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LBGTQ Actors, Directors, Screenwriters, Artists Shine at the 28th Cinequest Film & VR Festival

The Cinequest Film & VR Festival 2018 (CQ2018) returns for its 28th season, February 27th – March 11th. Dedicated to featuring works of all genres, cultures, countries and perspectives, this year's festival includes films that are thought provoking and relatable, heart-breaking and funny, poignant and triumphant, that put voices and artists from the LBGTQ community into the limelight.

Renowned for the exceptional quality and diversity of its program, CQ2018 will screen 258 feature, short and VR works from 45 countries, and invite attendees to immerse themselves in a new storytelling medium at its curated VR Cinema and VR Experience Lounge. 52 celebrations and special events round out the offerings amounting to 510 screenings, events, parties and experiences. Over the 13-day program, Silicon Valley becomes the epicenter of tech and entertainment as filmmakers, futurists, writers, technologists, actors and artists from around the world converge to celebrate their work in one of the most diverse metros in the world.

To learn more about the full festival lineup, and to purchase festival passes, tickets to screenings and special events, visit www.cinequest.org.

Highlights of LBGTQ Cinema at CQ2018:

FEATURE FILMS

From Baghdad to the Bay (Directed by Erin Palmquist, US premiere)

Ghazwan Alshari had his dream job – translating for the U.S. forces in Iraq. But when he was accused of being a double agent by the same people he was aiding, with his life and the safety of his family in jeopardy, Ghazwan fled Iraq and settled in San Francisco to begin anew. Struggling and alone, Ghazwan reveals another secret in his life– he is gay. Ghawan's turbulent and ultimately joyous journey is nothing less than a testament to the human spirit.

Snapshots (Directed by Melanie Mayron; World premiere)

Written and produced by the Bay Area artist Jan Corran Miller, when a grandmother's secret past collides with her granddaughter's secret future and her daughter's angry present, can the love of three generations be enough to accept decades of deceit? *Snapshots* shows the dimensionality of love across three generations, providing solace through a series of ambiguous photographs. Three time Academy Award-nominee and acting legend Piper Laurie (*Carrie*, *Twin Peaks*) plays the family matron.

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Venus (Directed by Eisha Marjara, US premiere)

When Ralph skates into Sid's life claiming to be his biological son, life has already thrown a curve ball at Sid, a woman trapped inside a man's body. As the woman inside bursts forth brandishing a red stiletto, Sid is wise enough to let her dance. But to navigate the labyrinth of relationships with her traditional Indian parents, a closeted gay boyfriend unsure of himself, and the son who she didn't even know existed, she will need more than a stiletto. The film takes you up close to the journey of a transgender person and is guaranteed to keep you transfixed.

SHORT FILMS

Empire on Main Street (Directed by Jessica Congdon)

A tireless entrepreneur sacrifices relationships, overcomes floods, and jump-starts the transformation of a neglected vacation town, until one project pushes her to the brink and changes her perspective on life, love and empire.

The House of Colors (Directed by Nicolás P. Villarreal)

A young girl wishes to live inside her favorite television show, but the wondrous trees of La Plata, a mysterious house and her loving Mother's secret, cause her to change her mind.

Lemonade (Directed by Troy Price)

Kristin Farrell just can't seem to ever catch a break; but that all changes when she receives a call from her mom that launches her into a whole new world.

I Like Girls (Directed by Diane Obomsawin)

Four women share funny and intimate tales of one-sided infatuation, mutual attraction, erotic moments, and fumbling attempts at sexual expression.

In a Heartbeat (Directed by Esteban Bravo and Beth David)

In this tender, award-winning animated short, Sherwin, a shy ginger haired boy, arrives at school awaiting the arrival of the handsome Jonathan. When Jonathan strolls by, Sherwin's heart become a third character in the tale, leaping from his chest to chase after the object of his affection.

Playing it Straight (Directed by Charissa Sanjarernsuithikul)

A guy deep dives into his family dynamics on a second date. Through comedic flashbacks, his unconventional upbringing with his two closeted lesbian mothers is revealed.

More than 105,000 attendees will experience the work of internationally renowned and emerging artists and technologists, representing a spectrum of genres, genders, ethnicities, orientations, and viewpoints. Honoring the careers of icons, legends and risk takers in film, Cinequest will present its coveted Maverick

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Spirit Award to **Nicolas Cage** (*Leaving Las Vegas, Raising Arizona*), **Andie MacDowell** (*Sex, Lies & Videotape, Four Weddings and a Funeral*), **Tatiana Maslany** (*Orphan Black, Stronger*) and **Tom Cullen** (*Downtown Abbey, Black Mirror*). Director, producer, tech entrepreneur **Travis Cloyd** will be honored with this year's VR Visionary Award, recognizing his work in immersive entertainment. Additionally, this year's Media Legacy Award will be presented to **Ben Mankiewicz**, Primetime Host Turner Classic Movies (TCM) celebrating his incredible life and impact on the industry, as a writer, journalist and co-founder of *The Young Turks*.

This year's program includes 74 World and 55 U.S. premiering films, starring award winning actors including past Maverick Spirit Award winners William H. Macy, Rosario Dawson and Peter Fonda, as well as Kal Penn, Michelle Pfeiffer, James McAvoy, Hilary Swank and Stanley Tucci. Visit www.cinequest.org for the full Cinequest Film & VR Festival 2018 program.

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About Cinequest

A vanguard organization set in the Silicon Valley, Cinequest fuses the worlds of the filmed arts and technology to empower artists, innovators, and audiences to create and connect - driving transformations and a better tomorrow. Cinequest's uniqueness and impact result from being ahead of the curve in the powerful integration of creativity and innovation.

CONTACT:

Dana Whitney
Cinequest
dana.whitney@cinequest.org
(408) 995-5033