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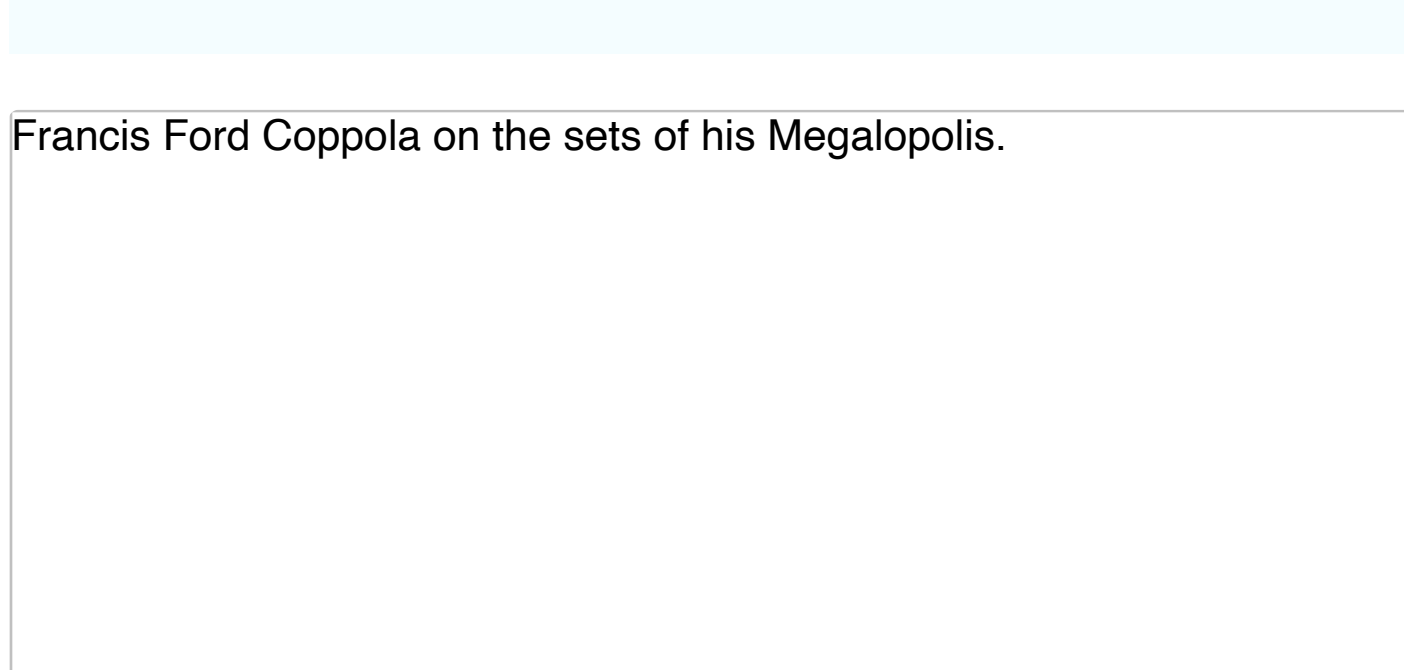
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Is Cannes Film Festival heavily tilted towards English-language fare this time?

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

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Cannes Film Festival is all set to take off on May 14 but there is some peculiar observation to be made about this year's films in competition.

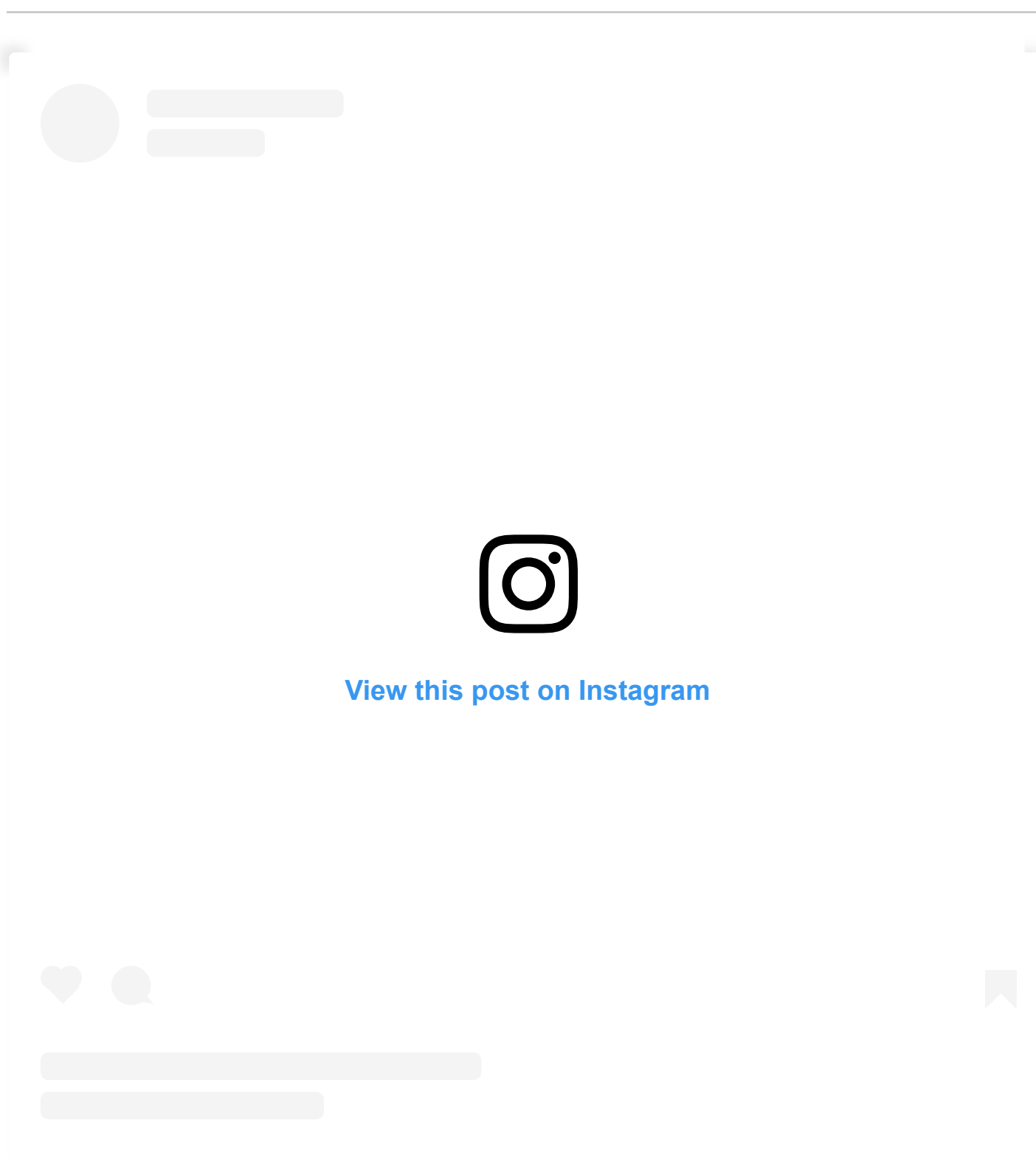


Francis Ford Coppola on the sets of his Megalopolis.

This year's **Cannes Film Festival** – to begin its roll on May 14 – is heavily tilted towards English-language work. There are 10 movies out of the 19 Competition titles announced on Thursday in Paris. They are The Apprentice, Bird, Emilia Perez, **Megalopolis**, The Shrouds, The Substance, Kinds of Kindness, Limonov, Anora and Oh Canada. This is a record. In 2018, there were only two in English, but in 2023, the number rose sharply to seven. **(Also read: Payal Kapadia' s All We Imagine As Light will be first Indian film to compete at Cannes Film Festival in 30 years)**

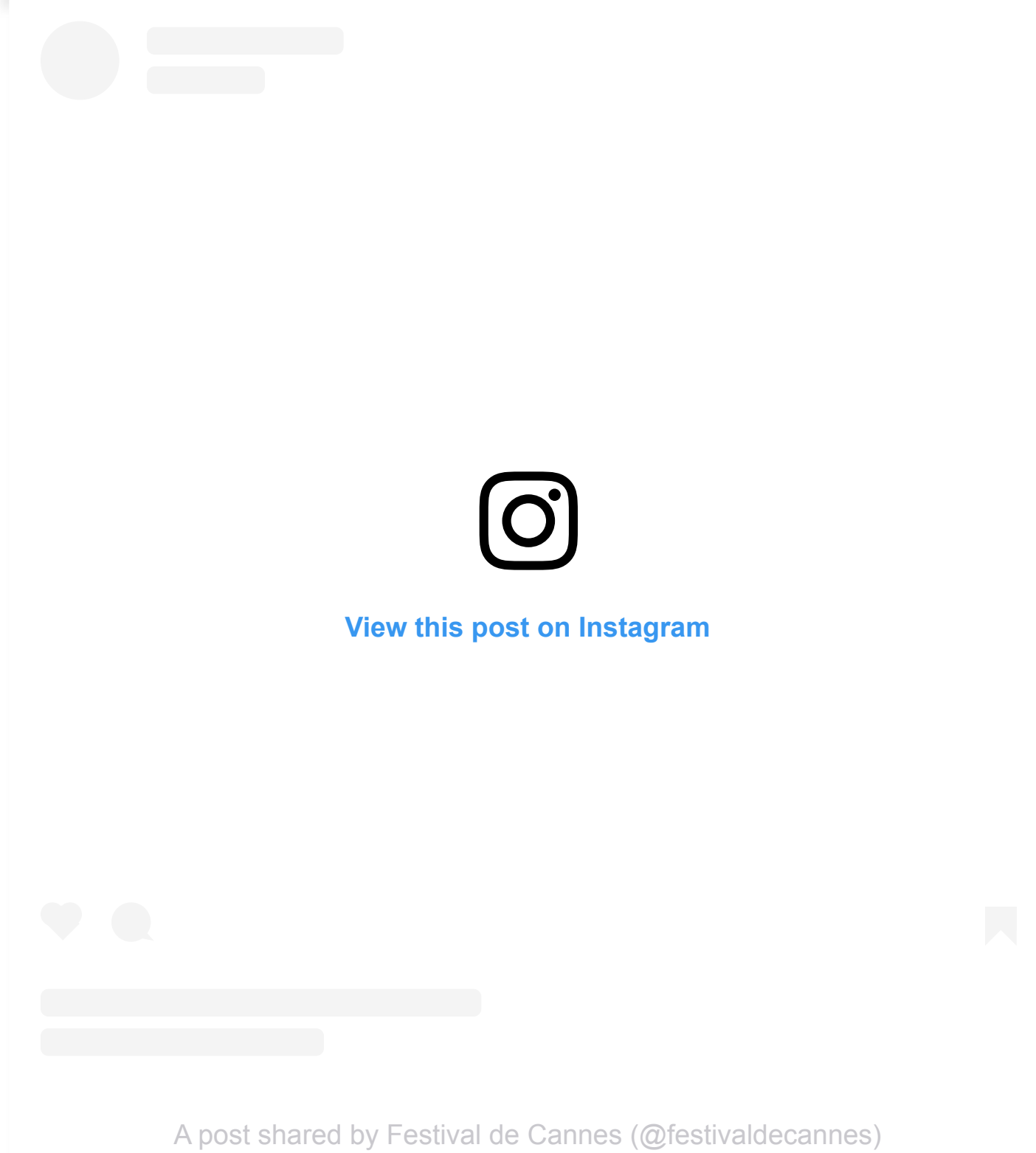
At the Press meet where the Festival lineup was revealed, the general-delegate, Thierry Fremaux, did say that "there is a strong American-Anglo-Saxon presence". But that is "coincidence", he quipped. Or is it? Over the three decades that I have covered the Festival (which was for a long time the premium event of this sort in the world, but now I would hesitate to say this with Venice becoming stronger and more attractive) I have seen a slow but steady rise in English-language fare.

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This is only to be expected. Although there are more Russian, German and French speakers in the world, English has been gaining ground as the lingua-franca. So, probably Cannes is following this trend, although the Festival may not admit this. Also, I have seen that American and British films attract far greater crowds at Cannes than those from other regions. Many arthouse directors in Europe (outside of Britain) have also begun to make their movies in English hoping to grab a greater slice of the market.

Cannes has also understood that big English projects (Megalopolis is one this year) can attract huge media spotlight – which is a very good thing for the market that runs along the 12-day festival. One report said that the "Festival President Iris Knobloch was keen to trumpet last year's record number of attendees, TV viewers and Oscar nominations". Cannes films generated an impressive 26 nominations.



If Cannes manages to keep pushing this trend, it may well mean that the Oscar awards season begins in May, not in September with Venice. So far, Venice had been the front runner here with many of its titles catching the eyeballs of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (which organises the Oscars).

At the Press conference, Fremaux was asked why there were fewer women directors in competition this time than in 2023 (Andrea Arnold, Coralie Fargeat and relative newcomers Payal Kapadia and Agathe Riedinger). Last year, there were seven, although there had been competitions with none or just one or two previously.

Fremaux averred: "The number of four female directors is the average number for the last few years. It is less than last year. As I've said in the past, Cannes is at the end of the chain, it's an echo of the world cinema, which last year produced lots of movies by women and this year a bit less. We need half a century to understand what is going on but the trend is that there are more and more female directors throughout the world. We keep saying it – and we will publish a study on this subject soon – that there are a lot of more female directors in competition and in the official selections overall by percentage than there are around the world. Each time we hesitate between a film that is by a man and one that is by a woman and we have to make a choice, we will go for the one that is more rare [the one by the woman]. Again, I repeat, we need to look at this issue across the year and not only on the day of the Cannes press conference to ensure the place of women in cinema."

By the way, he said that Indian journalists should be happy this year. Year after year, they were disappointed to find nothing from their country. There are two films in the lineup by Indian filmmakers – All We Imagine As Light (Payal Kapadia) and Santosh (Sandhya Suri). Then there is The Shameless with two Indian actresses -- Anasuya Sengupta and Mita Vashisht. A bit of this happens in Bengaluru but the work is helmed by Belgian director Konstantin Bojanov.

There is also a strong showing from Chinese directors, which Fremaux said, was a "as a welcome return for a country that has been less present on the international film stage of late".

Finally, Cannes has made an exception for the Saudi title, Norah. It was a big hit at the Red Sea International Film Festival at Jeddah last December. So, Cannes thought it might make an exception to the rule of "premieres only". I really do not remember a movie that came to Cannes after opening elsewhere.

The Festival runs till May 25.

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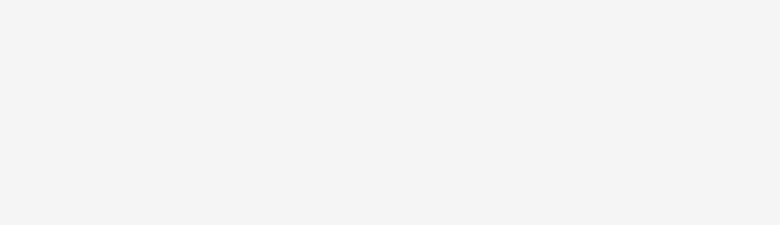
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