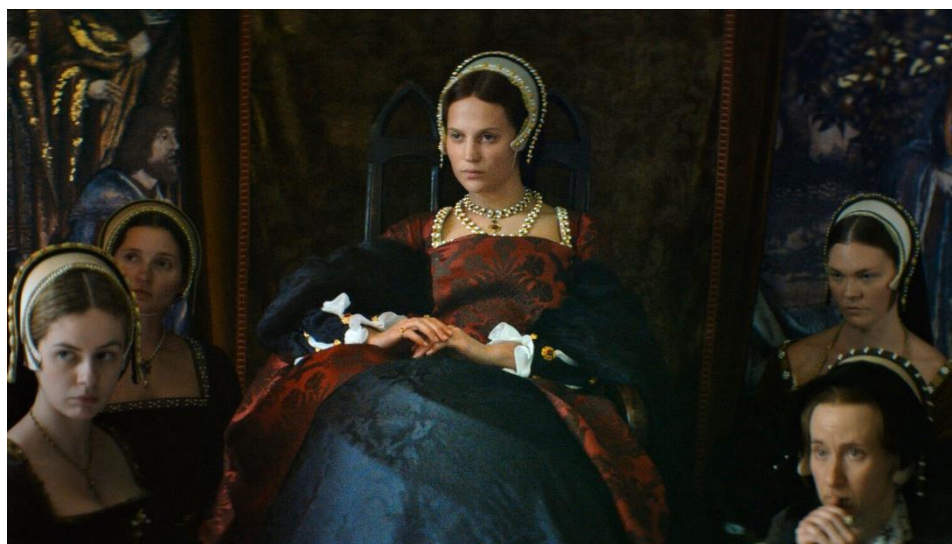




THE FILM
VERDICT
CANNES REVIEW DAILY



COMPETITION



FIREBRAND

VERDICT: Alicia Vikander steps into the robes of Henry VIII's last queen in a drama more concerned with turning Katherine Parr into feminist icon than is historically believable, yet bold visuals and a fine cast raise the appeal of Brazilian auteur Karim Aïnouz's first time in Cannes competition.

Deborah Young, May 21, 2023

Back in the 16th century, King Henry VIII of England beheaded two wives, dismissed another two and lost one in childbirth. The only one who got away – somewhat miraculously, judging by *Firebrand* – was his sixth queen Katherine Parr, who squeaked through an order of execution to survive him. What this story has to do with Brazilian maverick director Karim Aïnouz, whose output has ranged

from the edgy walk on the wild side of *Madame Sata* to *The Silver Cliff*, to his 2019 best-film winner in Un Certain Regard *Invisible Life*, is anyone's guess. But there are enough Tudor fans out there to test the offbeat appeal of this gloriously shot, designed and costumed period film, the director's first bow in Cannes competition. [Full Review](#)

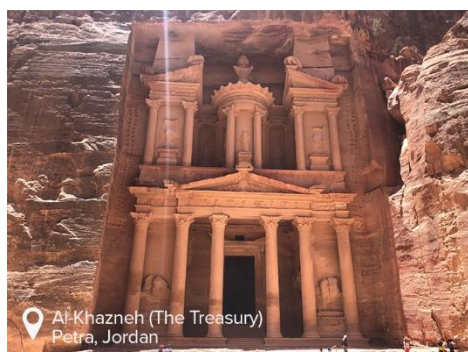
TFV Acquires MIME

THE FILM
VERDICT
التقدير
— MIDDLE EAST —

The Film Verdict (TFV) announced today that it has acquired Moving Image Middle East (MIME). "The Film Verdict filled the void to provide film reviews during a time when international reviews dramatically declined, TFV recognized the lack of consistent "trade" editorial and film review coverage in one of the fastest growing regions for film and entertainment. This acquisition will allow TFV to accelerate its strategic plans to provide the most inclusive, equitable international platform for the film industry that covers the Middle East, Spanish language territories with CINEVERDICT, Hollywood and all international territories," said Eric Mika, President and Publisher of The Film Verdict.

MIME was founded by E. Nina Rothe in early 2021. Nina, a journalist and blogger who

[\(Continues page 2\)](#)



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TFV ACQUIRES MIME *(Continued)*

currently lives in London, has written for Vogue Italia, Harper's Bazaar Arabia, Cosmo Middle East, The Art Newspaper, Empire Arabia and HuffPost. She will join The Film Verdict in the role of Editor, Middle East and will continue writing and contributing as she leads the growth and expansion of the newly branded *The Film Verdict, Middle East*.

E. Nina Rothe said: "I feel very proud to join The Film Verdict family. When I founded MIME, it was always my intention to expand the brand. I can happily say that I have found in Eric Mika, Deborah Young and the great group of writing colleagues at The Film Verdict a perfect combination of ethical business practices, forward thinking, vision and a passion for cinema that is unequalled in the current landscape. With such a fantastic line up of MENA films this year in Cannes, it seems like the stars are beginning to shine brightly on the Region and this partnership is the perfect way to move that even further. The skies are the limit!"

The Film Verdict's Editor and Chief Film Critic, Deborah Young, rejoined: "Speaking on behalf of the whole team at The Film Verdict, I am delighted to welcome Nina and her Moving Image Middle East into our fold as *The Film Verdict, Middle East*. It is our long-cherished



E Nina Rothe

dream, born out of long association with and respect for Arab cinema and MENA Region filmmakers, to reach a wide audience of film lovers with independent, high-quality reviews and reports."

About:

The Film Verdict, the premier platform for global film reviews, was launched in 2021 and has rapidly become the indispensable source of international film reviews and festival coverage for the film business. Its newest additions include in-depth reviews of short films, film podcasts by acclaimed hosts, Spanish language reviews (CINEVERDICT), Weekly Critics Choice, Festival Dailies, and in-depth international Oscar coverage.

www.TheFilmVerdict.com

Moving Image Middle East (MIME), has become the fastest-growing platform dedicated to news, reviews, features, and lifestyle in the Middle East. The MIME brand currently comprises a website, a weekly newsletter, and a press mentoring consultancy business.

www.mime.news

The domain name will remain www.mime.news until June 14, and then will change to www.TFVMiddle-East.com.

For more information contact:

Catherine Beauchamps: Catherine.Beauchamps@thefilmverdict.com



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COMPETITION



MAY DECEMBER

VERDICT: The combined talents of Natalie Portman, Julianne Moore and veteran indie auteur Todd Haynes are largely wasted on this humdrum Cannes competition contender.

Stephen Dalton, May 21, 2023

Nobody gives better Resting Bitch Face than Julianne Moore. Reunited with director Todd Haynes for a fifth time on *May December*, the diva of dysfunction radiates repressed rage and tremulous inner pain on screen, especially in her gently acerbic exchanges with co-star Natalie Portman. The electrical charge from their shared scenes could power a small city. But sadly, all this energy gets dissipated by an oddly conventional story with soapy overtones and fuzzy intentions. Despite its baffling high-profile slot in the main Cannes competition, this is a slender effort from the auteur creator of *Far From Heaven* (2002), *I'm Not There* (2007) and *Carol* (2015). Box office prospects will hinge more on Portman's marquee pulling power than the connoisseur indie cineaste credentials of Haynes or Moore.

A passion project for Portman, who first pitched it to Haynes

during Covid shutdown, *May December* is based on a screenplay by Samy Burch, an occasional shorts director primarily known for casting credits, notably on the *Hunger Games* series. Burch plays with some fairly heavy material here: the lines between sexual consent and abuse, guilt and forgiveness, rehabilitation and eternal damnation for child sex offenders. But despite Haynes' track record of artfully re-framing the language of camp melodrama, he maintains a kind of middlebrow issue-movie flatness here, never delivering the emotional fireworks and psychological catharsis that the set-up seems to promise.

Set in 2015, *May December* loosely mirrors the real case of Mary Kay Letourneau, a Washington state schoolteacher jailed in 1997 for second-degree rape after she began a sexual relationship with 12-year-old student Vili Fualaau, who she later married. [Full Review](#)

COMPETITION



ANATOMY OF A FALL

VERDICT: German actress Sandra Hüller plays a woman accused of murdering her French husband in Justine Triet's latest, an unconvincing and overlong drama.

Boyd van Hoeij, May 21, 2023

A successful German writer is accused of having murdered her French husband with whom she lives in the Alps, in *Anatomy of a Fall* (*Anatomie d'une chute*). This is the latest film from French director Justine Triet, who again co-wrote the screenplay with fellow director Arthur Harari (*Onoda: 10,000 Nights in the Jungle*), with whom she already collaborated on her previous outing, *Sibyl*. One of the starts of that film, Sandra Hüller, takes centre stage here as Sandra, a self-centred German novelist whose relationship with her husband, a teacher and wannabe writer, is explosive and has a lot of idiosyncratic edges. But does that mean that she has killed him, or has he fallen out of an open window on the third floor? The answer to that question is what should drive this mystery-slash-courtroom drama, though at 2.5 hours it's too long and its characters not lucidly drawn enough to make this a constant edge-of-your-seat experience.

The early going takes its time, as it is explained that Sandra and her other half, Samuel (Samuel Theis), are playing games with each other that could be dangerous. Sandra has invited a female student writing her thesis about Sandra's oeuvre into their imposing mountain chalet outside of Grenoble for an interview, which has apparently irked Samuel, who is afraid that the bisexual Sandra might be seducing the student. So in order to annoy them, he plays very loud music from the attic, where they've planned to create a few rooms to rent out. Their son, Daniel (Milo Machado Graner), is almost blind but that doesn't stop him from going on a walk with his guide dog, also because he doesn't like it when his parents argue or are about to argue. When he comes back, he sees his father's corpse lying in the snow outside, seemingly having fallen from an open window on the third floor. Or was he pushed from the second-floor balcony after having been hit by a blunt instrument?

[Full Review](#)



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DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT



THE BOOK OF SOLUTIONS

VERDICT: Back after a long hiatus, French writer-director Michel Gondry's most personal film to date is a scrappy, self-indulgent but entertaining love letter to asshole artists.

Stephen Dalton, May 21, 2023

Film-makers are needy, narcissistic, bullying egotists with every right to demand the

impossible from the lowly underlings who work for them. If they were not, they would never

get any films made, and certainly none that qualify as Great Art. This seems to be the dubious take-home message of Michel Gondry's first feature in eight years, *The Book of Solutions*, the visionary French writer-director's most nakedly autobiographical work to date.

Of course, as with previous Gondry comedies like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *The Science of Sleep* (2006) and *Be Kind, Rewind* (2007), his new feature is leavened by ironic humour, off-beat charm, hand-crafted special effects, jaunty music and inventively quirky visuals. Whether these factors save it from sinking into a special-pleading apologia for asshole artists is arguable, but they go a long way to making *The Book of Solutions* more fun than most navel-gazing genius-is-pain movies. [Full Review](#)



UN CERTAIN REGARD



IF ONLY I COULD HIBERNATE

VERDICT: Japan-educated Mongolian filmmaker Zoljargal Purevdash's first feature provides a sensitive yet sobering account of a teenager's struggle for his family's survival, even if it means sacrificing his own future.

Clarence Tsui, May 21, 2023

An academically gifted teenager abandons his own prospects to keep his family afloat in *If Only I*

Could Hibernate, Mongolia's first-ever entry at the Cannes Film Festival. Bowing in the Un Certain

Regard sidebar, the Mongolian-French-Swiss-Qatari co-production showcases the solid and unshowy direction of Japan-educated Zoljargal Purevdash, as well as powerful performances from its young cast.

A sturdy social realist drama that rarely veers into melodramatic or over-expositional territory, the film is a sensitive and sobering character study of a teenager torn between his ambitions and his reality. It's also a subtle yet pointed critique about how well-intentioned Good Samaritans sometimes fail to understand how below-the-breadline classes decline to dream by dint of their birth – something that Ken Loach, for one, might readily approve, aware of the ironies within.

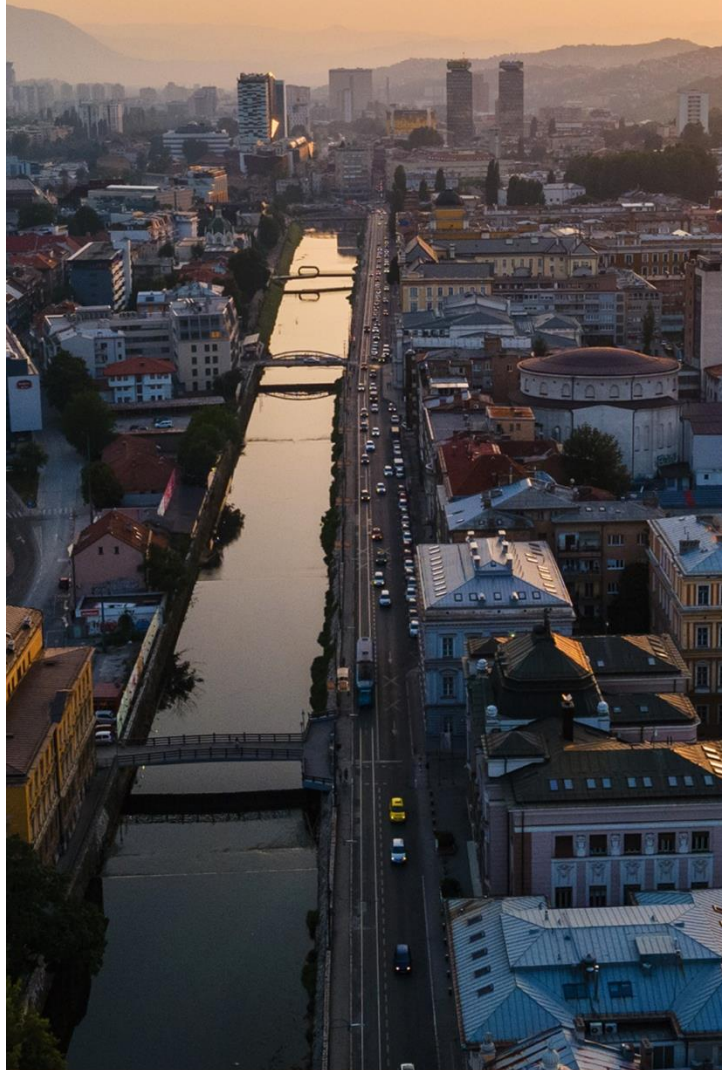
While the middle-class, private-schooled Loach (who is in Cannes to present [Full Review](#)

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DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT



MAMBAR PIERRETTE

VERDICT: Cameroonian documentary director Rosine Mbakam makes her fiction debut with this modest look at the life a seamstress in Douala.

Boyd van Hoeij, May 21, 2023

The title character of *Mambar Pierrette* is a stoic seamstress who tries to keep her head above water — sometimes, also literally, as floods happen regularly — in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. Tragedy comes on her path several times and still she soldiers on, like a kind of saint with a sewing machine. In real life, Pierrette's character would be admirable and praise-worthy but in the world of fiction (or perhaps docu-fiction as a lot of *Mambar Pierrette* feels very documentary-like) it doesn't make for very exciting cinema. This is the main issue of the first fiction effort from the Cameroonian, Belgium-based documentary director Rosine Mbakam, who has found herself a protagonist who is an exemplary human but not a fictional character you could watch for hours on end. The modestly assembled work debuted in the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes. It will find some traction on the festival circuit, which is always on the look-out for films by women and from Africa, but it will have a harder time as a commercial proposition.

"Art doesn't exist in this country, it is dead," says a street performer (Calvin Zognou) to Pierrette (Pierrette Aboheu) in her small sewing shop. He's but one of many passing through and stopping by for a chat, often while Pierrette keeps on working on her clients' orders. If the performer is talking for the director, it would explain why she takes such a quiet, documentary-like approach to her subject, as if it was impossible to create a more artistic vision of a life and a country so stuck [Full Review](#)



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