

## Paper Mache for 2-28-25 by David Read

Guilty! Yes, I do buy into the Academy Awards hype each year. Do I get a pass if I say that I'm a bona fide cinephile? Speaking of which, the 97th Awards ceremony is scheduled for this Sunday at 4 pm. As always, the nominations showcase a diverse array of films contending for Best Picture. For me, it helps to sift through the hundreds of new films each year and refine my choices about how to spend those hours in front of the big as well as small screen. Having seen all ten Best Picture nominees, I can state that they not only exemplify cinematic excellence but also delve into pressing social issues and themes. Here's my overview of each nominated film and the topics they explore.

Emilia Pérez is a Spanish-language film with a narrative that centers on a Mexican drug lord who undergoes gender transition, aiming to escape his criminal past and seek redemption. The film addresses themes of identity, transformation, and the quest for personal redemption. The Brutalist follows László Toth, a visionary Hungarian architect who emigrates to post-WW II America. The film explores themes of immigration, the pursuit of the American Dream, and the personal and professional challenges faced by immigrants striving to rebuild their lives in a new land. Wicked is a musical fantasy adaptation that reimagines the backstory of the witches from the Land of Oz. Beyond its enchanting musical numbers, Wicked delves into themes of friendship, societal prejudice, and the moral ambiguities of good versus evil.

A Complete Unknown is a biographical drama that chronicles the life of iconic musician Bob Dylan, exploring his impact on culture and music. The film delves into themes of artistic identity, the evolution of personal and public personas, and the societal influence of music as a form of expression and change. Conclave is a thriller that delves into the secretive process of electing a new pope. How timely considering Pope Francis' current health crisis. The film examines the intricate political and spiritual dynamics within the Catholic Church, highlighting themes of faith, power struggles, and the tension between tradition and modernity. Anora presents a modern-day Cinderella story set in Brooklyn, following a young lap dancer's fleeting escape from poverty. It addresses themes of socioeconomic struggle, the pursuit of a better life, and the harsh realities faced by those on the fringes of society.

The sequel to the epic science fiction saga, Dune: Part Two continues the story of political intrigue, environmental exploitation, and colonialism on the desert planet of Arrakis. It explores themes of power, resource control, and the complex interplay between indigenous cultures and imperialistic forces. The Substance is a body horror satire about a former fitness guru who resorts to extreme measures to regain her youth. The film critiques societal obsessions with beauty and aging, exploring themes of vanity, the pressures of maintaining relevance, and the lengths individuals will go to preserve their self-image. Based on a true story, the Portuguese-language film I'm Still Here follows Eunice Paiva's investigation into her husband's disappearance during a period of national turmoil in Brazil. The film poignantly considers themes of political oppression, human rights, and the personal toll of systemic injustice. Based on Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, Nickel Boys portrays the harrowing experiences of boys at a reform school in the Jim Crow-era South. It addresses themes of

systemic racism, abuse, and the enduring impact of historical injustices on African American communities. Collectively, the 2025 Best Picture nominees offer a rich tapestry of storytelling that reflects on diverse social issues, from personal identity and transformation to systemic oppression and the quest for justice, reflecting on the complexities of the human experience. May I have the envelope, please?