

SUNDANCE: THE NEW FRONTIER

Artists get space to be auteurs

By ANDREW BARKER

As Sundance becomes progressively more established as a global film market, fest programmers have to work diligently to preserve its artistic integrity. Hence the unveiling of an expanded New Frontier section this year, featuring moving image installations from 11 visual artists.

The fest's Frontier section has screened experimental films since 2000, and this year will see features from the likes of these Anthony Hopkins ("Slipstream"), Nina Menkes ("Phantom Love") and a spotlight on French wunderkind Pierre Huyghe.

The films will show at regular fest screening venues, while the installations, live performances and panels will be housed in a new venue on Main Street.

For senior programmer Shari Frilot, it seemed a perfect time for the expansion, given the growing number of Sundance contributors (like Miranda July and Matthew Barney) who trace their origins to the fine art world.

"It's a general trend," she says, "and it seemed to fulfill our mission to find new, independent visions. The art world is very ripe for the picking in terms of what's coming out, with artists getting their hands on the tools of filmmaking in a professional way."

Frilot promises the New Frontier on Main will be "as much a social space as an art space," with an adjunct lounge boasting DJs and a chance for face time with the artists themselves.

Much of the installation art has a social aspect as well. Lincoln Schatz's "Cluster" is a sort of mutating mirror that records its observers, then blends that footage into an evolving collage with other images



Copenhagen Cycles

recorded previously. Shu Lea Cheang's "MobiOpera" invites the hoi polloi to contribute cell phone-helmed segments to form a composite soap-opera. And the aptly titled "Lunch Film," commissioned by Mike Plante, treats 14 filmmakers to lunch in return for a short film made with an equivalent amount of money.

"It was a goal to include new media," Frilot explains. "The whole scene is changing now, where distribution is becoming part of the narrative — of the filmmaking — where you're there looking at something and you actually become part of the story."

While all of the installations utilize film or video, some are particularly inspired by cinematic history. "Copenhagen Cycles," from Eric Dryer, uses a series of zoetropes to create a mobile portrait of the Danish capital. R. Luke Dubois exploits Sundance's industry connection



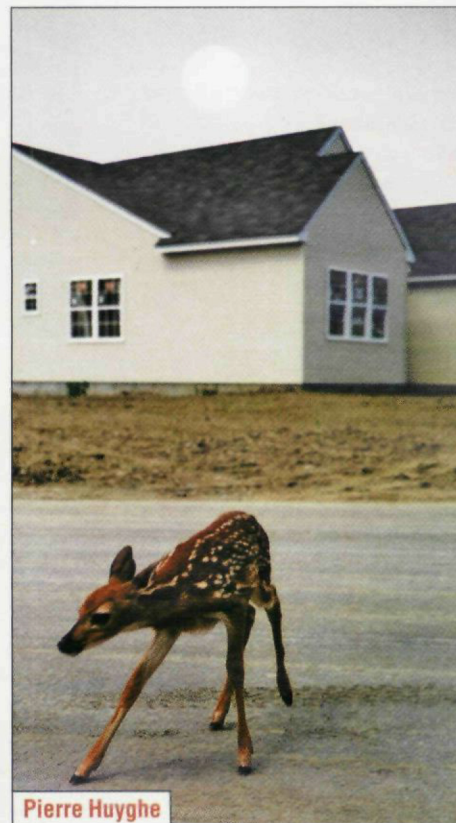
Phantom Love

even further in his piece "Academy," which compresses each best picture Oscar winning film into a single minute and runs them consecutively.

According to director of programming John Cooper, compatibility with the festival was a concern when soliciting artists.

"I like the fact that we're providing a platform in the film world, instead of the museum art world," he says. "So we did look for artists that seemed right for that context."

But will the amassed acquisitions



Pierre Huyghe

execs, busy scouring screenings for the next "Little Miss Sunshine," take time out to nurture their artistic side?

"Ah, we don't care," laughs Cooper, adding: "We have a launch party for it on the opening night of the festival, even before the opening-night film. So we're certainly committed to making sure people know it's there."

But beyond aggressively promoting it, the 17-year festival veteran is content to give the show room to grow.

"We're letting it sort of build on its own, which is how we did everything early on at Sundance," Cooper notes. "We don't decide where to take things, or what will be the next movement. You just follow what the artists are doing, and they'll take you there. So it's so much more organic, and kind of no-fail."

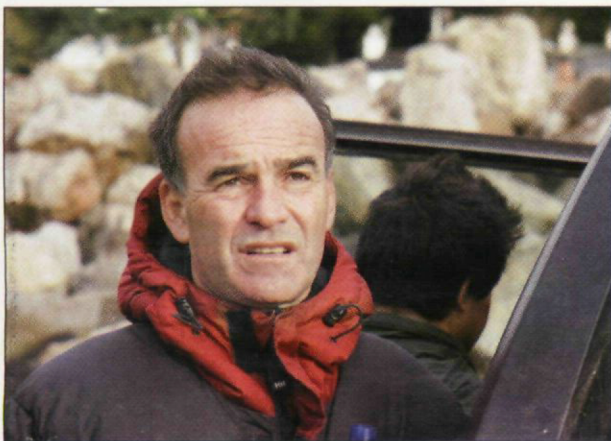
CREATIVES IN TRANSIT

NICK BROOMFIELD

Broomfield, the award-winning documentary filmmaker ("Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer") made a dramatic feature once before, 1989's "Diamond Skulls." "It took me about 15 years to recover from it," he says, blaming the slow, lumbering 35mm camera and massive crew for derailing his efforts. But with "Ghosts," his 2007 Sundance dramatic entry about Chinese illegal immigrants, Broomfield says he's finally found an ideal hybrid form. "I decided to take what I was used to doing, rather than fit into a tradition that I didn't really understand," he says. Shooting on hi-def DV, he incorporated the freewheeling, long-take style typical of nonfiction and cast nonprofessional actors in the lead roles. But

Broomfield chose to tell a fictional story for purely practical reasons as well. "Illegal immigrants and their employers don't want to be filmed," he explains. While Broomfield missed the "crazy adrenaline rush" of pure documentary filmmaking, he admits, "It was a relief to redo things that you don't get the first time. In documentaries, if you missed it, you missed it."

— Anthony Kaufman



ANTHONY HOPKINS

With a resume that includes some of the most memorable performances in cinema history, Hopkins has nothing left to prove as an actor. But as a writer, director and composer, he's just getting started. "Slipstream," the 69-year-old's first turn behind the camera, tells the story of a screenwriter (played by Hopkins) who discovers that the fictional characters he's created in his work have started to come to life. "I'm interested in the dreamlike quality of life, space and time, past, present and future," Hopkins says. "I tried to touch on these themes without being scientific, to show how life is both arbitrary and logical." Hopkins wrote the first draft several years ago, and after getting encouragement from his friend Steven Spielberg, he sent the project out to several producers. When they passed, he decided to finance the production himself, eventually lining up a team that includes actors Christian Slater and John Turturro and renowned cinematographer Dante Spinotti. "I just wanted to have some fun, explore and challenge myself," Hopkins explains, "and that's what I did."

— Matthew Ross

