

PRO CATALOGUE



55TH INTERNATIONAL FILM  FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM 29/1-8/2 2026

Projects

29 January - 8 February 2026

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INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM



Foreword

Marten Rabarts

Head of IFFR Pro

What began here at CineMart, the first co-production market of its kind, launched in the early 80s, has become standard practice at major festivals and markets worldwide.

For this 43rd edition, IFFR Pro continues to evolve its programme, adapting to filmmakers' shifting needs, creating opportunities where others don't. This year's initiatives strengthen our ecosystem and deepen support for artists at different stages of their journeys.

Safe Harbour, our new programme for emerging filmmakers who have experienced displacement or forced migration, provides vital access to professional networks, funding pathways and development opportunities.

CineMart x HBF brings six exceptional projects into closer dialogue between development and co-production, formalising CineMart's longstanding collaboration with the Hubert Bals Fund. Lightroom creates a dedicated industry home for immersive storytelling, in closer conversation with IFFR's Art Directions programme. Together, they bring greater cohesion to how we nurture projects across different mediums from conception through completion.

Central to this is our connection to the national industry. We're pleased to bring back Pulling Focus: NL 2026, the Dutch industry focus day, for its second edition on Sunday 1 February. Alongside three projects presented in CineMart x NLWave, we're launching the Dutch Talent Market for the professionals who form the backbone of successful co-productions. This pilot edition offers a platform for guilds representing editors, cinematographers, composers, production designers, post-production houses and more.

As always, CineMart is the place to discover groundbreaking and vital projects from around the globe. Rigorously selected and driven by brilliant, highly motivated creators, we are thrilled to introduce them to you here in Rotterdam.

Elsewhere, we're expanding our renowned Rotterdam Producers Lab with the new Creators Lab for writers and directors, building on more than 25 years of supporting emerging producers and continuing to evolve how IFFR can empower writers and directors in the audiovisual business world

What does this all mean for you, dear delegate? As always CineMart is the place to discover groundbreaking and vital projects, from around the globe. Rigorously selected and driven by brilliant, highly motivated creators, we are thrilled to introduce them to you here in Rotterdam.

Last edition's projects traveled to major festivals throughout 2025. Our Darkroom works in progress platform, now in its fourth edition, saw a remarkable string of premieres at Locarno, Venice, Toronto, Busan and San Sebastián. Three recent CineMart films premiered at Cannes 2025 as well as two immersive works in the Venice Immersive competition, just a handful to mention from this year that join the long line of projects that found crucial support at IFFR – reminders that the projects you'll discover in these pages will be found in worldwide festival programmes in the years and months ahead.

The selections once again reflect the times we are living in – they carry a palpable urgency: stories grappling with war and displacement, narratives exploring climate change and queerness, struggles to define identities in turbulent times – expressed through bold experiments with sci-fi, horror, musical, and genre-defying forms.

We hope you enjoy discovering the projects as much as we have, and wish you all the best for a fruitful market.

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arte



Colophon

This Pro Catalogue is a publication of the International Film Festival Rotterdam, marking the 43rd CineMart, from Sunday 1 to Wednesday 4 February 2026.

Project selection

Marten Rabarts
Alessia Acone
Lara González Lobo
Facundo Lema
Larisa Gutmanis
Nikolas Montaldi

Bongiwe Selane
Dorien van de Pas
Giancarlo Nasi
Gyula Gazdag
Julien Razafindranaly
Paulus Hagemeyer
Raymond Phathanavirangoon
Teresa Cavina

Alberto Pickers
Ayumi Filippone
Francesca Emiliano
Fraser White
Emilie Vestergaard
Tommaso Priante

Editors

Roxy Merrell
Fraser White
Lara González Lobo
Francesca Emiliano
Laura Pinto

Design

Martijn Smits

Cover

Philippine Haverbeke

Campaign, concept & design

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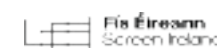
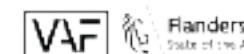
International Film Festival Rotterdam

P.O. Box 21696
2001 AR Rotterdam
T: +31 10 8609090
cinemart@iffr.com
iffr.com/en/iffr-pro



IFFR Pro

Partners of IFFR Pro 2026



General information

International Film Festival Rotterdam (29 January – 8 February) is proud to present the 43rd edition of CineMart, featuring a remarkable array of projects seeking partners and collaborators across strands both new and familiar: CineMart, Darkroom, Safe Harbour, NLWave and Lightroom.

CineMart

CineMart kicks off the year in its trademark informal and productive style, presenting a highly curated lineup of projects from every corner of the world. This edition's selection presents 21 feature projects each looking for international financial and creative partners. Project teams will have the opportunity to present delegates with their stories and personally share the urgency and creative vision that drives them.

CineMart x HBF

New for 2026, six Hubert Bals Fund Development Support recipients have been handpicked for the first CineMart x HBF lineup. The strand creates a market platform for the filmmakers championed by the Hubert Bals Fund – those who dare to question, imagine and challenge the status quo, and coming from countries where local film funding and infrastructure is lacking or restrictive.

Safe Harbour

Safe Harbour is IFFR's new market programme intended to uplift projects in development from emerging filmmakers who have experienced displacement or forced migration and who face limited access to professional networks, funding pathways and development opportunities. The initiative has been developed in collaboration with the International Emerging Film Talent Fund (IEFTF).

Darkroom

Darkroom offers a platform for the international industry to see exclusive previews of recently or nearly completed films seeking completion or gap funding, sales agents and festivals – all supported by the Hubert Bals Fund, formerly presented at CineMart or with a Rotterdam Lab alumni attached. Each project receives expert consultancy and has the chance to present their work to an exclusive audience of international sales agents, festival programmers, and buyers on the morning of Monday 2 February at 09.30 during the Darkroom Spotlight.

Lightroom

Lightroom is IFFR's new industry platform for immersive storytelling. Together with a symposium, the programme brings together all XR, VR, interactive and expansive installation projects previously presented as works-in-progress and works-in-development in CineMart and Darkroom, creating one unified market space closely aligned with IFFR's Art Directions programme.

CineMart x NLWave

A bespoke showcase of three Dutch projects seeking international partners are presented in the CineMart x NLWave selection. These projects have been handpicked from NLWave25, an initiative by the Netherlands Film Fund, in collaboration with SEE NL and Eye Filmmuseum, aiming to spotlight new and upcoming Dutch feature-length films, documentaries and animation.

The programme offers tailored mentorship, script consultations with international experts, and targeted one-to-one meetings to support project development and strengthen international co-production opportunities.

Pulling Focus: NL 2026

IFFR Pro once again spotlights Dutch filmmaking talent with the second edition of Pulling Focus: NL 2026 on Sunday 1 February – a day of activity and conversations highlighting Dutch breakthrough success on the international stage.

The day features project presentations as part of NLWave and launches the Dutch Talent Market, a new platform connecting international producers with Dutch creative professionals. Pulling Focus: NL 2026 concludes with an IFFR Big Talk following the screening of the recent Dutch co-production Jimpa, featuring John Lithgow and the Dutch cast and moderated by Hanna van Vliet.

Dutch Talent Market

During Pulling Focus: NL 2026, the Dutch industry focus day, IFFR Pro launches the Dutch Talent Market dedicated to below-the-line professionals. With presentations and dedicated booths, this pilot edition offers a platform for guilds representing editors, cinematographers, composers, production designers, post-production houses and more – precisely the professionals who form the backbone of successful co-productions. International producers are invited to connect directly with the crews and learn about the technical and creative expertise they can bring to a project.

Video pitches and previous works

Before meeting project teams, delegates are encouraged to watch the video pitches and previous works available on the individual project pages on IFFR.com, where the teams give detailed insights into their visions and inspirations. You must be logged into your IFFR account to access these pages.

Meetings

The CineMart staff provides a tailor-made schedule for both project teams and delegates. In the meeting request form, you can indicate which projects you would like to meet. Upon receipt of your online meeting requests, the CineMart staff will organise your meetings and make a personal schedule for you.

Shortly before the festival, you will find this schedule online in your [My IFFR Agenda](#). If you wish to schedule additional meetings or to request any changes in your schedule after that, you can do so by contacting us through email.

Talent Development

Rotterdam Lab is IFFR Pro's annual training workshop for international film producers, equipping emerging professionals with the tools, skills and connections to navigate international co-production, financing, sales and distribution.

Expanding on the 25-year legacy of the producers' Lab, we're launching the parallel Creators Lab for writers and directors. This strand will support creators to strengthen their production knowledge, hone their entrepreneurial skills and become empowered creative partners when developing and realising their films.

Taking place over five days, the two labs will bring together 84 participants nominated by partner organisations from around the world.

Pro Hub

The Pro Hub organises panels, workshops and mentor sessions – creating a meeting place, networking environment and hive of expert knowledge for the whole professional community at the festival. The Pro Hub will take place on the fourth floor of 'de Doelen, with Mentor meetings, Meet the Expert and Pro Encounters sessions' while the Pro Dialogues will be taking place in Studio 8, which you can access from street level. Join us at the Pro Hub Welcome Drinks – on Friday 30 January at 18.00.

The Pro Hub also provides the First Rights List, showcasing titles from the IFFR 2026 programme that are looking for an international sales agent.

Video library and Pro (P&I) screenings

Depending on rightsholder permission, films from the IFFR 2026 programme will be available to watch online for accredited guests via their regular film pages on [IFFR.com](#). The online video library will be available from 29 January at 9.00 CET to 22 February 9.00 CET. Access is given under strict confidentiality.

This edition, screenings arranged exclusively for press and industry will include all films in the Tiger Competition, Big Screen Competition, the closing film as well as a selection of films premiering later in the festival. These will appear in the regular programme schedule on [IFFR.com](#). They must be pre-booked in the same way as all other screenings.

IFFR Pro Awards

The IFFR Pro Awards celebrate outstanding projects from the CineMart, Darkroom, Lightroom and Safe Harbour selections, recognising bold artistic vision, innovation and international collaboration at different stages of development. The awards will be presented on the evening of Wednesday 4 February 2026.

IFFR Pro is grateful to all its award partners who continue to make the following prizes possible through their generosity:

- *Eurimages New Lab Awards*, consisting of an *Innovation Award* for CineMart projects in development (€20,000) and an *Outreach Award* for Darkroom work-in-progress projects (€30,000).
- 4DR Studios will again hand out two Awards, one for *Best Immersive Project in development* & one for *Best Immersive work-in-progress project* in Lightroom, both consisting of a volumetric video studio package (and workshop) for a selected and eligible project in development and a selected and eligible work-in-progress.
- Thanks to a private donor, the Hubert Bals Fund is granting the *HBF Empowerment Award*, worth €10,000, to a Darkroom project to empower filmmakers who come from politically challenging contexts or whose work addresses themes such as freedom of expression, displacement, human rights and/or underrepresented communities.
- *HBF x PUBLIKUM Audience Outreach Award* is awarded to a HBF-supported film project that demonstrates strong potential to engage a clearly defined or underserved audience. Worth €9,000, the award offers tailored consultancy from PUBLIKUM, supporting the project at a critical stage of development where audience insight can meaningfully inform creative choices, positioning, and communication strategies. By strengthening the project's audience awareness and impact readiness, the award helps filmmakers translate artistic vision into clear audience connection and market presence.
- Amsterdam-based Filmmore, a leading full-service post-production, editing and visual effects facility, offers once again two awards: a *Filmmore Post-production Award* (€7,500) to be used for visual effects & post-production for a CineMart project, and a *Filmmore Work-in-progress Post-production Award* (€7,500) for a Darkroom project.
- *ArteKino International Award* (€6,000), providing support for financial development.
- *VIPO Award* (€3,000) for projects with budgets where the award can make the most impact.
- The *New Impulse Award* of €2,500 will be given to one of the newly presented Safe Harbour projects, thanks to the generosity of a private donor.



Find the IFFR Pro & Hubert Bals Fund teams

If you have any specific questions about your programme or navigating the IFFR Pro Days, or you want to know more about our industry initiatives, here's who to look out for during the festival.

For questions related to your stay at the festival, please contact the guest team via: guest@IFFR.com

Any questions about your accreditation: accreditation@IFFR.com

For ticketing queries: service@IFFR.com



IFFR Pro General Coordination



Marten Rabarts
Head of IFFR Pro



Alessia Acone
IFFR Pro Manager



Larisa Gutmanis
IFFR Pro Coordinator

CineMart Team



Lara González Lobo
CineMart Coordinator



Laura Pinto
Darkroom Officer



Francesca Emiliano
CineMart Officer



Klaas Feij
Safe Harbour Coordinator



Emilie Myrup Vestergaard
Projects Market Intern

Lightroom Team



Eva Langerak
Art Directions Curator & Coordinator Lightroom



Ellen Kuo
Special Consultant Lightroom



Jelte Zonneveld
Lightroom Producer

Hubert Bals Fund Team



Tamara Tatishvili
Head of the Hubert Bals Fund



Jeske van der Slikke
Hubert Bals Fund Manager



Ayumi Filippone
Hubert Bals Fund Project Manager

Talent Team



Facundo Lema
Talent Manager



Lucila de Arizmendi
Talent Producer

Pro Hub Team



Nikolas Montaldi
Pro Hub Manager



Jiří Pecinovský
Pro Hub Officer



Dominic Reschke
Pro Hub Intern

IFFR Pro Communications



Fraser White
Marketing and Communications IFFR Pro & HBF



Paula Estany Hachuel
Communications Intern

Premieres and prizes for IFFR supported films 2025–2026

We are proud to present a list of finished films and immersive media that were presented at CineMart or Darkroom in previous editions, or were supported by one of the schemes of the Hubert Bals Fund. A number have their world premiere or screen at IFFR 2026, next to those that screened at prestigious festivals across the world in 2025.

Anoche conquisté Tebas (Last Night I Conquered the City of Thebes)

Gabriel Azorín

Spain, Portugal
Produced by DVEIN Films, Filmika Galaika, Bando à Parte
World premiere at Venice 2025 (Giornate degli Autori)
Darkroom 2025

Amoeba

Siyou Tan

Singapore, Netherlands, France, Spain, South Korea
Produced by Akanga Film Asia, Volya Films, Les Films d'Antoine, Mararia Films, Widelog Office
World premiere at TIFF 2025 (Discovery)
HBF Development 2022, NFF+HBF 2023, HBF+EU: Minority Co-production 2023

Bayaan

Bikas Ranjan Mishra

India
Produced by Platoon One Films, Summit Studios, Guidant Films
World premiere at TIFF 2025 (Discovery)
HBF Development 2013, Darkroom 2025

Becoming

Zhannat Alshanova

France, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Lithuania, Sweden
Produced by Film de Force Majeure, Voyla Films, M-Films, Kjellson & Wik, Accidental Films
World premiere at Locarno 2025 (Cineasti del Presente)
HBF Development 2021, NFF+HBF 2023, HBF+EU: Post-production 2023
CineMart 2022

O último azul (The Blue Trail)

Gabriel Mascaro

Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Netherlands
Produced by Desvia Filmes, Cinevinay, Quijote Films, and Viking Film
Silver Bear for Best Director at Berlinale 2025 (Official Competition)
HBF Development 2016, NFF+HBF 2020
CineMart 2017

Cotton Queen

Suzannah Mirghani

Germany, France, Palestine, Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan
Produced by Strange Bird, Maneki Films, Philistine Films, Film Clinic
World premiere at Venice 2025 (Settimana Internazionale della Critica)
Winner: Golden Alexander Award Best Feature Film at Thessaloniki
HBF+EU: Minority Co-production 2023

Desire Lines

Dane Komljen

Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Netherlands, Croatia, Germany
Produced by Dart Film, Mak Film, Marletti, SeriousFilm, Piper, Flaneur Films
World premiere at Locarno 2025 (Competition)
HBF Development 2018, NFF+HBF 2022

Dry Leaf

Alexandre Koberidze

Germany, Georgia
Produced by New Matter Films
World premiere at Locarno 2025 (Competition) – Special Mention
Darkroom 2025

Estados generales

Mauricio Freyre

Peru, Spain
Produced by Estudio RIEN, Walden Films, Tasio
World premiere at FID Marseille 2025 (First Film Competition)
HBF+EU: Post-production 2024

The Garden Of Earthly Delights

Morgan Knibbe

Netherlands, Philippines, Belgium
Produced by BALDR Film, Popple Picture, and CZAR Film & TV
World premiere at Movies that Matter 2025
CineMart 2020

The Great Escape

Joren Vandenbroucke

Belgium, Luxemburg
Produced by Animal Tank, a_BAHN
Dutch premiere at IFFR 2026 (Art Directions)
World premiere at Venice 2025 (Venice Immersive)
CineMart 2024

The Great Orator

Daniel Ernst

Netherlands
Produced by The Shoebox Diorama
World premiere at Venice 2025 (Venice Immersive)
Dutch premiere at IFFR 2026 (Art Directions)
CineMart 2020, Darkroom 2025

Hiedra (The Ivy)

Ana Cristina Barragán

Produced by Boton Films, BHD Films, Ciné-Sud Promotion, Guspira Films, Ecuador, Mexico, France, Spain
Winner: Orizzonti Best Screenplay Award at Venice 2025
Winner: Special Mention – Horizontes Latinos at San Sebastián
CineMart 2021, Darkroom 2025

Love on Trial

Koij Fukada

Produced by Toho Co., Ltd., Knockonwood, Survivance, Japan, France
World premiere at Cannes 2025 (Cannes Premiere)
CineMart 2022

Nuestra tierra (Landmarks)

Lucrecia Martel

Argentina, USA, Mexico, France, Netherlands, Denmark
Produced by Rei Pictures, Louverture Films, Piano, Pio & Co, Snowglobe, Lemming Film
World premiere at Venice 2025 (Out of Competition)
Winner: Best Film Award at BFI London
Dutch premiere at IFFR 2026 (Harbour)
HBF Development 2019, NFF+HBF 2020, Dutch Post-production Awards 2020

Olivia

Sofía Petersen

Argentina, United Kingdom, Spain
Produced by Animitas Cine, Vitrine Filmes, Elías Querejeta Zine Eskola
World premiere at Locarno 2025 (Cineasti del Presente)
HBF+EU: Post-production Support 2024

Promised Sky

Erige Sehiri

France, Tunisia, and Qatar
Produced by Maneki Films, Henia Production
World premiere at Cannes 2025 (Un Certain Regard)
Winner: Étoile d'Or for Best Film at the Marrakech
HBF+EU: Minority Co-production 2024

Romería

Carla Simón

Spain, Germany
Produced by Elastica Films, Ventall Cinema, Dos Soles Media, Romeria Vigo AIE
World premiere at Cannes 2025 (Competition)
Dutch premiere at IFFR 2026 (Limelight)
CineMart 2021

Sorella di Clausura

Ivana Mladenovic

Romania, Italy, Spain, Serbia
Produced by microFILM, Nightswim, Boogaloo Films, Dunav 84
World premiere at Locarno 2025 (Competition)
Winner: Katia Pascariu – Boccalino d'Oro for Best Actress at Locarno
Winner: Heart of Sarajevo Award for Best Director at Sarajevo
CineMart 2022, Darkroom 2025

Testa o croce? (Heads or Tails?)

Alessio Rigo de Righi and Matteo Zoppis

Italy, France
Produced by Ring Film: Lead producer, Rai Cinema, Cinema Inutile, Andromeda Film, Cinemaundici, Volos Films Italia
World premiere at Cannes 2025 (Un Certain Regard)
CineMart 2023

The Settlement

Mohamed Rashad

Egypt, France, Germany, Qatar
Produced by Hassala Films, Caractères Productions, SEERA Films
World premiere at Berlinale 2025 (Perspectives)
HBF Development 2020, HBF+EU: Minority Co-production 2022
CineMart 2021

Si no ardemos, cómo iluminar la noche (If We Don't Burn, How Do We Light Up the Night)

Kim Torres

Costa Rica, Mexico, France
Produced by Noche Negra Producciones, Tropical Films, Les Films du Clan
World premiere at San Sebastian 2025 (New Directors)
HBF+Europe: Minority Co-production Support 2023

A Useful Ghost

Ratchapoom Boonbunchachoke

Thailand, France, Singapore, Germany
Produced by 185 Films, Momo Film Co, Mayana Films, Haut Les Mains Productions
Winner: Grand Prix – Semaine de la Critique at Cannes 2025
Dutch premiere at IFFR 2026 (Harbour)
HBF+EU: Minority Co-production 2023

Variations on a Theme

Jason Jacobs & Devon Delmar

South Africa, Netherlands, Qatar
Produced by Kraal, Meria Productions, Interakt
World premiere at IFFR 2026 (Tiger Competition)
HBF+EU: Post-production 2024

Redoubt (Värn)

John Skoog

Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Poland, Finland, United Kingdom, Switzerland
Produced by Plattform Produktion, Film i Skåne, Film i Väst, Sveriges Television AB - SVT, BCD Film, Oy Bufo Ab., Lemming Film, Paloma Productions, Madants Sp. z o.o.
World premiere at San Sebastián 2025 (New Directors)
CineMart 2023

The Wolf, the Fox & the Leopard

David Verbeek

Netherlands, Ireland, Luxembourg, Croatia, Taiwan, Belgium
Produced by Lemming Film, Deal Productions, Feline Films, Nukleus, Flash Forward Entertainment, Lemming Film Belgium
World premiere at Tribeca 2025 (International Narrative Competition)
Dutch premiere at IFFR 2026 (Limelight)
CineMart 2020

The World Came Flooding In

Isobel Knowles, Van Sowerwine

Australia
Produced by Film Camp
World premiere at the Melbourne International Film Festival
International premiere at IFFR 2026 (Art Directions: immersive media)
CineMart 2024

Displacement Film Fund

Five new short films from Maryna Er Gorbach, Mo Harawe, Hasan Kattan, Mohammad Rasoulof and Shahrbanoo Sadat world premiere at IFFR 2026. The films are backed by the Displacement Film Fund, an initiative spearheaded by actor, producer and UNHCR Global Goodwill Ambassador Cate Blanchett, with IFFR's Hubert Bals Fund as management partner. Find more details later in the publication.

'WE GROW WITH EVERY PROJECT: WE KEEP EXPLORING CINEMA'

Producer María Zamora on CineMart selection and Carla Simón's *Romería*

Spanish producer María Zamora returns to CineMart this year following her 2022 selection with Carla Simón's *Romería*, now presenting *Adarna* by Lois Patiño. She spoke to us about a career defined by long-term creative partnerships and a commitment to singular voices.

By Paula Estany Hachuel

Among her most significant collaborations is her creative alliance with Carla Simón. The two first met through a mentoring programme that led to their first co-production, an encounter that would evolve into one of the most celebrated creative trajectories in recent Spanish cinema. Zamora reflects on that shared journey as a process of growth: "For both of us, every small step we take together feels like moving forward."

From their first trip to Berlinale with *Estiu 1993* (2017) to *Romería*'s world premiere in the main competition of the Cannes Film Festival in 2025, with a Golden Bear win for *Alcarràs* (2022) in between, their collaboration has been marked by a rare consistency of artistic ambition and international recognition. "The feeling with Carla, always shared, is that we grow with every project. We're in this for that reason: to keep learning from cinema."

What she values most in working with Simón is that while she remains faithful to her intimate, naturalistic approach, she continually seeks new expressive terrain. *Romería*, Zamora explains, remains deeply rooted in Simón's cinematic universe, "a cinema that is close to reality, and stays grounded" but also ventures into a more poetic and imagined space than

ever before. The film is an intimate autofictional exploration of identity and family, and marks a subtle yet meaningful expansion of Simón's emotional and visual language.

Simón's work is also defined by her extraordinary ability to direct children and non-professional actors, an approach that brings a striking authenticity to her films. In *Romería*, performers such as Lluïcia Garcia and Mitch Robles embody this sensibility, creating characters whose emotional truth resonates deeply with audiences. For Zamora, this constant willingness to take risks is what matters most: "What is important is where the film can make you fly to."

Beyond her collaboration with Simón, Zamora's through her production company Elástica Films has supported stories that "tell truths", often through deeply personal, female-driven narratives. Filmmakers such as Mar Coll, Elena Martín, and Paula Ortiz have found in Zamora a producer willing to support bold, intimate visions, earning recognition across festivals and awards, from the Goya Awards to Locarno. While she tells us she has had to learn to say no, Zamora sees this selectivity as a form of creative freedom, allowing her to fully commit to the projects she believes in.



Romería (2025)



María Zamora

One of those projects is Lois Patiño's *Adarna*, selected for CineMart 2026. Following his recent experimental works such as *Ariel* (IFFR 2025), Patiño now embarks on his most narrative-driven film to date: a speculative exploration of the afterlife. For Zamora, the project's openness was what made it resonate with her: "It doesn't speak about certainty or fixed truths, but about possibilities." She adds that what truly connects her to Patiño is that: "He believes there is a path toward understanding one another, toward understanding why we cling to life."

Returning to CineMart for the second time, Zamora speaks of the platform as a turning point for *Romería*. "It gave us the momentum we needed so the film wouldn't stay in a drawer," she says. Reflecting on her experience and her "fond memories" of IFFR, she offers valuable advice to new participants: "Use your time in the best possible way in one-to-one's. And IFFR also gives you the chance to meet incredibly interesting people in the film business. Make the most of it."

A year of premieres and success for

DARKROOM PROJECTS

As IFFR's work-in-progress platform during CineMart, Darkroom offers filmmakers a focused and supportive environment at a decisive moment in their process. It's a space where recently completed or nearly finished films can receive final guidance on financing, festival positioning and sales representation, and where emerging voices connect with the professional networks that help carry their stories into the world.

We spoke to the 2025 edition cohort about the success they found this year, and how Darkroom shaped their path towards world premieres at Venice, Locarno, Toronto, New York and San Sebastián.

"The programme was impeccably organised, and it gave us our first chance to see the film on the big screen with film experts from around the world," says *Bayaan* (2025) producer Shiladitya Bora. For the team, Darkroom was a turning point: the film – centred on a woman confronting a patriarchal system — met an international circle of mentors. The conversations helped shape *Bayaan*'s next steps: "We had nearly 17 in-depth meetings with international professionals who engaged deeply with our work." This contributed to the film's path to its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival and subsequently to Busan's A Window on Asian Cinema.

Ivana Mladenović's *Sorella di Clausura* (2025) – a bittersweet comedy about female autonomy and the intersections of sex, money and power – also found its first international foothold at Darkroom. Producer Diana Caravia highlights how the programme balances structure and strategic support, giving filmmakers the grounding they need to prepare their films for international circulation: Darkroom "helped us understand how the film resonated beyond our local context and how to better position it in the market." The film went on to premiere at Locarno, and received the Heart of Sarajevo Award for Best Director.

For *Last Night I Conquered Thebes* (2025) producer Carlos Pardo Ros says that connection to the film industry community is what makes Darkroom special. "The comments at Darkroom helped us understand how to position the film, find collaborators and expand our network of contacts." He adds that Darkroom aligns with his collaborative approach and values and describes IFFR as a place "to build long-term

professional relationships, and often friendships." This support made Gabriel Azorin's film travel from Darkroom to Venice, premiering at Giornate degli Autori to strong critical acclaim. According to the International Film Society, this film depicting male intimacy like rarely seen, showed "a distinct directorial hand and the bravery to let scenes breathe... as close to a masterpiece as one can get."

Hiedra (2025), also attracted international attention at its premiere in Venice where it won the Best Screenplay Award in the Orizzonti section, as well receiving a special mention at San Sebastián. Ana Cristina Barragán's exploration of trauma, through a tactile cinematic language found in Darkroom, a first platform that helped the team refine its positioning and prepare for entering the festival landscape.

Shot entirely on an obsolete Sony Ericsson phone, *Dry Leaf* (2025) is a meditative journey through rural Georgia, built on a blurred, grainy and intimate visual language directed by Alexandre Koberidze. "Darkroom was an excellent platform to present the work-in-progress version of our film and, for the first time, understand how an audience might respond," says producer Mariam Shatberashvili. This feedback shaped the film's distribution and festival strategy. After Darkroom, *Dry Leaf* premiered in competition at Locarno and went on a festival circuit at TIFF, the New York Film Festival and the BFI London Film Festival. Variety praised it as "a pioneering use of old, ephemeral tech to invent new, eternal cinema."



Bayaan (2025)



Sorella di Clausura (2025)



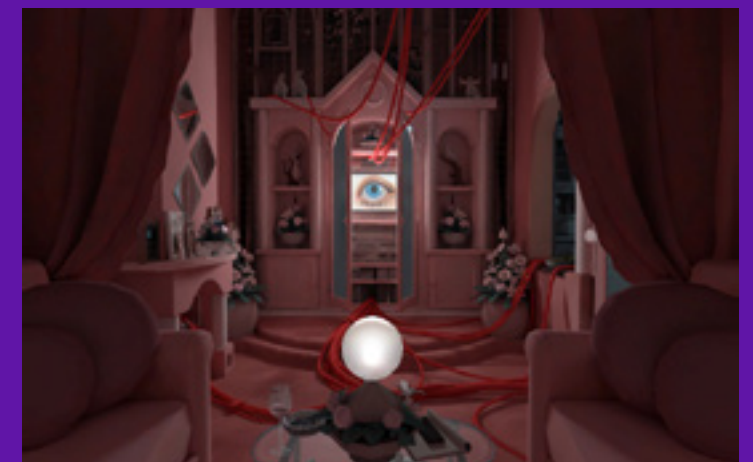
Last Night I Conquered Thebes (2025)



Hiedra (2025)



Dry Leaf (2025)



The Great Orator (2025)

In 2025 VR projects also found their place in Darkroom. *The Great Orator* (2025), an immersive project by Daniel Ernst, went from IFFR's programme to the prestigious Venice Immersive selection.

The Great Orator is selected for IFFR 2026, where this commitment to supporting formally adventurous work has led to the launch of the first edition of Lightroom, a new strand that unifies interactive and immersive projects previously split between CineMart and Darkroom. This year,

nine projects have been selected to be part of this new industry strand designed in close collaboration with the festival's Art Directions programme.

Across genres, regions and production scales, the 2025 alumni hint that this year's Darkroom projects might just be poised to make waves across festivals in the months ahead – and they'll be in excellent shape to do so.

Step into the LIGHTROOM

Thirty years ago, IFFR's Exploding Cinema sparked a dialogue between digital technology and the language of cinema. The festival's Art Directions programme continues to shape the cultural and media landscape by fostering bold audiovisual experiments that extend far beyond the small or large screen. What's more, the trajectories of many projects over the years were shaped by their involvement with IFFR Pro, most notably the CineMart Immersive programme, itself an extension of CineMart, the mother of all co-production markets.

by Nick Cunningham

In 2026, the festival further ups the ante with the launch of Lightroom, which brings together the XR, VR, interactive and expansive installation projects previously presented as works-in-progress and works-in-development at CineMart and Darkroom. With its own home in Rotterdam's Katoenhuis, and closely aligned with IFFR's Art Directions programme (see below), Lightroom underpins IFFR's long-running commitment to unveiling innovative audiovisual artworks by offering "a clearer pathway for development, visibility and exchange", underline Section Organisers Eva Langerak, who oversees the Art Directions programme, and Ellen Kuo, formerly VR Gallery Curator at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, and IFFR Pro Special Consultant.

"Lightroom aims to build a bridge between the Art Directions programme and IFFR Pro", confirms Langerak. "IFFR has already, for 30 years, really championed open-format, expanded cinema works, that really exist on the intersection between the visual arts and cinema. And, of course, on the Pro side of things, CineMart has really proven itself to be an important place for filmmakers and producers to meet and to work on great cinema".

The proof is in the programme: this year's Art Directions at IFFR 2026 features three works that began their journey at CineMart and Darkroom – *The World Came Flooding In* by Isobel Knowles & Van Sowerwine (CineMart 2024, world premiere Melbourne 2025), *The Great Escape* by Joren Vandenbroucke (CineMart 2024, world premiere Venice Immersive 2025), and *The Great Orator* by Daniel Ernst (Darkroom 2025, world premiere Venice Immersive 2025).

Langerak adds: "But the necessity of this new platform arises from the fact that, for these new open-format works or for works that deal with new media, there is not really a blueprint for an infrastructure that makes sure these works are finding the right funding or the right partner or the right forms of distribution. As a festival that has always wanted to

go where other festivals or institutions might not dare to go, we want to be innovative and pave the way for these new projects to find the fertile ground on which they can flourish".

"It's not about finding the right answers immediately, I think that this platform will need time to find out what is needed. It's not a case of copying what we have done at CineMart or replicating what is happening in the visual arts world, it's really about getting all the right minds together from all these different sectors and these different disciplines, and finding these new methods collectively".

Ellen Kuo further reasons that this independently branded space is needed for an immersive sector that is constantly "refractionised". Structure and form changes on a day-by-day, project-by-project basis, she stresses. "The [projects] are not necessarily fitting the one-to-one schedule that we have had since the beginning of CineMart".

Therefore the objective is to meet the market needs of immersive projects "that are giving us different challenges, not just technological challenges in terms of production, but also in terms of storytelling itself", Kuo adds.

For most proponents of immersive, finding distribution and exhibition outlets is a core and elemental criterion, which is why Lightroom is partnering with museums "that are interested in showing these new media or expanded cinema creation works", says Langerak.

"We are partnering with curators that are interested in understanding the works and these kinds of practices", she adds. "We're partnering with developers and tech companies that are working on these technologies from another perspective, and we are also partnering up with companies or new start-ups that are working on ways to make these [new] media accessible for a wider audience".

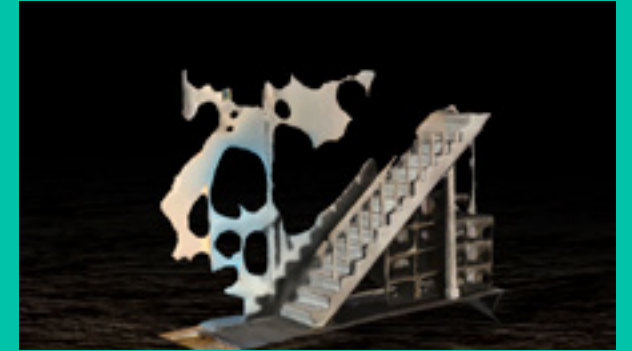
The nine Lightroom projects presented form a bridge between IFFR Pro and Art Directions and bring the range and forms of projects presented in the market in line with the Art Directions programme, incorporating mediums ranging from single-channel installation to XR, VR and multiplayer mixed reality. Amsterdam-based filmmaker and visual artist Maya Watanabe presents the single-channel video installation *Jarkov*, where a 20,000-year-old woolly mammoth becomes the focal point for exploring time and matter beyond human grasp.

One of the projects selected for the first edition of Lightroom is *Les Gens de la Pluie* by Nicolas Blies & Stéphane Hueber-Blies (aka Bliesbro) who continue their exploration of fragility and intimacy that began with *Ceci Est Mon Coeur* (Venice Immersive 2024, Cannes Immersive 2025).

The synopsis reads: in an immersive space blending spoken word, electronic music and digital landscapes, *Les Gens de la Pluie* (The Rain People) invites the audience on a unique sensory journey. These beings, made of rain, melt into the tears of people when they weep, thus reinventing love. As the audience moves through the space, the narrative unfolds in two voices, like two sides of the same story, each spectator becoming the author of their own journey. An intimate odyssey about love in the face of time and the gradual erosion of the body.

"I'm pretty much a newbie at this IFFR Pro market, but obviously I know it's famous and well known for being a bold festival and open to new and innovative forms of cinema", says producer Le Gall. "And also, because it has always had a strong sense of authorship. I think that for this particular project from Bliesbro, we are trying to provide them with a long-term support for their career. We know that in Rotterdam, they take care of their authors. And IFFR is closely in line with our company DNA, which is lots of hybrid content".

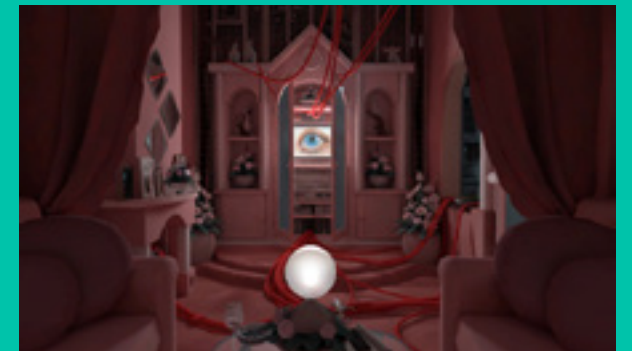
Le Gall isn't looking for co-production partners on the project, rather opportunities for its dissemination across as many outlets as possible. He is therefore impressed by what Lightroom is offering. "It's really important to be in touch with venues really early in the project. What I expect from IFFR Pro is to really create strong leads and interest from venues all over the world". That will help validate the "concept" of the project and enable its improvement through dialogue and comment, Le Gall signs-off.



The World Came Flooding In



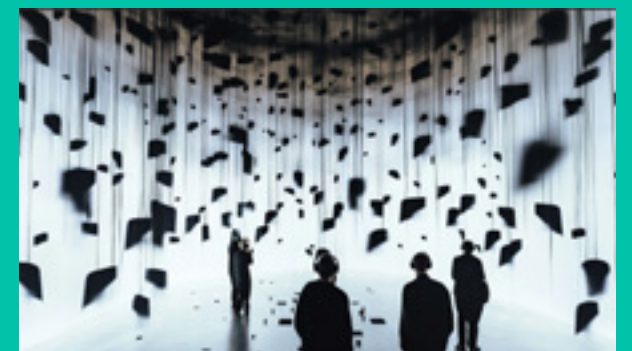
The Great Escape



The Great Orator



Jarkov



Les Gens de la Pluie

CINEMART



Balancing breakthrough talent with celebrated auteurs at the height of their careers, this year's selections underline CineMart's role as a place where discovery and established filmmaking meet.

The urgency is palpable: stories grappling with war and displacement sit alongside narratives exploring climate change, queerness, and the struggle to define and preserve identities in turbulent times – all rendered through bold cinematic creativity and forays into genres including sci-fi, horror, and musical.

The selection is typically faithful to our commitment to nurturing IFFR alumni, featuring previous Tiger and Youth Jury Award winners and numerous Rotterdam Lab alumni producers. This commitment is further extended this edition with the launch of CineMart x HBF, with six projects featured in the following section.

Adarna

Lois Patiño

After stealing a rooster believed to have magical powers and suffering an accident, Denis finds himself in a place where he has the opportunity to confront, once dead, the past that tormented him in life.

Tags: redemption, after death, philippine mythology

Synopsis

On a Philippine Island lives Denis, a 42-year-old European who ekes out a living guiding tourists by boat. He carries a wound: guilt over his absence in his daughter Maya’s life, whom he hasn’t seen since. One day, after hearing of the death of Indigenous leader De Luna, his friend Bruno – who has an intellectual disability – steals a mysterious fighting cock. Denis tries to help him, but a nighttime chase ends in an accident. Rescued by an enigmatic Fisherman, Denis awakens in a jungle village where De Luna awaits. Only then does he realise they are both dead, suspended in a limbo of restless souls. The jungle opens uncanny dimensions. In its waters, Denis relives memories of Maya and Julia, his ex-girlfriend. The weight of remorse overwhelms him – until Bruno reappears, having taken his own life, to follow him. In his innocence, Bruno believes they can return together to the world of the living. They try in vain, but the Fisherman leads Denis there: Julia and Maya have come to say goodbye. Invisible to them, he shares one last moment. Returning to limbo, Denis seems more serene, and in a mysterious waterfall of colours, he disappears, merging in a transformative sound experience.

Director's Statement

Exploring how different cultures imagine death and the afterlife is a theme that runs through much of my work – *Lúa Vermella*, *O Sembrador de Estrellas*, *Fajir*, *Samsara* – and now *Adarna*. Each film approaches this question through distinct spiritual lenses. With *Adarna*, I take a more fictional route, following a Western protagonist whose journey allows me to explore cultural identity, uprootedness, and the transformative power of confronting mortality. Inspired by Heidegger’s concept of “being-towards-death”, I see death not as an end but as a vital impulse, a force that urges us to live fully and meaningfully. Through this film, I want to invite viewers to embrace life with courage, presence and love. The Philippines became the setting for its rich pre-Christian animist imagery and its layered colonial history, first under Spain for three centuries, then under the United States for nearly fifty years. These influences remain visible today in language, religion and everyday life. This backdrop allows the film to reflect on colonisation from multiple angles, but above all, it offers a universe of myths, spirits and legends that deeply fascinate me. For this project, I focused on how animist groups imagine limbo. While some traditions believe in reincarnation, most conceive an intermediate space, a region between life and the afterlife where souls linger, either as punishment or because of unfinished business. Only by achieving inner peace can they continue their journey toward reincarnation or transcendence. This concept became the heart of *Adarna*. Narratively, the film unfolds in two distinct movements. The first part, set in a coastal village, carries the tone of a mystery-thriller: Denis’s

past, the death of an Indigenous leader, and a rooster rumoured to be magical propel the story forward. His search for Bruno, his best friend, becomes the driving force, leading to a climax of chaos and pursuit. The second part shifts radically: Denis discovers he is dead and enters a limbo village deep in the jungle. Here, the film embraces fantasy and metaphysical adventure. The jungle ceases to be a real space and becomes a dreamlike, symbolic territory where Denis must confront his memories and unresolved family drama. Bruno’s arrival and his desperate plan to escape sustain the narrative tension while opening the door to surreal, sensory experiences. One of the most powerful sequences is the “river of memories”, where sound becomes a transgressive tool to explore Denis’s regrets. The film culminates in its most spectacular moment: a waterfall of colours representing the threshold to the afterlife. Here, fragments of sound, echoes of mundane life, merge as Denis dissolves into threads of light, a passage beyond grief and desire. Although the script is carefully structured, the shoot will embrace the unpredictability of real life in the Philippines. Coming from documentary filmmaking, I want fiction to remain porous, allowing reality to seep in. We will shoot on location, letting daily life continue around us, and combine professional actors – selected through an international casting – with non-professionals for Filipino roles. *Adarna* flows boldly between tones and genres: from mystery and thriller to fantasy and metaphysical drama, always anchored in an intimate, existential core. Ultimately, *Adarna* is a sensory and philosophical journey, a film that seeks to move viewers emotionally while inviting them to contemplate mortality, uprootedness and love.

Director's Biography

Lois Patiño (1983, Spain) is a filmmaker and artist based in Vigo. His films have been shown at film festivals such as Cannes, Berlinale,

Locarno, Toronto, Rotterdam, New York, Viennale, IDFA, Cinéma du Réel, Oberhausen and Clermont-Ferrand, among others. Harvard University awarded him the Robert Fulton III Scholarship in 2016, intended for emerging filmmakers. *Costa da morte* (2013), *Lúa vermella* (2020) and *Samsara* (2023) are his three feature films to date. His last two short films, *Sycorax* (2021) and *El sembrador de estrellas* (2022) premiered in the Cannes Directors’ Fortnight and in the Berlinale, respectively, the latter receiving an award. *Ariel* (2025), shot in the Azore islands, is his fourth feature film. His project *Adarna* is selected for CineMart 2026.

Company Profile

Elastica Films, founded by María Zamora and Enrique Costa, is a production and distribution company behind acclaimed titles such as Berlinale Golden Bear’s *Alcarrás* (Carla Simón), Berlinale Panorama’s *Matria* (Álvaro Gago), Directors Fortnight’s *Creatura* (Elena Martín), SSIFF Golden Shell’s *The Rye Horn* (Jaione Camborda), Locarno’s *Salve Maria* (Mar Coll) and Cannes Official Section’s *Romería* (Carla Simón).

Current Status

We currently have a first draft of the script on which the screenwriter is working on, with the intention of having a new one by the end of the year after the scriptwriting sessions with Santiago Fillol (*Sirat*). The project has secured development funds from AGADIC and MG for national distribution.



|| Inspired by Heidegger’s concept of “being-towards-death”, I see death not as an end but as a vital impulse, a force that urges us to live fully and meaningfully.

Goals at CineMart

At CineMart, we hope to find potential co-producers, sales agents and funding partners who connect with our project. With no international co-producers attached yet, we are actively seeking collaborators who can help bring this story to life both creatively and strategically. We are also eager to meet with professionals who can offer insights on navigating the Southeast Asian markets, which we have not yet had the opportunity to explore. This market also represents a key opportunity to expand our network and build the right partnerships for *Adarna*’s next steps.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Samsara* (2023) by Lois Patiño is available on Festival Scope.



Lois Patiño, Director



María Zamora, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP 4k (final) | 100 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Lois Patiño
Genre: Fiction
Languages: English, Filipino
Locations: Philippines
Budget: €3,973,063
Financing in place: €286,144
Production Company: Elastica Films
Co-Production Company: Matriuska Producciones
Partners attached: Elastica Films (National distributor MG) €30,000
Spanish Tax Credit, AGADIC (Development Fund) €286,144
Seeking partners from: Philippines and European countries

 watch previous work

 watch pitch

Contact
Elastica Films
mzamora@elasticafilms.com
https://elasticafilms.com

after the night, the night

Naomi Pacifique

Naomi's partner, No  , tells her that he will return to monogamy with one of his more recent partners. Confronted with some of the harsh realities of non-monogamy, Naomi takes to the streets of Amsterdam for the night. In search of intimate encounters with others, she gains insight into how to deal with loss in the context of non-monogamy.

Tags: intimacy, monogamy/polyamory, queer/LGBTQ

Synopsis

Naomi's long-term partner, No  , returns from a trip with his other partner, Julie, to announce he will commit to monogamy with Julie. The past months of his and Naomi's open relationship have proven challenging for him; an open relationship is not what he wants anymore. Naomi is shocked and hurt by his decision: she hadn't seen it coming at all. Shaken and reeling, she steps into the streets of Amsterdam for the night, retracing the reasons that first led her to embrace a life beyond monogamy. Her evening unfolds through three encounters, each shaping her journey differently.

While drifting through the Red Light District, Naomi meets Gusje, an older bartender whose perspective on loyalty and love challenges Naomi's own assumptions. Later, she reconnects with Jeremy, a former lover, rediscovering a language of intimacy they thought had been lost. Finally, Naomi crosses paths with Marine, an artist she admires, and experiences physical intimacy with another woman for the first time – an awakening that deepens her understanding of desire, vulnerability and connection.

As Naomi navigates the city, the camera drifts into other lives, revealing a diversity of contemporary intimacies. Anne, a mother preparing her daughter for bed, Steve, a thirty-something seeking true love, Esteban and Clara, a couple trying to understand when they stopped being present for each other, and Matthias, anxious to face the night alone. These glimpses echo Naomi's own journey, reflecting the complexity of desire, love and human connection today.

By dawn, Naomi returns home. She wakes No   gently, confessing her fear of losing him. She wants to commit to their relationship in renewed ways, but she will need distance to understand their future and how to better shape it. Alone in the shower, water flows over her, carrying the night's experiences and encounters, as she embraces a clearer understanding of love and a deeper sense of security in herself.

Director's Statement

Over the past eight years, my artistic practice has sought to explore intimacy and its importance in everyday life. To me, intimacy has come to mean the space of exchange between two people, or beings, where both can affect one another. Unlike love, which can exist even when two people fuse into one and individuality fades, intimacy requires a "third space" – a shifting, shared space between people that allows difference to exist. Today, intimacy feels more urgent than ever, as technology has



made us more distant to one another than we had expected, and fear of difference continues to drive hostility between us. Instead of dividing the world into "me" and "not-me", intimacy invites curiosity, connection and the chance to grow together, rather than apart, with our differences taken into account. This perspective on intimacy has its roots in my own experience of a difficult family upbringing, with a father who could not engage with intimacy and who, over many years and in various situations, sought instead to exert power. Over the course of the years, I saw how much pain this caused in others, myself included. In contrast to intimacy, relationships of power allow one person to affect the other, while remaining largely unaffected in return. In my early twenties, as I began to experience the world and learn through my body, I was confronted with echoes of this childhood pain in normalised interactions and relationship structures. Since then, I have wanted to find alternate ways in which we can exist with one another. In my first short film, *after a room*, I wanted to rethink the possibilities for expression that the naked body has. I showed two naked adults experiencing a relationship that had more to do with introspection, discovery and curiosity than it did with seduction or passion. I was guided by filmmaker Carolee Schneemann's question: Can a naked woman be both image and image-maker? In my second short, *looking she said I forget*, I questioned traditional relationship models. I explored intimacy as it exists in non-monogamous relationships. I am interested in the potential which life outside monogamy has to alter our possibilities for presence, vulnerability and empathy towards one another. With *after the night, the night*, I bring these two films together, exploring alternative perspectives on both bodies and relational structures in the context of one film. I continue to gesture to the limited choices we are given growing up today when deciding what lens to place our intimacies under. To this end, the film's structure is based not only on one main character, but allows itself to 'fall in love', to become polyamorous, with others in the night. We follow the people who the protagonist meets in the streets back to their homes, bathrooms and beds, to experience with them what intimacy is to them. By questioning the current norms surrounding intimacy, I want to challenge the barriers in place which limit love and intimacy's possibilities in our contemporary context, allowing the audience to think through the depths of their own intimate experiences.

By questioning the current norms surrounding intimacy, I want to challenge the barriers in place which limit love and intimacy's possibilities in our contemporary context, allowing the audience to think through the depths of their own intimate experiences.

Director's Biography

Naomi Pacifique is a Swiss-Dutch artist based in Amsterdam. She graduated from Oxford University with an MA in Creative Writing and from London Film School with an MA in Filmmaking. Her graduation film from London Film School, *after a room* (2021), was awarded the Pardino d'Argento Swiss Life at Locarno Film Festival in August 2021. Throughout her work she is interested in intimacy and deep ecology, exploring spaces and discovering and reinventing both oneself and the environment one is surrounded by. Her second short film, *looking she said I forget* (2024), premiered at Locarno Film Festival in 2024 and was nominated for the Swiss Film Awards. She is currently developing her first two feature films *after the night, the night*, a CineMart 2026 selected project.

Company Profile

GROM Productions believes that how we work is as important as the end result. Therefore we actively work towards a safer working environment for everyone involved in our productions and in the industry at large. *Wheelie* by Isis Cabolet won the Just Film Youth Award at JUST FILM 2025. *You're Killing Me* by Ivo van Aart and *Uchronia* by Fil Ieropolous will be released in 2026.

Current Status

We are in final development and early financing stage. There is a draft of the script ready to share. We will hear a result from a production support application in the Netherlands early spring. If this is granted more then 70% of the budget will be financed. Aiming to finance internationally from spring 2026 to winter 2027. The shoot is scheduled for the spring of 2027 and delivery by that year. The cast already attached is: Sofia Kokali (Greece), Eszter Tompa (Romania), Jordi Vilches (Spain), Kiefer Zwart & Malou Gorter (Netherlands). But we are open to add cast members to open possibilities for co-producers. As most roles are intimacy-forward we are looking for actors that are open to this.

Goals at CineMart

To find a third co-producing partner preferably from one of the countries we have a cast member attached from but open to others as well. Also looking to meet sales agents to start discussing the global potential of the project. We would also be happy to connect to other professionals working in the field of filming intimacy to discuss approaches to this.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The short films *Looking She Said I Forget* (2024) and *after a room* (2021) by Naomi Pacifique are available on Festival Scope.



Naomi Pacifique,
Director

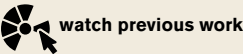


Sacha Gertsik,
Producer



Steven Rubinstein
Malamud,
Producer

Feature: 16mm (shooting) | DCP (final) | 90 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Naomi Pacifique
Genre: Fiction
Languages: English, Spanish, Dutch
Locations: Amsterdam
Budget: €2,475,000
Financing in place: €641,842
Production Company: GROM Productions
Co-Production Company: Lemming Film, GoldenEggProduction, Idle Eye
Partners attached: San Sebastian Ikusmira Berriak Residency €10,000 Netherlands Film Fund - Development support €28,750 Swiss media (co-development) €21.184
Seeking partners from: Greece, Spain, Romania, Belgium, France, Worldwide



Contact
GROM Productions
steven@grom productions
<https://grom productions/>

Animals

Hayawanat

Morad Mostafa

Malik, a teenage boy in his twenties, goes on the run with a strange, elusive girl (Noura) haunted by a crime involving his twin brother. As they travel across the cities of Egypt, his human instincts begin to unravel, giving way to something feral.

Tags: thriller, road, coming of age, drama, crime

Synopsis

In a rooftop room in downtown Cairo, identical twin brothers Malek and Rasheed wrestle like wild animals – bodies twisting in a primal dance of adolescence, aggression and devotion. After the fight, Rasheed lights a cigarette and demands Malek give him a matching wound with a switchblade – “so we stay identical”. Bound by blood, the twins serve Moussa, a jailed smuggler, who sends them to abduct a Sudanese antiquities trafficker. The job ends in daylight gunfire, leaving two men dead and the brothers spiralling deeper into violence. They plunge into Cairo’s nightlife with Noura – Moussa’s daughter and Rasheed’s mysterious lover. Malek’s animal instincts awaken; he barks at a stray dog and violently rejects meat at a grotesque dinner. Tension erupts between the brothers. That night, Malek spies on Rasheed and Noura. Her gaze reveals something inhuman, connecting her to Malek’s transformation. When Moussa threatens them over a missing artifact, Malek discovers Rasheed plans to escape with Noura – and the stolen piece. Feeling betrayed, Malek kills his twin and assumes his identity. Their journey becomes a mythic descent: four chapters, four animals – dog, wolf, hyena, shark – mark Malek’s transformation. Fleeing across Egypt, he begins to act on instinct: eating a cat when starving, killing with his teeth when afraid. These savage acts deepen his bond with Noura, who shares his brutal essence. They reach the sea, no longer hiding, embracing their true nature – feral, free and untamed. A visceral exploration of identity, desire and the wildness buried in the human soul.

Director's Statement

Since the dawn of human history—when man first saw his own reflection in the face of his brother—the first crime on Earth was committed. Cain killed Abel, not out of hatred, but out of jealousy, betrayal, and a desire to be unique. Since then, that sacred story has become a symbol of the violent side hidden within us. But in my view, it was not only the first murder in human history—it was the first terrifying moment of self-revelation. From it emerged the first existential question ever asked by mankind: Is brutality within us a passing instinct, or is it part of our very nature? In *Animals*, I’m not offering a modern retelling of Cain and Abel. Rather, this is a story about what happens to the brother after the killing. About the moment when a human is no longer fully human, yet not entirely animal either—but something in between. A third, hybrid creature that has stepped beyond the limits of nature. That was the initial spark for this film: the image of a teenage boy forced to kill his twin brother—not because he hates him, but because he cannot bear to be betrayed by him. Because betrayal, like murder, is unforgivable. These feelings haunted me—not just as a dramatic premise, but as a brutal psychological condition. What happens inside you after you kill someone who looks exactly like you? Someone who knows you better than you

know yourself? From there, the film started to take shape—not just as a crime story, but as a psychological and physical journey into the unknown. I wasn’t looking for an answer, but for an experience. A thread that would lead me deep inside this teenage boy’s soul—his inner weight of guilt, not before God, but before the self. This is a film about how human behavior can become animalistic—not because the boy was born a monster, but because he never learned how to love his brother. This year, my debut feature film *Aisha Can’t Fly Away* premiered in the Un Certain Regard section at the Cannes Film Festival. It was an intense and difficult experience—not only because the film falls under the category of body horror, but because it delves deeply into the fragility of the female body when it becomes a battlefield within a society where violence has become part of everyday language. This was never meant to be an easy film, and I knew that while writing and shooting it. During the official screening at Cannes, some audience members walked out, unable to bear the violent, bloody, and at times even repulsive scenes. To me, that was not a failure—on the contrary, it was a success. It meant the film had struck a nerve, had touched something deeply human and unbearable. It confronted viewers with what they did not want to see. Because in this case, the fear of watching is itself an admission: that the pain and ugliness within the film are real. Beauty sometimes has to pass through ugliness. The brutal and bloody moments exist to reveal truths that beautiful images cannot articulate. What is truly painful, however, is that we often lack the tools to confront such violence—or even to understand its cause. I’ve always preferred to use violence to express a specific feeling. My characters are not born violent. They grow up in suffocating environments that turn them into ticking bombs—ready to explode at any moment.

Director's Biography

Morad Mostafa (1988, Egypt) is an Egyptian filmmaker who began his career as an assistant director, working in the industry for over a decade before moving into writing and directing. An alumnus of Berlinale Talents, Durban Talents, Locarno Academy, and Cannes Cinéfondation, he was named one of Screen Daily’s Arab Stars of Tomorrow. His short films *What We Don't Know About Maryam* (2021), *Henet Ward* (2020), *Khadiga* (2021), have been selected for Clermont-Ferrand and screened internationally receiving numerous awards and broad international circulation. *I Promise You Paradise* (2023), was selected for the 76th Cannes; Critics’ Week, where it won the Rail d’Or. He has served on several international juries, including the Cairo International Film Festival. His debut feature *Aisha Can’t Fly Away* (2025) premiered in Un Certain Regard at the 78th Cannes Film Festival. His new project *Animals* is selected for IFFR’s CineMart 2026.

Company Profile

Bonanza Films, a Cairo-based production company established in 2019 aiming to help in developing film industry by producing shorts and feature films for directors in their first or second project that can be presented internationally, its productions created in

This is a film about how human behaviour can become animalistic – not because the boy was born a monster, but because he never learned how to love his brother.

collaboration with international productions that share enthusiasm for cinema. It has produced more than ten shorts over the past three years.

Current Status

The film is in early development, it has only been presented nationally in El Gouna Film Festival and CineMart is it's first to be presented internationally we are in the second draft of the script and we are in co-production with France.

Goals at CineMart

We are seeking to introduce the film to the international market, receive feedback on the script, talk to sales agents and distributors and find other partners from Europe to be able to submit to funds.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Aisha Can’t Fly Away* (2025) by Morad Mostafa is available on Festival Scope.



Morad Mostafa, Director



Sawsan Yusuf, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 120 min. | Colour
Based on: Original Screenplay by Morad Mostafa and Sawsan Yusuf
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Arabic
Locations: Egypt
Budget: €770,000
Financing in place: €40,000
Production Company: Bonanza Films
Co-Production Company: Wrong Films
Partners attached: Bonanza Films (Own investment) €40,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide

watch previous work

watch pitch

Contact

Bonanza Films
sawsan.yusuf@gmail.com



Beirut Baby

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige

By day, Souraya, a psychotherapist, listens and heals Beirut’s wounds through the stories of her patients. By night, she lives the life of a free woman. Against all odds, she becomes pregnant without knowing who the father is. But in a collapsing Lebanon, having a child on your own is not an easy option. An unexpected journey begins...

Tags: psychological thriller, woman rights and freedom, motherhood

Synopsis

Souraya, 42, a psychotherapist in Beirut, lives alone, carefully keeping her patients’ suffering apart from her private life. Among them are Rabih, a lawyer seeking justice for depositors robbed by the banks, and Dounia, a striking woman trapped in an abusive marriage to a powerful ex-militiaman turned politician, who demands an heir.

To release the weight of her patients’ pain, Souraya slips into fleeting affairs, protecting herself from love. But her orderly life shatters when she discovers she is pregnant. At her age, the news feels both like a shock and a last chance. She has no idea who the father is, and in Lebanon giving a child a nationality and therefore an identity without a father seems almost impossible – as women alone cannot pass on their citizenship. What begins as a personal decision soon collides with patriarchal law, turning her desire for motherhood into a political battle. Supported by her sister Nadia and her friends Petra and Rana, Souraya navigates a maze of legal traps: sham marriages, contradictory decrees, hostile bureaucrats. She reconnects with her former great love, Sam, confronts her past, and faces her own solitude and the choices that shaped it. In time, she discovers that the law does protect children born without a legally recognised father but tradition and social stigma are stronger than the law itself.

Forced by complications to return to her family home, Souraya is surrounded by echoes of a collapsing society: her father Kamal’s stubborn resilience, a former militiaman haunted by his past, or a patient woman losing her senses. Confined to her childhood bedroom, now turned into her office, she watches Beirut’s turmoil from the window while family tensions funny and absurd situations and therapy sessions collide within the same walls.

Her path confronts with Sharif Sawma, Dounia’s husband, who offers to help secure papers for her child at the price of compromising her ethics. Soon, he harasses, spies and blackmails her, turning her pregnancy into a battle for survival. Everything begins to spiral.

Yet amid this fragility, new strengths emerge: Souraya rebuilds bonds with her family, Kamal finds unexpected allies, and Dounia seems to break free. The two women share a fleeting moment of solidarity, daring to embrace life despite all uncertainties, Souraya gives birth as Dounia confronts her own destiny.



Director's Statement

During both of my pregnancies, I spent months on bed rest, an experience that profoundly reshaped my perception of the world and of images. Like a modern *Rear Window*, I filmed constantly, observing life from my confined space, and reflecting with Khalil on the fragility and intimacy of daily life. This period transformed our artistic and cinematographic sensibility. Lebanon’s collapse, compounded by the 2020 Beirut blast on 4 August, left us disoriented, resurfacing this story with urgency: how can one bring a child into a world on the brink of collapse, in a region perpetually at risk of explosion?

In Lebanon, a child without a legally declared father has in general no nationality or identity, since women cannot pass on their citizenship. This structural injustice drives the core political and emotional tension of the film. Determined to keep her child, Souraya must navigate the absurdities of bureaucracy, the weight of tradition and the threats of a patriarchal society. Her struggle is both personal and political, transforming her desire for motherhood into a fight for justice, and survival.

The film is structured in two movements. First, Souraya is active and mobile; the city is captured almost in a documentary style. We move through Beirut’s streets, bars, hospitals, banks and apartments, immersing the audience in the city’s fragmented pulse under financial collapse, political paralysis and social decay. Beirut becomes a living character: chaotic, absurd yet intimate, reflecting the personal and collective crises of contemporary life.

Then, Souraya is bedridden in her father’s home. Her childhood bedroom becomes a makeshift clinic where she treats patients. From her window, Souraya observes Beirut, where apartment buildings act as screens revealing glimpses of neighbours’ lives. Social media and videos from her sister Nadia and friends create a layered, fragmented perspective of the city. Vertical scrolling contrasts with the horizontal, panoramic view from her room. Sound is crucial, carrying distant chaos and unseen events, making the aural landscape central.

Souraya’s pregnancy embodies her fears: bringing a child into an uncertain world, confronting vulnerability and facing her mother’s death. As she fights for her child’s legal recognition, she becomes entangled with her patient Dounia, whose journey is one of liberation from patriarchal constraints. Within her room, tension escalates: Sharif, Dounia’s husband, intrudes to harass and blackmail her, forcing Souraya

to balance ethics, survival, and protection of her unborn child. Around her, other characters embody fragments of resistance: her father and his friend Michel, ruined by the banks and plotting revenge with Rabih; Abu Assem, a bitter militiaman; her sister Nadia, collecting and selling remnants of broken lives. Their wounds converge in Souraya’s room, creating a gallery of intimate portraits embodied by renowned Arab actors.

Beirut Baby continues our exploration of Lebanese society, focusing on character-driven stories with universal resonance, a film where personal stories intersect with collective trauma. Through Souraya’s journey, we explore fragility and tension, immobility and urgency, despair and defiance but also surreal and funny realities. The film captures the psychological landscapes of the characters alongside the palpable pulse of the city and the ways women reclaim agency in spaces designed to constrain them, asserting their right to autonomy and freedom.

■ The film captures the psychological landscapes of the characters alongside the palpable pulse of the city and the ways women reclaim agency in spaces designed to constrain them, asserting their right to autonomy and freedom.

Director's Biography

Joana Hadjithomas (1969, Lebanon) and Khalil Joreige (1969, Lebanon) artists whose work spans cinema, video, photography, performance, and art installation. Moving between documentary and fiction, they explore personal and collective narratives, history, traces of the invisible and the absent, and hidden stories such as the missing from the Lebanese civil war. Their films include *Memory*

Box (2021), *The Lebanese Rocket Society* (2012), *Je Veux Voir* (2008), and *A Perfect Day* (2005), presented and awarded at major international festivals and acclaimed for innovative storytelling and visual experimentation. Their artworks have been exhibited in numerous museums, biennials, and foundations, earning several prizes including the Marcel Duchamp Prize. Retrospectives of their films have been held at institutions such as the Lincoln Center, MoMA, Tate Modern, Locarno and the Harvard Film Archive. They teach film and art, founded About Productions company, and serve on the boards of Metropolis Cinema and the Cinémathèque Beirut. Their project *Beirut Baby* was selected for CineMart 2026.

Company Profile

Since 1998, About Productions has produced award-winning films that reflect the Arab region’s stories and identity. The company supports emerging and established filmmakers, fostering collaborations locally and internationally. In 2025, in recognition of its contribution to international independent cinema, About Productions was honoured with the Raimondo Rezzonico Award at Locarno Film Festival.

Current Status

The project has now entered its late development phase. We will launch production financing in early 2026, aiming to begin principal photography in late 2026 or early 2027.

Goals at CineMart

The film is a Lebanese-French co-production, and we are looking for partners from around the world, including co-producers, an international sales agent, distributors, financiers and funds.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Memory Box* (2021) by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige is available on Festival Scope.

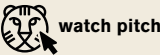
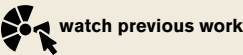


Khalil Joreige, Director
Joana Hadjithomas, Director



Georges Schoucair, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 100 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige and Gaele Macé
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Arabic
Locations: Lebanon
Budget: €1,779,325
Financing in place: €363,870
Production Company: About Productions
Co-Production Company: Haut et Court
Partners attached: CNC, Development Fund €3,000
Europe Creative MEDIA €45,000
MG French Distributor, Haut et Court €50,000
Producers, Development Participation €38,597
Deferral, part of Producers’ Salary €45,454
Equity €181,818
Seeking partners from: Europe (Germany, Greece, Belgium, Other), USA, MENA



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Contact
About Productions
christian@aboutproductions.com
<https://aboutproductions.com/>

The Dispute

Andrea Ellsworth, Kasey Elise Walker

A failing designer duo from South Central is desperate to make it, so they put on a façade for a life-changing magazine shoot in London.

Tags: coming-of-age, dark comedy, road trip

Synopsis

Ryan and Ebonie, two restless dreamers with designer ambition, race to the Beverly Hills Hotel, chasing a future far removed from the cracked sidewalks, chain-link fences, and constant threat of their neighbourhood. Their dream? To find, meet and impress Ella Ferretti, a creative director at *Trend Magazine*, who has the power to help them turn their homegrown fashion line into a global sensation. Their strategy? They don't have one. While they certainly look the part, they'll need hustle, charm and a miracle to achieve their dream.

Desperate to find Ella, they allow an interception by her colleague, Femi, at the Beverly Hills Hotel pool to derail them as he promises to make the connection to Ella by the end of the evening. But when Femi reveals his price – unwelcome sexual favours – they narrowly escape his proposition, coming up on money and a watch in the process. Just when it seems all hope is lost, by chance, they cross paths with Ella Ferretti. Captivated by their style and spirit, Ella invites them to London for a design market and to interview for an artist feature, which promises global exposure in *Trend Magazine*. Suddenly, their desire for more feels within reach.

London is something from a dream, at first. But as the glitter fades, a sobering new reality sets in. Missteps, miscommunication and cultural dislocation threaten to break their momentum and ultimately, their bond. In a city built on class and clout, Ryan and Ebonie must not only navigate external expectations, but also their growing internal rift. The closer they get to their dreams, the more they risk losing each other. Will ambition tear them apart, or will their friendship be the very thing that saves them?

The Dispute is a bold, stylish, coming-of-age odyssey set in the liminal space between where you're from and who you're becoming. Through detours, deception and dreams deferred, it explores the high-stakes magic of female companionship and the painful, beautiful process of self-definition in your late twenties.

Director's Statement

As co-directors, we strive to tell nuanced, emotionally rich, and character-driven stories that reflect the complexity of the world we come from, through the feminine lens of a Black woman. Growing up in South Los Angeles, we were surrounded by raw, heartfelt narratives, and our work, together and separately, is rooted in capturing these experiences with honesty and authenticity – challenging stereotypes while celebrating the depth, humour and resilience inherent in being a Black woman.

Our collaboration on *The Dispute* extends that mission, pushing us to define our voices and explore our storytelling instincts. Our goal is to take risks by bending genre expectations and experimenting with



visual language in ways that feel unique and unexpected. We want this film to spark curiosity and empathy while remaining deeply honest and nostalgic. The film itself is bold and unapologetic, with a pressure-cooker intensity, yet shaped through an intentional, manicured aesthetic. We plan to use wardrobe, jewellery, soft lighting and colour to reflect the persona and space that Black women occupy in the world. Imaginative elements will counter the chaos of our leads, offering glimpses into their inner lives. These surreal moments romanticise ordinary experiences, bridging the characters' worlds with the audience's own.

We're telling this story because films centering Black women from underserved communities – who challenge their circumstances and defy stereotypes – remain rare in mainstream media. Our goal is to present a fresh perspective on urban communities and the layered identities within them, while acknowledging the unique realities of Black womanhood. Our leads are shaped by displacement, having been raised without the resources to fully connect with their heritage. They're subtly influenced by white ideologies and materialism and struggle to find belonging – caught between the world they aspire to and the one they come from. The film highlights the isolated road of carving out one's own space. Too often, depictions of our communities recycle outdated clichés that fail to capture them integrally, and we plan to challenge this with our film.

Artistically, our vision is to create a cinematic piece that embodies the colours, textures and vibrancy of our lived experience. Each frame should feel like a work of art – evocative on its own yet cohesive within the story. We aim to craft a film that resonates universally, offering a narrative of triumph, perseverance and belonging. What's most exciting about this story is the truth and heart of it, and how that relates to audiences across the globe. We believe this film has the power to encourage audacity and ferocity in others chasing a dream, and that continues to fuel our pursuit of making this film. We want the audience to walk away with an appreciation for friendship, a renewed passion for their own dreams and a more holistic understanding of minority narratives.

Director's Biography

Andrea Ellsworth is a Black and Filipino American multidisciplinary artist from Los Angeles based in New York City. Drawing from her experience as a performer, she brings a sagacious filmmaking sensibility to the engaging characters she creates as both author and entertainer. Ellsworth's debut short, *The Dispute*, is being developed into a feature film under Riley Keough's and Donald Glover's respective production

banners after being selected for the Sundance Screenwriters and Directors Labs, the Gotham Week Project Market, CineMart 2026 and with grants from Focus Features and Disney.

Kasey Elise Walker is a Black American writer, director, and actress from LA. She co-wrote and starred in *The Dispute*, a short that screened at Sundance and SXSW, became Short of the Week, earned a Vimeo Staff Pick, and is a CineMart 2026 project. She won the 2021 Soho Script Lab with her short *Hoop Dreams* (2021), which premiered at Tribeca Film Festival. Kasey was recently selected for the 2025 Sundance Screenwriters and Directors Lab, received the Breakthrough Focus Features Fellowship, and presented at the Gotham Week Project Market.

Company Profile

At Felix Culpa, we pride ourselves on a 360° approach to producing. Shepherding projects from early concept through international festival premieres and distribution has given us a holistic understanding of the full life cycle of a film.

Titles produced:
The Body (2026, series)
Sasquatch Sunset (2024, feature)
Under The Bridge (2024, series)
Manodrome (2023, feature)
War Pony (2022, feature)

Current Status

We have \$1.5 million USD committed in private equity, and hope to raise the remainder of our equity need through domestic and/or international partners. We participated in the Gotham Week project market in October 2025 and have shared our script with ~30 potential partners from there. Our sales agent, Christine Hsu at CAA, will share the latest draft with more financiers in early December.

We received a \$25,000 USD development grant from The Walt Disney Company in November 2025, and are awaiting notice from Sundance regarding their Catalyst program, as well as news from Fondazione Prada regarding a grant and news from Berlinale regarding participation in their co-production market.

Our collaboration on *The Dispute* extends that mission, pushing us to define our voices and explore our storytelling instincts. Our goal is to take risks by bending genre expectations and experimenting with visual language in ways that feel unique and unexpected.

Goals at CineMart

We intend to go after 30-40% private equity, and we already have half of that secured. At CineMart, we aim to attract European partners in co-production that can jump in at the current stage or assist at later stages. This could be: co-financing partners in equity, co-production partners who assist with moving our late-stage development into the prep and pre-production stages or distribution partners.

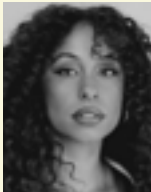
After all of the positive responses and conversations we had at the Gotham Week Project Market, we are hopeful about our position in such film markets and forums, and believe CineMart could truly help attract those few final partners who will help bring this film to life.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The short film *Hoop Dreams* (2022) by Kasey Elise Walker is available on Festival Scope.



Andrea Ellsworth,
Director



Kasey Elise Walker,
Director



Sacha Ben Harroche,
Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 98 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Andrea Ellsworth and Kasey Elise Walker
Genre: Fiction
Languages: English
Locations: Los Angeles, California and London, United Kingdom
Budget: €4,312,000
Financing in place: €1,293,600
Production Company: Felix Culpa, Watermark Media, Gilga
Co-Production Company: Silkscreen Entertainment
Partners attached: Watermark Media €1,293,600
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



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Contact

Felix Culpa Films
sacha@felixculpafilms.com
<https://www.digitalignitionent.com/felix-culpa>

Hearing

Thính Giác

Lê Bao

Ninh is a mechanic that installs decibel meters in public spaces and homes. As sound levels rise in his work and life, they become a warning for matters of the heart.

Tags: family, sensory, love

Synopsis

Ninh is a mechanic that installs decibel meters in public spaces and homes. His work takes him to a noisy pub below an apartment, a cemetery where the dead are too loud and a grandfather cannot write in peace, and a zoo with errant monkeys in a turf war with giraffes.

Ninh lives with his mother and misses his ex-wife Ngoc and their young children. His life mirrors his parents, who live apart and do not speak to each other. When Ninh visits his father’s mushroom farm, his parents do not meet but they exchange gifts through him. When Ninh can see his children, he brings them to feed the homeless in an abandoned train station and in a nearby forest, teaches them his childhood games. Though he speaks with his ex-wife, his dream of family life is fading away.

Through his work, Ninh encounters Khôi and Chi, former Càiluong (Vietnamese folk opera) singers that have fallen out of love with each other. They want to reconcile, but in her old age, Chi can no longer stand the sound of the voice she once loved.

When Ninh’s mother suddenly dies and Ngoc plans to leave with her new husband and the kids to the coast, away from him and the city, the absence of the sound of his loved ones becomes too much to bear for Ninh, who is finally forced to face realities he has been avoiding.

Director's Statement

Hearing is inspired by my parent’s separation.

My parents’ relationship started to crack when I was little. The sounds of their arguments spread through my memory like slow-creeping fissures. Yet within that sorrowful melody, moments of brightness still glimmered, mornings when my mother would pedal me to school on her old bicycle. Along the way, she’d always sing a familiar tune. Sometimes I’d stand up on the back seat, nestling close against her back to hear it better:

“A lullaby so sad, it drifts far and wide
Beyond the bamboo hedge, it stirs my soul inside
The day you wed, you walked the village trail
Where grass grew along the worn dirt valley
A yellow butterfly followed close behind
But now it rests on a wild fruit vine
Why marry so young, so soon, so fast?
To make this lullaby last forever”

Only much later, grown up, did I understand how piercingly sad that song was. Yet for me, it remains a beautiful memory, my mother’s voice weaving with the rhythmic creak of the bicycle chain, rising above the bustling streets, making the road to school feel shorter and warmer.



Now grown, walking those same familiar streets, the sound of that bicycle chain has long since given way to the drone of motorbike engines. Yet that cherished sound has quietly shifted from in front of me to behind me when it was my turn to take my mother on a gentle ride through the city streets.

My father was a labourer. Since I was little, he was rarely home, always off somewhere far for work, returning only once every two or three days. As the tension in our family deepened, so did his absences. Weeks turned into months. Then a year passed before he came back, just once, on the day we honoured my grandfather’s death. After that, he never returned. He moved to the countryside, somewhere on the edge of the city. Sometimes when I visit him, I bring my mother with me. At a nearby corner, I stop my motorbike and let my mother get off and wait. After my visit, I go back to where my mother is waiting to pick her up. This has continued for over a decade. Their relationship has left me with so much sorrow, especially now, as I dream of building a small family of my own. But I’m filled with fear, terrified that my children might witness the same things unfolding between their parents as I’ve seen with mine. But I’ve never felt any hatred for my father.

There exists an inseparable connection between two senses, linking *Taste*, my first feature film, and *Hearing*, the film I now passionately yearn to create. Like the longing for my mother’s cooking during lonely nights in Paris, when I was there for a screenwriting residency. I was longing for the sounds of her cooking, the clatter of pots and pans, intertwined with the flavours of her dishes. I remember my mother’s figure, crouched low as she cooked. The stove sat directly on the ground, so she’d kneel

every evening, back slightly hunched. The sizzle of oil, the clatter of chopsticks against the pan, the rising aroma of garlic and fish sauce, they filled the room, like a kind of lullaby. A kind of love, wordless but warm.

|| *Hearing* is an anti-love story about people who love one another yet keep their tenderness and purity locked away, unable to voice the truths buried in their hearts.

Hearing is an anti-love story about people who love one another yet keep their tenderness and purity locked away, unable to voice the truths buried in their hearts. Instead, they wound each other, and themselves, until the distance between them grows unbearable. It is a tale of relentless longing. The characters in this story are gentle, wounded people. They crave comfort and consolation.

Director's Biography

Lê Bao (1990, Vietnam) is a filmmaker from Saigon, who made his first short film when he was 20 years old, borrowing an old camera from a friend. His short

films *Coal* (2013) and *Scent* (2014) were shot in the rural areas where he grew up. *Taste* (2025), his first feature, is also shot with non-professional actors in the places he has known all his life. He is developing his new project *Hearing*, with the support of CineMart 2026.

Company Profile

Founded in 2010 by Elizabeth Wijaya and Lai Weijie, E&W Films works with visionary writers and directors to create forceful sensorial works that challenge and resonate with audiences. Taking an active role in project development and valuing long-term collaborations, feature films include *Pop Aye* by Kirsten Tan, *Taste* by Lê Bao and *Mongrel* by Chiang Wei Liang.

Current Status

Pre-production/production.

Goals at CineMart

Looking to connect with co-production partners, financing, world sales and festival programmers.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The short film *Coal* (2013) by Lê Bao is available on Festival Scope.

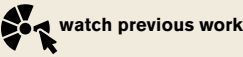


Lê Bao
Director



Weijie Lai
Producer

Feature: ARRIRAW (shooting) | DCP (final) | 100 min. | Color
Based on: Original screenplay by Lê Bao
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Vietnamese
Locations: Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City, Đà Lạt, Bao Lộc
Budget: €428,014
Financing in place: €286,760
Production Company: E&W Films, Sensory Ocean Films, KawanKawan Media
Co-Production Company: Deuxième Ligne Films, Stær Film
Partners attached: E&W Films €36,120, Sensory Ocean Films €17,200, Deuxième Ligne Films €15,000, Stær Film €16,340, KawanKawan Media €21,500, SudEst Productions €43,000, OhBoy! Pictures €21,500, Effortless Work €21,500, ARRI Asia €21,500, HK Film €21,500, Purin Film Fund €25,800, Red Sea Fund €17,200
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact
E&W Films
weijie@ewfilms.com.sg
ewfilms.com.sg

Kingdom of the Insomniacs

Sen Guo

Kang Bo

On a half-century-old forest farm, people who live by cultivating fungus find themselves plagued by insomnia and a strange aging disease. After his father dies, a rebellious teenager tries to extricate himself from this wicked kingdom.

Tags: drama, fantasy, horror

Synopsis

At the beginning of the new century, forestry farms in Northeast China are being cut back and demolished. In one of the halted farms, left-behind residents are suffering from severe insomnia and an aging disease. Time seems distorted and lapsed for this forestry site that has been hidden in the forest, unnoticed, for over half a century. 15-year-old Erduo's mother escapes from the forest farm with him many years ago. After her suicide, Erduo is sent back. His shrewd stepmother Daxiang is busy raising and selling black fungus, hoping that this business can maintain the existence of the forest farm. Erduo's father, Tong San who just turns 40, dies suddenly of the aging disease, throwing the farm into deep panic. Erduo takes the opportunity to flee to the forest in the morning of the funeral. His stepbrother Liang teaches him how to live with the forest, which gives him a different experience and brings him closer to Liang. But a crime of illegal logging is soon discovered, becoming the final straw that crushes the forest farm. When the police break into the forest in pursuit, Erduo runs away in fear and becomes separated from Liang. After the frost, the forest farm is now empty: their stepmother is in prison and Liang is missing. Awaiting his fate, Erduo is placed by the collective leader, Shorty, in a relic-like forest shed with a team of vagrants. They are ordered to carry out the final logging operation. Erduo is shocked to discover that the logging captain, Lau, looks exactly like Liang, though they have completely different personalities. Lau spends his nights drinking with those vulgar vagrants, anxiously competing for the only woman in the shed, Erduo's stepsister, Zhen. The danger and attraction of the forest continue to torment Erduo, and signs of rapid aging begin to appear in him too...

Director's Statement

The story originates from my mixed feelings towards the native land of the forest along the Northeast frontier of China where I was born. *Kingdom of the Insomniacs* is a concept of time: It only took half a century for the forest industry enterprises to settle in the deserted virgin forest and establish forest farms, from cutting the trees down to prohibition on deforestation. Those were born there found that the forest was gone before they had any time to digest the emotion and culture entrenched in the forest. However, people still had the instinct to find a way to get along with nature in such distorted and mutated environment. The mystery and human nature within are my original starting points and themes for constructing the story. The story begins with a forest farm family suffering from insomnia and a strange aging diseases. They live in the cracks of time, history and nature. Due to the relatively unique setting of time and space in the narrative, the characters look nearly 20 years older than their actual age.



The casting will be close to the visual age, resulting in the contract of the characters' states, to create a sense of fantasy. It requires the actors to behave as though they're 20 years younger than their actual age. The audio-visual design will be largely documentary style, utilising images to create a real immersive sense of fantasy stories. The camera movements are not limited to traditional documentary means, such as hand-held shots. The entire film will be shot on-site with natural lighting and try to capture vivid and natural details and moments. The film will strive to explore and break the boundaries between drama and documentary, to achieve the establishment of the fantastical realism.

Director's Biography

Kang Bo (1983, China) is a Chinese filmmaker who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy. He made his debut feature, a piercing family drama *Enjoy Yourself* (2024) which was a box office success. His second feature, *Blood Ties* (2025) premiered in theatres in China. Since 2010, he has been documenting the decline of forest farms in Northeastern China through his documentary project A Touch of Forest. Drawing inspiration from this long-term work, he is now developing his next feature, *Kingdom of the Insomniacs*, which received the Busan Award at the Asian Project Market in 2024, and support from CineMart 2026.

The film will strive to explore and break the boundaries between drama and documentary, to achieve the establishment of the fantastical realism.

Company Profile

Established in Beijing in 2017, Rediance specialises in international sales, film production and film financing. With a global perspective, Rediance strives to discover filmmakers with original styles and bring the finest arthouse films to the international market.

Current Status

The project has been developed for a long period, originating from Kang Bo's documentary filmmaking. Following this, he completed two fictional feature films that successfully entered the Chinese mainstream market, strengthening his positioning and significantly reinforcing the financing potential of this project. With the completion of the third draft of the script,

we are now entering an active pre-production phase, including initial location scouting and early casting discussions with established actors. We have received strong interests from streaming platforms and other distribution partners in China, alongside preliminary confirmations from equity partners regarding private financing.

Goals at CineMart

Through the great platform of CineMart, we expect to find partners to develop the project, provide artistic contribution and to secure public funding from different territories. We are seeking co-production partners from around the world.



Kang Bo,
Director



Meng Xie,
Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 100 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Kang Bo
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Mandarin
Budget: €1,200,000
Financing in place: €615,000
Production Company: Rediance
Partners attached: Private Investment (Rediance) €300,000
Private Investment (Chinese equity investors) €300,000
Asian Film Market Prize €15,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



URL?

Lux

Thomas Elley

A summer in the life of Leni, a blind woman in her late twenties, who reluctantly hires a state-appointed companion, Kevin, to help her find a job. As the line between professionalism and intimacy blurs, Leni becomes increasingly obsessed with him, sparking her journey of self-discovery.

Tags: drama, identify, self-exploration

Synopsis

It's summer. A group of young people with various visual impairments are attending a workshop on sex and intimacy at the Institute for the Blind. They take part in intimacy exercises and discuss topics such as consent, flirting and online dating. Leni (29) is there with her two best friends, Yasmin and Anna. The three of them struggle to take the workshop seriously and instead start making fun of the other participants. In the world of the sighted, Leni is often treated as if she's completely helpless. At the job centre, they're eager to put her on welfare. On the streets, people try to 'help' her without asking. She goes on a date with a sighted guy she met on an app. He likes her, but she finds him boring and fragile. The fact that she has a short temper doesn't make her life any easier. Leni has been encouraged to get a state-funded companion to make her daily life more smooth. She reluctantly hires Kevin, a guy her age who was previously unemployed due to stress and depression. He's quiet and intense. Not an obvious match. At first, the situation is awkward. But after they endure a painfully uncomfortable job interview together, they go out for beers. The line between professional relationship and personal connection immediately starts to blur. They end up dancing together. When they meet again, Kevin tries to keep things professional. But Leni starts looking for excuses to get him to accompany her more often and continues to test the intimate boundaries of their relationship. In a last attempt to keep a distance, Kevin reveals he has a girlfriend. But Leni pushes forward, leaning into a newfound femme fatale confidence and seduces him. They spend the night together. After this, Kevin disappears completely and stops answering her calls. Yasmin and Anna confront Leni about her actions, but she lashes out and cuts them off. Furious and hurt, she threatens to report Kevin to the authorities, pressuring him into meeting her one last time. During a grotesque game of Truth or Dare, Leni gets increasingly drunk, they argue and she throws him out. Desperate, she goes on a date with an online-match who has a fetish for blind women. The date, at his house in the woods, ends badly when he crosses Leni's boundaries. She sneaks away at night and ends up making her way alone through a forest until she reaches home. The film ends with Leni reconciling with her two friends, as they go together to an open casting for a TV show about the romantic lives of people with disabilities.

Director's Statement

I always seem to be drawn towards people whose abilities society often underestimates. I've previously explored groups of angry males,



the silenced working class in the outskirts of provincial Denmark and the migrants who travel to Denmark from Eastern Europe as 'foreign labour'. With *Lux*, my focus is on another marginalised group whose representation in public discourse is dominated by stereotypes and clichés: individuals born with disabilities. More than anything, I am interested in the lives and experiences of real people. That's why I've crafted a method of scouting, casting, collaborating with and directing non-professional actors playing fictionalised versions of themselves in a narrative context. I like working with what is already present, in front of me, with a heartbeat and a pulsating mind. This ethos is evident in *Lux* in order for me to represent the life of a blind person in a truthful way. This is also why I have spent the first year of the development meticulously casting the role of Leni. The choice fell on first-time actor Maria-Louise Lundqvist. Maria embodies what I want to create with this character. Someone strong-willed and rebellious, not always polite, willing to take risks and get hurt. But also with feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. I want to create a character that is neither a victim nor a superhero. On the rare occasions when a person with a disability has appeared in films throughout history, they are almost always portrayed as the villain, the victim, the sidekick or the outcast. These days, perhaps, it is possible to be the colleague, the friend, the brother or sister. The time has come for the leading role. When I speak with visually impaired people, they share with me how the job market and educational systems often exclude them, how the design of streets, institutions and public transportation makes everyday life difficult. They witness first-hand how the capitalistic structures primarily privilege able-bodied people. These matters are important to me. But I want to go a step further and not shy away from the taboos that normally cloud the representation of people with a disability: sexuality and the role of sexual capital. In the film, Leni wants to be desired and this is what she's constantly exploring: how she is viewed as a woman, a person with a disability, employee, friend, daughter, sexual being. All this while avoiding the trap of 'inspiration porn'. When creating and consuming stereotypical inspirational stories, we often risk fetishising disabilities or 'otherness' in order to validate ourselves. We sometimes use people with disabilities – and any minority group – for our own gain, in order to appear more politically correct and more moral. I don't want to make a film like that. The film itself will also have a different body. It is a film about a character

with a visual impairment, but it should also be a film with a visual impairment. How does such a film behave? Intriguing questions arise: how do you depict visual impairment in a visual medium like cinema? How do you look at someone who cannot see – when the relationship is unequal from the start? I want to explore how we can work with obstructions and distortions of sight and allow sound – atmospheres, footsteps, digital worlds, voices – to carry more weight. What does the world sound like if you cannot see it? What becomes important and what fades away? When are the sounds of the world hostile and when are they kind?

In the film, Leni wants to be desired and this is what she's constantly exploring: how she is viewed as a woman, a person with a disability, employee, friend, daughter, sexual being.

Director's Biography

Thomas Elley is a Danish film director working in both fiction and documentary. His short, *Open Spaces* (2018), was selected for Clermont-Ferrand in 2019. He graduated from fiction directing at The National Film School of Denmark in 2023 with both a fiction and a documentary graduation film. The latter, *Romantica* (2023), had its world premiere at DocLisboa 2023. His next documentary, *Europa Endlos* (2025), premiered at CPH:DOX in 2025. *LUX* marks Elley's debut feature and will continue his process of blending fiction with documentary elements through collaborations with non-professional actors.

Company Profile

Frau film is a Copenhagen-based production company that produces high-quality fiction and non-fiction content for global audiences. Nationally we collaborate with the new generation of Danish voices, while working with acclaimed international directors. Recent titles include Teona Mitevskas *The Happiest Man in The World* (Orizzonti – Venice, 2022) and *Mother* (Orizzonti – Venice, 2025).

Current Status

Lux has received substantial development support from The Danish Film Institute and we currently have a first draft. Extensive casting and research have been conducted, together with workshops and test shootings of the lead character while exploring the film's audiovisual potential. The lead is confirmed and our goal is to close national financing from DFI and regional funds by May 2026, leaving us time to finance the project internationally, as we plan to shoot in May–June of 2027.

Goals at CineMart

Our goal at CineMart is to find one or two co-producers, who can bring additional financing and distribution to the project. We are looking to shoot a scene in Sweden and are open to include crew and cast from abroad. Especially a composer and an additional sound mixer, who can contribute to the unique audiovisual landscape of *Lux*. Furthermore, we are looking forward to discussing the project with sales agents and festivals.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The films *Wolf Nation* (2023) and *Europa Endlos* (2025) by Thomas Elley are available on Festival Scope.



Thomas Elley,
Director



Maria Møller
Christoffersen,
Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 100 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Thomas Elley and Astrid Plesner Hansen
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Danish
Budget: €1,500,000
Financing in place: €75,097
Production Company: Frau film
Partners attached: Danish Film Institute (Development I) €26,794 Danish Film Institute (Development II) €40,191 Frau film €8,112
Seeking partners from: The Nordics and European countries

watch previous work

watch pitch

Contact

Frau Film
maria@frauilm.dk
www.frauilm.dk

Noodles, Our Love was Instant and Forever

Whammy Alcazaren

In a small seaside town in the Philippines, there is a high school dedicated to the training of students in mind and body to survive the effects of climate change. A young queer man from the school and the ghost of his past lover are once again brought together by an alien being. United, they harness the power of their love to save the world from the devastation brought upon by the apocalypse.

Tags: sci-fi, dark romantic comedy, queer/LGBTQ

Synopsis

Myth and history weave together from messy strands like noodles into a beautiful song of young queer love. A child balladeer sings of the world's origins – two lovers whose union birthed a flower that made life possible. He sings of rebirth and recycling, and now, of the world's slow unraveling. The land scorches under the sun while rain pours endlessly.



Mists rise. Floods come and go. The earth dries out and humanity's systems begin to break. Pregnancy becomes impossible and the future looks bleak. Villagers of a storm-wracked fishing town in the Philippines brace for the end.

A local high school becomes the frontline in an effort of hope. Here, academic lessons and practical exercises revolve around reproduction and survival. Girls and boys undergo rigorous trials of mind and body in a desperate attempt to procreate – to save the human race. But for queer boys, life follows a different rhythm. They are allowed freedom. They are taught to enjoy what time remains. For them, the end of the world is quieter – softer – coloured by love, not duty.

Jelison (18) and Ipe (18) are soulmates caught in the collapse of their world. Their love is tender, sacred and achingly young. They are just two boys dreaming of forever in a world collapsing around them. Jelison and Ipe resolve to triumph over the apocalypse. Jelison, always frail, tries bulking up. Ipe, haunted by his father's death, learns how to swim. They dream of higher ground – living on the mountain, where the floods can't reach. The ignorance of youth and the purity of simple love drives them to dream.

But life isn't fair. Jelison accidentally breaks his neck in the middle of training and symbolically ends Ipe's world all the same. The balladeer sings again. Another death, another song. Life vanishes into shadow. Ipe grows numb with all the death that surrounds him.

Time goes by and much changes. Ipe becomes sad, single and lonely. The seaside town is now uninhabitable. The villagers have despaired and resorted to praying to the cosmos for deliverance. Ipe, in this darkest hour, is henceforth rescued by aliens. Through cosmic science, he is reunited with the ghost of Jelison. He is gifted a reason to live. Time is broken and the past is the present. Together, Jelison and Ipe harness the power of their love. Flowers bloom and it is as if the world can be saved. They learn that they may not live forever, but their love for each other may save them from the apocalypse.

Director's Statement

Climate change is accelerating – bringing floods, droughts and destruction – but what preoccupies me most is not just the collapse itself, but the ache of facing it alone. The looming end forces us to confront how small we are in the vastness of time and space, and it sharpens that unshakable human desire to find meaning, purpose and, most of all, connection. I am a queer man in my late thirties who is, unfortunately and unwillingly, still single. Though yes, there are bigger problems at hand – my country, the Philippines, is on the frontline of typhoons and natural disasters, compounded by the frustrating reality of having a government that repeatedly fails to address this ever-growing crisis; The simple fact is that I do not want to be alone when all goes dead. Where is the lust for life, the drive to protect the living, if I have no one to protect, no one who inspires me to want the world to keep turning? Who is this 'other', and why does his absence feel like a missing piece of hope? I have come to believe that saving the world is also the act of saving myself, and that love is the last resistance against despair.

|| Noodles, Our Love was Instant and Forever tackles grand themes – survival, ecopolitics and the reality of the climate crisis – yet at its heart, it is a deeply personal story. It follows the search for home, for connection, for a love that lasts beyond the self.

For a queer man, love and survival are intertwined. To find a partner is to build a home, a purpose, a place to be held when everything falls apart. *Noodles, Our Love was Instant and Forever* tackles grand themes – survival, ecopolitics and the reality of the climate crisis – yet at its heart, it is a deeply personal story. It follows the search for home, for connection, for a love that lasts beyond the self. Climate collapse becomes the mirror of a queer man's internal struggle: the fear of being forgotten, the longing to be seen, the hope that love can outlast ruin. The life of a queer man at the end of the world is something quite strange. It is life not built for permanence. From dust to dust, from ashes to ashes – so easily forgotten. The legacy of man and woman has long been defined by love, marriage, children and continuity. But what then of the gay man? I, too, long for love. I, too, dream of having children, of growing old with someone by my side, of building something that lasts. The film asks: How does a queer man make a home in a world that was not built with him in mind? What does it mean for him not just to live – but to live forever? At the end of time, at the end of the world, I do not want to be alone.

The love I hope to share with someone is not simply sentimental; it is the beginning of a chain, something that can be passed on so that we might care for the world together. Love blooms where it is planted. In Filipino mythology, humanity began when a single bamboo stalk split open and revealed *Malakas* and *Maganda* – a strong man and a beautiful woman. It is a story centred on a man and a woman destined to carry the world forward. As a queer man, I wonder where I fit in that mythology. But when we wash all things away, it is all just rooted in love. In rewriting old stories there then clears a truth. If two people can

grow the world from love, perhaps two queer people in love can keep it from ending. I realise that the idea is not that the world is ending and I am alone. But, it is that I do not want to be alone so that I can hope and do something so the world does not end. In this understanding then that I think that maybe I know how to beat the apocalypse. Maybe me finding a boyfriend is really the key to solving climate change. And I say it with all seriousness, maybe love is all we really need to save the day.

Director's Biography

Whammy Alcazaren is an award-winning director and production designer for film and advertising based in Manila, Philippines. He is a participant of the 2013 13 Little Pictures Film lab in Singapore, 2016 Festival Belluard Bollwek Watch and Talk Residency in Switzerland, and 2024 Berlinale Talents. His first short film, *Bold Eagle* (2022) won Best International Short at the Fantasia Film Festival 2023 and screened in the 40th Edition of the Sundance Film Festival and the 61st New York Film Festival. His latest short film, *Water Sports* (2024), is a proof of concept for his work in progress *Noodles, Our Love was Instant and Forever*, supported by CineMart. The short film won Best of Fest short at the 20th Fantastic Fest and screened at the 63rd New York Film Festival, the 61st Chicago International Film Festival, and AFI Fest. He loves cats and Pokemon.

Company Profile

Committed to crafting entertaining, relevant and thought-provoking content, Daluyong Studios collaborates with both local and international partners producing a wide range of projects from arthouse films to online series, experimental shorts to documentary features. TwoFold is a Manila studio producing and doing post works for commercial projects across Southeast Asia.

Current Status

The film began development at the mylab workshops of the Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival in 2023. We received the CreatePH Development Grant from the Film Development Council of the Philippines in 2024 and produced the short *Water Sports* as the project's proof of concept. The short has screened widely, including the New York Film Festival and Fantastic Fest, where it won Best of the Fest Best Short Film. We have since completed the first draft of the script, and CineMart will be the project's first international market presentation.

Goals at CineMart

We aim to secure production and post-production partners from Europe, North America, and Asia who can support the film's extensive worldbuilding. We are looking to collaborate with cinematographers, VFX artists, sound designers, and musicians who can help shape the visual and sonic language of *Noodles, Our Love was Instant and Forever*. We are also seeking a French co-producer, as our long-time editor is based in France. In addition, we hope to meet potential sales agents and distributors who are open to supporting the film's international festival, marketing and distribution strategy.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The short films *Water Sports* (2024) and *Bold Eagle* (2022) by Whammy Alcazaren is available on Festival Scope.



Whammy Alcazaren, Director



Mara Bernaldo, Producer



Alemberg Ang, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP 4k (final) | 80 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Whammy Alcazaren
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Tagalog
Locations: Philippines
Budget: €736,925
Financing in place: €191,075
Production Company: Daluyong Studios, TwoFold
Partners attached: Daluyong Studios (Own investment) €155,540
Film Development Council of the Philippines CreatePH Development Fund €5,400
Seeking partners from: Worldwide

watch previous work

watch pitch

Contact

Daluyong Studios
alem@daluyong.ph
<https://daluyong.ph/>

Pale Faces

Wit Gesigte

Chantel Clark

Southern Africa. 1785. With the Dutch East India Company in decline, the moral rot of its settler colony, built on slavery, begins to manifest in a blood disease that consumes the settlers. Abiona, a descendent of the Khoe interpreter Autshumato, enters the service of a Dutch Commissioner seeking to use her traditional knowledge to find a cure.

Tags: horror, colonialism

Synopsis

Southern Africa. 1785. After more than a century of cattle raids and bloody clashes, the Dutch East India Company has occupied the territory from Table Bay to the Fish River to establish a settler colony, forcing the Indigenous inhabitants further into the desert; the once beautiful land now corrupted by slavery and moral decay. At the Cape, on the foothills of the Hoerikwaggo mountain, a creolised community of escaped slaves and political exiles expelled from the Dutch East Indies for resisting the Company's expansion, live in isolation. Led by an Imam in exile himself, they covertly practice Islam as a form of spiritual resistance against the brutality of the colonial authorities. When her father is imprisoned for the illegal propagation of Islam, Abiona, his eldest daughter and accomplished scribe, is impelled into the service of Dutch Commissioner, Van Thiel. At his remote estate on the outskirts of the colony, Abiona soon learns that Van Thiel is cursed with a disease that requires him to feed off the blood of other living beings. In the depths of his obsession to find a cure, he believes Abiona's knowledge from her mother's Goringhaicona ancestry may hold the key. Fearing for her own survival, Abiona feeds him an elaborate tale about her ancestor Autshumato, the Khoe translator for the Cape's first Governor, and the first pale-faced sailors who came to the land. Enjoying their strange bond and the power she has over Van Thiel, Abiona weaves him into her story, casting him as a shipwrecked Dutch Sailor, rescued by the amaMpondo. In Abiona's tale, a young Mpondo Bride undergoing her marital initiation is seduced by the Sailor when he appears to her as a beautiful but terrifying bird with the face of death – a bloodthirsty creature called the Impundulu. Completely taken with Abiona, Van Thiel resolves to marry her. Abiona accepts on the condition that he proves his benevolence, by convincing the Governor to release her father. With Van Thiel away at the Cape, Abiona makes the macabre discovery that the estate's women labourers can only give birth to the mangled corpses of birds, never children. The Governor refuses Van Thiel's petition and in the interim, the Imam dies. Van Thiel's failure causes him to lose control of his bloodlust, shattering the illusion of his remaining humanity. Abiona realises the only way to free herself from Van Thiel, is to slay the beast, and using the final part of her tale, she lures him across the desert to his death.

Director's Statement

I could not think of a more appropriate monster to embody colonialism than the vampire, a perversion of humanity that survives by sucking the



blood from other living beings, growing more powerful in the process. Like the colonizer, the vampire lives to abuse and consume, and for over 400 years, since Portuguese and Dutch sailors first set foot onto this soil, South Africa has been plagued by the curse of the vampire's insatiable thirst. When I write about this curse, I cannot separate myself from it. As a South African of European descent with Dutch, Portuguese, German, and French ancestry, I am a product of colonialism. It is my curse too. But I cannot exorcise my demons if I do not bring them out into the light.

“ In the 18th century, the Cape Colony promised a Garden of Eden to many European settlers, an abundant paradise to start a new and better life, while, in reality, this 'Garden' was an important part of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)'s domination of global trade routes, the establishment of exploitative capitalism as we know it today, and the darkest part of global history – the slave trade.

In the 18th century, the Cape Colony promised a Garden of Eden to many European settlers, an abundant paradise to start a new and better life. In reality, this Garden was an important part of the Dutch East India Company's domination of global trade routes, the establishment of capitalism as we know it today, and the darkest part of global history – the slave trade. In South Africa, it is hardly recognised that our past is intertwined with this shameful legacy, yet the very foundations of our country were built on it. From the sprawling Winelands to the breath-taking mountain passes, all the eye-watering beauty hides our blood-soaked history. With *Pale Faces*, I want to tell the story of South Africa's “Original Sin”, where the rot of colonialism manifests in a blood disease, a curse, that consumes the colonizing settlers, if they do not keep feeding it.

While *Pale Faces* is rooted in hyperlocal vampire mythology, it takes structural cues from a universally recognised fable. Our South African Impundulu myth tells the story of a birdlike vampiric creature that seduces a woman while appearing to her as a man, making it a variation

of the animal groom and human bride folktale (the most famous of which is the French, *La Belle et la Bête*). *Pale Faces* also takes inspiration from Scheherazade, whose skill and instinct keeps her alive for as long as she can tell her stories, much like our protagonist Abiona uses her storytelling abilities to survive the Dutch Commissioner, Van Thiel's bloodlust.

Although our vampires are not traditional Western vampires, *Pale Faces* still borrows an element from Dracula, which is often lost in modern adaptations — the creature's intimate and fraught relationship with the natural world. In our film, the vampire's curse is tied directly to the land itself because Van Thiel believes that he was created by and reborn of the land. This is his version of the myth of white indigeneity and land claim, which is at the core of the legacy of colonialism in South Africa to this day.

Pale Faces is the kind of horror film that slowly buries itself under your skin. It only needs a few moments of air to unsettle, but it will be enough to show us what seems to be the almost un-human capacity for atrocity, through the most violent parts of our combined European and African histories, which have shaped the modern world.

Director's Biography

Chantel CLARK is a South African director and screenwriter, currently developing her feature directorial debut, *Pale Faces*, with the support of Creative Europe Media, The Netherlands Filmfonds, and the National Film, Video Foundation of South Africa and CineMart 2026. Her script for the project was selected for the Sundance Institute's Screenwriters Lab, the Realness African Screenwriter's Residency, and was made a SFFILM Rainin Grant finalist. Most recently, as a director, Chantel was invited to the Locarno Filmmakers Academy, and to the Jacob Burns Film Center as the Sundance International Narrative. Her short film, *Our Albertinia* (2018), was awarded a 2018 National

Board of Review Student Grant, as well as the inaugural Columbia University/Big Sky Edit Visionary Award and screened at over 25 international film festivals.

Company Profile

Award-winning producers Cait Pansegrouw of Cadence (SA) and Frank Hoeve of BALDR Film (NL) collaborate on provocative, director-driven co-productions. Their films have premiered at Cannes, Venice, Sundance and Berlinale, among others, achieving nominations and shortlisting for the Academy Awards and Golden Globes. They focus on innovative and equitable co-production models.

Current Status

Pales Faces is the first feature film by Chantel Clark. The project is in early development and received support from Creative Europe Media in 2024 and was awarded the Thuthuka Co-Development Grant from the NFF and NFVF in 2025. We are currently finessing the first draft of the script and plan to shoot a proof of concept in mid-2026. Chantel's extensive research and consultation around the period, cultures and languages is ongoing.

Goals at CineMart

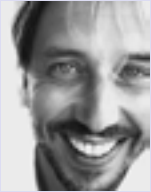
In addition to launching our project into the global financing market and expanding our network, we are interested in identifying partners who have a special interest in anti-colonialist stories. We would like to discuss casting, crew, post-production and sales opportunities with partners who are open to exploring innovative and equitable co-production structures.



Chantel Clark,
Director



Cait Pansegrouw,
Producer



Frank Hoeve,
Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 120 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Chantel Clark
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Dutch, Afrikaans isiXhosa

Locations: Western Cape (South Africa)

Budget: €2,550,000
Financing in place: €85,000
Production Company: BALDR Film, Cadence
Partners attached: Thuthuka Development Fund (Netherlands Film Fund + SA Film Fund/NFVF) €40,000
Creative Europe Media €45,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

BALDR Film
misscaitp@gmail.com
<https://www.baldrfilm.nl/>

Portuguese Man O War

Ridham Janve

On a remote Goan island, Tukaram and Kustodio live in quiet contentment until a pale body washes ashore – Bartolomeu Cabral, the ghost of a long-dead Portuguese conquistador. Mistaking care for submission, he begins to colonise them, turning their isolated haven into a darkly absurd stage where faith, greed and power replay the violence of empire.

Tags: drama, satire, absurd, dark comedy, postcolonial allegory

Synopsis

On a small Goan island, Tukaram, a Hindu fisherman, and Kustodio, a Catholic with a feni distillery, live in slow rhythm. They fish, drink, nap in the shade, and call each other best friends. With no one else around, the claim is both absurd and true.

One day, they find a pale body on the beach. Wrapped in a heavy cloak, his face packed with silt, he seems lifeless until he jolts up, coughing seawater. He calls himself Bartolomeu Cabral, an explorer of the Portuguese Crown, who in reality is the ghost of a long-dead conquistador, flung into the present by a strange seam in time and tide. They do not understand his Portuguese words, but his bearing fascinates them, and they take him home.

Cabral recovers quickly. He eats crab soup, praises the wild pepper, drinks too much feni, and soon begins to redraw the island. A Catholic altar faces Hindu gods, docks and forts appear on his maps, curfews and borders are declared. Hospitality slips into rule. He crowns himself king, names the men his ministers, bans their practices, and fines them for imagined crimes. With Kustodio he flatters faith and promises Portugal. With Tukaram he rattles coins and mocks his laziness. The two men, once free in their idleness, find themselves colonised.

They try to build him a boat, patching a broken hull with melted plastic, but the tide carries it away. Cabral grows harsher. The friends drift apart – one seduced, the other ridiculed. Humiliation finally brings them back together. Eventually, they forgive each other and choose to fight.

After several failed attempts at rebellion, they finally lure Cabral to a cliff with the promise of a ship. As he peers to the horizon, they push him into the sea. When they search the rocks below, they find only his heavy cloak, its pockets empty. The island is theirs again, for now, in its unhurried light.

Director's Statement

Living in Goa, once under Portuguese rule for 450 years, one cannot escape the layers of history embedded in its landscape. Churches, mansions, abandoned seminaries, hidden grottos, and spice orchards hold fragments of memory – often beautiful, often unsettling. This film is both an ode to Goa's resilient spirit and a meditation on the haunting persistence of colonisation.



Portuguese Man O War is conceived as a modern fable – absurd, satirical and deeply human. A 15th-century conquistador washes ashore in present-day Goa and begins to colonise two unsuspecting islanders. Through this encounter, a miniature version of history unfolds: the clash between greed and contentment, power and simplicity. The two men are just two units who could represent communities or nations pushed into conflict by external manipulation. Cabral, the conquistador, embodies domination and capital. Tukaram, seduced by gold, becomes complicit. Kustodio, rooted in faith and modesty, resists yet is altered. Their dynamic mirrors patterns repeated across centuries.

While set in Goa, this is not merely a Goan story. Colonisation across continents – Africa, the Americas, South and Southeast Asia – followed different routes but operated through the same logic: erasure of Indigenous systems, forced conversion, slavery, treaties and new powers built on old wounds. Crucially, colonisation is not confined to the past. It permeates passport hierarchies, borders, racism, capital, labour, displacement, even the rhetoric of space conquest. By placing a conquistador in the present, the film asserts that colonisation never truly ended – it simply changed form.

Comedy and satire are my chosen tools for this film. They expose the absurdity of conquest: how could a few men, armed with deceit and force, claim entire worlds? Humour does not diminish the violence – it unmasks it. In laughing at Cabral's bravado and Tukaram's gullibility, the audience confronts uncomfortable truths about ongoing systems of exploitation.

Visually, the film draws from Giorgio De Chirico's dreamlike architecture and from Herzog's vision of men consumed by impossible ambition. The landscapes of Goa, its abandoned chapels, crumbling mansions, silent rivers, carry spectral histories. Over years, I travelled across these spaces, piecing together the fictional island from real locations, blending the tangible with the imagined.

The title references the *Portuguese Man O War*, locally known as the "blue bottle" – beautiful yet dangerous, named for its resemblance to Portuguese ships. Cabral, cloaked in blue, is imagined as its human echo: seductive, destabilising, leaving paralysis in his wake.

Inspired also by Goan painter F. N. Souza's visceral depictions of faith, violence and desire, the film seeks contradictory emotions: beauty and grotesque, humour and brutality, satire and sorrow.

Ultimately, *Portuguese Man O War* does not aim to solve history but to confront it. It holds up a mirror to patterns of domination that persist. With visual intensity and tonal lightness, the film contributes to decolonisation discourse – not as a statement, but as an experience. The island is fictional, but its truth is real: the ghosts of colonisation still walk among us, the rebellion may come through laughter, and the battle between greed and contentment is timeless.

“The ghosts of colonisation still walk among us, the rebellion may come through laughter, and the battle between greed and contentment is timeless.”

Director's Biography

Ridham Janve is an Indian filmmaker whose work moves between spirituality, history, myth, and the absurd. His self-produced debut *The Gold-Laden Sheep and the Sacred Mountain* (2018) premiered in Bright Future competition at Rotterdam and went on to win the Silver Gateway Award at Mumbai, the FIPRESCI Prize at Hong Kong, and the Young Cinema Award at APSA. His period project *The Sacrifice* was selected for La Fabrique Cinéma at Cannes. His second feature *Hunter's Moon*, a spiritual western set in the Dhauladhar mountains, is currently in post-production. His project *Portuguese Man O War* is supported by CineMart 2026.

Company Profile

BBFP's recent feature *Thursday Night Is Too Dark* was at the EIPW Lab, Hamburg, winning two post-production awards at Antalya FF. They have produced/co-produced *LOEV* (Tallinn, SXSW, Netflix), *The Road to Mandalay* (Venice, TIFF), *Triya* (Shanghai, MUBI) and *Spying Stars* (Busan, IFFI). The Film Café's titles include *Alms for the Blind Horse*

(Venice, Rotterdam), *Soni* (Venice, Pingyao) and *The Knot*.

Current Status

We are on the second solid draft, shaped through multiple refinements. Feedback from partners and co-producers will guide upcoming drafts while preserving the visual ambition and emotional depth of Ridham and Mayabhushan's vision. Casting conversations have begun, and we are exploring diverse markets to align with the right creative and production partners. We aim to activate automatic rebates through India's treaties with Germany, Portugal, Brazil and possibly the Netherlands. We are already in talks with a Brazilian distributor and have early interest from Portuguese co-producers. As this is our market debut, we are also seeking the right world sales and distribution partners.

Goals at CineMart

At CineMart, we hope to connect with producers and financiers who champion ambitious arthouse cinema with global reach. Told in Konkani and Portuguese, and featuring a Portuguese actor, the project resonates in Portugal and Brazil while reflecting the wider afterlives of colonisation. We are seeking European and Latin American partners, especially from the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, Switzerland and Norway, for completion funding, post-production (sound design, DI), and key HOD collaborations. We also aim to bring sales companies and distributors on board early, as we plan to shoot in Q4 2026.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *The Gold-Laden Sheep and the Sacred Mountain* (2018) by Ridham Janve is available on Festival Scope.



Ridham Janve, Director



Arfi Laamba, Producer

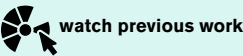


Katharina Suckale, Producer



Kartikeya Narayan Singh, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 90 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Ridham Janve and Mayabhushan Nagvenkar
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Konkani, Portuguese
Locations: Goa
Budget: €1,000,000
Financing in place: €312,500
Production Company: The Film Cafe, Bombay Berlin Film Production
Partners attached: Bombay Berlin Film Productions
€40,000
Film Cafe €25,500
Investment Utilized for Development €25,500
Seeking partners from: Portugal, Netherlands, Norway



Contact
Bombay Berlin Film Productions
arfi@bombayberlin.com
www.bombayberlin.com

The Poet's Son

Le Fils du Poète

Nicolas Graux

Set in a Russia at war, a young man who narrowly avoids conscription must navigate a harrowing choice: remain loyal to his father or break free in pursuit of his own freedom.

Tags: drama, war, father-son

Synopsis

In a small, snowbound Russian town, 26-year-old Senya narrowly escapes conscription. During the military intake, as he undergoes medical exams, he breaks a thermometer and swallows the mercury to avoid being sent to the front. Three months later he is released from a psychiatric hospital, frail and hollowed, returning to a home suspended in winter quiet. Sealed coffins come back from the front, mothers mourn their sons, and the idea of resuming a normal life feels impossible. Reuniting with his father, Alexey, a poet worn down by failure and regret, proves difficult. In their cramped apartment, Senya's absence lingers in the mess. Alexey, adrift in memories of his wife, who left them years ago for Japan, wavers between alcohol, shame and clumsy tenderness. Senya answers with silence and reproach, yet both know they only have each other. To regain some stability, Senya resumes his job as a cleaner at the local home for disabled people. There he cares for a comatose Ukrainian girl deported after surviving a bombing, and reconnects with Vanya, a melancholic former gold miner living with insomnia. Amid the home's quiet routine, half lit corridors and elderly residents, Senya begins to recover a sense of purpose. He talks to the silent girl, hoping his voice might reach her, while his bond with Vanya deepens. One day the old man confesses a terrible memory from the mines, a secret guilt that still haunts his nights. When Rita, Senya's childhood love, briefly returns from Moscow, she urges him to flee with her to Europe. Their reunion rekindles tenderness but exposes Senya's fear. They walk on the frozen sea, then try to make love in a hotel room, but Senya cannot. Unable to leave his father or face the future, he hesitates until it is too late. Rita departs alone. After a bitter quarrel at home, Senya returns to the home and finds that the young girl has miraculously awakened. Caught between fragility and hope, he senses that his own crossroads has arrived. That night soldiers knock on his door with a new draft order. Senya hides, then burns the paper. Realising he must choose his life, he goes out into the snowstorm to find his father. In a bathhouse, Alexey, suddenly clear and steady, urges his son to go, to live free of him and the weight of the past. No son should sacrifice himself for his father. Senya finally breaks down in his father's arms. Wrapped in the warm white steam, their embrace becomes both reconciliation and farewell.

Director's Statement
In all my films, I start in darkness and search for the light. As a filmmaker, I believe it's necessary to look beyond 'enemy lines', to pierce the dark and see how the embers of humanity still survive behind it. For the past seven years, my life has been intimately tied to Russia. What I've lived through with my Russian friends – suicides, FSB raids, constant anxiety, exile – I've felt in my own flesh. This film is the



distillation of that lived experience, a reality that has shaped me as a filmmaker and allowed me to touch something essential: war not just as an external, political event but as an emotional reality, a threshold of human experience that reaches the deepest, most intimate parts of us, regardless of our history or nationality. What does it mean to be a son in a country that assigns you to death? And how are families supposed to live with this from the inside? I think of Arseny, a friend I knew in Russia. We were bound by a shared melancholy, and grew very close. To avoid military service, he once attempted suicide. His father was his only family. When the war began, he was torn between fear of mobilisation and guilt over abandoning his father. He chose to stay. Since then, speaking to him has become nearly impossible, as if he had withdrawn into denial or a kind of self-imposed silence. A year into the war, his father passed away. Yet instead of freeing him, this loss only sank him deeper into isolation. This film is inspired by the story of that friend, lost to war. Through the healing power of fiction and cinema, I hope to offer him, and other sons trapped in this war, a way out. Senya, the film's protagonist, embodies fragility, compassion and innocence in a world that treats these qualities as weaknesses. By refusing the warrior role assigned to him, he is relegated to a gray zone of existence: if you are not a soldier, you are nothing. The film explores this liminal space, between his initial escape and the looming threat of a second draft order. His arc is not heroic, but one of quiet resistance and difficult rebirth. Through his relationship with his father, the film questions sacrifice not on the battlefield but within the family, and implicitly, the bond to the 'fatherland': a deadly allegiance that demands the sacrifice of sons. Yet in the rightful order of things, shouldn't it be the father who sacrifices himself to free his son? White, still and surrounded by silence, the winter world Senya calls 'home' evokes a state of hibernation or convalescence: a frozen space that resembles death, yet holds a fragile hope of renewal. In the daily routine of the home for disabled people, Senya begins, unknowingly, to heal through contact with others' pain. This place allows the film to extend into the past and speak of today's unseen communities: the elderly, the vulnerable, the veterans. Many among them carry the legacy of another trauma, that of the Gulag, where the Soviet state once sacrificed millions of its own citizens, a memory now tragically reawakened by the current war.

It is the unbearable, ongoing reality of war today that compels me to speak of it, through cinema and through poetry. Now more than ever, I need to see characters on screen who, despite the pain, still try to care for one another. I need to see gestures of compassion, hands that heal, fragile smiles, glances filled with silent understanding... With this film, I need the light, however fragile, to shine all the brighter.

■ This film is inspired by the story of that friend, lost to war. Through the healing power of fiction and cinema, I hope to offer him, and other sons trapped in this war, a way out.

Director's Biography

Nicolas Graux (1988, Belgium) graduated from the Institute of Media Arts in 2012 with a master's degree in Film Directing. His films utilise sensory ethnography and fiction to explore the resonances of personal and collective memory, addressing contemporary social issues from an intimate perspective. His debut feature documentary, *Century of Smoke* (2019), about a young father struggling with opium addiction in Laos, premiered at Visions du Réel before touring widely. Since 2020 he has frequently collaborated with his partner, Vietnamese filmmaker Truong Minh Quý. Their co-directed short film Porcupine premiered at IFFR in 2023. In 2025, their latest film *Hair, Paper, Water...* was awarded the Golden Leopard at Locarno and went on to screen at NYFF, BFI London, Busan, Viennale and Doclisboa. *The Poet's Son*, rooted in years of personal research in Russia, will be his first fiction feature, and is one of the selected projects for CineMArt 2026.

Company Profile

With its solid experience in co-production, Tarantula in Belgium centres its editorial policy around a successful script and good human relationships between producers and directors. To see these artistically ambitious projects through to fruition, Tarantula combines its expertise with that of other European countries.

Current Status

The Poet's Son is currently in development and financing. With a very solid script, the project has already attracted several selective national funds in Belgium and France. With shooting scheduled for late 2026, we are currently in the second phase of location scouting, which will allow us to secure the shooting sets. Casting is also underway. We are gradually trying to finalise the film's financing with prospects in Germany, as well as with a Eurimages application early in 2026. We are still looking for a potential production partner, as well as distributors and an international sales agent.

Goals at CineMart

In addition to benefiting from the keen eye of our peers on *The Poet's Son*, which is becoming increasingly concrete, we are also looking for co-production, distribution and broadcasting partners, as well as an international sales agent. For co-production, we are mainly targeting Eastern European countries (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria) as well as Northern European countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Ireland).

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The short film *After Dawn / Passée l'aube* (2017) by Nicolas Graux is available on Festival Scope.



Nicolas Graux,
Director



Alice Antoine,
Producer



Joseph Rouschop,
Producer

Feature: 16mm (shooting) / DCP (final) | 95 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Nicolas Graux
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Russian
Locations: Russia, Kazakhstan
Budget: €1,946,697
Financing in place: €1,213,897
Production Company: Tarantula

Co-Production Companies: Yellow Blackbird, Petit à Petit Production, Clin d'Œil Films
Partners attached: Tarantula (Own Investment) €14,500
Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles (Writing support) €7,500
Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles (Development support) €20,000
Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles (Production support) €495,000
Centre Audiovisuel Bruxellois (Writing support) €3,750
Dérides (donation) €20,000
Taxshelter €225,000
Cinéma du Monde €180,000
VAF €112,500
Seeking partners from: Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Ireland



Contact

Tarantula
jo@tarantula.be
www.tarantula.be

Shumari

Tanaka Toshihiko

In Japan's northernmost region at Lake Shumarinai, filmmaker Yusaku arrives to document a community-led excavation of wartime forced-labour victims. But when the long-hidden bones of a young girl – strikingly out of place among the remains – are unearthed, he is drawn into the concealed crime of a Korean professor who has lived there for decades and into a moral reckoning he can no longer escape.

Tags: mystery, history, memory

Synopsis

Yusaku Kuroki (42), once an acclaimed documentarian, has withdrawn from filmmaking since a tragedy on a past project. When his boss orders him to join a new documentary about a human-remains excavation workshop in Shumarinai – partnering with Soyong Song (28), a Japan-born Korean – Yusaku refuses. But a chance encounter with a care worker named Tsugumi Sato (33), who bears a faint burn scar on her face and says she is from Shumarinai, quietly pushes him back toward the work he has long avoided. Shumarinai, home to Japan's largest man-made lake, carries the buried history of Korean forced labor during the Second World War. After twenty-five years, the excavation workshop resumes, bringing together students and volunteers from Japan and Korea to uncover remains and return them to their home country. Yusaku reluctantly begins filming with Soyong. As he works, he meets Tsugumi's father, Dohyun Park (68), a Korean professor who has lived in the area for decades and dedicated much of his life to the workshop. With gentle humour and an easy warmth, he opens his world to Yusaku. During long drives through late-autumn Shumarinai, their bond deepens. Only then does Yusaku speak of the guilt that drove him away from filmmaking: he once pursued truth too far, and the person he filmed died as a result – yet he cannot deny that same instinct still lives within him. The workshop is shaken when the remains of a young girl – clearly unrelated to wartime labour – are unearthed. Dohyun freezes. He tells Yusaku the remains belong to his daughter, Mari, Tsugumi's twin, who died in a house fire twenty-five years ago; he buried her himself. Yet Yusaku senses a deeper truth. Seeking answers, he meets Tsugumi, who remembers nothing of her childhood or her twin. Searching for the memories she has lost, they visit a crystal monument standing in the snow. It marks the place where the sisters once played. The moment Tsugumi touches the monument, a violent flash reveals what had been hidden: the girl who died – and was buried on the island – was Tsugumi. The woman living as "Tsugumi" is Mari, who killed Tsugumi before living on under her sister's name. In Dohyun's studio, Yusaku discovers a painting titled *Tsugumi, age 8*, depicting burns far worse than the Tsugumi he knows. Then Dohyun begins to confess on camera – how he burned Mari's face and raised her as Tsugumi. With the truth uncovered, Yusaku faces his final choice – to reveal it, or to protect those still living.

Director's Statement

This film is a story of redemption, centered on a friendship that crosses borders and generations—between Yusaku and Dohyun. While the narrative unfolds against the backdrop of Japanese–Korean history, what I aim to portray is not anger or accusation but the subtle emotional shifts and difficult choices that arise when two people try to understand each other. The script came to life almost by accident. A friend of mine once said, “When I was a child, I stood by a lake and felt an inexplicable fear.” That single remark triggered a vivid image in my mind—one that became the film's opening shot. I later learned that the lake was Shumarinai, the largest artificial lake in Japan, in the coldest region of the country. I immediately traveled there and completed the script while living on-site. During my stay, I met a Korean professor who became the foundation for Dohyun, while my own experiences formed the starting point for Yusaku. The conversations we shared, and the sense of two people from different cultures slowly closing the distance between them, shaped the emotional core of the friendship at the heart of this film. Like many Japanese of my generation, I grew up knowing nothing about the history of forced Korean labor. During my time in Shumarinai, I was confronted with my own ignorance and felt ashamed of how little I had known. At a time when nationalism and historical denial are rising on both sides, I want to believe in the more fundamental connection between people before nations or ethnicity. This film seeks not only to acknowledge that history, but to follow those who meet upon it as they struggle—however imperfectly—to understand one another. The remains of the unidentified girl, which set the story in motion, are not a puzzle device typical of mystery films. They are a catalyst that forces each character to return to their own past—unopened memories, unhealed wounds, and the ethical choices they can no longer avoid. Yusaku wavers between his convictions as a documentary filmmaker and his loyalty to friendship. Dohyun, burdened by the crime he has concealed for decades, cannot decide what is right as he tries to protect the one person he has devoted his life to—his daughter. Their relationship leads them to an ultimate question: to speak the truth or to remain silent. Nature in this film is not a backdrop. It is another performer—responding to or resisting the characters' inner states, reflecting the emotional currents beneath the narrative. Its beauty stands alongside human sorrow, loneliness, and guilt, deepening the film's emotional texture. Across the vast northern landscape, I follow how the two men's friendship trembles, deepens, and approaches the edge of rupture. The music, centered on piano and violin, is placed to permeate their inner worlds and gently guide the audience through them. In my previous film *REI*, I served as both actor and director. For this film, I chose to focus solely on directing. To engage with themes of history and ethics, I felt the need for a more precise, collaborative process and a larger production team. The ending offers no definitive answer. Is it betrayal or salvation, silence or confession, friendship or escape? I placed the story on that fragile boundary, where certainty dissolves and interpretation begins. In that space, questions arise about truth, loyalty, and the cost of redemption. It is within that unresolved space that the dialogue between the film and its audience truly begins.

Director's Biography

Toshihiko Tanaka is a Japanese filmmaker and founder of the production company No Saint. & Bloom. After establishing himself as a stage actor – appearing in more than 100 productions – he transitioned to filmmaking and taught himself directing, cinematography and editing. His debut feature *Rei* (2023), which he wrote, directed, shot, edited and starred in, won the Tiger Award at International Film Festival Rotterdam 2024, making him the first Japanese filmmaker to receive the honour as a sole recipient. The film also won Best Feature Film at the Lucca Film Festival and earned a Special Mention at Art Film Fest Košice, with additional selections in Cartagena, Las Palmas and New Horizons.



He later served as a jury member at the Cartagena International Film Festival, one of the leading film festivals in South America. His work often contrasts the conflicts, wounds and vulnerabilities of human life with the quiet beauty of nature, particularly within the landscapes of Hokkaido. He is currently developing a Hokkaido Trilogy, with *Rei* and *Shumari* as the first two entries.

His work often contrasts the conflicts, wounds and vulnerabilities of human life with the quiet beauty of nature, particularly within the landscapes of Hokkaido.

Company Profile

Founded in 2014, ColorBird is a Tokyo-based production/sales company creating high-quality films that merge commercial appeal with artistic ambition. Credits include the smash hit across Asia *When I Get Home, My Wife Always Pretends to Be Dead* (2018) and *The Young Strangers* (2024), a France–Korea–Hong Kong co-production. Upcoming in 2026 are *Magical Secret Tour*, *NUMB*, and documentary *Gun Fish*.

Current Status

We began developing the project in 2023, and the screenplay is now in its twelfth draft. An English script is available. Regarding financing, domestic distribution has been secured, and with our own investment, 40% of the budget is confirmed. We will soon begin negotiations with more than ten companies interested in domestic internet/TV/video rights, from whom we aim to secure an additional 20–30%. We also plan to apply for Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs Support Program for International Co-Production. We will handle sales for Asia. For the rest of the world, we have had preliminary discussions with several European sales agents, but remain open to further partnerships.

Goals at CineMart

We aim to secure additional financing (over 20%), further refine the project through the mentorship program, and build distribution networks and festival strategies to position the film for international success. To achieve this, we look forward to meeting co-producers, sales agents (particularly in Europe), distributors, broadcasters and festival programmers. We are open to all artistic collaborations across countries.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Rei* (2024) by Tanaka Toshihiko is available on Festival Scope.



Toshihiko Tanaka, Director

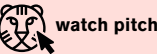
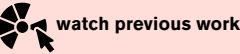


Yasushi Miyamae, Producer



Yasuyuki Nagano, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 120 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Tanaka Toshihiko
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Japanese, Korean
Locations: Japan (Shumarinai, Hokkaido)
Budget: €769,814
Financing in place: €307,925
Production Company: ColorBird Inc.
Co-Production Company: No Saint. & Bloom
Partners attached: ColorBird €76,981
No Saint. & Bloom €76,981
United Productions €153,963
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

ColorBird Inc.
ymiyamae@colorbird.co.jp
<https://colorbird.co.jp/>

When the Goats Came

Arthur Elias Gay

Cyrus and his adoptive mother Flora return to their hometown in New Zealand in search of Cyrus' long lost father.

Tags: drama, road film, coming-of-age

Synopsis

Flora, 33, waits in an immigration office clutching paperwork. Her phone rings. It's about Cyrus, her adopted son. He's landed himself in a Glasgow hospital after a violent fight that leaves him injured and expelled from school yet again. Bullied or not, he's dangerous and unwanted. At thirteen years old, Cyrus is spiraling, angry, volatile, and resentful of Flora.

She's not his mother. Running across town to the hospital, Flora is fired from work. Out of options, and after a huge fight with Cyrus, she realizes she can no longer protect or contain him. He's out of control. In a moment of desperation and resolve, she makes a decision: they're going back to New Zealand, the place they left behind.

Arriving in Northland, New Zealand, Flora brings Cyrus to a remote convent where she was partly raised, and where we learn she grew up in the foster system alongside Harriet, Cyrus's biological mother, who died seven years earlier. Flora adopted Cyrus after Harriet's death. Tensions continue to boil between Flora and Cyrus, yet beneath it are fleeting moments of delicate tenderness that hint at the history and love between them. Cyrus befriends a young boy named Sigve and his pet goat, Lee. Flora reveals the true reason for their return: to find Falko, Cyrus's estranged father. Their search leads them deep into the northern forests, where Falko lives in isolation, building a house by hand. Cyrus is quietly drawn to him, sensing a life free from schools, rules, and rejection, while Flora grows increasingly unsettled. Old wounds surface when Falko admits that after Harriet's death, he was prepared to let Cyrus enter foster care, a fate Flora refused to allow. In her mind, the choice to adopt Cyrus was no choice; it was Falko's doing. Falko agrees to let them stay one week. No more.

Believing she is the obstacle, and that Cyrus might finally get the father he longs for, she makes a devastating choice. Before dawn, she leaves him behind. This was always the plan. The abandonment shatters Cyrus, and Falko wants nothing to do with this plan. In a spiral of grief and rage, Cyrus destroys Falko's unfinished home, setting it ablaze. Cyrus is then left unceremoniously with Falko's sister. Alone and unmoored, Cyrus runs away, falling in with local teens and dragging the one fragile friendship he's formed into chaos. At an abandoned quarry, his anger turns catastrophic when he accidentally kills Sigve's pet goat, Lee. Left completely alone, for the first time, Cyrus breaks down, fully confronting the pain beneath his violence.

Meanwhile, Flora, drowning in guilt, steals money to buy a ticket back to Scotland, convincing herself that leaving is the right thing, that Cyrus will be better off without her. Before she goes, she visits her estranged mother, now living in a nursing home, lost to dementia. In a quiet, wordless encounter, Flora bathes her, searching her face for recognition, for answers that never come. Confronted with a woman who abandoned her and can no longer explain why, Flora is forced to face the cycle that shaped her childhood, and the unbearable possibility that she is repeating it.



Cyrus returns to the convent, searching for Flora, only to learn she's already gone. All he can bring himself to say is, "Tell her I'm sorry." Down another lonely road, Cyrus is stopped in his tracks. A wild goat appears on the road, then a herd of goats. He follows them down to the river. Cyrus steadies his breath as he lies in the freezing water, using the technique Flora taught him. Through the fog, Flora appears. She came back. In a silent exchange, a look, a small smile, mother and son choose each other.

Director's Statement

Having grown up as a Cross Cultural Kid in a single parent family, the concept of 'home' has always been complex and fluid. My childhood was marked by movement and change. My mother and I moved countries and towns and schools many times. At the time, I saw it as an exciting journey my mother and I were on together. We were a team, against the world. It wasn't always easy for her though. Each move was driven by the promise of greater stability, belonging and prosperity. Hard to come by as a single mother with no support network.

At the age of eight, I vividly remember when I moved countries again, this time without my mother. I moved to Norway with my father. A man who I barely knew at the time. I knew no Norwegian and I began again, but this time alone. A few years later I was able to move in with my mother again and we moved back to New Zealand. That experience of losing my only ally in the world was a profoundly formative experience for me. As an adult, I have a deeper understanding of the journey my mother undertook, a single parent with sometimes very few resources, she sacrificed more than I could ever grasp. I realise how deeply painful and courageous it must have been for her to ask for my father to take care of me, not out of indifference, but out of necessity.

These experiences, and my relationship with my mother, shaped my identity, who I am as a filmmaker and the kinds of stories I am drawn to telling. While *When the Goats Came* is far from a biography but it is informed by emotional landscapes I have walked. And while Flora and Cyrus inhabit their own story, navigating their own set of challenges, the bond that ultimately connects them is drawn from a relationship I know intimately.

At its core, *When the Goats Came* is about love and two people who are deeply in need of each other but unable to accept it. Cyrus and Flora search for a way to actualise themselves, neither believing they can find it in each other. Their connection is taut and fragile, pulling away and inevitably snapping back, shaped by a lifetime of transience and resentment for the parents and lives they never had. This bond is raw, intimate, and full of emotional intensity, reflecting the push and pull that defines both their relationship and the film itself. The story breathes at times with urgency and intensity, at other times with quiet reflection. It's a film that blends natural realism with lyrical realism. It is raw and gritty, propelled by intense emotional energy, and at other times reflective and observant. It is a film that holds both friction and tenderness, capturing

the push and pull of their relationship and their search for belonging in the place they once called home. It's a film with flawed characters, doing things we sometimes really wished they wouldn't.

I am driven to make this film, not because it is personal, but because I believe it celebrates the courage of single mothers and the confusion of adolescence. This journey is never easy or clean, it has sharp edges and rock hard walls, yet it is ultimately a story of resilience and love. I want the film to show compassion for the struggles so many single parent families face. In a world where so many are displaced, wrestling with identity and a search for home, I hope it reminds these viewers that they are not alone.

At its core, *When the Goats Came* is about love and two people who are deeply in need of each other but unable to accept it.

Director's Biography

Arthur GAY (New Zealand) is a writer and director based between New Zealand and New York City. In 2020, Arthur started his MFA at Columbia University and is now a recent graduate. He was awarded the Miloš Forman Directing Fellowship and the Katharina Otto-Bernstein Mentorship and Development Prize. His film *When the Geese Flew* (2025) had its world premiere at the Quinzaine des Cinéastes, in Cannes 2025 and later the San Sebastián International Film Festival and Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival. It won the 'Small Golden Camera 300 Award' at ICFF Manaki Brothers, 'Best Artistic Contribution Award' at the New Zealand International Film Festival and 'Best New Zealand Film' at Show Me Shorts. His earlier film, *Sunshine City* (2023) had its world premiere at the NZIFF and went on to play at numerous US regional festivals. In 2024, with his writing partner, Rali Chaouni, Arthur was selected for the Sundance Screenwriters Intensive Program with his feature project *When the Goats Came*, which was recently awarded funding by the New Zealand Film Commission and selected for CineMart 2026.

Company Profile

In Two Minds Productions is an Auckland-based company founded and led by Arthur Gay.

Exa Films is an Athens-based production company recently founded and led by Laura Ganotis, which produced its first short film *Just Before the World Almost Entirely Fades Out* by Alki Politi.

Ossian International is a Glasgow-based production company founded and led by BAFTA-nominated producer Alex Polunin.

Current Status

So far the project has undergone six rewrites and has been developed towards its next draft with the support of the New Zealand Film Commission's Early Development Fund. The script was selected as part of the Sundance Screenwriters Intensive 2024 and won the awards for Best Screenplay Faculty Select and Ezra Litwak Award for Distinction in Screenwriting at CUFF 2024. It was also a semifinalist at the Academy Nicholl Fellowships Screenwriting Competition 2024. The short film for which the feature is a proof of concept, *When the Geese Flew*, premiered in the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes 2025 and went on to the San Sebastián International Film Festival 2025 in the NEST section.

Goals at CineMart

We are seeking out relationships with financiers, sales agents, and distributors who will get us closer to getting the film made. We want to ensure we make cinema about people and for people. Strategically, it's important for the film to be set up as a co-production to ensure it has a life outside of New Zealand. By bringing together collaborators of various countries and cultures, we are ultimately reaching a broader audience – bridging two parts of the English-speaking markets which are interconnected as well as rooted in each other's history of migration.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The short films *When the Goats Flew* (2025) and *Sunshine City* (2023) by Arthur Gay are available on Festival Scope.



Arthur Elias Gay,
Director

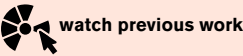


Alex Polunin,
Producer



Laura Ganotis,
Producer

Feature: 16mm (shooting) | DCP (final) | 120 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Arthur Elias Gay
Genre: Fiction
Languages: English
Locations: New Zealand & Scotland
Budget: €2,430,000
Financing in place: €672,750
Production Company: Exa Films
Co-Production Companies: Ossian International, In Two Minds Productions
Partners attached: New Zealand Film Commission Early Development Fund €12,650
New Zealand Screen Production Rebate €556,600
UK Tax Credit €103,500
Seeking partners from: Scotland, United Kingdom, New Zealand



Contact

Exa Films
laura.ganotis@gmail.com

Worse Together

Luis De Filippis

Iris breaks up with her boyfriend, but something feels off. As she and her best friends descend into the shared heart beat of nightlife, Iris chases an answer to a question she can barely name.

Tags: drama, women, queer/LGBTQ, night life, gen Z, friendship

Synopsis

Iris is a 32-year-old electronic music artist stuck on a track she can't finish and a relationship she can't quit. After years of on-and-off, she and Ali have finally decided to end things. As their shared apartment empties, Iris and Ali can't help but fall back into old patterns and back into each other's arms. But something feels off. By the time Iris peels herself away, she's late to Souza's birthday and Portia's DJ-set. Iris steps out into the city, descending into Toronto's nightlife in search of an answer to a question she can't yet name.

Iris picks up Gina and they get ready in the back of a taxi, passing makeup and scrolling through Grindr. They arrive at the club to find their friend Portia's set over. The dolls storm the men's bathroom, they kiki and make themselves up. Men stop short and back out of the washroom full of women staring back at them. Souza finally arrives late to her own birthday, bare faced and spiralling.

Iris, Portia, Gina and Souza dive deeper into the night: a warehouse rave where bodies press together under strobing lights. Plastic sheets billow. Silhouettes merge in the dark. Souza receives a mysterious text and vanishes into the night.

Meanwhile Iris takes a break from the crush of the crowd and lays outside in the grass. She calls Ali and gets his voicemail. She watches a nearby couple: a boy picks a tick out of his girlfriend's arm.

A panicked phone call reveals Souza is tripping badly, alone, somewhere in the city. The girls set out to find her, but their efforts get derailed by their own unravelling. Iris discovers Portia played her unreleased track at the set she missed and Portia realises why Iris was late. And like a siren, Ali resurfaces, pulling Iris back into his orbit.

By dawn the group arrives at a still missing Souza's apartment. She's not there, but Ali's moving boxes are. Footage on Souza's cam-corder confirms what Iris didn't want to confront: Ali and Souza have been together for months.

Iris returns to her apartment to find Souza sleeping in her bed. As Souza wakes to leave, she notices a tick embedded in Iris' arm and removes it, freeing Iris of the parasite she couldn't extract herself. Iris is exhausted, emotionally, physically, spiritually, but has found the answer she was looking for.

Gina and Portia make it to Iris'. Iris plays her unfinished track for her friends, at peace with its imperfections. The three girls fall asleep tangled in each other's arms. Iris cries while they hold her.



Director's Statement

My past work deals with the dynamics of family. In *For Nonna Anna* (Sundance Special Jury Prize) I explore the relationship between a trans woman and her Italian grandmother. In *Something You Said Last Night* (TIFF Changemaker Award, Sebastiane Award, & IFFR Youth Jury Prize) I continue this exploration by centring the film on the relationships between a trans woman and her immediate family. *Worse Together* is similarly a film about a trans woman and her family, and as such completes the 'Doll Trilogy'. In this last installment of the trilogy I explore the family found in friendship, the family found in romance, the family we nurture into being.

Worse Together is ultimately a film about breaking up. At first glance, viewers assume the relationship between Iris and Ali will be the driving force of the film, when in fact the film centres on the dynamics and dissolution of friendship. There is so little language about the experience of friendship breakups, thus the ways that we talk about it are limited. I am interested in the ways that the film's language and structure can play with an audience's expectations. Over the course of this film we watch as Iris learns that the relationships that truly matter, and are the most devastating when they end, are those with friends. Friends become their own form of family. Perhaps the true tragedy of these friendship families lies in choice. We choose to be friends with these people we consider family. Choice is powerful and transmutable, it can be both crippling and hopeful, it can betray and uplift. This is why the magic of choice in friends is heartmaking, and heartbreaking.

Time walks hand in hand with choice. Time, similar to choice, can both heal and destroy. Yet the true tragedy of time is the passing of it. Often we don't fully comprehend the weight of a moment until it no longer exists. *Worse Together* explores the passing of time through the fading of friendships, and the loss of those you thought you'd have forever. I am also interested in the way that time affects space, the way that an apartment can transform into something new so suddenly, so slowly. This phenomena can also be witnessed in the morphing of a party, the ebb and flow of partygoers filling a space and draining out of it.

This idea of time is especially poignant as it feels like we are hurtling through the present only to stop short and teeter on a precipice.

Never have we been more free to make choices for ourselves, and yet, there is a palpable feeling that it is all coming to an end. This feeling is made ever more present by the realities of the rising tide of blatant transphobia. And though this film centres on the lives of a group of trans women, it does not seek to inform, or educate. Instead the women are fully rendered characters whose lives skate on issues of transness but never drown in the politics of trans issues. Nightlife for these girls is a place of refuge, a place where they can both be seen and unseen, perceived and invisible. *Worse Together* pushes away with respectability politics or showcasing the tired depictions of 'trans joy'. Instead it is an answer to the accusations of those who paint trans women as monsters by brashly and defiantly answering: "Let us show you how monstrous we can be."

II *Worse Together* explores the passing of time through the fading of friendships, and the loss of those you thought you'd have forever.

Director's Biography

Luis De Filippis is a Canadian-Italian filmmaker based in Toronto, who studied Image Arts: Film at Ryerson University. Her films explore the complexities around familial bonds and the realities of loving as a trans woman. De Filippis is also part of The Trans Film Mentorship, where she helps to highlight the work of other trans filmmakers. Her short film *For Nonna Anna* (2017) screened at IFFR 2018, and won a Special Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival. *Something You Said Last Night* (2022), selected for IFFR 2023, is her debut feature. Her work in progress project *Worse Together* is selected for CineMart 2026.

Company Profile

JA Productions is led by Jessica Adams. Credits include *Something You Said Last Night* (EP'd by Julia Fox), *Astronaut* (Richard Dreyfuss), *Tammy's Always Dying* (Felicity Huffman). Jessica has been invited as a speaker on Eurimages: The Co-Production Podcast, the International Co-Production Talks in Taipei, the CMPA's Co-Production Accelerator and TIFF International Financing Forum.

Current Status

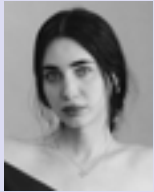
Development on *Worse Together* began earlier this year with our Swiss partners Michael Graf and Rhea Plangg. We're currently casting with the award-winning team behind *Didi*. We have confirmed Hari Nef (Barbie, Assassination Nation) for the lead role Iris. Our open casting call reached over 500,000 people in just three days, with 1,000+ submissions from trans women around the world. We've secured \$15,000 in private development financing and have several funding applications pending. An LOI has been received from CBC and we have Canadian distribution from Maison 4 Tiers and MDFF. *Worse Together* was recently a part of the 2025 EAVE Marketing Workshop.

Goals at CineMart

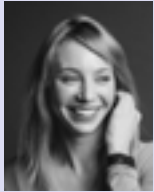
Our goals for CineMart are to find a second European co-producing partner, but also to find sales representation and to expand our producer's network in general.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Something You Said Last Night* (2022) by Luis De Filippis is available on Festival Scope.



Luis De Filippis,
Director



Jessica Adams,
Producer

Feature: 35mm (shooting) | DCP (final) | 85 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Luis De Filippis
Genre: Fiction
Languages: English
Locations: Toronto, Canada
Budget: €2,810,500
Financing in place: €788,500
Production Company: JA Productions Inc.
Co-Production Company: Cloud Fog Haze Pictures
Partners attached: OFTTC and CFPTC Tax Credit €450,000
Canada MG (Maison 4Tiers) €62,500
Canada Producer/Director Re-investment €50,000
Swiss Producer Deferment €37,000
Seeking partners from: Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Ireland, France



Contact

JA Productions Inc.
jessicaka@mac.com

CINEMART X HBF



New for 2026, six of the CineMart titles have been selected for the inaugural CineMart x HBF lineup – a curated strand of projects previously awarded Development Support by IFFR's Hubert Bals Fund.

The CineMart x HBF projects were carefully selected from the many HBF-supported titles submitted, with the same rigorous process applied to all CineMart submissions – formalising a longstanding connection that brings these projects to the market each year.

The selection spans India, Senegal, the Philippines, Brazil, and Georgia, featuring magical realist love stories, to investigations of ritual and spirit, surrealist musical satire and tales of war and precarious labour.

Birdwoman

Lipika Singh Darai

A passionate love story woven with lucid dreams and magic realism, tracing a young couple Puria and Neema's passage from village to city, from sexuality into depths of desire, and from the shape of a woman to the flight of a bird.

Tags: dreams, women, sexuality

Synopsis

Weakened by the gap in love, a young man, Puria, tries to understand his wife Nima and her belief that she can fly like a bird. Nima feels she could lift into the sky in flesh and bone, yet the being she might have to become frightens her. The newly married couple live in a partially constructed apartment on the outskirts of a developing city. Their imagined love falters: while Puria's desire grows desperate, Nima turns distant and cold, leaving him feeling small and unloved. He waits, imagining Nima soaring like a bird and returning to him with passion. Nima cooks quietly in a city household, where she meets two very old women, perhaps lovers, whose presence stirs her past. Before the city, the man, there was Jaamu – spirited, wild, once inseparable from her. They had been one, like a four-legged creature born of two women inside a tiger figurine, dancing along the riverbank. As Nima explores her sexuality with Puria, her longing for Jaamu intensifies; she craves the woman whose scent and presence still haunt her. Working as a security guard of a forest land, aching for Nima's touch, Puria gets drawn into a forest surrendering to it. The forest is home to a huge mythical bird that cannot fly. Anxious, the bird calls the rain, and purple mushrooms bloom. Nima, a lucid dreamer, moves through shifting dream-landscapes: in one she heals the bird's wounded foot; in another, the forest of Palash, Jaamu once witnessed her fly. How does one hold a dream forever? To escape, Nima chose a man and the city, and Jaamu vanished from the village. All three live separate lives in various stages of love each driven by longing. When Nima's mother was accused of being a witch they once fled village mobs breathless, barefoot and Nima regretted not flying away. Puria grew up drifting from one construction site to another and yearns for a home that will not disappear. Jaamu longs for a lover who can truly see her. Puria and Nima's apartment, illegally built and temporary, embodies the same uncertainty they try to escape. Puria once fulfilled Nima's dream of city life, yet the constant threat of displacement terrifies him. He has lost his parents to the construction sites; Nima has lost Jaamu to the unknown. Nima searches for Jaamu across dreamscapes. In the waking world, Puria searches for Nima and, in doing so, confronts his fears. He moves from claiming her to witnessing her. And there she is: soaring, a contour of light rising from the conservative earth – the birdwoman.

Director's Statement

The film's elements are body, sexuality, dreams and love. It sketches three characters Puria, Nima and Jaamu, who are in various stages of experiencing love belonging to their respective social canvases. The main narrative expands through the protagonist Nima's lucid dreaming, taking us deep into her consciousness. She feels as if life is a constant dream, she can always return to from other dreams. The motif of flying symbolises



|| The motif of flying symbolises deep engagement with the body and freedom. The film examines the self's ability to transcend a body often confined by societal norms.

deep engagement with the body and freedom. The film examines the self's ability to transcend a body often confined by societal norms. The sub-narrative has a witch, a mythical bird, a tiger figurine and a forest. It moves through multiple dreams, where one may find the self in one dream and love in another. The film is personal in many ways. The motif of flying comes from my recurring dreams and experience of lucid dreaming. Characters and their presence have emerged from my decade-long research-intensive documentary experiences. The tiger character evolved from my documentary *Backstage*, featuring puppeteers; the tiger appears in the Animal Mask dance from southern Odisha. In the documentary *Some Stories around Witches*, I investigated a case where a woman was branded as a witch and believed to fly. The protagonist's mother draws characters from that, with "flying" woven into the narrative. It is set in the developing city where I live and is inseparable from my lived experience. As an independent filmmaker, working and voicing from my region in India has been central to my practice. This film aspires to a different cinematic language – one that explores sexuality and human desire, having a man looking for his ground and a woman, her sky. The film gently seeks to understand these against the backdrop of society's dark side. For the past decades, there has been numerous challenges to voice from here, in fact when many from India get confused about the geographical or political existence of Odisha, I have been able to keep reminding myself of the importance of making my films that have brought new ideas and ripples of change. That inspires me to bring this film *Birdwoman*, to life, even more.

Director's Biography

Lipika Singh Darai is an Indian filmmaker, writer and editor from Odisha, a recipient of four National Film Awards, India's most prestigious cinema honours. Her film essay *Night and Fear* (2023) premiered in the Tiger Short Competition followed by *B and S* (2025) in the Short & Mid-length section at International Film Festival Rotterdam. She is developing her debut fiction feature *Birdwoman*, supported by the Hubert Bals Fund Development Support scheme in 2023, and is recognised by BAFTA Breakthrough India 2023.

An alumna of the Film and Television Institute of India in Sound Recording and Design, she chose to build her cinematic practice working from her home region despite limited opportunities in order to nurture a voice grounded in her native landscape, language and cultural milieu where she belongs to the Ho indigenous community.

Her film *Some Stories Around Witches* (2016) made for National television exposed the humanitarian crisis of witch-hunting and screened at social justice festivals worldwide; *The Waterfall* (2017) won the National Award for Best Educational Film; and *Backstage* (2021), on Odisha's last generation of puppeteers, premiered in feature competition at the 39th Asolo Art Film Festival, Italy. She is a mentor at Docustan, currently making Rediscovering Sita Bibaha with India Foundation for the Arts.

Company Profile

Salt for Sugar Films is an independent film company in Paris with a focus on original expression by auteurs, specifically from the Global South. They tell stories

fixated in the stark reality around us but with a dash of visual experimentation. Their films includes *After* (2023, Berlinale), *Casablanca* (2023, Venice Days), *In Retreat* (2024, ACID) and their last feature *Divine Comedy* (2025, Venice).

Current Status

The project is in mid-development, we're aiming for a finished script by mid 2026 to start financing in the second half of 2026. At the moment, we're researching on the visual style of the film and deliberating on the choice of our cinematographer, we're also researching the techniques to be used for the film's black ink animation part. Along with this, we're actively looking for our lead cast.

Goals at CineMart

The project is a co-production with India and France, with Salt for Sugar Films leading the production. We are looking for for like-minded partners from Europe and Asia to collaborate with on this ambitious first fiction feature film. This will help us onboard key talents for our crew. Since the shooting will take place entirely in India, we are open for all the post-production to be done in Europe or outside India. Apart from meeting potential co-producers, we are also are eager to meet national funds, broadcasters, world sales and distribution partners to follow the director's strong track record and build a global audience for the film. Shooting is planned for 2027 and we have to have a completed film by mid-2028.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The short films *B and S* (2025) and *Night and Fear* (2023) by Lipika Singh Darai are available on Festival Scope.



Lipika Singh Darai,
Director



Avantika Singh
Desbouvries,
Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 90 min. | Colour & Black-and-white
Based on: Original screenplay by Lipika Singh Darai
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Odia
Locations: Odisha, India
Budget: €845,000
Financing in place: €88,000
Production Company: Salt for Sugar Films
Partners attached: Hubert Bals Fund - Development €10,000
Seeking partners from: Europe, Asia, United States

 watch previous work

 watch pitch

Contact

Salt for Sugar Films
contact@saltfaorsugarfilms.com
www.saltforsugarfilms.com

Coumba

Mamadou Dia

When a seasoned inspector returns to his hometown to investigate a murder with no body, he’s drawn into a haunting mystery where local belief, lost memories and the spirit of a woman with hooves blur the line between justice and the unseen.

Tags: drama, dark comedy, investigative, mystery

Synopsis

This film explores our fragile relationship with the unseen through Ins, a seasoned but skeptical detective returning to his native town after two decades away. Tasked with investigating a murder tied to the latest sighting of Coumba – the legendary hooved spirit who haunts local memory – Ins finds himself caught between duty and disbelief. At Christmas, the new head of the national police announces Ins's assignment to Matam, a town where Coumba is not folklore but a fact of life. As Friday night approaches and tension builds, Ins must decide whether he is confronting superstition or something far more dangerous – while each side, seen and unseen, fights to save the town on its own terms.

Director's Statement

Coumba is based on two stories I grew up with. One from a village around 50km from Matam, my hometown. Polel did not have running water. The wells they used tasted strange. For drinking water, women had to fetch it to the closest village, 3km away. Every day, they did 6km round trip to feed their kids and family members. The best moments were always, as a group, right before sunset when the hard temperatures become cool enough and they were done cooking dinner and that men were back home from field work. As a child, the youngest one, I was allowed to follow such activities. To me, they were full of laughter, hugs and confessions. For them, it was hard work. They protested and got what they wanted: running water in their houses that tasted good. A couple of years later, a sociology PhD student from the region found a suspiciously high rate of divorces and couples' mismatches. It turns out, the road to the well was a moment of social integration and belonging. Younger women turned to older ones to share their issues. On their way they sang their sorrows, shared their burdens and gave each other advice.

As a kid, spending summers at my grandparents, the well felt like a happy space full of laughter, joy and jokes. With its disappearance, the ritual seems to have vanished. In the story Coumba, the women have found a way of having their own night, by using the Friday full moons. The most important one is the wolf moon, the first full moon of the calendar year. It falls after the holidays of Christmas and New Year's Eve.

Secondly: Coumba Koltiel, the djinn-looking woman. Every Friday night, we all went to bed early and slept not under the starry skies but in our rooms, even when it was hot. Coumba could take any shape or form that she wished. The only way to recognise her was by the hooves. I heard stories and saw the looks of those who have seen her. It was mostly their fault because they stayed out too late on Fridays. One night, I was

sure to have heard the sound of her hoof. It was my doing; I did not sleep when I should have. After Matam got electricity, and lamps were everywhere; Coumba didn't wander around much. She stayed mostly in the big sacred tree now surrounded by an asphalt roundabout. Growing up, I found out Friday was also the night of prayers at home. Most adults stayed up late to pray.

Coumba talks about the importance of rituals in our lives and how the big cities are impacting their evolution.

Coumba is a visual experience in filming at night under the full moon. We plan to shoot under the actual full moon. Northern Senegal is known for its bright days and cool nights. Around the Senegal river, not too far from the Sahara Desert, the full moon hangs low, adding another layer of magnificence to the ritual night. This film follows Ins as he goes back to his hometown as a police officer to investigate the presence of a spirit. He quickly realises the involvement of an estranged friend with whom he was very close to. Searching for the Spirit known as Coumba is his mission. Coumba is known by all but never seen. Or more precisely those who have seen (after their red eyes and 3 days of silence) do not give exact accounts. One thing is for sure, she is human looking with horse hooves instead of feet. The sound of her hooves can be heard every Friday night. To prevent anything from going wrong, the women led by Dado are preparing rituals. One of them is to ask benediction for a friend leaving.

|| *Coumba* talks about the importance of rituals in our lives and how the big cities are impacting their evolution.

Director's Biography

Mamadou Dia is a Senegalese director and director of photography based in New York, where he completed his MFA at Tisch School of the Arts in 2017. His stories are rooted in daily realities, inspired by his life in Senegal and his travels. His short *Samedi cinema* (2016) premiered at the Venice International Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival. With *Nafi's Father* (2019), he won the Golden Leopard in the Filmmakers of the Present competition, the First Feature award at Locarno and was Senegal's official entry for the Oscars 2021. With his company Joyedidi co-founded with Maba Ba, they toured Senegal with an inflatable screen to show the film in open air places. His project *Coumba*, is selected for CineMart 2026.

Company Profile

Maayo Productions, a company built from what we have achieved over the past ten years. Les Films du Bilboquet –Les Films du Bilboquet accompanies films at the frontiers of genres, forms, subjects and disciplines. We work with writers, directors and technicians to create a filmography that stands on its own. This dialogue between films has also been initiated and strengthened through European cinematographic perspectives intersecting with others from Africa.

Current Status

Coumba is the third fiction feature by Mamadou Dia, building on *Baamum Nafi* and *Demba*. The project was selected for production



support at the Red Sea Souk, and has attracted early interest from Canal+ Afrique. It is also under consideration by Senegalese public institutions aware of its cultural significance. With a completed treatment and structured script, *Coumba* is seeking final co-production partners to move into pre-production. The film will be shot in Dia's hometown with local community involvement, blending spiritual realism with a compelling investigative narrative.

Goals at CineMart

At CineMart, *Coumba* seeks co-production partners, post-production collaborators and equity or gap

financing to move into pre-production. The goal is to build relationships with producers and institutions who understand hybrid narratives rooted in African realities, while exploring international visibility strategies. We also aim to initiate dialogue with sales agents, broadcasters and festivals interested in supporting a project that bridges police procedural with spiritual realism, grounded in Senegal but resonant globally.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The films *Demba* (2024), *Nafi's Father* (2019) and *Samedi Cinema* (2016) by Mamadou Dia are available on Festival Scope.



Mamadou Dia,
Director



Eugenie Michel
Villette,
Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 90 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Mamadou Dia
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Fulaani
Locations: Matam, Senegal
Budget: €1,600,600
Financing in place: €190,000
Production Company: Maayo Productions
Co-Production Company: Les Films du Bilboquet
Partners attached: Hubert Bals Fund - Development €10,000
Private Fund €100,000
Maayo €40,000
Les Films Du Bilboquet €40,000
Seeking partners from: Italy, Norway, Holland, Germany and South Africa

 watch previous work

 watch pitch

Contact

Les Films Du Bilboquet
eugeniemichelvillette@lesfilmsdubilboquet.fr
www.lesfilmsdubilboquet.fr

Daughters of the Sea

Anak Alon

Martika Ramirez Escobar

Three lives intertwine like kindred beings from the same soil. Lucia, a curious tour guide who unknowingly meets her father for the first time, lives vicariously through two people – a pet shop owner who tries to keep a dying mermaid alive and a child whose long missing mother reappears from the ocean.

Tags: fantasy, coming-of-age, women

Synopsis

Three women dive deep into unknown parts of their lives.

First is Lucia, a curious museum tour guide who has never met her father. One day she is sent by her office to travel to Spain to pick up colonial maps of the Philippines. From Manila, she lands in Madrid, where she meets Danilo, a handsome archivist who is assigned to assist her. In the span of a week, they both form a special bond that makes Lucia think that Danilo might actually be her father.

On another island, Lucia is also a child named Isa. Her mother disappeared in the ocean when she was still a baby and now at seven years old, after a typhoon in their quaint fishing village, her mother resurfaces from the ocean as if nothing happened. This compels her, along with her father, to try to bring back the life they once had and to rebuild the relationship they thought they had lost. The waves take us to another Island where Lucia is also Delia – a senior citizen who runs a pet shop. This is her bubble, her life, and one morning, while doing errands at the local wet market, she stumbles upon a small dying mermaid being sold at one of the stalls. Delia instantly buys it, takes it home and tries to keep it alive. Slowly we realise that her affinity with the creature stems from the fact that she is one of the last descendants of mermaids in the Philippines.

The three stories, like islands, are all connected by water.

Director's Statement

As a filmmaker, I stand at the confluence of the past and the present, navigating the currents of history and identity. I'm 30 years old and I have never met my biological father. I'm shy to ask my mother about him but I also think part of me likes the mystery of not knowing who he is. So in my birth certificate, in the space where his name is supposed to be is a word – “unknown”.

In an attempt to trace my roots, my grandmother once showed me a photo of two women – a native who is my great great grandmother and her daughter, a mestiza whose face reveals features from her father, a Spanish Friar. Coincidentally, the only clue I have from my mother is that my biological father is Spanish as well. Collectively, as a country that has been colonised for three hundred years, we Filipinos have been always dealing with the complex questions of identity. Regardless of where we come from, we all become reflections of our past and you can see it in our names, faces, beliefs and systems.



In this film I try to understand these complexities through three people that dive deep into their own unknowns. Rita, who has watched her mother Raquel wait for her missing husband for over five years, has grown afraid of the sea that took him. When rumours spread about a sighting of her missing father in a nearby village, Rita will slowly grow the courage to face the unknown – the sea. When Dewey steps out of his bubble to save a dying mermaid, he will face his own heritage and be capable of making a connection with another human being. Lucia, whose job is to explore and recreate an image of different people in her documentaries, ends up with the task to explore a person she had always been longing to meet.

Each story in this film is like an island connected by water. In the Philippines we have more than seven thousand islands and each is its little world. But when we look above in a wider perspective – we see a map and realise that we are much more connected than we think.

I started writing this film at the peak of my obsession with being underwater. I've always wondered how the uncertainty of the dark depths of the ocean gives comfort instead of rattled nerves. Perhaps I was a sea creature in a past life, who lived around the thousands of islands in the Philippines. Or maybe it is just me trying to draw a map in different forms.

Cinema for me has been a map to all things that make sense in life. And I live for the connections it can make – in people, thoughts, philosophies, histories and even feelings and these are precisely what will weave the three stories together.

Director's Biography

Martika Ramirez Escobar (1992, Philippines) is a filmmaker and educator with a playful and bizarre filmmaking style. Her thesis film, *Stone Heart* (2014), won Best Film at Cinemalaya and competed at Busan. Her debut feature, *Leonor Will Never Die* (2022), won the Special Jury Prize for Innovative Spirit at Sundance. It was also nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the Independent Spirit Awards and received acclaim at TIFF, where she was awarded the Amplify Voices Award. She has

also earned the New Visions Best Director Award at Sitges. In the Philippines, she received the FDCP Gawad Parangal and became the youngest recipient of the University of the Philippines' Glory Awards. *Daughters of the Sea* is Martika's second feature film, and it is currently in pre-production after participating in the La Fabrique, Oxbelly Writer's Retreat and now Cinemart 2026.

Regardless of where we come from, we all become reflections of our past and you can see it in our names, faces, beliefs and systems.

Company Profile

Arkeofilms is known for a selective slate of culturally resonant films. With *This Side Up*, it pursues international co-productions and new media content. Its most notable title is the Sundance-winning *Leonor Will Never Die* by Martika Ramirez Escobar. Other titles include *Respeto* and *Apocalypse Child*. The coming-of-age drama *My Neighbor the Gangster* is set for 2026.

Current Status

The project was recently showcased in San Sebastian Film Festival for the Filipinas Industry Focus. An interesting development is an investment from Tarzeer Pictures who are not only putting in money for the production but also a budget to create an art installation arising from the film once it's completed. We are now transitioning to the pre-production stage as we finalise Philippine locations and cast. Since the

project will be shot in four locations, we are treating them as four phases of principal photography. We are targeting principal photography of phase 1 in April 2026.

We are currently looking for co-producers in France and possible partners in Brazil.

Goals at CineMart

We would like to meet French co-producers who have experience in tapping the various funds in their region specific to Southeast Asian projects. We have only one critical scene in Brazil so we'd like to meet possible partners in Brazil as a line production company or as a co-producer. We are looking for sales agents who have strong ties to distributors and festivals. The film has a unique production process and it would be great to have a dialogue with production specialists who can share their experience in developing this material that organically relies on the location and use of non-actors. And finally, we look forward to meeting people at CineMart who can advise us on festival strategy and sales.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Leonor Will Never Die* (2022) by Martika Ramirez Escobar is available on Festival Scope.



Martika Ramirez Escobar, Director



Rajiv Idnani, Producer



Monster Jimenez Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP 4k (final) | 120 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Martika Ramirez Escobar and Helen Beltrame-Linné
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Tagalog, Hiligaynon, Spanish, English
Locations: Philippines, Spain and Brazil
Budget: €1,239,000
Financing in place: €579,000
Production Company: This Side Up / Arkeofilms
Co-Production Company: Alba Sotorra Cinema Productions
Partners attached: This Side Up / Upside Down Entertainment €150,000 Tarzeer Pictures €75,050 Arkeofilms (development) €75,000 Private Investor 1 €45,000 Private Investor 2 €7,500 Tokyo Talents Next Masters Grant €3,720 FDCP CreatePH Development Grant €4,500 Hubert Bals Fund - Development €10,000 Purin Film Fund €27,900 QCinema Co-Production Prize €30,000 Local Pitch Prizes €375 Dogzilla Equipment Sponsorship €75,000 CMB Equipment Grant €75,000
Seeking partners from: France and Brazil

watch previous work

watch pitch

Contact

This Side Up
monster@thissideupmanila.com
www.thissideupmanila.com

Golden Balls

Colhões de Ouro

Lillah Halla

A dark comedy that catches Krista Bomba (82), a radical man-hater, disguising herself as Kristo, a feisty old alpha-male, to rescue her needy son Otto (55) from the absurdities of a masculinist cult.

Tags: dark comedy, queer, drag-king, mother-son

Synopsis

At 82, Krista Bomba, a recently freed radical feminist, discovers that her long-lost son Otto is now serving the Golden Balls, a grotesquely comedic masculinist cult obsessed with the idea of restoring lost virility. Determined to rescue him, she recruits a queer guerrilla called the Comrades and infiltrates the cult with them in full drag king disguise, ready to extract Otto and detonate the entire operation. Behind a carpentry workshop that doubles as the perfect front for sabotage, Krista and the Comrades win over frustrated members and gradually build a parallel micro-community filled with humour, tenderness and quiet rebellion. Otto, drawn to this newfound warmth, begins to rethink his commitment to the cult and reconnect with Krista, until he discovers the explosive plan. Feeling betrayed, he forces her to choose between revolution and son. This time, she chooses him. Their attempted escape becomes the fuse for total chaos. Identities unravel, loyalties shift and the hidden explosives ignite in a spectacular unintended blast. From the ruins emerges an unexpected and absurd collective metamorphosis that hints at a strangely hopeful future.

Director's Statement

Colhões de Ouro (*Golden Balls*) was born from an urgent need: to build bridges between worlds that seem irreconcilable. To revive dialogue where no one is listening anymore. To invent strategies, aesthetics and forms of catharsis that serve not only cinema, but life itself. Laughing at myself and at the tragedy of our times, not with cynicism but with recognition, felt like fertile ground. Laughter disarms, opens cracks, oxygenates creativity and allows us to step into a shared terrain of contradictions. Perhaps this is what we need most now: to step down from our pedestals, roll up our sleeves, loosen our rigid certainties and ask ourselves, as a society, what words like community, listening and democracy can still mean today.

We live in a moment when hatred seems more organized than love, and vengeance more seductive than dialogue. The dilemma is complex and uncomfortable, especially for a comedy. That is precisely why *Colhões de Ouro* dives headfirst into this battle of narratives, not to impose a point of view, but to inhabit the slippery ground where mothers and sons, resentments and reconciliations, misunderstandings and inflamed speeches coexist in a whirlwind that can trigger devastating consequences.

The project also emerged from an intimate desire for reconnection. Since the rise of fascism in Brazil in 2016, I spent years without speaking to my father. We are antipodes in our worldview, but identical in stubbornness. The distance hurt. During the 2020 pandemic, with fear hovering everywhere, I decided to try to reconnect, without knowing how. I thought of the horses. He always communicated better with them



than with me. I immersed myself in that universe, searching for the crack through which we might draw closer again. That was the beginning of *Colhões de Ouro*.

At its core, the film is a question: how do we move forward as a society? And whenever we try to answer it, more questions appear. Still, a few clues guide us: laughter as an aesthetic and as a strategy; the collective as a driving force for stories and for life; and listening as the most radical gesture of all.

Laughing is political. Although it deals with the darker phenomena of our times, *Colhões de Ouro* embraces a sunlit tone, moving between satire, comedy and adventure. Exaggeration and surrealism coexist with an emotional realism that reveals how close absurdity actually is to our everyday lives. Krista, with her irresistible megalomania, embarks on a full-blown saga by infiltrating the Golden Balls cult with her drag king Trojan horse performance. Meanwhile Otto, a queer Cinderella waiting for their moment, receives their invitation to the ball in the most crooked way possible when the “father” suddenly reappears. The film carries a clownesque spirit inspired by silent cinema, combined with an anarchic and badass energy reminiscent of Daisies in a senior, drag king version. It is in this intersection of farce, affection and rebellion that the aesthetic of *Colhões de Ouro* truly explodes.

Director's Biography

Lillah Halla is a Brazilian director. Her debut feature, *Levante* (*Power Alley*, 2023), premiered at Cannes Critics' Week, winning the FIPRESCI Prize for Best Film and more than 25 international awards, including Best Film Awards in Rotterdam, Palm Springs, Festival do Rio and Havana. Distributed by M-Appeal, the film has reached over 20 countries.

Her short *Menarca* (2020) also premiered at Critics' Week, was licensed by Canal+, screened widely, won several awards and was selected as MUBI's Film of the Day. Halla is currently financing her second feature, *Colhões de Ouro* (*Golden Balls*), selected for Cannes' Next Step II and supported by the Hubert Bals Fund, while developing *Wombs* (Junafilm Germany). She studied Directing and Scriptwriting at EICTV in Cuba and holds a research fellowship from Concordia University in Montreal. She has participated in the Locarno Academy, TIFF Lab, Berlinale Talents and Talent Paradiso, and was an artist-in-residence at Berlin's Akademie der Künste.

Exaggeration and surrealism coexist with an emotional realism that reveals how close absurdity actually is to our everyday lives.

Halla teaches at EICTV-Cuba and Catalyst Berlin. She co-founded the queer feminist Coletivo Vermelha in São Paulo.

Company Profile

Manjeriçao Filmes is a Brazilian production company focused on representativity, authorship and international reach. Its acclaimed works include *Levante* (*Power Alley*), which premiered at Cannes

Critics' Week and won the FIPRESCI Prize, and *My Name is Baghdad*, winner of the Berlinale Generation 14plus Grand Prix. Led by producer Rafaella Costa.

Current Status

The project is currently in financing, after participating in Next Step II (Semaine de la Critique, 2022) and winning the Hubert Bals Fund (2024). *Colhões de Ouro* has a global budget of approximately €2M. Manjeriçao Filmes (Brazil) and its co-producer Arissas have already secured 40% and continue to pursue national, state, and municipal funds, as well as international co-production schemes. Uruguayan co-producer Cimarrón Cine has also secured 5% of the budget.

Goals at CineMart

We are now seeking European co-producers to join the project both financially and creatively, as well as international sales agents, festival programmers and partners such as distributors, broadcasters and streamers interested in strengthening the film's reach and international circulation. Our goal is to complete financing by the end of 2026, enabling preparations in the first half of 2027 and principal photography in the second half of 2027.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Power Alley* (2023) by Lillah Halla is available on Festival Scope.

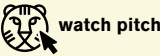


Lillah Halla, Director



Rafaella Costa, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 100 min. | Colour
Based on: Original Screenplay by Lillah Halla and Maria Elena Morán
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Portuguese
Locations: Brazil
Budget: €2,000,000
Financing in place: €900,000
Production Company: Manjeriçao Filmes
Co-Production Companies: Arissas, Cimarrón Cine
Partners attached: Manjeriçao Filmes and Arissas €1.500.000
Cimarrón Cine €256.302
Hubert Bals Fund - Development €10,000
Seeking partners from: Europe and Worldwide



Contact

Manjeriçao Filmes
contato@manjericaofilmes.com.br
www.manjericaofilmes.com.br

Neon Phantom

Fantasma Neon

Leonardo Martinelli

A musical about a young delivery worker in Rio de Janeiro who finds his worldview and family ties tested as he's swept into the rising wave of protests led by fellow gig workers.

Tags: musical, gig economy, drama

Synopsis

In Rio de Janeiro, delivery rider João Lázaro dreams of saving enough to swap his bicycle for a motorcycle. But while chasing that goal, he juggles caring for his teenage brother Luiz, who's skipping school, and helping his father Antonio with the household bills, all while hiding a secret. When a fellow rider is gravely injured on the job, protests explode across the city, forcing João to question his faith in meritocracy and straining the bonds at home. With Luiz's birthday approaching, João promises to pass down his bicycle if his brother changes his ways. Yet Luiz is the only one who knows João's truth: he was expelled from university, unable to keep up with classes while working endless shifts. After another gruelling day, João bursts into song on his way to the train, vowing that with a motorcycle his income will rise, he can return to school, support his family and maybe one day travel across Brazil. But the protests divide him from childhood friends and work mates Felipe and Jessica, who demand better conditions. While workers chant their visions of resistance, João clings to his belief that the hungry can't afford to fight back. Then comes a dangerous proposition: a motorcycle shop offers him a bike at a bargain if he hands over his savings, his bicycle and agrees to make deliveries he knows are illegal. It could be his fast track back to school, but it means betraying his promise to Luiz. As his father edges closer to discovering the truth, João must choose between loyalty to his family and his own ambitions. Meanwhile, the app's exploitative grip tightens, pushing workers to the brink. This musical fantasy becomes a portrait of a generation caught between survival, sacrifice and broken dreams.

Director's Statement

As delivery workers became essential to urban life, the pandemic drove a significant surge in demand for their services. Meanwhile, labour laws have failed to keep pace with technological advancements, leading to increasingly abusive working conditions. That is why the delivery worker symbolises the precarious state of labour rights and working conditions in Brazil today. I am interested in exploring how the delivery worker integrates into the daily life and landscape of the modern city, particularly in Rio de Janeiro. Additionally, I aim to examine how the issues faced by these characters in their microcosm could perhaps reflect a larger and endemic situation in Brazil and Latin America. A few years ago, my parents ran a small business of two private drivers, themselves. Unfortunately, due to the similarity of their services to a rapidly growing company, Uber, their business eventually went bankrupt. On the other hand, it became clear very quickly that the work relationships established by these major companies were abusive and unfair. These struggles that many people are facing are some of the major issues we're confronting in this fight for fair labour conditions, especially now with the consequences of the so-called gig economy.



Witnessing this parallel between my family in this situation, and many workers facing poor work conditions, motivated me to investigate this subject, leading to the theme of this project. A musical about the uberisation of labour and its material consequences for a generation of young people with broken dreams. While our protagonist is facing this harsh reality, our film will use the musical genre on a quest to subvert the way we expect to see these stories on screen. During the golden age of Hollywood musicals, these films served as an escape from the reality of economic depression and the postwar, while also propagating „Ää,Ääthe American dream: the idea that it's possible to prosper only with hard work. That is why using the musical genre to portray this particular story increases the contrast between fantasy and reality, exploring the archetypes of the genre and subverting its original escapism. Music and dance come into play here not to pretend that everything is fine, but precisely to show that it is not. In this sense, in addition to being inspired by the aesthetics and *mise-en-scène* of the musicals by Vincente Minnelli and Stanley Donen, I also drew inspiration from musicals that brought new approaches to the format, such as the films of Jacques Demy, Leos Carax, Tsai Ming-Liang and Bob Fosse. My country has a strong relationship with local music and dance which I want to explore, from Bossa Nova (which is related to jazz and samba) to Funk Carioca (which is related to hip-hop and electronic music). In choreography, I want to draw on both the style of Jerome Robbins ballets and also contemporary dance styles such as Brazilian Passinho. Thus, I want to meet the elements of the musical genres with aspects of Brazilian local culture to portray a problematic situation in the country. Neon glows everywhere, and while shining in the eyes, it represents their invisibility. The musical language, which many times tells stories of glamour and meritocracy, is used here for the story of a working class insurgency.

Director's Biography

Leonardo Martinelli (1998, Brazil) is a director and a screenwriter, often blends genres while exploring iconography and postcolonial structures,

examining how these elements manifest in daily life, labor, and the relationship between the individual and the city. His work has been screened internationally including Cannes, Locarno, Toronto, San Sebastián, BFI London. With the short *Fantasma Neon* he won the Golden Leopard for Best International Short Film at the Locarno Film Festival. *Pássaro Memória* (2023) premiered at the Locarno and TIFF competition. His latest film, *Samba Infinito* (2025) was selected for the Festival de Cannes, competing at the Semaine de la Critique. A focus session featuring his complete filmography was a highlight at the 63rd Cartagena Film Festival, making him the youngest filmmaker in the festival's history to receive this recognition. Currently he is developing his first feature, which has been selected for the Locarno Residency and Hubert Bals Fund and CineMart 2026.

|| A musical about the uberisation of labour and its material consequences for a generation of young people with broken dreams.

Company Profile

Duas Mariola Filmes is a Rio de Janeiro-based company focused on experimental and authorial films since 2006 founded by Felipe M. Bragança and Marina Meliande. They have produced 18 feature and short films, such as *The Joy*, *A Yellow Animal* and *Sultry*, all screened at international film festivals around the world, including Cannes, Berlin, Rotterdam, Sundance and Locarno.

Current Status

The project was selected by Locarno Residency 2022 and was awarded the best project among the 12 selected from over 400 projects from all over the world. Since that year, the director has been developing the treatment and then the script in prestigious residencies such as ALCA and Munich Film Up Residency (Pop Up Film Residency). Martinelli was also awarded the prestigious Hubert Bals Fund for development, a milestone in this stage for enabling the director to work in an immersive way on the script. The project has 15% of the budget secured and is waiting for results from other funds.

Goals at CineMart

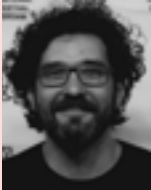
Due to the participation of the short film *Fantasma Neon* in several prestigious international film festivals (San Sebastián, Clermont-Ferrand, BFI), including the Golden Leopard award in Locarno, the project has attracted the interest of several international co-producers. We are currently assessing which countries and companies align best with the project, and as such, no co-production contracts have been signed yet. Therefore, we believe that international co-production is essential for this project and CineMart is the ideal place to find it. Also are interested to be with sales agents, distributors, film festival directors and curators and professionals to establish artistic collaborations.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The short films *Samba Infinito* (2025) and *Neon Phantom* (2021) by Leonardo Martinelli are available on Festival Scope.



Leonardo Martinelli, Director



Felipe M. Bragança, Producer



Marina Meliande, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP 4k (final) | 90 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screeplay by Leonardo Martinelli
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Portuguese
Locations: Rio de Janeiro
Budget: €1,500,000
Financing in place: €235,975
Production Company: Duas Mariola Filmes
Partners attached: Hubert Bals Fund - Development €10,000
RioFilme Fund €167,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

Duas Mariola Filmes
marinameliande@gmail.com
<http://duasmariola.com.br/>

Vika

Tamar Shavgulidze

After the Russian invasion of their hometown, Vika and her heavily injured husband Lado are forced to flee. During the arduous trip through the mountains Lado dies. Strengthened by her unconditional love for Lado Vika manages to carry his body into safe territory.

Tags: women, refugee, road trip

Synopsis

Autumn. Two newlyweds from the seaside town of Sukhumi: Vika (21), a member of the local women's basketball team and Lado (25), her seriously injured husband. They join an irregular group of refugees that cross by foot the high mountains of the Caucasus. On the run for the war in their hometown, Vika carries her injured husband on a make-shift construction. The journey is hard; the dead are simply left by the side of the road. Just before crossing the border to safety, Lado dies. Trusting her godfather across the border will help her bury him, Vika keeps quiet and drags Lado's dead body along for two days. Vika's childhood friend Irina, who is among the refugees, is the only one to keep an eye on Vika. Irina understands the harrowing fate of the young couple; placing a mechanical toy under Lado's clothes makes it appear as if he is still alive. But when they finally reach the border, the toy falls out and Lado's death is revealed to all. The other refugees avoid looking at Vika. The truck enters a dark, sparsely lit town, just before sunrise. The truck stops at a house with a garden. None of the other refugees help Vika; she struggles to get her husband off the truck all by herself. When the truck has left, she calls out to the people in the house. She talks quickly, loudly, sometimes even screaming. Finally, an old man comes out of the house, his wife following his steps. The garden is big. The house is hidden in its depths. As the old couple approaches, Vika reminds them who she is; their godchild who escaped the war. She starts to tell them how her injured husband passed away on their journey and how she deceived the other refugees. The dog in the garden barks and jumps at the fence. Vika cannot stop. She continues talking. Until she asks for her husband to be buried and waits for an answer.

Director's Statement

After the occupation of Abkhazia in 1993, around 300,000 refugees – mostly ethnic Georgians – were forced to flee ethnic cleansing. Many escaped on foot through the Caucasus mountains, forced to abandon loved ones who died by the side of the road, unable to bury them properly because of cold and hunger. For years I felt unable to make a film about this traumatic rupture in our history. I believed even 30 years would not give me enough distance to approach the subject. But one day my friend and co-writer Nestan Kvinikadze told me the story of a young woman who carried her wounded husband for 11 days – and his dead body for two more – to bury him with dignity. This story stayed in my mind and provided me with the perfect angle to approach this difficult subject. In our film, Vika's husband Lado dies two days before the refugees reach



safety. Among the group is Irina, a young doctor mentored by Vika's father, who was killed during the war. Irina feels responsible not only for Lado but also for Vika, knowing Vika will refuse to leave him behind. To protect her, she hides a toy in Lado's clothes to mimic breathing; his death becomes their shared secret. I imagine Vika vividly: her casual movements, her unkept fingers touching Lado – her face bright even in sorrow. The refugees move through a harsh winter landscape, supporting each other silently, speaking only with glances. At night they gather around the fire, recalling past and future but rarely the present. Nature's nocturnal murmur becomes part of their inner world. After Lado's death, Vika retreats into the forest, where her grief seems answered quietly by nature itself. I try to avoid dramatising pain. The restraint of YasujiroŌzu inspires me: his films protect the viewer even while showing life's tragedies. In my culture too, grief is expressed with minimal words and gestures. The film will reflect this silent, restrained sorrow. Tears will be subtle; emotions internal. I hope this helps Western viewers understand what it means to be expelled from your home or punished for wanting freedom. The story focuses on a few characters – their relationships, their glances, their actions. Vika's inner world appears in how she cares for Lado and interacts silently with Irina. Once she reaches her godparents' house, everything breaks open and she finally speaks, releasing what she carried throughout the journey. Her unconditional love gives her strength and resonates universally, while the exodus of Georgian refugees forms the backdrop. As in my earlier films, I want to stay close to the characters, emphasising their vulnerability against the vast, dramatic mountains. Countless photos and videos exist of this route; the ones I choose inspire the film's colour, mood and rhythm. Although I don't know the people in these images, I feel close to them – not only because of 1993, when I was 13, but also because of the 2008 war, which I witnessed as an adult. Sadly, this story is not unique. We still have not learned how to confront and stop evil forces hindering peace and prosperity. Nevertheless, I remain hopeful that people like Vika, motivated by love, can save us.

Director's Biography

Tamar Shavgulidze (1980, Georgia) studied at the Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgian State University in Tbilisi. Tamar is a

a writer director whose debut feature *Born in Georgia* (2011) premiered at the Tbilisi Film Festival in 2011. In 2019, she wrote and directed her second feature *Comets* (2019) for which she received an APSA nomination for Best Screenplay. The film premiered at Toronto IFF in the Discovery competition, at Museum of Moving Images NY, Prague IFF-International Competition, Queer Lisboa 24 and many other international film festivals. Next to her two features Tamar directed several short films.

“ One day my friend and co-writer Nestan Kvinikadze told me the story of a young woman who carried her wounded husband for 11 days – and his dead body for two more – to bury him with dignity. This story stayed in my mind and provided me with the perfect angle to approach this difficult subject.

Company Profile

Founded in 2015, Nushi Film is a Tbilisi-based company creating bold, socially engaged documentaries and fiction from Georgia and the region. Its films, including *Holy Electricity*, *Drawing Lots*, *Comets*, and *Before Father Gets Back*, have screened at Locarno, TIFF, Sarajevo, and Rotterdam. Nushi also supports emerging filmmakers through co-productions and education.

Current Status

Vika is in the financing stage, with the third draft of the script completed in English and French. Next steps include location scouting, casting, and field research in refugee regions. Director of Photography Giorgi Shvelidze will join to create a visual teaser.

For nearly two years, Georgian filmmakers have been boycotting the Ministry of Culture due to its repressive actions, and many remain active in the ongoing protests against the authoritarian regime.

In this context, securing international partners and funding is crucial to support filmmakers at risk and to share experiences on how to continue our work.

Goals at CineMart

Participation in CineMart is especially important now. Georgia's Moscow-aligned government continues to restrict freedom of speech, culture and media, and several of our colleagues are imprisoned. In this environment, international solidarity is essential. The film is structured as an international co-production, and the political situation in Georgia makes global partnerships crucial for protecting artistic independence. We will continue working with our Dutch partners at Gogofilm and are seeking additional co-producers across Europe. CineMart is the ideal place to strengthen these connections. More broadly, our goal is to build sustainable models for Georgian independent cinema within an international network, ensuring both creative freedom and the worldwide circulation of our stories.



Tamar Shavgulidze, Director



Tekla Machavariani, Producer



Ineke Smits, Producer

Feature: Digital (shooting) | DCP (final) | 90 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Tamar Shavgulidze and Nestan Nene Kvinikadze
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Georgian
Locations: Georgia
Budget: €806,600
Financing in place: €74,600
Production Company: Nushi Films
Co-Production Company: GoGoFilm
Partners attached: Public Support €370,000
Cash Rebate Georgia €1060,00
Nushi Film (Own investment) €10,000
Jaga Grip technical investment €25,000
Hubert Bals Fund - Development €10,000
MPA APSA Script Development Prix FNC Nouveau Marché Pitching €39,000
Producer, Own Investment €10,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact
Nushi Films
tekla@nushifilm.com
www.nushifilm.com

DARKROOM



9 feature works-in-progress form the fourth edition of the Darkroom work-in-progress platform.

Darkroom offers a platform for the international industry to access exclusive previews of recently or nearly completed films seeking completion or gap funding, sales agents and festival selections. Selected teams receive expert consultancy tailored to their final phases and have the chance to present their work to an exclusive audience of industry professionals both in a presentation and during one-to-one meetings.

Each project has either an attached Rotterdam Lab graduate producer or received previous support from CineMart or the Hubert Bals Fund.

Amor es el monstruo

Love Is the Monster

Neto Villalobos

In the heart of a tropical dystopia and aware that she doesn't have much time left, a grandmother tries to bond with her 6-year-old granddaughter. After conflicts lead her daughter to forbid contact with the child, she regains trust—until the girl is kidnapped. She must confront prejudice about old age and push her limits to get her back.

Tags: drama, tropical dystopian, thriller, family

Synopsis

“And when I grow up, will you be dead?” That’s what your granddaughter will ask you. She’ll ask it just minutes before you accidentally lock her in your car. Maybe you were distracted. Or maybe your daughter is right when she says you’re getting old. Now you have to explain why you didn’t take her home like she asked – and admit you have no idea what to do.

Your daughter will hire a nanny. Not just any nanny – one of those security-nannies who, along with changing diapers and prepping meals, carries an assault rifle slung over her shoulder. You’ve seen them around more and more. Now your granddaughter has one. Which means, so do you.

You’ll want to get your granddaughter a bunny for her birthday. To get rid of the nanny, you’ll lock her in a bathroom and sneak off with the girl. That’ll be the final straw. They’ll forbid you from seeing her. The next day you’ll try to go to her party, but your name won’t be on the list. They won’t let you in. You’ll miss her birthday.

Your daughter will forgive you – sort of – and let you take the girl to bingo. At bingo, you’ll get a full card. You’ll step away for just a moment, and when you return, your granddaughter will be gone. Nowhere in sight. Your daughter will get furious and cut all ties with you, leaving you out of the search to find her entirely.

You won’t know how to get your granddaughter back, or who to turn to. But once you’re contacted, you’ll try to withdraw your savings from the bank, only to be told it’s not possible, that the money is tied up in an investment fund. Back in the parking lot, in a moment of desperation, you’ll make a rash decision: you’ll kidnap two children, hoping their mother will lend you the money. You just want your granddaughter back. You’ll return the boys the moment your granddaughter is safe. But things will spiral.

Director's Statement

A few years ago, I lost the person I loved most: my mother. She was a strong woman who always fought for what she believed in, but as time went on, she began to struggle with everyday life. Solving simple problems became a challenge and she grew more insecure. Her reasons for moving forward changed over the years, until, upon discovering she was ill, she found in her granddaughter the strength to keep fighting. This experience raises the question that drives this film: How far would you be willing to go when someone you love is in danger? This feature film not only explores that question but also examines



the condition of the elderly in our society, family relationships, class polarisation and a pervasive urban insecurity that has given rise to widespread paranoia. It is the portrait of a tropical dystopia – one that, sadly, does not feel so distant or improbable. Old age and urban violence are increasingly urgent issues, and I believe their depiction in cinema should be bold, challenging and provocative. After directing two comedies, I now feel the need to explore a more dramatic register – a story that reflects my current emotional state while simultaneously unsettling, questioning and keeping the audience on edge. *Amor es el monstruo* is a thriller and a family drama, a story about love and despair in an increasingly hostile world. It is a genre film infused with the necessary elements to convey the anguish of a reality that feels all too close, even if we refuse to acknowledge it. In my third feature film, I want to create a realistic, slow-burning and violent approach, exploring the moral dilemma of a grandmother willing to do whatever it takes to protect her granddaughter, regardless of the consequences. I seek to create an art house film that also resonates with a broad audience. I want viewers to understand and be confronted by the main character's decisions – her contradictions, her virtues and her flaws. Because, in the end, this is a story about complex human beings, navigating a world where inequality has spiralled out of control and violence has become a means of survival. I believe cinema is a mirror that not only reflects who we are but also anticipates where we might be headed. It is essential to speak about the uncomfortable, to confront what we avoid looking at, in order to generate a necessary and urgent dialogue. Because only by facing our reality can we begin to question it – and perhaps, change it.

Director's Biography

Neto Villalobos Brenes graduated in Sociology from the University of Costa Rica and later studied Film Directing at the Centre d'Estudis Cinematogràfics de Catalunya. He has taken part in programs such as the Berlinale Talent Campus, the Rotterdam Lab, and the “How to Tell a Story” workshop led by Gabriel García Márquez. His first

feature, *Por las Plumas* (2013) premiered at the TIFF and later screened at SSIFF, BAFICI, IFFR, Miami and Toulouse. His second feature, *Cascos Indomables* (2018), was written during a residency at the Cinéfondation and also premiered in TIFF. He co-directed *El Gran Líbano* (2017), which opened Directors' Fortnight as part of the Lebanon Factory. He is currently developing the experimental documentary *Jamón*, supported by the TFI Latin American Fund. His most recent short, *Amor es el monstruo* (2022) won the Audience Award at the Shnit Festival. This is also the title of his third feature, an international co-production now in post-production, supported by Ibermedia, DAFO, and Panama's national fund, and Darkroom 2026.

Company Profile

Company established in Chile and Spain, dedicated to international co-production and to building a bridge between Latin America and Europe. We develop auteur-driven projects with strong audience appeal, constantly seeking creators and stories that expand cinematic form. Our films have been recognised at major festivals such as Cannes, Venice, San Sebastián, PÖFF, IFFR, and FICG, among others.

Current Status

The film is currently in its third edit cut, and we are looking to bring a new editor to collaborate closely with the director. As we participate in Darkroom in Rotterdam, we are seeking international funds, in-kind services, and industry partnerships to complete the remaining stages. Our goal is to secure this financing soon and finalise the film in the first half of 2026.

I want viewers to be confronted by the main character's decisions – her contradictions, her virtues and her flaws. Because, in the end, this is a story about complex human beings, navigating a world where inequality has spiralled out of control and violence has become a means of survival.

Goals at Darkroom

At Darkroom, our goal is to present the film at a key moment in its creative process and to strengthen the film's international network as we enter the final phase of editing and post-production. We aim to connect with potential co-financiers and post-production partners, and to meet sales agents, distributors and festival programmers to position the film within the global festival circuit and prepare its worldwide commercial release.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *All About the Feathers* (2013) by Neto Villalobos is available on Festival Scope.

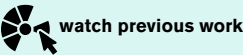


Neto Villalobos, Director



Clara Larrain, Co-Producer

Feature: Digital | 96 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Neto Villalobos and Diego Vanderlaat
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Spanish
Locations: Golfito, Costa Rica
Budget: €700,000
Financing needed: €159,518
Production Company: La Sucia Centroamericana
Co-Production Companies: Clara Films, Cine Infinito, Expansiva Cine
Current Status: Fine cut
Final steps to complete the film: Image post-production, colour grading, sound design and mixing, original music, graphic and narrative design elements, subtitles, final deliveries
Partners attached: La Sucia Centroamericana €174,145
DAFO Fund €90,720
El Fauno Fund €88,945
DICINE Fund €69,000
Ibermedia Fund €64,400
Clara Films €23,832
Cine Infinito €15,640
Expansiva Cine €13,800
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

Clara Films
hola@clarafilms.cl
www.clarafilms.cl

Làstima

Mario Piredda

Vera, an unemployed Romanian woman in her forties, is tasked with accompanying Kali, a young Nigerian girl, from one city to another. What begins as a simple one-day assignment becomes a lifelong journey across a sun-scorched Sardinia.

Tags: roadmovie, women, sisterhood

Synopsis

Vera, 41 year-old, Romanian, has been living in Sardinia for a long time. She works as a caregiver in a small provincial town and when the elderly woman she looks after dies, she loses her home and her job all of a sudden. She has no alternative than asking Sorin, a shady fellow countryman who has resurfaced from her past, for help: he actually is looking for a trusted person for a job, so he agrees to host Vera. The task is apparently simple: she has to pick up Kali, a 21-year-old girl from Nigeria, from a train station in Sassari, and bring her to him, in Cagliari. But during a train stop Kali escapes and Vera has to chase her. Their journey starts, fighting and opening up to each other, eventually finding a common ground between the depths and the beauty of a sun-scorched Island.

Director's Statement

Two women – Olimpia Melinte, acclaimed Romanian actress, and Cynthia Atekia, a young Nigerian-born non-professional actress making her on-screen debut – one journey across a sun-scorched Sardinia, endless possibilities of being human. “Làstima” is a word in the Sardinian language that carries the weight of the island’s linguistic and cultural stratification, marking that fragile border between original sin and compassion. Vera and Kali meet by chance through one of the many violent, vulgar men they’ve encountered in their lives. It is because of him – or perhaps thanks to him – that their wandering begins: on trains, buses and makeshift cars, crossing on foot an island that isolates and rarely lets you leave its borders, especially if you’ve just arrived, if you are a foreigner. They give voice to characters living on the edges of society, united in their stubborn opposition to their fate. It is a contemporary story with no winners or losers. The characters step into each other’s shoes, and we watch them before and as they get dressed, with no judgment. The film unfolds between two cities and their outskirts, in the countryside of my homeland, where Sardinians, the sons of Sardinians, must learn to open up to one another. That’s who we are: we hide behind our fists because we can’t bear the heart’s own speed, but when we finally calm down, we open it wide. Vera and Kali are ‘the others,’ and through their eyes, the film takes shape, the places emerge and the cultural boundaries collide at full speed.

Director's Biography

Mario Piredda was born in Badesi, Sardinia. He has been living in Bologna since 1999, where he began working as a director. In 2016, he won the David di Donatello award for best short film with *A casa mia* (At My Home), produced by Articulture and distributed at over 100 festivals worldwide. His first feature film, *L’Agnello* (The Lamb), produced by Articulture and RAI Cinema, distributed worldwide by



TVCO, premiered in competition at the 2019 Rome Film Festival - Alice nella città section (where it won a special mention for best female debut by Nora Stassi) and was selected, among others, at international festivals in Istanbul, Moscow, CineMed, Prague, CPH Buster, Denver, Lucas Film Frankfurt, and Cinemagic UK. It won the Annecy Cinéma Italien 2020 festival (Best Film, Youth Jury Award, Audience Award), while the screenplay received the Italian prestigious Suso Cecchi d’Amico Award, dedicated to the best original work with a female main character. The lead actress, Nora Stassi, won the Golden Globe for Best Newcomer 2021, and the film was shortlisted for Best Directing. It is available on Rai Play and Netflix Europe. *Làstima* is his second feature film.

Company Profile

Articulture is an Italian independent production company focused on arthouse cinema with impact-producing potential. Since 2009, we have released 12 fiction and documentary films, which address cultural issues and engage real communities without compromising international breadth. We work in “the border” symbolic space: a land of conflict and mediation that nurtures concrete social change.

Current Status

On 25 October, Làstima completed its six weeks of shooting across desert plains, hidden beaches, winding inland roads and quiet suburbs of Sardinia Island. Editing began immediately afterwards, and the first rough cut will be available by the end of December. It will be ready for festival submission by mid-March 2026.

Goals at Darkroom

We expect to gather industry feedback on the rough cut and together assess the film’s market potential. We want to close a deal with a sales agent with whom we can plan and push the festival strategy as soon as possible, raising awareness among programmers, and start identifying distributors interested in the territories of origin (Italy and Switzerland) and the film’s primary markets of interest (France, Spain, Germany, Romania, Central Europe).

|| Vera and Kali are ‘the others’, and through their eyes, the film takes shape, the places emerge and the cultural boundaries collide at full speed.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *The Lamb* (2019) by Mario Piredda is available on Festival Scope.

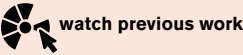


Mario Piredda, Director



Chiara Galloni, Producer

Feature: Digital | 100 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Mario Piredda
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Italian, Sardinian, Romanian, Pidgin English
Locations: Sardinia
Budget: €1,650,000
Financing needed: €150,000
Production Company: Articulture
Co-Production Company: Dok Mobile
Current Status: Rough cut
Final steps to complete the film: Final editing, original soundtrack, audio mix, colour grading, VFX and marketing tools
Partners attached: Italian Ministry of Culture €558,900
Sardinian Region €288,300
Sardegna Film Commission €181,300
PICS (Film Investment Refund Switzerland) €101,000
RSI - Radio Television Switzerland €84,800
Office Fédéral de la Culture Switzerland €217,300
Creative Europe Media Slate €45,000
Cineforum €21,730
Seeking partners from: Italy and Switzerland, France, Spain, Germany, Romania, Central Europe + Worldwide



Contact
Articulture
chiara.galloni@articulture.it
<https://www.articulture.it/>

LFD Hope

Joshua Loftin

LFD Hope is a requiem for a city and a hymn for its forgotten souls – a film about men learning to speak in a world that taught them to stay silent. Through intimate, symbolic encounters, their lives reflect one another and London bears silent witness to pain, confession and the quiet emergence of hope.

Tags: docu fiction, mental health, magical realism

Synopsis

For over a decade, *LFD Hope* has been growing in London's margins, gathering life, stories and silences. Real people, found on the streets, became characters in symbolic, choreographed scenes, playing versions of themselves but filtered through loss, longing and honesty. One shared anatomy of vulnerability through five tales – a city's hidden fractures, voiced by its men who carry mental illness like a secret tattoo in a macho world that demands their silence.



London stands as both stage and evidence. Its towers, empty windows and gaps between buildings become psalms of isolation and yearning. Across this landscape moves an omniscient spirit and his antithesis, the Businessman, gathering five lives so their echoes form a chorus of truth. The city mirrors their inner worlds, its architecture reflecting their states of mind. Its voice threads the film together, transforming suffering into connection, solitude into communion and silence into the faint sound of redemption. The spirit does not judge or explain; it bears witness of the other characters: Mason, haunted by his mother's death, waits for an alien ship to carry him to peace. Harry and Kris, two skaters, fight despair through play, reinventing freedom in motion. Mark, a man with learning difficulties, lives with the wonder and directness the city has forgotten. Matthew (Michael Balogun), a gun-runner who operates in the underworld of the streets, discovers redemption through family and a newfound vulnerability. Alan, a phone salesman by day and a shaman by night, channels the city's collective neurosis through his search for spiritual release.

Though their paths never fully cross, each man reflects the others: fragments of the same broken mirror. Their struggles – grief, isolation, addiction, self-delusion, faith – echo one another through the architecture of London itself. Through these five lives, we experience one story: that of men walking toward honesty in their inner darkness, of a city that doesn't see them until they speak; of strength born from confession. *LFD Hope* is not an anthology, it is a single poem in five parts. The city is the chorus, the characters its verses. And in the silence between, we find hope.

Director's Statement

LFD Hope explores the quiet yet profound journeys of psychological re-evaluation, revealing both the beauty and the chaos within lives often overlooked by society. In Britain, we still struggle to face the realities of poverty and mental health; this silence creates deep and lasting wounds. Growing up on a London council estate, I experienced these tensions firsthand within my own family.

As a young man, I questioned why I felt inadequate and mistrustful of a world that seemed to have no place for me. Over time, I found strength and clarity through the wisdom of friends and collaborators who guided my own healing. Over the past ten years, I have immersed myself in the lives of my contributors – sharing their homes, listening to their stories, and witnessing their humour and pain. These relationships, built on sincerity and trust, allowed the film to emerge naturally from our shared experiences over the last 12 years.

I wanted *LFD Hope* to be sincere but never solemn – to reflect life's duality, where darkness and humour coexist. When things grow too heavy, absurdity often follows. In that rhythm of contradiction lies the possibility of healing.

Unlike my earlier fictional work, where I created characters and then searched for actors to embody them, *LFD Hope* evolved from the real lives of its protagonists. Their narratives intertwined with mine, blending truth and imagination in equal measure.

The film began as an act of survival. When life comes to a standstill, you can no longer look away – you must face the fear, the sadness, and the absurdity, and allow meaning to take shape. Through filmmaking, pain became recognition and recognition became connection.

I wanted *LFD Hope* to be sincere but never solemn – to reflect life's duality, where darkness and humour coexist. When things grow too heavy, absurdity often follows. In that rhythm of contradiction lies the possibility of healing.

London itself becomes a character – vast, indifferent, haunted. Its empty towers and tunnels reflect the psychic states of its inhabitants, echoing the chiaroscuro of Pedro Costa's Lisbon, the interior stillness of Béla Tarr's domestic purgatories, and the observational tenderness of Gianfranco Rosi's Rome. Like those films, *LFD Hope* dissolves the border between realism and poetry, between documentary evidence and spiritual allegory.

I need to be close to the characters, to put them centre in the frame, this is why I intend to shoot in 4:3. I don't care about the landscape, it's just where they are. London is only London because of them, because of anyone, not anything.

Shot with lo-fi intimacy, the film refuses cinematic polish. Its raw texture mirrors the fragility of its subjects; its rhythm, slow and musical, allows the city's hidden pulse to surface. What connects these lives is not plot but presence – a shared rhythm of endurance, where small acts of honesty become moments of transcendence. We see into rooms where light is partial, shadows linger, the atmosphere is raw. The camera does not impose beauty everywhere, but sometimes beauty slips through cracks – an unsent letter, a tremor in a voice, the horizon glimpsed above rooftops.

Ultimately, *LFD Hope* is a requiem for a city and a hymn for its forgotten souls – a film about men learning to speak in a world that taught them to stay silent. It is one story told in five movements: a single breath of hope carried through the dark.

Director's Biography

Joshua Loftin was born in south east London, and went on to study Film Production at the Edinburgh College of Art. Whilst there, he edited *Should We Go Home* (2009) by Nelson Carlos, which won a BAFTA New Talent Award. In 2010, Joshua was nominated for a BAFTA New Talent Award. Upon graduating Joshua went on to direct his self funded debut feature film, *I can't be Kaspar?* (2012) before beginning work on developing *LFD Hope* in 2013, project in which he worked for 11 years and is supported by Darkroom 2026. Alongside this he has worked within the film industry from an assistant director to directing indie music videos, for fellow artists. As well as working within the film industry, Joshua has also had a successful career in music releasing the album "positive mental health music" with his band Tiña.

Company Profile

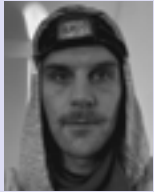
Gallivant Film is an award-winning London–Budapest company making human-focused, socially and environmentally-driven documentaries and creative commercial work. Its features *Another News Story* *Granny Project*, *KIX*, *Another Land* won awards and screened at major festivals. Founded in 2015, it's now producing work for HBO, ARTE and Doc Society to name a few.

Current Status

Following the completion of this final production phase, director Joshua Loftin began the extensive process of logging and reviewing all footage captured across the past decade. Then in October 2025, Joshua travelled to Budapest to commence work with editor Anna Vaghy, marking the beginning of the film's dedicated editing phase. Together, they will work together for the remainder of the year to refine the film's structure and tone, with the goal of achieving picture lock in early 2026.

Goals at Darkroom

During the programme, we'll connect with co-producers, financiers, consultants and festival curators to support the final post-production of *LFD Hope* and shape our 2027 release plan. We'll also fundraise for editing, licensing, grading, sound and deliverables, while using workshops and meetings to refine our release strategy. Key to our participation is discussing the film's themes like non-actors, ethics and urban mental health and to strengthen its global relevance.



Joshua Loftin,
Director



Balint Revesz,
Producer



Anna Vaghy,
Editor

Feature: Digital | 80 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Joshua Loftin
Genre: Hybrid, Creative Documentary
Languages: English
Locations: London
Budget: €287,500
Financing needed: €154,100
Production Companies: Gallivant Film, Sea Fox Films, Lorenz Films
Co-Production Company: Good Kids productions
Current Status: Rough cut
Final steps to complete the film: Financial support to cover costs associated with the latter edit, post-picture finishing, sound design, score and mastering
Partners attached: Private Equity €42,550
Crowd Funding €28,750
Hungarian Film Office - Tax Incentive €28,750
Post-production services €28,750
Filmjus Foundation €1,150
Seeking partners from: Europe, United Kingdom, United States

Contact

Gallivant Film
rev.balint@gmail.com
<http://www.gallivantfilm.com/>

Marina

Laís Santos Araújo, Pethrus Tibúrcio

Trying to feel loved, a teenage girl makes two worlds tragically collide during her 15-year-old birthday party.

Tags: tragedy, teen romance, coming of age

Synopsis

The daughter of a white military police officer and a black touristic guide, Marina attends a private school where she dates the wealthy Henrique in secret, since he prefers it that way. Excluded, Marina dreams of having a debutante party like the ones she is never invited to, and of dancing with Henrique in front of everyone. To save money, Marina has her dress made by a seamstress in the outskirts and becomes involved with her son, Pedro. They develop a vibrant, secret romance, and with him Marina starts sneaking out to dangerous areas of Maceió, where disappearances, murders and police raids are frequent. Although in love, she prefers to keep Pedro hidden, and to maintain her relationship with her school boyfriend as well. She hides the romance until the day she is exposed, which brings her family, emotional life and school life into a crisis. On the night of the party, most of her classmates do not show up. Pedro does, but the night ends very differently from what she imagined.

Directors' Statement

We co-directed *Marina* in the beginning of 2025, after 15 years of friendship and creative collaboration. We wanted to create a film that reflects the way we grew up – somewhat protected in North-eastern Brazilian cities that were considered very violent to a part of its population. We wanted to reflect on the fact that living your own life is unavoidable even when surrounded by terrors, and that a part of coming-of-age in unequal places is to be aware of, or to be a part of, the pain around you.

A very central point in our perspective as directors, which guided all our creative and aesthetic decisions, was to build a gaze on adolescence that would not minimise this stage of life, but rather approach them with the seriousness and importance they hold at the moment we are living through them. In *Marina*, the desires of a 15-year-old girl – to have a fancy and popular birthday party, to use drugs and be seen as cool at school, to be considered beautiful and to have sex for the first time like in a fairy tale – are the driving forces of the story, worthy of being looked at with respect and affection.

In the film, these youthful, everyday experiences are closely intertwined with broader themes such as structural violence, class difference and racial inequality. Featuring characters who are diverse in geography, race and social background, we aimed to portray them honestly – to represent people in all their moral and ethical complexity. While it was important for the film not to criminalise Black characters and to highlight urban violence in Brazil as an issue deeply tied to race, it was just as essential that our gaze toward the characters avoided both idealisation and vilification. We wanted to move away from simplistic or one-dimensional portrayals, embracing instead the nuanced contradictions that make people who they are.



Marina experiences all of this in the beautiful, tropical city of Maceió. Through the locations we chose for the shoot, we placed our protagonist both in the city's most beautiful and tourist areas and in its most distant, overlooked neighbourhoods – often seen as dangerous – in order to visually build this very familiar experience of growing up in a so-called paradise, a place where people come to spend their vacations, only to later realise it is marked by deep inequality and social violence. Together with Marina, we trace the journey of discovering another Maceió. Through Pedro, her love interest in the story, the girl is led to explore parts of the city she had never been allowed to visit. Alongside her emotional journey, as she transforms and matures, the landscape around her also changes. The character's openness to life and new experiences is mirrored in our creative choices, allowing the film to evolve aesthetically alongside Marina: we move from a walled, enclosed, supposedly protected Maceió to a new vision of the city, beyond the limits of where she was once permitted to go.

The more of Maceió she experiences, and the more exhilarated and alive she becomes on these journeys, the more vibrant our cinematography and editing grow. It is essential that the audience can feel, alongside her, the thrilling sensation being a teenager encountering the world for the first time.

Directors' Biography

Laís Santos Araújo (1993, Brazil) is a director and screenwriter from Alagoas, Brazil. Her work focuses on narratives with morally ambiguous characters, exploring femininity and violence. She's currently a part of the Festival de Cannes' 50th Résidence, in Paris. In 2025, she co-directed her first feature film, *Marina*, which received Hubert Bals Fund support and is currently in post-production with the support of Darkroom 2026. Her short film *Infantaria* (2024) won Best Film at the 73rd Berlinale,

and her short *Sometimes We're The Same Height* premiered at IFFR 2019.

Pethrus Tibúrcio is a non-binary filmmaker based in northeastern Brazil. They directed the short film *Tell Her What Happened to Me* (2025), which premiered at the IFFR and received awards at its national premiere and won the best screenplay award from Projeto Paradiso and was selected for the Em Curta editing lab. Over the past decade, they have worked as an assistant director on more than thirty films, collaborating with renowned Brazilian filmmakers such as Kleber Mendonça Filho, Karim Ainouz, and Marcelo Gomes. In 2024, they took part in Berlinale Talents Rio with their research project Tela Trans, an archive dedicated to mapping all scripted and directed audiovisual works by trans creators in Brazil. Pethrus directed the short documentary *We Won't Lose Weight* (2016) and co-directed *Wednesday* (2014). They are one of the filmmakers selected for Darkroom 2026.

Company Profile

Aguda Cinema is a production company from Alagoas, Brazil, focused on bold, auteur-driven stories from emerging North-eastern voices. Its first feature, *Marina*, was shot in 2025 with support from the Hubert Bals Fund. In 2023, its short *Infantaria* won Best Film at the Berlinale (Generation 14plus). The company now develops two features: *Love is Love* and *Infantaria*.

|| The more of Maceió [the protagonist Marina] experiences, and the more exhilarated and alive she becomes on these journeys, the more vibrant our cinematography and editing grow.

Current Status

Currently, we are at the beginning of the post-production with the editing being made by Tomas Von Osten, we estimate that by mid-December or early January it shall reach the picture locked cut of the film.

Goals at Darkroom

We are seeking funding or potential investors to close the remaining financial gap. We are also keen to connect with international sales agents, distributors and festival programmers.

Previous Works available on Festival Scope
The short films *Infantry* (2022) by Laís Santos Araújo and *Tell her what happened to me* (2025) by Pethrus Tibúrcio are available on Festival Scope.



Laís Santos Araújo,
Director

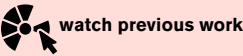


Pethrus Tibúrcio,
Director



Pedro Krull,
Producer

Feature: Digital | 120 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Laís Santos Araújo
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Brazilian Portuguese
Locations: Maceió, Alagoas, Brazil
Budget: €530,000
Financing needed: €80,000
Production Company: Aguda Cinema
Co-Production Company: Carnaval Filmes
Current Status: Rough cut
Final steps to complete the film: Post-production, finishing funds, colour grading, sound design, sound editing and mixing, and marketing
Partners attached: Imovision (National Distribution) FSA/ ANCINE HBF Development Fund
Seeking partners from: Europe



Sea, Star, Woman

Mer, étoile, femme

Jeunghae Yim

All I have of my mother are photos with holes cut out of them where her face had been. And a fleeting memory, that of a fallen woman fleeing her country, South Korea, for the United States, leaving her two children behind. I return to the country I chose to leave, Korea, to find meaning in my mother's deleted image.

Tags: drama, family, women

Synopsis

My mother disappeared from my life when I was seven. Soon after, another woman came to live with us. My brother and I called her “Mum”. My name was changed, we moved to a new neighbourhood, and I enrolled in a new school. My mother was never to be talked about except as a woman of little virtue who had abandoned her children. I could only stare at holes cut out of family photos, knowing it was her. I ended up forgetting her, as if she had never existed.

My mother reappeared in my life when I was twenty-two; she had become an American professional golfer. We met once in Virginia, the US, where she now lived. Sadly, she passed away a year later, before we had time to truly reconnect. I then left Korea too without ever questioning my mother's image or the absence of her image. Years later, now living in France, I suddenly started having vertigo attacks that prevented me from working. It turned out my brain was deleting one of my two eyes' images instead of merging them together, causing the dizziness. As my world spun, my thoughts returned to the blind spot in my existence: my mother.

In this film, I depart for my mother's two countries to find meaning in her deleted image and begin to recreate a portrait of her. In Korea, my mother's family, friends and colleagues tell me stories I have never heard before: that my father accused my mother of adultery, which was a crime in Korea until 2015; that she was sent to prison and had to resign from her job as a secondary school teacher; that she had nowhere to live and found little or no support from her family, some of whom volunteered to testify against her in court. I then learn how losing her impossible battle to remain our mother led her to emigrate to the US, forgotten by those she loved.

I find myself wondering what it meant to be branded an ill-reputed woman and shunned by Korean society in the '90s. And yet, despite the tragedy of my mother's story, I hope to go beyond it – to confront the prejudices, fears, and taboos that shaped it – and to move toward reconciliation with my family, with my past, and with the image I hold of her.

Director's Statement

What form should I choose to tell my mother's story, her holes, her absence? By facing the uncertainties and silences in my present, and the emerging, contradictory stories of her past, I want to understand how law, convention and intimate decisions combined to erase a woman, a daughter, a wife, a mother, a teacher, and a Korean citizen. Yet, my mother's absence will only be a starting point. The film will be



a way to save her from oblivion by going in search of the traces she left behind. As I try to piece together a picture of her, I will gather precious yet sometimes contradictory recollections from individuals, objects and places that hold memories of her in Korea and the US, her adoptive country.

I will playfully weave together different cinematic forms – archival footage, portraits, and re-enacted childhood memories – allowing my mother to gradually re-appear – not as a fixed truth or solved mystery, but as a shifting, resonant presence.

Navigating these fragile recollections, I realise part of her story will always inhabit an intangible space between memory and fact, tale and reality. For me, Korea is a place where I was encouraged to forget my past, a place of personal amnesia. To break that process and embrace the porosity between lived experience and its perpetual reconstruction in people's memory, I would like to explore my own intimate memories of my mother from my childhood. I want to return to the moment when my mother disappeared, when I was seven years old, and recreate with actors her departure and my father's reaction. Using this “visual laboratory” of my buried sensations, I hope to excavate the memory-images that remain with me of this pivotal moment and probe their different interpretations through the very process of making them visible on camera. This will finally allow a space and time where differing views of my mother's story can coexist, and where I can have an impossible conversation with my mother but also with my father, who, whether because of personal convictions or social conventions, is unable to re-evaluate the events of the past. By conjuring up these images, my mother's story will have a new role in the present and even the future which fills me with hope and also great responsibility. My mother's exile was shaped not only by an unjust law,

but by the society around her that ended up branding her an ill-reputed woman. This convergence of legal, political, and social forces exposes how women can be erased long before they disappear, making her struggle both deeply personal and universally political. Beginning as a personal sound and image scrapbook of fragmentary truths and improbable situations, I will playfully weave together different cinematic forms – archival footage, portraits, and re-enacted childhood memories – allowing my mother to gradually re-appear – not as a fixed truth or solved mystery, but as a shifting, resonant presence.

Director's Biography

Jeunghae Yim is a Paris-based Korean artist and filmmaker, who studied Fine Arts at Hongik University (Seoul), l'École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts Villa Arson (Nice) and Chelsea College of Arts (London), and graduated in film at Paris 8 University. She has exhibited in Seoul, London, Paris and Monaco. Her short, *Entre Chien et Loup* (2019, short doc) screened at FIDMarseille, Jeonju IFF, Cinémathèque Française, Lyon Biennale and Seoul National Modern and Contemporary Art Museum. She was artistic advisor on *Return to Seoul* by Davy Chou (2022). Her project *Sea, Star, Woman* is selected for Darkroom 2026.

Company Profile

Our films are shaped by singular voices: Camilo Restrepo's *Los Conductos* (Best First Film, Berlinale); Pascal Tagnati's *A Corsican Summer* (Jury Award Tiger Competition, Rotterdam); Elisabeth Subrin's *Maria Schneider, 1983* (Directors' Fortnight, César); Lora Mure Ravaud's *Euridice, Euridice* (Pardino d'Oro, Locarno); Isabel Pagliai's *Fantasy* (Best First Film, FID); and Anouk Moyaux's *Selegna Sol* (Best First Film, Cinéma du Réel).

Current Status

After several shoots over a two-year period in France, Korea, and the United States, we have begun editing with experienced editor, Dounia Sichov. We hope to have a first cut in February and a final cut in March.

Goals at Darkroom

Darkroom offers a setting in which to discuss the film with industry partners at a crucial moment for our project. We would like to meet potential distributors (national), broadcasters and sales agents interested in ambitious creative documentaries with universal appeal. We hope to raise awareness of the project among key festival programmers, and we would also welcome meetings with potential finishing funds.



Jeunghae Yim, Director



Helen Olive, Producer



Martin Bertier, Producer

Feature: Digital | 90 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Jeunghae Yim
Genre: Creative Documentary
Languages: French, Korean, English
Locations: Paris, Seoul, Daegu, Washington DC
Budget: €555,933
Financing needed: €130,000
Production Company: 5 à 7 Films
Co-Production Company: Seesaw Pictures
Current Status: Rough cut
Final steps to complete the film: Sound editing, mix, colour grading, simple animation (VFX), subtitling and deliveries
Partners attached: CNC Aide au cinéma du monde €130,000
CNC Development support €60,000
Normandie Region Production support €50,000
Sub-ti Award, Torino Feature Lab
KOFIC (Korean Film Council) €53,000
H! - Docs Pitch €19,000
Busan AND Fund €6,000
Seoul Film Commission €3,500
Korea Film Commissions & Industry Network (KFCIN) €2,700
Seeking partners from: Worldwide

Contact
5 à 7 films
contact@5a7films.com
5a7films.com

Stand Up

Mari Sanders

The indecisive Vera (23) loses her autonomy after an accident and must reinvent her life in a wheelchair. Only when she meets Xander (22), who has been in a wheelchair since birth, does she begin to gain a new perspective. Their growing friendship forces Vera to face the dilemma: embrace her limitation or fight to appear as 'normal' as possible.

Tags: drama, coming of age, inclusion

Synopsis

Vera (23) doesn't know what she wants and has plunged herself into a life of clubbing with friends. She's a cheerful tease and the life of the party. She dreams of travelling the world, free from obligations, alone. Her motto is: "Travelling is done alone, or it's a vacation". In an unguarded moment during a night out, Vera gets hit by a truck. She ends up in a wheelchair with a low spinal-cord injury. At the rehabilitation center, it's own eco-system of modified housing, activity center and swimming pool, Vera feels like her life is destroyed. During recovery she meets Xander (22), an aspiring stand-up comedian, who has been in a wheelchair his entire life. Xander takes Vera under his wing, and Vera meets his group of friends, who all have a physical disability. Vera and Xander seem to fall for each other, but their feelings for each other remain unspoken. To Vera choosing Xander is choosing a life "steeped in disability". Vera moves back in with her parents. Everybody coddles her and it exasperates her. Vera feels like she no longer fits in with her old life. Xander does make Vera feel welcome in his life. After a 'crip' party, thrown by Xander's friends, they end up in bed together, nerve-wracking for them both. Xander has never had sex before, and Vera isn't sure whether she'll feel anything. During the awkward encounter, all their insecurities come to light. They fail to connect with each other. All Vera's anger and tension come out and she lashes out at Xander. Xander won't put up with this and rides off, hurt. Her physical therapist at the rehabilitation centre encourages her to choose the things that really matter to her. Vera starts working at her father's bike shop. When she gets a ride to the city from her mother, Vera lashes out at after being told she should accept the help. She frees herself from the wheelchair van and jumps out when it is standing still. That night, she decides to visit Xander again. She sees him on a stage at a comedy club. His performance is not going well and Xander returns to his dressing room disillusioned. Vera follows him. Finally, they acknowledge what lies at the core of their struggle. Their conversation ends in a tender kiss. Finally, they feel connected. Vera decides to go on her long-desired voyage. Xander waves her off and she asks him if he wants to come with her. But Xander reminds her life motto: "Traveling is done alone, or it's a vacation". Finally, Vera's journey can begin.



Director's Statement

In *Stand Up*, I reveal a world that often goes unnoticed. The film explores the lives of young individuals with disabilities, showcasing their challenges, unique youth culture and perspectives on the world. The story delves into the experiences of those born with a disability versus those who acquire it later, examining life both before and after this event. It touches on how it can be an obstacle, and in case of a disability required later in life, a life-changing event. The central question this film explores is the relationship between identity and disability. To what extent does a disability shape who you are? Is it something you prefer to erase or downplay, as Vera's friends seem to do? Is it something that demands extra care and attention from those around you, as Vera's parents provide? Or is it something you boldly claim and perhaps even overemphasise, as Xander and his friends do? Ultimately, Vera must navigate these perspectives to discover her own answer. My inspiration for *Stand Up* comes from my personal experiences. Born with a disability and using a wheelchair, I spent my early years in special education. I connected with other young individuals navigating their own paths with disabilities. I too had to embrace my uniqueness, undergoing a process of grieving and coming to terms with being different from the majority. At the academy of arts, I discovered that this perspective on life opened up an artistic goldmine of possibilities. As a fiction and documentary filmmaker, I have delved into the themes of disability, societal misunderstanding and physical diversity. *Stand Up* dives into a deeply poetic exploration of life with a disability. I believe that in a fiction film with documentary elements, I can portray the experience of living with a disability precisely and poetically. The response of the environment to a person with a disability is also a source of inspiration for me. Since I began exploring the lives of people who acquired a disability later in life, I've learned that almost everyone has experienced the phenomenon of friendships fading quickly. Understandably, many people don't know how to deal with such situations. Choosing the path of least resistance by creating some distance often becomes tempting. As Vera herself puts it, "The disability is, in a way, yours too." Every actor portraying a character with a disability in the film also has a disability in real life. This deliberate, artistic choice is essential for authentically portraying the colourful world of young individuals with disabilities. Additionally, it enabled us to nurture a relatively overlooked

pool of talents within the film industry. Lucia Zemene in the role of Vera and Daan Buringa for the role of Xander used their personal experiences and unique physicality in a very authentic way. The inspiration for this group of friends came from multiple sources. In the US and the UK, there are similar 'crip communities'. Such communities existed in the Netherlands as well, particularly in the '80s when disability activism was at its peak. It was a complete 'bunch of outcasts' composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds, ages, genders and styles of clothing. The unifying element was their strong embrace of their disability as an integral part of their identity.

Director's Biography

Mari Sanders (1988) graduated in 2012 from AKV St. Joost in Breda with a bachelor in Audiovisual Design. His graduation film which he directed and wrote was *Rue Des Invalides* (2012) a short about autobiographical elements about a boy in a wheelchair looking for love in wheelchair-hostile Paris. A year after graduating he made the short film *Sync* (2013) within the framework of a Dutch talent development program, the award-winning Youth Film *Go Daan Go* (2014) and his first documentary *80% Disabled* (2017) a comical documentary road movie about the pros and cons of receiving government benefits for being disabled. His work often deals with the reality and nuances of living with disabilities, drawing from his personal experience. His project *Stand Up* is selected for Darkroom 2026.

Company Profile

The Film Kitchen is a female-led production company creating feature films, documentaries and series for national and international audiences. We collaborate with both established and emerging filmmakers to deliver authentic storytelling from original perspectives that explore societal issues and sparks dialogue.

|| *Stand Up* dives into a deeply poetic exploration of life with a disability.

Current Status

Stand Up is fully financed. The film is supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, Creative Europe media, Dutch broadcaster BNNVARA and Greek broadcaster ERT TV, Eurimages and Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center (HFAC) as well as cash incentives in both countries. Dutch distribution is handled by Gusto Entertainment. Wrapped shooting in November, shooting in the Netherlands, with one day in Greece for our final scene. Post-production, with exception for music, will take place in Greece with, among others editor Yorgos Mavropsaridis (*The Lobster, Pour Things*). Picture Lock will be achieved in February, and work on music, sound and VFX will continue throughout February and March. The film will be ready for delivery in May.

Goals at Darkroom

We are actively looking for a sales agent and eager to talk to festival programmers too to establish an international festival premiere in 2026. Expert's feedback on the positioning of the film would be helpful. We are planning an impact campaign alongside the regular release; we would love to speak to festival programmers about special programmes within festivals as well.



Mari Sanders, Director



Lisette Kelder, Producer

Feature: Digital | 90 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Mari Sanders
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Dutch
Locations: Netherlands, Greece
Budget: €3,146,252
Production Company: The Film Kitchen
Co-Production Company: Neda Film
Current Status: Rough cut
Final steps to complete the film: Final editing, final music, sound design, colour grading, VFX
Partners attached: Netherlands Film Fund €1,456,565
Netherlands Film Production Incentive €712,000
Eurimages € 390,000
Creative Greece - Rebate €212,000
ERT Broadcaster €100,000
BNNVARA Zilveren Film €95,000
Creative Greece - Minority Selective €85,000
Creative Europe Media Slate €35,000
CoBO Zilveren Film €21,250
Gemeente Rotterdam Local production support €20,248
Holland Film Market award: €10,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide

Contact

The Film Kitchen
lisette@thefilmkitchen.nl
www.thefilmkitchen.nl

Sugar

Amira Duynhouwer

When Chyna's boyfriend Raoul becomes increasingly violent, she decides to pack up their baby Sugar and leave. But he doesn't let her go easily. We follow Chyna, as she breaks free from old patterns, violence and everything she has ever known.

Tags: drama, sisterhood, domestic violence

Synopsis

Sugar is set in and around a vibrant hair salon where Chyna – who is juggling sisterhood, financial pressure and young motherhood – works with her sisters.

She is the neighbourhood's go-to stylist, admired both for her talent and for her relationship with Raoul, the man everyone desires. But behind closed doors, their relationship is far from what it seems. When Raoul becomes increasingly violent, Chyna decides to pack up their baby, Sugar, and leave. But he doesn't let her go easily. We follow Chyna as she breaks free from old patterns, violence and everything she has ever known.

Director's Statement

Sugar is a film about the complicated mechanics of domestic abuse within the relationship between Chyna and Raoul. There is a set pattern of isolation and dependency that precedes femicide and is recurrent in domestic abuse. The misconception that women 'choose' to stay fuels the silence around abuse and is one of the reasons so many still die at the hands of their partners each year. This pattern when viewed day to day seems small and unimportant, but when viewed on the whole turns out to be universal and lethal. *Sugar* is set in the South East of Amsterdam, in Chyna's family-owned Black hair salon. Contrary to the subject matter, the film will be colourful and vibrant. Not all tragedy warrants tears. Especially in our culture. We are rarely despondent. We are fighters. Mostly because there is so little room for us to be vulnerable. That's why I chose to tell this story with an all-Black cast, because they deserve every side of themselves seen and represented: when they are fierce, but also when they are not. With *Sugar* we make an attempt to connect the dots – to show the audience how the day to day adds up to a great, big, awful mess, trapping a young woman in a relationship that might eventually kill her. We connect the dots all the way from childhood, from her parents, to her sisters, to her community, from her past to her present. *Sugar* is a celebration of women, a plea for their future, a reminder of their glory.

Director's Biography

Amira Duynhouwer was born in Nairobi and raised in Deventer. She is a writer and a director. Amira directed her own shorts *Kimya* (2019), *Beti* (2020) and *Save It* (2021) and is currently in post production of her first feature film *Sugar* presented at Darkroom 2026. Amira often collaborates with other filmmakers; she co-wrote Jim Taihuttu's *Hardcore Never Dies* (2023), a box office hit in Dutch cinema, and is working on

a new feature film *Wildflowers* set in Kenya with director Teddy Cherim. In the three years since she's graduated Amira has worked in various writers rooms for Videoland, Amazon prime, HBOmax, Viaplay, Netflix and most recently Disney+ for the series *Nemesis*. She likes to move between different genres and formats, finding joy in the puzzle of setting up a fresh story structure.

Company Profile

Studio Ruba is an Amsterdam-based production company founded in 2019 by Layla Meijman and Maarten van der Ven. They aim to move and broaden audiences with innovative stories such as *Kiddo* (Zara Dwinger, Berlinale Generation Kplus, '23), *Idyllic* (Aaron Rookus, IFFR Big Screen, '25) and the minority co-production *To a Land Unknown* (Mahdi Fleifel, Cannes Quinzaine des Cinéastes, '24).

Current Status

We wrapped principal photography on 31 October and are now in the early stages of editing. Our aim is to reach picture lock in the first week of March and to deliver the completed film by the end of May 2026.

Goals at Darkroom

At Darkroom, our goal is to secure a festival premiere, attract an international sales agent and build awareness around the film and the filmmaker. As this is a debut feature, gaining visibility and attention from international partners can be challenging, so an outside perspective would be incredibly valuable.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Save It* (2021) by Amira Duynhouwer is available on Festival Scope.

With *Sugar* we make an attempt to connect the dots – to show the audience how the day to day adds up to a great, big, awful mess, trapping a young woman in a relationship that might eventually kill her.



Amira Duynhouwer,
Director



Maarten van
der Ven,
Producer



Layla Meijman,
Producer

Feature: Digital | 90 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Amira Duynhouwer
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Dutch, Sranan Tongo
Locations: Amsterdam, Bijlmer
Budget: €2,532,670
Production Company: Studio Ruba
Co-Production Company: Mirage Films
Current Status: Rough cut
Final steps to complete the film: Editing and post-production including, colour grading, sound, titles and music
Partners attached: Netherlands Film Fund
Creative Europe Media Slate
Dutch Filmworks Distributor
Flemish Audiovisual Fund
Belgium Tax Shelter
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

Studio Ruba
layla@studioruba.com
www.studioruba.com

The Hummingbird Paints Fragrant Songs

Èlia Gasull Balada, Matteo Norzi

After a lifetime of hardship, 75-year-old Indigenous artist Sara Flores emerges from the Peruvian Amazon into the global contemporary art scene. As she confronts the emotional and physical toll that comes with being in the spotlight, she defies the lure of material wealth and transforms her art and legacy into a force for the territorial and cultural resistance of the Shipibo Nation.

Tags: indigenous people, contemporary art, environmental activism

Synopsis

Sara Flores is an Indigenous painter from the Peruvian Amazon, one of the last true practitioners of *kené* – the visionary design system of the Shipibo People. Trained in a highly ritualised way within a community founded on ancestral principles of reciprocity, she grew up in a world that no longer exists. After a lifetime without recognition in her own country, Sara – now in her seventies – suddenly finds herself celebrated in the global art world, becoming the first Shipibo artist to exhibit in leading international galleries. Her newfound success brings both empowerment and disruption. The prices of her paintings skyrocket, lifting her family out of poverty, yet her new status unsettles her sense of balance. Sara wants little for herself, but everyone in her family purchases something, triggering envy among the neighbours. Invited by White Cube to inaugurate her first European solo show and by Christian Dior for a design collaboration, Sara travels between Paris, New York and London, navigating her new reality through exhaustion. A trip to Miami during Art Basel culminates in a glittering Dior party where, Cinderella for one night, she walks in as a star – caught between wonder and alienation. Back home, her body begins to fail. Doctors offer no answers, and superstition takes hold: during an *ayahwasca* ceremony, a shaman reveals that her malaise has been caused by witchcraft from a jealous neighbour. Moreover, the shaman's visions reveal that Sara's body mirrors the Amazon – itself a dying patient. Reflecting on mortality and the teachings of her youth, Sara decides to visit her childhood village. In search of plants for her dyes, she finds instead the wounds of deforestation. In a local assembly, she meets the Guardia Indígena, a growing movement of land defenders resisting encroachment amid the government's indifference. It's her political awakening. During another of her trips to New York, Sara brings the leader of the Guardia to the United Nations Permanent Forum – the main platform for international diplomacy between Indigenous peoples and nation-states. An idea sparks: what if her art could make the struggle for Indigenous sovereignty visible? When the most prestigious museum in Lima finally invites her to exhibit, Sara is determined to address the Peruvian State on behalf of her people. She presents a new body of work around the theme of the flag – an emblem of Shipibo sovereignty and a call for unity and autonomy as the only path toward cultural survival.



Directors' Statement

Èlia Gasull Balada:
Throughout my career as a filmmaker, I have focused my work on narratives that underscore deeply-felt themes of trauma, race, inequality and activism in the face of steep odds. My choice stems from respect, admiration, awe and a commitment to dedicate myself to stories that have radically changed the course of societies and humanity at large. I believe in this film because Sara Flores' story has the potential of transforming the course of Indigenous resistance in her own community and the Amazon at large. My involvement with the Shipibo community started more than 6 years ago, while developing a visual art project in co-creation with a group of Shipibo women that were forcefully sterilised during the Fujimori dictatorship. This film is an evolution of a practice in collectivity and it is also a continuation of a constant exercise in decolonising the mind. To keep following a path that challenges my capacity to unlearn, to become more aware of privilege and biases and to defy the paradigm of endless extraction that has happened in the past. From the smallest encounter to the largest exchange, I challenge myself to explore any interaction from a place of love, gratitude and fairness. This is what master plants teach you when you open yourself to deep work with Shipibo healers. This is also why I'm making this film – to seek transformation through a process that will ultimately make me more empathetic, compassionate, vulnerable and humble. Success for me will be measured by the recognition of my own personal point of view on the human condition by fellow filmmakers – a gaze that I aim to feed by the soul and by the heart.

Matteo Norzi:
I'm interested in the transformative power of art and film as introspective practices that, unfolding, become commitments to propose alternative ways of seeing. Interculturality is my core focus, shaped by a lifetime of travel across diverse geographies and mental landscapes. This journey has grounded an interdisciplinary practice that spans visual art, writing, performance and film. My first major collaboration with the Shipibo People was the feature *Icaros: A Vision* (2016, co-directed with Leonor Caraballo). As the afterlife of that film, I cofounded The Shipibo-Conibo Center (SCC), a non-profit rooted in Indigenous self-determination and territorial sovereignty. SCC operates at the intersection of art, culture and politics, with a mission informed by the Shipibo lifeway, where visual art, music and ethnobotany are inseparable realms. We work

from the belief that Indigenous identity belongs not to a romanticized past, but to a sustainable and technologically engaged future. I align with the notion of the artist as healer – concerned with collective restoration, from environmental struggles to political equality. This current film project bridges my early practice with a decade of community organising and environmental work in the Amazon. It marks a shift away from the cult of authorship toward collaborative, genre-defying approaches aimed at social change. Through years of artistic activism, with many more losses than victories, I've come to see success not as visibility or acclaim, but as the meaning and growth found in the process. Especially in times of crisis, art is how we remind each other what it means to be human.

|| This film is an evolution of a practice in collectivity and it is also a continuation of a constant exercise in decolonising the mind.

Directors' Biography

Èlia Gasull Balada is a visual artist and filmmaker. In 2021, she was listed in the DOC NYC 40 under 40 list and in 2023 she was selected to be part of the Berlinale Talents Summit. Èlia has extensively worked as an editor and writer for documentaries and narratives. Her most recent credits include *The rebellious life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (2022), *The Sit-In* (2020) both screening at Tribeca Film Festival, and *Son of Monarchs* (2020) at Sundance 2021. Her project *The Hummingbird Paints Fragrant Songs* is selected for Darkroom 2026.

Matteo Norzi (1976, Italy) is an artist, filmmaker, writer, and Indigenous rights activist. His debut feature, *Icaros: A Vision* (2016) (co-directed with

Leonor Caraballo), premiered at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival and was praised internationally. Drawing on years of research and engagement with Amazonian cultures, he co-founded and now directs the Shipibo Conibo Center, the organization that brought Sara Flores's work to the forefront of the international contemporary art scene. His project *The Hummingbird Paints Fragrant Songs* is selected for Darkroom 2026.

Company Profile

The Shipibo Conibo Center is an experiment in art, culture, politics and the afterlife, in the form of a non-profit cultural organisation based in NYC on ancestral Lenape land. It emerged from the film *Icaros: A Vision* to promote and sustain the creative life-ways of the Shipibo People of the Peruvian Amazon in support of their struggle for territorial sovereignty and self-determination.

Current Status

Post-production began in summer 2025 and the project is now in an intensive editing phase. Over the coming months we'll refine the cut through internal and external feedback, aiming for picture lock by April/May 2026. Finishing and final deliverables will follow, with the goal of premiering at a major festival in 2026.

Goals at Darkroom

We are seeking finishing funds to support post-production and delivery, and a sales agent to help shape our festival and market launch strategy. We also seek fresh, critical perspectives from industry mentors and peers, strengthening both the creative and strategic dimensions of the film as we near completion.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *Icaros: A Vision* (2016) by Matteo Norzi and Leonor Caraballo available on Festival Scope.



Èlia Gasull Balada,
Director, Producer

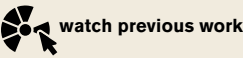


Matteo Norzi,
Director, Producer



Maria Altamirano,
Producer

Feature: Digital | 100 min. | Colour
Genre: Creative Documentary
Based on: Original screenplay by Èlia Gasull Balada and Matteo Norzi
Languages: Spanish, Shipibo, English
Locations: Pucallpa and Lima, New York City, Miami, Los Angeles, Paris, London
Budget: €766,450
Financing needed: €300,000
Production Company: Shipibo Conibo Center
Current Status: Rough cut
Final steps to complete the film: Post-production and finishing funds
Partners attached: Shipibo Conibo Center Private Investors AJH Doc NYC Prize
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



The Outside

El exterior

Víctor Moreno

How far can humans go?

Tags: sci-fi, future dystopia, adventure

Synopsis

In the near future, astronaut Ana Lima lives at a space training base in the middle of an arid and desolate landscape on Earth. She is undergoing a long isolation drill to prepare for a possible mission to Mars. At the same time, Ana is receiving treatment to prepare her body for pregnancy in zero gravity. As the weeks go by, the training intensifies and the astronaut is forced to delve deeper into the area where the drill is being conducted: a former site known as the Argus Zone. Lost among the rocky, sandy hills, she encounters a mysterious character. Although, they are unable to communicate verbally, Ana stays by the woman's side in an attempt to find her way back to the base. However, this character

without name transforms the astronaut's perception of her own planet – and her connection to the cosmos.

Director's Statement

Years ago I learned that different space agencies were performing drills for a future settlement on Mars and I started my research about this kind of training. I was trying to find out whether a philosophy of space exploration exists. During my research I was surprised to discover the hard work astronauts must endure; complex goals, competitiveness, testing new technologies and medication on their bodies. I realised their work has nothing to do with the romantic aura of being explorers of new worlds. They are prepared to achieve goals and perform operations as if they were guinea pigs in a great corporation. I pictured a story about one of these simulations in a near future, when landing on Mars will be imminent. *The Outside* questions a value system and at the same time questions our own limits and ambitions as a species.

Director's Biography

Victor Moreno studied film and Philosophy and a master's in Creative Documentary at Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona). He made *The Hidden City* (2018), awarded with the Best documentary film

The Outside questions a value system and at the same time questions our own limits and ambitions as a species.

in the Feroz awards 2020 and the full-length documentary *Edificio España/The Building* (2012), nominated for best documentary at the GOYA Awards. He has directed other mid-length and short films, such as *The Stone* (2013) and *The Stranger* (2019), which received international awards. His films have been shown internationally, including at IDFA, San Sebastián, Viennale, or Visions du reel, and exhibited at the Lincoln Center, Centre Pompidou, Barbican Centre, and Reina Sofia Museum, amongst others. He also works on video installations, presented in Cineteca Matadero and MIAC (Lanzarote), and teaches at several film schools. He has offered master classes about his films at universities such as La Sorbonne (Paris) and the University of Southern California (Los Angeles). From 2015 to 2017, he was the artistic director of the Muestra de Cine of Lanzarote, Canary Islands. His project *The Outside* is selected for Darkroom 2026

Company Profile

Canary Islands-based production company to produce and co-produce national and international films.

Current Status

We are currently editing the first rough cut and will be finished by the end of January.

Goals at Darkroom

To meet potential sales agent, distributors, broadcasters and investors. Specifically interested in Europe but also America.

Previous Work available on Festival Scope

The film *The Hidden City* (2018) by Victor Moreno is available on Festival Scope.



Victor Moreno, Director



Silvia Sánchez Horna, Producer

Feature: Digital | 100 min. | Colour
Based on: Original screenplay by Victor Moreno and Judith Alzola
Genre: Fiction
Languages: Spanish
Locations: Gran Canaria and Fuerteventura
Budget: €1,800,000
Financing needed: €50,000
Production Company: KV FILMS
Co-Production Companies: Womack studios, Transit Transat Films
Current Status: Rough cut
Final steps to complete the film: Final editing, image post-production, VFX, sound, post-production
Partners attached: ICAA €760,000
Canary Government €255,000
Cabildo Tenerife €105,000
RTVC €70,000
Seeking partners from: Europe and America

 watch previous work

Contact
KVFilms
silvia@kvfilms.es
www.kvfilms.es



LIGHTROOM



Nine projects have been selected for the first edition of Lightroom: IFFR's new industry platform for immersive storytelling, hosted in Katoenhuis.

Lightroom brings together all XR, VR, interactive and expansive installation projects previously presented as works-in-progress and works-in-development in CineMart and Darkroom, creating one unified market space closely aligned with IFFR's Art Directions programme, which celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2026.

Originally named Exploding Cinema, Art Directions is IFFR's transformative programme that presents cinema beyond the traditional screening room – through immersive media, performances, installations and exhibitions.

As part of the Lightroom programme, the Lightroom x Reality Check symposium will be held on 31 January investigating the topic: 'Building future pathways for immersive storytelling: development, production and circulation.'

DEVELOPMENT

Chemin des Bâtards

Leon Rogissart

A poetic VR journey through man-altered landscapes, where a wandering choir drifts endlessly and the viewer bends time with a single gesture, revealing the fragile resonance between human intervention and the natural world.

Tags: immersive VR, poetic environmental documentary, sound driven

Synopsis

Chemin des Bâtards is a poetic VR film that places the viewer inside landscapes subtly but irreversibly altered by human presence. Highways cutting through fields, turbines turning against the horizon, a lighthouse platform overlooking the sea: places we usually pass without noticing become environments to inhabit, listen to, and question. These sites carry the traces of desire, ambition and control that have shaped the world around us. In VR they unfold not as images but as living terrains surrounding the body.

Through each of these places moves a wandering choir of six figures who walk endlessly and echo the ancient Greek chorus. They are nomads searching for a home they never reach. Their footsteps measure time and their voices resonate with the fragility of the landscapes they cross. Their songs draw on interviews, speech fragments, field recordings and polyphonic textures. They do not narrate but reflect. They embody displacement and the ongoing search for belonging in a world already transformed.

The viewer holds a small finger trainer that becomes an instrument for time. When squeezed, time stretches: engines turn into drones, voices elongate, textures unfold. When released, the world accelerates again. This simple gesture turns the viewer into an active participant. Time becomes a material shaped by the body, revealing rhythms and meanings that would otherwise remain hidden. Reality and fiction flow into one another. Real 360 degree footage merges with subtle virtual interventions like shifts of light or translucent forms. Sound behaves the same way: field recordings anchor each site while voices and temporal layers move through them. The result is a world that feels at once real and unstable, familiar and estranged. *Chemin des Bâtards* is not a traditional narrative but an experience built on rhythm, presence and deep listening. By standing still in places we usually ignore and by walking with a choir that never arrives, the viewer is invited to reflect on how human traces shape the world and how we might relearn to dwell attentively within these altered landscapes.

Director's Statement

My work begins where narrative loosens its grip. I am drawn to moments in which meaning is no longer explained but felt, when understanding shifts from rational comprehension to sensory experience. This fascination originates in music, in chant and polyphony, and in encounters with the sublime: moments that suspend language and sharpen perception. Over time, this interest led me away from linear storytelling and toward states of presence. In earlier stage works, I explored what happens when narrative structure is removed altogether, allowing sound, rhythm



and bodily response to guide the experience. I discovered that when explanation disappears, feeling intensifies. Meaning no longer needs to be decoded; it is sensed. This shift has become central to my artistic practice. *Chemin des Bâtards* grows directly from this approach and from a growing unease with the landscapes we inhabit today. Everywhere I look, I encounter places shaped by human intervention: highways cutting through fields, turbines on the horizon... These are not destinations, but transitional spaces we move through without attention. Yet they carry powerful traces of desire, ambition and control. I am compelled to slow down within these places and to listen to what they reveal. My motivation for this project lies in the tension between movement and stillness. Contemporary life is defined by speed and efficiency, and while this acceleration can be seductive, it also generates a deep longing for pause. I believe that stillness is not the opposite of movement, but a condition that allows us to perceive more clearly. *Chemin des Bâtards* invites the viewer to stand still in landscapes that are usually passed by, and to experience time not as a fixed flow, but as something elastic and embodied. Two concepts guide my work here: the canvas and the void. I begin from absence, from what feels missing or unresolved. These altered landscapes are already full of human traces, yet they often feel strangely empty. Through immersive image and sound, I seek to create a canvas that does not impose meaning but opens space for the viewer's own associations. The work should never fill the void completely. It must remain porous. For this reason, I privilege association over interpretation. Interpretation fixes meaning, while association allows it to move freely. I want the viewer to form connections from their own memories, sensations and inner rhythms. Through this process, the experience becomes personal, and from that personal space, openness toward others and toward the world can emerge. The wandering choir in *Chemin des Bâtards* embodies this condition. They move endlessly through altered terrains, searching for a place to settle yet never arriving. Their voices do not explain but resonate. They carry the tension between belonging and displacement, between presence and passage. Ultimately, *Chemin des Bâtards* is an attempt to create a space of quiet attention. A space where narrative steps aside, listening takes precedence, and the viewer can experience moments of alignment and reflection. In a world increasingly shaped by intervention and acceleration, the project asks how we might relearn to dwell, to listen, and to be present within the landscapes we have created.

Why Immersive

The immersive format is essential to the project because it places the viewer inside the altered landscapes rather than in front of them. In traditional cinema, the frame creates distance; in VR, the viewer stands beneath a viaduct, beside a turbine, or on a coastal platform, surrounded by the fragile traces of human intervention. This direct presence transforms passive looking into embodied attention and makes the tension between nature and construction physically felt. The interactive time-bending deepens this impact. By squeezing a finger trainer, the viewer slows or accelerates sound and image: voices stretch into long harmonies, engines dissolve into drones, footsteps scatter into pulses. Time becomes a material the body shapes, revealing layers of rhythm and detail that fixed cinematic editing would hide. This act of bending time is not a gimmick but a form of listening. The wandering choir, moving around the viewer in all directions, creates a sense of displacement and fragile belonging. Instead of narrative, the experience is built through rhythm, resonance, and presence. VR turns overlooked passages into places to dwell, inviting the viewer to notice what usually escapes perception.

Director's Biography

Leon Rogissart (1995, Belgium) is a director and composer whose work bridges opera, music theatre and immersive media. Rooted in sound as a primary narrative force, his practice explores how voice, rhythm and presence can shape dramaturgy across stage, installation and extended-reality performance. In 2023, he co-created the VR performance *Ascension*, which was presented internationally and received the Best VR Award at Kaboom Festival. Alongside his artistic practice, Rogissart teaches at the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam and serves as Artistic Coordinator for Music Theatre NOW. His work *Chemin des Bâtards* (2026), selected for Lightroom, marks his move into immersive cinema.

Company Profile

BNA-BBOT is a Brussels-based organisation dedicated to recording, preserving, and activating the

city's oral histories. For over two decades, they have captured voices, sounds and stories from diverse communities, creating a unique sonic archive. Their expertise in deep listening and documentary sound supports artistic, cultural, and social projects.

By standing still in places we usually ignore and by walking with a choir that never arrives, the viewer is invited to reflect on how human traces shape the world and how we might relearn to dwell attentively within these altered landscapes.

Current Status

Chemin des Bâtards has received initial research funding to conduct first tests, including field recordings, VR trials, and a proof of concept with the finger trainer. The artistic vision, time bending interaction and role of the wandering choir are defined. We are now developing the script, selecting locations, expanding the team with VR and Unreal specialists and seeking structural and financial partners.

Goals at CineMart

Our goal for the Lightroom programme is to strengthen *Chemin des Bâtards* both artistically and structurally. We're seeking financial support to complete development and secure the technical team, as well as co-producers experienced in immersive cinema. We're looking for artistic collaboration in VR, sound design, and chorale work, and for guidance on distribution. We also aim to connect with festivals, museums and XR platforms that can act as strong structural and financial partners to help launch the project internationally.



Leon Rogissart, Director

Feature: VR (final) | 35 min.
Format: VR
Genre: Hybrid
Technology: VR
Tech/headset compatibility: TBC
Lenght: 35 min
Completion date: end 2027
Current Status: Concept / Early stage
Based on: Original Screenplay by Leon Rogissart
Languages: no dialogue
Budget: €160,000
Financing in place: €15,000
Production Company: BNA-BBOT
Co-Production Company: UPscaleXR, Muziektheater Transparant
Partners attached: BNA-BBOT, UPscaleXR, Muziektheater Transparant
Seeking partners from: Belgium, Netherlands, France, Luxembourg, Worldwide

Contact
BNA-BBOT
ruby@bna-bbot.be
<https://www.bna-bbot.be>

DEVELOPMENT

Les Gens de la Pluie

Stéphane Hueber-Blies, Nicolas Blies

Blending spoken word, electronic music and digital landscapes, *Les Gens de la Pluie* offers an immersive sensory journey. Through the story of two “rain beings” we explore a couple who, despite illness and bodily transformation, continue to love absolutely.

Tags: drama, immersive, room-scale

Synopsis

Les Gens de la Pluie is a large-scale immersive installation at the crossroads of spoken word, electronic music and digital art. Conceived as a poetic performance in motion, it immerses audiences in a visual universe of constantly transforming digital rain. The work is composed of eight stories, each featuring two characters facing time, illness and the erosion of desire. Gradually, they become the “rain people”: sensitive beings shaped by rain, able to transform their tears into new ways of loving. Each story explores a fragile form of intimacy – shared solitude, loss of desire, fear of the changing body, avoidance, disconnection, vulnerability, overcoming fear, or the discovery of new emotional territories. Inspired by personal experience, the project follows two lovers whose relationship falters as one body weakens. Forced to rethink desire, touch and togetherness, they ask how love can endure when intimacy slips away. The work becomes an ode to resilience in intimacy, celebrating the memory of connection and the transformation of love through time, silence and erosion. The body emerges as a territory of memory, love and reinvention. Rain takes multiple forms – summer rain, gold rain, salt rain, blood rain, diamond rain – each reflecting emotional and physical states. Reality, myth and magical realism intertwine as the characters confront time and bodily change to relearn how to love differently. The narrative unfolds in a cyclical, fragmented structure with no beginning or end. Two voices recount the same events from different perspectives, echoing and colliding. Digital rain – drizzle, storms, condensation, suspended drops – becomes a sensitive language: the image turns into texture, the rain into speech. The interactive system, inspired by DJ crossfading, allows audience movement to modulate sound and narration. Spectators wander freely, navigating between voices and emotions. Each visit becomes a unique journey shaped by personal movement and perception. Designed for immersive venues and digital art centers, *Les Gens de la Pluie* blurs the boundaries between performance, installation, and narrative. More than an immersive work, it is a sensory experience where the intimate meets the universal, inviting audiences to listen, feel and perceive rain as an organic language.

Director's Statement

Les Gens de la Pluie was born from a deeply personal experience: mine (Nicolas) and that of my wife Lucie, who has lived with multiple sclerosis for many years. Married over twenty years, our life together has been marked by the gradual progression of an illness that slowly but



profoundly transformed her body and our relationship. In the beginning, our life had the lightness of first times – laughter, travel, shared projects. Lucie was lively, spontaneous, joyful; I was more melancholic and introspective, yet together we balanced each other. Then the illness appeared, insidiously, through diffuse signs: unusual fatigue, numbness and motor difficulties. Months later came the diagnosis: multiple sclerosis – a chronic, unpredictable, degenerative and incurable disease. Some days Lucie would fall for no reason; other days, she could no longer walk far. I supported her as best I could, but the distance between us grew. Sometimes she could not explain what she felt, and I could not fully understand. One day, in a metro station, everything stopped. Lucie could no longer walk. In front of our children, we were frozen, powerless, confronted with the body's betrayal. Later, in a museum, she could not stand, and I had to request a wheelchair – facing embarrassed looks, indifference and lack of empathy. What once seemed occasional became everyday life. The outside world often felt unsuitable, even excluding. The illness also transformed our intimacy. Desire faded – not from lack of love, but from fatigue, fear of causing pain and discomfort with a body that no longer responded as it once did. Tender gestures became rarer, and silence sometimes fell.

Yet, within this transformation, a different form of love emerged: quieter, deeper, resilient. A bond made of presence, gestures, and shared glances, beyond carnal desire. We learned to adapt, to redefine ourselves within a new reality. This harder, uncertain path revealed another beauty: a love not dependent on the body as it was, but on who we became together.

Through the story of two “rain beings” who come together and move apart endlessly, we explore a couple who, despite illness and bodily transformation, continue to love absolutely. Tears become an organic, polymorphous language, gentle, violent, vibrant, or joyful, reflecting the intensity of romantic relationships. Rain serves as a metaphor to redefine intimacy and desire when bodies fail.

Les Gens de la Pluie is universal, exploring the gap between imagined life and reality, the weight of lost dreams, and the adaptations needed to move forward. It addresses maintaining desire and intimacy as bodies change, the fear of no longer desiring or being desired, and the

quest for recognition. It is a story of love confronting bodily limits and the passage of time, luminous in its resilience.

More than a story of resilience, it is a lyrical reflection on love beyond the physical – after 10, 20, or 40 years of shared life. It questions what love truly is, redefining it profoundly.

Like *Ceci Est Mon Coeur*, *Les Gens de la Pluie* explores fragility and intimacy. Where the first work focused on a child reconciling after trauma, this project examines a couple confronting transformation, loss and illness. It reflects on how love and intimacy persist despite faltering bodies, highlighting tenderness, connection and reinvention.

■ Digital rain – drizzle, storms, condensation, suspended drops – becomes a sensitive language: the image turns into texture, the rain into speech.

Why Immersive

The immersive principle of *Les Gens de la Pluie* is based on a two-voice narrative, giving the viewer the freedom to choose the perspective they wish to inhabit. The space is thus divided into two visual and audio territories, reflecting the two components of the couple. By moving, the audience navigates between these two intertwined narratives. Two ways of experiencing the same love story, fragmented, multiple and shifting.

Director's Biography

Nicolas Blies (1981, France) and Stéphane Hueber-Blies (1976, France), also known as Bliesbro, are poets, musicians, filmmakers, producers and

digital artists who work collaboratively across cinema and immersive media. Their practice is characterised by the hybridisation of forms, combining animation, live action, sound and digital technologies. They wrote and directed their first feature film *Zero Impunity* (2019), a hybrid documentary blending animation and real footage, which premiered at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival and screened in official competition at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival. In 2024, the duo released the immersive installation *Ceci Est Mon Cœur* about a child's reconciliation with their body. Combining video mapping and connected clothing, *Ceci Est Mon Cœur* made its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival and was then selected out of competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

Company Profile

a_BAHN is a forward-thinking production company based in Luxembourg, dedicated to blending art, impact, and innovation through immersive storytelling. We excel in creating hybrid narratives, XR experiences, and impact-driven stories, all while maintaining a strong independent vision. Our work has been featured at major festivals and distributed in museums and cultural venues globally.

Current Status

We're currently kicking off the development stage: script writing, concept art, research in technological development... for the release of a proof of concept.

Goals at CineMart

We are primarily looking for immersive venues and distributors.



Stéphane Hueber-Blies, Director

Nicolas Blies, Director



François Le Gall, Producer

Feature: Other (final) | 35 min. | -
Format: Other
Genre: Hybrid, Fiction
Technology: Projections, Mapping
Tech/headset compatibility: Video-projection or LED screens, and headphones
Length: 35 min
Completion date: 2027
Current Status: Concept / Early stage
Based on: Original screenplay by Stéphane Hueber-Blies and Nicolas Blies
Languages: French, English, Luxembourgish (Letzeburgesch)
Budget: €988,000
Financing in place: €228,000
Production Company: a_BAHN
Co-Production Company: Dark Euphoria
Partners attached: Film Fund Luxembourg - Development €150,000
CNC - Development €50,000
a_BAHN (Own investment) €3,000
Dark Euphoria (Own Investment) €25,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

a_BAHN
francois@a-bahn.com
www.a-bahn.com

Hiatus

Laurent Novac

The project Hiatus invites the audience into an immersive experience of nuclear fission. Based on a principle of polyphony, this modern tale invites the user to immerse themselves in both the microscopic and macroscopic scales of a nuclear winter. At any moment, it is possible to shift perspectives and experience the story either as a plant or as a Yokai creature...

Tags: VR, future dystopia, animation

Synopsis

In a distant, lush landscape, nuclear fission has just occurred. Within seconds, the infamous mushroom cloud freezes the atmosphere and suspends space-time, while all around, the explosion releases radioactive energy in massive quantities. The flora has become a no-man’s-land saturated with grey dust and ashes. Daylight is deeply affected: the colour of the sky has changed, plant photosynthesis no longer operates, and the electromagnetic field around vegetation has been altered. We have entered a new dimension, and the conquest led by the omnipresent Kuzuryû has begun. His plan: to seize control of light in order to impose his reign of darkness. As his power rises, the monster is no longer merely a creature, but a place – infinitely expandable. Within this apocalyptic imbalance, long-dormant creatures awaken: the Yokai. The survival of plants, and of life itself, now depends on three Yokai confronting the formidable underworld of Kuzuryû, in their effort to restore the light essential to photosynthesis.

Director's Statement

Hiatus is an immersive virtual reality artwork conceived as a post-apocalyptic polyphonic tale exploring how the world is perceived after a nuclear catastrophe. Set in a deeply altered environment, the experience invites users to successively inhabit multiple points of view: several Yokai creatures as well as a mutant plant named Ophrys. Each perspective radically transforms perception – shapes, textures, sounds, rhythms and movement are procedurally reconfigured – allowing the world to be experienced through distinct sensory and temporal filters. The project emerged from a strong desire to create an experience where body, matter and perception are closely intertwined. Using nuclear fission as a symbolic event rather than a literal narrative device, *Hiatus* questions our relationship to living systems and to invisible forces that traverse both bodies and environments: radiation, energetic flows, electromagnetic signals. By shifting viewpoints, the work challenges habitual modes of perception and invites users to sense the world differently. Beyond its aesthetic and technological ambitions, *Hiatus* raises a fundamental question: what is the contemporary human relationship to life itself? Life here is fragile, destabilised, sometimes silenced, yet still capable of vibrating, emitting and resisting. The artwork encourages attentiveness to these subtle presences and proposes alternative forms

of coexistence, care and perception in a damaged world. The creative process draws inspiration from virtual production methodologies. A custom setup combines live motion capture of a dancer with real-time musical improvisation by a musician. These sessions – already partially completed, with three days of capture and an initial modeling phase of four out of seven creatures – generate rich material in both animation and sound. Working within a real-time engine allows scenes to be replayed, adjusted and evolved continuously throughout the production process. A central artistic challenge lies in the embodiment of viewpoints. Perception is not only altered through visual or sonic filters, but embedded directly into the design of the creatures themselves. Their bodies express specific relationships to space, time and sensation, making interaction a means of experiential understanding – a way to physically feel what it means to inhabit an altered ecosystem. Ultimately, *Hiatus* seeks to make the audience feel rather than explain. Through shifting forms, inhabited soundscapes and moving perspectives, the work explores memory, disruption and the fragile possibility of renewed harmony between human and non-human beings.

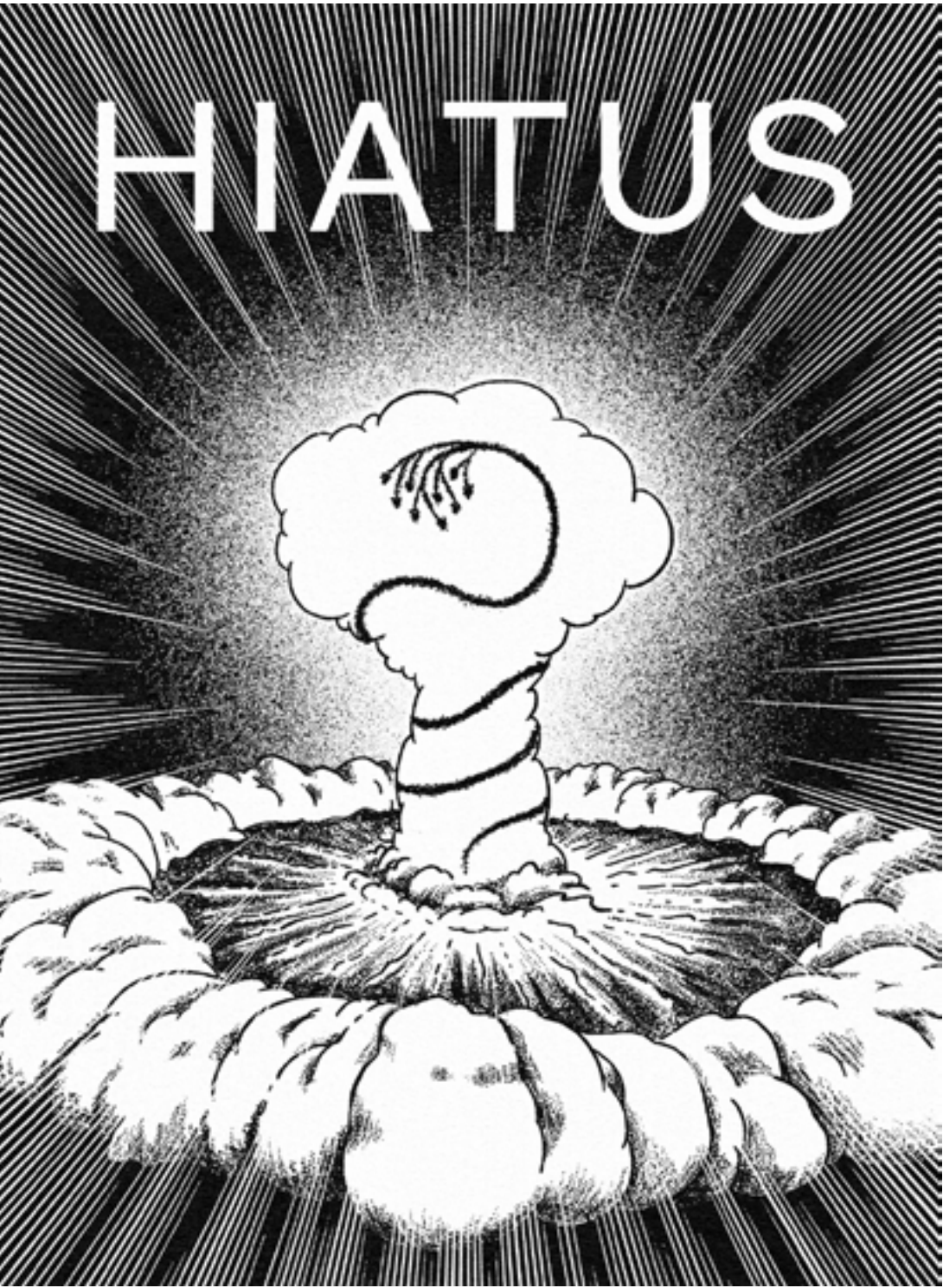
Why Immersive

The immersive format allows *Hiatus* to move beyond linear storytelling, placing the audience inside the experience rather than observing it externally. VR enables an embodied relationship to the narrative, where perception, movement and attention actively shape meaning. By inhabiting different creatures – Yokai and a mutant plant – users experience altered perceptions from within: changes in scale, sound, temporality and sensory filters are felt physically, letting the narrative unfold through sensation rather than explanation. Immersion also deepens our connection to the living world: invisible phenomena like radiation, energy flows, and electromagnetic vibrations become perceptible through spatialised sound, procedural visuals, and interaction. Meaning emerges from presence and engagement, making *Hiatus* an experiential form of storytelling that explores fragility, disruption, and coexistence beyond what traditional cinema can convey.

Using nuclear fission as a symbolic event rather than a literal narrative device, *Hiatus* questions our relationship to living systems and to invisible forces that traverse both bodies and environments: radiation, energetic flows, electromagnetic signals.

Director's Biography

Laurent Novac lives and works in Geneva at the studio z1, which he co-founded with Camille de Dieu in 2016. Alongside his involvement in the supermafia artist collective in Neuchâtel (2004–2013), he studied software engineering to meet the needs of his artistic endeavors. Following this, various collaborations allowed him to work internationally in audiovisual creation. His projects have been showcased at institutions such as SAT (Montreal), Mapping Festival (Geneva), Bam Festival (Liège), Whiteline (Strasbourg, Metz), Harvestworks (NYC), Animal Farm (Saigon, Vietnam), and others. Within the z1 studio, he and Camille de Dieu have created works such as *Otiosi* (Tout Bleu, 2023), *Ever'ett* (2022), *Virtual Crossings* (w/ Cie Gilles Jobin, 2022), *Divine Nature* (2021), *Fear of Murmuration* (2019), *Nova Land* (2018), and more.



Company Profile

Studio z1, founded in Geneva in 2016 by Laurent Novac and Camille de Dieu, creates immersive audiovisual works at the intersection of sound, image, space and technology. Their practice combines real-time systems, digital tools, and performance to explore perception, memory and speculative worlds through sensitive, immersive experiences.

Current Status

Current development focuses on sequence six of the storyboard, “The Alliance”, a pivotal scene that stages the tension between the two narrative forces: between Yokai, emerging from the shadows, and those carrying light. All characters converge in this sequence, while the environment gradually transforms according to the balance of power, fully expressing the project’s visual, sonic, interactive and symbolic ambitions.

The next prototyping phase aims to expand the motion capture sessions with three dancers simultaneously, finalise the remaining creature models, deepen procedural environmental effects and sensory transformations, and complete a full prototype ready for presentation as an immersive, location-based VR installation (LBE).

Goals at CineMart

We are searching for potential co-producers and distribution.



Laurent Novac, Director



Camille De Dieu, Producer



Lucien Salmon, Producer

Feature: VR (final) | 20 min.
Format: VR
Genre: Animation
Technology: VR
Tech/headset compatibility: Meta Quest 3
Lenght: 20 min
Completion date: spring 2027
Current Status: Prototype / In development
Based on: Original screenplay by Laurent Novac
Languages: - none
Budget: €350,000
Financing in place: €100,000
Production Company: Tell me the Story, Z1 Studio
Partners attached: Office Federal de la Culture €50,000
Ville et Canton de Genève €50,000
Seeking partners from: France

Contact

Tell Me The Story
contact@tellmethestory.ch
<https://www.xy-z1.xyz>

DEVELOPMENT

Lueurs intérieures

Bianca Shonee Arroyo-Kreimes,
Philippe Lambert

Lueurs intérieures is a 15-minute VR quest where participants transform into fireflies guided by a holographic elder. It fuses pre-Columbian art and speculative tech to explore memory, environmental care, and ancestral wisdom through synchronised bioluminescence and cultural metamorphosis.

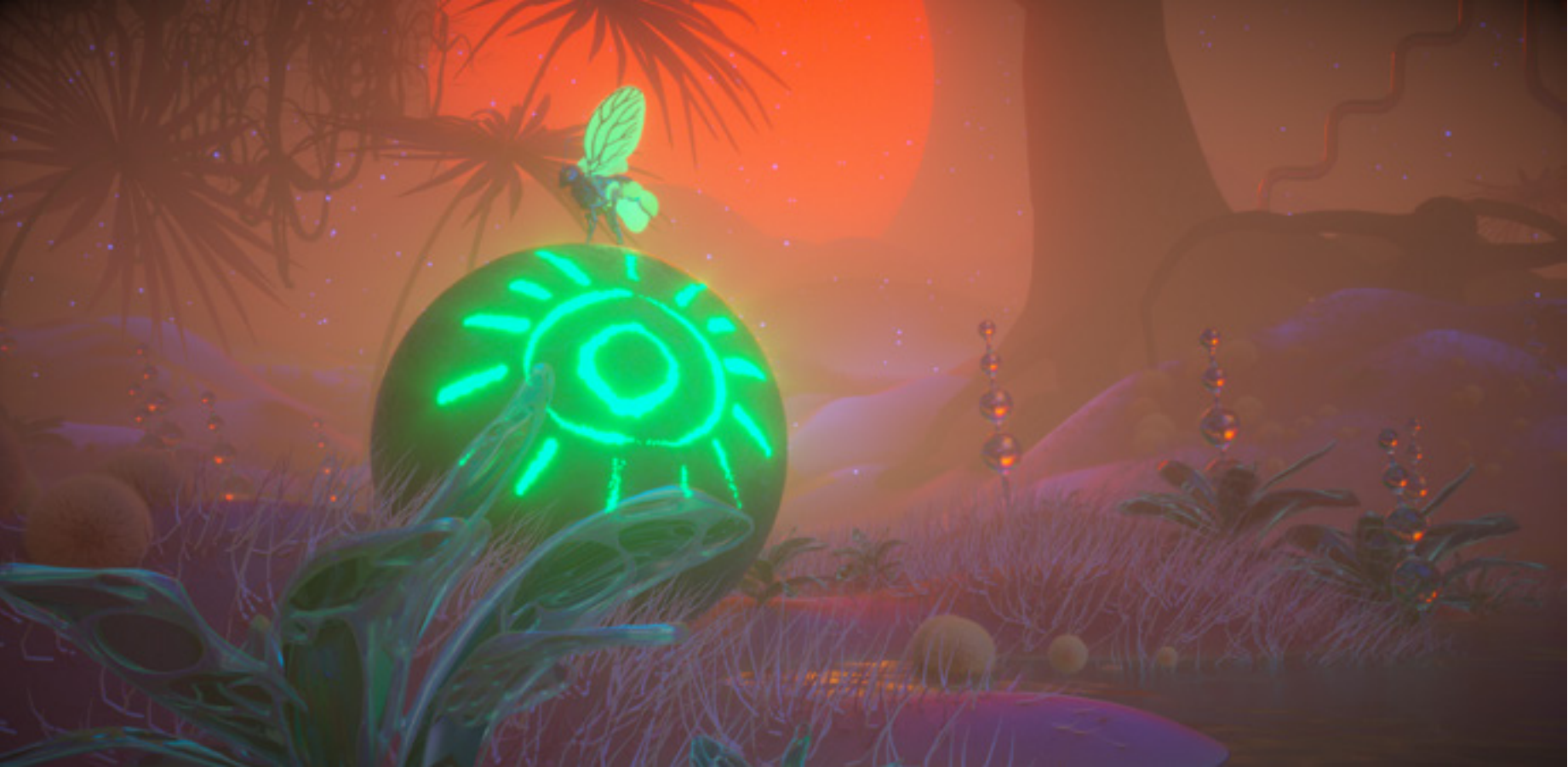
Tags: animation, mesoamerican futurism, environment

Synopsis

Set in a speculative future where the boundaries between technology and nature have blurred, *Lueurs intérieures (Inner Lights)* reimagines a digital vision quest inspired by Costa Rican legends, mesoamerican shapeshifting myths and the threatened bioluminescent communication of real fireflies. The journey begins inside a ceremonial hut, where an elder spirit appears before a fire. The spirit introduces a concept called firefly walking; a ritual designed to reconnect future generations with ecological knowledge and endangered cultural memory. As they speak of creation stories and forgotten languages, the physical hut dissolves into a celestial threshold, guiding the participant toward a transformation. Entering a cocoon-like void, the participant moves through a liminal space where forms continually shift between human, animal and pure light. Pulsing membranes carry encoded patterns that blend native Bribri and Boruca inspired symbols with digital structures. Through rhythmic pressure gestures on a soft object, participants fuel their own metamorphosis, learning to embody a firefly's mode of existence. Emerging as an adult firefly, they enter a vibrant nocturnal rainforest illuminated by natural and artificial light. Scattered through the landscape are ancient stone spheres etched with shifting petroglyphs which represent living repositories of endangered cultural memories. Other fireflies flicker erratically, their communication disrupted by pervasive artificial illumination. By synchronising their bioluminescent rhythms with these disoriented fireflies, participants gradually restore balance to the ecosystem. As each connection is remade, the rainforest brightens, and the encoded memories within the stone spheres awaken with myths, songs and fragments of nearly forgotten languages which emerge as pulses of living light. The experience culminates in a mass synchronisation of thousands of fireflies, a moment where natural and digital patterns merge into a radiant network. *Lueurs intérieures* suggests that cultural wisdom survives not only through preservation, but through adaptive transformation – an ecological metaphor for resilience in an era of environmental and linguistic disappearance.

Director's Statement

I grew up on the edge of a Costa Rican rainforest, where fireflies painted the night with signals I could not decipher, yet instinctively understood. Their presence was a quiet lesson: even without shared language, living beings find ways to find one another. When my family abruptly moved to Canada, I lost not only my homeland but also my mother tongue. Years



later, when I encountered fireflies again in rural Ontario, their soft glow revealed an unexpected continuity, something of my past had followed me into a new world. I later learned that fireflies across the world are disappearing as artificial light interrupts their delicate communication patterns. This loss echoed my own experience of linguistic erasure: just as my Spanish faded from disuse, bioluminescent signals were being drowned out by an ever-brightening world. *Lumières Intérieures (Inner Lights)* emerged from this parallel: a desire to understand how communication breaks down, how memory survives, and how transformation might restore what is slipping away. As a Costa Rican-Canadian artist navigating the space between cultures, I explore how technology mediates our relationship to nature and to ourselves. VR, unlike traditional cinematic tools, enables an embodied form of knowledge: it allows us to momentarily become something else. In *Lumières Intérieures*, participants do not simply observe fireflies; they become one, feeling the fragility and power of bioluminescent communication from within. VR becomes not a spectacle, but a medium of empathy, where transformation is not metaphorical but proprioceptive. Working with composer and co-creator Philippe Lambert, whose generative soundtrack system is based on firefly synchronisation patterns, we explore how sound and light coalesce into a system of collective communication. As participants restore the rhythms of disrupted fireflies, they also reactivate fragments of endangered cultural memory embedded within ancient stone spheres. The final moment of mass synchronisation is both ecological and spiritual: a network of lights re-illuminating itself through community. In a world where light pollution threatens firefly survival and globalisation erodes Indigenous languages, *Lueurs Intérieures* proposes that adaptation, rather than static preservation, is necessary for cultural continuity. By merging ancient knowledge systems with immersive technology, I hope to create a space where participants can reflect on their own lost or endangered connections, to nature, to culture, to one another, and imagine new futures where these lights might shine again.

Why Immersive

Traditional cinema positions viewers as observers, but *Lueurs Intérieures* uses VR to create an embodied transformation. Participants don't watch a firefly's story: they become one, experiencing bioluminescent communication through proprioceptive knowledge rather than visual observation alone. The custom soft-object controller transforms interaction into ritual: rhythmic pressure gestures fuel metamorphosis and enable

synchronisation with other fireflies. This tactile dimension makes the act of restoring ecological balance physically felt, not just witnessed. Most critically, the medium mirrors the message. Just as fireflies communicate through synchronised light patterns, participants actively restore disrupted rhythms through their embodied actions. The final mass synchronisation becomes a collective experience where individual participants recognise themselves as part of a larger network; a sensation of interconnection that passive viewing cannot achieve. By merging haptic feedback, generative sound based on real firefly algorithms, and spatial interaction, VR becomes a medium of empathy and transformation rather than spectacle.

In *Lumières intérieures*, participants do not simply observe fireflies; they become one, feeling the fragility and power of bioluminescent communication from within.

Directors' Biography

Bianca Shonee Arroyo-Kreimes is a multidisciplinary artist based in Montréal. Her practice encompasses interactive installations, digital prints, sculpture and augmented reality, often combining speculative or dystopian futures with motifs drawn from Latin American folklore. Through these hybrid forms, she examines humanity's contradictory relationship with the natural world, weaving together technology, myth and cultural memory. Her work has been exhibited internationally at venues including the International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA), DANAÉ in Paris, William Morris Gallery in London, PRIOR Art Space in Barcelona and OPTICA: centre d'art contemporain in Montréal. She has received several awards supporting emerging practices in digital and speculative art. Philippe Lambert (Canada) is a Montréal-based composer and interactive creator working across

sound, installation and digital media. An alumnus of the National Film Board of Canada's interactive studio, he has contributed to a range of award-winning projects that explore new narrative and sensory forms. His work often focuses on the relationship between sound, space and audience interaction, creating immersive experiences that bridge composition and technology. Lambert's projects have been presented internationally at venues and festivals including La Gaîté Lyrique, Centre Georges Pompidou, IDFA, Tribeca Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival and MUTEK.

Company Profile

Montreal-based prod hub SCINTILLA develops adaptive stories for XR environments with artists, scientists, and developers, focusing on innovation and social impact. *V F C* screened at Cannes NEXT, won at FIVARS, and showed at DOX Prague; while *Poetastr* is a Sheffield Doc/Fest finalist. *Tartupaluk*, by Inuk artist Laakkuluk Williamson, was co-produced with Denmark and exhibited in Berlin and Toronto.

Current Status

We are in the prototype phase.

Goals at CineMart

We are seeking European and Central/South American based co-production partners and creative collaborators specialising in immersive storytelling, Unreal Engine development, and interactive installation design. Our needs include technical support for advanced hand-tracking mechanics, R&D around our tactile/pressure-based controller, and expertise in synchronising VR with projection and lighting systems. We also welcome partnerships with cultural consultants, XR producers, and European institutions interested in supporting the project's international development and installation touring.



Bianca Shonee Arroyo Kreimes, Director



Charles S. Roy, Producer

Feature: VR (final) | 20 min.
Format: VR
Genre: Animation, Hybrid
Technology: MR, Haptics
Tech/headset compatibility: Meta Quest, Stream VR
Lenght: 20 min
Completion date: 2027
Current Status: Prototype / In development
Based on: Original screenplay by Bianca Shonee Arroyo Kreimes and Philippe Lambert
Languages: English, Bribri, Brunca
Budget: €208,815
Financing in place: €81,900
Production Company: SCINTILLA
Partners attached: SODEC Atelier Grand Nord XR Grant €63,000 Canada Arts Council Research & Creation Grant €15,750 SCINTILLA's own investment €3,150
Seeking partners from: Costa Rica, Columbia, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Germany



Contact

<https://scintillaxp.com/en/>

DEVELOPMENT

Mine Land

Katja Verheul

Mine Land is an immersive VR installation placing audiences in a Bosnian minefield with deminers – former enemies now clearing deadly war remnants. Equipped with weighted vests and tools, users kneel, sweep, and probe the soil. When mines are discovered, black-and-white flashbacks expose the buried past, asking: when is a war really over?

Tags: post-conflict, documentary, trauma, justice, soil, pollution

Synopsis

Mine Land places you inside a minefield in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thirty years after the war ended. Dressed in a bulletproof vest and VR headset, you kneel in a forest where yellow tapes marked “MINE!” stretch between trees. You help Amir, a deminer, sweeping with metal detectors and probing soil with authentic tools after demining dogs complete their first sweep. When you discover a mine, the world shifts to black and white. Through fragmented memories, Amir’s story unfolds: as a young soldier in 1995, he laid mines in this forest, shouting at enemies across the hill. One of those voices belonged to the man now beside him – his former enemy, now his colleague and friend. “We became great friends, while for four years we were great enemies,” they laugh together. The flashbacks reveal Amir’s injury from a booby-trapped mine, and years later, his body still remembers: in a cornfield, he throws himself down, expecting an explosion. The trauma remains buried in his body, just as mines remain buried in soil. Recent conflicts have seen nations withdraw from landmine ban treaties despite international agreements. *Mine Land* confronts a disturbing reality: while Bosnia struggles to clear minefields three decades later, new mines are being laid in active war zones, creating minefields that will claim victims for generations. Through Amir’s story of dismantling weapons he once planted, working daily alongside his former enemy in life-threatening conditions, *Mine Land* explores how reconciliation unfolds through dangerous labor. Their collaboration becomes a meditation on responsibility, forgiveness, and peace – while asking urgent questions about our failure to prevent new minefields. The minefield becomes a map, revealing thirty years of clearance work. Finally, we see locals using the land again, freed from its deadly past. Yet the experience reminds us: while ground may be cleared, human trauma remains buried. The scars in Amir’s body and mind persist. When is a war really over?

Director's Statement

As a child, I grew up with stories from my grandfather, a resistance hero, and my father, who reported on wars for Dutch television. Both left a deep impression and form the basis for my research into war and the damage that remains. An important question in my work is: what is the impact of war on humans and nature? This quest resulted in projects like *Toni and Bleri* (2018) and *What is Left Behind* (2026). But my first visit to a minefield in Kosovo in 2017



fundamentally changed my perspective. I was deeply impressed by what was still hidden, deadly remnants waiting beneath a peaceful surface. The meticulous process of scanning kilometers of ground revealed a reality invisible to most of the world. What struck me most were young deminers sweating in the burning sun, who hadn’t experienced the war but were confronted daily with its consequences. Their work embodied a profound truth: war doesn’t end when the guns fall silent. It continues, hidden beneath the earth, claiming new victims decades later. My visit to the minefield in Čelić, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in summer 2025 crystallised the concept for *Mine Land*. Standing in that forest, wearing a bulletproof vest in 40-degree heat, watching barrier tapes marked “MINE!” sway in the breeze, I experienced the absurdity and terror of invisible violence. The bright yellow ribbons marked boundaries between safety and death. As a filmmaker, I’ve always struggled with the limitations of the flat screen. How do you convey the physical tension of kneeling in a minefield? How do you capture the weight of a bulletproof vest, the muffled sounds through a visor, the amplified sound of your own breathing? Traditional documentary forms couldn’t transport viewers into this reality, they could only observe from a safe distance. Virtual reality offered the solution. VR allows me to truly take users to the places I’ve visited, to let them meet the people I’ve spoken with, and to share experiences that cannot be captured within traditional frames. By physically placing users inside a recreated minefield – complete with barrier tapes, scattered leaves, authentic tools, and weighted vests – *Mine Land* transforms observation into embodied experience. The urgency has only intensified. Thirty years after the Bosnian war, large areas remain inaccessible and continue to claim victims. Recent developments are deeply troubling: the US delivered anti-personnel mines to Ukraine despite international treaties, and Poland and the Baltic states withdrew from the landmine ban treaty in March 2025. New wars are creating fresh minefields even as we struggle to clear old ones. *Mine Land* asks a fundamental question: when is a war really over? Through the story of a former soldier now dismantling the very mines he once laid, working alongside his former enemy, the project reveals how reconciliation happens through daily, dangerous work. Their collaboration offers a powerful meditation on responsibility, forgiveness, and the long path toward peace. By blurring boundaries between documentary, installation, and participatory art, *Mine Land* becomes transformative – an experience designed to resonate long after the VR headset is removed, challenging viewers to consider their relationship to conflict, trauma and our collective responsibility for war’s invisible legacies.

Why Immersive

As a filmmaker, I’ve struggled with flat screen limitations. How do you convey kneeling in a minefield? The weight of a bulletproof vest, muffled

sounds through a visor, amplified breathing? Traditional documentary keeps viewers at safe distance. VR transforms observation into lived experience. By placing users inside a recreated minefield with barrier tapes, tools, and weighted vests, *Mine Land* makes war’s invisible legacy tangible. The vest restricts movement, creating vulnerability deminers feel daily. The immersive format lets users perform demining steps – sweeping with metal detectors, probing soil, facing tense discovery moments. This embodied participation creates empathy impossible through passive viewing. When users kneel beside a former soldier dismantling mines he once laid, working alongside his former enemy, reconciliation becomes personal. VR makes inaccessible places visible – users safely enter dangerous minefields, understanding landscapes that remain deadly decades after conflict. By blurring boundaries between documentary, installation and participatory art, *Mine Land* challenges viewers to consider their relationship to conflict, trauma and collective responsibility for war’s hidden legacies.

By physically placing users inside a recreated minefield – complete with barrier tapes, scattered leaves, authentic tools, and weighted vests – *Mine Land* transforms observation into embodied experience.

Director's Biography

Katja Verheul (1988, Netherlands) is a researcher, visual artist and filmmaker based in Amsterdam. She holds a Bachelor of Audio-Visual Arts from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and a Master of Fine Arts from Goldsmiths University. While at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, she directed the short *The Process* (2014). In 2017, she collaborated with artist Jane Chan for her short film *Where is the riot at?* (2017). *Toni and Bleri* premiered at the 2019 Visions du Réel. Verheul directed *Maiden* (2019) during her residency at YARAT Contemporary Art Space in Baku, Azerbaijan. Her fifth

short, *Improvised Objects*, had its world premiere at IFFR 2021. She was a resident at the Jan van Eyck Academie (2018–2019), a participant at VISIO – European Identities, New Geographies in Artist Film and Video (2018), FilmForward (2020–2021) and Rotterdam Writers’ Rooms (2024).

Company Profile

Katja Verheul is a Rotterdam-based filmmaker and artistic archeologist investigating war’s lasting impact on humans and nature. Through long-term research and immersive storytelling, she excavates recent history to make invisible legacies visible. Her work has been shown at IFFR, Visions du Réel, Eye Filmmuseum, and internationally, examining what remains after conflict ends.

Current Status

Mine Land is in development. We secured funding from CBK Rotterdam, Creative Industry Fund NL, the Netherlands Film Fund and Mondriaan Fund to create a teaser and conduct technical tests. In August 2025, we documented a minefield in Čelić, Bosnia with Norwegian People’s Aid and interviewed their deminers. We’re now developing the complete VR script, refining the narrative structure, and preparing for full production, pending additional financing.

Goals at CineMart

Mine Land seeks producers in the Netherlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and internationally – co-producers interested in immersive documentary and post-conflict themes to help secure financing and distribution. Lightroom offers opportunities to connect with producers, collaborate with VR creators, gain technical expertise, and access international distribution networks. We’re interested in meeting festival programmers, cultural institutions, and conflict legacy project partners. Post-Lightroom, we aim to secure funding and partnerships for screenings at festivals, museums, and demining sites, bringing *Mine Land* to global audiences as an artistic and educational experience.



Katja Verheul, Director

Feature: VR (final) | 25 min.
Format: VR
Genre: Creative Documentary
Technology: VR, 360/180 Video
Tech/headset compatibility: Meta Quest 3
Lenght: 25 min
Completion date: 2027 Current
Status: Prototype / In development
Based on: Original Screenplay by Katja Verheul
Languages: Bosnian
Budget: €120,000
Financing in place: €30,000
Production Company: Katja Verheul
Produced by: Katja Verheul
Partners attached: CBK Rotterdam 2024 €7,500 Mondriaan Fonds 2024 €2,500 Stimuleringsfonds 2025 €20,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

Katja Verheul
katjaverheul@gmail.com
www.katjaverheul.com

Cléo

克萊歐

Coco Chen

A 30-minute multiplayer Mixed Reality (MR) performance combining live dance with digital avatars, exploring female identity under the algorithmic gaze. The dancer engages with her virtual self, guiding the audience through the tension between embodied presence and digital reflection, inviting them to experience identity as a relational, immersive phenomenon.

Tags: MR, female identity, digital gaze

Synopsis

Cléo is a performance that integrates Mixed Reality and live dance, inspired by Agnès Varda's 1962 film *Cléo from 5 to 7*. In the original film, Cléo gradually becomes aware of how the gaze of others shapes her perception and sense of self. *Cléo* reimagines this inquiry in a contemporary digital context.

Set in a Mixed Reality space, the performance follows a dancer portraying Cléo as she interacts with a virtual reflection of herself. The avatar is designed to reflect the aesthetics and dynamics of social media, responding to, resisting and mirroring the dancer's movements. Through these interactions, the piece examines the construction and negotiation of female identity under constant visibility and systemic digital observation.

Audiences experience Cléo's journey in a shared spatial environment, where they are simultaneously observers and participants. Motion capture, spatialised sound, and multi-user interaction enable the audience to witness and engage with the tensions between physical embodiment and virtual representation. The performance interrogates how identity is mediated, performed and perceived in digital spaces, and how presence, action, and interaction can reveal aspects of selfhood that cinema alone cannot convey.

Cléo addresses questions about visibility, embodiment, and authenticity in the digital era. It asks: How does the body negotiate between self-perception and externally imposed expectations? Through the MR medium, these questions are made tangible, allowing audiences to explore the interplay between physical and digital selves in real time.

Director's Statement

As a creator growing up in a world saturated with digital media and social networks, the presence of another self living in virtual spaces feels natural. *Cléo* explores this contemporary phenomenon through Mixed Reality, reflecting how identity navigates between physical and digital realms. By positioning a female protagonist within these digital interfaces – smartphones, tablets, computer screens and VR headsets – the work examines how algorithms amplify scrutiny of women's bodies, appearance and social identity.

The performance centers on the interaction between Cléo, the live dancer, and her virtual projection – an imagined, idealised version of herself. This relationship dramatises the tension between self-perception and external expectations, highlighting the push and pull between personal authenticity and societal judgment. The live dance reinforces

the physical presence of the performer, while the real-world room installation anchors the virtual space, creating a tangible point of reference for audiences. Participants are invited to assume the role of the gaze, witnessing and negotiating the friction between corporeal reality and virtual fantasy. The visual design underscores this duality: hand-drawn animation juxtaposed with live video evokes the sensation of reading the protagonist's private diary. Sketchy, ghostly lines and the persistent avatar seem to reach for the dancer, mirroring the inescapable pressures of observation. The MR environment transforms spectators into active participants, allowing them to inhabit a space where looking and being looked at coexist. This relational engagement illuminates how identity fractures, duplicates, and negotiates itself within a digital context. *Cléo* is ultimately an inquiry into contemporary femininity and selfhood. By situating the audience within a shared virtual-physical space, the work invites reflection on how much of identity is chosen, inherited, or imposed, and how presence, embodiment, and performance can reclaim agency in a hyper-visible, algorithmically mediated world. It asks: what does it mean to inhabit oneself when digital projections constantly define who we are? Through this exploration, the performance offers a space to experience, witness, and question the pressures that shape modern identity.

Why Immersive

MR's room-scale movement, spatialised sound and multi-user interaction dissolve boundaries between performer and spectator. Audiences experience Cléo's journey bodily, simultaneously observing and being observed. Immersion transforms the narrative from cinematic reflection into a lived, relational encounter, making the pressures of contemporary femininity tangible and amplifying the work's conceptual stakes.

Director's Biography

Coco Chen (Taiwan, 1998) is a new media artist working in XR (VR, AR, MR). She explores the intersections of body, gender, and digital technology, creating immersive experiences that investigate identity, self-perception, and the tension between real and virtual. Her recent works include the XR performance *Cléo* and the VR interactive animation *About Your Death*.

In the original *Cleo from 5 to 7*, Cléo gradually becomes aware of how the gaze of others shapes her perception and sense of self. *Cléo* reimagines this inquiry in a contemporary digital context.

Company Profile

Founded in 2008, Digital Art Foundation has been dedicated to exploring and experimenting with creative thinking in technological society, conducting projects including curating, technology research and development, education, policy planning, publication, and international art projects. Digital Art Foundation is the organizer of DAC.tw, focusing on the application and the experiment on VR and AR.

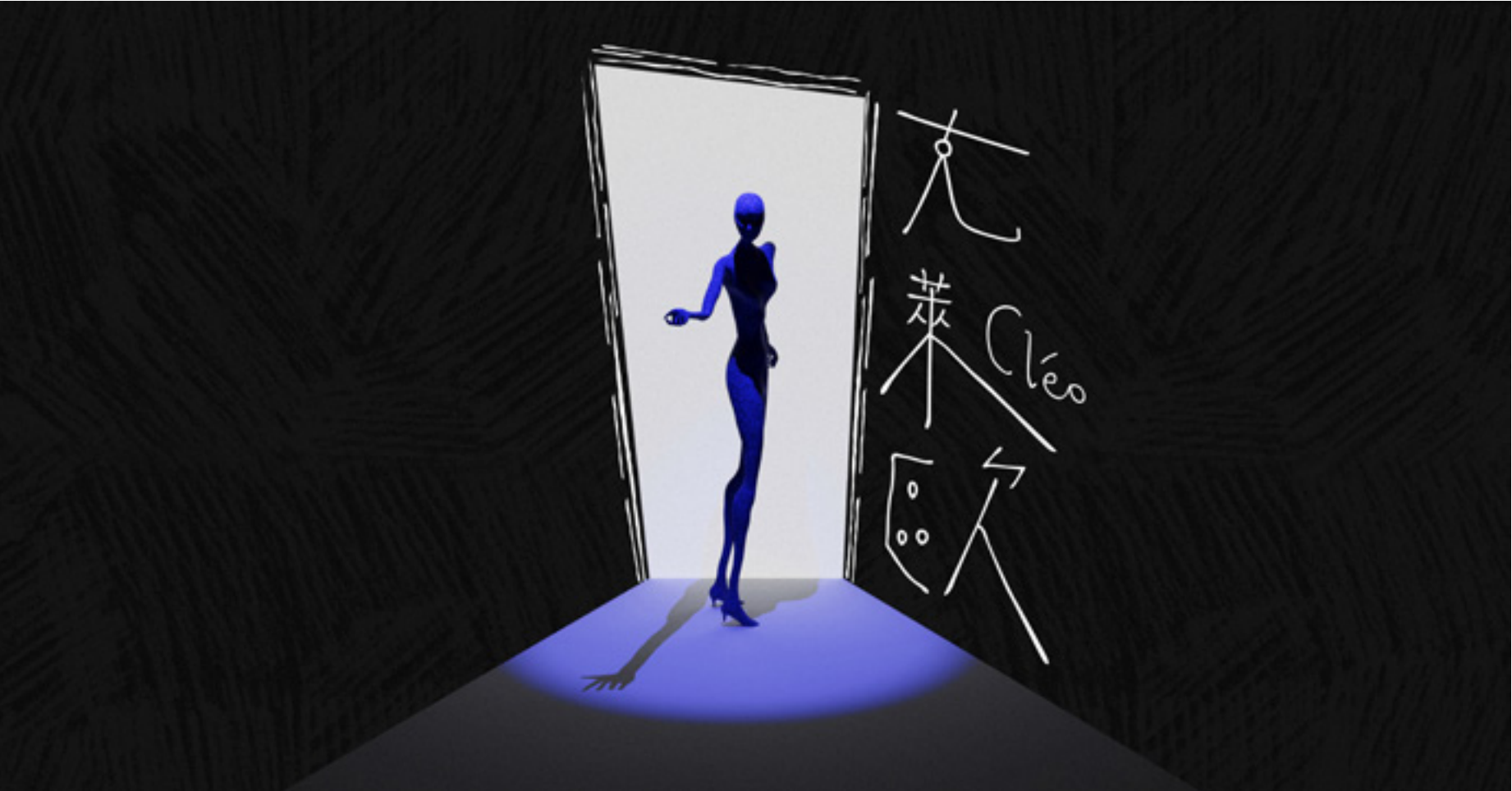
Current Status

Cléo is currently in the final stage of production. The motion capture, interaction system, and mixed reality environments have been completed, and we are now refining choreography, narrative flow and multi-user synchronisation. We are seeking opportunities through Lightroom to present the work, connect with programmers and partners, and prepare for its premiere and international touring.

Goals at CineMart

At Lightroom, our goal is to establish a sustainable circulation model for *Cléo*, a hybrid of live performance and Mixed Reality. We are specifically seeking:

1. Presentation partners: festivals and venues capable of hosting the work with full technical support and professional artist fees.
2. Technical exchange: residencies or partners specialising in dance dramaturgy and motion interaction to assist with site-specific adaptations.
3. Strategic alignment: connecting with European partners and funders for potential co-production and long-term international visibility.



Coco Chen,
Director



Jolene Hsiao,
Producer



Tsung Hsuan Yeh,
Performer

Feature: VR (final) | 30 min.
Format: VR
Genre: Animation
Technology: MR
Tech/headset compatibility: Meta Quest 3
Lenght: 30 min
Completion date: 06/2026
Current Status: Finished / Distribution
Based on: Original screenplay by Coco Chen
Languages: English
Budget: €20,000
Financing in place: €20,000
Production Company: Digital Art Foundation, National Performing Arts Center- National Taichung Theater
Partners attached: National Perming Arts Center - National Taichung Theater €20,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

Digital Art Foundation
jolene@dac.tw
<https://dac.tw/>

WIP

The Demise of the ISS Leonardo

Davide Maria Emanuel Cocchiara

Cooperation is the only antidote in *The Demise of the ISS Leonardo*: a collaborative co-located multi-user investigative experience where users act as forensic investigators uncovering the causes behind the collapse of a German-Italian touristic space station.

Tags: investigative, collaborative, sci-fi

Synopsis

The Demise of the ISS Leonardo is a collaborative MR/VR investigative experience in which users act as forensic investigators uncovering the causes behind the collapse of a futuristic German-Italian touristic space station. Starting with an XR onboarding, users are immediately placed within the investigation with a disaster briefing. The story unfolds through a supernatural narrative device that allows users to peer into the memories of deceased crew members. These memories are fragmented, biased and often contradictory, forcing participants to question what they witness. At its core lies a central question: how do prejudice, corruption and mismanagement destroy communities from within? Users must pay attention to character flaws, systemic failures, and the social and material breakdowns that ultimately led to disaster. The project adopts a stark black-and-white, comic-book-inspired aesthetic and language. This enables surreal elements to take place such as thoughts of characters being heard, or frames-within-frames appearing in the scene. The stylisation favours emotional clarity and moral ambiguity over realism, reinforcing that a seemingly monochrome world is full of gray areas. Up to four users collaborate together, co-located in the same physical space. They can freely move through memory scenes as if standing on a stage. After an observation phase, participants collect clues embedded in the environment and place them on a shared deduction board. Correctly connecting these elements unlocks new context and advances the narrative, actively encouraging discussion and cooperation. Crucially, participants do not all perceive the same information. Each user encounters partial perspectives – hidden thoughts, altered viewpoints, or missing details – making collaboration essential. XR uniquely allows participants to stand side by side, look in the same direction, yet experience different realities at once. In a multicultural environment marked by clashing languages, cultures and interests, the story presents miscommunication and unspoken power dynamics as catalysts for collapse. Rather than presenting a single villain, we display how diffuse responsibility, secrecy and systemic corruption produce disasters where accountability becomes elusive. By foregrounding collaboration as the only path to truth, we position dialogue as an antidote to the dysfunctional social system portrayed, and aim to spark lasting conversations beyond the experience itself.

Director's Statement

The Demise of the ISS Leonardo explores how communities erode from within under the pressure of prejudice and corruption. Set aboard a fictional international touristic space station, the project uses a



speculative setting to depict a multi-layered, multicultural microcosm of society: one shaped by contradictions, power dynamics, self-interest and fragile human bonds familiar from real-world structures such as offices, universities or political systems. Rooted in our perspective as young Italian creators working with cutting-edge XR technologies, the narrative draws from lived experiences of navigating rigid hierarchies, ageism, and systemic stagnation. These dynamics ultimately pushed us to leave Italy and build our careers in a more cosmopolitan European context. Since we now collaborate across borders we are deeply aware of both the beauty and the fragility of cross-cultural collaboration. As well as the biases, assumptions and unspoken divisions that can undermine it. The experience emphasises that people are fundamentally the same, even while societies may be structured differently. Through fragmented viewpoints and shifting perspectives, participants are encouraged to recognise how easily individuals can be demonised when only partial information is available. Rather than assigning blame to characters, the narrative places responsibility on systems and structures that enable dysfunction. The immersive, collaborative MR/VR format is central to this message. Participants share the same space but experience different perspectives, forcing them to listen, discuss and reconcile conflicting interpretations. Only through collaboration – the very antidote absent within the story world – can they uncover the truth behind the station's downfall. In a visually stark, monochrome aesthetic inspired by Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* and the horror comics series *Dylan Dog*, apparent moral simplicity gradually dissolves into shades of human fallibility.

Why Immersive

The immersive format transforms the project from a story that is observed into one that is actively inhabited. Instead of passively watching events unfold, participants step inside a fragmented, multi-perspective investigation, embodying the role of investigators sent to uncover the station's demise. By physically exploring stylised memory scenes, peering into the subjective recollections of deceased crew

members, and collaboratively reconstructing events, the narrative becomes experiential rather than linear. The collaborative XR setup – where participants see different fragments and must piece them together – mirrors how prejudice and mismanagement emerge from partial perspectives. It is crucial for users to participate actively in the story, establish theories and collaborate. Most of the experience will change for each group, depending on how they interact with each other, based on how they perceive the story from their personal biases. The stylised art style allows representation through symbolism and impactful stylised emotion. Interactivity, spatial presence and shared reasoning elevate the conceptual impact beyond traditional cinema, turning the narrative into a collective act of investigation and reflection rather than a fixed, authored viewpoint.

Director's Biography

Davide Maria Emanuel Cocchiara (Italy) is an XR experience and game developer and producer based in Nuremberg, Germany. He is the co-founder and Creative Director of Abduct Media, an XR-focused development studio he founded with his brother Giovanni in 2024, following the successful funding of a game project by FFF Bayern. He is currently leading the development and production of the investigative XR experience *The Demise of the ISS Leonardo*, co-producing the international documentary project *Library of Dreams*, and developing the XR game *Interdimensional Mailmen*. Trained in computer science at the University of Trento, Cocchiara combines technical research with creative practice and occasionally lectures on XR design and Unreal Engine-based production.

At its core lies a central question: how do prejudice, corruption and mismanagement destroy communities from within?

Company Profile

Abduct Media is an XR development studio based in Nürnberg, Germany. With a strong computer science basis, we are dedicated to innovative storytelling that resonates with a global audience while highlighting European cultural touchstones. We are currently working on the internationally co-produced documentary *Library of Dreams* and the XR strategy game *Interdimensional Mailmen*.

Current Status

Our completed 15-minute prototype successfully overcame all technical and artistic challenges related to project feasibility. The artstyle, complex MR multiplayer interactions, story beats, characters and narrative mood are established. For production, we seek to reunite these elements into a 50-minute narrative. Current scenes and pacing serve as proof of concept. Using the same technological basis, all mocap, voice acting and environments will be expanded and modified. An optimisation pass and shader work to improve visual quality are planned within the production budget.

Goals at CineMart

We seek additional financing, global distribution partners beyond the Benelux and strong technical collaborators. In particular, we are looking for a creative co-producer with access to funding and an international network, ideally connected to a leading animation studio known for narrative-driven, visually distinctive work. This partner should help elevate the visual storytelling to match the level of interactivity. We are especially interested in experts and producers with deep experience in performance capture, motion capture and animation, and with a proven mixed-media approach within VR/XR/MR.



Davide Maria Emanuel Cocchiara, Director



Eline van Lint, Producer



Giovanni Cocchiara, Producer

Feature: VR (final) | 50 min.
Format: VR
Genre: Fiction
Technology: MR, VR, AR
Tech/headset compatibility: Meta Quest 3, Quest 3S, PICO 4 Ultra
Length: 50 min
Completion date: Q1 2027
Current Status: Prototype / In development
Based on: Original screenplay by Davide Maria Emanuel Cocchiara
Languages: English, Italian, German
Budget: €210,000
Financing in place: €55,500
Production Company: UPscaleXR
Co-Production Company: Abduct Media
Partners attached: FFF Bayern, Prototype fund €37,500
Abduct Media & UpscaleXR €17,500
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

UPscaleXR
eline@upscalexr.nl
<https://abduct.media>

Jarkov

Maya Watanabe

Jarkov, a remarkably well-preserved 20,000-year-old woolly mammoth encased in a Siberian permafrost tunnel, becomes the focal point for exploring time and matter beyond human grasp.

Tags: mammoth, siberia, permafrost, underground, darkness, time

Synopsis

Over the last two decades, the Arctic permafrost has lost one meter of ground each year. As it melts, it uncovers carcasses from the Pleistocene Epoch. Buried in ice for millennia, these frozen bodies appear remarkably well preserved from time and material decay, sometimes maintaining fur, skin, and internal organs intact.

Jarkov is a complete woolly mammoth who died 20,000 years ago. Upon discovery, instead of being excavated, he was removed as a single, solid mass along with the surrounding soil. As a result, the mammoth remains are encased in a block of permafrost, only displaying visible patches of skin and hair on the surface, as well as two tusks protruding from it.

Carved from the permafrost in northern Siberia, an underground tunnel houses the 23-ton block containing Jarkov. The frozen subterranean cavern maintains a constant temperature of -12 °C throughout the year, preventing the block from thawing.

Why Immersive

I usually work with video installations that integrate architecture into the viewer's experience. In this specific case, the installation's proposal is to create a room within a room. This 'nested' room is tilted at a slight angle to create a subtle sense of spatial disorientation. This tilted gravity seeks to enhance the sense of losing references to time and space. The video, with its darkness and constant motion, already suggests this intention, so the installation is a way to alter the coordinates of space in a bodily way that acts upon the senses. The sound is also working towards that by using very low frequencies that are felt in the body rather than heard. The idea is to create an experience rather than a video projection, and to alter the space using the video as an architectural element, modifying the geometry of the space itself and leaving behind the fixed place of a "screen". I want to modify how the space is felt in a very subtle way to install a "doubt", a sense of mistrust or suspicion of something being out of balance. The infiltration of doubt also introduces the idea of the impenetrable or the obscure, which is also present in the video in relation to time and temporalities.

Director's Statement

Alongside dinosaurs, woolly mammoths are emblems of prehistoric times. Merely mentioning them evokes deep time and extinction.

My work derives from an intimate engagement with death, mortality, and their aftermaths. It follows a documentary impulse, drawing me



toward first-hand experiences of recording and engaging directly with dead bodies. This direct contact is essential, as it involves confronting death's materiality itself, rethinking our relationship with it, and reconsidering its visual representation. Central to my work is the relationship between a living being—myself—and a corpse, mediated by a meaning-making device: the camera. Under specific conditions, these encounters open the possibility for alternative logics of representation to emerge from the corpse's resistance to visual legibility, challenging traditional ways of seeing and depicting.

In this case, the encounter between myself—a 42-year-old living human—and Jarkov, a 20,000-year-old prehistoric creature, establishes a relationship between two separate historical narratives and time scales: recorded human history and natural history, human lifespan and deep time. The human lifespan marks the duration and scope of human memory, as well as the temporality that defines the reach of recorded history. Conversely, Jarkov's temporality falls within the notion of deep time and the category of natural history. Labelling these categories as separate serves here only as a starting point for collapsing the distinction between them and for questioning notions of presence, memory, and history beyond human temporality, intelligibility, and representability.

This questioning extends into notions of darkness and the underground, which in the Western imagination have long been figured as irrational, barbarian, and subordinated—associations embedded in a global spatial and racial order. Within this framework, the underground holds both literal and symbolic implications. As a physical space, it is a place devoid of sunlight, existing primarily in darkness.

The Jarkov mammoth remains partially hidden, and it is this concealment that raises questions about the reach and limits of human time and memory. Although preserved—a bearer of the (de-)extinction imaginary—Jarkov is buried inside a block of permafrost. The mass of sediment

that surrounds him denies visual access; apart from his bony tusks, his state of preservation can only be glimpsed through the fur protruding from the block. His suspended, undecayed body seems to shatter time's passage as a decomposing force, opening the possibility of a different relation to time. In our shared imagination, the haunting mammoth almost permeates the present, becoming coetaneous with us.

The video depicts an abyssal black space. A few glares of light and starkly contrasted shapes appear as the camera wanders through an underground tunnel. The darkness obscuring the frame does not empty the space; instead, it materialises the obscured and subterranean as a generative domain, beyond the logics that impose light, surface, and visibility as mandates.

Playing with light and shadow to articulate depth, time, and space does not perpetuate the humanistic idea of lightness and shadow as antagonistic forces. Quite the opposite. I propose darkness as generative, obstructed visibility—one capable of provoking a disorienting reflection on cognitive and visual intelligibility. It is a bet on what matter and time can mean beyond human lifespan and finitude, positioned through a camera held in vulnerable, humble relation to what escapes full sight.

Director's Biography

Maya Watanabe (1983, Peru) is a visual artist and filmmaker working primarily with video installation. Her work explores perception, violence and the limits

of representation, often through spatialised moving-image environments. She has presented work at institutions including De Pont Museum in Tilburg, MAXXI in Rome, Sharjah Art Foundation, Palais de Tokyo in Paris, Fridericianum in Kassel, Mori Art Museum in Tokyo and MASP in São Paulo. Her work has also been shown at international biennials and festivals such as Manifesta, Videobrasil and the Havana Biennial. Based in Amsterdam, Watanabe teaches at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and is currently a PhD researcher at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Company Profile

Fondazione In Between Art Film was founded by Beatrice Bulgari in 2019 with a cultural programme focused on the role of contemporary moving images and the support of international artists, institutions, and research centres exploring the dialogue between different disciplines. It investigates the boundaries of time-based media through commissions, acquisitions and institutional collaborations.

Current Status

The project is almost finished.

Goals at CineMart

I would like to connect with potential venues in which I could show the work once it is finished.



Maya Watanabe, Director



Leonardo Bigazzi, Producer

Feature: Other (final) | 25 min.

Current Status: Prototype /

In development

Based on: Original screenplay by Maya Watanabe

Languages:

Budget: €50,000

Financing in place: €50,000

Production Company:

Fondazione In Between Art Film

Co-Production Company:

Mori Art Museum

Partners attached:

Fondazione in Between Art Film

€20,000

Mori Art Museum €6,000

Mondriaan Funds €24,000

Seeking partners from:

Worldwide



Nox

Rio Nakada

Nox is an immersive XR narrative in which the audience enters the internal world of a teenage girl struggling with trauma, social anxiety and dissociation. Instead of observing her from a distance, viewers inhabit the same fluctuating psychological space, where memory, identity, and emotion manifest as shifting light, sound and atmosphere.

Tags: PTSD, women, mental

Synopsis

Nox is an immersive XR work inspired by the director's lived experiences with complex PTSD, social anxiety, hallucinations, and dissociation. Moving beyond a linear plot, the film unfolds from a deeply subjective perspective, inviting audiences into a fragile psychological space where memory, sensation, and identity constantly shift. Reality is presented not as a stable surface, but as a trembling landscape of emotion. The story begins in a quiet bedroom, where the teenage protagonist battles crushing loneliness through a single companion: an invisible imaginary friend. She engages in an imagined dialogue – writing letters and replies – to cope with her isolation. The setting then shifts to her former elementary school, visualising the emotional violence of society where words and glances become sharp scissors that wound without visible scars, forcing the girl to retreat into an inner safe zone. As a survival mechanism against overwhelming fear and pain, she begins to split into multiple personalities: a childlike self, a composed self, and a furious self. Dissociation becomes a structural defence. A later scene transports the audience to an aeroplane, visualising profound derealisation and depersonalisation. The girl observes her life from a distance, her body and thoughts uncontrollable, as if she is floating outside herself. Here, she sees a child made of flowers – a past, innocent version of herself she abandoned to survive – crying softly. She realises this part never vanished but was quietly waiting. The protagonist eventually finds a safe space, a gentle, living warmth reminiscent of a mother's embrace. In this sanctuary, she remembers her original self: a being without fear or defence, simply existing. She makes a critical decision: "I will return. I will come back to myself." Her long inner journey culminates in an encounter with one final fragmented self – an exhausted young girl carrying the weight of all the suffering the protagonist had tried to ignore. This personality had been her protector for years. The protagonist kneels, apologises, and whispers, "You no longer have to fight." The injured girl dissolves into light, returning to the protagonist's inner world, no longer separate.

Director's Statement

Although *Nox* is fictional, it is also documentary in nature. The director truly lived with imaginary companions, visual distortions, dissociation, agoraphobia, and prolonged emotional paralysis. Crowded spaces caused nausea; the line between imagination and reality disappeared. She experienced multiple personalities and produced countless self-portraits that resembled monsters. All of these inner experiences

are represented in XR as subjective landscapes rather than symbolic metaphors. Using Unity, Quill, RealSense, and cross-modal interaction, memories become spatial and tactile forms rather than narrative descriptions. The work does not seek entertainment; it seeks resonance – emotional, physical, and psychological. We all wish to live in the light. Yet many of us carry invisible shadows. These shadows are not signs of shame or weakness, but evidence that we have endured and survived. *Nox* does not attempt to erase pain. Instead, it gently sits beside it, whispering: "Even so, you are allowed to exist." It is a journey of returning home – not to normality, but to oneself.

Why Immersive

In *Nox*, psychological states are not illustrated through dialogue or montage. Instead, the environment itself reflects the instability of identity: rooms dissolve, objects distort, time fragments, and pathways appear or disappear based on the protagonist's emotional state. Rather than explaining dissociation, XR allows the audience to feel it directly – vision loses clarity, body ownership weakens and sound detaches from meaning. This subjective access is difficult to achieve in conventional film. The immersive format also reduces the psychological distance between viewer and character. Instead of consuming a narrative, the audience coexists with the protagonist, sharing isolation, safety, or memory recovery from within the same experiential space. The story becomes internal rather than observational. Viewers often discover personal

associations: their own memories, anxieties, or forgotten emotional wounds surface as they navigate the environment. In this way, XR expands storytelling from representation to interoception, inviting the audience to reconstruct emotions within themselves. The result is a deeper, more lasting narrative resonance that exceeds the limits of traditional cinema.

■ We all wish to live in the light. Yet many of us carry invisible shadows. These shadows are not signs of shame or weakness, but evidence that we have endured and survived.

Director's Biography

Rio Nakada (2008, Japan) is a media artist based in Tokyo whose work explores the intersection of art and technology through XR practices. Integrating haptics, sound and moving image, her projects investigate the reconstruction of inner worlds and sensory fluctuation, with a particular focus on psychological states such as PTSD, dissociation and altered perception. She has been selected for the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs' Media Arts Creator Development

Support Program and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's Soufu Creator Support Program. Her work has been presented in academic and interactive research contexts, and she continues to explore new experiential forms that enable audiences to engage with the inner experiences of others.

Company Profile

For this project, an independent team has come together, centered around artist Rio Nakada.

Current Status

The production is currently in the final stages, with the CG expression of each scene being polished and the interaction parts being developed and implemented.

Goals at CineMart

The film is already nearing completion, so from March 2026 onwards, we will be looking for exhibition venues, international distribution and submission to film festivals. In addition, as director Rio Nakada is also an artist, we would like to consider exhibiting his paintings and illustrations in addition to his MR works.



Rio Nakada
Director



Katsutoshi Machiba,
Producer

Feature: Other (final) | 15 min.
Format: Other
Genre: Creative Documentary, Hybrid
Technology: MR, VR, Photogrammetry/Volumetric, Haptics
Tech/headset compatibility: Meta Quest 3, Windows PC
Length: 15 min
Completion date: 02/2026
Based on: Original screenplay by Rio Nakada
Languages: Japanese, English
Budget: €55,000
Financing in place: € 50,000
Production Company: Independent Project (Agent company: Cinemaleap .Inc)
Partners attached: Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in Japan
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact

Cinema Leap
katsutoshi.machiba@cinemaleap.com
<https://www.tactus.jp/nox>



SAFE HARBOUR



Safe Harbour is IFFR's new market programme intended to uplift projects in development from emerging filmmakers who have experienced displacement or forced migration and who face limited access to professional networks, funding pathways and development opportunities.

For the pilot edition of Safe Harbour, four early-stage projects by writers, directors and artists who are at risk and/or stateless have been selected to participate and present their work at CineMart, spanning filmmakers from Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan and Syria.

Safe Harbour has been developed in collaboration with the International Emerging Film Talent Fund (IEFTF), the Athens-based philanthropic organisation dedicated to strengthening film ecosystems across the Global South. Following their predecessor organisation, IEFTA, the fund brings extensive expertise in supporting displaced and at-risk filmmakers across festivals, markets and labs worldwide. For Safe Harbour they led global outreach and contributed to the selection process following extensive research and interviews with more than 30 filmmakers.

The Beer Girl in Yangon

The Beer Girl in Yangon

Sein Lyan Tun

Escaping the dark world of a beer stand, Lily (17) enters another magical universe to find love and hope.

Tags: drama, sexuality, politics, queer

Synopsis

Lily (17) works at a beer station – a typical outdoor beer stand in Myanmar – serving customers, when she gets involved romantically with a karaoke singer named Moon. Lily has acute endometriosis (painful menstruation) from which she suffers but at the same time can transport her into another universe, giving her strength and a voice that she never has in real life. In this other universe, she always encounters a mysterious older man that raises her curiosity until he appears in real life at the beer station as her customer. She starts to build a platonic relationship with him that causes a complication with her relationship with Moon. Constant pressure forces her into prostitution. Lily must escape the grim fate in front of her by keeping her dreams to become a singer alive.

Director's Statement

I grew up under the shadow of my father's involvement in politics, which resulted in social exclusion and constant fear of military persecution. With an absent father and a mother struggling with her mental health, my sister and I were forced into early independence. I had to work as underpaid teenagers at a beer station in Yangon. In many ways, my sister and I raised each other. When she experienced her first menstruation, there was no one to guide us through the physical and emotional changes. We learned together about the complexities of womanhood. I watched my sister struggle with emotional turbulence, and through her, I came to understand how difficult it can be to exist as a woman in a world that offers little support. Yet she always carried a dream: to sing, to live freely, and to explore her identity without fear. Today, Myanmar has once again fallen under military dictatorship, and Yangon feels as dark as it used to be. Yet when I think back to my teenage years at the beer station, my memories are not only marked by brutality. Beneath the harsh presence of the military, I remember moments of tenderness and solidarity. Despite being haunted by fear and violence, these women helped one another and find small ways to thrive. *The Beer Girl in Yangon* is a semi-autobiographical film inspired by these memories. The character of Lily is a blend of my sister and myself. We often joked that we were born at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and in the wrong bodies. In this film, menstruation is not portrayed solely as personal trauma. It becomes a metaphor for the country itself, a nation bleeding under the weight of repeated military coups. Bleeding becomes a sign of survival, not only suffering. This film is a tribute to my sister, my mother, and women everywhere who grow up in the shadow of trauma. Through this story, I want to give a voice to my sister and to women like her, encouraging them to continue striving for something better.



When I think back to my teenage years at the beer station, my memories are not only marked by brutality. Beneath the harsh presence of the military, I remember moments of tenderness and solidarity.

Director's Biography

Sein Lyan Tun (1980, Myanmar) is a filmmaker currently living in exile in Paris. His short film *Everybody's Gotta Love Sometimes* was selected for Busan International Film Festival 2023 and won the Sonje Special Mention Award. His short *Late Blooming in a Lonely Summer Day* screened at Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur, Festival du Court Métrage de Clermont-Ferrand and Locarno Filmmakers Academy. He is an alumnus of Berlinale Talents 2022, FAMU Summer Filmmaking Campus, Talents Tokyo and the American Film Showcase Fellowship. *The Beer Girl in Yangon* is his first feature film, which won development prizes from CNC and Swiss Films at Locarno Open Doors 2021 and was selected for Cannes L'Atelier Cinéfondation 2022 and Torino FeatureLab 2023.

Company Profile

KawanKawan Media is a production company based in Jakarta, Indonesia, producer of among others: *Solo*, *Solitude* (2016, dir. Yosep Anggi Noen), *The Science of Fictions* (2020, dir. Yosep Anggi Noen), *You and I* (2020, dir. Fanny Chotimah), *Whether The Weather Is Fine* (2021, dir. Carlo Francisco Manatad), *Stone Turtle* (2022, dir. Woo Ming Jin), *Autobiography* (2022, dir. Makbul Mubarak), *Tiger Stripes* (2023, dir. Amanda Nell Eu), *Dreaming & Dying* (2023, dir. Nelson Yeo), *Last Shadow At The First Light* (2023, dir. Nicole Midori Woodford), *24 Hours With Gaspar* (2023, dir. Yosep Anggi Noen), *Don't Cry*, *Butterfly* (2024, dir. Duong Dieu Linh), *Tale of the Land* (2024, dir. Loeloe Hendra), *Renoir* (2025, dir. Chie Hayakawa), and *The Fox King* (2025, dir. Woo Ming Jin).

Current Status

We are in advanced development entering pre-production.

Goals at CineMart

We are looking for potential partners who can contribute with gap financing, a sales agent, distributors and festivals.



Sein Lyan Tun,
Director



Yulia Evina Bhara,
Producer

Feature: DCP (final) | 100 min.

| Colour

Current Status:

Based on: Original Screenplay by

Sein Lyan Tun

Genre: Fiction

Languages: Burmese

Budget: €901,160

Financing in place: €661,160

Production Company:

KawanKawan Media

Partners attached:

In Vivo Films

France Momo Film Co

Singapore Loaded Films

Japan Daluyong Studios

Seeking partners from:

Netherlands, Norway, Poland,

Belgium, Germany



Contact

Kawan Kawan Media

yuliaevina@gmail.com

www.kawankawan.media

Hidden Journey

سيلم

Noura Adil

Noura's camera captures the intimate moments of her displacement with sister Duha, as they flee war in Sudan to East Africa – a journey that reconnects them to themselves and their deceased parents.

Tags: displacement, grief, sisterhood

Synopsis

The unexpected journey begins on April 15, 2023, with the outbreak of war in Khartoum, Sudan. After losing their parents to illness over the past decade, Noura and Duha have no close relatives or a safe place to turn to when shelling reaches their neighborhood. The two sisters are forced to choose between staying under the constant threat of war or venturing into the unknown. They leave their home alongside their neighbours, carrying only one small bag filled with their most valuable belongings: family photo albums, old video tapes, and their parents' love letters. The journey unfolds in ways they never anticipated. Moving from one place to another, constantly chased by war, and living among different families and environments allows the sisters to rediscover life and step outside their comfort zones. Along the way, they begin forming new connections and reshaping their sense of identity. After several stops across Sudan, they eventually reach their hometown in the far east of the country, Kassala.

In Kassala, Noura and Duha live alone for the first time in the house their parents had built early in their marriage, once imagined as a family nest filled with love. The sisters spend ten months there, confronting both memory and absence, while slowly transforming the abandoned and empty house into a warm home.

Throughout the journey, fragments of the past surface. The sisters recall the life they lived before loss, drawn from a family archive spanning more than fifteen years, reaching back to their childhood.

As the war expands and daily life in Kassala becomes increasingly unstable, the sisters are forced to flee once more, this time leaving the country entirely. Seeking stability and a clearer future, they cross the Ethiopian border into East Africa. Today, they are in Kigali, Rwanda, navigating a new life while reconstructing their story through the footage and diaries collected throughout their journey.

Duha, the youngest, begins her university studies, while Noura pursues her passion for photography and filmmaking, presenting her work through multiple photography exhibitions in Rwanda and Nairobi. Along the way, both sisters experience profound and transformative moments, gradually discovering new meanings of home and belonging.

Director's Statement

I grew up in a loving and artistic family, in a home filled with shelves of books, movie tapes, and music. My father was an architect, and although I was very young, he involved me in designing and building our family home in Kassala. He passed away before the house was fully completed, and soon after, we left everything behind and moved to Khartoum. Years later, after my mother's passing, my sister and I continued living there alone, never imagining that we would return to our family house during the most fragile period of our lives – the war. This film emerges from a lived experience rather than a distant



observation. When we were forced to flee Khartoum, I became deeply aware of how quickly places lose their meaning and how memory becomes the only stable ground. Carrying a camera throughout this journey was not initially a deliberate artistic choice, but a personal necessity. Filming allowed me to stay present, holding onto fragments of life as everything around us shifted.

Through this film, I explore the idea of home as something unstable and continuously reshaped by loss, displacement and time. At the heart of the story is the bond between my sister and me – a relationship strengthened by the absence of our parents, yet shaped by vulnerability, fear, and self-doubt. Our shared journey reflects how survival is not only about crossing borders, but about emotional negotiation and mutual care.

The film also reflects the experience of a young Sudanese woman navigating across the African continent, encountering unfamiliar places while carrying inherited memories and responsibilities. Working with personal archives, diaries, and observational footage, I aim to create an intimate cinematic space that mirrors the uncertainty of displacement. The film illustrates how unexpected challenges can lead to profound growth and understanding.

Director's Biography

Noura Adil (Sudan) is a visual storyteller, filmmaker, and photographer who harnesses the power of storytelling to explore and share profound human experiences. With a background in architecture, Noura brings a unique and diverse set of skills to the film industry. Her work has earned

international recognition and has been showcased globally. She recently completed the short version of the documentary *Hidden Journey*.

■ Carrying a camera throughout this journey was not initially a deliberate artistic choice, but a personal necessity. Filming allowed me to stay present, holding onto fragments of life as everything around us shifted.

Company Profile

Weika Production is an independent Sudanese production company based in Rwanda, specialising in both documentary and fiction filmmaking. We support projects through all stages, from development to production. Our recent work includes the short version of *Hidden Journey*.

Current Status

The project is currently in advanced development, supported by a completed short film serving as proof of concept. A substantial body of footage has already been collected over several years and across multiple locations. This includes footage filmed during the war in Sudan, personal and family archival material spanning more than fifteen years, and recent documentary shooting following the sisters' journey outside Sudan.

Goals at CineMart

Our goal in attending CineMart is to connect with potential producers, sales agents, distributors, financiers and co-producers.



Noura Adil, Director

Feature: Digital (final) | 90 min.
| Colour
Current Status:
Based on: Original Screenplay by Noura Adil
Genre: Creative Documentary
Languages: Arabic
Budget: €252,300
Financing in place: €7,000
Production Company: Weika Production Ltd.
Partners attached: Weika Production Ltd. Equity, Sudan €7,000
Seeking partners from: Worldwide

Contact

Weika Productions
weikaproduction@gmail.com
noura.adilsuliman@gmail.com

Last Trip

Ziad Kalthoum

A former Syrian army photographer, now a refugee in Berlin, spirals into a psychological nightmare when a bondage performance reawakens buried trauma. Fleeing with his girlfriend to the Polish countryside, he's drawn into a strange healing ritual that forces him to confront his past.

Tags: psychological thriller, refugee story, Shibari bondage

Synopsis

When the Syrian revolution erupts, Karim, a military-assigned photographer, is forced to document detainees – capturing their final days before execution. Consumed by guilt, he deserts, escaping to Berlin in search of peace. In Berlin, Karim rebuilds his life, working in a bar and training as a lifeguard. He finds solace in an intense relationship with Franz, a German Shibari artist. But when she gifts him an old camera, buried memories resurface. His reality fractures when he is asked to photograph one of Franz's performances, triggering visions of the prisoners he once documented. Haunted by the ghosts of his past, Karim spirals, drowning in trauma that even the sanctuary of the pool can no longer soothe. Desperate for redemption, he obsesses over a hidden archive of prisoner photos smuggled from Syria. Convinced that at least one detainee survived, he embarks on a frantic search, where imagination and reality blur. Meanwhile, Franz struggles with grief over her mother's death, as Karim's turmoil threatens to unravel their relationship. Hoping to heal, the couple retreats to the Polish countryside, but the eerie stillness only deepens Karim's descent. A disturbing dinner with their neighbours, Christine and André, reignites his rage. As visions consume him, Franz leads him on a surreal journey into the depths of the forest – a gateway into the abyss of Karim's psyche, where he must confront his demons.

Director's Statement

As a child, my father handed me a rifle to shoot a small bird. That moment was my first encounter with death – and I vowed never to hold a weapon again. Yet fifteen years later, conscripted by the Syrian regime, I was forced to take one up as a soldier. I refused to shoot civilians or destroy cities, choosing instead to disobey and flee. My path led first to Beirut, another city marked by war, where I saw Syrian labourers rebuilding Beirut stone by stone under near-slave conditions – another hidden battlefield. I fled again and arrived in Berlin, a city that promises peace. Yet even here, violence lingers in the scars of buildings and in the shadows of its streets. These traces reminded me that war never truly ends; it simply changes form. No matter where I went, I felt trapped in a recurring cycle, my role shifting each time – witness, victim, survivor. With *Last Trip*, I want to show Karim's struggle to break this same cycle. As a soldier, he was forced to photograph political prisoners before their execution, becoming the last witness to their existence. Pressing the shutter felt like pulling a trigger – an act that remains lodged in him like a slow poison.



Karim is inspired by my own experiences, though he has become a fictional character with his own wounds and desires. My co-writer, Nadja Dumouchel, helped shape this transformation, allowing reality and imagination, nightmare and poetry, to merge. When the film begins, Karim has found a fragile sense of stability in Berlin. His lifeguard training adds new depth to the swimming pool scenes – the water as a place of refuge and fear. Then he meets Franz, a Shibari artist. Their attraction is immediate, their relationship intense. As she introduces him to her world of bondage, fascination mixes with unease; the ropes evoke memories of the prisoners he once photographed, memories he has tried to suppress. From here, Berlin distorts into a hallucinatory space mirroring Karim's inner collapse. Haunted by the faces of the prisoners, he wanders through a city that becomes increasingly surreal. Franz remains his anchor, yet the descent into trauma is one he must take alone. Only by confronting his past can he surface again. The ending reflects this: Karim finds a new, fragile balance after facing the soldier he once was. *Last Trip* is also a raw and passionate love story. Karim and Franz are drawn together by their vulnerabilities. Their search for healing is dangerous – a journey along a narrow edge where love may save them or break them. The uncertainty of their bond creates emotional tension: can love mend wounds shaped by war? The epilogue stands as testimony to the brutality of the Syrian regime. Documentary images of prisons – doors opening, detainees stepping into the light, even children born in cells – remind us of the terror that shaped Karim's life. These real images connect his fictional journey to a collective truth. Fiction and reality echo through one another, showing how deeply war marks individuals and societies. For me, telling this story is a responsibility – as a filmmaker and as a human being. It is a personal perspective shaped by survival, and one I feel compelled to pass on.

As a soldier, he was forced to photograph political prisoners before their execution, becoming the last witness to their existence. Pressing the shutter felt like pulling a trigger – an act that remains lodged in him like a slow poison.

Director's Biography

Ziad Kalthoum (1981, Syria) is a filmmaker based in Berlin. He holds a degree in film studies. His debut documentary *Oh My Heart* (2009), portraying Kurdish women living in a female-only community, was banned in Syria for political reasons. During the outbreak of the Syrian revolution, he served compulsory military service while secretly directing his first feature, *The Immortal Sergeant*, which premiered at Locarno in 2014 and won Best Feature Documentary at the BBC Arabic Festival in 2015. Refusing to fight his own people, Kalthoum deserted the army in 2013 and fled to Beirut, where he made *Taste of Cement* – a widely acclaimed documentary that won numerous international awards, including the Golden Sesterce at Visions du Réel in 2017, and received a nomination for the German Film Prize in 2018. In 2022, he was awarded an artist residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. He is currently developing his first fiction feature, *Last Trip*.

Company Profile

Founded in 2022 in Berlin by Zorana Mušikić and May Odeh, Mayana Films grew from their co-production of *Maradona's Legs*. The company supports bold, author-driven international cinema with strong artistic vision and social impact. Recent successes include *A Useful Ghost* (Semaine de la Critique 2025) and *Aisha Can't Fly Away* (Un Certain Regard 2025).

Current Status

The script is fully developed (fourth draft), and the main cast is attached. The project is currently in financing, with 20% already secured. Funding applications are underway, and we are actively seeking additional financing, investors, partners, world sales and distribution.

Goals at CineMart

At CineMart, our goals are to meet potential investors, funds and co-production partners, and connect with world sales agents and distributors who believe in the film's artistic and international potential. We aim to build strategic alliances that will strengthen the project's visibility, ensure a solid path toward production, and position the film for a strong festival and distribution trajectory.



Ziad Kalthoum, Director



Zorana Mušikić, Producer



May Odeh, Producer

Feature: DCP (final) | 90 min.
| Colour
Current Status:
Based on: by Ziad Kalthoum
Genre: Fiction
Languages: English, Arabic, German
Budget: €1,948,681
Financing in place: €341,500
Production Company: Mayana Films
Partners attached: Mayana Films €35,000
Medienboard (Development Fund) €25,000
Red Sea Film Fund (Development Fund) €21,500
Seeking partners from: Worldwide



Contact
Mayana Films
hello@mayana.film
<https://mayana.film>

Shall We Meet Again?

Amjad Sokkar, Woroud Alqassas

Two young filmmakers – Amjad in exile in Egypt and Woroud in besieged Gaza – create a documentary together. Through exchanged footage, memories and grief over a fallen friend, they discover a new story: a testament to friendship, loss and the enduring memory of Gaza.

Tags: Gaza, war, filmmaking, youth, friendship

Synopsis

Amjad and Woroud, both in their early twenties, shared more than just their youth; they studied filmmaking together in Gaza before their world fell apart. The devastating war forced a harsh separation: Amjad fled to the relative safety of Egypt, while Woroud, against her family’s wishes, chose to stay rooted in the besieged city. Now miles apart – Amjad in Alexandria, Woroud in Gaza – they decided to face their reality the only way they know: by making a film. They became both the directors and the main subjects of a documentary about a city divided. Their project became a lifeline of daily voice notes, shared footage, and raw ideas. Woroud walked through Gaza’s rubble-strewn streets, searching for an elderly ‘Hajja’ who had lived through the Nakba (the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war), hoping to connect past resilience with present survival. Although she could not find the perfect person, she sent every fragment of her search to Amjad. Meanwhile, Amjad worked from Egypt, looking for Woroud’s friends who had also fled the conflict. He recorded their testimonies in exile, trying to piece together a map of their shared lost lives, and sent his footage back to Ward. He even arranged for Woroud to visit his mother’s half-destroyed family home, so she could capture what remained of his history. The story took an emotional turn when Amjad came across a documentary about Fatima Hassouna, their mutual friend and fellow film student who was killed during the war. Amazingly, he discovered that Woroud also appeared in some scenes with Fatima. This coincidence broke their emotional distance, sparking long and heartfelt conversations about war, friendship, and cinema. Through these exchanges, and through their shared grief and memories, the film they were making finally took its true shape – becoming a powerful testament to friendship, loss, and the enduring memory of Gaza.

Director's Statement

What remains etched in my mind about Gaza is its image before the war: its simple, quiet streets, and its vast sea with its deep blue color. I keep archival materials that I return to from time to time to restore the city’s features in my memory, while Woroud helps me film the same places as they appear today – an attempt to reassure me that Gaza is still okay despite everything it has endured. Yet every time, I’m shocked by the extent of the change, by the disappearance of the details I was attached to, and by the destruction that erased the place I once knew. Since arriving in Egypt, I’ve carried a heavy sense of guilt – because I

Every day, I recall the small moments, the places, and the days... wondering whether I will ever return, and if I do, whether I will find the city I remember or one completely changed.

left, because I distanced myself from my family, from Gaza, and from my friends while pursuing my journey in filmmaking. I try to shake off this feeling, searching for some inner peace through this film, hoping it might offer answers to my attachment to Gaza, to the longing I feel, and to the memories that remain beautiful despite years of war and destruction. Every day, I recall the small moments, the places, and the days... wondering whether I will ever return, and if I do, whether I will find the city I remember or one completely changed. My friendship with Woroud began in a filmmaking workshop. We all dreamed of creating films that express who we are and show Gaza as we, the youth, see it. We shared this dream for years, until the war began. That’s when I decided to leave Gaza to continue pursuing my dream abroad. I remember the first time I told Woroud; she was happy for me, but when I asked if she wanted to leave too, she refused. I asked more than once: why stay in the middle of a war? She would answer: “I don’t want to leave out of fear or because I’m forced to. If I ever leave, I want it to be by choice – with the freedom to return anytime I want.” Maybe Woroud feared leaving Gaza without being able to return. Maybe she loved the city more deeply and was more attached to it. Since I left, I’ve been in daily contact with my mother – following the news of our neighborhood, receiving photos, and filming with her help. She too refused to leave Gaza, perhaps for the same reasons that made Woroud stay: a deep attachment to the land and the city. These emotions have weighed on me for a long time, and I need to bring

them into the light so they don’t remain trapped inside me. I believe the best way is to tell them through a film – because Gaza’s stories surpass the limits of place, and it is important that the world hears the voices of those experiencing this reality, and understands that even those who survived are still unable to live normally or return to the life they once knew.

Director's Biography

Amjad Sokkar (Palestine) is a filmmaker and video editor from Gaza with a BA in Multimedia and Web Development. His filmmaking journey began with *Dancer of Gaza* (2021), which received a post-production grant from the Between Women Filmmakers Caravan. He directed the short fiction *Yazan* and continued his film studies in Egypt at the We Talk Cinema School. Sokkar has led documentary workshops for young women filmmakers from Gaza, Yemen, Egypt and Sudan, supervising several impactful films. He has worked with CARE International and the Al-Saher news platform, and participated in the CineGouna Emerge Programme with his documentary project *Shall We Meet Again?* Woroud Alqassas (Palestine) is a filmmaker and photographer from Gaza known for her award-winning work documenting life in conflict zones. She has collaborated with CARE International, Action for Hope and ConnectHER, focusing on stories of women and resilience. AlQassas has trained more than 25 young filmmakers in Gaza, with several of their films gaining

festival recognition, including the award-winning *The Miracle Girl*. She is developing her feature documentary *Shall We Meet Again?*, continuing her commitment to preserving memory through cinema.

Company Profile

Dessi Films is an independent film production company operating in Alexandria and Nubia, Egypt, and Nubia, Sudan. It produces and co-produces diverse films at various stages and has released multiple films showcased at international festivals. The company’s current projects include the creative documentaries *Shall We Meet Again?* and *Dwellers of the Cabins*.

Current Status

Development

Goals at CineMart

Our goal at CineMart is to build a strong professional network that opens concrete production and funding opportunities, and to find an international producing partner who believes in the project. We seek expert guidance to refine our creative and financing materials and increase access to international funding paths. We also aim to expand potential avenues for the film’s future circulation, present our artistic vision clearly, and establish long-term relationships that can support the project through development, production, and distribution.



Amjad Sokkar, Director



Woroud Alqassas, Director

Feature: DCP (final) | 75 min.
| Colour
Current Status:
Based on: by Amjad Sokkar
Genre: Creative Documentary
Languages: Arabic
Budget: €350,000
Financing in place: €11,500
Production Company: Dessi Films
Partners attached: Dessi Films €10,000
Directors’ own investment €1,000
Munira AL-Ansari €500
Seeking partners from: Egypt, Qatar, Palestine



Contact
hend.dessifilms@gmail.com



A year of evolution for the Hubert Bals Fund

2025 was a year of renewed commitment and evolution for the Hubert Bals Fund. In a rapidly shifting global landscape – marked by political uncertainty, fragile public policy frameworks, and growing pressure on independent voices – we mobilised our energy, embraced renewed forms of collaboration, and, most importantly, continued to stand where the HBF has always stood: alongside filmmakers who dare to question, imagine and challenge the status quo.

Throughout 2025, our actions went far beyond the administrative funding of films alone. We focused on strengthening creative ecosystems for filmmakers supported by HBF. We made bold decisions to join forces with new partners, and introduced tailor-made funding initiatives for diverse talents. Our recent role as managing partner of the Displacement Film Fund, as well as the unique HBF + Brazil Co-Development Support initiative developed with a number of Brazilian partners, are vivid examples of actions conceived, implemented, and brought to fruition over the past months.

Across each and every activity, we remained grounded in our core mission: fostering international solidarity and supporting storytelling as a vital tool to ensure that bold, independent cinema can continue to exist, circulate, and have lasting impact.

The new CineMart x HBF market strand, and the HBF Reunion in Rotterdam this edition, mark a decision to take a more active role in accompanying projects already supported by Hubert Bals Fund and creating a sense of informal homecoming at IFFR – a space where HBF backed filmmakers are always welcome at different levels of their careers. IFFR remains a natural home for the projects and perspectives supported by the Hubert Bals Fund, offering visibility, dialogue, and connection across borders and disciplines in different stages of development and financing of those. HBF Audience Award

As I look ahead, the Fund remains in motion. Entering the future requires bravery, imagination, and a willingness to take risks. Thanks to the incredible commitment of all the members of the HBF team, we will continue to evolve our tools and partnerships to meet new realities.

As you explore the following pages, you will see that the projects and initiatives supported this year reflect a wide range of perspectives, urgencies, and artistic approaches. Together, they reaffirm the Hubert Bals Fund as an active force within the global film landscape – one that believes in courage, collaboration and the responsibility to support voices that might otherwise go unheard.

Tamara Tatishvili
Head of the Hubert Bals Fund



**Hubert Bals
Fund**



HBF Development Support

Supported projects in 2025



**Hubert Bals
Fund**



Amateur
Carlos Díaz Lechuga

Production countries: Cuba, Spain
Production companies: Cacha Films (Cuba), La Filmahora (Spain)
Feature: 100 min.

It's the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, and the Cuban delegation of athletes is accompanied by state agents. The agents' job is to prevent any athlete from defecting to a capitalist team. This is the love story between one of the agents and one of the athletes who wants to escape.

Contact
Carlos Díaz Lechuga
carlosdiazlechuga@yahoo.es



The Appalling Human Voice of the Animals
Neritan Zinxhiria

Production countries: Albania, Greece
Production company: Reconstructing Memories (Greece)

In the steppe depths of a futuristic Byzantine landscape, Georg "The Saint", a mercenary known for never bleeding, uncovers a young girl's body in the land he patrols. She is dead, yet refuses to rot. Conspiracy and superstition spread as an abstract army advances, fracturing the territories Georg crosses. Conflicting testimonies turn him into both a target and a myth. His task is not to solve a murder, but to bear witness, and awaken what refuses to die.

Contact
Efijeni Kokedhima
e@reconstructingmemories.com



Boca da noite
Stephanie Ricci

Production country: Brazil
Production company: Ladaia (Brazil)
Feature: 90 min.

Areta is 70 years old and has only one fear greater than death: fading into oblivion. On a strange night, after losing her house keys in downtown São Paulo, she sets out to find a 24-hour locksmith, but falls into a maze of marginal and solitary figures who push her into an absurd journey through a disappearing city.

Contact
André Bulascoschi
ladaia@ladaia.com



**Hubert Bals
Fund**



Coumba

Mamadou Dia

Production countries: Senegal, France
Production companies: Maayo (Senegal), Les Films du Bilboquet (France)
Feature: 90 min.

When a seasoned inspector returns to his hometown to investigate a murder with no body, he's drawn into a haunting mystery where local belief, lost memories, and the spirit of a woman with hooves blur the line between justice and the unseen.

Contact
Mamadou Dia
dia.mamaid@gmail.com



The Immigrants

Suman Mukhopadhyay

Production country: India
Production company: Bridge PostWorks (India)
Feature: 100 min.

In 1947's Partition aftermath, refugee Satyabrata builds a fragile life in Kolkata with Anima and their child until police records claim he is already dead. His land is illegal, and Anima's past splinters into three conflicting truths—of forbidden love, coercion, or brutal escape. As doubt engulfs him, Immigrants probes how fractured histories erase certainty and blur identity, memory, and belonging.

Contact
Suman Mukhopadhyay
sumanmukhopadhyay@gmail.com



MOTO

Chris Chong Chan Fui

Production country: Malaysia
Production company: Apparat (Malaysia)
Feature: 85 min.

A diverse group of hardscrabble Malaysian motorcyclists, cemented together by moments of modest care between strangers, bring light to lives overlooked by a nation stuck in a perpetual crisis of identity, even while the effects of climate change escalate.

Contact
Nandita Solomon
nansolo@gmail.com



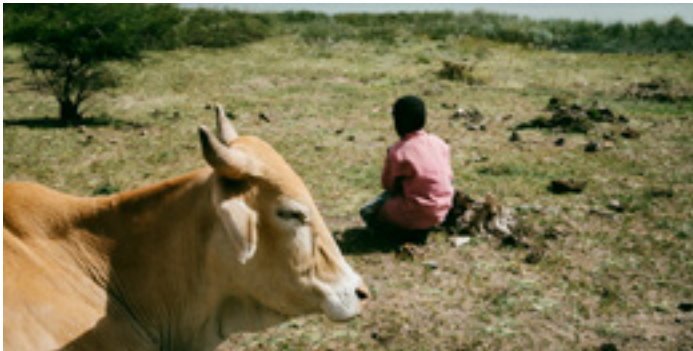
Nobody to See Us

Renata Dzhalo

Production countries: Kazakhstan, Moldova, France
Production companies: Anykey (Kazakhstan), Metrafilms (Moldova), Moderato (France)
Feature: 99 min.

Saint Petersburg, 1999. Twenty-year-old Olya is raising a child alone after her husband from Guinea-Bissau disappears. When she seeks a divorce and termination of his parental rights, the court demands proof that she was abandoned. Her search leads to people from their past, where conflicting stories blur the truth of his absence. As the past intrudes on the present, Olya begins to question who left whom behind. She must choose between pursuing justice in court or remaining faithful to a love she still believes in.

Contact
Dmitrii Grebennikov
d.grebennikov@anykey.kz



Last Cow

Amil Shivji

Production countries: Tanzania, Ethiopia/Canada
Production companies: Kijiweni Productions (Tanzania), Gobeze Media (Ethiopia/Canada)
Feature: 90 min.

Leiyen, a young Maasai, returns home to a drought-stricken village facing eviction due to government plans for eco-tourism. Amid chaos, his beloved cow, Naserian, miraculously survives an arrow lodged in her neck, becoming a media sensation. Ironically, the eviction is revoked as tourists flood in, exploiting the village's culture and land. The community becomes a spectacle, trapped by restrictive regulations. As exploitation escalates, Leiyen struggles to shield Naserian from becoming a symbol of commodification, realizing survival may ultimately cost them their traditions and dignity.

Contact
Amil Shivji
Amil.shivji@gmail.com



Lotus Feet

Amanda Nell Eu

Production countries: Malaysia, Taiwan
Production companies: Ghost Grrrl Pictures (Malaysia), Flash Forward Entertainment (Taiwan)
Feature: 110 min.

Malaya, 1938 - a second wife struggles to adapt to life within a powerful family on a remote rubber estate, ultimately turning to violence to reclaim autonomy over her own body.

Contact
Foo Fei Ling
foofeling@gmail.com



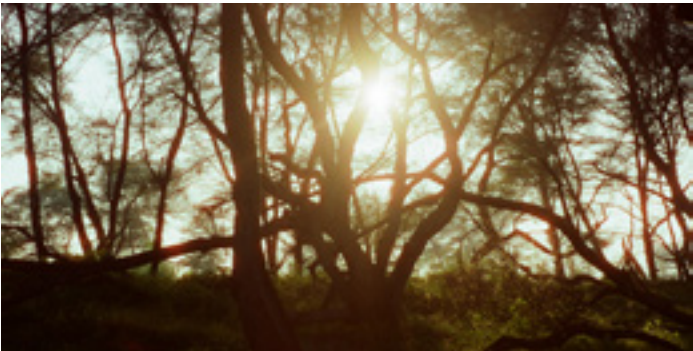
MWADIA

Inadelso Cossa

Production country: Mozambique
Production company: 16mmFILMES (Mozambique)
Feature: 90 min.

Mwadia and Zero Madzero live happily and isolated from the rest of the world, in a land called Antigamente. With no memories, no passage of time or recollections. Surrounded by the vast green wasteland, they have to invent a new life without a past. But one night suddenly everything changes, when a star falls in Antigamente, to trace a new destiny for their lives, now they have to return to the past and confront their ghosts.

Contact
Inadelso Cossa
16mmfilmes@gmail.com



Orphaned Atlas

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno

Production countries: Indonesia, France
Production companies: Forka Films (Indonesia), Pili Films (France)

Toh, a young man in his twenties, follows the faint traces of a figure he once believed to be his mother. Together with Bening, a stranger who suddenly appears in his settlement and walks as if she already knows every turn, Toh moves along a path that slowly reveals fractures in time. Toh begins to understand a larger truth. The place he has called home is not an ordinary settlement. It is a laboratory where the regime has been carrying out a long-running experiment in collective amnesia.

Contact
Ifa Isfansyah
isfansyah@forkafilms.com



The Rapture

Farida Baqi

Production countries: Syria, Germany
Feature: 90 min.

When having a brief erotic encounter with a man, a woman in perimenopause is convinced their meeting was divinely designed as she experiences rapture and intense passion - so she recreates him in her reality, only to learn that she will live in limbo unless she releases him from her imagination and aligns with her own soul.

Contact

Farida Baqi
faridabaqizada@gmail.com



Tears

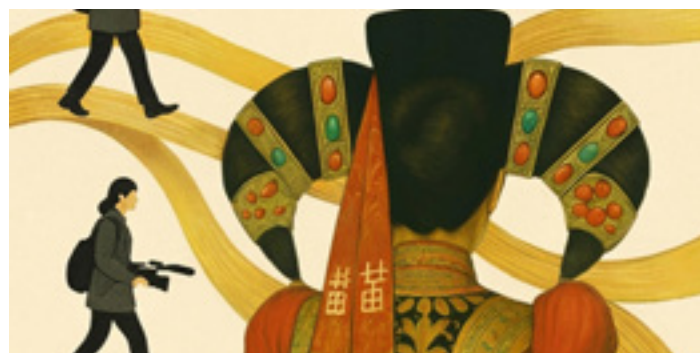
Moise Ganza

Production country: Rwanda
Production company: Kiruri MFN (Rwanda)
Feature: 105 min.

Against his boss's advice, Mugema, an intuitive youtube journalist goes on the search for Kibogo, a controversial christ-like figure whose elusive trace leads him to a surreal journey that introduces a peculiar character to confront Mugema with his unresolved paternal grief.

Contact

Ganza Moise
kirurimfn@gmail.com



Vulnerable Observer

Xiaoxuan Jiang

Production countries: Hong Kong, Mainland China, Malaysia
Production company: Huniche Pictures Limited (Hong Kong)
Feature: 120 min.

Seeking a breakthrough to secure her academic future, ambitious anthropologist Lei embarks on fieldwork in a remote region of Inner Mongolia. Her research initially thrives with the help of a charismatic local guide, granting her exceptional access. However, when constructed realities and hidden motives from both sides surface, Lei's carefully maintained mask of academic objectivity collapses. She must confront the complex, ethically murky dilemma between observer and observed, and the elusive truths hidden within human connection.

Contact

Xiaoxuan Jiang
amantalik@gmail.com



Where Shadows Wait

Arya Rothe

Production countries: India, Italy
Production company: NoCut Film Collective (India, Italy)
Feature: 89 min.

In the final months of her alcoholic father's life, 13-year-old Manu discovers a shadow without a host. It leads her into the past, revealing her parents' forbidden love and her father's struggles as an artist born in labour caste. As reality and magic blend, she discovers her father in a new light and finds her own voice as a storyteller.

Contact

Arya Rothe
nocutarya@gmail.com

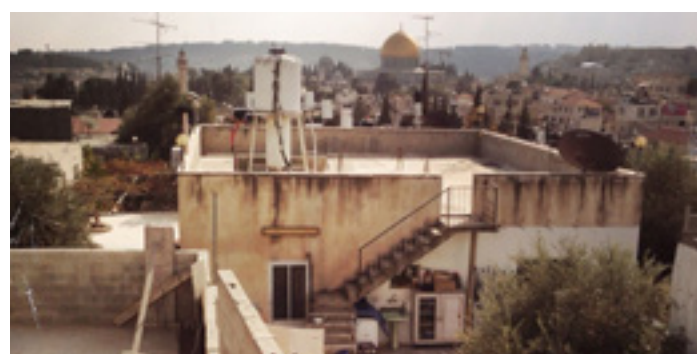
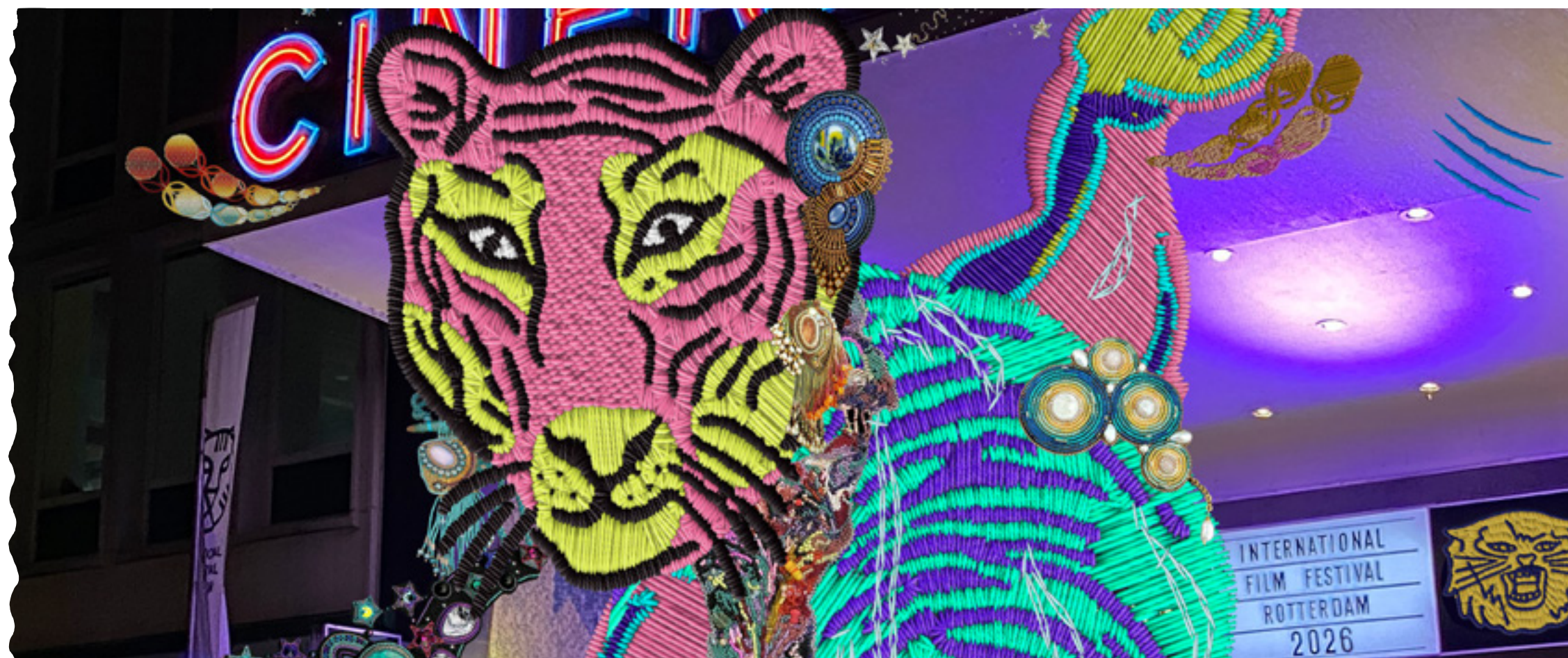


Hubert Bals
Fund

NFF+HBF Co-production Scheme

Supported projects in 2025

NL FILM
FONDS



Conversation With The Sea

Muayad Alayan

Production countries: Palestine, Netherlands
Production companies: PalCine Productions (Palestine), KeyFilm (Netherlands)
Feature: 90 min.

Kamal, a 60-year-old Palestinian man receives an order from the Israeli court in Jerusalem demanding him to pay a large sum of money for an unpaid social security debt on behalf of his son Wael. But his son passed away 20 years earlier, he drowned in the Red Sea, at least that is what Kamal was told.

Contact
Rami Alayan
rami@palcine.net



Corte Culebra

Ana Elena Tejera

Production countries: Panama, France, Netherlands
Production companies: Mestizo Cinema (Panama), Fulgurance Films (France), GROM (Netherlands)
Feature: 100 min.

A Panamanian soldier enters the Panama Canal Zone for the first time, uncovering the hidden history of communities displaced during the U.S. occupation.

Contact
Tomás Cortés
tomas@cineanimal.com



Exactly What It Seems

Darya Zhuk

Production countries: Belarus, Poland, Estonia, Netherlands
Production companies: Apple Film Production (Poland), Turnstyle TV LLC (US), Allfilm (Estonia), Topkapi Films (Netherlands)
Feature: 90 min.

An immigrant couple living in the US is unwillingly teleported back to Belarus by a secretive government technology. Pursued through the hostile woods of their homeland, the fractured couple must rekindle memories of their love so they can find their way back to safety.

Contact
Veta Krechetova
vetakrechetova@gmail.com



Four Seasons in Java

Kamila Andini

Production countries: Indonesia, France, Singapore, Netherlands, Germany
Production companies: Forka Films (Indonesia), Ici et Là Productions (France), Giraffe Pictures (Singapore), Lemming Film (Netherlands), One Two Films (Germany)
Feature: 120 min.

A woman released from prison returns to her village to rebuild her life. Together with the marginalised, she finds the strength to confront her past and redefine her own meaning of home, family and peace.

Contact
Ifa Isfanyah
isfanyah@yahoo.com



Bicho

Madiano Marcheti

Production company: Terceira Margem

The escape of a Calf sparks a war between Neri, a farmer obsessed with preserving his family's legacy, and his neighbor. His drive for control spirals into violence, threatening both the ranch and his fragile bond with his son, who is reluctant to inherit the business. Meanwhile, the Calf ventures through the unsparing wilderness of the Brazilian Cerrado.

Contact
Ana Luz Arteaga
filmesdarterceiramargem@gmail.com



Brasa

Marcelo Gaetano

Production company: CUP Filmes

In Colonial Brazil, witches, homosexuals and Jews come together to escape persecution by the Church.

Contact
Ivan Melo
cupfilmes@gmail.com



Enquanto não voltam

Anita Rocha da Silveira

Production company: Kromaki

Rio de Janeiro, 1986: the lives of three young music lovers intertwine around lingering memories and scars left by the Military Dictatorship. When unidentified objects light up the sky during the notorious "Night of the UFOs", their destinies are altered by abduction encounters and by the possibility of healing traumas and wounds from the past.

Contact
Rodrigo Letier
kromaki@kromaki.com



Irmã mais velha

Rafaela Camelo

Production company: Lupa Filmes

After the tragic death of her older sister, eleven-year-old Isabel is left in the care of her unstable mother, Verônica, who hides a suppressed gift: the ability to channel the dead. In a desperate attempt to comfort her daughter, Verônica brings back Angélica, but what begins as a farewell spirals into a haunting cycle of love, grief, and decay.

Contact
Andre Pereira
andre@lupafilmes.com



LAGUNA

Maurílio Martins

Production company: Filmes de Plástico

After two years in prison, Leo is now a free man, wishing for a new beginning, in fear of the ghosts from the past, and about to find an unknown beast on the way.

Contact
Thiago Macêdo Correia
prod@filmesdeplastico.com.br



Múmia tropical

Lucas Parente

Production company: Besta Fera Filmes

In 1876, while Brazil faces a severe economic and political crisis, its Emperor, Dom Pedro II, travels through Egypt. After visiting ancient ruins, he falls gravely ill. Egyptian deities manifest, embarking the Emperor on an initiatory journey.

Contact
Lucas Gadelha Parente
astramonstra@gmail.com



Olhos de Yara

Lincoln Pércles Pinto

Production company: Quarta-feira Filmes

Yara's third eye grows on her forehead: loud, relentless, and impossible to silence. A 16-year old hip hop lover in the biggest São Paulo (Brazil) favela, she must navigate rap battles, friendships, and the suffocating noise of institutional politics to claim her own voice.

Contact
Julia Alves
julia@quartafeirafilmes.com



Papiloscopista

Carlos Segundo

Production company: A Manduri

A mysterious woman leads a double life as a fingerprint analyst by day and an elusive chameleon by night, seamlessly adopting new identities and immersing herself in a web of danger, intrigue, and vengeance. When a passionate affair unravels her secrets, she must confront her past and decide whether to face the consequences or disappear once again.

Contact

Daniela Antonelli Aun
daniela@amanduri.com



Sobre noix

Luciano Vidigal

Production company: Dualto

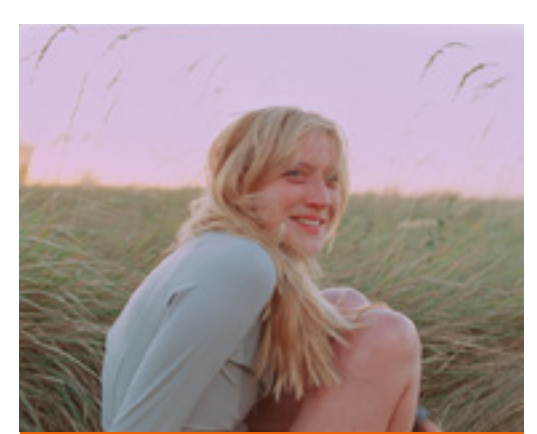
Joana and Drica, two Black women from the favela, set out to adopt a child in hopes of building a family. To make it happen, the couple will face the toughest battle of their lives.

Contact

Sabrina Garcia
sabrina.garcia@tvzero.com



Super Afghan Gym – Shahrbanoo Sadat



Rotation – Maryna Er Gorbach

DISPLACEMENT FILM FUND

Cate Blanchett, together with the Founding Partners, warmly congratulate the DFF funded filmmakers on the World Premieres of their films at IFFR.



Um longo despir-se

Pedro Geraldo

Production company: Alento

In 1930s São Paulo's countryside, Denise works in a textile factory, secretly stealing fabric to sew a white dress for her brother Mateus. In 2010s São Paulo, Jun, a trans woman, works erasing people from photographs. She is hired to remove Mateus from an old picture. Haunted by the image, Jun tries to find the same dress.

Contact

Amanda de Souza Pó
alento@alento.com.br

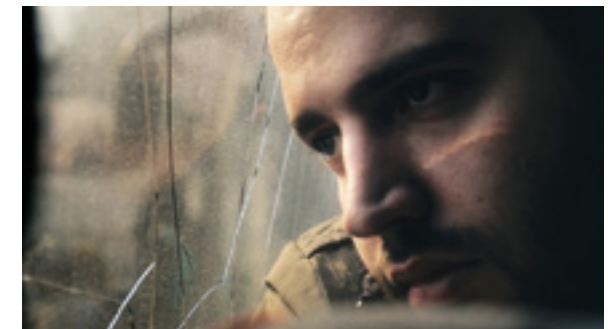


Whispers of a Burning Scent – Mo Harawe



Sense of Water – Mohammad Rasoulof

The Displacement Film Fund was established to champion and fund the work of displaced filmmakers, or filmmakers with a proven track record in creating authentic storytelling on the experiences of displaced people.



Allies in Exile – Hasan Kattan

30 January 2026, Oude Luxor
World Premiere screenings with
filmmakers and special guests

1 & 6 February 2026
de Doelen, Jurriaanse Zaal
Repeat screenings

IFFR.com/en/dff

Founding Partners

MASTER MIND



droom en daad

The Tamer
Family
Foundation



Management Partner



Strategic Partner



CINEMART X NLWAVE

A bespoke showcase of three Dutch projects seeking international partners are presented in the CineMart x NLWave selection. These projects have been handpicked from NLWave25, an initiative by the Netherlands Film Fund, in collaboration with SEE NL and Eye Filmmuseum, aiming to spotlight new and upcoming Dutch feature-length films, documentaries and animation.

The programme offers tailored mentorship, script consultations with international experts, and targeted one-to-one meetings to support project development and strengthen international co-production opportunities.

Near Far Up(side) Down

Esther Rots

Synopsis

Two women in search of themselves find each other amidst magic hour in Seoul. Their unexpected connection spirals into a passionate lawless union. Shoplifting and breaking into houses, their friendship develops into increasingly absurd proportions under the darkness of the night, revealing itself only to be based on dependence, blackmail and submission.

Director's note

Near, Far, Up(side), Down is a poetic and associative film about the exhilarating rush – like falling in love – of a vibrant new friendship between two women set in the ultramodern, colourful and mysterious Seoul. With a slightly satirical take on life, literally oscillating between zoomed in and zoomed out, *Near, Far, Up(side), Down* uses ambiguity, subjective images and hypnotic sound design to depict an honest human struggle; a psychological quest for function, friendship and freedom, amidst the fragility of love.



Esther Rots,
Director



Els Vandevorst,
Producer

Director and screenwriter:

Esther Rots

Production company:

Isabella Films

Producer: Els Vandevorst

Co-production partners: Rots Filmwerk (NL), Seesaw Pictures (SK), Prime Time (BE)

Budget: €2.8 million

Financing in place: €1.8 million

Financiers confirmed: Netherlands Film Fund

Runtime: 100 minutes

Current status: received a majority grant from the NFF, applied at KOFIC in South Korea to apply to the VAF Jan 2026. Shooting scheduled before summer 2026.

Looking for: (inter)national distributors and a sales-agent

Contact

els@isabellafilms.com

pink & green

Rory Pilgrim

Synopsis

When an explosion deep in a quarry releases two bubbles, one pink and one green, sound waves ripple through the sea. Rising to the surface, these bubbles do not burst but hover, shimmering above the Isle of Portland: a remote, windswept island in the English Channel, tethered to mainland Britain by a narrow spit of land. Known for its ancient stone quarries and high levels of poverty, Portland bears the scars of social exclusion, incarceration and time itself.

Within this landscape, we follow four people: Amy and Katy, teenage best friends with precarious home lives and few prospects, drawn toward trouble; Jake, an inmate inside one of the island's two prisons, fighting to cope with life behind bars; and Carina, a former prisoner returning years later to confront the trauma of her past.

Their stories unfold against the raw beauty of Portland's cliffs and quarries. As the characters face the long shadows of their experiences with the criminal justice system, the mysterious orbs of pink and green grow stronger, creating a portal where voices can meet. In this space, new connections form and the possibility of healing begins to emerge – not only for Amy, Katy, Jake and Carina, but for others in the wider community who step forward to offer support.

As the light of pink and green spreads across the island, the landscape itself seems to respond, singing a final, resonant song of resilience and hope.



Director's note

Following in the tradition of socially-engaged British cinema, *pink & green* reflects the urgent realities of life in the UK, but always with a commitment to hope. I want the film to apex at a moment where all characters are truly heard. Creating such imaginative spaces is, for me, the vital function of film.

As an artist, I combine 'kitchen sink' realism with the spiritual and symbolic. For years I've drawn sonic orbs; bubbles that protect but are fragile. *pink & green* uses these orbs to represent both imagination and the need for real-world structures of support, especially for those in prison. In Portland, many are from marginalised communities, disproportionately affected by systemic violence.

While *pink & green* is a film very much about people, the relationship with nature, time and our environment is also essential. The island itself is central. Its scarred, quarried landscape mirrors the wounds in our social fabric. Through song and sound, Portland will become a character, giving voice to the land and echoing our need for care, both human and environmental.

I hope to create a film that resonates deeply, inviting audiences to truly listen. To others, to the land and to themselves.



Danielle Guirguis,
Producer



Suzan de Swaan,
Producer

Director and screenwriter:

Rory Pilgrim

Production company:

SMARTHOUSE Creative Impact
Studio

Producers: Danielle Guirguis &
Suzan de Swaan

Co-production partners: Tyke
Films

Distributor: Cinema Delicatessen

Financiers confirmed: NFF,
Mondriaan Fund, BFI, Fonds 21,
Stimuleringsfonds Creative Industry

Budget: €1.1 million

Financing in place: €1.1 million

Runtime: 90 minutes

Current status: post-production

Looking for: sales agents and
festivals

Contact

danielle@smarthouse.amsterdam

suzan@smarthouse.amsterdam

Tina Town

David-Jan Bronsgeest

Synopsis

19-year-old queer Gabriel from Zeeland (NL), flees his conservative religious home to meet an older man in Germany. There, he is pulled into the seductive and destructive world of chemsex and TINA (crystal meth). Caught between repression and self-destruction, Gabriel is forced to confront the question: is there really no alternative?

Director's note

Like Gabriel, I grew up without a father figure and any form of sex education at home. At a young age, I sought validation from older men, without understanding the power dynamics at play. That vulnerability, the desire to be seen and loved, lies at the heart of *TINA Town*.

The film explores how this emotional hunger makes young queer men vulnerable to the seduction of TINA: confidence, intimacy and escape. Set around a fair, it unfolds in a space where pleasure and danger coexist. Spinning lights and constant movement reflect the characters' mental state. Daylight becomes the enemy, the moment reality returns.

Rather than moralising, I want to portray this world with honesty. *TINA Town* is about vulnerability and the need to acknowledge it before more young men disappear into this cycle.



David-Jan
Bronsgeest,
Director



Ellen Havenith,
Producer



Tim Koomen,
Producer

Director: David-Jan Bronsgeest

Screenwriter: Roy Seerden

Production company: PRPL

Producer: Ellen Havenith,
Tim Koomen

Co-production partners:
BLOODRAVE

Financiers confirmed: Netherlands
Film Fund

Budget: €2.57 million

Financing in place: €1.3 million

Runtime: 95 min

Current status: financing stage

Looking for: queer-friendly
producers and sales agents
championing bold cinema

Contact

ellen@prpl.nl



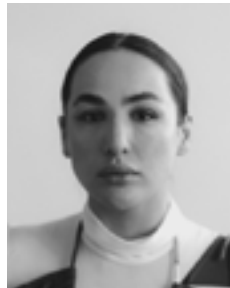
FESTIVAL DE CANNES LA RÉSIDENCE

Since 2000, La Résidence du Festival de Cannes has provided each year accommodation and support to 12 selected young directors in order to help them prepare their first or second feature film. These young filmmakers are selected on the basis of their short films, or even first feature film, and the merits of their feature film project. During their 4-and-a-half-month stay in Paris, they work on the writing of their feature film project, have meetings with professionals and try, with the support of the Festival de Cannes, to bring their project to co-production status.

5, rue Charlot, F-75003 Paris
Tel.33 (0) 1 53 59 61 00
residence@festival-cannes.fr
cinemadedemain.festival-cannes.com

Baran Sarmad

Iran



Baran Sarmad is an Iranian filmmaker and producer known for her distinctive cinematic identity, often mixing reality and fantasy and exploring complex emotional landscapes. She directed the short film *Must Black* (2014) before studying dramatic literature at Soureh University of Arts in Tehran. During her undergraduate years, she co-founded an independent film studio with Mohammad Reza Mayghani, producing their first film, *Dar* (2015), followed by *Cleaner* (2018). Baran's first professional short film, *Spotted Yellow* (2019), premiered at the Locarno Film Festival and was screened at numerous prestigious international festivals. In 2020, she was the producer and production designer of *Orthodontics*, a short film nominated for the Palme d'Or.

Mellow Pink

Roham, a Tehran-based hand model, consumed by wealth and fame, has built his entire life around the beauty of his hands, always wearing gloves and avoiding direct touch with the world around him. During a photoshoot, he is attacked by a pink flamingo, leaving a serious wound on his hand. The incident shatters his professional life and throws him into a cycle of unemployment and despair. In a moment of anger, he steals the flamingo – at first for revenge, but ultimately setting off on a journey that takes him far from Tehran.

Screenplay: Baran Sarmad
Genre: Live-action Fiction / Drama – Feature Film
Production Companies: MenisnFilm, Seven Springs Pictures
Contact: baran.sarmad@gmail.com

Laís Santos Araújo

Brazil



Laís Santos Araújo is a film director, screenwriter and founder of the production company Aguda Cinema. She was born in Maceió, Northeastern Brazil, in 1993. Her work focuses on narrative tales with morally ambiguous characters, exploring womanhood and violence. Her first short film, *Como ficamos da mesma altura* (2019), premiered at Rotterdam's IFFR. Her short *Infantaria* was awarded the Generation 14plus Special Prize for Best Short Film at the 73rd Berlinale, screened at over 70 festivals and selected for the Brazilian Grand Prix of Cinema. Her first feature, a co-direction with Pethrus Tibúrcio, *Marina*, selected by the Hubert Bals Fund, was shot in 2025, and is now in post-production. Currently, Laís is developing the feature film *Infantaria*, a project supported by initiatives like La Fabrique Cinéma, Projeto Paradiso, CineLatino Toulouse, BrLab and CineMundi.

Infantaria (Infantry)

Mysterious activities that take place in the home of Ludmilla (35), a seamstress with a secret side job, cannot be explained to anyone. Especially not to her children, Joana (7) and Dudu (11). When unknown women stay overnight in their toy-filled bedroom, leaving behind bloodstained sheets, the children are instructed to keep it a secret. Joana, eager to grow up quickly, is fascinated by the blood she sees and tries to hasten her first menstruation. Meanwhile, Dudu, resentful of his absent military father and blaming Ludmilla, schemes to bring him back.

Screenplay: Laís Santos Araújo
Genre: drama
Production Company: Aguda Cinema (Brazil)
Producer: Pedro Krull
pedro@agudacinema.com.br
Contact: arjlais@gmail.com

Dian Weys

South Africa



Filmmaker Dian Weys was born in South Africa in 1991. He holds an MA in Film Studies cum laude from the University of Cape Town and is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Groningen (Netherlands). His first three short films screened at over a hundred international film festivals, including Clermont-Ferrand, Palm Springs ShortFest, Message to Man, Tampere, and ZINEBI Bilbao. *Bergie* (2022) won the Tanit d'Argent for Best Short Film at the Carthage Film Festival. His latest short film, *Vultures* (2025), was selected in the Official Short Film Competition at the 78th Festival du Film de Cannes, where it won the Unifrance Short Film Grand Prix.

Bastion

Roslyn is a law enforcement officer leading the court-ordered eviction of over fifty homeless people living in the moat separating the old colonial Castle of Good Hope from the modern city of Cape Town. For her, a successful eviction would realise her ambitions for a promotion as well as her desire to treat the unhoused with dignity and respect. However, when she finds a dead body among the makeshift structures, strict protocols chain her to the scene. Minor mistakes escalate into severe catastrophes.

Screenplay: Dian Weys
Genre: Social Thriller
Producers: Anaïs Bertrand, Emilie Dubois, Le Roux Fourie
Production Company: Electronic Roof Films
Co-production: Insolence Productions
Contact: dian.weys@gmail.com

Federico Luis

Argentina



Federico Luis was born in Buenos Aires in 1990. He holds a degree in Social Communication Sciences from UBA (University of Buenos Aires). His first feature film, *Simón de la Montaña*, won the Grand Prix of La Semaine de la Critique in Cannes in 2024. In 2023, he received the Best Short Film award at IDFA in Amsterdam for *En El Mismísimo Momento*. His short film *La Siesta* had its international premiere in the Official Competition at Cannes 2019, won Best Short Film at BAFICI, and received an honorable mention at TIFF. His next feature, *The Dog Trainer*, was selected at the Film Academy of Spain, TorinoFilmLab, Oxbelly Retreat and is currently in development at La Résidence du Festival de Cannes.

The Dog Trainer

Simón, a young soldier, accidentally loses a dangerous military working dog. Tasked with recovering it, he tracks the dog down to the remote home of its former breeder: Amado, a motionless and deformed man. From his stillness, this man has created a unique language with which he controls these dogs like no one else. He lives with Jean-Pierre, the nurse who has been serving him for many years, and twenty dogs trained to kill. The arrival of the soldier destabilises the delicate balance of power that kept the house standing.

Screenplay: Federico Luis, Matías F. Burzaco, Agustin Toscano
Genre: Drama
Nationality: Argentina-Chile
Production Company: Planta
Producer: Fernando Bascuñan
Contact: fcorreoelectronico@gmail.com

Alica Bednářiková

Slovakia



Alica Bednářiková is a Slovak filmmaker currently based in Prague. She holds a BA in fiction directing from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, and is completing her MA in directing at FAMU. Her film *Boredom* (2020) was screened at EnergaCamerimage and received the Ján Fajnor award at the IGRIC national competition in 2021. Her next short, *Liquid Bread* (2021), was selected for La Cinef in Cannes, Future Frames at Kalovy Vary, and Clermont-Ferrand, and was a semi-finalist at the Student Academy Awards. Alica is an alumna of Les Arcs Talent Village. After completing a short version of her feature debut *Attention Whores* as her FAMU graduation project, she is now developing the film at La Résidence du Festival de Cannes.

Attention Whores

Johana and Marika (both 16) are inseparable. Their bond thrives on rivalry and provocation. At an elite Slovak high school, they pull pranks and compete for attention, constantly testing how far they can go. Marika, already sexually experienced, flaunts it and treats Johana like she's still a child. Tired of living in her shadow, Johana becomes desperate to prove herself. When Marika proposes a dangerous game to see who can seduce their new teacher first, Johana agrees, unaware of how quickly the game will stop being one.

Screenplay: Alica Bednářiková
Genre: Dark comedy
Production Companies: Nutprodukcia (Slovakia), Nutprodukce (Czech Republic)
Contact: alicabed@gmail.com

Maksym Nakonechnyi

Ukraine



Maksym Nakonechnyi holds a bachelor's degree in directing from Karpenko-Kary Kyiv National University of Theater, Cinema and Television. After working on several TV projects, he teamed up with a group of fellow creators to form the independent production company Tabor, which now creates documentaries, fiction films, plays, commercial and social videos, and cultural volunteering projects. Maksym has completed several fiction shorts as a director and regularly produces documentary films. His most prominent awards include the 2020 IDFA award for Best First Appearance for *This Rain Will Never Stop* and the 67th Berlinale's Generation 14plus Grand Prix for *School #3*. Maksym's feature film directorial debut *Butterfly Vision* was selected by the Un Certain Regard section in Cannes in 2022.

The Earth is flat - I flew around and saw it

Mykola, a flat-earthier and a wannabe YouTuber who believes himself to be a truth seeker, leaves Ukraine after a personal crisis with his two best friends: Misha and his girlfriend Angela, whom Mykola actually loves. When a doubly failed experiment in Poland and work in a Berlin gay club reveal Misha's hidden homosexuality, with Misha actually being attracted to Mykola, it causes a bitter split-up between all three. Mykola leaves for the USA where he flies to open space to prove the existence of a dome firmament for a flat-earthier billionaire.

Screenplay: Maksym Nakonechnyi, Artem Chapeye
Genre: Tragicomedy
Production Company: Tabor (Ukraine)
Co-Production Company: Oma Inge Film (Germany)
Contact: nakonechnyimaksim@gmail.com

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