

Best films of 2012

David Walsh, Joanne Laurier
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As we noted in September, in our coverage of this year's Toronto international film festival, "This year's festival and the general state of the film world present a sharper contradiction than ever. On the one hand, the major productions of the American film studios, which dominate the world market, are more and more negligible, often painfully so. The summer and this fall so far have been especially miserable. ...

"On the other hand, an initial list of films that seemed worth seeing in Toronto included more than 80 titles, an unprecedented number. We succeeded in viewing nearly 50 of those. And, while there were disappointments and obvious failures, the level of seriousness and honesty seemed to us higher than at any such event in memory. Several dozen films fell into the general category of the thoughtful and socially critical."

Filmmaking on the whole continues to be far behind global events and human conditions. A self-involved, self-satisfied, upper middle class layer dominates the cinema world that remains largely oblivious to events going on in front of its nose. War, poverty, social disaster—all of this barely registers. Such people have loftier concerns: their own personal relationships, neuroses and unhealthy fantasies.

By contrast, works such as Asghar Farhadi's *A Separation*, Mahdi Fleifel's *A World Not Ours*, Ra'anan Alexandrowicz's *The Law in These Parts* and *Far From Afghanistan* (for all its unevenness), directed by John Gianvito and others, represent something different and opposed, an honest attempt to look at the world and assist an audience in orienting itself.

The polarization in contemporary filmmaking and in the reactions to it has found specific expression in the US in recent months. Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* is the first significant film about that major American figure since 1939-40. In the final analysis, the timing is not fortuitous.

Some fifteen million people in the US have seen *Lincoln*, which is not of course a flawless work. Audience members, the anecdotal evidence suggests, generally watch the film's drama unfold with rapt attention. To coin a phrase, one can hear a pin drop. There is an understanding, half-intuitive, that this is important subject matter and, moreover, that this monumental history belongs to those watching it. The Civil War was the second American Revolution, and features of the present situation, in an extremely contradictory fashion, are calling up its specter.

The Spielberg-Tony Kushner film, however, has been received for the most part by the liberal-left and what passes for "radical" press with either sullen indifference or outright hostility. Much of this layer decisively prefers either Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* or Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, or both.

That the New York Film Critics Circle bestowed its best picture and best director awards on Bigelow and her filthy film, which glorifies torture, assassination and the CIA, tells us nearly as much as we need to know.

The response to Tarantino's latest toxic and artless, witless effort has been even more enthusiastic. We will write more about this when we review *Django Unchained* in the near future. But this much can be said. The "left" critics have made clear their preference for race, blood, irrationalism and mythology with almost a single voice. Some of the comments verge on the unhinged.

This milieu, a wing of the American establishment (and the same social element exists everywhere), is hostile to the revolutionary traditions in the US, to the population itself (which it ceaselessly calumnies as racist and backward) and to any "grand narrative" based on reason and a concern for historical realities and laws.

This social, moral and artistic gulf can only widen as the global situation heats up.

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The best films that played in movie theaters in the US in 2012:

1. *Lincoln*, Steven Spielberg, 2012
2. *A Separation* [*Jodaeiye Nader az Simin*], Asghar Farhadi, 2011
3. *The Law in These Parts* [*Shilton Ha Chok*], Ra'anan Alexandrowicz, 2011
4. *Citizen Gangster* [original title: *Edwin Boyd*], Nathan Morlando, 2011
5. *Tears of Gaza*, Vibeke Lokkeberg, 2010
6. *Being Flynn*, Paul Weitz, 2012
7. *The Queen of Versailles*, Lauren Greenfield, 2012
8. *The Deep Blue Sea*, Terence Davies, 2011
9. *The Beasts of the Southern Wild*, Benh Zeitlin, 2012
10. *Central Park Five*, Ken Burns, Sarah Burns, David McMahon, 2012

Best director:

1. Steven Spielberg, *Lincoln*, 2012

Best performances:

1. Daniel Day-Lewis, *Lincoln*, 2012
2. Payman Maadi, *A Separation* [*Jodaeiye Nader az Simin*], 2011
3. Scott Speedman, *Citizen Gangster*, 2011
4. Quvenzhane Wallis, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, 2012
5. Sareh Bayat, *A Separation* [*Jodaeiye Nader az Simin*], 2011

Best supporting performances:

1. David Straithairn, *Lincoln*, 2012
2. Kevin Durand, *Citizen Gangster* [original title: *Edwin Boyd*], 2011
3. Tom Hiddleston, *The Deep Blue Sea*, 2011
4. Dwight Henry, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, 2012
5. Cecile De France, *The Kid With a Bike* [*Le gamin au vélo*], 2011

Best screenplay:

1. *Lincoln*, 2012

Best first feature:

1. *Citizen Gangster* [original title: *Edwin Boyd*], 2011

Best documentary:

1. *The Law in These Parts* [*Shilton Ha Chok*], 2011

The best films we saw in 2012 that have not yet been distributed:

1. *A World Not Ours*, Mahdi Fleifel, 2012

2. *Far From Afghanistan*, John Gianvito, Jon Jost, Minda Martin, Travis Wilkerson, Soon-Mi Yoo, 2012
3. *Dormant Beauty* [*Bella addormentata*], Marco Bellocchio, 2012
4. *Roman Polanski: Odd Man Out*, Marina Zenovich, 2012
5. *Underground: The Julian Assange Story*, Robert Connolly, 2012
6. *Detroit Unleaded*, Rola Nashef, 2012
7. *The We and the I*, Michel Gondry, 2012
8. *Fidai*, Damien Ounouri, 2012
9. *After the Battle* [*Baad el Mawkeaa*], Yousry Nasrallah, 2012
10. *Artifact*, Jared Leto, 2012

WSWS reviewer Richard Phillips writes :

These are my favourite films of the year, all three from the Sydney Film Festival. Given the dearth of decent films in Australian cinemas this year—Spielberg's *Lincoln* will not appear until 2013—I've also included classics re-released on blu-ray and dvd this year. These are all high-quality remasters with interesting extras.

2012 films

The Law in These Parts by Ra'anan Alexandrowicz (Israel)

Caesar Must Die by the Taviani Brothers (Italy)

Beauty by Oliver Hermanus (South Africa). This was the only one given an Australian theatrical release this year.

Important remastered classics released on blu-ray and dvd in 2012

Children of Paradise (1945) (France) by Marcel Carné

Rashomon (1950) (Japan) by Akira Kurosawa

The Organizer (1963) (Italy) by Mario Monicelli

Rosemary's Baby (1968) (US) by Roman Polanski

Trilogy of Life: The Decameron (1971), *The*

Canterbury Tales (1972) and *The Thousand and One*

Nights (1974) (Italy) by Pier Paolo Pasolini

Heaven's Gate (1980) (US) by Michael Cimino



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