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## REEL WORLD



### Art and war

#### Real moments of beauty from multigenerational historical drama

**N**ever Look Away presents itself as an account of the formative years of a young German painter, before, during and after World War II. But with those historical settings and a large cast of interesting characters, this Oscar-nominated German-language film from Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck is also a sprawling sort of historical drama, a mixture of melodrama and docudrama that sometimes plays as if it were doing a run-up to miniseries status.

by  
**Juan-Carlos Selznick**



**Never Look Away**  
Opens Friday, March 8.  
Starring Tom Schilling, Paula Beer, Sebastian Koch, Saskia Rosendahl and Oliver Masucci. Directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. Pageant Theatre. Rated R.

And a good many other noteworthy characters emerge in the course of those reflections.

Barnert's development as an artist is a major narrative thread throughout, but it's not the only story in *Never Look Away*. The love story between the Kurt character and Ellie Seeband (Paula Beer), an art stu-

dent and kindred spirit, is one of them, as is the tale of Kurt's childhood adoration of his wildly unconventional and inspiring Aunt Elizabeth (Saskia Rosendahl).

Professor Carl Seeband (Sebastian Koch), Ellie's father, is also a striking shadow figure throughout—a gynecologist much involved in the Nazis' genetic purification schemes, a post-war captive who wins a respected role in East Germany via some pediatric heroics, and later still, a haunted but still successful defector to the West. He's an obvious and seemingly omnipresent villain here, but he's also the most sharply developed character in the film, thanks in particular to the ironies in Koch's shrewdly nuanced performance.

For Kurt in particular, the key counter forces to Professor Seeband and the sins of the German patriarchy are found in the ecstasies and insights of his doomed Aunt Elizabeth, and the radical musings and practices of Professor Antonius van Verten (Oliver Masucci), an experimental artist and teacher (who is clearly a version of the legendary post-WWII avant-gardist, Joseph Beuys). The performances of Rosendahl and Masucci in the latter two roles are definite high points in the film's celebration of the visionary potential in art—all art and any art.

All in all, von Donnersmarck's script is more than a little overloaded with coincidences, recurring motifs, and thematic shortcuts. But whatever its limitations in terms of realism, its bluntly stylized moments of "inspiration" bring forth some real and unexpected beauty. □