

The New York Times

MOVIE REVIEW

Immersed in Anger and Smothered by Loneliness 'Dissolution,' a Film Set in Israel by Nina Menkes



David Fire plays an unmoored and profoundly distressed soul in “Dissolution.”

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

Published: March 8, 2012

Thematically somber but visually luminous, “Dissolution,” the remarkable new work from the Israeli-American filmmaker Nina Menkes, explores a soul stained by blood and smothered by loneliness.

Following a young Israeli Jew (played by David Fire) living in a predominantly Arab section of Tel Aviv, the story (written by Ms. Menkes with contributions from Mr. Fire) loosely transplants Dostoyevsky’s “Crime and Punishment” to a present-day region paralyzed by violence. Unnamed, unmoored and profoundly depressed (though we don’t learn why until late in the film), the man spends his days wandering the streets and his evenings in desultory flirtations in a gloomy bar.

Both witness of, and contributor to, the anger around him — an innocent neighbor is stabbed by her jealous fiancé, and arguments bleed through closed doors — he appears increasingly hemmed in, the film’s hallways and stairwells offering only one way out.

Filmed in high-definition black and white, Ms. Menkes’s often exquisite compositions — a single, attenuated shot of the aftermath of a car crash is a miracle of choreography — drive a narrative mired in poverty and spiritual desperation. Though devoid of music, scenes pulse with the rhythms of brutality as our antihero sharpens a knife to the beat of a metronome, and gurgled screams echo off screen. Here, dreams and reality rub shoulders, and redemption seems as distant as peace itself.

This film has been designated as a Critics' Pick.

A version of this review appeared in print on March 9, 2012, on page C10 of the New York edition with the headline: Dissolution.
© 2012 The New York Times Company