PRESS RELEASE

AWARD-WINNING FILMS OF THE 29TH JI.HLAVA IDFF

Jihlava, November 1, 2025

29th Ji.hlava IDFF Announces its Winners!

The 29th Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival has announced its award-winning films. The best Czech documentary is *Time to the Target* by Vitaly Mansky made in Czech co-production. The Best World Documentary Award went to Polish filmmaker Natalia Koniarz for *Silver*. The Best Debut Award was given to *So Close, So Far* by Chinese director Yudi Zhu. The Audience Award went to *Mr. Nobody vs. Putin* by directors David Borenstein and Pavel Talankin. The Bolivian film collective Grupo Ukamau received the Award for Contribution to World Cinema.

Opus Bonum

The **Opus Bonum** section, representing the showcase of contemporary world documentary cinema, featured sixteen films this year.

The five-member jury selected <u>Silver</u> by Polish director **Natalia Koniarz** for the main award. "Some people in our winning film believe that their lives and deaths are governed by a ferocious demon-deity. But they're at the mercy of evils that are of this world too. Somehow, this enormously cinematic documentary makes gigantic issues like colonialism and economic disparity tangible, by telling its strange, sorrowful story — of a place as inhospitable as the surface of the moon — in images and soundscapes that even now remain scorched into our minds. Still practically feeling the grit beneath our fingernails and tasting the mineral dust on our tongues, the jury is honored to unanimously award the Best Documentary Film in the 2025 Opus Bonum Competition to Silver, directed by Natalia Koniarz," said the statement of the jury, consisting of Serbian director and screenwriter Ognjen Glavonić, Irish film critic Jessica Kiang, British director Dominic Lees, Georgian producer Tekla Machavariani, and Czech documentary filmmaker Jana Ševčíková. The winning film receives a cash prize of USD 10,000.

The jury also awarded two Special Mentions. The first went to the French film <u>Abysses</u> and <u>Wonders</u> directed by Jean Boiron-Lajous. "Philip Larkin has a famous poem that

starts: 'They fuck you up, your mum and dad. They may not mean to, but they do. They fill you with the faults they had. And add some extra, just for you.' Here all that fucked-up-ness is channelled into a bright, moving film that navigates real-life pain with impish fun and self-awareness, illuminated especially by the lovely, bickering relationship between the director and his blazingly cool and funny friend Christine," said the jury statement.

The second Special Mention was awarded to the creative duo Hilary Powell and Dan Edelstyn for the British film <u>Power Station</u>. "We can all feel overwhelmed into inaction when faced with oncoming environmental collapse. But here's a reminder that one person — or one funny, chatty, tirelessly energetic couple — can make a difference. For a how-to guide to staving off the end of the world, with humour, good-nature and fearlessness in the face of what the kids might call cringe, the jury awards a Special Mention for Social Impact to the inspirational Dan Edelstyn and Hilary Powell who prove that not just any house, but any person can become a Power Station," appreciated the jury.

The Award for Best Central and East European Documentary Film went to <u>Bürglkopf</u> by German director Lisa Polster. "With a new acute crisis springing up every day to consume all our attention and compassion, it can be easy to forget about the longer, more drawn-out traumas and tragedies that are often ongoing right in our own back yards. For a stirring, intelligent, beautifully shot act of empathy towards a community of refugees enduring what is essentially psychological torture by isolation on an Austrian mountaintop while tourists ski nearby, the Award for Best Central and East European Documentary Film goes to Bürglkopf, directed by Lisa Polster," stated the jury. The winning film receives a cash prize of EUR 3,000, in cooperation with the International Visegrad Fund.

The award for the best film from the Visegrad region was presented to <u>Silver</u>, directed by Polish filmmaker Natalia Koniarz. "Filmmakers are rightly wary of telling stories not their own. But cross-cultural understanding is not only possible, it is vital for bringing international attention to worker exploitation by the forces of global capitalism for which we are all responsible. For an outsider perspective that has nothing but respect for the dignity of a local population ensnared by an industry that both gives them their living, and all too often takes it away, the Award for the Best Documentary Film in the Visegrad Region goes to Silver from Polish director Natalia Koniarz," the jury stated.

The Award for the Best Editing went to Xavier Sirven for the French film <u>Abysses and Wonders</u>. "The road movie structure can often be an excuse for a loose and untamed narrative. But here the cutting is as dynamic and witty as the touching, steadfast friendship it outlines. Following the rhythms of an eventful road trip that proves the truth that the journey is always more important than the destination, the Award for Best Editing goes to Xavier Sirven, for knowing just when to speed along the highway, and

when to stop and smell the lavender, in director Jean Boiron-Lajous' Abysses and Wonders," said the jury statement.

The Best Cinematography Award went to Stanisław Cuske for <u>Silver</u> by Natalia Koniarz. "Deep underground, where there is little air and less light, it is hard to imagine there can be any beauty. Yet somehow, despite the forbidding conditions, lit only by flickering torchbeams, fizzing fuses and glowing cigarette tips, images of startling power emerge. For stunning, risky camerawork that sparkles darkly like the soot that clings to the slick torsos of the miners working in this wildly hostile environment, the Award for Best Cinematography goes to Stanisław Cuske for Silver, directed by Natalia Koniarz," said the jury in their statement.

The Best Sound Design Award was given to Henry Sims for <u>The Beauty of the Donkey</u> by director Dea Gjinovci. "If you listen carefully you can always hear the sounds of the past echoing in our present — whether it's the hammering of construction work for buildings that have long ago been torn down, the chatter of children now become adults, or the long silences that follow bursts of gunfire. Reflecting the high production values on display throughout this deeply personal yet ambitious work of family history, the Award for Best Sound Design goes to Henry Sims for director Dea Gjinovci's The Beauty of the Donkey," appreciated the jury.

The Award for Original Approach went to Diego Hernández for the Mexican film <u>Skyless Roof</u>. "We have all at some point noticed how disrupted sleep can make reality feel a little less real. But not so many of us manage to respond to this phenomenon with creativity and charm. As an example of a youthful, irreverent approach to old, stale divisions — between documentary and fiction, between wakefulness and sleep, and even between what is my story and what is yours — the Award for Original Approach, especially in recognition of the collaboration between cast member Liz Felix and director Diego Hernandez, goes to Skyless Roof," says the jury statement.

The Student Jury Award in the Opus Bonum section went to Peter Mettler for the Swiss-Canadian film While the Green Grass Grows: A Diary in Seven Parts. "The jury recognizes a film that, in today's fast-paced world, reminds us of the power of standstill, silence, and the present moment. With courage and creative freedom, it leads us to reflect deeply on time, memories, and our place in the world. The award goes to While the Green Grass Grows: A Diary in Seven Parts by director Peter Mettler," said the student jury.

Czech Joy

This year's Czech Joy competition presented eighteen Czech documentaries. The Best Czech Documentary Award went to <u>Time to the Target</u> by Vitaly Mansky. "Mansky's film is a kaleidoscope of collective memory and a true tribute to documentary

cinema. It is also a work that exceptionally sensitizes our attention — attention to time itself, to the fates of the inhabitants of Lviv. It reminds us that the war in Ukraine is not over, and neither should our need for its honest reflection ever end. As a native of the city, Mansky not only observes but also anticipates situations and turns of events. He gives his city an objective voice, creating space for freedom of life against the dogmatism of schematic interpretation, allowing social life to determine its own destiny. The film is essentially a unique love letter that maps and contemplates the question 'what is independence?' without pathos, yet with an intensity that feels almost physical," stated the jury. The five-member jury was composed of Polish cultural sociologist Ludmila Dobrovolná Władyniak, Czech dramaturge and screenwriter Ilona Smejkalová, Slovak cinematographer Simona Weisslechner, and Czech directors Tomáš Hlaváček (last year's winner in this category) and Aleš Suk, who lives and works in Croatia. The winning film receives a cash prize of CZK 200,000.

The jury also awarded a Special Mention to <u>What About Petey?</u> by Martin Trabalík. "In the film What About Petey?, a powerful individual story is confronted with the complicated situation of caring for disabled people in remote areas of the Czech Republic. However, the problem is not only outlined through the story of a specific family, but also through other persons who are involved in searching for solutions and helping the vulnerable. It is a strong and socially responsible film equipped with empathetic documentary language, which attempts not only to describe specific issues, but also to address the loneliness of people abandoned to their fate," stated the jury.

The Award for Best Editing went to <u>Unborn Father</u> by Michal Böhm. "The film by director and editor Michal Böhm recaps his family and relationship stories, but he also looks ahead to his own future, honestly moving between the past, the future, and the collected and filmed material itself. The work is experimental in form, seeking hidden depth in the banality of fragmented moments, uncovering new layers, stripping away random moments to reveal deeper connections. The experiences of one partnership or one seemingly ordinary family are thus imprinted on the deeper collective memory of the last seven years of all of us," said the jury.

The Best Cinematography Award in the Czech Joy section went to <u>Chronicle</u> by Martin Kollár. "In his film Chronicle, director Martin Kollár demonstrates his ability to be attentive and patient, but also his sense of a broader context that transcends the individual perspective. Kollár's Chronicle helps us remember the fleeting moments of the last eight years and also introspectively search our own memories, looking for ideas of small and large events in our lives. The camera shots are universal, but in a way also altar-like, meditative, and yet often simple and civil. And although the camera is distanced from the subjects, it is still very empathetic and non-manipulative," noted the jury.

The Best Sound Design Award was given to Martin Stýblo and Eliška Cílková for Kapralova by Petr Záruba. "In the film Kapralova, the story of composer and conductor Vítězslava Kaprálová is brought to life and revived primarily through sound and musical composition. Kaprálová's face and artistic identity are perfectly conveyed through sound, with Antonie Martinec Formanová's voice and the sound dramaturgy creating a perfect unity. The creators have succeeded not only in showing how Kaprálová's music enlivens and permeates the lives of performers and fans, but the music directly plays out specific lives and, across cultures, personifies the legacy of an exceptional artist who is unfortunately unknown to a wider audience," stated the jury.

The Award for Original Approach was given to Jan Strejcovský for <u>Is It Worth It!?</u> "Director Jan Strejcovský brilliantly captures the absurdity of today's world, where the distinction between consumer goods, art, and experimentation is blurred. His film Is It Worth It!? delightfully exposes the nonsense that accompanies such debates. He works with mystification and explores the relationships between the individual actors in a detective-like manner. It is an exciting game that constantly draws the audience into the story, as the film is not confined to just one ethical dimension. In both the literal and figurative sense of the word, it even reveals a kind of "vanity fair" — after all, not only the value of any work of art, but also human life is all too often expressed in terms of money," said the jury.

The Student Jury Award in the Czech Joy section was presented to <u>What About Petey?</u> by Martin Trabalík. "The film sensitively tackles a serious topic that needs to be discussed. It tells the story of Péta — a nearly adult boy with autism — and shows how demanding his care is, both for his family and for the staff at the respite care center. The documentary opens a discussion about the necessity of preserving human dignity even in the most challenging situations — situations that many of us can hardly imagine. The student jury selected this film for its sensitivity, authenticity, and ability to portray the topic of autism with deep understanding," the students stated.

First Lights

The First Lights section, showcasing directorial debuts, presented eleven films this year. The Main Award went to <u>So Close, So Far</u> by Chinese director Yudi Zhu. "This film shows how confrontation can also be care. It tells stories of great, looming systems of corruption without having to refer to them head on, making their telling all the more powerful," said the jury composed of Juliette Duret, curator at BOZAR Brussels; Mira Fornay, Slovak filmmaker; and Rachael Rakes, American writer and curator.

A Special Mention went to <u>The cats, the sea and everything in between.</u> by Karel Malkoun. "We liked the way she brought us into her family, her frailty, her joy and grief," stated the jury.

The Award for Best Cinematography went to Ludmila Cimbůrková and Maja Penčič for <u>Minimum Love</u> by Maja Penčič. "This director uses the camera as a way to meet people where they are, in spontaneous yet intimate scenes. The film shows how much can be made with the tools at hand, with curious angles, surprising closeups, and a singular voice," noted the jury.

The Award for Original Approach was presented to <u>Taste of Salt</u> by Syrian director based in Germany Raaed Al Kour. "For its uniquely tender approach to masculinity and its expressions in scenes of otherness. Encountering realities of migration through means of performative re-enactment and play," said the jury statement.

Fascinations

The Fascinations section, dedicated to experimental documentary films, presented twenty-four titles this year. The Award for the Most Interesting World Experimental Documentary went to <u>Land of Barbar</u> by Tunisian director Fredj Moussa.

"We honour this work for it's poetic and ironic portrayal of a socio-political reality that still endures — a mirror fragment reflecting the Chimaera, that collective western illusion of the ever-feared 'barbarians'," noted the jury.

A Special Mention was awarded to the Italian film <u>Transparencies</u> by Mario Blaconà. "For it's perspective on a more pressing-than-ever subject and it's attempt to discuss evil without reducing it to the obvious or the trivial, creating a space for reflection," appreciated the jury in its statement.

The Second Special Mention went to the Slovak film <u>Branching Light and Flickers</u> <u>of a Dawn</u> by Paula Malinowska. "This work combines the lyrical and the scientific, weaving a surreal, science-fiction—like tale that ultimately draws us back to the fragile beauty of our natural world," said the jury.

Fascinations: Exprmntl.cz

The Fascinations: Exprmntl.cz section, presenting the best of Czech experimental cinema, featured thirteen films. The Award for the Best Czech Experimental Film went to <u>tiny film about rape</u> by Nebe Motýlová. "A delicately woven collage gives voice to a girl's confession of the sexual violence she endured, underscoring the vital importance of consent and the scars left in its wake. And yet the film traces a path of healing," stated the jury.

A Special Mention in this section went to Zbyněk Baladrán for his film <u>The</u> <u>Totalitarian Society of the Image</u>. ""The film presents a dark critique of society's obsession with the consumption of goods and information, reflecting on the power structures of global capitalism," the jury concluded.

Testimonies

The Testimonies section presented fifteen films. The Main Award went to <u>The Tree of Authenticity</u> by Congolese director Sammy Baloji. "For its fearless illumination of the intertwined roots of colonization, race, nature, and slavery—revealing the wounds of our shared past with haunting truth and poetic power. With its breathtaking imagery, immersive sound design and the use of the non-human perspective of a tree the movie makes a powerful statement about the importance of acknowledging extractive colonial practices on personal, political and environmental levels," stated the jury, composed of Palestinian-Canadian physician and peace activist Izzeldin Abuelaish, Hungarian film editor and media artist Szilvia Ruszev, and Czech philosopher Ondřej Lánský.

A Special Mention was awarded to Canadian director Amber Fares for <u>Coexistence</u>, <u>My Ass!</u>

"For being fearless and unapologetic by giving a needed and important prospect on an extremely painful and dividing topic the movie offers a possibility to find compassion and eventually reconciliation through the sense of humor and self-irony," said the jury.

The Special Mention for the Best Film on Politics went to Polish director Joanna Grudzińska for *Poland versus History*.

"The movie addresses a sensitive and often silenced issue — the involvement of parts of Polish society in the persecution of Jews during World War II. By combining personal testimonies and historical research, it calls for a more truthful understanding of the past and challenges lingering myths in education and public discourse. We would like to award this movie for its profoundly important contribution to the public debate on historical memory. The Special Mention for Best Film on Politics in the Testimony section of 2025 goes to Poland versus History, directed by Joanna Grudzinska," stated the jury.

The Special Mention for the Best Film on Knowledge was awarded to the Norwegian film <u>Teenage Life Interrupted</u> by documentary filmmaker Åse Svenheim Drivenes. "For shedding light on the struggles, confusion, and resilience of adolescence. The movie serves as a heartfelt alarm and a lesson for parents and society—to listen, to learn, and to understand the unseen battles their children face in the journey to adulthood. We would like to award this movie for its profoundly important contribution to the public debate on mental health. The Special Mention for Best Film on Knowledge in the Testimony section of 2025 goes to Teenage Life Interrupted, directed by Åse Svenheim Drivenes," said the jury.

Virtual Reality

The Award for the Best VR Film went to <u>The Exploding Girl</u> by Caroline Poggi and Jonathan Vinel. "The work stands out for its layered metaphors of monstrosity and

despair that reflect the challenges of women – and, more broadly, of the individual – in contemporary society. We recognized the film's immersive and imaginative world, open to multiple readings, which drew on popular culture artifacts without resorting to straightforward intertextual references, and which evocatively conveys themes of loneliness and isolation," stated the jury, which included Czech game scholar Tereza Fousek Krobová, Italian philosopher Luca Marchetti, and British Tate Modern curator Valentine Umansky.

A Special Mention was awarded to <u>Shelter</u> by directing duo Sjoerd Swierstra and Ivanna Khitsinska. "We were impressed by the direct depiction of a reality often only perceived through the media. We particularly resonated with the scenes that allow viewers to feel the Ukrainian lived experiences of the people filmed and the deliberate claustrophobic emotions the technology enhances," said the jury.

A Second Special Mention went to Shiuan Yan for <u>Trans-composition</u>. "We particularly enjoyed the interplay of light and shadow and its deep connection to the author's culture and its symbolic underpinnings. The ties to idealized and rarefied personal memories that become, in turn, universal. The intricacies of an architecture that mirrors the intricacies of the self. And the narrator's voice that guides you throughout on a journey of amazement and wonder," said the jury statement.

Audience Award

The Audience Award this year went to <u>Mr. Nobody Against Putin</u> by directors David Borenstein and Pavel Talankin.

The Best Short Documentary in the **Short Joy** section, which featured 23 films, was awarded to the Austrian film <u>wedLOCK tradWIFE</u> by Gabriele Neudecker, a work that, with ironic exaggeration, comments on contemporary gender stereotypes and the return to "traditional" female roles.

The Award for Contribution to World Cinema was presented to Pedro Lijerón Vargas on behalf of the Bolivian film collective Grupo Ukamau, founded in the 1960s as one of the most distinctive representatives of the so-called *Third Cinema* – a radical movement rejecting both commercial and elitist notions of filmmaking and promoting cinema as a tool for social change. Grupo Ukamau's films have consistently given voice to Bolivia's Indigenous population, capturing their struggle against oppression, colonialism, and power structures. "Author collectives emphasize shared authorship, non-hierarchical creation, and present an alternative to the traditional film industry. This is a radical choice by the authors, and one we wish to pay tribute to. Therefore, we have decided to dedicate this year's Award for Contribution to World Cinema to one of these exceptional collectives – the Bolivian Grupo Ukamau," said Marek Hovorka, the director of Ji.hlava IDFF.

The festival traditionally also presented the **APA World Excellence Award**, which went to American producer **Joslyn Barnes** for her outstanding contribution to world cinema. "The greatest honor for me is always recognition from my own peers," said Barnes.

Night Journey by Tsai Ming-Liang

A highlight of this year's Ji.hlava was the world premiere of *Night Journey* by acclaimed Taiwanese director **Tsai Ming-Liang**. "A sleeping city, streets without people. A figure in red robes walking slowly. Across a carpet of leaves, across cobblestones, across cold pavement. Autumn night fog descends on the city. People in the cinema watching the monk's slow steps and falling asleep. Can spectres meet and understand each other?" says the film's annotation.

Night Journey was created in collaboration between Tsai Ming-Liang and FAMU students in just ten days as an homage to both cinema and Ji.hlava as a place of quiet dreaming.

For more information visit <u>ji-hlava.cz</u> or the festival's <u>Facebook</u>, <u>Instagram</u>, and <u>TikTok</u> profiles.

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