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Alpha Violet Co-Head Virginie Devesa Talks Decade Of Launching Talents Including Christos Nikou, Fernanda Valadez & Myroslav Slaboshpytskyi – Venice Q&A

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September 2, 2022 8:07am



Alpha Violet

[Alpha Violet](#) founding co-heads Virginie Devesa and Keiko Funato are at the [Venice](#) Film Festival this year with Indonesian filmmaker Makbul Mubarak's first film *Autobiography*, which plays in Horizons ahead of trips to Toronto and London among other festivals.

The coming-of-age drama, exploring the legacy of Indonesia's 30-year military dictatorship, revolves around a young boy working as a housekeeper in the empty mansion of a retired general.

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Devesa and Funato, who fete the 10th anniversary of their Paris-based sales boutique Alpha Violet in October, have a strong record of launching debut features on the Lido having previously handled Japanese filmmaker Kei Ishikawa's 2016 feature *Gukoroku, Traces of Sin* and Greek director [Christos Nikou's](#) 2020 breakout *Apples*, which both played in Horizons.

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Neither title won the top prize, but both works put the directors on the international festival and industry map. Ishikawa is back in Horizons this year with his third film *A Man*, while Nikou is currently gearing up for the shoot of his English-language debut *Fingernails*, starring Jessie Buckley and Riz Ahmed, for Apple Original Films.

Prize winners in Alpha Violet's carefully curated library of some 60 titles include *Here And There* by Spanish U.S.-based filmmaker Antonio Mendez Esparza and Ukrainian director *Myroslav Slaboshpytskyi's The Tribe*, which won the Cannes Critics' Week Grand Prix in 2012 and 2014, respectively.

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The company has also found success on the North American festival circuit, with Mexican director *Fernanda Valadez's Identifying Features*, which won Sundance's Audience Award and Best Screenplay in the World Cinema Dramatic lineup in 2020, and Sundance 2022 Grand Jury Prize winner *Utama* by Alejandro Loayza Grisi.

Like Nikou, Slaboshpytskyi is also now preparing for an English-language debut *The Tiger*, based on his adaptation of John Vaillant's book, which will star Alexander Skarsgard and Dane DeHaan. Other directors handled by Alpha Violet early on in their careers include Santiago Mitre (*El Estudiante*), Frelle Pettersen (*Uncle*) and Agnieszka Smoczyńska (*Fugue*).

Devesa and Funato met while working at Hengameh Panahi's Celluloid Dreams in the early 2000s. Devesa had previously spent two years in Ukraine where she joined the team running the Kyiv Film Festival. Funato had moved to Paris from Japan in the 1990s, having begun her career at Tokyo-based indie distributor Uplink Co.

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They went their separate ways for a time, with Devesa moving to Moscow to take up the post of cultural attaché at the French embassy, before reuniting at Frédéric Corvez's UMedia (now Urban
ution International).

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their international connections and sales and acquisition know-how to focus on world cinema and first films by emerging directors.

Deadline sat down with Devesa to talk about Alpha Violet's first decade of activity.

DEADLINE: *What prompted you to set up your own indie sales company?*

VIRGINIE DEVESA: It was Keiko who suggested the move. We met at Celluloid Dreams and became very good friends. We then worked together at UMedia. We have this need for independence, to be more in control of the films that we chose to get behind. We're complementary. Keiko loves to do things in an artisanal way, I think it comes from her culture, while I studied communication and am more of a people person.

DEADLINE: *The name Alpha Violet, where does it come from?*

DEVESA: I won't lie to you, "Alpha" was partly to be high up in alphabetical lists. "Violet" came from a Cannes marketing campaign we devised while at UMedia to promote Peruvian directors Daniel and Diego Vega's feature *October* [winner of Cannes Un Certain Regard's jury prize in 2010].

October is known as the purple month in Peru. We didn't have much of a marketing budget, so we came up with the idea of putting up purple balloons up and down the Croisette and I bought myself a purple wardrobe. The color stuck with us.

DEADLINE: *How many films do you handle a year?*

DEVESA: Five, six. We should do more, financially it would make sense, but we don't want to. We put a lot of energy into framing and positioning these first films in the right festivals, paying close attention to everything from the first-look images, the artwork and the trailer and getting the right PR attached. When you work with first-time filmmakers, you often have to create everything from scratch, making sure the film is properly valued. With *Autobiography*, we're only going to screen in competitions for six months, before letting it play elsewhere.

DEADLINE: *You have a particularly strong track record in scouting first films with festival and awards potential out of Latin America. What's your secret?*

DEVESA: I have Spanish roots and speak fluent Spanish which helps. I knew I wanted Latin American cinema to be part of our slate but took the decision that we would do just one Latin American film a year and that it would be something really special. We scout our projects through a variety of sources. Of course, we check out all the co-production markets, but I do a lot of mentoring and other things throughout the year. For example, I work with the Produire Au Sud workshop of the Festival des 3 Continents, which is where I first came across *Utama*. More recently, I read a lot of synopses and we have a network of producers we work with too.

DEADLINE: *France has a rich network of international sales companies and there is a lot of*

DEVESA: We can't offer substantial MGs like some of the other companies, but when a young director comes to us, they know, they'll be completely taken care of, pampered even, and that our focus will be on their film.

DEADLINE: *What happened to the Chernobyl-set feature by Myroslav Slaboshpytskyi [provisionally entitled Luxembourg] that you were going to co-produce after The Tribe?*

DEVESA: We had a great relationship with Myroslav, helped by the fact I had spent time in Ukraine and he asked us to co-produce his second feature. I even went onto the pre-shooting for five days, visiting the exclusion zone and staying with him at his home.

It was a disappointment it didn't happen, but the upshot was that we set up a small production entity, run by our business affairs manager Jean-Baptiste Bailly-Maitre, through which we are now co-producing Lila Avilés' second film, whose debut feature *The Chambermaid* we handled, [getting it into Toronto's Discovery strand]. We don't have plans to get majorly into production but it gives us the possibility to apply for Cinema du Monde and Arte funding on one or two projects a year.

DEADLINE: *Is it frustrating to put so much time and energy into emerging filmmakers, for them then to be snapped up by bigger sales companies or the platforms, as is the case with Nikou and Slaboshpytskyi?*

DEVESA: It can be hard, but I've reflected on this a lot and it's forced me to think about what's my drive, what's my motor. I've come to the conclusion that what I like to do is to elevate these young filmmakers, who are unknown and at the very beginning of their careers. It's amazing to accompany them.

Once we've got them on the road, it's for them to continue their career. If Christos is making a film for Apple that's great. We still talk all the time and if ever he needs support for future films, we're there. I see our mission as talent accelerators, and as long as we have the energy and drive this is what we will continue to do.

