



Locarno Film Festival
CONCORSO CINEASTI DEL PRESENTE
OFFICIAL SELECTION

PEPITO PRODUZIONI and **FILMAFFAIR**
with **RAI CINEMA** and **LUCE CINECITTÀ**
in collaboration with **LES FILMS D'ICI**
present



A film by **Adele Tulli**

Italy-France | ov. English, German, Korean, Italian | 83 min | 2024 |

**As human beings made of flesh, we now spend most of our time in a digital landscape,
seeking happiness, wealth, relationships, knowledge, and experiences.
What is today's reality made of?**

SYNOPSIS - SHORT

Everyday digital devices are no longer just tools; they have become gateways to a new multi-layered reality, an exponentially growing augmented universe that we experience largely without a physical connection. As human beings made of flesh, we now spend most of our time in a digital landscape, seeking happiness, wealth, relationships, knowledge, and experiences. What is today's reality made of?

REAL is a kaleidoscopic and visually striking journey exploring how it feels to be human in the digital age.

SYNOPSIS - LONG

Our shared understanding of 'reality' used to be made of tangible objects, of corporeal relations, of experiences and events taking place in actual physical spaces. Recently however, an inexorable process of digital acceleration has profoundly transformed our planet, our societies and ourselves: our screens' flat bright surfaces function as portals into a disembodied world, a parallel digital multiverse where every existing thing is transformed from the physics of oxygen and carbon to the physics of electron, and the logic of bits. As we explore the digital landscapes beyond the threshold of our screens, we leave our bodies behind, battling with tingles and back pain, while our incorporeal virtual identities float unrestrained and unconfined in the online world: how does it feel to be human in the digital age?

With a unique sci-fi-edged visual style, **REAL** explores the transformation of human experience in the digital era, shedding light on the many - at times disorienting - aspects of living in a tech-dominated and hyper-connected world: the protagonists - human, robotic, virtual - are grappling with cyber relationships, digital labours, online intimacy, and fully automated homes and cities of the future. They tell us of screen and selfie addictions and of alienation and algorithmic control, but also of new liberating ways of exploring one's own identity, beyond the physical constraints of the body.

Blending together documentary and experimental aesthetics, **REAL** is a unique filmic experience leading us into the disembodied world of the Web, by playing creatively with the same lenses that we use every day to access new digital territories: webcams, smartphones, surveillance cameras, VR headsets, mechanical and virtual gazes that reveal a new way of experiencing reality.

With an associative mosaic of stories filmed across the globe, **REAL** weaves together a deeply evocative, essayistic meditation on our present condition of digital humans.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

"The digital realm is overtaking and redefining everything familiar even before we have had the chance to ponder and decide," argues Shoshana Zuboff in her landmark book '*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*' (2019). Zuboff's work was completed prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Since then, an unimaginable technological acceleration has transformed even more every aspect of our daily lives. We now find ourselves immersed in a digital present where a number of fundamental qualities of the world as we knew it are no longer there, such as the boundaries between physical and meta experiences, between public and private spheres, between ideas of true and fake, as between a body and its simulations. Ultimately, what is no longer obvious is the feeling of what is *real*.

I began this project with an urge to delve into the ongoing emotional, social and cognitive metamorphoses triggered by our relationship with digital technologies. The film therefore started as a loose and personal investigation into this unprecedented transformation, where the moving image practice turned into a viable lens for further reflecting upon our present condition of digital humans: I felt that whatever we used to call *real* was collapsing and I started looking for ways to represent this collapse.

Through a mosaic of stories collected across the globe, **REAL** sketches fragments of the daily life of several individuals who interact with ordinary digital devices connected to the Web. From a family living in a newly built *smart* neighbourhood in South Korea filled with technological and data-extracting devices, to a VR queer community, who explore their gender identity and fluid sexuality through colourful non-humanoid digital avatars; the patients of an Internet addiction clinic, dealing with the consequences of their Internet abuse; a live webcam model streaming adult content shows from home; a food delivery rider, whose precarious working conditions prompted him to start his own vlog channel. The devices they use daily are gazing machines, equipped with cameras that record their surroundings in a wide variety of formats, resolutions and styles, according to their purpose: smartphones, laptops, electrical appliances, surveillance cameras, VR headsets, dashcams. The story of these existences permeated by new digital technologies is narrated in the film by constantly interacting with the raw footage recorded by their own devices, evoking the presence of a mechanical, automated, surveilling gaze, recording everything, all the time: an omnipresent, constant and inseparable gaze, so familiar to feel almost invisible, while dominating our hyperconnected routines. It is a gaze that watches over city streets and public squares, an eye that lives with us in our homes, sitting on our desks, and lying in our beds, monitoring our sleep. It is everywhere all the time, recording the great paradox of our times, which see us hyperconnected and isolated at the same time, with most of our interactions taking place not in the presence of other bodies, but alone in front of a screen.

These scenes are collaged next to images of the material infrastructures that sustain the digital world - such as a colossal data centre or a cable laying vessel -, and to fragments of videos fetched from the web: archival internet material displaying a vortex of paradoxical, nonsensical and viral images, simulating the frenetic and sometimes disturbing feed of social media platforms. The film's narrative thus proceeds through seemingly unrelated episodes, where the different situations follow one another

according to a sort of algorithmic logic, a multiform kaleidoscope where the cohesive element is given by the system that contains them: the Internet. The result is perhaps disorienting and alienating, as surfing the net often is: the spectacle of our everyday digital life, observed through its hallucinatory lenses, eventually turns the familiar into something unfamiliar, uncanny, estranged, emblem of our contemporary media-saturated existence.

“The Internet is an alien life form,” declared David Bowie in 1999:

“is there life on Mars? Yes, it’s just landed here”.

Welcome to Mars.

PRODUCTION'S NOTES

This is the second time we have worked with director Adele Tulli after producing *NORMAL*, her first feature film. Once again we are thrilled to embark on this new project, delving into the complex and mostly immaterial reality of the digital world, recomposed through the director’s brilliant vision. We started the first conversations about the project short before the Covid Pandemic, thereafter we undertook preliminary research and began a development process that involved academics, scientists and expert, after which we began the film’s production.

With a radical visual approach, Adele Tulli investigates some of the crucial contemporary issues that constitute the backbone of the film, embodied by the characters and the scenes displayed as the material evidence of human experience in the digital era: from new forms/modes of work to social cultures (tiktokers-youtubers-influencers), from smart living/smart environments to surveillance systems, from virtual intimacy to robotic process automation, offering us a new way of seeing and understanding reality.

In doing so, **R E A L** evolves through situations connecting digital experiences on multiple scales, where elements of the internet infrastructure appear in the film melted with the life scenes of human beings interacting in digital and virtual environments.

The film has been shot around the globe in several material and virtual contexts: in Greece on a cable layer vessel; in Portugal in a data-center; in Sweden in a fiber cable factory; in Busan in South Korea with a family living in a Smart Village and in Seoul with a food delivery rider and youtuber; in Germany with the patients and the medical stuff of a clinic specialized in Internet Addiction Disorders; with a woman working on an adult content platform; in Venice where a street performer in the guise of the an alien works as a living statue while thousands of tourists take selfies with him; on the sea coast in Tuscany where a quadrupedal robot is collecting environmental data; in Rimini during the annual convention of social media marketers and digital entrepreneurs; in a virtual reality platform with a queer couple living together several experiences from meeting friends to attending a VR party. The film also includes a creative use of archival internet material and tech-inspired artwork that together deliver an uncanny mirror of our present.

Assuming that the future is not something far ahead but it is the place where we are going to live for the rest of our life, REAL is as an open invitation to reflect on the changing process we are all immersed in, giving us through Tulli's vision a bright new access to what has become our new *reality*.

FILM CREDITS

directed by: ADELLE TULLI

written by: ADELE TULLI

cinematography: CLARISSA CAPPELLANI, FRANCESCA ZONARS

editing: ILARIA FRAIOLI, ADELE TULLI

creative producer: LAURA ROMANO

assistant director: MAURO VICENTINI

original music: ANDREA KOCH

sound: MATTIA BIADENE, SYLVAIN COPANS

sound design & editing: RICCARDO SPAGNOL, JEAN-NOËL YVENS

mix: PAOLO SEGAT

art work: GIANLUCA ABBATE

research and digital archives: ALESSIA LOMBARDINI

ufx: StudioAIRA!

executive producers: VALERIA ADILARDI, LAURA ROMANO

delegate producers (PEPITO PRODUZIONI): MIRCO DA LIO, MARIA SOLE LIMODIO

produced by:

AGOSTINO SACCÀ, (PEPITO PRODUZIONI), VALERIA ADILARDI, LUCA RICCIARDI, LAURA ROMANO, MAURO VICENTINI (FILMAFFAIR) in collaboration with CHARLOTTE UZU (LES FILMS D'ICI)

A PEPITO PRODUZIONI and FILMAFFAIR production
with RAI CINEMA and LUCE CINECITTÀ
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EWIP Koln 2023, Best project award at Milano Film Network Atelier 2023

ADELE TULLI

Adele Tulli is a film director and researcher, exploring innovative documentary forms and essayistic film practices. Following an MA in Documentary at Goldsmiths and a PhD in Audiovisual Studies at Roehampton University, she also teaches non-fiction, and experimental cinema. Tulli's works have been screened and exhibited internationally at the Berlin Berlinale, the Lincoln Center in NY, the MAXXI Museum in Rome, the ICA in London, among others.

ADELE TULLI-FILMOGRAPHY

NORMAL (2019) - feature length documentary

Produced by FilmAffair (Italy) with Ginestra Film (Sweden), Luce Cinecittà, RAI Cinema, Eurimages LAB Award 2018, premiere in Berlinale Panorama 2019, Special Mention 'Nastri d'Argento' 2020, screened at major International Film Festivals (CPH:DOX, Sarajevo FF, Karlovy Vary FF, Annecy Cinema Italien, Lincoln Centre, Taipei FF, Thessaloniki FF, Triennale Milano among others).

365 WITHOUT 377 (2011) - medium length documentary

Produced by Ivan Cotroneo, 21 produzioni (Italy). Best documentary at the Flare BFI/London (UK), screened at Guadalajara International FF (Mexico), Watch Docs (Poland), Mix Copenhagen (Denmark), Frameline/San Francisco (USA), among others.

REBEL MENOPAUSE (2015) - short documentary

Best documentary at the Torino Lovers Film Festival (Italy), screened at Sheffield DOC Fest (UK), Festival International de Films de Femmes de Creteil (France), International Women's Film Festival in Seoul (South Korea), Queer Lisboa (Portugal), among others.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

FilmAffair is a production company based in Rome since 2018 that focus on impact documentaries exploring new frontiers of storytelling.

LA PITTURESSA (2023) by Fabiana Sargentini, in co-production with Kama Production, distributed by Lo Scrittoio, Festa del Cinema di Roma 2023.

RADICAL LANDSCAPES (2022) by Elettra Fiumi, in co-production with Fiumi Studios (CH), CentralProductions (CH) and RSI, supported by Women Make Movies, Sundance editing Lab, Graham Foundation (Premiere DOC NYC 2022, FIFA Montréal 2023, Lo schermo dell'Arte 2023, Palazzo Grassi 2024, Rotterdam Architecture FF 2023).

LOS ZULUAGAS (2021) by Flavia Montini, co-produced with Inercia Pelicula (Colombia), RAI Cinema, Istituto Luce Cinecittà, AAMOD, Intramovies, premiere Festival dei Popoli 2021, Cartaghena Film Festival, DOC AVIV.

SQIZO (2020) by Duccio Fabbri, produced with Epsifilm (USA), Les Films d'Ici (FR), RAI Cinema, MIC, Biografilm 2020.

NORMAL (2019) by Adele Tulli, with RAI Cinema, Luce Cinecittà, Intramovies, Ginestra Film (Sweden), granted by Eurimages LAB 2018, Berlinale/Panorama 2019, CPH:DOX, Sarajevo FF amongst the others. Special Mention Nastri d'Argento 2020.

www.filmaffair.it

PEPITO PRODUZIONI is a production company founded in 2010 by Agostino Saccà. Among the most recent hits **Hammamet** directed by Gianni Amelio and **Bad Tales** by the D'Innocenzo Brothers, Silver Bear for best screenplay at the 70th edition of the Berlin 2020 Film Festival. Other film productions are **Where I've never lived** by Paolo Franchi and **Boys Cry**, the film debut of the D'Innocenzo Brothers. Four feature films are been recently released: **The De Filippos**, directed by Sergio Rubini, the international co-production with Ukraine **Koza Nostra** and **Me and My Brother** and **Paper dolls** both directed by Luca Lucini, in co-production with 302 Original Content.

www.pepitoproduzioni.it

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