

Dissident of The Digital Age Julian Assange – a guest of the 19th edition of Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival, whose theme is “Eternity”

The theme of this year's Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival is “Eternity”. The visual concept of the 19th edition of Ji.hlava, that will take place from October 27 to November 1, is going to shift from the smoking factory chimneys to the heights of the abstract; nevertheless the programme is going to be very specific. One of the guest speakers at the 5th edition of the Inspiration Forum – a platform for initiation of new ideas and the reflection of the present world – is a journalist, Internet activist, and the founder of WikiLeaks, “one of the most courageous people of the present”, Julian Assange.

The poster and the visual concept of the 19th edition of the Jihlava IDFF was introduced at a press conference on June 10 by the festival director Marek Hovorka. The festival's graphic design, traditionally made by the artist Juraj Horváth slightly differs from previous editions' distinctive artistic features. **Contrary to the explicit symbols – factory chimneys, fruits and vegetables – this year's design represents a haze of colors and textures of the Eternity.** Like any valuable abstract art work, it contains, just like the themes and symbols of the previous editions, many hidden meanings. **The Eternity does not belong solely to romantic poets and science fiction writers. It is a theme that is also explored by precise observers of the human nature and the world around us.** Let us recall, for instance, the famous writer, Bohumil Hrabal, whose literary imagination made his Na Hrázi (On the Border) street in Prague's Libeň into the “Border of Eternity”.

“The keen eye of the viewer can see how easily the “Eternity” on Ji.hlava's poster can become “Factuality”, and vice versa. This Czech play on words is expressing a powerful metaphor; we are interested in documentaries that are capable of using factuality to change the palpable into metaphysical eternity,” says Marek Hovorka, explaining the theme of the festival's upcoming edition and the design of this year's poster. *“We search for films whose message will be eternal, just like the paintings in The Cave of Altamira. We also aim at changing the perspective – from the factual everyday life to eternity, to the Masaryk's favourite ‘sub specie aeternitatis’”.*

Dissident of the digital age

This year, Jihlava IDFF will host the fifth edition of the Inspiration Forum. It is a unique platform where selected documentary directors meet with three significant personalities from outside the film world. The aim of the Forum is to search for new documentary topics as well as to spark a broader discussion on the burning issues of the present day. **Only few have managed to open such an intensive worldwide discussion as did our first precious guest, the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange.**

Marek Hovorka describes the first guest of Jihlava IDFF as follows: *“Julian Assange is a global icon, digital Robin Hood, who has managed to divide the society into his devout supporters and ardent opponents. While The New York Times describes him as the most influential journalist in the world, the republican presidential candidate has stated that “any punishment apart from hanging would be too kind to him”. Hovorka adds: “We have been trying to get Mr. Assange involved in the festival’s programme for over three years and we highly value his promise to participate, albeit through the mediation of the Ecuador Embassy. It is known that he rarely makes public appearances. Visitors of Jihlava IDFF will have a unique chance to ask him various questions. As part of the Inspiration Forum, Julian Assange will also collaborate with selected documentarists on their work.”*

In only a few days, on June 19, it will be three years since Assange set his foot on the grounds of the Ecuador Embassy. Since 2010, when his server has published a video of an American helicopter bombing civilians in Baghdad, including two journalists from Reuters, **our perception and approach to freedom of speech, the Internet, media, intelligence agencies and the foreign policy of world’s most powerful nations has changed.** With regard to the fact that Assange dwells as a political asylum seeker at the Ecuador Embassy in London, his participation at Jihlava IDFF will be arranged through a videoconference. For a “dissident of the digital age” and one of the most important and most controversial Internet personalities, this way of communication is quite symbolical.

New screening hall, European Film academy honor and Jihlava IDFF's film in Cannes

Jihlava IDFF's last year's edition has, in many aspects (including the number of spectators) been unprecedented. This is one of the reasons, why a challenging project of searching a new screening hall begun after the end of the festival.

"I am very glad that we have found a seventh screening hall – the Community Hall in Dělnický dům with a capacity of up to 400 seats, which had to undergo substantial conversions in order to improve its acoustic properties," says Marek Hovorka.

Jihlava IDFF is one of the ten European documentary film festivals that has been chosen by the European Film Academy (EFA). Its Felix Award is the European version of the Oscars. Each of the ten festivals nominates three of their world premieres for the European Award for the Best Documentary Film of the Year. This decision made by EFA underlines the importance of the cooperation of film festivals in the filmmaking process in Europe and highlights the importance of Jihlava IDFF in the European context.

The high quality of Jihlava's festival programme has been proved by the fact that the French film, *I Am the People*, that was world premiered at the last year's edition of the festival, winning two of Jihlava IDFF's awards, has afterwards been screened at many international film festivals and included in the ACID section of the programme of the Cannes Film Festival. Last year, it was *The Way Out* by Petr Václav that was featured in this section.

"It is usually the other way around. Cannes opens the door to the rest of the world. We managed to find a film which was afterwards presented at many film festivals topping off its successful streak in Cannes – which is very rare and it makes me very happy. I don't think that any other Czech festival has ever achieved anything similar," said Marek Hovorka, adding: *"The programming team has already been at work for several months, shortlisting films for the upcoming 19th edition of our festival."*

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State Fund for Cinematography
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ROP South-East
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