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“From Toronto to glory”

The 34th International Film Festival, starting today, is where Oscar-eager flicks debut - among them, a searing doc about the Barnes Foundation.



By Steven Rea
Inquirer Movie Columnist and Critic

Starting tonight with the world premiere of *Creation*, a movie about naturalist Charles Darwin starring Paul Bettany, and closing a week from Saturday with *Young Victoria*, with Emily Blunt as Britain's mighty monarch, the 34th Toronto International Film Festival promises 271 features and more than 500 filmmakers and red-carpet-treading stars. (Most of the 271 films are *not* about historic 19th-century Englishfolk.)

An epic collision of studio releases with Oscar ambitions, of titles from Europe and Asia, Africa and the Americas, Down Under and Up There (Iceland, Scandinavia), TIFF09 boasts the latest from Pedro Almodóvar (*Broken Embraces*, with Penélope Cruz), the Coen brothers (*A Serious Man*), and documentarian Michael Moore (*Capitalism: A Love Story*). George Clooney will be there to talk up *Up in the Air*, and Megan Fox will pose provocatively as she unveils her hip horror exercise *Jennifer's Body* (scripted by *Juno's* Diablo Cody).

Of particular interest to Philadelphia-area residents, and art lovers the world over, is Don Argott's *The Art of the Steal*, a conspiracy theory-documentary about the Barnes collection and its controversial move from Merion to a new site on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway.

Although the film will have its world premiere Saturday at North America's biggest and most prestigious festival, *The Art of the Steal* was screened for a handful of critics in New York last week. It presents a strong case that a "cabal" of Philadelphia power brokers past and present - including John Street, Ed Rendell, billionaire Raymond Perelman, the Pew Charitable Trusts' Rebecca Rimel, and the late publishing magnate Walter Annenberg - strategized to defy the last will and testament of billionaire collector Albert C. Barnes, ultimately succeeding in wresting hundreds of Cezannes, Matisses, Picassos, Renoirs, and van Goghs from the eccentric physician-turned-art educator's Foundation headquarters on leafy Latch's Lane to a new spot just blocks from the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

This important and fascinating film - guaranteed to upset more than a few people on both sides of the Barnes battle - will no doubt find theatrical and broadcast distribution at TIFF. Look for much, much more about this incendiary film, also to be shown at the New York Film Festival later in September, in the weeks and months ahead.

Other anticipated new work debuting at Toronto includes:

An Education, a 1960s coming-of-age tale with Carey Mulligan as a teenage Brit who falls for a man twice her age (Peter Sarsgaard). Nick Hornby wrote the screenplay, based on Lynn Barber's memoir.

Tales From the Golden Age, written by Romanian director Cristian Mungiu, following up his grim masterpiece, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*.

The Road, an adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's postapocalyptic yarn starring Viggo Mortensen.

Bright Star, Jane Campion's beautiful bio of poet John Keats and his brief, heated romance with the young Fanny Brawne.

Antichrist and *The White Ribbon*, a pair of controversial Cannes entries from, respectively, Lars von Trier and Michael Haneke. The former is sexually explicit and super-violent; the latter depicts the physical abuse of children.

The Vintner's Luck, an oenophilic tale from director Niki Caro set in 19th-century France, but shot in 21st-century New Zealand.

The Bad Lieutenant, Werner Herzog's loose remake of the intense Harvey Keitel corrupt-cop drama, with Nicolas Cage in the title role.

The Private Lives of Pippa Lee, from writer and director Rebecca Miller, and starring Maria Bello, Winona Ryder, and Robin Wright Penn.

The Toronto fest, which turns the Canadian city into one giant communal cinematheque (Torontonians are some of the most ardent filmgoers on the planet), has been used in recent years as a platform for the Hollywood studios to launch their awards-season campaigns.

Last year, *Slumdog Millionaire* rocketed into an Oscar-bound trajectory after experiencing one of the most enthusiastic press and industry responses in festival history. Likewise, Mickey Rourke and *The Wrestler* turned heads, setting the actor and the film on their prize-nabbing autumn march.

With the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences expanding its field of best-picture contenders from five to 10 for Oscar 2010, the field of possibilities at Toronto

gets wider. Needless to say, expectations - from filmmakers, from distributors, from buyers, press, and festival-going fans - are high.