



**AUSTIN FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES *THE WHALE* AND *ARMAGEDDON TIME* IN SECOND WAVE OF FESTIVAL PROGRAM, JAMES GRAY TO RECEIVE BILL WITTLIFF AWARD FOR SCREENWRITING**

*Additional films include Jonathan Dekel's Checkout and the world premiere of local Austin filmmaker Riley Cusick's The Wild Man*

**Austin, TX (September 8, 2022)** – Austin Film Festival (AFF), the premier film festival recognizing writers' and filmmakers' contributions to film, television, and new media, announced today that *The Whale* will serve as the festival's Opening Night selection. Directed by Academy Award®-nominee Darren Aronofsky (*Requiem for a Dream*, *Black Swan*, *The Wrestler*). *The Whale* stars Brendan Fraser and is written by Samuel D. Hunter, based on his acclaimed play of the same name. *The Whale* will screen the opening night of the Festival, October 27 with Hunter in attendance.

Additionally, AFF is hosting a special screening of James Gray's latest film *Armageddon Time*, with Gray in attendance to receive this year's Bill Wittliff Award for Screenwriting. Previous recipients include Buck Henry (1997), Lawrence Kasdan (2001), Nancy Meyers (2016), and Tony Gilroy (2018). The festival is also welcoming a wide slate of films including Israeli filmmaker Jonathan Dekel's *Checkout* and the world premiere of local Austin filmmaker Riley Cusick's *The Wild Man*.

Writer/Director/Producer James Gray, who has written the screenplay for every major motion picture that he's also directed, made his directorial debut in 1994 at the age of 25 with *Little Odessa*. The film received the Critics Award at the Deauville Film Festival as well as the Silver Lion in Venice. His second feature, *The Yards* (2000), started a career-long collaboration with Joaquin Phoenix and included Mark Wahlberg, Charlize Theron, Faye Dunaway, Ellen Burstyn and James Caan. Gray's New York crime drama *We Own The Night* (2007) starred Mark Wahlberg, Joaquin Phoenix, Eva Mendes and Robert Duvall.

His fourth feature, the Brooklyn-set drama *Two Lovers* (2008), premiered In Competition at Cannes and went on to receive a César nomination for Best Foreign Film in 2009. It received nominations at the Independent Spirit Awards for Best Director and Best Female Lead. In May 2013, *The Immigrant*, which starred frequent collaborator Joaquin Phoenix, Marion Cotillard and Jeremy Renner, became his fourth film to premiere In Competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

Gray's film *The Lost City of Z* was based on the best-selling novel by David Grann and starred Charlie Hunnam, Sienna Miller, Robert Pattinson and Tom Holland. It had its world premiere as the closing night selection of the 2016 New York Film Festival and was released in theaters by Amazon Studios/Bleecker Street in April 2017. Gray's Academy Awards nominated space epic *Ad Astra* starred Brad Pitt and was released in theaters in September 2019 after its Venice Film Festival premiere.

His latest project, *Armageddon Time* - which he again wrote, directed, and produced – is a deeply personal project inspired by Gray's own childhood growing up in 1980s New York City. The film stars Anthony Hopkins, Anne Hathaway and Jeremy Strong and will be released this fall by Focus Features.  
AFF SECOND WAVE:



### **THE WHALE**

OPENING NIGHT SELECTION

Directed by: Darren Aronofsky

Written by: Samuel D. Hunter

Synopsis: From Darren Aronofsky comes *The Whale*, the story of a reclusive English teacher living with severe obesity who attempts to reconnect with his estranged teenage daughter for one last chance at redemption. Starring Brendan Fraser and based on the acclaimed play by Samuel D. Hunter.

In attendance: Writer Samuel D. Hunter

### **ARMAGEDDON TIME**

Directed/written by: James Gray

Synopsis: From acclaimed filmmaker James Gray, *ARMAGEDDON TIME* is a deeply personal reflection on the strength of family, the complexity of friendship and the realities of class and privilege, seen through the eyes of a young Jewish boy growing up in 1980s Queens. The film features an all-star cast including Anthony Hopkins, Anne Hathaway and Jeremy Strong.

In attendance: Writer/Director James Gray

### **THE WILD MAN**

WORLD PREMIERE

Directed/written by: Riley Cusick

Synopsis: A son takes care of his father with a deteriorating mental condition where he believes he's a wild animal. The film's cast includes Cusick, Larry Fessenden, Jenna Kanell, and Kelli Maroney.

### **CHECKOUT**

WORLD PREMIERE

Directed/written by: Jonathan Dekel

Written by: Shai Satran

Synopsis: *Checkout* follows Dov (Josh Pais), a desperate spy who must convince his peers he is telling the truth about a legendary terrorist. Trying one last time to become the myth he always thought he would be, Dov faces the harsh realities determined to retire him. He'll do anything to change their minds.

*Checkout* is a dark comedy based on real lies of real Mossad spies.

### **THE FIRE THAT TOOK HER**

Directed by: Patricia E. Gillespie

Synopsis: Mother-of-two Judy Malinowski, was doused in gasoline and set on fire by her crazed ex-boyfriend – becoming one of the first people to testify at their own murder trial. *THE FIRE THAT TOOK HER* goes inside the landmark case to ask a timely question: How much must women suffer in order to be believed?

### **FOLLOW HER**

Directed by: Sylvia Caminer

Synopsis: *FOLLOW HER* is a psycho-sexual thriller. Jess Peters, a struggling actress and live streamer, has finally found her hook: secretly filming creepy interactions she encounters via online job listings, and using the kinks of others to fuel her streaming success. For her next episode, she's been hired to write



the ending of a screenplay in a remote, lavish cabin. Once there, the alluring self-proclaimed screenwriter hands her a script in which the two of them are the main characters. This client isn't what he seems, and even though the money is great... the real payment here could cost her life.

### **FOR THE LOVE OF FRIENDS**

Directed/written by: Cara Consilvio

Synopsis: In 1986, to awaken America to the AIDS crisis and to honor the friends he lost, Brent Nicholson Earle runs the perimeter of the United States. In *The American Run for the End of AIDS*, Brent runs almost a marathon a day for 20 months straight. After enduring blisters, exhaustion, ignorance and fear, he returns home to his own HIV diagnosis. Though the run finishes, Brent's activism never stops.

### **GOLDEN DELICIOUS**

Directed by: Jason Karman

Written by: Gorrman Lee

Synopsis: When basketball-obsessed Aleks moves in across the street, Asian-Canadian teen Jake finds himself trying out for the basketball team to get his attention in this classic coming-of-age drama set in the digital age.

The complete list of Festival programming, including over 100 films as well as hundreds of panels, will be announced in late September.

Press accreditation is now open through October 8, 2022. Press can apply at [austinfilmfestival.com/contact/press-inquiries](http://austinfilmfestival.com/contact/press-inquiries)

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### **ABOUT AUSTIN FILM FESTIVAL:**

Austin Film Festival (AFF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering the art, craft and business of writers and filmmakers and recognizing their contributions to film, television, and new media. AFF champions the work of aspiring and established writers and filmmakers by providing unique cultural events and services, enhancing public awareness and participation, and encouraging dynamic and long-lasting community partnerships. AFF is supported in part by the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Austin Economic Development Department and the Texas Commission on the Arts. All attendees and events are based on permitting schedules and are subject to change and/or cancellation without notice. For media credentials, please contact Travis Broughton at [marketing@austinfilmfestival.com](mailto:marketing@austinfilmfestival.com). Badges and passes are available for purchase online at [www.austinfilmfestival.com](http://www.austinfilmfestival.com) or by phone at 1-800-310-FEST.

### **ABOUT BILL WITTLIFF AWARD FOR SCREENWRITING:**

Introduced in 1995, Austin Film Festival's Bill Wittliff Award for Screenwriting has honored the leading storytellers of film, television, and new media. Past award recipients include Buck Henry (1997), Lawrence Kasdan (2001), Nancy Meyers (2016), and Tony Gilroy (2018).

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