

# Institute of National Remembrance

<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/anniversary/echoes-of-katyn-interna/8017,Films-that-echo-with-more-than-Katyn.html>

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## Films that echo with more than Katyn

The second "Echoes of Katyn" Film Festival on Totalitarianisms offers a combination of domestic and international releases that will excite not only film buffs and history enthusiasts: it will strike a chord with audiences whose past has been marked with the experience of living under a regime.



The most fascinating part of learning about the past is discovering the fate of ordinary people, who often became part of great historical events without meaning to do so. Getting to know their stories and lives, enables us to have a much better understanding of the past. The four premieres produced by the Institute of National Remembrance in this year's edition of our Festival, constitute a collection of extraordinary micro-stories, which together create a comprehensive picture of the difficult history of the Polish nation.

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## *GOD'S CHOSEN ONE*

Totalitarianism undoubtedly leads to casualties and losses which are difficult to put into numbers. If you would like to find out more about GOD'S CHOSEN ONE watch a full-length documentary presenting the profile of Józef Marcinkiewicz, an outstanding Polish mathematician, murdered during the Katyn Massacre. His story will be told by eminent researchers, historians, mathematicians and teachers. Our hero's life is illustrated by fictionalized fragments which help us imagine how much each of the Katyn victims could still have achieved and given back to society, in various dimensions. If only they had been allowed to live their lives...(dir. Konrad Starczewski, Rafał Pękała, Tomasz Matuszczak, 2021, 62 min.)

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A lieutenant in the infantry reserve, a mathematician, son of Klemens and Aleksandra née Chodakiewicz, born on 10 March 1910 in the village of Rudawka, near Janów in Podlasie. A graduate of the King Zygmunt August middle school in Białystok (1930) and the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of the Stefan Batory University in Vilnius (1930-1933). A brilliant mathematician, the youngest lecturer at the University of Vilnius. He defended his doctoral thesis in 1935, and received his post-doctoral degree in 1937. The author of many scientific works which greatly contributed to the development of mathematics. In 1934, he successfully completed the division course for infantry reserve cadets in the 5th Legions Infantry Regiment in Vilnius and was assigned to the J. Piłsudski 1st Regiment of Infantry Legions in Vilnius. Marcinkiewicz, a scholarship holder of the National Culture Fund – received internships in Paris and London. In August 1939, due to disturbing news about the possible outbreak of war, he returned to Poland. He fought in defense of Lwów, and after its capitulation (22 September 1939) he was taken prisoner by the Soviets. A prisoner of Starobilsk, murdered in 1940 in Kharkiv, rests in the death pits in Piatykhatky. In 2007, he was posthumously promoted to the rank of captain.



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*THE CROSS AND THE SWASTICA*

This is a story about the price the Polish clergy paid for their love of freedom and the human race. The film describes how German Nazism found victims among those whose only "crime" was serving others. "THE CROSS AND THE SWASTICA" is the last part of the triptych, alongside previously screened productions: "Listy śmierci" [Death Lists] and "Podróżnik" [The Traveler]. The film portrays the persecution and suffering of the Polish clergy in prisons and concentration camps through the extremely modest and touching accounts by both priests and the witnesses of their martyrdom. Their personal testimonies are accompanied by an adequate historical context and commentary. (dir. Hanna Zofia Etemadi, 2021, 77 min.)



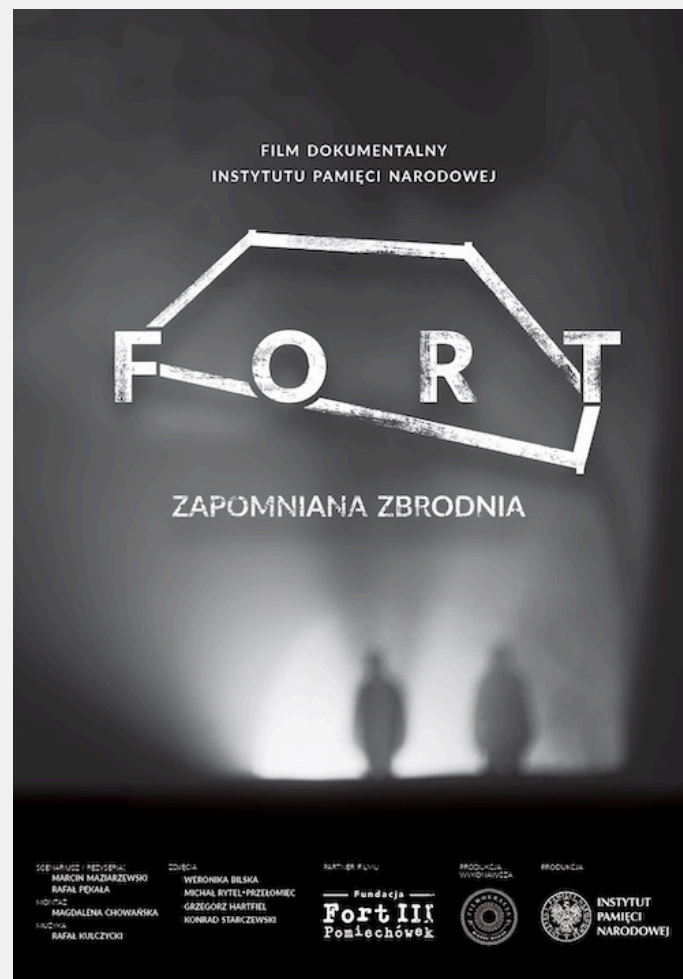
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## FORT

Have you ever thought about the dark secrets sealed within the walls of places which are sometimes right at your doorstep? "Fort" is an account of the local, and thus little-known facts of German crimes against Poles and Jews committed at Fort III in Pomiechówek, which functioned as a Gestapo detention center during the German occupation of Poland. The film presents numerous testimonies of prisoners as well as the recollections of the victims' families. (dir. Rafał



Pękała, Marcin Maziarzewski, 2020, 70 min.)



## *IN THE NAME OF THE TRUTH. THE CLADESTINE KATYN INSTITUTE*

This is a story of the significance of the truth, the proclamation of which was considered a crime and for which one could be sentenced. The film describes the activities of an informal organization - the clandestine Katyn Institute founded in Cracow in 1978 by a group of anti-communists and truth-seekers: Andrzej Kostrzewski (a soldier of the Home Army), Adam Macedoński (a renowned graphic artist) and Stanisław Tor. The main goal of the Institute was to pass the forbidden truth on to Polish society, keep the memory of the Katyn Massacre alive and to collect archival materials, testimonies and artifacts

associated with those tragic events.(dir. Jarosław Mańka, 50 min.)



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## *THE SIGN PAINTER*

The foreign selection includes Latvian *The Sign Painter* – a perspective of history by the eponymous character, forced to update the signs to match political changes in his country: over just a few years, one street, originally "Liberation", becomes "Unification" under the authoritarian rule of Kārlis Ulmanis, only to be renamed "Josef Stalin" by the Soviets, and then "Adolf Hitler" by the Germans. The job, the same that years before supported an aspiring artist and would-be politician in Vienna, is now used to support the earthquake the likes of Hitler subjected a number of European nations to. On top of that, Ansis, the painter, falls in love with a girl who belongs to the very nation that the German Nazism doomed to complete extermination – the Jews.





## SHADOW COUNTRY

No less intriguing is Czech *Shadow Country*. That release touches upon similar aspects of modern history, despite being set thirteen hundred kilometers to the south-west from where the street painter struggled to keep up with the changing politics. Here, a small community in a border region has no say on the big politics, but its members must nevertheless make personal choices, ranging from the ethnic affiliation – Czech, German or Austrian – to the way they'll cope with the spreading evil that sets one neighbor against another – join, ignore or renounce it. What the viewer gets is a pot boiling with emotions, and a powerful collage of individual stories reflecting the dilemmas that millions had to deal with before and during WWII.



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## ORDINARY COUNTRY

Poland's *Ordinary Country* also shows sort of a shadow land: this short piece takes you into the world of security services in a communist state. Director Tomasz Wolski decided to inspect the modus operandi of the secret police, the grime and stench of breaking the strong and corrupting the weak, and the normality of surveillance cameras and phone taps as means of controlling a society living under an authoritarian rule. Based entirely on the footage kept by the IPN Archive and free from the maker's comments, the film suggestively conveys the perverted reality of a totalitarian regime, in which surveillance becomes normality, while true normality, subject to surveillance, can become leverage or evidence against citizens.



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## THE FANTASTIC

Then, there's *The Fantastic* – a film about encountering the unknown and the relationship between imagination and reality. It was built on interviews with exiled North Koreans, who describe what they imagined the outside world to be like, inspired, interestingly, by western movies on contrabanda videotapes. Coming from a Finnish director Maija Blåfield, the piece offers the perspective of oppression victims stealing a look onto the freedom side of the fence through color-enhanced foreign entertainment. Truly fantastic.



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## *DIARY 1937*

You also have 15-minute Ukrainian short *Diary 1937*, browsing through family heirlooms bought at a Kharkiv flea market. Created not long after the Great Famine, which the Soviet state orchestrated and carried out to break Ukraine's back, and in the year of the Great Purge that took countless lives, these memorabilia were nevertheless offered for sale for modest profit. Does it mean people are discarding the memory of living under the Soviet rule? More importantly, what picture of that period do the combined personal stories translate into? The documentary does not offer easy answers, but then, the questions are far from easy either.



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The organizers have more fine productions in store, and the audience seeking variety, depth, or emotions will not be disappointed. Hopefully, this year's selection will help foster the understanding of historical totalitarianism and the dangers of its contemporary forms.





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