

FILM



Editor's Choice

Manufacturing mystery

The auteurs behind three of this month's new releases revel in keeping the viewer on the back foot. *By Paul O'Callaghan*

DON'T MISS

KuirFest Berlin

Conceived to protest the 'indefinite ban' on LGBTQ+ events in Ankara, this fest kicked off in May but concludes with a screening of Lizzie Borden's 1983 queer-feminist classic *Born in Flames* at bi'bak, followed by a party at Raum-erweiterungshalle.

Jun 7

Female Filmmakers Festival Berlin

This inaugural edition takes over *Moviemiento* for five days of female-driven films and video art, plus networking events and a panel discussion about women in VR and video games.

Jun 13-17

Exblooks: The Good Change: Poles Apart

Join us at Lichtblick Kino for a special screening of this riveting doc about right-wing populism in Poland, presented as a double-bill with the short *Three Days in Berlin*, which tackles the equally thorny topic of abortion.

Jul 1

For its first half or so, *High Life* (photo), the English-language debut by French auteur Claire Denis, is an assured piece of enigmatic nonlinear storytelling. It stars Robert Pattinson as Monte, a taciturn father raising his baby daughter in testing circumstances – the pair are the sole inhabitants of a dilapidated spaceship hurtling towards a black hole. Denis is in no rush to explain how they ended up in this position, but through flashbacks we learn that Monte was once accompanied on the vessel by a rag-tag crew of criminals, led by the eccentric Dr Dibs (Juliette Binoche), who harbours an all-consuming obsession with artificial insemination. For a while, the film strikes a deft balance between moody introspection and genre thrills, as Denis weaves a compelling tale with minimal exposition. And a sequence in which Binoche pleasures herself in a retrofuturistic “fuckbox” is glorious, charging subsequent scenes with a palpable sense of yearning. But ultimately, *High Life* is too beholden to the sci-fi classics that inspired it. With Earth-set vignettes that look like deleted scenes from Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, and a climax that's heavily indebted to Kubrick's *2001*, it fails to establish a visual language of its own, and winds up feeling like less than the sum of its parts.

While Denis' film is challenging by multiplex standards, it looks like a Marvel movie next to *Sunset*, László Nemes' follow-up to his Oscar-winning Holocaust drama *Son of Saul*. Set in Budapest on the eve of World War I, it follows the determined Írisz (Juli Jakab) on her quest to reclaim her rightful place in society, decades after her parents, the founders of a prestigious hat shop, perished in a fire. The director employs many of the techniques he used to evoke the horrors of Auschwitz – long takes, lingering close-ups, shallow focus – to tell a more intricate story. The effect is initially mesmerising: the opening sequence simply documents Írisz' attempt to get a job in her parents' shop, but it's utterly immersive and strangely tense, with a clear sense that something sinister lurks beneath the city's elegant facade. Alas, as Írisz struggles to make sense of her family's murky history, Nemes is a little too effective at mirroring her state of perpetual confusion, and the film becomes too muddled and disorienting for its own good.

Happily, there's one confounding arthouse drama out this month that totally sticks the landing. Adapted from a Haruki Murakami short story, Lee Chang-dong's *Burning* centres around Jong-su (Yoo Ah-in), an aspiring writer from the sticks now living in Seoul, who becomes embroiled in a love triangle of sorts with his former classmate Hae-mi (Jong-seo Jun) and her suave, wealthy friend Ben (Steven Yeun). Though superficially jovial, the trio's interactions are profoundly uncomfortable to observe, with Jong-su clearly consumed by class consciousness and youthful insecurity. And then one day Hae-mi drops out of the tentative *ménage à trois* she instigated, leaving the two men awkwardly sizing each other up. There are direct references to *The Great Gatsby*, and shades of *American Psycho* in the depiction of Ben, but this minimalist thriller is so meticulously constructed and relentlessly riveting, it transcends its influences to stand on its own feet as a masterly exploration of fragile masculinity. ■

High Life ★★☆☆☆ *Starts May 30* D: Claire Denis (France, Germany, UK, Poland, US 2018) with Robert Pattinson, Juliette Binoche | **Burning** ★★★★★ *Starts Jun 6* D: Lee Chang-dong (South Korea 2018) with Yoo Ah-in, Stephen Yeun | **Sunset** ★★☆☆☆ *Starts Jun 13* D: László Nemes (Hungary 2018) with Juli Jakab, Vlad Ivanov