

Pearl (2022 film)

Pearl (subtitled ***An X-traordinary Origin Story***) is a 2022 American psychological horror film directed by Ti West, co-written by West and Mia Goth, who reprises her role as the title character, and featuring David Corenswet, Tandi Wright, Matthew Sunderland and Emma Jenkins-Purro in supporting roles. A prequel to *X* (2022) and the second installment in the *X* film series, it serves as an origin story for the title villain, whose fervent aspiration to become a movie star led her to committing violent acts on her family's Texas homestead in 1918.

West began co-writing a prequel script stemming from his collaboration with Goth while filming *X*. Motivated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cinema, filming started in New Zealand immediately after the first film, using *X* sets and the *Avatar: The Way of Water* crew and taking pandemic safety precautions. *Pearl* drew inspiration from the works of Douglas Sirk, Technicolor films like *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Mary Poppins* (1964), and Disney films. It had its world premiere at the 79th Venice International Film Festival on September 3, 2022, and was released in theaters in the United States on September 16, 2022, by A24. The film grossed over \$10 million and received generally positive reviews from critics, with Goth's performance receiving wide praise.

A direct sequel to *X*, titled *MaXXXine*, is scheduled to be released on July 5, 2024, with Goth reprising her second role from the first film.

Plot

In 1918, Pearl is a mentally ill young woman living with her German immigrant parents on their homestead in Texas, while her husband, Howard, serves in the First World War. Her father is infirm and paralyzed, and her domineering mother, Ruth, insists that she help care for both him and the farm as they isolate themselves to protect against the Spanish flu Pandemic. Pearl, captivated by the movies she sees, aspires to be a chorus girl or a film star, which Ruth disapproves of, and chafes under the forced isolation. Pearl also shows signs of psychopathy; she kills farm animals and physically abuses her father.

Pearl



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Ti West
Written by	Ti West <div></div> Mia Goth
Based on	Characters <div></div> by Ti West
Produced by	Jacob Jaffke <div></div> Ti West <div></div> Kevin Turen <div></div> Harrison Kreiss
Starring	Mia Goth <div></div> David Corenswet <div></div> Tandi Wright <div></div> Matthew Sunderland <div></div> Emma Jenkins-Purro <div></div> Alistair Sewell
Cinematography	Eliot Rockett
Edited by	Ti West

Sneaking away to the movie theater while waiting for her father's prescription, Pearl meets a young projectionist who takes a liking to her. On the way home, Pearl dances with a scarecrow at a cornfield and masturbates with it, fantasizing about him. When her mother realizes that 8 cents are missing, she berates Pearl for selfish behavior and withholds her supper for the night.

Pearl hears from Mitsy, her rich and beautiful sister-in-law, of an audition to find new dancers for a traveling troupe around the state, and envisions it as her ticket out of spending her life living on the farm and having to care for her father. She later visits the projectionist, who shows her *A Free Ride*, an illicit stag film he acquired in France, and encourages her to pursue her dreams. Pearl comments that she cannot abandon her family and that she wishes "If only they would just die."

When Ruth finds a theater program Pearl hid, the two get into a fierce argument over dinner concerning Ruth going out into the world with her mental illness, to which Ruth declares Pearl as her biggest failure. A physical altercation erupts, Pearl shoves her mother against the kitchen hearth, igniting her dress and inflicting life-threatening burns when Pearl uses boiling water to douse the flames. Pearl drags Ruth into the basement and leaves her father in the dining room. She flees to the movie theater, where she has sex with the projectionist.

In the morning, the projectionist drives Pearl home to prepare for the audition. He is disturbed by a now maggot-infested roasted pig that Mitsy's mother left for Ruth the day before, the inconsistencies in Pearl's stories, and her increasingly erratic behavior. When he attempts to leave, Pearl erupts into a fit of rage at the perceived abandonment and stabs him to death with a pitchfork. She pushes his car into a pond, where an alligator she nicknames Theda eats his remains. Pearl dresses herself in one of Ruth's Belle Epoque gowns and dresses up her father before smothering him to death using a pillow cover.

Pearl arrives at the church to attend the audition. She thinks her dance performance will impress the talent scouts, but is rejected for not being young, blonde, or "all-American". Mitsy accompanies her home in an attempt to console her. In the kitchen, Pearl gets into a lengthy and disturbing confession to Mitsy regarding many things, from resentment toward her husband, Howard, and having an affair to killing animals, her parents and the projectionist. Pearl then intimidates a stunned Mitsy into confessing that she won the audition. Pearl then chases Mitsy down the driveway and kills her with an axe.

Pearl dismembers her body and feeds the remains to Theda, then goes into the basement and lies next to Ruth's corpse. Concluding that her mother was right that Pearl should "make the best of what she has", she decides to atone for her crimes by creating a comfortable home for Howard.

Music by	<u>Tyler Bates</u> <u>Tim Williams</u>
Production companies	<u>Little Lamb</u> <u>Mad Solar Productions</u> <u>A24</u>
Distributed by	A24 (United States) <u>Universal Pictures</u> (international) ^[1]
Release dates	September 3, 2022 (<u>Venice</u>) September 16, 2022 (United States)
Running time	102 minutes ^[2]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$1 million ^[3]
Box office	\$10.1 million ^[4]

An indeterminate number of days later, Howard returns and is greeted with the long-decomposed bodies of Pearl's parents seated at the dining table around the rotting feast. As Howard stares in horror, Pearl greets him with a protracted, pained smile.

Cast

- [Mia Goth](#) as [Pearl](#)
- [David Corenswet](#) as the projectionist
- [Tandi Wright](#) as Ruth, Pearl's mother
- [Matthew Sunderland](#) as Pearl's father
- [Emma Jenkins-Purro](#) as Mitsy Pratt, Howard's sister
- [Alistair Sewell](#) as Howard Pratt, Pearl's husband

Production

Development

[Ti West](#) began writing a script for the prequel film during production on *X*. He stated that the prequel project had developed from a story he had collaborated on with [Mia Goth](#), and that he had seen it either as becoming a potential film, or simply serving as a [backstory](#) for Goth's role as [Pearl](#) in the first movie.^[5] After the onset of the [coronavirus pandemic](#), seeing its [impact on the cinema industry](#), West stated that he had been inspired to continue working and had decided to begin production of the prequel immediately after [wrapping](#) on the previous installment. West stated that he had pitched his idea of a new franchise to [A24](#) and had been surprised when they [green-lit](#) his projects. The filmmaker stated that he intends each film to have its own distinct style and [genre](#) of horror. Describing his approach to *X*, he said he was heavily influenced by [The Texas Chainsaw Massacre franchise](#) and by the works of [Mario Bava](#), which explore how the rise of [independent filmmaking](#) affected society. Regarding *Pearl*, he described it as [Douglas Sirk](#) melodrama meeting the [Technicolor](#) style of [Mary Poppins](#) and [The Wizard of Oz](#), made as a "demented Disney movie", and said it will explore how [Hollywood filmmaking](#) has influenced people. West stated that he intends to continue this trend of exploring diverse styles and genres in future installments. The movie is a joint-venture production between A24 and Little Lamb Productions.^{[5][6][7][8][9]}

With the release of the first publicity poster, it was announced that West would once again serve as [film editor](#) alongside his other production roles, that [Eliot Rockett](#) would return as cinematographer, and that [Tyler Bates](#) and [Tim Williams](#) would serve as co-composers of the film's [score](#).^[10]

Casting

Mia Goth reprises her role as a younger version of [Pearl](#), the elderly woman from the first film.^{[7][8][9][5]} In July 2022, it was revealed that [David Corenswet](#), [Tandi Wright](#), [Matthew Sunderland](#), and [Emma Jenkins-Purro](#) would feature as the supporting cast.^[11]

Filming

Principal photography was revealed to have begun in secret immediately following the completed photography on *X*. Filming started in New Zealand, took place back-to-back with the first movie and used the same sets that were built for *X*. West worked with the production crew of *Avatar: The Way of Water*, who were taking a break from production on that film at the time. West stated that, despite the production taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the production crew had already completed their required period of self-isolation, and were therefore able to work safely and efficiently together during the pandemic. He said: "I came out of quarantine and I was like, 'We're already building all of this stuff, it's COVID and we're on the one place on Earth where it's safe to make a movie.'"^{[7][8][5][12][13]}

Post-production

In March 2022, having completed filming, West announced that he was currently working on editing the movie, that he would go to Nashville, Tennessee, following the March 2022 SXSW Film Festival, to record the orchestral score for the soundtrack with Tyler Bates and Timothy Williams, and that the film was expected to be finished in May.^{[8][5][12]}

Marketing

A teaser trailer was screened at the SXSW Film Festival, following screening of the first film. The footage accompanied the theatrical release of *X*.^{[12][9][5]} In July 2022, the first trailer was released with the marketing tagline of "an *X*-traordinary Origin Story", referring to the previous installment.^[10]

Release

Pearl had its world premiere at the 79th Venice International Film Festival on September 3, 2022,^[14] and was released in theaters in the United States on September 16, 2022.^[10]

The film was released on VOD on October 25, 2022,^[15] and was released on Blu-ray and DVD on November 15, 2022.^[16]

Reception

Box office

In the United States and Canada, *Pearl* was released alongside *The Woman King* and *See How They Run*, and was projected to gross around \$4 million from 2,900 theaters in its opening weekend.^[17] The film made \$1.3 million on its first day and went on to debut to \$3.1 million, finishing third at the box office.^[18] It made \$1.92 million in its second weekend, finishing fifth at the box office.^[19]

Critical response

On Rotten Tomatoes, the film holds an approval rating of 93% based on 201 reviews, with an average rating of 7.8/10. The site's consensus states: "*Pearl* finds Ti West squeezing fresh gore out of the world he created with *X* – and once again benefiting from a brilliant Mia Goth performance."^[20] On Metacritic, the film has a weighted average score of 76 out of 100 based on reviews from 39 critics, indicating "generally

favorable reviews".^[21] Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "B—" on an A+ to F scale, while those at PostTrak gave the film a 75% overall positive score, with 54% saying they would definitely recommend it.^[18]

Reviewing the film following its Venice Film Festival premiere, Peter Bradshaw of The Guardian praised West's direction and Goth's "grandiose performance", assigning it a perfect rating of five stars and remarking: "Perhaps I shouldn't have enjoyed *Pearl* as much as I did: but it's clever, limber, gruesome and brutally well acted. A gem."^[22] In his review for The Hollywood Reporter, David Rooney described it as a "cleverly packaged pandemic production with narrative echoes of that global anxiety", praising the screenplay, cinematography, score, and Goth's performance—which he compares to that of American actress Shelley Duvall in *The Shining* (1980).^[23] In a year-end retrospective for Daily Grindhouse, Preston Fassel named the film as the best horror movie of 2022 as well as "the best film of the year, period, and a bona fide cinematic classic that deserves Criterion status ASAP."^[24] In a negative review, Ewan Gleadow of Cult Following wrote that while West "doubles down on what made *X* such a chilling feature and consolidates what he is good at", the film ultimately "feels like a weak parody of the MGM days of *The Wizard of Oz*."^[25] Similarly, Derek Smith of Slant Magazine thought that, while *The Wizard of Oz* references were "purposeful", they lacked "follow through", creating an impression that the film is more focused on showcasing its "cleverness" rather than enhancing its narrative or character depth.^[26]



Goth's performance as the titular character was widely praised by critics.

Filmmaker Martin Scorsese was reportedly impressed by the film, calling it "mesmerizing" and stating that it was "powered by a pure, undiluted love for cinema".^{[27][28]} *The New York Times* named the character of Pearl one of the 93 most stylish "people" of 2022, highlighting her "blood red dress, lacy blue bow, smudged makeup, boots ... and ax".^[29]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Toronto International Film Festival</u>	<u>September 18, 2022</u>	<u>People's Choice Award for Midnight Madness</u>	<i>Pearl</i>	Runner-up	[30]
<u>Sitges Film Festival</u>	<u>October 15, 2022</u>	<u>Best Feature Length Film</u>		Nominated	[31]
		<u>Best Direction</u>	<u>Ti West</u>	Won	[32]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Mia Goth</u>	Won	
<u>Boston Society of Film Critics</u>	<u>December 11, 2022</u>	<u>Best Cinematography</u>	Eliot Rockett (also for <i>X</i>)	Won	[33]
<u>Chicago Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 14, 2022</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	Mia Goth	Nominated	[34]
<u>St. Louis Gateway Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 18, 2022</u>	<u>Best Horror Film</u>	<i>Pearl</i>	Nominated	[35]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Mia Goth	Nominated	
<u>San Francisco Bay Area Film Critics Circle</u>	<u>January 9, 2023</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>		Nominated	[36]
<u>Austin Film Critics Association</u>	<u>January 10, 2023</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>		Nominated	[37]
<u>Seattle Film Critics Society</u>	<u>January 17, 2023</u>	<u>Best Actress in a Leading Role</u>		Nominated	[38]
		<u>Best Villain</u>	Pearl (portrayed by Mia Goth) (also nominee for <i>X</i>)	Nominated	
<u>Online Film Critics Society</u>	<u>January 23, 2023</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	Mia Goth	Nominated	[39]
<u>Bram Stoker Award</u>	<u>June 17, 2023</u>	<u>Superior Achievement in a Screenplay</u>	Mia Goth & Ti West	Nominated	[40]
<u>Independent Spirit Awards</u>	<u>March 4, 2023</u>	<u>Best Lead Performance</u>	Mia Goth	Nominated	[41]
		<u>Best Cinematography</u>	Eliot Rockett	Nominated	
<u>Critics' Choice Super Awards</u>	<u>March 16, 2023</u>	<u>Best Horror Movie</u>	<i>Pearl</i>	Nominated	[42][43]
		<u>Best Actress in a Horror Movie</u>	Mia Goth	Won	
		<u>Best Villain in a Movie</u>		Won	

<u>Fangoria Chainsaw Awards</u>	May 21, 2023	Best Wide Release Movie	<i>Pearl</i>	Nominated	[44] [45]
		Best Lead Performance	Mia Goth	Won	
		Best Screenplay	Mia Goth and Ti West	Nominated	
		Best Cinematography	Eliot Rockett	Nominated	
		Best Score	Tyler Bates and Tim Williams	Nominated	
		Best Costume Design	Malgosia Turzanska	Nominated	
<u>Saturn Awards</u>	February 4, 2024	Best Independent Film	<i>Pearl</i>	Won	[46]
		Best Film Writing	Ti West and Mia Goth	Nominated	
		Best Actress in a Film	Mia Goth	Nominated	

Future

West announced in March 2022 that he was working on the script for a third movie in the film series, to be set chronologically after the events of *X*. That project will explore another subgenre of horror and will continue depicting how cinema in general, and the development of home video releases in particular, have influenced society. West stated that, while a viewer can watch each movie independently without having seen the previous film, they are made to "complement each other".^{[9][5]} In describing his creative processes during the development of these films, West stated, "I'm trying to build a world out of all this, like people do these days." The filmmaker further noted, "You can't make a slasher movie without a bunch of sequels."^[8]

In September 2022, at the first Midnight Madness showing of *Pearl* for the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival, a third film was officially announced with a short teaser played after the credits. The clip was later released online for those not present at the event. West once again serves as writer/director and one of the producers, while Mia Goth will reprise her role from the first movie. Titled *MaXXXine*, the film takes place in 1985 and serves as a sequel to *X*. The plot was confirmed to center around Maxine, the only survivor of the "Massacre of *X*" as she continues to pursue her future in Hollywood. Though principal photography has not yet begun, the teaser trailer was shot with the film fast-tracked to being green-lit by A24, following the successes of the previous two installments. Jacob Jaffke, Kevin Turen, and Harrison Kreiss will be producers, while Goth will additionally serve as an executive producer.^{[47][48][49]} It will be released in 2024.^[50]

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External links

- Official website (<https://a24films.com/films/pearl>) 
- *Pearl* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt18925334/>) at IMDb

- *Pearl* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pearl_2022) at Rotten Tomatoes
 - *Pearl* (<https://www.metacritic.com/movie/pearl-2022>) at Metacritic
 - *Pearl* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/vm11883744424>) at AllMovie
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