

Famous faces line up alongside new discoveries in...

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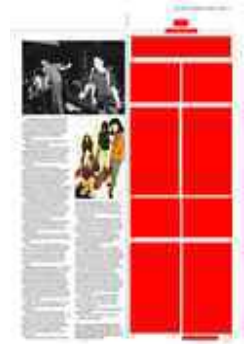
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Famous faces line up alongside new discoveries in this year's French Film Festival Here are four highlights.

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Film

ENZO

Seven weeks before shooting, Robin Campillo (best known for 2017's *BPM*, an energetic recap of the fight against AIDS) took over directing this last film by veteran director Laurent Cantet, who was then dying of cancer.

The two friends' sensibilities – gay and straight, older and younger – blend in this perceptive, ambiguous portrait of an upper-class teenager who rejects his family's ambitions to become a builder's labourer. Enzo turns out to be hopeless with a hammer but embraces workplace camaraderie – especially with the Ukrainian worker Vlad, whose honest toil and association with a just war fills him with a romantic yearning.

"His desire is haunted with a lot of elements," says Campillo. "He wants to go away with this guy: two people storming through the night. It's a fantasy but a fantasy connected to the body."

We forget the intensity of adolescence, he says, but we've all been there. "Everything burns inside you, everything is too much – and it's good."

CASE 137

A perfectly paced police procedural, Dominik Moll's immersive account of an internal investigation of police brutality finds its focus in a superb performance by Lea Drucker as the investigating officer. A family from a country town who came to Paris with the Yellow Vests movement, eager to protest against the closure of their local bus service, is devastated when a police officer shoots teenage Guillaume in the head. The boy is left with brain damage; meanwhile, his best friend goes to prison for six months. He did nothing but nobody in court listens to him.

"When the [Yellow Vests] protests began, I didn't know what to think of it," says Moll. The media painted the thousands of protesters as far-right extremists.

"And I guess in the beginning I fell for that. But then I started to get more

interested. It was mainly just people who wanted to be seen.

"What struck me was, after the lockdowns, nobody talked any more about this movement that had shaken the whole country. But the fractures are still present, so how can we talk about that?"

ALPHA

Julia Ducournau, whose flamboyant scorchers *Titane* won the Palme d'Or at Cannes a few years ago, takes a futuristic voyage into the lower depths as a virus turns the infected into crumbling ceramic statues. Alpha, 13, believes herself to be infected after a class bully forces a tattoo on her. Her uncle Amin, a junkie, hopes for death; her mother, a doctor whose hospital is surrounded by the rioting sick, is on the brink of collapse but compelled to care for everyone, even feckless Amin. "Too much love makes you crazy," he tells his niece between withdrawal spasms.

Ducournau's memories of the AIDS crisis, the scars left by the pandemic and her own immigrant family's crises are all part of *Alpha*'s searing, squalid mix. "If I am going to do a film with love, I cannot talk about another family than mine," she said in Cannes, where *Alpha* appalled at least as many people as it impressed. "Every time you make a film you expose a side of yourself you didn't even know existed before you started. That is what is scary: that you are naked in front of everyone."

THE LITTLE SISTER

Fatima is the youngest in her devoutly Muslim Algerian family, a beloved but puzzling daughter who hangs out with loudmouth boys and horses around, although she bristles when her family suggests she's a lesbian. Hafsia Herzi's adaptation of Fatima Daas' autofiction *The Last One* is no hackneyed coming-out story, however; it is about one girl's determination to establish her own identity, achieved on screen by an appealingly fresh performance by Nadia Melliti. An almost domestic intimacy tempers the drama of Fatima's first real affair – with a Korean nurse who turns out to suffer from crippling depression – her awkward relationship with her family and a toe-curling interview with the imam, to

whom she turns for advice.

"She doesn't talk about her life with anyone, so she goes to him," says Melliti, who spent a lot of time with Daas to prepare for the role. "But this is what I love in the book: this isn't someone who says no to her religion and education. She wants a way to live with the two of them. I identified with that. She was a fighter."



The festival runs until April 8.