

TOP MOVIES OF 2010



JASON For the past five years, roughly coinciding with the Oscars, *Eugene Weekly* has provided dual lists of the year's most intriguing films. Not by accident, we arrange them side-by-side in the printed version, without regard to overlap or differences of opinion. This year, something unexpected happened: Molly and I largely agreed. That our lists for 2010 so closely resemble one another is, I suspect, further evidence of the creeping conservatism in film we've been witnessing these past several years. Simply put, when there's this much agreement, I have to wonder if a narrowing of choices — and ultimately of quality — is at work.

This is my fifth and final annual film list for the *Weekly*. It's been nothing short of a pleasure appearing in these pages, distracting, provoking and in some cases even infuriating you. It was never very complicated: I tried to evaluate the emotional and intellectual qualities of a film and, if space permitted, its technical aspects. The intention was always to start a debate. And yet I fear there is less to debate in films today than there has been in many years.

Although neither of us could know it at the time, something went slack in Hollywood when Molly and I assumed these roles in 2006. The industry had just suffered its worst box office decline in twenty years; while it took a few years to suss out, I'm of the belief that during the five years since, the shift to remakes, sequels and comic book adaptations are the result of the disaster that was 2005. Only time will tell, of course, but here's hoping that movies rediscover their mojo — and that you, interested filmgoers, are there to see it happen.



1. EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP

The film that risked more than any other in 2010 is *Exit through the Gift Shop*. It purports to tell the story of filmmaker Thierry Guetta, a Frenchman who, after gaining access to an underground network of street artists, has his film hijacked by the most revered street artist in the world — Banksy, a grossly talented Englishman known for stenciling the West Bank wall. Dismissed by Banksy, who assembles the footage into what will eventually become *Exit*, Guetta surprises everyone by becoming a street artist himself, achieving both notoriety and great sums of money. Part art documentary, part guerilla film experience — and pure hoax, according to some — *Exit* is an unforgettable film about identity and integrity in an art form designed to be temporary. (7/15/10)



2. THE FIGHTER

The best non-documentary offering this year, *The Fighter* has everything you ask for from a film. The performances are already legendary, with each actor physically remaking him or herself — witness the emaciated, wild-eyed Christian Bale — to a level of near-disguise, all under the watchful eye and masterful direction of David O. Russell

(*Three Kings*). But it's the women who carry *The Fighter*, from Amy Adams in a career-defining role as sassy Charlene to Melissa Leo in a career-highlighting turn as Alice, the

evil matriarch of a middling boxing family. *The Fighter* is a sports film about everything that matters — love, community and the family ties that shackle us — as well as the pain of coming in second when you're good enough to be first. The film has more pulse in its first ten minutes than the entire slate of most film festivals. (1/6/11)

3. ANOTHER YEAR

A tale of growing up and starting over well into maturity, *Another Year* is the story of Gerri (Ruth Sheen) and Tom (Jim Broadbent) and the misfit friends they attract. While Tom and Gerri's chemistry is undeniable, their stability evolves into something complex and extraordinary when pals Mary (Lesley Manville) and Ken (Peter Wight) seem headed for nervous breakdowns. A deceptively simple film about the limits of sympathy and the importance of being ordinary, *Another Year* is a lasting gift from writer/director Mike Leigh (*Happy-Go-Lucky*) in which very little seems to change — primarily because Mary and Ken live in fear of what change might feel like. So whisper-light it takes a second viewing to fully appreciate. (2/3/11)



4. WINTER'S BONE

Winter's Bone is the bleak but heroic story of Ree Dolly (Jennifer Lawrence), a teenager raising her younger siblings in the Ozarks. Steady beyond her years, Ree has one week to track down her father, a fugitive whose disappearance puts the family homestead in jeopardy. The incredible story, a masterpiece of country noir filmmaking based on the novel by Daniel Woodrell, turns on Ree's ability to convince her father's brother Teardrop (John Hawkes) to take up a case he knows is hopeless. The further they push into Ree's father's criminal world, the more dangerous and violent their situation becomes. A film about family, both distant and immediate, and the responsibilities that come with it. Both Lawrence and Hawkes are nominated for an Oscar, as is the film and screenplay. (8/5/10)

5. ANIMAL KINGDOM

Animal Kingdom is the story of the Cody Brothers, three handsome but ruthless Australian gangsters and their quietly malevolent mother, Smurf (Jacki Weaver). While the film hints at their former prestige, the Codys are under siege by a squad of renegade cops. Into this maelstrom moves J, a Cody nephew recently orphaned by his mother's drug overdose. But J, instead of being ingratiated into the gang, can only watch his uncles' descent; even worse, once he is approached by a detective (Guy Pearce), J's status goes from nuisance to liability to expendable. But is J cleverer than he looks? Like last year's *Gomorrah*, this a gangster film about the pettiness and desperation of a crime syndicate past its prime. Tense, elegant, paranoid and shocking, *Kingdom* begins at the end and never looks back. A caged animal of a film. (9/9/10)

