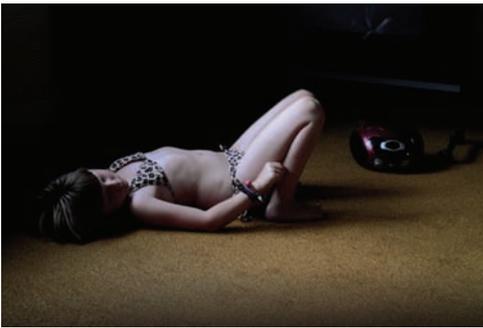




Sweden Gunnar Rehlin

A clinical study of black boys robbing white boys and a story about two teenage girls becoming both friends and competitors at a riding school. These were the two international Swedish hits of 2011. Ruben Östlund's controversial **Play** had its debut in the 'Directors' Fortnight' at Cannes and went on to become a festival darling throughout the year. After winning awards at Sundance and Berlin, Lisa Aschan's **She Monkeys** (*Apflickorna*) also travelled the world. Both films represent new, young Swedish film directors, a generation that dares to do the unexpected and to steer away from the conventional, both in terms of subject matter and narrative style.



Lisa Aschan's **She Monkeys**

Lisa Aschan describes *She Monkeys* as 'a modern western'. There is something in that description, although the film's style owes much to documentary. The same can be said about Ruben Östlund's hugely successful *Play*, which develops themes raised in his previous film, *Involuntary*. The new film is based on the true story of a gang of black teenagers in Gothenburg that employed racial stereotypes to intimidate and rob young white boys. It is an impressive and daring film, provoking us



Ruben Östlund's **Play**

into asking questions about peer pressure and racism. Östlund shows with the film that he is the heir to Roy Andersson.

Both films opened domestically during the latter half of the year, with the first six months bereft of any great releases, with the exception of Pernilla August's acclaimed literary adaptation **Beyond** (*Svinalängorna*). The film opened late in 2010, after having won the Critics' Prize at Venice, and was picked as the Swedish entry for the 2012 Academy Awards.

Back to the start of 2011, the war film **The Border** (*Gränsen*), directed by Richard Holm, had its defenders. The documentaries **I Am My Own Dolly Parton** (*Jag är min egen Dolly Parton*), directed by Jessica Nettelblatt,



Richard Holm's **The Border**



Göran Hugo Olsson's *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975*

and **The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975**, by Göran Hugo Olsson, also received good reviews, but performed poorly at the box office (though the latter film played well at festivals). Martin Jern and Emil Larsson's **The Beast** (*Odjuret*) and Agnieszka Lukasiak's **Between 2 Fires** were uneven but watchable dramas, while the advance hype for Ella Lemhagen's **The Crown Jewels** (*Kronjuvelerna*) guaranteed the film would disappoint.

The end of summer saw the release of Alexandra Theresa Keinig's striking **With Every Heartbeat** (*Kyssten*). Ruth Vega Fernandez and Liv Møjnes impressed as two young women who meet and fall in love, despite the fact that one of them is about to be married. Partly based on producer Josefin Tengblad's own experiences, the film is a captivating depiction of love prevailing against all odds. It should attract audiences beyond gay festivals and the director and actresses are names to watch.

Autumn began with **I Miss You** (*Jag saknar dig*), directed by Anders Grönros. It is a heartfelt story about teenage twins and what happens when one of them is killed in accident. Henrik J. P. Åkesson and Mattias Olsson's solid thriller **Missing** (*Försvunnen*) showed that Sweden can produce genre product beyond the usual police dramas.

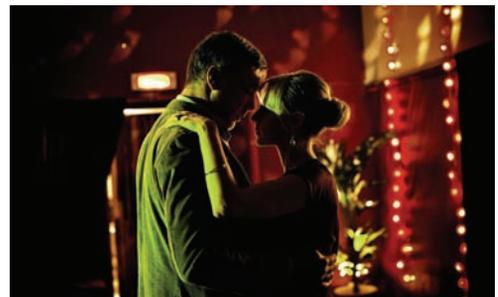
At Venice's Critics' Week, first-time feature director Simon Kaijser da Silva screened **Stockholm East** (*Stockholm Östra*), a captivating low-key romance.

Older directors also turned in some impressive work. Kjell Sundvall has talked for years about a sequel to his action hit *The Hunters*. As the year was drawing to a close, **The Hunters 2** (*Jägarna 2*) reached cinemas. The film features the same lead actor in Rolf Lassgård, as well as the same northern setting. Other than that it had little to do with the original. It received mixed reviews but performed well with audiences.



Richard Hobert's *One Way to Antibes*

Björn Runge presented **Happy End**, the final film in his trilogy about tragic lives and ruined relationships, while Richard Hobert scored a critical hit with his gentle drama **One Way to Antibes** (*En enkel till Antibes*). Runge was attached to direct the film version of the bestseller **Simon and the Oaks** (*Simon och ekarna*), a coming-of-age tale set during World War II, but citing creative differences, Runge left the production and Lisa Ohlin took over. The result was visually impressive, but lacked the punch and drama that Runge might have brought to it.



Simon Kaijser da Silva's *Stockholm East*

The end of the year also saw the release of Kjell-Åke Andersson's **Somewhere Else** (*Någon annanstans i Sverige*), an Altman-esque ensemble piece.

The major box-office hits of the year were local comedies such as Leif Lindblom's **Svensson, Svensson** and Lasse Åberg's **The Stig-Helmer Story**. However, as with many local comedies, whose humour may not travel so well, they are unlikely to have a life outside the domestic market.



Leif Lindblom's **Svensson, Svensson**

So 2011 was hardly a great year for Swedish film. A couple of really good films, yes, but in general most of what we saw was quickly forgotten. 2012 looks far more interesting, with Axel Petersén's Toronto winner **Avalon**, Jan Troell's **Truth and Consequence** (*Dom över död man*), Anders Öhman's **Bitch Slap** (*Bitchkram*), Jesper Ganslandt's **Blondie**, Mikael Marcimain's **Call Girl**, Catherine Hardwick's Anita Lindblom biopic starring Noomi Rapace, and Peter Dalle's drama **An Enemy to Die For** (*En fiende att dö för*) all awaiting release.

The new year will also see the premiere of Lasse Hallström's thriller **The Hypnotist** (*Hypnotisören*), his first Swedish film in more than twenty years. Hallström returns home as other creative talent, such as Noomi Rapace, Michael Nyqvist, Daniel Espinosa, Alicia Vikander, Alexander Skarsgård and many others, seek their fame and fortune abroad.



Kjell-Åke Andersson's **Somewhere Else**

The year's best films

Play (Ruben Östlund)

She Monkeys (Lisa Aschan)

Somewhere Else (Kjell-Åke Andersson)

Stockholm East (Simon Kaijser da Silva)

With Every Heartbeat (Alexandra Therese Keinig)

Directory

All Tel/Fax numbers begin (+46)

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GUNNAR REHLIN is a Swedish journalist and critic, working for several international media, among them Swedish news agency TT Spektra, Norwegian magazine *Film & Kino* and *Variety*. His four years as a TV host was the subject of a one-hour mockumentary, directed by *Let the Right One In* director Tomas Alfredson.
