

San Sebastián Hails Spain's Crime Boom

JOHN HOPEWELL

From when it began to incorporate Spanish TV series in its Official Selection—think 2017's *The Plague* or 2020's double whammy of *Patria* and *Riot Police*—San Sebastián has used its first Saturday to debate TV issues.

This time around, a panel highlighted crime series, featuring Movistar Plus+'s Susana Herreras, Laura Sarmiento, showrunner of Netflix hit *Intimacy* and writer on *Burning Body* and León Elías León Siminiani, co-creator of the 2017 docuseries *El caso Asunta* (*Operación Nenúfar*), which inspired the 2024 Netflix fiction series, *El caso Asunta*.

Five takes on the panel discussion:

Spanish Crime Boom

The panel was entitled in Spanish "The Spanish Crime Series Boom." That seems an understatement. According to Variety research, through Sept. 13 this year, seven Spanish titles hit No. 1 on Netflix's Global Non-English TV series charts, occupying the top-charting position for a total 15 of the period's total 35 weeks. That's a far better performance than any other

non-English language country in the world: Korea (8 weeks), Japan (3) and France (2) trailed behind. Six of the seven series reaching global No. 1, accounting for a total 13 weeks at the top, were crime series or part crime series from heist dramedy *Berlin* to drug cartel drama *Gangs of Galicia* or gender abuse thriller *Raising Voices*.

Streamer Drivers

"The arrival of the platforms changed everything," said Siminiani. That cuts several ways. "The platforms allowed for budgets which didn't exist before, which permitted longer series and far more investigation," he said. Also, series creators began to include their process of investigation in the very content of titles, and were made by investigators which had no formal legal training. That opened up access notably the true crime genre, Siminiani argued. From two years or so back, platforms are asking for sister titles, a fiction and docuseries. "The possibility to invent in a fiction series is now far broader than a decade ago. That's a tectonic shift," he said. One result is 2024 Netflix fiction series *El*

caso Asunta, one of Spain's biggest global hits of this year.

True Crime Energizes Crime Fiction

If series now dramatize creators' procedure, the push into and possibility of investigation is energising others, to the better. Fran Araujo and Pepe Coira, lead writers of Movistar Plus+ crime series *Hierro* and *Rapa* "researched, read, created documentation before and during the writing. They let reality overturn what they were thinking, changing whole scenes, plots and characters. That's very much Movistar Plus+. We don't want our characters to be clones of foreign crime series, U.S., French or English attorneys. They have to be lawyers working here and from here. That's only possible if you create voluntary links to reality," said Herreras.

Character, Character

Beyond research, the key to a crime series, Sarmiento argued, is character. *Burning Body*, for example, is inspired by a real-life crime. The burning question, for Sarmiento, however, is



Querer.

"Why?" "There were things about the characters, their voraciousness for life, dissatisfaction, which seemed to me to be very human and recognizable," she said at the panel. So why did such recognizable people, even if they were a little crazed, go as far as murder? That's what I want to explore."

The Advantages of Crime Fiction

Querer, the biggest Movistar Plus+ series at the San Sebastián Festival this year, directed by Alauda Ruiz de Azua, turns on a woman who after 30 years of a seemingly stable marriage, takes her husband to court, accusing him of continued sexual abuse. The series is fiction but inspired

by "an amalgam of real-life cases," said Herreras. "Fiction allows us to talk about highly polemical issues but shape and nuance them so that they are comprehensible," she added. Depending on every case, fiction can give you more tools than non-fiction, Herreras said, citing the case of Federation Studios' London TV Screenings hit *Samber*, where from late '80s Northern France, women are being sexually assaulted along the same road by the Samber River. It takes more than 30 years to catch a man. "*Samber* portrays a society. It seems like a lot of time has passed, but it connects with current cases in France and indeed with *Querer*."

 **SSIFF** Donostia Zinemaldia
Festival de San Sebastián
International Film Festival

**Urbil, euskal
produkzioekin bat!**

**Gure kulturaren zantzuak
elkarrekin zaindu eta
ospatu ditzagun.**

www.urbil.es

