

## Locarno 2023: The Verdict



*The Film Verdict, August 10, 2023*

After some rocky years in which the Locarno Film Festival seemed more appreciated by filmmakers than critics, the situation is evening out as artistic director Giona A. Nazzaro and his programming team complete their third year guiding the venerable event, with a stronger-than-usual international competition line-up.

That's especially good news as the Festival moves into a new period of its existence, with long-time president Marco Solari handing control over to his successor Maja Hoffmann. Solari, a hands-on, ebullient presence whose deep links to Switzerland's Ticino region ensured that the Festival maintained and solidified its importance within the country's

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## PIAZZA GRANDE



*Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival*

## THEATER CAMP

**VERDICT:** Molly Gordon and Nick Lieberman's loving tribute to theatre teachers, camp and performances is familiar but a little magic all the same.

*Boyd van Hoeij, August 11, 2023*

The magic of live theatre is hard to capture on film, which is why movies about the theatre frequently end up being about the performers doing theatre rather than theatre itself.

Blame it on the power of close-ups, which are the one thing that movies have and theatre doesn't (unless it's one of those new-fangled stage situations that incorporate live video capture and projection — theatre purists have

killed for less). Molly Gordon and Nick Lieberman's crowd-pleasing shaggy-underdog drama *Theater Camp* is not immune to a well-placed close-up or two, even if there's no real overall sense of style. But somehow, it manages to evoke something of the magic of live theatre as well. After a well-received Sundance bow and another award in Seattle, the funny and fun *Theater Camp* landed in Locarno for its European premiere.

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Italian-speaking canton, now passes the baton to Hoffmann, an international art patron on a major scale (Bloomberg lists her as the 435th richest person in the world), whose philanthropic activities are better known globally than regionally. She does however have experience in the film world, having studied filmmaking in New York and acted as executive producer, most especially on documentaries about artists. How she'll seek to change Locarno, which just finished its 76th edition, remains to be seen, though her arrival is one of the more interesting developments in the ever-changing festival world.

The criticisms of recent years that the Piazza Grande selection felt increasingly amorphous haven't subsided, but this year's international competition boasted

of a number of strong titles whose future life seems assured. Topping the list are two remarkably bold and excoriating takes on their own societies: Radu Jude's withering *Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World* and Ali Ahmadzadeh's risky *Critical Zone*. While vastly different in approach, the two films, one from Romania, the other from Iran, fillet their country's social order (or lack thereof): in the latter, government repression has forced people to rely on each other, whereas in the former, government corruption has smashed the social fabric. Unsurprisingly, they nabbed the two top honors, with the Pardo d'oro (Grand Prize) for best film going to *Critical Zone* and the Special Jury Prize to *Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World*.

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## AWARDS



Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival

*Full Review*

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### THE INVISIBLE FIGHT

**VERDICT:** Estonian director Rainer Sarnet's 'The Invisible Fight' is an idiosyncratic tale featuring monks, metal rock, and a maniacally superb performance from Ursel Tilk.

*Oris Aigbokhaevbolo, August 11, 2023*

If there's a heaven for great epigraphs, open the hallowed gates for Rainer Sarnet. He begins his fifth film, *The Invisible Fight*, with a quote from the Psalms: "Praise him with drum and dance"—and then unfurls a madcap tale of kung fu and metal rock. Drum and dance indeed.

The picture opens gloriously. Three leather-clad rockstar kung fu men fall gracefully from the skies. It is the 1970s and the rockstars are on their way from the clouds to the USSR-China border. Upon arrival, they attack Soviet guards—with kicks, swirls, nunchaku, and rock music. At the end of the ruckus, every guard is dead, except for one. You get the picture: it's quite enough of an insane event to inspire a change of life.

But Rafael doesn't become a vigilante seeking the deaths of rockstar kung fu fellas. He falls in love with the coolness of their technique, perhaps because, as he later says, "Everything cool is banned in the Soviet Union."

And so Sarnet's ridiculous tale truly begins. His film recalls both the Jackie Chan drunken-kung fu films of the 1970s as well as the hyperkinetic Stephen Chow hit, *Kung Fu Hustle*. As with the latter film, *The Invisible Fight* has taken a rascally irreverent route to pay homage to a genre that has always paired physically impressive actions with comedy. But Sarnet's take is too European, too arthouse-y to attract Chow's sizable audience. He is much too given to sacrificing coherence for gimmickry. For much of the film's first half, the main thing is fun and silliness.

[Full Review](#)



## VERDICT SHORT



### MÁTALOS A TODOS

**CINEVERDICT:** CineVerdict: En *Mátalos a todos* una amistad tentativa florece a través de una video correspondencia. Este docudrama observa con destreza la incertidumbre juvenil y su conmovedora soledad.

*Ben Nicholson, August 11, 2023*

*Mátalos a todos* de Sebastian Molina Ruiz's combina estética *grunge* en video con elementos epistolares para explorar el sentimiento adolescente de aislamiento.

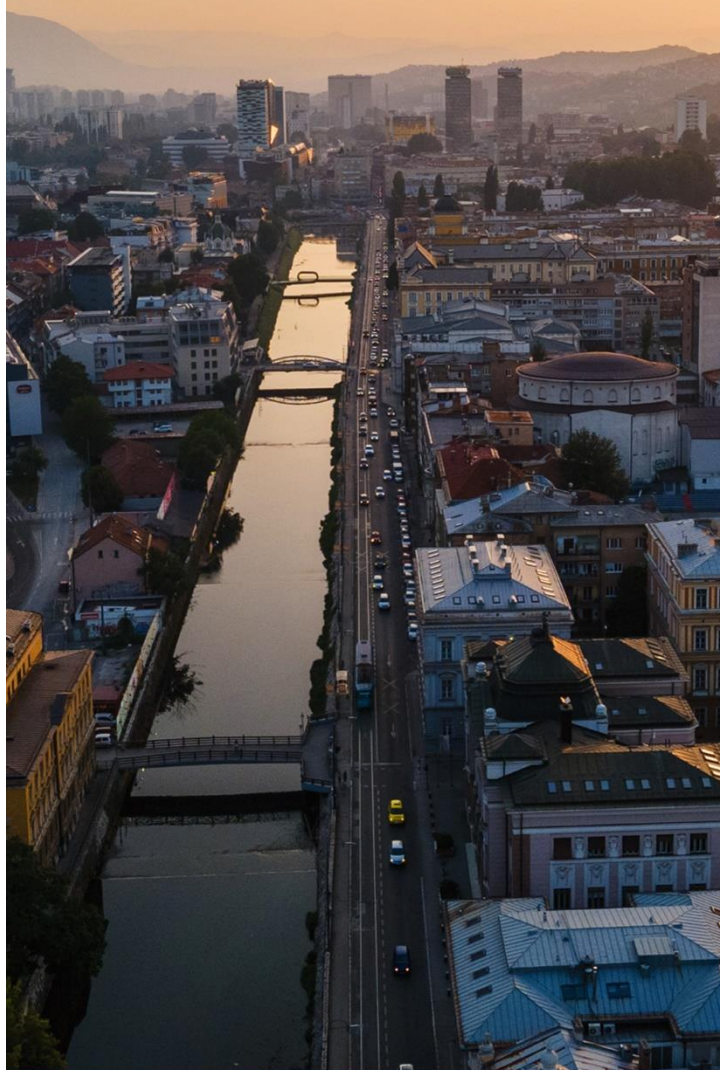
Aunque es evidente muy pronto en la acción que Mila (Mila Mijangos) y María (María Villanueva) nunca se han conocido en persona, la naturaleza de la floreciente relación entre ambas es un tanto ambigua. Entonces, el plan es consumir en persona durante el verano una amistad que se ha desarrollado en línea. En ese momento la banda musical de María se presentará y habrá un boleto a esperando a Mila en la puerta. A través de la preparación y representación de este escenario, Molina Ruiz crea un drama discreto pero conmovedor que insinúa varias inseguridades y aflicciones que afectan a sus jóvenes protagonistas, y un trastorno más innato que parece ser parte integrante, territorio de la vida contemporánea, transitoria y digital.

Molina Ruiz abre la película con video digital granuloso, filmado por las dos chicas mientras se envían presentaciones. "Valentina me dijo que casi nunca publico fotos", explica María, por lo que quiere asegurarse de que Mila la reconozca. Estos perfiles de video están llenos de pequeñas preocupaciones sobre su apariencia, sobre el valor de lo que están diciendo; la reserva subyacente, particularmente en el caso de Mila, parece ser sobre *su* valor. Es Mila con quien se queda la película cuando terminan los segmentos autograbados. Con ojo de documentalista.

[Full Review](#)

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## VERDICT SHORT



### KILL 'EM ALL

**VERDICT:** A tentative friendship blossoms through video correspondence in 'Kill 'Em All', a deftly observed docudrama filled with youthful uncertainty and poignant loneliness.

*Ben Nicholson, August 11, 2023*

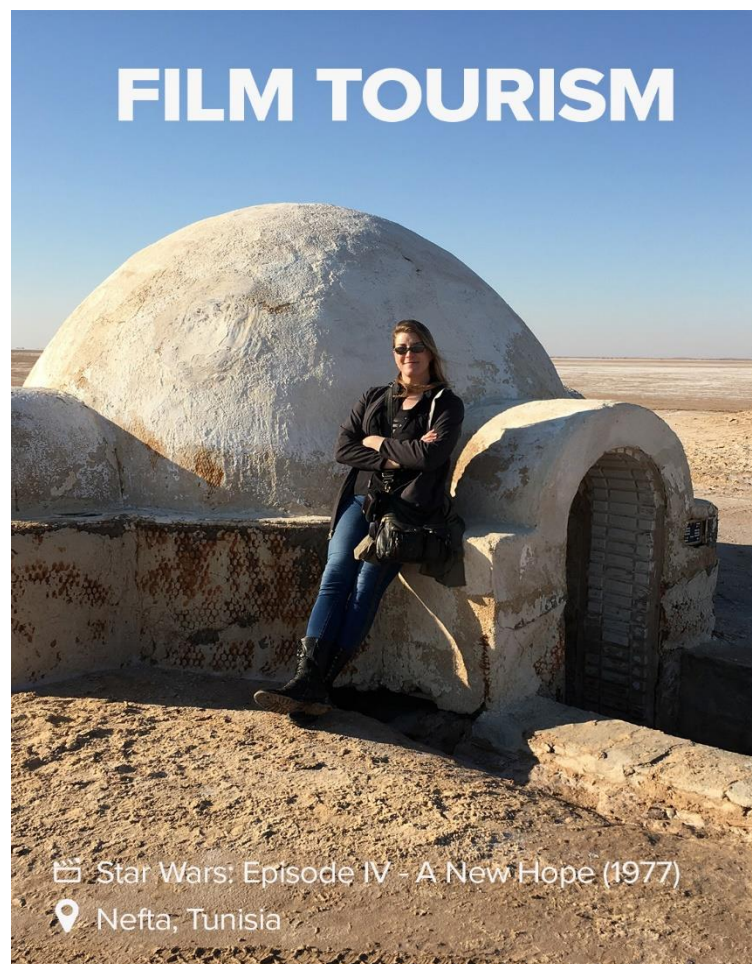
Sebastian Molina Ruiz's *Kill 'Em All* combines grungy video aesthetics and epistolary elements to explore a sense of teenage isolation.

The nature of the burgeoning relationship between Mila (Mila Mijangos) and María (María Villanueva)

remains somewhat ambiguous, but it is quickly evident that they have never met. As such, the plan is to consummate an online friendship in person during the summer, when María's band are playing a gig and Mila has a ticket waiting for her at the door. Through the build-up to and depiction of this scenario, Molina Ruiz creates an understated but affecting drama that hints at various insecurities and maladies afflicting its young protagonists, and a more innate dislocation that seems to be part and parcel of a transitory, digital, contemporary life.

Molina Ruiz opens the film with grainy digital video, filmed by the two girls themselves as they send introductions to one another. "Valentina told me I almost never post photos," explains María, so she wants to be sure Mila would recognise her. These video profiles are filled with minor qualms about their appearances, about the value of what they're saying – the underlying reservation, particularly in Mila's case, seems to be about *her* value. It is Mila with whom the film remains when the self-recorded segments finish. With a documentarian's eye, the director and his DoP, Ángel Jara Taboada, capture the discreet patterns of Mila's life as she skates along deserted streets and sheepishly adds her name to the graffiti in a rundown city park.

[Full Review](#)

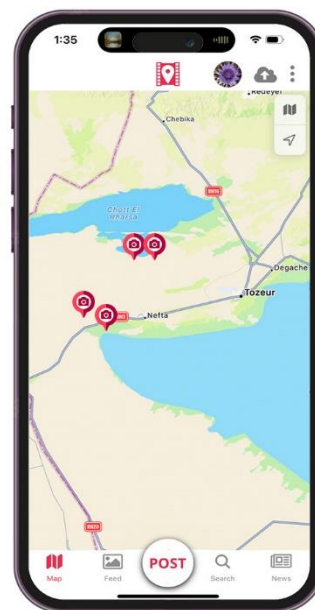


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