

QUINZAINE
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT
CANNES 2025

MILITANTROPOS



MILITANTROPOS

A film directed by
Yelizaveta Smith,
Alina Gorlova,
Simon Mozgovyi

Ukraine, Austria, France

111 minutes
World premiere: 21 May, 2025 – Directors Fortnight
Language: Ukrainian, English
Ratio: 16:9
Format: 2K – 5.1
Colour

CONTACT DETAILS

producer

TABOR LTD

Eugene Rachkovsky
tabor.production@gmail.com
www.taborproduction.com

MISCHIEF FILMS

Ralph Wieser
office@mischief-films.com
www.mischief-films.com

LES VALSEURS

Nabil Bellahsene
nabil@lesvalseurs.com
www.lesvalseurs.com

world sales

SQUARE EYES

Wouter Jansen
info@squareeyesfilm.com
www.squareeyesfilm.com

international publicity during Cannes

THE PR FACTORY

Barbara van Lombeek
barbara@theprfactory.com
www.theprfactory.com

FULL CREDITS

directors

Yelizaveta Smith
Alina Gorlova
Simon Mozgovyi

scriptwriters

Yelizaveta Smith
Alina Gorlova
Simon Mozgovyi
Maksym Nakonechnyi

directors of photography

Viacheslav Tsvietkov
Khrystyna Lizogub
Denys Melnyk

producers

TABOR: Eugene Rachkovsky
Mischief Films: Ralph Wieser
Les Valseurs: Nabil Bellahsene
Justin Pechberty
Damien Megherbi

associate producer

Viktoriia Horodynska

editors

Yelizaveta Smith,
Simon Mozgovyi,
Alina Gorlova

music

Peter Kutin

sound

Mykhailo Zakutskyi,
Peter Kutin

editing consultant

Dieter Pichler

colorist

Emmanuel Fortin

MILITANTROPOS

captures the human condition through the fractured realities of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The film pieces together everyday lives transformed by war — those who flee, those who lose everything, and those who stay to resist and fight — tracing both the instinct to survive and the need for closeness. Amid devastation and atrocity, the human is absorbed into war — and war, in turn, becomes part of the human.



DIRECTORS BIO + FILMOGRAPHY

Alina Gorlova is a film director, co-founder of Tabor LTD, a member of the Ukrainian and European Film Academy. Her latest documentary, THIS RAIN WILL NEVER STOP, won the award for Best First Appearance at IDFA, the Best Feature Award at Festival dei Popoli, GoEast, Beldocs, One World a.o..

- 2016: Kholodny Yar. Intro – feature
- 2017: Invisible Battalion – feature
- 2018: No obvious signs – feature
- 2020: This Rain Will Never Stop – feature
- 2025: Militantropos – feature



Yelizaveta Smith is a film director, co-founder of Tabor LTD, a member of the Ukrainian and European Film Academy. Her documentary, SCHOOL NUMBER 3, co-directed by George Genoux, won the Grand Prix of the Generation 14plus International Jury Berlinale 2017, and a Special Award at HumanDOC Festival in Warsaw. Sundance Screenwriters Lab Alumni.

- 2017: SCHOOL NUMBER 3 – feature
- 2019: SOLITUDE – short
- 2021: Break the circle – feature
- 2025: Militantropos – feature



Simon Mozgovyi is a Ukrainian film director and film editor, a member of the National Filmmakers Union of Ukraine. His debut documentary, THE WINTER GARDEN’S TALE (2018), premiered at Ji.hlava IDFF and then participated in DOK Leipzig, won the Best Ukrainian Film Award at Docudays UA IHRDFF.

- 2018: The Winter Garden’s Tale – feature
- 2020: Salt from Bonneville – feature
- 2022: Orpheus Is Standing On The Bank Of The Styx – short
- 2025: Militantropos – feature





INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS OF MILITANTROPOS

WHILE THE FILM DOESN'T FOLLOW TRADITIONAL MAIN CHARACTERS, A FEW PROTAGONISTS EMERGE OVER TIME. HOW DID YOU CHOOSE THESE INDIVIDUALS, AND HOW DID YOU BUILD TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM IN SUCH AN INTENSE AND FRAGILE ENVIRONMENT?

TABOR Collective:

This was a very complex process. Sometimes we looked for protagonists who could embody the ideas we had, but more often, the ideas were born because of the people we met. Our film is about humans, so our greatest inspiration was the people we randomly encountered in the field. Almost always, we decided to follow people during the shooting without preparing any communication with them beforehand. In other words, we arrived at a location and found the protagonists because we felt a connection with them.

For example, we decided to film the artillery, and that's how we found the artillery unit — protagonists who brought the energy of youth into the war. It was a powerful experience that enriched our vision for the film.

We shot a very large amount of material, traveling to different regions of Ukraine. During these filming expeditions, we were often not only looking for something to shoot but also learning and discovering a lot. Thanks to the volunteers who provided access, we visited de-occupied villages in the Kherson region together with the cameraman Viacheslav Tsvetkov. There, we met many open and sincere people who were ready — and even needed — to share what had happened to them during the war and the forced evacuation. We were amazed at the scale of destruction, looting, and brutality of the Russian army.

Our involvement helped open the way to connect with people. Later, during the editing process, we realised where we needed to go deeper and returned to film more with the people we had met earlier.

It is also worth mentioning that we met some of the characters purely by chance. For example, when we were returning from filming at the frontline, we happened to choose a different road. There, we met children playing a military checkpoint at an intersection, stopping cars. We managed to shoot a short episode with them. Another time, while filming the evacuation of civilians in the Kharkiv region, we approached various evacuation crews and among them met some charismatic volunteers, with whom we then spent the next few days.

The influence of luck and chance on the work of documentary filmmakers should not be underestimated.

WITHOUT RELYING ON A CENTRAL CHARACTER OR CONVENTIONAL NARRATIVE STRUCTURE, MILITANTROPOS STILL DRAWS THE VIEWER INTO A POWERFUL ARC. HOW DID YOU SHAPE THE NARRATIVE THROUGH EDITING, RHYTHM, AND VISUAL MOTIFS?

TABOR Collective:

We started filming at the very beginning of the full-scale invasion. Honestly, at that time, we didn't have any clear concept for the film. Filming was more about the urgent need to document war crimes. For example, our crew witnessed atrocities after the liberation of the Kyiv region and was among the first to visit the liberated cities.

We also realised that filming could create a sense of distance — and believe me, we really needed that distance at the start of this nightmare.

After six months of shooting, we began to review our footage to find the essence of what we were doing and why. This was a

very interesting process. Being inside the situation — not just as witnesses but as people directly affected — we were trying to find the meaning in everything that had happened to us and those around us.

While rewatching our footage, we arrived at the concept of three films. The first one, MILITANTROPOS, would be about the human experience in war.

While working on the film, we were careful to choose material that showed the transformation of a person during the war. We wrote out and highlighted possible narrative lines while watching the footage, and then analysed them together.

This led us to understand that MILITANTROPOS follows two main lines: civilians who took up arms and became soldiers, and civilians who live amid war and are transformed by it.

We understood that the film should move from the initial chaos at the beginning of the invasion, to a period of adaptation to the new reality, culminating in an extreme closeness to the individual — to the person who has been profoundly changed, to the MILITANTROPOS.

Over many years of work and friendship, we developed a very precise editing dynamic that we can share. When one person was filming, the others edited — and then we switched roles. Or we worked side by side: when one got tired at the editing table, the other would sit down and continue.

Like the characters in our film who train at a combat skills ground, covering each other when they run out of bullets, we became a well-coordinated editing unit.

During editing, we searched for non-obvious, associative connections and rhymes between scenes to create new meanings. At some point, we felt we needed to get closer to the human being in our film. This realization paralleled the way our DOPs — Viacheslav Tsvietkov, Krystyna Lizogub, and Denys

Melnyk — started shooting more close-ups and portraits, moving away from pure observation.

This led us to structure the film into three acts: the chaos of war, the adaptation to a new reality, and a deep journey inside the human being.

We also sought an element that could unite everything — civilians, soldiers, and the narrative itself. This unifying motif became the sky: the Sun and Moon, clouds, rain, thunder, and lightning — forces that unite all the characters under one vast reality.

WHAT WERE THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES OF FILMING IN A STATE OF WAR? CAN YOU SHARE WHAT IT MEANT FOR YOU — PRACTICALLY, ETHICALLY, AND EMOTIONALLY — TO CREATE A DOCUMENTARY IN SUCH EXTREME CONDITIONS?

TABOR Collective:

From a practical standpoint, filming during wartime presents many challenges. In 2022, we realised we needed small cameras that would allow us to move quickly if necessary. The film crew had to be limited to two, or at most three, people.

Each crew member needed a bulletproof vest, helmet, and military first aid kit, along with first aid training.

Our European colleagues helped us a lot in acquiring bulletproof vests and helmets during the first months of the war. Some team members even took special military courses. There were moments during filming when their training enabled them to respond quickly and appropriately to threats.

We also realised the importance of having a vehicle capable of driving anywhere. Another crucial point was obtaining official permission to film in regions where military operations were taking place — a necessary step for our safety.

For all of us, the filmmaking process became, in early 2022, almost the only way to experience and cope with the overwhelming pain and chaos we were living through — and still are living through.

We filmed events, people, and spaces around us while remaining fully immersed in the war, sharing the experience with our protagonists. We did not come from outside to film or sympathize from a safe distance.

The events of our film are close to us as people. This act of coexistence, and the experiences we lived through, helped us grow both as authors and as individuals committed to making conscious choices to become the best versions of ourselves.

These three years influenced us deeply. They changed the very principles of how we film, how we approach documentary filmmaking, and they made us more resilient and stronger. We must mention the emotional burden, which is very difficult to cope with. It primarily stems from witnessing the pain experienced by those being filmed. Despite the prolonged duration of the war, empathy has not diminished — each encounter continues to evoke a deep emotional response. And we don't quite understand where we find the strength to keep going.

NATURE OCCUPIES A STRIKING PLACE IN THE FILM — SOMETIMES SERENE, SOMETIMES OVERWHELMING. CAN YOU SPEAK TO THE ROLE OF LANDSCAPE AND NATURAL ELEMENTS IN THE NARRATIVE? WERE YOU CONSCIOUSLY CREATING AN ELEGIAC COUNTERPOINT TO THE CONFLICT?

TABOR Collective:

We would like to highlight that, for us, nature is not a counterpoint to war. Nature, war, and people coexist in the same time and space.

Warfare destroys nature as well as human spaces, but it is often possible to witness nature reclaiming what belongs to it.

For all of us, nature in Ukraine is associated with love. There is a profound connection between people and the land — a bond that, in this critical moment, is not fading but growing even stronger.

This became tangible during the filming process. In the de-occupied south of Ukraine, for instance, we encountered people who had returned to their bombed and looted homes. They did not give up; they began to rebuild and de-mine the land, often with their bare hands. These moments left a deep emotional impact.

Such observations and shared experiences ultimately shaped the decision to depict the coexistence of war, human life, and nature.

When you are in a state of war and feel the proximity of death, the fragile power of nature becomes more visible, more expressive. Its beauty is often underestimated when viewed through a "peaceful" gaze.

Something profound happens when mines are falling around you, an artillery battle is raging, and your eye focuses on a small spider weaving its web — this is a real testimony that you are alive and that you exist.

Nature becomes a real character in the film, helping us convey certain states to the viewer.

For example, the war-torn forest, which we revisit twice in the film, embodies the unknown horror of death, the enemy lurking among the trees — the ultimate state of consciousness.

The DOP and I kept returning to this forest, despite the difficult access, searching for a cinematic form to express the experience we had lived through there on screen.

THE FILM SEEMS TO ADOPT AN "APOLITICAL" STANCE IN ITS NARRATION, WHILE REMAINING DEEPLY POLITICAL

THROUGH ITS VERY EXISTENCE. HOW DID YOU APPROACH THIS PARADOX? WHAT DOES NEUTRALITY MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF SUCH A FILM?

TABOR Collective:

Our collective was shaped by large-scale political events in our country.

We were all born during the period between the collapse of the USSR and the declaration of Ukraine's independence. We are representatives of the generation that does not remember the Soviet Union at all. For us, the existence of an independent Ukraine within its borders has been a fact since we were born.

We are active witnesses and participants in the Revolution of Dignity. We witnessed the beginning of the war in 2014 and filmed it. All these events shaped us — not only as individuals but also as artists. That's when we started making documentaries.

It is very important for us that this film is a collective one: these are the voices of people who have lived through all these events personally, the voices of a part of the 30-year-old generation — people who have been working with the topic of war from its very beginning.

For us, representatives of this generation of Ukrainians, politics has long ceased to be something that happens only in the "highest offices."

For us, living in Ukrainian society means living politically. It is always an action based on a person's will.

In our country, the war has been going on for 11 years.

Before this film, each of us had explored the war in our previous works. So now we have approached this film as an exploration of the nature of war.

We don't believe that an author in the modern world can be apolitical. Politics is a part of our lives that directly affects us.

We not only create films but also make choices every day — often choices to act and influence society and our future. This is the lesson we learned during the Revolution of Dignity. It was important for us to make a film that would be a personal statement, an exploration of the nature of war and the human being within it, but also relatable and understandable to people with different backgrounds.

This is a paradox: war is both a personal and a universal archetypal experience.

MILITANTROPOS [*lat. «milit» - soldier; gr. «antropos» - human*] — *a persona adopted by humans when entering a state of war. The chaos of war not only tears apart the physical world but also fractures the Militantropos' sense of self.*

MILITANTROPOS IS ROOTED IN A STRONG CONCEPTUAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK. CAN YOU SPEAK ABOUT THE MEANING BEHIND THE TITLE AND THE IDEAS THAT SHAPED THE FILM'S FORM AND GAZE?

MILITANTROPOS is a neologism created by our colleague and friend Maksym Nakonechnyi. While working on the film, we talked a lot as a team, asking questions and searching for answers. One of the main things we agreed upon was that aggression and war try to wipe out not only people, cities, and villages, but also the meanings that identify us.

We realised that in order to continue, we needed to find — or even create — senses that would help us personally go through this experience. We worked on the concept and texts for the film's intertitles with our friend, philosopher Oleksandr Komarov. Oleksandr joined the army at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, and his personal

experience allowed us to collectively find and formulate meanings that reveal the transformation that happens to a human inside the war.

War is a fact that people face — and that distorts their existence. A human finds themselves in a situation of choice without choice, where they are free only to choose how to react.

Thus, a person freely chooses an experience that can become a relentless one.

This borderline experience transforms people both individually and collectively — and this transformation is irreversible.

This is where it becomes important to understand why the film is a collective portrait. In the film’s scenes, we meet another human — their actions, their face — and through this encounter, we can glimpse the collective experience, the integrity of the transformation process.

So what is war?

It is a universally substantial experience — and at the same time, an encounter with possible non-existence. An encounter with death, which can become both a personal and a collective non-existence.

This experience of facing death becomes a borderline experience, forcing a human being to reflect on the very nature of existence.

Discussing all these thoughts together, we decided to expand the usual film form and add short texts: texts that express, in our opinion, the individual and collective transformation of a human inside the war.

THE QUESTION OF OBJECTIVITY IS ALWAYS PRESENT IN DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING. AS A DIRECTOR, YOU’RE CONSTANTLY MAKING CHOICES — WHAT TO SHOW, HOW TO FRAME, WHAT TO LEAVE OUT. WHAT WAS YOUR GUIDING LINE WHEN NAVIGATING THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN DOCUMENTATION AND INTERPRETATION?

TABOR Collective:

We did not edit in a way that altered the facts or the reality of what was happening. This was very important to us.

Our main guide was our own experience — what we were living through — and sharing that experience with the people around us. We were inside the events.

The fact that we worked on this film over a long period — filming extensively, documenting widely, traveling to many places, and witnessing many things over two and a half years — gave us the necessary distance. It allowed us to find a balance between documentation and interpretation.

In other words: we documented events, but always interpreted them through the lens of our own experience of involvement.

When speaking about what to show and how to frame, we were guided by a deep respect for people and their dignity.

We avoided naturalistic depictions of suffering and never chased after “exclusive” footage. We never filmed those who refused to be in the frame.

On the contrary, sometimes the camera became a medium through which people could cope with trauma by telling their stories. In such moments, we continued filming, realising the importance of this process for the person — even though we knew it might not be included in the final film.

The responsibility we felt toward our subjects was as important as the artistic responsibility toward the film itself.

THE SOUND DESIGN IS PARTICULARLY POWERFUL — JUXTAPOSING THE SOUNDS OF WAR WITH THOSE OF EVERYDAY LIFE. HOW DID YOU WORK ON SOUND AS A NARRATIVE AND EMOTIONAL LAYER?

WAS THIS DIMENSION DEVELOPED DURING FILMING, OR MOSTLY SHAPED IN POSTPRODUCTION?

TABOR Collective:

There are a lot of sounds in war. It sounds. It is very audible.

When you experience war — explosions, shots, missile and drone strikes — the human psyche develops a heightened sensitivity to sound. Afterwards, even sounds that merely resemble stressful moments can provoke strong reactions.

Not only military personnel but also civilians experience this firsthand.

That’s why we realised we had to pay a lot of attention to sound.

Most importantly, the sounds had to be real, recorded during filming.

During our shooting expeditions, working with sound was just as important to us as working with the image.

For example, while filming in the forest, we were lucky enough to record a unique atmosphere on one of the days when there was no wind — something that could never have been recreated artificially. It felt like sounds from another world.

We noticed small details that impressed us, and we carefully noted and preserved them. Later, during editing, these sound impressions became fundamental to the emotional structure of the film.

We talked a lot about sound during production.

There are many contrasts in the soundscape — shelling, air raids — and at the same time, birdsong, buzzing bees and children’s voices. These intertwining sounds reflect the nature of war and how people perceive it. While editing, we often found that sound

suggested dramaturgical solutions for scenes. We were lucky to work with dedicated and attentive sound recordists during filming. And later, we had the honour of collaborating with Mykhailo Zakutskyi, a Ukrainian sound supervisor, and Peter Kutin, an Austrian composer and sound designer.

We worked on the film’s soundtrack in Vienna. Although we had a clear emotional and narrative understanding of what we needed from sound, together with Mykhailo and Peter we found new solutions — discoveries that deepened the film’s impact.

COULD YOU SPEAK ABOUT YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PEOPLE YOU MET OUTSIDE OF THE FILMING PROCESS?

TABOR Collective:

As we have already mentioned, making this film was a deeply personal process for us. When we met the people we filmed, we often went beyond the film. We got involved in volunteer work. We raised money to equip the military and helped people rebuild their homes.

For example, the film crew, led by Alina, helped Maria from the village of Bohorodichne, Kharkiv region, to repair her house. Another part of the team, which worked in the South, launched a project to rebuild villages in the Kherson region, led by Yelizaveta. This process grew into a separate volunteer project that has been going on for two years in cooperation with the local administration.

The volunteer team, which consists entirely of filmmakers, has opened a charitable foundation, raises money from foundations across the border, and brings materials to rebuild homes in de-occupied villages.

Many of the villagers have become the protagonists of the film MILITANTROPOS.

