

FILM FESTIVAL

GOING UNDERGROUND

The inaugural SYDNEY UNDERGROUND FILM FESTIVAL is set to deliver the most tantalising festival lineup of the year. BY BRIAN DUFF

Cousin in name only to the actively contrarian Melbourne Underground Film Festival, Sydney's version – the SUFF – is less a political statement on the nature of local production, and more an effort to bring to the screen a number of overlooked and unclassifiable films that might not otherwise ever screen. With a fierce spirit of democratisation, festival director Stefan Popescu has assembled a programme that attempts to “keep the field as open as possible, irrespective of content,” in the words of the festival's marketing/publicity co-ordinator Samantha Findley. “Sydney has a rich history in subversive and experimental film,” she claims. “In no way are we trying to compete against the Sydney International Film Festival; we're attempting to find films that have been pushed to the side, and that are a little bit subversive or different to the conventional formulas that might be shown in the SIFF. It would be fantastic if one day we can sit alongside the SIFF, but for now we're latching onto the legacy of the filmmakers of the '60s, '70s and '80s – the UBU filmmakers – who pioneered the underground scene.”

The UBU film co-op was formed by Albie Thoms, David Perry, Aggy Read and John Clark in Sydney in 1965, and was Australia's foremost foray into the exhibition and creation of experimental film. Their actions were deeply political, but primarily artistic, and that legacy is being promoted by Popescu and company, with Thoms and Perry both screening two shorts alongside works from Paul Winkler, John Gillies, Dirk De Bruyn, David Firth and Geoff Weary – all of whom Findley is infectiously excited about. Those films will showcase alongside films from the likes of David Lynch (whose *The Amputee*,

along with two other shorts, will screen), John Waters (*Polyester* will likely provide the festival's biggest draw) and Christina Andreef (the *Soft Fruit* director will show the short *Shooting The Breeze*) to make up the bulk of the non-competitive field.

As far as the competitive programme – which Findley takes care to place within audible inverted commas – goes, it is a mash-up of styles and structure, without a thought to maintaining any kind of “festival reputation”. Instead, the SUFF is all about “establishing a place for alternative film through exposure and exhibition, regardless of funding from government organisations,” she says. “The term ‘underground’ has been used for a whole lot of other things, but we're keeping it entirely open to parallel the original underground filmmakers and to establish our integrity.”

Even more than the brand of institutionalised rebellion that the SUFF is peddling, though, Findley sees a legitimate causal linkage between the times we live in now and those that first produced the UBU group. “The whole political side of the festival has come to the surface outside of our control,” she says. “The festival runs on September 7, which is the first day of the APEC summit, and while that's just a happy accident, we're running with it because it's so similar to the issues that were faced by the filmmakers back in the day.”

The 2007 Sydney Underground Film Festival takes place from September 7-10 at The Factory Theatre in Newtown.

For all information, head to www.sydneyundergroundfilmfestival.com.