

David Walsh picks his favorite films of 2003

David Walsh
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There were certain encouraging signs in 2003, both in the US and international cinema. A number of filmmakers revealed a serious attitude toward their times and the human situation generally. There were even critical voices in the US.

Still, considering the depth of the world political crisis—which deepened enormously this past year with the launching of a criminal and illegal war in Iraq—and the devastating conditions facing much of the global population, filmmaking lags far behind.

Goethe said, “You must *be* something to *do* something.” Most contemporary film artists and critics are guided by the most limited, even impoverished, concerns and aims. They have neither lived important lives, undergone genuine hardship nor struggled with life-and-death questions. They remain obsessed for the most part by the small change of career, status and image. These objective difficulties and weaknesses continue to shape the great majority of what film audiences see.

Two lists are included below. The first includes what in my opinion were the best 15 films that had a theatrical release in North America in 2003 (although, in some cases, this means only a limited run in New York and Los Angeles, for example). Some of these I had previously seen at film festivals and included on lists of favorite films in previous years. The second contains what seemed to me the 15 most successful artistic efforts that I saw in 2003, theatrical release or not.

Best theatrical releases

Under the Skin of the City, Rakhshan Bani Etemad
Capturing the Friedmans, Andrew Jarecki
The Human Stain, Robert Benton
The Magdalene Sisters, Peter Mullan
The Last Letter, Frederick Wiseman
About Schmidt, Alexander Payne
Divine Intervention, Elia Suleiman

The Cuckoo, Aleksandr Rogozhkin
11'09"01, various
Love & Diane, Jennifer Dworkin
Intolerable Cruelty, the Coen Brothers
All the Real Girls, David Gordon Green
Mondays in the Sun, Fernando León de Aranoa
Rana's Wedding, Hany Abu-Assad
Raising Victor Vargas, Peter Sollett

Best films I saw in 2003

Crimson Gold, Jafar Panahi [Iran]
The Pianist, Roman Polanski [released in December 2002]
Capturing the Friedmans, Andrew Jarecki
Cry Woman, Liu Bingjian [China]
Our Times, Rakhshan Bani Etemad [Iran]
Abjad, Abolfazl Jalili [Iran]
Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs—The Iraqi Connection, Samir [Germany-Switzerland]
The Flowers of September, Pablo Osores, Roberto Testa, Nicolás Wainszelbaum [Argentina]
Blind Shaft, Li Yang [China]
This Little Life, Sarah Gavron [Britain]
Molly & Mobarak, Tom Zubrycki [Australia]
Fuse, Pjer Zalica [Bosnia-Herzegovina]
The Human Stain, Robert Benton
About Schmidt, Alexander Payne
11'09"01, various



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