

Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, culture, books and more, edited by Heather Zimmerman

United Nations Association Film Festival explores new 'Ground'

Four world premieres included among the 60 documentaries screened this year

By Karla Kane



Courtesy UNAFF

The documentary "Soaking the Ground" tells of how a community in the Amazon rainforest is using rainwater capture to help address the impact of climate change. The film makes its world premiere at the festival.

Each year, the United Nations Association Film Festival gives local audiences the chance to hear true stories from all over the world, via the sharing of documentaries that relate to the association's dedication to human rights. This year marks the 28th annual festival, with screenings of 60 films in Palo Alto, Stanford, East Palo Alto and San Francisco between Oct. 16 and 26. This year's theme is "Messages For the Future" and includes documentaries from countries including Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Congo, Ethiopia, Georgia, Guinea, Hungary, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Luxembourg,

Malaysia, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Mongolia, Palestine, Rwanda, Sudan, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, Zimbabwe and many more, according to a press release from the organization.

Among the selections are four world premieres: "The Burning," about Africa's refugee crisis; "Exodus," about a college student and a village elder helping evacuate thousands back to their homeland during Sudan's civil war; "An Ordinary Insanity," a conversation with the late activist Daniel Ellsberg about the dire threat of nuclear weapons; and "Soaking the Ground," about the efforts by a community in the

Amazon rainforest region to utilize rainwater in a land suffering from human-caused environmental damage and climate change.

Film Festival

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The film screens Oct. 19 at 1:15 p.m. at Mitchell Park Community Center.

"Nice Girls Don't Ask"

Palo Alto filmmaker Jan Krawitz is a professor emerita in Stanford's documentary film MFA program. Her documentary "Nice Girls Don't Ask," which is having its U.S. premiere Oct. 17 at 6:15 p.m., also at the Mitchell Park Community Center, makes subversive use of archival footage from vintage "social guidance" films from the 1950s, which helped shape and enforce adherence to gender norms. It's the third film in a trilogy she's made about women's issues, following "Mirror, Mirror," which focuses on women and body image, and "In Harm's Way," a personal memoir about her own

experience as a survivor of sexual violence and the myths about safety she learned in childhood. She felt compelled to make "Nice Girls Don't Ask" in part due to the erosion of women's rights she's witnessed in recent years, she told this news organization in an email interview. She was also inspired by thoughts of her late mother, who raised her in the 1950s according to the norms of the time. For this film, Krawitz meticulously edited elements from the 120-or-so vintage films she studied for the project.

"My goal was to make a seamless narrative despite the disparate sources used to tell the story," she said. Krawitz said she hopes that audiences will ponder the cost of this "behavioral straitjacket" for a generation of women, as well as see it as an ominous parallel to today's idealizing of a "trad-wife" lifestyle on social media and by people in power. "I hope that audiences (find) the film to be provocative, infuriating, and

entertaining, — laughter is definitely permissible!" ■

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The United Nations Association Film Festival runs Oct. 16-26 at venues in Palo Alto, Stanford, East Palo Alto and San Francisco. General admission tickets are \$18 per session, with festival passes available for \$280 (\$80 for seniors 60 and up). Admission to the opening and closing receptions, which also include a session of films each, is \$60. There are also several free events over the course of the festival, and free tickets for students. For complete schedule, tickets and more information, go to unaff.org/2025/special.html.



Courtesy UNAFF

"Nice Girls Don't Ask," by Palo Alto filmmaker and Stanford professor emerita Jan Krawitz, makes subversive use of "social guidance" films from the 1950s.