Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

AFM, You Oughta Be in Pictures

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, November 12th, 2014

The American Film Market is an annual ritual in the global movie business, a convocation that signals the end of one year and presages the next. Every November, the AFM overruns the Loews Hotel in Santa Monica, and several surrounding hotels, which become populated by hundreds of sales agents, thousands of producers, and innumerable civilians who seem to believe that if they dress up in costume and accost people in the lobby, someone will make their movie.

The international film business differs from the big summer studio movies. Here movies are bought and sold, and buyers (distributors) from different territories (countries) pinch, squeeze and smell the merchandise on offer from sellers (sales agents). This is largely how the independent sector operates: by selling, or pre-selling, distribution rights for movies in different countries, producers can get some cash in advance or cover their costs. A few lucky ones may even "sell out," and, having pre-sold all available rights, be in profits before the cameras even roll.

AFM is an essay in contrasts. For every high-end, legit film on offer, such as Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight,* there are probably a thousand awful, schlocky, low-brow attempts at cinema, some of which have actually been made, and many of which exist only in the imagination of their hopeful creators or on posters that promise even less than they can deliver. They have titles like *Yakuza Apocalypse* and *Sex Ed: The Movie,* the latter, which opened (or rather, didn't open) in the US as AFM started, starring Haley Joel Osment, and picturing him holding a banana with a tag-line reminder that he starred in *The Sixth Sense* (in 1999).

These photos, from my Instagram feed, give you a peek into this corner of the movie biz, generally unseen by folks who just go to the movies and want to be enlightened and entertained.

1950s-style fake crane shot, the lobby at the Loews Hotel, AFM 2014.

Will you finance our movie? A writer-director-producer with two of his stars. This one was about hot biker chicks who chase vampires. Or are vampires. Or something like that.

One-sheets for movies that may or may not exist, and that you will never see. Winner of the tag-line contest: "On Craigslist, no one can hear you scream."

You put up a backdrop, a few yards of red carpet, and everyone becomes a celebrity. As Catherine Breillat reminds us, the camera's eye is the male gaze.

Can we check our mobiles? Expectant audience at the Producers Conference, a feature of AFM. I

spoke at a panel on DIY distribution.

Int. Loews Lobby – AFM – Day. All flags flying.

Still life: The sink in a sales agent’s suite on the last day of the market, AFM 2014.

All photographs by Adam Leipzig. Top image: Dark clouds over the Loews on the last day of the American Film Market.

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