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The best online videos of 2009



Burning down the house: *Phantoms of Nabua*

With the web hosting more and more diverse moving images than ever, we invited a sample of critics and curators to recommend the year's best online viewing. Nick Bradshaw surveys the tally

One of the most striking sights I saw this year at the cinema wasn't on the big screen so much as in front of it – the swath of small screens, mobile-phone and laptop, glowering in the stalls of the BFI Southbank's NFT1 at this year's **Power to the Pixel** conference. The UK's principal arthouse showcase had been overrun by virtual movie seers, given every encouragement to wire up their digits, tap away at text messages, wander off on the world wide web and Twitter from the back of the class.

How has the shrunken-screen world of online movies matured? We decided to append our traditional critics' poll of the year's **best films** (and our accompanying end-of-year survey of DVD releases (which **as noted** has become a wonderful world of film revivals) with a look at what critics and curators have been watching online this year. If, as everyone agrees, the internet is a game-changer – stretching the field of both movie production and exhibition – how is the new game shaping up?



Inland empire: *It Felt Like a Kiss*

We kept the remit of our invitation broad, to encompass both new and archive work: what were the best moving images our invitees had seen online in 2009 that they couldn't have seen online a year earlier? The responses were predictably varied. There were several nominations for formerly 'lost' works by historic feature directors, from Zoltán Huszárík to

Welles, **Kubrick**, **Mizoguchi** and Rivette. (Sadly if also predictably, given the lawless vagaries of the internet, some of these videos have already been removed since we began work on this feature.)

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There were recommendations for new web films by contemporary feature directors (**Apichatpong Weerasethakul**, **James Benning** – admittedly in both cases samples of longer works made for the gallery and cinema spaces, respectively), and for shorts (dramatic, documentary, essay and animation) by newer directors. There were votes for experimental artists' work – three different films on the avant-garde showcase **UbuWeb** – and for the repositories of such work, including **tank.tv** and **artfem.tv**. Similarly, there were citations for new online offerings of film archives – **London's Screen Archives**, **Europa Film Treasures** – and for the screening room-cum-social network **The Auteurs**.

There were also online series (**Between Two Ferns with Zach Galifianakis**; Isabella Rossellini's **Green Porno**), inventive 'official' music videos, home-made mashups and puppet remakes. And there were four **cat videos**... though **only two** from the school of my-wacky-cat home movies. (The latter, according to its nominator, being "one of the great sound/image pieces of the year if not the decade.")



Chaos reigns: *Please Say Something*

Was there any consensus, any common ground? Not much: three votes for Weerasethakul's *Phantoms of Nabua* and related *Primitive videos*, and three in total for Adam Curtis' **It Felt Like a Kiss** video and his multimedia blog more broadly. There were also two votes for David O'Reilly's Berlinale-winning dysmorphic animation *Please Say Something* and two for street animators Blu and David Ellis' collaboration **Combo**. I count 50 other unique votes, making for less a bell curve than a barely rippled line. Welcome to the wide-open cyber sea!

See the complete list of nominations

See also

The films of 2009

The best DVDs of 2009

Tropical Rocket: Tony Rayns on Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Primitive* installation at the Abandon Normal Devices festival