

PRODUCERS ELEVATOR PROGRAM

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PRODUCERS ELABORATOR PROGRAM

“ This catalog contains the best projects that have been shortlisted and developed further in close cooperation with international producers ”

Dear friends, dear colleagues,

First of all, let me greet you on behalf of the Producers Guild of Azerbaijan. This catalog reflects the result of the Producers Elevator Program, training programme for young film producers implemented by the Producers Guild of Azerbaijan with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Azerbaijan Republic and the Cinema Agency of the Azerbaijan Republic.

Thanks to the hard work and mentorship of honorable professor from Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf, Mr. Martin Hagemann and Mr. Titus Kreyenberg. They have trained more than 30 participants of the training programme and have provided them fundamentals of Film Producing.

This catalog contains the best projects that have been shortlisted and developed further in close cooperation with international producers. In our opinion, these have more chances to receive positive feedback and recognition of an international audience and are ready to be completed in 2024.

According to the best international pitching practices, we are quite confident, that these projects will light a fire in your heart and would receive your support and that new movie stars will shine in the film sector of Azerbaijan.

Best regards,

Fikrin Bektashi

Chairman of the Producers Guild



SARAH

Producer: Elmira Azizkhanli



Logline

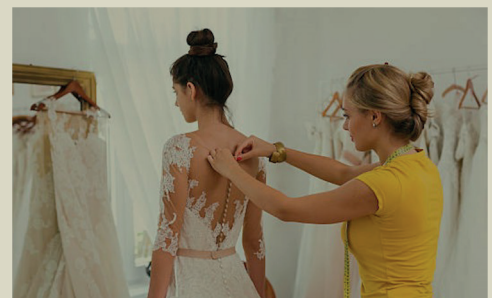
In the middle of preparations for her wedding, Sara's dreams of independence are shattered when Ahmad proposes living with his family after getting married

Synopsis

Sarah (25), an architect, still lives with her mother (50). She has never moved out to her place due to her mother and the pressures of their relatives. Now she is about to get married. She eagerly anticipates her life with Ahmad as a means to establish her independence. Ahmad (28) is a well-off, obedient man who holds a deep affection for his mother.

Sarah's dream of an independent life is jeopardized when Ahmad proposes to move into his family home with his mother after their wedding. Sarah begins to search for advice from her mother to avoid sacrificing her love and independence. What her mother tells her, is not what she expected to hear.

It is a general problem that young people, especially women cannot form their lives as they wish because of gender restrictions. Restricting women's freedom, especially in terms of living space, is normal in some cultures. The purpose of the film is to shed light on this issue from a female perspective.



Short film

Budget: 62 949 AZN

THE LAST NOMAD

Producer: **Nurlan Hasanli, Irina Gelashvili**

Director: **Nurlan Hasanli**

Synopsis

Jamal (15), grappling with poor school performance, seeks to drop out of school to join his family's traditional nomadic sheep farm despite his father, Mirza (38), who envisions a different future for his son. Seeing his son's determination, Mirza concedes to let Jamal work on the winter pasture. Jamal, no stranger to the family's traditional business, faces increasingly challenging responsibilities imposed by his father. Mirza hopes the hardships will dissuade Jamal from pursuing the life of a shepherd.

As spring arrives, the shepherd's family embarks on their migration to the Greater Caucasus Mountains, a 200 km journey. Mirza sends the other family members off by car and sets off with his son Jamal. Jamal encounters migration for the first time.

Besides the difficulty of the road itself, they face modern challenges. Mirza and Jamal have to contend with sedentary peasants who unlawfully occupy their traditional route. Their most formidable adversary, however, is climate change, which has detrimentally altered the region's ecosystems: the largest river has been dwindling in the summer, impacting water distribution, and rising temperatures hinder grass growth for the sheep.

Jamal confronts various challenges, gaining valuable insights along the way. Will these experiences alter Jamal's decision? If he opts out of the shepherd's life, what becomes of his traditional culture?

Logline

Against his father's wishes, the son of a nomad shepherd is determined to quit school and pursue the traditional family business

Full-length documentary

Budget: **326 748 AZN**



I LOVE YOU, DAD



What could be funnier than an educator who needs re-education himself?

Producer: **Rosita Kurbanova**

Director: **Ali-Sattar Guliyev**

Screenwriter: **Javid Kurbanov**

Leading actor: **Taleh Yüzbeyov**

Synopsis

Vasif, an adventurer and an alcoholic, has a baby dropped off at his doorstep.

Instead of going to the police, Vasif decides to raise the baby, because he realizes that with a baby, he can cheat even more successfully!

Vasif names the baby Ali. Together they perpetrate ingenious tricks and scams. It's going quite well and they live together as friends, having fun.

But as time goes by, Ali starts asking questions. Why do the other children go to school and he does not? Why does Vasif often feel sick and it becomes more and more difficult to wake him up? Why do they have to hide from the police?

Vasif gets angry at the boy for asking such uncomfortable questions, and scolds him for being too curious.

Their relationship starts to deteriorate.

But one day Vasif has to choose between his son and his old life.

"I Love You, Dad"
is a great opportunity to introduce
the actively developing Azerbaijani
cinema to the international
audience



80-90 minutes

Budget: **360 000 USD**

Thriller with unnatural element, dark comedy

7

DEAD HASAN

Synopsis

The narrative centers on Hasan, a 29-30-year-old man who, after studying in the capital city, returns to his quiet village to live with his father, Jahangir. One day, Hasan goes missing in the mountains, and the villagers discover him unconscious. The village doctor is absent, and a nurse, in his place, mistakenly pronounces Hasan dead. This shocking declaration leaves Jahangir and the villagers in an eerie silence. Yet, as Hasan's lifeless body is prepared for burial, a miraculous twist transpires. While being ritually washed in the mosque, Hasan mysteriously awakens. His revival bewilders the village, sparking a flurry of whispers and fascination. Hasan's newfound "resurrection" introduces an uncanny aura that pervades the village. As Hasan navigates the changed village landscape, he struggles to cope with the newfound attention and the expectations placed upon him. Word of his supposed miracles spreads rapidly, and people from far and wide flock to seek his blessings, transforming Hasan into a reluctant local saint. His reluctant blessing sets in motion a series of miraculous events, deepening his connection to the villagers. As more individuals approach him with their wishes, Hasan remains skeptical, attributing the outcomes to mere coincidences. The turning point arrives when two investigators, Jafar and Kamil, approach Hasan to seek his assistance in solving a perplexing murder case. Initially hesitant, Hasan is coerced into joining the investigation. His journey unfolds in the bustling district center, where he encounters the complexities of urban life and is confronted by a high-stakes murder case. The narrative takes a chilling turn as Hasan, under duress, makes a crucial decision in the murder investigation that will have far-reaching consequences. He returns to his village, where a fateful encounter with a figure from his past propels the story toward a poignant and enigmatic conclusion.

Producer: **Emil Najafov**

Director: **Turkan Huseyn**

Production company:
Ultra Production, Chinar Film

Logline

A man, mistakenly declared dead, becomes an accidental local saint, forced to investigate a highstakes murder

Feature film

Budget: 250 000 AZN

Unusual Fear

Producer: **Rashid Aghamaliyev**

Co-Producer: **Samaya Hillenbrand**

Director: **Nazrin Aghamaliyeva**



Synopsis

"Unusual Fear" is an animated short film that tells the story of Lala, a young woman dealing with a silent struggle. Living in a world where discussions about women's sexual health are taboo, Lala has always felt a sense of discomfort and unspoken fear about her own body.

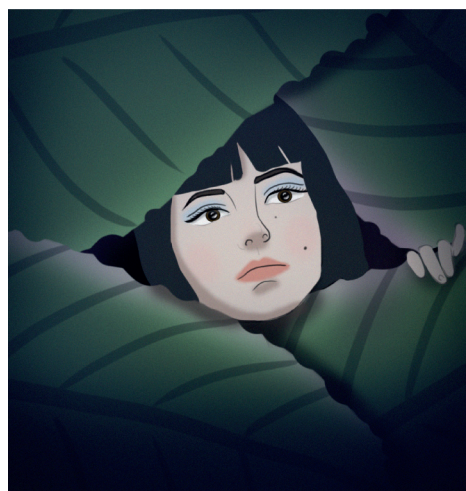
The film opens with Lala nervously stepping into the unfamiliar space of the gynecology clinic. She has been battling a deep-seated anxiety and pain that surfaces in her most intimate moments, a secret she has kept hidden even from her husband.

Lala discovers she has vaginismus, a condition she had never known existed. The doctor's appointment is illustrated through thoughtful and sensitive animation. As Lala learns about her condition, the film takes us through her internal world, now vividly animated.

In the end, Lala's story is one of empowerment. She learns to embrace her condition with new-found knowledge and support. The film concludes with a message of hope and strength, encouraging viewers to find their own voice in a world that often tells them to remain silent.

Logline

Lala, a young woman, confronts her unspoken body fears and sets out on a journey of self-acceptance in a world where discussing women's sexuality is taboo



15 minutes

Budget: 193 811 AZN

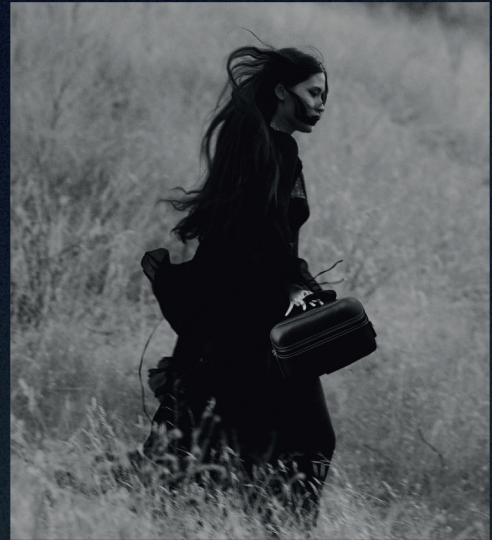


IN THE SEARCH

Producer: **Khayal Afandiyev**

Director: **Sevinj Mahmudova**

Screenwriter: **Khavar Najaf**



Synopsis

Aitan (20) escapes her husband's violence by running away from her house in the village to the city. She lives here in fear. She works as a dishwasher in a cafe to earn money for housing and food. Due to her beauty and loneliness, she was harassed by the men around her. The other women who work in the cafe are jealous of her. But she has no other choice, because her education was interrupted and she did not have the opportunity to learn any craft. When she was only 15 years old, she was taken out of school and forced to marry her fellow villager GARIB (32). Garib, a heavy drinker, became more aggressive over the year. Aitan is now forced to hide from the violent Garib. Photographer ASIF (25), the son of the owner of the house where Aitan lives, falls in love with Aitan. The fact that Aitan was married before does not bother him. Aitan, who was cared for by a man for the first time in her life, hopes to spend next step of life happily with Asif. But Garib's finding of Aitan destroys all her dreams. A hand-to-hand fight begins between Garib and Asif. The issue goes to the law enforcement agencies. As a result of the decision, the lovers are separated. Uneducated and oppressed from an early age, Aitan has to return to her village with her husband.

Logline

A young woman in her 20's who had been forced to an early marriage, seeks her independence after running away from the village

27 minutes

Budget: **68 600 AZN**

SIDES

Producer: Nazim Sherbatov

Director: Almaz Gasimova



Synopsis

Sarah is a television journalist. She is the first person in all hot spots of the city, in the places where the incident takes place. Even the police, emergency medical services, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs arrive almost as quickly. There is nothing to deter her. She prepares a hot reportage from the incident, and is not afraid to go to places that many are afraid of.

For Sara, who does not consider the victims and their relatives, does not empathize, and is somewhat cruel, the work and the rating are more important in any shooting she goes to. Such behavior towards people often leads to disputes with relatives of the victims. They criticize her, make her bitter, and sometimes even drive her away from the scene. Sarah doesn't care about any of this.

When Sarah goes to cover the next crime scene, she encounters a terrifying scene. She sees that the murdered person is her mother. She seems to be in a state of shock. She looks at the woman who was found dead in blood on the ground and does not know what to do or say. At that moment, all the criminal shootings she has done so far come in front of her eyes, all the words she heard echo in her ears with mixed sounds. At one point, losing herself, Sarah closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, opens her eyes and presents the event to the audience as if nothing had happened. Her presentation is no different from the previous ones. She speaks very coolly, lists the details of the event one by one without excitement, fluently.

After that, the young journalist begins to investigate the reasons for the mysterious murder of her mother, who worked as a tutor in an orphanage. The main plot of the film starts after that. She comes across terrible facts. At the same time, many issues, as well as the reason for the negativity in her character, become clear in her meetings with the psychologist. In which direction will Sara's life change after this investigation, which began with the revelation of her childhood traumas?

Logline

The young journalist lady, who is ruthless in her work and has a tough character, is deeply shaken by the mysterious death of her mother, who works as a teacher in an orphanage. During the investigation, facts about the mother's terrible torture of the children are revealed. Afterward, the journalist's life changes completely

Short film

Budget: 120 000 AZN



Drama, Family, Adventure

11

the partner

Every living creature
has the right to...

Producer: **Elchin Haji**

Director: **Namig Aghayev**

Screenwriter: **Alex**

Logline

A poor farmer, on the advice of the village elders, sets out on a journey to sell his old, sickly donkey to the butcher of a neighbouring village, where he encounters a shocking incident requiring unprecedented fortitude

Synopsis

Exhausted by the hardships of poverty, enduring daily and strenuous, yet ultimately unpaid, labor on the inherited land passed down from his fathers and grandfathers, a young villager dreams of one day selling everything. He envisions taking his family to the big city for a better life, intending to start a new business and radically transform their circumstances. However, he has not mustered the courage to take a decisive step toward change. Days pass by routinely, as if the young man is waiting for a specific sign, perhaps one from above.

During the haymaking season, an unusual incident takes place. Despite the screams and blows with a whip, the donkey, buried in hay, sits down and refuses to get up. The donkey is as exhausted as its young master. After all, it has faithfully served the family for many years, working tirelessly to help its masters feed themselves. Like all living beings on earth, the donkey has the right to rest and is susceptible to illness.

On several occasions, the donkey, still a teenager, had to listen silently to the complaints of the current owner, who expressed a desire to continue studies instead of working from morning to night in the fields to support the family. The donkey even laughed with him when the boy shared funny stories. It seemed to the donkey that it had become a friend to the owner.

Does the young villager know and remember all this? Does he realize that the donkey was not just a partner but also a friend?

In the evening, gathered in the young man's house, fellow villagers and elders advise him to sell the ailing donkey for meat. The proposed buyer is a butcher from a neighboring village, whose nephew recently opened a zoo park in a big city. The money raised from the sale could help address some household issues. Why let the opportunity go to waste? The wife appreciates the new dishes from the village potter, and the children dream of wooden toys sold by the local carpenter. The young man himself has long dreamed of selling everything and moving to the big city. Perhaps this is the sign he has been waiting for.

The next morning, with the donkey loaded onto a cart and accompanied by well-wishes for a successful sale from fellow villagers, as well as envious glances from neighbors in similarly dire circumstances, the young man heads to the neighboring village. Braving the last hot days of the passing summer, the road ahead is long.

30 minutes

Budget: 250 000 AZN



Producer: Zaur Mirzazadeh

Director & Screenwriter: Samir Kerimoglu

Synopsis

The main characters of this short film – two brothers living on the border with Iran have been transporting drugs for many years.

A conflict arises between them when one of them wants to leave the case.



Director's statement

My aim is to create a film that captivates and stirs strong emotions, ensuring viewers cannot turn away from the issue of drug trafficking.

It is crucial to depict the harsh reality of this world, enabling everyone to grasp the gravity of its consequences.

15 minutes

Budget: 70 000 EUR

HARD TIMES

Producer: Shahin Aliyev
Director: Rashid Aghamaliyev

Synopsis

Narrative

The narrative of the animated documentary film “Hard Times” is based on a journey. Rediscovering the history of his own family, the narrator embarks on a journey. This journey is the basis of the plot, which is autobiographical with the central image of the author-narrator telling the details of the life of his great-grandfather, who became a victim of mass repression in the Soviet Union during the Great Purge.

This journey is both real, following the route of the great-grandfather's exile and the forced relocation of the family, and at the same time fictional, using animation, instantly transporting us from the Ordubad village to Siberia, from Baku to Ganja and further to the Kazakh steppes.

Narrator

The narrator is one of the film's creators, the producer, Shahin Aliyev. He has a direct personal connection to the story as it is his great-grandfather's tale and the story of his family. The narrative part is based on Shahin's stories, his childhood memories and stories heard in his family.

Journey

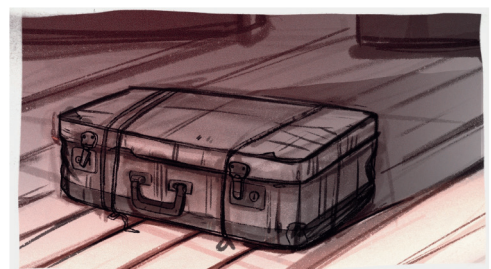
The narrator goes on a journey. The trigger for this journey and research is the traumas of the past, which were passed on in the family from generation to generation. Visiting his great-grandfather's hometown and talking to his grandfather, the Narrator as a contemporary representative of this family analyzes himself and his own life attitude.

With this careful immersion into the history of a particular family, studying their past and the impact of this often difficult and tragic past even nowadays, we uncover a bigger picture. By telling the story of an ordinary family, we touch upon different layers and project their experience onto the fate of the entire country, moving from the specific to the general.

Logline

In an attempt to understand himself, the narrator embarks on a journey, unravelling the story of his great-grandfather, who fell victim to Stalin's repressions. He explores how the events of the past affected the lives of his entire family and society around them

The great-grandfather of the narrator is Mammad Jafar Aliyev (1885–1970). He was exiled initially to Siberia in 1938, then to Kazakhstan and spent 20 years in exile. When he was exiled for the second time, his family was forbidden to reside in Nakhchivan, and was forced to move to Ganja city.



Short film
Budget: 196 691 AZN



Elmira Azizkhanli | Producer

As a Digital Marketing Specialist, Elmira works at "Azerbaijanfilm" studio since 2022. She studied Radio, Television, and Cinema at the Faculty of Communication at Seljuk University (2013-2017), completed a master's program at Anadolu University (2018-2022). In 2015, she studied Audio Visual Techniques and Media Production at Vilnius University. Elmira worked as a 2nd Assistant Director for a film at Ultra Production in 2022, festival manager (2020-2022), Executive Producer on the "Istiqlaliyyet" Documentary (2018). Besides, she completed a fellowship (Chai-Khana Media, 2021) and internship program at the Radio and Television Supreme Council (2016).



Nurlan Hasanli | Director, producer

Nurlan Hasanli is a screenwriter, director, and producer based in Azerbaijan. He received his cinema education in Istanbul and Budapest. He has directed and produced short films, which were selected for the Lublin, Unified Filmmakers, DokuBaku, CineDoc Tbilisi, and Baku International Film Festivals. Additionally, he is an alumnus of Sarajevo Talents 2022.

His debut feature documentary project, "The Amateur Photographer's Family Portrait," was selected for programs such as B2B Doc (2023), CineDoc Tbilisi (2023), and When East Meets West (2024).



Rosita Kurbanova | Producer

Rosita Kurbanova, born in 1983 in Moscow, pursued advertising psychology studies at the Russian University of Innovations (2000-2003). Starting in 2002, she began her entertainment career with KVN's "Stanitsa Sportivnaya" team, excelling in organization and later becoming concert director until 2014. From 2012 to 2022, she served in various roles at Comedy Club Production, notably as administrator, casting manager, and SMM manager for "Comedy Battle." In 2021, Rosita trained in acting at the Postscriptum School Studio and completed an intensive directing course at Alexander Mitta Film School, culminating in a short film project. Since relocating to Azerbaijan in 2022, she continues her creative endeavors, recently attending the Producers Elevator Program in 2023.



Turkan Huseyn | Director

In 2020, she established her own production company, "Chinar Film," and began producing small-budget independent films, primarily focusing on documentary projects. Currently, Chinar Film is in the production stage of two documentary features and developing one fiction feature project. Her debut short documentary, "Papanin" (2021), premiered at the Ji-Hlava International Documentary Film Festival and earned the Best Documentary Award at the Baku Short Film Festival. Turkan Huseyn is an alumna of the GoEast Film Festival East-West Talent Lab, the Sarajevo Film Festival Talents, and the Ji.hlava Documentary Film Festival Academy.



Emil Najafov | Producer

Emil Najafov, an experienced figure in TV and documentary production, served as executive director for TV projects like "Marc Show" and "Mashin Show" at Mgroup Production. He produced documentaries such as "Thinking of Sabir" and "Sattar's Azerbaijan" at Made in Baku Production. Emil also executive produced "Captain" at Ultra Production. Notably, "Sermon to Fishes," which he co-produced and directed by Hilal Baydarov, received two nominations at the Locarno Film Festival. Furthermore, "Məhvolma," a short feature film he produced, directed by Igor Smola, had its world premiere at the Busan Film Festival. Between 2021 and 2022, while at Ultra Production, Emil contributed to the success of films like "Yadlar" (directed by Daniel Guliyev), "Hasar" (directed by Qulu Askerov), and "My Magical World" (directed by Elvin Adigözel). Additionally, the short documentary film "I Still Talk to You," directed by Turkan Huseyn, premiered at the Dok Leipzig Documentary Film Festival alongside other notable productions like "Where Are You, Durna?" directed by Ilkin Yusif.



Rashid Aghamaliyev | Producer

In 2023 he produced a short film HADIS. It premiered at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, was accepted into more than 38 international festivals and received 9 awards.



Khayal Afandiyev | Producer

Khayal Afandiyev was born in Baku in 1983. In 2004, he graduated from the College of Music with the qualification of "Music Theory Teacher." After working as a composer and sound director for a long time, his keen interest in film production prompted him to pursue a second degree. Therefore, at the University of Culture and Arts, he specialized in film studies. Currently, his film analysis articles are regularly published in the media. His filmography includes two feature films as a composer and one short film as a producer.



Elchin Haji | Actor, producer

Elchin Haji was born on December 19, 1987, in Baku. He graduated from the Faculty of Theater and Film Actor of the University of Arts. After military service, he worked as an actor in Yerevan Azerbaijan Theater and Academic Azerbaijan Theater. He has appeared in many films and serials. He was a dubbing actor. In 2020, Elchin Haji created 1 SƏHNƏ producer center. He has been a producer of shows, social media, theater performances. Now he is working on several projects as a producer and he is continuing his acting activities.



Almaz Gasimova | Director

Almaz Gasimova worked as a journalist on various websites and television channels. Currently, she is employed at Oxu.Az website. In her opinion, journalism is also a pathway to becoming a great director. The intriguing events encountered in journalism also serve to inspire filmmaking. She directed a short feature film titled "Namerd," which is related to the point she mentioned.

Her filmmaking journey began in 2015 with "Son mid," followed by "Qalos piri" and "Sabake" in 2021. Transitioning to featured films, she directed "NaMard" in 2022 and "Bir an" in 2023. Additionally, during her education years, she created the animated feature advertisement "Coffee Nuxa."



Samir Kerimoglu | Director

He is an accomplished film director and screenwriter, also skilled in film editor and artist.

6 feature films and 3 short films across a 20-year career, spanning various genres.

His film drama "Intention" the winner Established by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism "Zirve" (Elevation) Award, while his commercial film "XOXAN (House Spirit)" was widely popular among audiences and achieved great box-office success.



Zaur Mirzazadeh | Producer

He has extensive experience in the film industry and has led many successful projects.

Zaur Mirzazadeh is an experienced producer who brought his creative vision to life in this film.

His commitment to storytelling and meticulous approach greatly impacted the final results.



Shahin Aliyev | Producer

Shahin Aliyev is a seasoned professional with a rich background in both the game development industry, where he spent nearly a decade, and project engineering, having honed his skills at BP for six years. Currently, he manages Azerbaijan's largest game development studio, contributing to half of the country's revenue from this sector. With over 100 international projects under his belt, his team and he are no strangers to animation, integrating it into every game they have developed up to now. They are excited to channel this expertise into their first short animation title.

Dear friends in Azerbaijan,

Dear Enablers and Dear Participants,

it was an honor and pleasure to be involved as tutors and mentors in the ELEVATOR workshop from October 2023 to January 2024. First and foremost, we would like to express our gratitude to the Producers Guild of Azerbaijan and its Chairman Fikrin Bektashi, who supported us in engaging with the workshop and collaborated with us in structuring its content. We also extend our thanks to the Ministry of Culture of the Azerbaijan Republic and the Cinema Agency of the Azerbaijan Republic for making the workshop possible in the first place.

Above all, we would like to thank all 30 participants of the workshop who enclosed us with their trust, shared their ideas with us, and brought us closer to Azerbaijan through their stories, ideas, and enthusiasm.

It was crucial for us to work with teams primarily consisting of a producer, a writer, and/or a director. In contrast to other art forms, the seventh art cannot be produced alone. Cinema must be created collaboratively and interdisciplinary. A successful producer is always accompanied by a good writer and director, and around the world, there is invariably an enthusiastic and knowledgeable producer behind successful writers and directors. For quality films, it is essential for filmmakers to collaborate on their stories and ideas from the outset.

These goals were developed and embraced in the projects presented in this catalogue. Emerging from diverse educational backgrounds and equipped with different experiences, everyone worked together to make the best out of the idea and material.

The projects are characterized by a wide variety of genres and different approaches. What unites them is their portrayal of Azerbaijan and, like all good films, addressing universal themes with a local context. Our aim was to create projects that would captivate a local audience equally while also being suitable for international festivals and film markets.

We wish the jurors a lucky hand as they choose the projects to be realized and look forward to the continuation of our collaboration in the future. All that's left for us to say is a heartfelt "Çox sağ olun!"

Titus Kreyenberg & Martin Hagemann



Titus Kreyenberg
Film Producer



Martin Hagemann
Film Producer

2023-2024

