All-around horror multi-hyphenate Eli Roth is making Toronto his temporary home while in town to shoot his upcoming original Netflix scare series, HEMLOCK GROVE. Earlier this week, the writer, producer, director, and actor stopped by the TIFF Lightbox theatre to screen an uncut print of one of his personal favorite horror films—the sticky, grubby, breast-spearing ode to 'long pig' known as CANNIBAL FEROX.

Directed by Umberto Lenzi, 1981's FEROX stars the official punching bag of splatter cinema Giovanni Lombardo Radice, a.k.a. John Morghen (CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD, HOUSE BY THE EDGE OF THE PARK) and is one of the inspirations behind Roth's mission to return primitive cannibalism to the big screen with proposed revival film THE GREEN INFERNO. After the FEROX showing, Roth took some time to chat with his event moderator Colin Geddes, of TIFF's Midnight Madness programme, where the pair chewed over the appeal of FEROX and provided updates on some of the many pies in which Roth has his finger inserted.

Speaking about the forbidden, or underground, feel to FEROX and horror movies of that era, Geddes says, "With a film like this, there was a real kind of mystique, where you couldn't find it at your average video store. You would have heard about it from someone. I think the first time I saw a still from CANNIBAL FEROX, it was in the Joe Bob Briggs book. It was the disgusting breast hanging picture, and it was like, 'there's a movie that has that?' And the way that you'd finally see it, there'd be so much of a legend around it. Is that gone now (for modern horror films)?"

Roth replies, "I think there are still films that have that reputation. There are movies that try to

get it, and movies that want to have it. If it's a movie like A SERBIAN FILM, or a movie that comes out and plays at a film festival that's banned in a country and recut. I felt lucky that the HOSTEL movies had a bit of that. In the theatres, there was that mystique. That's what you want to build with a horror film."

"What these [Eurohorror] movies had was this otherworldly quality, and I think that comes from the dubbing. What happened was that in fascist times, in World War Two, it was made illegal to have sync sound in Italian films, because that way the government had to monitor everything that was being said in every movie. So, what happened was that during World War Two and after, Italians got so used to dubbing that they actually preferred the movies that way. It wasn't until the nineties that sync sound really came in, and in fact their studios were built out by the airport and not soundproofed, because they were never waiting for airplanes. So, what the Italians would do is they would basically make movies with Italian actors speaking English that they were going to redub and try to trick American audiences into thinking were American films. That's why you get 'John Morghen' and not Giovanni Lombardo Radice; they wouldn't put Italian names in the films. There was something about that period of movies, with the over-the-top music and the dubbing, and the low budget quality where you felt that the people were really in the jungle, and they're actually killing the animals—it gives them this strange otherworldly mystique. I remember watching CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST and thinking, 'How the hell do you direct a bunch of natives who truly live in the jungle to gang-rape a woman but not gang-rape her, and chop his d—k off?"

Asked if he prefers the film's original title CANNIBAL FEROX or the more evocative U.S. moniker of MAKE THEM DIE SLOWLY, Roth doesn't hesitate: "MAKE THEM DIE SLOWLY, for sure. Because what is a Ferox? I mean, is that a ferret? Is that an ox? It's not a word that I normally use. And MAKE THEM DIE SLOWLY was just the ultimate title to me as a kid. I remember being twelve years old and the only movies we wanted to see were, like, BLOODSUCKING FREAKS, MAKE THEM DIE SLOWLY… ("Banned in thirty-one countries," pipes in Geddes.) Yeah, the more countries it was banned in and the bigger the video box, the better. I much prefer MAKE THEM DIE SLOWLY, but out of respect to the maestro, I will call it CANNIBAL FEROX."

On other standouts in the field of cannibalism, Roth admits “My favorite of these is CANNINBAL HOLOCAUST. I think that [director, Ruggero] Deodato, even though there’s a lot of really sick stuff with the animal killings, made something so compellingly real and horrifyingly disturbing—it wasn’t until I met Deodato that I truly believed that he actually hadn’t killed people. Deodato had been talking for years about a sequel to HOLOCAUST, and I think it’s just a matter of funding. CANNIBAL METROPOLITANA, I don’t know what’s happening with it, but Deodato still works and does a lot of television stuff in Italy.” Roth then adds, “I don’t know what stage it’s in, but I do know that Gaspar Noe is doing a remake of CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST. (cue chorus of boos from the audience) Roth laughs and says, “I wouldn’t boo. I’d love to see what Gaspar Noe would do with the film!”

For a fan wanting to know about Roth’s next collaboration with Quentin Tarantino, as well as the status of Roth’s remake for Tobe Hooper’s THE FUNHOUSE, Roth says, “MAN WITH THE IRON FISTS, that’s the next thing with [Tarantino]. Quentin is presenting and I produced with Mark Abraham and Eric Newman. I wrote it with RZA, and he directed it, and Russell Crowe is in it. It’s really fun, and it’s something very different. It certainly has the feel of my other things, but it’s a different genre for me. I don’t even know what to call it. We set out to make a kind of kung-fu, hip-hop STAR WARS [*laughs*]. It’s as weird as it sounds, it’s really fun and insane, like a visual representation of Wu-tang Clan’s music, with lots of really cool violence thrown in there. It comes out November 2nd.”

Unfortunately, the prognosis on THE FUNHOUSE is not as promising: “The FUNHOUSE remake is kind of on hold for the moment. We haven’t really quite cracked the script in a way that any of us are happy with. I mean, there’s a script that we could go and shoot, and the kills are fun, but we’re not quite there with the story, so we’re still working it out with the writers.”

However, in response to a fan pleading to finally see a full-length THANKSGIVING trailer based on Roth’s fondly-received GRINDHOUSE trailer, Roth’s verdict was more optimistic: “My co-writer Jeff Rendell, who plays the pilgrim in the trailer, we finally buckled down two months ago and we cracked the story. There are two writers who I’m partnering with, and we’re close to closing the deal, so I can’t announce it, but I definitely want to shoot that movie. I can’t not. It’s one of the ideas that won’t let me go to sleep, and those are the ideas I listen to. There are certain ideas you have, and you think about it and you’re excited about it, and then you forget about it. Two years later, you’re like, ‘Oh, I forgot I was going to do that.’ Then, there are ideas where every night before you go to sleep, you feel if you die before making that movie, your life is a failure. So I have to do [THANKSGIVING].”

Roth is similarly enthusiastic about his Goretorium attraction in Las Vegas, set to open next

month: “I’m so excited. Every year in Los Angeles, they do the ‘Haunts’. You have all the best special effects artists and people who work in building studio sets. At Universal, they do this thing ‘Universal Horror Nights’, and Knott’s Berry Farm becomes ‘Knott’s Scary Farm’, and there are these incredible, incredible mazes where you walk through them, and it’s like being in the movie. I remember twelve years ago, even before the movie came out, there was this HOUSE OF 1000 CORPSES maze, and it was one of the scariest, most intense experiences I’d ever been through. My frame of reference for haunted houses was like, [mimes a stiff, cackling dummy] sitting in a chair, and I went through and there were people getting chopped up, and bodies... I said, ‘I gotta do one of these.’ So I talked to [Universal] about doing a HOSTEL maze. They only open for nineteen nights out of the year; every year I go, and I never want it to end. They must have spent $700,000 building that HOSTEL maze. I gave them the set design, the construction, all the props that I’d saved. They rebuilt everything, and it was like being in the movie, but I came up with new stuff—I was like ‘How about a human meat grinder?’ So we had a guy in half with guts coming out, and we had people fainting and pissing and puking. They were getting between 2000 to 2100 people an hour going through, it was crazy. So for years, I’ve been saying I want to do a year-round haunted house.”

“ I could have Halloween every day of the year, and there’s something so fun, and so magical, about going in a haunted house. Vegas, to me, is actually kind of boring. I don’t really gamble. I’m not going to go to shows all the time. So I thought, ‘I want something for me in Las Vegas.’ So with this other partner, we found this massive space that’s right on Las Vegas Boulevard. We’re putting a lot of money into building the most high-tech, terrifying [attraction]. It’s going to be really, really sick. People are going to be very upset. I want all the effects to be, literally, you walk in rooms and people are being chopped in half with chainsaws, and stuff jumping out. Now, you can’t touch the performers and they can’t touch you, but it’s one of the most terrifying experiences you can have, and you come out of it feeling like you’re ten years old, laughing hysterically. And we’re going to have cameras where you can watch other people going through and freaking out, and buttons you can push blasting them with air, so after you go through, you can scare other people. And I’m going to have a half girl in a martini glass in the downstairs bar, so when you order a drink it’s like in A CLOCKWORK ORANGE—except you’re draining her blood. And upstairs, I want to have a zombie cage where you can actually have live zombie feedings.”

On his fascination with cannibalism, and the films of that sub-genre that have inspired him to

work on THE GREEN INFERNO, Roth says, “I think [cannibalism] is the last boundary of human taste that’s still repulsive to people. I think that there are all kinds of violence—tool violence, gun violence. People are sort of inured to it, but the idea that we would eat our own species is so inherently terrifying. I also think that we’ve become so technologically connected, and things are so advanced in our society and civilization—our whole world is in our phones and stuff—that we can broadcast by ourselves twenty-four hours a day, to everyone in the world if we want. The idea that there are parts of the world completely uncontaminated by modern technology, ‘Do they still exist?’ and ‘What would happen in those places?’ is fascinating to me.”

The recent real-life incidents of cannibalism in the U.S. that the mainstream media so gleefully pored over are brought up, to which Roth replies, “It’s weird that I’m in prep on a cannibal movie and then there are two cannibal attacks. So, I feel like I was slightly ahead of the curve. You know, people are fucking nuts and I wouldn’t put anything past them.”

A fan brings up the revolting degradations in Passolini’s SALO as being a deeper broach to human values than the violence in cannibal movies. Roth considers this and says, “I love SALO. It’s one of my favorite films. It’s a hard film to watch, but it’s an incredible movie. The first time I saw it, I had been prepared for it and it was still pretty shocking. But I think SALO is a great allegory for World War Two and for fascism and what humanity had become during the war, and what people were doing to each other. So if you look at SALO, it’s horrific, but if you look at what was actually going on in that time, it’s far worse. It’s an incredible film; but to me, unless I see an animal being killed, I never see movies as violent. I see them as a representation of violence. It’s like looking at a painting or a picture. To me, it’s all makeup. It’s effective storytelling—yeah, when the meathooks go through her tits, you feel it, but at the end of the day I know it’s corn syrup and food coloring and foam latex.”

Finally, Geddes drops the news that the Chilean film AFTERSHOCK, directed by Nicolas Lopez and co-written, produced by and starring Roth, will be making its world premiere at TIFF. Roth sets the film up; “[AFTERSHOCK] is based on Nicolas Lopez’s stories of what happened

in the 8.8 earthquake in Chile. It went off at three-thirty in the morning; most people were out partying in clubs, and basically the whole country shook like an amusement park for three-and-a-half minutes. Shit crashed down; one guy got his hands cut off. Everything fell apart. The prisons broke open, there were no police, no firemen. It was like fucking anarchy for six hours until daylight. There were towns with tsunami warnings and everybody in the town started panicking and stampeding. [Lopez's] stories of what happened in the earthquake were so horrific, we said, 'We have to make a movie about this'. So it's based on all these true events, we shot it [in Chile] and we did almost everything practically, because a lot of the country is still destroyed from the earthquake. And what's great about Chile is that they don't have the same safety laws that they do in America, so we got to do shit in Chile that I could never, ever have gotten away with in America, and it looks fucking crazy. There hasn't been an earthquake movie in thirty, maybe forty years, and Nicolas fucking went for it and made a really, really crazy ride. It's insane."