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SIX DAYS, THREE HUNDRED FILMS, BACK IN CINEMAS!

JI.HLAVA CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY

The 25th Ji.hlava IDFF, a key European documentary film festival, kicks-off in two weeks! Festival visitors can look forward to three hundred films including the latest Czech and international documentary cinema, a unique retrospective of Romanian experimental film, and a section dedicated to the American thinker and essayist Susan Sontag. This year's Ji.hlava Inspiration Forum will include a discussion with gender studies legend Judith Butler. The 25th Ji.hlava IDFF will take place on October 26–31.

The Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival marks a quarter of century in existence. *"Last year, we hoped to get together in person in Ji.hlava, but wasn't possible in the end. We believe that this year we will meet. And I'm convinced that this anniversary year will be an unforgettable experience, full of friendly encounters and surprising film experiences,"* says festival director Marek Hovorka. *"This year's visual identity of the festival taps into the spirit of dreaming because we all need peace and rest after the hectic times. And that is how we are approaching this year's edition of Ji.hlava: we want to create a little wellness for the mind and soul for the visitors of the festival events. Even one of the Inspiration Forum days will focus on mental health and the importance of such care."*

[This year's festival spot](#) was created by Filipino poet and filmmaker Khavn de la Cruz, whose work was presented by the Ji.hlava IDFF in 2006. *"Khavn de la Cruz is a prominent figure on the contemporary independent scene in the Philippines, and the Ji.hlava IDFF has been following his predominantly provocative and surprising work for fifteen years. Khavn himself has also been collaborating with Ji.hlava: he is currently leading the Ji.hlava Academy workshop for emerging filmmakers, and has been among of the jurors and authors of the festival diary,"* says Marek Hovorka commenting the choice.

Three hundred films, fewer festival sections

What will [this year's programme](#) offer? Almost three hundred films in competition and off-competition sections – the number of which has been reduced. *"Over the twenty-five years of its existence, the Ji.hlava IDFF has confirmed its position of the leading European documentary festival, known for its trailblazing approach and innovative programme. Therefore, we have upgraded the competitions as well as the structure of the awards in order to highlight the complexity of documentary cinema,"* explains Marek Hovorka.

Opus Bonum: Diverse tendencies

The main [Opus Bonum international competition](#), which will this year offer fifteen films in their world and international premieres, is a showcase of diverse techniques and tendencies found in contemporary world documentary cinema. This selection will feature, for example, a film essay by German director Lina Zacher (awarded at last year's Ji.hlava for her debut *Fonja*) entitled [Betula Pendula](#) – about how being blind shapes one's personality. [You Are Ceausescu to Me](#) made by Sebastian Mihăilescu will offer a collective portrait of contemporary Romanian youth, following their value priorities and their relationship to the history of their own country. Chinese director Rikun Zhu's intimate film [No Desire to Hide](#) explores the phenomenon of open romantic relationships in today's China. Mid-life crisis is reflected through the portrait of Czech film critic Kamil Fila in Martin Mareček's [Out in Force](#) which provides a more general reflection on the changes and forms of masculinity in the twenty-first century.

Susan Sontag: Filmmaking is a privilege

This year, the audience can look forward not only to latest documentary titles, but also to exceptional film retrospectives. For example, the 25th Ji.hlava invites to a screening of the film work of American thinker, award-winning writer and human rights activist [Susan Sontag](#). *"Susan Sontag claimed that filmmaking was a creative privilege. And she used this privilege with dignity. As a director, she has made two documentaries and three feature films that are extensions of her reflections on film, society, partnerships and politics. On top of that, her film works show the specific signature of an important intellectual and artist of the 20th century,"* says the section's programmer, David Čeněk.

Transparent Romania

The non-competition section [Transparent Landscape](#) will for the seventh year in a row showcase the cinema production from one selected country – this year visiting Romania. This unique retrospective of twenty-four films made in the underground conditions of totalitarian Romania between 1967 and 1989 will present a number of cinematic discoveries, including poetic film with industrial setting – [Alert!](#) (1967) by Mircea Saucan. This will be the film's first screening outside Romania. *"Since the 1960s, the Romanian experimental scene has concentrated in several cities. The artistic collective kino ikon was founded in Arad, the artistic group Sigma started in Timisoara, and another centre was Bucharest, where several unconventional filmmakers emerged. The films in this retrospective represent a variety of stylistic approaches, filmmaking techniques and authorial gestures,"* says Andrea Slováková, the programmer of this festival section.

Fifteen films in Czech Joy: Brotherhood and partisans

The [Czech Joy](#) competition section that focuses on new Czech documentaries will also present fifteen films. It will include a premiere of [Eyewitness](#) created by director and playwright Jiří Havelka, depicting the tragic events of June 1945, when 265 Carpathian Germans, Hungarians and Slovaks, mostly women and children, were killed during the brutalities that took place after WWII.

The Czech Joy competition will also feature the Czech premiere of [Brotherhood](#) by Francesco Montagner, a graduate of Prague's Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) that took home the Golden Leopard at this year's Locarno International Film Festival. The documentary tells the story of three Bosnian sheep-herding brothers, following their story as they grow up and tend to their flock and household during the years when their father is in prison for terrorism. *"I wanted to come as close to the reality as possible. At the same time, I wanted to give the film a poetic touch. A touch of magical realism,"* says the director.

The judiciary system and the political spheres in Slovakia are associated with corruption, violence and murders – but how do they really work? This is a question asked by director Zuzana Piussi in her film [Ordeal](#). Another Slovak documentary filmmaker, Vera Lacková, will be presenting her very personal film [How I Became a Partisan](#) in which she recounts the fate of her great-grandfather – a Romani partisan.

The film [Kinloss](#) directed by Alice Doušová portrays the life on one of the largest ships in the Danish Maersk Line's fleet of tankers, traversing the world's oceans. In the Czech festival premiere, Ivana Pauerová Milošević will offer a portrait of the typical "Czech fisherman" ([Peculiarity of Fisherman's Soul](#)). Together with journalist and director Tomáš Etzler the viewers will visit a Chinese orphanage in his film [Heaven](#).

Testimonies: Mansky about Gorbachev

The [Testimonies](#) section, which takes a look at current world events, will comprise eighteen films. Russian director Vitaly Mansky will bring his film [Gorbachev. Heaven](#). This portrait of the last leader of the USSR revolves around a struggle between two personalities: the 90-year-old legend of Russian politics, and father of Perestroika – and a critical filmmaker, interviewer, and a thinker. Both Gorbachev and Mansky offer their own perspective on the key moments of the fall of the Soviet empire thirty years ago. *"For me, he is the man who gave me the happiest years of my life. They were perhaps the hardest years in terms of living conditions – I had to work as a labourer at night and stand in a line for milk in the morning, which I didn't always get – but these years gave me hope. Hope is the most precious thing a person can have,"* the director says about Gorbachev in an interview with Dok.revue. After its premiere at Ji.hlava, the film will be released in Czech cinemas.

The nature documentary, [The Mushroom Speaks](#), by German director Marion Neumann is also a remarkable documentary piece. The film captures the uniqueness of the fungi species and other of its still unexplored qualities, such as their ability to survive in inhospitable environments, to communicate through mycelium or to destroy harmful substances by gradual ingestion.

[How to Kill a Cloud](#) by Finnish director Tuija Halttunen plays with a sci-fi-esque theme. The film follows meteorologist Hannele Korhonen, who is challenged by a wealthy sheikh from the United Arab Emirates to try to invent artificial rain. A documentary by the Berlin-based director Anna Caroline Arndt called [Roof of Leaves](#) takes a closer look at the phenomenon of polyamory: the film is an intimate confession of Constantin, Sarah and Gregor, who live in an open relationship. A struggle against the system, or rather protests against the construction of an airport, are the focus of [The Spark](#) by Swiss journalist Antoine Harari. *"I wanted to stop*

being a goods-producing commodity, who only buys goods and consumes his free time when on holiday," says one of the film's protagonists.

British university student with Nigerian roots Rob Lemkin follows the trail of Captain Voulet's murderous streak in the territory of the present Niger. [African Apocalypse](#) depicts how "a white man unleashed a deadly rampage with his colonial ambitions, the consequences of which affect the locals to this day."

Cow by British Oscar-winner Andrea Arnold

Various links and connections can be traced in the various parts of the festival programme. "A distinct focus is on the environment and the relationship between humans and nature," says Marek Hovorka. "Across continents, filmmakers deal with these issues more and more often, following protests, court cases and even observing the lives of animals. But the previous alarmist tone is now replaced by motivation for action and positive activism."

The [Constellations](#) section that traditionally presents a selection of the cream of the world's film festivals will screen [Cow](#) by British Oscar-winning director Andrea Arnold. The protagonist of this time-lapse documentary is a dairy cow named Luma. The film follows the animal, whose life is reduced to the exhausting cycle of calf rearing and milk production, for several years.

The same topic is also featured in a documentary by Italian director Andrea Dalpian. His documentary [Connection](#) follows two wolf cubs and their journey from captivity to freedom. The film [Animot](#) by Juliana Moska, which will be screened in the Czech Joy section, takes viewers to rescue stations for injured animals and observes the world through their eyes. The theme of animals injured due to human activity is also reflected in [From the Wild Sea](#) by Danish filmmaker Robin Petré that shows how human recklessness threatens marine life. "Rather than a film about the sea, it is a film from the sea. It's as if the sea itself is speaking to us," says Petré.

Another film worth watching is [Bigger Than Us](#) by French director Flore Vasseur about teenagers who fight for human rights, the protection of the planet and freedom of expression: at the cost of leaving their comfort zone into the danger zone. "The film proves that children too can change the world and set an example," says the film's protagonist, 18-year-old Melati. The film, featured at this year's Cannes Film Festival, will be shown in the [Special Event](#) section at Ji.hlava.

Short Joy: Audience chooses the winner

Before the start of the festival, the viewers will be treated to a preview of festival films from the [Short Joy](#) section. All nominated short docs shown in their world or international premiere will be available for free at [DAFilms.cz](#) and from October 11 as part of the online festival programme at [dafilms.com](#). This year again, the best film will be selected by online audiences worldwide and will be announced during the festival's Opening Ceremony. The vote is open until October 24. "The cooperation between DAFilms and Ji.hlava has been crucial and to some extent trailblazing from the very beginning. This also applies for the competition section Short Joy, which was screened online for viewers worldwide. This was completely unprecedented in

the days before the pandemic. We are happy that we can continue to promote short films around the world and help short format filmmakers gain visibility in the stiff competition of fiction films," says Diana Tabakov, Executive Director at DAFilms, about the competition.

Exprmntl.cz: Creation in isolation

A special competition of Czech experimental documentaries [Exprmntl.cz](#) will for the eleventh time present the latest works of contemporary avant-garde filmmakers. Layered essayistic formats meet with exploratory miniatures, films by established filmmakers stand alongside the playful inventiveness of works by an emerging generation of experimental filmmakers, or even students of film and art schools.

Back to the roots!

The programme also includes a [thematic retrospective of the Fascinations](#) experimental section. This year its main theme is dedicated to "roots". *"We have selected films from different historical periods that work with the theme of roots, whether as a visual motif, literally or figuratively,"* says Andrea Slováková. Roots thus become tangible through material and structural experiments, but also in performative or lyrical films. *"The symbolic level is represented, for instance, by the film The Living Room by Dutch artist Roderick Hietbrink: it is an observation of a struggle between a man and a tree,"* explains Slováková. Material films include, for example, the Czech film [Rutabaga](#) by František Wirth.

Inspiration Forum will bring Judith Butler and David Abram!

The [Inspiration Forum](#), which connects the film world with the world beyond, will be a part of the Ji.hlava IDFF for the eleventh time. *"We will be looking at mental health, equality and inequality, how digital technologies can help create a more just and fairer world, the relationship between humans and nature, and the online programme will deal with the challenges the Czech Republic is facing after the recent Parliamentary elections,"* says Tereza Swadoschová, programmer of the Inspiration Forum.

Visitors will be invited to discuss with personalities from across the world, including Afghan filmmaker Sahra Karimi, who became the first head of Afghan Film Organisation founded in 1968. *„Sahra will share her views on the situation in Afghanistan and on ways how to improve the country's future as well as the life of women,"* adds Swadoschová.

The programme will also feature a discussion with one of the most inspiring contemporary environmental thinkers – American ecologist and philosopher David Abram and among the stars of this year's Inspiration Forum will be American feminist, philosopher and gender studies legend Judith Butler.

Institute of Documentary Film celebrates its 20th anniversary

The [Institute of Documentary Film](#) marks its 20th anniversary this year. Its [Ex Oriente Film](#) workshop for film professionals and the public will offer a rich programme: masterclasses and lectures by leading documentary makers: Editor Phil Jandaly, director Agnieszka Zwiefka and

producer Julianna Ugrin. The East Silver Video Library will be open throughout the festival and the Silver Eye Award will recognize the best Central and Eastern European films.

dok.incubator marks 10 years at Ji.hlava

This year, the [doc.incubator](#) documentary workshop will also celebrate a special anniversary: ten years of its existence. The incubator has helped twelve films to make it to Sundance, eight to Berlinale and one to even become an Oscar nominee. It has contributed to the success of one hundred and fifty films from all corners of the world many of which were springboarded to world's top festivals. This year's anniversary will be celebrated at the Ji.hlava IDFF by a retrospective comprising five outstanding films that were presented at the workshop in the past. These will include the Sundance titles *The Earth Is Blue as an Orange* and *The Machine Which Makes Everything Disappear*, as well as an intimate portrait of a mother who decides to disappear from the world she has been living in (*The Disappearance of My Mother*), a probe into mystical architecture of Brasília (*A Machine To Live In*) and frank and open conversations about sex and sexuality (*Venus – Let's Talk About Sex*).

The 25th Ji.hlava IDFF will take place on October 26–31, 2021.

More information at www.ji-hlava.com / pressservice@ji-hlava.cz

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