

# DOKUDAILY

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PHOTO: FERDI LIMANI

# CULTURE AS RESISTANCE

“Dokufest started because there was a need. We reclaimed Kino Lumbardhi to show films in a city that didn’t have a cinema.”

This sentence, spoken by artistic director Veton Nurkollari during yesterday’s panel on public spaces as cultural resistance, has stayed with me. He was responding to a question from the audience about the impact of a film festival beyond simply screening films. “Since then,” he continued, “we’ve grown by building programmes that respond to the needs of our community.”

Sharing the panel with cultural organisers Rozafa Maliqi (from the Termokiss team in Prishtina), Luka Knežević Strika (co-founder of Magacin in Belgrade), and Valentina Bonizzi (artist and member of the ATA group in Kamza), our discussion centred on how public spaces can be transformed into community-driven, accessible, and independently run organisations.

A recurring theme was that of legacy. Who opens the path forward? How do you keep going? And what long-term impact can you have on the communities you serve?

Since I began working with Dokufest a few years ago, I’ve been consistently struck by the deep and lasting influence this organisation has had on cultural life in Kosovo. And I’m not talking solely about the yearly festival edition, but the people.

From Alba Çakalli (now festival producer) and Malbo-ra Krajku (project manager)—who both began as volunteers over a decade ago—to filmmakers Leart Rama and Norika Sefa, who made their first films as Future is Here students. To upcoming filmmakers Hana Ahmeti and Blerta Haziraj, who joined the festival years ago, to the many young volunteers who return year after year because they love it every time—or who joined the educational programme Future is Here to make their very first film.

For 23 years, Dokufest has been much more than a place that screens films. Its legacy is written in the people it has nurtured: those it has cared for, trained, supported, and seen. That is the essence of cultural resistance. And it’s exactly what is threatened when culture is dismissed—when funding is cut, and programmes are shut down.

And yet, despite it all, the work continues. Because the need is still there. And I believe the next generation is more than ready to carry that fight forward.

Until then, Eroll, Veton, Linda, Samir and the whole Dokufest crew - thank you for showing the way.

Written by Dea Gjinovci





# DAILY PICKS

NOBODY’S BUYING YOUR SHORT: SO WHAT NOW?  
DOKUTALKS



SHKOLLA E MUZIKËS  
'LORENC ANTONI' 17:00

SAY GOODBYE / 103'  
HUMAN RIGHTS DOX



SHTËPIA E KULTURËS  
(SALLA E VOGËL) 18:30

A STRANGE COLOUR OF DREAM / 74'  
BALKAN DOX



KINO LUMI 20:00

CUTTING THROUGH ROCKS / 95'  
VIEW FROM THE WORLD



KINO OBORRI 20:00

O-BI, O-BA: THE END OF CIVILIZATION / 85'  
BLAST FROM THE PAST



SHTËPIA E KULTURËS  
(SALLA E MADHE) 21:00

DAKHA BRAKHA  
DOKUNIGHTS



SONAR STAGE 22:30

# DokuFest Launches the First Short Film Forum: A New Regional Platform for Co-Productions



FOTO: LUKA STRIKA

The 24th edition of DokuFest marked a milestone for regional filmmaking with the inauguration of the Short Film Forum, a groundbreaking platform dedicated to supporting co-productions and creative collaboration among emerging filmmakers from Kosovo, Albania, and North Macedonia. This Forum officially opened on Monday at Shkolla e Muzikës “Lorenc Antoni” in Prizren, introducing a new chapter in the development of short-form storytelling in the Balkans.

With eight selected projects in development—spanning animation, documentary, fiction, hybrid, and experimental genres—the Short Film Forum aims to cultivate a culture of exchange, mentorship, and regional synergy. The initiative is envisioned as a launchpad for new voices, offering them the tools and network needed to thrive in an increasingly globalized film landscape.

At the opening, Eroll Bilibani from DokuFest, described the Short Film Forum as the realization of a long-held dream inspired by the Nordic model of cinematic cooperation.

“This is a very important moment for DokuFest, that this dream is coming true the first Short Film Forum for co-productions in the Balkans,” said Bilibani. “We were inspired by how the Nordic countries collaborate and support short films across borders. Although we lacked the resources to begin then, the idea remained a seed waiting to grow.”

The concept took shape over the years through small steps, including grants for what Bilibani termed the New Wave of Filmmakers. Momentum truly began to build when discussions with the Swedish Film Institute and sustained support from the Swedish Embassy in Prishtina and SIDA transformed the vision into a reality.

“We are very grateful, Mr. Westerlund, for the support of the Embassy,” Bilibani added, acknowledging Sweden’s catalytic role in securing funding. “This also encouraged the Ministry of Culture of Kosovo to match the support and help bring this Forum to life.”

Representing one of the Forum’s key supporters, Jonas Westerlund, Ambassador of Sweden to Kosovo, spoke warmly at the opening ceremony, emphasizing the power of film to provoke thought, foster dialogue, and challenge societal norms.

“Film has a unique ability to inspire reflection, encourage dialogue, and give voice to stories that need to be heard,” said Ambassador Westerlund. “We are very pleased to support DokuFest and this important new initiative. And it’s not just about the funding what’s equally important is the spirit of Nordic cooperation that inspired it.”

Westerlund also shared how cinema influenced his own life, citing films like *Burnt by the Sun*, *In the Heat of the Night*, and the Swedish series *The Boy with the Golden Pants* as shaping his ethical worldview from a young age.

“We’ve supported DokuFest for over 15 years,” he noted. “I’m very happy that we can now also inspire and support this new Forum, and that it draws from Nordic values of partnership and creative growth.”

The Forum is being moderated by Jing Haase, a respected short film curator with decades of experience, including roles at Nordisk Panorama and the Swedish Film Institute. The mentoring component is led by Martijn te Pas, former senior programmer at IDFA, who brings a wealth of expertise in festival programming and documentary development.

The inaugural edition welcomes Scotland as a guest country, through a partnership with the Scottish Documentary Institute and its Breaking Borders program. Scottish projects will be showcased in the Forum’s work-in-progress screenings, building a foundation for future transnational cooperation.

The Short Film Forum is organized by DokuFest in Partnership with film centers of Kosovo, North Macedonia and Albania; Italian Short Film Center, ShorTo Film Market, Documentary Association of Europe, Thessaloniki Film Festival’s AGORA MARKET, Square Eyes, Finnish Broadcaster YLE, The New York Times: Op-Docs.

Participating projects will compete for several awards and industry support.

The Short Film Forum is supported through the Creative Force Program, financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Swedish Embassy in Prishtina, alongside annual contributions from the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports of the Republic of Kosovo.

With plans to expand participation in 2026 to include other Western Balkan countries and to welcome a Swedish delegation of producers in 2027, the Short Film Forum is poised to become a permanent fixture in the regional film ecosystem—fostering co-productions, building bridges, and amplifying diverse voices from across South-east Europe.



# For all the magic and nostalgia A conversation with Marko Grba Singh



FOTO: SARA QAFLESHI

As per usual, Prizren can be full of surprises, no doubt about it, but it is a special pleasure to see each year some familiar faces in the busy coffee streets in Prizren, when the lights lie dim and low and the whole world transforms into conversations that keep people at their tables up to the sunrise. In this midst, DokuDaily met Marko Grba Singh, the director from Belgrade that finds Prizren as his own home, and this is his tenth year in a row being here for the festival.

He is no stranger to being part of the festival in different ways: as a filmmaker in competition, as a jury member or as an enthusiast of everything that DokuFest brings. He says:

"I'm enjoying the festival as every year, and I think Prizren really becomes the best city in the Balkans in these times, during DokuFest, and the whole city actually becomes like a carnival, which is a unique thing in festivals."

Grba Singh is here with his film competing in the Balkan Dox Category titled "The Divided City of Mitrovica". As he notes, the title might sound informative, but it is rather a poetic reflection of the impression he got while visiting and getting to know the city. He went to Mitrovica 25 years after the war and to him it was inevitable to notice the frozen state of the communities in the city wrapped in a sense of alienation.

When the director came to Prizren for the first time a decade ago, with an invitation by the artistic director of DokuFest, to screen his film "Abdul and Hamza" about two Somalian refugees in Serbia, it was a chance to discover more from his perspective on how filmmakers in the region have developed their stories or shifted their focuses throughout the years.

He says: "It's normal to have topics that change within years, because things happen in the world and then you cannot. It's inevitable that you have some films that spoke about topics that are current and relevant now. So back then, in 2015, it was the big refugee crisis in Europe. So there were many films exploring this topic, and also in Syria and the civil war. Then, unfortunately, the invasion of Ukraine started at some point. So, you know, these topics shift, and I don't think it's a bad thing. I mean, people sometimes say that it's manneristic to make films about the relevant topics, current topics, but I think it's just normal because documentary filmmakers show the reality and the reality is what's happening in the world right now."

He also highlights some of the developments on the Kosovar film scene, naming the impressive careers of Norika Sefa, Samir Karahoda and Kaltrina Krasniqi, among others, as directors that have incorporated taste and a sense of education and nurturing in their filmmaking.

While at it, DokuDaily was eager to ask the director more on his experience in the city during the festival. It was the perfect moment to get a glimpse of the rhythm of the festival that we always carry with ourselves when we part ways from DokuFest. For Marko, a typical day during the festival would preferably begin depending on how the DokuNights sessions determine the timeline. If it is an early start, the qebapa at Afrimi's are the cure. In case of a late wake up, everyone's ways cross at Bar Aca at a certain point. One of his favourite spots is the Secret Bar, which still in a strange way holds place for a nostalgia that makes up a sense of home in a very indefinite way during Prizren's nights.

Note to all the readers of DokuDaily: Marko wanted us to place our bets for the Golden Leopard award at Locarno Film Festival, on Neil Young's website, who is also here in Prizren during DokuFest. Marko is placing his bet for Dane Komljen's film "Desire Lines". You can place your bet [here](#).

While we invite you to see Marko's film on the Balkan Dox Category along with other excellent entries, we hope that you get the same joy and magic that the director expressed while talking to DokuDaily. See you at the screenings!



FOTO: GRESA NUREDINI

## DOKUTALKS

## Reclaiming Public Space Through Culture



In the spirit of Jürgen Habermas, public space is more than a physical location it is the arena where collective will is forged, where conversation becomes the lifeblood of democracy, and where community resists the slow erosion of its voice.

But what happens when this space, fragile, fought for, and yet constantly under threat becomes both the battleground and the prize?

"It was a magical place, but nothing could happen there... unless we tried," began Veton Nurkollari, Artistic Director of DokuFest, opening the DokuTalk held at the "Lorenc Antoni" Music School on August 3. Titled Public Space as Cultural Resistance, the talk brought together Veton Nurkollari, Valentina Bonizzi, Rozafa Maliqi, and Luka Knežević Strika, and was moderated by Dea Gjinovci.

In 2002, the old Lumbardhi Cinema in the heart of Prizren stood silent. Its doors were shut, the roof sagging under years of neglect. Once a cultural jewel of the city, it had been reduced to an empty shell.

The group that would eventually launch DokuFest didn't have a blueprint. Most had never organized a festival before. "We had no idea how to put one in place," recalls Nurkollari, one of the founders. "But we thought, if we can show something here, maybe it will come alive again."

That first screening did more than bring audiences back. It sparked a belief that would ripple far beyond the festival: public spaces are not "theirs", they are ours!

Coming from a socialist past where "public" often meant state-controlled, and a post-war reality where privatization was swallowing much of the urban landscape, reclaiming Lumbardhi felt like a breakthrough.

"If you come up with a good idea and put in the effort, you can recreate a space," says Nurkollari. "And once you do, you realize, you can do it again, and again, in other places," he adds.

Without a permanent cinema, DokuFest began transforming unused buildings, courtyards, and open-air sites into temporary screening venues. Over time, it marked the city with culture, showing that shared public spaces can be brought back to life.

The model caught on. In Kamza, Albania, a city that had grown from farmland to 100,000 inhabitants almost overnight after the 1990s, the collective ATA began in a basement. "They were just a group of young, curious people," says Valentina Bonizzi, visual artist, writer and pedagogue.

ATA, founded in 2014 by a group of activists in Kamza, has established a community center that hosts social and cultural activities spanning art, journalism, anthropology, and law. The center serves as a hub for creative practices rooted in human relationships, reflecting a broader effort to reclaim and activate public spaces.

Valentina Bonizzi, one of the speakers at the DokuTalk, emphasized the importance of such spaces as open, inclusive forums where community members come together to make collective decisions. She highlighted how these evolving conversations address social challenges and ensure the space remains accessible and relevant to all generations, fostering ongoing cultural resistance and engagement.

She also emphasized the importance of learning from each other.

"Time is quite important on what we are talking about. Because what we learnt from DokuFest is not just the claiming of the space but to be persistent on building practices of having something in common, building collective memories", said Bonizzi.

In Belgrade, the self-managed space Magacin became another node in this informal network of resistance. Completely outside state control, Magacin operates on a radical premise: anyone in the cultural field can use the space for free. There is no rent, no selection process, no gatekeeping. Decisions are made collectively in monthly assemblies.

"It's one of the few places where access isn't tied to money or status," says Luka Knežević Strika, photographer, visual artist and cultural worker. "If you need the space, you send an email. The answer is yes."

Back to Prishtina, Rozafa Maliqi, community organizer, cultural manager and researcher, sees public spaces in Prishtina not just as physical places, but as living canvases for dialogue and transformation.

She believes that real change emerges when communities dare to confront the hard truths whether it's the absence of queer-friendly areas or the shadow of sexual harassment and bring these issues into the open.

For her, these spaces thrive when they become arenas for honest, sometimes raw conversations where accountability is embraced, weaving a stronger social fabric that belongs to everyone. In this way, public spaces become more than gathering spots, they become catalysts for a community's own evolving story.

"I think that was a crucial note throughout the years because many generations come in, and they bring different priorities with them as well. That means the conversation is always alive. There's always something new: a challenge to address," she says.

But these initiatives are not just about art. They are about defending the right to assemble, to create, to exist together outside market logic.

Negotiating with authorities can be a drawn-out, frustrating process. "Public spaces get measured in square meters and assigned a price," explains Nurkollari. "They treat it as if you should be grateful they 'allow' you to use what is already yours," he adds.

Some permissions are secured after months of talks; others are ignored until the event is already underway. "Sometimes you have to show them you can do something without their approval," says another. "Only then do they take you seriously."

As the discussion closed, one truth emerged from every statement: public space is never "won" once and for all. It must be constantly imagined, debated, and defended. The work is exhausting, often precarious, and always unfinished. But in Habermas' terms, the public sphere lives only so long as people keep showing up, together to speak, to act, and to refuse silence.

Written by Shefket Bujari



REVIEWS

Beneath Which Rivers Flow (2025)



Riverbeds dry, canoes rust, and green grass fades to brown. Still, people remain. Beneath Which Rivers Flow (2025) follows Ibrahim, a southern Iraqi marsh dweller, as he navigates dull pastures ravaged by environmental decay. His journey lacks a beginning or end, reflecting the slow desiccation of the marshland itself. The only emblem of warmth: a water buffalo, his silent companion.

Directed by Ali Yahya, Beneath Which Rivers Flow confronts viewers with the uncomfortable truth of ecological catastrophe. Environmental decline not only scars physical landscapes but also reshapes entire ways of life. While those in affluent nations remain largely insulated from its effects, populations in the Global South must bear the consequences of nature’s unraveling. Ibrahim echoes this truth, often staring directly into the camera, as if to say, “You—yes, you—did this.” We, the viewers, become complicit in his quiet struggle to exist.

Yahya’s visual language reinforces this emotional weight. The film’s meditative long-shot structure allows viewers to breathe through

Ibrahim's world. As misty horizons shift into sparse, fire-tinged brush, the dryness in one’s own mouth becomes palpable. Intimate framing defines the film’s beginning: Ibrahim bathed in blueish green, tethered to the earth by a lone buffalo and his mother making fresh bread. This tenderness transitions to expansive shots of unruly terrain and close-ups of ache. The cinematography in this film is not only beautiful but deeply moving.

Beneath Which Rivers Flow is a film that finds gravity through uncolorful truth. Evoking the opening chapters of a Hermann Hesse novel, the beginning gestures toward a hero’s journey: a man and a water buffalo drifting through a fading world. Yet there are no mythic arcs here, only cold reality. No transformation, only erosion. This stagnation poses a radical question: In an age of ecological collapse, is the hero’s journey still possible? Or has environmental decay reduced life in the Global South to one of pure endurance?

Written by Carson Beale

A Want in Her (2024)



DokuFest’s selection of “A Want In Her” in the International Feature Dox category gave our audiences a poignant look into the lives of one family struggling with addiction. The want in mother Nauna is alcohol, and the relief it brings. The want in daughter Myrid is in a relationship with a sober mother. This is one sad story. Making a film like this that spotlights your own alcoholic mother had to be heartbreaking and at the same time hopefully cathartic. The film details the destruction left on a family by one member who is self-destructing. Into each life a little rain must fall, as the saying goes, but at some point, too much rain will lead to floods. In this film we watch as poor Myrid gets rained on, over and over, and does her best to stay dry, stay healthy.

The film also does a nice job of exploring just how far a daughter will go to save her mother. Myrid looks for her alcoholic mother when she’s gone missing, and tries to help her sober up once found. This is proof that there is an equally strong force in the universe as a mother’s love, and that is a daughter’s love. Myrid’s heart breaks for her mother, this comes through clearly in this film.

It’s backwards and strange, and not the way it should be for a daughter to become the mother of her mother. We all know this happens in our world, lives wrecked by drugs and alcohol. Our heart goes out to Myrid, going more than the extra mile for her mother.

Written by Scott Hoy

ON  
FILMS

Films that speak in different tongues



KONTAKT Collection in collaboration with Autostrada Biennial at DokuFest

Prizren always breathes differently in August. The river, open-air cinemas and people in the alleys create an atmosphere that is not repeated throughout the year.

This year, among the many programs of DokuFest, in collaboration with Autostrada Biennale, KONTAKT Collection brings a special selection: 13 experimental short films, from the 70s to the present day, making notes on memory, war, migration and everyday life in a personal and frank language.

These films do not have a traditional structure and do not tell stories in a linear way. Their visual and emotional complexity makes the content even more sensitive and tangible. Based on the themes, I will divide them into three groups: war, migration and a different view of everyday life.

War and its traces

These films bring war from within people's lives, without much noise, but with an intensity that remains for a long time. Sokol Beqiri with Superman (2002) takes us back to the 1999's isolation, depicting the attempt to be a "hero" for the family, while the inner fear does not go away. His narrative appears in the belly of La La from Tele-tubbies, where childish humor mixes with trauma.

Milica Tomić in Portrait of My Mother (1999) walks in Belgrade after the NATO bombings, towards the house of her mother, a retired actress who now works as an upholsterer. A simple journey that turns into a portrait of pain and memory. While Anna Jermolae-wa's Kiev (after Lumière) (2021) takes us to a quiet market next to the railway, which is

suddenly overturned by a long military train, becoming a metaphor for the war that enters everyday life without warning. Migration and everyday life

These films show the lives of people between two worlds, between the old and the new home, often separated by migration or social circumstances. Adrian Paci in Albanian Stories (1997) films his young daughter inventing fairy tales after moving to Italy, where her childish play hides the fears and memories of exile. Želimir Žilnik in Inventur – Metzstraße 11 (1975) places the camera in front of the inhabitants of a building in Munich, foreign workers from Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece, who tell their simple and honest stories. Artur Żmijewski's Glimpse (2016–17) takes us to refugee camps in Berlin, Paris and Calais, where the silence of black and white images speaks more than any dialogue about isolation and endless waiting.

Seeing the everyday differently

Recent films play with form and see the everyday with new eyes, turning it into a cinematic experience.

Ivan Ladislav Galeta's Two Times in One Space (1984) places the same family scene twice on screen, with a slight delay, creating the feeling that time and space collide and repeat themselves. Mladen Stilinović's Walls, Coats, Shadows (1975) films gray walls, dark coats, and quickly passing shadows, turning socialist everyday life into a silent and ironic reflection.

Dietmar Brehm's Rolle-2 (1983) combines close-up portraits, strange gestures, and brief shots of flowers, capturing the absurdity of everyday life. While Ashley Hans Scheirl's At This Speed Hairs Are Dashing

(1979) and Jocasta Emerges (1982) mix television fragments, landscapes, and intimate scenes of the queer community, turning the visual experiment into a personal and felt narrative.

KONTAKT Collection is an invitation to see differently and to feel. These films show how war, migration and everyday life enter the screen in the most honest form. They are films that should be watched calmly and closely.

The films will be shown on these dates:  
August 7: At This Speed Hairs Are Dashing, Black Film, General Alert (godard), Inventur – Metzstraße 11, Glimpse, Jocasta Emerges, Kiev (after Lumière), Rolle-2, Two Times in One Space, Walls, Coats, Shadows  
August 8: Albanian Stories, Superman, Portrait of My Mother

Written by Lendina Balaj



# DOKUNIGHTS

# Shndrit, shndrit, shndrit!

Perhaps it was apt for Beatriçe Gjergji to enter the stage adorned in red, sauntering forward against the backdrop of hungry flames. Continuing on after a series of early technical difficulties paused Shkodra Elektronike's night, she gave the impression of a phoenix rising from the ashes, delivering, along with synth wizard Kolë Laca, an all-time performance echoing across the stone structure of Kalaja and beyond. These initial power cuts didn't spoil the mood but delayed the catharsis: one of the most exciting acts in the contemporary Albanian music scene making their mark on a voracious Prizren crowd.

The performance began with the ethereal croons of a polyphonic backing choir to build anticipation, but the crowd had already reached fever pitch—swarming into the dancefloor, it felt like the entirety of Prizren had waited for this night. Then, the ominous synthlines of Laca, before Gjergji drifted to the front of the stage, an otherworldly figure. What followed was shuddering bass reverberating to the core, the duo making themselves felt as much as heard.

While Eurovision track 'Zjerm' may be the fan favourite, it is not what Shkodra Elektronike are defined by, and a series of punchy tracks, each wielding oddball synthlines, tantalising builds and ecstatic releases proved that. Gjergji's gorgeous vocals swimming in synth, unexpected turns into high-BPM headbangers, distorted, chopped-up Shkodran instrumentals, and striking tribal beats amid what can only be described as melodic yelps all culminated in pandemonium in Prizren, the crowd feasting on the energy the duo brought to the table. This duo was accompanied by an iso-poliphony that epitomised what Shkodra Elektronique are all about: a glorious celebration of Albanian history, respecting and taking in the past while refracting it through contemporary, forward-thinking sonic instrumentation.

Gjergji proved a real physical presence, draped in red threads, hair billowing in the wind, commanding the stage with her brand of energetic movement, including, yes, that particular Zjerm dance. Laca's approach, a stare-down of the audience, was more intimidating but no less threatening. And the heavenly presence of the iso-poliphony, applying ancestral south Albanian incantations to the dynamic electronic beats, was chill-inducing.

If the opening night of DokuNights was all about getting the party started, this felt more like a reckoning with its own significance. As an outsider to Albanian music and culture, it was wonderful to see everyone in Kosovo and beyond push up to the stage, chant out the lyrics, jump to the pulsating rhythms as one. Last night, as Shkodra Elektronike played out 'Zjerm' one final time, the crowd reached complete, harmonious collectivity—and isn't that what it's all about?

The celebrations continued with a surprise set from DokuNights' very own Leart Rama, capping off the evening with giddy grooves for anyone still riding the high of what came before.

Last night's event may be a difficult act to follow, but if anyone can do it, it's Ukrainian world-music quartet DakhaBrakha, who wield a unique, otherworldly style known as 'ethno-chaos': a blend of multiple cultural elements shaped through research expeditions. Join us tonight, and watch them storm the castle in a transcendent experience full of goosebump-inducing compositions.

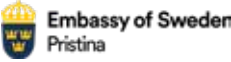
Written by Gus Edgar-Chan



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