

# 2017 Berlin Film Festival Retrospective

## Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

I was proud to be an American abroad.

â??

â??
https://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/2017/06_streaming_2017/Videos.html#item=45501

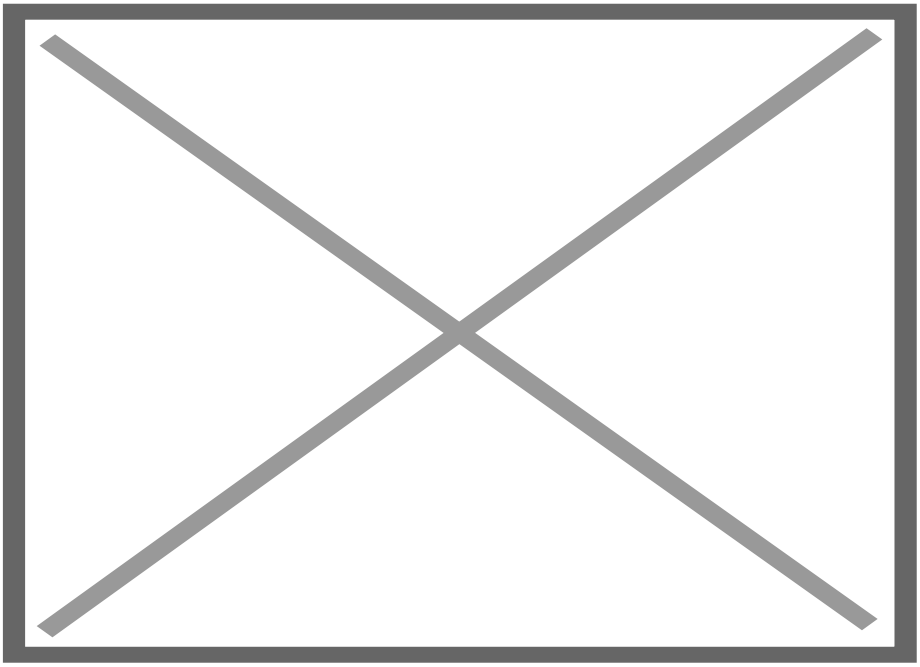
**Diego Luna**: Iâ??m here to investigate how to tear down walls. Apparently there are many experts here. And when I bring that information back to Mexicoâ?¦
**Maggie Gyllenhaal**: And to America.

Of course we must begin with the Wall. Fifty-six years after Berlin was split into two by a wall, a Mexican actor and director and a US actor â?? both members of the International Jury â?? sat together at the first Press Conference of the 2017 festival and drew inspiration from a peaceful revolution to learn how barriers and borders can be overcome. And not in the metaphorical sense.

On January 20, 2017, a shocking event played out in Washington D.C., one which appeared to many observers to be a nightmare from which they could no longer awake: Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States of America. And one of his election promises was the vow to build a wall between â??hisâ?• country and Mexico to put an irrevocable halt to the flow of migrants from south to north. In the previous year, the billionaire had waged his election campaign against his opponent Hillary Clinton chiefly with half-truths, falsehoods and audacious lies, causing contemporary politics to be labelled â?•post-factualâ?•. The traditionally paranoid tendencies in American politics received an unprecedented boost. Thirty years after Reaganâ??s â??Tear down this wallâ?•, the global political situation scaled new heights of unreality to shocking effect. Journalists were excluded as the

enemy whenever the new strong man in the White House deigned to face inconvenient questions.

And although Festival Director Dieter Kosslick already made it clear at the 67th Berlinaleâ??s Program Press Conference that Trump should be deliberately omitted because the billionaire chiefly had the media circus surrounding him to thank for his success, it is still Trump we must begin with to make clear the â??politicalâ?• atmosphere in which the 2017 program unfolded.



Three of the 2017 *Competition* films: *Viceroyâ??s House*, *FÃ©licitÃ©*, *El Bar*

## The End of Utopias

The great ideologies had already been done for, communism and capitalism had both been discovered to be dead-ends. What remained was a reactionary (ultra) nationalism with powerful leading characters who created a lot of noise in the media: Trump in the US, Putin in Russia, Erdogan in Turkey, the list goes on. Societyâ??s unifying themes had unravelled and vested interests governed and dominated â?? and the program of the 67th Berlinale reacted accordingly. â??A spectre is haunting us â?? and not just in Europe. We have confusion following the collapse of the great utopian dreams and disenchantment with globalization. [â?¦] Rarely has the Berlinale program more forcefully captured the current political situation in imagesâ?•, wrote Dieter Kosslick in his foreword to the program. A way out of this confusion was offered by a look back and an analysis of the historical developments which led to this current impasse.

In the *Competition* with *Viceroyâ??s House*, Gurinder Chadha traced the colonialism which was the original driving force behind both capitalism and globalization. This period piece is set in 1947, the year in which the territory of British India was arbitrarily partitioned into India and Pakistan and the conflicts which burden both countries to this day were irrevocably set in place. A present-day perspective on the ravages of colonialism was presented by Alain Gomisâ?? *FÃ©licitÃ©*, in which the director follows his titular heroine on her daily struggle for survival in Kinshasa. The catastrophic consequences of the

colonial past may not be present as an explicit indictment in this film but they nevertheless resonate in every frame. In his chamber piece *El Bar* (*The Bar*), Ã•lex de la Iglesia delivered an experimental set-up that reflects the growing fear in Europe of falling victim to a random and sudden act of violence: a customer of a Madrid bar is shot dead upon exiting, without cause or provocation â?? a scenario which, due to the many random acts of violence that haunted the â??peacefulâ?• European homeland in 2016, captures with great precision the feelings of insecurity these acts left behind. Particularly in Berlin, the memory of December 19, 2016, when a perpetrator deliberately crashed an articulated lorry into the Christmas Market on Breitscheidplatz, was still raw.

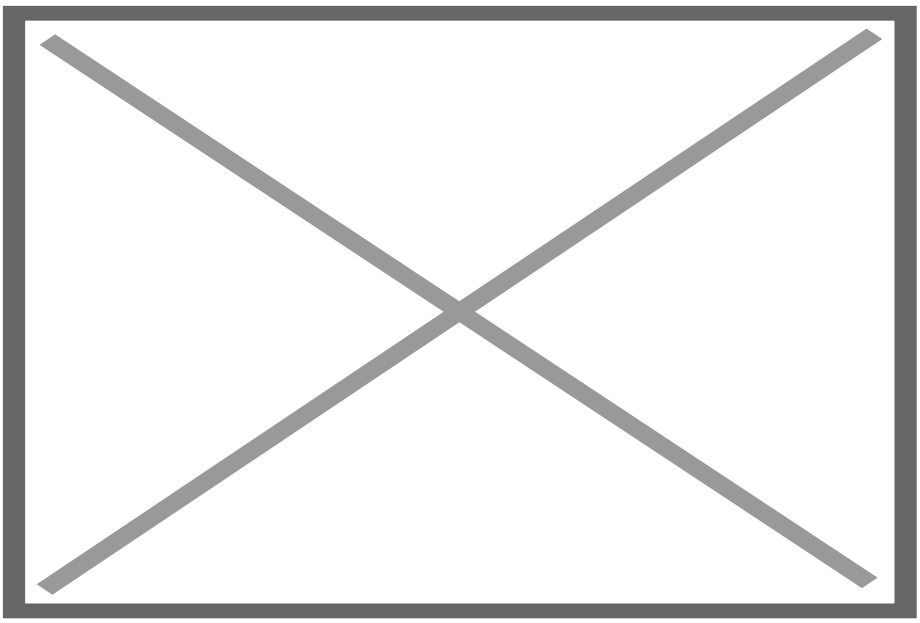
Director Ceylan Ã?zgÃ¼n Ã?zÃ§elik on *KaygÄ±*

**Interventions**

https://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/2017/01_jahresblatt_2017/01_jahresblatt_7.html

The spirit of a post-utopian era and its excesses was not only tangible in the *Competition* but throughout the festival. Erdoganâ??s â??purgingâ?• of the political, civilian and military apparatus found its reaction in the *Panorama* film *KaygÄ±*(*Inflame*), in which director Ceylan Ã?zgÃ¼n Ã?zÃ§elik tells the story of a Turkish journalist who is censored and suppressed and finally descends into paranoia. A highly explosive subject matter â?? for even during the Festival, on February 14, the German-Turkish journalist Deniz YÃ¼cel was arrested in Turkey. The power-crazed fantasies of another illustrious politician, Russian president Vladimir Putin, were considered in the *Berlinale Special* with *The Trial â?? The State of Russia vs Oleg Sentsov* by Askold Kurov which investigates the show trial of the Ukrainian film director and Maidan-activist who protested against the internationally unacceptable annexation of Crimea by Russia. Romanian filmmakers deployed placards on the Red Carpet to draw attention to the increasingly draconian censorship and the escalating corruption in their homeland. As he explained in an interview with Variety, Dieter Kosslick was relaxed about this appropriation: â??â??Everyone has been using our red carpet as a kind of Hyde Park Corner, and Iâ??m happy with this,â?? he said, referring to the area in London where speakers share their political views with the crowd. â??We want to be on the right side of the world,â?? he saidâ?• (Leo Barraclough, February 18, 2017).

Such interventions were numerous and always had their finger on the pulse of the age. For example, the 2017 edition of the *NATIVe â?? A Journey into Indigenous Cinema* special presentation made its focal point the Arctic, a place which, according to climate researchers, will play a decisive role over the coming decades in the survival of humanity and the planet (it seems almost superfluous to mention President Trumpâ??s promise to his supporters that, following his election, he would rescind all the hard-fought climate protection goals adopted by his predecessor Barack Obama).



The awarding of the first GlashÃ¼tte Original Documentary Award: Producer Palmyre Badinier, protagonist Wadee Hanani and director Raed Andoni

## A New Award

In a highly-politicised region, for decades the political football of increasingly opaque claims to power and sensitivities, Raed Adoni created his film *Istiyad Ashbah* (*Ghost Hunting*) which screened in the *Panorama*. In Ramallah the director enabled the Palestinian ex-inmates of an Israeli interrogation centre to replay their experiences there and, in doing so, traced their trauma and his own life story. The fictional framework of this re-enactment brings the very real wounds of the past to the surface. Adoni was recognised for his work with the GlashÃ¼tte Original Documentary Award â?? the inauguration of the first prize in the history of the Berlinale to be explicitly devoted to the documentary form.

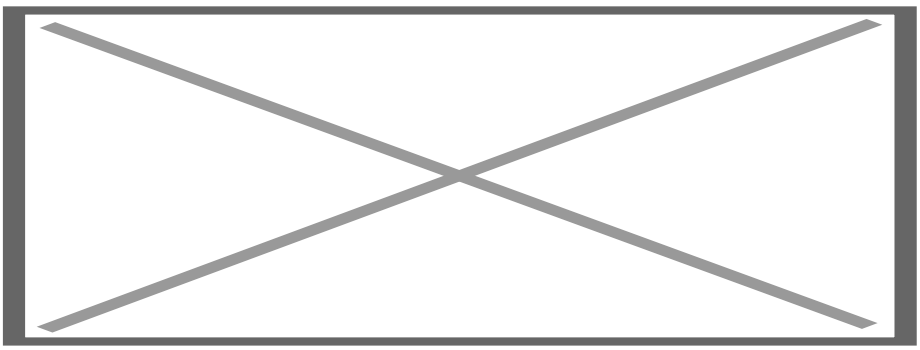
## Aesthetics and the Political

At the beginning of the festival, Dutch director and President of the International Jury Paul Verhoeven declared he would not reward any film simply for having a political content. Cinematic art, the aesthetics, would be the deciding factor. In doing so he was merely expressing what has long been a programming principle for the Berlinale. A textbook example of this was delivered by Aki KaurismÃ¤ki in the *Competition*. In*Toivon tuolla puolen* (*The Other Side of Hope*), the director tells of an encounter between a Syrian refugee and a Finnish travelling salesman. The rigorously composed, stoical shots stage the filmâ??s (political) stance in KaurismÃ¤kiâ??s very own humorously melancholic style. We desperately need immigration, said the director at the filmâ??s Press Conference, â??because our blood is getting thickâ?•.

The nexus of aesthetics and the political demanded by Verhoeven extended throughout the programme. In the *Forum*, *El mar la mar* focused on the very stretch of the Sonoran Desert which migrants have to cross in their desperate journeys north â?? the place where Trump will lay the foundations for his wall. Filmmakers Joshua Bonnetta and J P Sniadecki eschew the post-factual

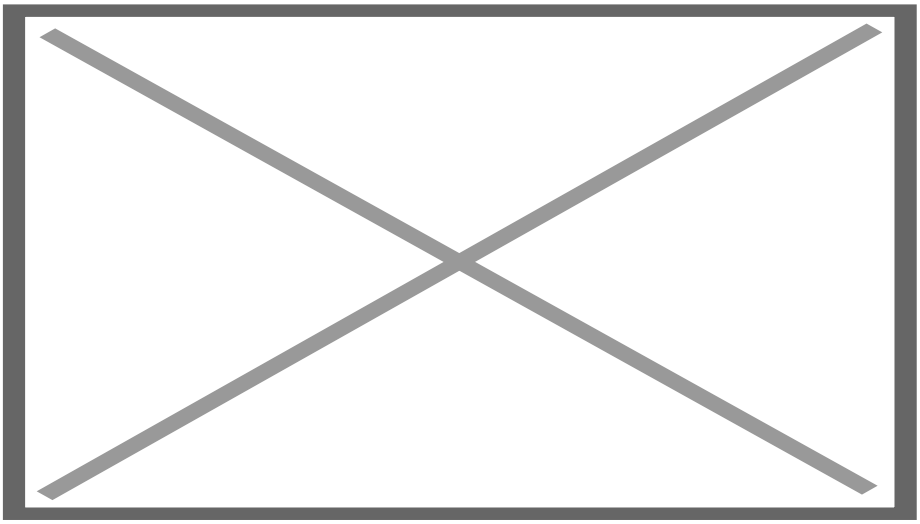
imperative to place emotionality above actuality and instead embark upon an archaeological journey and bear witness to the human dramas in the traces left behind in the landscape by the passing travellers. Avoiding an explicit political message, the film instead makes tangible the remorselessness of the landscape, of nature.

The search for archaeological traces was one of the strongest programming strands in the 67th Berlinale, a theme which permeated all the sections. In the *Competition* and sections alike an entire panoply of films was devoted to the past and the historical process. The current sorry state of â??realityâ?• did not happen overnight: there were signs, developments and early events, powers that developed unseen which have now risen to the surface. Many films took a step back and sought to find in yesterday the reasons for today.



*No Intenso Agora*, *Casting JonBenet*

An overview of the cinematographic eye expanded across the sections. And, as in previous years, the richness of the documentary form was compelling: *No Intenso Agora* (*In the Intense Now*) by JoÃ£o Moreira Salles in the *Panorama* traced the vibrancy of the Prague Spring as far as the revolutionary force of Paris in May 1968. A tightly knit film essay that permitted no causality and sometimes took an eccentric view of the genealogy of events. In his almost five-hour long *Combat au bout de la nuit*( *Fighting Through the Night*), Sylvain Lâ??EspÃ©rance took Greece as the example for his exploration of the ongoing decline of the idea of Europe, an idea which suffered a further blow with the UK Brexit vote in the summer of 2016. With *Casting JonBenet*, Kitty Green put the process of uncovering the truth itself in the spotlight. Rather than furnishing the story of the still-unsolved murder of the six-year-old JonBenet Ramsey with further truths, she invited the people who lived in the area at the time of the murder to a casting session and observed the mechanics by which the truths about an event are first outlined and constructed. The documentaries in the *Forum* were notable for their long-term observations, taking in the rhythms of their subjects rather than adding redundant dramatisation to these lives. This was exemplified by *Aus einem Jahr der Nichtereignisse* (*From a Year of Non-Events*) by Carolin Renninger and RenÃ© FrÃ¶lke, which portrayed the life of a north German farmer.



A *Forum Expanded* panel day on the archive in the silent green Kulturquartier.

History and stories were told whilst constantly ensuring the exposure of the methods of production and reflection upon them. Archive material often played a dominant role. In the *Competition*, Andres Veiel (re)constructed the work of Joseph Beuys almost exclusively from contemporaneous material (*Beuys*); the *Forum Expanded* devoted an entire day of panel discussions to the archive.

The *Retrospective*, in contrast, provided a change of perspective and, with its topic of Science Fiction film, dedicated itself to the future without losing sight of the present in the process: â??We understand that, although Science Fiction tells a story set in the future, it actually uses this future to address questions and situations from the presentâ•, explained section head Rainer Rother.

## The Fictionality of Reality and the Reality of Fictions

In the war of images the borders between reality and fiction had become more porous than ever before. Politicians like Trump, Erdogan and Putin simply declared their assertions as reality and imposed their sovereignty of interpretation via all available media. The Berlinale program provided an important counterpoint to these fatal developments: â??Nowhere else, neither in Cannes nor Venice, is the appetite for reality-based and reality-seeking images as great as here. For images that cleave less to the daily politics than to targeting the heart of the now, in slow films for frantic timesâ• (Christiane Peitz, Der Tagesspiegel, February 20, 2017). The title of the 2017 *Forum Expanded* was also emblematic of this: â??The Stars Down to Earthâ•. The works gave themselves to â??the search for possibilities of an artistic way of dealing with a reality that is increasingly difficult to graspâ•. The view is directed back down to earth, to the here and now and the condition of perceivable realities. Yet this was not about nostalgia for a â??lostâ• factual era but instead the unnerving feeling that â??realityâ•, which has always been in interplay with fiction, was being suffocated under the weight of false assertions.

Maike Mia HÃ¶hne took the same line with her selection for the 2017 *Berlinale Shorts* which, with its title of â??Reframing the Imageâ•, similarly interrogated the fundamentals of what we see and perceive. The relationship between â??medialâ• and â??factualâ• reality, between fiction and reality, is obviously not alien to the cinema. It lies at the heart of the medium itself, based as it is upon changing the actuality without losing it and creating stories out of the material of the visible world. Recognition, interpretation and, in the worst cases, lying â?? these are the techniques and questions

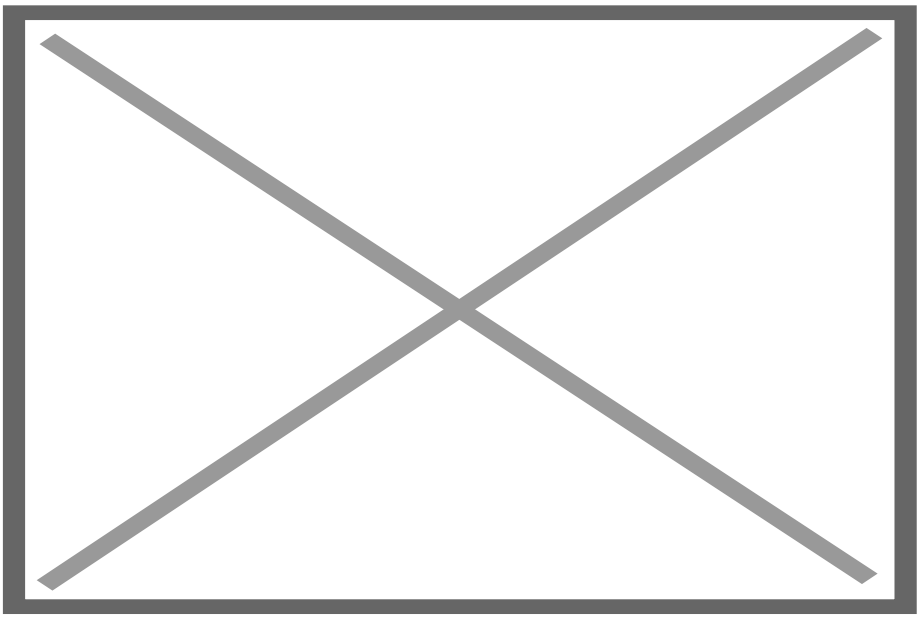
that constitute film.

A lot of irony: the Press Conference on *Toivon tuolla puolen*

**Poetry and Irony in the *Competition***

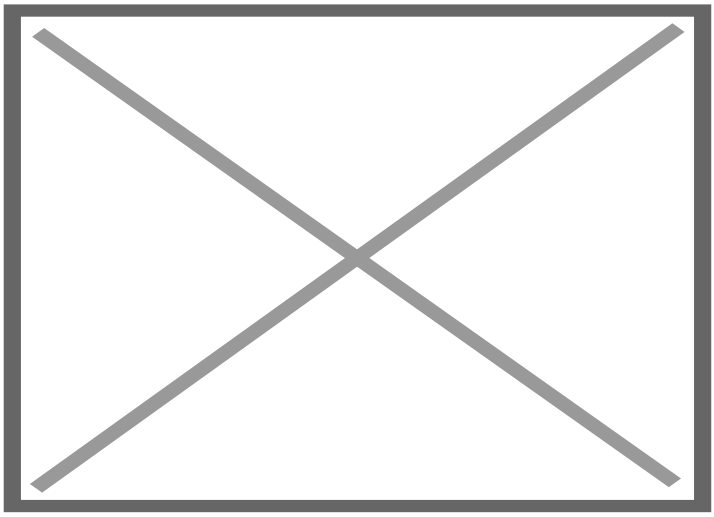
https://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/2017/01_jahresblatt_2017/01_jahresblatt_7.html

Against this backdrop it is perhaps unsurprising that, on February 18, 2017, the Golden Bear was presented to a film which engaged intensively with the modulations and relationship between dream and reality â?? traditionally fertile ground for both film practice and theory. *TestrÅ?l Ã©s lÃ©lekrÅ?l* (*On Body and Soul*) by IldikÃ³ Enyedi ostensibly tells a tender love story which contrasts the graceful ease of a dream with the â?? literally â?? bloody reality of a Hungarian slaughterhouse. TestrÅ?l Ã©s lÃ©lekrÅ?l was a worthy winner, lauded by critics and audiences alike. As Anke Westphal wrote in the Berliner Zeitung: â??How these two people, both marked with tragedy by fate, gradually come closer together, at first in their nightly dreams when they meet as deer in a wintery forest, and then in their apparent real lives, counts among the most beautiful, tender and truthful experiences that cinema can createâ?• (February 20, 2017). Poetry and humour dominated the 67th Berlinale *Competition*. And while *TestrÅ?l Ã©s lÃ©lekrÅ?l* excelled at poetry, doyen Aki KaurismÃ¤ki, who won the Silver Bear for Best Director with *Toivon tuolla puolen* (*The Other Side of Hope*), provided the requisite irony. And not just with his film: asked at the Press Conference for his opinion about the danger of the Islamisation of Europe, he first made the journalist repeat her question three times and then, with the deepest of deadpan, replied that no, he had no fears about the Icelandisation of Europe â?? even though that country sensationally made it as far as the quarter finals before being eliminated from the 2016 European Football Championship.



Happy winners: Festival Director Dieter Kosslick with Kim Minhee, IldikÃ³ Enyedi and Jury President Paul Verhoeven.

The International Jury continued the trend of previous years by chiefly presenting awards to films not at the centre of global attention. Alain Gomis won the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize with *FÃ©licitÃ©,* a co-production between France, Senegal, Belgium, Germany and Lebanon. Polish director Agnieszka Holland won the Silver Bear Alfred Bauer Prize for *Pokot* (*Spoor*). South Korean Kim Minhee took home the Silver Bear for Best Actress for her role in *Bamui haebyun-eoseo honja* (*On the Beach at Night Alone*) by Hong Sangsoo. The Chilean film *Una mujer fantÃ¡stica* (*A Fantastic Woman*) by SÃ©bastian Lelio won the award for Best Screenplay and Romanian editor Dana Bunescu (*Ana, mon amour* by CÄ?lin Peter Netzer) was visibly overcome as she was presented with the Silver Bear for Outstanding Artistic Contribution. This courage to give centre stage to the seemingly marginal was also honoured by the critics: â??The Competition [assembled] art-house works, offering the kind of platform to small, powerful films which is unavailable to them during the rest of the yearâ??s blockbuster-dominated film glutâ?• (Christiane Peitz, Der Tagesspiegel, February 20, 2017).



Dieter Kosslick at the Award Ceremony of the Independent Juries

**Diversity and Hope**

The 2017 program was controversial and never played it safe. At times its immense diversity seemed to leave critics overwhelmed. Some commentators missed a clear unifying theme in the program. That this could be down to the fact that, as Andreas Busche wrote, the world itself had lost its unifying theme, was only infrequently acknowledged: â??The eschewal of an official programming agenda benefits the films which, like all good art, must be measured against their own standards. And perhaps the social discourses accruing from the invisible connections between individual films are much more complex than a political slogan could ever beâ?• (Der Tagesspiegel, February 8, 2017).

For years the Cold War and the balance of power between the USSR and the USA was the organizing principle which provided the world with clear meaning and an overriding narrative. The Berlin Wall became the ultimate symbol of this dichotomy. Where else but in Berlin should a Festival Director have hope in spite of the current tense situation? Thus Dieter Kosslickâ??s exhortation at the end of his speech at the prize-giving ceremony of the Independent Juries: â??Donâ??t lose your courage, we will win.â?•

(Source: berlinale.de)
**Category**

1. #Berlinale
2. #BIFF
3. Berlin Film Festival

**Date Created**
July 1, 2017
**Author**
hollywoodglee