

# OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY DARLEEN ORTEGA



# My Top 10 Films for 2020

## Best films help you see world in another light

For a cinephile like me, this year has been a hard one. I miss being inside movie theaters; it really is the best way to experience a film. I'll be glad to go back.

Fortunately, I've learned to access a broad range of cinema from home and have easily assembled a list of my 10 favorites of the year, which I'm releasing in advance of Sunday's Academy Awards ceremony as I always do. These are the films that stayed with me, that changed me and helped me see beyond my circumstances, as the best films do. *Here's my list, in total, followed by my thoughts about what makes them especially great:*

1. **Minari**
  2. **Beyond the Visible: Hilma af Klint**
  3. **Driveways**
  4. **Judas and the Black Messiah**
  5. **The White Tiger**
  6. **Ma Rainey's Black Bottom**
  7. **The Dissident**
  8. **Crip Camp**
  9. **The Father**
  10. **David Byrne's American Utopia**
1. Writer-Director Lee Isaac

Chung has said that he began work on his luminous film *"Minari"* by making a list of memories of his childhood in the early 1980s, when he, his sister, and his Korean immigrant parents moved to rural Arkansas so that his father could start a farm.

This film isn't strictly about experiencing racism and alienation, or about being Asian American, or about being immigrants or the children of immigrants, though it poignantly depicts aspects of those experiences that are under-explored in American cinema.

It's also the best film I can remember about marital conflict between people who love each other.

2. My favorite film for most of this year was a sleeper that few people saw--and it came into my world early in the pandemic, when I was largely accessing films through distributor and theater websites. *"Beyond the Visible: Hilma af Klint,"* now more broadly accessible, stayed with me more than anything I saw this year. It's a beautifully crafted examination of the life and work of the Swedish artist.

Af Klint is one of the more dramatic examples of how far from a meritocracy the art world--and the world in general--actually is. She



*Minari*, director Lee Isaac Chung's film about a Korean family who moves to a farm in rural Alabama. In advance of the Academy Awards on April 25, Portland Observer film critic, Opinionated Judge columnist Darleen Ortega, rates *Minari* as the best film of 2020, the first of her top 10 films of the year. Photo courtesy Diamond Films.

began creating a massive body of astoundingly visionary abstract work in 1906, yet remains relatively obscure to this day. Unnoticed, hindered, discounted, and quite possibly ripped off, the artist nevertheless kept producing astounding work that no one saw until recently--and this film enlists a host of passionate experts (most of them women) to help us understand af Klint's importance and what her obscurity indicates about the art world to this very day.

3. *"Driveways"* is a gentle film that stayed with me long after I watched it, and called me back for return viewings. By any measure, it's a slender film--no major plot

points, many moments of quiet observation. But director Andrew Ahn and screenwriters Hannah Bos and Paul Thureen seem to understand that human beings viewed with compassion and interest can be inherently moving, even without a major conflict or tragedy; this is a story about kindness and connection that earns real investment and even tears with every lean moment.

4. *"Judas and the Black Messiah"* deserves much more credit than it is getting for bringing attention to a long-neglected story with courage and canniness. Its creators made a string of improbably good choices

in selecting as their focus Fred Hampton in contrast with Bill O'Neal, the FBI informant who played a critical role in facilitating his fascination, shedding light on the FBI's obsession with Hampton, other charismatic black leaders, and the Black Panthers, and opening the way to so many questions we should be asking ourselves. This is smarter storytelling than we usually see, and Daniel Kaluuya deserves an Oscar for his brilliant performance of the charismatic murdered leader.

5. *"The White Tiger"* is a major omission from the Oscar list of Best Picture and Best Actor nominees. As with *"Jesus and the Black Messiah,"* I suspect its under-appreciated status is because it shines such a light on things we don't want to see in ourselves. Director Ramin Bahrani (nominated for the screenplay) is drawn to the stories of people at the margins--his excellent prior work includes the 2008 film *"Chop Shop,"* which made a lasting impression on me with its immersion into the life of a young boy supporting himself and his sister in the underworld of Queens, New York, in poverty that we pretend doesn't exist in the United States.

6. *"Ma Rainey's Black Bottom"*

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# Local elections count!

Make a Plan to VOTE this May.

As we approach the May 18, 2021 Special District Election, Multnomah County Elections is asking voters to Make a Plan to VOTE in May!

- Register to VOTE. (by April 27)**
- Sign up for Track Your Ballot!**
- Get, VOTE, and return your ballot.**
- Local elections are important. Make your vote count!**

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