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THE GLOBE AND MAIL

September 28, 2009

Flicks capitalize on market crash at this year's VIFF

By MARSHA LEDERMAN
From Monday's Globe and Mail

Sometimes a filmmaker gets lucky.

True, during the 12 years it took Richard Brouillette to get *Encirclement: Neo-Liberalism Ensnares Democracy* made, the Quebec filmmaker didn't always feel all that lucky. Especially when he had to put the project aside for five years to concentrate on other - paying - work. But as it turns out, *Encirclement's* world premiere last November in Montreal couldn't have been better timed. With audiences suddenly very interested in matters economic, the 160-minute intellectually-challenging, black-and-white dissertation on the evils of neo-liberalism has attracted an interest that has surprised even Brouillette - and he admits might not have been there if he had finished the film when he had originally hoped - long before the global economic meltdown.

"It's good timing," Brouillette, 39, said just before showing his film at an Acadian film festival in Moncton last week. "I couldn't wish for better."

Encirclement, which Brouillette says is "demanding" and "not a big audience film" has been invited to close to 30 festivals and has a distribution deal with release in parts of English Canada scheduled for next January.

"I'm surprised by the success ... but I think often we underestimate the curiosity and the level of intelligence of the average spectator."

The Vancouver International Film Festival, which begins Thursday, is also hoping to capitalize on the current intense interest in economic issues, with a new series called Follow The Money, featuring *Encirclement* and eight other films.

"I think it's pretty important that in a festival anywhere near this size, there should be a real effort on the part of programmers to have films that are relevant," says Alan Franey, director of VIFF (which features 377 films over 16 days). "Because you want to have people coming to really feel like they're getting a time-sensitive perspective on things."

Franey has his own perspective on the crash. Things were melting down exactly one year ago, during last year's festival and ticket sales took a hit (the drama unfolding on TV with the presidential race south of the border didn't help either, he says). "That was our worst week in most of our memories," he says. Securing sponsorships in the current economic climate hasn't been easy, either.

While it's hard to imagine any filmgoer not having some familiarity with the market crash - perhaps from reading their shrinking investment statements or, worse, losing their jobs - not everyone may have a grasp on the reasons behind it.

"I don't really believe the public understands the history of this," says Kevin Stocklin, whose film *We All Fall Down* will have its Canadian premiere at VIFF. "I don't think they understand the fundamental underlying causes of this crisis and I don't think there's a clear view of how we're going to get out of this at this point."

Stocklin has an insider's understanding of the issues. A former Wall Street banker, he lost his position as the problems in the sector began to mount. In his 40s and suddenly unemployed, Stocklin decided to follow a long-time dream: He enrolled in film school at New York University.

Again, timing was everything. Stocklin may have been new at the film game, but he had a hot story to tell - and a firsthand perspective (he was working in the very sector he says was at the core of the problem). He put together a proposal that intrigued one of his professors. They quickly got to work on *We All Fall Down*.

Unfortunately, they wrapped shooting in August, 2008. They had just started post-production when the financial world blew up: Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, AIG. "The whole story had kind of exploded in front of our faces," says Stocklin, now 44. He had to shoot new interviews, rewrite and reorganize the film entirely. Such are the perils of making so timely a documentary.

The finished product is certainly instructive; Franey says it's like watching "a very good Power Point lecture." Indeed, the film is being shown in economics classes around the world to explain the crisis.

Not all the films in the series are quite as educational as Stocklin's or as esoteric as Brouillette's. *American Casino* also traces the history of the crash - but with more drama, heartbreak and visual illumination (you'll never forget the shots of abandoned swimming pools filled with abandoned furniture - and mosquito larvae). The filmmakers point fingers - and don't attempt to hide their disdain.

The Great Contemporary Art Bubble examines what filmmaker Ben Lewis says might one day be viewed as "the epitome of ... the folly of our age:" collectors clamouring to pay tens of millions of dollars for works of questionable value.

Of course the big money film this fall is Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story*. Its release date - this Friday - made it impossible for Franey to get it into the festival (he tried), but he thinks all the press Moore is getting will help bring attention and interest to the films in his series - even if they don't employ Moore's brash brand of storytelling.

"It's not like watching an entertaining film," says Stocklin of *We All Fall Down*. "But if you can spend an hour and give an hour's attention, you can really understand what went wrong and what caused this mess."

VIFF runs October 1-16. For more information, check out viff.org

Five VIFF highlights

Chloe

Atom Egoyan's latest film examines marriage, suspicion and fidelity. Catherine (Julianne Moore) suspects her husband (Liam Neeson) is being unfaithful. So she hires the young, gorgeous Chloe (Amanda Seyfried) to test him.

I Killed My Mother (J'ai tué ma mère)

Xavier Dolan's debut feature about a just-out-of-the-closet teenager's contempt for his mother was a hit at