

[← Back to Original Article](#)

Movie review: 'Dissolution'

A man who killed longs for redemption in Nina Menkes' effective drama.

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Experimental filmmaker Nina Menkes has a genius for making the moving images captured by her camera precisely expressive of the inner life of her characters, and beyond that, to suggest that whatever turmoil going on inside an individual is reflective of whatever's going on in the world in which he or she lives.

This is especially true of her latest film, "Dissolution," which is not only her most accessible but arguably her most accomplished work to date. Last year it won the top prize for an Israeli drama feature at the Jerusalem Film Festival <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/polls/films-of-2010-intro.php>.

"Dissolution," which was inspired by Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment," is a departure for Menkes in that for once her central figure is a man, but otherwise she continues to focus on isolated individuals living peripheral lives and striving to make sense of them.

Shot in a gloriously modulated black and white, "Dissolution" is a dazzling visual experience in which the camera pans and pauses for long shots that heighten the hero's loneliness. "Dissolution" is intuitive and rhythmic, and its images, camera movements and assemblage achieve a quality of perfection. This sense of poetic beauty is crucial to keeping a portrait of despair enthralling rather than depressing.

The film stars Didi Fire, a nonprofessional actor who also helped write the script and edit the movie. He plays a young Israeli living in a dreary apartment in the Arab quarter of Tel Aviv who is so desperate for funds he kills a neighborhood pawnbroker and steals her jewelry. But he is overcome with guilt as he increasingly longs for a redemption that proves elusive.

His aimless existence leads him to spend nights in near-empty bars and includes encounters, one that is grimly amusing, with many who have no answers for him.

"Dissolution," a kind of existential film noir, is rich in evocative imagery, and its inspired, confounding final moments are as astonishing as they are precise.

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'Dissolution'

No MPAA rating; In Hebrew with English subtitles

Running time: 1 hour, 28 minutes

Playing: At Downtown Independent, Los Angeles