

PRESS RELEASE
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24th Ji.hlava will feature films about COVID-19: Ai Weiwei in Wuhan and Romanian documentarians in quarantine

The 24th Ji.hlava IDFF starts in three weeks. *“We believe that despite the pandemics, the festival will take place on site in Ji.hlava. Personal meetings are irreplaceable as a source of inspiration, and films are primarily made for the big screen”*, says Ji.hlava festival director Marek Hovorka. The current COVID-19 pandemic will also be reflected in this year’s festival programme not only in terms of safety measures, but also in the form of films dedicated to the issue. The Ji.hlava IDFF will show the latest film *CoroNation* by artist Ai Weiwei, capturing the situation of isolation in Wuhan at the start of the year.

Covid-19 started spreading into the world in December 2019 from Chinese city of Wuhan and turned the world upside-down. It affected the entire society as well as our culture. *“It is more than evident that the virus will change the whole society and these dramatic changes will also affect cinemas. Therefore, it is important to organize our festival, to support filmmakers, cinema operators and filmgoers,”* says Marek Hovorka. *“This year we will already bring the first films focusing on this phenomenon.”*

The audience will see the Czech premiere of **feature-length documentary by Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei**. The awaited film *CoroNation* captures events in Chinese Wuhan between January 23 and April 8, during the most challenging weeks of the quarantine. The film follows the stories of “ordinary” people mourning their dead, fighting bureaucracy and trying to “just” live. *“To maintain stability, the government uses huge amounts of money and many people to follow and control me,”* says a man who is desperately trying to get an urn with the ashes of his father from the authorities. *“Why don’t they use these sources to actually help us?”* he asks. Ai Weiwei, who also designed last year’s Ji.hlava awards, and his *Coronation* follow up on one of his previous films with a similar theme: seventeen years ago he critically captured the situation of the SARS epidemic in a documentary entitled *Eat, Drink and Be Merry* (2003).

The **world premiere of a Romanian film cycle *Around the Home in 60 Days*** that was made in spring of this year will be a more poetic experience. Seven Romanian documentary filmmakers reflect on the isolation due to pandemic and show different ways of coping with the crisis. Poetic montage of found footage is combined with compilations from public cameras around the world and with scenes from a puppet fairy-tale, and a visit from the outer space. *“Empty streets look exactly the same on one night at Sukhumi in Abkhazia as in the afternoon in Bucharest during a nationwide lockdown,”* to quote one of the films.

Spanish film *Interregnum* by directors Fernando Gómez-Luna and César Souto Vilanova. It unfolds through “film letters” exchanged by two friends: one in Spain, and the other in the USA. They could not work together in person as their countries were

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www.ji-hlava.com

**24th Ji.hlava International
Documentary Film Festival**

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most hit by the pandemic. Closed cities, isolation, frozen social and cultural life. The two friends decided to continue and survive the crisis actively: through lively correspondence using the film medium. Ji.hlava will host the world premiere of the film.

Dissipatio by Italian director Filippo Ticozzi is a cinematic contemplation on time in the pandemic world. *“Time turned into something peculiar. We were trying to be as silent as possible, terrified by our breath while our home turned into the kingdom of a new kind of time,”* says the director about their film project that will see its world premiere at Ji.hlava.

The topic of the **corona virus also reflects itself in experimental cinema**. Fascinations will show 14-minute hybrid film *The Devil Had Other Plans (Act 2)* by British director Guli Silberstein, which works with the viewers’ senses and reflects the “pandemic” feelings of fear and paranoia.

Czech docs that reflect on the pandemic will also be included in the popular section Czech Television Documentaries. Among the film titles will be Tereza Nvotová’s *New York in the Time of Corona*, a unique look at the “paused” New York, one of the epicentres of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Hospital in the Frontline* by Zuzana Kirchnerová Špidlová and Adam Ořha follows the extremely difficult work of healthcare professionals during the battle with COVID-19.

And what about Ji.hlava?

The Ji.hlava IDFF will take place as scheduled! *“We are getting ready for a physical event. Personal meetings are irreplaceable as an inspiration, and films are primarily made for the big screen. However, this can only happen if safe environment is guaranteed by the festival organizers,”* says Marek Hovorka, the Director of Ji.hlava IDFF, who continues: *“Of course, we expect less visitors, but the situation can also be seen from a different angle: this year, Ji.hlava will offer enough seats to watch films and enjoy discussions that were too packed in the previous years. Consequently, visitors can look forward to a unique and concentrated experience, pure inspiration.”*

Inspiration Forum using digital technology

The preparations of the Ji.hlava’s discussion platform – Inspiration Forum – which will this year see its tenth edition are also in full swing. The visitors can look forward to **six days packed with debates and discussions**. *“Digital technology will connect the audience and guests of the Inspiration Forum with speakers who cannot join the discussions directly in Czechia due the pandemic,”* says Marek Hovorka.

What topics will the Inspiration Forum offer? The potential of African continent will be discussed as well as the possibilities of feeding humankind and the impact of intelligent technology, the status of women in religion and why is the “crisis narrative” problematic. These issues will be explored for example by American professor Jessica Fanzo, who is an expert on nutrition and immunology and has for 20 years been researching the ways of reducing hunger in developing countries. The Forum’s guests will also feature South African philosopher Ndoni Mgunu, director of NGO Black Women in Science that supports African scientists. American journalist Peter Tinti, who

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focuses on human rights and organized crime, will talk about the issue of migration. The guest speakers will include Austrian social scientist and management philosopher Harald Katzmaier who is a prominent expert in applied analysis of social networks. The topic of digital capitalism will be discussed by German social scientist Philipp Staab.

The 24th Ji.hlava IDFF will take place on October 27 to November 1, 2020.

For more information visit www.ji-hlava.com festival [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#) profiles.

Contact: Ji.hlava IDFF Press service (pressservice@ji-hlava.cz)

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