

How is Spanish and European cinema perceived by US audiences?

In a series of interviews conducted by the REBOOT Project's research team in Spain, qualified experts, professionals and renowned film critics discussed the identity of European cinema and how it is perceived by American audiences. The experts talked about the European productions distributed in the US and in a global market where large-scale films are still the ones preferred by general audiences, whether on big screens, small screens or VoD platforms.

The identity of European cinema

When addressing the issue of European cinema's identity and how this one is received by American audiences, REBOOT'S research had shown that there was a turning point after Netflix's emergence in the global audiovisual market. According to some film critics, the creation of a Netflix production hub in Spain in 2018 can be seen as part of its intent to connect American and European audiences. In the case of Spain, the aim was to give Latin American viewers living in the United States access to Spanish film works.

As interviewees highlighted, before the emergence of Netflix, there was a minority audience who, regardless of their nationality, was generally keen on European cinema. This audience tended to be primarily interested in arthouse films from the United Kingdom, France, and Italy. Spanish cinema was seen as part of that European cinema, while popular directors like Pedro Almodóvar helped to stress its uniqueness. This situation persists today (even after Netflix has radically changed the way cinema is consumed), although only among a very specific audience: older spectators living in large urban centres who still prefer to watch films in movie theatres.



Film director Pedro Almodóvar at Goya Awards in 2020. Author: Pedro J. Pacheco (CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license). Source: Wikipedia

(<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Premios_Goya_2020_-_Pedro_Almod%C3%B3var.jpg>).

Younger audiences, who no longer consider film reviews when choosing a film but rather the recommendations of the Netflix algorithm, prefer to consume other types of films. In that sense, the film critics interviewed by the REBOOT Project point out that the top 10 most-watched productions on the platform in the United States do not usually include series or films that can be clearly *identified* with a European country. Most are American productions or European works that have been stripped of any sign of national identity. This is the case of the successful Spanish series *Money Heist* ("La Casa de Papel"), which is considered an international production and not primarily Spanish, although the actors, director, and production team are entirely Spanish.

European films consumed both on digital platforms and in American movie theatres are chosen much more consciously by audiences especially interested in this kind of (usually smaller) productions.

European cinema with an international vocation

European films that embrace international production and aesthetic models are more likely to achieve commercial success in the United States. This may be because films "made in Hollywood" are no longer truly American works, as some US film critics believe. Since the early 2000s, when American films began making 50% of their box office revenue overseas, strategic decisions were taken in order to make them more accessible to global audiences. This includes, among other modifications, reducing the dialogues or eliminating many nuances that would be lost in the translation and dubbing of films into other languages. In this regard, some experts consider the support of big European productions as the European Union's most recent strategy to ensure that European films can compete on a level playing field with their US competitors.

A type of international cinema that is fully accepted in the United States is that made by Spanish director J. A. Bayona, author of blockbusters shot mostly in English, such as *The Impossible* (2012), *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (2018), and *Society of the Snow* (2023). His productions are easily found in the catalogues of global VoD platforms, unlike most European works, which suffer from a significant lack of visibility.



Director J. A. Bayona (second from the left) with *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*'s actors at Japan Film's Premiere Red Carpet. Author: Dick Thomas Johnson (CC Attribution 2.0 Generic license). Source: Wikipedia

(<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jurassic_World_Fallen_Kingdom_Japan_Premiere_Red_Carpet_J._A._Bayona,_Colin_Trevorrow,_Chris_Pratt,_Bryce_Dallas_Howard,_Tamaki_Hi>).

roshi,_Kimura_Yoshino,_Mitsushima_Shinnosuke,_Ishikawa_Yui_%26_Sumida_Moeno_%2843055482312%29.jpg>)

The reputation of European cinema

The prestige of European cinema remains high among American audiences, although there are substantial differences between works coming from big countries such as France, Italy, and the United Kingdom and those produced by other European nations. In the experts' opinion, the image of Spanish cinema is improving among American audiences, especially in recent times, after the success achieved by international actors and directors like Antonio Banderas and Pedro Almodóvar. However, American audiences seem to know in general little about Spanish cinema. Spain is seen more as a production country, a place with especially attractive locations to shoot films, as it was already the case more than half a century ago, when the Spanish deserts were used as the backdrop for a great number of Hollywood Westerns filmed in the 1960s and 1970s.



Actor Antonio Banderas with his Award for Best Actor in the 2020 Goya Awards ceremony. Author: Pedro J. Pachecho (CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license). Source: Wikipedia (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antonio_Banderas_2020.jpg).

The identity of European cinema is however still strong, despite competition from major Hollywood productions, and is particularly appreciated by a specific segment of the American audiences. This segment, more knowable and cinephile, is interested in appreciating the differences between works from different authors and in diversifying its consumption of European cinema. Younger audiences consume European cinema to a greater extent through series and films created with an international vision and produced in the most competitive film industries on the area. Probably, these different ways of consuming European cinema by the US public are still, for the moment, two reasonably effective and complementary options.

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