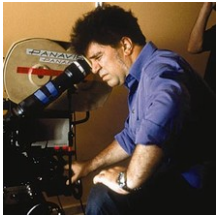


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By: Carmen Ivanov, Associate Editor



## [Europe Eclipses Hollywood in Hot Year for Cannes](#)

*Cousins: America is really performing badly this year*

Veteran Spanish director Pedro Almodovar leads the early running in Cannes this year with his bittersweet comedy *Volver*, as European cinema overshadows Hollywood at the world's biggest film festival.

Also catching critics' eye as the annual orgy of pictures, publicity and parties reached the halfway point on Monday is a first-time filmmaker from Britain, Andrea Arnold, with *Red Road* and Turkey's Nuri Bilge Ceylan with *Iklimler* (*Climates*).

"America is really performing badly this year," said Mark Cousins, an author and commentator on cinema. "Asia is doing next to nothing in the competition, so it is really Europe that is shining with an old-fashioned approach to cinema."

While critics and the Cannes jury do not always see eye to eye, leading the pack in the hunt for the coveted "Palme d'Or" is Almodovar's *Volver*, a touching and humorous return to his beloved world of women.

Spanish star Penelope Cruz pairs up with another of the director's muses Carmen Maura in what has been described as the 32-year-old beauty's best performance yet, putting her in pole position to take the best actress award.

Her stiffest competition to date comes from the lesser known Kate Dickie, who plays a grief-stricken woman bent on revenge in Arnold's first ever feature film.

Set on a grim, windswept housing estate in Glasgow, the picture has won the British director comparisons with established names such as Michael Haneke and Lars von Trier, and uses security TV cameras to follow the characters' lives.

Screen International critic Allan Hunter said the film, the first of a trilogy involving the same characters, was "likely to emerge as one of the discoveries of this year's Cannes."

Also highlighted as a possible prizewinner among the first 10 of 20 films in competition is Britain's Ken Loach with his Irish drama *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*.

Along with *Summer Palace*, set against the backdrop of social upheaval during the Tiananmen Square protests and Finnish director Aki Kaurismaki's *Lights in the Dusk*, Cannes is eclipsing what some considered a weak 2005.

"So far what I've seen has been pretty good, and certainly better than the last two years," said Kirk Honeycutt.

"The benchmark year recently was 2002, when Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* won, although we are not at that level so far."

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