

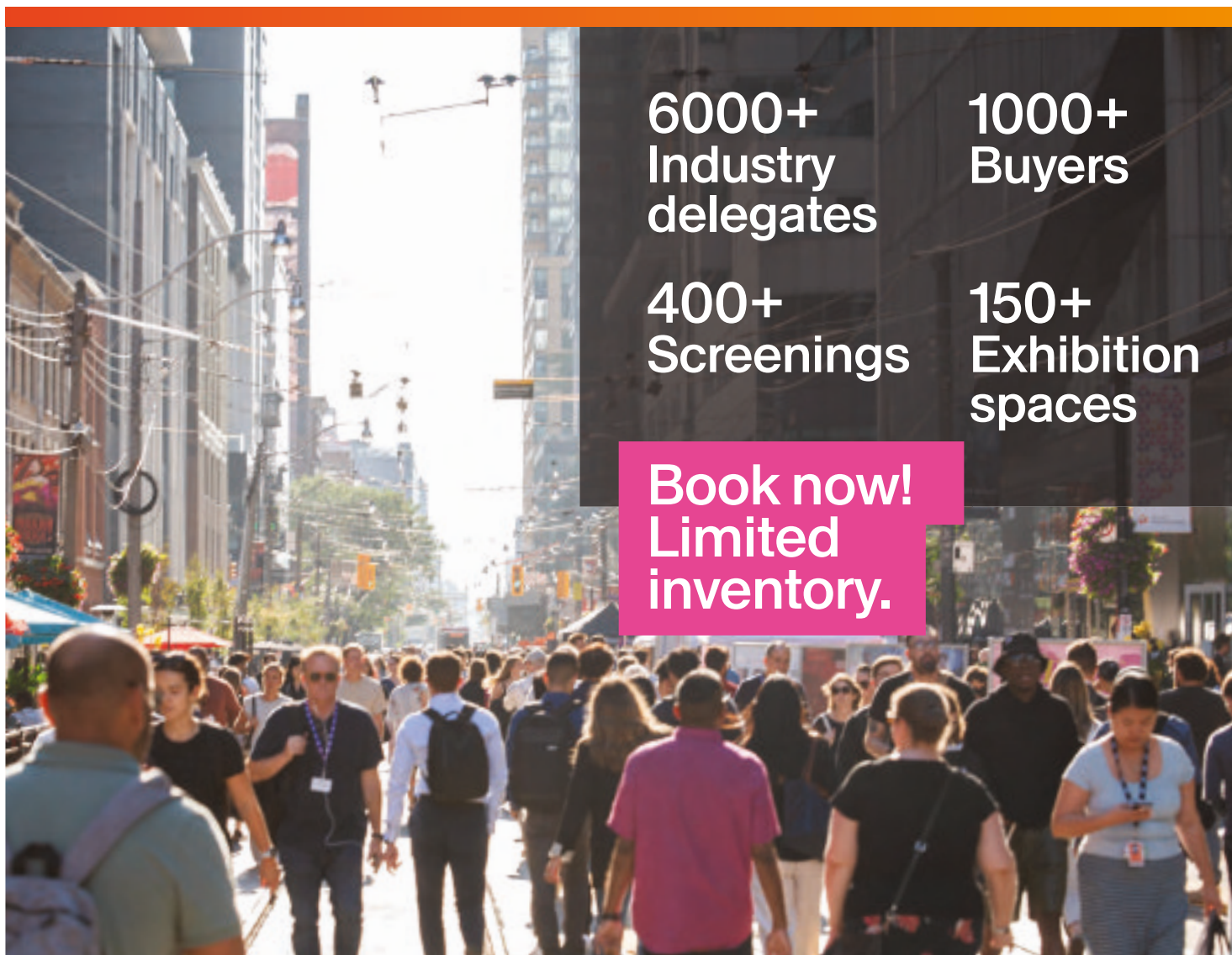
# THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

MAY 14, 2026 | DAY 3 | CANNES

THR.COM/CANNES

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## ALL THAT WE NEVER WERE

a Romantic Drama film by Jorge Alonso

Fri May 15th – 15:45 hs – Palais F

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a Horror Film by Olallo Rubio

Thu May 14th – 16:15 hs – Palais E




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**Thu May 14th – 12:00 hs – Lerins 3**  
**Sat May 16th – 15:45 hs – Lerins 2**



## UNDER YOUR FEET

a Fantasy / Thriller film by Cristian Bernard

Fri May 15th – 12:00 hs – Palais C

**NO HIT WONDER**

A Dramatic Comedy film by Florian Dietrich

**Thu May 14th – 14:00 hs – Riviera 1**

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# THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

MAY 14, 2026

DAY 3

CANNES

CANNES  
WEATHER  
AND HIGH  
TEMPS

TODAY  
72° F  
22° C



TOMORROW  
63° F  
17° C



REVIEWS

*A Woman's Life* page 40

*Nagi Notes* page 41

*In Waves* page 44

more reviews on [THR.com](https://www.thr.com)

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

### Breaking the Auteur Glass Ceiling

Eight years after their march on the Palais steps, women directors are still waiting for Cannes to make good on its gender parity promises

BY MIA GALUPPO AND LILY FORD

In 2018, Ava DuVernay, Cate Blanchett, Agnès Varda, Kristen Stewart and over 80 other female filmmakers stood on the steps of the Palais at the Cannes Film Festival to protest gender inequality in the global film industry. That year, only three films in the festival's prestigious competition section were directed by women.

Thierry Frémaux then signed a pledge from Le Collectif 50/50, the French association dedicated to promoting sexual and gender diversity in the film industry. The pledge outlined steps the festival would take to move toward greater inclusion of women in its lineup, among them generating gendered statistics for its annual program, while working toward achieving gender equity in its governing bodies and programming committees.

Some eight years later, while gains have been made, this year's competition section includes five female directors, down from last year's seven (the record for the most women directors ever in competition). At the 2026 festival's opening press conference on May 12, Cannes boss Frémaux

(Continued on page 2)



DIRECTOR Q&A

### Diego Luna Is Ready to Talk

Between *Andor*, a live-action *Tangled* and a Cannes premiere, the busy actor-director reflects on his intimate new migration film *Ashes*, the mother he never knew and the Cesar Chavez revelations that left him devastated BY RYAN GAJEWSKI



READ ON PAGE 26

For all the latest coverage of the Cannes Film Festival, go to [THR.COM/CANNES](https://www.thr.com/cannes)



Cate Blanchett, standing with other women in the industry, read a statement demanding gender parity at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival.

## GLASS CEILING

*Continued from page 1*

defensively offered: “Films are chosen for their quality, not the gender of their directors.”

“The word quota is scarring everybody,” says **Fanny de Casimacker**, general delegate at Le Collectif 50/50. “People in the industry are always giving responsibility to someone else. We really think that every single step of the film industry has a big responsibility.”

When asked about its efforts to reach parity in the festival’s main competition, a spokesperson for the fest who was reached for comment by *THR* said: “The Cannes Film Festival has been committed to gender parity for several years across all areas directly under its responsibility.”

Cannes provided *THR* with an array of data, such as the fact that the juries have been gender balanced since 2011, their presidents since 2013, and the

official selection committee is a team currently composed of five women and four men. On top of that, the permanent staff organizing the fest and the Marché du Film is now over 50 percent female, including in leadership positions.

The percentage of women — out of the total number of directors — who have feature films in the official selection this year (competition, Un Certain Regard, out of competition, Midnight Screening, Special Screening and Cannes Première) is at 34 percent, up 8 percent from 2025. But this number dwindles to just 22 percent in the festival’s marquee competition section, which features films that most often go on to win awards and land top distribution deals.

“We’re having a really hard time breaking through the auteur glass ceiling. There is still the perception that auteurs are men,” says Women in Film CEO

**Kirsten Schaffer**, who notes there are a handful of exceptions, like **Chloé Zhao** and **Jane Campion**. At Cannes, a festival that bills itself as the global home of auteurs, female directors can face even more biases.

**Faith Elizabeth**, founder of U.K.-based female empowerment organization Yes She Cannes, a Croisette fixture since 2018, says the competition section is where the crux of the issue lies. “Competition is considered in a much higher regard in terms of the selection, because they’re competing for the Palme d’Or,” she tells *THR*. Yes She Cannes holds events aimed at championing female filmmakers and producers, and arranges tangible support systems for those entering the industry.

The 2026 short film competition is close to parity, with four of the 10 films directed by women, while 44 percent of the special screenings are directed

*(Continued on page 46)*

## JAWS DROP

# Kate Beckinsale Sinks Her Teeth Into Shark Flick

The shark survival genre has reeled in another star: **Kate Beckinsale**.

The *Hollywood Reporter* can reveal that the *Serendipity* and *Aviator* actress has boarded action film *White* from director **Jake West** (*Evil Dead*), alongside **Katherine McNamara** (*Maze Runner: The Death Cure*). The script is written by **Dan Schaffer**, the writer and illustrator of the cult comic book series



Beckinsale

*Dogwitch*. Beckinsale will also executive produce the feature.

The film follows Willa Harba, a struggling actress trying to catch her big break,

who is traveling overseas for a shoot with a self-obsessed star when their private jet crashes into the Pacific. The sole survivor, she’s stranded on a fractured wing with nothing but ocean around her. Her only lifeline is a satellite phone salvaged from the wreck, but when she calls for rescue, her demanding studio boss, Barbara (Beckinsale), brushes her off. Her signal is then picked up by marine biologist Sam Swatek (McNamara). She delivers chilling news: Willa has crashed into the infamous White Shark Café, a stretch of ocean where great whites gather to feed.

Highland Film Group is handling worldwide sales, launching in Cannes, and co-financing the project. *White* is produced by **Yariv Lerner** (*Hellboy*), **Dominic Burns** (*Jay and Silent Bob Reboot*), **Crawford Anderson-Dillon** (*5lbs of Pressure*) and **Sky Morfopoulos** (*Wildcat*).

“*White* is an incredibly elevated and intense adventure for the ages, filled with tension, emotion and ferocious sharks,” says Fraser, Highland Film Group’s CEO. The company’s COO Perrier adds: “We are delighted to be working with producer Yariv Lerner, who continues to be a guiding force behind some of today’s most innovative action films. And with our wonderful cast led by Kate Beckinsale and Katherine McNamara, it’s the perfect addition to our Cannes slate.” — LILY FORD

## Meanwhile, in the Real World ...

→ The war in Iran has cost the U.S. \$29 billion so far, according to an updated Pentagon estimate. An expert from the Harvard Kennedy School recently projected that the conflict with Iran could end up costing American taxpayers \$1 trillion-plus.

→ A man who was arrested in Atlanta last year on charges of stealing hard drives containing unreleased **Beyoncé** music has pleaded guilty. He now faces two years in prison and will spend three years after that sentence on probation.

→ **Jimmy Kimmel** roasted the TV industry at Disney’s New York upfront presentation amid recent late night turbulence. Referencing his suspension from ABC amid a showdown with **Donald Trump**, he quipped: “I cost our company billions.”

# PÖFF30

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INDEPENDENT VOICES

# Empire Records Founder Ghazi Shami Boards Gaza Documentary

BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH

**G**hazi Shami, founder and CEO of leading U.S. independent record label Empire, has signed on as an executive producer on *American Doctor*, **Poh Si Teng's** Sundance documentary about three American physicians — one Palestinian, one Jewish, one Zoroastrian — who travel to Gaza to provide medical care in the middle of a war zone.



Shami

Shami announced the collaboration, together with **Badie** and **Hamza Ali**, co-founders of Watermelon Pictures, which is releasing *American Doctor*

in North America, at the Cannes Film Festival on Wednesday night. Outlook Filmsales is handling international sales on the film and presenting to buyers at the Cannes market.

This *American Doctor* tie-in follows Empire and Watermelon Pictures' collaboration on *Palestine 36*. Shami was an executive producer on **Annamarie Jacir's** Oscar-shortlisted drama, and Empire compiled a 36-track companion soundtrack for the movie. Watermelon co-produced *Palestine 36*, a period drama set during the Arab revolt against British colonial rule, and released the film stateside.

"I'm thrilled to be here in Cannes alongside the Watermelon Pictures team celebrating this film and everything they've built," says Shami. "What



*American Doctor* follows three U.S. physicians who travel to Gaza to provide medical care in a war zone.

Watermelon Pictures has accomplished in such a short time is truly inspiring. Both Empire and Watermelon were founded on the belief that independent voices deserve global platforms. *American Doctor* is one of the most important documentaries I've seen in years, and I'm proud to join the project as it continues connecting with audiences around the world."

Speaking to *The Hollywood Reporter*, Shami says Empire is looking to broaden its collaboration with Watermelon Pictures to support their films "with music licensing, soundtracks, with anything we can do."

"We're honored to continue our partnership with Ghazi," adds Hamza Ali. "Ghazi is someone who has consistently broken barriers and created space for independent voices to thrive on a global scale. To have him join *American Doctor* after our collaboration on *Palestine 36* is deeply meaningful. There's a shared mission between our companies rooted in culture, storytelling and creating real impact through art."

Ali says Watermelon will be rolling out *American Doctor* in domestic theaters this summer and be making "a full awards push" for the documentary.

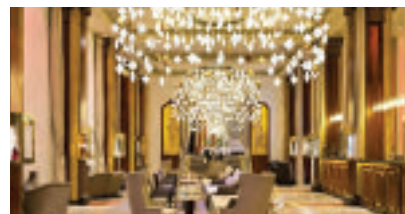
Watermelon Pictures, launched in 2024, was a producer and/or distributor on Oscar-shortlisted films *From Ground Zero*, *Palestine 36* and *All That's Left of You*, as well as **Kaouther Ben Hania's** Oscar-nominated *The Voice of Hind Rajab*. **VIVA**

## Room Service: Inside Cannes' Best Hotels

Where Grace Kelly slept, juries dine and deals get done BY MELINDA SHECKELLS

### Carlton Cannes, a Regent Hotel 58 Boulevard de la Croisette

Opened in 1913, the Carlton is arguably Cannes' most famous film hotel thanks to its prominent role in *To Catch a Thief* starring **Grace Kelly** and **Cary Grant**. Its belle époque façade and location helped define the Riviera fantasy for generations of Hollywood audiences. The hotel serves as one of the industry's unofficial headquarters, where sprawling terraces, private beach cabanas and sea-facing suites are prime venues for meetings, parties, celebrity sightings and high-profile industry gatherings.



### Hôtel Barrière Le Majestic Cannes 10 Boulevard de la Croisette

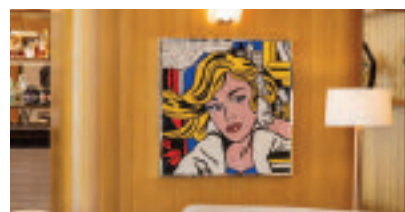
Directly across from the Palais, Le Majestic remains one of the Croisette's most important hotels. Built in 1926 — two decades before the Cannes Film Festival launched — the property has long attracted celebrity guests and industry power players. The lobby walls are lined with black-and-white photographs documenting that history, while the beachfront terrace and Fouquet's Cannes restaurant fill with actors, filmmakers, executives, publicists and photographers moving between screenings, meetings, interviews and late night dinners.

### Hôtel Martinez 73 Boulevard de la Croisette

Since opening in 1929, Hôtel Martinez has remained one of Cannes' defining addresses. Redesigned by **Pierre-Yves Rochon**, the art deco landmark is instantly recognizable for its wrought-iron Juliette balconies and grand façade. The hotel has hosted the Cannes Film Festival jury dinner since the 1990s, while its two-Michelin-starred restaurant, La Palme d'Or, references the festival year-round. Set slightly farther down the Croisette, Martinez balances Riviera glamour with a more relaxed atmosphere.

### JW Marriott Cannes 50 Boulevard de la Croisette

JW Marriott Cannes remains the only Croisette hotel with its own auditorium: the 820-seat Palais Stéphanie theater. The venue has long hosted concerts, premieres, fashion presentations and entertainment events. Above the city, Le Panorama Rooftop and pool deck offer sweeping views of the French Riviera, Mediterranean sunsets, private cabanas, cocktail service and an escape from the festival crowds. Its entertainment history, event spaces and rooftop continue to make the hotel a popular gathering place.



### Mondrian Cannes 48 Boulevard de la Croisette

The Mondrian stands apart for its sprawling private garden that opens directly onto the sand — a rarity along the Croisette, where outdoor space comes at a premium. Formerly the Grand Hotel Cannes, the property now pairs sleek interiors with sea-facing terraces and a quieter atmosphere than its central location near the Palais might suggest. That combination of genuine beach access, open-air spaces, understated luxury and discreet service makes it a natural fit for private meetings, cocktail hours and low-key celebrity stays.

EXCLUSIVE  
FIRST  
LOOK



## Monster Star Power

**Léa Seydoux** (left) and **Catherine Deneuve** as mother and daughter in *Gentle Monster*, the new film from *Corsage* director **Marie Kreutzer**, which is premiering in Cannes competition on May 15. Seydoux plays Lucy, a successful pianist, who sacrifices her own career to move with her family to the countryside to support her partner, Philip (**Laurence Rupp**), after he suffers burnout. But an early morning police visit brings horrific allegations that threaten to tear their world apart, as Lucy is trapped between the man she loves and the fear of what he may have done.

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TO THE VENICE  
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2026

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HIDDEN GEM

# An Animated Reinvention of Opera's Leading Lady

Sébastien Laudenbach on adapting Bizet's *Carmen* for a young audience, why he set out to make a movie he'd never quite finish and what failure can teach children **BY LILY FORD**



The film reframes Bizet's story by focusing on the children's chorus, primarily the leader, Belén, and her fellow orphan, Salvador.

I think animated movies are dead," declares **Sébastien Laudenbach**.

It's quite the statement from the celebrated filmmaker and illustrator, whose 2023 movie *Chicken for Linda!* won him a César Award. He's catching up with *The Hollywood Reporter* before the premiere of his latest feature, *Viva Carmen* — inspired by **Georges Bizet's** beloved opera — hypnotizes the Croisette with its sun-dappled, spirited animation and imaginative storytelling.

To clarify his point, the festival regular must cite his mother tongue. "In French, it's the same word to say [you are] finishing something and killing something. It's very strong," Laudenbach says. "I'm moved by

unfinished drawings, by unfinished sketches. When something is totally finished, it can be beautiful, but it can be dead, as well." So, in the case of *Viva Carmen*, Laudenbach's objective was clear: "To not finish the movie."



Laudenbach

You wouldn't know the film is, according to its director, incomplete. The product of that poetically described creative approach is simply stunning: The Seville-set movie adapts Bizet's story by fleshing out the lives of the children's chorus, primarily focusing on the leader of the pack, Belén, and her fellow orphan, Salvador. In 1845, Salvador — along with the rest of the town — is set abuzz

by a captivating gypsy woman. When a gifted knife grinder glimpses into the future of his sharpened blades and foretells a tragic fate for Carmen at the hands of a soldier, José, Salvador musters a band of misfit street kids to challenge those unyielding threads of destiny.

For Laudenbach, *Viva Carmen* was always about appealing to as wide an audience as possible. "I know we can't change the world with a movie, but maybe speaking to kids, a young audience — [the opera] *Carmen* is only an adult story — [...] it's a way to make this story more simple and more accessible." He's well aware that the tale is not the easiest sell for kids, considering Carmen's widely known fate, but this tussle with failure is exactly the message he hopes to send to young audiences — the ones lucky enough to catch it on the Croisette, but also theatergoers in December, when the film gets its wide release. "Normally, kids have a mission, and they succeed," he says. "Here, it's not the case. They fail, but after the failure, [they can think]: 'What can we do? What's next? Maybe we can change the world?'"

Laudenbach can't talk about the movie without gushing over the work of his team, including producer **Pierre-Henri Léon**, who first came up with the idea to adapt the opera, graphic designer **Cyril Pedrosa**, head of character design **Éléa Gobbé-Mévellec** and production designer **Élodie Rémy**. They created, he says, an unfinished piece of cinema, teeming with mystery. "Having a mystery when you are kid, but also when you are an adult, it's beautiful," he says.

He confesses that the prospect of premiering *Viva Carmen* in Cannes is a little daunting. But Laudenbach is ready to send Carmen and the kids out into the world, far from the elite circles of opera: "I work on this movie every day, but now it's not mine anymore. So I look at him — I look at it, but it's like a person for me — and I want to tell him to grow, to meet people. Cannes is a good first step." **VTR**

## Cannes, According to ... The Buyer



**Miranda King**  
VP acquisitions, co-productions, Bleecker Street

### Best bargain in Cannes?

My co-worker and I both like to stock up on European skincare at the pharmacies since it's so much cheaper there than in the U.S. Avène Cicalfate forever.

### Favorite meal in Cannes?

As a vegetarian, food in Cannes can sometimes pose a bit of a challenge. My go-to for fast casual is the Acai Spot, an amazing vegan place that literally keeps me alive during the festival. And for a nicer dinner, I really like UVA.

### Biggest Cannes faux pas?

Wearing uncomfortable shoes in the name of fashion. Blisters and rolled

ankles are not worth it, I promise! Be judicious with your sartorial choices (at least with regards to footwear).

### Place to avoid during the festival?

The Croisette at peak hours. Would rather circumvent the crowds and take an extra 10 minutes to get to my next meeting than fight my way through the thick of it.

### Your "only in Cannes" moment?

I was leaving the CAA party a few years ago just as the star of one of our upcoming movies was walking in. We were in post on *The Lesson*, and I'd been staring at **Daryl McCormack's** face almost daily for months, and then seeing him

suddenly materialize in front of me was surreal. I think I said something to that effect when I introduced myself to him.

### Most interesting celebrity encounter?

In 2022, everywhere I went, **Paul Mescal** was there. I promise it was unintentional, but I can't say I was mad about it.

### Cannes guilty pleasure?

This is so deeply annoying, so I apologize to everyone in advance, but it's finding the time to go on a run — eastward, along the Croisette, away from the crowds. It's so gorgeous over there and is a necessary mental break.

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MIMAOKU invests in lantern festival projects integrating various cultures and interpretations, seeking suitable venues, partner organizations and investors around the world.

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We develop ELF MAY CHANT, a Chinese cyber project with social reality and global coexistence themes, focusing on co-production and game development, and are currently seeking international co-production partnerships.

### FRAGMENTS OF BEING Cannes Premiere

MAY 20<sup>th</sup> 18:00 - 19:50

Palais F, Marché du Film, Festival de Cannes

FRAGMENTS OF BEING was premiered at Cannes Marché du Film, including Modern Libretto, Frequency (Maggie Qin & Uriah Jiang) and Doll (Xuaner Zhang & Uriah Jiang), exploring the experience of being through fragmented consciousness.

### ANFFF AI-Empowered Ecological Film Incubator

Under the Animal Nature Future Film Festival (ANFFF), operated by MIMAOKU and supported by SHVFS, two promising documentary series on bird conservation and a 3,000-stray cat rescue sanctuary are being developed. This initiative supports filmmakers to integrate AI tools within full copyright compliance, using AI to optimize content and upscale archival footage. MIMAOKU views AI as a filmmaker's supportive tool, striking an ideal balance between technology and creativity, and empowering documentaries to thrive in the AI era.



### International Agency

Directed by Sun Ning, supervised by Lu Chuan and produced by Kean Cao, the world's first wild crested ibis documentary, shot over 6 years, tells the touching story of their survival journey.

Scheduled for release in China in June 2026 and globally in October.

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presenting SPACE NATION

 **Kling AI** Presented by: WINSTON | BAKER <sup>▲▲</sup>MIMAOKU<sup>△△</sup> Media Partner: **SCREEN** INTERNATIONAL  MARCHÉ DU FILM

### FROM CREATIVE POSSIBILITY TO PRODUCTION REALITY: *Kling AI in Cinematic Workflows*

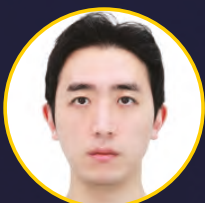
Monday, May 18th | 3:30pm - 5:30pm  
Main Stage, Palais des Festivals



JON ERWIN  
INNOVATIVE DREAMS



WEI LI  
DIRECTOR



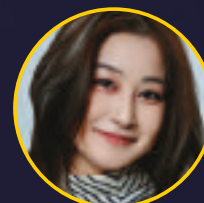
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# WINSTON | BAKER

16th ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CANNES, FRANCE

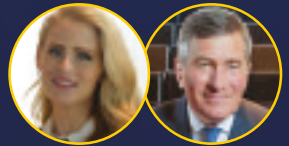
## FILM FINANCE FORUM

PRESENTED BY WINSTON | BAKER IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MARCHÉ DU FILM FESTIVAL DE CANNES

► Friday, May 15th, 2026 | 2:00pm - 6:00pm | Main Stage, Palais des Festivals

### 2:00PM - 2:15PM | WELCOMING ADDRESS

**Amy Baker**, Winston Baker  
**Charles Rivkin**, Motion Picture Association (MPA)



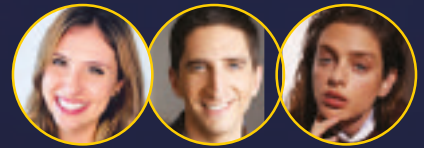
### 2:15PM - 3:00PM | STATE OF THE INDUSTRY; STATE OF FINANCE

**Kayla Bowman**, Fifth Third Bank  
**Maxime Cottray**, XYZ Films  
**Uri Singer**, Passage Pictures  
**Juliana Lubin**, Ashland Hill Media Finance  
**Paul Scanlan**, Legion M Entertainment



### 3:00PM - 3:30PM | FIRESIDE CHAT: CORPORATE RETREAT

**Miriam Spritzer**, Int'l Correspondent & Golden Globe Board Member  
**Aaron Fisher**, Corporate Retreat  
**Odeya Rush**, Corporate Retreat



### 3:30PM - 4:15PM | THE POWER (S)HIFT: CREATOR ECONOMY; FROM STORY TO GLOBAL BRAND

**Tyler Sabino**, The Shift Studios and Shifter(s) OS; Shifter(s) Series  
**Vic Mensa**, Musician, Actor, Filmmaker & Entrepreneur  
**Brendan McCafferty**, IPX  
**Edgar Esteves**, Filmmaker, Entrepreneur & Innovator



### 4:15PM - 5:00PM | DIRECTORS' ROUNDTABLE

**Alex Proyas**, (*I, Robot*; *The Crow*; *Dark City*)  
**Roger Avary**, (*Pulp Fiction*; *Killing Zoe*; *Rules of Attraction*)  
**Marco Weber**, Ex Machina Studios  
**Daniel Baur**, K5 International



### 5:00PM - 5:45PM | GREENLIGHT & GLOBAL: THE NEW RULES OF INDIE FILM

**Maria Soccor**, Maria Soccor Productions  
**Laura Lewis**, Rebelle Media | Producers United  
**Imani "Manny" Halley**, Imani Media Group  
**David Orman**, Hiway  
**Tristen Tuckfield**, Wonder Project  
**Nick Vallelonga**, 2x Academy Award Winning Filmmaker (*Green Book*, *That's Amore!*)



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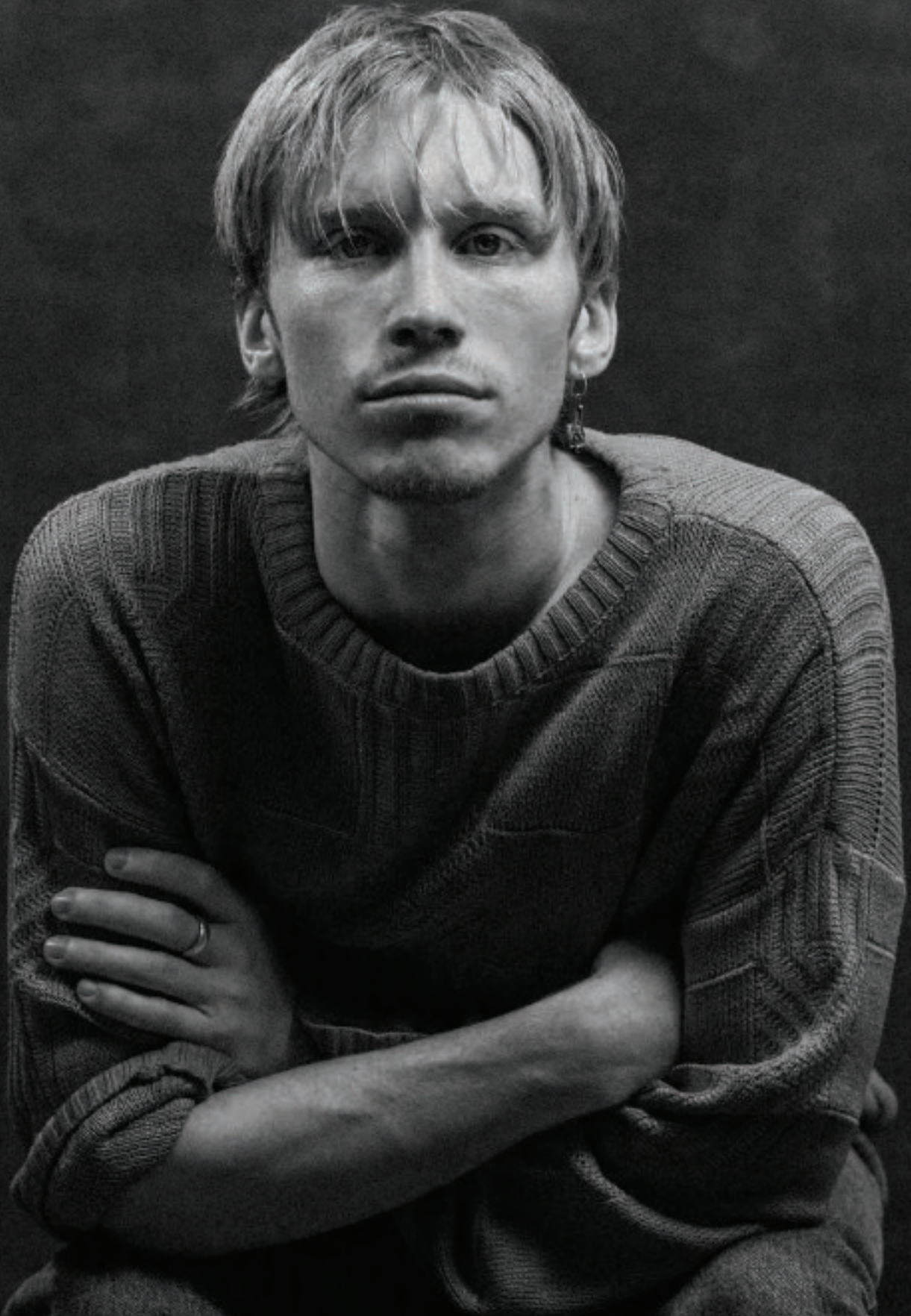
HOLLYWOOD REPORTER



CANNES RISING STAR

# *The Man I Love's* Luther Ford

Four years ago, he sent in a self-tape as a dare. Now he's making his feature debut opposite Rami Malek in Ira Sachs' Cannes competition film (and he's never had a single acting lesson) BY LILY FORD



**L**uther Ford's start in this industry began with a teasing dare from his relatives.

The Londoner was already an admirer of the craft. He was studying film editing at a university in Bournemouth, on the U.K.'s south coast, but had never dreamed of being in front of the camera. Until four years ago, when a small Netflix series called *The Crown* — you might have heard of it — launched a country-wide casting call for the role of an adolescent Prince Harry.

"I did [it] as a joke," Ford says through giggles to *The Hollywood Reporter*. "My brother's wife sent it to me like, 'You're ginger. Get out there.' And then I got the part." Three weeks after that self-mocking self-tape, a Mercedes-Benz was waiting outside one of Bournemouth's student accommodation blocks. Ford, with nothing but a well-timed resemblance to the redheaded royal, was due on set.

"*The Crown* was scary," the 26-year-old recalls. "That's a hard place to start because you're literally learning while you're doing it. It was so visible." And yet, without any formal acting training, Ford's taken that high-exposure Netflix credit and run with it. He secured an agent and landed supporting roles in 2024's **Keira Knightley**-starring spy thriller *Black Doves* and last year's historical miniseries *King & Conqueror*. And now, the young actor has pulled off a feat that will almost certainly render his university peers speechless: Ford is making his feature film debut

Luther Ford never considered acting until he heard about a casting call for *The Crown*. He now appears opposite Rami Malek in Ira Sachs' *The Man I Love* (inset).



in **Ira Sachs'** heartrending, musical drama *The Man I Love*. "This film definitely feels like the first time I understood the creativity of acting," he ponders. "[And] it's definitely the pinnacle of being in a film, for me. There's nothing more I would like to be a part of than a film like this."

To have reached one's career pinnacle within just five projects is, the newcomer concedes, a real blessing. It began with an audition that Ford nearly passed on — his impressive run of form has come with plenty of rejections,

**"The Crown was a hard place to start because you're literally learning while you're doing it. It was so visible."**

too — and a Sachs movie, he felt, was bound to be a real dogfight. Soon, Ford was face-to-face with the American filmmaker, a recent rewatch of *Passages* in his back pocket. "We spoke for two hours," he says. "Talking about films, my local cinemas. And then [Sachs] was like, 'What do you think about the film?' We had a nice conversation about that. Halfway through, he was just like, very casually, 'So, yeah, I'd love you to do it.' He's never seen anything I've done to this day."

*The Man I Love* stars Ford as Vincent, a young British bachelor who's moved into the same building as the popular, charismatic performer Jimmy George (**Rami Malek**) and his partner, the stoic, elusive Dennis (**Tom Sturridge**). Backdropped by New York's '80s AIDS crisis, the film sees Ford's character develop a painstaking infatuation with Jimmy, despite the latter's declining health. Sachs, in fine form, comes to the Croisette with a feature that asks his audience to peer into the space between life and death, and contemplate the sanctity of art in doing so.

Ford, in his first interview about the film, is still formulating his thoughts on it. "For

Vincent, it isn't a coming out story. He's not someone who's discovering that he's gay, but he is discovering love — his version of love — which I think is really interestingly contrasted with Dennis' version," he says. "We always talked about him like he would have been from the suburbs of London. Maybe he's never really left home, and is coming to New York for experience. He finds this person who maybe represents something so different, which is so exciting to him ... It becomes this obsession where it's almost like he wants to consume [Jimmy], and prove to him that his love is bigger than the stakes of death."

The shoot took place last summer on location, Ford awed by colleagues Malek, Sturridge, **Rebecca Hall** and **Ebon Moss-Bachrach**. "That is kind of my favorite thing about the film," he tells *THR*. "My first thought watching it was like, 'Fuck, [Malek]'s really so good.' Everyone is really good."

Admittedly, Ford himself was a little shy among such seasoned players. His closest relationship was with Sachs, and securing the director's trust was a buoying experience. Thus far, even with a Cannes photocall next to Rami Malek and Ira Sachs imminent, Ford has taken a lot of comfort from his unconventional showbiz start. "Being naive is really quite good, because you actually don't understand how hard the industry is," he says. "At times, you need to be fairly guarded and cynical to enjoy it. It's very hard to feel a sense of security until you're extremely successful," he adds with a smile. "It's such a psychological job."

One thing's for sure: This is absolutely his job now. He's got a TV show in the works that he can't talk about yet, but that's a conversation for another time — here, in Cannes, Luther Ford has already peaked. "It looks deeply glamorous. It looks chaotic," the Gen Z star says about what to expect from his first major film festival. And then, suddenly, all royal etiquette goes out the window: "I've been looking at pictures of the [Louis Lumière Auditorium]. It's fucking huge!" **VIR**

## My Cannes Moment

### Jia Zhangke



Chinese auteur **Jia Zhangke** returns to Cannes for the seventh time this year with *Torino Shadow*, a 32-minute short showing in the festival's Special Screenings section.

*My most impressive Cannes encounter came in 2013, the year A Touch of Sin was in competition. Someone came up to me at a party — and it was Bernardo Bertolucci (pictured right). And it was he who wanted to meet me! As I shook his hand, he told me he had seen all of my films except for one documentary, because he hadn't been able to find a copy. I couldn't believe it — this was tremendous encouragement. Then we talked for a while about his experience making The Last Emperor, how few hotels there were in Beijing at that time, and how much China has changed since the 1980s. Then, at that same party, I was introduced to Abbas Kiarostami. He said, "Unlike Bernardo, I haven't seen your films yet, but I still want to give you a hug" — and he gave me a big hug. That was another great director giving a young director some warm encouragement. When I think of these memories now, I grow emotional because both of them have left us. For me, I love encountering great cinema at Cannes, but the people you meet there are the most important thing. The old guard giving some of their strength to the next generation — I hope now I can do the same.*

For all the latest coverage of the Cannes Film Festival, go to **THR.COM/CANNES**

# The Outsider Who Walked Into Cannes With Three Competition Films

Marco Perego had no producing track record when he founded Leaf Entertainment. Two years later, he's behind Zvyagintsev's comeback, Mungiu's new film and James Gray's *Paper Tiger* — and he's just getting started **BY DAVID CANFIELD**

**M**arco Perego, a conceptual artist whose work has been displayed around the world, grew up on world cinema and tends to watch a movie every day. Yet the Italian native has operated mostly outside filmmaking circles — until now. Coming off of his feature directorial debut from 2023, *The Absence of Eden* — which starred his wife, Oscar winner **Zoe Saldña** — Perego launched the production company Leaf Entertainment alongside **Michael Cerenzie**. The goal was simple: Work with the best, most decorated global auteurs and help them get their next projects made. Easier said than done, right?

Perhaps, but Perego has hit a remarkable benchmark in a very short period of time. At this year's Cannes Film Festival, he will make history as the first producer to have three movies in the main competition — and they're among the most pedigreed and anticipated: *Minotaur*, the first film in nine years from Russia's **Andrey Zvyagintsev** (*Leviathan*, *Loveless*); *Fjord*, the **Sebastian Stan**-led drama from Romanian master **Cristian Mungiu** (*4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*); and *Paper Tiger*, the starry latest from Croisette regular **James Gray** toplined by **Scarlett Johansson**, **Adam Driver** and **Miles Teller**. That doesn't even cover Perego's full Cannes slate: He's also behind **Kantemir Balagov's** *Butterfly Jam*, screening in Directors' Fortnight.

As Perego tells *The Hollywood Reporter*, he knows he's new to the producing game and that he does things differently. He sees each highly anticipated film on his slate as part of a larger collective project: "My ultimate goal is to build this idea of a company of artists," he says. "I feel very lucky to give these directors a voice."



"I believe in the spirit of the cinema because when I was very lonely, I spent so much time in the movie theater," says Marco Perego.

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**You have a background as a visual artist. Now you're a producer on three competition films in Cannes. How did that happen?**

Growing up in a small place in Italy, my father and my mother showed me films all the time. I was very curious — it can be a great voice for all these different places around the world, where you can talk about social commentary, or just tell a story about the human condition. The first question I asked myself was: Where is the space to support that? We set up a company called Leaf Entertainment. I asked my partner Michael [Cerenzie], “What do you think about starting to really produce auteurs?” I was very lucky to be part of this very strong community of all these great filmmakers. ... There is a necessity culturally to really help and protect the voice of these great auteurs, now more than ever.

**It's been almost a decade since Andrey Zvyagintsev's last film, and he's been open about health issues in the intervening years. How did you get involved with him on *Minotaur*?**

I've known a friend of his for a long time, and I kept telling him that anything he wants to do, I want to support it. *Leviathan* really changed something in my life: It was an incredible movie, I've watched it so many times. And I'm an artist: My job is not really like a normal producer. I don't want to come in and invade this space. I want to just say, “Hey, I'm here. I can be an asset. Tell me how I can help you.” With this movie, MK Productions and Charles Gillibert, a great producer, were already involved. I asked, “Can I Zoom with Andrey?” Then I told him, “I'm not here to give you a note. I'm

here to support you.” You will see, it is a very important film. I just supported him to make the best film he could.

**You mentioned the necessity of backing these auteurs right now. Is that a unique problem in the U.S. from your perspective? What was it like getting *Paper Tiger* off the ground for James Gray?**

Again, I came in last [among the producers]. You cannot understand right now how, for somebody like James, it really has been a challenge to put a movie together.

**There were some recastings as it remained in development. Did you come in after that?**

I read the script before that; after that, yes, I came in. I was at lunch with James and we had a call with the producers, like Rodrigo [Teixeira], and they said, “The movie is not happening.” He had a film before that was supposed to go with Zoe, my wife, and he's really a friend. I said “OK, let me think about this.” Within a week we put the rest together and he went to make his film.

**How did it turn around, if it looked like it wasn't happening?**

It was missing the money aspect and I helped figure out the money aspect. I supported that aspect and the movie came through.

**What are some of the biggest challenges right now in getting movies like *Paper Tiger* made?**

There are so many. It's very difficult to generate a real business right now. Around the world, people go to the cinema to watch this type of film. There's more [understanding] around what it means to be an auteur, so I hope America really, really will [embrace that], too. The big challenge here is pure economic business. There is a struggle right now to just put together these types of films, and that's where I see an opportunity: to come in and try to support it.

**I know you're focused on the distribution end, and strategizing ways to get these movies widely seen. *Paper Tiger* recently sold to Neon in the U.S. I imagine a lot of the filmmakers you're working with are resistant to streaming. Are you finding that?**

Everything is finding the balance. The question we need to ask is not about being for or against streaming, but how we can support filmmakers on that [topic] correctly. Thinking about it, streaming will be part of the future, but the question is can we protect and continue to make this type of film that goes to cinema, that creates an experience — and after, if they need to go to streaming, they go to

streaming. It's very important to have that experience. I believe in the spirit of the cinema because when I was very lonely, I spent so much time in the movie theater.

I don't think one thing takes away from the other. I just think it's important to be sure: Can we support one another? What does the filmmaker want? That's what we need to consider very carefully. It's about asking the filmmaker how you see your film, where you see your film. I'm asking the question all the time: What James wants, what Andrey wants, what all these people want.

**Coming off of this first round of producing, what are some of the big lessons learned for you in how to move forward?**

The first big lesson is, more than ever, I believe that directors need to be speaking together. Just to understand where everything started for me here, there's this photo of all these great artists together at Mr Chow. I asked myself: Why doesn't a photo like this exist for today's auteurs? I grew up with Coppola, Scorsese, Spielberg, Lucas — they were all together. So I created a manifesto of a creative community, why we need to do this again. My first step was, “Let me see if you want some help from a complete outsider.” The second part, now, is to try to put the community together and see where in the next five years film will change, and how we can support these filmmakers in that. That's really what I want to do now: Build this community. I want to have the same picture of all these great filmmakers together, who can learn [from] each other, exchange ideas with each other, and protect each other. **THR**



Clockwise from top left: Perego arrives in Cannes with three auteur-driven features: Cristian Mungiu's *Fjord*, Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Minotaur* and *Paper Tiger* from James Gray.

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## Dress du Jour Demi Moore

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The jury member and *Substance* star (styled by **Brad Goreski**) stepped out at the opening ceremony in a statement-making stunner by the French fashion house. Designer **Simon Porte Jacquemus** adapted a fall 2026 strapless sequined dress into a floor-length gown to amp up the glamour, punctuated by Chopard jewelry.



WELCOME TO THE ARENA

## Why Cannes Is Like the Hunger Games for Makeup Artists

Independent glam workers who prep stars for the bright lights of the Palais shell out up to \$6,000 of their own money so they can snag clients at the fest — ‘but it’s so worth it.’ May the odds be ever in their favor **BY CHRIS GARDNER**

**D**rama is not exclusive to the big screen in Cannes.

**Naïma Bremer** — a celebrity makeup artist and Fenty global artistry ambassador whose work has appeared at Paris Fashion Week and in the pages of *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar* — has been to the film festival for four years to help bold-faced names prep their faces for the crush of photographers at the Palais and various red carpet events. And from her perch, there’s serious competition in the streets.

“We always call it the Hunger Games

for glam,” she said with a laugh over Zoom from Stockholm at a recent work event. “Our agents are always going crazy trying to get jobs for us during the festival, and it’s quite hectic rushing around because there are people from all over the world who come and we have to fight over the same pool of clients to get that big red carpet moment. But it’s so worth it.”

So worth it, in fact, that Bremer foots the bill herself to come to Cannes for 10 days and hustle from job to job and client to client. While luxury houses like



Left: Makeup artist Naima Bremer makes the annual pilgrimage to Cannes, where she spends a minimum of two hours get each client red carpet ready. Above: Among other stars at the Cannes Film Festival, Bremer has worked with model Jasmine Tookes multiple times.

Dior and Chanel bring their own rosters of artists and ambassadors (travel and accommodations included), some hair and makeup artists like Bremer and her peers pay their own way.

“A lot of people don’t know that we come on our own, and it’s a big investment,” Bremer explains, adding that it can cost anywhere from \$3,000 to \$6,000 each year. “The prices are really crazy here for hotels, food and everything, it makes no sense. Luckily, I have a lot of friends, so we can share an apartment and that makes it so much more fun.”

That said, she considers it money well spent. “There’s so much exposure here and it’s such a major event that as an artist, it gives you a certain credibility, and I would say that it adds credit to your name. Your work is seen by so many people.”

During her Cannes tenure, Bremer has done makeup for such high-profile names as **Jasmine Tookes**, **Josephine Skriver**, **Natasha Poly**, **Iris Law**, **Sabrina Elba**, **Pritika Swarup** and **Sara Sampaio**. Many of those women have social media followings in the millions, so when they share Bremer’s work, it only further amplifies her artistry. That means she takes her time to make it perfect.

“The whole world is looking at Cannes red carpet photos and on Getty Images, there is no filter,” she says. “There is no lying. You have to switch to your techniques that you know will look good and work in any light possible. That’s really difficult to do because the makeup has to almost be undetectable, but you have to put on enough so you can see it. It’s one of the hardest makeup techniques to do.”

In order to accomplish that, Bremer estimated that she gives each client a minimum of two hours. But it can also be a challenge to pull it off in that time frame if the client is also having their hair done or last-minute styling changes with the gown, jewelry, etc.

The Caribbean-born artist, who has also worked on stars outside of Cannes including **Saweetie**, **Willow Smith**, **Kali Uchis**, **Ryan Destiny**, **Imaan Hammam** and **Amina Muaddi**, also says that a big mistake makeup artists make is expecting that their reps will land them every job in Cannes. “It’s actually also great to reach out to people on your own, let people know you’re there and ready to work.”

To survive the week, Bremer also packs a few essentials in her kit: TheraFace LED light mask, TheraFace depuffing wand, steel cryo sticks to help with depuffing and inflammation, a good SPF like Fenty Skin’s Hydra Vizor, Dr. Barbara Sturm’s Sun Drops or Christian Dior’s new Le Fluide UV Invisible, Fenty Beauty’s rose amber lip luminizer and a “must have” lip liner like YSL Beauty’s new Lovenude Lip Blusher in soft matte.

Oh, and a good attitude. “Going to Cannes for me has almost become like a little vacation/glam meetup, so if you’re able to shift your mind from it being super stressful to enjoy it as a time to find community with your fellow artists, it can be really fun actually,” she says. “And I always give a little time to myself. The most fun thing that I get to do in Cannes is after I’ve done my glam, I go sit on a bench on the Croisette and people watch. You get to see so many people walking by in their crazy outfits. It’s great.” **THR**

THE SUITE LIFE

# Dior Pulls Out All the Stops for Glam

Hair, makeup, nail and beauty treatments await the VIPs who snag appointments in the fashion house’s enviable Majestic Hotel suite

Only in Cannes does the glam happen in the most glamorous setting.

For the 79th installment of the film festival, Dior has opened doors to a suite on the Majestic Hotel’s sixth floor, where from May 12-23, the house’s team of beauty experts are on hand to help celebrities prep for their respective red carpet appearances.

Last year, the Dior Suite hosted such stars as **Natalie Portman**, **Robert Pattinson**, **Jennifer Lawrence**, **Ryo Yoshizawa**, **Nicole Wallace**, **Harriet Herbig-Matten**, **Razane Jammal** and **Nadia Tereszkiwicz**. But this year’s VIPs will be greeted by new views. The Dior Suite in Cannes is freshly customized year after year, and for 2026, the interiors drew from multiple inspirations.

The color scheme in shades of white and sky blue evokes a scene just steps away — the French Riviera — and striped patterns give a beach resort feel. To add flair the walls, there is a gallery of characters dressed for a masked ball, which is said to be a nod to the art of film costume design inspired by illustrations done by French artist and fashion illustrator **Christian Bérard**, who had done work for house founder **Christian Dior**.

Monsieur Dior’s handwritten signature has also been added to accentuate the space along with wickerwork shells. Also inside is an old-fashioned tent in the center of the first reception room — a “room within a room,” if you will — that features the same pattern adorned with the Dior Masquerade motif. Steps away, a main reception room offers privacy, palm tree lamps, a white sofa and armchairs positioned toward the terrace with sea views.

Back to the beauty: Dior offers massages and flash facial treatments carried out by house experts in a treatment room. This year’s roster includes U.S. house ambassador **Sarah Akram** and Dior global wellness expert **Hadda Akrim**. The makeup room is led by Dior Backstage professionals like **Norman Pohl**, **Jamie Coombes**, **Junior Cedeno**, **Ricky Wilson**, **Serby Gil** and international makeup artists including **Aurore Gautier**, **Kristina Vidic**, **Ruby Mazuel**, **Khela**, **Phophie Matthias**, **Christina Lutz**, **Carole Hannah** and **Alexandra Schiavi**, using collections designed by Dior Makeup creative and image director **Peter Philips**.

A nail bar for manicures and nail care is fully stocked with the Dior Vernis line. And something for the men: Barber and Dior Sauvage grooming ambassador **Brice Tchaga** will take care of their looks with his signature beard and hair grooming routine that cleanses, calms and energizes. It’s good timing, too, as Dior recently launched Sauvage shampoo and hair serum products in its wildly popular men’s line fronted by **Johnny Depp**.

Dior and Dyson Beauty continue their collaboration in Cannes (under the direction of Dyson ambassador **Pierre Saint-Sever**) with a spotlight on products like the iconic Dyson Supersonic hair dryer, travel-format hair products and formulations, and a new addition with the handheld fan called the HushJet Mini Cool. — C.G.



This year’s Dior Suite at the Majestic Hotel features decor that brings the French Riviera views indoors, offering a serene setting for beauty treatments.

For all the latest coverage of the Cannes Film Festival, go to **THR.COM/CANNES**

LEGEND OF THE GROISSETTE

# THE GREATEST FRENCH ACTOR YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

At 76, Daniel Auteuil arrives at Cannes with two films, a parrot on his head and five decades of work that somehow still hasn't made him a household name outside of France

BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH

Sorry, my apologies," says Daniel Auteuil. "A parrot just landed on my head." Did I hear that right? We're doing the interview over Zoom, without video, and in French — not my strongest language. Our translator sounds equally uncertain.

"I'm not sure I understand," she says carefully. "Apparently there's a parrot?"

Auteuil switches on the camera. And there it is: a grey parrot perched squarely atop his head, utterly at home.

"It's because of all my gray hair," he says, laughing. "She thinks it's her nest."

The image feels oddly perfect. One of the giants of French cinema sitting calmly beneath a bird that has mistaken him for part of the furniture.

For more than five decades,

Auteuil has occupied a singular place in French cinema. He has been a broad comedy star, a romantic lead, a physically transformative character actor and, in films like Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005), a master of near-unnerving minimalism.

He is one of the very few actors of his generation who could move effortlessly between popular mainstream hits and severe auteur cinema without seeming out of place in either.

And yet, outside France and the festival circuit, especially for

those under 50, his name still produces blank stares. Unlike Gérard Depardieu, Jean Reno or even Jean Dujardin, Auteuil rose to and has remained at the summit of French cinema without ever really crossing over into Hollywood.

"It's true," he says with a shrug. "I shot movies in Italy and in England with my bad English, but I never went to Hollywood. At least not yet."

That "not yet" hangs in the air with characteristic Auteuil ambiguity — part wistfulness, part mischief, entirely noncommittal.

At 76, he arrives at this year's Cannes Film Festival with two films premiering on the Croisette, one as an actor, one as a director. It's roughly his 15th appearance at the festival. He is, by any reasonable measure, one



In *Crescendo*, the dramedy from Agnès Jaoui screening out of competition, Daniel Auteuil plays an opera conductor attempting to navigate the post-#MeToo French arts scene.



of the defining faces of modern Cannes. Yet he remains, to most English-speaking audiences, effectively undiscovered.

For devoted Auteuil fans, his lack of an international profile is genuinely puzzling. He is a formidable quadruple threat: actor, writer, director and singer. He got his start as a castmember on the French tour of *Godspell* and, in 2023, aged 71, released his first album of chansons. His range across more than 120 films and TV appearances is staggering. He has worked with André Téchiné and Michael Haneke, with Agnès Varda, Claude Berri and Claude Sautet. He starred opposite Catherine Deneuve in *My Favorite Season* (1993) and *Thieves* (1996) — “my sister of cinema,” he calls her — and alongside Romy Schneider in *The Lady Banker* (1980). “A small role,” he says of the Schneider film. “But what a joy to play with one of the greatest actresses in the world.”

None of it was inevitable.

At 19, Auteuil was rejected three times by France’s National Academy of Dramatic Arts, the kind of early failure that ends many acting careers before they begin.

“But I didn’t have a Plan B, so I had to stick it out,” he says. “I think that’s the strength of youth. You’re completely unaware of the risk. Giving up was never part of my plan.”

For years, he drifted through musical theater, television and minor film roles before his commercial breakthrough arrived in 1980 with *Les sous-doués* (*The Under-Gifted*), Claude Zidi’s blockbuster French teen comedy about schoolkids cheating their way through the baccalaureate exams.

“It made me famous,” Auteuil recalls. “But people thought I was light. I knew I could do other things. But nobody asks you for what they



Auteuil stepped behind the camera to helm *When the Night Falls*, a Holocaust-era drama about a civil servant who attempts to save 100 Jewish children from a deportation camp.

cannot imagine.”

The first director to imagine something else was Claude Berri.

He cast Auteuil in his period epic *Jean de Florette* (1986), playing Ugolin — a stooped, obsessive farmer ultimately destroyed by his own stunted capacity for love. It was a complete physical reinvention. “When I saw myself made up as Ugolin, I thought: ‘Finally, people won’t recognize me,’” says Auteuil. “He really changed my stature, the way people looked at me as an actor.”

The performance earned him both a BAFTA and a César and established him as a dramatic actor.

Another performer might have continued down that path — outward, demonstrative, physically transformational performances akin to the style of his *Jean de Florette* co-star Depardieu. Perhaps that would have led to similar international success. Four years after *Jean de Florette*, Depardieu was playing

alongside Andie MacDowell in Peter Weir’s *Green Card*.

Auteuil moved in the opposite direction.

“I’m afraid I’m not much of a dreamer. I’m very pragmatic,” he says. “I never chose roles thinking about my career. It was always about my desire to spend time with a certain director, with certain actors. It was always about the work.”

That instinct led him to Sautet, and to the performances that would ultimately define him.

If Zidi made Auteuil famous and Berri made him respected, Sautet made him great.

Working with the director transformed his entire approach to acting. The extroverted performer of the early comedies gave way to something quieter and far more difficult: an actor capable of building scenes around silence, withholding and microscopic emotional shifts.

“Claude Sautet really changed my acting, from extrovert

acting to introvert acting,” says Auteuil. “It was a major step for me.”

His performance in *A Heart in Winter* (1992) remains one of the defining works of modern French cinema. As Stéphane, a violin restorer broken inside and emotionally incapable of love, Auteuil does almost nothing outwardly. The performance lives in tiny hesitations, fleeting glances and emotional refusals. He withholds so completely that the audience leans toward him, searching for signs of feeling.

He would return to that same radical interiority years later in Haneke’s *Caché*, playing Georges Laurent, a successful Paris TV host whose carefully controlled bourgeois life begins to unravel as a dark secret from his past resurfaces. Auteuil’s performance is a master class of moral opacity. His Georges is so psychologically sealed off that even his own guilt seems inaccessible to him. *Caché* premiered in Cannes, winning best director and the international critics prize.

“Together, it was these three Claudes — Claude Zidi, Claude Berri and Claude Sautet — that made my career,” says Auteuil. “They made me comfortable doing everything: comedy,

**“NOSTALGIA. LONGING FOR THE PAST. THIS IS MY BIGGEST ENEMY.  
WHAT I WANT IS TO PREPARE THE FUTURE IN THE PRESENT.”**



drama, playing open or playing closed and mysterious.”

That flexibility may also help explain why Auteuil has never fully translated internationally. He never built a singular exportable persona in the way Depardieu or Reno did. There is no “Daniel Auteuil type.” His career is defined by mutation, not branding.

It’s notable that Auteuil drew more attention stateside last year, playing Jodie Foster’s ex-husband, with crackling chemistry between them, in Rebecca Zlotowski’s *A Private Life*, than he did from dozens of acclaimed roles across the past two decades of French cinema.

“Working with Jodie Foster was wonderful,” he says. “She’s very generous but also very demanding. I think we have the same way of working. We’re like little soldiers — we just want to do the work.”

Foster, notably, speaks fluent French.

“What I’d need,” Auteuil jokes, “is for all my favorite American actors to speak French!”

Until then, Cannes remains his natural habitat.

He remembers arriving on the Croisette as a young unknown, wandering freely between screenings and cafés

in a festival that felt less militarized, less consumed by celebrity branding and influencer culture.

“There was less security. You could just drop into a screening or walk along the beach,” he recalls. “Things have changed. Now you have fashion and YouTubers everywhere. But it remains the biggest film festival in the world. The greatest celebration of cinema.”

His defining Cannes moment came in 1996, when he shared the festival’s best actor prize with Pascal Duquenne for *The Eighth Day*, directed by Jaco Van Dormael, in which he played a driven businessman transformed by his friendship with a man with Down syndrome. “I accepted the award from the hands of [jury president] Francis Ford Coppola himself! A very, very happy moment,” he says, grinning.

Two years ago, the legal drama *An Ordinary Case*, which he directed and co-wrote, was accepted for an out-of-competition slot. “That was the first time I was celebrated [in Cannes] as a director. It was equally beautiful and important. Awards matter. But what really matters, for me, is to do the job.”

This Cannes, Auteuil is on double duty and operating in two entirely different registers, itself a kind of demonstration of the range that has defined his career. He’s starring in *Crescendo*, a fun and frothy dramedy from Agnès Jaoui, screening out of competition, playing a hapless opera conductor trying to navigate the French arts scene in the post-#MeToo era. *Crescendo* plays in a register unique to French cinema, mixing light, silly comedy — there’s a repeated joke involving huge, phallus-shaped columns — with an attempt, sans finger-wagging, to address serious issues of sexism, racism and workplace abuse.

“Both my parents worked in opera. I grew up in that world, so the story is very personal to me,” says Auteuil. “I crossed paths with a lot of conductors,

who really inspired me for the role. A lot of memories and emotions came to the surface.”

In sharp contrast is *When the Night Falls*, Auteuil’s sixth film as a director, screening in the Cannes Premiere section this year. It’s a sombre, Holocaust-era period drama about the real-life effort, in 1942, to save 100 Jewish children from a deportation camp outside Lyon. It follows Gilbert Lesage (played by *BPM* and *Anatomy of a Fall* actor Antoine Reinartz), the young civil servant tasked with determining the fate of Jews arrested by the Vichy regime who tries, with the aid of Catholic priest Alexandre Glasberg, to save the children. Auteuil, who co-wrote the script with Camille Lugan, plays Glasberg.

“It’s a story of suffering,” Auteuil says. “About the children trapped in 1942 because of the Vichy laws. But it also echoes the suffering done to children now, to migrant children around the world. It’s also a bureaucratic thriller, because the fate of these 100 children is decided by numbers, by their cases and files — it’s very abstract, the way their fate is decided. I wanted to tell this story because I thought, 70 years after the Holocaust, we would have become intelligent enough to act differently. But of course we haven’t. Unfortunately, history is repeating itself. This is my way of talking about today through this real story in history.”

Directing, like so much else in

Auteuil’s career, came through persistence rather than plan.

He first attempted to direct as a young theater actor, staging a play by Pierre de Marivaux.

“It was called *The Island of Slaves*, and it failed so badly it made me sick to my stomach,” he recalls. “When I was 30, I tried to direct another play, and it was better, but it still wasn’t good.”

By then, his acting career was taking off. “I had a lot of offers to make movies, I simply didn’t have time to direct. So if you asked me why I came to directing late, it is because I got caught up with my success as an actor. But I also needed time, time to find my own style, my own point of view. And I found it. I found it a bit late, but I found it.”

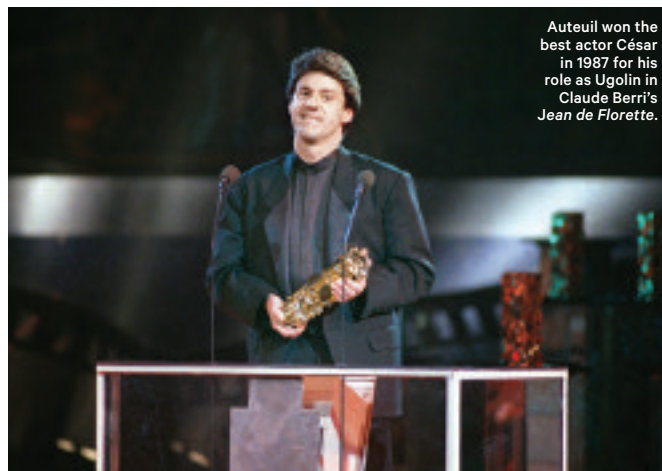
After five decades in cinema, Daniel Auteuil speaks less like a filmmaker reflecting on a legacy than one still trying to move forward, eager for the next opportunity “to do some work.”

There is one enemy, however, that still troubles him.

“Nostalgia,” he says. “Longing for the past. This is my biggest enemy. It presents itself sometimes in very sweet ways, through little details that seem beautiful. But what I want is to prepare the future in the present.”

The parrot has since moved from Auteuil’s head to a perch on his shoulder, nibbling at his ear with complete proprietary confidence.

He barely seems to notice.



Auteuil won the best actor César in 1987 for his role as Ugolin in Claude Berri’s *Jean de Florette*.

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# AFRICA IS HAVING ITS CANNES MOMENT

A first-time Rwandan director, Nigerian twin brothers with a starry *Mrs. Dalloway* reimagining, a Moroccan drama about seasonal laborers and a Congolese refugee story — meet the African films demanding attention at this year's fest **BY GEORG SZALAI**

Cannes has long served as a discovery platform for African cinema — and not just from South Africa or Nigeria's Nollywood. The 2026 edition is again showcasing works from across the continent, from established auteurs and debut voices alike, and some of the stories may well surprise you.

The global entertainment industry has taken note. At a moment when Afrobeats has reshaped the global music scene, appetite for African film and TV is surging. A recent report from Akunna Cook's Next Narrative Africa Fund, produced in partnership with Parrot Analytics, found that global demand for African and diaspora content has outpaced supply for five consecutive years — and that the U.S. is now the single largest market for that content, accounting for 8.5 percent of global demand, with the U.K., Canada, France, Brazil, China, Belgium and Portugal also among the top-consuming territories. The report also put to rest the persistent rumor that African stories can't travel.

The continent's demographics only underscore the opportunity: More than 60 percent of Africans are under 25, making it a seemingly inexhaustible source of stories the world is more ready to receive than ever.

Last year, Akinola Davies Jr.'s *My Father's Shadow* made history as the first Nigerian-backed film in Un Certain Regard, earning a special mention for the Caméra d'Or. This year, the African slate ranges from the first film by a Rwandan director to premiere in Cannes' Official Selection, a landmark co-production by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, a Moroccan drama about seasonal fruit pickers in Spain, and the star-studded sophomore feature from Nigerian-born twin brothers.

Cannes artistic director Thierry Frémaux, announcing the 2026 lineup, pointed to the festival's deepening commitment to African cinema, noting that DRC filmmaker Dieudo Hamadi served on last year's competition jury. "He said, 'I'll go back to my country, and I'll try to create a national center of cinema in Kinshasa,'" Frémaux recalled. "And we

went to visit him and supported him. The project is underway."

Here, then, is *THR*'s closer look at the African films making their mark at Cannes this year.

## **BEN'IMANA**

**DIRECTED BY** Marie-Clémentine Dusabejamba  
**SECTION** Un Certain Regard

**INTERNATIONAL SALES** MK2 Films

This film is a triple premiere: It is not only a world premiere and Dusabejamba's first feature, but also marks the Cannes Official Selection debut for a director from Rwanda. The film, from producers Ejo-Cine in Rwanda and Princesse M Productions in Gabon, in co-production with Les Films du Bilboquet in France and DuoFilm in Norway, has been a decade in the making.

*Ben'Imana*, which director Dusabejamba wrote with French scribe Delphine Agut (*Souleymane's Story*), tells the story of Vénérande, a survivor of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda who urges everyone around her to exercise forgiveness at a time when people's courts are meant to bring justice, healing and reconciliation. But when she learns of her teenage daughter's unexpected pregnancy, her past trauma resurfaces, testing the limits of forgiveness within her family.

Dusabejamba has previously created such shorts as *Icyasha*, about an effeminate soccer-loving boy who tries to join a neighborhood team but gets bullied; *A Place for*



Arie and Chuko Esiri's *Clarissa* is a modern-day reimagining of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.



*Myself*, about an albino girl; and *Lyiza*, whose story of a girl living with the traumatic memory of her parents' murder during the genocide in Rwanda explored themes that are also in focus in *Ben'Imana*.

Her feature-length cinematic exploration of intergenerational trauma, which Frémaux in his Cannes 2026 press event lauded as "an amazing work of cinema," stars a cast of mostly nonprofessional actors, including Clémentine U. Nyirinkindi, Kesia Kelly Nishimwe, Leocadie Uwabeza, Antoinette Uwamahoro and Aime Valens Tuyisenge, as well as Rwandan actress Isabelle Kabano, known for the likes of Mauritanian director Abderrahmane Sissako's *Black Tea*.

"Ben'Imana" means "the people of God" or "the children of God," Dusabejamba tells *THR*. "We all shared the same language in Rwanda before this division. It is the same language and the same culture, and not many countries have that. We have the same mother tongue. And this means we came from the same father, which is God. So it's 'the people of God,' but translating the title beyond that, it is 'the lucky ones,' because we have all this in common. They say that God spends the day outside of Rwanda, but he comes to sleep in Rwanda."

The title, then, is both a statement of unity and a reminder of how completely that unity was shattered. "We see the weight of the silence between our parents and us, and I took a journey to really be able to understand people's body language, because sometimes they are telling you a horrible thing, but they do it with a smile," the director tells *THR*. "So I really wanted to capture that weight."

*Ben'Imana* features different people dealing with past trauma in different ways — some look for revenge, while others want to move on. "That's actually the duality of life today," highlights Dusabejamba. "I had to rely on public money, so every time we



From top: Marie-Clémentine Dusabejambo's *Ben'Imana* and Rafiki Fariala's *Congo Boy*.

pitched the film, they asked: 'Why [focus on] this time? People have moved on!' But we are all different. And I wanted to really talk about the genocide and its aftermath, ... [when] there is this process of coexisting that really requires that we all work together so that we can make the future possible.'

But beneath the trauma, Dusabejambo wants audiences to find something else entirely. "What I really want for the public to come and see in the film is the resilient spirit of Rwanda," she explains. "The soul of Rwanda may have been broken by the genocide, but not the spirit. And in this film, I was really looking to [allow audiences] to meet the mothers' heartbeat, because it is those women who are coming together every morning and going beyond their brokenness to find that identity of being a mother. A mother is someone who cares. A mother is someone who brings [people] together. ... There is always light in the darkness, and that is what we are all looking for, in a way."

There is a quiet defiance in how the film

was put together, too. "There is a challenge for getting films financed in Africa. What is very important is that the film is a co-production, where Rwanda and Gabon have the majority, economically," the filmmaker tells *THR*. "We can do this. There's a new wave of African filmmakers coming up, and we really wanted to keep this sovereignty. France and Norway are minority producers. It has been a really fantastic journey for us."

#### GLARISSA

**DIRECTED BY** Arie and Chuko Esiri  
**SECTION** Directors' Fortnight

**INTERNATIONAL SALES** Neon International

Nigerian-born brothers Arie and Chuko Esiri return for their sophomore feature after turning heads with their debut film, 2020's *Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)*, which followed two complete strangers trying to scrape by in the sprawling metropolis of Lagos, Africa's largest city.

*Clarissa* features a starry cast, including Sophie Okonedo, David Oyelowo, Ayo Edebiri and Nikki Amuka-Bird, and has already been

acquired by Neon for U.S. distribution and international sales duties.

A reimagining of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, set in modern-day Nigeria, was shot on 35mm in Lagos and Delta State, Nigeria. It follows Lagos socialite Clarissa, who hosts a party where old friends reunite. As the night unfolds, the party crowd revisits past loves, secrets and lost dreams. Expect a heartfelt reckoning.

Produced by the Esiri brothers and Theresa Park of Per Capita Productions and Nicholas Weinstock of Invention Studios, the co-producers are Nina Gold and Thomas Bassett. Okonedo, Dolly Omodolapo Kola-Balogun, Osahon Okunbo and Jason Reif are credited as executive producers.

*Clarissa* is "a much more ambitious project than the first one," Chuko Esiri tells *THR*. And for the duo of Nigerian filmmakers, there was a key challenge: "We met with a number of financiers and producers and studios that have an impression, or have an idea — actually, it's a bias — of what films from Africa should be or should look like, or what stories you should be telling." But the brothers found "wonderful" partners "who did understand and who were very protective of the vision and of it being a truly authentic Nigerian piece." Adds Arie Esiri: "The festival [also] sees the merits of the film and understands what it was we were trying to achieve with the film and its ambitions. So that was also very encouraging, as well as validating."

What sets the Esiris apart, though, starts with a memory Arie has carried since childhood. "I had an English teacher when I was 12 in the U.K. who once said to me ...: 'When I close my eyes and think of Africa, I can't see anything other than Safari images.' And even at that age, I understood that that's not really his fault. That's all the media gives you. Even from that age, I felt I needed to somehow share images of what Africa really is in contemporary times."

His brother is equally specific about where they sit within the Nigerian film landscape: "We're interested in telling Nigerian stories. I know Nollywood is a big thing, but there's also a big debate about whether Nollywood is a genre or an industry. I personally believe it's a genre and not in an industry, because an industry incorporates many things, many different voices, many different tales. For us, it's just marching along that road of wanting to make these types of films for Nigerians and for the world."

The brothers clearly love and admire *Mrs. Dalloway*, and they are bringing their Nigerian lens on the story to the world. "There are things that are happening, structurally, in the book, that are very applicable to a Nigerian context," explains Arie. For example, the post-First World War challenges, including the trauma and mental

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“Cannes is really the place for directors from all over the world,” says *Strawberries* director Marrakchi. “It can change everything for the journey of a film.”

health issues experienced by a soldier in the novel, allow the filmmakers to “talk about the insurgency in our country” by jihadist militant group Boko Haram and “how much of a stronghold the military still has on Nigeria, even post a military regime.” But there are also “the human aspects of the book, which are wonderful and translatable to any culture at any time.” Highlights Chuko: “For us, it’s about the old saying that humanity is banal. Everybody understands what it is to love and not be loved back, everybody understands what it is like to have a dream or ambition for your life and maybe not quite make it. So, these are the themes of the novel and the characters that translate to home,” and the world.

That ambition extends to who they got in front of the camera. “It was surreal,” recalls Chuko. “One of the first people to come on board was Nina Gold, who did the casting. That just gave us a big, big stamp of validation that this is something you should pay attention to. ... A dream of ours, or an ambition, has always been, and will continue to be, to work with Africans in the diaspora and tell stories at home.” Concludes Arie: “A lot of these actors who are of Nigerian heritage are all very curious about their heritage and about Nigeria and the speed at which the arts are progressing back home. So much has changed over the last 15 years.”

### **GONGO BOY**

**DIRECTED BY** Rafiki Fariala  
**SECTION** Un Certain Regard

**INTERNATIONAL SALES** The Party Film Sales

*Congo Boy* follows Robert, a 17-year-old Congolese refugee in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, who is left to care for his four younger siblings after his parents are imprisoned — all while trying to become a musician. The film is autobiographical: Director Rafiki Fariala is himself the son of Congolese parents, raised in the CAR and a self-taught musician.

Fariala previously turned the camera on his own world with the 2022 documentary *We, Students!*, a portrait of everyday life among his friends at Bangui University. The cast of *Congo Boy* includes Bradley Fiomona Dembeasset, Christy Djomanda Louba, Pétruche Mbomba, Rosiana Kotozia, Gloria Ambacko and Dieufera Sana. The film is produced by Mahongo Films in the CAR, co-produced by Kiripi Films in the DRC and France’s Unité.

The autobiographical roots run deep. “It is really my own story, told through Robert, played by Bradley,” Fariala tells *THR* via a translator. “When you see in the film that Robert is shot at, I was actually shot at.” The same is true for Robert’s stay with a colonel and his participation in a UNICEF-organized talent show.

“My family fled the Congo because there was war there, and when we got to the Central African Republic, war started there, too,” he explains. “They wanted to be in a country that was more at peace to protect their family. So they were thinking of going to Benin and then on to Europe to have some stability for our future. But unfortunately, they had passports and their refugee card that showed a different country, so they got arrested.”

Finding the right actor to carry that story took months. Fariala and a French casting director auditioned 50 young men at a school at 6 a.m. before Bradley emerged from the crowd. “He was reserved and smiling, but he had something in common with me. He liked to sing and rap, but only in his bedroom, because his father didn’t want to hear anything about art. His father just wanted his son to do well in school, like mine. So I gave him an improv exercise about failing his high school degree, and it was very different from the others.” Persuading Bradley’s parents to agree took further negotiation — but Fariala was convinced he’d found his double.

After his documentary *We, Students!* was censored in the CAR, Fariala himself went into exile in France. “We often speak about refugees who want to go to Europe, but there are a lot of people who are refugees within different countries of Africa,” he notes. “And I want to convey that refugees are not beggars. They have to leave their home because this world is really crazy because of human destruction. But the young ones still want to fight; they still have hopes and dreams. I am proud to be a refugee.”

### **STRAWBERRIES (LA MÁS DULCE)**

**DIRECTED BY** Laïla Marrakchi  
**SECTION** Un Certain Regard

**INTERNATIONAL SALES** Lucky Number

Every year, thousands of Moroccan women travel to Andalusia to pick strawberries, hoping to send money home for a better life. *Strawberries*, inspired by real events, follows them into that experience — and into its darker realities: harsh living conditions, abuse, sexual harassment and prostitution. When the fruit pickers, aided by a female lawyer, take their exploiters to court, the personal becomes political.

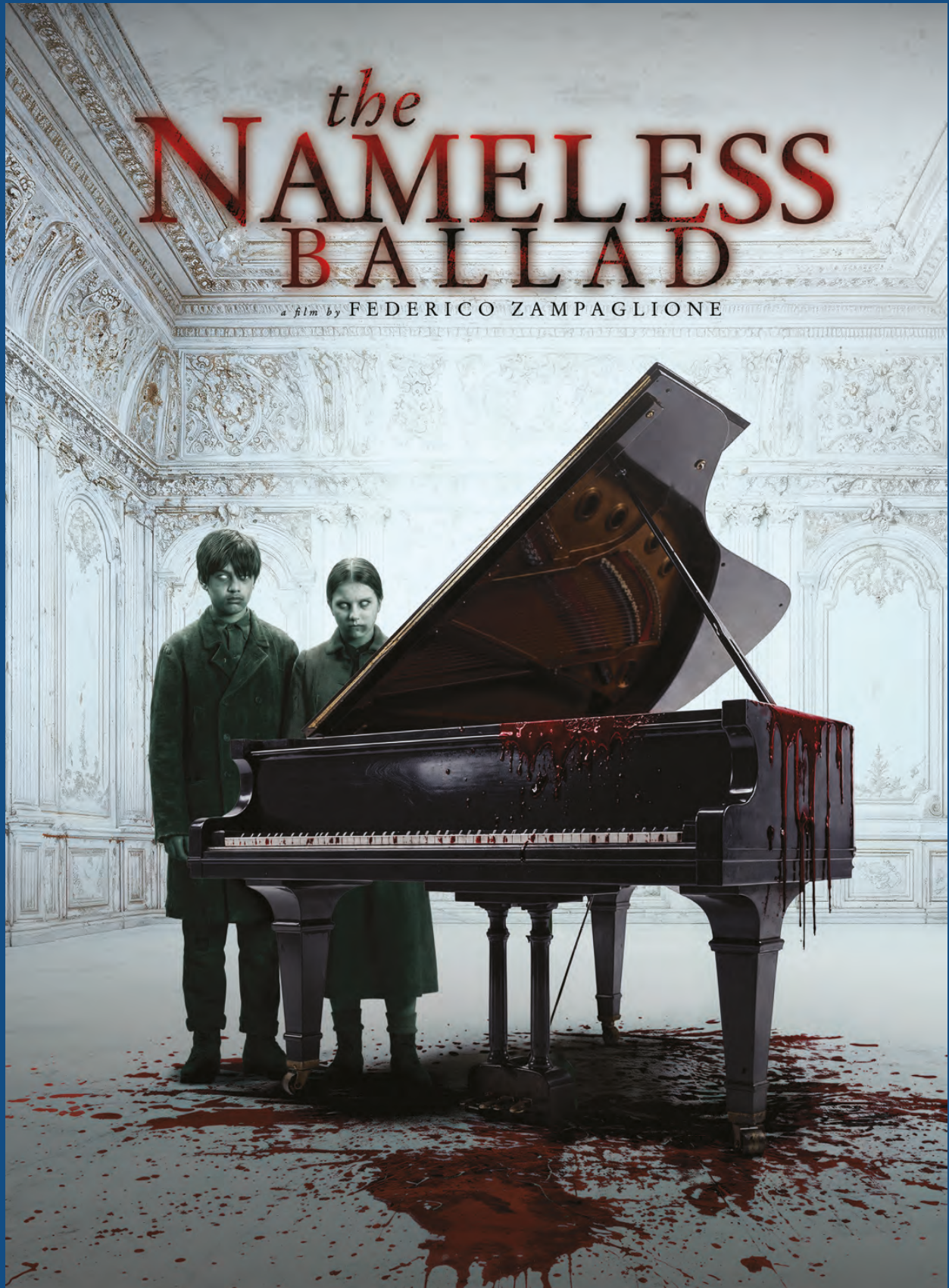
Paris-based Moroccan filmmaker Laïla Marrakchi (*Marock, Rock the Casbah*) wrote the script with Delphine Agut, drawing on real-life cases and testimonies. The cast includes Nisrin Erradi (*Everybody Loves Touda, Adam*) as well as Hajar Graigaa, Hind Braik, Fatima Attif, Larbi Mohammed Ajbar and Itsaso Arana. Producer Juliette Schrameck (*The Worst Person in the World*) leads the co-production through her company Lumen, alongside Morocco’s Mont Fleuri Production, Spain’s Fasten Films and Belgium’s Mirage Films.

Marrakchi returns to Un Certain Regard, where her debut, *Marock* — a Muslim-Jewish romance set in Casablanca — premiered in 2005. She has since directed episodes of *The Bureau* and Damien Chazelle’s *The Eddy*, and sees Cannes as essential to a film’s journey. “Cannes is really the place for directors from all over the world,” she tells *THR*. “It’s a good showcase. And it can change everything for the journey of a film.”

Her research took her to meet actual fruit pickers. “I met lots of women working in the strawberry fields who had the experience of bad conditions and [abuse], but there were also some who went to Spain, had a good experience and went back to Morocco with money. They had the opportunity to have a better life in Morocco. So, there are many stories, and they depend on the [specific] experience.”

For Marrakchi, the stakes extend far beyond the strawberry fields. “It’s a sad form of new colonialism,” she says. “This is also a film about the relationship now between the Western world and the [Global] South.” **THR**

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# DIEGO LUNA IS READY TO TALK

Between *Andor*, a live-action *Tangled* and a Cannes premiere, the actor-director reflects on *Ashes*, his intimate new film about migration, the mother he never knew and the Cesar Chavez revelations that left him devastated

BY RYAN GAJEWSKI

**D**iego Luna had both personal motivations and more universal ones that drove him to make *Ashes*, his fifth feature as director.

While Luna continues to tackle an array of high-profile fare in front of the camera — starring opposite Jennifer Lopez in last year's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, leading the Emmy-winning *Star Wars* series *Andor*

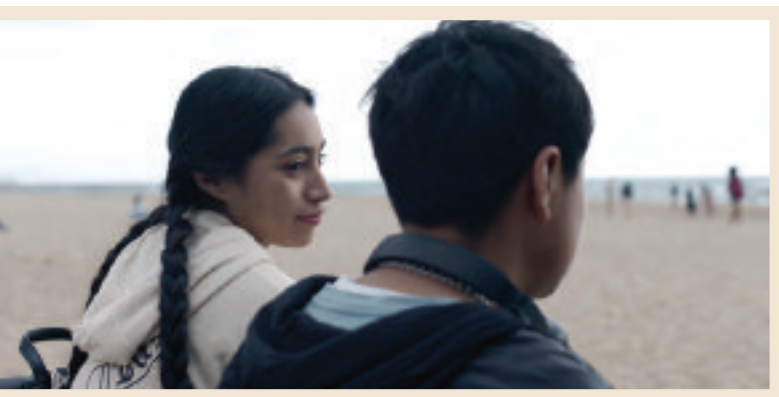
and nabbing a role in Disney's live-action *Tangled* — he continues to tell more intimate stories through his filmmaking work. Adapting Brenda Navarro's novel *Ceniza en la boca*, his latest effort centers on Anna Díaz as Lucila, a 21-year-old woman leaving Mexico for Madrid in search of a better life as she reunites with her mother (Adriana Paz), who moved there years ago.

Ahead of *Ashes* premiering

during the Special Screening section at Cannes, Luna told *The Hollywood Reporter* that the film resonates with him not only because of the current polarizing debate over immigration, but also due to his own family history. Additionally, he reflects on having directed the 2014 biographical feature *Cesar Chavez* in light of recently surfaced abuse claims against the labor leader who died in 1993.

**What was it about the novel that drew you to this project?**

It was a very powerful read for me. My son was 14 when I read it, and I thought it was a very interesting story to approach migration from an angle we don't see much, particularly living in Mexico with that proximity to that huge border between such a powerful country [as the U.S.] and ours, and such a complicated scenario



Left: Diego Luna directed *Ashes*, premiering in the Special Screening section. Above: Anna Díaz (left) stars as Lucila, a 21-year-old woman leaving Mexico for a better life in Madrid.

these days. For me, the book resonated profoundly because of the journey of this young woman. If you read it, you'll understand that I took a piece of that book to make this story and decided to center everything on Lucila. Distance in crucial years for people where parents are not around — that is something really important for me. My mother died when I was 2 years old. I grew up with my father, and he dedicated his life to theater. In a way, what Spain represents in this film for me was theater. It was that thing that was keeping my father away from me.

**How did you decide that Anna Díaz and Adriana Paz were the right fit as the mother-daughter duo?**

With Adriana, I've known her from a long time. We played a couple together in a film called *Rudo y Cursi* that we did many years ago, and I know her strengths. With Anna, it was very interesting because as soon as the casting director in Mexico read the script, he said to me, "What about Anna? Did you see [her in the 2024 movie] *La Cocina*?" And I said, "Yes, I saw *La Cocina*! Obviously, I thought about her, but we should see a lot of actresses." We saw hundreds of options of great actresses from Mexico. At the very end, I said to Anna, "Do you mind coming and working with me a good hour, and we'll do a little scene together?" We had a session — Adriana, Anna, me, a few of the producers and the casting director — and everyone was sobbing. When they did that scene, I was like, "This is it. It's them."

**Over a decade ago, you made a film about Cesar Chavez starring Michael Peña. The civil rights leader has been in the news with labor activist Dolores Huerta, whom Rosario Dawson portrayed in your movie, having accused him of sexual abuse. Have you thought about how you might approach the film differently today?**

Completely. I was devastated and very confused and very worried and sad and conflicted with the whole thing because, most importantly, of what the movement means. It was very, very, very hard to understand and believe. I was shocked, and there's very little you can say. I met so many people whose lives depend on what the movement achieved and what the community was able to do. It was horrendous and painful to read what we all read.

**This year marks the 25th anniversary of *Y Tu Mamá También*, which still delivers such impact. How has the process for independent filmmaking changed since then?**

The cinema I still enjoy doing the most is one that celebrates the perspective of someone and has a point of view with independent drive. That can be done small or big. It's not about the size of the production, it's about what actually drives the project. I get to work with people that make me feel that way. Basically, in every project I've done for the last 10 years, I have had that kind of feeling — no matter what it is, if it's animation or a gigantic production or a very small one. I'm in search of those projects and trying to celebrate that cinema as much as possible. It's urgent, and it's needed, and there's nothing more powerful for me as the audience, so I want to defend those spaces.

**Your *Star Wars* series, *Andor*, is beloved as well, so you've found a balance between massive projects and smaller ones.**

That independent drive was there. We were working on the project written by Tony Gilroy, and there was a very clear vision. That independent drive can happen in gigantic or very small productions. It's about what's propelling the project.

**I have to ask you about Michael Jackson, given that you played a version of him in [Harmony Korine's 2008 movie] *Mister Lonely*, and now the new hit biopic *Michael* has sparked debate about what it says or doesn't say. How was the experience with your film?**

I haven't seen [*Michael*] just because of all the research I

had to do and all the beautiful work I got to do with the amazing Harmony Korine on *Mister Lonely*. It was quite an experience, getting in the head of Harmony and trying to serve him and become a tool for his story to come across. I remember that as a wonderful journey. I learned a lot [from Korine]. His way is different than anybody else. It's incredible. But I haven't seen the [new] film. I'll probably go by myself and watch it soon.

**What excites you most about *Ashes* premiering soon?**

I am very anxious to see it in that cinema in Cannes and find a first audience. The fear, the ignorance, the hate we are seeing around migration, this is the way to fight that — reflecting on it, telling stories, trying to get you close to understand the story of just one person who can't live where they belong, and what does that mean? We don't stop enough to think about that. That would make the experience and the world different these days.

**Have you started considering future projects to direct?**

As soon as I finished directing, I was like, "I need to write this other thing and this other thing." Suddenly, directing allowed me to remember how much I like this process and also how much I'm ready to talk. As an actor, I'm always ready to be invited to help others tell their stories, but today, I have stories to tell, and I want to do it again. **VIII**

Luna lines up a shot on the set of *Ashes*. "I have stories to tell," says the actor, "and I want to do it again."



# Can TIFF Fill the Cannes-Berlin Market Gap?

As the Toronto International Film Fest formalizes its film and content market, Cameron Bailey and Charles Tremblay are betting on timing, convenience — and a global hub beyond Trump’s America — to lure buyers back in

BY SCOTT ROXBOROUGH

After years of operating one of the world’s busiest unofficial film markets, the Toronto International Film Festival is finally making it official. This September, TIFF will launch its first fully fledged content market, a move CEO Cameron Bailey says has been “years” in the making — and one designed to reshape the North American dealmaking landscape at a moment of rapid industry change.

The TIFF Market arrives with ambitious aims: to bridge the long gap between Cannes and Berlin, offer a more structured alternative to the festival’s long-running informal marketplace, and position Toronto as a global hub where film, TV and emerging media converge. As Bailey notes, the goal is to create a space that reflects how the business itself is evolving, with intellectual property now flowing freely between formats and platforms.



Tremblay

Leading the effort on the ground is newly appointed head of market Charles Tremblay, a veteran distributor and executive with more than two decades of experience in the Canadian and international film business. Tremblay began his career as a lawyer before joining UTA as an agent trainee, later co-founding Métropole Films Distribution with Mongrel



“We want to provide a bigger platform for people to do business, to meet each other and advance the networks that are necessary in a really quickly changing industry,” says TIFF CEO Cameron Bailey.

Media, where he served as managing director for 11 years. He went on to launch mk2 Mile End in partnership with France’s mk2, which was later acquired by Sphere Media and became Sphere Films, where he served as president until 2024. Most recently, he worked at Mubi, overseeing the Canadian releases of titles including *The Substance*, *Queer* and *Maria*. Over the years, he has acquired and released a wide range of festival hits, from *Parasite* to *Aftersun* and *The Worst Person in the World*.

Together, Bailey and Tremblay are betting that Toronto’s existing strengths

— its global audience, dense festival footprint and reputation for industry-friendly logistics — can translate into a market that competes not by scale, but by convenience and integration. The pitch: a compact, walkable, “full-service” market anchored by curated screenings, expanded buyer programs and a growing focus on crossplatform storytelling.

As Tremblay puts it: “Once we’ve explained to people that it’s going to be a full-service market — they’re in.”

**You’ve been planning the TIFF Film Market for several years now. What’s been the biggest**

**challenge in getting it over the line?**

**CAMERON BAILEY** There have been all kinds of challenges. We’ve had strategic, logistical, financial and operational challenges in really bringing this on stream. Of course, we’ve been doing informal market activity and making that possible at the festival for many years, but this is different. We want to provide a bigger platform for people to do business, to meet each other and advance the networks that are necessary in a really quickly changing industry now. So it’s taken not just months, but years to really get it fully up and running. We’ve now got a great team in place, and we’re excited to be able to bring a lot more of the dealmakers, the creative people, the financiers, the buyers and sellers to Toronto every year.

**CHARLES TREMBLAY** I just joined seven months ago, so I wasn’t part of all the work. But I remember when Cameron mentioned his idea to me a while back, I always thought that it was a good idea. It’s not being built from scratch. TIFF Industry has been around for a long time. It’s been providing very good services to the industry, and a good chunk of the staff is transitioning from TIFF Industry to the market. We have those veterans still with us. Also, the senior staff on the festival side have been heavily involved in putting this

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together. These are people who put together what is widely considered one of the best organized festivals in the world. There's a very solid base to build on and expand.

**Toronto has had a successful informal market for many years. What benefits come from creating a formal one?**

**CHARLES TREMBLAY** I was a distributor for more than 20 years, so I've attended a lot of festivals, especially TIFF every year. I've always felt it was a bit of a missed opportunity given the size of the festival and all the people attending. I could have used a more structured market, and I think a lot of people feel the same way. There's an eight-month gap between Cannes and Berlin, and both are in Europe. None are in North America. Meeting in lobbies and Zooms works when that's the only option, but people prefer in-person interaction in a structured environment. That's why [Berlin's] EFM and the Marché du Film [in Cannes] have been successful.

One of the biggest changes will be the market screenings [at TIFF]. This is a game-changer because it allows sales agents to show films that are not necessarily in the festival to buyers. We'll have about 400 slots, including two days prior to the launch. That allows promo reels and films to be shown before the market officially begins.

Also, one of the main benefits of Toronto is that people no longer have to rush finished films, promo materials or artwork in time for Cannes. They can hold back and know they have a strong option three months later.

**BAILEY** We're going to be doing something that is really unique in North America. Right now, there is no official market attached to a major film festival. A major festival brings filmmakers, talent and



Says head of market Charles Tremblay: "Everything will be housed in the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Film will remain the core, but there will also be space for series and the immersive industry. We'll have an innovation hub featuring eight XR works. ... Over time, we want to grow into a full content market serving film, series and innovation."

professionals who are already in town. We're building on that with market activity. Toronto is a very global city, and we've always designed our festival to be very international. That will be part of the market as well.

**Are you hearing concerns from international executives about travel, visas and border restrictions in the U.S.?**

**BAILEY** We've heard from some international colleagues that the U.S. industry remains very important, but some are hesitant to travel to the U.S. right now. We've always been a place where the world meets the American film industry, and that will continue. There's already a proven desire to do business in Toronto even without a formal market. We just want to offer more services and reasons to come. We've also worked on affordability. Hotels will start around \$200 to \$220 U.S. [early bird rates for attendees that book by June 5]. It's going to be affordable, convenient and walkable. We're trying to build something that serves the industry in ways they can't find elsewhere.

**Your vision is broader than a traditional film market. Can you**

**explain that?**

**TREMBLAY** Everything will be housed in the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Film will remain the core, but there will also be space for series and the immersive industry. We'll have an innovation hub featuring eight XR works. Programming will include speakers from TV and innovation sectors. Over time, we want to grow into a full content market serving film, series and innovation.

**Do you see competition with AFM or, on the TV side, with MIPCOM?**

**BAILEY** Budgets are tight and companies have to be nimble. Our response is to build the most convenient market possible. Everything will be within a 12-minute walk. The Metro Toronto Convention Centre will be the hub, with companies nearby. Screenings and gala venues are also close. We want to reduce the pain points people experience at other markets and make this as attractive as possible.

**What are you doing specifically for buyers?**

**TREMBLAY** We've invited 200 net new buyers — people who stopped attending or haven't

been attending TIFF. We worked with stakeholders to ensure we have the right buyers. That's on top of around 800 who already attend. The response so far has been very strong.

**What kind of companies do you expect to attend?**

**TREMBLAY** We'll still have a strong presence from film bodies, but also more sales agents taking space like they do at other markets. We expect a very international mix — North America, Europe, Latin America and Asia. Our buyer invitations were designed to reflect that global spread.

**How integrated will the market be with the festival?**

**TREMBLAY** They take place in the same compact area. That creates energy and allows for interaction between festivalgoers and industry participants. We will also be doing curated market screenings, which will be private screenings but with a mix of buyers and curated audiences. For example, a sales agent can request 50 buyers and 150 audience members. Using TIFF's database, we can target specific demographics. That creates a real audience experience, which is unique [among film markets].

**What is still keeping you awake at night ahead of the launch?**

**BAILEY** Travel challenges are a concern, as are costs. We want to make sure we're affordable and accessible. Beyond that, it's like hosting a dinner party — you prepare everything and wait for guests to arrive. We're excited and looking forward to opening the doors.

**TREMBLAY** I share those concerns, but I sleep pretty well. We've assembled a great team. Feedback has been very positive. Out of around 150 meetings, most people are enthusiastic and say they've been waiting for this. We're confident we'll put on a great market. **TIFF**

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*Legend of the South* is billed as China's first documentary made with artificial intelligence-generated content.

# China Lands in Cannes With Robots, AI Films and a Very Clear Message

From a gala evening of cutting-edge technology to the fifth year of its film pavilion, China is using the Croisette to announce itself as cinema's next great creative and technological force

BY MATHEW SCOTT

China Night sits at the heart of the country's Cannes presence this year — a single gala evening at the Marché du Film Beach that aims to capture both where Chinese cinema currently stands and where it intends to go.

Guests can expect trips into the worlds of artificial intelligence and extended reality (XR), cameo appearances from some of the Magic Lab robots that

have captured China's imagination (think robotic people, puppies and pandas) — and a menu created by a team of chefs representing Black Pearl (China's version of the Michelin Guide) who have promised to “craft a sensory journey through Chinese flavors.”

Co-hosted by Marché du Film, the China Film Administration, China Film Group Corporation, the China Film Producers

Association and the Chinese acquisition, investment and production house Wing Sight, the May 14 event will feature some of the country's biggest stars parading down its red carpet. Attention will then turn to previews of upcoming Chinese movies, displays that tap into the country's vast artistic traditions, and examples of the new technology that is altering the way Chinese audience see

cinema and how Chinese creators produce their content.

The overall aim, according to China Night chairperson and Wing Sight founder Tina Jia, is to offer guests a “deeper understanding of how China is evolving as both a cultural force and a creative partner.”

“China Night is not just an event — it is a curated platform that brings together culture, cinema and global industry

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Once a rising star, Faiz's football career ends after a hit-and-run. Seeking a fresh start on Pulau Lang Tengah, he meets Amelia, a terminally ill scuba instructor. Their lives take a dangerous turn when they uncover coral poachers. During a confrontation, Amelia is trapped underwater. Faiz rushes to save her, racing against fading oxygen. He must transform into a hero to save Amelia and the ocean that gave him a second chance.

Directed by Dr. Wendy Wong

Cast: Aniq Durar (Hero Remaja, Sekali Lagi Cinta Kembali), Shiqin Kamal, Amerul Affendi, Fify Azmi

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dialogue,” explains Jia. “This year, we are launching it under a dual framework: China Night × China Film+. China Night represents the cultural expression and global stage, while China Film+ is our own IP focused on industry connection, content exchange, and future collaboration in film and storytelling. Together, they create a more complete experience.”

Jia promises a dynamic mix of Chinese cinema and creative talent, cultural showcases and artistic performances, technology and “new forms of storytelling, and conversations that connect Chinese creators with global industry leaders.”

China has brought a strong presence to Cannes this year, buoyed by healthy box office figures and industry growth back home. Ongoing promotions this year include the fifth staging of the China Film Pavilion, which has been showcasing the work of more than 70 film companies and more than 180 films. It has also featured screenings of the likes of *A Story About Fire*, the acclaimed animation that was rendered in the style of traditional Chinese ink painting; the family drama *Shanghai Wonton*; and the female-centric comedy *It's OK* and a series of panels that tap into trends in the contemporary Chinese market with topics such as “Institutional Support for Filmmaking: Policies and International Collaboration.”

Leading into China Night has been the first staging of the China Film+ initiative, which on May 13 presented screenings of recent AI- and XR-generated content, along with panels that aimed to share where these advances in technology were taking Chinese content creators.

Featured films included *The Reunion Journey*, produced by China Media Group and promoted as China's first animated film produced via artificial intelligence-generated content



From top: The animated *A Story About Fire* is just one of more than 180 films that the China Pavilion will be promoting in Cannes; China Night on May 14 promises a glimpse of just how far Chinese robotics technology has come.

(AIGC), as well as *Legend of the South*, produced by Wing Sight and billed as the country's first AIGC documentary. Panels have been grouped around such timely issues as “Creative Sovereignty of Filmmakers in the AI Era” which featured international filmmakers including Li Shaohong (*Blush*) and Sébastien Raybaud (*Greenland*) discussing such topics as “When AI intervenes, who is the author?”

The focus on AI in particular taps into the dominant themes being pushed by China's film industry watchers and by state media. Recent reports suggest that the AI-animated drama market was, for example,

already worth \$2.8 billion by the end of 2025 and the entire AI-generated microdrama industry would be worth more than \$16.5 billion by the end of this year.

Jia, who served previously as head of new media distribution for Paramount Pictures in Greater China and whose Wing Sight produces AI-generated content, says the Chinese industry is bullish about where AI is leading it, and that she expects it to “grow steadily and prosperously.”

“AI empowers the whole industrial chain of Chinese filmmaking to reduce costs, improve efficiency and expand capacity, promoting China's

transformation from a major film producer to a powerhouse of quality, technology and cultural export,” she says. “It also realizes technological inclusiveness, lowering the entry threshold for young directors, small and medium-sized teams and independent creators, and fostering a diverse creative ecosystem of human-AI collaboration.”

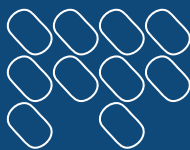
Her ambitions for the future are equally unambiguous. “Looking ahead to the next five years, China's AI film sector will grow into a 100 billion-yuan market with world-class technology ... standing as one of the core business cards showcasing China's technological strength and cultural confidence.”

The background to it all is a Chinese film industry that has continued in the post-pandemic era, with recent box office reports showing earnings of more than \$1.89 billion so far this year. The Chinese government has also been pushing film tourism and its impact on wider consumption, with state media claiming that initiatives such as turning film sets into tourism hotspots has created a “film-related industry” that will generate around \$26 billion in revenue this year from “tourism and dining to cultural products.” China Night aims to spread the good news.

“We are not here just to present China, but to create dialogue, foster partnerships and open new pathways for Chinese content, brands and ideas to engage globally,” says Jia.

That makes the Croisette the only logical stage for what China Night is trying to say. “It represents not only cinematic excellence, but also international recognition and cultural influence. Bringing China Night to Cannes means placing Chinese creativity and voices directly into the center of the global stage — where they can be seen, understood and connected.” **THR**

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# Film Frontier

Organized by Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, Japan Arts Council and UNI JAPAN

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## Film Frontier Global Networking Program

The Film Frontier Global Networking Program focuses on supporting emerging filmmakers in their planning and development activities, helping them realize projects with a global perspective and empowering them to take on challenges overseas.



Film director **AKIO FUJIMOTO**



Film director **EMMA KAWAWADA**



Film producer **HIROYUKI YOSHIHARA**



Film director and writer **KOHKI HASEI**



Writer & Director **MAI NAKANISHI**



Film director **NATSIKA KUSANO**



Film director and actor **SHINGO OTA**



Film director **SOTA TAKAHASHI**



Film director **YURINA KANEKO**

## Film Frontier Feature Anime Creators in Progress

Film Frontier Feature Anime Creators in Progress supports international development for feature-length animation projects involving young creators, with the aim of the creators being actively engaged to facilitate growth and broader international knowledge.



**HIDARI**  
Director **MASASHI KAWAMURA**



**HIDARI**  
Director **IKU OGAWA**



**A NEW DAWN**  
Director **YOSHITOSHI SHINOMIYA**  
Photo by YUI SHINZU

: in Cannes

: in Cannes Animation

## SCREENING GUIDE

THURSDAY  
May 14

**00:00** *Species* Lumiere, WTFilms  
**8:30** *Teenage Sex and Death At Camp Miasma* (106 mins.), Debussy, The Match Factory  
**8:45** *Dua* (101 mins.), Miramar, The Party Film Sales  
**8:45** *We Are Aliens* (111 mins.), Theatre Croisette, Charades  
**9:00** *Nagi Notes* (108 mins.), Agnès Varda, mk2 Films  
**9:00** *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* (137 mins.), Lerins 2 Online, Beta Cinema  
**9:00** *Zealot* (93 mins.), Olympia 4, WestEnd Films  
**9:00** *Strawberries* (103 mins.), Olympia 7, Lucky Number  
**9:00** *Nils, the New Adventure* (85 mins.), Palais D, Toonz Media Group  
**9:00** *All the Lovers in the Night* (139 mins.), Palais F, Bitters End, Inc.  
**9:00** *The Ones Who Grieve* (116 mins.), Palais H, WTFilms  
**9:00** *The Upside of Unrequited* (105 mins.), Palais J, Capture  
**9:00** *Nagi Notes* (108 mins.), Palais K, mk2 Films  
**9:00** *Living Rent Free* Riviera 2, Elle Driver  
**9:30** *Marie-Madeleine* (104 mins.), Lerins 3 Online, Pyramide International  
**9:30** *A Woman's Life* (98 mins.), Lumiere, Be for Films



Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma

**9:30** *Maddie's Secret* (98 mins.), Olympia 2, Mister Smith Entertainment  
**9:30** *Just Play Dead* (97 mins.), Olympia 6, Voltage Pictures  
**9:30** *Tin Castle* (105 mins.), Olympia 8, Films Boutique  
**9:30** *The Bearded Girl* (101 mins.), Palais E Online, Princ Films  
**9:30** *Scruggs* (115 mins.), Palais E, Kassab Pictures LLC  
**9:30** *Vita Mia* (125 mins.), Palais G, Beta Cinema  
**9:30** *The Loneliest Man in Town* (86 mins.), Riviera 1, Be for Films (Paris)  
**11:00** *The Son and the Sea* (102 mins.), Online #1, Mmm Film Sales  
**11:00** *Light Pillar* (90 mins.), Online #5, Cercamon  
**11:30** *A Woman's Life* (98 mins.), Agnès Varda, Be for Films  
**11:30** *Carte Blanche* (90 mins.), Arcades 3, Latido Films  
**11:30** *Quelques Mots d'Amour* (95 mins.), Debussy, StudioCanal (Fr)  
**11:30** *Agata Christian — Murder on the Snow*, (109 mins.), Lerins 2, Piperplay  
**11:30** *Viva* (112 mins.), Miramar, Loco Films  
**11:30** *Che Guevara: The Last Companions* Olympia 4 Online, Lucky Number  
**11:30** *The Last Resort* (107 mins.), Olympia 1, Voltage Pictures  
**11:30** *La Perra* (106 mins.), Olympia 4, Lucky Number  
**11:30** *Shana* (84 mins.), Olympia 7, Les Films du Losange  
**11:30** *Treasure Trekkers* (98 mins.), Olympia 9, Goodfellas  
**11:30** *Into the Belly of the Beast* (92 mins.), Online #6, Reel Suspects  
**11:30** *Someone's Daughter* (102 mins.), Palais D Online, FilmOption International  
**11:30** *Matter of Time* (103 mins.), Palais J Online, Pinnacle Peak Pictures  
**11:30** *Last Dive* (90 mins.), Palais B, MultiVisionnaire Pictures  
**11:30** *Summer Days* (96 mins.), Palais D, Deep Communication Roots SL  
**11:30** *Tied Up* (75 mins.), Palais F, Film Factory Entertainment  
**11:30** *The Nest* Palais H, Filmax (Castelao Pictures)  
**11:30** *Brave Cat* (94 mins.), Palais J, Indie Sales  
**11:30** *Masters* (73 mins.), Riviera 2, True Colours Glorious Films SRL  
**12:00** *Blaise* (80 mins.), Arcades 2, Best Friend Forever  
**12:00** *Blood Window*

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# CALIFORNIA PICTURES

## Cannes 2026 | Marche Du Film | Riviera E12



SCREENING: Sun, May 17  
15:45 (3:45p) | Palais H

SCREENING TODAY



SCREENING: Thurs, May 14  
13:30 (1:30p) | Palais H



SCREENING: Sat, May 16  
15:45 (3:45p) | Palais H



SCREENING: Fri, May 15  
15:45 (3:45p)



SCREENING: Fri, May 15  
15:45 (3:45p)

SCREENING TODAY



SCREENING: Thur, May 14  
15:45 (3:45p)



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## SCREENING GUIDE

Rehearsals for a Revolution



- 12:00** *Showcase* (90 mins.), Lerins 1, Grupo Mórvido
- 12:00** *Pacific* Lerins 3, FilmSharks / The Remake Co.
- 12:00** *On Edge* (96 mins.), Olympia 6 Online, Intramovies
- 12:00** *Everytime* (119 mins.), Olympia 2, Charades
- 12:00** *She Keeps Me Young* (91 mins.), Olympia 3, Visit Films
- 12:00** *Viva Carmen* (90 mins.), Olympia 8, Global Constellation
- 12:00** *The Cycle of Love*, (98 mins.), Palais C, Dogwoof
- 12:00** *Lakadbaggha 2 — The Monkey Business* (111 mins.), Palais E, Webfilmland Productions
- 12:00** *Frequency of Fear*, (76 mins.), Palais G, Bleiberg Entertainment LLC
- 12:00** *Bo Bo* (98 mins.), Palais I, Kinokult
- 12:00** *Permafrost* (93 mins.), Riviera 1, Vision Distribution
- 12:00** *Gabin* (105 mins.), Theatre Croisette, Lightdox
- 12:30** *Nagi Notes* (108 mins.), Lumiere, mk2 Films
- 13:30** *Things We Don't Say* (115 mins.), Arcades 1, Rai Cinema
- 13:30** *The Nameless Ballad* (90 mins.), Lerins 2, Minerva Pictures
- 13:30** *The End of It* (102 mins.), Olympia 1, Bankside Films Ltd
- 13:30** *Funk* (103 mins.), Olympia 4, Cinema Do Brasil
- 13:30** *Second Chances* (109 mins.), Olympia 7, Le Pacte
- 13:30** *Low Expectations* (105 mins.), Olympia 9, Salaud Morisset
- 13:30** *Love Kills* (96 mins.), Online #6, Reel Suspects
- 13:30** *Zoners* (120 mins.), Palais B Online, Pinnacle Peak Pictures
- 13:30** *Zoners* (120 mins.), Palais B, Pinnacle Peak Pictures
- 13:30** *5 Centimeters Per Second* (121 mins.), Palais D, Pony Canyon Inc.
- 13:30** *Young Washington* (120 mins.), Palais F, Angel Studios
- 13:30** *The Road to Galena* (110 mins.), Palais H, California Pictures
- 13:30** *The Sun Never Sets* (102 mins.), Palais J, Capture
- 13:30** *Time And Water* (93 mins.), Riviera 2, Dogwoof
- 14:00** *The Match* Agnès Varda, Goodfellas
- 14:00** *Red Rocks* (90 mins.), Arcades 2, Luxbox
- 14:00** *The Meltdown* (100 mins.), Debussy, Les Films du Losange
- 14:00** *Ip Man: Kung Fu Legend* (98 mins.), Lerins 1, All Rights Entertainment (France)
- 14:00** *God Forgives Everyone* (114 mins.), Lerins 3, Piperplay
- 14:00** *Death Has No Master* (105 mins.), Olympia #8 Online, Lucky Number
- 14:00** *Comédie Française* (75 mins.), Olympia 3, Charades
- 14:00** *In the Shadows* (117 mins.), Olympia 6, Altitude

- Film Sales / Altitude Film Entertainment
- 14:00** ***Knight on Wheels*** (75 mins.), Palais E Online, Cinema Do Brasil
- 14:00** ***Bachelorette Nightmare*** (110 mins.), Palais G Online, OCG Plus (Uzbekistan)
- 14:00** ***Secret Heart*** (88 mins.), Palais C, Lightdox
- 14:00** ***A Fading Man*** (102 mins.), Palais E, Bendita Film Sales
- 14:00** ***The Furies*** (106 mins.), Palais G, Other Angle Pictures
- 14:00** ***Winnipeg, Seeds of Hope*** (81 mins.), Palais I, MMM Film Sales
- 14:00** ***Girl in the Clouds*** (90 mins.), Palais K, SC Films International
- 14:00** ***La Luz*** (120 mins.), Riviera #1 Online, Latido Films
- 14:00** ***No Hit Wonder*** (118 mins.), Riviera 1, FilmSharks / The Remake Co.
- 15:00** ***Człowiek Z Żelaza (Man of Iron)*** Bunuel, Cannes Classics
- 15:00** ***Hold Onto Me*** (102 mins.), Online #5, Cercamon
- 15:00** ***Thanks for Coming*** (82 mins.), Theatre Croisette, Quinzaine Des Cinéastes / Directors' Fortnight
- 15:30** ***Next Step Studio*** (65 mins.), Miramar, Semaine de la Critique
- 15:45** ***I See Buildings Fall Like Lightning*** (109 mins.), Arcades 3, Charades
- 15:45** ***The History of Concrete*** (101 mins.), Olympia 4 Online, Visit Films
- 15:45** ***The Golden Age*** (112 mins.), Olympia 7 Online, Films Boutique
- 15:45** ***The Sausage Dog*** (97 mins.), Olympia 4, France TV Distribution
- 15:45** ***Corporate Retreat*** (100 mins.), Olympia 5, The Film Sales Company
- 15:45** ***Virginia Woolf's Night & Day*** (95 mins.), Olympia 7, WestEnd Films
- 15:45** ***The Crystal Planet*** (95 mins.), Olympia 9, Sola Media GmbH
- 15:45** ***Shanghai Wonton*** (108 mins.), Palais B Online,
- China Film Co-Production Corporation
- 15:45** ***2 Degrees South of the Equator*** (100 mins.), Palais D Online, VDF Connection
- 15:45** ***Lady*** Palais B, MetFilm Studio
- 15:45** ***Sweet Violence*** (93 mins.), Palais D, Jinga Films
- 15:45** ***Wild Is the Wind*** (105 mins.), Palais F, Media Art
- 15:45** ***Annie*** (70 mins.), Palais H, California Pictures
- 15:45** ***Trinidad*** (115 mins.), Palais J, Deep Communication Roots SL
- 15:45** ***Late Bloomers*** (92 mins.), Riviera 2 Online, Piperplay
- 15:45** ***Mariinka*** (94 mins.), Riviera 2, Films Boutique
- 16:00** ***L'Âge d'Or*** Agnès Varda, Cannes Classics
- 16:00** ***Taboo. Egon Schiele*** (90 mins.), Online #3, Nexo Studios
- 16:15** ***Rehearsals for a Revolution*** (95 mins.), Arcades 2, The Party Film Sales
- 16:15** ***Horse on a Stick***, (80 mins.), Lerins 1, The Playmaker Munich (A Brand Of B.A. Produktion GmbH)
- 16:15** ***Downtown*** (98 mins.), Lerins 3, M-Appeal
- 16:15** ***Flesh & Fuel*** (90 mins.), Olympia 6 Online, Pyramide International
- 16:15** ***Marvelous Mornings*** (86 mins.), Olympia 8 Online, Loco Films
- 16:15** ***Crawlers*** (80 mins.), Olympia 8, Altitude Film Sales / Altitude Film Entertainment
- 16:15** ***Arcadia Sky: Touching the Sky*** (80 mins.), Palais C Online, Electrolift Creative
- 16:15** ***Last Call*** (91 mins.), Palais E Online, Picture Tree International GmbH
- 16:15** ***500 Miles*** (102 mins.), Palais I Online, Beta Cinema
- 16:15** ***Gaua*** (92 mins.), Palais C, Filmmax (Castelao Pictures)
- 16:15** ***Torment*** (80 mins.),

Continued on page 45

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## WORLDWIDE

### CANNES 2026

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# REVIEWS



REVIEWS

## *A Woman's Life*

Léa Drucker seals her status as one of France's best actresses in Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet's buoyant, perceptive competition entry about a Parisian surgeon at a crossroads **By Jon Frosch**

The bracing romantic screwball *Anaïs in Love* (2021) marked the arrival of Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet among the ranks of French female directors giving their national cinema a vigorous dusting-off — an honor roll including Mia Hansen-Love, Justine Triet, Rebecca Zlotowski and, with *The Little Sister*, Hafsia Herzi.

Starring Anaïs Demoustier as an irrepressible Parisian grad student who steamrolls her way into and out of affairs, the film was the standout of that year's Cannes Critics' Week. Now Bourgeois-Tacquet has a slot in the festival's competition, though *A Woman's Life* (*La vie d'une femme*) is the kind of intimate, modestly scaled Gallic movie likely to be greeted with some sniffling about whether that

Léa Drucker (right) and Mélanie Thierry in a film that probes issues of gender, work and identity.

promotion was premature — as if a Cannes competition entry *must* be a magnum opus-level swing for the fences.

But while it isn't the major artistic step up that a swift upgrade to the main event might have augured, *A Woman's Life* is, in its own way, something almost as gratifying: an elegant, enjoyable sophomore outing that proves the breakout was no fluke.

Bourgeois-Tacquet's elevator pitch — unforeseen circumstances lead Gabrielle, a workaholic 55-year-old surgeon, to question her life choices — isn't exactly earth-shaking, and the film lacks the propulsive spontaneity that made *Anaïs in*

*Love* such an off-kilter delight. That's partly a reflection of the type of protagonist *A Woman's Life* is dealing with: Gabrielle is as grounded — or “rational,” to borrow her word — as Anaïs is flighty. Still, there's an unmistakable safeness here — a sense that the writer-director is never pushing beyond the familiar contours of a certain slice of contemporary French cinema, complete with customary storyline staples (extra-marital affair, ailing parent) and stylistic moves (pacy editing, soundtrack packed with lively classical piano, chapter headings

Competition

**CAST** Léa Drucker, Mélanie Thierry, Charles Berling, Laurent Capelluto, Marie-Christine Barrault

**DIRECTOR** Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet  
1 hour 38 minutes

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# Nagi Notes

Two women redefine their relationship while one sits for the other as an artist's model in Koji Fukada's study of art and rural life in Japan **By Leslie Felperin**

divvying up the narrative).

And yet, when coloring within the lines yields a second consecutive character study this buoyant and perceptive, it feels churlish to complain. Particularly with a lead like Léa Drucker — so fantastic in Catherine Breillat's *Last Summer* — delivering another performance of riveting nuance, feeling and wit.

Written by Bourgeois-Tacquet and Fanny Burdino, *A Woman's Life* opens with flashes of Gabrielle in panting mid-coital close-up — a clear indication we're in that recognizable realm known as French Cinema. The following scenes show Gabrielle, the tireless chief of facial reconstruction surgery at a Parisian hospital, in default mode: racing through a quotidian gauntlet of medical, administrative and personal challenges, all while griping about the ineptitude of everyone else.

Simultaneously good-humored and ill-tempered in that quintessentially French manner, Gabrielle is shouldering a crushing amount of responsibility. In addition to her daily schedule of operations, there are interns to train and a clinic renovation to oversee. Her longtime surgical partner, Kamyar (Laurent Capelluto), is about to go on paternity leave. Tensions with her husband (Charles Berling) are flaring over the fact that his grown kids are still living at home. (Gabrielle doesn't have biological children of her own.) Her mother (Marie-Christine Barrault, wonderful) has Alzheimer's and requires round-the-clock care.

Gabrielle is so adept at juggling, pivoting, and tending to everyone and everything, that — you guessed it — no one really tends to her. Nor do the people who populate her world seem duly dazzled by her ability to rein in its chaos; they're not just dependent on her virtuosity — they're accustomed to it.

That status quo is jolted by Frida (Mélanie Thierry), a writer who comes to observe Gabrielle at work as research for her upcoming novel. The experience of being watched by Frida in the operating room, of being appreciated and admired by this younger woman, awakens something in Gabrielle.

Any French film buff will intuit how this all unfolds. But *A Woman's Life* deepens, building out Gabrielle's outer and inner worlds with darts of sly humor and sweeping brushstrokes

of melancholy. This is, in a broad sense, a story of serial heartbreak — of the trade-offs and losses we endure in life, which no measure of achievement or privilege can protect us from. More specifically, the film posits, it's women like Gabrielle — of a certain age, accomplished — who are especially susceptible to regret or second-guessing.

But Bourgeois-Tacquet is scrupulous in not denying the character her agency. Gabrielle isn't a "victim," as she insists, and her occasional swells of anger seem triggered less by the impossibility of "having it all" than by the assumption that she would want to have it all in the first place.

One of the pleasures of the film — of today's French cinema in general — is the delicious multidimensionality of the female protagonist. Like numerous Gallic screen heroines before her, Gabrielle skates the line between brisk and brusque, with patience bordering on zero and phone etiquette most charitably described as "perfunctory." She suffers no fools, but she can also be unfair with those closest to her. When Kamyar, her co-department-head and dear friend, broaches his upcoming parental leave, Gabrielle's response is one part scoffing to two parts guilt-tripping.

But if Drucker refuses to round off her character's spiky edges, she never overplays her toughness. Gabrielle's unflinching competence and dynamism belie acute sensitivity, and the actress allows hints of childlike hurt and hesitation to pierce the carapace. Much of the film's drama stems from this supremely empowered woman being confronted with the fact that she needs other people, too.

The supporting characters are more functional than fleshed-out, perhaps not unfitting for a portrait of someone like Gabrielle, who has the effect of making those around her feel inessential. Berling's Henri, especially, suffers from the film's disinterest in anyone aside from its central figure. Capelluto's Kamyar and Barrault's impaired but sharp-tongued Arlette are more compelling, partly because the movie conveys the idiosyncrasies of their relationships to the protagonist without spelling them out.

Frida is the most secondary figure — the person who makes Gabrielle pause and ponder roads not taken. But Thierry doesn't have

*Continued on page 54*

*Nagi Notes*, writer-director Koji Fukada's latest, offers a thoughtfully modulated tribute to the communal coziness, hap-hazard beauty and organic shape of rural life in contemporary Japan. That all comes filtered through the eyes of two creative women, sculptor Yoriko (Takako Matsu) and her latest model Yuri (Shizuka Ishibashi), an architect from Tokyo, who reconnect at Yoriko's place in the Japanese hinterlands. (Yuri used to be married to Yoriko's brother.)

At the same time, through storylines that explore LGBTQ+ identity with a frankness that's rare in Japanese cinema, this inclusive drama doesn't sugarcoat how stifling, even soul-crushing, villages like the titular town of Nagi can be when traditional values are practically synonymous with menacing conformity. Think *Brokeback Mountain* meets *La Belle Noiseuse* but with both lesbians and gays and a more hopeful ending.

Cumulatively, it makes for an exportable slice of festival-friendly art house humanism that's easy to consume but perhaps almost as easy to forget, less interesting than Fukada's unsettling breakthrough *Harmonium*, which played Cannes Un Certain Regard strand in 2016, or his melancholy, elegantly structured exploration of grief, *Love Life*, a Venice competitor from 2022.

The titular town is a serene speck of a place in the west of Japan, near a mountain also called Nagi, a beautiful but raggedy landscape that patchworks swathes of virgin forest, farmed fields and twinkling solar panels. Around 5,000 people reside in the town, give or take the shifting subpopulation of soldiers from the Japanese Self-Defense Forces who ship in and out for noisy munitions drills in the mountains nearby. The inconvenience of that military presence has brought certain compensations from the government, such as a strikingly modern, geometric contemporary art museum (Nagi MOCA) that draws visitors not put off by the arduous journey required to get there. (The town isn't serviced by the national railway.) As one character observes, traveling to Nagi from Tokyo takes longer than it would to go abroad.

Yoriko Endo, an unmarried woman in her early 40s or so, grew up in Nagi and went

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Takako Matsu (left) and Shizuka Ishibashi play former relatives reunited under new circumstances.

away to attend art school but came back to live on the family farm. Her brother Masato, seen only as a sculpture but never in the flesh, should have been the one to take over their family's business according to the custom of primogeniture, which favors the eldest male child. But Masato went off to become an architect, married Yuri and went to live in Taiwan, so Yoriko is the one who's taken over the family farmhouse and a large barn that she's had converted into a rustic studio. In the mornings, she milks her neighbors' cows and then spends the rest of her time working on her art.

Fukada's attention to the artistic process here is one of the film's great delights, and congruent with his interest, seen in his other films, in how people get things done, be it cooking, social work, pop stardom or car mechanics. Yoriko mostly makes wooden portraits of people she knows (the finished sculptures seen here are credited to Ami Yoshida), pieces hand-carved from blocks of wood donated to her by local forestry workers. But before she can pick up a chisel, she makes copious sketches of her subjects, and then maquettes made from clay, all of which require the subject to sit in the studio for hours chatting with Yoriko while she works. The better she gets to know someone, the better the final product. Crucially, Yoriko sees her process as a three-way collaboration between herself, the subject and the material, especially the

wood — an approach that couldn't be more different from the (mostly male) great artist-genius stereotype usually peddled in films. Indeed, one might even say that Nagi itself — its landscape, its people, its history — also informs and shapes Yoriko's work as well.

As a trained architect, Yuri can appreciate her former sister-in-law's painstaking technique. It's clear that the two women liked one another back when Yuri was married to Masato, even if they weren't close. Now that their legal bond as family has been dissolved, they have a chance to reimagine their relationship as intellectual equals, exploring their common interest in aesthetics, and their common experience as female practitioners in fields dominated by men. Without making a big song and dance about it, Fukada and company quietly point out how the still-dominant patriarchy of Japan warps things in all kinds of ways.

There are two teenage boys in the film, Haruki (Waku Kawaguchi) and Keita (Kiyora Fujiwara), whose inchoate erotic feelings for one another, a love that can still barely say its name in provincial Japan, forms a subplot here. At one point, Keita asks Yuri if she and Yoriko are lovers (they're not); it's as if he finds it easier to imagine that's the nature of their relationship rather

than that they might just be friends. And yet, Keita's clearly picked up on something that no one has ever told him: that Yoriko is actually gay and was once deeply in love with Haruki's mother, Sanae (Sawako Fujima), who died years ago but still haunts Yoriko's imagination.

Fukada stealthily shades in these subtleties of feeling into the story with exacting skill, creating a drama that touches on social issues but never feels issues-driven. The characters themselves are always at the forefront, and it's obvious that Yoriko's philosophy about the collaborative nature of her art applies equally well to Fukada's cinematic practice. He may have written the words and devised the plot, but the film's spirit only comes alive through the collaboration of the actors (the cast is excellent throughout), the craftspeople and the technicians.

It's such a seamless, harmoniously composed work, effortlessly edited and elegantly shot, that it's almost too easy to just drift along with it, like floating down a river on a canoe, letting its currents take control. This isn't a grabby, attention seeker of a film, but a quiet, watchful sort of movie that whispers its secrets sotto voce.

#### Competition

**CAST** Takako Matsu, Shizuka Ishibashi, Ken'ichi Matsuyama, Waku Kawaguchi, Kiyora Fujiwara  
**DIRECTOR** Koji Fukada  
 1 hour 50 minutes

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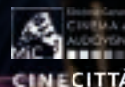
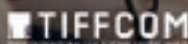
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## In Waves

Will Sharpe and Stephanie Hsu lead the English-language voice cast of Phuong Mai Nguyen's debut feature, a tender, sharp and luminous animated adaptation of a graphic novel by AJ Dungo **By Sheri Linden**

The first animated film to open Cannes Critics' Week, *In Waves* is an understated marvel, its elegant hand-drawn simplicity bolstered by a strong emotional through-line. The love story it tells — spirited, tender and wrenching — begins with the clumsy meet-cute in the suburban Los Angeles high school of AJ, an introverted skateboarder, and Kristen, a gutsy surfer. They're vivid characters brought to warm life by unfussy animation and the superb performances of Will Sharpe and Stephanie Hsu. Moving within a few short years from blushing infatuation to friendship to committed partnership, these two will weather some of life's harshest storms.

Based on AJ Dungo's 2019 graphic novel of the same name, *In Waves* is propelled by the immediacy of autobiography; its main character, AJ (Sharpe), is a visual artist whose life is transformed by Kristen (Hsu) and her love of surfing. Phuong Mai Nguyen, at the helm of her first feature, infuses every frame with a quicksilver sensory power, from the sun-kissed palette of its SoCal setting to the black-and-white scenes of an imagined Hawaiian princess, whose symbolic heroism — and connection to Kristen — is more poignant each time she appears. In addition to these sequences, the main action is intercut with scenes of AJ that foreshadow a solitary interlude for a committed surfer and artist.

As the story opens, AJ is, in the words of his best friend, Francisco (Alejandro

Antonio Ruiz), "aquaphobic" — a situation Kristen wastes no time correcting, urging the shy skateboarder into the ocean and teaching him to surf. Along with her brother, Jeff (Griffin Puatu), and cousin Eon (Johnny Young), they form a tight quartet. AJ's friends become a crucial part of his life after Francisco moves away. The boys' awkward driveway goodbye is a key example of what the screenplay by Fanny Burdino and Samuel Doux gets so right about adolescence, as is the tantalizing suspension of time after a boy hits send on a text to the girl he can't stop thinking about.

The characters' athleticism speaks volumes too, from the skateboard-level action on sidewalks to the moments when AJ awakens to the physical thrills and transcendent mysteries of catching a wave. Kristen's surfing lessons extend beyond the physical to the historical: She tells him about the legendary father of modern surfing, Duke Kahanamoku, and how the missionaries colonizing Hawaii outlawed surfing, a centuries-old part of the local culture. For the Philippine American characters at the center of the drama, cultural identity is one facet among many, not always directly illuminated; like the snippets of Tagalog spoken by Kristen's father, it's an organic part of the everyday whole.

Kristen and AJ's romance follows familiar arcs, but the way those moments are presented is dazzling. They share their first kiss under an exquisite inky sky, and the

Teenagers confront love, mortality and nature in this first animated film to open Cannes' Critics' Week sidebar.

sight of an elated AJ skateboarding home in the rain would make Gene Kelly proud.

All the sweeping expansiveness snaps shut with a sudden health crisis for Kristen, its onset signaled with masterful concision in a middle-of-the-night calamity that leaves her helpless. It isn't until well after Kristen has faced a life-threatening illness and an extreme medical ordeal that she and AJ make their relationship official to her parents. Every decision becomes an expression of tenacity and determination, but also an acknowledgment that things can shift in an instant. Kristen finds her way back to her natural vivacity, but the brightness burns differently. An overhead shot of the four friends together again on their boards, waiting for a wave on the sunset-pink Pacific, is a quiet stunner, packed with feeling and hard-won knowledge.

The excellent English-language cast (the festival is screening both this version and the French) features several actors doing double and triple duty as supporting and background characters. At its center, Sharpe and Hsu create a compelling and dynamic contrast as two smart people looking toward careers and ready to build a life together. A trip to New York — depicted with a vibrancy that complements the story's West Coast settings — finds AJ and Kristen in a paradox: more committed to each other than ever before, and also lying to each other about monumental things.

In this tale of body and spirit, Nguyen strikes a fine balance between narrative and visual language, the imagery bolstered by musical contributions and outstanding sound work: the whoosh of the surf, the wind combing through palm fronds, the scratch of markers on a skateboard.

Water is the drama's connective tissue. With remarkable fluency, *In Waves* captures its various textures, trajectories and degrees of translucency, and, in a sweetly sly touch, the way it can spatter against the lens of a camera. Eventually Kristen, AJ, Jeff and Eon make their way from the Southland to a corner of the Northwest; it's a journey into icy beauty and a kind of terror, but, no less, a headlong plunge into the balm of love. This is a movie that effortlessly marries primal poetry to the quotidian. Its aching heart understands that a full moon of brilliant perfection can illuminate one of the most painful moments of your life.

Critics' Week

**CAST** Will Sharpe, Stephanie Hsu, Johnny Young, Alejandro Antonio Ruiz, Griffin Puatu, Taiana Tully  
**DIRECTOR** Phuong Mai Nguyen  
1 hour 31 minutes

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- Palais E, FilmSharks / The Remake Co.
- 16:15** *Gaukhartas* (90 mins.), Palais I, Kazakhfilm JSC
- 16:15** *Fujiko* (95 mins.), Palais K, SC Films International
- 16:15** *Arriba Tutto* (98 mins.), Riviera 1, Latido Films
- 16:30** *Invisibles* (94 mins.), Online #4, MMM Film Sales
- 17:00** *Blood Behind Us* (140 mins.), Lerins Cinema Club, Quantify Sales
- 17:45** *Carlo Acutis. The Millennial Saint* (90 mins.), Arcades #3 Online, Nexo Studios
- 17:45** *Noise of Time* (100 mins.), Arcades 1, Luminescence
- 17:45** *In Waves* (91 mins.), Arcades 3, Charades
- 17:45** *My World Without Me* (114 mins.), Lerins 2, China Film Foundation — Wutianming Film Fund for Young Talents
- 17:45** *The Lion Queen* (87 mins.), Olympia 4, Submarine Entertainment
- 17:45** *Melody for a Bear* Olympia 5, Pathé Films
- 17:45** *Julian* (85 mins.), Olympia 7, New Europe Film Sales
- 17:45** *A Girl Unknown* (125 mins.), Olympia 9, Pyramide International
- 17:45** *Hershey* (120 mins.), Palais #B Online, Angel Studios
- 17:45** *White Nights* (98 mins.), Palais B, Cinema Do Brasil
- 17:45** *Long Long Night* Palais D, Finecut Co. Ltd.
- 17:45** *Laalo Krishna Sada Sahaayte* (135 mins.), Palais F, Imppa-Indian Motion Picture Producers Association
- 17:45** *The Pond* Palais H, Myriad Pictures
- 17:45** *Four Minus Three* (121 mins.), Palais J, Beta Cinema
- 17:45** *Mimics* (93 mins.), Riviera 2 Online, Pinnacle Peak Pictures
- 17:45** *He Bled Neon* Riviera 2, XYZ Films
- 17:45** *We Are Aliens* (111 mins.), Theatre Croisette,
- Charades
- 18:00** *1949* (82 mins.), Lumiere, The Match Factory
- 18:00** *Viva* (112 mins.), Miramar, Loco Films
- 18:15** *Mouse* (120 mins.), Olympia 6, Visit Films
- 18:15** *House of Emotions* (85 mins.), Palais C, Confederation of Indian Industry
- 18:15** *The Correspondent* (119 mins.), Palais I, Tricoast Worldwide
- 18:30** *Tangles* (102 mins.), Agnès Varda, Charades
- 18:45** *Une Vie Manifeste* Bunuel, Cannes Classics
- 19:00** *When the Tree Moves*, (100 mins.), Online #1, Imppa-Indian Motion Picture Producers Association
- 20:00** *Into the Jaws of the Ogre* (86 mins.), Arcades 1, Rediance
- 20:00** *A Woman's Life* (98 mins.), Olympia 1, Be for Films
- 20:00** *The Endless* (82 mins.), Olympia 4, Altatensionfilms
- 20:00** *Elle Driver's Private Screening* (109 mins.), Olympia 7, Elle Driver
- 20:00** *Balan: The Boy* (150 mins.), Olympia 9, Confederation of Indian Industry
- 20:30** *Into the Jaws of the Ogre* (86 mins.), Arcades 2, Rediance
- 20:30** *Parallel Tales* (138 mins.), Lumiere, Charades
- 20:30** *Nagi Notes* (108 mins.), Palais K, mk2 Films
- 20:45** *Gabin* (105 mins.), Theatre Croisette, Lightdox
- 21:00** *Molière, Cyrano and The Young King* (120 mins.), Agnès Varda, Ginger & Fed
- 21:15** *Ken Russell's the Devils* Bunuel, Cannes Classics
- 21:30** *Marie-Madeleine* (104 mins.), Debussy, Pyramide International
- 22:30** *Nagi Notes* (108 mins.), Olympia 1, mk2 Films
- 22:30** *A Woman's Life*, (98 mins.), Palais K, Be for Films

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## GLASS CEILING

Continued from page 2

by women. Still, Elizabeth questions, “Are [women] going into different categories that are not as prestigious? Although, overall, it looks good, are we just upping the numbers by putting more women in smaller selections?”

This year’s Un Certain Regard section has the highest percentage of women directors, with 10 out of the 19 films directed by women. (Un Certain Regard is also opening with the latest film from director **Jane Schoenbrun**, who is nonbinary.) “What Un Certain Regard shows us is that it is possible. If the main competition really wanted to, they could,” says Schaffer, who points to other prestigious festivals’ recent history of adding more women to competition sections.

Of the 22 films in the Berlin Film Festival competition section, nine were directed by women. The Sundance Film Festival, America’s preeminent platform for indie filmmaking, has had parity in its U.S. Dramatic Competition section for several years. Seventy percent of the films in the 2026 competition lineup were directed by women.

Schaffer and other insiders point out that several of the issues that keep women directors from the highest echelons of the international film industry are systemic, from education and mentorship to financing and distribution. After debuting the 2019 festival competition lineup, where only four competition films were directed by women, Frémaux argued: “Cannes and any festival, we are the last stage of that journey.”

Top film schools like USC, NYU and AFI are now routinely graduating more women than men, but financing for independent productions still predominately goes to projects from male directors, as do the projects with the larger budgets.

“We have a global crisis in how independent cinema is financed, and it is affecting women and marginalized people first,” says de Casimacker.

Schaffer says she and her team

at WIF have a shorthand for this phenomenon: “When the money comes in, the women go out.” She says. “For every *Book Club* you have many, many **Jason Statham** action thrillers.”

Filmmaker **Daphne Schmon** launched her nonprofit Breaking Through the Lens in 2018 at the Cannes Film Festival, coincidentally the same year of the demonstration on the steps of the Palais. The organization’s focus is on helping female filmmakers find avenues to financing through grants, curated meetings and industry mentorship. Says Schmon: “We purposely focus on the financing stage, because we believe that that’s where the problem lies, and that’s where change needs to happen.”

At a Breaking Through the Lens events at last year’s Cannes, Kirsten Stewart talked about the difficulties she faced when finding financing for her directorial debut, *The Chronology of Water*. While goodwill for female filmmakers is high, Schmon notes that this doesn’t translate to funding. “There’s a lot of wanting to get better. But when push comes to shove, there are very, very few people who are putting their money where their mouth is.”

As a U.S.-based independent producer and business development executive, **Luna Zhang** considers it her mission to finance female-led stories, as well as movies that focus on Asian and minority representation and social consciousness. She comes to Cannes as a producer of a short film competing in La Cinef titled *Tian Tian De Mi Mi* (*Our Secrets*), a coming-of-age tale from director **Lenti Liang**.

Zhang is admittedly buoyed by the amount of female talent set for Cannes premieres this year, but says there remains an industry-wide crisis when it comes to decision-making. “People are still threatened by females, and they don’t want to recognize female authority,” says Zhang. “It’s an ego blocking their way, or [they’re] not confident that a woman can make things happen as [well] as men can.”

Outside of private financing, there are continuing equity

conversations when it comes to the handling of state-funded projects. Some countries, like Sweden, have implemented quotas for the funding that comes out of their film commissions. Notably, one of the women-directed competition titles at this year’s Cannes, *Gentle Monster* from **Marie Kreutzer**, is a Swedish co-production.

Says Elizabeth: “[When] we have organizations that can give opportunities to different voices — not just voices who can necessarily afford to pay for that visibility — [then] we can see the landscape shifting.”

There is an overall acknowledgment that progress is being made, it’s just not at the speed that was promised. “It’s a very slow evolution,” says de Casimacker.

Schmon praises Cannes upholding artistic excellence and the gains made so far by the fest’s programmers, but would like to see the festival engage more with organizations like hers. “Festivals should really be picking films based on merit. They should also realize [the numbers of female directors] is pretty shocking,” says Schmon. “I would never want to be in the festival because they had to hit some quota, but that’s not to say that having goals aren’t good.”

Cannes comes at a moment when female representation in the director’s chair is currently in a precarious situation, domestically. The larger American entertainment industry, which is currently in a period of retrenchment due to economic headwinds, has also backslid in terms of representation in the director’s chair. In 2025, the number of female directors behind the top 100 grossing films of the year hit a seven-year low, with women representing just 8.1 percent of all directors on these films, according to USC’s Annenberg Inclusion Initiative.

Says de Casimacker: “We think that the objective of reaching equity and parity is possible. We just need to have more concrete objectives. Parity was a promise, but we don’t need more promises.” **TJR**

## A WOMAN’S LIFE

Continued from page 41

much to work with besides Cheshire cat smiles and dulcet-toned come-ons. Gabrielle’s feelings for Frida are understandable; the latter approaches her with fresh eyes and few demands, giving her space to be something other than problem-solver extraordinaire. Too bad the film doesn’t make us feel in our guts what stirs Gabrielle so intensely in the younger woman.

Working with DP Noé Bach and editor Clément Pinteaux, Bourgeois-Tacquet keeps *A Woman’s Life* moving with a crisp efficiency that mirrors Gabrielle’s own. But she knows when to slow things down, the camera advancing gently and tightening around Gabrielle to capture tiny shifts and turning points. She also can turn it up, staging a swoony first-date sequence that finds Gabrielle and Frida swept into intimate proximity by an immersive dance performance.

Among Bourgeois-Tacquet’s strengths is her nimble way with tone. A meeting with a social worker about Arlette’s worsening dementia is a marvel of counterintuitive comedy, while Gabrielle’s huddle with a tongue cancer sufferer proves an unexpected emotional centerpiece. “Sometimes life is tough,” she tells the man. “And it’s always unfair.”

Those words might read as harsh. This is, after all, a doctor who tells a class of interns they won’t be remembered fondly. But Gabrielle’s manner with the patient is gentle, and by this point we recognize her statement as one of profound, hard-won honesty. It’s this deeply human character’s defining quality — a gift she extends to the people around her, and, by the film’s end, to herself as well. **TJR**

# THE MEMBERS CLUB

LA PLAGÉ  
DU FESTIVAL

12 - 21 May 2026

(9am -5pm Daily)

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(opposite/between The Marriott and Carlton hotels)

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## 25 Years Ago, Kore-eda Went the *Distance* in Cannes

Legendary Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda has become a mainstay of the Cannes Film Festival. His newest film, *Shoplifters*, a sci-fi tale about a couple who adopt a humanoid robot after the death of their son, will be his eighth film to play in competition. The Tokyo-born Kore-eda served on the jury, headed by Greta Gerwig, two years ago, and before that, his film *Shoplifters* won the Palme d'Or in 2018 and went on to earn an Oscar nomination for best foreign-language film.

But while a lot of promise surrounded Kore-eda when he was first called to Cannes in 2001 with his film *Distance*, that invitation might have been premature, and his later success

could not have been predicted. In *Filmmaker Magazine*, Noah Cowan wrote, "I am a big fan of Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Distance*. But following his pitch-perfect global hit *After Life*, which seemed to single-handedly resurrect the metaphysical art film, expectations were running way too high to put this very small, fragile film under the heat of competition."

The film takes place three years after a cult poisoned Tokyo's drinking water then committed mass suicide; five survivors revisit the site of the suicide and reminisce about those they lost. Cowan called the story "so ambiguous and unresolved that it allows small yields only after much work.

**'Distance'**  
 By Michael Rechtshaffen  
 CANNES — Taking his inspiration from a mass homicide perpetrated by Japan's Aum Sect cult, filmmaker Kore-eda Hirokazu is less concerned with the actual chain of events than with the lasting effects on the family members who have been left behind.  
 In Hirokazu's "Distance," three years have passed since the Ark of Truth massacre in which more than 100 people were killed by fellow members of the apocalyptic cult.

**In Competition**

But I can think of no filmmaker with the courage to try such an austere approach with such an open wound of a subject, especially in Japan. Rumor has it that it was elevated to compete at the last minute — how foolish."

*THR* critic Michael Rechtshaffen was less forgiving, saying, "With its reliance on shaky handheld camera work, unscripted dialog and a heavily wooded backdrop, *Distance* feels like *The Blair Witch Project* minus the creepy bits."

But Cannes stuck with Kore-eda, who later told interviewer Kuriko Sato that "the experience of making *Distance* gave me a wider perspective on how a film can be made." — GREGG KILDAY

Director Hirokazu Kore-eda at the photocall for his Cannes debut, *Distance*, the first of 11 films of his to screen at the festival.



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“Every child is a poet, even though as we grow up, the world around us tries to make us forget it. But imagination has no limits, and today’s dreams are tomorrow’s life.”

Michele Diomà  
Founder, WILD FILMMAKER



### BEST INDEPENDENT ARTIST OF 2026



- |                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Anaya (AnayaMusic) Kunst     | Ian Williams           |
| Andria Litto                 | Joey Agbayani          |
| Ariel Orama López (AG Orloz) | Kai Fischer            |
| Carla Di Bonito              | Scooter Morris         |
| Casey Williams               | S. Strange             |
| Christopher Pennington       | Leilani Amour Arenzana |
| Cosmo Swevens                | Lena Mattsson          |
| Daniel Arreola               | Lesley Ann Albiston    |
| Danilo Del Tufo              | Lynn H. Elliott        |
| Davi Kinski                  | Matthew J. Roch        |
| David Williamson             | Michelle Arthur        |
| Derek Lakeith Martin         | Patricia Planck        |
| Dianne Lang                  | Ricardo Fleshman       |
| Dr Dawn Menge                | Sarah Bitely           |
| Eirini Alligiannis           | Sean Gregory Tansey    |
| Fabrizio Fuochi              | Sol Solaris            |
| Florence Cazebon-Taveau      | Suzanne Lutas          |
| Frank Mancuso                | Timothy A McGhee       |
| Gabriel Womack               | Tracey Cochrane        |
| Hugo Teugels                 | Uwe Schwarzwaldner     |



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