



Director Gus Van Sant On Finding Stories In Unexpected Places

by Megan Williams
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River Phoenix on the set of *My Own Private Idaho*, 1991.

Since the 1980s, the filmmaker and artist has turned his lens towards the fringes. He talks to us about relinquishing control, Hollywood reboot culture, and how a Gucci mini-series captured the spirit of his early works.

Gus Van Sant has engaged with filmmaking in every which way. He's had the mainstream Oscar success story with *Good Will Hunting*, done the Hollywood remake (though not as you know it) with 1998's *Psycho*, and directed a career's worth of compelling indie pictures, *Drugstore Cowboy*, *My Own Private Idaho* and *Elephant* among them.

What knits his work together is his proclivity for telling stories about life on the margins, which end up speaking to the wider human condition. The characters in his films are often "not necessarily linked by family," he tells us, but people brought together by shared circumstances who end up creating "their own version of a group or family". He leaves audiences empathising with characters they may have little in common with on paper, were it not for the feelings of love, loss and listlessness that have touched most of us in one way or another.

Van Sant is the subject of a new book by Katya Tylevich called *The Art of Making Movies*, which sheds light on his creative process, offers up anecdotes and revelations gathered throughout his filmmaking career, and gives an insight into his art practice. It's brought to life with a wealth of moviemaking materials - storyboards, stills, and behind-the-scenes images - as well as Van Sant's own catalogue of Polaroids. His many sitters include John Waters, two Coppolas (Francis Ford and Sofia), David Bowie, William S. Burroughs, and David Byrne, who along with the other Talking Heads studied at the Rhode Island School of Design around the same time as Van Sant in the 70s.

"As a school, it's filled with a lot of creative kids of that period," says Van Sant, who originally intended to study art but instead majored in film, graduating in 1975. "It's strange, the other people that later went like Shepard Fairey or Joe Bradley, who's a painter, they seemed to be very similar, even though they're from different decades, to the students that were there in the early 70s."



Gus Van Sant testing an Arriflex 16S. Both photos by Eric Alan Edwards