

Film, television and trends and events in art and culture in 2025

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As contradictory and even convoluted as the process may be, the development of the world does determine the development of art. Given the generally explosive state of things, with imperialist aggression and violence reaching new heights and large-scale opposition emerging to the policies of virtually every capitalist government, it was inevitable that new tensions should find expression in artists' work and erupt as well within existing industries and institutions.

The WSWWS reported on various trends and events in 2025. Protests over genocide in Gaza and resulting conflicts between tens of thousands of outraged artists, filmmakers, actors and others, on the one hand, and studio, museum and film festival officialdoms, on the other, attracted a good deal of our attention. Revulsion and anger over the Israeli criminality, backed to the hilt by the US and the other great powers, was a factor radicalizing the art world, as well as the film and television industry. The cultural powers that be, by and large, took the side of their governments, i.e., the accomplices of mass murder.

This past year saw a significant rise in the number of films and television series trying to come to terms with a convulsive social reality. The danger of dictatorship and fascism, attacks on immigrants and the rule of the billionaire oligarchs appeared as themes in numerous works. They varied widely in style and quality, but *Andor*, *One Battle After Another*, *Mountainhead*, *The Phoenician Scheme*, *Souleymane's Story*, *Bugonia* and *Anniversary* all reflected those general concerns. Films from the Middle East, fiction and documentary, directly addressed life-and-death questions: *To a Land Unknown*, *Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk*, *Yalla Parkour*, *Palestine 36*, *The Voice of Hind Rajab* and more.

Battles over censorship at museums and with governments, desperate efforts to suppress the growing anti-establishment and anti-capitalist moods among young people in particular, open expression of protest at music and film festivals and awards ceremonies ... such episodes occurred regularly in 2025. Artists like the Irish band Kneecap and others led crowds of tens of thousands in chants of "Free Palestine" to the collective horror of the ruling elites and their hangers-on.

The victory of *No Other Land*, documenting Zionist terror on the West Bank, at the 2025 Academy Awards in the best documentary category and the stirring appearance by co-directors Basel Adra and Yuval Abraham at the March 2 ceremony brought the explosive tensions into the public eye. The upper echelons in Hollywood, who have made sustained attempts to blacklist performers opposed to the Gaza genocide, could only grind their teeth in fury. When a third co-director of *No Other Land*, Hamdan Ballal (who had also stood on the stage March 2), was savagely attacked by Israeli settlers three weeks after the awards ceremony, the Academy leadership revealed its true attitude, by essentially remaining silent in the face of the brutal assault on an individual it had officially just honored.

A few weeks earlier, at the Berlin film festival, prominent British actress Tilda Swinton, receiving a lifetime achievement award, denounced "state-perpetrated and internationally enabled genocide" and the current campaign for mass deportations of refugees against the background of the

Israeli onslaught on the Gazan population.

In September, what one of the organizers described as "possibly the largest protest ever seen at a major film event" occurred at the Venice film festival. Bearing a sea of Palestinian flags, thousands of protesters chanted "Free, Free Palestine" and "End the Genocide," accompanied by blasts from foghorns and music playing from speakers.

Political ferment and unrest intersects with the ongoing assault on the jobs and conditions of artists and workers in the film and television industry. Challenger Gray reports that more than 17,000 jobs were cut across television, film, broadcast, news and streaming in the first 11 months of 2025, up 18 percent from last year. Between 2024 and 2025, 32,000 jobs in the industry have been lost. The main driving forces have been corporate mergers and acquisitions, AI and automation and the steady loss of jobs to low-wage locations outside the US. The emergence of Paramount, under the ownership of the vicious reactionary Ellisons, as a major studio power exemplifies the combined economic, social and intellectual crisis.

Moreover, the loss of 17,000 jobs does not provide a full picture of the economic devastation. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 100,000 people were employed in the Los Angeles County's motion picture industry, home to the highest wages and most generous benefits, by the end of 2024. That figure stood at 142,000 two years earlier—this is nearly a 30 percent decline, with no end in sight. The statistics for television production are even more staggering. The Los Angeles region reached a peak of 18,560 days of television production in 2021—three years later, the number of television shoot days had fallen to only 7,716, a near 60 percent decline.

The response of the entertainment unions to the jobs massacre has been to join hands with the conglomerates, some of the most ruthless corporations on the planet, in the parochial-corporatist "Stay in LA" campaign, tying the future of their members to the studios and networks and brazenly abandoning workers in other cities and countries.

The growing worldwide radicalization, which heralds impending social upheavals, terrifies and appalls the ruling classes, and drives them into frenzied pre-emptive action. Spearheading the counter-revolution is the Trump administration, which has declared war on culture and critical thought, branding every sign of resistance to its barbaric policies as "lunacy" and "extremism" and "Marxism." On various fronts in 2025 (the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian, public broadcasting, the elimination of federal subsidies and support, the "National Garden of American Heroes," "Making Federal Architecture Beautiful Again," the tariff on foreign films and so on), it pursued crude, vicious and stupid attempts to nullify the past two centuries or more of social and cultural progress. None of this provoked any serious opposition from the Democratic Party or the media.

The governments of every country have no answer to the upsurge of opposition except repression and censorship, and this process will only deepen in an increasingly sinister and dictatorial manner. Similar

processes repeat themselves in the US, Germany, Britain, Australia and elsewhere. The artists will have to learn that appeals to the authorities and to the “left” parties and trade unions are futile. The turn must be to the rank-and-file of the working class and its revolutionary potential. Art cannot save itself. It can neither evade the general crisis of society nor seal itself off from the latter. Its future is entirely bound up with the fate of the social revolution.

In the films referred to above, the writers and directors have confronted the immense social issues with varying degrees of depth, but the enhanced seriousness represents something of a positive change. What the filmmakers still lack most grievously is historical and social knowledge and understanding, above all of the seminal events of the 20th century—the fate of the first socialist revolution in Russia, the rise of Stalinism and Trotsky’s struggle against it, the nature of fascism, the character and crisis of American imperialism.

In this regard, one of the most crucial cultural developments of 2025 came late in the year, in December: the launching of Socialism AI, the application of advanced technological development to the political education and mobilization of the international working class. This has already produced an important discussion with artists and intellectuals over the significance of augmented intelligence.

It is not of course necessary for filmmakers to confine themselves to social problems or any particular set of “numbered strips.” Intimate, lyrical and poetic work is needed more than ever, but such work too will only prove meaningful or enduring if it takes into account the generalized conditions under which humanity lives and struggles, if it strives, in fact, to “feel the world in a new way.” A great many writers and directors (and critics) still want to watch themselves and their friends in the mirror—a small, shrinking, muddled mirror, one might add—but that’s as it must be. We will leave them to it.

These are some of the films, all of them with weaknesses or inadequacies, that seemed to us oriented in the most promising directions.

Best films of 2025, according to WSWS reviewers:

- Souleymane's Story* (Boris Lojkine)
- To a Land Unknown* (Mahdi Fleifel)
- One Battle After Another* (Paul Thomas Anderson)
- Put Your Soul on Your Hand and Walk* (Sepideh Farsi)
- The Disappearance of Josef Mengele* (Kirill Serebrennikov)
- Palestine 36* (Annemarie Jacir)
- Riefenstahl* (Andres Veiel)
- Bugonia* (Yorgos Lanthimos)
- The Phoenician Scheme* (Wes Anderson)
- [We have not seen *The Voice of Hind Rajab* (Kaouther Ben Hania), about the IDF murder of six-year-old Hind Rajab in Gaza in January 2024, but we presume it has value.]
- Also worth mentioning:
- The Settlement* (Mohamed Rashad)
- The German People* (Marcin Wierzchowski)
- Living the Land* (Huo Meng)
- Where the Wind Comes From* (Amel Guellaty)
- Yalla Parkour* (Areeb Zuaiter)
- Köln 75* (Ido Fluk)
- Leibniz—Chronicle of a Lost Painting* (Edgar Reitz)
- Palliative Care Unit* (Philipp Döring)
- The Moelln Letters* (Martina Priessner)
- Caught by the Tides* (Jia Zhang-ke)
- Auction* (Pascal Bonitzer)
- Familiar Touch* (Sarah Friedland)
- No Other Choice* (Park Chan-wook)
- Anniversary* (Jan Komasa)
- On Falling* (Laura Carreira)

- Xoftex* (Noaz Deshe)
- Television and miniseries
- Andor* (Tony Gilroy)
- The Eternaut* (Bruno Stagnaro)
- The Pitt* (R. Scott Gemmill)
- Louis Theroux: The Settlers* (Louis Theroux)
- Suspect: The Shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes* (Jeff Pope–Paul Andrew Williams)
- Adolescence* (Jack Thorne–Stephen Graham)
- Mountainhead* (Jesse Armstrong)
- Toxic Town* (Jack Thorne)
- Lockerbie: A Search for Truth* (Otto Bathurst–Jim Loach)
- Gaza: Doctors on the Frontline* (Alex Crawford)

Stefan Steinberg: Films and television

Film list:

[Most of the films on this list have already been reviewed on the WSWS] From the end of last year to the present:

1) *Riefenstahl*: a new documentary about the Nazi propagandist Standing out at the 75th Berlin International Film Festival were...
... two films dealing with racism and fascism:

- 2) *The Moelln Letters*
- 3) *The Lie* (Katrin Seybold, Melanie Spitta, 1987)
... and three films from Palestine and Germany:

- 4) *Yalla Parkour*
- 5) *Köln 75*
- 6) *Leibniz—Chronicle of a Lost Painting*

More recently:

- 7) *The Disappearance of Josef Mengele*

Also of some merit:

- 8) *A House of Dynamite* (Kathryn Bigelow)
- 9) *One Battle After Another*
- 10) *The Studio* (Evan Goldberg, Alex Gregory, Peter Huyck)
- 11) *Adolescence*
- 12) *A Complete Unknown* (James Mangold) – The drama about singer Bob Dylan was flawed. Two documentaries about the roots of his music are much better:
- No Direction Home* (Martin Scorsese, 2005)
- Down the Tracks: Bob Dylan* (2008)

A documentary entitled *Germany's Israel Obsession* is also well worth seeing. It depicts the extent of the vicious repression by the German state of all those opposed to the Israeli genocide in Gaza. It includes an interview with Sigmunt Königsberg (Anti-Semitism Commissioner for the Berlin Jewish Community) who fully supports Israel and ignores the antisemitism of the right. Instead he claims that the main enemy of Jews are Muslims and the extreme left.

Another interviewee, a leading member of the fascist Alternative for Germany, agrees with Königsberg and declares that the AfD (riddled with true anti-Semites!) is working together with Israel to combat Muslims and the far left. The film can be seen here.

Richard Phillips: Best films and television of 2025

Films

- One Battle After Another* (directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, inspired by Thomas Pynchon’s 1990 novel, *Vineland*) – United States
- Souleymane’s Story* (directed by Boris Lojkine) – France
- The Phoenician Scheme* (directed by Wes Anderson) – United States
- Caught By The Tides* (directed by Jia Zhangke, written by Wan Jianhuan and Jia Zhangke) – China
- Hard Truths* (written and directed by Mike Leigh) – UK
- I’m Still Here* (directed by Walter Salles, screenplay by Murilo Hauser and Heitor Lorega) – Brazil

Television and mini-series

Adolescence (directed by Philip Barantini, written Jack Thorne and Stephen Graham) – UK

The Leopard (directed by Tom Shankland, Giuseppe Capotondi, Laura Luchetti, based on Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel of the same title) – Italy

Documentaries

The American Revolution (directed by Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein and David Schmidt) – United States



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