



Inside FX's Slasher-Themed Campaign for AHS: 1984

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As FX prepared to launch the ninth season of American Horror Story, the network tapped into its well-established marketing strategy-comprising a slew of teasers and key art-to set the stage for its nostalgic theme: '80s slasher films.

"The series allows us to do what [marketers] always want: to be creative and not have to start from scratch with the audience where the marketing messaging and visuals have to be didactic!" said Stephanie Gibbons, president, creative, strategy and digital, multi-platform marketing, FX Networks. "You can just jump right in and the more unusual here, the better."

Despite its established strategy and audience, season nine of the horror anthology-labeled AHS: 1984-offered some new opportunities for Gibbons and Todd Heughens, SVP of print design, FX Networks.

"This season, more than any other, is more genre-based. For younger people, it's vintage and for us, it's just a memory," Gibbons said. "But I think it resonates with both. I have nieces and nephews who know Halloween, Friday the 13th and all those movies as well as I do."

Those iconic franchises-along with Nightmare on Elm Street-served as the "true

north on the compass," Gibbons said. The team also relied on their own experiences from the '80s, channeling the decade through a "modern lens."

"Sometimes our memory of the best marketing from a certain era is better than the actual thing," Heughens said.

"We literally went back to our memories and looked through a ton of horror films," Gibbons said. "We tried to distill it down to the tropes-visually and narratively-that are present in almost all of those pulpy horror narratives."

That included "cliché" yet iconic scenarios that scream "'80s slasher films," such as teens sneaking off to make out, being chased into the woods and getting stabbed from behind-all of which are represented in the season's 18 teasers.

"Every other season, we work really hard to avoid cliché," Heughens said. "What we've found this year was that we shouldn't avoid cliché, we should just do it really well."

The teasers comprise "certain stock characters" to elevate the theme, including the prom queen, bad boy, ill-fated couple, jock, nerd and more. Once these tropes were identified, the team carefully determined what deadly scenes they should be a part of.

"And we were lucky enough to shoot at an actual summer camp, which gave us the creeps," Heughens said. "It was very creepy."

Moving In

Welcome to Camp Redwood

Nightmare

Parked

Shower

In recreating these scenarios, it was also important to never show the actual murder, Gibbons noted.

"We went a step away from where the show and those movies can go, because we felt it was a lot more exciting to play into anticipation versus the gore and threat," Gibbons said. "We integrated these moments where the subject feels like his or her life is in danger-even though the knife is not piercing their body-or the audience sees that the subject's life is in danger in that moment."

That theme also is reflected in more than 20 editions of key art, inspired by Ryan Murphy's visually-focused themes.

"The thrill of working [with] Ryan Murphy is that the art direction is beyond exquisite," Gibbons said. "You can really lean into the retina and find things that excite your eye even before you know anything about it. He always picks very visually infused themes."

'AHS:1984' key art. [FX Networks]

All of these elements comprise American Horror Story's killer season-nine campaign, which also included an activation at San Diego Comic-Con and FX's first overnight immersive experience on Friday the 13th. They all work in unison to excite the franchise's already-existing fans ahead of season 9's premiere on Wednesday, Sept. 18.

"Just like the comfort of a long-term relationship, you can communicate in less words," Gibbons said. "You have a shorthand with each other, but you also have the freshness, newness, excitement and anticipation of the unknown. It's like being married with a perfect mistress. It really works well as a marketer."