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Dance Camera West, at the intersection of choreography and film

The festival will show 32 films — including 'The Co(te)lette Film,' Mike Figgis' collaboration with Ann Van den Broek — beginning Thursday.

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Dance Camera West (Dance Camera West / June 15, 2011)

By Victoria Looseleaf, Special to the Los Angeles Times
June 15, 2011

Ever since Thomas Edison hand-tinted the swirling skirts of modern dance pioneer Loie Fuller in the film version of the 1905 "Danse Serpentine," there's been an interest in capturing this most ethereal art form on celluloid.

Flash forward to 2011 and the 10th Dance Camera West, the festival dedicated to the intersection of cinematography and choreography.



Founded by Lynette Kessler in 2002, the festival's offerings have always been a far cry from the usual summer movie fare

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have always been a far cry from the usual summer movie fare. Opening night at the Getty Center features nine short dance films from around the world. Included are the American premieres of two Dutch films, "Horseplay," featuring a herd of Friesian horses and a male duet, and "Rehearsal 101," a peek at a ballerina striving for perfection — from all angles and without a body double à la "Black Swan."

Thirty-two films from nine countries will be on view Thursday to Sunday at several Westside venues.

Audiences for Dance Camera West are as eclectic as the films, Kessler says. "People come from every art discipline, not just the dance world. There are also a lot of industry people — producers, directors, composers, designers," she adds. "The work is stunning in its application and creativity and it's not dance as some would identify dance — a pointed toe, a full body in the picture. It makes people become more aware of their everyday movements."

There's nothing everyday about Mike Figgis' award-winning, "The Co(te)lette Film," a collaboration with Dutch choreographer Ann Van den Broek, who earned the Swan, Holland's most prestigious dance honor, in 2008 after touring the concert piece for a year. Kessler scored a coup in bringing the Oscar-nominated director ("Leaving Las Vegas"), to town to discuss the film, which has its American premiere Saturday at the Hammer Museum's Billy Wilder Theater.

At 55 minutes, "Co(te)lette" is a kind of postmodern "Showgirls" meets "Fight Club" punctuated with a dance marathon vibe. This unrelenting portrait of three women features female flesh bruised, naked, quivering and in erotically charged poses. Van den Broek says that "Co(te)lette," — literally "a piece of meat" — was also inspired by French feminist writer Colette.

As for British-born Figgis, he's no stranger to dance, having previously made documentaries featuring avant-garde choreographer William Forsythe ("Just Dancing Around"), and "Flamenco Women," both from the '90s. Speaking by phone from London, he said, "I love dance and the ballsy way Ann was dealing with this material in an uncompromising way," Figgis said. "I also didn't want to alter her choreography. It's already quite inflammatory as a piece of dance theater, and when you introduce cameras and angles, it becomes more edgy."

"The Co(te)lette Film" was commissioned by Belgian and Dutch television and was made for about \$400,000. It pushes both boundaries and bodies to the brink. "I liked dealing with sexual issues that were so confrontational that they transcended the kind of voyeuristic, the sort of shallowness, if you like, that you can get just with bodies," Figgis said.

Having staged "Lucrezia Borgia" in February for English National Opera that also included a live 3-D telecast, Figgis, 63, incorporated several highly eroticized Renaissance paintings — what he calls "Renaissance porn" — into short films he made as part of that production.

"Some of these ideas — the use and abuse of women in the opera — I could see with Ann's ideas in "Co(te)lette," he said. "Her choreography is one of the few pieces I've seen that successfully takes those images — pornographic in many instances — and takes them somewhere else. The intention is very clear and I liked that."

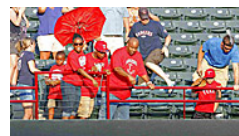
For those who might prefer gentler dance films, the festival will not disappoint. Friday evening's short offerings screen outdoors amid bucolic surroundings at UCLA's Fowler Museum Amphitheater. They include "Stronger," a four-minute B-boy romp through the forest from Britain, and the experimental, nonfiction American short "Together: Dancing With Spinner Dolphins," a look at the tender relationships forged between human and dolphin.



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Eight short films are also on tap at the Hammer on Saturday, including selections from Australia, Mexico, Canada, with the West Coast and U.S. premieres, respectively, of "Figment," a homage to Joseph Cornell's boxes, and "Vias de Vuelo," a humorous look at a contemporary Icarus.

New this year, too, is a conference, "Dance Media: An Active Spectrum," comprising panels of artists, dancers, educators and business professionals from the TV and film industries. Says Victoria Marks, conference panelist and UCLA choreography and performance professor: "Dance Camera West is great for L.A. art makers, dance makers and filmmakers, because it allows us to participate in that larger conversation of what people are making, how they're making it and what they're paying attention to.

Fans of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui will want to pay attention to "Sutra," one of three long-form documentaries closing the festival (all West Coast premieres), as the Flemish Moroccan's choreography, inspired by Shaolin monks, is vividly captured on film by director Deborah May. Fabrice Herrault will also be on hand to discuss his film, "Claude Bessy —Lignes d'une Vie: Traces of a Life," in the film that looks at the legendary rising star of the Paris Opera Ballet during World War II.

Kessler has plans to develop and find a larger market for these kinds of films. "Dance media is a new visual language for our time, and our crusade is to bring the creative back into the industry," she said.



calendar@latimes.com

Dance Camera West

When: Thursday-Sunday

Complete schedule: <http://www.dancecamerawest.org>

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