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LACMA 2002

"When you have two characters and the desert, it's like you have three characters. The desert becomes something you start reacting to."—Gus Van Sant

The Essential Gus Van Sant

Los Angeles Premiere of *Gerry*

Gus Van Sant occupies a unique niche in American cinema. Over the past twenty years, this most independent and "European" of American directors has given each of his films a distinct look, tone, and atmosphere. Whether he is presenting raw dramas about male bonding on the fringes of society—like *Mala Noche* and *My Own Private Idaho*—or sardonic portraits of individuals who challenge conventional assumptions of the American success story—as in *Good Will Hunting* and *To Die For*—Van Sant invests his films with a heightened sense of style and a rich emotional texture that never detract from the harsh realities his characters frequently face and rarely overcome.

With *Gerry*, Van Sant has renewed his reputation as a risk-taking filmmaker by making one of his most radical films, a work that builds to an emotional and aesthetic crescendo and marks a new and exciting direction in his career. Following the film's highly anticipated and hotly debated premiere at this year's Sundance Film Festival, critics reached for comparisons to explain Van Sant's remarkable achievement, citing European filmmakers such as Theo Angelopoulos, Michelangelo Antonioni, Jacques Tati, and most notably Chantal Akerman and Bela Tarr, both of whom Van Sant has openly acknowledged as major influences. However, critic Amy Taubin, writing in *Film Comment*, best describes the film's unique power: "*Gerry* is an extremely disconcerting film—emotionally and aesthetically—partly because of its hybridity. It's neither an avant-garde landscape epic such as Michael Snow's *La Region Centrale* nor a narrative movie such as *Thelma and Louise* or Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*, which use landscape to define character and story. But like those three, it is a distinctly North American film. . . . Its inspiration is the land itself—the huge incomprehensible scale of it—and the loneliness it engenders."

This preview screening is courtesy of THINKFilm, special thanks to Mark Urman.



Gerry, Photo: Van Sant/Savides

Thursday, October 17

Mala Noche (1985/b&w/78 min.)

Scr/dir: Gus Van Sant; w/ Tim Streeter, Doug Cooneyate, Ray Monge.

Mala Noche is a beautifully grainy black-and-white trip through Portland's skid row that follows a young grocery store clerk's obsession with a Mexican teen on the run from immigration police. Van Sant's feature debut was acclaimed by critics for its gritty portrayal of love and sex on society's fringe.

Shorts by Gus Van Sant (c. 60 minutes)

A rare chance to see shorts from throughout Van Sant's career including **Five Ways to Kill Yourself** (1987), **My New Friend** (1987), and **Ballad of the Skeletons** (1996).

Friday, October 18

Drugstore Cowboy (1989/color/100 min.)

Scr: Gus Van Sant, Daniel Yost; dir: Gus Van Sant; w/ Matt Dillon, Kelly Lynch, James LeGros, Heather Graham.

Based on an unpublished novel by James Fogle (who is currently serving time in a Washington State penitentiary for the same drugstore heists depicted in the film), *Drugstore Cowboy* is an insider's look at the junkie lifestyle, without romanticization or finger-wagging. With vividly drawn performances by Matt Dillon and Kelly Lynch and a sublime cameo by William S. Burroughs.

My Own Private Idaho (1992/color/102 min.)

Scr/dir: Gus Van Sant; w/ River Phoenix, Keanu Reeves.

A sweet-tempered, narcoleptic street hustler on a quest for stability and love is ultimately betrayed by those closest to him. Van Sant openly lifts characters and situations from Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, and this heartfelt portrait of one of life's innocents is by turns a highly theatrical, dreamily poetic, and cinematically audacious film.

Saturday, October 19

Gerry (2002/color/103 min.)

Los Angeles Premiere

Special Guest: Gus Van Sant

Shot in Argentina and Death Valley and based on the true story of two young men who became lost while hiking in the desert, *Gerry* moves beyond this basic premise and away from conventional psychology to evoke the beauty, freedom, and cruelty of nature and the isolation of the figures who pass through it. Spare and rigorously edited, at times darkly humorous and deeply affecting, *Gerry* uses all the resources of cinema—cinematography, editing, music, and stars—to construct a mesmerizing glimpse into the abyss. "A spellbinding work, open to surprise, possibility, and wonder . . . and one of the most abstractly beautiful movies an American filmmaker has ever attempted."—*IndieWire*



Gerry, Photo: Van Sant/Savides