

FOCUS

O N P O L A N D

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Catalogue
of **new**
films



Bucolic by Karol Patka



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The second year of the pandemic turned out to be as difficult for the film industry as the first one. However, Polish filmmakers did their best to continue with their projects, and the results could be seen by viewers all over the world. How do you make films when you're in danger? We discuss this with Tomasz Wysokiński, the director of *Walk with Angels*, which premiered in Locarno and is now visiting festivals around the globe. Polish documentary filmmakers are also making narrative films. We ask some of the most interesting directors who have successfully made their feature film debuts about what drives them and what they draw from the documentary world. Polish successes on the international arena can be credited to talented filmmakers, but also to the activities carried out as part of the Polish Docs project, which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year. Thanks to its presence in the international film community, Polish Docs has managed to build a strong brand and continues to offer cinema of the highest quality. An interesting case study by Robert Sowa, who worked on Tomasz Wolski's *1970*, shows how animation collides with documentary to create an entirely new form of political cinema. We present a portrait of Piotr Dumata, the great creator of animated films, and we talk to Marta Pajek about the last and – simultaneously – first part of her triptych *Impossible Figures and Other Stories I*. An intriguing article about themes such as the end of the world and environmental disaster, frequently popular with short film directors, proves that filmmakers observe reality and want to talk about what really matters. In addition, we present the latest documentary and animated projects as well as catalogues of films that will soon begin their international careers. **We warmly recommend Polish cinema for cold, long winter nights! Enjoy!**

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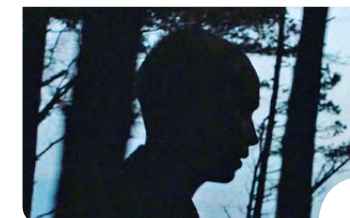
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KRZYSZTOF GIERAT INTERVIEWS **TOMASZ WYSOKIŃSKI**, THE DIRECTOR OF **WALK WITH ANGELS**

THE HERO, CAMERA, AND ME

KRZYSZTOF GIERAT: What's your story, exactly?

TOMASZ WYSOKIŃSKI: I grew up in a very peculiar and wonderful family where my grandmother played the viola and we were holding late-night meetings reading poetry by Herbert and Baczyński, and – after Jazz Jamboree – jazzmen used to visit our house to smoke good weed and improvise. I had an unwritten agreement with my parents that I didn't have to go to bed if I wanted to read a book or if there was a good film to watch. And my dad made sure to prepare me accordingly. For example, he would tell me about old westerns or Akira Kurosawa's film the week before, creating a magical time of waiting... I didn't finish any film school. The need to make films comes from my childhood and the passion born back then.

Okay, but what did you do before you got into making films? You are debuting with a full-length documentary at the age of 56!

I studied medicine and dreamt of creating a maxillofacial surgery clinic employing artists from the Faculty of Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts. I had wanted to become a surgeon who deals with post-traumatic facial reconstruction or after cancer surgery, but I gave it all up after realizing that modern technologies won't allow me to achieve the results I had dreamt of. I had everything prepared: a team of surgeons, anaesthesiologists, and mid-level staff, but I gave up and handed the clinic over to my parents. Later I had a very successful company dealing with public relations and events in Poland and abroad. At one point I was doing really well, but I reached a point in my life where I was afraid to win another tender. The scenarios I had been writing were later altered



by my clients almost entirely and I was ending up doing things completely alien to me. When a late-stage project of a 200-metre container ship sailing in the Gdańsk Bay hosting a huge party broadcast by MTV fell through, I realized I couldn't do it any more, and that's when the idea of making a film came to me. I went to Pakistan and spent six months there, working with two colleagues, but we had to put the project on hold due to, let's call it, artistic disagreements.

It started with a journey, or with a specific idea for a film and hence the journey?

I have always travelled a lot. I think I have spent a quarter of my life travelling, and most often to poor, forgotten places, somewhere on the margins of the world. Here, too, it began with travelling. At one point I decided to make a film about the spirit of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan... I have very interesting and unusual materials that show Pakistan from a completely different perspective – perhaps I will return to this project one day...

Since you abandoned that project, where did South Africa and your protagonist Jerry come from?

It's a total coincidence. Some time ago I was working on a project with photographer Tomek Tomaszewski, and on one occasion Tomek started talking about his trip to South Africa for National Geographic, where he was doing a story on South Africa and its

condition as a country. He told me about Baragwanath Hospital – the largest hospital in the southern hemisphere, the third largest in the world. He told me about a night he spent in the emergency ward, where a hundred or two hundred patients with serious injuries from assault can be brought in just a few hours. And since I largely grew up in the hospital where my mother was a doctor, I felt a connection with that subject. I went to Africa with Jerry's phone number in my pocket and came across an extraordinary man and an extraordinary subject, so I dropped everything, left the hospital, and followed his story.

Were you only following him? Or did you somehow inspire him, provoke him to make certain decisions?

Primarily, it was my first time in South Africa and a first in Sub-Saharan Africa. I didn't know and understand this world. When I found out that Jerry was searching for children stolen in Johannesburg and the surrounding *townships* I said: listen, can I be your shadow, can I follow you around?

But the film depicts his search for a single child and you're using a plural form. So, does he specialise in this? Is this his calling, his profession?

It isn't his job. He's doing it out of the need of his heart and gets no money out of it. I chose one of his investigations, I wanted to jump into a story right at the beginning.

Even with a very minimalistic approach, a documentary film crew consists of a director, a cinematographer, a sound engineer...

That would be me.

Just you! What were you shooting with?

At the beginning I was using a Sony A7 camera with a single 24-70 mm lens. Later Panasonic lent me a phenomenal camera with a 50 mm lens. In addition, I also used a Sony Handycam worth PLN 3 000. I looked like an amateur and I wasn't that much attractive for potential robbers. Besides, as a child, just after school I used to go to my mother's hospital, located in the most dangerous district of Warsaw, so I spent a lot of time at the Różycki market and in the backstreets of Brzeska street, so I feel at ease in such a world. That's my advantage.

Some say that the film is a journey into the heart of darkness, that it's an anus mundi, Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* in documentary form, a horror film, a crime thriller. Those are the terms you can find in its reviews. And you say you were there alone with Jerry...

These comparisons, especially to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, are a source of great satisfaction for me, but I don't know if I've earned it. And that I was alone? This is my optimal workflow. When there's a protagonist and when there is me. And there is some kind of a bond that has to form. It worked. We had a similar way of thinking, similar sensitivities. Jerry accepted me, which wasn't easy as he had often had very negative experiences with journalists. And when you say that the film looks as if a larger team worked on it, this is the result of the work done by great



artists, including Mateusz Zaluski, who worked on the image, and Tomasz Dukszta, who did the sound. A lot was done in-studio because the footage I had brought was often of questionable quality.

It was three long trips. Do you remember how long were they?

Yes. Exactly 30, 30, and 40. I spent 100 days there in total. I lived in Soweto, in a part that's called White City. It's a place where whites never show up. Black people from other parts of Soweto don't even come, because White City is a true hell on earth.

And was there any security? Was Jerry not only the main protagonist, but also the only guarantor of safety and a cicerone at the same time?

During my first trip there was no security, I fully trusted Jerry. He was my bodyguard, he was my guide, without him I had no chance. But even then there were some dangerous situations. For example a tsotsi* threatened me with a knife and if it wasn't for Jerry, it would have ended badly for me. At the end of the second trip, I was starting to break and I asked him once or twice to have someone stand behind my back. Especially since I saw a woman being killed with a brick and another time a tsotsi reloaded his gun right in front of my face. And I don't even want to mention the third trip...

It must have been dangerous during the scene with the boy being maimed in the street...

No, I almost wasn't afraid at all when filming that scene. It was during the evening, with lots of people still in the streets.

You also go into places that are truly dangerous for a different reason, into places of worship, where Jerry talks with Satanists who have a lot on their conscience, and they reveal themselves in front of your camera...

I was also wondering why these people trusted me at all. One of these characters, Michael, says he lost track of how many people he's killed. There's a lot of shocking material I didn't use, like a woman admitting she killed 13 children, or the stories of mothers who sell their babies knowing they will be mutilated or killed. I think I have reached a point, an edge, where the film is still acceptable to our sensibilities. Unfortunately the awareness of good and evil, and where the boundaries lie that separate these two concepts, has become blurred in this world. Human life there often costs no more than 20–25 dollars.

So the law doesn't work...

The law does not work; the state does not work. Private police forces are being formed, for example in Johannesburg there



TOMASZ WYSOKIŃSKI – film director and screenwriter who also works as a cinematographer. He has been an author of promotional campaigns and happenings in Poland, Germany, Hungary and Malesia. He draws his inspiration from more than a decade of journeys to over 50 countries of the world. He is especially interested in other cultures, art and bonds between people. At present, while planning his journeys in search of a theme of a new feature-length documentary, he is writing a feature film script based on a short story by Jorge Luis Borges.



* A slang word in South Africa for a thug or a criminal



are the Badboys who protect shops and other buildings. Outside of urban centres there are the tough guys from Mapogo A Mathamaga – an organisation whose members catch criminals, hang them, and beat them with sjambok whips, mutilating them almost to the bone so that they would not steal or attack the residents of townships any more. People take matters into their own hands, but poverty and crime are enormous there. **And to think that South Africa is often presented in the media as an exclusive, luxurious holiday destination.**

There are very rich people there just like there are beautiful places. Northwest of Johannesburg there is a lake at the foot of the mountains where houses cost several million dollars each. It's a problem I discovered when living in Rio de Janeiro's favelas. Where there are massive disparities between the rich and the extremely poor, crime runs rampant.

You limited yourself in shocking the audience, but left one scene...

I think I know which shot you have in mind... We worked on it with editor Daniel Gąsiorowski, to whom I owe a lot. The way the film looks is largely thanks to him and producer Piotr Kobus. Daniel and I worked on this shot for several months, shortening and lengthening it by half a second, by several frames. I knew it was going to be a very controversial part of the film, but without it, I wouldn't have been able to tell the entire truth about a world where children are thrown away into the trash and on a mass scale.

You came back with 60 hours of material. Is there anything that you found difficult to part with, but that went beyond the topic, beyond the format?

I have often encountered the phrase 'kill your darlings'. I can't understand it and I was fighting for certain scenes from the very beginning. Daniel and I had some heated discussions about some of them, like the hill prayer scene, or the exorcism scene.

At what point did producer Piotr Kobus join?

In 2018 I was pitching *Walk with Angels* during the Krakow Film Festival. After the presentation, Piotr approached me and said that it was a very interesting project and he regretted that we hadn't met earlier, because he really wanted to make such a film. Way back when I frequented the Latin American Film Festival organised by him in Warsaw. I remember how passionate he was before the screenings about the films he was presenting. I had received a very attractive offer from Germany to produce the film, but I felt that I wanted to work with him. Piotr had his fire inside him and that's how it started.

A beautiful story with Krakow in the background... The soundtrack and music by Paweł Mykietyn are extremely important in this film.

Well, I have to come back to Piotr once more. I am grateful to him, because he gave me a chance to work with Paweł. It was a great experience for me, as Paweł isn't only a brilliant artist, but also a fantastic person. I wrote him a very long e-mail that described what music I was hearing in my mind when focusing on individual scenes. It took him three days, I think, to send me a proposal. I was shocked. On the one hand his music met my needs perfectly, and on the other I needed some time to distance myself from what had been before, from the music that was in my head. After a few months of work, Paweł elevated the film to a completely different level.

The thing with documentaries is that they're based on life, and life writes its own stories. Jerry was at the Krakow Film Festival. He attended the world premiere of the film, returned to his home country, was shot and critically injured...

Ever since the lockdown and since people started wearing masks, crime in South Africa has risen by another 60 percent. These are official police figures. Right now approximately 35 000 murders happen there every year. Jerry was seriously wounded while his friend and one of their attackers were killed. Jerry is now out of his fourth surgery. I'm very grateful for the award at the Krakow Film Festival because it goes a long way to funding Jerry's treatment and I believe he will succeed once again.

The hero of your film says that he is guarded by angels twice. There may not be enough angels to protect this country.

The problem is that there are more such South Africas and, in my opinion, the world is heading in a very bad direction.

I can only wait for your next projects. Maybe they will be a little brighter. Do you already have something up your sleeve?

I'm waiting for the day when the power appears in me to take up a new challenge and set off to some inaccessible place in the world to make a film. Now I'm all about books. I go through such phases. For example I can watch 2 or 3 films a day like crazy for six months, usually at night, and then I stop watching films and only read books while listening to music. Right now I'm at the stage of reading books and hoping that one day something will happen and make me go on a journey.

I liked working independently on the set. Me, the camera, the hero, and the reality around us. I feel that it presents the best opportunity to obtain unique footage for a film. ■

EXTRAORDINARY HEROES AND CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS

WHAT INTERESTS POLISH DOCUMENTARIANS

KATARZYNA WILK

It would seem that the pandemic has significantly hampered both producing films and holding industry events that showcase upcoming projects – as most of them have moved online. Nevertheless, it has been a very successful year for Polish documentary cinema.



Leon by Wojciech Gostomczyk



Girls' Stories by Aga Borzym



The Ultimate Joker by Krzysztof Dzieciotowski

Polish documentary film projects have been presented and awarded at many forums and pitching events around the world – including the most important ones. We were present at IDFA Forum, East Doc Platform, When East Meets West, Cannes Docs, Baltic Sea Docs, Nordisk Forum, and DOK Co-Pro Market. Polish filmmakers won big and came back with four awards from Sunny Side of the Doc. What's more, industry events organised alongside numerous important festivals (CPH:DOX, DOK Leipzig, IDFA, Ji.hlava IDFF, FIPADOC, Nordisk Panorama) hosted producers' delegations and featured presentations of Polish projects organised as part of the Polish Docs Pro, whose main objective is to promote the Polish documentary industry abroad. Another edition of DOC LAB POLAND was once more a key event. It concluded with the Docs to Start and Docs to Go pitch sessions during KFF Industry in Kraków, presenting 20 of the most interesting Polish documentary projects in development and post-production.

CHILDREN'S STORIES

Of the most interesting Polish projects in production, five revolve around topics related to children or are created with young viewers in mind. Jaśmina Wójcik's *King Matt the First* tells the story of two girls – sisters fascinated by a book about how children rule the world. The film is shaping up to be a documentary that makes creative use of sound and movement, with the children using them to guide the viewer through the world of nature as seen from their perspective. *Lili* by Sylwia Rosak is the story of an 8-year-old who invites the audience into her world – where she has to struggle with tough situations, particularly for a child, like her parents' breakup and a new life shared between two different families. However, her natural curiosity lets her take a step back and look at many things with a sort of detachment appropriate for her age while the promised birthday hitch-hiking trip with her dad is supposed to help her take her first steps into adult life.

Maciej Cuske foreshadows a nostalgic story about the end of childhood. To make *Candidates of Death*, the director has been observing his own son for several years – first a boy, then a teenager, and finally an adolescent who – together with his friends – has been shooting one episode of an amateur horror series every year during their summer holidays. It's about a carefree and joyful childhood, but also about the more difficult aspects of growing up. Another coming-of-age story, this time from a female perspective, can be found in Aga Borzym's *Girls' Stories*. It's a film for teenage girls and about teenage girls who discuss things like puberty, their first periods, intimate relationships, and their femininity waking up in them. There aren't many adults here (and even if one shows up, they're on the side). It's the girls who are the driving force of the story. Things are a bit different in *Base 13* by Paweł Hejbudzki – a film about the relationship between children and parents. The project deals with the difficult subject of unfulfilled ambitions and adults who try to realise

POLISH PROJECTS AT INTERNATIONAL PITCHINGS AND MARKETS IN 2021

FIPADOC PITCHING FORUM

HARLEY UNKNOWN MISSION BY ANDRZEJ MIĘKUS • PROD.: FILMICON

CANDIDATES OF DEATH BY MACIEJ CUSKE • PROD.: BYDGOSKA KRONIKA FILMOWA

ONE FOR THE TEAM BY KATARZYNA WIŚNIEWSKA • PROD.: HAKA FILMS • DAE ENCOURAGEMENT PRIZE WINNER

WHEN EAST MEETS WEST

KING MATT THE FIRST BY JAŚMINA WÓJCIK • PROD.: PINOT FILMS

EAST DOC FORUM / EAST DOC MARKET

WAITERSGATE BY KONRAD SZOŁAJSKI • PROD.: ZK STUDIO

WORKCENTER BY ANIELA ASTRID GABRYEL • PROD.: KOI STUDIO

THE ULTIMATE JOKER BY KRZYSZTOF DZIĘCIOŁOWSKI • PROD.: VISION HOUSE

MEETMARKET SHEFFIELD

THE PLAGUE BY MONIKA KOTECKA • PROD.: CENTRALA FILM

BROTHERHOOD BY HANNA MACIĄG • PROD.: FIRST HAND FILMS

SUNNY SIDE OF THE DOC

JUNGLE FEVER. THE RACE TO SAVE MALAYSIA'S LAST TIGERS BY PAOLO VOLPONI • PROD.: CLEARWING FOUNDATION FOR BIODIVERSITY • BEST WILDLIFE & CONSERVATION PITCH WINNER

WAITERSGATE BY KONRAD SZOŁAJSKI • PROD.: ZK STUDIO • MOVIES THAT MATTER AWARD WINNER

THE ULTIMATE JOKER BY KRZYSZTOF DZIĘCIOŁOWSKI • PROD.: VISION HOUSE • BEST HISTORY PITCH WINNER

GIRLS' STORIES BY AGA BORZYM • PROD.: PINOT FILMS • NEW VOICES AWARD WINNER

BALTIC SEA DOCS

GIRLS' STORIES BY AGA BORZYM • PROD.: PINOT FILMS

INVISIBLES BY PIOTR BERNAŚ • PROD.: HASKO FILM

NORDISK PANORAMA FORUM

LILI BY SYLWIA ROSAK • PROD.: HAKA FILMS

TRUST ME BY JOANNA RATAJCZAK • PROD.: SILVER FRAME

DOK CO-PRO MARKET

GIRLS' STORIES BY AGA BORZYM • PROD.: PINOT FILMS

JI.HLAVA NEW VISIONS FORUM

GUEST WORKER BY MATEJ BOBRIK • PROD.: KOI STUDIO



King Matt the First by Jaśmina Wójcik

them through their children – here young karting drivers. The pressure they put on the film's young protagonists often causes a lot of frustration by awakening a desperate need to compete and prove their worth in a way that isn't necessarily healthy.

UNCOMFORTABLE AND CONTROVERSIAL

Polish filmmakers rarely reach for topics related to current social and political events. They're more often interested in history, although it often serves as a mirror for what is contemporary, as in Monika Kotecka's *The Plague* – which looks back on a viral outbreak from many years ago. Even if they do talk about current events, they're usually more interested in that which is uncomfortable and controversial. In *Waitersgate* Konrad Szolajski looks at a current and hot topic – one of the biggest wiretapping scandals involving Polish politicians and establishment figures. Krzysztof Dzieciołowski's *The Ultimate Joker*, a portrait of Jerzy Urban – one of the most influential and controversial politicians of the communist period – is about the present day, but rooted in history. Through social media, Urban

has become a guru for many young Poles today, valued for his insightful and ironic analysis of current politics and everyday events. Polish filmmakers also examine, albeit in their own cinematic way, subjects that strongly engage the public opinion, such as the refugee crisis, the ban on abortion, and restricted access to contraception in Poland. Matej Bobrik in *Guest Worker* and Piotr Bernaś in *The Invisibles* look at how immigrants are doing in Poland, while Karolina Domagalska analyses how the society and Polish activists react to the government's actions regarding abortion and contraceptives in *5 Pills Away*. Polish filmmakers have an interest in unusual heroes having unconventional and often controversial stories behind them. Such films include Joanna Ratajczak's *Trust Me* – a documentary about a long-term couple who decide to start an open relationship, Bogna Kowalczyk's *Boylesque* – about the oldest Polish drag queen, who is still full of hope for new love despite being 82, or Wojciech Gostomczyk's *Leon*, whose protagonist sees no boundaries between his private and artistic life regardless of the conflict with his family and society. ■



ANITA PIOTROWSKA

Between Fiction and Reality

POLISH DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKERS AND NARRATIVE FILMS

Krzysztof Kieślowski abandoned the documentary genre after realising that a 'living' human being cannot be fully figured out or enclosed in a directorial concept. He focused on fiction when he felt he had no right to film real tears – it was better to hire actors and use glycerine. Nevertheless, one could notice a documentary touch in his narrative films (mainly the early ones): the camera recorded a more or less controlled stream of life, filmed existing places, and professional actors were mixed with amateurs.

In contemporary Polish cinema, especially that of the younger and middle generation, there is a group of filmmakers who have followed a similar path, though not necessarily due to ethical dilemmas, and their parting with artistic documentaries isn't often a definitive one. Among them are Kinga Dębska, Paweł Ferdek, Bartek Konopka, Marcin Koszałka, Michał Marczak, Jan P. Matuszyński, Marta Minorowicz, Marcin Sauter, Piotr Stasik, and Małgorzata Szumowska. In what way has documentary film-making affected their narrative work? Let's look at some examples.

FROM A DOCUMENTARIAN'S POINT OF VIEW

For a long time, Szumowska shot both kinds of films in parallel, but she always considered herself more a student of Wojciech Jerzy Has than of Kazimierz Karabasz. In *Dokument...* (2001) she even expressed her disbelief in this form of cinematic sincerity. Today she fulfils her professional aspirations in fiction films, although her affinity for documentaries sometimes shines through. Certain scenes from the autobiographical *33 Scenes from Life* (2008) can be watched as if recorded with a home video camera. *In the Name of...* (2013, Teddy Award, Berlinale



The Last Family by Jan P. Matuszyński / Photo: Hubert Komerski, Aurum Films



The Moths by Piotr Stasik / Photo: Łukasz Bąk

2013) also featured non-professional actors and some scenes seemed improvised. Szumowska's later output gravitates more towards metaphor than encounters with reality, although the yet-to-be-released *All Inclusive* promises to be on the verge of documentary and fiction.

Watching Jan P. Matuszyński's *The Last Family* (2016), Piotr Stasik's *The Moths* (2021), or *Holiday* (2021) by Paweł Ferdek, one can also recognise the mark of a documentary in them. For example in their distance from fictional conventions or in a type of attentiveness that's characteristic of cinema that believes in reality, regardless of whether it arises from facts or imagination. On the other hand, going back to these directors' documentary roots (*Deep Love* by Matuszyński, 2013; *Opera About Poland* by Stasik, 2017; *Pollywood* by Ferdek, 2020), you can't miss their inclination towards staging that sooner or later had to result in a narrative film. It was a wholly different matter with Bartek Konopka. In *Rabbit à la Berlin* (2009) or *The Art of Disappearing* (2013), he played with quasi-documentary form in an intelligent way and has been rotating between documentary and fiction for years now. Another interesting case is that of Marcin Koszałka, who made two films about serial killers from Poland's communist period and each time approached the topic differently: first as the creative documentary *Lust Killer* (2012), and then as a narrative feature – *The Red Spider* (2015) – which painstakingly recreated the mood of the time and places it was set in.



A LESSON IN AUTHENTICITY

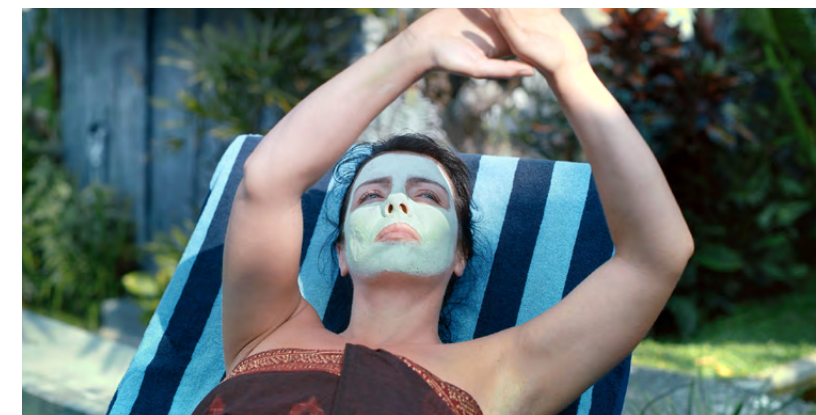
And how does it look from the perspective of the filmmakers themselves? What did they get out of documentary cinema and what limitations did they encounter? Marta Minorowicz – the director behind, among others, the docufiction film *Zud* (2016) – who is about to make her narrative debut, said: ‘Working on documentaries has certainly made me more sensitive to location authenticity, to natural lighting and, above all, to acting. I intuitively sense fakery on set.’ Her new film, *Illusion*, was also supposed to be a documentary at first, but it’s difficult subject matter – the relatives’ search for missing persons – involved specific expectations on the part of the protagonists and made the filmmakers responsible for the success of the case. According to the director, narrative films do not carry such a heavy burden. Kinga Dębska, whose fiction films *These Daughters of Mine* (2015) or *Back Then* (2021) are eagerly watched by Polish audiences, owes much to her beginnings in documentary film making. ‘Thanks to them I gained an eye, a kind of sensitivity to the truth,’ she says. ‘That’s why I often not only talk the actors through the script, but also discuss actual life situations’. On the other hand, she adds, ‘In a documentary, I couldn’t make anything different from what it actually is like. I wouldn’t be able to change the script of someone’s life. I also don’t buy docufiction hybrids, because to me they always show the *seams* and differences between professional and non-professional actors. That’s why I separate documentary and fiction in my work’.

Marcin Koszałka, on the other hand, has made a name for himself by constantly blurring these boundaries in his documentaries, mainly for the sake of sophisticated visuals. His films had also relied on very strong emotions, which boxed the director into the same corner Kieślowski had once mentioned. Currently, while preparing for the big historical film *White Courage* (about Polish highlanders collaborating with Nazis), he still feels a documentary drive. The sheer scale of this production’s staging is based largely on archival material, and its pursuit of maximum authenticity means paying attention to the local language or doing away with body doubles. ‘I won’t allow any BS in my film’, Koszałka points out. Although after years of ‘rummaging through documentary guts’ he has a kind of euphoria that he is making a film exactly as he envisions it. ‘There’s no place for coincidences here,’ he adds.

Piotr Stasik has also never thought in strict categories of ‘fiction versus documentary’. He finds the latter more mentally exhausting, as it personally involves the director in someone else’s life. Besides, as he notes, ‘people want to be recorded less and less often. They prefer to record themselves, they choose self-creation.’ Hence, after a series of creative documentaries, he made the fictional and personal *The Moths*. ‘A narrative film allowed me to be more condensed. I was able to achieve greater poeticism and more elaborate symbolism,’ he says, although he still exhibits a strong documentary-oriented way of thinking. For a change Stasik’s next film is supposed to be a purely observational documentary.

PERCEPTION OF TRUTH

Today, these mutual influences are becoming even closer. Ever more often documentaries draw from narrative fiction, while fiction at times imitates the rawness of documentary cinema. Distinguishing fiction from fact is becoming increasingly more difficult even outside of cinema, and Polish directors are creatively experimenting with this phenomenon. One example is Michał Marczak’s *All These Sleepless Nights* (2016), a docufiction hybrid set in the milieu of Warsaw’s 20-somethings, which has been presented at fiction and documentary film festivals to equal acclaim. The viewers themselves have also changed, realising that there’s no such thing as a pure documentary. In today’s cinema, the focus is placed more often on something one might call ‘the truth of the screen’, and less so on the orthodoxy of the methods selected by the filmmaker. However, the question about the limits of staging in a documentary returns every now and then, and the degree of interference in reality is subject to constant negotiation. ■



Holiday by Paweł Ferdek / Photo: press materials



Holiday by Paweł Ferdek / Photo: press materials

15 YEARS OF POLISH DOCS

POLISH DOCS was established at the Krakow Film Foundation and was one of world's first initiatives of its kind. Several years ago, individual countries had special institutions dedicated to promoting the cinema of their respective nations – like the British Council, Uni France, or German Films – but there were almost no organisations dealing exclusively with documentary films. We started with nothing, a blank page, only to develop certain standards within a few years. We go by them to this day and other countries often follow. Now it's difficult to imagine a documentary event without the project's white and red label. We want to be present at all major film events because we believe that Polish documentary cinema is of the highest quality, and deserves to be promoted as widely as possible.

We were driven by this goal – increasing the presence of Polish documentaries at international film festivals – when organising our first promotional events during the festivals in Jihlava and Leipzig in 2006, thus creating the Polish Docs brand which, after 15 years, has become recognisable worldwide. A year later we organised our first booth at Sunny Side of the Doc and took a delegation of Polish producers to France. We're in La Rochelle every year, just like at IDFA in Amsterdam, DOK Leipzig, Visions du Réel in Nyon, or at Copenhagen's CPH:DOX.

It didn't take long to get results. Within a few years the presence of Polish films at foreign festivals increased by several hundred percent and Polish documentaries started receiving awards in the double digits every year. In addition, there were major reviews of the latest Polish documentary films at the Documentarist festival in Istanbul, 'Cinema Verite' International Documentary FF in Tehran (2010), Hot Docs in Toronto (2013), Doc

Aviv in Tel Aviv (2014), DOK Leipzig (2016), and others, as well as retrospectives dedicated to outstanding artists – Marcel and Paweł Łoziński (Festival dei Popoli in Florence, 2013), Wojciech Staroń (Festival dei Popoli in 2015; 2017's GZDOC in Guangzhou, China), Marcin Koszałka (Trieste FF in 2016 and GZDOC in 2017), or Bogdan Dziworski (Festival Flahertiana in Perm, Russia, in 2015, and GZDOC in 2017) – involving lectures, workshops, masterclasses, and photo exhibitions.

The canon of Polish documentary classics has also gained popularity. The original program 'Masters from Krakow' – presenting outstanding documentaries awarded over the years at the Krakow Film Festival, including films by Krzysztof Kieślowski, Kazimierz Karabasz, Wojciech Wiszniewski, Jerzy Bosak, Marcel Łoziński, or Marek Piwowski – visited the DOCSDF festival in Mexico (2012), the Polish Doc Days in Moscow and Kazan (2015), the Polish Short Film Week in Tokyo, the FIDBA in Buenos Aires, Bogoshorts in Colombia, and GZDOC in China (2017).

Although the project has been promoting the Polish film industry from the very beginning, it only gained real momentum with the establishment of Polish Docs PRO – the part of the project that aims to help Polish producers and filmmakers reach international markets with their projects, seek funding or co-production partners. Although sparse at first, delegations of Polish producers to events such as COPRO in Tel Aviv (2008), Nordisk Forum in Oulu, Finland (2012), Hot Docs Forum in Toronto (2013), or MeetMarket in Sheffield (2014) have now become the norm, and we regularly bring Polish projects to Prague's East Doc Platform, IDFA Industry in Amsterdam, DOK Industry in Leipzig, or CPH:Industry in Copenhagen.



**POLISH
DOCS**

Tokyo, Buenos Aires, Tel Aviv, Toronto, Mexico, Moscow, Rome, Leipzig, Istanbul, and Guangzhou – these are just some of the places in the world that Polish documentaries have visited thanks to Polish Docs. For 15 years Polish Docs has been organising film screenings, filmmakers' delegations, and project presentations.

KATARZYNA WILK, HEAD OF POLISH DOCS

15 YEARS OF POLISH DOCS



Sunny Side of the Doc 2018



Sunny Side of the Doc 2018



Sunny Side of the Doc 2019



IDFA 2019



East Doc Platform 2020



Nordisk Panorama 2021



@miriamfrompoland

DIR.: PIOTR SZCZEPAŃSKI • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 77'

It isn't easy to get close to Orthodox Jews to accompany them with a camera for long periods of time. Piotr Szczepański managed to do this in *@miriamfrompoland*, where he portrays a young woman who has chosen to follow Judaism and its traditional model of life. Along the way the film debunks many stereotypes about this religion and the role women play in it. Interestingly, Maria became Miriam in a way that went against the assimilation and emancipation tendencies prevailing among the women of her family. We hear that it's the return to her roots that lets the heroine find true fulfilment – to be a wife, mother of a bunch of children, and an activist for the revival of Jewish life in Poland. The film throws us right in the middle of Miriam's busy everyday life, but the dilemmas of women trying to reconcile work and family are alien to her. For her, it's one coherent world where all elements fit together neatly. And Szczepański films it on the fly, without any authorial interference. Every now and then his tale comes around in a wider circle, embracing Łódź's Jewish community as well as the issue of complicated relations between Poles and Jews, and ever-present anti-Semitism. 'I am the river and I carve my own path,' is how Miriam speaks of her place in family and religion. The same could be said about her place in the film. Energy and feminine power fill almost every shot, making a world many consider closed-off and exotic appear familiar and free from prejudice. This is actually one of the goals of the online TV channel Miriam is co-creating. Szczepański's documentary is a fascinating encounter with a living culture that even the Holocaust couldn't destroy. Thanks to people like the film's protagonist, memory comes alive and so does the everyday reality young religious Jews create in today's Poland. This is their home, in spite of the dark history and the sometimes problematic present. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



1970

DIR.: TOMASZ WOLSKI • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 70'

In his previous film *An Ordinary Country* (2020), Tomasz Wolski used documentary records collected by the communist security apparatus to show the vileness of that system. In *1970*, the director uses the archives of the communist regime, both film and audio recordings, in an even more creative way. The result is a powerful film with a political rather than historical flair. For history likes to repeat itself too often.

This time Wolski recreates its main scene. The atmosphere of protests on the Coast in December 1970, provoked by a drastic rise in food prices, is recreated not only by black-and-white found footage material from Polish streets or factories. They have been supplemented by Robert Sowa's excellent puppet animation, which brings to life the leading characters of the unfolding drama, i.e. high-ranking communist officials. Recordings of authentic phone conversations held by the then crisis team of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are thus given faces and silhouettes. The ugly office interiors of the regime recreated in the studio are once again filled with the buzz of telephones and the grey mist of cigarette smoke. We're transported into a ghastly puppet theatre. After all, those who were responsible for suppressing the workers' protests were also helpless puppets steered by a mysterious hand.

The horror of those days is perfectly accentuated by Marcin Lenarczyk's score. With all these artistic endeavours one of the most dramatic chapters of the communist era plays out before our eyes almost in real time. Hence, despite the passage of time and numerous systemic changes, *1970* seems to be a strangely contemporary film. In times of democratic crisis, limited not only to post-communist countries, Wolski's documentary sounds like a warning. By looking behind the scenes of the December events and into the places where decisions were made about the military shooting at protesting citizens, the author reminds us what the arrogance of any authority can lead to. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



Bucolic Bukolika

DIR.: **KAROL PAŁKA** • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 70'

It's hard to imagine a less bucolic place on Earth, because this adjective is usually associated with something pleasant, picturesque, ecotouristic. But already the opening song of the Ukrainian band DakhaBrakha introduces a certain dissonance – its sweet beginning turns into a harsh sound over time. And that's exactly what the film is like – built on the clash between a messy reality and pure emotion, stretched between storytelling and the raw documentation of everyday life of two women.

In a run-down, cluttered country house, amidst animals and worn-out belongings, a mother and daughter have created their own kingdom. Cut off from the world, living in primitive conditions, they seem self-sufficient, and maybe even happy, although hardly anyone remembers they exist. But the young director Karol Pałka goes beyond just an anthropological description in *Bucolic*. He's interested in an isolated microcosm which is simultaneously as big as the universe itself. And from time to time it opens up to emissaries of another (that is our) civilization. The appearance of a visiting priest or the arrival of a postman become an event. This is where the whole alternative phonosphere of *Bucolic* comes from, taking the story out of the earthly garbage dump and elevating it into a completely cosmic dimension.

Although occupied with their daily toil, the mother and daughter seem to be one organism at first, but each of them gains their own horizon in the film. While the older of the two finds her fulfilment in religion, conversations with the dead and taking care of stray dogs, the younger, suffering from a slight mental disability, goes on to seek human contact outside the home. And the author of the documentary gives her full right to do so, without any paternalism. He only gently tweaks the reality, so that the woman finally tries to transcend her limitations on her own. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



Fury Furia

DIR.: **KRZYSZTOF KASIOR** • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 85'

When the camera films her girlish face up close, it's sometimes hard to believe that she is the same person. Because in the ring, or during training, Aleksandra (Ola) Rola is fierce and ready for anything. But the very first scenes already show that it's not just about winning more MMA titles. Krzysztof Kasior's documentary *Fury* is a portrait of someone for whom the ring is their whole life.

In the case of the film's protagonist, the road to the championship also requires dealing with her inner demons. In subsequent scenes, Ola seems to use this brutal sport to vent about her many problems: with family, her love life, her existence. And MMA, as we know, takes no prisoners, imposing a brutal regime on its fighters outside the ring also. This sport requires total dedication, which is a real challenge for a girl from a 'difficult' home, looking for closeness and struggling with mental health issues. Kasior observes her in a variety of vague incarnations: a rebel, victim, ruthless fighter, defeated contestant. *Fury* is an intimate portrait of a female athlete that focuses not so much on the dynamics of an individual career, but on the complicated relations with people closest to her, such as the mother or the coach. However, the most difficult thing for Ola is to come into contact with herself – the ability to articulate her own needs and desires.

The story is also set in a specific socio-economic context. Sport can help achieve social advancement, but without a completely professional approach, the heroine of *Fury* can only count on herself. Outside the ring she is a fragile soul, with no financial backing and a heavy family burden. In this film we won't find the spectacular dimension of sports or great emotions. There is, however, a dream of success, albeit not strong enough to overcome internal and external limitations. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



No Hero at All Antybohater

DIR.: MICHAŁ KAWECKI • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 77'

The title of this film may bring to mind someone off-putting or simply 'uncinematic'. But nothing could be further from the truth. Already the first scene, in which we see a scooter being stolen, shows the bad boy character, and we certainly like watching his kind on the screen. Moments later, he's skiing under the watchful eye of his coach. But anyone expecting another sports documentary would be mistaken. When it turns out that the professional skier has no hands or feet, we are in for another surprise – this isn't going to be a typical film about overcoming disability. Michał Kaweck's debut documentary goes against the grain of various genre patterns, and Miszka, his magnificent anti-hero, will surprise us more than once.

The dramatic conflict doesn't revolve around Miszka's difficult life situation, such as his disability, lack of prospects or being abandoned by his parents during childhood, but his fiery temper and extraordinary ability to get into trouble. His conflict with the law casts a shadow over the boy's Paralympic career, but he has no intention of giving up on life. The camera accompanies him at a crucial time, when he is entering adulthood. But at every step Miszka does something that catches both the people around him and the camera off guard.

If there is such a thing as a documentary comedy, then *No Hero at All* is just that. Observing his protagonist for several years, Kaweck has managed to capture all his spontaneity, unpredictability and, above all, his exquisite sense of humour, which makes this unruly character immediately likeable. Certain scenes with Miszka have an almost Chaplin-esque charm, others are closer to a romantic comedy, and Miszka's juicy language becomes the punch line of many situations. After all we're watching a film about someone who does his all to avoid being a good-for-nothing. And someone who becomes a fully-fledged hero in spite of life's circumstances, and somewhat involuntarily. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



Only the Wind Tylko wiatr

DIR.: ZOFIA KOWALEWSKA • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 58'

In the short film *Close Ties* (2016), the young director Zofia Kowalewska examined the complicated relations between her grandparents. The new documentary could bear a similar title and in different senses of the word.

Only the Wind focuses on the bond between grandfather and granddaughter and also deals with his strong ties with the past. A trip to Kazakhstan, where the now ninety-two-year-old man was in exile as a child, turns into a personal journey to the land of memories. Those connected with Stalinist terror and the daily struggle for survival, as well as the most personal ones – evoking his first love. These memories are brought back to life by the harsh steppe outside the train windows – almost unchanged 70 years later. But everything else has changed. Kowalewska creates a double road film, immersed both in space and time. The grandfather's attempts to find the old world and, above all, to uncover the traces of those once close to him who have passed away with the wind are touching.

The film breathes in a similar rhythm to its elderly protagonist. The story unfolds slowly, arresting our stare on the empty landscapes of Kazakhstan, and the underprivileged life of its rural inhabitants. Through this gaze one can see tenderness – of the director, fulfilling perhaps the last wish of the elderly man, and of the man himself, cherishing the memory of his years spent in the distant Asian country. Because *Only the Wind* isn't only about ghosts. The protagonists travel thousands of kilometres to meet living people there, and what happens here and now between the director and her grandfather turns out to be just as important as the journey to the past. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



Polański, Horowitz. Hometown

DIR.: MATEUSZ KUDŁA, ANNA KOKOSZKA-ROMER • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 75'

Documentaries about Roman Polański usually concern the high-profile court case from over forty years ago. Debutants Mateusz Kudła and Anna Kokoszka-Romer went much further back in time – to the director's childhood and his friendship with the famous photographer Ryszard Horowitz. The third and equal hero of the film is Kraków, a city of intense memories and ever-present ghosts for both artists.

Seemingly it's an easy enough formula: follow their present-day stroll around Kraków, through the Jewish Kazimierz district and the former ghetto in Podgórze, listen to their conversations, record their emotional reactions. Few, however, would have succeeded in gaining so much trust from their characters and even directing a director so well. The authors of the documentary also made a huge investigative effort, whose results we can't reveal here, but which serves as the film's poignant conclusion.

Polański (born in 1933) and Horowitz (1939) are more than just happy about this meeting and the visit to their home town. Shooting this documentary triggers in each of them their own inner films, in which traumatic experiences (loss of the family home, death of loved ones, stay in a concentration camp or in hiding) intersect and complement each other. History comes full circle before our eyes. Familiar buildings and apartments are filled with relatives again while Romek and Rysiek are a few years old again, playing, fooling around, fighting for survival. The film's dark sense of humour may be shocking at times, but the protagonists have already partially worked through the nightmare of the Holocaust, also with their own creative output. Today, in their home town of Kraków, they have nothing left to do but banter with each other and string together endless anecdotes, as if they wanted to cleanse their wartime memories and exorcise that time once and for all. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



Soil Ziemia

DIR.: ZUZANNA SOLAKIEWICZ • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 71'

Soil, woman, mother – Zuzanna Solakiewicz's exceptional documentary turns these three words into synonyms. And what brings them together is singing: in white voice, primal, performed in a circle of women during traditional ceremonies. It's accompanied by images of farmlands covered with a blanket of snow, spring farm work, then haymaking, and finally hand-made bread or the waving belly of a pregnant woman. What lies before us is a sensual essay on female community, built on cultivating forgotten rural rituals and, of course, on singing together.

The strength of this film lies in its visuals. Not only in the surreal juxtapositions of femininity, nature, and folk culture, but also in ready-made iconic representations. Such as, for example, old family photographs held by village doyens as a sign of continuity and perseverance. The camera, however, is most eager to look at (seemingly) empty landscapes – filmed at different times of the year, in different weather conditions, and stages of natural life. It is with its secret, as clearly suggested by the sensual layer of the film, that the participants of the singing workshops communicate.

Solakiewicz isn't searching for a paradise lost in the countryside because she is probably aware how brutal it can get, especially with regard to women. However, through singing, her protagonists manage to revive this myth for a moment. Even the work of agricultural machinery or the everyday bustle around the farmyard gains magical power in the film, seducing us with its unobvious beauty and encouraging us to be more attentive. One might get the impression that these meetings of women of various ages restore some kind of ancient order to the world, away from the big-city rush, consumption, competition. Here, an ethnographic record meets living human tissue, and a trip to the Polish countryside, which in itself is almost gone, becomes a deep metaphysical and interpersonal experience. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



The Balcony Movie Film balkonowy

DIR.: PAWEŁ ŁOZIŃSKI • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 100'

This film touches on one of the greatest mysteries of documentary cinema. How is it that a camera can suddenly reveal things so painfully true – not only about the protagonists, but also about ourselves? For those being filmed, it can be an attraction or an intruder. It can act as a psychotherapist, a confessional, or a tribunal open to complaints. Paweł Łoziński's still camera is a bit of everything. Set up on a balcony for two and a half years, at various times of day and regardless of the weather, it filmed random passers-by with the director standing right next to it and asking them questions. These were the simplest and the most difficult questions at the same time. Some people avoided answering, others philosophised, some others clowned around, but there were also those who opened their souls. Dozens of people passed under the director's balcony, but each of them is the main protagonist here.

The simplicity of this method is captivating, although not everyone would be able to achieve such a strong result by only asking 'what's up' or 'what's the point of living'. The director can listen and knows when to be silent. What's important, he doesn't hide completely behind the camera, allowing us and his interlocutors into his private world. This is an important gesture, because the neighbours and strangers who appear in Łoziński's film often give him a lot. Thus, partly shot during the pandemic, *The Balcony Movie* becomes a story about overcoming isolation and social distance not only in the pandemic meaning.

A priest, an actress, a homeless man, a girl on roller skates, a diplomat, a postman... the gallery of characters gathered here makes an excellent vertical slice of Polish society. They are people of different ages, with different opinions and temperaments. There are the well-to-do and the homeless, the happy and the unhappy. But the greatest strength of this documentary parable lies in its universality. During the screening, many are going to ask themselves: what would I have said to Paweł Łoziński? And would I dare to ask someone all these questions? ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA



Walk with Angels Spacer z aniołami

DIR.: TOMASZ WYSOKIŃSKI • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 84'

Some films can draw viewers into a dark abyss from which it is difficult to return to reality. Told in a trance-like rhythm, Tomasz Wysokiński's expedition to South Africa, a private investigation into the case of a missing child – one of the many thousands who disappear without a trace in this part of the world – is such a film. It's also a story about a deeply scarred country, where years of apartheid and wars have shattered basic human bonds, including familial ones. There would be no *Walk with Angels* if not for Jerry, the main protagonist and our guide through the slums and miserable streets. Thanks to him, the documentary has something of a psychodrama in it, because, while overwhelmed with the mission, the man also takes us into the depths of his own psyche at the same time. Both journeys are almost equally dark. Jerry's life consists of years of homelessness and the past of a child soldier, and this is only a drop in the ocean of horrible experiences. When we meet him, he seems like a different man: deeply spiritual, but also ready to do anything to solve the mystery of the missing girl. It's clear that the violence he once suffered and inflicted still lingers within him, and now he must touch evil in its purest form once again.

The meandering narrative jumps between South Africa's past and present, between its everyday life and the realm of religious superstition, whose bloody victims today are, above all, the youngest and most defenceless. Together with Jerry, we plunge into this bleak world head-first and without any safety net, unprepared to face such a crushing nightmare. Wysokiński gives it a very expressive visual form, strengthened by Paweł Mykietyn's minimalistic score. But Jerry's conviction and determination relieves these heavy emotions – at least partially – and lets us see the light glimmering at the end of the tunnel. ■ ANITA PIOTROWSKA

POLISH DOCS

CATALOGUE OF FILMS

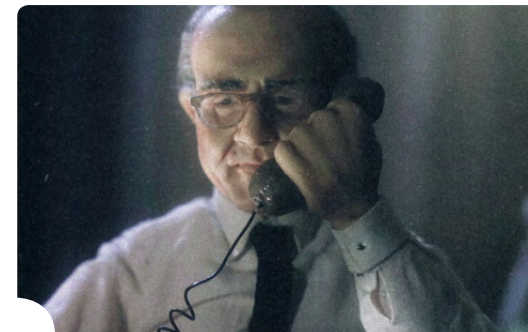
2021–2022



The Pack

DIR.: **TADEUSZ CHUDY** • 2022 • DOCUMENTARY • 51' • PROD.: STORY VEHICLE • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

A group of prisoners is tasked with taming the most aggressive dogs from the shelter. For the course leader, this is the last task before he resigns. Working with dogs completely transforms one of the convicts.



1970

DIR.: **TOMASZ WOLSKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY, ANIMATION • 70' • PROD.: KIJORA FILM, TVP, IPN • CONTACT: SQUARE EYES, WOUTER JANSEN, WOUTER@SQUAREEYESFILM.COM

Wolski continues an excellent series of documentaries based on found footage. This time he reveals the real dynamics of the events on the Polish Coast in December 1970. Combining archival footage with recently discovered transcripts of conversations between decision-makers (brought to life on the screen thanks to animation), he creates an overall image of the protests. He pays tribute to the protesters but mostly sheds new light on actions of the authorities: he depicts those who gave orders and those who followed them obediently.



Silence Heard Loud

DIR.: **ANNA KONIK** • 2022 • DOCUMENTARY • 71' • PROD.: ANNA KONIK • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

London 2020 – here the paths of seven asylum seekers cross. Their stories reveal the plight of all those fighting a desperate battle for freedom and dignity. They list their own problems: alienation, racism, loneliness, endless asylum procedures with no permission to work in the meantime, uncertainty about the future, and longing for family and home. So they are faced with self-doubt and begin to question the meaning of life. No one can tell what the future holds for them.



@miriamfrompoland

DIR.: **PIOTR SZCZEPAŃSKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 77' • PROD.: ANAGRAM FILM, EC1, KBF • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

Miriam Synger is a strong woman in a patriarchal society. She is struggling for her identity as an orthodox Jewess wanting to live in contemporary Poland. Miriam, also a mother of five children, has a mission. She wants to prove that Jewish life is still possible in Poland. Coming from an assimilated Polish family, she is a third generation Holocaust survivor. And she believes that Poland is not a big cemetery.



An Actress in Wonderland

DIR.: **MACIEJ KOWALEWSKI, PIOTR KONSTANTINOW** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 83' • PROD.: CUCKOOEGG PRODUCTIONS • CONTACT: PIOTR KONSTANTINOW, PJKONSTANTINOW@GMAIL.COM

'I have always had the curiosity to look further' – admits one of the greatest Polish actresses. Barbara Krafftówna takes the viewer on a visit to her magical land, inhabited by ghosts of the past, the Elderly Gentlemen's Cabaret and, above all, by her unforgettable artistic creations for the theatre, TV series and films. The protagonist, with her inimitable voice, tells an intimate story in which she combines her experiences of a woman and an artist with the vivid imagination of a little girl, and her own words are intertwined with lines from her roles.



Backstage

DIR.: **ADA SMYK** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 10' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION, KIKA • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

The backstage of the Polish National Opera in Warsaw. Craftspeople from workshops and wardrobe are preparing costumes and set design for the upcoming premiere of one of the most important shows of the season. The film sheds light on the invisible work of dozens of people who are usually overshadowed by the artists performing on stage.



Bucolic

DIR.: **KAROL PAŁKA** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 70' • PROD.: WAJDA STUDIO • CONTACT: TASKOVSKI FILMS, MARIJA KNEŽEVIĆ SHAJAHAN, SALESTF@TASKOVSKIFILMS.COM

Danusia and her daughter Basia live far away from the modern world, in tune with the rhythm and laws of nature, among animals and spirits of the dead. The peace and sense of security offered by their enclave come at a price – the women increasingly long for contact with other people. *Bucolic* is an affectionate observation of people who live in a different way. It evokes a curiosity about their world and a desire to take a closer look.



Escape to the Silver Globe

DIR.: **KUBA MIKURDA** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 94' • PROD.: SILVER FRAME • CONTACT: CAT&DOCS, MAËLLE GUÉNÉGUES, MAELLE@CATNDOCS.COM

A story about the biggest mystery and the greatest, unfulfilled dream of Polish cinema. In 1975 Andrzej Żuławski returns to Poland and plans to make *On the Silver Globe*, a science fiction epic and the biggest film in the history of Polish cinema. This film could have become one of the most ground-breaking SF films ever made. The huge budget, thought-provoking script, and bold artistic vision promised a masterpiece. Why, then, did the communist film industry bosses halt production two weeks before the shoot was completed? Was it for economic reasons? Political? Artistic? Personal?



Balcony Concert

DIR.: **DIANA KADŁUBOWSKA, KRZYSZTOF KADŁUBOWSKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 16' • PROD.: STUDIO FILMOWE PLUS TV • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

A tragicomic picture of the Polish society at the time of the first lockdown. Residents of a townhouse – each locked in their own apartment – are trying to adjust to a new situation. The majority remain at home and their only point of contact with the outside world is via a balcony and a common backyard. Isolation and physical distance abruptly limited the number of social interactions but also became an opportunity to observe the lives of our neighbours.



Common Place

DIR.: **KAROLINA ANNA KUTA, PATRYCJA SKORUPSKA** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 27' • PROD.: KAROLINA ANNA KUTA, PATRYCJA SKORUPSKA, KAROLINA CUPER • CONTACT: KAROLINA.ANNA.KUTA@GMAIL.COM

In defiance of the war in former Yugoslavia and ethnic and religious antagonism, which is still alive, women from Bosnian Rogatica who belong to different nations, denominations and generations are trying to bridge the rifts created by men. They do it on a small scale living together in an old house. In the shadow of an Orthodox church and a mosque, they cook together, talk and reminisce about the times of the fratricidal conflict. Contemporary footage is combined with the archival materials from the war in the Balkans.



Fury

DIR.: **KRZYSZTOF KASIOR** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 85' • PROD.: WŁADYSŁAW ŚLESICKI FILM FOUNDATION • CONTACT: ADAM ŚLESICKI, ADAM.SLESICKI@FUNDFILM.PL

Ola is dreaming about a career as a professional fighter. She would like to get out of her provincial high-rise estate, leave local pathologies behind and start to live on her own. At training sessions she is giving all she has got and her dream slowly starts to materialize. She needs to deal with obstacles too. As the stakes are getting higher, stress, injuries and conflicts are on the rise too. To succeed, she must practically resign from her private life, although she is hopelessly looking for closeness and affection at the same time.



Herbert. Barbarian in the Garden

DIR.: **RAPHAEL LEWANDOWSKI** • 2021 • POLAND, FRANCE • DOCUMENTARY • 95' • PROD.: DONTEN & LACROIX FILMS, LUTETIA ARABIANS, BLICK PRODUCTIONS • CONTACT: MARIA Blicharska, DONTENLACROIX@GMAIL.COM

Zbigniew Herbert is one of the most remarkable poets of the 20th century, struggling with anger, physical pain and mental illness. His works have been translated into 40 languages, acclaimed and awarded around the world, because of its universal dimension. However, behind the crystalline beauty of his poetry, there is a man struggling with everyday life. His story is told by his wife and people who were close to him unveil a picture of a unique, yet complex artist.



Invincible

DIR.: **TOM KOLIŃSKI** • 2021 • POLAND, SWITZERLAND • DOCUMENTARY • 83' • PROD.: OPUS FILM, HBO POLAND • CONTACT: EWA BADYNA, EWA.BADYNA@OPUSFILM.COM

A dynamic and emotional story of fighting, passion, and sacrifice. The filmmakers accompanied Joanna Jędrzejczyk – a multiple UFC champion, who at her time conquered the world of female MMA – for four years. In order to stay on top, she has to constantly confront consecutive opponents and her own body, being forced into superhuman efforts all the time. *Invincible* reveals what happens behind the scenes during the fights of modern gladiators. It shows the blood, sweat and tears as well as loneliness, which mark the path to global success in sports.



Judges Under Pressure

DIR.: **KACPER LISOWSKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 87' • PROD.: LOLLIPOP FILMS • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, SALES: BARBARA ORLICZ-SZCZYPULA, BARBARA.ORLICZ@KFF.COM.PL, FESTIVALS: KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

While democracy and the rule of law in Poland are under assault, judges risk their freedom to defend the rights of citizens. *Judges Under Pressure* tells the story of defiant judges who stand in defence of the Constitution and the separation of powers. One of these judges is Igor Tuleya who withstands the pressure and issues verdicts that are unfavourable to those in power.



In a Knot

DIR.: **ALEKSANDRA SYKULAK** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 32' • PROD.: THE ONLY CHILD PICTURES • CONTACT: CONNECT THE DOTS FILM AGENCY, MAŁGORZATA JANCZAK, ROCKYCREATE@GMAIL.COM

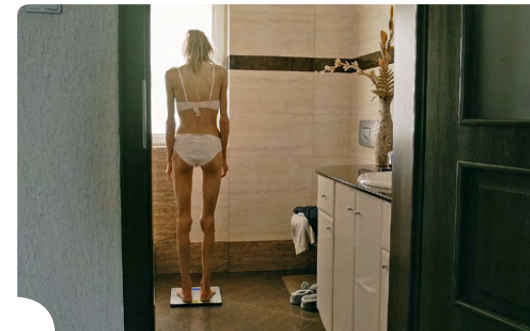
They are unable to live together, but they also cannot live in complete separation from each other. They split 30 years ago. He stayed in Warsaw and she moved to Berlin. Nevertheless, they keep calling each other and are involved in each other's everyday matters. Although the age difference between them is insignificant, the autumn of life is completely different for the grandma and the grandpa. How is it possible that two people with such different temperaments and lifestyles are able to remain in close contact?



It's a Very Pretty Picture

DIR.: **JAKUB CIOŚIŃSKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 30' • PROD.: JAKUB CIOŚIŃSKI • CONTACT: JAKUB.CIOSINSKI@GMAIL.COM

These intimate situations were recorded with a phone, registered on a VHS tape or filmed using a digital camera. Jakub Ciośiński shows the life of a three-generational family in the context of love failures and problems with relationship building. Can a camera lens serve as a tool to provide film therapy or to understand family stories? This documentary family self-portrait combines not only different filming techniques but also different stages of life and social norms with regard to relationships. Almost all members of the Ciośińskis have a say in it.



Last Chance

DIR.: **WIKTORIA NIEWIADOMSKA** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 25' • PROD.: WARSAW FILM SCHOOL • CONTACT: VERONICA ANDERSSON, VERONICAANDERSSON@SZKOLAFILMOWA.PL

Sara says that anorexia took away 8 years of her life. And she is aware that this is the last moment when she can really change something. She takes the opportunity of staying at a closed facility for girls and women with eating disorders. During comprehensive psychotherapy the protagonist tries to work over her problems and improve her relations with family members. Above all, she wants to recover so that she can continue to live and fulfill her dreams about her private life. The film is an intimate recording of this process.



Light Years

DIR.: **MONIKA PROBA** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 28' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION, SQUARE FILM STUDIO • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL
Vitali has always wanted to be a priest. There is only one thing left to do – according to the rules of the Eastern Orthodox Church, he needs to find a wife. Waiting for the change to come, he rents a flat with a friend from the seminary. They turn the two tiny rooms filled with books and icons into their own world, living beyond time and mundane rules. Years go by and Vitali's family is still waiting for the return of the priest.



No Hero at All

DIR.: **MICHAŁ KAWECKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 77' • PROD.: UNLIMITED FILM OPERATIONS, WAJDA STUDIO, TVP • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, SALES: BARBARA ORLICZ-SZCZYPULA, BARBARA.ORLICZ@KFF.COM.PL, FESTIVALS: KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL
Mishka is a boy with many faces. This petty criminal and promising alpine skier enjoys life to its fullest despite his physical disability and difficult living conditions. What is more, he has an extraordinary sense of humour. He is captured at a key moment when he enters adulthood and receives the last opportunity to take part in the Paralympics. But above all he needs to make a decision about his future. Despite his limitations, he takes up consecutive challenges in his life.



Over the River

DIR.: **ANDREI KUTSILA** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 43' • PROD.: BELSAT TV • CONTACT: BARTOSZ BARYNOW, OFFICE@BELSAT.EU
Once he wanted to be a soldier and today he is a rural doctor and a hard-working farmer. He is also a lonely guardian of the memory of this land's Jewish inhabitants whose only reminder is an overgrown cemetery. Next to the protagonist, there is his little son who is killing time during summer holidays. Who will little Gosza become in the future? Will he stay in the village which is gradually becoming depopulated and losing ties to its past? The only thing that will remain in place is a bucolic landscape over the Neman River, preserving the traces of the deceased.



Nature Is My Homeland

DIR.: **MAREK GAJCZAK** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 54' • PROD.: KRAKOW FILM KLASZTER, ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS IN KRAKOW • CONTACT: ANETA ZAGORSKA, ANETA.ZAGORSKA@FILM.KRAKOW.PL
A surprisingly refreshing approach to ecology. The scientists, artists and enthusiasts who are related to nature on very different levels present the relationship between man and nature from a completely novel perspective. We need to learn to live with the awareness that people have irreversibly changed the world they share with millions of other species. Which of them have best adjusted to the life in a city? Why do nature films show a false image of nature? What can we learn from plants and animals that can adapt to a life among waste?



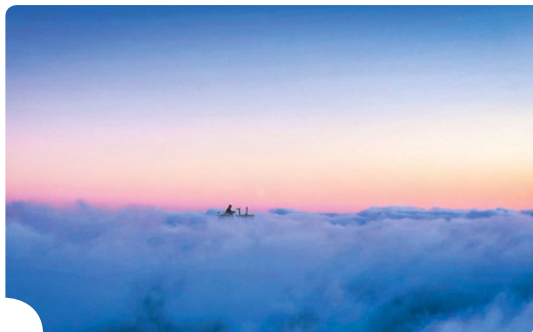
Only the Wind

DIR.: **ZOFIA KOWALEWSKA** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 58' • PROD.: SILVER FRAME, TVP • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL
A 92-year-old Zdzisław and his 25-year-old granddaughter set out on a 5000 km journey to a remote village in Kazakhstan. For him, this marks a return to where he was exiled as a teenager by the Soviets during WWII. After 70 years, he once again travels to the land of his childhood, in search of his first love, which he was forced to leave behind. The granddaughter is looking to support him through his arduous journey while discovering the reality behind the bedtime stories she heard as a child.



Polański, Horowitz. Hometown

DIR.: **MATEUSZ KUDŁA, ANNA KOKOSZKA-ROMER** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 75' • PROD.: KRK FILM • CONTACT: OFFICE@KRKFILM.COM
After several decades, they finally met in their hometown. Two artists, photographer Ryszard Horowitz and film director Roman Polański, are wandering around Kraków along the pathways of their wartime experiences. They walk through the streets of Kazimierz and the former ghetto, look into the flats where they spent their childhood and remember those who are no longer alive as well as those who enabled them to survive the Holocaust. The film is a colourful tale about childhood, friendship, the same Jewish fate and, above all, the place that continues to be their home.



Solar Voyage

DIR.: **ADAM ŻADŁO** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 18' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION • CONTACT: MICHAŁ HUDZIKOWSKI, M.HUDZIKOWSKI@SFP.ORG.PL

'This is a film about Mirek Lech, a visionary, inventor, extreme traveller and a champion of renewable energy sources'. The portrait of an unconventional protagonist takes on an unconventional form: a parody of a documentary essay with elements of friendly humour. From Pciim to Slovakia, from Slovakia to Greece and from there straight to Africa, where this man, not so young anymore, wants to find a job in a solar power plant and a future wife.



Tanaka's Diary

DIR.: **FILIP JACOBSON** • 2021 • POLAND, GERMANY • DOCUMENTARY • 22' • PROD.: FURIA FILM, FILIP JACOBSON • CONTACT: KAROLINA.GALUBA@FURIAFILM.PL

What was to be a coveted tour of a Japanese group around Europe had a tragic end. The 1979 events are remembered by a couple who went on their honeymoon at that time. Their story is illustrated by authentic footage recorded by Japanese tourists and a private journal, which is read out off-screen, full of euphoria and puzzlement with regard to foreign cultures. Who was its author and what did this journey become for him?



The Herd

DIR.: **MONIKA KOTECKA, KAROLINA PORYZAŁA** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 79' • PROD.: LAVA FILMS • CONTACT: MARTA GMOSIŃSKA, MARTA@LAVAFILMS.PL

Members of the 'Volteo' amateur female equestrian vaulting club get a chance to join the Polish national team. They take on this overwhelming and costly challenge. Three girls of different ages will have to overcome their own weaknesses to achieve their joint goal. The tension grows from one training session to the next. Entering the professional level means higher demands and stress, and constant indulgence of the weak takes away the strength of the group.



Swell

DIR.: **ŁUKASZ RATUSKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 72' • PROD.: LUKKA ŁUKASZ RATUSKI • CONTACT: ŁUKASZ RATUSKI, LUKASZ.RATUSKI@GMAIL.COM

The Baltic: cold, dismal, not a place you'd associate with surfing. Waves only form there for a couple of weeks a year. Even though they live 500 km from the sea, Paweł and Artur make sure to be in the water during THOSE days. But not everything goes according to plan. They spend a few years seeking their dream wave. Is it even possible to catch it? And is it only about surfing for the two of them? A captivating story about chasing dreams, friendship, waiting, determination and overcoming barriers. The director's debut feature-length film.



The Balcony Movie

DIR.: **PAWEŁ ŁOZIŃSKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 100' • PROD.: LOZINSKI PRODUCTION, HBO MAX • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

Can anyone be a movie hero? Can the world be locked in one film frame? Director Paweł Łoziński is watching people from his balcony as they are passing by, he accosts them, asks questions, talks about how they deal with life. Every story is unique, and life always surpasses imagination. Maybe it's enough to stop for a moment to get a deeper insight?



The Soil

DIR.: **ZUZANNA SOLAKIEWICZ** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 71' • PROD.: KIJORA FILM, TVP, ENDORFINA, KBF • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

A beautifully illustrated story of a contemporary village and its unconventional dwellers who are of different age, but have one thing in common – their strong attachment to folk culture. In this film, music is as important as images, since it accompanies the protagonists during key events in their lives.



The Way

DIR.: **WOJTEK KOZAKIEWICZ** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 23' • PROD.: PROJEKTOROWNIA WOJCIECH KOZAKIEWICZ • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, KATARZYNA WILK, KATARZYNA.WILK@KFF.COM.PL

The Krakow climbing scene has always been full of personalities from the edge of science, culture and art. For many, sport was a window to the world. The invisible force that draws you into sport is like a drug. Sometimes it doesn't seem to make any sense, but without it everything else loses its meaning as well. Whether you represent the country internationally, climb rocks, or do it just to push your boundaries – it sets the rhythm of your life.



Walk with Angels

DIR.: **TOMASZ WYSOKIŃSKI** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 84' • PROD.: MAÑANA • CONTACT: VISIBLE FILMS, THIERRY DETAILLE, THIERRY.DETAILLE@VISIBLEFILM.COM

Children routinely disappear in South Africa. Organised business, local conspiracy of silence and blood clotting stories often stand behind it. Jerry, who has been fighting his demons since childhood, makes an attempt to find a girl from Soweto who was kidnapped a few years ago. He needs to walk along the path leading through slums and shady streets, the traces of apartheid, local religious cults and personal memories. His private investigation, magnified by Paweł Mykietyn's hypnotic music, and a journey deep into the self, will lead the viewer to the very heart of darkness.



Universes

DIR.: **DOROTA ROŚ** • 2021 • DOCUMENTARY • 16' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION, WONDERLAND PICTURES COMPANY • CONTACT: MICHAŁ HUDZIKOWSKI, M.HUDZIKOWSKI@SFP.ORG.PL

There is a national festival, 'In the Land of Dumplings', in Bychawa. This peculiar event and a spectacular photograph of a NASA astronaut have a common denominator – a small commune in the region of Lublin. The view is beautiful from afar, but what do little homelands look like from up close? The satellite picture taken from space by Jeff Williams becomes a pretext to show the local community. Against the backdrop of spectacular decorations in this rural commune, its residents live their regular lives to the rhythm of tractors and amateur music making.

CASE STUDY / 1970

1970 is an unusual and original project in terms of both narrative and production. It combines archival footage and audio recordings from 1970 with stop-motion animation.

ROBERT SOWA

**DIRECTOR, CINEMATOGRAPHER,
EDITOR:** TOMASZ WOLSKI
ANIMATION DIRECTOR: ROBERT SOWA
(KRAKOW ANIMATION CENTER)
MUSIC: BARTŁOMIEJ TYCIŃSKI, DJ LENAR
PRODUCTION: KIJORA FILM, ANNA GAWLITA
CO-PRODUCTION: TELEWIZJA POLSKA S.A.,
INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL REMEMBRANCE
YEAR OF PRODUCTION: 2021



The film shows the events of the so-called 'December '70'. A wave of protests swept across Poland over rising prices, a failure to guarantee basic workers' rights, and a deepening economic crisis. As time went on more and more workers began revolting and – especially in Pomerania – the strength and determination of ordinary people was starting to show. They clashed with the police and security services. The authorities decided to use force. Shots were fired... killing people.

The film has been structured primarily around preserved archival footage. However, previously unknown recordings of conversations political decision-makers had with the army and police command were found. These tapes showed the helplessness and inability to react to the events that had been dynamically unfolding in the streets accompanied by increasing ruthlessness and, consequently, use of force and firearms against the protesters.



Anna Gawlita (producer) and Tomasz Wolski (director)

In the conceptual phase, we decided on a risky combination – to confront archival materials with an animated world of offices, cabinets, and party bureaucrats. The idea was to recreate the places where those in power had been making their decisions. For this purpose we created 1:6 scale models. Their look and furnishings were based on preserved archival photographs, films, and documentation. The entire decor, furniture, and even the most minute details – cigarettes, ashtrays, bottles, glasses, and food have been carefully recreated on a micro scale to achieve the most realistic effect possible. Six rooms were created and each with removable walls that would let them be freely combined during filming.





The film features six characters. These are actual party decision makers, police and army generals who were calling the shots at the time. Materials provided to us by the Institute of National Remembrance and some freely available documentation served to create realistic puppets. The faces, gestures, and facial expressions have been carefully selected to get the right dramatic effect. Their design utilised movable joints to allow complete freedom of movement. The heads were interchangeable. Each character had two – each one with different facial expressions. We didn't include lip sync, but the eyeballs, hands, and fingers were fully articulated. All these elements were first modelled in clay and then turned into moulds for the final silicone castings. The finished heads and hands were covered with hair made of natural bristles while the skin was coloured to complement the character of each figure. Their clothes: suits, uniforms, shirts, and ties were sewn from natural materials and tailored to each of the characters. The figurines are between 20 and 28 cm tall.



In the film we used various lighting methods to accomplish the desired visual effect. From dedolights, through micro lamps, diodes, LEDs, etc. Certain scenes required dollies and sliders. The models, characters, as well as all other set elements and details allowed us to create extremely realistic scenes. We managed to make numerous shots look like actual documentary footage from that period. We have also decided to keep the colour in the animated sequences. When combined with black-and-white archival materials, it heightened the sense of realism, but also allowed for the expected contrast to be maintained between the world of ordinary people, the workers, and the decision-makers and prominent government officials. At a time of crisis and shortage of basic necessities, nothing was in short supply in party offices, including exclusive citrus fruits and expensive delicacies.

Movement in the animated scenes is sparse and subdued. It's actually 'anti-animation'. A result of the intention to expressively juxtapose these two spaces – the documentary and animation. The tragic and frantic events on the streets are opposed by restrained movement in the animation. Decisions taken in comfortable offices shrouded in cigarette smoke are juxtaposed with the violently suppressed protests.

The use of puppet animation and models was also intended to have a symbolic effect – Poland's government at that time was a puppet one. The Soviet Union and the authorities in Moscow were actually in charge of what was then happening in Poland and the local leaders were nothing more than figureheads. This type of animation was therefore a conscious semantic



Robert Sowa (animation director)



choice. Realistic and dramatic events on the streets have been juxtaposed with the artificiality and conventionality of those who governed our country. The final scene directly refers to this symbolic dimension. Six animated puppets are removed from the set by an unknown red hand – they were just puppets that played their part and were no longer necessary. ■

CONTACT: KIJORA FILM • kijora@gmail.com,
ANIMATION CENTER KRAKÓW • animation@film.krakow.pl

For many years, Piotr Dumala kept insisting that his films originated from dreams, but when he made his debut with the largely dreamlike feature film *The Forest* (2009), he stopped. 'There are no more dream films,' he admitted to me then. And added: 'Reality has outpaced dreams'. I suppose it has. But if one thing has outpaced dreams for certain – it's imagination.

Piotr Dumala is one of the most interesting directors in the history of Polish animation and a very versatile artist. He doesn't only write scripts, but also interesting short stories, draws, illustrates books, does stage design, posters, and even takes up acting. He is also an educator, teaching the art of animation at the Łódź Film School.

He has several dozen prestigious festival awards to his name, e.g. from Bilbao, Espinho, Huesca, Mannheim, Montreal, Oberhausen, Ottawa, Zagreb. In his extensive collection of festival

trophies, several come from Kraków, including: Bronze Hobby-Horse (1989) for *Freedom of the Leg*, Silver Hobby-Horse (2014) for *Hippos*, Bronze Dragon (1992) for *Franz Kafka*, and two Golden Dragons (1985, 1988) for *A Gentle Spirit* and *The Walls*. The year 2021 brought him the Dragon of Dragons for his exceptional contribution to the world of animation.

Thus, he joined a truly exclusive group. There, he will meet Jan Švankmajer, Stephen and Timothy Quay, Jurij Norsztein, Raoul Servais, Jerzy Kucia, Piotr Kamler, Paul Driessen, Priit Pärn,

When Dreams Are Gone, Imagination Remains

THE CINEMA OF PIOTR DUMAŁA

JERZY ARMATA



Hippos Source: Fumi Studio

Witold Giersz, Caroline Leaf – his masters, friends, and fellow artists. In 1999, Jan Lenica received the Dragon of Dragons Award. Dumala played the leading role in his last film, *Island R.O.* (2001), finished by his friends after the artist's passing. Four years ago the Dragon of Dragons Award went to Daniel Szczechura, not only a great director, but also an esteemed teacher whose best student was Dumala.

IT ALL STARTED WITH A STONE SCULPTURE

Piotr Dumala did not attend any film schools; he graduated from Warsaw's Academy of Fine Arts, where he earned a degree in the Studio of Conservation and Restoration of Stone Sculpture. While at the Academy, he discovered animation and took classes at the Animated Film Studio run by Professor Daniel Szczechura and later, for a short time, worked as his assistant. It was this outstanding artist and teacher who discovered Dumala as a filmmaker and artist in general.

It seems that Piotr Dumala has been dreaming about animated films ever since he was a child. In an interview for the monthly magazine 'Kino' he confessed: 'For me each drawing has always been just one scene in a sequence of events which took place before the moment I recorded, and then found its further development. They all tell a story and often create a series of adventures that turn into action – one that's clearly



Dr Character Presents II

cinematic. For example, this drawing is very characteristic; a bandit escapes from policemen chasing him on a tractor.' This drawing, reproduced by 'Kino' (no. 10/1993), comes from 1960. Its author was four years old then.

Made while still studying and under Szczechura's supervision, *Lycanthropy* (1981), a dark tale about wolves and humans, is considered one of the most interesting debuts in the history of Polish animation. Two years later Dumala revisited a wolf character in the carelessly drawn *Little Black Riding Hood* (1983), a subversive, darkly humorous mockery of the famous children's tale, this time intended for adults. This type of cinema, i.e. silly stories with a pinch of surrealism and punnonsense, was continued in *A Nervous Life of Cosmos* (1996), as well as in two series of comical shorts, this time set on Earth: *Nervous Life 1* (1992) and *Nervous Life 2* (1994), as well as in the series *Dr Character Presents* (the first part was made in 2010 and the second in 2011), a successful pastiche of TV talk shows.

ACCIDENTAL DISCOVERY OF PLASTER TILES

In 1984 he made *Flying Hair* – a poetic impression about two people in love going for a walk. Here for the first time he used

For me each drawing has always been just one scene in a sequence of events which took place before the moment I recorded [...].

his own invention – a plaster tile technique. Later, with *A Gentle Spirit* (1985), *The Walls* (1987), *Freedom of the Leg* (1988), *Franz Kafka* (1991), and *Crime and Punishment* (2000), this method brought him universal recognition, confirmed by an avalanche of festival awards (among others in Espinho, Huesca, Mannheim, Oberhausen, Ottawa, Zagreb, and Kraków). The artist discovered this technique by accident, as he admitted in an episode of the TV documentary series 'Anima' (2000), devoted to his work. He once found an old wooden board back from his school days in his studio, a leftover from his painting technique lessons. It was a piece of plywood which he had used in art school to learn how to apply gesso. He decided to paint something resembling the style of the



FILMOGRAPHY:

OSTATNIA WIECZERZA (THE LAST SUPPER) • ANIM. • 2019

EDERLY • FEATURE • 2015

HIPOPOTAMY (HIPPOS) • ANIM. • 2014

KOŁYSANKA (LULLABY) • ANIM. • 2012

DR CHARAKTER PRZEDSTAWIA (DR CHARAKTER PRESENTS) • ANIM. • 2011

DR CHARAKTER PRZEDSTAWIA II (DR CHARAKTER PRESENTS II) • ANIM. • 2010

LAS (THE FOREST) • FEATURE • 2009

WALKA, MIŁOŚĆ I PRACA (FIGHT, LOVE AND WORK) • ANIM. • 2009

ZBRODNIA I KARA (CRIME AND PUNISHMENT) • ANIM. • 2000

NERWOWE ŻYCIE (A NERVOUS LIFE) • SERIES ANIM. • 1993

FRANZ KAFKA • ANIM. • 1991

WOLNOŚĆ NOGI (FREEDOM OF THE LEG) • ANIM. • 1988

ŚCIANY (WALLS) • ANIM. • 1987

NERWOWE ŻYCIE KOSMOSU (A NERVOUS LIFE OF COSMOS) • ANIM. 1986

ŁAGODNA (THE GENTLE ONE) • ANIM. • 1985

LATAJĄCE WŁOSY (FLYING HAIR) • ANIM. • 1984

CZARNY KAPTUREK (LITTLE BLACK RIDING HOOD) • ANIM. • 1983

LYKANTROPIA (LYCANTHROPY) • ANIM. 1981

old Dutch masters on it. Since they used rather dark palettes, he first covered the board with a dark base and then started to scrape off the outline of the future painting with a stylus. This was the only way to make something visible. After all, the background remained dark. It was at this moment that it dawned on him: if one can 'discover' a drawing on a dark background, it's also possible to animate it!

Dumała's plaster-tile films draw generously from literary classics, from the world of Fyodor Dostoyevsky to the inner landscape of Franz Kafka. The film adaptation of *A Gentle Spirit*, with its narrative functions led by visually refined, extremely condensed and intense cinematography and complemented by Zygmunt Konieczny's wonderful music, is much truer to Dostoyevsky's prose than many feature-length adaptations.

In this short film Dumała has managed to capture the atmosphere of the Russian writer's work. There are also traces of... Kafka. For example, in his next animations: *The Walls*, a strikingly expressive and overwhelming story about a man and his fate, and *Freedom of the Leg*, a surrealistic grotesque about the right of individual body parts to act freely. And finally in *Franz Kafka* – an excellent animated documentary about the life and work of this brilliant writer, and the adaptation of *Crime and Punishment*, made without words, captivating with its atmosphere and storytelling.

ARTISTIC DIVERSIFICATION

The year 2009 saw Dumała's live-action debut. *The Forest*, a moving story about an ailing father and his caretaking son, impresses with its slow, contemplative narration, attention to frame composition, and mainly visual storytelling. Words are used sparingly, complementing what's otherwise told through images. In the same year, the director surprised everyone with a computer-generated, fascinating collage of painting and music *Fight, Love and Work* (2009), presented during the New Horizons festival on a huge wall of one of Wrocław's tenement houses.

Dumała is a proponent of artistic diversification. After the feature film *The Forest*, he made several animated films which are completely different in terms of style: the beautiful *Lullaby* (2012), a surrealistic music video for Krzysztof Komeda's famous *Rosemary's Baby* main theme (1968), or two editions of *Dr Character...* (in 2010 and 2012). The intriguing animated *Hippopotamuses* (2014) was followed by an oneiric feature-length comedy in the form of a philosophical parable *Elderly* (2015), and then by an unconventional animated attempt at Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting – *Last Supper* (2019).

While maintaining the characteristic style of his cinematic output, the artist also produces commercial animations. He makes opening credits for festivals and TV shows, commercials, music videos. He does stage design, press illustrations, designs book covers as well as theatrical and film posters. He also writes short stories (*Gra w żyletki*), novels (*Elderly*), and song lyrics (*The Treflik Family*). Moreover, he is a respected teacher loved by students, a professor at the Łódź Film School, which he never attended. Nearly two hundred graduation films were created under his supervision, becoming the first step on the artistic path for many young filmmakers, perhaps future winners of no less prestigious festival trophies. ■



The Forest Photo: Małgorzata Olecka

PIOTR DUMAŁA – animated and feature film director and graphic artist. He was born in 1956. His films, including *A Gentle Creature* (1985), *Freedom of the Leg* (1988), *Franz Kafka* (1991) and *Crime and Punishment* (2000) won over 70 awards at international festivals (among others, in Kraków, Zagreb, Annecy). In 2009 he made his feature debut *The Forest*. Dumała teaches at the Film School in Łódź, Konstfack College in Eksjö and Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

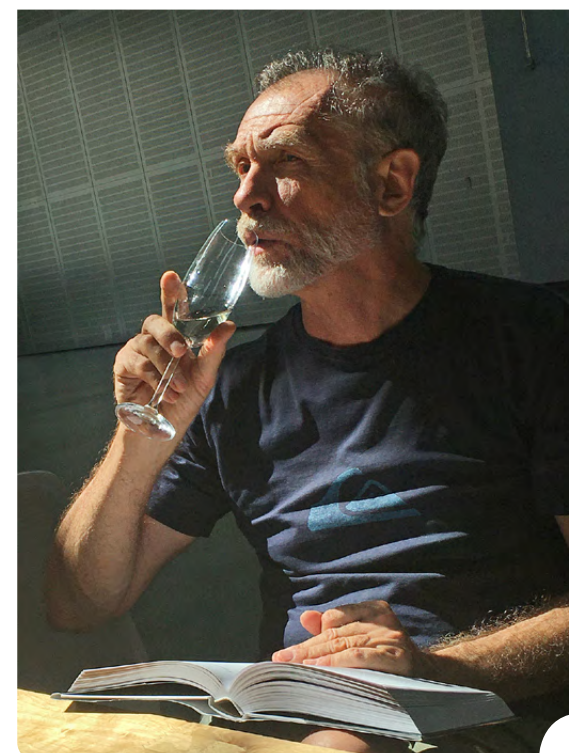


Photo: Monika Augustyniak-Dumała

INTERVIEW WITH MARTA PAJEK

We meet following the release of the last part of *Impossible Figures and Other Stories*. The third film – serving as a conclusion to the triptych – had its premiere during the competition at the Ottawa Film Festival.

ADRIANA PRODEUS: You're concluding a long project you've started in 2015.

How does it make you feel?

MARTA PAJEK: Indeed, it's been a long time. I've done a lot of searching and I feel fulfilled; I'm ending a certain stage with satisfaction. I feel that the film coincides with various issues that are currently happening in the political and social dimensions. The personal and the universal intertwine organically. I'm satisfied with the result and curious how it's going to be received.

What was the original concept?

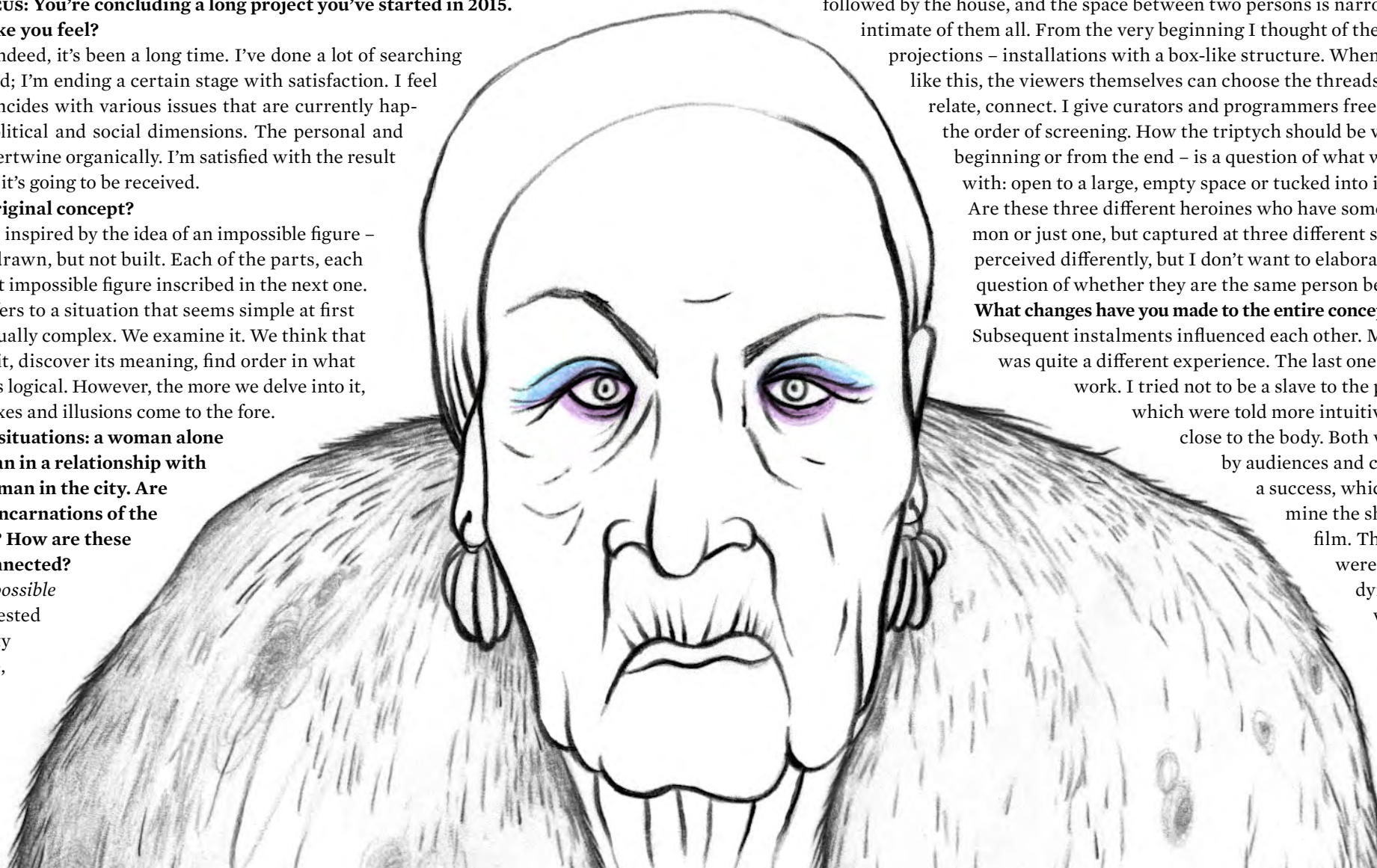
The triptych was inspired by the idea of an impossible figure – one that can be drawn, but not built. Each of the parts, each film, is a different impossible figure inscribed in the next one. Each of them refers to a situation that seems simple at first glance, but is actually complex. We examine it. We think that we should solve it, discover its meaning, find order in what apparently seems logical. However, the more we delve into it, the more paradoxes and illusions come to the fore.

Three different situations: a woman alone at home, a woman in a relationship with a man, and a woman in the city. Are these different incarnations of the same character? How are these three spaces connected?

The space in *Impossible Figures...* has a nested structure: the city is the largest one,

followed by the house, and the space between two persons is narrowest and most intimate of them all. From the very beginning I thought of these films as spatial projections – installations with a box-like structure. When watching them like this, the viewers themselves can choose the threads that overlap, relate, connect. I give curators and programmers freedom to choose the order of screening. How the triptych should be viewed – from the beginning or from the end – is a question of what we want to be left with: open to a large, empty space or tucked into its deepest place. Are these three different heroines who have something in common or just one, but captured at three different stages? It can be perceived differently, but I don't want to elaborate on that. Let the question of whether they are the same person be an open one.

What changes have you made to the entire concept over the years? Subsequent instalments influenced each other. Making each one was quite a different experience. The last one required the most work. I tried not to be a slave to the previous parts, which were told more intuitively and sensually, close to the body. Both were well received by audiences and critics, and were a success, which could determine the shape of the final film. The previous parts were absorbing and dynamic. This one was intended to be more meditative, oneiric.



The film speaks of decline, marasm, stagnation. A broader social context was also required. I had to refer to the collective memory. As a model, I used the classically ideal human body from antiquity that had then permeated into the Renaissance and Baroque and whose proportions finally influenced totalitarian visions. One element is the athletic, muscular body in sculpture, another is Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, but also socialist-realist monuments. The city where the film is set does not belong to a specific place or time; it's a conglomeration of fantasies. It is one of those utopian cities that people were trying to build. Perhaps someone will spot specific buildings or unrealized architectural projects. I wouldn't want to close it off to the viewer. I was looking for architecture related to the ideas of a 'better society' or social regime.

Why did you make the first part last?

It was the biggest unknown. I wrote all three scripts at the same time. But I came back to the last one after finishing the previous films. I refined the text and filled the general outline with details. The runtimes of individual films were changing slightly while working on them, but the main idea remained the same. In a triptych, as we know from art history, the chronology of the individual parts is not the most important thing. We approach the altar and perceive it differently depending upon whether we first see hell, banishment from paradise, or heaven. Coincidence and how our gaze wanders around it determine our interpretation of the whole. The order of completion resulted from the fact that each individual film was complicated, and each one in its own way. The third and second related more to personal experience and observation rather than in-depth knowledge. So I decided to do the first part last because I felt least competent and mature to build a broader context right from the get go. I waited a few years for some kind of wisdom to enlighten me, but, well, nothing like that happened, so I had to work with what I had. What changed me the most during that time was the pandemic and the fact that I became a mom. I look at the theme of the future outlined in *Impossible Figures*... differently.

Why didn't III get an expanded title?

Both films were made almost back-to-back and ran concurrently at festivals. The producers were afraid it might confuse viewers, so we shortened the title.

What did the production process for each part look like?

If one were to look at it as a whole, I first needed various developments to push me further: an artistic residency in France, a grant from the Polish Filmmakers Association. When the



MARTA PAJEK – director, graphic artist and painter. She was born in 1982 in Kielce (Poland). She is a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow where she studied Animated Film at Jerzy Kucia's Film Studio. As part of her scholarship, she participated in an internship under the supervision of Priit Pärn at the University of Turku in Finland. Her short animations include *After Apples* (2004), *Behind the Wall* (2005) and *Sleepincord* (2011). Her latest films which are part of the triptych: *Impossible Figures and Other Stories II*, *Impossible Figures and Other Stories III*, is now screened and awarded across the world.



script was ready, Piotr Szczepanowicz decided to produce the film. The Animoon studio was just starting out, and we made Parts II and III one after the other, in a flash. During the production of II we applied for funding for III, and did the same

for I when making III. Then, for the last film, the National Film Board of Canada joined us as a co-producer. We did some of the work in Montreal. I spent two months there with a true dream team. The way of working there is a bit of a model of how I would like to work in ideal conditions. They have unimaginable production facilities and wonderful people. For me, the NFB is a utopian vision of what an animation studio should look like.

What methods did you use?

The technique is the same throughout the triptych: a simple pencil drawing on paper with splashes of colour – in crayon or as an overlaid background. We also used a lot of 3D. I used it in each part: in *II* and *III* to animate the fur, in *II* for the movement of wallpaper in apartment corridors, for forced perspective illusions of how the space loops, in *I* for the fly-by of the city. On the new film, I worked on the sound with Michał Jankowski once more, whom I had met on *Sleepincord*. The pandemic surprised us, the images from the new film – empty streets, a paralysing silence that lets you almost hear the rubbish flying by. Suddenly it became all too real. In the midst of all this, the dream of working with actress Anna Polony came true. Unfortunately, the pandemic intensified when it came time to do recording sessions, so we made them separately: me at home in Suchedniów, her in the studio in Kraków, the sound engineer in Warsaw. It's amazing that we had to create an intimate situation without meeting at all, just hearing each other. We recorded a song, ultimately performed a cappella, and it was a big challenge.

You started working on the film 8 years ago. Do you feel that animation production has changed a lot?

Certainly the equipment and technological facilities in Poland have developed incredibly. Many artists have turned to the language of animation, and there are more and more promising series and feature-length animated films on the way. There change is huge.

Impossible figures turned out to be possible. The running theme of the triptych is the persistent pursuit of perfection – can it be continued indefinitely?

Life experience allows us to accept that neither we, nor the world, nor the situations we pursue are, or will ever be, perfect.

When will Polish viewers get to see the film?

At the Krakow Film Festival, I hope, because it is particularly close to me.

And what are you planning next?

I'm dreaming of an animated feature for children. Currently I'm relaxing, thinking about the exhibition. ■



A drying sea, a dachshund hidden in a cake, and the mysterious world of predatory mushrooms – a summary of this year's edition of Animated in Poland.

ANIMATED IN POLAND

The 9th edition of the Animated in Poland pitching was held as part of KFF Industry at the 61st Krakow Film Festival. Seven projects spread across a variety of techniques were presented online by the directors. A total of 6 projects directed by women have entered the selection this year. This trend has been visible in the pitching selection for a few years now and is also reflected among the most popular festival Polish animated films made by female directors like Marta Pajek, Renata Gąsiorowska, and Julia Orlik. However, strong female representation does not mean that the focus was placed on female themes. This year's projects mainly revolved around social issues.

Nawojka Wierzbowska presented two projects. Her *How to Be Loved* is a portrait of a boy who, trying to win his mother's affection, decides to swap his head for that of a dog in order to earn some much-coveted strokes. Made with sparse crayon

drawings, the film is a short story about the intoxicating power of relationships. Wierzbowska's second project, *I'm Not Here Anymore*, is a 2D digital animation telling the subversive story of a dead grandfather who cannot leave his home because his family possessively refuses to let him go. The author's surrealistic approach to the most important issues and simple, yet expressive visuals make her a new voice of Polish animation that's worth following. Betina Bożek, the author of *The Land of Whim* – presented at Animated in Poland a few years back – dives even deeper into surrealism. Her latest film, *Dessert Dachshund*, is a grotesque and absurd story about a dachshund hidden in a wedding cake, which, depending on its position, bodes luck or lack thereof for the young couple. Expressive crayon strokes and the characters' bold, distinctive look make Bożek one of the most intriguing creators on the Polish animation scene.

The selection also included two graduation projects made by students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. In the poetic and austere *Smell of the Ground*, Olivia Rosa paints a vision of the world after the end of the Anthropocene while Małgorzata Wowczak's *Eyeshoom* examines how living creatures constantly strive for domination and mutual destruction. This auteurist puppet animation film is likely to gain some significant festival outreach.

All My Effing Superheroes by Piotr Kabat is a fan trip to sun-drenched Los Angeles that grew out of film and comic book inspirations. The film follows a director who arrives in LA to sign a contract and meets a number of increasingly strange characters along the way. Piotr Kabat, known in the industry for his award-winning *Minor Accident of War*, pushes his hand-drawn visual style even further in his latest film.



I Am Not Here Anymore by Nawojka Wierzbowska



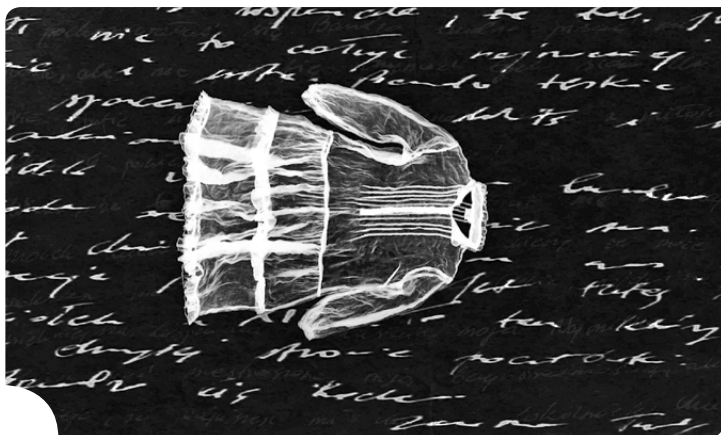
Dessert Dachshund by Betina Bożek

Joanna Kożuch's animated documentary *Once There Was a Sea...* is a moving testimony from the people living in the vicinity of the disappearing Aral Sea. This unique, transmedia project is the first instalment of a series produced by Petr Badac from Bfilm. Animated in Poland is the only pitching in Poland devoted to short projects in the final stages of production. 'Every year we pitch projects from Letko, because there's no better platform for discussing them with the representatives of the world's leading festivals, television, and distribution companies, and an opportunity to establish contacts for the years to come!' – says Piotr Szczepanowicz, creative producer at Letko studio, who this year pitched *All My Effing Superheroes*. Pitching is also open to projects looking for co-production support, such as this year's *I Am Not Here Anymore*. 'During the pitching, I met Aneta Zagórska from the Krakow Animation Centre and started working with her. We are currently in talks with a potential French co-producer' – comments the author Nawojka Wierzbowska. Animated in Poland not only offers a chance to gain partners, but also an opportunity to obtain key post-production

support thanks to prizes offered by the event's partners. In addition to Sound Mind Studio, which has supported the pitching from the beginning and awarded a selected project with a voucher for sound post-production services, this year the Warsaw-based post-production studio Fixafilm has joined the group of partners, offering a voucher for image post-production. The Fixafilm award went to the project *Once There Was a Sea...* by Joanna Kożuch. Having received this kind of support, the film has gone out of post-production and is now starting its festival distribution path. A special award was provided by the third partner Crew United in the form of access to its database. This year's pitching session was held online with the participants pitching their projects via live streaming. The opportunity to meet in studio was extremely valuable, and the need for a studio recording was the first step towards holding the next year's pitching offline. Pitching was preceded by a workshop led by Wim Vanacker, and followed by a networking session including more than 90 one-on-one meetings. ■



Eyeshoom by Małgorzata Wowczak



Ashes Popioły

DIR.: JOANNA DUDEK • ANIMATION • POLAND • 2020 • 8'

A couple of cups, a sugar bowl, an ashtray, tea bags – seemingly ordinary objects became witnesses to events the narrator won't ever forget. Using everyday objects, the film tells a story like many before it, but makes it unique.

Daneczka and Edek were married; their relationship had been completely free of drama, cheating, and suffering. Instead, there was love, which allowed them to go through life in harmony and happiness – from their first meeting, when they had fallen in love with each other, until death did them part. There were also shorter and longer periods of separation – forced by work or the political situation. They filled that void with letters which, years later, were given the chance to be seen in a film made by their granddaughter.

The film is narrated by the author's grandmother, who recalls her great love through simple moments that were making her happy – buying shoes, an afternoon spent in an armchair with a cup of tea, meetings through a prison window... In this way, the film becomes an affirmation of life and love. Daneczka was at peace with her fate. She doesn't regret anything and knows that she made good use of the time she had. Her senior years are peaceful and filled with memories. Perhaps it was no coincidence that the narrator is voiced by Polish actress Helena Norowicz, who also became a model at the age of 80, defying the stereotypes connected with old age. The protagonists of the animated film, however, are not so much Daneczka and Edek, but the items that represent their everyday life and themselves. A dress and a shirt visually replace the absent characters, making the film more universal, but still very personal. The visual side of the film was inspired by Man Ray's output and his technique called rayograph, which involves arranging objects directly on light-sensitive paper. The film uses the method of capturing objects without photographic equipment to emphasize the feeling of closeness and intimacy in the story. ■ DAGMARA MARCINEK



Beasts Among Us Bestie wokół nas

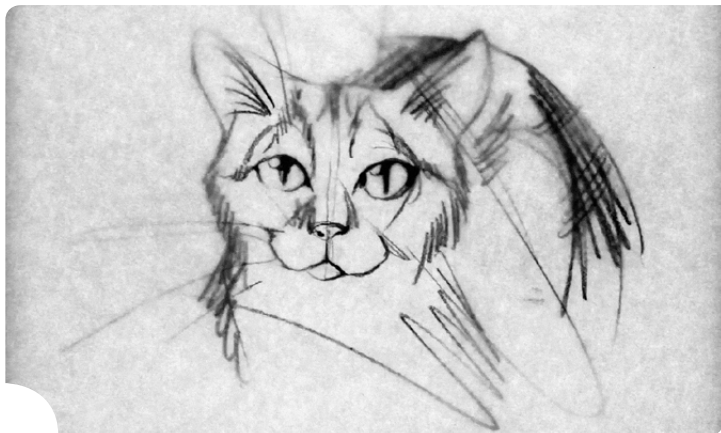
DIR.: NATALIA DURSZEWICZ • ANIMATION • POLAND • 2021 • 6'

What if animals ruled the world? If what people drank was drinking water from the streams, and whales were flying over their heads? What if it were wolves that walked on two legs and people who were locked in cages? Such improbable visions are drawn by Natalia Durszewicz in her surreal animated film.

Beasts Among Us makes humans and animals switch roles. It tears down the hierarchy and reverses the relationship between the worlds of nature and culture. In this abstract look at reality, there's a clear-cut division between nature and civilization – untamed flora and fauna contrasts with a distant city. Somewhere in the heart of a mysterious forest, the film's creator has placed a circus arena – a symbol of exploitation of the weak and helpless solely for the pleasure and entertainment of those higher on the social ladder.

The film becomes a metaphor for an unfair world where the strong reign over the weak. Inequalities and divisions lead to a constant struggle for survival, and the desire to live provokes violence and 'animalistic' instincts. After the screening, one question remains – who is the real 'beast'? Who's the master, and who's the subject? Who's the tyrant and who's the victim? The film wants to make viewers uncomfortable, and not only with its subject matter, but also with the way it's shot – brutal, ugly, terrifying. Through its entire run it's dark and psychedelic. Blacks combined with violets and intensive greens build an aura of mystery and anxiety, while the characters, painted in white, resemble ghosts roaming through the woods. The disturbing atmosphere is created not only by grim visuals, but also by the sound – strange whispers muttered in the dark like ancient, magic incantations, and in the finale – ear-piercing screams. Beasts... won't leave anyone indifferent!

Beasts Among Us set off on their festival journey at the 74th Cannes International Film Festival by competing in the Cinéfondation competition. ■ DAGMARA MARCINEK



Dog's Field Psie pole

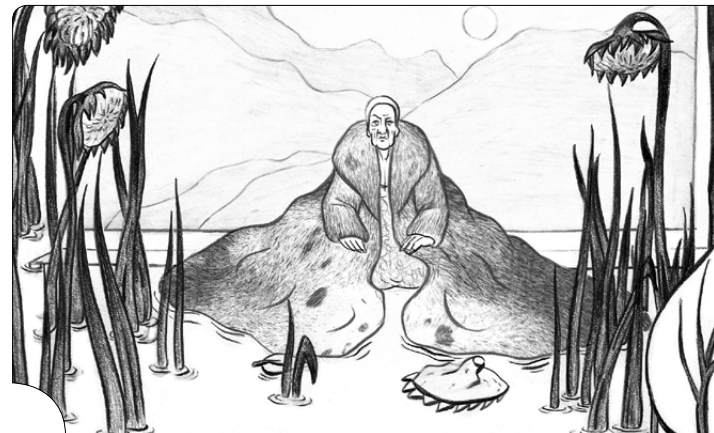
DIR.: MICHALINA MUSIALIK • ANIMATION • POLAND • 2020 • 12'

The day is rather slow: the dog yawns on the ground and the cat stretches on the couch. Between them an elderly woman is feeding a bird and preparing to go for a walk with her dog. The idyll is interrupted when the woman suddenly falls to the ground. From now on, the animals have to take care of themselves.

The animals in the film behave just like humans do after losing a loved one; they experience sadness, go through mourning, and cannot find a place for themselves. Eventually, grief gives way to a feeling of uncertainty about the future and the need to survive. With extraordinary sensitivity, the filmmaker shows animals that have to face a new situation. Domesticated by man, they don't know how to behave when there is neither a guardian around, nor anyone who has so far taken care of their basic needs – food or toilet. In the film, domestication has been equated with addiction, which for a while makes the animals lose their natural ability to fight for themselves.

The four animal characters embody different types of personalities and life situations. The author juxtaposes a canary trapped in a cage with a cat who values freedom. The most interesting clash, however, turns out to be the two dogs' test of character: the one attached to its owner and the one who knows that in order to survive, it has to cross the line... When food becomes scarce, loyalty will have to be confronted with animal instincts.

The black, unfilled contours resemble unfinished sketches, just like the old lady's life, which stops abruptly somewhere between walking the dogs and feeding the cat. Although the animation is only composed of sketches, the film remains extremely realistic, and the atmosphere of decay, sadness, and uncertainty pervades the audience. ■ DAGMARA MARCINEK



Impossible Figures and Other Stories I

Figury niemożliwe i inne historie I

DIR.: MARTA PAJEK • ANIMATION • POLAND, CANADA • 2021 • 12'

Five years after the premiere of the first part in the *Impossible Figures and Other Stories* series, Marta Pajek's triptych is now complete. However, the series is crowned not with Part III, but with Part I, allowing it to be both a starting point for the stories to come, and a finale that binds the trilogy into a complete whole.

A sense of suspension between beginning and end is created in the film's very first scene.

A big bang, which can be both the one that created the world and the apocalypse we're headed towards. This explosion pulls us into the abyss – first the stones flying towards us, then objects and elements of nature, and finally people drifting in space.

Like before, a woman is the hero. In *II* she explored the space of her home, and in *III* she showed her relationship with another human being, while in *I* the city becomes an equal protagonist. This isn't a city teeming with life, but a post-apocalyptic vision of the fall of civilization. Office buildings are empty, a traffic light pole creaks somewhere in the background, and on the train platform there is nothing left but trash being blown away by the wind.

The endless labyrinth of deserted streets and buildings takes us on a hypnotic journey between spatial figures. The city swallows us, frightens us, and evokes anxiety. Although in this world everything is arranged, symmetrical, and rhythmic, we can feel under our skin that something is wrong. That the ideal world turns out to be a utopia. During this journey everything that our civilization is based on blends together: mythology with biblical plagues, the cult of the body with the praise of the mind, and art and religion with consumerism. Store windows filled with re-imagined iconic motifs, such as The Three Graces or the Pietà, embed this seemingly abstract world into our European culture. And the excruciating finale – having first reminded us of the tragic events in mankind's history – prophesizes that it is we who are going to bring the apocalypse upon ourselves. ■ DAGMARA MARCINEK



Love in Times of Coal-Based Economy

Miłość w czasach gospodarki opartej na węglu

DIR.: **TOMASZ SIWIŃSKI** • ANIMATION • POLAND • 2021 • 12'

A long, long time ago, before dinosaurs roamed the world, coal deposits appeared on Earth. Four hundred million years later, coal mining has an impact on Zbyszek's life. The year is 1963, Poland is in the midst of the winter of the century, and he is working in a mine. Exhausted, overwhelmed by work, the cold, and unrequited love, he tries to commit suicide. He's saved by chance, a magical creature, and a TV show about coal...

Alina, Zbyszek's love interest, is a mining crane operator. Although at first she pays the man no mind, as time goes by she too begins to have feelings for him. Slowly, she notices someone more than an ordinary worker. She sees his commitment and artistic spirit. This animated film is a story of love that has to overcome the hardships of everyday life – from the harsh winter to working beyond one's ability.

The title, inspired by Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*, refers to the aesthetics of magic realism, which in the film perfectly harmonizes with the socialist realist style. Urban legends, supernatural creatures, daydreams – all this accompanied by characters that look like they have been plucked straight from communist posters and monuments. Well-built, handsome men are most often portrayed from below to emphasize their sheer size and strength. The image of women also conforms to propaganda from the 1960s – that of a woman who works physically and yet remains very sexy. The film, however, deals with the myth of the socialist model worker. Here the protagonist isn't a man of success. On the contrary, he's on the verge of physical and mental collapse. *Love in Times of Coal-Based Economy* is a love story set in Upper Silesia with a concise plot and distinctive art style. An animated melodrama that defies classic genre conventions. ■ **DAGMARA MARCINEK**



On Time

DIR.: **ZBIGNIEW CZAPLA** • ANIMATION • POLAND • 2021 • 5'

Woven from Japanese symbols, the film captures the essence of the contemporary world – with its constant rush, chaos, and even fear of a pandemic. Once again, Zbigniew Czapla has impressed with the visual layer of the film complemented by poetic comments.

Origami, calligraphy, or manga – *On Time* uses recognizable elements of Japanese culture to juxtapose them with everyday life in the Land of Cherry Blossoms: overcrowded trains, crowds on platforms, and face masks. In this dynamic medley, woodcuts from the Edo period alternate with contemporary timetables and complex public transportation networks. Hokusai's tranquil, picturesque landscapes are combined with modern, raw photographs of people and subway stations. We also go back to the past when we see the first techniques of animating images – quickly flipping through the pages of a book gives the illusion of movement.

The play with film forms and techniques, as well as with the past and the present, takes us on a hypnotic journey through time, making us feel like the world is moving faster and faster. Dynamic editing makes us lose ourselves in the rapidly pulsating frames while trying to capture and interpret Basho's poetry read by an off-screen narrator.

The film can be seen as a diagnosis of the modern age, in which people – thrown into a whirlwind of duties and obligations – have less and less time for others and for themselves. At the same time, it's also a film about a journey: both literal and metaphorical – a journey into oneself, into one's roots, and into the past.

Zbigniew Czapla has created an animate film that is extremely intense and rooted in the present day, but at the same time elusive and fleeting. It's a film that can be watched over and over again, and discovered anew each time. ■ **DAGMARA MARCINEK**



The Visit Wizyta

DIR.: **MATEUSZ JARMULSKI** • ANIMATION • POLAND • 2021 • 7'

A terrified chimpanzee escapes from a burning forest. She is more fortunate than other animals who have been killed by hunting rifles and arrows. Exhausted, she finds refuge in an abandoned colonial villa. What she finds inside is going to intrigue her greatly. *The Visit* is a gripping animated film that shows the world of humans from an animal's perspective. The chimpanzee, who until recently had to protect herself from humans, tours the house decorated by humans with great curiosity. She confronts the objects left behind by the owners of the villa as well as the domestic animals whose behaviour and lifestyle are completely different from hers. Eventually, she will also have to confront people and make important decisions.

The film asks questions about the boundaries between nature and civilization, and wonders whether animals really differ from humans in the area of emotions and feelings. What behaviours make animals more 'human'? And do human choices and actions really make us morally superior to animals? The film juxtaposes predators, who kill to survive, with humans – who kill animals for pleasure, to conquer new lands, or to stuff animal heads as trophies adorning their homes.

The only splashes of colour in an otherwise black-and-white film are orange flames and the red eyes of the chimpanzee. Sound also plays an important role here, as it lets the film be drowned in almost total darkness. It almost single-handedly builds the film's ambiance – from barking dogs and the crackle of the burning forest, through the sounds of the jungle, to the crisp morning sunlight with insects chirping softly. The buckle that holds the film together is a harpsichord suite. Slightly irritating and vibrating, it leaves viewers with a sense of doubt. Unexpectedly, the chimpanzee – who came to 'visit' us during the screening – won't be leaving our heads soon. ■ **DAGMARA MARCINEK**



Too Late Za późno

DIR.: **KINGA SYREK** • ANIMATION • POLAND • 2021 • 15'

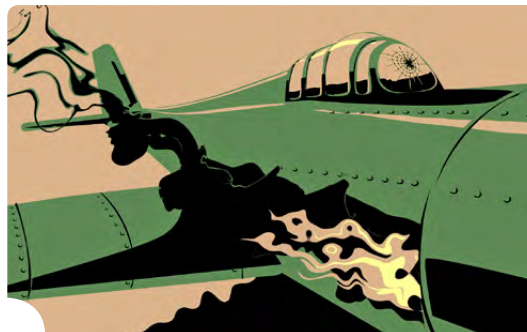
Too Late is an animated biography of the American model and actress Edie Sedgwick. The film doesn't only show her turbulent career and life with Andy Warhol, but – above of all – her relationship with her toxic father which contributed to the artist's tragic death. The story begins on a ranch in California where Sedgwick was growing up under the watchful eye of a demanding and strict father. Violence, a cold upbringing, and alcoholism in the family home will haunt her like a shadow throughout her entire adult life. And even though a while later we see a successful woman who almost dances her way across the United States – from Santa Barbara, through Boston, to New York – the figure of her father constantly returns. The film's visuals are dominated by greys and blacks with occasional colourful elements arranged in a collage mixed in. Warhol's paintings, the muffins at the banquet, and the red carpet are in colour, highlighting the joyful moments in Sedgwick's life. More powerful, however, is the story of slowly losing oneself in addiction, loneliness, and mental illness.

The author doesn't show the family drama directly. Instead, she depicts the father through the attributes of animal predators – the shadow of his hat looks like horns, and the man's every appearance on screen is accompanied by a roar. To depict family relations, the animator uses personification, letting animals play out scenes of conflict that resemble those from the artist's family home. Klaudia Syrek generally avoids showing the protagonists' feelings and emotions directly. The animated characters do not have faces, they are cut out from the background and resemble shadow puppets whose lives are guided by an unknown demiurge. This clearly shows that the characters' life roles have already been written out and it's too late to change their tragic fates. ■ **DAGMARA MARCINEK**

POLISH ANIMATIONS

CATALOGUE OF FILMS

2020–2021



Airborne

DIR.: **ANDRZEJ JOBCZYK** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 8' • PROD.: LETKO •
CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA,
MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

In *Airborne*, the worlds of nature and flying machines collide. A plane crashes into the crown of a tree. A tragedy, that seems to be the end, opens a new stage in history. During a psychedelic flight where there are no limits, even aggression turns into love.



Dog's Field

DIR.: **MICHALINA MUSIALIK** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 12' • PROD.: FUMI
STUDIO • CONTACT: KONRAD GŁĄBEK, FESTIWALE@FUMISTUDIO.COM

When an elderly woman unexpectedly falls down on the floor, her pets are left all on their own. Two dogs, a cat, and a bird have to fend for themselves, which gets more and more difficult as food becomes scarce.



98 kg

DIR.: **IZABELA PLUCIŃSKA** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 5' • PROD.: LAS SZTUKI,
CLAYTRACES • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA,
MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

A film that centres on domestic violence. The heroine is physically strong, although she is abused by her husband – they remain stuck in a toxic trap. 98 kg is the weight of a barbell, as well as that of her husband.



Beasts Among Us

DIR.: **NATALIA DURSZEWICZ** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 6' • PROD.: POLISH
NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN ŁÓDŹ • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION,
MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

Set in a surreal scenery, the film is focused around the role reversal between victims and predators. It shows the world we live in from the perspective of those most vulnerable. A world full of inequality, division, brutality, and a constant struggle for survival.



Fury

DIR.: **JULIA SIUDA** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 5' • PROD.: ANIMATED FILM STUDIO,
JAN MATEJKO ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION,
MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

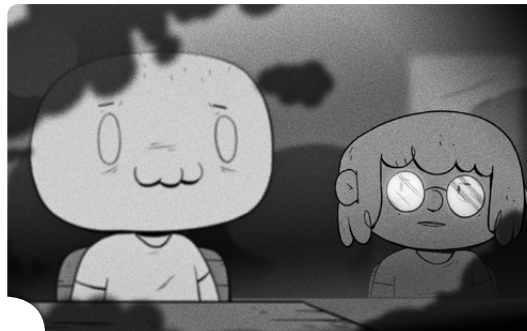
The film deals with the problem of growing anger, frustration, and aggression that seeks an outlet. The heroine of the film is a person whose anger easily gets out of control. Losing herself in emotions, she cannot stand the tension.



Green

DIR.: **KAROLINA KAJETANOWICZ** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 8' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN LODZ • CONTACT: KRZYSZTOF BRZEZOWSKI, K.BRZEZOWSKI@FILMSCHOOL.LODZ.PL

Black shapes are dashing through green, evenly-mowed lawns, turning into animals. Calming sounds of nature – flowing water, chirping insects, singing birds – a hum in the background. This animated short looks like a meditation session and draws the viewers' attention to human interference in the natural world.



Insect

DIR.: **MARCIN PODOLEC** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 30' • PROD.: YELLOW TAPIR FILMS • CONTACT: MARCIN PODOLEC, MARCINPODOLEC@GMAIL.COM

Smoke hides the secrets of people and infamous insects. The discovery of one of these secrets changes Pascal's life.



On Time

DIR.: **ZBIGNIEW CZAPLA** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 5' • PROD.: ZBIGNIEW CZAPLA • CONTACT: ZBIGNIEW CZAPLA, INFO@ZBIGNIEWCZAPLA.PL

Timetables flashing at a dizzying pace are juxtaposed with Hokusai's drawings. Set in Japan, this story is about travelling and the world rushing ahead at breakneck pace. The spirit of Bashō's poetry is present in the entire film, setting the tone for philosophical reflection to this visually intense spectacle.



Hierophany

DIR.: **MARIA NITEK** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 4' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN LODZ • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

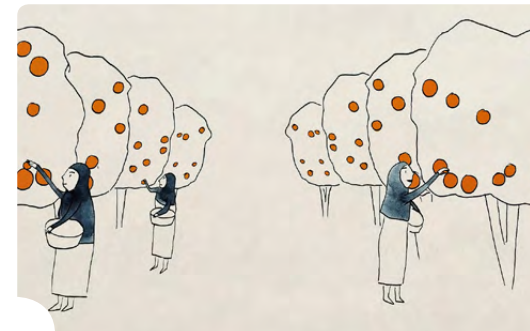
The filmmaker shows hierophany in a symbolic way – the manifestation of holiness in the world as described by historian and philosopher of religion Mircea Eliade. The director presents an oneiric vision borderline of reality, dreams, and psychedelic experiences. Hierophany is a fantasy tale about the beginning – of the world? Mankind? Myth? Religion? Culture? It's a journey into an imaginary world that escapes singular interpretations.



Love in Times of Coal-Based Economy

DIR.: **TOMASZ SIWIŃSKI** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 12' • PROD.: LETKO, ADRIATIC ANIMATION, SILESIA FILM FUND • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

A prehistoric fish makes the first step on dry land. A T-Rex couple in a loving embrace is about to become extinct. Meanwhile in Poland, it is 1963, and the Winter of the Century is in full swing. Chimneys are cheerfully spitting out clouds of black smoke. A young coal loader is madly in love with a beautiful crane operator. The heat of his love will not let him freeze while he trudges through the snow.



Once Upon a Time in Israel

DIR.: **WERONIKA SZYMA** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 11' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN LODZ • CONTACT: KRZYSZTOF BRZEZOWSKI, K.BRZEZOWSKI@FILMSCHOOL.LODZ.PL

An animated documentary in the form of a travel journal. A girl, while in love with a Palestinian boy, goes to Israel for the first time. Her simplified vision of the world, and a desire to take sides in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, is quickly confronted with the reality of living on the border of Sderot and the Gaza Strip.



Opus Magnum

DIR.: **ALEKSANDER MAKOWSKI** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 8' • PROD.: ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS IN WARSAW • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

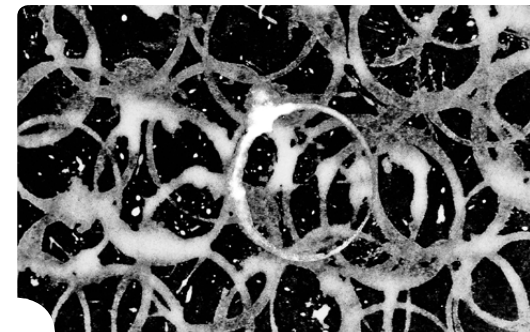
This introspective animated film, narrated by the director himself, explores the never-ending struggle against perfectionism, procrastination, and one's inner self.



Too Late

DIR.: **KINGA SYREK** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 15' • PROD.: ANIMATED FILM STUDIO, JAN MATEJKO ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

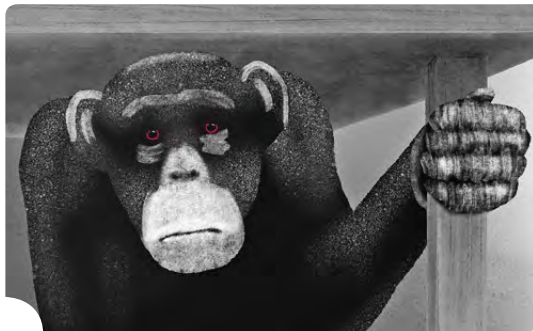
A relationship with his toxic father forces Edie Sedgwick to find love thousands of miles from home. Edie meets Andy Warhol and starts to lose touch with reality.



Ashes

DIR.: **JOANNA DUDEK** • 2020 • ANIMATION • 8' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN LODZ • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

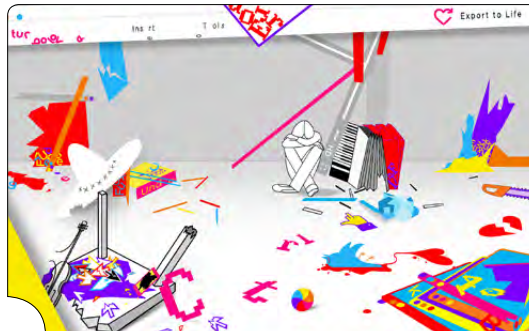
Letters from her husband are reminding Danuta of the feelings she once had for the love of her life. She is revisiting familiar places and reliving her youth. The story is told through items from Danuta and Edward's life, and the memories they hold within them.



The Visit

DIR.: **MATEUSZ JARMULSKI** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 7' • PROD.: ANIMOON • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

Chased by hunters, a chimpanzee reaches a colonial villa. Leaving her natural habitat, she will stand before an important choice. The film asks the question of where humanity begins.



Turbo Love

DIR.: **ALICJA JASINA** • 2021 • ANIMATION • 7' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION • CONTACT: MICHAŁ HUDZIKOWSKI, M.HUDZIKOWSKI@SFP.ORG.PL

How does one find an ideal boyfriend? The Turbo Love app comes to the rescue – letting you create a man of your dreams and design a perfect date. It's an animated parody of the blogosphere, which shows that perfection on social media often hides falsehood and loneliness.



Crumbs of Life

DIR.: **KATARZYNA MIECHOWICZ** • 2020 • ANIMATION • 7' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN LODZ • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

Absurd adventures of three inhabitants of a small town by the sea – Una, who's experiencing a peculiar anxiety about her own foot; G., who's cursed by a plump pony, and the mysterious Faceless Man.



Home in a Shell

DIR.: **RENATA GAŚSIOROWSKA** • 2020 • ANIMATION • 6' • PROD.: HBO EUROPE • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

A story that reveals how much more we have locked ourselves down in our bubbles, even though we have so many ways to communicate remotely. An observation about our relations with the media we gorge on. Or specifically about the relationship between a director and a particular channel of a streaming platform that she watches non-stop, and about how she's slowly morphing into a domestic animal.



Prince in a Pastry Shop

DIR.: **KATARZYNA AGOPSOWICZ** • 2020 • ANIMATION • 16' • PROD.: EGOFILM, KRAKOWSKIE BIURO FESTIWALOWE, PARIS+HENDZEL CO. ŁUKASZ HENDZEL • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

A seemingly humorous tale about happiness. This philosophical parable about a cake-eating couple in a cafe touches upon fundamental issues that are close to everyone – the elusiveness of happiness, the fact that we are not always able to perceive it, let alone experience it as fully as possible.



The Place

DIR.: **SYLWIA ZAWIŁA** • 2020 • ANIMATION • 7' • PROD.: ANIMATED FILM STUDIO, JAN MATEJKO ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS • CONTACT: ROBERT SOWA, ANIMATIONSTUDIO@ASP.KRAKOW.PL

A mother lives with her three kids in a stark, concrete building. The children's only food is their mother's milk. What if it was gone? Would a fig tree become their tree of life? A terrifying, surreal film that invokes the biblical motif of paradise and the forbidden fruit.



I'm Here

DIR.: **JULIA ORLIK** • 2020 • ANIMATION • 15' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN LODZ • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

An elderly man is looking after his paralysed wife. Despite his old age and health problems, he does his best to relieve her suffering, which is getting worse day by day. His daughter helps him, trying to balance care for her mother with her work in the hospital and family life. Everyone has a different view on how to properly care for the sick, which often leads to arguments.



The Moon

DIR.: **TOMASZ POPAKUL** • 2020 • ANIMATION • 12' • PROD.: HBO EUROPE • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

On the one hand, it's the apocalypse, and on the other, it feels like business as usual. Something bizarre is throbbing on an invisible layer.



A TREMBLING WORLD

DAGMARA ROMANOWSKA

46

Short forms react to current threats much faster than features. In Polish cinema it's no different. The visions outlined by the authors aren't particularly encouraging, but they're certainly convincing. Perhaps they're the scream we so badly need to hear for things to change?

Lately, Polish feature films have been avoiding the subject of challenges posed by the 21st century. The dominant theme of the last Polish Film Festival in Gdynia (September 2021) was the period of the communist Polish People's Republic. It sometimes takes on a dramatic form – like Jan P. Matuszyński's *Leave No Traces*, the Polish Academy Award candidate, also presented in Venice, about a student murdered by police officers, or Piotr Domalewski's *Operation Hyacinth* about the communist authorities' operation

ENVIRONMENTAL APOCALYPSE IN SHORT FILMS

against the LGBT community (the film is available globally on Netflix). Other times it's a bit more humorous, like Mateusz Rakowicz's *The Getaway King* – a local riff on *Ocean's Eleven*. In turn, short cinema goes against the grain and keeps its finger on the pulse. Sure, young filmmakers like to play with comedy and horror, like Adrian Apanel does in the grotesque *The Last Room on the Left* about a young student who ends up in a gloomy mansion inhabited by a cast of characters taken straight from a Stephen King novel. Or Bartosz Kozera who takes some subtle jabs at the cult of holy miracles in *The Stone*. These are great, entertaining propositions. Universal, but with a local twist. At the same time, an increasing number of creators decide to use the medium of film to draw attention to the most serious challenges our world is facing. In addition to topics like the refugee crisis and the pandemic, the environment is

given more and more prominence. The filmmakers present a world plunging into chaos. The Earth is dying. Their post-apocalyptic, grim visions will leave you thinking and pose questions that need to be answered as soon as possible.

THIS IS HOW THE END OF THE WORLD BEGINS

'An increasing number of animal species are dying on an unprecedented scale' – we hear in the prologue of *First Last Summer*, a film by Łódź Film School's Nastazja Gonera that has been nominated for Student Oscar and awarded at the Krakow Film Festival. 'We still don't know the exact causes, but the government spokesman confirmed today the existence of experimental scientific institutions which – successfully, he added – work on the restoration of endangered species. For the sake of the animals, however, the locations of these government centres

and the details of their activities are kept secret for the time being' – continues the voice coming from the radio. Obviously, the director takes us to such a secret centre. It's nowhere near a modern, sterile laboratory. It's a military base. It's dirty. There's no water. The mood is oppressive. The customs are hostile. The weather – harsh. Everybody is performing their duties – quite frightening ones. Perhaps noble in assumption, the experiment is terrifying when carried out. Under the watchful eye of veterinarian Gaja... repeat offenders are turned into extinct animals. Can a glimmer of hope appear under such conditions? What of love? In Nastazja Gonera's story, the world of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* intersects with Yórgos Lánthimos's *Lobster*.

HOMO HOMINI LUPUS

A man is a wolf to another man – says Plautus' well-known proverb. It's more than a metaphor in Zuzanna Grajcewicz's *Dog Days*. Welcome to a planet where there are no more animals and man compensates for that by imitating them. A grandfather teaches his grandson to ride a horse – or rather a man who trots and gallops with the toddler on his back. A girl cuddles up to an old lady – she purrs and stretches. Good kitty... How far can this game go? Are there any limits to pretending? The director looked for inspiration in mythology and the Bible, but – together with the co-author of the script and cinema-

tographer, Ewa Radzewicz – she decided to use her own fears as a starting point. 'We both believe that if we have a chance, we need to make the best use of it and tell a story that affects us, that is important to us,' says Zuzanna Grajcewicz in an interview for the Film Magazine of the Polish Filmmakers Association. 'My biggest fears back then were related to human activity and its unpredictability,' she adds. The film, made under the wings of the Łódź Film School, has already visited numerous festivals – Tirana, Bogota, Brno, Barcelona, Canada, and more. Polish jurors, who had already awarded it several prizes, in their verdicts brought attention to 'an ambiguous game between the world of humans and animals', courageous social critique, and a unique style. This story stays with the audience for a long time also thanks to the two main actors – who otherwise play in Maciej Pesta and Sonia Roszczuk's theatre on a daily basis. In front of the camera they really become dogs, cats, horses, deer. It's an intriguing film. And a disturbing one.

THE LAST SEEDS

The future. Pollution has ravaged the Earth. The Global Seed Vault in the Svalbard archipelago stores goods more valuable than gold. And they had to run out. The end of life on the planet is nigh... Green, an astronaut and a mother, the titular character

of Ivan Bambalin's film, has no choice. The woman takes a rocket she built herself and sets off on a space mission in the hope of obtaining seeds that are so desperately needed for survival. She wants to save humanity, but primarily her daughter. Her only companion and helper is a dog. Will they make it? 'There are two ways of talking about the environmental disaster: to look at what is going to happen and what is already happening. To show heavy stuff without mincing words. But you can also show it all in a more entertaining way, and that's what *Green* does,' says the Belarusian director, who came to Poland to study at the Warsaw Film School, in an interview for the Polish Film Festival. He made his film with a minimal budget, yet his creativity allowed him to stay true to science-fiction genre conventions, which he fuses with a mockumentary formula. There is also an avant-garde aspect here with the inclusion of animated fragments. It's colourful, surprising, with a pinch of salt, and yet at the end a thought flashes in your head about how much the generation of parents has let their children down, leaving them a dying planet as inheritance... We're also left with similar conclusions after watching Michał Ciechomski's *Submission* and Karolina Kajetanowicz's *Green* (made under the artistic supervision of Mariusz Wilczyński). Young Polish short cinema isn't afraid of asking painful questions. ■



Dog Days by Zuzanna Grajcewicz



Submission by Michał Ciechomski



Balcony Concert Koncert balkonowy

DIR.: **DIANA KADŁUBOWSKA, KRZYSZTOF KADŁUBOWSKI** • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 16'

'Please stay at home for your own safety. If you find it necessary to leave your place of residence, avoid direct contact with other people and keep a distance of at least two meters (...) We urge you to stay at home!' – several months ago, the citizens of Poland and the rest of the world heard this message. The message concerned us all, including the authors of the documentary, who – instead of idleness – chose to act within the imposed restrictions. They kept to their homes, kept their distance, and used their extraordinary sense of timing and observation to show how a small, neighbourly community can function under social isolation. Over a year and a half ago, we woke up to a new reality. Disinfecting hands, wearing masks, limiting social contacts, general social distance, caution. The short documentary by Diana and Krzysztof Kadłubowski is a record of the first days of isolation, when the streets were filled with government appeals to stay indoors and concerts could only take place – at most – on balconies.

Such conditions made filming legally impossible; life went on behind closed doors. With the exception of children, people were accompanied by a common fear of infection, so strong that even touching the shoes of the deceased seemed to be a potential source of danger of a new, unknown disease. Closest neighbours were meeting on their way to hurried shopping trips, while taking short walks with their pets, or when going out on their balconies – the new hubs of social and cultural life.

A pair of documentary filmmakers captured the everyday life of a tenement house all while maintaining distance and – paradoxically – closing it in order to unite their neighbours during the production of their intimate documentary. However, *Balcony Concert* isn't just a diary from the pandemic, but rather proof that even under the most unfavourable conditions we are still eager to work, create, and be with each other, even if separated by several floors and staircases. ■ **MAGDALENA WALO**



First Last Summer Pierwsze lato końca świata

DIR.: **NASTAZJA GONERA** • FICTION • POLAND • 2020 • 26'

In Yorgos Lanthimos' cult film *Lobster*, people who fail to find a romantic partner during their stay in a luxury resort are transformed into animals. The vision of the future painted by the Greek filmmaker is terrifying, but sterile and set in a safe world of consumerism. In the case of Nastazja Gonera's dystopian story, it's difficult to talk about any sense of security, even an illusory one. It's a reality where any hope is long gone. Filth, mustiness, drinking water shortages, and a lack of privacy are the everyday reality for the inhabitants of a military settlement where everyone tries to maintain any semblance of the old life. It's there, in a base located somewhere by the sea, that disturbing experiments are made on captured repeat offenders. Under the leadership of soldier and scientist, Gaia, the convicts are transformed into endangered animals in a radical attempt to save dying species in a world plagued by ecological collapse.

In addition to the military, Gaia is accompanied by two children. Youngster Bebe and teenager Janek don't have a typical childhood. Apart from taking care of his sister, the boy has to help his elders with the criminals. When he notices a young girl among another group of convicts, he decides to save her from irreversible transformation. Unaware of his own feelings, he lets strong emotions guide his actions – all against his mother and the military. He rescues the girl from custody and takes her to the only beautiful place he knows. The seaside. On the beach the young couple has a chance to get close. For the girl, these are the last hours of life in human form.

In the aforementioned film by the Greek director, feelings were forced on people and finding a partner rescued them from transformation. In Gonera's case, even a sincere, youthful fascination cannot stop the military from continuing the experiment. When Janek realizes he has lost his girlfriend, he rebels and fights back, but it's already too late. The ruthlessness of adults corresponds with the brutality and hopelessness of the outside world. Only those who conform will survive, there is no place for people who break the law. The director dispels any illusions – in this catastrophic, post-human reality even love is doomed to fail. ■ **MAGDALENA WALO**



Liberty Swoboda

DIR.: JOANNA RÓŻNIAK • FICTION • POLAND • 2021 • 14'

'If you want to play politics, don't get caught right away like some chump,' an influential factory director tells his twenty-something son when picking him up from prison. The father is right. Kuba is arrested in the very first minute of the film and is actually 'playing' politics, as his father has been doing for a long time now. Only that the son decides to stand on the other side of the barricade.

More than half a century ago, Polish novelist Marek Hłasko wrote: 'I believe in rebellion as the highest value of youth. I believe in rebellion as the highest form of hatred of terror, oppression, and injustice, and I also believe that there is no rebellion without a purpose (...)'. Kuba believes in rebellion too. Together with a group of his peers, he takes part in an illegal demonstration against the authorities. The reasons why the young people are protesting are unknown. The reasons why most of the protesters are detained are as vague as the agenda of the party against which the gathering was organized. Although there are some friends with him in the police van, Kuba is put in a prison cell alone. His only companion and guard is a drone.

It's the flying robot which gives away that the story is set in the near future. However, the use of technical novelties isn't important; it only serves the director to show the universal message of the story. That young people rebel against the old hasn't changed for centuries, and the need for unfettered freedom remains the same regardless of the times we live in. Although Kuba belongs to a privileged, wealthy family, where the mother doesn't have to work and an alpaca scarf can be worn during skirmishes with the police, he also has a strong desire to break free from the shackles of the political, familial, and technological system. No matter what party is in power, you have to oppose it because your father sympathizes with it. No matter how lonely it gets in an empty cell, one does not strike a deal with the robot. It is not playing politics that drives Kuba to rebel, it's his faith in his own beliefs and a burning desire to gain the titular liberty he craves so much. ■ MAGDALENA WALO



Light Years Lata świetlne

DIR.: MONIKA PROBA • DOCUMENTARY • POLAND • 2021 • 28'

Łukasz and Witalij have been living together for over five years. They spend every free moment together, singing, reading, celebrating holidays and, above all, having long, lively philosophical and theological discussions. The latter shouldn't come as a surprise – they're friends, graduates of an Orthodox seminary and are on the verge of making the most important decision of their lives. In order to be ordained an Orthodox priest, one has to get married first. Otherwise they're in for a life in a monastery. Although Łukasz has a girlfriend, who occasionally visits him in the flat he rents together with Vitaly, he isn't eager to get married. Witalij, in turn, isn't even looking for a partner, a disappointment to his Belarusian family.

The documentary *Light Years* is not so much a story about friendship as it is about making decisions and the slow process of getting used to the inevitable – change. Although the camera accompanies both men, the director focuses more on the Belarusian, who has to face both his own dilemmas and the expectations of his relatives. The boy left his home country a few years ago to study in Warsaw. He was supposed to come back as an ordained priest with a good, decent wife, but in the meantime, he settled in a small flat, took a liking to living a bachelor's life, and became friends with Łukasz, with whom he shares passions and a similar way of thinking. It's hardly surprising, as the reality of the capital turned out different from the stereotypical image of a bustling, modern city. In their rented flat, they created an ideal space for contemplation and prayer.

The director looks at the characters with great empathy. She does not judge, but only records their everyday life, leaving the audience free to interpret the men's behaviour. Are they just friends? Are they holding back from making decisions due to convenience and Peter Pan syndrome, or perhaps is it because of some deeper internal conflict and spiritual dilemma? One thing is certain. The relationship between Łukasz and Witalij is truly unique, as seen in their glances, gestures, and heard in conversations. ■ MAGDALENA WALO



Submission Uległość

DIR.: MICHAŁ CIECHOMSKI • FICTION • POLAND • 2021 • 26'

Outsiders may consider angling one of the most boring hobbies. It requires concentration and patience. It's a perfect pastime for sulky loners. In Michał Ciechomski's film, however, an angler is the main protagonist. What's more, it is he who will decide the future fate of his community.

Submission begins with a dark and very disturbing prophecy of Saint Ichthis: 'Madness shall fall upon your world; your eyes shall become misted and fire shall consume your land. Your children shall be born twisted, and most will die in the wombs of your women. Famine shall consume your bodies, and darkness shall consume your souls, and all that I have said shall come to pass if ye take that which is not yours.' Piotr – quite by accident – took, or rather fished out, something that didn't belong to him. The man had been unsuccessfully competing for prizes in a fishing competition for several years. Even his closest family stopped believing in his skills. It all changed when Piotr unexpectedly fished out a record-breaking, mysterious specimen. Although the prize went to his competitor in the end, the unusually ugly and huge fish gathered universal attention. Piotr was invited to a local TV station, his wife threw a party, and the prize winner tried to buy the fish back, as did the biologist who couldn't classify the giant creature as any known species. Previously disrespected, Piotr finally began to be noticed and admired. Unfortunately, unusual and dangerous phenomena start to happen in the area.

The director skilfully combines the atmosphere of terror of the impending apocalypse with a modest story about a man without any qualities. The catastrophic motifs fit perfectly into the current concerns about man's responsibility for climate change. The decision the protagonist has to make can be compared to the situation humanity has found itself in. Climate doom hangs in the air, and it's up to us whether we sacrifice our own comfort and splendour to save everyone. ■ MAGDALENA WALO



Venus of Willendorf Wenus z Willendorfu

DIR.: ZUZANNA GRAJCEWICZ • FICTION • POLAND • 2020 • 23'

Measuring just over 11 centimetres, the stone figurine representing a female body is both awe-inspiring and controversial. With its full figure, ample breasts, and rounded belly, the Palaeolithic sculpture is considered a symbol of fertility and female strength while simultaneously deviating from the contemporary canons of beauty and repulsing those more sensitive to nudity and excessive fat. The title isn't bringing up the famous Palaeolithic Venus by accident. It is the excess of kilograms that becomes the starting point for Zuzanna Grajcewicz's original, extremely subversive film, which is also a part of the thriving body-positive movement. The director sets the plot in a reality where extra weight is the universal canon of beauty and obesity becomes a most desirable trait.

Kamila is a young, pretty, independent woman who seems to fit perfectly into the current standards. She has a good job, a boyfriend, and all she is just a few kilos away from complete happiness. When it turns out that the heroine was wearing a chunky costume under her loose shirt and wide trousers, she begins to lose everything she has ever achieved. She gets fired from her job, her boyfriend dumps her, and she sinks into hopelessness. Now, only a visit to a specialist clinic with a statue of the titular goddess in its garden can get her back on her feet. The 'Fit&Fat' centre is inhabited by eccentric patients. All of them weigh too little, which excludes them from social life. Lack of physical exercise, a diet involving excessive amounts of sugar, a walking ban, and group therapy are supposed to stimulate the growth of body fat. It doesn't help much. Some patiently endure the treatment, others simply get used to living in the clinic, knowing that nothing good awaits them outside its walls. This distorted image of reality is a perfect reflection of our fears of gaining weight or even aversion to obese people, manifested by the so-called fat shaming. Using a (fittingly) thick line and pastel colours, Grajcewicz paints a reality that ruthlessly suppresses otherness, regardless of gender. Although she chooses physicality and the pressure involved with one's appearance as her point of reference, when addressing the notion of corporeality she speaks more broadly about exclusion and the clumsy attempts at conforming to current norms just for the sake of belongingness. ■ MAGDALENA WALO

POLISH SHORTS

CATALOGUE OF FILMS

2020–2021



Fruits and Vegetables

DIR.: **MACIEJ JANKOWSKI** • 2021 • FICTION • 26' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN LODZ • CONTACT: KRZYSZTOF BRZEZOWSKI, K.BRZEZOWSKI@FILMSCHOOL.LODZ.PL

Wojtek, an obese boy, is ashamed of himself and his mother (who runs a shabby greengrocer's). On a bad hair day, the boy rebels against his mother. But instead of making her change, he humiliates her.



Headfish

DIR.: **JAKUB PRYSAK** • 2021 • FICTION • 24' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN LODZ • CONTACT: KRZYSZTOF BRZEZOWSKI, K.BRZEZOWSKI@FILMSCHOOL.LODZ.PL

Immersed in an industrial landscape, the film tells a harsh story about two loners who share the same sensitivity and a dream about getting out from where they have been so far. Eryk lives in a grey room in a workers' hostel and every day wakes up at dawn to go to work at the equally grey Milky Paradise cooperative. Marissa is a prostitute at a crummy night club with colourful lights that cannot make anyone happy. What separates them from a different life is a ticket to the unknown. But to get it, they need more than money.



Brother the Fisherman

DIR.: **ALICJA SOKÓŁ** • 2021 • FICTION • 20' • PROD.: WARSAW FILM SCHOOL • CONTACT: VERONICA ANDERSSON, VERONICAANDERSSON@SZKOLAFILMOWA.PL

Somewhere on the other side of the world, a small fishing village is home to two brothers who couldn't be more different. Every day, while the older brother works hard, the younger one turns on the radio to participate in a competition in hope that winning will change his life. Their father's sudden disappearance forces both men to take on his mantle in the port and brings them closer together.



Goose

DIR.: **MARIA WIDER** • 2021 • FICTION • 30' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION • CONTACT: MICHAŁ HUDZIKOWSKI, M.HUDZIKOWSKI@SFP.ORG.PL

When Ewa's family is preparing for the holidays, unsettling things start to happen. At first, the mother and daughter, who don't necessarily see eye to eye, start blaming each other. But it soon turns out that the erotic writings appearing here and there have been made by someone from outside the family. When the situation takes a truly dramatic turn, the women take matters into their own hands and decide to teach the intruder a lesson.



Howling

DIR.: **BARTOSZ BRZEZIŃSKI** • 2021 • FICTION • 30' • PROD.: KRZYSZTOF KIEŚLOWSKI FILM SCHOOL • CONTACT: SŁAWOMIR KRUK, SŁAWOMIR.KRUK@US.EDU.PL

Raised by an alcoholic father, Kuba – a sheep breeder – is growing up in a small village where nothing ever happens. One day, an old friend from the big city arrives. The protagonist starts to discover his sexuality and soon has to make a tough choice.



Just for a While

DIR.: **ZUZANNA GORCZYCKA** • 2021 • FICTION • 19' • PROD.: ZUZANNA GORCZYCKA • CONTACT: ZUZANNA.GORCZYCKA@GMAIL.COM

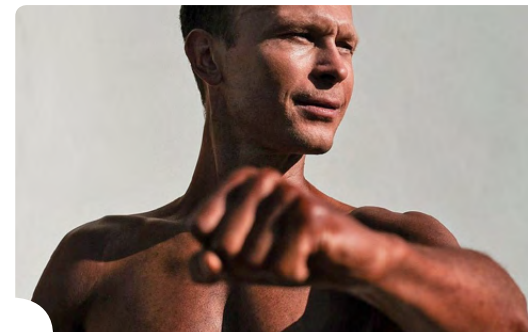
It's a beautiful summer day. The greenery is lush, the birds are singing, the grass is rustling, the insects are buzzing, and then there's the two of them – two women of different ages. So much divides them and, at the same time, so much attracts them to one another. They know one another so well. They are so close. What is the secret behind their bond? What can they learn from one another? Where will 'one more moment' together take them? This ambiguous, surprising, and subtle film moves in half-steps when it unfolds in a serene and lazy holiday rhythm and touches us with its warmth.



My Son Locks Himself in the Bathroom

DIR.: **KUBA JANUSZEWSKI** • 2021 • FICTION • 30' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION • CONTACT: MICHAŁ HUDZIKOWSKI, M.HUDZIKOWSKI@SFP.ORG.PL

Love hidden behind hostility and jokes, fury and disappointment concealed behind silence, sadness poured into a trillion jars of tomato sauce. All of this instead of a painful, but necessary, conversation. In a modern villa, a mother and a son are playing a strange game of appearances. The woman does not want her adult son to move out; she tries to stop him using various methods. A family psychodrama and a vivisection of emotions related to an empty nest.



Synthol

DIR.: **PIOTR TROJAN** • 2021 • FICTION • 25' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION • CONTACT: MICHAŁ HUDZIKOWSKI, M.HUDZIKOWSKI@SFP.ORG.PL

With the help of his overprotective mother, 33-year-old Eryk records a video blog documenting his preparations for his first bodybuilding show. Right before the competition, he meets Mona. Their date will turn into a reality check for the young sportsman.



Liberty

DIR.: **JOANNA RÓŻNIAK** • 2021 • FICTION • 14' • PROD.: KRZYSZTOF KIEŚŁOWSKI FILM SCHOOL • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

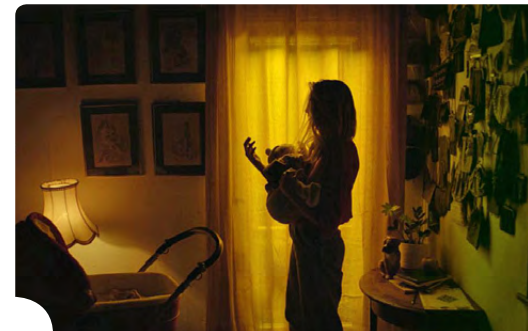
In a near-future dystopia, citizens are rising up against their increasingly oppressive nationalist government. Kuba, a twenty-year-old member of an illegal opposition group, gets arrested at a street protest. Despite his clear political involvement, he is treated more favourably than he expects. As it becomes apparent that there is a personal dimension to his rebellion, he has to make a choice that will determine his future.



Slave

DIR.: **GRZEGORZ PIEKARSKI** • 2021 • FICTION • 29' • PROD.: KRZYSZTOF KIEŚŁOWSKI FILM SCHOOL • CONTACT: SŁAWOMIR KRUK, SŁAWOMIR.KRUK@US.EDU.PL

Nikodem is serving his sentence at Maja and Łukasz's home as part of a new penitentiary programme. The couple has complete control over him. To their surprise, Nikodem's court appeal is successful and the man becomes free. Though they could go their separate ways and never see each other again, they stay together for one more day.



The Cracks

DIR.: **MAGDALENA GAJEWSKA** • 2021 • FICTION • 30' • PROD.: WARSAW FILM SCHOOL • CONTACT: VERONICA ANDERSSON, VERONICAANDERSSON@SZKOLAFILMOWA.PL

Thirty-two-year-old Teresa is suffering from post-partum depression. Together with her husband, they decide to move to Teresa's family home for a while. There, she unexpectedly runs into her past love, Anna. Old passion reignites in both women. From that moment, depression mixes with desire and fascination. Teresa has to choose between staying with her husband and starting a new life with Anna.



The Hero

DIR.: **MILENA DUTKOWSKA** • 2021 • FICTION • 24' • PROD.: KRZYSZTOF KIEŚŁOWSKI FILM SCHOOL • CONTACT: SŁAWOMIR KRUK, SŁAWOMIR.KRUK@US.EDU.PL

Cyprian, a 10-year-old orphan raised by his beloved grandmother, dreams to become a real hero. Suddenly his grandmother dies and the threat of being sent to an orphanage looms over Cyprian. Now he has to confront real loss and realize what it means to be a hero in the face of suffering.



Beyond Is the Day

DIR.: **DAMIAN KOCUR** • 2020 • FICTION • 25' • PROD.: TOMCAT, KINGHOUSE • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

Black and white cinematography, amateurs in leading parts, and the small realism of Poland's countryside. Paweł is a single man who works on a small river ferry. Day by day he keeps doing the same things until he meets Mohammad, an illegal immigrant. Paweł decides to help him. There is finally someone he can talk to.



Fools Gold

DIR.: **SHAILESH SINGH** • 2020 • FICTION • 16' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN ŁÓDŹ • CONTACT: KRZYSZTOF BRZEZOWSKI, K.BRZEZOWSKI@FILMSCHOOL.LODZ.PL

It's 2020. A virus has taken over the world. People are dying in vast numbers. The economy has collapsed (or so it seems). Unemployment remains a relevant and widely ignored problem. In this setting, an accident happens in the city of Łódź. They say a blue crystal fell from the sky and killed a homeless man. Miłosz and Tomek, two random guys, find the body and the rock. They ignore the former and take the latter as it looks valuable. This puts them on the police's radar. The story about the absurdity of this day and age.



The Last Room on the Left

DIR.: **ADRIAN APANEL** • 2021 • FICTION • 30' • PROD.: MUNK STUDIO – POLISH FILMMAKERS ASSOCIATION • CONTACT: MICHAŁ HUDZIKOWSKI, M.HUDZIKOWSKI@SFP.ORG.PL

'I'm here about the listing' – a boy in foggy glasses and a warm hat explains the reason for his unexpected visit to an irritated landlady. When it turns out that he has the money, hostility gives way to effusive cordiality. The woman invites him inside. Is it really the room he was looking for? Or, maybe, it is a trap he will not be able to escape from? Adrian Apanel's film is a crazy adventure where anything can happen. It involves dark humour, a creaking floor, a dark villa with its strange residents, moments of terror and laughter.



First Last Summer

DIR.: **NASTAZJA GONERA** • 2020 • FICTION • 25' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN ŁÓDŹ • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

In a world destroyed by an environmental disaster, people are being experimented on inside a secret military base somewhere on the coast. There is a way to transform repeat offenders into animals of endangered or extinct species. The process is cruel, but love and rebellion can blossom even in such circumstances. The film combines post-apocalyptic genre conventions with a dramatic pro-environmental message, as well as a commentary on protest, family, obligations, and the process of growing up to independent decisions.



Four Cups of Coffee or Three

DIR.: **SEBASTIAN ŁACH** • 2020 • FICTION • 12' • PROD.: SEBASTIAN ŁACH • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

Twelve hours of the protagonist's life. A harmless fantasy transforms into a completely altered reality. It begins with a physical change to her body. She's going to have to confront a tormenting feeling with the outside world to check if it's even real.



Submission

DIR.: **MICHAŁ CIECHOMSKI** • 2020 • FICTION • 26' • PROD.: KRZYSZTOF KIEŚLOWSKI FILM SCHOOL • CONTACT: KFF SALES & PROMOTION, MACIEJ REGUŁA, MACIEJ.REGULA@KFF.COM.PL

Piotr catches the biggest and most disgusting fish out of all contestants. His life immediately starts to change for the better. Unfortunately, the fish also brings apocalyptic destruction upon the world. Piotr will have to make a choice between his own best interest and that of his entire island community. An apocalyptic story about the bond between Nature and Man and about how easy it is to shatter the delicate balance between these forces. Intriguing and discomfoting, the film is part of the discussion about ecology.

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The Case of Jan Pampuch

DIR.: **MIKOŁAJ PISZCZAN** • 2020 • FICTION • 18' • PROD.: POLISH NATIONAL FILM SCHOOL IN ŁÓDŹ • CONTACT: KRZYSZTOF BRZEZOWSKI, K.BRZEZOWSKI@FILMSCHOOL.LODZ.PL

An absurd comedy underlain with political satire and a subversive commentary on our tribal reality. Jan Pampuch, a modest toy seller, must not break 'daddy's word' given to his daughter. The problem is that a drawing of hers unexpectedly gives rise to a heated ideological conflict and becomes the number one topic in the news and on social media. The scandal keeps getting bigger. Jan, confused with the scale of the dispute, has to do everything to settle it since his company and the future of his entire family are at stake.



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FILM INCENTIVES PROGRAM

26 000 000 €

CO-PRODUCTIONS

AND SERVICES ARE ELIGIBLE



WHO CAN APPLY

- a Polish partner with credits or a company registered in Poland

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

- a cultural qualifying test applies
- minimum spending level applies
- at least 75% of production
- funding is confirmed

ELIGIBLE PRODUCTIONS

- full-length features
- full-length documentaries
- full-length animated features
- all kind of series

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- applications are accepted all year round
- „First come, first served” basis
- support from development to post-production
- cap per applicant and cap per project applies

more information: incentives@pisf.pl, www.en.pisf.pl/incentives

WHO CAN APPLY

- producer based in other EEA countries
- however, it is strongly advised to have a Polish co-producer

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

- Polish artistic contribution
- application must be submitted before the shooting period
- the remaining sources must be confirmed by LOIs, memo-deals or co-production agreements

ELIGIBLE PRODUCTIONS

- full-length features
- full-length documentaries
- full-length animated features

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- up to £ 435 000 € per project
- up to 70 % of Polish funding
- 2 calls per year: February and September



MINORITY

CO-PRODUCTIONS

SCHEME

2 120 000 €

more information: promotion@pisf.pl



www.polishdocs.pl

www.polishanimations.pl

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