

Ji.hlava
NEW VISIONS AWARD


THESSALONIKI
INTERNATIONAL
DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL
INTERNATIONAL
COMPETITION 2024
TIDF26

FOREST

A DOCUMENTARY BY **LIDIA DUDA**

THEY CREATED THEIR OWN PARADISE, BUT ONE DAY
BIG POLITICS KNOCKED ON THEIR DOOR



LUMISENTA



LASFORESTDOC

FOREST A DOCUMENTARY BY LIDIA DUDA

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INTERNATIONAL TITLE: **Forest**

ORIGINAL TITLE: **Las**

COUNTRIES: **Poland, Czech Republic**

RUNTIME: **84 min**

LANGUAGE: **Polish, English**

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY: **Lidia Duda**

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY: **Zuzanna Zachara-Hassairi**

SOUND BY: **Krzysztof Ridan, Pavel Rejholec MPSE**

EDITED BY: **Lidia Duda, Filip Stanisławski**

PRODUCERS: **Patryk Sielecki, Michał Ostatkiewicz, Aleksandra Ostatkiewicz**
LUMISENTA FILM FOUNDATION

CO-PRODUCERS: **Michał Sikora** **Anna Bławut Mazurkiewicz** **Lidia Duda**
LONELY PRODUCTION STUDIO FILMOWE RABARBAR

OUTREACH PRODUCER: **Weronika Adamowska**

PRODUCED BY: **Lumisenta Film Foundation**

CO-PRODUCED BY: **Lonely Production, Studio Filmowe Rabarbar, Canal+ Poland, EC1 Łódź - City of Culture, Lidia Duda**

CO-FINANCED BY: **Polish Film Institute, Czech Film Fund**

WORLD SALES: **Rise And Shine World Sales**

LOGLINE

**ASIA AND MAREK CREATED THEIR OWN PARADISE IN THE FOREST,
A PLACE WHERE THEIR CHILDREN WERE GOING TO GROW UP SAFELY,
FAR AWAY FROM THE PROBLEMS OF TODAY'S WORLD.
YET, ONE DAY, BIG POLITICS CAME KNOCKING ON THEIR DOOR.
AND NOTHING WAS THE SAME ANYMORE.**

TRAILER

vimeo.com/lumisenta/forest-trailer

SYNOPSIS

After graduating from university, Asia and Marek bought an old house near the eastern border of Poland. There in Białowieża Forest, the oldest forest of Europe, the couple created their own paradise over the years – a place where their children can grow up safely, away from the problems of today's world. For Marysia, Ignacy and Franek the forest became their second home. Yet one day, things change as strangers show up. Refugees, unwelcome both in Poland and Belarus. Despite controversial border laws the whole family helps those who are in need. The new reality shows its impact on the children's world: they no longer play knights and princesses, but refugees and border guards. The growing humanitarian crisis on the EU border entered the family's safe place, leaving nothing as it used to be.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I'm not interested in big politics, but rather its consequences for an individual person, the human perspective of ethical and moral decisions in a given situation. What I try to find in my protagonists is the strength of character and the strength of family, the members of which support each other in hard times. The fear of refugees, of a political crisis, of war and trauma: this is my antihero. I'd like to tell a story that will give hope to the viewers that they can also find strength within themselves and react to evil and human suffering when they enter their world. This is a universal and positive message.

There have always been and will be refugees as well as people helping them. In this case, they are helped by a Polish family with three little kids. The children are very important in this project. I have decided to focus on them because they are helpless. If the world of adults crumbles, children are always recipients of what has happened in the adult world. The children's narrative is powerful because its emotions are pure, not ruined by political correctness. "Forest" is a human story, not a film showing refugees from a wider perspective. In our project, there won't be any organisations or volunteers helping migrants. There will be only one Polish family, whose life was unexpectedly filled with refugees. Many families around the world, it seems, might relate to their experience.

The project began in August 2021 when thousands of refugees tried to cross the Polish-Belarusian border. Since then, our protagonists have seen so much pain and evil that they are suffering from an emotional crisis. Before that, they helped as much as they could. However, new refugees showed up every day. First, those 'unwelcome' refugees from the Congo, Syria, Iraq... followed by those 'welcome' from Ukraine. The family decided to help those 'unwelcome' ones, but were unable to help all of them. They felt more and more trapped in this situation and helpless in the face of the refugee wave. They experienced trauma and were haunted by nightmarish memories. As a result, the situation, which at first seemed to be a problem of refugees only, penetrated the family's life and changed it forever.

In the summer of 2022, our protagonists stopped helping refugees. They tried to forget about them, saying that now it's warm and easier for people living in the forest. However, winter is coming and the drama in the woods begins again. The cold won't spare anyone, neither women, nor men, nor children.

This is going to be a decisive moment in our project. The Polish family will have to make a key decision for the second time: to help or not to help. I know them and I'm sure their conscience won't let them stay in their warm house, doing nothing. They are going to go to the forest again to save people even though they know now what the forest has in store for them: an ocean of human pain and suffering. Their own trauma. And more nightmarish memories they won't ever blot out.

INTERVIEW WITH LIDIA DUDA ABOUT THE PROJECT FOR "VARIETY"

READ MORE: bit.ly/3BP45Qz

CONTEXT

In the summer of 2021, to put pressure on the European Union, Alexander Lukashenko's regime started to lure refugees mainly from East Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan by promising them an easy way of entering the EU. People are transported and pushed out to the borders with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. The Polish government replies by spreading anti-migrant propaganda and putting the Border Guard on alert. Border Guards illegally push refugees back into the forest and Belarus. After the exclusion zone was set up, journalists and doctors couldn't enter the area, activists' hands were suddenly tied and the local communities were put in a dramatic position.

There is no end in sight to this drastic situation at the Polish-Belarusian border. What is worse, it's been more and more overshadowed by the war since the Russian aggression on Ukraine.

LIDIA DUDA

DIRECTOR

Lidia Duda is a director and writer of documentary films. Her latest film "Fledglings" (2022) received the Marco Zucchi Award in the Semaine de la critique section at the 2022 Locarno Film Festival as well as four awards at the Millennium Docs Against the Gravity Film Festival in Poland. She is a two-time winner of the Grand Prix at the Krakow Film Festival for "Hercules" (2005) and "Entangled" (2012). She also won Grand Prix awards at film festivals in Chicago, New York, Houston, Istanbul, Mexico, Moscow, Banff, Guangzhou and Prague. For her documentary "U nas w Pietraszach" ("In Our Village Pietrasze", 2002), Lidia Duda was awarded the Grand Press. A member of the Polish Filmmakers Association, the Polish Film Academy and the Documentary Directors Guild of Poland.



ZUZANNA ZACHARA-HASSAIRI

CINEMATOGRAPHER

An award-winning cinematographer working on documentaries and fiction films. A two-time winner of the Amber Award ("Jantar") for Best Cinematography at the Koszalin Festival of Film Debuts 'The Youth and Film' (2019 and 2022). She was also awarded at the Zsigmond Vilmos Film Festival, Hungary (2021), and at the 44th Polish Film Festival in Gdynia (2019). She and Wojciech Staroń are behind the cinematography for Lidia Duda's "Fledglings" (2022), which was awarded at the 75th Film Festival in Locarno. The Culture.pl web portal put her on the list of ten most interesting cinematographers of the young generation in Poland. A participant of the prestigious Berlinale Talents 2024 program, dedicated to supporting film talents from around the world.

PATRYK SIELECKI

PRODUCER / LUMISENTA FILM FOUNDATION

Born in 1996 in Lodz, Poland. After two years of professional experience at Lava Films, he began working as a producer at Lumisenta Foundation. His involvement in many film productions has made him one of those filmmakers who fully appreciate the complexity of the film production process. His recent works include "An Orange From Jaffa" (2024) by Mohammed Almughanni, which won the Grand Prix at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival and "Forest" (2024) by Lidia Duda, premiering at the Thessaloniki International Documentary Film Festival. Currently, he's developing the feature-length fiction "You Don't Know Me" by Michal Edelman as part of the MIDPOINT Feature Launch Program 2024.

LUMISENTA FILM FOUNDATION

Established in 2022, Lumisenta Film Foundation focuses on international co-productions for both fiction and documentary films. It aims for projects with high artistic value and strives to create a safe space for young, ambitious creators to explore their individual paths. Throughout the first two years of its activity, Lumisenta's projects were noticed by entities such as: Sheffield DocFest MeetMarket, DOK.Incubator, ARTE, CNC, Canal+, New Horizons Studio+ and Millennium Docs Against Gravity, among others. Lumisenta's recent production, the short film "An Orange From Jaffa" by Mohammed Almughanni, recently won the Grand Prix at the Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival. Lumisenta's current projects include: "Forest" by Lidia Duda (the recipient of the 2022 Ji.hlava New Visions Award), "The Slugs" directed by Katarzyna Gondek, participant of the Biennale College Cinema, "Fakir" directed by Roman Ďuriš and "You Don't Know Me" by Michal Edelman, currently being developed in the MIDPOINT Feature Launch Program 2024.

CONTACT

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