

Imperceptibles, France and Hungary

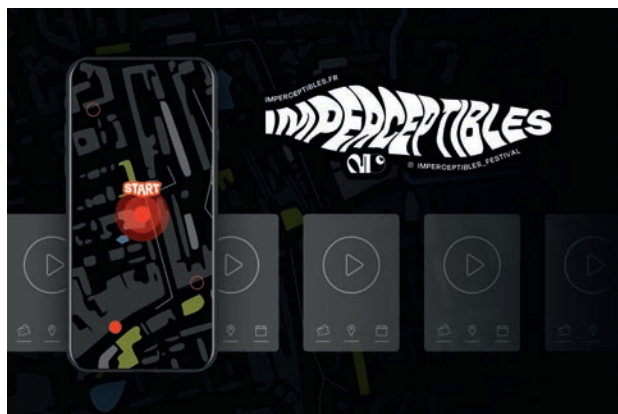
Interview with Alix Menard, Le Balzac

by **Melanie Goodfellow**

The Imperceptibles project will see one of Paris's oldest arthouse venues, the 87-year-old Le Balzac Cinema off the Champs-Élysées, lead the way on a secret film festival inspired by the Space Invaders pixel mural hunt craze, augmented reality mobile game Pokémon GO, and the underground techno scene.

Other participants in the project, aimed predominantly at the 15 to 25-year-old age group, comprise three other Paris arthouse venues, the Studio Des Ursulines, Luminor and L'Épée de Bois, and the Budapest Film Zrt group and its six cinemas in the Hungarian capital, the Corvin film palace and Művész, Puskin, Toldi, Kino Café, and Tabán arthouse cinemas.

The project is the brainchild of Alix Menard, head of development and local anchoring at independent cinema chain Étoile Cinémas and graphic artist Robin Pierre.



Why did you choose to launch this project?

Independent arthouse cinemas in Paris are perceived as places for older audiences. Through my work at Etoile Cinémas, I could see that, of all the cinemas in the group, Le Balzac was suffering the most because of this perception. I felt there was an urgent need to reflect on how we could get a younger audience into the cinema. The types of independent films we show often tackle issues of interest to this age group and would likely have a longer lasting impact than many of the blockbusters but, the challenges is getting that age group through the door.

What is the thinking behind the secret film festival?

The identity of the festival lies in its secret nature, rather than the films or venues. One of our inspirations has been the underground techno scene in cities like Paris and Berlin, and their pop-up events in unexpected locations that are promoted as something rare and exclusive but, in reality, generate a lot of excitement and hype.

If the event is secret, how are you going to promote it?

Rather than using traditional methods of posters, flyers, or trailers, we've developed an App-based, augmented reality mobile game using our own icons. When located and scanned, they'll bring up exclusive film content, and completing the game will give the user access to information on the film and venue. The final stage will be buying a ticket to the event. The initiative is predominantly aimed at the 15 to 25-year-old demographic, but there will also be two or three routes aimed at children and films for that age group.

Graphic artist Robin Pierre came up with the initial concept. He approached me as a student about a year-and-a-half ago asking for help on his final dissertation. He had similar ideas around arthouse cinemas as I did, and he had read the final dissertation I wrote on the future of cinemas while studying exhibition and distribution at the Fémis. We were bandying around ideas when Europa Cinemas launched its call for projects Collaborate to Innovate and it felt like a good opportunity to try them out.

When will the inaugural edition to take place?

June 2022.

How will you create the line-up?

We're partnering with three festivals; the Strasbourg European Fantastic Film Festival (SEFFF), the Premiers Plans Film Festival in Angers, and the National Festival of Animation Film organised by the French Association of Cinema Animation (AFCA) in Rennes. We'll select films from their line-ups that we find the most relevant for



Project presentation at Strasbourg European Fantastic Film Festival, with Alix Ménard and Robin Pierre

our initiative. There will also be an animated short film programme, involving works by French and Hungarian filmmakers. We want to create events around the screenings in keeping with this idea of it being a festival. This could be a concert or perhaps a fake power-cut for a horror film... it will depend on the films we end up selecting.

What was your thinking behind partnering with arthouse cinemas in Budapest for this inaugural edition?

I visited Budapest and I was struck by how its arthouse cinemas are much more inventive than the cinemas in Paris. They don't have the system of state support that we have in France, so they need to generate different sources of revenue. The Toldi Mozi, for example, transforms itself into a night club. I found this dynamic interesting. There are also lots of cinema theatres in the city so, in that respect, it's a bit like Paris.

Will there be any physical interaction between the audiences in Paris and Budapest?

There will a competitive element to these games under which the person who collects the most icons in Paris and Budapest will then be invited to the closing event in the other city.

What are your expectations for this project?

As well as being selected for Collaborate to Innovate, the project has also participated in the Challenge Futur@Cinema [an incubator event aimed at innovative projects supporting the renewal of cinema audiences running under the auspices of Les Arcs Film Festival]. Through that, we've met a lot of people, including distributors who are very interested in the concept of the game and how it could be applied to individual releases of their films. Beyond encouraging younger audiences into arthouse cinemas, we think the concept could help transform the marketing of independent films.

Partner cinemas:

Cinéma Le Balzac (Paris)
 Studio des Ursulines (Paris)
 Luminor (Paris)
 L'Épée de Bois (Paris)
 Művész Art Cinema (Budapest)
 Puskin Art Cinema (Budapest)
 Toldi Art Cinema (Budapest)
 Kino Café Art Cinema (Budapest)
 Tabán Art Cinema (Budapest)
 Corvin Film Palace (Budapest)