

# Best films of 2014

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In our view, a number of intriguing films showed up at theaters in North America in 2014, although in some cases very briefly and only in New York and Los Angeles, and perhaps a few other locations.

The quantity of interesting works suggests some change for the better, since it has been difficult in some recent years to come up with even ten titles. There is a growing seriousness about life and reality in filmmaking.

For the most part, however, the movie-going public is still left at the mercy of the trivial or bombastic “blockbuster.” The list of the top 100 films at the box office in the US this past year is dominated by comic-book heroes, special effects, animation and sophomoric comedy. Moreover, a great many empty and self-absorbed “independent” films continue to be made and praised.

Shamefully, the major Hollywood studios produced almost nothing that speaks deeply to contemporary life in the US. With films like Jon Stewart’s *Rosewater* and Seth Rogen-Evan Goldberg’s *The Interview*, sections of the film industry associated themselves more than ever with the American state and imperialist geopolitics.

Our list of the best films that played in a movie theater in North America in 2014 includes these works:

*Mr. Turner* (Mike Leigh, 2014): A remarkable and radical portrait of the English painter J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851).

*Omar* (Hany Abu-Assad, 2013): A Palestinian drama about life under the immense stress of occupation and oppression.

*A World Not Ours* (Mahdi Fleifel, 2012): A documentary about life in Ain al-Hilweh, a Palestinian refugee camp in Southern Lebanon, done with considerable sensitivity and humor.

*Citizenfour* (Laura Poitras, 2014): The first encounters of journalists with NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden in Hong Kong in June 2013 and later.

*The Grand Budapest Hotel* (Wes Anderson, 2014): A fantastic version of life and events in pre-World War II Central Europe under the shadow of fascism.

*Night Will Fall* (Andre Singer, 2014): The story of the making of a film about the liberation of the concentration camps in 1945, shelved by the British and US governments.

*The Kill Team* (Dan Krauss, 2013): A strong documentary about atrocities committed against civilians by the US military in Afghanistan in 2010.

*Ilo Ilo* (Anthony Chen, 2013): A moving story set in Singapore about a family and their live-in Filipina maid. The film contradicts expectations.

*Foxcatcher* (Bennett Miller, 2014): The tragic encounter of multi-millionaire John du Pont and the Schultz brothers, based on real events.

*Boyhood* (Richard Linklater, 2014): A drama about the early years in the life of a Texas boy, shot over the course of a dozen years, 2002 to 2013.

*Ida* (Pawel Pawlikowski, 2013): A Polish film set in the 1960s; a young novice nun finds out about her family’s and the country’s painful past.

*Devil’s Knot* (Atom Egoyan, 2013): A fictional recreation of the case of the West Memphis Three, framed up for a supposed “satanic cult” murder in the 1990s.

*Finding Vivian Maier* (John Maloof and Charlie Siskel, 2013): The fascinating story of the enigmatic photographer Vivian Maier (1926-2009), entirely unknown during her lifetime.

*Rich Hill* (Andrew Droz Palermo, Tracy Droz Tragos, 2014): A non-fiction film about three adolescents in a poverty-stricken rural Missouri town.

*Bad Hair* (*Pelo malo*, Mariana Rondón, 2013): A social drama set in working class Caracas; a widow struggles to raise her two children, one of whom she fears may be gay.

*Mood Indigo* (*L’écume des jours*, Michel Gondry,

2013): An imaginative and often charming version of French writer Boris Vian's well-known novel.

*Venus in Fur (La Vénus à la fourrure*, Roman Polanski, 2013): An impertinent look at actress-male writer relations, with a wonderful performance by Emmanuelle Seigner.

Also worth mentioning:

*Dormant Beauty (Bella addormentata*, Marco Bellocchio, 2012)

*Whiplash* (Damien Chazelle, 2014)

*Miss Julie* (Liv Ullmann, 2014)

*Belle* (Amma Asante, 2013)

Our list of the best films we saw in 2014, primarily at film festivals, that have not yet been distributed in North America:

*99 Homes* (Ramin Bahrani, 2014)

*Iraqi Odyssey* (Samir, 2014)

*Good Kill* (Andrew Niccol, 2014)

*Tigers* (Danis Tanovi?, 2014)

*Phoenix* (Christian Petzold, 2014)

*Labyrinth of Lies (Im Labyrinth des Schweigens*, Giulio Ricciarelli, 2014)

*Timbuktu* (Abderrahmane Sissako, 2014)

*High Society (Le beau monde*, Julie Lopes Curval, 2014)

*The Reaper (Kosac*, Zvonimir Juric, 2014)

*School of Babel (La cour de Babel*, Julie Bertuccelli, 2014)

*Tamako in Moratorium (Moratoriumu Tamako*, Nobuhiro Yamashita, 2013)

WSWS writer Richard Phillips recommends the following films:

*Mr. Turner* (Mike Leigh, 2014)

*Boyhood* (Richard Linklater, 2014)

*The Grand Budapest Hotel* (Wes Anderson, 2014)

*Human Capital (Il capitale umano*, Paolo Virzì, 2013)

*With You, Without You (Oba Nathuwa Oba Ekka*, Prasana Vithanage, 2012)

*Keep On Keepin' On* (Alan Hicks, 2014—documentary about jazz trumpeter Clark Terry)

*The Great Museum (Das große Museum*, Johannes Holzhausen, 2014)

*Omar* (Hany Abu-Assad, 2013)

*The Gatekeepers* (Dror Moreh, 2012)

And two classics on DVD, not recently released, but revisited this year:

*The Cranes are Flying (Letyat zhuravli*, Mikhail

Kalatozov, 1957)

*Grave of the Fireflies (Hotaru no haka*, Isao Takahata, 1988)



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