



Portugal Martin Dale

Optimism has never been one of the strong suits in Portuguese cinema. In 2011, as the country confronted its biggest economic crisis since the 1974 revolution, the main themes addressed in domestic films have been particularly bleak – accompanied by a marked downward trend in admissions figures. Overall admissions in Portuguese cinemas fell by 8 per cent during the year, from 16.6 million in 2010 to 15.3 million in 2011, with gross box-office figures falling from €82million to €78.5million. With Portugal's GDP expected to shrink by 3.2 per cent in 2012 and with VAT on cinema tickets likely to be hiked from 13 to 23 per cent, total admissions are expected to tumble further in 2012. Portuguese cinema's share of overall admissions was only 0.6 per cent in 2011.

Since 2005, there has been at least one annual domestic title with more than 100,000 admissions – typically an erotic drama or local comedy – but in 2011 the biggest local hit only clocked up 20,000 admissions.

One of the main growth signs in terms of admissions was the rising number of successful documentaries – of the 22 domestic features released in 2011, six were feature-length documentaries. Documentaries actually performed better than domestic features, with average admissions of 4,324 spectators per documentary, compared to an average of only 1,074 per Portuguese feature.

The year's top film was João Canijo's brooding urban melodrama **Blood of My Blood** (*Sangue do meu Sangue*), which played in Toronto and won the FIPRESCI award at the 2011 San Sébastian film festival.

Like many Portuguese auteurs, Canijo delights in exploring the dark and sordid underbelly of Portugal's most impoverished neighbourhoods. In it, his long-time collaborator Rita Blanco portrays struggling mother Marcia, who desperately fights to protect her two children.



João Canijo's **Blood of My Blood**

The next biggest local hit was Mário Patrocínio's documentary debut **Complexo: Paralel Universe** (*Complexo: Universo Paralelo*), set in one of Rio de Janeiro's biggest slums, or favelas, known as the Complexo do Alemão. The film garnered 17,100 admissions and won the Human Rights award in the Artivist Film Festival, in Los Angeles. US-trained director Mário Patrocínio and his brother Pedro, spent 3 years living in the slum, where locals struggle to survive in the midst of intense poverty, drug barons, gang warfare and everyday violence.



Mário Patrocínio's **Complexo: Paralel Universe**



Sérgio Truffaut's **The City of the Dead**

Brazilian-born Sérgio Truffaut shot the documentary **The City of the Dead** (*A Cidade dos Mortos*) in Cairo and won the Grand Prize at the 2010 Documenta Madrid festival. It racked up 6,866 admissions in Portugal. The film explores the world's largest inhabited cemetery – Cairo's unique necropolis neighbourhood – where one million people live in tomb houses, shops, schools and workshops nestled next to graves.



Solveig Nordlund's **The Death of Carlos Gardel**

Susana de Sousa Dias's documentary **48** makes innovative use of still photographs, accompanied by victims' voices, as it explores the taboo subject of the brutal imprisonment and torture practises applied during 48 years of fascist dictatorship in Portugal. Solveig Nordlund's **The Death of Carlos Gardel** (*A Morte do Carlos Gardel*) is an adaptation of the homonymous novel by António Lobo Antunes. With a moving poetic structure, the film revolves around a hospitalised young drug

addict, as his family try to bring him out of a coma. We flash through episodes of his life, as if entering his comatose mind.

Teresa Vilaverde's **Swan** (*Cisne*), which premiered at Venice, is an existential film poem that flits between lush countryside scenes and dark Lisbon interiors in an exploration of loneliness and the search for human connection. Sérgio Truffaut's **Journey to Portugal** (*Viagem à Portugal*) stars two of Portugal's best-known actresses – Maria de Medeiros and Isabel Ruth. Based on a true story, and shot in stark black and white, the film follows a Ukrainian doctor, who arrives in Portugal, at Faro airport, as a tourist, but is detained by the Border control agency and commences a nightmare journey.



Sérgio Truffaut's **Journey to Portugal**

João Nuno Pinto's debut **America** is an angst-ridden ride through one of Portugal's squalid social sub-cultures – as a group of petty crooks fake passports and mingling with Ukrainians, Russians and immigrants from Portugal's former colonies.



João Nuno Pinto's **America**

José Miguel Ribeiro's *Journey to Cape Verde*

Experimental filmmaker Edgar Pera's gothic monochrome film **The Baron** (*O Barão*) is reminiscent of a 1930s horror film, skilfully blending humour with a palpable sense of dread. José Miguel Ribeiro's stylish animated travel diary **Journey to Cape Verde** (*Viagem a Cabo Verde*) picked up the Best Documentary Director at the 2011 Krakow Film Festival. Meanwhile, Gonçalo Tocha's documentary **It's the Earth Not the Moon** (*É na Terra não é na Lua*), set in the volcanic island of Corvo in the Azores, won the Special Jury Prize at the 2011 Locarno film festival.

Gonçalo Tocha's *It's the Earth Not the Moon*

Other notable films from 2011 include Paulo Rocha's personal odyssey, **If I Were a Thief... I'd Steal** (*Se Eu Fosse Ladrão... Roubava*) and Miguel Gomes' love and crime drama, **Taboo** (*Tabu*).

There is no obvious silver lining to Portugal's current cloud of economic depression, but there are some promising upcoming films for 2012. Bille August will return to Portugal for the first time since 1993's *The House of the Spirits*, once again teaming up with

Jeremy Irons for **Night Train to Lisbon**. Zeze Gamboa is putting the finishing touches to his Angolan drama **The Great Kilapy**, a Portugal-Mozambique co-production, and Flora Gomes is completing **The Children's Republic**, starring Danny Glover, about a futuristic Mozambican city ruled by children in the wake of a tragic civil war.

The year's best films

Blood of My Blood (João Canijo)

Complexo: Parallel Universe

(Mário Patrocínio)

Journey to Cape Verde (José Miguel Ribeiro)

The Death of Carlos Gardel (Solveig Nordlund)

The Baron (Edgar Pera)

Directory

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MARTIN DALE has lived in Lisbon and the north of Portugal since 1994 and works as an independent media consultant and a contributor to *Variety*. He has written several books on the film industry, including *The Movie Game* (1997).

Susana de Sousa Dias's **48**