

Where are we headed? Verzió 20 is coming in November!

Why do violent and sometimes deadly initiation rituals persist in the Belarussian army? What did the Taliban do with \$7 billion worth of American military equipment? Who owns the ocean depths? What makes someone male or female? These are some of the questions explored at the Verzió Human Rights Documentary Film Festival, held between 22–29 November, in Budapest and six other cities across Hungary.

From intersex individuals to the Norwegian forests, from Bengali weavers to deep-sea mining, this year's festival delves into the most pressing international and domestic human rights issues. While these themes could easily be incorporated into fictional film adaptations, it's their reality that truly sets these films apart. Seven fresh, new works will be showcased in the Hungarian competition program, and more than 80 films will be available for viewing in five competitive categories and seven thematic sections. A detailed program will be available on 31 October, but here's a sneak peek at some of this year's most anticipated films!

Fairy Garden, directed by Gergő Somogyvári, portrays the daily lives of two people who have escaped society and now live in a forest near Budapest. Fanni, a 19-year-old transgender teenager ostracized by her family, and Laci, a tough former factory worker, attempt to create a family and a home with their version of a father-daughter relationship. This intimate film, making its debut at the Verzió Film Festival, tells a unique coming-of-age story about the importance of human relationships and unconditional acceptance.

The festival's opening film, *We Will Not Fade Away*, directed by Alisa Kovalenko, made its debut at this year's Berlin Film Festival and was nominated for the Silver Bear in the Generation Section. The young protagonists reach the threshold of adulthood in the Donetsk Basin, but dream of conquering the world. They rebel, ride waves of adventure, walk through minefields, and sunbathe by a nearby lake. An opportunity arises for them to embark on a long journey to Nepal. Will their dream of conquering the world come true?

The director of *Five Seasons of the Revolution* went underground to document the Syrian revolution using a variety of pseudonyms: she's Lina in Damascus, Maya when she's a war correspondent in Homs, and Lama in Aleppo. Lina records her thoughts and memories in smuggled videos as she and her friends become more deeply involved in the fight for freedom, and she repeatedly returns to the frontlines. The film spans an entire decade and tells Lina's story across various historical shifts and forces. It was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize at this year's Sundance Film Festival.

Ibrahim Nash'at's film *Hollywoodgate* is another daring piece of cinema; it follows the Taliban in Afghanistan for one year as they seize a weapons depot left behind by the Americans, and transform from a fundamentalist militia into a heavily-armed military regime.

The International Competition includes *Motherland*, a powerful film about "dedovschina," a state-directed, military initiation ceremony that employs the same mechanisms of fear and control used to suppress the general population. Increasingly dissatisfied, the violent abuse, torture, and killings taking place in the military are a breaking point for Belarusians.

The Anthropocene Section features films that address our planet. *Songs of Earth*, where the Norwegian highlands provide the backdrop for a magical journey, is one example. In this lyrical film,

director Margreth Olin sets out into the infinite wilderness with her elderly parents, demonstrating how the environment resonates with humans' inner being.

In the same section, *Deep Rising* explores the unknown consequences of deep-sea mining. Narrated by Jason Momoa, the film sheds light on the crucial relationship between the ocean depths and the survival of terrestrial life from geopolitical, scientific, and corporate perspectives.

The Golden Thread, directed by Nishtha Jain, is presented in the Work/Dream/Work Section. Beautifully composed images capture the last moments of Bengal's jute production, which, with its ancient weaving machines, century-old weaving mills, and a minimum wage equivalent to \$250 per month, has barely changed since the golden age of the industrial revolution.

Tünde Skovrán's film *Who I Am Not* makes its debut in the Doc Future Student and Debut Film Competition. Sharon-Rose Khumalo, a South African beauty queen, faces an identity crisis when she learns she is intersex. An intersex activist living as a man is the only person willing to help her. The two parallel but diverging stories provide an up-close look at what it's like for those who belong to both or neither gender to live in a world divided into men and women.

Verzió also features films that push the boundaries of cinematic genres. The Vector VR section showcases works that explore life situations through the VR medium with even great impact. The selected productions examine the long-term effects of environmental change, and analyze the mechanisms of violence, revealing their invisible, unfolding effects on individuals, and leaving the responsibility of interpretation up to the viewer.

The festival also includes professional programs, such as the Young Critics Workshop and the DocLab Story Development and Editing Workshop. Interested individuals can find more details on the festival's website.

The festival also offers programs free of charge: the Verzió Specials section, the films of Budapest: Faces, Places, and retrospective screenings of director Peter Nestler's works will be free, but registration is required.

The Verzió International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival will be held in Budapest on 22–29 November, with Corvin Cinema joining our longtime partner, Toldi Cinema. Screenings will also be held throughout Hungary, in cities like Szeged, Szombathely, Debrecen, Kecskemét, Miskolc, and Pécs. The festival's online film library, Verziotechue, will be open from 30 November to 10 December for those who prefer to join the 20th Verzió online.

For more information, please visit www.verzio.org.