

**VENICE REVIEW DAILY**

**COMPETITION**

**WOMAN OF...**



Venice Film Festival

**VERDICT:** In 'Woman of', the passive heroism of a Polish working class father of two who identifies as a woman is affectingly portrayed in the inimitable style of Malgorzata Szumowska and her co-director and D.P. Michal Englert ('Never Gonna Snow Again').

*Deborah Young, September 8, 2023*

At a time when Poland's conservative government is tightening the screws on LGBTQ activists and transgender people who have to fight for their basic rights, leading directors Malgorzata Szumowska and Michal Englert (Never Gonna Snow Again) have come up with the remarkable story of a trans woman who spends the first half

of her life as a man, as society slowly open up, in Woman Of... (Kobieta Z...)

The timing of this Polish-Swedish co-prod could not be more perfect, with parliamentary elections coming up next month in Poland amid a divisive debate over the right to live one's own sexual identity.

[Full review, click here](#)

**Venice Film Fest Players Strike Deals Amid Hollywood Strike Action**

**VERDICT:** It's not quite Cannes or Toronto when it comes to deal-making, but a steady stream of news on sales and pick-ups has surrounded the 80th Venice International Film Festival.

*Liza Foreman September 8, 2023*

Amid the somewhat muted Red Carpet activity affected by the ongoing strikes in Hollywood, sales companies have been ratcheting in deals on smaller as well as bigger titles.

Most companies contacted by The Film Verdict were keeping

*Continues next page*



Venice Film Festival

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# A Big Thanks to the Film Community as TFV Begins its 3rd Year

We opened our Venice dailies with an anniversary salute to both the Biennale's 80th Mostra del Cinema and The Film Verdict's entry into its third year. I'd like to end with a few words of gratitude to all the many film festivals that have embraced and supported our vision of providing the film community with a real trade platform of practical use to film companies working in the international arena.

On behalf of the entire tireless team at TFV, I would like to thank the following film festivals: IFFR Rotterdam, Palm Springs, the Berlinale, Thessaloniki Doc, Cannes, Guadalajara, Munich, Karlovy Vary, Locarno, Sarajevo, Venice, Oldenburg, San Sebastian, El Gouna, Dok Leipzig, Thessaloniki, IDFA, and Cairo Film Festival. Sincere thanks to all the advertisers who understood the true value of promoting their films on a professional trade platform, and to the many film commissions who have worked with us. A special nod of thanks goes to the EFP - European Film Promotion, AFCI – Association of Film Commissioners International, and the Italian film association ANICA. Also, to German Films and Flanders.

A personal thank you to my friends Thaddeus Bouchard, CEO of Screen Dollars, Rudi Salo and Michael Lawhead from Nixon Peabody LLP, Roberto Stabile, Advisor for Intl. Rel. & In Charge for Special Projects DGCA MIC, and the many others around the globe who have supported TFV since its inception.

It is our belief that a trade publication is the community's public square, a place to inspire commerce among the international film community. A trade should never be bigger than its community, but it should be an essential part of its value. TFV brings the community together to facilitate business and events through its independent and professional reviews and editorial. And our expansion reflects the growth of the film community: our friends, readers, advertisers, and filmmakers around the world.

## **Eric Mika**

President & Publisher, The Film Verdict CEO,  
The Film Verdict Inc.



**Deals continued from page 1**

mum on further news but apparently enjoying dealmaking in the sunshine.

“We have absolutely had a blast with Stolen and The Theory and are sure the same will go for Infested this Friday,” said Yohann Comte from sales shingle Charades.

**Amongst key news:**

Film Constellation closed numerous distribution agreements for Ryuichi Sakamoto | Opus which portrays the last performance of the late Oscar-winning composer Sakamoto (The Last Emperor and Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence). The film has sold to Spain (Filmin), Germany and Austria (Rapid Eye), Scandinavia (NjutaFilms), South Korea (Media Castle), China (JL Vision Films), Hong Kong and Macau (Edko Films), Taiwan (Cai Chang) and Singapore (Anticipate Pictures). Bitters End is releasing the film in Japan in 2024. The film premiered out of competition.

Neon picked up rights to Ava DuVernay’s Origin. The racial drama stars Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor and Jon Bernthal. The company plans a nationwide roll-out later this year.

[Full article, click here](#)



Michael Crotto

**COMPETITION**

**OUT OF SEASON**

**VERDICT:** An unexpected story of loneliness and yearning from Stéphane Brizé in which two former lovers come face-to-face with the disappointments of life, beautiful in its understatement and cinematic restraint yet still generating tremendous poignancy.

*Jay Weissberg, September 8, 2023*

The “what ifs” of life are having their moment, as the popularity of Past Lives can testify. What if we didn’t miss that opportunity, that relationship, that possibility? Stéphane Brizé attributes his own rumination on the theme to pandemic lockdown, when isolation triggered a re-evaluation of the

choices we’ve made, resulting in his studiously low-key, aching melancholy Out of Season. Comfortably slotting into the category of films shot in lonely off-peak seaside hotels, this calm, reflective drama about a famed movie actor in crisis and the unfulfilled woman he dumped sixteen years earlier has none of the socialist anger the director is best known for, burrowing instead into the feelings of loneliness and yearning when these former lovers meet again. Antoine Heberlé’s beautifully restrained camerawork places these two adults grappling with life’s disappointments on a cool yet charged canvas, hesitantly expressing their insecurity and longing through excellent dialogue by Brizé

[Full review, click here](#)



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Venice Film Festival

### PET SHOP DAYS

**VERDICT:** Olmo Schabel’s directorial debut succeeds as a delivery system for ’90s-indie vibes, but it fails to elicit empathy for its spoiled, obnoxious lead characters.

*Alonso Duralde, September 3, 2023*

Studio notes, more often than not, will ask filmmakers to make the characters more likable, to offer the audience someone to root for, even though some of the best films ever made center characters who are quite unlikable and even unredeemable. The trade-off in creating such characters, however, is to provide some reason as to why their plight matters and how their bad decisions illuminate the human experience.

Sometimes, unfortunately, anti-heroes are just obnoxious idiots, and enduring their stories becomes insufferable, as in *Pet Shop Days*, the directorial debut from Olmo Schnabel, son of artist and filmmaker Julian Schnabel. While the film succeeds at capturing the look and atmosphere of New York City-set indie cinema of the 1990s — including a cameo from art-house stalwart Peter Greene as a desiccated-looking drug dealer — Schnabel fails to elicit empathy for, or even interest in, his lead characters.

Alejandro (Dario Yazbek Bernal) lives on a lavish estate in Mexico with his parents. He’s close to his mother, Karla (Maribel Verdú), but his father Castro (Jordi Mollà) is a rich jerk who doesn’t understand his son and is always getting into arguments with him. Jack (co-writer Jack Irv) lives in a huge Manhattan apartment with his parents. He’s close to his mother, Diana (Emmanuelle Seigner), but his father Francis

[Full Review, click here](#)



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CRITICS WEEK

VERMINES

**VERDICT:** Creepy but derivative killer spider thriller is angrier at the world than at arachnids.

William Bibbiani September 8, 2023

Sébastien Vanicek’s *Vermine* — soon to be released in the United States as *Infested* — dwells at the intersection between two horror classics: Frank Marshall’s *Arachnophobia* and Joe Cornish’s *Attack the Block*.

It’s not as whimsical as Marshall’s cult favorite, and it’s not as exciting as Cornish’s, but it jams those pieces together into a film that eventually, slightly too late, finds its own voice. And that voice is hoarse with rage.

Kaleb (Théo Christine, *Gran Turismo*) lives in a rundown building with his sister, Lila (Lisa Nyarko, *A Bookshop in Paris*). They don’t talk to each other much since their



mother died. She’s constantly renovating the place because she wants to move, he’s trying to raise money to keep their home by selling Nike shoes out of a storage locker, and his only hobby is collecting scaly critters and poisonous bugs, in the hopes of one day owning his own reptile house.

We know early on that Kaleb’s newest acquisition is a deadly, invasive species of spider. Just like we know that all the kindly neigh-

bors with only one personality trait he knows will turn up dead later, mostly killed by [checks notes]... spiders. The motion activated hallway light only seems to exist because it, too, will be important later, just like the bag of fireworks Kaleb confiscates early on from his fellow, mischievous residents. It’s a lot of clunky setup for what is, at first, a predictable payoff.

But as *Vermine* charges along into [Full review, click here](#)

METaverse UNLEASHED:

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Unlocking its 30th milestone, the Oldenburg Film Festival teams with MILC Platform and The Film Verdict, venturing into the Metaverse. Experience the virtual Oldenburg, attend panel discussions and discover a curated collection of films from the festival. Unveiled this September at [metaverse.milc.global](https://metaverse.milc.global)



VENUE:



# GIORNATE

## COUP!

**VERDICT:** Writer-director duo Austin Stark and Joseph Schuman blend historical pandemic echoes with timeless political tensions in this old-fashioned but engaging class-war drama.

*Stephen Dalton, September 8, 2023*

In America, declares one minor chorus character in *Coup!*, “you either have servants or you are one”. A slow-burn domestic thriller with an undertow of caustic social commentary, this handsome period piece from New York writer-director duo Austin Stark and Joseph Schuman was partly inspired by the glaring inequalities exposed by the recent Coronavirus pandemic, but the end result feels more timeless-



Venice Film Festival

ly traditional than current, invoking vintage class-war dramas like *The Servant* (1963) more than recent eat-the-rich polemics like *Parasite* (2019).

*Coup!* is an engaging battle of wits powered by strong performances across the board, notably from

Peter Saarsgard as a devilishly charming proto-hippie revolutionary with murky, possibly murderous intentions. Following its world premiere on the Lido as the closing film in the Venice Days section, this old-school crowd pleaser should

[Full review, click here](#)

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# Venice Bridge Market Hits Milestones and Builds Better Platform for Producers

*The Film Verdict spoke with Venice Production Bridge Head Pascal Diot about this year's Venice film market.*

By Liza Foreman

**T**he Venice Production Bridge is the multi-faceted market arm of the Venice Film Festival, attended by festival business players. VBP focuses on producers and production than sales.

When the Venice Production Bridge's head honcho Pascal Diot started the Venice film market some 12 years ago, he had a specific idea in mind: Help producers with every step of the process of putting together a film, including completing financing.

"At the time, there were 150 co-production markets and all focused-on development money. But it's just as difficult to raise the last financing on a film production," he said.

To that end, this year, the five-day market (August 31-September 5, 2023) celebrated the tenth year of the Venice Gap-Financing Market.

A large number of projects that take part in the market reach their goals soon after, Diot said.

"As a producer, I knew the last 30 percent (of financing) is as difficult to find as the first. We have helped 370 films from 70 different countries, and 80 percent have been completed within six months of the market," he said. "We are now proud of having famous directors come with their projects like Wim Wenders or Jim Sheridan."

Steve McQueen's documentary *Occupied City*, Wim Wenders' *The Secrets of Places*, and Alain Parroni's *An Endless Sunday*, are among the films that have completed financing on the Lido. "We have to adapt



to each film we are selecting being at a different stage. It's tailor made," Diot added.

Meanwhile, VPB's Book Adaptation Rights Market is so popular that six extra publishing houses were added this year, bringing the total to 40.

"For the book publishers, they all told us that it is becoming the second most important RDV after the Frankfurt Book Fair, Diot said, adding "The principle is for everyone to come with their total catalog. Then stay in touch throughout the year."

This year, more than 560 one-to-one meetings (compared to 450 in 2022) were organized with producers for the adaptation from the page to screen of literary rights. Other sections at the market include Meet the Streamers. This year, nine European and international streaming platforms participated in the market, taking 96 one-to-one meetings. Overall, as per Diot, the feedback from this year's record number of attendees is that many say they prefer to stay for the duration of Venice, and not pack in Toronto as well, so the market could grow further.

"The highlight for me is that we have more than come back to a new situation because last year we already broke a record with about 2,500 attendees, and now it's about 2,900 attendees. We've had almost 60 screenings. 50 panels. And a lot of people on Immersive Island, which is sold out," he added.

As for selling films. "It's not automatically a buy and

[Full review, click here](#)

## VERDICT SHORT

### WANDER TO WONDER

**VERDICT:** The miniature beings that starred in an 80s television show slowly unravel in this surreal animation that riffs on an enchanting children's story trope.

Ben Nicholson, September 8, 2023

In Nina Gantz's strangely haunting animated short, there was once a children's television show called *Wander to Wonder*.

It was a familiar setup; a plink-plonking theme tune, a friendly old man speaking directly to the camera, and a trio of small furry creatures having semi-educational adventures. In this case, those creatures were played by tiny people (like *The Borrowers*) in costumes who are bereft after the

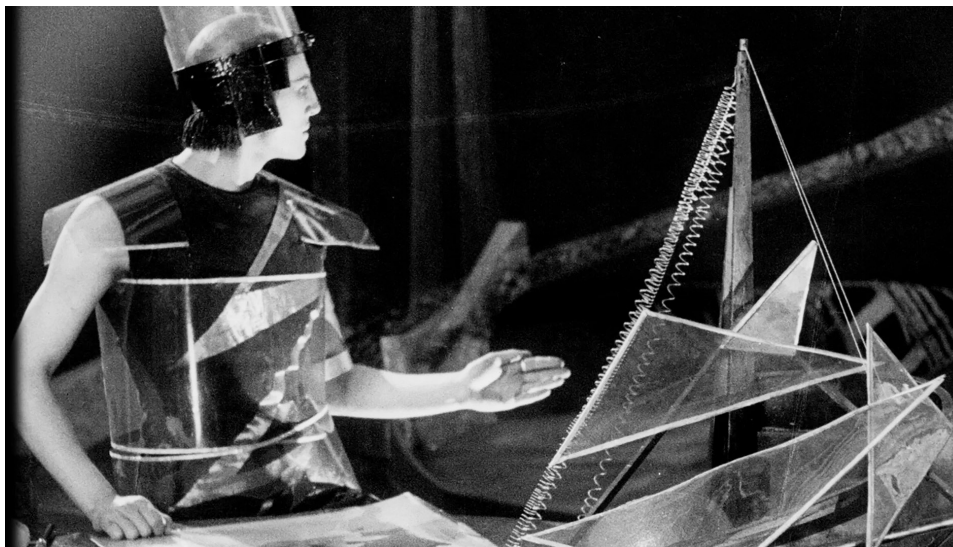


Venice Film Festival

series' creator and presenter (Neil Savage) has died. Not only that, but his body is lying rigid on the studio floor. This unexpectedly affecting tale sees the trio of diminutive performers – Mary (Amanda Lawrence), Billybud (Terence Dunn) and Fumbleton (Toby Jones) – attempting to keep their programme going.

All portrayed in beautifully intricate stop-motion puppet animation, the film oscillates between the contents of a grainy VHS and the happenings of the real world. In the former sections, the audience sees an old recording of an episode of the show, interspersed

[Full review, click here](#)



Venice Film Festival

## VERDICT SHORT

### WE SHOULD ALL BE FUTURISTS

**VERDICT:** Silent film footage is repurposed in a deliciously comic reimagining of Marinetti's man-machine hybrid as a novel – intimate – cure for female hysteria.

Ben Nicholson, September 8, 2023

Revered footage from cinema's illustrious history is given a sly reworking in *We Should All Be Futurists*.

Angela Norelli's found footage film, which screens as part of the Settimana Internazionale della Critica at Venice, is a work of montage that creates a fictional story from a selection of monochrome film

clippings. Taking pieces from cinema's earliest years, Norelli crafts a narrative adjacent to the predictions of early 20th-century Futurists, particularly Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, about the extension of man by machines. In this instance, such ideas take on a deliciously emancipatory feminist edge as a woman discovers the sexual possibilities of the concept.

The plot of *We Should All Be Futurists* is presented as epistolary, opening with the receipt of a letter by Giorgina from her friend, Rosa. It recounts Rosa's husband, Umberto, accusing her of being hysterical and consulting a physician to see if she could be cured. Little did Umberto know that what the doctor ordered was a regular dose of sexual gratification – all while he continued paying a handsome price for the treatment. When Giorgina's

[Full review, click here](#)





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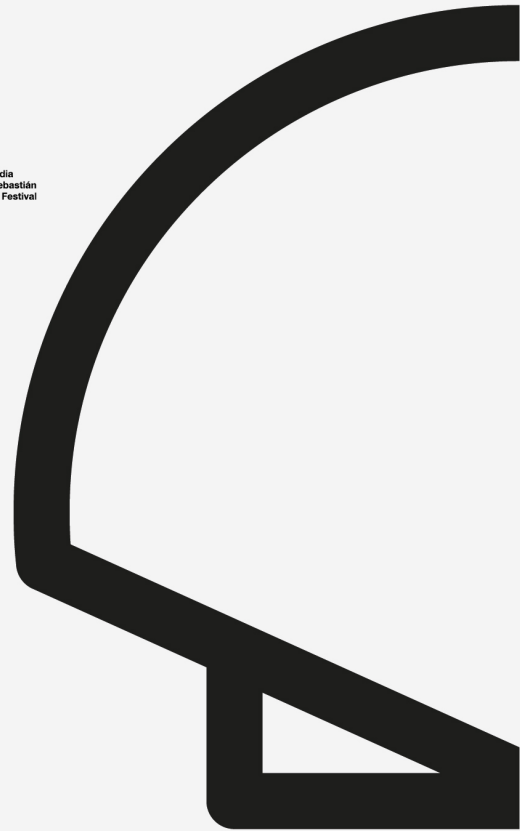


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