

PRESS RELEASE

Ji.HLAVA TURNS 30!

LINE-UP UNVEILED: ANNIVERSARY EDITION TO SHOWCASE OVER 350 FILMS TURNS THIRTY

Jihlava, October 9, 2026

‘Documentary Film Is Experiencing a Golden Age,’ says Marek Hovorka

The anniversary edition of the Ji.hlava IDFF is just around the corner! The festival’s 30th edition will showcase 350 films in total. Alongside the latest films from the Czech Republic and abroad, the programme includes the unique Films That Changed the World section and a retrospective of Vietnamese-American filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha. The first Ji.hlava films can already be watched: the Short Joy competition is available free of charge on DAFilms.com, and the audiences vote the winner. This year’s Inspiration Forum will welcome archaeologist David Wengrow and political philosopher and writer Lea Ypi. The 30th Ji.hlava IDFF takes place from October 23 to November 1.

This year, the Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival will present 350 films across its competitive and non-competitive sections, including 106 world premieres, 28 international premieres and 8 European premieres.

‘The thirtieth Ji.hlava will offer a strong programme full of premieres, festival hits and discoveries. The main competitions will bring together new works by James Longley, a two-time Oscar nominee, and Iraqi-Chilean-Costa Rican director Ishtar Yasin Gutiérrez, whose previous film won one of the top prizes at the prestigious European festival IDFA, alongside debuts by filmmakers from Argentina, Colombia, Burundi and South Korea. We will also celebrate thirty years of the festival with the largest-ever presence of Czech films in the international competitions and by expanding Czech Joy with a special short film award. Our non-competitive sections will present fresh highlights from Venice and notable films from Cannes, Berlin, Sundance and Locarno. But the festival also helps films in development and production. Iranian director Ali Razi and Pulitzer Prize winner Lindsey Sitz, among others, will present their forthcoming projects at the Ji.hlava New Visions Forum. For several years now, I have felt that documentary film is experiencing a golden age – and this incredible journey continues,’ says festival director Marek Hovorka.

‘Over thirty years, the festival has screened 6,388 films, seen by approximately 940,000 viewers in total. We are therefore very likely to pass the one-million-viewer mark this year. Impressive as that figure is, the festival’s ten-day format has in recent years made the event comfortable for both returning and new audiences. The anniversary edition is thus an ideal opportunity to visit, whether you already know Ji.hlava or will be attending for the first time,’ Hovorka adds.

Opus Bonum Competition: Finding One's Place in Society, War and a Stray Cat

[Opus Bonum](#), the competition presenting some of the most compelling work in international documentary cinema, will feature 14 films this year.

The international Opus Bonum competition brings together films about finding one's place in society, the effects of war and its aftermath, and humanity's relationship to place, time and the surrounding world. The Taiwanese film [The Songs from Within](#), directed by **Elvis A-Liang Lu**, follows two siblings from the Paiwan community who do not identify with local ideals of masculinity. Both adopt female alter egos and find room for self-expression through music and dance. This sensitive work explores social exclusion and the discovery of gender identity in a setting that prefers to ignore queer people rather than embrace their differences.

The Swiss film [Small Talk](#) by **Mateo Ybarra** takes audiences inside Switzerland's last remaining etiquette school, where women from different countries learn table manners, hosting and social protocol. The Swedish-Finnish film [Good Girls](#) by **Ania Winiarska** is set in a Catholic correctional institution for teenage girls in Polish Łódź, where daily life is governed by discipline, surveillance and enforced obedience. Their different experiences are united by the difficulty of escaping the influence of one's family and upbringing.

Several films reflect on armed conflicts and their consequences. The Lithuanian-German-Latvian [Baltic UXO](#), directed by **Agnė Dovydaitytė** and **Alexander Belinsky**, follows scientists, fishermen and coastal residents around the Baltic and North Seas, where approximately 1.6 million tonnes of unexploded military munitions remained after the Second World War. The film reminds us that the consequences of wartime decisions do not end with the war: they can transform nature and the lives of its inhabitants for generations. The American-Afghan [Mohabat](#) by **James Longley** portrays a twelve-year-old boy growing up in an orphanage after his father was killed in a drone strike. His experience is far from exceptional: many children there have lost parents and other loved ones to war. In this sensitive portrait of a childhood cut short, individual suffering intersects with the wider social consequences of a protracted conflict. The Ukrainian-Latvian [I See No Death](#) by **Yevhen Titarenko** follows a Ukrainian unmanned systems unit. Here war also takes place on operators' screens, where destruction becomes a technical task and death a handful of pixels.

The Iranian film [Outside/Inside](#) by **Maani Petgar** chronicles seven years in the lives of the director and Ceci, a stray cat who moves from the street into his flat without abandoning the world of other cats, neighbours and the city. In the French film [For the Moon](#), director **Éric Baudelaire** hands the camera to five students at a Parisian institute for blind young people, who record their everyday lives, memories and artistic work through sound, music, touch and other senses. This sensitive collective portrait shifts attention from what its protagonists cannot see to the ways they perceive the world through hearing, touch and other senses.

Explore all films in the Opus Bonum section [HERE](#).

First Lights Competition: Saint Lucy, a Landfill in Kinshasa and Eroticism

The [First Lights competition](#) will present 13 remarkable debuts. Several films return to personal histories, reconstructing them through personal or found images.

The Argentine film [I Hope You Fall in Love](#) by **Ariel Feldman** is an autobiographical chronicle of his romantic relationships. Alongside interviews with former partners and his parents, it features old footage from romantic holidays, the director wandering alone through his apartment, walking his dog and the very process of editing the film. The French-Italian [The Lucias](#) by **Clizia Centorrino** returns to the director's native Sicilian village, where a procession honouring Saint Lucy has taken place for centuries. The director interviews women who have portrayed the saint over the years, combining their testimonies with amateur recordings of the procession. As perceptions of the saint evolve, the film also traces the history of Sicilian women. The Ukrainian-Czech [Water Wears Away](#) by **Kateryna Ruzhyna** draws on old home videos of her childhood in Zaporizhzhia. She searches them for traces of Russian cultural influence, confronting the images with her present-day experience as an émigré in Prague and conversations with friends from Ukraine and Russia.

Other films observe daily life in places marked by violence or scarcity. The Congolese film [Journey](#) by **Eli Maene** opens with people searching through a landfill in Kinshasa and continues with the story of a local painter who runs out of paint days before an exhibition. Unable to raise money, he decides to become a Christian street preacher. The Swiss-French [Saudades Eternas](#) by **Emma Boccanfuso** takes viewers into a household in Rio de Janeiro's Chapéu Mangueira neighbourhood, where gunfire is a routine feature of everyday life and police raids only heighten tensions. The director films residents with a handheld camera and joins her protagonists directly in the situations that make up their daily lives.

The competition also features striking experiments with cinematic imagery and the filmmaking process. [Erotic Blossoms in a Dream](#) by South Korean director **Jihyeon Oh** evokes Myeong Wol, a historic Korean courtesan who was also a poet. The first part uses visual montages and linguistic metaphors; the second is a compilation of 79 explicit films converted into negative images and presented as a silent film.

Explore all films in the First Lights section [HERE](#).

Czech Joy Competition: Fire in the Landscape, Rabbit Competitions and Petr Hruška

The [Czech Joy competition](#) presents 29 new Czech documentaries. This year's selection explores people's relationships to the landscape, changes in communities and social relationships, political conflicts, and personal memory and identity.

The programme includes the visually dazzling documentary [Glowing](#) by **Martin Páv**, which deconstructs outward attractiveness as a norm of global capitalism. A perfect relationship, thousands of Instagram likes, a successful career and, ideally, lighter skin: young protagonists from different social backgrounds in Seoul, New Delhi and Nairobi share the same goal – to 'shine'. The film enters the private lives of people caught in a web of expectations and pressure to achieve perfection. Behind their obsession with appearance lies a deeper crisis of identity and the question of whether our interconnected world leaves any room to be ourselves.

[Light it Before it Burns](#) by **Markéta Ekrť Váľková** examines controlled burning as a possible tool for regenerating landscapes and the differing views of experts, firefighters, politicians and local residents. The idea of protected natural areas as untouchable museums increasingly clashes with the reality of climate change. Visually captivating, the film explores this controversial subject through ecologist Ondřej Sedláček's impassioned expert commentary and poetic journeys through the Czech countryside with botanist Jiří Sádlo.

The time-lapse documentary [Hating](#) by **Ondřej Šálek** captures an escalating street conflict between pro-Russian activists at a petition stand in Prague's Klárov district and a group of liberal-minded citizens who have decided to take justice into their own hands. This unsettling account of civic resistance in a deeply polarised society does not adopt either side's perspective. Its detached observation of actions and counteractions shows how easily a sense of threat and a desire for community can turn into aggression.

[Dear People, Dear Citizens](#) by **Andrea Culková** follows a unique political experiment over five years: around 800 randomly selected Europeans of different generations – students, workers and pensioners – are given the opportunity to help decide the continent's future within the European Parliament. The confrontation between determined citizens and cautious political elites reveals the mechanisms of a system that may itself be responsible for many of today's crises.

[My Life for My Word](#) by **Slobodanka Radun** captures a year in the life of renowned Czech writer Radka Denemarková between Prague and world capitals. Denemarková writes, makes public appearances and reflects on solidarity, China, the Holocaust, democracy and global injustice. Rather than recounting her past, the film captures her in the present, in everyday situations and at work with language.

[The Chairman Must Win](#) by Czech-American writer, screenwriter and documentary filmmaker **Jan Novák** revisits the village of Staňkovice over more than ten years, following a small-animal breeders' association, its exhibitions, competitions and disputes over personal ambitions, rabbit judging and public funds. This decade-long chronicle of rural life is a bittersweet study of local politics and community life, revealing broader patterns of the Czech mentality.

[Wasteland Chronicles](#) by **Lucie Kašová, Barbora Sliepková and Viera Čákanyová** connects three contaminated sites in Slovakia – the 'triangle of death' in eastern Slovakia, the tar sludge pits in Predajná and Vrakúňa in Bratislava – combining investigative thriller, meditative essay and dystopian animated documentary.

[Land of Fire](#) by **Nikola Klinger** captures northwestern Canada in the aftermath of extensive wildfires and the lives of people who remain there.

[My Father from the Island Russia](#) by **Georgy Mezhujev** uses home archives and video calls to document a young Russian director's attempt to understand the political views of his father, an influential Russian political scientist who approved of the annexation of Crimea and continues to defend Putin's regime. This intimate film considers the ongoing war through the gulf between filial love and moral responsibility.

[Porno para Ricardo](#) by **Hana Jakrllová** tells the story of Gorki Águila, frontman of the Cuban punk band of the same name. His opposition to the communist regime has brought him censorship,

harassment and imprisonment. The documentary looks behind the mask of an uncompromising rebel who, despite displacement and powerlessness, intends to continue his fight until the dictatorship falls.

The gentle film [Mushroom Seconds](#) by **Aleš Pojar** follows poet and mushroom enthusiast Petr Hruška in everyday moments, with family and friends, at literary events and on walks through the city of Ostrava.

Explore all films in the Czech Joy section [HERE](#).

Fascinations Competition : The Stasi and the Slime Mold Dictyostelium Discoideum

This year's international [Fascinations competition](#) of best experimental films will present 24 films from 21 countries, including two Czech works, revealing diverse ways of discovering and experimenting with audiovisual representations of reality. *'It is inspiring and enjoyable to see new forms of storytelling, such as the playful chemical interpretation of an Argentine novel in battle under the pink sky, and encouraging to see artistic disciplines intersect, as in [Fashion of Resistance – Shaheen Bagh](#). Once again, Fascinations offers this abundance of invention, vigour, exploration and unexpected ways of illuminating its subjects,'* says section programmer Andrea Slováková.

Fascinations brings together works employing personal and public archives, photography, animation, found footage and digital tools. The Greek-British film [The Unknowing of Things](#) by **Aristotelis Maragkos** animates documents from the General State Archives of Greece; **Scott Calonico's** German film [The Lichtenberg Effect](#) uses records from the East German secret police, the Stasi, and the New York police Red Squad. Hungarian filmmaker **Péter Lichter**, previously awarded at Ji.hlava, visually manipulates propaganda films and political publications in an inventive interpretation of George Orwell's novel 1984, [Memory Hole](#).

Lyrical explorations confront us with natural materials and their transformations, as in [Spring Song](#), a French-South Korean experiment by **Gao Wei** created through nine years of collecting photographs, or with the contours of the body, as in the Dutch-French-Italian [Ecology of the Body](#) by **Madelon Hooykaas**, which connects close-ups of human skin with landscapes.

The Dutch [Panorama Chemours – River Reflections](#) by **Michiel van Bakel** uses hand-animated photographs of the River Merwede and a chemical plant, employing toxic-looking colours. Meanwhile, the Canadian [Body Electric](#) by **Mike Hoolboom** and the American-Hong Kong [Infinite Replica](#) by Kwan Q Li explore technologies in relation to the body and everyday life.

Explore all films in the Fascinations section [HERE](#).

Czech experimental cinema has its own competition, [Fascinations: Exprmntl.cz](#), featuring 14 films. *'I am delighted by the creative freedom, courage, consistency and inventiveness I find in Czech experimental films. The Czech scene is strong,'* says Slováková.

The selection showcases contemporary Czech experimental filmmaking, bringing together established artists and a new generation. Notable titles include [On the Peaks of All the Beech Mountains](#) by **Klára Trsková** and **Anežka Horová**, which revisits a site in the Broumov region

known as 'Beech Mountain'. At the end of the Second World War, elderly people, women and children were murdered there simply because they belonged to the German-speaking population.

The Czech-British film [Grex](#) by **Jitka Čejková** and **Hannah Watson Emmrich** combines visual sensitivity with the precision of chemistry and biology, composing microscopic laboratory footage of the slime mold *Dictyostelium discoideum* with music and a piano performance.

[The Liminal Hum](#) by **Šimon Herrmann** is an essay on the use of drone music in audiovisual art. The first landscape a person encounters is a landscape of sound: the deep frequencies of the heartbeat and the mother's body create a world that is noisy yet safe. Ji.hlava audiences can also look forward to new works by **Franz Milec**, **Vladimír Turner** and **Zbyněk Baladrán**.

Explore all films in Fascinations: Exprmntl.cz [HERE](#).

Testimonies Competition: Music for a Humpback Whale and Custom-Made AI Men

The [Testimonies competition](#) presents films exploring authentic human experience, using individual stories to illuminate broader social, cultural and historical contexts. Its 15 films this year address relationships between people and nature, questions of power and influence, and new technologies and their role in personal relationships.

The Italian [The Forest Code](#) by **Alessandro Bernard** and **Paolo Ceretto** captures a visionary experiment in the Dolomites, where scientist Alessandro Chiolerio and ecologist Monica Gagliano attempt to detect signals from a forest devastated by a storm and decipher the language of plants. The French film [The Musician and the Whale](#) by **Valentin Paoli** follows composer Rone on Réunion as he tries to make contact with a humpback whale through music. In [Replica](#), an Australian-French-Chinese film by **Chouwa Liang**, three women develop relationships with AI partners. The film shows how increasing numbers of young women in China are choosing partners tailored to their needs with artificial intelligence software, whether to navigate family and social expectations or to find something that feels safer than relationships in the real world.

Another highlight is the Spanish-Norwegian [Atlas of Disappearance](#) by **Manuel Correa**. The film follows three families searching for the remains of loved ones who disappeared under Franco's regime. Their quest encounters persistent bureaucratic, legal and social obstacles. Using archives, digital maps and forensic reconstructions, the film traces the transfer of bodies to the Valle de Cuelgamuros complex, where the remains of thousands of people from mass graves were secretly moved during the dictatorship.

The German film [River](#) by **Tim Grosspietsch** follows the river from its mythical source in the Krkonoše Mountains to its turbulent mouth at the North Sea, treating the Elbe as a space of memory. It is a poetic essay on water and time.

Explore all films in Testimonies [HERE](#).

Short Joy Competition: Watch for Free Right Now!

Ji.hlava may not begin for another two weeks, but the first documentaries are available already. The [Short Joy competition](#) brings together 22 short documentaries from around the world,

available free of charge online on [DAFilms.com](https://dafilms.com) from October 8. Viewers can vote for the best film there until October 21.

'Even a short film can encompass complexity: a human story, the tragedy of a fragile territory, intricate historical developments or current political events. Many of the selected films use a carefully considered, synecdochic approach to capture perspectives and arguments, stories and characters alike. And they do so with striking poetic language, precise observation, daring investigation or images that evoke tactile experience,' says Ji.hlava programmer Andrea Slováková.

The winning film will be announced at the opening ceremony of Ji.hlava on Friday, October 23, where it will receive the DAFilms Audience Award. The films in this year's section share a personal perspective, visual experimentation and sensitivity to contemporary issues, from cultural memory and social and environmental questions to reflections on human identity.

'Short Joy offers audiences a unique chance to watch one of Ji.hlava's competitive sections before the festival even starts—and entirely free of charge. Short films have long been an important part of the DAFilms programme. They are often where we discover remarkable new talents and contemporary documentary filmmakers seeking unexpected forms and modes of storytelling. We are therefore delighted to introduce these films to audiences ahead of their screenings in Jihlava,' says DAFilms curator Magda Španihelová.

Among the films available is the Iranian [Dotuk](#) by **Hadi Sabet**, depicting life in the remote village of Taj Mir in South Khorasan Province, which is battered by severe sandstorms for as many as 120 days a year. Villagers make a living by handcrafting dotuk dolls, traditional ritual objects that have become a source of income. The film follows daily life in an environment where cultural tradition becomes a commodity while remaining one of the few ways to earn a living.

The Slovak-Croatian documentary [Inside](#) by **Dorota Vlnová** is built on the contrast between what is outwardly visible after an abortion and what remains hidden within. Archival footage of women and mothers and images of flowers alternate with anonymous testimonies from women discussing their relationships to motherhood and their experience of abortion.

The Austrian-German-Moroccan documentary miniature [living](#) by **Eric M. Weglehner** takes place in a chicken slaughterhouse, where a cat and her kittens survive among the remains of animal bodies and swarms of insects. In a naturalistic style, it observes their movement through an environment marked by human activity and their desire to play, explore and live.

Watch all the Short Joy films [HERE](#).

Constellations: A Road Movie and Couriers' Resistance

The non-competitive [Constellations section](#) brings 33 outstanding films from international festivals to Ji.hlava. Together they form a multilayered portrait of contemporary documentary cinema, exploring how family, work, communities and landscapes shape people, as well as expressions of solidarity and resistance and humanity's relationship with nature.

The Danish film [Christiania](#) by **Karl Friis Forchhammer** revisits one of Denmark's most iconic social experiments, established in 1971 when hundreds of young people occupied an abandoned military

base in Copenhagen and created a parallel society with its own rules. The director now moves there himself, seeking to understand the story of his parents, who lived there before he was born.

In the Swiss-French film [Summer Drift](#) by **Céline Carridroit** and **Aline Suter**, Johanna works in a luxury watch factory and decides to repair her old Volkswagen Beetle rather than sell it, entering a race in Belgium. Johanna is a factory worker in Geneva whose wife has just left for an extended visit to relatives in Mexico. Summer is in full swing, and she is unsure how to spend it. This staged documentary about the life of a transgender woman takes us on an exhilarating journey towards the fulfilment of personal desires despite trauma and fear.

The American film [Union Town](#) by two-time Oscar winner **Barbara Kopple** follows New York couriers, drivers and warehouse workers during strikes and documents their clashes with management at Amazon and UPS.

In [Going Home](#), Palestinian director **Kamal Aljafari** returns to his parents' house after three years and watches televised reports from bombed-out Gaza. He transforms news images of ruined houses, burnt-out cars and people searching for drinking water into home video, stripped of its original informational purpose. The film also shows that even intense media coverage of violence cannot prevent it from continuing.

[Some of You Fucked Eva](#) by Austrian director **Lilith Grasmug** revisits a mysterious incident in 2002, when a group of cheerleaders at a North Carolina high school fainted en masse. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the event, the film draws on found footage from the internet to dissect the myths and rituals of American high schools. Whispered teenage voices, oppressive ambient sounds and deliberately distorted images of girls' bodies in prescribed poses expose layers of latent gender-based violence. Violence against women is also explored in [The Second Skin](#) by **Mariia Lapidus**. Three filmmakers transcribe anonymous accounts by rape survivors and then turn them into scenes in which they re-enact the act from the victim's perspective. As the attacker remains absent and immersion deepens, the staged experience becomes terrifyingly close to the real one.

Explore all films in Constellations [HERE](#).

Films That Changed the World. Literally.

The anniversary section [Films That Changed the World](#) presents works whose impact has extended far beyond cinema screens. Its thirteen films have shaped public debate and turned it into action, helped change legislation or profoundly shifted society's perspective.

'Can films change the world? We decided to take this question seriously and look across the past century for films that genuinely did. Some helped free people who had been wrongfully convicted; others changed rules, contributed to funding for neglected regions or helped bring about new laws. These are not ideological films, but films that stand with ordinary people—with individuals, communities and society as a whole,' says festival director Marek Hovorka.

Explore all films in the section, including works by **Frederick Wiseman**, **Errol Morris** and **Rithy Panh**, [HERE](#).

The Translucent Being: Trinh T. Minh-ha

Ji.hlava will also present [a retrospective of Trinh T. Minh-ha](#), one of the most distinctive figures in essayistic documentary cinema. This Vietnamese-American filmmaker, writer, composer and theorist challenges conventional ways of representing other cultures, women, minorities and documentary reality itself. The programme includes her debut [Reassemblage](#) (1982), a landmark of postcolonial and feminist cinema. Filmed in Senegal, it deliberately rejects the traditional anthropological documentary, in which Western filmmakers assume the authority to explain another culture to audiences. Instead, its images, sounds and fragments of everyday life remain open to different interpretations. Another major work in the retrospective is [Surname Viet Given Name Nam](#) (1989), in which Trinh T. Minh-ha uses Vietnamese women's testimonies to examine who tells their stories and what happens when those stories are translated into cinematic images. Here too she intentionally disrupts the notion of documentary as an objective record of reality.

Explore all films in The Transparent Being: Trinh T. Minh-ha [HERE](#).

David Wengrow and Lea Ypi at the Inspiration Forum!

Lea Ypi, one of today's leading political philosophers and writers, will appear at the Ji.hlava IDFF's discussion platform [Inspiration Forum](#) on October 24. Her talk is part of the new Big Talks series, bringing 'big names to the big hall' and opening these events for the first time to visitors without festival accreditation. Other guests include archaeologist **David Wengrow**, climate comedian **Matt Winning**, and political theorists **Camila Vergara** and **Samuel Bagg**.

The new Big Talks series presents four exceptional events in the main auditorium, open to the wider public.

October 24 – Lea Ypi: What Is Europe For Today?

October 25 – Matt Winning: What Can Humour Do in a Crisis?

October 30 – Camila Vergara and Samuel Bagg: How Can We Limit the Power of Oligarchs?

October 31 – David Wengrow: The Dawn of Change

Matt Winning: What Can Humour Do in a Crisis?

Matt Winning is a climate researcher and comedian who has long worked on climate policy while also using stand-up to address the climate crisis. In his show Solastalgia, which has been selling out London's Soho Theatre, he connects climate change with fatherhood, anxieties about the future and the story of the fossil fuel industry and financial power. In Ji.hlava, he will discuss what humour can do with a topic so often associated with fear, helplessness and overwhelming quantities of data.

Camila Vergara and Samuel Bagg: How Can We Limit the Power of Oligarchs?

Political and legal theorist Camila Vergara and political philosopher Samuel Bagg study the concentration of political and economic power and the workings of democratic institutions. In Ji.hlava, they will consider how democracy can respond when political and economic power is concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people. Vergara's work addresses oligarchisation

and possibilities for democratic oversight, while Bagg focuses on democracy, political representation and institutional arrangements.

David Wengrow: The Dawn of Change

David Wengrow is an archaeologist and co-author, with anthropologist David Graeber, of the book *The Dawn of Everything*. The book challenges the idea that human societies developed along a straightforward path towards today's forms of state, property and social organisation. In Jihlava, Wengrow will ask what history tells us about our capacity to change society—and whether the world we live in today is really the only possible form of society.

The 30th Ji.hlava IDFF will take place from October 23 to November 1, 2026. Early bird Industry accreditations for film professionals are available until September 30. More information is available at ji-hlava.com. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

To request a press accreditation, please contact us at pressservice@ji-hlava.cz

30th Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival

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