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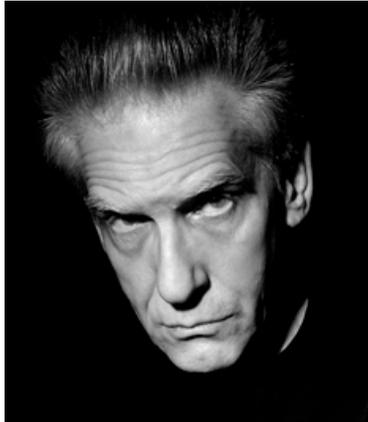
Best of the Year: David Cronenberg



December 19, 2011 by [Marc Glassman](#)

What's the scariest part of David Cronenberg's ongoing success story?

That the director who terrified us a generation ago with *Scanners* and *The Fly* and recently made big waves internationally with such indie hits as *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* may just be hitting his peak now. With TIFF hit *A Dangerous Method* being readied for commercial release across the globe — Bryan Gliserman, president of Entertainment One plans a launch here early in 2012 with “an aggressive marketing campaign” — and *Cosmopolis* having its final sound mix in Paris in December, Cronenberg has just had his most satisfying, creative year ever.



“This is the first time that David has done two films back to back since *Scanners* and *Shivers*,” says Cronenberg's go-to Canadian producer, Martin Katz, president, Prospero Films. “He really seemed to thrive on the divergent nature of the two films.”

Cronenberg's track record of creating challenging but successful films (*Crash*, *eXistenZ*, *Naked Lunch*, *Spider*, *Dead Ringers*) has now run for decades, placing him as a rare, truly bankable director. *A Dangerous Method* and *Cosmopolis* were both budgeted at “slightly more than \$20 million (CAD),” according to Katz, who coproduced both films.

“There are very few directors whose names inspire immediate response from buyers in every significant territory. And David is one of them. I was talking to a European distributor about that list — and it's short. It's probably David Cronenberg, Clint Eastwood and Pedro Almodovar. Then, you start thinking of the next tier.”

When asked to compare the responses to the two latest films by financiers, Katz is forthright.

“As you can imagine, among pitches that David's had to do, *A Dangerous Method* was among the harder ones. But he approaches every story that attracts him with a sense of enthusiasm for the human conflict that arises from that set of characters.

From the Venice International Film Festival this fall, where he premiered *A Dangerous Method*, Cronenberg told *Playback* that the film, a Germany-Canada copro, was one of the more difficult to finance.

“It's really lovely to have coproductions — it's one of the best ways you can get an independent film made. But when you do an indie, you are dealing with [a complex structure] — *A Dangerous Method* incorporates about 14 financial entities. It's a very tricky thing to do, very difficult.”

Cosmopolis was much easier to finance, says Katz. “Despite its literary roots with [award-winning novelist] Don DeLillo, and the fact that it was written a decade ago about the last economic crisis, we could sell it as a contemporary thriller.”

There are few directors who can attract stars without paying premium prices for their services.

Only Woody Allen compares to Cronenberg in his ability to get bankable stars for all of his projects. The presence of Ralph Fiennes (*Spider*) and Jeremy Irons (*M. Butterfly*, *Dead Ringers*) as leads and Ian Holm (*Naked Lunch*), Miranda Richardson (*Spider*), Holly Hunter (*Crash*) and Ed Harris (*A History of Violence*) as character actors has contributed to the financing and international sales of his films.

A Dangerous Method stars Cronenberg favourite Viggo Mortensen (*A History of Violence*, *Eastern Promises*) as psychologist Sigmund Freud, Michael Fassbender as his rival Carl Jung and Keira Knightley as Sabina Spielrein, the “hysteric” patient who broke up their mentor- acolyte relationship.

Twilight hottie Robert Pattinson breaks new ground for Cronenberg as Eric Packer, the multi-billionaire lead in *Cosmopolis*, a film that features such stellar talent as Juliette Binoche, Samantha Morton, Paul Giamatti and Canadian newcomer Sarah Gadon.

“One of the subjects of *Cosmopolis* is the disintegration of society,” observes Dan Lyon, Telefilm Canada’s Ontario regional film development operator. “In this case, the cause of the disintegration is economic, which is very much on our minds now. With the current protests here and around the world, it was prescient of DeLillo to write the book and Cronenberg to choose to adapt it now.”

Telefilm Canada came in for \$2.7 million on *Cosmopolis*, shot in Toronto last spring.

Working with Cronenberg — even being on his sets — has clearly impressed industry veterans Lyon, Gliserman and Katz.

“Distributors are best when not present on set I find, but on the rare occasions I have attended, David is completely in control, very subdued, calm, and guides his crew and cast with great confidence and humour,” says eOne’s Gliserman. “David is one of the most visionary filmmakers in the world today and we are happy to support him in his efforts to tell a wide variety of stories.”

Ever thoughtful, Katz hesitates when asked what it’s like to work with the visionary director, choosing his words carefully.

“We don’t get to see great artists at their work very often. I’ve never stood at a painter’s studio and watched something being created on canvas. Over the decade I’ve been working with David, what I’ve noticed is the shedding of the extraneous — his single-minded focus. He has clarity of purpose, which as he says, allows ‘the film to announce itself.’”

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