

VENICE REVIEW DAILY

**Allen, Besson,
Polanski:
Three
Converging
Scandals?**

VERDICT: The Venice Film Festival has made headlines in some quarters for selecting the latest works of three controversial filmmakers.

Max Borg, September 3, 2023

Not too long ago, we were wondering if the age-old “separate the art from the artist” philosophy was still at play in the context of festivals, with a general idea that European events were more open to works from controversial directors compared to American ones. Toronto, for example, canceled the world premiere of Ulrich Seidl’s *Sparta* at the eleventh hour last September, after German media suggested the Austrian filmmaker had been dishonest with the younger cast regarding the film’s premise. The film bowed without incident at San Sebastian.

In the case of Venice, which has repeatedly claimed to be a festival and not a tribunal, the 2023 edition

Continues next page

COMPETITION

THE KILLER



Netflix

VERDICT: David Fincher brings his considerable style and craft to this procedural about a professional assassin, but not even Michael Fassbender can make the character distinguishable from a thousand other cinematic hired guns.

Alonso Duralde, September 3, 2023

The world of hired killers is an endlessly fascinating one for filmmakers; the 2023 edition of the Venice Film Festival features no less than three, from the likes of Harmony Korine, Rich-

ard Linklater, and David Fincher. Fincher’s *The Killer* comes to the screen with the filmmaker’s trademark style and craft, but even as he reunites with his *Seven* screenwriter Andrew Kevin

[*Full review, click here*](#)

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Rendez-Vous

OUT OF COMPETITION

MENUS PLAISIRS – LES TROISGROS

VERDICT: Frederick Wiseman’s latest observational documentary is a four-hour look at a French dynasty of chefs at the highest possible level.

Kevin Jagernauth, September 3, 2023

Six years into retirement, 42-year-old former world featherweight champion Willie Pep still has some fight in him.

With three ex-wives, one son, a father in the hospital, and money running out, he agrees to have a film crew follow him around to

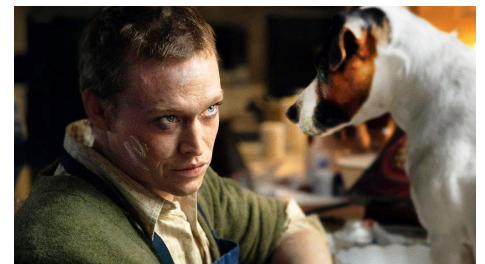
capture his planned return to the ring. What they find in Robert Kolodny’s clever and inventive faux documentary feature debut *The Featherweight* is the much more interesting story of a man unable to forget who he was as he tries to build a future he can’t imagine.

“I’m older now, so I’m always looking back,” Willie reveals. It’s 1964 and the boxer, played by James Madio, has settled in his old stomping grounds of Hartford, Connecticut where his impressive legacy (220 wins and 10 losses) carries more currency than his money in the bank (he earned \$1.2 million over his career and spent \$1.3 million, he cracks). He’s a glad-hander,

[Full review, click here](#)

Scandals continued from page 1

is arguably the pinnacle of such a mindset. “There’s nothing left to say on the matter,” said Alberto Barbera in a recent interview with the Venetian newspaper *Il Gazzettino* on the subject of having the new films by Roman Polanski, Woody Allen and Luc Besson in the Official Selection. His stance has always been that the festival is all about the quality of the work, which caused some to question the inclusion of Luc Besson in competition. (But this was before the festival started, and in a plot twist even M. Night Shyamalan might regard as outlandish, Besson’s *Dogman* has actually been much better received than Polanski’s *The Palace*, while Allen’s Paris-set *Coup de Chance* has not yet screened at the time of writing.)



Caleb Landry Jones in Dogman

That at least one of the three would be included in the competition lineup was a foregone conclusion, given that Polanski’s previous film *An Officer and a Spy* played to great acclaim on the Lido in 2019 and even won the Silver Lion

[Full Article, click here](#)

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COMPETITION



THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING

VERDICT: Timm Kröger's ambitious new feature tips its hat to the genres of yesteryear, though it's the atmosphere more than the story that impresses in the end.

Boyd van Hoeij, September 3, 2023

A doctoral student in physics finds himself in a rather odd Alpine resort in the early 1960s in *The Theory of Everything* (*Die Theorie von Allem*) from German director Timm Kröger.

Classifying the genre of this ambitious feature, shot mostly in crisp black-and-white and in widescreen, is almost as complicated as understanding quantum mechanics. Kröger borrows liberally from sources from across the 20th century, splicing in elements of science fiction, fantasy, film noir, mystery, 1970s German television shows and many other things besides to create a surprising but not always easy-to-follow collage that is very unlike most contemporary German-language films. Its premiere in a prime competition slot in Venice should ensure it has a good measure of visibility on the international circuit, though the hard-to-classify product itself will not appeal to everyone.

The Theory of Everything opens in 1974, when a bearded Johannes Leinert (Jan Bülow) is a guest on a cheap German chat show shot in Hamburg. He's there to talk about the book he has written called *The Theory of Everything*, which the presenter assumes is fiction, though Leinert seems to suggest that perhaps it's not science fiction or a romance at all but rather... reality.

[Full Review, click here](#)

THE BEAST

VERDICT: The inability to open oneself to love is the main beast of Bertrand Bonello's striking and cerebral film that follows a stalled relationship over three time periods, though the message in the central portion doesn't have the same resonance as the other two.

Jay Weissberg, September 3, 2023

There's a compelling watchableness about all Bertrand Bonello's films, notwithstanding the not infrequent case that some elements work brilliantly and others seem somehow misjudged, as if all the strands he's brought together succeed on their own but don't always mesh in a meaningful way. That was the case with *Zombi Child* and it's also true of *The Beast*, a film set in three time periods of which only two mutually resonate.

Very loosely based on Henry James' late novella *The Beast in the Jungle*, in which a man's inability to open himself to love is the cause for his lifelong premoni-



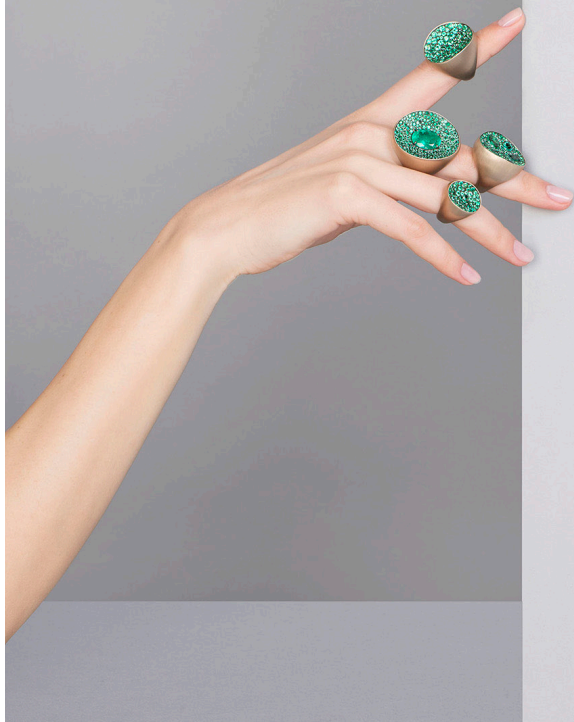
*George Mackay and Léa Seydoux in *The Beast*.*

tion of catastrophe, Bonello's *Beast* turns the questioning figure into a woman, played to perfection by Léa Seydoux, and weaves together three incarnations, from 1910, 2014 and 2044. Cerebral and striking in all periods, the film works on richly meaningful levels in the first and third periods but loses its universality with the 2014 story, when the man is made into an incel. While intriguing on its own, the plot twist

[Full Review, click here](#)

ANTONINI

MILANO



OUT OF COMPETITION



Venice Film Festival

THE PALACE

VERDICT: Roman Polanski's appallingly bland black comedy about the filthy rich is set in a fancy Swiss hotel on New Year's Eve 1999, and not the least bit funny.

Deborah Young, September 2, 2023

The world's wealthiest people gather in Switzerland's posh Gstaad Palace Hotel to ring in the Millenium with all its Y2K uncertainties: how could the director of the amusing parody Fearless Vampire Killers miss squeezing some laughs out of a situation dripping with more irony than diamonds off an heiress's neck?

Perhaps a theme, a plot, a storyline would have helped? Writer-director Roman Polanski's *The Palace* is a situation waiting for comedy to come along; a portrait oozing with bitterness, spite and disgust for a society that lusts after the demon money, amplifying their vulgarity at every turn. There isn't much more to the film than that.

Venice has always been a pretty safe haven for Polanski's movies, though his open court case over accusations that he raped a 13-year-old girl in 1977 have made it impossible for him to physically attend the festival. It nevertheless proved a good launching pad for his last film, the 2019 historical drama *An Officer and a Spy* about the Dreyfus affair: the film took home a Silver Lion Special Jury Prize and proceeded to be nominated for many more awards around the world (rarely winning, however.)

More is the shock to see *The Palace's* flimsiness, which is even more glaring against the generally high production values and a decent cast that includes Oliver

[Full Review, click here](#)

ORIZZONTI

THE FEATHERWEIGHT

VERDICT: ‘The Featherweight’ is an inventive faux doc portrait of boxing great Willie Pep who faces his greatest fight yet: his own legacy.

Kevin Jagernauth, September 3, 2023

Six years into retirement, 42-year-old former world featherweight champion Willie Pep still has some fight in him.

With three ex-wives, one son, a father in the hospital, and money running out, he agrees to have a film crew follow him around to capture his planned return to the ring. What they find in Robert Kolodny’s clever and inventive faux



Venice Film Festival

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[Full review, click here](#)

VENICE FAST FACTS

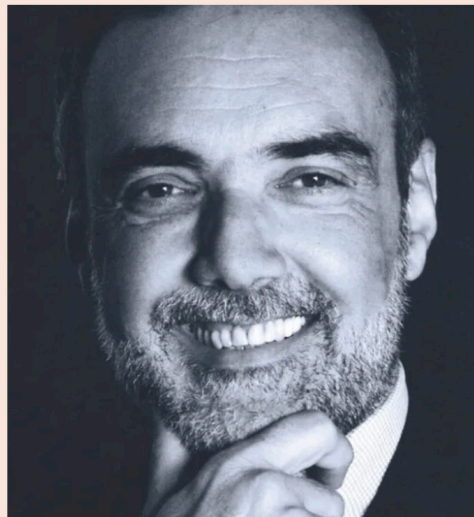
Biennele celebrates 80 years

1992



Gillo Pontecorvo was nominated as curator (to become Director in 1996) with the agenda to make Venice the capital of quality filmmaking, bringing the great directors and film stars back to the Lido, and revitalize the Palazzo del Cinema zone with young people.

1998



Alberto Barbera was appointed as director of the Festival, by the president and its delegates, It was also the debut of the “Cinema del Presente” section in parallel to the customary competition.

2007



The Festival celebrated its 75th anniversary. Director Alexander Kluge prepared a special retrospective program on the last 75 years in the history of cinema. A special award, the Golden Lion of the 75th edition, was presented to Bernardo Bertolucci.



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ARNI

VERDICT: Hungarian director Dorka Vermes' feature debut 'Arni' is a slow-burn slice-of-life drama with an exceptional lead performance from newcomer Peter Turi.

Oris Aigbokhaevbolo, September 3, 2023

The eponymous character in *Arni*, a product of the 2023 Venice Film Festival's Biennale College Cinema, is a young member of a travelling circus family. He's a worker, a handyman, and, apparently, the only non-family member in the group. It is never really clear if this is the reason he seems like an outcast of sorts, although the family itself hardly screams warmth.

In any case, at the start of this super-dry account of the life and work of the troupe, Arni is required to bring in a selection of workers to erect a tent, which will be used for a forthcoming show. He chooses to scout for his men in a bar, where



Venice Film Festival

he asks for water and is handed a glass of clear liquid. He spits once it reaches his mouth — it's alcohol. The bartender, a mischievous lady, laughs. Another patron does the same. On this evidence, Arni is a sucker. But he does get his men.

Or does he? Back home, he is berated for hiring drunks as workers. The family's patriarch and chief bully also says he has paid the men too much. Who needs enemies when you have co-workers

like this? With these scenes, all of which are mediated by low light photography and a bleak, barely-there score, the principal mode of action is revealed to be melancholy. When one of Arni's associates takes him for a rough, joyless quickie in the woods, the picture is complete.

There can be no more doubt what kind of movie this is: a slice-of-life depiction of an isolated young man

[*Full review, click here*](#)

GIORNATE



Emo-Weemhoff

MELK

VERDICT: The low-key Dutch domestic drama 'Melk' doesn't quite manage to set itself apart enough from its competitors.

Boyd van Hoeij, September 2, 2023

A Dutchwoman whose pregnancy ended in the loss of her child clings to the breast milk she starts producing in a nearly obsessive manner in Stefanie Kolk's feature debut Melk.

A domestic and largely internalised story that avoids histrionics and melodrama completely, Kolk's first steps in the world of feature films suggests she's a measured storyteller with an interest in possibly telling minutiae. But this isn't quite enough to make a splash in today's overcrowded marketplace, neither at home, where slow-moving arthouse films are basically but a single blip on the box-office radar, or on the international festival circuit, where its exceedingly well-mannered execution might be less of an eye-catcher than something with a stronger auteurist stamp.

The film opens with the protagonist, Robin (Frieda Barnhard), in a doctor's office, where she's told how they'll induce the contractions that'll allow her to evacuate her baby. With her pale complexion, jet-black hair and high cheekbones, she looks like a contemporary Snow White, though clearly this is not a fairytale.

Robin's partner — no Batman jokes, please! — seems to mostly just sort of be there instead of either going into full-on moral-support mode for Robin or having a breakdown because he, too, lost their

[Full review, click here](#)

Today@The
Italian Pavilion

September 4

15:00 – 17:00

WE ARE STORIES CAMPAIGN:
PROTECTING CREATIVITY AND
SUPPORTING YOUNG TALENTS

The FAPAV campaign, created in collaboration with ANEC, ANICA, MPA and UNIVIDEO, will then be the focus of the panel We Are Stories Campaign: Protecting Creativity and Supporting Young Talents (4 September, 15:00-17:00). The meeting will present this year's themes and will focus on true stories of young women who have realised their dream of working in the audiovisual industry, with a special reference to disability and inclusion, to safeguard the future of the film and audiovisual sector. After the opening speeches by Roberto Stabile and FAPAV President Federico Bagnoli Rossi, there will be talks by: Laura Aria, Commissioner, Authority for Communications Guarantees - AGCOM; Fabia Bettini, Director, Alice nella Città; Alberto Carroz-zo, Vice President Country Manager Italy, Paramount; Simone Gialdini, General Director, ANEC; Francesca Medolago Albani, General Secretary, ANICA; Luciana Migliavacca, Vice President UNIVIDEO and President, Mustang Entertainment; Davide Novelli, Distribution Director, Vision Distribution; Nicola Maccanico, CEO, Cinecittà. Director and screenwriter Nicola Conversa and the stars of the campaign spots will also attend the event.

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IFTA & AFM

STEADFAST LEADERSHIP AND VISION

**Jean Prewitt, President & CEO, Independent Film & Television Alliance & the American Film Market
Speaks candidly to The Film Verdict ahead of AFM 2023**

Jean M. Prewitt is President and Chief Executive Officer, before joining IFTA, Ms. Prewitt was a Principal from 1994 to 1999 at a major Washington, D.C.-based lobbying and public relations firm, representing some of the world's most prestigious entertainment and high technology companies. She also served as a senior government official with the U.S. Department of Commerce. In this role, Ms. Prewitt represented the White House and Executive Branch on international communications and information policy. Ms. Prewitt also worked for eight years as Senior Vice President and General Counsel of United International Pictures (UIP), the foreign distribution arm of Paramount, Universal and MGM studios, implementing the initial creation of the global distribution network and managing legal and government affairs on a worldwide basis. She began her legal career at the New York firm of Donovan Leisure Newton & Irvine, where she specialized in federal tax, antitrust and copyright litigation.

The Film Verdict: There is no doubt that you have a very impressive career, which enhances your current role as President and CEO of the Independent Film & Television Alliance (IFTA®). What are the parallels of your past positions and as CEO of IFTA?

Jean Prewitt: I've been fortunate in my career to have had a 360-degree tour through the international film and communications industries, with positions in the studio system, in government policy-making roles, and in law and technology firms. All of my career-stops have been at crucial moments of change within the industry – as new technology emerged, as world markets opened, and more recently the shifts between traditional and streaming distribution, and now AI. Those experiences certainly have informed my work at IFTA.

TFV: According to the IFTA website, "The Independent Film & Television Alliance (IFTA) supports, protects and

advances the global independent film and TV industry," in general terms. How? And an example you can share with us?



JP: We support the independent industry and our Members at multiple levels. Most of our companies are small to medium size, very entrepreneurial companies. We provide the building blocks for their businesses: for example, we create

and update the IFTA Multiple International Agreements (MILA) – the standard contractual forms for documenting international

distribution deals used by the industry at large. Our IFTA Collections service has collected more than \$155 million in secondary royalties on behalf of the companies whose works the service represents. IFTA Certificates of Origin provides the documentation Members need to export their films, without expensive and time-consuming trips to consulates and notaries. More broadly, IFTA actively lobbies in the U.S. and around the world on business-defining issues such as copyright protection and

consolidation, and the removal of market barriers. And of course, we produce the American Film Market which is a cornerstone of the independent film business.

Continues next page



The Independent Film & Television Alliance (IFTA®)

The Independent Film & Television Alliance (IFTA®), the global trade association of independent distributors and producers of motion picture and television programming. Headquartered in Los Angeles, the organization represents and provides significant entertainment industry services to Member companies from more than 20 countries, consisting of independent film and TV production and distribution companies and sales agents -- those companies that operate without the benefit of a wholly-controlled global distribution network, thus relying upon licenses to local distributors for the financing and exploitation of their productions.

Since Prewitt, appointment as president and CEO, in April 2000, IFTA and the services it provides to its members have dramatically evolved. Its most visible service continues to be the annual American Film Market (AFM) in Santa Monica, which has grown to be the world's largest film market. Markets, in contrast to festivals, focus on the conclusion of financing and licensing deals to place films and programs into theatrical, television and digital distribution around the world. Each year, AFM hosts more than 7,000 industry leaders from 80 countries for a week of deal-making, 400 screenings, networking and the industry's preeminent conference series AFM 2023 will return to Santa Monica October 31 – November 5 allowing the global industry to immerse themselves for five days dedicated to deal making, discovery, education, and reconnecting.

Full article, [click here](#)

Jean Prewitt *continued*

TFV: What are leading common challenges you see across your global membership in more than 20 countries.

JP: The Independents continue to battle to maintain strong copyright protections and prevent illegal exploitation of their works, to ensure open marketplace access throughout the channels of distribution and in every territory, and to protect the producers' ability to assemble the rights and to manage exploitation of their works.

TFV: Although, obvious differences, there are some similarities between IFTA and the Motion Picture Association, oddly, it is the similarities which perhaps could cause conflict, what is the relationship between IFTA and MPA and have there ever been points of conflicting interests which needed to be addressed?

JP: We work very closely with the MPA on many issues in the United States and partner with them in coalitions around the world. We are closely aligned on copyright, trade, and economic development, and share common views on the

challenges ahead of the entertainment industry. Because the business models followed by the studios and independents diverge, we may diverge where market power and media consolidation are at issue.

TFV: Several high profile American independent producers have recently expressed to TFV the challenges they are facing in maintaining the Rights of their own productions. Unlike their European counterparts who enjoy a more Producer friendly climate, what are your thoughts on the future of American Independent Producers and how valid are their concerns and worries?

JP: For independent producers, ensuring that they can retain, control, and fully exploit their creative work is of supreme importance. Where major streamers (or broadcasters) take all rights as part of the production deal, producers are left with no library of works and no revenue flow from new exploitation opportunities. In some countries, there are emerging industry-wide negotiations to manage trade practice; in others, the competitive marketplace may provide an antidote.

Full interview, [click here](#)

Location Flashback

Cabana Bar near Rome

La Dolce Vita (1961)



In this scene, halfway through *La Dolce Vita*, writer Marcello Rubini (Marcello Mastroianni) sits in a beachside bar writing. He is distracted by a young waitress who says she wants to be a typist in Rome.

The film is directed and co-written (with Ennio Flaiano, Tullio Pinelli and Brunello Rondi) by Federico Fellini. The film stars Marcello Mastroianni as Marcello Rubini, a tabloid journalist who, over seven days and nights, journeys through the “sweet life” of Rome in a fruitless search for love and happiness.

Most of the film was shot at the Cinecittà Studios in Rome. Set designer Piero Gherardi created over eighty locations, including the Via Veneto, the dome of Saint Peter’s with the staircase leading up to it, and various nightclubs. However, other sequences were shot on location such as this one and the party at the aristocrats’ castle filmed in the real Bassano di Sutri palace north of Rome.

Released in Italy on 5 February 1960, *La Dolce Vita* was both a critical success and worldwide commercial hit, despite censorship in some regions. It won the Palme d’Or at the 1960 Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Award for Best Costumes. It was nominated for three more Oscars, including Best Director for Federico Fellini, and Best Original Screenplay. Its success proved a watershed moment for Italian cinema and European cinema-at-large, and it has come to be regarded as a masterpiece of Italian cinema and one of the greatest films of all time.

In 2008, the film was included on the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage’s 100 Italian films to be saved, a list of 100 films that “have changed the collective memory of the country between 1942 and 1978.”



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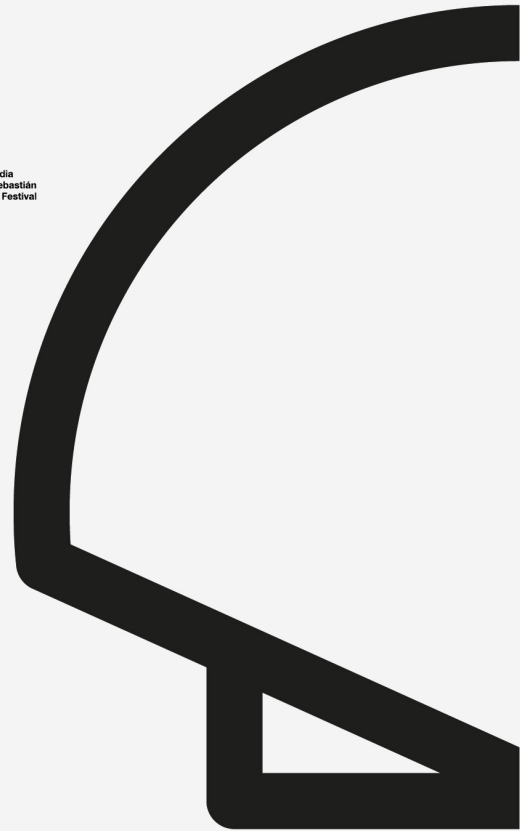


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