no matter the risks. ***The Meddler*** is his story. Painstakingly filmed over seven years, Alex Roberts and Daniel Leclair's documentary is a nerve-racking, warts-and-all study of an individual consumed by a desire for retribution, and the corruptive impact of his work on his relationships, his health and even his sense of self.

A collective of around 30 filmmakers, **Karrabing Film Collective** has established itself internationally as an extraordinary voice for Australia, and for cinema. Their latest work, ***Day in the Life*** is a hip-hop-infused visual kaleidoscope that blends together filmed footage, archival audio, music and media clips, as they chart a day in a remote Aboriginal community and the unrelenting experience of marginalisation. Uncompromising in its vision, the film further cements Karrabing Film Collective as some of Australia's leading artists and filmmakers.

In the world premiere of Jo-Anne Brechin's uplifting and uproariously funny rom-com ***Paper Champions***, a mild-mannered photocopier salesman finds his life is as blank and meaningless as the A4 paper that logjams his days, and steps out to find love and reclaim his sense of self, in this Geelong-shot local highlight.

Directed by Australian expat Christopher King and Maia Lekow, ***The Letter*** is a moving, at times harrowing, documentary – investigating the interplay between cultural traditions, colonisation and religious beliefs – that bears witness to a 90-year-old Kenyan woman Margaret who stands accused of being a witch in East Africa by her own family.

Self-described "CEO and dreamer" Fabian Dattner hopes to transform society by starting with the women who could spearhead that change. To set things in motion, in 2016 she takes 76 female scientists from around the world on the first all-women Homeward Bound voyage to Antarctica. Over the 20-day trip, however, political and philosophical tensions slowly begin to simmer. Set against the sublime icy backdrop of the southern continent, Ili Baré's revelatory documentary ***The Leadership***, exposes the discrimination and structural challenges faced daily by women in STEM fields.

In director Alison Chhorn's ***The Plastic House***, a young Cambodian-Australian woman copes with her parents' death by retreating to the family greenhouse and tending to their plants. A masterful piece of experimental filmmaking, ***The Plastic House*** is minimalist in set-up and style, privileging atmosphere over action in its almost-wordless exploration of mourning, migration and the passage of time.

INTERNATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

In MIFF Accelerator Lab alumnus Kazik Radwanski's ***Anne at 13,000 ft*** a young woman emerges through freefall in more ways than one, in a claustrophobic, unfettered and utterly convincing portrait of a young woman not quite emerging into adult responsibility.

The winner of the Crystal Bear at this year's Berlinale, ***Sweet Thing*** is indie auteur Alexandre Rockwell's lucid, tender-hearted and arresting tale of childhood joy persisting amidst trauma. Filmed in luminous black-and-white, Rockwell directs his own children and their real-life mother, Karyn Parsons in this dreamy coming-of-age drama.

The unanimous winner of Locarno 2019's Golden Leopard and declared by jury president Catherine Breillat as a film that "will enter the heritage of world cinema," Pedro Costa's latest feature ***Vitalina Varela*** is a hypnotic exploration of grief and displacement.

Bassam Tariq's ***Mogul Moggli***, sees Riz Ahmed command the screen, drawing on his own hip hop background to deliver a role as a British-Pakistani rapper undone suddenly by an illness that forces him to confront the dynamics of family, home and identity.

Black dress code turns into black comedy as a young woman attending a funeral service is forced to navigate her uptight parents, former girlfriend and current sugar daddy, in Emma Seligman's ***Shiva Baby***. A claustrophobic comedy of awkwardness par excellence, with an ensemble cast that includes *Booksmart*'s Molly Gordon, *Obvious Child*'s Polly Draper and *Glee*'s Dianna Agron, this is a masterfully whip-smart feature debut about putting one's best foot forward – no matter who's around.

Winner of the FIPRESCI Prize for Best Film, ***The Fever*** is Maya Da-Rin's literal fever dream depicting the experiences of a man navigating the displacement and isolation of being an Indigenous person in Brazil. The prolific Da-Rin brings her wealth of documentary and visual art experience to this pointedly political fiction debut, whose story is informed by the lives of its Amazonian actors.

In ***Servants***, the Catholic Church and the communist State collide in a repressive Czechoslovakian seminary. Reminiscent of Paweł Pawlikowski's *Ida* and *Cold War* (MIFF 2018) in its stunning black-and-white cinematography, immaculate composition and distinctively film noir sensibility, the second fiction feature by Ivan Ostrochovský (*Koza*, MIFF 2015) is an immersive excursion into the paranoia of late-communist Czechoslovakia – a milieu that is both from a bygone era and in so many ways redolent of our own.

The winner of the LGBTQI-themed Teddy Award at this year's Berlinale, ***No Hard Feelings*** is German director Faraz Shariat's vibrant, vivid and energetic take on the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and immigration, all bound up momentarily in a love story between a German-born Iranian exile and a refugee.

DOCUMENTARIES

The multi-award-winning documentary ***Welcome to Chechnya*** is a transfixing and eye-opening exposé of the persecution of queer Chechens – and a testament to the courage of those who risk their lives to grant them safe passage to freedom. The country's homophobic tyranny, and the immense bravery of those who resist it, is laid bare in this acclaimed film by Oscar-nominated filmmaker David France (*The Death and Life of Marsha P Johnson*, MIFF 2017; *How to Survive a Plague*, MIFF 2012).

Jane Magnusson's ***Maddy the Model*** follows the exuberant Madeline Stuart all the way from Brisbane to the catwalks of New York Fashion week and beyond. As a supermodel with Down syndrome, Maddy and her mother Rosanne work for inclusion; work to challenge perceptions of beauty; and work for change within the heights of the global fashion industry from the inside out.

Described by *IndieWire* as a "hyper-expressive cinematic flashmob," ***Dark City Beneath the Beat*** explodes onto the screen. To many, Baltimore is the setting of *The Wire* or the city where the 2015 death of Freddie Gray sparked weeks of anti-racism protests, but to multi-talented rapper and filmmaker TT the Artist, it is a thriving hub of musical creativity and expression. Home to the melting-pot genre known as Bmore club, a pulse-pounding mix of hip-hop, breakbeat and choppy house sounds, Baltimore comes alive in breathtaking fashion in this technicolour love letter that challenges our perceptions of the city.

The Go-Go's is Alison Ellwood's definitive take on the trailblazing band who were the first all-female band to find huge success playing their own instruments and writing their own songs. With an editor's gift for montage, Ellwood embeds this filmic valentine with archival footage that captures the band's verve, while interviews with the band and those who followed them, including Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna, celebrate their DIY defiance of music-industry sexism.

Elsewhere in the documentary program, ***Mayor*** reveals a political portrait unlike any other as it follows Musa Hadid, the charismatic Mayor of Ramallah, as he navigates a singular storm of deep-dive-day-to-day-geopolitics, amongst enough bureaucratic absurdity to fill a series of *The Thick of It*, in a verite doc that knows that comedy and tragedy are parts of a political whole.

In ***Some Kind of Heaven***, 23-year-old director Lance Oppenheim paints an alternately delightful, forthright and somewhat surreal portrait of those going grey and going large in a Florida retirement land designed as a "Disney World for retirees." Produced by Darren Aronofsky, Oppenheim's feature debut offers profound insights into our own mortality and what ends up mattering most to us, through the lens of this affluent elderly community.

What does it mean when the technology that surrounds our lives is built on systemic racial and gender-based prejudices? Shalini Kantayya's **Coded Bias** unveils the truth behind the invisible forces that decide everyday human potential. Spanning today's most influential platforms and institutions, this eye-opening documentary raises the alarm against corporate and government surveillance, as well as the way our personal data is weaponised in arenas like finance, employment and criminal justice.

Fresh from winning the 2020 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature with *American Factory*, Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar round out the documentary program with **9to5: The Story of a Movement** – their inspiring paean to the forgotten women of the 9to5 movement whose actions to end gender discrimination in the workplace paved the way for generations to come. Providing the women at the centre of the movement a long-overdue platform to share their stories, the film combines extraordinary archival footage and pop-culture reference points in a passionate call-to-action - and an equally vital document of a historical moment we're still living with.

ANIMATED FEATURES

Romance and romanticism collide in **Bombay Rose** – a sumptuous, Bollywood-inspired feature about two star-crossed lovers from the slums of Mumbai. A brilliantly hand-crafted animation about desire, duty and repression, *Bombay Rose* is at once an uplifting ode to Bollywood and cinematic fantasy, and a social-realist text on poverty, religious conflict, the sexual exploitation of women and the vulnerability of children.

A decade in the making, **Kill It and Leave this Town** is renowned animator Mariusz Wilczyński's dizzying, deliberately rough-hewn feature debut that traces personal tragedy and political turmoil through 1960s-and- 70s-era Poland. With its enigmatic poetry and images that are sometimes absurd, sometimes abject, this defiantly personal film revels in the bittersweet act of pining for lost days and lost loved ones.

In Anca Damian's stunningly poignant **Marona's Fantastic Tale**, a little dog looks back in kaleidoscopic fashion through the hurt and the heartswell that has captured her days. This gloriously imaginative fable isn't just about a dog's life – it's a profound meditation on life itself.

RETROSPECTIVES

In a special collaboration with Speak Percussion, Djibril Diop Mambéty's Senegalese classic **Hyenas** – a film which sees a long-excommunicated woman return to her village to test the morality of those who vanquished her – will be recut and completely rescored by a collection of incredible percussionists.

Premiering in a new restoration at MIFF 68½ is Rolf de Heer's brilliant jazz odyssey, **Dingo**. The first and last feature-film role for jazz great Miles Davis sees a small-town West Australian trumpet player on a quest to reunite with his jazz hero. Newly and gorgeously restored, this free film experience is not to be missed.

Finally, Raúl Ruiz's unfinished, long-lost feature debut **The Tango of the Widow and Its Distorting Mirror** – a surreal tale of death and blurred identity – is brought back to the screen by his widow and long-time artistic collaborator, Valeria Sarmiento 50 years after it was first screened.

SHORT FILMS

Available free to audiences Australia wide, this year's shorts program features 44 films. Highlights include:

Yorgos Lanthimos' film **Nimic**, starring Matt Dillon as a professional cellist who has a strange encounter on the subway that threatens to upend his entire life; Agustina Comedi's Berlinale Short Film Teddy Award-winner **Playback** pieces together memories from "La Delpi," the last remaining member of a group of drag performers who underpinned the Queer community throughout the AIDS crisis in 1980s Argentina; Anthony Nti's **Da Yie**, which won Grand Prix at Clermont-Ferrand and follows best friends Prince and Matilda as the two children are led astray by a seemingly-friendly foreigner; and **Umbilical** by Danski Tang, an animated documentary that won a Silver Leopard at Locarno and centres on the filmmaker's conversations with her mother, unravelling shared traumas and dreams

UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

In celebration of the film's 30th anniversary, MIFF 68½ will host a **virtual table read of *Death in Brunswick*** directed by MIFF Accelerator Lab alumnus **John Sheedy** (who helmed MIFF Premiere Fund-supported *H is for Happiness*).

An epic and eclectic 14-hour journey through the vast, brilliant but all-too-often-neglected realm of female-directed cinema, Mark Cousins' ***Women Make Film: A New Road Trip Through Cinema*** is a must-see for film lovers. Enlisting Adjoa Andoh, Jane Fonda, Thandie Newton, Tilda Swinton and Sharmila Tagore to narrate a deep dive into how 183 female filmmakers – hailing from six continents – have approached everything from the building blocks of visual composition and narrative to portrayals of bodies, dreams and memory. An expansive canvas that paints an alternative history of the artform.

Steve James, the visionary director of *Hoop Dreams*, tackles an ambitious, four-part chronicle of Chicago's 2019 mayoral elections, revealing a city divided on social-justice issues – and between black and white in ***City So Real***. James' sprawling work is a thoughtful and compelling portrait and following the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests is more relevant than ever.

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

- MIFF 68½ will be online from 6 to 23 August.
- A digital showcase of over 60 features, 44 shorts, talks, Q&As, events and activations.
- Available to stream across Australia.
- The 2020 Program Launch will stream at 6pm, 14 July via Facebook Live and MIFF's Youtube Channel.
- The full MIFF 68½ program will be live on miff.com.au at 7pm, 14 July.
- Tickets are on sale from 9am, 17 July.

Images and further information can be found at the [MIFF Media Centre](#).

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