

# What the Tokyo world premiere means for 'Motel Acacia' team

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The horror film "Motel Acacia," which will have its world premiere at the 32nd Tokyo International Film Festival in Japan (TIFFJP) on November 1, Friday, is touted to be more than just a scarefest.

"As the creatures and monsters in Motel Acacia strike terror in our minds, it is the actions of humans that terrify me. This film seeks to understand our own apathy towards man's cruelty in today's society," explains director Bradley Liew.



Photo from the [Epicmedia website](#)

The Malaysian-born filmmaker based in the Philippines continues, "It is about the scars of colonialism in Southeast Asia and how it facilitates the vicious cycle of violence. It's about a young man's search for truth and the affirmation that there is good inside us all, no matter how dark the times are."

Award-winning producer Bianca Balbuena, who is Liew's wife, relates how grateful they are for having been given the TIFFJP platform to showcase their work to a global audience. "We found a good place to launch 'Motel Acacia' here and we hope to get a good response also," says the 2018 Asian Film Commissions Network (AFCNet) Producer of the Year.

Her notable works include Pepe Diokno's "Clash (Engkwentro)," plus Lav Diaz's "A Lullaby to the Sorrowful Mystery (Hele sa Hiwagang Hapis" and "Season of the Devil (Ang Panahon ng Halimaw)."

Balbuena adds, "Yoshihiko Yatabe and Kenji Ishizaka, the head programmers, have been our good supporters. And even if we submitted late, they watched the film with great interest and wrote personal messages to us on how they love the film."



Photo from the [Epicmedia website](#)

Proudly representing the Philippines

"Motel Acacia" is among the eight films included in the Asian Future section for up-and-coming directors who have a maximum of three feature-length films.



Photo from the [Epicmedia website](#)

It is about a man, portrayed by JC Santos, who confronts a demon haunting a motel that he took over from his father. Santos is part of the multinational crew and cast which includes actors Jan Bijvoet and Nicholas Saputra.

"Sobrang honored bordering nakakaiyak (I am very honored, bordering on being on the verge of tears)," says Santos before letting out a laugh. Turning serious, he reveals that it is his first time to represent the county.

"Sobrang proud ako na nakakasali ang pelikulang Pinoy sa film festivals tulad nito. Sana ma-experience ito ng lahat ng actors sa bansa natin. Na-validate ulit 'yung feeling ko na gusto ko talaga itong ginagawa ko," he declares.

[Translation: I am very proud that Filipino Films get to join film festivals just like TIFF. I hope that all Filipino actors can experience this, too. This validates once again my feeling that I really want what I am doing.]

Balbuena, on the other hand, is not a newbie at the TIFFJP. "Tokyo IFF has always had a special place in my heart ever since Pepe Diokno's 'Above The Clouds' competed here," she remarks.



Photo from the [Epicmedia website](#)

She eagerly announces that the "Motel Acacia" second screening at TIFFJP 2019 has been sold out. In addition, she lauds Picture Tree International and XYZ Films for securing distribution in other countries.

After Japan, "Motel Acacia" is set to be screened in November at the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival in Taiwan. It will also serve as the closing film of the Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival in Indonesia.