

IN FOCUS

Five new films in postproduction. **By Mary Glucksman**

JACKSON AVENUE HUSTLE

"It's about people in tough predicaments fighting like hell to get out," says John-Luke Montias (*Bobby G Can't Swim*) about his second feature, *Jackson Avenue Hustle*, a stylized New York crime film that weaves three stories about a sex-slavery victim, a sensitive Japanese hit man and a local car thief.

The son of an esteemed Yale economist who was also one of the world's leading Vermeer scholars, Montias grew up in New Haven, Conn. and studied acting at NYU. He staged his own plays Off-Off-Broadway before directing a feature-film debut (which he also wrote and started) inspired by the colorful Hell's Kitchen characters he'd met as a neighborhood bartender. The no-budget *Bobby G* won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2000 Florida Film Festival and the AFI Los Angeles fest's Best Director Award and had its European premiere at San Sebastian before its blink-and-you-missed-it domestic release. "We opened on six screens in Paris, played Singapore for three months and sold numerous international territories, but it was not widely seen in the U.S.," says Montias, adding that Showtime just bought the film. "*Bobby G* got me to Hollywood agents and meetings, but support for what I wanted to make wasn't hap-



JOHN-LUKE MONTIAS' JACKSON AVENUE HUSTLE.

PHOTO BY: GORDON ERICKSON

pening. Ultimately I said, 'I got *Bobby G* made on a shoestring [budget] outside the system, so why can't I do that again?'"

The Super 16mm *Hustle* shot 20 days in New York and Jersey City this January and February, with *Bobby* d.p. George Gibson as cinematographer; locations included Coney Island, Chinatown's Pell Street and the exterior of Shea Stadium. Montias, Jessica Pimentel, Stivi Paskoski (*Brotherhood*) and

Jun Suenaga (*The Love Machine*) round out the cast. "We shot at a breakneck pace, with actors speaking Cantonese and Japanese and temperatures so low we'd have to cut when people's jaws froze," says Montias. "It was actually harder than the first film." With *Jackson* out for fest consideration by early June, Montias plans to segue seamlessly into a early September production on his third feature, the black comedy *Mother's Day*.