

Three Australian projects selected for Sundance Film Festival 2021

Wednesday 16 December 2020: Feature documentary [Playing with Sharks](#), virtual reality project *Prison X - Chapter 1: The Devil and The Sun* and short film *GNT* will screen at Sundance Film Festival, taking place both online and in-person across the US from 28 January to 3 February 2021.

Sundance has a history of launching Australian works into the US market including feature films [Relic](#) (2020), [The Nightingale](#) (2019) and [Sweet Country](#) (2018), as well as documentaries such as [Casting JonBenet](#) (2017).

Screen Australia's CEO **Graeme Mason** said, "Congratulations to these teams, this selection is an incredible accomplishment. These projects each have a distinctive Australian voice and demonstrate the breadth and ingenuity of our industry on the world stage. It's fantastic to have three projects representing Australia all helmed by female directors in this year's program. Last year we saw the influence of the festival and its ability to launch careers with Natalie Erika James' debut feature *Relic* selected and celebrated and we are delighted that these three can follow in that path."

Playing with Sharks, a documentary about iconic Australian diver and filmmaker Valerie Taylor, will make its world premiere in the World Documentary Competition.

Director **Sally Aitken** said, "To launch this film at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival is a dream come true. Valerie's daredevil exploits and her astounding rich underwater archive are a potent mix for any director. It is a privilege to sink my teeth into her pioneering story. That she is still diving and fighting for sharks at the age of 85 shows Valerie's incredible passion and that her thirst for adventure remains undiminished. Her life-affirming journey as an unlikely conservationist proves to all of us just what is possible with our interconnectedness to the natural world, if we allow it."

Virtual reality animation *Prison X - The Devil & The Sun* will make its world premiere in the New Frontier section which showcases emerging media storytelling, multimedia installations, performances, and films across fiction, nonfiction and hybrid projects. The project takes viewers on a mythological journey inside a Neo-Andean underworld.

Prison X director **Violeta Ayala** said, "As a storyteller, VR gave me the tools and technological capacity to push my imagination to a further degree. But it takes a community to make a film, and I'm very proud that the team behind *Prison X* represents the Australia that we see on the streets. *Prison X* is a team effort pushing the boundaries of filmmaking, animation and technology from the minds of Bolivian-Australian, Ghanaian-Australian and Filipino-Australian creatives."

Animated short film *GNT*, which won the Yoram Gross Animation prize at Sydney Film Festival 2020, will screen in the Short Film section. The film follows one woman's outrageous mission to conquer social media and upstage her friends.

Creators **Sara Hirner** and **Rosemary Vasquez-Brown** said "We are absolutely thrilled that our debut short film, *GNT*, will be featured at Sundance Film Festival. We put so much love into this chaotic four minutes, and feel especially humbled that it will be shown at Sundance, alongside the same talent that we are continually inspired by. We hope it makes you giggle, or at the very least, question your choices on social media."

Australian projects at Sundance 2021:

PLAYING WITH SHARKS

Wildbear Entertainment Pty Ltd

Director: Sally Aitken

Producer: Bettina Dalton

Executive Producer: Alan Erson

Australian Distributor: Madman

Media enquiries: Lidia Williams

+61 2 8113 1091 | +61 468 784 170 | lidia.williams@screenaustralia.gov.au

www.screenaustralia.gov.au



[Twitter](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



[Facebook](#)



[Instagram](#)



Australian Government



MEDIA RELEASE

International Sales: Dogwoof

Synopsis: Valerie Taylor is a shark fanatic and an Australian icon. A marine maverick who forged her way as a fearless diver, cinematographer and conservationist. She filmed the real sharks for *Jaws* and famously wore a chain mail suit, using herself as shark bait, in experiments that changed scientific understanding of sharks forever.

Production credit: *Playing with Sharks* is a Wildbear Entertainment production. Principal production investment from Screen Australia in association with Screen NSW.

Media contact: Tracey Mair, traceym@tmpublicity.com

PRISON X - THE DEVIL & THE SUN

UNF Pty Ltd

Writer/Director: Violeta Ayala

Producers: Violeta Ayala, Dan Fallshaw, Roly Elias

Australian Distribution: Contact UNF Films

International Sales: Contact UNF Films

Synopsis: A virtual reality project where heavy doors open up and suck you in as a world of magical realism swirls around you, where you have to hang onto your soul so the devil doesn't take it away.

Production credit: *Prison X - The Devil & The Sun* is an UNF production. Principal production investment from Screen Australia and developed with support from Screen NSW. Financed with support from Sundance Institute, the MacArthur Foundation and Tribeca Film Institute.

Australian media contact: Annette Lin, annette@unitednotionsfilm.com

International media contact: Ingrid Hamilton, GAT PR, ingrid@gat.ca

GNT

Writer/Directors: Sara Hirner, Rosemary Vasquez-Brown

Producers: Sara Hirner, Rosemary Vasquez-Brown

Synopsis: An animation that follows Glenn, a woman on an unwholesome mission to conquer her clique and social media at large.

Media contact: Sara Hirner and Rosemary Vasquez-Brown, gday.GNT@gmail.com

A history of Australian titles at Sundance is available [here](#)

ENDS

Media enquiries: Lidia Williams

+61 2 8113 1091 | +61 468 784 170 | lidia.williams@screenaustralia.gov.au

www.screenaustralia.gov.au



[Twitter](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



[Facebook](#)



[Instagram](#)