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Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Proxima Competition

ART TALENT SHOW

feature documentary / Czech Republic / 102 min / 2022 / world premiere at 56th KVIFF

DIRECTOR: ADÉLA KOMRZÝ and TOMÁŠ BOJAR

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: ŠIMON DVOŘÁČEK **EDITOR:** HEDVIKA HANSALOVÁ

SOUND MASTER: VÁCLAV FLEGL **SOUND MIX:** MICHAELA PATRÍKOVÁ and DAVID TITĚRA

DRAMATURGY: JAN GOGOLA Jr. **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:** MARTIN KOHOUT and JAN STREJCOVSKÝ

CREATIVE PRODUCER (CZECH TELEVISION): DUŠAN MULÍČEK **PRODUCER:** JAKUB WAGNER

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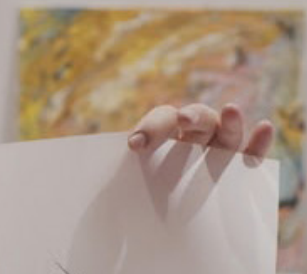
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ART TALENT SHOW

CAST:

Graphic Design 2 studio: Vladimír Kokolia and Eva Červená

New Media 2 studio: Kateřina Olivová, Darina Alster

Painting 4 studio: Marek Meduna and Petr Dub

Synopsis

How to search talents in the 21st century?

The Academy of Arts (AVU) in Prague holds entrance exams every year. At three different studios, the film observes a demanding challenge the teachers are facing: how to find the chosen ones in the crowds of applicants, the new talents who will be given opportunities to form the art world in the following years? How will the teachers stand the test? The talent test eventually becomes an art as such. What is the role of art in today's confused world? And more questions emerge: Who do we make art for? Is it enough to do things as we feel them? Do we need to know when Tiepolo made his works? Is there anything left to scandalize us? A murder or a suicide? Bisexuality or pansexuality? Shit or blood? What does all of this tell us about the character and meaning of today's art?

Adéla Komrzý and Tomáš Bojar

How did it all start?

I was approached by the AVU board a few years ago to make a TV programme commemorating the school's 220th anniversary. I suggested I would in fact prefer to make a feature about talent tests at this prestigious art school. I was inspired by Claire Simon's "Le Concours" which uncovers talent tests at the Paris-based La Fémis film school. The talent tests provide a favourable platform for asking questions such as: How do we search talents in the 21st century and which criteria do we use? Why do we need arts nowadays? What is an artist's social role? What is the character and meaning of today's art?

I would find it intriguing to see a documentary from the times when the school was established as well as 200 years from now – if it still continues to exist. The entrance exam process reflects the values of the institution educating those who will form the art scene.

I approached Tomáš Bojar. He has vast experience with co-direction and working with multiple crews. Furthermore, he is also a practised writer and dramaturge. When I called Tomáš, he said he'd always wanted to make a film about art school entrance exams so he wouldn't hesitate. We started working on the script, checking locations and soon we started shooting.

I am very grateful to the former rector Tomáš Vaněk and his team as they were so forthcoming to the film and they approached it as a gesture of openness towards society at the time when most institutions tend to become withdrawn. I truly appreciate it. Perhaps there was also a hint of curiosity about what our film would tell about their school.

Adéla Komrzý



About the shooting

We knew we wanted to show the talents tests from the institution's perspective. We had to find three studios with different approaches to the selection process. Our choice was made easier by the fact that some studios refused to participate. After long searching and consideration, we selected the New Media 2 studio led by Kača Olivová and Darina Alster, the Paining 4 studio led by Marek Meduna and Petr Dub, and the Graphic Design 2 studio led by Vladimír Kokolia and Eva Červená. The shooting was made in school workshops designated for stuccoing, locksmithery and cabinetmaking as well as at the main reception. The reception is also a metaphor for the entrance to the AVU and it is the receptionists who can make this decision – it is only up to them whether they decide to unlock the door for you.

DIRECTORS:

ADÉLA KOMRZÝ

(b. 1992) Adéla studied History of Arts at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts of the Charles University and graduated from Documentary Directing at the FAMU (Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts in Prague). In 2018, she participated in a prestigious internship at the Filmuni Babelsberg Konrad Wolf where she studied directing, and she was selected for Berlinale Talents in the same year. In 2013, she received the FITES Trilobit Award for her chapter in the TV Celebration film series. Her BA graduation film Teaching War from the Czech Journal cycle was awarded with the main Andrej “Nikolaj” Stankovič Prize. Her film Viva Video, Video Viva about Czech video art pioneers was nominated for the Pavel Koutecký Award. Her last film, Intensive Life Unit, was awarded numerous prizes including the Czech Lion Award, the Czech Film Critics' Award, the Trilobit Award, the Pavel Koutecký Award and various film festival prizes. Selected films: Art Talent Show (2022) – with Tomáš Bojar, Intensive Life Unit (75 min), 2021 Viva Video, Video Viva (85 min), 2019, Teaching War, 2016, TV Celebration (52 min), 2013.

TOMÁŠ BOJAR

(b. 1981) Tomáš studied political science and international relations (specializing in political philosophy) and law at the Charles University where he also got his PhD. in ethics. He has worked on films since 2003, first as a screenwriter and dramaturge, later also as a director and producer. In collaboration with the director Pavel Abrahám, they made feature documentaries Czech RAPublic (2008) and Two Nill (2012). Together with the director Rozálie Kohoutová, they worked on feature documentaries FC Roma (2016) and Off Sides (2019). In 2018, he completed the feature documentary Breaking News and the five-episode series The Magnificent Five together with Zuzana Kirchnerová.

His films have been shown at various international film festivals including the Karlovy Vary IFF, Visions du Réel Nyon, the BAFICI Buenos Aires, the London Open City Documentary Festival, the DOXA Documentary Film Festival Vancouver, the Kasseler Dok Fest and the Edinburgh International Film Festival. His films were given numerous awards including the Pavel Koutecký Award, the Czech Joy award at the Jihlava International Documentary Festival, the Golden Kingfisher Award at the Finale festival in Pilsen, Trilobit Award and others as well as prestigious nominations in the best document category (the Czech Film Critics' Award and the Czech Lion Award).



INTERVIEWS WITH THE DIRECTORS

Questions:

- **The film was shot within one week. Where did you get the idea to focus on the time of talent tests only?**

AK:

The director always looks for a certain frame, delimits the field of activity. When thinking about the topic, I remembered Claire Simone and her film about the talent tests at the La Fémis film school. I saw it a few years ago at the FAMU where she showed it and discussed with film students. I found her approach very inspiring. Even limited space and time allow you to ask the most general questions and explore the character of an institution and arts.

The time of talent tests is a very dramatic one. Teachers decide about the applicants' future, and the heaviness of these decisions influences the atmosphere at the school. Teachers reflect on their responsibility and admit it – more or less. Some even see themselves as “gatekeepers” watching over those who may or may not enter.

For my films, I look for environments that are also visually attractive. The academy's building is perfect in this sense and so are the teachers' and applicants' preoccupied faces. It is joyful to see interest in their expressions.

TB:

I'd say we got the idea rather quickly. Its genesis was surprisingly simple: Adéla was addressed by the AVU to make a film on the occasion of the school's 220th anniversary. Adéla gave it some thought and reached a conclusion that observation of talent tests could make an interesting portrait of the institution. When future artists are selected, it also becomes clear – among other things – what we expect from art as such. Later Adéla asked me if I wanted to be a part of this project and I didn't hesitate at all. It is primarily because I respect her work – I find her last film exceptionally great. I somehow supposed we would get on well and the collaboration would be fruitful. Another reason was that I'd thought of the talent tests as a film topic for years, but I'd never expected any art school would let it happen. The AVU did, surprisingly, and I'm very grateful to the school and mainly its then rector, Tomáš Vaněk. It is not something to be taken for granted, this proves his ability to stay above things and his generosity.

As soon as we agreed upon basic things with the rector and teachers, we started coming to the academy regularly and observing it closely. We were rather thorough: we explored it from the workshops in the basement to the New Media studio at the attic and we were witnessing many unusual moments. Most importantly, we watched the whole four-day process of the previous talent tests a year in advance, mostly without shooting. That was when we realized it was this time period we would like to use in the film, as the talent tests are concentration of all that we were looking for. It has the necessary drama and tension, and especially the questions we are asking ourselves: Why should one create artwork? Who for? Is it enough that “I know how to do it” or that someone praises my work? All the crucial things are taking place in a lively dialogue and authentic situations so there is no need to manipulate things – all you do is watch carefully. Naturally, preparation was necessary and we had to accept the risk that things may not go as well as we’d imagined. For me, it was not that hard. I worked on the films *Breaking News* that was shot within one day and *Two Nill* which was shot during one evening, so this one-week schedule seemed almost generous in comparison.

It would be incredibly interesting to work on a time-lapse documentary observing the future careers of some of the applicants to see how they used their talents. But that would take a lot of hard work and I’m afraid I don’t have enough time and energy for that right now.

● **Talent tests can be very stressful for applicants. How did you manage to enter this delicate environment? And was there anyone who refused to participate?**

AK:

The whole process was based on the AVU’s helpfulness and mostly on the rector Tomáš Vaněk who wanted this documentary to be made and supported us in communication with applicants. This was the first step. Our next task was to find specific studios and teachers who’d be willing to rise to the challenge. After we found them, we finetuned the details of the shooting together making sure that the crew wouldn’t bother the applicants. This was specific for each studio. For example, in Kateřina and Darina’s studio, we were not physically present during the interviews. The room was rather small and they explicitly asked us not to send more people there, so we just set the cameras and watched the field monitor from another room. In the other studios, we got closer to the applicants and communicated directly which was nice. It was a great ice-breaker – even for us. I was worried and wanted to make sure I wouldn’t upset anyone or violate their concentration. Recently I met an applicant who was admitted to Vladimír Kokolia’s studio and asked him how he felt about the shooting in hindsight. I was pleased when he said: “Oh, I completely forgot! What did you shoot?” I found it very reassuring.



TB:

Everyone agreed, there was only one applicant who was not keen on the crew and sort of sabotaged the shooting. However, she never stopped the shooting, although she had that option and could use it anytime. Generally, all the applicants were informed about the documentary in advance by the studios. They were told that if they didn't agree with the shooting, they could simply tell us and the crew would respect it. Nobody asked us to be excluded though. At the beginning of the talent tests, they were notified again – and again, nobody complained. During the process, we kept making sure we didn't bother anyone or ruin their performance. Besides minor exceptions, the whole camera concept was designed in an unobtrusive way. There were two reasons: we wanted them to be able to work smoothly without interruptions, and we wanted our material to be as lively and natural as possible.

● **How did you select the studios we can see in the film?**

AK:

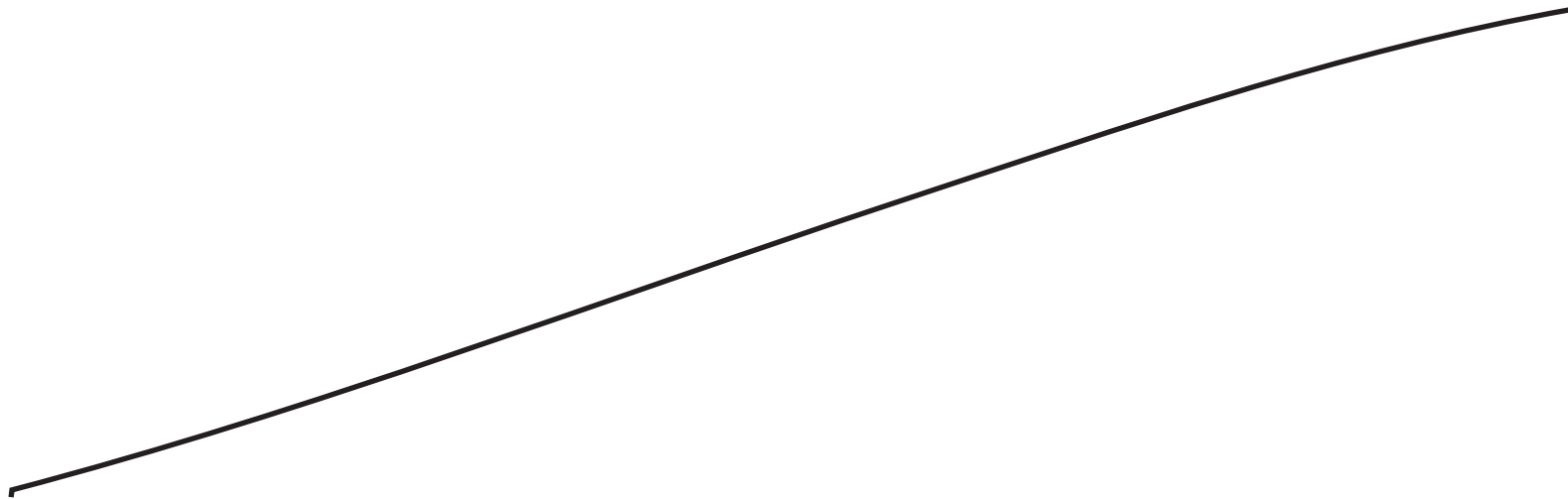
We wanted to show diversity of approaches to the talent tests. It's a pity we could not include all the media, for example sculpture. However, this would be too demanding in terms of funding and also because of the length – the film would get twice as long. Not all the studios wanted to be included, which in fact made our selection easier and I'm happy about the final structure. Each studio has a slightly different vision of their role and their selection criteria. Art is not like sports or science; it cannot be measured so easily. It is therefore interesting to observe how the selection process gets influenced by personal taste, overall feeling, the studio's strategic concept or the structure of students who had already been admitted. I really appreciate how open the academy was about its processes and how they admit that they are not 100% in control of everything. They saw the film as a kind of feedback and I'd say it's always a healthy approach.

TB:

I think it has two levels. One level is simply the fact that not only at art schools, but also in society as such, plurality is extremely important. It is this, let's say, Nietzschean concept of what is good for one person may not be good for another. There are very different types of people with very different needs. Vladimír Kokolia made an apt comment after seeing the film for the first time: "It's great that we still don't understand each other completely here at the AVU." This is a crucial and useful thing. Especially if we know why we don't understand or agree completely and if we're able to have a factual discussion about it.

The New Media 2 studio is different from the Graphic Design 2 studio in any imaginable way. As a student – if I had any artistic talent, of course – I would choose Kokolia's Graphic Design 2 studio based on my personal inclinations, but I fully understand why the school has the New Media as well. Among other things, it is an experimental lab where new unorthodox methods can be tested. As a slightly conservative person, I may be a little sceptical about some of them and I wouldn't pretend otherwise, but I fully understand why it makes sense for the above-mentioned plurality. We tried to work with this diversity intentionally – in fact, we followed the simple dramaturgical rule that if three people do the same thing, it is not the same thing.

The other level is also simple: making a film is the art of the possible, and you can only do it with those who are willing to. There are also other interesting studios at the AVU, but we weren't able to come to agreement with all of them. However, the resulting composition is certainly more than virtue made of necessity. Honestly, we would have probably reached it even in case of no limitations at all. Perhaps, the only hypothetical difference would be adding the sculpture studio where they would hardly talk and mostly just do things.





● Was there anything surprising? And did you find answers for all your questions?

AK:

For me, the whole work was about searching for an answer to my question how the most prestigious art school in Czechia organizes its talent tests. What do the teachers look for and what are their selection criteria? Do the applicants need to be able to draw? How important is it to know the context for art work? What does it mean to be an author? Why do we need arts nowadays – if we still do? What is an artist's social role? These were some of the questions I was curious about. I'd find it fascinating to ask such questions at the time when the AVU was founded or, for example, in the 1950s when the school and artwork was heavily controlled by the state ideology. And so we made a report on talent tests in 2020.

The very fact we were present during the talent tests and allowed to enter the building gave me some basic insight. I'm not offering any objective answers, but our documentary will reveal the process to the audience so we could look for the answers together. That's what I'm looking for.

TB:

I haven't found any ultimate answers, but after all, I never find them anywhere. This was actually another confirmation of the fact that the more you learn about something, the less clearly defined your opinion is. Although in fact, we live in an era when – as Tereza Matějčková pointed out fittingly – opinions are overrated while thinking is underrated.

Nevertheless, there was something I found slightly surprising. When asked why and for whom we make arts, many protagonists gave answers such as “I do it for myself”, “because I feel it this way” or “Because I can and because I want to.” In the film, this is naturally but a partial layer and certainly not the most important one, but I still find it remarkable. I believe it says something about the value paradigm of the current generation of the “Klaus children” as I call them, something they grew up with and see as self-evident. The heritage of liberal individualism seems still very strong and perhaps that's why most attempts of collective or community functioning of studios appears a little awkward. As Vladimír Kokolia says in the documentary, in the 1990s, we moved from one extreme to another and in the name of everything “personal” in art, we sort of forgot those “impersonal” or “transpersonal” aspects. Some time ago, I tried to write an essay on this topic. I may publish it one day, but I don't want to do it now and influence viewers before they get to see the film.

I will only mention one key idea that was expressed so well by Hannah Arendt. She said that what differentiates philosophy of the modern age from the previous eras, is the emphasis and analysing of the self and self-consciousness as something separate from the soul or person or human existence. All experience including the world of people around us is reduced to experience of consciousness of the self. The typical sign of the modern era is therefore not alienation from the self as Marx suggested, but rather alienation from the world. I was surprised to see this becomes very obvious in some moments of our film.

● **Is there anything you'd like to share with the viewers before the screening?**

AK:

It would be great if they come with their friends to the cinema and see the film. They will surely have fun and remember various amusing situation from the times when they took entrance exams or any interviews – as all of us have had some of them. I'd also like to invite high-school students who are considering application for an art school. They will get an idea what it may be like, and perhaps becoming more familiar with this formerly unknown territory may give them empowerment and insight.

TB:

I think they should just watch the film and see what they think. It may or may not resonate, but it hopefully contains everything that me, Adéla and Hedvika wanted to point out. If we explained things explicitly before the screening, we would erase everything beautiful, implicit and uninstrutive about the film. So perhaps just one thing: if the viewers don't find it good, they do not need to comfort us with those polite phrases like "I'm sure you worked really hard on it". As we have learned from Vladimír Kokolia, it is often the most pathetic works that cost too much hard work (laughter).







Interviews with protagonists

Graphic Design 2 studio: Vladimír Kokolia and Eva Červená

New Media 2 studio: Kateřina Olivová and Darina Alster

Painting 4 studio: Marek Meduna and Petr Dub

Questions:

- **Why did you agree with shooting at your studio and what was it like for you?**

Vladimír Kokolia – Graphic Design 2:

We were astonished by the amount of the filmmakers' work and time as well as their sensitive perfectionism. We trust them, so we wanted to see them in action and learn from them. They had to process huge amounts of material and then brutally reduce it – I envy them by no means.

Furthermore, we were flattered by their interest in the academy. Teaching at the AVU is full of paradoxes. Sometimes it is the teaching that prevents students from finding their own way. And this film is certainly aware of such paradoxes.

Kateřina Olivová – New media 2:

We found their idea, responsibility and sensitive approach very appealing, plus we liked the idea of experimenting. Our main concern was convenience for applicants as we didn't want them to feel discouraged. So we kept asking them during the talent tests how they were feeling and whether they didn't mind the shooting. We did our best to communicate adequately and we also had some rest with several camera-free moments.

It has been an intense, rich and nourishing experience. We decided to let loose, take no notice of the crew and go on with our lives as usual.

Marek Meduna – Painting 4:

I'm not quite sure, to be honest, perhaps because we weren't able to find many reasons why we shouldn't. We were also curious what it's like to become work material for someone else. And last but not least, it was also fondness with the filmmakers and their work.



Petr Dub – Painting 4:

I found the idea of the documentarists' intervention at the talent test interesting and provocative. It is a break from what we usually perceive as a standard school year flow with all its administration and bureaucracy, rapidness, limits to creativity yet being very personal and dramatic. I also realized that the presence of the crew will make us all – both students and applicants – step out of our comfort zones. However, this is what the art is principally based on: constant searching and crossing borders, whether social or artistic ones. I am not a big fan of safe zones as they blunt our perception, relation to reality and possibilities of art experiments which are necessary to prevent existential sterility. I took the shooting as a personal challenge and also a duty related to my formal position at the academy.

● What does the film say about the AVU and contemporary arts?

Vladimír Kokolia – Graphic Design 2:

It shows that studying an art school is not as simple as some may think.

And perhaps the fact that the current arts might appear as an institution with enormous rights and little responsibility, although there must be some accuracy or reliability, no matter how hard it is to define, which turns this seemingly foolish activity into an exciting and even risky endeavour.

It also shows that people want to study arts – although it's not quite clear what it's about. The reason why it's not clear is because it waits for them. Ideally, it happens through them.

Kateřina Olivová – New media 2:

We believe we can partially reveal what today's art is, how it acts, how it is created and also evaluated. It shows that the entrance exams are a subjective and demanding task for all the people involved – they take a lot of energy and responsibility. And maybe, for some people it may also be an inspiration to apply and get ready for the tests at the selected studios (as all of them are very different)!

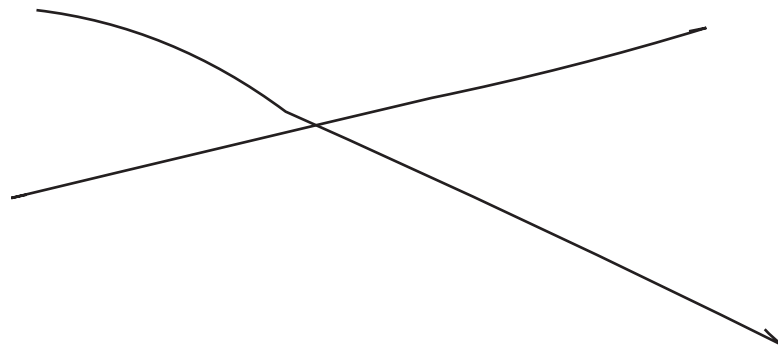
Marek Meduna – Painting 4:

I don't think this film is about contemporary arts. And I'm not quite sure whether the filmmakers had this ambition. It is about the talent tests. The fact that many people apply, but few are admitted. It shows that all the protagonists are basically interchangeable elements in the selection mechanism. Some may think of Jaroslav Papoušek's film *The Most Beautiful Age* and the comically peculiar world of visual arts. Others may wonder who the AVU teachers actually are.

Other viewers' attention may be caught by the hint of attitudes and ideologies, rather felt than explicitly thought over, or various strategies of approaching one's public image – such strategies may be rather amateurish as visual arts are hardly featured in mainstream media and thus the protagonists often have relatively limited media experience. Despite all potential generalizations, this film tells me that we take our roles – both as teachers and students – in a way that is far from automatic. This non-automatic, unobvious approach mixes with other roles – that of a Moravian weird guru, fake irony or the feminist-matriarchal mycelium which may be somehow different from what it seems to be.

Petr Dub – Painting 4:

In retrospect, I see the position of the AVU as a bubble inside a bubble after the documentary was made. In a way, the time stopped at the academy. In those two hundred years of its existence, very little has changed about the way this school operates. We can accessorize ourselves with progressive vocabulary, fortify ourselves with new isms, shield ourselves with woke codes of ethics, de-hierarchize the whole institution and give it a sexy design, but obviously, humans are still just humans. They still have their desires and problems, which applies both to teachers and students. And still, I believe that even in the spotlight, the academy appears as a unique place to be. With its life that is ephemeral and eternal at the same time.





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