

# SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

# 4 – 15 JUNE 2025

## SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES FULL PROGRAM FOR 4-15 JUNE FESTIVAL

The 72nd Sydney Film Festival program was officially launched today by Festival Director Nashen Moodley, unveiling an exceptional line-up, including 15 films direct from the Cannes Film Festival including Jafar Panahi's *It Was Just an Accident* and Kelly Reichardt's 1970s-set art heist drama *The Mastermind*. Other highlights include *The Life of Chuck* starring Tom Hiddleston; debut Australian director Amy Wang's SXSW-winning satire *Slanted*; Sundance comedy hit *Twinless*; the sweeping queer romance *On Swift Horses* with Daisy Edgar-Jones and Jacob Elordi; and *Dreams (Sex Love)*, winner of the Berlinale Golden Bear.

"The 2025 Festival offers a bold and expansive view of cinema today, with films that confront the urgent realities of our world, while also revelling in the power of imagination and storytelling," said **Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley**. "From astonishing Australian debuts to daring new works by global auteurs, this year's program is a celebration of creative risk, personal vision and artistic resilience. We invite audiences to explore this thrilling line-up, connect with filmmakers from around the world, and share in the transformative joy of cinema."

"The Sydney Film Festival is the highlight of the year for NSW film fans and is part of an amazing lineup of cultural events that kick off as the cooler weather kicks in. As this lineup confirms, you will always see the best films in the world at the Sydney Film Festival. You won't find this carefully curated collection of films from your couch, so I implore you to get down the festival and join the experience," said the **Minister for the Arts John Graham**.

In 2025, the Festival will present **201** films from **70** countries including **17** World Premieres, **6** international premieres and **137** Australian Premieres, bringing together hundreds of new international and local stories, with more to be announced. This year also sees the addition of the iconic **Sydney Opera House** as a screening venue, joining the State Theatre and cinemas across the city – allowing Festival goers to experience some of the world's best cinema in one of Sydney's most celebrated cultural landmarks.

### OPENING NIGHT

The 72nd Sydney Film Festival will open with the Australian Premiere of *Together*, written and directed by Australian filmmaker Michael Shanks and starring Alison Brie and Dave Franco.

The breakout hit of Sundance, *Together* is a bold new Australian feature that blends domestic drama with a devilishly supernatural twist, offering an off-the-wall and twisted take on codependency.



Writer and director Michael Shanks will attend Opening Night to present the film.

## **OFFICIAL COMPETITION**

In 2025, the Official Competition celebrates 17 years of the prestigious Sydney Film Prize, which sees \$60,000 awarded each year to the most “audacious, cutting-edge and courageous” film.

Direct from the 2025 Cannes Film Festival Competition are major new works from acclaimed directors. SFF 2025 retrospective focus Jafar Panahi also brings a new title ***It Was Just an Accident*** which reimagines the Iranian road movie; while Kelly Reichardt’s ***The Mastermind*** brings her unique sensibility to a 1970s-set art heist starring Josh O’Connor and Alana Haim. Berlinale Golden Bear-winner Carla Simón returns with ***Romería***, a mesmerising drama blending family history and breathtaking fantasy, and Sydney Film Prize-winning filmmaker Kleber Mendonça Filho (***Aquarius***, SFF 2016) delivers the rousing and tense political thriller ***The Secret Agent***, starring Wagner Moura.

Also straight from Cannes, Icelandic auteur Hlynur Pálmason follows ***Godland*** (SFF 2022) with ***The Love That Remains***, a tender and surprising portrait of a family navigating separation; Christian Petzold reunites with Paula Beer in ***Mirrors No. 3***, an intrigue-filled, intimate drama exploring loss, healing and the pull of the past; and Akinola Davies Jr.’s debut ***My Father’s Shadow***, a poetic coming-of-age drama set during Nigeria’s political upheaval in 1993. Direct from Cannes Directors’ Fortnight, after a buzzy premiere at Sundance, is Eva Victor’s ***Sorry, Baby***, a witty and vulnerable dramedy about trauma, healing and friendship.

Internationally awarded films in competition at SFF include Gabriel Mascaro’s Berlinale Grand Jury Prize-winning ***The Blue Trail***, a psychedelic, anti-authoritarian fable set in the Amazon; and Sundance Audience Award-winner ***DJ Ahmet***, a charming coming-of-age story about tradition, dance music and first love in North Macedonia.

Also competing is ***All That’s Left of You***, a moving epic from Cherien Dabis (***Amreeka***, SFF 2009) that chronicles a Palestinian family’s hopes and traumas over seven decades, which premiered at Sundance.

Opening Night Film ***Together*** will also screen in competition at the 2025 Festival.

The winner of the Sydney Film Prize is announced at the Festival’s Closing Night Gala on Sunday 15 June. Previous winners include: ***There’s Still Tomorrow*** (2024), ***The Mother of All Lies*** (2023), ***Close*** (2022), ***There Is No Evil*** (2021), ***Parasite*** (2019), ***The Heiresses*** (2018), ***On Body and Soul*** (2017), ***Aquarius*** (2016), ***Arabian Nights*** (2015), ***Two Days, One Night*** (2014), ***Only God Forgives*** (2013), ***Alps*** (2012), ***A Separation*** (2011), ***Heartbeats*** (2010), ***Bronson*** (2009), and ***Hunger*** (2008).

The competition is the only film competition in Australia endorsed by FIAPF, the regulating body for international film festivals, and is judged by a jury of international and Australian filmmakers and industry professionals.

The 2025 Official Competition Jury is led by acclaimed Australian director, writer and producer Justin Kurzel as Jury President, joined by Director of the Marrakech International Film Festival and producer Melita Toscan du Plantier, Aotearoa New Zealand director and actor Rachel House, Hong



Kong-based producer and distributor Winnie Tsang, and Kamilaroi writer and actor Thomas Weatherall.

### **DOCUMENTARY AUSTRALIA AWARD**

Ten outstanding new Australian documentaries will compete for the 2025 Documentary Australia Award, with a \$20,000 cash prize presented to the winner. The prize also makes the winning film eligible for Academy Award consideration.

World Premieres include ***Floodland***, Jordan Giusti's deeply moving portrait of a flood-affected community in Lismore, Australia's most disaster-prone postcode; ***Joh: Last King of Queensland***, Kriv Stenders' captivating portrait of controversial Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen; ***Journey Home, David Gulpilil***, a powerful and intimate record of the renowned Indigenous actor's final journey to his Homeland to be laid to rest; ***The Raftsmen***, Chadden Hunter's high-seas yarn revisiting a daring 1970s raft voyage across the Pacific; and ***Yurlu | Country***, Yaara Bou Melhem's deeply personal portrait of Elder Maitland Parker's environmental and cultural fight for his Wittenoom homeland.

Australian Premieres in competition include ***Deeper***, Jennifer Peedom and Alex Barry's high-stakes chronicle of Thai cave rescue hero Dr Richard "Harry" Harris's attempt to achieve the world's deepest cave dive; and ***The Golden Spurtle***, Sydney based Constantine Costi's charming and hilarious portrait of the World Porridge Making Championship in the Scottish Highlands.

Also in the running are ***The Wolves Always Come at Night***, Gabrielle Brady's story of a Mongolian family forced to abandon their nomadic life; ***Songs Inside***, where female prisoners find healing through a unique music program; and ***Ellis Park***, Justin Kurzel's debut documentary, about musician Warren Ellis and his passionate work rescuing animals in Sumatra.

### **SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS AT THE STATE**

The State Theatre sets the stage for Sydney Film Festival's biggest nights, with red carpet premieres, award-winning films, star-studded line-ups, and dazzling special events.

Star-led features include Richard Linklater's ***Blue Moon***, starring Ethan Hawke, Margaret Qualley and Andrew Scott in a hilarious chamber piece set against the backdrop of musical theatre; Michel Franco's ***Dreams***, featuring Jessica Chastain as a wealthy philanthropist whose passionate affair with a Mexican dancer challenges her carefully curated life; ***The Ballad of Wallis Island***, a charming comedy with Carey Mulligan about the musical reunion of two estranged former lovers; and Jodie Foster heads a stellar cast in ***Vie Privée***, a Cannes-selected, gently comic murder mystery set in Paris.

Familiar faces also feature in Kevin Macdonald's documentary ***One to One: John & Yoko*** which brings John Lennon and Yoko Ono's historic 1972 Madison Square Garden concert vividly to life.

Australian award-winners shine with two bold new features: ***Slanted***, debut Australian director Amy Wang's provocative, SXSW-winning satire on racial identity and belonging; and ***Lesbian Space Princess***, a riotous, Berlin Teddy Award-winning animated adventure following an introverted lesbian princess on an inter-gay-lactic rescue mission.



From New Zealand, two deeply personal stories will screen: **Prime Minister**, an intimate portrait of Jacinda Ardern's transformative leadership, and the World Premiere of **Pike River**, the powerful true story of two women's fight for justice after New Zealand's deadliest modern mining disaster, starring Melanie Lynskey.

Direct from Cannes, Raoul Peck's **Orwell: 2+2=5** offers a gripping meditation on the enduring relevance of George Orwell's vision; and Robin Campillo's **Enzo**, the Opening Film of Cannes Directors' Fortnight, captures a tender coming-of-age story set against the backdrop of war and migration.

Rounding out the section is **Twinless**, a hilarious and unpredictable queer bromance starring Dylan O'Brien and James Sweeney, fresh from delighting audiences at Sundance.

## **FEATURES**

Australian features include **Death of an Undertaker**, having its World Premiere at the Festival. This debut from actor-turned-director Christian Byers is set in a real Leichhardt funeral parlour and stars Byers as a fragile part-time worker unravelling on the brink of homelessness.

Other local productions are having their Australian Premieres: **Birthright**, Zoe Pepper's biting satire about a disillusioned generation and the housing crisis; **Went Up the Hill**, a gothic tale of grief and possession starring Vicky Krieps and Dacre Montgomery; and **FWENDS**, Sophie Somerville's Berlinale award-winning ode to messy, modern friendship.

**Dreams (Sex Love)**, was the Golden Bear winner at Berlinale 2025, and is a potent, nuanced study of forbidden desire and creative awakening by Dag Johan Haugerud.

Also screening at the Festival is **Love**, the second in Haugerud's thematic trilogy (following *Sex*, SFF 2024, and preceding *Dreams*), a Venice competition selection that observes two Oslo singles – a straight urologist and a gay nurse – navigating vastly different but equally poignant paths to connection.

This year's award-winning highlights include **Alpha.**, a chilling father-son social drama set in the Swiss Alps, winner of the Europa Cinemas Label Award at Venice; **The Things You Kill**, a surreal Turkish psychological thriller about family secrets, awarded Best Director at Sundance; and **One of Those Days When Hemme Dies**, a wry, lyrical tale of revenge amid sun-dried tomatoes, which earned the Special Jury Prize at Venice.

**Come Closer** is a Tribeca Viewpoints Award-winner about a woman plunged into grief and obsession after her brother's death. **Kontinental '25**, Radu Jude's (*Do Not Expect Too Much From the End of the World*, SFF 2024) acerbic satire, took out a major prize at Berlinale for its darkly funny exploration of guilt and social complicity. **The Mohican**, a Corsican-set contemporary western about land rights and resistance, won the Audience Award at Thessaloniki. And **Moon**, Kurdwin Ayub's culture-clash thriller about an Austrian MMA fighter in Jordan, received Locarno's Special Jury Prize.

From Berlinale 2025 comes **The Heart is a Muscle**, in which a South African father, conditioned by a violent past, commits a terrible act while searching for his missing son, and **Islands**, where a luxury island resort is the setting for a gripping psychosexual mystery, by Jan-Ole Gerster (*Oh Boy*, SFF 2013).



**Late Shift** is a high-stakes hospital drama set over a single night on a hospital ward on the brink of a meltdown, a hit when it premiered at Berlinale. Ameer Fakher Eldin's (*The Stranger*, SFF 2022) **Yunan**, is an evocative drama about a world-weary author who retreats to a far-flung island.

Having screened in competition in Berlin, **What Does That Nature Say to You** by Korean indie auteur Hong Sang-soo (*in water*, SFF 2023), is a witty drama following an artist who finally meets his girlfriend's family.

**Olmo** is a vibrant coming-of-age tale about a 14-year-old in 1979 New Mexico sneaking away from his struggling family to attend a party. **BLKNWS: Terms & Conditions**, from Kahlil Joseph (frequent collaborator with Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar), is a genre-defying mixtape blending Black history, Afro-futurism, archival media and performance in dazzling, cerebral layers.

Among the diverse selection of bold international cinema in this year's program is **Happyend**, a politically charged story of teenage rebellion under surveillance in near-future Tokyo, and **Harvest**, Athina Rachel Tsangari's (*Attenberg*, SFF 2011) gritty Middle Ages parable starring Caleb Landry Jones. Female friendship takes centre stage in **January 2**, a minimalist road movie about fresh starts, while **Nineteen** offers a spirited coming-of-age odyssey produced by Luca Guadagnino.

Stories of mystery and suspense unfold in **Pooja, Sir**, where an atypically female cop investigates the abduction of two boys in a Nepali border town, and **Stranger Eyes**, the first Singaporean film to screen in competition at Venice – a twist-filled thriller about a grieving couple who receive anonymous surveillance footage after their baby goes missing. **To Kill a Mongolian Horse** delivers a powerful exploration of masculinity and cultural crisis, inspired by the lead actor's real life as a Mongolian horseback performer.

Global perspectives on motherhood and caregiving emerge in **The Mother and the Bear**, a quirky comedy about an overzealous Korean mother matchmaking her comatose daughter; **Daughter's Daughter**, a tender Taiwanese drama led by Sylvia Chang; and **Saba**, a Dhaka-set portrait of sacrifice and family.

In **The Legend of the Vagabond Queen of Lagos**, a mother living in a Lagos shantytown uncovers a stash of corrupt money worth millions, sparking a wild and unexpected journey. Two standouts are the Korean chilling psychological drama: **Somebody**, centred on maternal trauma and starring K-pop icon Kwon Yuri; and **State of Statelessness**, the first-ever Tibetan-language anthology, weaving four poignant stories of Tibetans living in exile.

**The President's Cake**, a Cannes Directors' Fortnight selection, is a rare film from Iraq and a humorous and touching debut about a young Iraqi girl's mandated mission to bake a cake for her class on Saddam Hussein's birthday. **On Becoming a Guinea Fowl**, a Cannes-selected drama from *Am Not a Witch* (SFF 2017) director Rungano Nyoni, sees a Zambian family confront hard truths following the death of a relative.

Star-studded features include Mike Flanagan's **The Life of Chuck**, a poignant sci-fi drama starring Tom Hiddleston, based on a Stephen King novella; **The Friend**, a warm dramedy with Naomi Watts and Bill Murray based on the popular book by Sigrid Nunez; **On Swift Horses**, a sweeping queer 1950s romance featuring Daisy Edgar-Jones and Jacob Elordi; **Bring Them Down**, a powerful Irish



thriller with Barry Keoghan; and **The End**, Joshua Oppenheimer's (*The Act of Killing*, SFF 2013) daring narrative debut – a dystopian musical starring Tilda Swinton and Michael Shannon.

Other standout selections include **Ciao Bambino**, a Naples-set debut in which a teenage boy is tasked with protecting a sex worker; and **Eighty Plus**, a wry and warm-hearted return by Yugoslav New Wave icon Željimir Žilnik, about a travelling musician returning to Serbia to reclaim a family property.

**Lurker**, the feature debut of TV writer-producer Alex Russell (*The Bear, Beef*), is a tense, slow-burn Hollywood psychodrama about obsession and fandom. **Spirit World** stars Catherine Deneuve in a gently supernatural road movie about a French singer who dies while touring Japan and finds herself guided in the afterlife by a devoted fan.

**Twelve Moons** is a visually stunning drama tracing a middle-class architect's descent into addiction and turmoil following a shattering personal loss, while **Tiger's Pond** is a haunting Indian thriller that examines caste, superstition and political manipulation in a remote village. Finally, **Mr. Burton** tells the remarkable true story of legendary Welsh actor Richard Burton's formative years, with Toby Jones portraying the teacher who helped him find his voice.

#### **INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARIES**

From the frontline of war to the quiet corners of rural life, this year's International Documentaries spotlight the most compelling, provocative and human true stories from around the world.

Winner of the Sundance World Cinema Documentary Directing Award and the CPH:DOX F:ACT Award, **2000 Metres to Andriivka** is an unflinching new work by Oscar-winning Ukrainian filmmaker Mstyslav Chernov (*20 Days in Mariupol*). Drawing on bodycam footage from the Ukrainian frontlines, the film follows soldiers on a mission to liberate Russian-occupied Andriivka.

Another major Sundance winner, **Cutting Through Rocks** took home the Documentary Grand Jury Prize for its electrifying portrait of Iranian Sara Shahverdi – the first woman elected to her local council, and the only woman in the village to ride a motorbike – as she fights to empower women against entrenched local resistance.

**Always**, winner of the top prize at CPH:DOX, follows an eight-year-old boy poet's coming of age in rural China. Also from Sundance, the moving Festival Favourite Award-winner **Come See Me in the Good Light** captures the extraordinary love story between a poet couple in the face of terminal illness.

In **André is an Idiot**, a Sundance Audience Award-winner, madcap character André Ricciardi faces a stage 4 cancer diagnosis with laughter, absurdity and honesty. And in **The Perfect Neighbor**, a Sundance Directing Award-winner constructed almost entirely from bodycam footage, captures the shocking escalation of a dispute between neighbours, fuelled by festering racism.

Two thought-provoking documentaries examine how institutions shape — and are shaped by — culture and power. **Predators** pulls back the curtain on the controversial, paedophile-hunting reality TV hit *To Catch a Predator* from the 2000s, and examines its complex cultural legacy. **How to Build a Library** follows two Kenyan women attempting to decolonise Nairobi's oldest library, offering a moving portrait of resistance, reclamation, and the radical potential of knowledge.



**Yalla Parkour** – DOC NYC Grand Jury Prize winner – charts filmmaker Areeb Zuaiter reconnecting with her Palestinian roots through a decade-long friendship with a Gazan parkour athlete.

Marking 40 years since *Shoah*, Berlinale selection **All I Had Was Nothingness** weaves together unused footage from Claude Lanzmann’s seminal film to create a powerful companion piece and tribute to one of cinema’s greatest documentaries.

Venice award-winner **Mistress Dispeller** follows a Chinese woman whose job it is to sabotage extramarital affairs, in a provocative, intimate look at love, manipulation, and the strange new economy of modern relationships.

Winner of the FIPRESCI Award at IDFA, **Writing Hawa** spans three generations of Afghan women navigating daily life, set against the turbulent backdrop of the Taliban takeover. Another IDFA prize-winning title, **A Frown Gone Mad** captures intimate conversations inside a Beirut beauty salon as clients open up about their lives as their faces open up for Botox and filler. In **Silent Observers**, an atmospheric hybrid doc selected for IDFA, myth and reality blur in a Bulgarian village where animals may harbour human souls.

Stories of endurance and self-reliance unfold in **Unwelcomed**, which documents the harrowing journey of Venezuelan migrants crossing the Andes into Chile, and **Agatha’s Almanac**, a portrait of a 90-year-old woman living off the land in Manitoba, thriving alone on her farm with quiet joy.

Several titles explore the shifting relationships between humans and the natural world. **Only on Earth** chronicles wildfire devastation in Galicia, and reveals its connection to dwindling numbers of wild horses. In **How Deep Is Your Love** a team of scientists race to explore the ocean floor before deep-sea mining destroys it forever. From the French Pyrenees, **The Shepherd and the Bear** follows an ageing shepherd as he confronts how the rewilding of brown bears threatens his flock, and him too. And from Louisiana, **Lowland Kids** follows America’s first climate refugees, who must make an impossible decision with their island home sinking into the sea.

Set in Norway’s Arctic, **Folktales** follows three teens through a year of wilderness survival and self-discovery at a traditional folk school. **The Shadow Scholars** investigates Kenya’s billion-dollar University essay ghost-writing industry, exposing how academic inequality and AI are reshaping higher education. A debut executive-produced by Steve McQueen.

In **Twiggy**, Sadie Frost profiles the mod icon turned dame, tracing her enduring influence through archival footage and interviews with Paul McCartney, Joanna Lumley, and more.

From scandal and stardom to scams and family scars, Irish stories feature in the documentary section. **Blue Road – The Edna O’Brien Story**, sees the fearless Irish literary icon reflect on a storied and scandalous life. **Beat the Lotto** is a rip-roaring tale about a mathematician who plotted to fix Ireland’s National Lottery in 1992; and in **A Want in Her**, Irish artist Myrid Carten confronts her alcoholic mother and her own childhood wounds.

Culinary enthusiasts will find much to savour in **Tokito: The 540-Day Journey of a Culinary Maverick**, following Michelin-starred chef Yoshinori Ishii’s quest to open a world-class Tokyo restaurant, blending culinary precision, personal loss, and deep respect for Japanese tradition.



**Assembly** tracks artist Rashaad Newsome as he builds a radical, joy-filled, AI-powered queer Black utopia at New York's Armory – a vibrant collision of art, activism, and community.

Two films explore the enduring influence of pop culture on how we watch, remember and create. In **Chain Reactions**, a Venice award-winner by Alexandre O. Philippe, horror legends dissect the cultural shockwaves of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* 50 years on. Indie filmmaking luminary Alex Ross Perry's **Videoheaven**, narrated by Maya Hawke, is a sharp, funny essay film about the rise and fall of video stores, built entirely from film and TV clips.

Already announced titles include **Make It Look Real**, a behind-the-scenes look at intimacy coordination on set; **exergue – on documenta 14**, a 14-hour epic about staging the world's most ambitious art exhibition co-presented with the Biennale of Sydney; **Speak.**, which follows five U.S. high school orators preparing for a national public speaking competition; and **Mr. Nobody Against Putin**, Sundance Special Jury Prize winner, tracking a courageous Russian teacher-turned-whistleblower exposing classroom propaganda.

### **SUSTAINABLE FUTURE AWARD**

The Sustainable Future Award amplifies voices for environmental progress. The \$40,000 prize is the largest in the world dedicated to environmental-led cinema.

The award will be presented to a film that explores the social, economic, political, and environmental consequences of climate change and highlights the urgent need for action to mitigate its effects.

The feature length films in the 2025 Sustainable Future Award include one feature, **The End**, five documentaries, **Floodland; How Deep is Your Love; Lowland Kids; Nechako – It Will be a Big River Again;** and **Only on Earth**, and one docu-fiction, **The Wolves Always Come at Night**.

One short, **Rolly: Story of My Father**, will also compete for the coveted award.

### **SOUNDS ON SCREEN**

Big screens come with big sounds – see and hear music take centre screen in this collection of aurally exhilarating documentaries.

**Move Ya Body: The Birth of House** raised the roof at Sundance, unearthing the Black, queer roots of house music in Chicago – born in underground clubs as a radical refuge from repression and segregation.

SXSW Audience Award-winner **Selena y Los Dinos** reignites the phenomenon around Selena, the pioneering “Queen of Tejano music” with never-before-seen family archives.

**Marlon Williams: Ngā Ao e Rua – Two Worlds** follows the acclaimed Aotearoa artist as he returns home to write his first album in te reo Māori.

**Once Upon a Time Michel Legrand** is a Cannes-selected tribute to the Oscar-winning composer of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* and *Yentl*, blending never-before-seen archives and interviews with admirers and friends including Barbra Streisand.

### **EUROPE! VOICES OF WOMEN+ IN FILM Supported by European Film Promotion**



EUROPE! Voices of Women+ in Film returns with six striking features by female filmmakers from across the continent, each exploring questions of identity, resilience and belonging. Presented in partnership with European Film Promotion (EFP) and Cineuropa, this year's selection spans intimate character studies and bold coming-of-age tales.

**Ari**, the third feature from Camera d'Or winner Léonor Serraille (*Montparnasse Bienvenue*), is an intimate and witty portrait of urban loneliness as a young man must couch-surf his way through life after impulsively quitting his job. In **Deaf**, a happy Spanish couple – one deaf, and one hearing – encounter strain when a new baby leads to drastically different experiences of parenthood.

In **Little Trouble Girls**, a Catholic choirgirl is caught between her experience of faith and the erotic stirrings brought about on a convent retreat. **I Shall See** centres on a teenage diver who loses her sight in a freak accident, tracing her journey as she adjusts to her new reality at a rehabilitation centre.

**Hanami** follows a Cape Verdean girl who must decide whether to leave her volcanic island home after her mother's unexpected return; and finally, **Têtes Brûlées** explores the shared ground between grief and love after a familial tragedy thrusts a young girl into a mature world.

#### **FIRST NATIONS AWARD Proudly supported by Truant Pictures**

Sydney Film Festival is honoured to continue the First Nations Award, proudly supported by Truant Pictures. With a \$35,000 prize, it is the world's largest cash award for global Indigenous filmmaking. In 2025, the program spans powerful stories from across Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Indonesia, Norway and Finland, with films that speak to memory, Country, activism, and cultural resurgence.

Having its World Premiere at the Festival, **Emily: I Am Kam** is a revelatory portrait of the legendary Anmatyerr artist Emily Kam Kngwarray, from the Utopia community in the NT, whose work reshaped the international contemporary art world.

From Aotearoa, **The Haka Party Incident** revisits a pivotal 1979 protest that changed race relations in New Zealand. Adapted from Katie Wolfe's acclaimed play, the documentary revisits the event through archival footage and unfiltered contemporary interviews. **Marlon Williams: Ngā Ao e Rua – Two Worlds** follows the beloved singer-songwriter as he reconnects with his Māori roots and records his first album in te reo Māori.

Three standout features from Canada offer stories of land, legacy and reclamation. In **Nechako – It Will Be a Big River Again**, director Lyana Patrick documents the 70-year struggle by First Nations communities to restore a dammed river and a way of life. **Seeds** is a comedy-thriller that follows a rising Indigenous influencer who discovers her family's heirloom seed is the target of a corporate scheme. **Wilfred Buck** is a hybrid doc exploring the life and teachings of Cree educator Wilfred Buck – a "star man" – whose luminous worldview blends Indigenous science, memory, and resilience.

From the USA, **Remaining Native**, the Special Jury award-winner at SXSW, follows a young Paiute runner, retracing his great-grandfather's 80km escape from a Native American boarding school.

Four First Nations shorts, **Bringing His Spirit Home; In My Hand; Rolly: A Story of My Father** and **Womb**, will also individually compete for the award.

#### **FOCUS ON NISHTHA JAIN**



Sydney Film Festival presents a series focused on the work of acclaimed Indian documentarian Nishtha Jain, showcasing three of her most compelling works alongside a special panel exploring the landscape of independent filmmaking in India today.

Over the last two decades, Jain has emerged as a leading voice in Indian independent cinema. Her deeply observational documentaries interrogate class, caste and gender, receiving numerous awards at festivals around the world.

The program includes ***Farming the Revolution*** (2024), which took out the top prize at Hot Docs and encompasses the 13-month protest by 12 million Indian farmers who camped on the outskirts of Delhi to challenge unjust laws.

Also screening is the award-winning ***Gulabi Gang*** (2012), which follows a vigilante collective in rural Uttar Pradesh, who, dressed in pink saris, fight against both the casual and extreme violence women face.

Finally, ***The Golden Thread*** (2023) documents the sunset days of one of the last standing jute mills in West Bengal.

Jain will also appear as part of **Independent Filmmaking in India**, a panel at the Festival Hub (Sunday 8 June, 3pm) presented as part of the Sydney Film Festival partnership with Dharamshala International Film Festival, exploring how Indian filmmakers navigate funding, censorship and audience reach outside the mainstream.

### **FAMILY FILMS**

Bring the whole family to Sydney Film Festival for an unforgettable big-screen adventure, with two new family features.

The magic of dragons returns in ***How to Train Your Dragon***, a live-action reimagining of the beloved animation. On the island of Berk, young Viking Hiccup (Mason Thames, *The Black Phone*) defies centuries of tradition when he befriends Toothless, a feared Night Fury dragon. Directed by three-time Oscar nominee and Golden Globe-winner Dean DeBlois (*Lilo & Stitch*), with cutting-edge visual effects and an all-star cast including Gerard Butler, this soaring tale of friendship, courage and destiny is a big screen family crowd-pleaser.

Adding a spooky twist to the family fun is ***Night of the Zoopocalypse***, a wildly entertaining, kid-friendly zombie comedy. When a meteor crash turns the animals of Colepepper Zoo into zombies, a grumpy mountain lion (voiced by David Harbour, *Stranger Things*) and a feisty wolf (Gabbi Kosmidis) must team up to escape the chaos. Executive produced by horror legend Clive Barker (*Hellraiser*, *Candyman*), this colourful and hilarious animated adventure introduces younger viewers to the spooky delights of the horror genre.

### **FREAK ME OUT**

Freak Me Out, Sydney Film Festival's sidebar dedicated to all things strange and scary, returns with seven features designed to jolt, disturb, and delight. Curated by Richard Kuipers, the 2025 lineup delivers everything from lo-fi time travel and existential horror to shark slashers and haunted nursing homes.



Direct from Cannes, Sean Byrne (*The Loved Ones*, *The Devil's Candy*) makes a triumphant return with ***Dangerous Animals***, a pulse-pounding Aussie horror-thriller about a shark-fixated serial killer stalking the Gold Coast. Hassie Harrison (*Yellowstone*) plays a fearless surfer drawn into a deadly game with Jai Courtney's grinning tour guide.

Mattias J. Skoglund's ***The Home*** is a chilling social horror set in a small Swedish town, where residents of a nursing home begin acting disturbingly after one patient starts seeing visions from her past. An eerie, slow-burn tale that's as affecting as it is terrifying.

A viral online short turned stunning feature debut, in competition at SXSW 2025, ***It Ends*** is an existential horror where four friends find themselves trapped on a road that never ends, surrounded by sinister forces.

From Sundance is ***OBEX***, a lo-fi, '80s-set genre blend about a reclusive man who enters a mysterious video game to rescue his missing dog.

Direct from its hit SXSW premiere comes ***Redux Redux***, where a grief-stricken mother travels across the multiverse to repeatedly take revenge on her daughter's killer.

Love meets extreme horror in ***Straight On Till Morning***, a wild ride through America's rural heartland where two queer lovers are ensnared by a devout family with twisted values.

In ***The Wailing***, a sinister presence visible only through a camera stalks three women. A textured chiller of a debut by Pedro Martín-Calero, who picked up the Best Director award at San Sebastián 2024.

## **SCREENABILITY**

Sydney Film Festival proudly presents its **Screenability** program for a ninth consecutive year – showcasing a vibrant line-up of films created by filmmakers living with disability.

Curated by Screenability Programmer **Rebecca McCormack**, this year's program features six titles, including three feature films and three Australian shorts.

The selection includes ***Life After***, a Special Jury Award winner at Sundance by Reid Davenport (SFF 2022's *I Didn't See You There*), which investigates the tangled ethics of assisted dying through the story of Elizabeth Bouvia, a disabled woman who sparked a national debate on autonomy and the value of disabled lives. Also featured is ***Marlee Matlin: Not Alone Anymore***, a powerful documentary directed by Shoshannah Stern that reflects on the life, career and advocacy work of the Academy Award-winning actor. ***Racewalkers***, winner of the Slamdance Grand Jury Prize, brings a heartfelt twist to the classic sports buddy comedy, following an unlikely coach-athlete duo united by ambition and resilience.

Three Australian short films also feature in the program: ***Where the World is Quiet***, in which Australian of the Year Grace Tame shares a personal reflection on autism and finding solace through long-distance running; ***Dark Matter***, Leo Berkeley's observational essay on living with multiple sclerosis; and ***With Love, Lottie***, a charming exploration of a disabled teenager's search for love.

## **FLUX: ART+FILM**



FLUX: ART+FILM celebrates films that expand the language of cinema, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. This year's program offers five striking works that transform real and imagined histories into unforgettable cinematic visions – from mythic rebirths in Lesotho to speculative Hong Kong futures.

Having its World Premiere at the Festival, ***The Unshakeable Destiny*** is a trilogy by Australian artist-filmmaker Nikki Lam that explores the artist's evolving relationship with Hong Kong as the city undergoes its own upheavals.

A leading light of the African avant garde, Lemohang Mosese (*This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection*) returns with ***Ancestral Visions of the Future***, a poetic meditation on exile, memory and myth.

Filmed over 15 years, ***Gods of Stone*** is a textured portrait of life on the Spanish-Portuguese border. Shot on 16mm, Ivan Castiñeiras' debut follows a young girl as she comes of age amid ancient legends.

***Listen to the Voices*** follows 13-year-old Melrick through the streets of French Guiana as he grapples with the aftermath of a family tragedy.

In ***Invention***, actress Callie Hernandez plays a lightly fictionalised version of herself investigating the eccentric world of her late father, a small-town, esoteric TV doctor and self-styled inventor.

#### **JAFAR PANAHI: CINEMA IN REBELLION**

Sydney Film Festival will present JAFAR PANAHI: CINEMA IN REBELLION, a major retrospective of the acclaimed Iranian filmmaker's work.

The retrospective, curated by Anke Leweke, will include all 10 of Panahi's feature films, offering Australian audiences a rare opportunity to experience the evolution of a visionary artist who has persistently defied censorship and persecution in order to tell urgent, human stories from inside Iran.

Jafar Panahi is widely regarded as one of the most significant figures in contemporary Iranian cinema. His films, often made in defiance of official restrictions on filmmaking, explore the lived realities of people in Iran – particularly women – within a tightly controlled social framework. Despite decades of travel bans, threats of imprisonment, and official prohibitions on filmmaking, Panahi has continued to create internationally acclaimed work, often under extraordinary conditions.

In 2023, Panahi's travel ban was lifted for the first time in 14 years, following his release from prison after a hunger strike sparked international outcry. His work remains a powerful symbol of resilience, freedom of expression, and the role of cinema in imagining a more just society.

The retrospective includes: ***The White Balloon*** (1995), ***The Mirror*** (1997), ***The Circle*** (2000), ***Crimson Gold*** (2003), ***Offside*** (2006), ***This Is Not a Film*** (2011), ***Closed Curtain*** (2013), ***Tehran Taxi*** (2015), ***Three Faces*** (2018), ***No Bears*** (2022).

Panahi's hotly anticipated latest work, ***It Was Just an Accident***, will also have its Australian Premiere at SFF, coming direct from the Cannes Competition.

#### **ELAINE MAY: URBANE LEGEND**



Sydney Film Festival celebrates the trailblazing Elaine May, whose four fiercely original features have grown into cult classics, cementing her legacy as one of American cinema's most distinctive voices.

This program features all four of May's films: her uproarious directorial debut ***A New Leaf***, the biting black comedy ***The Heartbreak Kid***, the mobster tale inspired by her own upbringing, ***Mikey and Nicky***, and the madcap comedy, and box-office disaster turned cult classic, starring Dustin Hoffman and Warren Beatty, ***Ishtar***.

Decades after first stepping behind the camera, May's influence continues to grow. This retrospective is a rare chance to revisit the work of an artist who made her mark on Hollywood, even as she refused to play by its rules.

### **CLASSICS RESTORED**

This year's Classics Restored program brings five iconic films back to the big screen, newly remastered and ready to be rediscovered – from Australian cult favourites to visionary international works.

*Ghost in the Shell* director Mamoru Oshii's early cult anime ***Angel's Egg***, long unavailable and newly restored in 4K, returns to mesmerise audiences with its surreal visuals and haunting allegory. A landmark of arthouse animation.

Peter Brook's ***The Mahabharata***, adapted from his acclaimed stage production, transforms the ancient Indian epic into a sweeping cinematic experience. Restored after years of limited access, it's a rare opportunity to see a legendary work of world cinema.

David Caesar's ***Mullet***, starring Ben Mendelsohn, is a sharply observed portrait of small-town tensions, following a prodigal son whose return stirs old resentments.

Also screening is ***Muriel's Wedding***, P.J. Hogan's joyous ode to outsiders and ABBA dreams, celebrating 30 years; and ***Somersault***, Cate Shortland's award-winning debut about longing, youth and emotional awakening in regional NSW.

### **THE DENDY AWARDS FOR AUSTRALIAN SHORT FILMS**

In its 56-year history, Sydney Film Festival's short film competition has launched the careers of many directors, writers, producers, cinematographers and other film creatives.

The 10 finalists compete for five illustrious prizes: the **Dendy Live Action Short Award**; the **Yoram Gross Animation Award**; the **Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director**; the **AFTRS Craft Award**; and the **Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award for Screenwriting**.

The short films competing are: ***Baggage***, ***Button Pusher***, ***DIY***, ***The Eviction***, ***Faceless***, ***The Fling***, ***Interview with a Hero***, ***Mango Seed***, ***Mates***, and ***Moment***.

### **THE HUB**

The Hub at Lower Town Hall is the beating heart of Sydney Film Festival. Drop in for a drink between films, grab a bite, and enjoy a swathe of special events, talks and parties.

Open to the public all nights, and select days from 4-15 June, The Hub will feature a daily Happy Hour special pop-up bar between 4:30pm and 6:00pm, with drinks from FELLR, Glendronach, Grifter



Brewing Co, Mt Yengo Wines, Tequila Herradura, Unexpected Guest Gin, and Woodford Reserve served in the main bar, alongside (non-alcoholic options) Heaps Normal and T.I.N.A.

The Hub will also feature the Glendronach Lounge, where Festival-goers can enjoy Glendronach whiskey cocktails or take a whiskey tasting masterclass.

### **SPECIAL EVENTS AT THE HUB**

#### **SFF Film Trivia Nights**

Presented with the Grifter Brewing Co.

Sydney's most prestigious film trivia trophy is back up for grabs – and this time we're putting on two nights, due to popular demand! Hosted by comedian Alexei Toliopoulos, and featuring live music and big prizes. Free Grifter drink on arrival for all guests. (7:00 pm | Fri 6 June & Wed 11 June | \$10pp.)

#### **Lesbian Space Princess – Premiere Party**

Presented with GiRLTHING

Following the Australian Premiere of the fabulous inter-gay-lactic new animated comedy *Lesbian Space Princess*, join members of the film team for an out-of-the-closet and out-of-this-world evening of themed cocktails, DJs, and more. Dressing up encouraged. (8:00 pm | Thurs 5 June | Free)

#### **Screen Vixen's 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday Drinks**

Presented with Screen Vixens

Join and celebrate 10 years of women screen producers supporting the fast tracking of careers of women in film. Come along whether you're looking for industry intel, initiating new creative collaborations or just looking for a fabulous time. (6:30 pm | Fri 6 June | Free)

#### **Letterboxd User Meet-Up**

Presented with Letterboxd

Meet up with fellow film fans from around Sydney and afar and chat about your favourite films at the Festival and beyond. Enjoy the pop-up bar, fun and games, and giveaways. (3:00pm | Sat 7 June | Free)

#### **Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> Horror Happy Hour**

Presented with Unexpected Guest

Enjoy a spooky edition of The Hub's daily happy hour with themed drinks and music before you head off to see *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* doc *Chain Reactions* or the new horror hit it inspired, *Straight on till Morning*. (4:30 pm – 6:00 pm | Fri 13 June | Free)

#### **Filmmaker Community Connect | Dendy Awards After Party**

A meet-up for all members of the Sydney – and international – filmmaking community from emerging to established. Mingle with your peers following a screening of the Dendy Awards films and celebrate exciting cinematic talent. (6:00 pm | Sat 14 June | Free)

### **FREE TALKS**



The **FREE Festival Talks** at the Festival Hub create a space for audiences, filmmakers and industry professionals to progress a dialogue about the important topics and issues of the year, as addressed in Festival films.

### **In Conversation with Justin Kurzel**

Justin Kurzel will deliver the 2025 Ian McPherson Memorial Lecture, a Festival tradition that honours the legacy of the man who helped establish Sydney Film Festival. The Lecture will take place at the Festival Hub, where Kurzel will be in conversation with Festival Director Nashen Moodley, reflecting on his career and the art of filmmaking. (3:30 pm | Sat 14 June)

### **The Journey to Your First Feature**

Join three debut women filmmakers who come together to share their highs, lows, and lessons learned. From budget blowouts to creative breakthroughs, they'll unpack the wild ride of getting their first features onto the big screen. (5:30 pm | Fri 6 June)

### **Independent Filmmaking in India: A DIFF Exchange**

Join filmmakers from our Dharamshala International Film Festival exchange as they discuss independent filmmaking in India today – and the parallels it shares with independent filmmaking in Australia. (3:00 pm | Sun 8 June)

### **Everything Old is New Again: The Rise of the Re-Release**

Industry insiders explore the art of the re-release, from restorations and remasters to marketing strategies and audience engagement. (4:30 pm | Mon 9 June)

### **Streaming Services: The New Home for Documentaries?**

This discussion unpacks the opportunities and challenges in this rapidly expanding space – covering funding models, global distribution, and what makes a documentary cut through in the streaming age. (5:30 pm | Thurs 12 June)

### **Audience Development: Maximising Your Film's Reach**

This session delves into data-driven strategies, festival positioning, digital marketing, and audience trend analysis to help filmmakers build visibility and impact. (12:30 pm | Sat 14 June)

### **Platform Pitch – For Film's Sake Incubator**

Back for a third year, the For Film's Sake Incubator challenges 12 emerging filmmakers to form new collaborations and develop original projects over just four days. Their ideas will be pitched live to an expert industry jury – complete with on-the-spot feedback and a live audience. (1:30 pm | Sat 14 June)

### **SFFTV Presented by Norwegian Cruise Line**

SFFTV returns to light up Martin Place from June 4 - 15 and bring Sydney's ultimate celebration of cinema to the streets, thanks to our Major Partner Norwegian Cruise Line. Enjoy an eclectic array of acclaimed shorts, SFF film previews, and special activations from SFF partners. Exclusive \$10 rush tickets, free lunchtime screenings with complimentary popcorn, and free twilight screenings with Vivid Sydney round out the daily activities.



## **SPECIAL SFF + VIVID SYDNEY EVENTS**

In addition to SFFTV as part of the Vivid Sydney Martin Place Light Precinct, Sydney Film Festival has teamed up with Vivid Sydney on an exceptional array of special events. These include ***An Evening with Warren Ellis***, where the Australian music icon will reflect on his life, music, and commitment to animal conservation, alongside a short solo performance following the premiere of *Ellis Park*; ***Planet City: Live***, a world-first immersive experience bringing designer and BAFTA-nominated producer Liam Young's visionary speculative film to life; and ***Beyond the Summit with Jimmy Chin***, an evening with the Academy Award-winning filmmaker and National Geographic photographer known for *Free Solo*, *The Rescue*, and *Nyad*.

The full Sydney Film Festival 2025 program can be found online at [sff.org.au](https://sff.org.au).

**Sydney Film Festival runs from 4-15 June 2025. Tickets and Flexipasses to Sydney Film Festival 2025 are on sale now. Please call 1300 733 733 or visit [sff.org.au](https://sff.org.au) for more information or to book.**

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Sydney Film Festival press pack, including images [HERE](#)

### **EDITOR'S NOTES**

#### **ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL**

The Sydney Film Festival is one of the world's longest-running and most prestigious film festivals. The 72nd edition, taking place from 4 to 15 June 2025, will showcase the very best in contemporary cinema and offer audiences the chance to experience premieres, red carpet events, and exciting special programs across Sydney.

The Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW and Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney.

Stay up to date with Sydney Film Festival:  
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