

Four Australian films selected for Venice including Warwick Thornton's *Sweet Country*

Thursday 27 July: The Venice International Film Festival today announced their 2017 program confirming the selection of four Australian films, including Warwick Thornton's *Sweet Country* which will make its world premiere in official competition. *West of Sunshine* will also make its world premiere competing in the Orizzonti section, and *The Knife Salesman* will screen in competition in Orizzonti - Short Films. In a first for an Australian film, *Strange Colours* will screen as part of the Biennale College.

Penny Smallacombe, Head of Screen Australia's Indigenous Department said it was a landmark moment in Australian screen history with *Sweet Country* being the first Australian Indigenous feature to be selected in official competition in Venice.

"*Sweet Country* is an outstanding Indigenous collaboration, from the incredibly talented writers Steven McGregor and David Tranter and the extraordinary vision of director Warwick Thornton. This is a vital and rich Indigenous perspective of how Aboriginal people have been treated historically and we're proud the film will premiere at one of the world's most prestigious film festivals," said Ms Smallacombe.

Warwick Thornton, who was awarded the Cannes Film Festival Caméra d'Or for his debut feature *Samson and Delilah*, returns to the director's chair for *Sweet Country*, a period western set in the late 1920s on the Northern Territory frontier, where justice itself is put on trial. The film features an impressive cast including Sam Neill, Bryan Brown, Hamilton Morris, Gibson John, Natassia Gorey-Furber, Thomas M. Wright, Ewen Leslie, Matt Day, Anni Finsterer and introducing Tremayne and Trevon Doolan.

Sweet Country is produced by David Jowsey (*Mystery Road, Goldstone*), Greer Simpkin (*Goldstone, Jasper Jones*) and David Tranter (*Nganampa Anwernekenhe*). The film received major production investment and development support from Screen Australia's Indigenous Department in association with Create NSW, Screen Territory, South Australian Film Corporation and the Adelaide Film Festival. International sales are handled by Memento and the Australian release by Transmission Films.

Director **Warwick Thornton** said: "That landscape around Alice Springs is sacred. The MacDonnell Ranges are always in my mind from growing up there with my family. So, *Sweet Country* is a film about the land and our family and what happened when the missionaries and pastoralists arrived."

Producers **Greer Simpkin** and **David Jowsey** said: "We are deeply honoured that *Sweet Country* has been selected in official competition in Venice, and that it will have its Australian premiere at the Adelaide Film Festival in October."

"To represent Australia on the cinematic world stage with such an important story is both humbling and thrilling. To our stellar cast and crew we thank you; to our inspiring director - we salute you, and to our funding partners who believed in this production from the start - we are sincerely grateful."

In competition in the Orizzonti section and also one of the debut films competing for the Lion of the Future award, *West of Sunshine* is the feature film debut from writer/director Jason Raftopoulos, whose short films have screened at festivals around the world, and is produced by Alexandros Ouzas (*Plague*) for Exile Entertainment. The film was shot in Melbourne and tells the story of a father who has less than a day to pay back a debt to a loan shark, while at the same time trying to look after his young son. *West of Sunshine* received production investment funding from Screen Australia.

The Knife Salesman will screen in competition in Orizzonti - Short Films and is written, directed and produced by Michael Leonard, with Jamie Helmer also directing. In the short film, tensions build when a travelling knife salesman visits a frustrated house wife in a heat-drenched coastal Australian town.

Strange Colours was co-written/directed by Alena Lodkina, co-written/produced by Isaac Wall and produced by Kate Laurie, with development and production investment support from Venice's Biennale College - Cinema, which provides advanced training dedicated to the production of micro-budget films. *Strange Colours* is the first Australian film to screen at the festival as part of the 2016/2017 Biennale College -



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Cinema selection. The film follows a woman who travels to a remote opal mining community to see her estranged, ill father to try and mend their fractured bond.

Director **Alena Lodkina** said: "It's been a whirlwind making this film happen in nine months - an exhilarating experience. And it's so exciting to have the premiere at the festival! It's surreal."

Graeme Mason, Screen Australia's CEO said: "The range of Australian stories and talent that Venice have chosen to showcase is astounding. From visionary Warwick Thornton to emerging artist Alena Lodkina, to get this kind of attention from one of the world's most prestigious festivals is significant. A warm congratulations to all the creatives, cast and crew who have been honoured by these selections."

[Earlier in the week it was revealed](#) veteran critic David Stratton will be on the competition jury.

The [74th Venice International Film Festival](#) runs from 30 August to 9 September 2017.

The [Adelaide Film Festival](#) runs from 5 to 15 October 2017.

Media enquiries: Jane Alexander
+61 2 8113 5833 | +61 400 940 682 | jane.alexander@screenaustralia.gov.au
www.screenaustralia.gov.au

