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Polls and surveys

2011 in review: The full poll



A Separation

101 critics and curators remember their film highlights of the year

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Melissa Anderson	Geoff Andrew	Nigel Andrews	Sergio Angelini	Michael Atkinson
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Tom Charity	Godfrey Cheshire	Ian Christie	Michel Ciment	Roger Clarke
Kieron Corless	Mark Cousins	Fernando F. Croce	Sam Davies	Thomas Dawson
Maria Delgado	Mar Diestro-Dópido	Bryony Dixon	Gareth Evans	Leslie Felperin
The Ferroni Brigade	William Fowler	Ian Francis	Lizzie Francke	Graham Fuller
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Peter von Bagh	Ben Walters	Catherine Wheatley	Charles Whitehouse	Armond White
Sam Wigley				

Melissa Anderson *The Village Voice, USA*

In alphabetical order:

The Arbor

Clío Barnard, UK

A Dangerous Method

David Cronenberg, France/Ireland/UK/Germany/Canada

Jane Eyre

Cary Fukunaga, USA/UK

Mysteries of Lisbon (*Mistérios de Lisboa*)

Raúl Ruiz, Portugal

To Die Like a Man (*Mourir como un homem*)

João Pedro Rodrigues, Portugal/France

Highlights:

Film critics are constantly humbled by how much they haven't seen, even in the oeuvre of a favourite performer. While researching a piece on Catherine Deneuve – an actress about whom I thought I knew everything – I watched *My Favourite Season* (1993) for the first time. In the third of six films she's made thus far with André Téchiné, her most frequent collaborator, Deneuve plays Emilie, a woman growing estranged from her husband and her two late-adolescent children including real-life daughter Chiara Mastroianni in her screen debut). Emilie's distance is understandable: her mother is growing frailer and she and her younger, erratic brother Daniel Auteuil) share the guilt of failing to care for her adequately. It's one of Deneuve's best, most undersung performances, a perfect distillation of a woman torn between the desire to relinquish all family obligations and the desperate need to hold her kin close – a template of sorts for the indomitable matriarch she plays in Arnaud Desplechin's *A Christmas Tale* (2008).

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Geoff Andrew *Head of film programme, BFI Southbank, UK*

What a strange year! So many fine films and so many of them frustratingly, even fatally flawed. Of course, there's no such thing as perfection but even so a large number of enormously impressive films this year fell foul, at some point or another, of overkill, cliché or some other niggling shortcoming. (I'm thinking of the dinosaur's discovery of mercy in *The Tree of Life*, for example, or Michael Fassbender's final, pathetic-fallacy collapse in *Shame*.) If this makes me sound ludicrously pernickety, remember that I'm not saying I didn't find much to enjoy and admire in these and other works; merely that 2011, for me, provided fewer fully satisfying films than usual. That said, the following (in alphabetical order) certainly did the trick:

Footnote (*Hearat Shulayim*)

Joseph Cedar, Israel

Literary cinema in the best sense (with form echoing content); ethically astute and complex, refreshingly different.

The Kid with a Bike (*Le Gamin au vélo*)

Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne, Belgium/France/Italy

The Future

Miranda July, USA

How Do You Know

James L. Brooks, USA

The Princess of Montpensier

Bertrand Tavernier, France

Take Shelter

Jeff Nichols, USA

The Tree of Life

Terrence Malick, USA

Highlights:

Most of the really noteworthy stuff that happened this year had nothing to do with movies – which is as it should be – but each of the titles above helped me in trying to figure out the rest. It's probably gauche to put so many American pictures on one's list but I'm from there and that's where I keep my stuff, so...

On DVD, Shout! Factory's release of a box set of Ernie Kovacs's pioneering television comedy/video art seemed to me an event of not much less importance than the excavation of Pompeii.

New York City's Film Forum showed, in close proximity, retrospectives of the film works of Robert Ryan and Bernard Herrmann, which were glimpses at an alternate-universe studio-era Hollywood devoted to perilous mental states.

A visit to Omaha, Nebraska's Film Streams proved that a medium-sized middle-Western city could sustain a nonprofit movie theater (granted, yes, that said city was home to a disproportionate number of Fortune 500 companies).

Conversation with critic Dave Kehr gave me a sense of optimism about a profession that often seems like a one-way ticket to obsolescence and penury; directors Larry Yust (*Trick Baby*, *Homebodies*) and Milton Moses Ginsberg (*Coming Apart*) proved gentlemen of erudition who'd passed through an industry which favors dunces; getting to talk on the phone with Linda Manz and transcribe her recipe for clam bread was quite simply a landmark (I am sorry, Linda, I tried twice to send you copies of the article and the package was returned. I hope they carry *Sight & Sound* at the gas station in Little Rock, California!).

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Agnès Poirier Critic, France

Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy

Tomas Alfredson, UK/France/Germany

It took a Swede to break into the British psyche with such maestria. John Le Carré's plot becomes almost anecdotal in this film where atmosphere and subtext grip and fascinate the audience. An inspiring mise-en-scène and superb performances from Gary Oldman, John Hurt and Colin Firth.

Habibi

Susan Youssef

This first feature shown in Venice is currently touring the world's festivals and will hopefully be released widely. *Habibi*, shot in secrecy in the West Bank and Gaza, is the first Romeo-and-Juliet story which honestly deals with Palestinian infightings and contradictions. Susan Youssef, an American-Lebanese based in Holland, has made a very subtle film on a very complex topic.

Boxing Gym

Frederick Wiseman, USA

After *La Danse*, 80-year-old documentary master Frederick Wiseman has made, in many aspects, another dance film, though this time he's dealing with boxing. These boxing fans who train at weekends are half-Gene Kellys, half-James Cagneys. Wiseman has this incredible talent to let daily noises and sounds become a whole life melody.

L'exercice de l'Etat (The Minister)

Pierre Schöller, France

Schöller's third feature is a remarkable study of power and politics in contemporary France. Screened in Cannes the same week as France's presidential hopeful Dominique Strauss-Kahn was arrested in New-York, it is part of a recent concern by film directors, alongside Alain Cavalier's *Pater* and Xavier Durringer's *The Conquest*, to document political leadership, its limits and failings.

Elena

Andrei Zvyagintsev, Russia

The director of Golden Lion-winner *The Return*, a first feature which stunned us all on its first viewing in Venice in 2003, has indeed returned in great form with his third film. *Elena*, shown in Un Certain regard at this year's Cannes, is a cruel allegory of contemporary Russia under Putin and