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Cannes Film Festival 2021: Director Paul Verhoeven's

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Paul Verhoeven's latest venture Benedetta, a story of two nuns in remote Italian monastery having a sexual relationship, has created a storm at the Cannes Film Festival.

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GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

Many, many years ago in 1992, Dutch director, Paul Verhoeven's Basic Instinct created a storm at the Cannes Film Festival, where it premiered. It had a very explicit scene of Sharon Stone with her ice pick crossing and uncrossing her legs. She did not have her underwear on, and Stone had recently said that she was tricked into doing that scene.

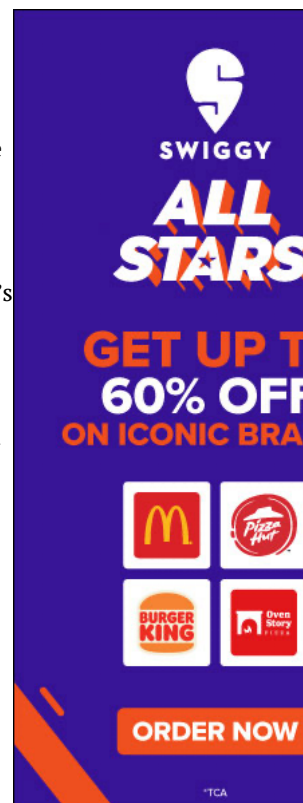
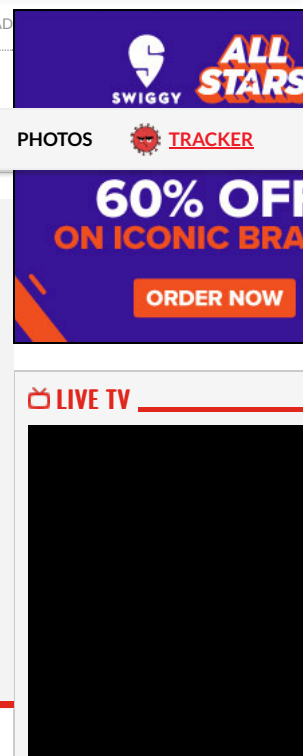
Verhoeven denied it, and now he has given up the ice pick for yet another salacious story of two nuns in remote Italian monastery having a sexual relationship. The movie, playing at the ongoing Cannes Film Festival, is Benedetta.

Based on a book, Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy by Judith C. Brown, Verhoeven's work has already opened up a Pandora's Box at Cannes with heated discussions and debates and arguments flying across the Cannes beach front called Croisette.

And Verhoeven's came out strongly in support of his movie at a Press conference which followed the Benedetta screening. He lambasted the "new puritanism" which has engulfed cinema and even went to the extent of saying that critics "don't want to look at the reality of life."



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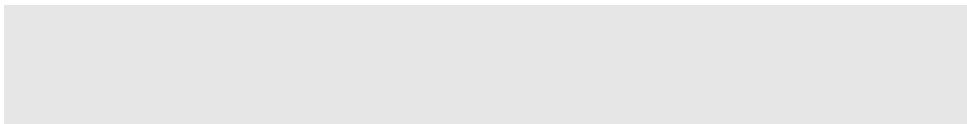


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He said time and again during the Press meet that his film — starring Virginie Efira and Daphne Pataxia as two nuns embarking on an illicit lesbian affair in their convent — was “based on a true story from 16th-century Italy”. He also read a passage from the book depicting the trial of the two nuns.

“I don’t really understand how you can really blaspheme about something that happened, even in 1625,” he said. “You cannot change history, you cannot change things that happened, and I based it on the things that happened. So I think the word blasphemy in this case is stupid.”

Verhoeven did not mask his ire when a reporter asked him about a “new hysteria regarding nudity”. The director minced no words: “Don’t forget, in general, people, when they have sex, they take their clothes off. So I’m stunned basically by the fact that we don’t want to look at the reality of life. Why this puritanism has been introduced — it is in my opinion wrong.”



Finally, can there ever be a Cannes without controversy. Some years ago, Danish auteur Lars Von Trier ruffled half the world when he said (presumably as a joke) that he supported Hitler. He was speaking at a Press conference following the screening of his Competition entry, Melancholia. The Festival was in a fix with dozens of phone calls from across continents. And Cannes had no option but to declare Von Trier persona non-grata and he was asked to leave the city.

This year, we have Verhoeven’ and his Benedetta to create all the excitement.

(Author, movie critic Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered the Cannes Film Festival for 29 years)

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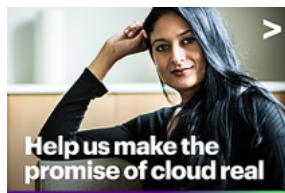
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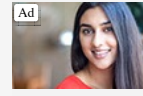
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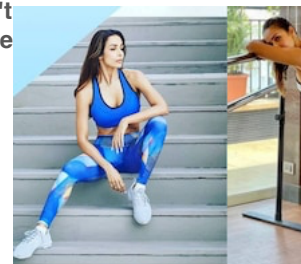
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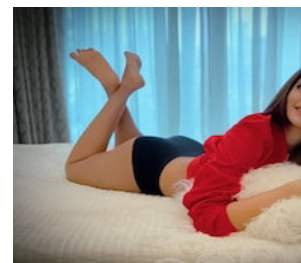
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