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Image from Marie-Charlotte Pez 

Documentary tips for IDFA 2023

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The 36th edition of the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) features a curated collection of over 250 documentary films from across the world. This year's festival is scheduled to run from 8 - 19 November at various theatres throughout the city. To kick off your experience, here are some initial recommendations!

A Picture to Remember (2023), directed by Olga Chernykh



Image from A Picture to Remember (2023), dir. Olga Chernykh

The film offers an intimate, essay-like portrayal of Ukraine's persistent conflict and tumultuous past. It explores the experiences of three generations of women: the filmmaker, her mother, and her grandmother via the incorporation of vintage family footage, recorded dialogues, and news broadcasts. The outcome is a multifaceted, personal film that seamlessly navigates through different time periods.

Choose Me (2023), directed by Amchilini





|Image from Choose Me (2023), dir. Amchilini

In Chad's Boutelfil village, drought causes severe land damage, leading male figures to blame unmarried women for their problems. They propose reviving Amchilini, an Islamic custom where unmarried women choose a husband publicly. However, when filmmaker Allamine Kader Kora speaks to young women privately, they express concerns about gender equality and personal autonomy, rejecting Amchilini as a misogynistic fantasy.

Hollywood Gate (2023), directed by Ibrahim Nash'at



|Image from Hollywood Gate (2023), dir. Ibrahim Nash'at

In Kruger National Park, a group of young South African women known as the Black Mambas work to protect rhinos and elephants from poachers. Whilst it might seem like a dream job, the truth is more complex. This engaging documentary reveals how there are no real opportunities for advancement, and better-earning jobs - such as park guides - invariably go to (white) candidates from outside the community.

Kokomo City (2023), directed by D. Smith



|Image from Kokomo City (2023), dir. D. Smith

Shot, directed, and edited by D. Smith, a transgender woman and former music producer, this film follows the experiences of sex workers and highlights the challenges they face as black transgender women in a major American city. These women discuss their place in the black community and the perspectives of their mothers. The black-and-white film also features testimonies from men regarding their acceptance of trans women and delves into themes of violence, beauty, wisdom, and sexuality through a mix of performances, fictional scenes, and interviews.

Malqueridas (2023), directed by Tana Gilbert





|Image from Malqueridas (2023), dir. Tana Gilbert

This poignant debut film offers an intimate glimpse into life within a Chilean women's prison, using photos and videos captured by inmates of more than 20 mothers' experiences in a collective narrative. The film primarily centers on mothers serving long sentences, who can keep their babies with them until the age of two. After that, control over their children's care and contact becomes uncertain. Their stories revolve around powerlessness and yearning, highlighting the exchange of affection and maternal love within the prison.

Three Promises (2023), directed by Yousef Srouji



|Image from Three Promises (2023), dir. Yousef Srouji

This documentary, set during the Second Intifada in the West Bank, follows Suha, a Palestinian mother who recorded her family's daily life amidst conflict. In 2017, her son, the film's director, Yousef, discovered these videos and explores why his mother documented their life during wartime and why she postponed leaving the country, breaking a promise to God. The film underscores the importance of documenting the present, offering a unique perspective on a mother's journey, a boy's childhood, and Palestinian history.

The Klezmer Project (2023), directed by Leandro Koch & Paloma Schachmann



|Image from The Klezmer Project (2023), dir. Leandro Koch & Paloma Schachmann

Argentinian videographer Leandro Koch, initially disinterested in his Jewish heritage, falls in love with klezmer clarinetist Paloma Schachmann. They journey to Eastern Europe to explore traditional Yiddish wedding music, klezmer. Despite limited Jewish presence, they find local folk musicians keeping klezmer elements alive. Their journey is interwoven with a folktale of lovers challenging Jewish traditions, and they explore the transition from Yiddish to Hebrew after World War II. "The Klezmer Project" also pays tribute to the neglected Yiddish language.

Postcard from the Veracé (2023). directed by Natalia Koniarz



|Image from Postcard from the Veige (2023), dir. Natalia Koniarz

A young Polish couple embarks on a challenging bike ride through the Andes, facing danger and strain. They try to cross into Bolivia in a truck, encountering a soldier. Amid growing tensions, they find the journey fosters self-discovery and strengthens their relationship. Capturing stunning shots of the desolate mountain landscape, the film tells a visually striking story of growth and connection amidst crisis.

JessZilla (2023), directed by Emily Sheskin



|Image from JessZilla (2023), dir. Emily Sheskin

Here we follow Jesselyn Silva, a determined young female boxer from New Jersey with Olympic dreams. She's been training since she was seven to excel in a male-dominated sport. Interviews with Jesselyn and her father Pedro offer insights into their views on boxing and life. As Jesselyn becomes a three-time national champion, their American dream takes shape. However, it is turned upside down when Jesselyn is diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumor around the age of 15.

Where Am I From? (2023), directed by Nouf Aljowaysir



|Image from Where Am I From? (2023), dir. Nouf Aljowaysir

In this thought-provoking video essay by Nouf Aljowaysir, she grapples with the complex question of her origin, having lived in the US since the age of 13, born in Saudi Arabia, and with family roots in Iraq. Aljowaysir engages in a dialogue with an AI system in a British accent, discussing her heritage and identity. The AI's responses

in a dialogue with an historian in a Dutch setting, discussing her heritage and feeling that her responses reflect Western biases and knowledge gaps about the Middle East. The film becomes a personal exploration of Aljowaysir's genealogy and life experiences, sparking a challenging conversation about migration and identity.

About IDFA

From 8 to 19 November 2023, you can enjoy more than 200 films and documentaries in all kinds of theatres throughout the city as part of the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam. For the complete programme and tickets, check out the [IDFA website](#).

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