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## PICTURE PURRFECT: GIANT 3D CAT DRAWS TOKYO CROWDS

Tokyo's neon cityscape has a futuristic new addition: a giant 3D cat that sleeps, meows and looks gingerly down at the crowd gathered below its high-tech screen. The white, black and orange feline appears between adverts on a new digital billboard in Shinjuku, one of the Japanese capital's busiest shopping and transit areas. It officially launched yesterday but has been making teaser appearances for several days, quickly drawing flocks of smartphone-clutching fans.

"He looks much more real than on YouTube. He's a beauty! And he is much bigger than I thought," university student Nanami Isawa told AFP. The cat gets its uncanny three-dimensional appearance from the curved 4K LED screen, which

has an area of nearly 155 square meters (1,668 square feet). Student Emine Atajanova said the cat was "so cute", adding that it looked larger and more impressive in real life than online. "Actually, it looks really real. I feel like when you look at social media, and the difference... it's like really pretty," she said. Another passer-by, who gave his name as Ryusuke, also said he was charmed by the creature: "It's nice that it's purring. I like it." — AFP

**A pedestrian takes pictures of a giant cat on a screen in Tokyo's Shinjuku district as Japan announces a new virus state of emergency stretching throughout the Tokyo Olympics. — AFP**



In this file photo Iranian actress and daughter of Jafar Panahi Solmaz Panahi (right) and Iranian actor and son of Jafar Panahi Panah Panahi arrive for the closing ceremony and the screening of the film "The Man Who Killed Don Quixote" at the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP photos

## Barred Iran director's son follows his footsteps to Cannes

You might think the family business did not seem so inviting to young Iranian filmmaker Panah Panahi, given that his acclaimed father has faced years of persecution at the hands of the authorities. But the 37-year-old made a splash at the Cannes film festival this weekend, presenting his first film "Hit the

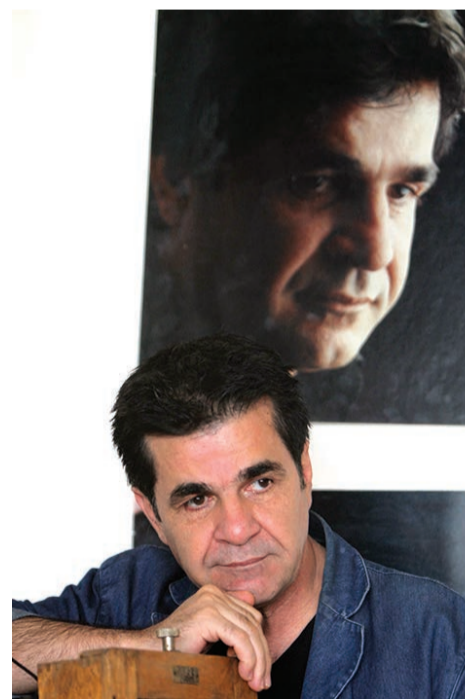
"Three Faces" in 2018.

But since being convicted of "propaganda against the system" in 2010, following his support for anti-government protests and a string of films that critiqued modern Iran, he has been barred from leaving the country to pick up any of these awards. None of this is what most concerned his son, however, as he toyed with becoming a director himself. "These things were a minor issue for me," he told AFP on the beach at Cannes. "My main problem throughout my life was how I could have a separate identity from my father. I was instinctively drawn to cinema with a passion... but this comparison was always there," he said. Eventually he "decided to only think of myself and what I want to achieve, and not occupy myself with the problems of my father or these comparisons. Otherwise, I'd never have been able to make films."

### 'A real issue'

The comparisons are hard to avoid, however. "Hit the Road" is playing in the Director's Fortnight at Cannes—the same section in which his father presented his classic "The White Balloon" in 1995, taking home Cannes' Prix de la Camera d'Or for best first film. The younger Panahi's effort is also a low-key triumph, a touching and amusing look at a family driving their son from Tehran to the border so he can leave the country. "I have close friends who have left Iran, so this is a real issue for me. All of my friends have reached a point of finding the situation intolerable," Panahi told AFP.

"I went with this idea that the boy had reached a total dead-end. This dead-end was a real one that I had witnessed for myself and those around me." But Panahi said he didn't want the specific situation in Iran to be his focus, and indeed the film is more about the bittersweet interactions between the family, including a hilariously high-spirited younger brother. "I wanted to avoid being too specific, so that if people from other countries watch the film, and their son or brother is dealing with similar problems, they can connect with him," the director said. — AFP



In this file photo Iranian film director Jafar Panahi posing in front of a picture of himself during an interview with AFP in Tehran.

Road" at an event that his father, Jafar Panahi, has been blocked from attending by Tehran for more than a decade. The elder Panahi has won a slew of awards at international festivals, including the top prize in Berlin for "Taxi" in 2015 and best screenplay at Cannes for his last film



British actress Jodie Turner-Smith poses as she arrives for the screening of the film "After Yang" as part of the Un Certain Regard selection at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival, southern France. — AFP

## Gem thieves rob Hollywood star at Cannes film festival

Hollywood star Jodie Turner-Smith has fallen victim to the curse of Cannes—the jewelry thieves who regularly haunt the world's biggest film festival. The British-born actress wore eye-catching Gucci gold and diamond jewelry to the red carpet premiere of her latest film "After Yang" on Thursday. The next morning her suite at the Marriott hotel in the Riviera resort was broken into while she was having breakfast with her one-year-old daughter. Police told AFP yesterday that they were investigating a theft of jewellery from the hotel but it was unclear

## 'Black Widow' spins new COVID-era box office record

New Disney superhero film "Black Widow" took in an estimated \$80 million in North America this three-day weekend, a pandemic-era record as the Marvel Universe showed continuing lure, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. The movie, starring Scarlett Johansson as the cat-suited superspy, took in an additional \$60 million streaming on Disney Plus (at \$29.99 for subscribers), and \$78 million internationally, for an impressive global total of \$218 million. Hollywood Reporter called it "unprecedented" for a studio to announce its streaming total on a film's opening weekend. The film has yet to open in China.

Far behind in second place was Universal's action thriller "F9: The Fast Saga," at \$10.9 million, down by more than half from last weekend's take. It had held the previous pandemic-era record with a \$70 million opening. Vin Diesel, Michelle Rodriguez and John Cena star in this ninth installment in the "Fast and Furious" franchise. Universal also claimed the next two box-office spots. In third was its animated sequel "The Boss Baby: Family Business," at \$8.7 million. The yarn about a cannily cando "boss baby" features the voices of Alec Baldwin, Eva Longoria, Jeff Goldblum and Lisa Kudrow.



US actress Scarlett Johansson

Horror film "The Forever Purge" placed fourth, at \$6.7 million. This latest in the "Purge" series is again set in a dystopian near-future where all crime, even murder, is made legal one day a year. Ana de la Reguera and Tenoch Huerta star. And in fifth was Paramount's "A Quiet Place: Part II," at \$3 million, pushing its domestic total near \$150 million in its seventh week. John Krasinski directed the horror flic; his wife Emily Blunt stars. This weekend marked the first time since Covid-19 struck that the domestic box office has surpassed \$100 million. It hit \$116.8 million, 20 percent higher than last weekend. Rounding out the top 5 were:

- "Cruella" (\$2.2 million)
- "The Hitman's Wife's Bodyguard" (\$1.6 million)
- "Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway" (\$1.3 million)
- "In the Heights" (\$630,000)
- "Zola" (\$620,000)—AFP

whether the jewelry was Gucci's-loaned for the premiere or the actress's own.

The star of "Queen & Slim" and the series "Nightflyers" and "The Last Ship" made no mention of her loss when she gave a "Women in Motion" talk at the festival Sunday. But she tweeted later: "I didn't think I would be spending 2.5 hours in the police station on my final day in Cannes, but here we are." It was the 34-year-old's first time at the festival. Cannes have become a notorious hunting ground for international cat burglars with a member of the infamous Pink Panthers gang suspected of taking gems worth 103 million euros (\$130 million) from the Carlton hotel in 2013. That same year a 1.6-million euro Chopard necklace was stolen at the film festival and gems worth only slightly less also went missing. — AFP

## 'Super Mario' video game cartridge sold for record \$1.5 million

A cartridge of Nintendo's classic video game "Super Mario 64" set a world record Sunday, selling at auction for \$1.56 million. The sale, the first ever of a game cartridge to surpass \$1 million, came just two days after a sealed copy of "The Legend of Zelda"

made for the old Nintendo NES console-sold for a then-record of \$870,000. Dallas-based Heritage Auctions, which handled both sales, has not identified the buyers. Before Friday, the record for a video game auction was the sale in April of a 1986 "Super Mario Bros."

cartridge: it went for \$660,000. Retro video games have become increasingly popular among nostalgic collectors in recent years, driving up prices for old-school consoles and cartridges at auctions. The past year has seen record prices not only for video games but also for Pokemon cards and for the digital collectibles known as NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens). — AFP



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

## Wes Anderson: The man who made his own film industry

Self-obsessed guys with daddy issues, maps, models and handwritten letters, probably some 1960s rock and definitely Bill Murray deadpanning-you know immediately whose universe you're in. "Wes Anderson is here tonight... He arrived on a bicycle made of antique tuba parts," joked Amy Poehler, hosting the Golden Globes a few years back. And everyone knew what she meant, because no one in film history has been so unblinkingly wedded to a specific off-beat vibe-from early successes like "The Royal Tenenbaums" through hits like "Fantastic Mr Fox" and "The Grand Budapest Hotel"—as the Texas-born director.



In this file photo US film director Wes Anderson poses in Paris. — AFP

Anderson returns yesterday with his 10th feature, "The French Dispatch", finally premiering at Cannes after last year's festival, where it was due to open, was cancelled by the pandemic. It is not a rom-com, slasher pic or dark thriller. It is a Wes Anderson movie, and at this stage in his career it seems unlikely he will ever make anything else. "Wes is only getting more Wes-like. (His first films) 'Bottle Rocket' and 'Rushmore' are practically naturalistic compared to where he's at now. Where will it end?" said Sophie Monks Kaufman, who wrote a book about him, "Close Ups: Wes Anderson".

### Award drought

The singular approach, full of meticulous sets and symmetrical shots, has certainly paid off. He has total creative control and an ever-growing menagerie of megastars eager to join his famously convivial sets. Timothee Chalamet and Benicio del Toro were the latest additions, expected to join him on the Cannes red carpet yesterday along with Anderson regulars Owen Wilson, Tilda Swinton and Adrien Brody.

"They do his films because it's fun," British critic Dorian Lynskey told AFP. "He's not a difficult guy and yet has that total aesthetic that you normally associate with difficult directors."

The adulation has not translated into many awards—Anderson has seven Oscar nominations but zero trophies—perhaps because he seems to exist in a parallel world to the rest of the film industry. "He never does anything to be successful," said Lynskey. Asked by Entertainment Weekly if he cared about awards, Anderson's own response was: "I would if I won more!"

### 'Brokenness and loss'

The miniature worlds look like chocolate box confections but are shot through with the hard facts of life: abandonment, self-delusion, suicide, the death of a parent or child. He has cited his parents' divorce when he was eight as the defining moment of his childhood, and broken families are a theme throughout his work. He returns endlessly to his childhood: filming in his own high school in Houston for "Rushmore", paying homage to youthful infatuations with explorer Jacques Cousteau ("The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou") and Roald Dahl ("Fantastic Mr Fox"). "He seems particularly nostalgic about the age of 12," writes Kaufman. "Wes can remember what it was like to be at that age and overwhelmed by a romantic crush, or when a book could become your whole world."

### 'My own handwriting'

Many find it all too twee. The winking irony and taste for analogue make him practically the definition of modern hipsterism: "Your barista's favorite director," as one YouTube parody put it. The style has leaked all over contemporary culture, from home decor to Gucci ads to countless films such as "Paddington" and "Lady Bird". It has spawned a hit Instagram account of real-life things that ought to be in his films, "Accidentally Wes Anderson", the director's personal favorite being a Croatian pancake stand.

This points to the fact that Anderson is not a cult figure, Kaufman told AFP: "He is too influential for that. He's more like his own cottage industry, and has been so successful at it that he doesn't have to woo the establishment or make a Marvel movie." Having built his world, he seems content in it. "There were times when I thought I should change my approach, but in fact, this is what I like to do," Anderson told NPR. "It's sort of like my handwriting as a movie director." — AFP