



## 73rd IFFMH: Initial highlights of the programme

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The International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg (IFFMH) is returning in its 73rd edition from 7 to 17 November. This year, festivalgoers can once again discover numerous German premieres of films by talented international directors as well as by established auteur filmmakers. Among them are Christoph Hochhäusler's neo-noir thriller ›Death Will Come‹ and the latest work by Hong Sang-soo, ›By the Stream‹. The ON THE RISE competition includes productions from India and Georgia – two countries that are not well represented in German cinemas, but that are currently producing some of the most exciting films around. In the FILMSCAPES section, the IFFMH is screening the German premiere of the animated film ›Memories of a Snail‹ by Oscar-winning Australian filmmaker Adam Elliot, who is known for his clay figures.

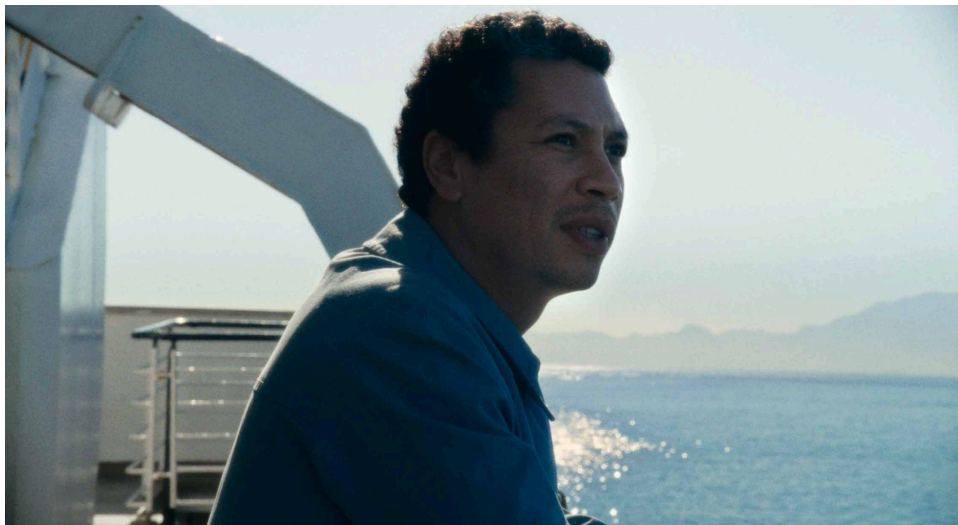
Festival director Dr Sascha Keilholz says: "In view of recent geopolitical events, the term 'resilience' has come to the fore. The relevant films of this year go a step further, from resilience to resistance. Accordingly, for the 73rd IFFMH, we have selected films that can be understood as a form of resistance; films as disobedience and rebellion. They are paradigmatic of the sociopolitical relevance of current international cinema. Aside from their fascinating range of aesthetics, there are a number of themes and motifs that keep recurring regardless of their geographic origin. These films take a stand, engage in mutual dialogue, and sometimes even embolden each other – and us as well. With this in mind, we're looking forward engaging in dialogue with our audience and to exploring artistic diversity together."

### **In the international competition: powerful stories of self-empowerment and unassuming humanity**

As part of the international competition ON THE RISE, the IFFMH is presenting the German premieres of first and second works by talented up-and-coming international directors. Many of these films deal with self-empowerment – often centring on characters with queer or migrant backgrounds or female points of view who must overcome prejudice and societal impediments. In ›Across the Sea‹, French-Moroccan director Saïd Hamich Benlarbi tells a moving immigrant story, painting a portrait of an entire era. In the early 1990s, 27-year-old Nour is living in Marseille as an illegal immigrant. After being arrested by the police, he's given a second chance from an unlikely source. Benlarbi's film is a multi-faceted tale of love and desire in every form, but more than anything it is about the enormous personal burden of migration. ›Cabo Negro‹, the second fictional feature film by Abdellah Taïa, the first openly gay Arab author, is also a



French-Moroccan production. Known as a filmmaker since he adapted his novel “L’Armée du salut”, he has been living in self-imposed exile in Paris since 1999. After being outed in 2006, he was subjected to hostility in his home country. In the place from which the film takes its title, his two main characters, the gay man Jafaar and his lesbian friend Soundouss, also face a world that despises them. This film impressively demonstrates the existential value of community and cohesion.



›Across the Sea‹ © Barney Production – Mont Fleuri Production – Tarantula

Solidarity is also the theme of the two Indian entries in the competition. In her debut film ›Girls Will Be Girls‹, Shuchi Talati tells a coming-of-age story through the delicately nuanced dynamics of a mother-daughter relationship. Smart schoolgirl Mira, who has just become the first girl ever to be appointed student representative, experiences her first love and the awakening of her sexuality. This puts her at odds not only with her mother, but also with the strict rules of the school. Santosh, a young police officer, must also find her own way in Sandhya Suri’s eponymous debut film, which received considerable acclaim at its world premiere in Cannes. ›Santosh‹ tells a compelling story about what it means for a woman in India to assert herself against patriarchal power structures, political corruption and the caste system. This is a highly topical feminist political thriller that addresses issues of law and justice.



›Santosh‹ © Taha Ahmad

Following up on the sensational reception of remarkable films from Georgia at the IFFMH in previous years, this year's festival will be presenting further young voices from that country. In ›Panopticon‹, George Sikharulidze uses the story of an insecure 18-year-old to paint a portrait of an entire society caught in the struggle between ultra-conservative and progressive ideas. In contrast, Tato Kotetishvili takes his audience on a wild trip into the heart of his hometown, Tbilisi, in ›Holy Electricity‹. This year's winner of the prestigious newcomer award in Locarno is a true cinematic find, a film that alternates between Soviet nostalgia and a keen sense of observation. At its centre is the whimsical story of Gonga and Bart, two oddballs who find boxes of crosses at a junkyard and have a bright idea of how to market them, which takes us into the homes and lives of a wide variety of people in the Georgian capital. Also screening in the PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES section is ›April‹, the second film by Georgian director Dea Kulumbegaschvili, whose internationally acclaimed debut film ›Beginning‹ was screened at the IFFMH in 2020. Her latest film is a stunning, stirring and staggeringly bold masterpiece of feminist cinema which just received the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival.



›Holy Electricity‹ (c) Zango Studio, Nushi Film

## German genre cinema, a South Korean elegy and a bittersweet drama from Australia

In the PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES section, the IFFMH presents works by established filmmakers which explore or even push the boundaries of the medium of film in an original way. These include ›Death Will Come‹, the latest work by award-winning German filmmaker Christoph Hochhäusler, who only last year drew acclaim at the Berlinale for ›Till the End of the Night‹. ›Death Will Come‹ is Hochhäusler's first French-language film and his most exuberant foray into genre filmmaking to date. In this utterly suspenseful and convincing neo-noir thriller, clearly inspired by the French "polar", or crime genre, Tez (Sophie Verbeeck), an accomplished assassin, is hired by Charles Mahr (Louis-Do de Lencquesaing), a powerful Brussels crime lord, to avenge the murder of one of his couriers. But Tez soon finds herself caught up in a web of lies and intrigue. It becomes more and more difficult to tell who's manipulating and using whom – and the hunter becomes the hunted. By contrast, Hong Sang-soo strikes an almost meditative tone in ›By the Stream‹. Discovered at the IFFMH in 1996, the South Korean auteur has since received numerous awards at major festivals around the world, most recently the Silver Bear at the Berlinale for ›A Traveler's Needs‹. ›By the Stream‹ celebrated its world premiere in Locarno and can now be seen at the 73rd IFFMH as a German premiere. In this film, the famous chronicler of everyday life tells the story of Jeonim, an artist and university lecturer, who is holding a sketch festival at her university. She asks her uncle, a

once famous actor, to spontaneously write a play for the event. Jeonim's uncle and her revered foster mother, a professor at the art academy, gradually grow closer. In the familiar style of other films by the Korean grandmaster, the plot results from profound, true-to-life conversations. But this time, the characters are remarkably and disarmingly direct with one another.



›La Mort Viendra‹ © Heimatfilm

Also celebrating its German premiere in the FILMSCAPES section is the Australian animated film ›Memories of a Snail‹ by Adam Elliot. In his familiar style of clay animation, Elliot tells the story of twins Grace and Gilbert. When their parents die, the twins are separated and fervently hope to see each other again. But fate won't have it. While Gilbert is taken in by a family of hateful evangelical Christians, grief and loneliness cause Grace to withdraw ever more, like a snail into its shell. Eventually, however, she's befriended by an adorably vivacious, eccentric older lady named Pinky. And suddenly, it even seems possible that Grace could feel love. Yet her longing for her brother will always remain. This is a magnificently animated bittersweet drama of great emotional power, made for adults.



·Memories of a Snail· © Arenamedia Pty Ltd

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## About the IFFMH

With “New Film Experience” as its credo, the IFFMH has been venturing new, interdisciplinary perspectives on and through the art of film since 1952. This makes it the longest-running film festival in Germany after the Berlinale, and it continues to be a major platform for cultural, social and political dialogue. With each subsequent edition, the IFFMH, as a festival for the public in cinemas, invites festivalgoers to discover the rising stars of the international film scene as well as to follow the careers of established filmmakers and to become more familiar with film in the context of other art forms. The 73rd IFFMH will be held from 07 to 17 November 2024. The complete schedule will be available on 17 October.

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The festival would like to thank its sponsors and partners.

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