

Media Release
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Rolf for President

Celebrated Australian filmmaker Rolf de Heer announced as President of Sydney Film Festival's 2009 Official Competition Jury.

Sydney, Australia: Sydney Film Festival today announced that **Rolf de Heer** will take the helm as Jury President for the Sydney Film Festival's Official Competition in June 2009.

Sydney Film Festival's FIAPF-accredited Official Competition, supported by the New South Wales Government through Events NSW, awards a prize for 'new directions in film'. Twelve films screen in competition, as red carpet gala premieres, selected for their 'emotional power and resonance'. A jury of two Australian and three international industry figures, led by de Heer, will award the Sydney Film Prize at the SFF in June 2009. The winning film will be awarded a cash prize of \$60,000 AUD, the largest cash prize for film in Australia, provided by the SFF's Prize partner Hunter Hall Investment Management.

"We are delighted to welcome Rolf de Heer as our 2009 Jury President. Rolf is a highly respected filmmaker whose body of work perfectly encapsulates the values – audacious, courageous and cutting-edge – championed by the Sydney Film Prize", Festival President **Virginia Gordon** said.

Film festivals and awards have played a vital role in de Heer's career. His impressive body of work has gained substantial international recognition, from his 1993 prizes in Venice for *Bad Boy Bobby* to the Cannes-winning *Ten Canoes*. Among de Heer's other films to have garnered prestige and accolades are *The Quiet Room*, *The Tracker* and *Alexandra's Project*.

"The significance of the award, and the prize money, is in what they allow you to do afterwards, the time and the freedom they give you with your next film. You can be more audacious, or cutting-edge, because you're allowed to be, you're encouraged to and have gained the confidence to be so," said de Heer today.

Sydney Film Festival was the first international festival de Heer attended, and his film *Ten Canoes* opened the SFF in 2006.

The 2008 inaugural Official Competition engaged audiences, achieved critical acclaim and increased film industry participation by 62%.

New South Wales Assistant Arts Minister **Virginia Judge** welcomed the appointment as a coup for Sydney and its international film festival.

"Rolf de Heer typifies the independent spirit of the festival as someone who has taken risks with his projects but also reached an audience," Ms Judge said. "We are honoured to have

someone of such international standing to chair the jury and help attract the world's best filmmakers to our festival and the Official Competition."

FURTHER INFORMATION FOR MEDIA

Sydney Film Festival will screen feature films, documentaries, short films and animations across the city at State Theatre, Greater Union George Street Cinemas, Metro Theatre and Dendy Opera Quays, from 3–21 June 2009. The festival is a major event on the New South Wales cultural calendar and is one of the world's longest running film festivals. In 2008, SFF introduced the inaugural Official International Competition, a FIAPF-accredited competition for 'new directions in film', which rewards courageous and audacious filmmaking.

Rolf de Heer biography

Born in 1951 in Holland, Rolf de Heer migrated to Australia with his family in 1959. He worked at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for seven years, then in 1977 was granted entry into Australia's Film Television and Radio School. He has gone on to make more than a dozen films of different genres, generally low budget, and has gained substantial international recognition.

Bad Boy Bobby won the Grand Special Jury prize and the International Film Critics Prize at Venice in 1993, and four Australian Film Institute awards. *The Quiet Room* (1996) and *Dance Me To My Song* (1998) were invited to Cannes, cementing de Heer's place in the international film arena. *The Tracker* premiered to critical acclaim at Venice in 2002. *Alexandra's Project* was invited into competition at Berlin, 2003, and *Ten Canoes* won the Special Jury Prize in the Un Certain Regard section at Cannes in 2006, opened the 2006 Sydney Film Festival and won 6 AFI Awards including Best Film and Best Director. The same year, de Heer was awarded the prestigious AFI Byron Kennedy Award for his "unflagging artistic courage across an astonishing body of work from *Bad Boy Bobby* to *Ten Canoes*."

2008 Official Competition Jury: Gillian Armstrong (President), Director, Australia. Essie Davis, Actress, Australia. Majid Majidi, Director, Iran. Scott Foundas, Critic, USA. Nansun Shi, Producer, Hong Kong.

2008 Winner of the Sydney Film Prize: *Hunger*, by celebrated UK artist Steve McQueen. Produced by Robin Gutch and Laura Hastings-Smith. Australian release date 6 November. Carlos Reygadas' *Silent Light* was commended for its highly poetic and creative use of sound and image and Matthew Newton's *Three Blind Mice* was commended for its energy, passion, superb ensemble cast and as a fine collaboration by a talented group of young filmmakers.

The 56th Sydney Film Festival 3–21 June 2009

For more information visit www.sff.org.au

Photographs from the 2008 festival are available to media at www.image.net

CONTACT

Next Step Media

Sophie Hodges 0403 959 528 (+61 403 959 528) sophie@nextstepmedia.com.au

Sydney Film Festival

Carmel England 02 9318 0999 (+61 2 9318 0999) carmel@sff.org.au

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