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Melbourne Queer Film Festival celebrates 35 years – Searching for Queer Utopias

Wednesday 15 October 2025 – Melbourne Queer Film Festival (MQFF), Australia's flagship celebration of queer film, proudly marks its 35th anniversary this year with the theme *Searching for Queer Utopias*.

Running from **13 to 23 November 2025**, the festival invites audiences to explore a program filled with moments of queer joy, connection and liberation – spaces where the LGBTQIA+ community and allies can exhale, be themselves while celebrating freedom, solidarity and creative expression with the best and latest cinema.

With major events at Collins Place, Melbourne Town Hall and The Capitol Theatre, the festival presents its hub this year at Cinema NOVA in Carlton. Presenting 100 sessions of over 130 features, documentaries and short films, MQFF's curated selection highlights First Nations artists and Australia's emerging stars alongside the best releases from around the globe.

"There's an incredible lineup of award-winning and premiere cinema for the audience for our milestone 35th season. We're bringing back premium events for our opening and closing night in what is a purely contemporary program that looks at the current and future for LGBTQIA+ communities in Australia and globally," says **MQFF Chief Executive Officer, David Martin Harris**.

The program features 35 Australian and 15 Victorian Premieres, promising to immerse audiences in the breadth of queer cinematic talent, including releases direct from **Venice, Cannes, Berlinale, Sundance, Newfest, Framelane, SWSX, and InsideOut festival**.

Special events in the program include a takeover of Collins Place for an **Opening Night Extravaganza** with an after-party for the Victorian Premiere of *Queen of the Dead* – a dazzling queer apocalyptic zombie comedy directed by visionary debut filmmaker Tina Romero, the rightful heir to horror-film legend George A. Romero. Lead actor and star of the hit FX series *Pose*, Dominique Jackson, is a special guest of the festival and will travel from New York to Melbourne to accept MQFF's inaugural Tribute Award. The award celebrates her remarkable impact on queer cinema and culture, which will be celebrated during the evening's program.

On Saturday, 14 November, **An Audience with Dominique Jackson** will feature the international star in conversation with best-selling author, media presenter and astrologer **Lillian Ahenkan (aka FlexMami)** for an inspiring conversation about advocacy, creativity and her groundbreaking career that has reshaped LGBTQIA+ representation on screen.

MQFF welcomes leading Australian Director, Sophie Hyde (*Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* and *52 Tuesdays*), to present a Keynote address ahead of the Victorian Premiere of their new film *Jimpa*, starring Academy Award winner **Olivia Colman** and **Golden Globe winner John Lithgow**, on Saturday 15 November.

On Friday 21 November, a double-bill presentation dedicated to First Nations film and voices culminates in **Indigiqueer Voices** and **The Ramon Te Wake Collection** at The Capitol Theatre. With short films from Australia, Canada and Aotearoa – the evening is dedicated to celebrating Indigiqueer excellence through the work of filmmakers who speak from their whenua, their ancestors, and their bodies.

The **MQFF Australian Shorts & Awards** returns, presenting boundary-pushing storytelling and the remarkable vision of both emerging and established filmmakers who are redefining Australia's cinematic landscape. The winner of the City of Melbourne Award for Best Australian Short will also qualify as MQFF's official selection for the Iris Prize – the world's largest prize for LGBTIQ+ short films.

For the **Closing Night Gala**, MQFF takes over Melbourne Town Hall for a fully catered romantic evening where audiences will enjoy the Victorian Premiere of **Plainclothes** by Carmen Emmi - Winner of the Special Jury Award for Ensemble Cast at Sundance. Starring **Russell Tovey** and **Tom Blyth**, the 1990s-set feature blends digital and lo-fi aesthetics for a raw and poetic vision of queer desire that will soon become a classic in the queer cinema canon.

"This year, we're seeing more filmmakers, particularly Indigenous, define, and tell their own stories. We're getting to see joy, tenderness, resilience and complex lives on screen, told by the people who are living those experiences. Everyone knows what it feels like to want to be seen, validated and loved as your full self - that's not only a queer experience, it's a human one. Film gives us that mirror," says **MQFF Program Director, Ro Bright**.

The full list of MQFF's 2025 program highlights appears at the end of this release.

As part of MQFF's commitment to inclusivity, the festival is presented in 100% wheelchair accessible venues, offers discounted concession tickets, Blaktix, free entry for Companion Card holders and an online platform MQFF+ for home viewing, with Closed Captions, English Subtitles and Audio Description across a growing number of sessions.

Tickets and passes (3, 6, and 10 Film Passes, plus the All-in Pass) are available via mqff.com.au, the MQFF App, in person at the MQFF Box Office (located at Cinema Nova during the festival), or by calling 0466 643 976.

Founded in 1991, MQFF is a not-for-profit organisation and Australia's flagship queer film festival, aiming to be a bold film festival that provides spaces for celebration, connection and diversity. Melbourne Queer Film Festival is proudly supported by the City of Melbourne, VicScreen, and the Victorian Government.

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MQFF 2025 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- **Thursday 13 November – Opening Night Extravaganza – Victorian Premiere of *Queens of the Dead*:** *Queens of the Dead* (Dir. Tina Romero, 2025), a queer apocalyptic survival comedy with an ensemble: Margaret Cho, Katy O'Brian, Cheyenne Jackson, Jack Haven, Nina West, and **Dominique Jackson**, the Tobagonian-American actress, author, model, and reality television personality best known for her role as Elektra Abundance on FX's *Pose*. Jackson will travel to Australia to attend the festival, be honoured with the inaugural MQFF Tribute for her outstanding contributions to queer screen and culture.

The Opening Night screening will be preceded by the world premiere of *Flight Risk*, a short by **Mohammad Awad**, commissioned through MQFF's *Pitch, Pleez!* Competition.

- **Friday 14 November – An Audience with Dominique Jackson:** An intimate conversation hosted by **Lillian 'FlexMami' Ahenkan**, exploring visibility, legacy and representation.
- **Saturday 15 November – Keynote address with leading Australian Director, Sophie Hyde** (*Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* and *52 Tuesdays*): Ahead of the Victorian Premiere of their new film *Jimpa*, - *Jimpa* (VIC premiere), Dir. Sophie Hyde explores intergenerational queer family dynamics, starring **Olivia Colman**, **John Lithgow**, and young Australians **Aud Mason-Hyde** and **Bryn Chapman Parish**.
- **Sunday 16 November – Industry Day:** Supported by RMIT University, featuring an Emerging Filmmakers Pitch, a Masterclass with Sophie Hyde, and a *Jimpa* Panel with key creatives Aud Mason-Hyde and Kate Box.
- **Thursday 20 November – Centrepiece – The Crowd** (Dir. Sahand Kabiri, 2025): A guerilla-style film shot in Tehran following queer youth resisting patriarchal norms and celebrating chosen family under threat of persecution.
- **Friday 21 November – Indigiqueer Voices and Ramon Te Wake Collection:** Celebrating Indigenous queer storytelling.
- **Saturday 22 November – Australian Shorts and Awards:** Showcasing the best emerging local queer talent.
- **Sunday 23 November – Closing Night Gala – Plainclothes** (Dir. Carmen Emmi, 2025): A 1990s romantic thriller starring Russell Tovey and Tom Blyth, which will be preceded by *Welcome to the Cyber Rodeo* by Jim Muntisov, also developed through *Pitch Pleez!*.
- **Additional highlights screening as part of the program, running 13–23 November 2025, include:**
 - **Hot Milk** (VIC premiere) – A Greek island-set drama about intergenerational desire and healing, starring **Emma Mackey** (*Sex Education*) and **Fiona Shaw** (*Killing Eve*).
 - **Row of Life** (VIC premiere) – Documentary portrait of Paralympian and Marine veteran Angela Madsen, a story of resilience and empowerment.
 - **The Serpent's Skin** (VIC premiere) – Experimental goth-trans cinema blending magic, romance, and dark humour, directed by rising Australian talent Alice Maio Mackay.
 - **Departures** (AUS premiere) – Dir. Lloyd Eyre-Morgan and Neil Ely's *Departures* is a bold, fast-paced British queer drama full of grit, wit and post-breakup chaos.
 - **Bearcave** (AUS premiere) – Direct from Venice Film Festival, offering a gloriously realized, unseen and intimate perspective into the lives of young queer women in Greece.
 - **She's The He** (AUS Premiere) – the queer teen comedy we've all been waiting for. A trans-led team of creatives brings us a hilarious coming-of-age that reimagines our favourite 90s movies.
 - **Cactus Pears** – Dir. Rohan Parashuram Kanawade – Winner of the World Cinema Dramatic Jury Prize at Sundance and Best Feature Film Award at SXSW London.

- **Heightened Scrutiny** (VIC premiere) – an urgent human rights documentary from the team behind *Disclosure* exploring the current fight for transgender rights and justice in the USA.