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PANDEMIC, PROTESTS AND PET SPIDERS: 'LIFE IN A DAY 2020' HITS SUNDANCE

When Ridley Scott and Kevin Macdonald created documentary "Life in a Day" a decade ago, their goal was to construct a video portrait of a typical 24 hours on Earth, as filmed by tens of thousands of amateurs around the world. Repeating the trick in "Life in a Day 2020," stitching together footage shot last summer as the coronavirus pandemic and massive anti-racism protests turned the world on its head, their sequel is anything but typical.

Assembled by a vast team of editors from 324,000 submitted clips, the film—which premieres Monday at the Sundance Film Festival before hitting YouTube—captures the eerily empty streets, collective cabin-fever and civil unrest of a year like no other. "Obviously because of everything that was going on at that moment in July—George Floyd, BLM, Trump, Covid—this is a more thematically rich film, and probably a year, than hopefully we'll get for a while," director Macdonald told AFP.

The footage is more personal than political. Macdonald's favorite clip is a Robinson Crusoe-esque man who recorded himself chatting to pet spiders

Sammy, Jacob and Crystal during lockdown, and "feels like he's the last man on Earth." We meet a man left homeless by the pandemic who finds relief in flying drones, and a mother whose young son appeared in the first film but who now keeps his ashes in an urn after his tragic death from Covid-19.

Macdonald-Oscar-winning director of "The Last King of Scotland" and "Touching the Void"—agreed to return for a sequel last March, when the looming pandemic was "this Covid thing" which seemed sure to "be over by May." (Scott returns as executive producer.) "Little did we know the whole year would be utterly transformed," Macdonald said. "Even when I look back on the first film, I feel like it is a time-capsule for all sorts of things... this one will feel even more different," he added.

'Never seen on camera'

While the first film received "endless stuff of people skateboarding and surfing," this time "the material was by a factor of 10 more sad, more about loss and mortality, and spirituality," he said. Macdonald was astonished by the brutal honesty of many of the submissions,



In this file photo British director/producer Ridley Scott poses for pictures on the red carpet upon arrival for the world premier of "Exodus: God and Kings" in London. — AFP photos



In this file photo British director Kevin Macdonald poses during a photocall for the film "Whitney" at the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France.

which include a man whose proposal to his girlfriend goes woefully wrong, and a couple breaking up live on camera. "It's amazing, things you've pretty much never seen on camera before for real," he said. "There's a lot of those in romantic comedies but, actually, this is what that really looks like." Over two months, clips from 192 countries were watched in their original language and cataloged by around 40 filmmakers, who gave each submission a rating out of five.

Macdonald and his editors then watched the top-ranked clips, and

begin the arduous task of assembling candidates by theme, while identifying their favorite characters. The team received four times the original project's submissions, with many remarkable for the far-flung locations that astounding mobile camera technology—and desire for global fame, however fleeting—has reached.

One memorable clip sees a man in remote Siberia sift through frozen cow heads in his basement before plunging into an icy lake and declaring to camera: "What I fear the most is that my life will

pass unnoticed." "And then we cut to bloggers, YouTubers, everybody desperate to be noticed—and I think that obviously is a human characteristic," said Macdonald. "But that's not necessarily a negative thing, it's just human beings want to matter."

'How the globe changes'

Despite the film's experimental and ambitious premise, a few powerful clips had to be omitted on taste grounds. The final YouTube film will offer child-friendly and over-18 versions, while Macdonald agreed to remove an "amazing" sequence of an aborted suicide attempt because "it wasn't a healthy thing to have." Still, despite the many challenges, Macdonald is pressing YouTube to commit to another edition in 2030. He hopes to establish a "long-running series that shows how the globe changes"—even if the next film is unlikely to match the events of the past year. "Maybe personally I'll be quite relieved if it's peaceful and uneventful," he said. — AFP



Brandon Cronenberg



German film-maker Michael Venus



French twins Ludovic and Zoran Boukherma

'Possessor' wins grand prize at Gerardmer film festival

Canadian film-maker Brandon Cronenberg—son of horror master David Cronenberg—picked up a top award in the genre Sunday, following in the family tradition. Cronenberg won the Grand Prize at the Gerardmer fantasy and horror film festival for "Possessor", which takes viewers on a sinister trip with white-collar assassins who take control of others to execute contracts. It was previously presented at the Sundance festival, where it marked audiences with graphic depictions of extreme violence. "Possessor" also won Gerardmer's prize for best score by Jim Williams.

The festival, which is normally held in eastern France, took place online this year owing to the coronavirus pandemic. In "Possessor", contract killer Tasya Vos (Adrea Riseborough), uses a brain implant to take control of Colin Tate, played by Christopher Abbott. He is used to try and kill the head of a firm that employs methods associated with Big Brother, but things don't go according to plan. The festival jury also awarded top prizes to German film-maker Michael Venus for "Sleep" and to French twins Ludovic and Zoran Boukherma for "Teddy", a wolfish tale that won the youth jury prize as well.

"La Nuee" (the cloud) by French director Just Philippot, won both the public prize and critics prize. Reminiscent of Hitchcock's "The Birds", Philippot uses carnivorous grasshoppers as a vehicle to set up apocalyptic scenes that make spectator's skin crawl. Gerardmer is the first French film festival each year and for the 2021 edition, it showcased 30 films, 12 of which were presented as part of its official competition. — AFP

Museums, malls re-open in Poland

Museums, art galleries, libraries and shopping malls re-opened in Poland yesterday as the country eased some of its coronavirus restrictions. But Health Minister Adam Niedzielski said most schools would remain shut until at least March. "Several countries that took decisions over Christmas that were less conservative than ours are suffering very bad consequences," he told RMF radio. Bars, restaurants, hotels, nightclubs and gyms will also stay closed until February 14 at the earliest.

"What was possible to ease in the current situation is being eased. Let's hold on a little longer to avoid a third wave," health ministry spokesman Wojciech Andrusiewicz told reporters last week. Infections and deaths have been falling in Poland in recent days. Yesterday, the health ministry reported 2,503 new infections and 42 coronavirus-related deaths over the past 24 hours. Some restaurants and nightclubs have defied the ban and re-opened but face hefty fines and police raids. Over the weekend, 150 officers were deployed to shut down a nightclub in Rybnik in southern Poland, with police using stun grenades and tear gas. — AFP



French director Just Philippot

KUNIS AND KUTCHER FILMED A SUPER BOWL COMMERCIAL

Mila Kunis and Ashton Kutcher agreed to shoot a Super Bowl commercial because they wanted to enjoy some "freedom". The 37-year-old actress and Ashton, 42, have been stuck at home with their kids - Wyatt, six, and Dimitri, four - amid the coronavirus pandemic, and they thought shooting the Cheetos commercial would give them a welcome break. Mila - who starred alongside her husband in "That '70s Show" earlier in her career - said: "It's so silly! Ashton and I, we never work together. I mean, I know we worked together before ... And in the midst of quarantine, they sent us this ad to do and every time I've ever been offered a Super Bowl ad it's always a female having to be scant-

ily clad. "And this one comes around, I started laughing so hard and Ashton was like, 'This is kind of funny.'

And I was like, "We should do it!" Mila also joked that her kids were one of the motivating factors behind the commercial. Speaking to "Entertainment Tonight", she quipped: "Also it was quarantine and we were stuck with our children for nine, 12, months at this moment, and I was like, 'Two days, baby! Two days off.' Literally we were like, 'Yeah, OK, let's do it.' And so we did it. "And I hate saying it but we were like, 'Freedom!... It was amazing!" Mila loves her children "very much" and they were disappointed to see her set off for the commercial. The Hollywood star - who married Ashton in 2015 - shared: "[I've] never been so excited to wake up at five in the morning to be like, 'I'm going to work!' And I literally skipped out of the house. My kids were like, 'You're abandoning us!' And I was like, 'Relax.'" — BangShowbiz



In this screengrab, Sia, Robin Wright, Halle Berry, Elisabeth Sereda, Andra Day and Zendaya speak at the 2021 HFWA Women Breaking Barriers Sundance Panel during the 2021 Sundance Film Festival. — AFP photos

'House of Cards' star Wright battles wilderness in Sundance debut 'Land'

US actress Robin Wright always wanted to direct, but it wasn't until Netflix's "House of Cards" crew helped her helm 10 episodes that she gained the experience to make her first movie. "What a gift that was, because otherwise I would not have had the confidence to move on and do a feature film, that's for sure," said Wright at the Sundance Film Festival premiere of her debut "Land" on Sunday.

It is a lesson in teamwork painfully ignored by the film's lead character Edeedeployed by Wright—who after suffering immense personal tragedy decides to live alone in the beautiful but unforgiving Wyoming wilderness. Arriving at a leaky, dilapidated cabin miles from civilization without phone or car, Edeedeployed attempts to teach herself to hunt and survive take a humbling and perilous turn, before the arrival of a local hunter. "Why make this movie?... It's a reminder that we do need each other," said Wright at a Q&A taking



In this screengrab, Robin Wright speaks at the 2021 HFWA Women Breaking Barriers Sundance Panel during the 2021 Sundance Film Festival in New York City.

place remotely—like the entire festival—due to the pandemic.

"We do face adversity, and it's generally the compassion and kindness of another person that gets us through that difficult time... I think we all can resonate with that right now." Even with her skills honed on Netflix's political drama, Wright faced unprecedented challenges shoot-

ing "Land" across 29 days in remote Alberta, Canada, where her team constructed a log cabin at 8,000 feet (2,400 meters). "We had one day of summer, and then all of a sudden it just turned into winter," she said "And so we had to shoot 10 to 15 (scenes)... in one day. But it was doable."

A scene featuring a bear confronting Edeedeployed couldn't be shot on the mountain real wild bears, which were so common on set that one regularly helped itself to hamburgers from the craft services table. Making matters more challenging still was the juggling act of directing for the first time while also starring. "You're in front of the camera, and you're in six feet of snow, and you can't walk... to watch playback because you're going to put footsteps in the snow—and it's freshly fallen snow that we need to shoot!" said Wright.—AFP