

Eye-to-eye with Kharkiv citizens. New Ukrainian-Czech movie in virtual reality will be featured at American SXSW festival

Kharkiv, 12 January 2023 - Prestigious US film festival South by Southwest (SXSW) organizers announced the list of movies that will be featured in Austin, Texas at the beginning of March. Special XR Experience competition will feature the new Ukrainian-Czech movie Fresh Memories: The Look made by filmmakers Ondřej Moravec and Volodymyr Kolbasa and produced by Czech-based creative studio Brainz Immersive. It is almost a year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and through VR headset lenses the movie teleports the spectators to Kharkiv destroyed by war. There they are confronted face-to-face by local inhabitants affected by war.

Do you dare look straight into the eyes of people whom the war ousted out of their destroyed homes? That is what the new Ukrainian-Czech VR film Fresh Memories: The Look challenges its viewers to do. It is a unique piece reflecting recent political events. That is why the organizers of the multigenre festival SXSW annually held in Austin, Texas have chosen the film to feature in its XR Experience section.

“SXSW is one of the most prestigious film festivals in the world. To take part in its VR competition among other current most interesting immersive projects is a great honor. I believe our movie is not only an important testimony about the horrors of war but at the same time a symbol of solidarity and power of values. Historically, the Czech Republic has had a long-lasting experience with Russian occupation. That is why we decided to participate in the symbolic fight against dictatorship side by side with our Ukrainian colleagues and show there is no place for such ideas in this world. I want everyone to keep that in vivid memory,” says Ondřej Moravec, the director, producer, and screenwriter who drew a lot of inspiration from his experience with human rights topics as a program director of One World film festival.

Fresh Memories: The Look focuses on stories of ordinary people affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The spectator is situated in the ruins of Kharkiv, a playground, a hospital, and a destroyed flat. The locals take long looks into the viewers' eyes. Similarities to the famous performance of conceptual artist Marina Abramovich are not accidental. Deep eye-to-eye looks can transfer strong emotions. The experience is amplified by the fact the actors do not speak. The spectator can only hear authentic sounds of hospital devices or kids at the playground, even though there is nothing else but ruins of houses around.

“We met with Ondrej randomly not long after the war started during the East Doc Platform program. I have voiced aloud my urge to tell people what is going on in Ukraine. I am very grateful that Ondrej decided to support that urge and join me in developing this project,” says Ukrainian filmmaker Volodymyr Kolbasa.

The movie Fresh Memories: The Look was produced by the Czech creative studio Brainz Immersive which is a part of the creative group Brainz Studios based in Prague with the official support of the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic.

“We managed to show how powerful a simple principle, which properly uses the power of this medium, can be in virtual reality. Participation at SXSW is a huge support for the communication of the project and at the same time for the fulfillment of its main goal. This is to not forget the tragic reality that unsolicitedly affects the human stories of ordinary people like us,” says Robin Pultera, founder of Brainz Immersive.

The Look is the first of two parts of the Fresh Memories project. The second part will be an interactive documentary called The Dive, which is currently in development. It will bring the horrors of war to its spectators. Thanks to mixed reality technology they will be confronted by war in the safest space they can imagine, their homes.

The Fresh Memories project is not the first collaboration of Ondrej Moravec with Brainz Immersive studio. It follows a fruitful cooperation on the development of interactive VR movie Darkening which describes how depression affects people and how they can deal with it. It premiered in September 2022 as a part of the immersive section of the Venice film festival.