PRESS RELEASE

AWARD-WINNING FILMS OF THE 30TH JI.HLAVA IDFF

Jihlava, November 1, 2026

30th Ji.hlava IDFF Announces its Winners!

The 30th Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival has announced its award-winning films! *Mohabat* by American documentary filmmaker James Longley won the Opus Bonum award for the most outstanding international documentary. The First Lights Award for the best debut went to *After the Rehearsal* by German director Philipp Fröhlich. Aleš Pojar received the Audience Award for *Mushroom Seconds*, his film portrait of poet and mushroom enthusiast Petr Hruška. The award for Best Czech Documentary was shared by Martin Páv's *Glowing* and Nikola Klinger's *Land of Fire*. This year, Ji.hlava honoured Vietnamese-American filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha and Czech documentarian Helena Třeštíková with the Award for Contribution to World Cinema. Ji.hlava Online runs from November 1 to 22, lasting three weeks for the first time.

"It is already clear that the jubilee 30th Ji.hlava has attracted more visitors than any previous edition. But even more important than the numbers are the tremendous number of excellent films, the intense discussions and the guests who have shared their unique experiences with all of us. Ji.hlava has demonstrated how essential independent cinema is to a stable society, and how rich contemporary Czech documentary filmmaking is. This is why it is vital that we stand up for the independence and stability of public-service media, as well as the institutions that create the conditions for Czech filmmakers. The fact that two Czech documentaries have received awards in the Czech Joy competition testifies to the strength of domestic filmmaking," says Ji.hlava IDFF director Marek Hovorka.

Award for Contribution to World Cinema

This year's Award for Contribution to World Cinema went to two outstanding filmmakers: Vietnamese-American filmmaker and theorist **Trinh T. Minh-ha** and Czech documentary director and FAMU lecturer **Helena Třeštíková**. *"Vietnamese-American director Trinh T. Minh-ha is one of the leading figures in international documentary cinema. Her radical approach transformed ethnographic filmmaking: guided by the principle of 'speaking nearby' rather than 'speaking about,' she involved the very people she filmed in the creative process,"* says Marek Hovorka.

"*It is symbolic that Helena Třeštíková received the Award for Contribution to World Cinema in the year when the festival celebrates its 30th anniversary. Helena attended the very first edition and has supported us ever since. In turn, we admire her filmmaking, patience and belief in long-term observational documentary, which helps us understand not only our past,"* adds Marek Hovorka.

Opus Bonum

This year, the Opus Bonum competition, showcasing contemporary documentary cinema from around the world, presented 16 films.

The five-member jury selected ***Mohabat*** by American filmmaker **James Longley** for the main award. "*Meticulously researched and exquisitely crafted, our chosen film casts a revealing light on life in rural Afghanistan under the Taliban through the story of twelve-year Mohabat, mourning the loss of his father in an American drone strike. Patiently observing the boy's interactions with his two older brothers and the routines and rhythms ofl ife in his village school, the film creates a complex and sympathetic portrait of an individual, a family, and a community stripping away the customary cliches,*" explained the jury, comprising Spanish producer, mentor and film scholar Marta Andreu, Dutch professor of film and media culture Patricia Pisters, Slovak documentary director Sára Prokopová, British professor of philosophy, art and film Murray Smith, and Czech filmmaker and theatre director Petr Zelenka. The winning film receives USD 10,000.

The jury also awarded a Special Mention to ***Songs From Within*** by Taiwanese documentary filmmaker **Elvis A-Liang Lu**. "*With very simple means and through the strong presence of its protagonists this film makes palpable the difficulty of non-conformity, especially when gender norms are determined by both Indigenous and Christian rules. Visually alluring, tender and full empathic contrasts between extrovert spectacle and introvert gloom, the Opus Bonum Special Mention goes to Songs from Within by Elvis A-Liang Lu,*" said the jury.

The Opus Bonum jury also presented an award for Best Central and Eastern European Film to ***Sacred Songs*** by **Nona Giunashvili**. "*Shot through with pictorial intelligence and a keen observational sensibility, our chosen film creates a sublime and surprising portrait of a community and an artistic practice caught between the currents of tradition and modernity. Juxtaposing, the layered, resonant vocal harmonies and dynamic dancing rhythms of the Sufi spiritual songs performed by the women of the Kist community in Georgia, with closely observed, telling moments in their everyday lives, the Opus Bonum prize for best Central and East European film goes to Nona Giunashvili's Sacred Songs,*" the jury explained.

The Best Visegrad Film award went to ***Love Exposed*** by Czech director **Filip Remunda**. "*Our chosen film in this category is an amusing portrait of the editor of the film's genius but totally ego maniacal father, nude photographer Vlastimir Kula. Editing the film becomes personal therapy resulting in a funny, daring and challenging portrait of a man who failed in his role as a father, but eventually leads to much needed reconciliation and a measure of forgiveness,*" said the jury. The award, presented in cooperation with the International Visegrad Fund, comes with EUR 3,000.

The Award for Original Approach went to Costa Rican, Chilean and Iraqi filmmaker **Ishtar Yasin Gutiérrez** for ***Life is There***. "*What if a moving image had the power of being alive, unpredictable, rough, free? What if a film were like a river, or a volcano, that moves, pushing forward what it finds in its way? Our chosen film in this category is built on an experience that unfolds, opening itself at each encounter, embracing the ghosts of the present and the past.... A film in the making, haunted and haunting, a film that reminds us that life and creation are also about getting lost, maybe the only guarantee to find our way back,*" the jury stated.

The Best Editing award went to editor **Yi-ling Huang** for ***Songs from Within*** by Taiwanese filmmaker Elvis A-Liang Lu. "*In an intelligent and subtly way, this film conveys much of its meaning through its suggestive editing that stirs the viewer's imagination and leaves room for empathic understanding of its characters,*" the jury wrote.

Best Cinematography went to ***Good Girls*** by Polish director **Ania Winiarska**. "*Filming life is about being present. The camera needs to find its place: the right distance to touch and be touched in return. In this film, the filmmaker's gaze discovers such closeness and intimacy that it makes others' vulnerability ours... our chosen film creates such a shared, sympathetic space that makes it impossible not to care about others' lives*," said the jury.

The Best Sound Design award went to Colombian editor **Diana Martínez** for ***19th Floor***, directed by **Patricia Ayala Ruiz**. "*Our chosen film explores the boundaries between distance and intimacy, public space and the private worlds of people living in the Bolgotá city. Through its self-reflexive approach and audiovisual counterpoint, the film creates a dialogue between political reality and an inner world processing the loss of loved ones. Bringing together three years of observations, the film layers time-lapse imagery from a 19th-floor window with urban soundscapes and the voices of the family members who are heard but never seen. It is this acoustic presence of memory and absence that turns the footage into a deeply layered diary essay,*" the jury observed.

The Opus Bonum Student Jury Award went to ***For the Moon*** by French-American filmmaker **Éric Baudelaire**. "*The jury commends a film that, in an era of visual smog, disinformation, and constant overstimulation, seeks a space within the blind spot of contemporary trends and technological advancements. The director has entrusted both the camera and creative freedom to those who perceive the world around us through touch, sound, and inner intuition. In doing so, he reveals an alternative—free from algorithms—rooted in mutual understanding, respect, and the pursuit of common ground.*" said the university student jury of Daniel Dvořák, Marie Kavinová, Ondřej Pavelka, Valentina Šimková and Filip Slezák.

First Lights

The First Lights competition, dedicated to debut films, presented 13 titles.

The main award went to ***After the Rehearsal*** by German director **Philipp Fröhlich**. "*In the spirit of the theatre of the absurd, this film creates a stunning yet mysterious cinematic investigation of the African now. With wit and delicate ferocity, it celebrates performance and parable. The phantasmal power of images that embrace fiction sets free the discourse surrounding Burundi, a country in constant transformation,*" said the jury, comprising Italian researcher Anja Boato, Italian film critic, programmer and curator Daniela Persico, and American filmmaker and poet Lynne Sachs. The winning film receives USD 5,000.

A Special Mention went to **Journey** by Congolese director **Eli Maene**. "*The journey of an artist-pastor and a dancer through the streets of Kinshasa offers a compeling glance at the challanges and the everyday beauty of Congolese society. We see scenes of pollution and poverty, while also recognizing the comunity's natural strength. By mixing fiction and documentary, this film invites viewers into the city of Kinshasa through these two charasmatic and sassy characters,*" said the jury.

Best Cinematography went to the Swiss-French film ***Saudades Eternas*** by **Emma Boccanfuso**. "In this film the camera follows a cast of characters whose magnetic presence fills the sceen. Their strength and sense of

humor transform a documentary about a city marked by extreme violence into a compelling portrait of an extraordinary family. The camera captures their essence through a visual style that conveys both their beauty and their spontaineity. Here we discover a remarkably accomplished director with a camera in her hand," the jury stated.

Best Sound Design went to **Voices from Neptune** by filmmakers **Leinad Pájaro De la Hoz** and **Manuel Escorihuela**. "T*his is a film in which images compliment the explosive power of sound which emerges as the central narrative and emotional force. Oral testimonies and empty landscapes intertwine to evoke a deep sense of loss. By pushing us to a heightened state of listening, the film makes us profoundly aware of absence and longing,*" said the jury.

The Award for Original Approach went to the Korean film ***Erotic Blossoms in a Dream*** by **Jihyeon Oh**. "*When watching a film sends us to another universe, we know we have encountered a new way of thinking about the alchemy of cinema. This film presents us with a remarkable awareness of our desires - both objects and aesthetic. It offers an intelligent, mature and original take on an essential concept employing powerful metaphors and inventive editing,*" explained the jury.

The FIPRESCI Prize, presented by the International Federation of Film Critics through a jury dedicated to First Lights, went to ***Journey*** by Congolese filmmaker **Eli Maene**. *"Within a highly globalised debut section, this film struck us as the most authentic. It's an honest portrait of an unforgiving metropole that still gives space for spiritual connection, artistic creation and existential reflection. The filmmaker dares to depict his immediate surroundings as being in damnation. Yet, his generous gaze makes us believe that salvation still seems within reach. For this delicate balance, the first ever FIPRESCI award at Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival goes to Journey by Eli Maene, "* said the jury: Czech screenwriter and author Tereza Brdečková, Dutch film critic Hugo Emmerzael and Canadian cultural journalist and film programmer Marc Glassman.

Czech Joy

This year's Czech Joy competition featured 27 documentaries.

The jury awarded its top prize to two films: ***Glowing*** by **Martin Páv** and ***Land of Fire*** by **Nikola Klinger**. "*This year's Czech documentary competition featured a record twenty-seven films, ranging from short student films to feature-length works by star filmmakers. The selection reflected the diversity of creative approaches, formats and themes, as well as the unflagging energy of the domestic documentary scene. The jury decided not to award a special mention, but instead to highlight two films whose filmmakers – each in their own unique way – inspire by stepping beyond local, Czech contexts and, through thoughtful directorial choices, explore the possibilities of personal freedom under mounting pressures in distant corners of the globe. The award for Best Film is shared equally by Land of Fire and Glowing,*" said the jury: film historian, lecturer and journalist Jindřiška Bláhová, Slovak cinematographer Eva Gabrižová and director and producer Vitaly Mansky.

The Best Editing award went to **Sebastian Kučkovský** for ***Anatomy of a Crash***, directed by **Vít Klusák**. *"This masterful editing brings documentary footage and staged scenes together into a cohesive narrative, gives it a compelling emotional rhythm, and transforms it into a gripping cinematic experience. The film would not have such a powerful impact without it,*" the jury said.

The Best Sound Design award went to **Jakub Jurásek** and **Marek Buranovský** for ***Wasteland Chronicles*** by **Viera Čákanyová**, **Barbora Sliepková** and **Lucia Kašová**. "*We wish to highlight the thoughtful handling of the film's sound and its role in developing the narrative. The sound design was particularly compelling in moments that allowed for a deeper immersion into the subject matter, enabling a focus on the core content itself. Furthermore, it added an extra dimension to the film through an experimental approach and a rich sonic texture. We also commend the sensitive use of tension and rhythm, which bolstered the narrative dynamics and created space for an emotional connection between the viewer and the film,*" the jury explained.

Best Cinematography went to **Matěj Piňos** for ***Light it Before it Burns*** by director **Markéta Ekrt Válková**. "*We appreciated the original approach to the film's visual realization within the framework of a more classical style of documentary storytelling. We particularly highlight the well-conceived visual consistency in the portrayal of the individual protagonists, which functions as an imaginative device in its own right. The cinematographer succeeded in conveying the gravity of the subject matter to the viewer through a playful and engaging visual style, thereby making a significant contribution to the film's exceptional artistic quality,*" said the jury.

The Award for Original Approach went to director **Karolína Hovězáková** for ***Love Video Letter***. *"This exceptional student work impressed us with its authenticity and the ease with which it challenges conventions regarding the subject matter of documentary film. We found it a refreshing piece, situated somewhere between an amateur recording and a significant statement from the younger generation. The filmmaker's own presence in the film further enhanced a sense of positive, uninhibited spirit. We look forward to future films that embrace a similar narrative freedom, as we see in this approach the potential for fresh, personal perspectives on the contemporary world,*" the jury stated.

The Czech Joy Student Jury Award went to **Georgij Mežujev** for ***My Father from the Island Russia***. "*A film that boldly addresses a political taboo won the favor of the student jury for its intimacy, sincerity, and authenticity. Even within a short timeframe, it manages to captivate the viewer and draw them into a disturbing reality. Facing difficult circumstances brought about by the geopolitical situation, the filmmaker utilizes virtual contact with his father,*" said the secondary-school jury of Viktorie Klímová, Kryštof Kopecký, Nela Krutišová, Eliška Kubátová and Jana Uřičářová.

The newly introduced award for Best Short Film in Czech Joy went to Ukrainian director **Dariia Kovalchuk** for ***Donbas Within Reach***. "*What can one take away from a home that is ceasing to exist? How does one remember a personal space that, amidst a horrific conflict, is reduced to a mere statistic? Returning as a way forward. A journey through places and memories that conveys—with almost tactile immediacy—something otherwise difficult to grasp: the trauma of loss caused by war, and the power of memory to hold onto what is truly essential,*" the jury stated.

Testimonies

The Testimonies competition featured 15 films.

Its main award went to ***Barbara Forever*** by American director **Brydie O'Connor**. "*A compelling cinematic study that breaks several taboos simultaneously: lesbian and female emancipation, aging, and terminal illness. This exceptionally empathetic film incorporates experimental footage—shot by the protagonist herself over the span of five decades—in a highly creative manner,*" stated the jury of journalist and presenter Linda

Bartošová, visual anthropologist and documentary theorist Tomáš Hirt, and human-rights activist Anna Šabatová.

The Special Mention for Best Film on Politics went to ***771 Days*** by Afghan director **Zainab Entezar**. "The director is also a participant in a courageous struggle for women's rights under an emerging authoritarian regime. The subtle motif of changing attire serves here as a testament to intensifying oppression," the jury said.

The Special Mention for Best Film on Knowledge went to ***The Sessions*** by Belgian director **Sien Versteyhe**. "*A minimalist documentary revealing the inner experience of a survivor of sexual violence. In an understated yet all the more impactful way, it reconstructs the experience of trauma, which the protagonist processes through therapy,"* said the jury.

The Special Mention for Best Film on Nature went to ***Light it Before it Burns*** by **Markéta Ekrt Válková**. *"The film approaches a complex ecological topic in an accessible and humorous way, demonstrating that even a fire can bring a new lease on life to nature. It illustrates, in a straightforward manner, that what appears to be a catastrophe can actually be a crucial step toward recovery*," the jury explained.

Fascinations

The Fascinations section screened 26 films.

The award for Best International Experimental Documentary went to Slovak director **Dominika Kováčová** for ***Elusiveness of Today***. "*For its gentle ability to take the viewer from the confines of the physical space in which an elderly woman is bound, to the boundless jam of her mental universe, and for the eloquent play of light and accomplished camera work, the jury gives the Award for the Best World Experimental Documentary Film award 2026 to Elusiveness of Today directed by Dominika Kováčová,*" stated the three-member jury for Fascinations and Fascinations: Exprmntl.cz: French researcher and art curator Rasha Salti, German curator Christoph Terhechte and German artist Johanna Terhechte.

The jury also awarded a Special Mention to ***Identity and Transit Document No. 4*** by Cuban director **Rocío Salima**. *"For its dexterous play between silences and testimony, lensing from anonymous faces in a crowd to a personal story of a mother and daughter in the journey of migration, the jury would like to recognize in a special mention the film Identity and Transit Document No.4 directed by Rocío Salima, "* the jury stated.

Fascinations: Exprmntl.cz

The Fascinations: Exprmntl.cz section, highlighting the best of Czech experimental film, screened 14 titles. The award for Best Czech Experimental Film went to ***On the Peaks of All the Beech Mountains*** by **Klára Trsková** and **Anežka Horová**. The jury praised the film "*For the political courage of recalling one among many dark chapters in our contemporary history, for the relevance of denouncing ethnic cleansing during complex and painful historical moments today, for the sophisticated and stirring filmmaking.*"

Audience Award

The Audience Award went to director **Aleš Pojar** for ***Mushroom Seconds***, a portrait of poet and mushroom enthusiast Petr Hruška selected by Ji.hlava audiences through a vote.

Short Joy

The winning short film is ***never been there, never.*** by **Joseph Vitali**. This observational portrait offers an intimate look at the realities faced by Filipino workers, especially in retail and services, and raises questions about working conditions and the right to rest. The film was selected by audiences voting online on DAFilms.

Ji.hlava Industry Awards 2026

See the list of all Industry Awards here.

For more information visit ji-hlava.com or the festival's Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok profiles.

30th Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival

23. 10.—1. 11. 2026

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