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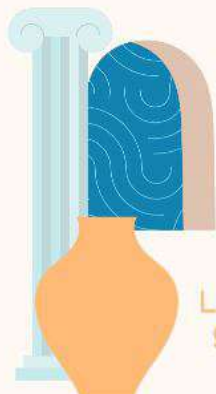


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Greek Cinema Is Having a Moment in Cannes

With five films in the fest lineup, Greece is experiencing its strongest showing in years, and insiders say the current boom is the result of a years-long effort to support the local industry following the financial crisis of the late 2000s. **BY RYAN COLEMAN**

Viggo Mortensen stumbles from a crumbling white stone building. He limps, eyes downcast, past ghostly ruins, toward a glittering beach. At the water, he finally raises his head to face one of the defining images of *Crimes of the Future* — a massive wrecked ship turned on its side, barnacled over with rust, floating a few hundred feet off shore.

Crimes of the Future marks Canadian auteur **David Cronenberg's** long-awaited return to body horror, and he shot the entire film in Greece. That ship is the Mediterranean Sky, a 600-foot tanker marooned since 2003 in the Bay of Eleusis, and the mystical, out-of-time city that Mortensen staggers through to see it is Athens. *Crimes* is competing for the Palme d'Or in Cannes this year, making it one of five films there with a significant Greek interest.

Alongside **Ruben Östlund's** competition contender *Triangle of Sadness* (shot on the island of Evia), **Panos Kouttras'** Cannes Premiere title *Dodo*, **Emin Alper's** Turkish-Greek co-production *Burning Days* (in *Un Certain Regard*) and **Evi Kalogiropoulou's** short film *On Xerxes' Throne*, the Greek showing at Cannes this year is stronger than it's been in decades. Despite the ravages of COVID-19 and the financial crisis of the late 2000s, the Greek film industry has emerged as a force to be reckoned with on the world stage.

"Greece is a small country, and it's not a rich country. So the talent we want to support is always far greater than the budget we have," says **Athena Kalkopoulou**, the director of Hellas Film, the promotion and distribution arm of the Greek Film Centre. "But Greek cinema is once again in a position of growth."

The Greek Film Centre is a vital organ in a vast network of public institutions, private enterprises, universities, film festivals, forward-thinking producers and creatives

driving the renaissance happening in the country's film industry. Founded in 1970 under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the GFC is a robust organization that assists filmmakers with everything from financing to production to location scouting, distribution and promotion. Of the roughly 900 films the GFC has assisted since 1970, 86 were made in just 2021 and 2022.

Markos Holevas, president of the GFC's board of directors, describes the GFC's mission as "cultivating a new generation of filmmakers. Helping them create a new vision in cinema." He asks, "You know the Greek Weird Wave?" He's referring to the explosion of idiosyncratic films that came out of Greece in the early 2010s, beginning with **Yorgos Lanthimos'** *Dogtooth*. Weird Wave directors like Lanthimos and **Athina Rachel Tsangari** (2010's *Attenberg*, 2015's *Chevalier*) got films accepted at Cannes, Venice and Berlin and screened across the world — not an easy feat during the dismal early years of the financial crisis. The movement helped put Greek film back on the map. As Holevas points out, "It was the result of a policy of the Centre, which was implemented 10 years previous."

The current Greek film boom isn't a product of good fortune. Years of careful planning and intra-organizational cooperation led to



Emin Alper's *Burning Days* is a Turkish-Greek co-production.

From left: David Cronenberg's *Crimes of the Future* was shot entirely in Greece; Ruben Östlund's *Triangle of Sadness* filmed on the Greek island of Evia.

this point. But if you look at the production numbers, you'd be forgiven for concluding that everything went quicksilver overnight at some point in 2017. That was the year the Greek government passed a stronger tax rebate law, which led to the formation of The National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication, known as EKOME.

EKOME is a unique public-private partnership between the Ministry of Digital Governance and the private sector, which provides shooting incentives for audiovisual projects like films, TV shows and video games. The 25 percent rebate on eligible expenses they offered in 2018 grew to an industry-leading 40 percent just two years later, in the middle of the pandemic. "I remember sitting in our hotel room taking meetings during last year's Cannes," recalls **Vasiliki Diagouma**, head of communications at EKOME. COVID canceled 2020's fest, and 2021's market went hybrid and decentralized, with the countries who bothered to even send delegations setting up operations off-site. "I remember sitting and thinking, We are so lucky because business has never been better."

The cash rebate, 30 percent tax relief and special programs like the ability to invoice a percentage of above-the-line salaries "made Greece immune to the pandemic." Since April 2018, EKOME has supported 221 projects, which created an estimated 51,400 jobs, and brought in an estimated 349 million euros in investment. Two of those projects were the Cronenberg and Östlund films.

There's no doubt EKOME has changed the game. But it's also "sparked a national debate," says **Yorgos Tsourgiannis**, head of Horsefly Films and producer on Alper's *Burning Days*. Some worry that the rebate will only attract expensive international co-productions, which may "dry up Greek crews and drive up prices." That's already happening, notes **Christos Karamanis**, a veteran DP who lensed *Burning Days*. "It has gotten harder to service Greek films with Greek crews," he says, and even Diagouma says that EKOME is "more aware than ever of the need to provide technical training and expand university programs."

But overall, everyone is optimistic about the state of affairs in the Greek film industry. Karamanis says the incredible Cannes showing is "a long time coming." Kalkopoulou describes it as "the fruit of all our labor." And if a Greek film or co-production can take home a competitive prize, it'll only be another jewel in an already illustrious crown. **VIII**