

# A HOLE IN THE HEAD



2016  
DOK LEIPZIG  
INTERNATIONAL  
PROGRAMME

Jihlava  
IDFF 2016  
Official  
Selection

TRIESTE  
FILM  
FESTIVAL  
2017  
OFFICIAL SELECTION

OFFICIAL  
SELECTION  
THESSALONIKI  
DOC FESTIVAL 2017

ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA  
JEDEN SVĚT 2017

mffk  
Mezinárodní festival  
filmových klubů veřejnosti  
OFFICIAL  
SELECTION

The Holocaust as a scar on the body and soul of the European Roma and Sinti.

**Written and directed by:** Robert Kirchhoff

**Director of photography:** Juraj Chlpík

**Sound:** Václav Flegl

**Editing:** Jan Daňhel

**Screenplay consultant:** Jan Gogola, Jr.

**Producer:** Barbara Janišová Feglová / HITCHHIKER Cinema

**Co-producers:** Martina Šantavá / Czech Television, Soňa Komová / Radio and Television Slovakia, Robert Kirchhoff / atelier.doc

**Main cast:** Raymond Gurême, Fatima Dedić, Nadir Dedić, Toti Dedić, Ladislav Welward, Ján Konček, Krystyna Gil, Karol Parno Gierliński, Rita Prigmore, Philomena Franz, Dragoljub Acković, Daniel Vojak, Fedor Gál, Markus Pape, Jan Hauer, Arnošt Vintr and others.

## LOGLINE:

The Holocaust as a scar on the body and soul of the European Roma and Sinti.

## SYNOPSIS:

Little is known about the tragedy of the Roma and Sinti during the Second World War. They were murdered by the tens, hundreds and thousands; in concentration camps, by the edges of mass graves and roadsides, by rifle butts, hammers or gas. Silence surrounds them. For years they existed and still exist on the edge of society. They survived and keep their memory and scars as proof. In a world where fascism is once again prevalent, they are one of the last living witnesses to the Holocaust. They exist with a hole in their head, an imprint from the past.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:

I believe that what helped the Roma and Sinti survive during times of persecution during the Second World War was their non-materialistic nature and attitude towards the world, existence and time. Their inner freedom is in fact a gift of irrationality or perhaps culture, that allows them to talk about their past and present, about life and death. That's what I wanted the film to convey the most - the memory that they keep with them and the one that our collective subconscious validates. I decided to record how the Roma and Sinti deal with their own history 70 years after the end of the war. I searched for what fascinated me the most about this subject, which was the human will and freedom. The use of illustrations and archive materials is omitted. Their scars, both visible and invisible, remind them and us, to never forget. To forget, would be the worst thing that we could do.

## Technical aspects

**Year of production:** 2016

**Country of production:** Slovakia, Czech Republic

**Genre:** Documentary essay

**Run time:** 90 min

**Languages:** Slovak, Czech, German, Polish, French, Serbian, Croatian, Sinti

**Subtitles:** English

**Rating:** 15

**Aspect ratio:** 16:9

**Sound:** 5.1

**Shooting format:** 2K

**Distribution formats:** DCP

**Official distribution premiere in Slovakia and the Czech Republic:** March 2017

**Distribution company in Slovakia:** Slovak Association of Film Clubs

**Distribution company in the Czech Republic:** Film Distribution Artcam

**World sales:** Taskovski Films

**Produced by:** HITCHHIKER Cinema

**In co-production with:** Czech Television, Radio and Television Slovakia, atelier.doc

**Made with the financial support of:** The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, Slovak Audiovisual Fund, International Visegrad Fund, Bratislava Region

**Website:** <http://aholeintheheadfilm.com>



WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT  
OF THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC



SLOVAK  
AUDIOVISUAL  
FUND



Visegrad Fund



BRATISLAVA  
REGION

## THE TEAM



**ROBERT KIRCHHOFF** is an independent film director, producer cinematographer, and scriptwriter. From 1995 to 2000, he studied film directing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, where he graduated as M.A. (2000) and later as Art. Dr. (2006) in documentary film. Throughout his professional career, he has filmed and produced a number of feature documentaries, many of which gained significant recognition at numerous festivals locally and internationally. His filmmaking focuses on current social topics that deal with the traumatic heritage of historical events in Central Europe during the 20th century. He provides critical insight into the current state of ethnic minorities pushed to the edge of society in post-Communist Slovakia (Black Word/Calo Lav, 1999), or explores the social and moral identity in the wake of "capitalism" in the former Eastern Block (Hey You Slovaks, 2002).

Most notably, the screenings and retrospective of his work include such prominent venues as Anthology of Film Archives, New York, USA (2006), Columbia University, New York (2004) or New School University New York (USA), (1999).

Since 2002, he is the founder and CEO of atelier.doc Ltd., which was established as an independent production organization focusing primarily on the production of documentary films and TV movies ([www.atelierdoc.sk](http://www.atelierdoc.sk)).

Since 2003, he has also produced and co-produced some of the most significant and awarded Slovak and Czech documentaries that gained national and international recognition. These include such titles as: Disease of the Third power (dir. Zuzana Piussi), Made in Ash (dir. Iveta Grofova), Obscurantist and his Lineage (dir. Karel Vachek). He also co-produced the documentary Blind Loves (dir. Juraj Lehotsky), which was awarded the CICA Award at Cannes 2008.

In addition to his filmmaking career, Robert Kirchhoff holds an academic appointment of Assistant Professor at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava where he leads the course: the Directing of Documentary Film and Auteur Documentary Film. He teaches film courses at Summer Film School in his native Slovakia or in the neighboring countries of Central Europe.

### FILMOGRAPHY (selection)

Filmography: Merry Christmas (1996), Recollection (1997), Losses and Returns (1998), Čierne slovo/Black Word/Kalo l v, (1999), Hej Slov ci/Hey You Slovaks, (2002), Flowers of Evil (2003), Glamour and Misery (2005), Slovensk  kino: Duch v stroji/ Slovak Cinema: Ghost in the Machine, (2010), Kauza Cervanov / Normalization (2013), Steam on the River / Para nad riekou, (2015)



### JURAJ CHLP K (DOP)

Graduated with a degree from the Cinematography and Photography Department of the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, Slovakia. He has shot dozens of commercials (Gucci, O2, McDonalds, Orange, Coca Cola, Skoda Auto, Freixenet, P&G, T-mobile, Unilever, Sky TV or Allianz), video clips and films. In 2011, he published a book of photographs titled Petr alka Identity, followed by an exhibition and short film release of the same title. (Slep  l sky /Blind Loves, Posledn  autobus / The Last Bus, Dom / The House, Nina) \*selection of director of photography's filmography



### JAN DA HEL (Editor)

Jan is an accomplished editor, photographer and also retains a post at the Faculty of Performing Arts in Prague teaching editing. He has worked and continues to work with the most prominent Czechoslovak directors. Last year, he was awarded the Czech Lion by the Czech Film Academy for his editing of the feature film D ra u Hanu ovic / Nowhere in Moravia. Since 1992, he has edited 40 feature length films including: B ba z ledu / Ice Mother (2017), P rko / Little Feather (2016), Gottland (2014), Nov  j vit / A New Life (2013),  t r  slunce / Four Suns (2012), Nebe, peklo / Heaven, Hell (2010), Pokoj v du i / Soul at Peace (2009), Venkovsk  u itel / The Country Teacher (2007), V clav (2008),       / Something Like Happiness (2005), Divok  v ely / Wild Bees (2001).





### **DANIELA MERESSA RUSNOKOVÁ** (Research)

Daniela graduated with a Master of Arts degree from the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava in 2006 and with a Doctor of Arts degree in 2014. Her graduation project (Sona and her Family, VSMU 2006) received significant recognition at national and international festivals. She focuses on documentary film directing and documentary photography. In her filmmaking, Daniela deals with social topics within different minorities and foreign cultures. From 2002 to 2003, she took part in an ethnographical survey of Roma settlements in Slovakia. In 2004, Daniela was granted the Socrates Erasmus Scholarship at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki. From 2008 to 2009, she was granted a Fulbright Scholarship for research for her dissertation at

San Francisco State University with additional consultations at Harvard University. She is currently finishing her time-lapse documentary film project titled Journey to Success, on which she has been working on intermittently in Mongolia since 2005.

## PEOPLE FEATURED IN THE FILM



### **Ladislav Welward**, Slovakia

He spent the war years in Banská Štiavnica, where as the child of Jewish parents, he witnessed countless acts of persecution, plunder and denouncement not only at the hands of the Hlinka Guard but by neighbors and acquaintances. He was baptized at the age of two and brought up in the Catholic faith. He spent the end of the war in a Roma camp in Dubnica nad Váhom where his father worked as a camp doctor. After their Jewish identity was exposed to the camp guards, the Welward family was deported to Auschwitz. Their

train was bombed by the Allies and they were sent back to Dubnica nad Váhom to Gestapo headquarters. They were saved by the fact that the Germans were now on the run and were too busy leaving no traces behind them. After the war, Ladislav Welward attended the exhumation of victims in Germany, where his older brother died and in Kremnička, where his grandmother died.

#### Quote:

„I never divided the people in the camp with me between Jews and Gypsies. They were people who suffered the same as I did. They were as innocent as I was and were suffering for something they had not caused.”



### **Jan Hauer**, Czech Republic

A Sinti Roma, one of the survivors of the Lety u Písku concentration camp where his father's first wife and four of their children died. His little sister Berta was also brutally murdered there. Jan Hauer's interest in the fate of the Roma and Sinti during World War II stems not only from his own survival but also from his role as an activist. He currently fights for the dissolution of the piggery that stands on land where Lety u Písku concentration camp used to be.

#### Quote:

„I think about what happened here. Many from my family are here. They threw my sister into a pond when she was two and a half months old. No one knows how many people are buried here.”



### **Arnošt Vintr**, Czech Republic

He was born in Kyšice to a poor family. After their own neighbors denounced them, the Vintr family found themselves in the Lety u Písku concentration camp. His childhood years were spent facing the ravages of the war. According to his memories, on May 27th, 1943, they rounded up prisoners in cattle wagons and sent them to Auschwitz. There he met Dr. Mengele himself, who conducted brutal experiments on him. That is where the scar on his head comes from. When his mother found out that the SS had deserted the camp on

January 23rd, 1945, she took her son and hid in a nearby farmhouse. She later hitched up some horses and they made their way back home to the Czech Republic.

#### Quote:

„I close my eyes and after 17 years I still see that man in front of me, his arm raised...Look, there's his hat with the crossbones. I see that SS officer in front of me.”



### **Markus Pape**, Czech Republic, Germany

A German journalist, publicist and translator living in Prague. He studied sociology and foreign languages at universities in Frankfurt am Main and Bamberg. He relocated to the Czech Republic in 1991, where his work focuses on the problematic issues of racism and discrimination. Since 1998, he has also taken on the role of legal advisor and observer for minorities who have been subject to discrimination or violent neo-Nazi attacks. He is the author of a book about the Lety u Písku concentration camp titled *No One Will Believe You*.

The book draws not only from historical evidence but also features interviews with 60 camp prisoners.

#### Quote:

„I think that de-Nazification is a terribly academic word. It's about de-pigging society. I think that it's an important symbol. The piggery should be demolished and those buildings are the best place for a collaborative memorial. Not only for the Czechs. A memorial of collaboration and indifference.“



### **Fedor Gál**, Czech Republic, Slovakia

A Slovak politician, sociologist and prognosticator who was born in the Theresienstadt internment camp. His brother Egon, a philosopher, was five years old at the time. In November 1989, during the Velvet Revolution, he became co-founder of the political movement Public Against Violence. He later became Chairman of Public Against Violence and advisor to the Federal Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. After his voluntary departure from politics, he founded the publishing company GplusG, which focuses mainly on

factual literature and current journalism.

#### Quote:

„My brother doesn't remember a thing and she (Denisa Elbertová) remembers everything. But that's also because you suppress what you don't want to remember.“



### **Raymond Gurême**, France

He was born on August 11th, 1925 and was married to Julienne Pauline with whom he has 15 children. Since the age of two, he performed in his father's circus as a clown. Even though his father was owner of both a circus and a movie theater, had all his paperwork and landowner's consent, on October 4th, 1940, his family was illegally imprisoned. Raymond was 15 years old at the time. He was imprisoned and managed to escape from camps in Darnétali, Montlhéry, Villa des Roses, Pré Pigeonne and Angers. He stole an SS supply

truck from a correctional facility, was imprisoned once again but managed to escape four times in Germany; from two forced labor camps, from Hedderheim and from a Frankfurt prison. After he fled to Paris, he joined the resistance, then the army and then returned home. His family survived the prison camp, yet the consequences of starvation and overall duress of the camps had a catastrophic effect on them for years to come. He wrote a book about his life story titled *Interdit aux nomades* (Nomads Not Allowed). Raymond Gurême was knighted by President François Mitterand and made a member of the French Legion of Honor. He is also Honorable Chairman of La Voix des Roms. He is an advocate of freedom of movement, he fights against police injustice, attends demonstrations and gives lectures at schools.

Historical facts: From 1940 to 1946, refugee camps for nomads were set up throughout France prohibiting their free movement. In September 2014, Raymond was attacked by two police officers in his caravan under the pretense that he was harboring criminals.

#### Quote:

„They talk about shame. It's not shame. I just don't want my children to know about what we lived through during the war. That's all.“



### **Danijel Vojak, PhD.**, Croatia

Born on January 7th, 1980, he has been working at the Iva Pilar Institute of Social Sciences in Zagreb since 2008. In 2011, he obtained his Ph.D. degree at the Faculty of Humanitarian and Social Sciences at Zagreb University. He has also worked for the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Zagreb as a project coordinator. He focuses on the status of minorities in Croatia, the social status of Roma before and during World War II in the Independent State of Croatia and European Union surveys.

Quote:

„What could they have experienced as children and attest to today? I ask you, what do you see through a child's perspective when you come to a camp? What do you remember?“



**Dr. Dragoljub Acković, Croatia**

President of the Parliament of the World Roma Organization and author of the book *They Killed His Eyes* about Dušan Jovanović, a boy who was killed by neo-Nazis in Belgrade. He is co-founder of the Genocide Against Serbs, Jews and Roma association. As an 18-year-old, his father managed to survive a concentration camp but the majority of his family died there. Due to his efforts, a memorial celebration dedicated to the victims of the Roma Holocaust takes place at Jasenovac every year on August 2nd. He is committed to spreading

and broadening society's knowledge of the Roma genocide during World War II.

Quote:

„I believe that our Roma will is what defeats all holocausts and has beaten them already.“



**Toti Dedić, Croatia**

The son of Nadir and Fatima Dedić, a football coach and anti-racism activist. He is president of the World Organization of Roma Against Violence, Discrimination, Racism and Poverty. The organization exists in Croatia for over a decade, its motto being „Pick up a ball against racism, discrimination and intolerance“. He fights against racist and neo-Nazi behavior at football stadiums in Croatia, where the chant „Kill a gypsy, kill a Serb!“ is commonplace, along with the Ustaše greeting „Za dom spremni!“ (For the motherland I stand!)



**Nadir Dedić, Croatia**

Born on May 7th, 1930, he comes from the village of Žeravica near Bosanska Gradiška. His father, Mustafa, was an ethnic Serb and small shop owner. His mother, Šehrija, was Roma. Nadir is registered as a Serb living in Croatia. On October 22nd, 1944, the Ustaše forcefully rounded up the Roma from their village, murdered them and threw them in mass graves. Many of the graves (Velika, Mala Mlaka, Strug, Gradina) still remain uncovered. During the war, 81 members of Nadir Dedić's family died. At present, Nadir and his wife Fatima live

in a Red Cross facility in Zagreb. They do not have their own home and the government refuses to grant them any benefits in spite of their deportation to concentration camps during the war and Nadir's involvement in the resistance. Dedić is a member of the Association of Roma Victims of Fascist Terror, whose goal it is to help find specific numbers and names of the Roma victims during the war. Thanks to his efforts, a Roma memorial was erected to those who perished during the Roma Holocaust. It was unveiled in 1970. He plans to publish a book titled *Gypsy Sadness*, dedicated to the memory of Roma victims in the Balkan states (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia) where the Roma were systematically murdered by the masses.



**Fatima Dedić, Croatia**

She is from Bosanska Gradiška, where in 1944, they rounded up all Roma and deported them to concentration camps. She walked with others, barefoot and naked to a prison in Okučany and then by cattle wagon to Jasenovac. As a child there, she witnessed tremendous bestiality towards the prisoners. According to her memories, she was saved by a German woman, most probably a „Volksdeutscher“, who worked in the camp. After seven months in the camp, the woman managed to smuggle Fatima to her uncle.

During the war, 136 members of Fatima's family died at Jasenovac.

Quote:

„We came to the camp. There was one Gypsy woman and many more. All of the dead children were staring. I thought that they were alive. I never knew you could see when dead.“

„An Ustase came with a knife and said: Taste this, little one. Taste how salty human blood is.“





### **Smilja Tišma, Serbia**

Smilja is from Western Slavonia in Croatia. She is Serbian. After the war she studied law and worked as a lawyer and legal advisor for Josip Broz Tito. She returned to school, attending a University of the Third Age where she studied painting – landscapes.

During her childhood, she managed to survive a number of concentration camps and attempts at ethnic cleansing of the Serbs. Now retired, she paints and exhibits her works as an Army Club member.

Her father and 14 other Serbs from her family were caught and sent to Jasenovac, where he died. In 1941, her mother wanted to take her children and flee to Serbia but Serbia no longer accepted refugees. They were sent back to Croatia, intercepted and taken to Jasenovac and later Stara Gradiška. They were then moved to Sisak children's camp where they were separated from their mother. Their mother most probably returned to Jasenovac and died in Dolna Gradina. When Smilja and her siblings came to Jasenovac in 1942, she was 10 years old. She was the eldest of her four siblings and they all managed to survive by sticking together and supporting one another. After the war, their Croatian neighbor Mata and his wife took them in as their own.

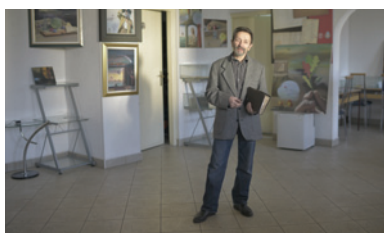
All of Smilja's family on her mother's side died, while on her father's side, two of her uncles' families were completely wiped out along with her father. The remaining nine siblings managed to survive.

Smilja's brother Nikola was a messenger for the guerrilla army and managed to survive as well, despite sustaining serious injuries after crossing a minefield between Ljubljana and Trieste. Smilja never had a family of her own. She lives alone in an apartment in the center of Belgrade and paints the landscapes of her youth. She has yet to find the courage to paint the traumas of her past.

Together with Radomir Kalea and Dragoljub Acković, she is the founder of the Genocide Against Serbs, Jews and Roma Association.

#### **Quote:**

„Every morning that man would walk across that big hall – a former factory hall – and push that cart in front of him. When he noticed a child was dead, he would grab it by the arm or leg and throw it in the cart. I'm an early bird. Just my nature. I wake up and rise early. Every morning, I watched that black man in the black suit with the black cart. That's what is left in my memories.“



### **Radomir Usainović Kalea, Serbia**

He is a Roma painter who paints pictures that interpret the horrors of the extermination of Roma and Serbs in the then Ustaše state of Croatia and abroad. He also paints portraits of influential Serbo-Roma revivalists and their families. Almost his entire family was murdered during the war. His mother, born in 1937, lost her father, who was shot in Banjici. Her father's brothers, sisters and aunts also fell. Radomir and his brother both graduated from music school, their older sister finished hospitality school

and the middle one works with computers. Together with Dr. Dragoljub Acković and Smilja Tišma, he is founder of the Genocide Against Serbs, Jews and Roma Association.



### **Karol Parno Gierliński, Poland**

During the war he was saved by Alfreda Markowska near Rozwadów after his mother threw him from a train wagon heading to Birkenau with a letter and his official papers attached. Thanks to the letter, he was reunited with the rest of his family who survived – his grandmother and aunt. His father died in 1945 and his mother most probably died in Auschwitz. He was one of the most well-known of Alfreda Markowski's 'children' and called her 'mama' until his death.

He began working tinning furnaces when he was 14 years old. He later graduated from art school and focused on painting and sculptures. He wrote poems. He had a daughter, Ania, who died young and left behind a daughter, Marzanna. They both got married when they were 14 years old. Marzanna's daughter wants to follow in her great-grandfather's footsteps and be a painter.

Karol Parno Gierliński was a member of parliament of the IRU (International Romani Union) for two terms. He died a few days after the film was finished.

#### **Quote:**

„...when I talk with people about the war and the fate of people who survived the war as orphans, I come to the conclusion that it would have been best if they had killed the children along with their parents. The fate of those children is very bitter.“



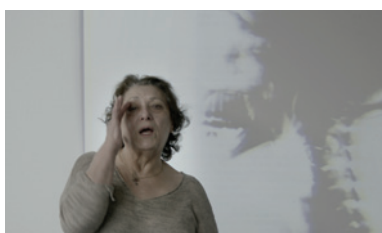
### **Krystyna Gil, Poland**

During the Szczyrowa massacre in 1943, 93 members of the Roma community, as well as her entire family except for her grandmother, were executed. A few Roma did not fit on the wagon headed towards the cemetery, where the execution took place. The commander of the Blue Police (the German police in German-occupied Poland) told them to run into the fields. Krystyna was five years old. Her efforts resulted in the first ever Roma memorial in the world dedicated to the Roma Holocaust. It was unveiled in Szczyrowa in 1956. She visits

the memorial twice a year – on the day the tragedy occurred and on All Saints Day.

#### Quote:

„He didn't shoot children under the age of two. It was a waste of bullets. Instead he grabbed them by the legs and smashed their heads against a wall. That's how my sister died. My brother was 10. They shot him.“



### **Rita Prigmore, Germany**

Nazi Germany's attitude towards the Roma race was guided by the so-called 'Law for the Prevention of Genetically Defective Offspring'. In 1943, Rita Prigmore's mother, a Sinti, was forced to choose between sterilization or Auschwitz. Shortly before her sterilization date, she realized that she was pregnant. The only thing that saved her unborn from sure abortion was the fact that she was expecting twins. She gave birth in a hospital in Würzburg on March 3rd 1943, under the supervision of Dr. Werner Heyde. The twins were taken away

immediately after birth. They underwent numerous surgical procedures to the brain and genetic experiments intended to change their eye color. One of the twins, Rolanda, died at two weeks old. She managed to find her other daughter in 1944 thanks to the Red Cross. Rita's mother never told her about the experiments. She found out about them when she was well into her 50s. A doctor treating her neurological and psychiatric problems noticed evidence of brain trauma from her youth. Only then, after keeping it secret for 50 years, did her mother tell her the story of the twins Rolanda and Rita. The aftermath of these experiments is evident not only by the large scar near her right eye but also by Rita's numerous health problems. In 2007, thanks to Rita's efforts, a memorial dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust was erected in Würzburg. She often visits schools to talk about her life experiences and makes sure that the Sinti and Roma Holocaust are not forgotten.

#### Quote:

„My mother asked, „Where is my other child?“ The nurse took her to the bathroom. Rolanda was lying in the bathtub with a bandage around her head. She was dead.“



### **Philomena Franz, Germany**

She was born in 1922 in Birbach an der Riss. She was a folk dancer and singer in a theater group. In 1943, she was deported to Birkenau where she survived the dissolution of the so-called Gypsy camp and was deported to Ravensbrück and Oranienburg. She currently lives in Rösrath by Cologne and writes Roma stories, organizes readings and gives lectures at schools and universities. In 1995, she was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, the highest civilian award in Germany, for her

efforts towards spreading empathy and understanding.

#### Quote:

„Everything repeats itself. I'm afraid of it all again, just in a different system. Do you understand? Nazis aren't what they used to be. They are different now. Masked.“

## IMPORTANT PLACES MENTIONED IN THE FILM



### **Roma concentration/labor camp in Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia**

In November 1944, an internment camp for Gypsies was established in Dubnica nad Váhom. It was the first and only of its kind in Slovakia. It was a concentration camp where Roma from all of Slovakia were sent along with their entire families. The number of Roma prisoners in the camp soon reached over 700 people, far more than what the camp could accommodate. The Roma there died of exhaustion, starvation, torture and disease. In Ja-



January 1945, a typhus epidemic broke out. There was no medication available for treatment. People began running from the camp in fear of infection. This caused a panic among locals living nearby. The camp was quarantined and could not take in any more Roma prisoners. At this point in time, Germans took over command of the camp and decided on a radical approach towards containing the typhus epidemic. On February 23rd, 1945, they loaded the sick onto a truck supposedly heading to the hospital. The truck stopped at a munitions factory where the sick prisoners were brutally murdered. After the quarantine was lifted, the camp never managed to regain its prior standing. The Allies were pushing forward and the camp was left unguarded. When the prisoners realized that the guards had fled, they ran from the camp. The Roma barracks were later burned to the ground and the entire camp was dismantled. The camp vanished from the face of the earth, as if it had never even existed. The place where the camp used to stand is now occupied by a scrapyard and an empty field. There is no memorial to remind the Roma suffering that was once rampant.



### **Lety u Písku labor/concentration camp, Czech Republic**

The camp was constructed on August 8th, 1940. At first it was used primarily as a labor (correctional) camp for prisoners but later turned into a concentration/internment camp for Czech Roma and Sinti. The camp fell under the jurisdiction of the Protectorate offices, employing Czech guards and enforcing inhumane conditions for those imprisoned. From a total of 1,300 people who passed through the camp, 329 died, 241 of whom were children. Three hundred prisoners were discharged or escaped and over 500 were deported to the

extermination camp Auschwitz–Birkenau. In August 1943, the internment camp in Lety was dismantled due to a typhus epidemic. The genocide of the Czech and Moravian Roma and Sinti, known in the Roma tongue, due to its great significance, as „baro mur-daripen“ (the big killing) is one of the most systematically executed genocides of the Second World War. Only 600 members of the Roma minority were left on Czech and Moravian soil. Lety is a sad memento of the Roma Holocaust in Europe, a topic that evaded discussion until the late 1990s, despite its hundred thousands of victims. In the 1950s, a mass piggery was constructed on the camp's former site. Four decades later, a memorial dedicated to the Roma Holocaust was unveiled right next to it. Attempts to shut down the piggery and give the site the respect it deserves continue to this day.



### **Jasenovac concentration camp, Croatia**

The camp was established by the Independent State of Croatia and it is the most notorious of all Croatian concentration camps. The camp was founded by Nazi collaborators known as the Ustaše (from the word *Ustaša* – revolutionary) who later formed the Army of the Independent State of Croatia under the command of Ante Pavelić. The camp's purpose was to exterminate Serbs, Jews and Roma living within Croatia. The horrific Jasenovac was notorious for its brutality, which overshadowed even its German counterparts. People

regardless of their age or gender, were murdered with knives, hammers, axes and thrown into mass graves or into the river Sava which flows around the camp. Many of the bodies ended up as fodder for the pigs the guards kept within the camp. Since no specific records exist, as the fleeing Ustaše destroyed all evidence, no one knows how many people were really murdered at the camp. The exhumation of hundreds of mass graves in and around the camp would help uncover the truth. Jasenovac was also one of the biggest concentration camps. It is known as the ‚Auschwitz of the Balkans‘. A unique memorial monument, the „Stone Flower“ by architect Bogdan Bogdanović stands at the former camp site.



### **Memorial to the Roma Holocaust, Szczurowa, Poland**

In 1943, a massacre of the Roma inhabitants of Szczurowa took place. Ninety-three people were taken to the local cemetery and murdered. Only five people survived. In 1956, the first-ever memorial in the world dedicated to the Roma Holocaust was unveiled. Krystyna Gil, who survived the massacre as a five year-old, is the person credited with its inception.



### **Auschwitz – Birkenau concentration camp, Poland**

The Roma camp at Auschwitz–Birkenau was exterminated on the night of August 2nd, 1944. Most of the Roma and Sinti ended up in the gas chambers while some were deported to the Buchenwald and Ravensbrück camps (among them was Philomena Franz). The extermination of the camps was preceded by an uprising of the Roma and Sinti, an act which is viewed as one of the only attempts of active resistance at the Auschwitz–Birkenau camp complex.

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ROBERT KIRCHHOFF

### **You worked on this project intermittently for almost 13 years. What does this mean to you?**

That's a long time. It came to me in ebbs and flows. It took me a while to go through all of the necessary archive material. I searched for a structure for the film and for my protagonists. I uncovered buried memories and a nightmarish past. I was surrounded by archive material, I read books, reports and looked at photographs. Then I visited the locations of the worst genocides in Europe. What I saw and what I heard had such a forceful impact on me that I truly believed that this topic would be able to move everyone else as much as it did me.

### **Do you think the significance of the film's subject material has changed since you decided to shoot *A Hole in the Head*?**

When I started working on preparation for the film, the Roma Holocaust was not a popular topic of discussion. It was a marginalized subject. From the beginning, meaning 10 years ago, I always had an idea of what I wanted the film to be. I wanted it to take on a personal stance, not only in regards to me but also to the Roma. I never wanted to make a genre film, a historical documentary. Internally, I struggled with and subsequently refused to talk only about the past. When I met with the people who shared their stories in the film, I realized that the events during the war are still very much an open episode. In the words of William Faulkner, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." These people carried their memories with them for over 70 years. Many were afraid to talk. They didn't want people around them to know. Their own families didn't know. From *Through the Forest*, which was supposed to deal with the historical and current coexistence of the Roma and non-Roma in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, emerged the essayistic *A Hole in the Head*, about memory and our collective historical consciousness.

### **From all of the stories from various countries throughout Europe, why did you choose these protagonists and their stories? Which story impacted you the most?**

It's hard for me to evaluate now. People should know that the protagonists in the film come from all of Europe and during those years, I spoke to tens of people who not only died before the film was finished but before shooting even began. Therefore, I had to choose my protagonists accordingly. I guess I will disappoint all those who expect a factual incision through the history of the Roma Holocaust. How do past traumas resonate today? How was this even made possible? At first, I recorded interviews and when I returned to the recordings, I realized that many of the protagonists of this film have psychological as well as physical scars. They keep reverting to what happened because if they do try to forget, that scar reminds them of what happened. There's no other way to talk about it but in the present tense. A second relevant aspect is our process of forgetting, for those of us who don't have a visible scar. Not only people but also places continually remind us of what happened. You walk through a snow-covered land and all of a sudden someone tells you that you're walking on an uncovered mass grave.

### **What's it like to stand on a mass grave?**

For years trees grew tall on that shallow soil. Light, loose soil, silence and maybe a memorial. Unless you have a sixth sense, there's no way you know where you're standing unless someone tells you. Then you stand there so piously, like a little mushroom. The entire horror of it all stems from the fact that underneath you lie the bones of children, women and men who had nothing to do with the war, territorial or political disputes and to this day they have not been given their names back or granted a decent burial. No one even knows that they ever existed. You get the feeling that no one even cares that no one knows. That's why they build piggeries, recreational centers and factories on the sites of mass graves or perhaps they grow corn fields there.

### **Did you manage to get everything you wanted into the film? Is there something you regret not having in the film?**

In regards to making a personal film and with respect to the subject matter, the people involved, the time that has passed, you always try to do the best work possible. It's almost like you're leaving a message. A documentary essay is a complicated feat because the viewer is supposed to believe you. I was sorry to see the surviving witnesses pass so quickly, to be flung at change so abruptly. You try, you reason, you build trust and all of a sudden it's all gone. A lot of stories were simply never told due to this injustice. No one ever heard them out. Then there's also how you want the film to be, an ambition to tell the film's story as you feel it, yet in a way so that everyone remembers it. It's all a process of trial and error. I just hope I made as few errors as possible.

## CONTACTS



Producer:  
**Barbara Janišová Feglová**  
+421 905 858 808  
boruska@hiker.sk

Festival Coordinator  
**Nicole Brlej**  
+421 905 768 805  
niki@hitchhikercinema.sk

Production company:  
**HITCHHIKER Cinema**  
Za tehelňou 3, 821 04 Bratislava, Slovak Republic  
info@hitchhikercinema.sk  
www.hitchhikercinema.sk

World sales:  
**Taskovski Films**  
19-21 Christopher Street, London, EC2A 2BS  
United Kingdom  
www.taskovskifilms.com

**Short company bio:** HITCHHIKER Cinema is an independent production company founded by the producer Barbara Janišová Feglová in 2012. HC's key interests comprise of seeking non-commercial issues of regional social potential, developing creative author projects and producing films for broadcasting on public television and for theatrical distribution.

**Producer's bio:** Barbara graduated with a Master's degree in Film Theory and Criticism from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. In the following years, she focused on film journalism and screenwriting. Later she pursued PR and publishing activities. From 2006, she became the Executive Producer at HITCHHIKER Films, producing TV documentary projects and in 2012 she founded HITCHHIKER Cinema, her own company, where she currently develops and produces documentaries. (Diera v hlave/ A Hole in the Head, Korupčná výchova/ Fighting Corruption; documentary series – Slovenské kino/ Slovak Cinema, Ažum, Iné ženy/ Other Women, Pánovi učiteľovi /To the Teacher a Prvá /Female First).

### Co-producers:

**Česká televize / Czech Television:** Kavčí hory, 140 70 Praha 4, Czech Republic, <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz>

**RTVS /Radio and Television of Slovakia:** Mlynska dolina, 811 01 Bratislava, Slovak Republic, <https://www.rtvs.sk>

**atelier.doc:** Galandova 5, 811 06 Bratislava, Slovakia, [www.atelierdoc.sk](http://www.atelierdoc.sk)

