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## Cannes 2011: Au revoir

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**S**o au revoir Nazi gaffes and the nightly procession of penguin-suited and designer-gowned celebrities — Cannes 2011 is officially fini, *writes Matt Mueller*. In a year where the standard of competition films was high, Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* emerged as a worthy recipient of the Palme d'Or despite splitting critical opinion.

Robert De Niro's jury seized the opportunity to recognise the elusive American auteur's ambitious, eccentric metaphysical musings over the more grounded tales of beloved European voices such as Aki Kaurismaki, the Dardenne brothers and the Turkish film-maker Nuri Bilge Ceylan, although the latter joined the Belgian siblings in splitting runner-up honours — the Grand Prix — with *Once upon a Time in Anatolia* and *The Kid with the Bike* respectively.

The Finnish film-maker Kaurismaki, however, is now 0-for-4 in competition, even though his offbeat, charming *Le Havre* was tipped as the early Palme d'Or frontrunner. Clearly, a jury made up of Uma Thurman, Jude Law and Olivier Assayas felt that opting for Kaurismaki's sweet but slight fable over Malick's visionary epic just wasn't the done thing at a festival that positions itself as the champion of cinematic art.

Nor were they in the mood to smile upon 2011's harsher competition entries — the Austrian slice-of-life paedophile drama *Michael*, by Markus Schleiner, or Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. Ramsay's accomplished, impressionistic portrait seems particularly hard done by, with the jury not even offering the consolation prize of Best Actress to Tilda Swinton. That went instead to Kirsten Dunst for *Melancholia*. Not that Dunst wasn't deserving, but it did feel like a message to Lars Von Trier that, although the festival came down on him like a ton of bricks, the jury recognised his tasteless jesting for what it was — a very bad joke blown out of all proportion. Equally, awarding Best Actor to Jean Dujardin for his splendid turn in Michel Hazanavicius's silent-movie homage, *The Artist*, over Michael Fuith's also excellent but deeply sinister performance as Michael's 35-year-old child rapist seemed to be an acknowledgment that Von Trier had thrown up enough controversy for one festival.

Elsewhere, the jury divvied up its prizes to reflect the outstanding level of competition, with Best Director going to the Dane Nicolas Winding Refn for his souped-up auto thriller *Drive*, and screenplay honours to Joseph Cedar for his Israeli father-son drama, *Footnote*.

Fantastic films, great festival, and a job well done by De Niro and his jury. Cannes 2011 will go down as a vintage year.