

US filmmaker Gus Van Sant sets Andy Warhol's early life to music

US filmmaker, writer, painter, photographer and musician, Gus Van Sant, is now turning his hand to theatre with a new musical in Lisbon about the early career of Pop Art creator, Andy Warhol. Van Sant—best-known for films such as “My Own Private Idaho” and “Good Will Hunting”—said he had long wanted to make a film about Warhol, and even wrote a screenplay with US actor River Phoenix, who died at 23 in 1993, set for the lead role. Now, in his first-ever work for the stage, the 69-year-old laureate of Cannes’ Palme d’Or has written the musical “Andy”, which is being premiered on Thursday in the Portuguese capital as part of the Biennial of Contemporary Arts where Van Sant is one of this year’s artists in residence.

“I was trying to put together the greatest hits of Andy’s life to explain his rise into the art world in the 60s,” the filmmaker said. With dialogue and songs penned by Van Sant himself, the musical—which is being staged in English in Lisbon’s prestigious Teatro Nacional D. Maria II, ahead of a European tour that takes it to cities such as Rome, Amsterdam, Paris and Athens—is a collection of anecdotes about Warhol’s encounters with leading figures of American culture, like writer Truman Capote, art critic Clement Greenberg and actor Edie Sedgwick. The picture that emerges of the artist is one of “a very strange character that is not really related to the Andy Warhol that maybe we know. He’s sort of a stand-in for Andy,” Van Sant said. Among Van Sant’s films

are biopics about iconic figures such as Nirvana singer Kurt Cobain in “Last Days” and gay rights campaigner Harvey Milk in “Milk”.

“Very few people knew who Andy Warhol really was,” said Portuguese actor Diogo Fernandes, who plays the artist in the production. “I think he was someone who was shy, fascinated by American culture and who wanted to be a star, but never imagined what impact he would have,” Fernandes told AFP. For Van Sant’s collaborator on the project, John Romao, Warhol was “someone half-hidden in the shadows, shy, but very forceful at the same time thanks to his ability to turn his ideas into reality. This made him both fascinating and frightening to those around him.” Born in Pittsburgh in 1928, Warhol began his career as a commercial illustrator.

But he soon became a leading exponent of the Pop Art movement and worked in a wide range of different media, such as painting, photography and film. His studio in New York, The Factory, was a meeting place for intellectuals, drag queens, playwrights, Hollywood celebrities and wealthy patrons. Best-known for his silkscreen paintings of “Campbell’s Soup Cans”, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and Mao Zedong, he also managed and produced the experimental rock band, The Velvet Underground, and founded Interview magazine. He died in New York at the age of 58 in 1987. — AFP

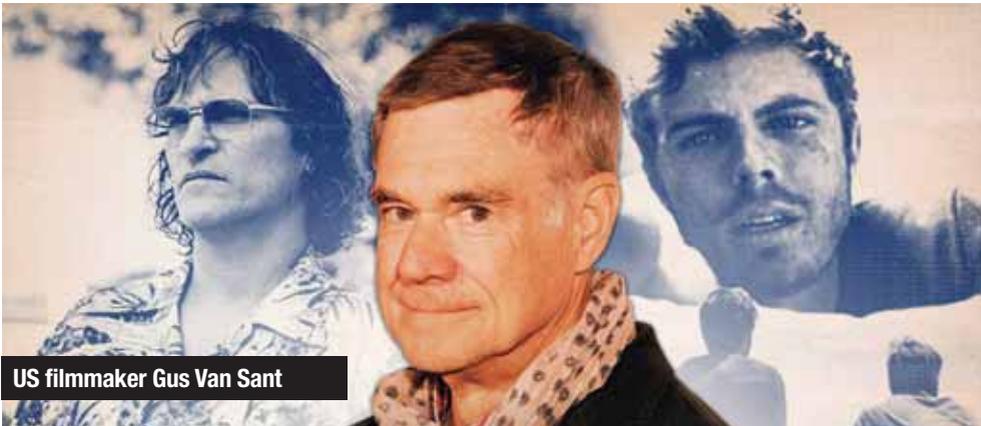


An undated photo courtesy of Sotheby's New York shows a Frida Kahlo self-portrait entitled 'Diego y yo'. — AFP

Frida Kahlo self-portrait set to smash records at auction

A Frida Kahlo self-portrait featuring her husband Diego Rivera is tipped to sell for more than \$30 million at auction in New York, Sotheby’s said Wednesday. “Diego y yo” (Diego and I), painted in 1949, “is poised to shatter” Kahlo’s current auction record of \$8 million set in 2016, the auction house said in a statement. The artwork, which will be the star lot of Sotheby’s big November sale, is also expected to smash the record for a painting by a Latin American artist. “Los Rivaless,” a 1932 work by Rivera, with whom Kahlo had a passionate and tumultuous love affair, is currently the most valuable—Christie’s sold it for \$9.8 million in May 2018.

“Diego y yo” is emblematic of Kahlo’s self-portraits, known for their intense and enigmatic gaze that made the Mexican painter, a feminist icon, famous around the world. In the painting, Rivera’s face appears on Frida’s forehead, above her distinctive eyebrows and dark eyes from which a few teardrops fall. The depiction of Rivera, who at the time was close to Mexican actress Maria Felix, as a third eye symbolizes the extent to which he tormented her thoughts, art experts say. Kahlo and Rivera married each other twice. She died aged just 47 in 1954. “Diego y yo” last sold at Sotheby’s for \$1.4 million in 1990. — AFP



US filmmaker Gus Van Sant

Tony Soprano returns in prequel film ‘The Many Saints of Newark’

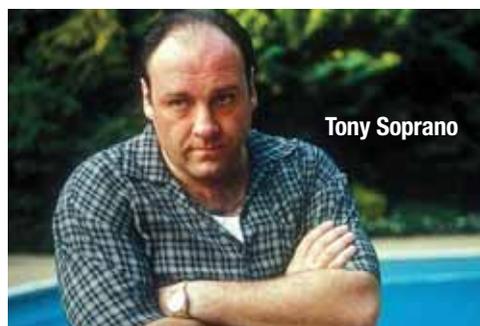
Fourteen years after the last episode of the cult television series “The Sopranos,” a film retracing the early years of future mob boss Tony Soprano premiered Wednesday in New York. Series creator David Chase, co-writer of the prequel “The Many Saints of Newark,” introduced the cast at the historic Beacon Theatre, which was transformed back into a giant cinema for the occasion. The applause redoubled for Michael Gandolfini, who stepped into the shoes of his late father to play the younger version of Tony Soprano, a role for which James Gandolfini won three Emmys with his portrayal of the violent head of a mafia clan who was also a troubled family man.

Broadcast between 1999 and 2007 on the US cable network HBO, “The Sopranos” marked the beginning of a golden age for television series with its dark humor and complex characters and made a star of James Gandolfini, who died in 2013 at the age of 51. “We miss your father!” shouted one member of the audience. In the film, 22-year-old Michael Gandolfini plays a teenage Tony Soprano in 1960s New Jersey. “I didn’t know if Michael really wanted to (do it), like whether it would be too much,” director Alan Taylor told AFP on the sidelines of the screening as part of the Tribeca film festival.

“He lost his father and to do this is very emotionally hard. Once he agreed to do it, and he showed he could with an audition, I just, I never doubted,” Taylor said. “The only thing I

had to sometimes do was pull him back from being his dad, too much. He’s not this guy yet (in the movie). He’s still the younger, a softer version of his character,” added Taylor, who directed several episodes of the original series, which ran for six seasons and won 21 Emmys and five Golden Globes. While the film traces the youthful years of Tony, a gifted teen but lacking a moral compass, caught between an absent father and an overly severe mother, the film centers on a character he venerates, Dickie Moltisanti, played by Alessandro Nivola.

The story also explores the tensions between the Italian-American and African-American communities in then-New Jersey, as well as the Newark riots of 1967 and police violence. But “The Many Saints of Newark” also includes multiple references to the series to satisfy fans. “I’ve seen the show maybe six or seven times ... (and) this definitely lived up to the hype,” Robert Quinn, 23, said after the screening. “I grew up in North Jersey. You definitely hear some people who talk like that.” The film is released this week in Britain and will be broadcast in the United States simultaneously in theaters and on HBO Max from October 1. — AFP



Tony Soprano