

Hack will have impact on future, say local filmmakers

Aurora filmmaker Jared Pelletier has been working on a sci-fi project for some time now.

It is a film intended to make a statement ? but it is unlikely this statement will have as wide-reaching an effect as the unlikely Seth Rogen-James Franco film ?The Interview?, which was all but scrapped by Sony, its parent studio, and international theatrical distributors, including Canada's Cineplex Odeon, last week following threats from cyber hackers.

While some restrictions on the film were lifted on Tuesday, the controversy to ?cave? to these threats has had everyone from casual film buffs to the President of the United States weigh in, but young local filmmakers question how the decision will affect their industry down the road.

?The sci-fi piece works into some potentially political allegories, and I think most movies have some sort of allegory that makes some sort of political statement, but this has already made me rethink that a bit,? says Mr. Pelletier. ?I think that is going to be the case for a lot of people and I think it is the wrong way to approach things because, again, any sort of reservation when it comes to new work, any reservation stemming from this whole event, is just playing into their hands and letting them win. It has had a huge effect.?

Mr. Pelletier has been following the cyber-attack on Sony Pictures Studios and has watched in dismay as it grew from leaked emails that were little more than tittle-tattle amongst executives on some of the film industry's top stars, to the ?9-11-style? threats against any theatres screening ?The Interview?, which is a spoof about two unlikely recruits being sent into North Korea to assassinate leader Kim Jong Un.

?I guess you have to take it with a grain of salt,? said Mr. Pelletier, questioning the extent of the threat the public may not be aware of. ?It feels like they are letting them win, which they are. Maybe it is for good reason, maybe there are threats, but it feels like a really strange political moment. Everyone I know in the industry who I have discussed it with have responded in the same way. I don't think anybody expected it to come to this point.?

The decision, he said, can have ?huge implications? on censorship and could result in a ?slippery slope? against other forms of satire.

?I think this is a bigger historical moment in cinema than maybe some people are realising right now in terms of how it affects what gets made down the road and ultimately how studios are going to treat this sort of material.?

More guarded in his assessment is filmmaker Alex Broughton, whose films often come with a social statement. There are things we know and more things to learn, he says, but one thing is clear ? and that is the landscape has changed.

?Sony hacking opens our eyes to a new digital system that has taken priority and those learning to master it are subsuming that power,? said Mr. Broughton. ?I think the real story is how shocked we are to know we are affected, we don't live in an innocent bubble and situations exist outside our Canadian media that we should be aware of.

?We are moving into a new age, we are completely connected by the internet and we need to see past the powerful veil that limits our horizons. As an artist, I have a hard time supporting censorship, however there is either a serious threat or a great publicity stunt going on here. I am a fan of Seth Rogen and his work, and I would rather be called a fool than to put people's lives at risk and I feel we shouldn't be so quick to judge, despite the fact it seems Sony is giving into demands.?

On the bright side, he says he is heartened to see a discussion of the larger issues and what could turn out to be a catalyst in moving towards ?more common viewing hubs? like YouTube and Netflix.

?That said, I am only a starving artist, so if the North Korean government reads this, they can hack \$100,000 (or more) into my bank

account for my next project, and/or my silence on the subject,? he concludes.