



**NEW YORK:** A DEFINING PERIOD IN  
THE HISTORY OF THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
FILM, ART AND MUSIC

**NO WAVE CINEMA**





Cover image: Debbie Harry from *The Blank Generation*, [1976, 16mm], photo: Fernando Natalici. Courtesy of Amos Poe.  
This page: *Unmade Beds*, [1977, 16mm], photo: Fernando Natalici. Courtesy of Amos Poe.

The Cast: Blondie (Debbie Harry, Chris Stein), Talking Heads, The Ramones, Television, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Glenn O'Brien, David McDermott, Patty Astor, James Nares, Eric Mitchell, Amos Poe, Keith Haring, Kenny Sharf, Julian Schnabel, Fab Five Freddy, King Kreole and the Coconuts, Arto Lindsay and DNA, James White and the Blacks, The Plastics, Duncan Hannah, Lydia Lunch, Klaus Nomi, George Clinton, Maripol, Danny Rosen, Patti Smith, Vivienne Dick, Ivan Kral, John Lurie, Jim Jarmusch, Tom DiCillo, Diego Cortez, Lee Quinones, Vincent Gallo, Steve Buscemi and many, many more...

Clockwise, from top left: *The Blank Generation*, [1976, 16mm]. Debbie Harry from *The Foreigner*, [1978, 16mm]. *The Foreigner*, [1978, 16mm]. Photos: Fernando Natalici. Courtesy of Amos Poe.



## BACKGROUND

From the mid 1970s to the early 1980s, New York City's East Village was the home, studio and playground to an eclectic group of young arrivals, hailing from all parts of America as well as Europe. Although from disparate backgrounds, these newcomers shared similar interests and passions about music, art, film and performance. Coupled with the neighbourhood's low rents and vibrant club scene, the East Village proved to be an invaluable partner to this small group who would go on to alter the course of film history by defining the *No Wave Cinema* movement.

No Wave Cinema, in many ways, was the result of the ever-evolving relationships and interchangeable roles between the East Village artists. Beginning in the mid 1970s with the Punk/New Wave movement, this scene provided a platform for collaborative experimentation: filmmakers created projected works for gigs; musicians composed sounds for artworks; artists/writers/filmmakers were in bands (James Nares and Jim Jarmusch in *Del-Byzanteens*; Glenn O'Brien in *Konerad*; Vivienne Dick in *Beirut Slump*).

However, it was in 1975 when Amos Poe, an Israeli-born photographer, and Ivan Kral, the guitarist with Patti Smith Group, set out to direct and produce a 16mm film on the punk scene. The result was the cult classic, *THE BLANK GENERATION*. The film depicts seminal performances from the *Ramones*, *Patti Smith Group*, *Blondie*, *Television*, *Talking Heads* and *Johnny Thunders* and proved to be an important launching point for the development of No Wave Cinema: 'what these artists did for music, this film did for cinema'.<sup>1</sup>



Above: *The Long Island Four*, [1979, Super 8mm]

Courtesy of the estate of Anders Grafstrom and Majka Lamprecht

<sup>1</sup> Notes from *East Village USA Film Festival* programme, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 2004.



Above: Jean-Michel Basquiat in *Downtown 81*, [1981/2000, 35mm], photo: Edo Bertoglio Courtesy Glenn O'Brien and Maripol.  
Below: David McDermott as Caligula in *Rome 78*, [1978, Super 8mm] Courtesy of James Nares.



### NO WAVE CINEMA

The movement (1976–1984) reflected the interests, lifestyles and modest means of its participants. These traits were integral to identifying common links amongst this East Village group, and highlighting the differences between themselves and nearly every other filmmaker of this period. As the first generation to grow up with television, they had a strong desire to tell stories that were not being portrayed in mainstream American cinema. These young filmmakers embraced the B-Movie genre, the avant garde and French New Wave as their ideal cinematic forms.

The films, for the most part, were shot on Super 8mm sound film (in some cases 16mm). This decision was for pragmatic reasons – they could afford to buy and develop it. As a result, the majority of the films shared distinctly identifiable visuals and sound.

Their exhibition was equally distinctive. Rather than use conventional theatres, the films were exhibited in the in-between spaces frequented by their makers as well as their group of faithful supporters: in lofts, gigs and other alternative spaces in the East Village. With this independent approach, the No Wave directors were free from the constraints experienced by other filmmakers who needed access to studio distribution as well as funding. In other words, they made the films they wanted to make without fear of censorship.

Below, left: Glenn O'Brien and David McDermott on the set of *Glenn O'Brien's TV Party*, [1978 – 1982], photo: Bobby Grossman. Courtesy of Glenn O'Brien. Below, right: Eric Mitchell and Lydia Lunch in *Rome 78*, [1978, Super 8mm] Courtesy of James Nares.



### **LONG ISLAND FOUR**

1979, Super 8mm transferred to DVD,  
colour, 76 mins

Written and directed by Anders Grafstrom  
Cast includes: David McDermott, Lance Loud, Bradley Fields, Kristian Hoffman with Eric Mitchell, Patty Astor, Klaus Nomi and Tina L'hotsky  
*Courtesy of the estate of Anders Grafstrom and Majka Lamprecht*

### **ROME 78**

1978, Super 8mm transferred to DVD,  
colour, 80 mins

Written, directed and produced by James Nares  
Cast includes: David McDermott, Kristian Hoffman, Tina L'hotsky, Lydia Lunch, Eric Mitchell, Patty Astor, John Lurie, Bradley Fields, Lance Loud, Anya Phillips and James Chance  
*Courtesy of James Nares*

### **THE BLANK GENERATION**

1976, 16mm transferred to DVD,  
b/w, 56 mins

Directed and produced by Amos Poe and Ivan Kral  
Featuring: The Ramones, Blondie, Talking Heads, Patti Smith Group, Television, Heartbreakers, Wayne County and Dolls  
*Courtesy of Amos Poe*

### **UNMADE BEDS**

1977, 16mm transferred to DVD,  
b/w, 77 mins

Written, directed and produced by Amos Poe  
Music by Ivan Kral  
Cast: Duncan Hannah, Eric Mitchell, Patti Astor, Robert Gordon and Debbie Harry  
*Courtesy of Amos Poe*

### **THE FOREIGNER**

1978, 16mm transferred to DVD,  
b/w, 95 mins

Written, directed and produced by Amos Poe  
Screenplay by Amos Poe and Eric Mitchell  
Music by Ivan Kral  
Cast: Eric Mitchell, Patti Astor, Duncan Hannah, Terens Severine, Debbie Harry and Anya Phillips  
*Courtesy of Amos Poe*

### **UNDERGROUND USA**

1980, 16mm transferred to DVD,  
colour, 73 mins

Produced and directed by Eric Mitchell  
Cast: Eric Mitchell, Patti Astor, Rene Ricard, Cookie Mueller, John Lurie, Taylor Mead, Jackie Curtis and Tom Wright  
*Courtesy of Eric Mitchell*

### **DOWNTOWN 81**

1981/2000; 35mm transferred to DVD,  
colour, 72 mins

Directed by Edo Bertoglio  
Written and co-produced by Glenn O'Brien  
Co-produced by Maripol  
Cast includes: Jean-Michel Basquiat, Debbie Harry, Arto Lindsay, Danny and Lisa Rosen, Fab Five Freddy, Amos Poe, Daniela Morera, David McDermott, Glenn O'Brien, Maripol, Cookie Mueller, King Creole and the Coconut, The Plastics, Michael Holman, Diego Cortez, Bradley Field, Walter Steding, James White and the Blacks and many more  
*Courtesy of Glenn O'Brien and Maripol*

### **Glenn O'Brien's TV PARTY**

1978 – 1982, DVD,  
b/w & colour, 94 mins

Presented and produced by Glenn O'Brien  
Directed by Amos Poe  
Co-hosted by Chris Stein  
Camera by Edo Bertoglio, Fred Braithwaite, Lisa Rosen  
TV PARTY Orchestra directed by Walter Steding  
Featuring: Debbie Harry, David McDermott, Jean-Michel Basquiat, John Lurie, Klaus Nomi, Art Lindsay, Mick Jones of the Clash, Steven Meisel, David Byrne and George Clinton  
*Courtesy of Glenn O'Brien*

Below: *Unmade Beds*, [1977, 16mm], photo: Fernando Natalici. Courtesy of Amos Poe.



## FILM PROGRAMME

For the Irish Museum of Modern Art's **New York: No Wave** film programme, I have made a selection of films which I hope will relay not only a sense of the time but an understanding of how these dynamic artists worked together. My rationale in selecting these films is to identify several members, familiar and of interest to Irish audiences, from the period, who, within the programme's entirety, will hopefully reveal an interesting story. They include: writer and cultural icon, Glenn O'Brien; Blondie's Debbie Harry and Chris Stein; artist, Jean-Michel Basquiat; and Dublin's own David McDermott of the celebrated artist duo, McDermott & McGough.

Amos Poe, who is considered by many to be 'father' of the modern indie American cinema made his first feature film, *UNMADE BEDS* (16mm), a homage to Godard's *Breathless* and the French New Wave, in 1976. As Poe explains, 'I wanted to start where Godard started, to go back to basics: innocence, romanticism, bohemianism, all things that made up New York City for me at that time'.<sup>2</sup> He cast a remarkable group who, for the most part, had never acted before: Debbie Harry from Blondie; Duncan Hannah, artist; and recent arrivals, Patty Astor, who, with her Jayne Mansfield body, would go on to feature in several No Wave films and eventually open the groundbreaking Fun Gallery in the East Village (first Gallery to show Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring and Kenny Sharf); and French-born filmmaker, Eric Mitchell, who also would feature in many films, as well as write and direct his own. The score was composed by Ivan Kral – Poe's collaborator on *THE BLANK GENERATION*.

Poe quickly followed this with *THE FOREIGNER* (16mm) in 1977 with similar casting (Mitchell, Harry, Hannah, Astor and Poe himself) and Kral again composing the score. Mitchell takes the lead as *Max Menace*, a secret agent from an unnamed country who arrives in New York on an unspecified mission and finds himself in the midst of undefined mystery and intrigue. 'This is the story of the other side of the American Dream, the foreigner who does not make it,' writes Poe. Downtown New York plays a dramatic part – with such landmarks as the Chelsea Hotel, CBGBs, and the streets and lofts of Soho serving as additional characters.

In 1978, British abstract painter and musician, James Nares, directed the classic *ROME 78* (Super 8mm). Featuring performance artist, David McDermott, as Caligula; Lydia Lunch (of the band, Teenage Jesus and the Jerks); downtown socialite, Anya Phillips as the Queen of Sheba; as well as the ever popular, Mitchell and Astor, the film is an ironic remake of the spectacle film. Nares was one of the founding members of *Colab* – an artist collective who, amongst other things, set up New Cinema – a short-lived alternative space on St Marks Place dedicated to screening many of the first No Wave films.

<sup>2</sup> Pierson, *John, Spike, Mike, Slackers and Dykes*, Miramax/Hyperion, 1995

Below, left to right: *The Blank Generation*, [1976, 16mm]; *Unmade Beds*, [1977, 16mm]. Eric Mitchell as *The Foreigner*, [1978, 16mm].  
Photos: Fernando Natalici. Courtesy of Amos Poe.



The following year, young Swedish art director, Anders Grafstrom directed his first feature, *LONG ISLAND FOUR* (1979, Super 8mm) which was based on a true story from World War II. Four German spies arrive on Long Island by submarine to complete a mission; after two decadent weeks in Manhattan, they are arrested by the FBI and subsequently executed. Cast members include: David McDermott, Lance Loud, Bradley Fields, Kristian Hoffman (as the Four) as well as Astor and Mitchell and an appearance by downtown performance artist extraordinaire, Klaus Nomi. Unfortunately Grafstrom died in a road accident in Mexico soon after the film was released.

In 1980, Eric Mitchell directed, wrote and starred in one of the most ambitious films of the No Wave movement, *UNDERGROUND USA* (16mm). Working with the themes of alienation and displacement, and reminiscent of Warhol's films from the 1960s it featured Patty Astor as Vicky, an aging actress who still thinks of herself as young and attractive and, in her vulnerability, falls for a hustler (played by Mitchell). With cinematography by Tom DiCillo, sound by Jim Jarmusch and the authentic locations of the East Village art scene, it was not a commercial success but did succeed in bringing in a whole new audience. It was also one of the first films to look at the scene itself and, for some, could be considered the beginning of the end.

Another highly ambitious film about the downtown scene at this time was *DOWNTOWN 81*. Writer and cultural commentator, Glenn O'Brien was approached by Edo Bertoglio, a photographer at *Interview* and Maripol, the art director from *Fiorucci*, to write a script for a New Wave film. In a single day he wrote a scenario depicting a fairytale day in the life of his young, but unknown, artist friend, Jean-Michel Basquiat. Unbelievably, they received the sum of \$250,000 from backers to make the film. The cast consisted of Debbie Harry and Chris Stein; Arto Lindsay; graffiti artists, Fab Five Freddie Brathwaite and Lee Quinones; David McDermott; Danny and Lisa Rosen; curator Diego Cortez; Amos Poe; journalist, Daniela Morera as well as Glenn and Maripol. Performances from bands from the local scene (*DNA*, *James White and the Blacks*, *The Plastics*, etc.) were also included. Ironically, this film was never released at the time – it took nearly 17 years to sort out a series of legal problems before post-production could begin. However, the fact that it was even made was an indication that the No Wave movement was evolving into the next stage. Some were ready for it, others weren't.

Below, left to right: *The Blank Generation*, [1976, 16mm]. Eric Mitchell as *The Foreigner*, [1978, 16mm]. *Unmade Beds*, [1977, 16mm]. Photos: Fernando Natalici Courtesy of Amos Poe. Glenn O'Brien and David Byrne on the set of Glenn O'Brien's *TV Party*, [1978 – 1982], photo: Bobby Grossman. Courtesy of Glenn O'Brien.



Coinciding with the release of UNDERGROUND USA and the production of DOWNTOWN 81, there were significant changes happening in the downtown art world which played a vital part in shifting attention from the film world to the gallery scene (and from East Village to Soho). In 1981, Swiss dealer, Bruno Bischofberger revolutionised the presentation and promotion of artists and their artworks. His professional approach contributed to the successful introduction of the three Italian painters – Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi to New York. At the same time, painter Julian Schnabel, who ironically was to make films a decade later, had a tremendously successful show at Mary Boone Gallery and was represented by Bischofberger in Europe. In addition, Diego Cortez was curating the landmark *New York/New Wave* at PS1 in Queens – a large-scale group show featuring work from East Village graffiti artists (including Basquiat) as well as artworks from musicians (Chris Stein, David Byrne, Brian Eno, etc.). It received mixed reviews but proved to be the beginning of the meteoric but shortlived career of Basquiat (he died in 1988). Keith Haring and Kenny Sharf were also moving forward with substantial shows planned in Soho.

With this shift farther west, there was a predictable scattering of the members of the No Wave scene and the sense of community which gave the movement its identity and strength. One of the reasons I wanted to include Glenn's TV PARTY (1978 – 1982), in the programme was that it depicts the scene and its members simultaneously at work and play.

A highly influential late night satirically-styled show on cable access television, Glenn O'Brien's TV PARTY was presented by Glenn with Chris Stein as co-host; Amos Poe, the show's director; Edo Bertoglio and Fab Five Freddy as the cameramen. Debbie Harry, David McDermott and Basquiat were frequent guests and there were appearances from *Talking Heads*, *John Lurie*, *George Clinton*, *Klaus Nomi* and *David Bowie*. David Letterman has described it 'as the greatest show ever'.<sup>3</sup> Free form television at its very best, the reasons it worked are the very reasons it would not happen today: access to cheap equipment and low rent; disinterested cable networks; but most importantly, a tremendously gifted group of people working together, not for financial benefit, but for fun.

For the most part, the invaluable contribution of the No Wave movement has not been adequately acknowledged in the development of American independent film. I am hoping that, with programmes such as this, greater interest will be generated – not only in the content of the films, but in how these incredibly talented individuals came together and changed our understanding of art, music and film.

<sup>3</sup> Zahm, Olivier, 'Glenn O'Brien Never Eat Fan Mail', in *Purple Fashion*, Spring/Summer 2006, p. 129



## AILEEN CORKERY

Curator

Aileen Corkery is a curator who was responsible for the development and curation of the Dublin-based outdoor artist film and video programme, *Temple Bar Outdoors: outside visual arts*. She has commissioned/co-produced films by Dorothy Cross, Paddy Jolley, Gerard Byrne and T.J. Wilcox. She has worked extensively with Matthew Barney, Juergen Teller, Richard Billingham, Douglas Gordon, William Klein, Glen Luchford, Salla Tykkä, McDermott & McGough and Phil Collins. She co-curated the film programme for the first *Glasgow International* with Francis McKee.

In 2005, she curated the inaugural exhibition at the new contemporary art space in Lismore Castle titled individual fields with Matthew Barney, Richard Billingham, Gerard Byrne, Michael Craig-Martin, Dorothy Cross, Barry Flanagan and Richard Long, as well as curating a film programme for the *Commotion* film series at Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol. For 2006, she has commissioned artists McDermott & McGough for a new film.

She is member of IKT – International Association of Curators and is a Board member of the Dublin-based Corn Exchange Theatre Company.

Having moved from Dublin in 2005, she is now based in London working at Hauser & Wirth London with the artists Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades.

## DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

**Anders Grafstrom:** Originally from Stockholm where he worked as an art director, Grafstrom moved to New York City in 1977 and began to make short films. At the age of 23, Grafstrom made his first Super 8mm feature film – LONG ISLAND FOUR. Unfortunately a few months after the film was completed, he died in a road accident in Mexico.

**Amos Poe:** An Israeli-born photographer, Amos Poe is considered the 'father' of modern indie cinema. He has written and directed several feature films including his 'underground trilogy': UNMADE BEDS, THE FOREIGNER and SUBWAY RIDERS, as well as FROGS FOR SNAKES starring Barbara Hershey and Robbie Coltrane. Poe also directed the legendary Glenn O'Brien's TV PARTY. He has made numerous music videos and written countless scripts. He is currently teaching at Tisch School of Arts at N.Y.U.

**James Nares:** Nares, a British-born artist, moved to New York City in 1974. He is responsible for three film projects: ROME 78 (feature), NO JAPS AT MY FUNERAL (documentary) and WAITING FOR THE WIND (short film). In addition, he performed in two successful bands from the New Wave period – Del Byzanteens and The Contortions. He is successful painter who shows regularly in New York, Los Angeles and London.

**Eric Mitchell:** The French born writer/director/actor moved to New York in the early 1970s. He has acted in many No Wave films (with Patty Astor) including: UNMADE BEDS, ROME 78, THE FOREIGNER, and LONG ISLAND FOUR. He is best known for his writing and directing of his own films: KIDNAPPED, RED ITALY, UNDERGROUND USA and THE WAY IT IS starring Steve Buscemi and Vincent Gallo. He currently resides in Paris.

**Glenn O'Brien:** After graduating from Georgetown University, O'Brien moved to New York to attend Columbia University Film School. In 1970, he and Bob Colacello were selected by Andy Warhol to edit his 'Interview Magazine'. He left the magazine in the early 1970s only to return in 1977 to write his celebrated music column 'Glenn O'Brien's Beat' which he continued to write for the next 12 years. In 1978, he presented and produced the cult classic cable network programme – Glenn O'Brien's TV PARTY. The weekly programme ran until 1982. In 1981, he wrote and produced the feature film, DOWNTOWN 81. He has written for Rolling Stone, GQ and Italian Vanity Fair. He was the creative director for Barney's New York and responsible for Calvin Klein and Armani ad campaigns with designer Fabian Baron. In addition, he and Baron were Madonna's collaborators on her infamous SEX book. He has published several books including *Soap Box* a collection of his essays, *Human Nature* a collaboration with the artist Richard Prince and *Bald Ego* magazine.

Film Programme Coordinator: Aoife Ruane,  
Education & Community Programmes, IMMA

Brochure and associated design: [www.hexhibit.com](http://www.hexhibit.com)  
ISBN Number 1-903811-66-X

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**THURSDAY 14 SEPTEMBER**

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**18.00 Discussion, Lecture Room**

A public in-conversation between Glenn O'Brien and David McDermott introduced by curator Aileen Corkery

This is followed by a wine reception in the Johnston Suite.

**Booking is essential as space is limited, priority booking for IMMA Members**

Automatic booking line tel: +353 1 612 9948 or email [talksandlectures@imma.ie](mailto:talksandlectures@imma.ie)

This event is free and open to the public

For this season, the films have been transferred from their original formats of Super 8mm and 16mm to DVD. This is due to the fragile state of many of the original works, many of which have not been duplicated into prints.

Admission to all screenings is free.

**Glenn O'Brien's TV Party: runs on monitor**

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**FRIDAY 15 SEPTEMBER**

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11.00 – 12.30 **Rome 78**  
12.30 – 14.00 **Long Island Four**  
14.00 – 15.30 **Rome 78**  
15.30 – 17.00 **Long Island Four**

Directors James Nares and Anders Grafstrom

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**SATURDAY 16 SEPTEMBER**

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11.00 – 12.30 **Downtown 81**  
12.30 – 14.00 **Underground USA**  
14.00 – 15.30 **Downtown 81**  
15.30 – 17.00 **Underground USA**

Directors Edo Bertoglio and Eric Mitchell

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**SUNDAY 17 SEPTEMBER**

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12.30 – 13.30 **The Blank Generation**  
13.30 – 15.00 **Unmade Beds**  
15.00 – 16.30 **The Foreigner**

Director Amos Poe

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**THURSDAY 21 SEPTEMBER**

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11.00 – 12.30 **Rome 78**  
12.30 – 14.00 **Long Island Four**  
14.00 – 15.30 **Rome 78**  
15.30 – 17.00 **Long Island Four**

Directors James Nares and Anders Grafstrom

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**FRIDAY 22 SEPTEMBER\***

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11.00 – 12.30 **Downtown 81**  
12.30 – 14.00 **Underground USA**  
14.00 – 15.30 **Downtown 81**  
15.30 – 17.00 **Underground USA**  
18.00 – 19.30 **Downtown 81 \***  
19.30 – 21.00 **Underground USA \***

Directors Edo Bertoglio and Eric Mitchell

\* on Friday 22 September only

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**SATURDAY 23 SEPTEMBER**

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12.30 – 13.30 **The Blank Generation**  
13.30 – 15.00 **Unmade Beds**  
15.00 – 16.30 **The Foreigner**

Director Amos Poe

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**SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER**

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12.30 – 14.00 **Rome 78**  
14.00 – 15.30 **Long Island Four**

Directors James Nares and Anders Grafstrom

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**THURSDAY 28 SEPTEMBER**

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11.00 – 12.30 **Downtown 81**  
12.30 – 14.00 **Underground USA**  
14.00 – 15.30 **Downtown 81**  
15.30 – 17.00 **Underground USA**

Directors Edo Bertoglio and Eric Mitchell

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**FRIDAY 29 SEPTEMBER**

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12.30 – 13.30 **The Blank Generation**  
13.30 – 15.00 **Unmade Beds**  
15.00 – 16.30 **The Foreigner**

Director Amos Poe

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**SATURDAY 30 SEPTEMBER**

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11.00 – 12.30 **Rome 78**  
12.30 – 14.00 **Long Island Four**  
14.00 – 15.30 **Rome 78**  
15.30 – 17.00 **Long Island Four**

Directors James Nares and Anders Grafstrom

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**SUNDAY 1 OCTOBER**

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12.30 – 14.00 **Downtown 81**  
14.30 – 16.00 **Underground USA**

Directors Edo Bertoglio and Eric Mitchell