

Films and television in 2022

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2022 was a momentous year. The war that the US-NATO provoked with Russia in Ukraine caused immeasurable suffering and threatens a wider, global conflict between nuclear-armed powers. The COVID pandemic, far from being “over,” continued and continues to wreak havoc, putting the health of tens, or even hundreds, of millions at risk. In the aftermath of an attempted fascist coup by a sitting president, the American political system sank into ever deeper crisis and reaction. Extreme right forces worldwide kept on the offensive, in the face of the utter prostration of the “left” parties and the so-called workers organizations.

The same processes convulsing the ruling elites and propelling them to the right are stirring the mass of the population and driving them into action. The working class is on the eve of its greatest international offensive in history. Socialism will become the watchword of vast numbers of people once again.

In these extremely complex and contradictory conditions, the artists are largely unprepared.

Business interests are desperately trying to claw back what was lost during the pandemic. The movie industry is making every effort to push people back into the theaters, with limited success.

According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, the global cinema box office “continues its slow but steady rise out of the COVID-19 pandemic.” Worldwide theatrical revenues, reports analyst Gower Street, “will hit \$25.8 billion in 2022 ... a 21 percent jump over last year, thanks to the success of *Top Gun: Maverick* and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, among other titles, in drawing fans back to cinemas.” The same firm is predicting that total global box office will reach \$29 billion in 2023, a 12 percent increase over this year.

These numbers are still far below pre-pandemic levels. “In the last pre-pandemic year, 2019, global box office hit an all-time high of \$42.3 billion,” writes the *Reporter*. And the 2023 forecast is still “27 percent behind the average of the last three pre-pandemic years of 2017-2019.”

World geopolitics intervened in the operations of the film industry this year in a significant manner. The global box office recovery was “slowed” in 2022 by China’s “strict no-COVID policy,” which meant theaters “stayed shut longer in the world’s second-largest theatrical market.” Revenues in 2022 in China were expected to be nearly \$3 billion below 2021 levels. Presumably, that will no longer be a problem in 2023.

The Ukraine war that erupted in February “led to a blanket boycott” of Russia by US studios. The combination “of the Russia boycott and volatile exchange rates have meant a further \$1 billion drop in U.S. dollar terms.”

Eight of the ten most commercially successful films globally in 2022 were negligible superhero, comic book or militarist action movies (*Top Gun: Maverick*, *Jurassic World: Dominion*, *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, etc.) The other two were Chinese commercial productions (*The Battle at Lake Changjin II* and *Moon Man*).

Despite the many obstacles and difficulties, including the present structure of film and television production, there are artists in that field with vision and sensitivity, who exhibit an increasing awareness that something is terribly wrong with the social order.

Whether the writers and directors know it or not, their growing and angry perception that social institutions and conditions are unreasonable and unjust, as Frederick Engels once explained, is only proof that changes “have silently taken place with which the social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping.” From this, Engels pointed out, “it also follows that the means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light must also be present, in a more or less developed condition.” These means “are to be discovered in the stubborn facts of the existing system of production.”

The writer and directors oriented to the “stubborn facts” of contemporary global existence may still be relatively few in number, but they exist. Film and television productions such as *Minamata*, *Lost Illusions*, *Ahed’s Knee*, *Tár*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Dropout*, *Dopesick*, *Triangle of Sadness*, *Working Class Heroes* and others, in various ways and to varying degrees, are evidence of that. The worsening of the conditions and the crimes of the ruling classes must increase the ranks of such artists.

2022 films

Minamata (Andrew Levitas)

Ahed’s Knee (Nadav Lapid)

Lost Illusions (Xavier Giannoli)

Tár (Todd Field)

All Quiet on the Western Front (Edward Berger)

Ali & Ava (Clio Barnard)

Triangle of Sadness (Ruben Östlund)

Tantura (Alon Schwarz)

Three Minutes—A Lengthening (Bianca Stigter)

The Box (Lorenzo Vigas)

Everything Everywhere All at Once (Daniel Kwan, Daniel Scheinert)

Skies of Lebanon (Chloé Mazlo)

Benediction (Terence Davies)

Costa Brava, Lebanon (Mounia Akl)

We (Alice Diop)

2021 films seen this year

Where is Anne Frank (Ari Folman, 2021)

7 Prisoners (Alexandre Moratto, 2021)

Blue Bayou (Justin Chon, 2021)

Flee (Jonas Poher Rasmussen, 2021)

The Phantom (Patrick Forbes, 2021)

A Hero (Asghar Farhadi, 2021)

The Tragedy of Macbeth (Joel Coen, 2021)

Netflix, Apple TV+ or film festivals

Farha (Darin Sallam)

The Time of the Fireflies (Matteo Robert Morales and Mattis Dalton)

Sun (Kurdwin Ayub)

Kash Kash—Without Feathers (Lea Najjar)

Cherry (Anthony and Joe Russo) (2021)

Palmer (Fisher Stevens) (2021)

Television series

The Dropout

Dopesick (2021)

Mo

Succession (2021)

Meltdown: Three Mile Island

The Silent Sea (2021)

Stefan Steinberg

1) *Rabiye Kurnaz vs. George W. Bush* – (Andreas Dresen)

2) *The Conference* – (Matti Geschonneck)

3) *Unrest* – (Cyril Schäublin)

4) *Leonora Addio* - (Paolo Taviani)

5) *Triangle of Sadness* – (Ruben Östlund)

6) *The Tragedy of Macbeth* – (Joel Cohen)

7) *The Swimmers* – (Sally El Hosaini - based on a true story and dealing with the dreadful plight of refugees from Syria and elsewhere seeking to enter a heartless capitalist Europe - with outstanding acting performances from the sisters Nathalie and Manal Issa - available on Netflix)

8) *R.M.N.* – (Romanian director Cristian Mungiu. His new film deals with the racism encountered by migrant workers entering Romania.)

One highly recommended documentary, unfortunately only currently available in German and/or French

1) *Musik im Dritten Reich - Der Maestro und die Cellistin von Auschwitz*

Television

In the sea of new releases a number of series stood out, including

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1) *Dopesick*, which is outstanding

2) ... and covering somewhat similar ground, i.e., the atrocities of the US health system: *The Good Nurse* - available on Netflix

Two US series dealt with the toxic world of new capitalist start-ups ...

3) *The Dropout*

4) *WeCrashed* - available on Apple

... and the increasing demands on their workforces made by modern companies

5) *Severance*

and lastly:

6) *The Wonder* by director Sebastián Lelio deals with, among other things, the conflict between religious faith and (medical) science in Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century - with a fine performance from Florence Pugh.

Richard Phillips

Features

Lost Illusions (Xavier Giannoli)

Tár (written and directed by Todd Field)

All Quiet on the Western Front (Edward Berger)

Don't Look Up (Adam McKay)

Funny Boy (Deepa Mehta)

* *Minamata* (Andrew Levitas) was released in several countries internationally in 2020 and 2021, but blocked by MGM and not officially released in the US until February 2022. MGM, which still has the release rights to *Minamata* in Germany, will not be showing it until 11 January 2023, nearly three years after it screened at the Berlin Film Festival.

Documentaries, television and mini-series

The Real Charlie Chaplin (Peter Middleton and James Spinney)

Ennio – The Maestro (Giuseppe Tornatore)

Theaters of War (Roger Stahl)

Meltdown: Three Mile Island (Kief Davidson)

Impeachment (Ryan Murphy and others)

The Kominsky Method (various directors, including Chuck Lorre)

Mo (created by Mo Amer and Ramy Youssef)

Verena Nees

We Might As Well Be Dead (Natalia Sinelnikova)

The Silent Forest (Saralisa Volm)

Working Class Heroes (Milos Pusic)



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