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**MIX: The 16th New York
Lesbian And Gay Experimental
Film/Video Festival**
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Sweet 16

Queer experimental film/video
festival, MIX, unveils line-up

By ERIK PIEPENBURG



“Gay cinema” is in a rut this year. Apart from *Lan Yu* and *The Cockettes*—both very independently produced films that played primarily to limited art house crowds—it’s hard to think of a gay or lesbian film that has made much of an impact in 2002.

Thus MIX 2002: The New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film/Video Festival (the longest running gay and lesbian film festival in New York), couldn’t come at a better time. Now in its 16th year, the festival returns to offer a challenging lineup of films and videos aiming to “activate, agitate and arouse,” says Ioannis Mookas, MIX executive director.

“Experimental is nothing to be scared of. It’s more a

code word for artists playing with narrative, and your expectations,” he says. “Let yourself be surprised by what the artists are doing and expect the unexpected.”

The year’s festival, which runs from November 20-24, includes over 150 films—features, shorts digital media, installations, and performances—under the theme “Counter Culture.” While not all the films are explicitly gay in content—although there is plenty of sex, nudity and ball-busting of the gayest kind—they do fall under the umbrella of “queer cinema,” which can mean anything from deconstructing gender to redefining camp.

“We take both of the terms of the festival’s identity—gay and experimental—to be very expansive and elastic,” Mookas says. “We don’t have a narrow definition of what they are, and we’re constantly trying to expand our understanding of what a gay film is, does, looks like and how it performs.”

In addition to the usual combination of New York, U.S. and world premieres, with new films by George Kuchar, Jack Waters, Martha Colburn and Naomi Uman among others, Mookas is especially enthusiastic about the opening night program, called “The Coming Revolution,” a collection of “hot, gutsy” shorts from experimental stalwarts John Greyson, Ximena Cuevas, Pierre Yves Clouin, and others.

Of course no gay film festival would be complete without hot sex. “The Super 8 Cock and Booty Show” (November 22) includes graphic films that Mookas says go “beyond the boundaries of titillating and enter the realms of hardcore queer sex.”

“We’re proud to support films like that,” he says. “I hope people turn out and are aroused by it. We have a dedicated crew to help stay around and mop up the floor afterwards.”

This year’s Innovations Features section includes the U.S. premiere of Philippe Khazarian’s feature *I Love The Sound Of the Kalachnikov*, *It Reminds Me Of Tchaikovski*, and the U.S. premiere of *A Circus In New York*, Frederique Pressman’s profile of the radical performance troupe Circus Amok.

Mookas also notes Brice Dellsperger’s *Body Double X*, a shot-for-shot remake of Andrzej Zulawski’s 1975, French art film *The Important Thing Is to Love*, recast with gender-bending performance artist Jean-Luc

Verna playing all the speaking roles.

“It’s unlike anything you’ve ever seen before,” Mookas says.

Fans of international experimental gay film will find special programs devoted to new work from Brazil, Mexico and the Netherlands. Documentaries also get special attention, with programs devoted to the videos of ACT-UP, pre-Stonewall gay imagery, Arab and Muslim gay experiences, and transgender issues.

A special retrospective sidebar is devoted to pioneering underground gay filmmaker Tom Chomont, a member of New York’s film underground who now battles Parkinson’s disease and AIDS. MIX’s two-part tribute to Chomont includes a selective survey of his films and videos (*The Mirror Garden and Razor Head*) and, after being featured at this year’s Toronto Film Festival, the New York premiere of Canadian Mike Hoolboom’s feature-length biography *Tom*, a film almost entirely constructed from found and appropriated film footage.

“We hope this will be a fitting tribute to someone who’s really paved the way for a lot of avant-garde filmmakers,” says Mookas.

Closing Night features an overview of 20 years of the legendary Atlanta local access television show *Funtone USA*, a send-up of conservative Southern traditions starring New York club legends The Lady Bunny, Larry Tee, Lahoma Van Zant and a mohawked teenage RuPaul as her alter ego STARBOOTY.

“Our audiences are quite literate and sophisticated and are stimulated by the challenges of our programming. They’re not thrown of by something that speaks to you on only one level,” Mookas says. “You can find that anywhere, at any gay film festival.

“Check out any one of our programs at random and you’ll find yourself pleasantly surprised by what you’ll find.”