



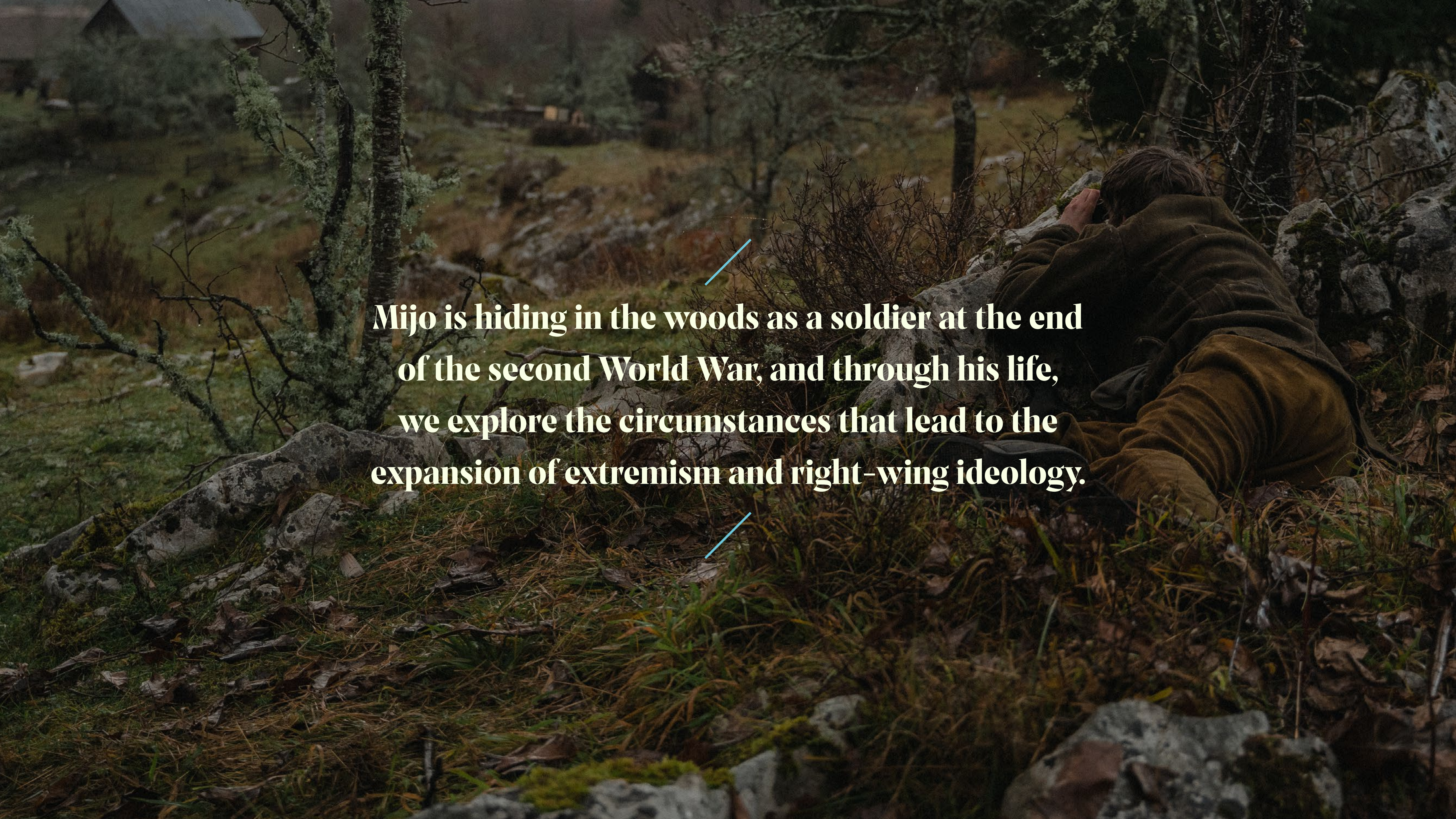
Karlovy Vary  
International Film Festival  
Crystal Globe Competition

director Bruno Anković

based on a novel by Damir Karakaš

# CELEBRATION






**Mijo is hiding in the woods as a soldier at the end of the second World War, and through his life, we explore the circumstances that lead to the expansion of extremism and right-wing ideology.**

A woman wearing a grey knit hat, a dark turtleneck, and a thick, light-colored wool vest is running across a grassy field. She is looking back over her shoulder with a concerned expression. In the background, there is a large, rustic stone building with a thatched roof. The scene is set in a rural, mountainous area with trees and a misty atmosphere.

SYNOPSIS



*Set between 1926 and 1945, the film follows Mijo and his family living in an impoverished Croatian village. By witnessing his father's cruel act driven by poverty and after carrying out the municipal authorities' undue order to get rid of the family dog, Mijo became easy prey for right-wing ideology which offered him false hope for a better life and a culprit for all the things he has suffered.*



A close-up portrait of Bruno Anković, a man with curly grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark blue jacket over a white t-shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a warm, textured wall.

**DIRECTOR**

# BRUNO ANKOVIĆ

**Bruno Anković (Split, 1976) graduated at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Zagreb. He has directed short fiction and documentary films and TV formats.**

**Since 1999 he has been working as a director of a great number of high-profile commercials winning awards and recognition. „Celebration“ is his debut feature**



# Q&A

with Bruno Anković

# What is the motivation behind choosing to adapt the novel “Celebration” by Damir Karakaš as your first film? What is it about the novel that drew you to the story?

Mostly it was the skill with which this personal and recognizably Balkan story speaks to the universal human experience and the enduring values of its messages, which have only grown more urgent over time.


When I first read the novel, I was struck by Karakaš’s intimate and emotional story, its style and the way in which the history of one man and his family echoes the history of the Balkan region, trapped in the vicious circle of wars, poverty, and a tragic hope that things can get better. The story itself is scarce in specific historic events, but their shadow hangs over the characters throughout the novel.

The plot of “Celebration” takes place a hundred years ago, at the outbreak of World War II. The film follows the life of Mijo, who will eventually become a member of the Ustasha movement, a fascist soldier. This is not merely a Balkan story; there is an ideological matrix at work in its very centre, the variants of which we can see around the world, working their way through various socio-political systems, in the past as well as in the present.

Sadly, the humanity doesn’t seem to have progressed much in the past century. Nationalist, populist, and far-right parties are growing in power across Europe. In recent months, European governments have been increasingly rattling their sabres; meanwhile, their people steadily experience more and more destitution amid the inflation and impending wars that have become our present reality, both in Europe and globally.

Young people are growing up in fear for their future, under the constant threat of existential insecurity, poverty and lack of opportunities, often without the access to quality education. All of these are the reasons why this story needs to be told. For us, this film represents a full-blooded international ode to humanity, a love story for the human race, a history textbook and a warning against all the evil steadily encroaching on us.





## Who do you think is represented by the main character, Mijo?

We often wonder how young people become so radicalised, embracing extreme ideologies. Although the film follows the trajectory of a young boy who eventually becomes a fascist soldier, it does not deal with politics. Except indirectly, in order to explore the way politics and ideology, which go hand in hand, shape our private lives and influence our intimate decisions, making them impossible to avoid. Today, Mijo would likely be a Russian, American or some other soldier, looking for a way out of poverty, or a young man recruited into an extreme ideology in some global conflict or an unstable country. We can find Mijo anywhere where political elites play with human lives, the so-called “little” people.

## How challenging was it to depict a character whose arc crosses the moral line and who ultimately becomes a member of a fascist army?

Mijo, much like Dostoevsky’s characters, is both the victim and the oppressor. But as viewers we only recognize him as an antagonist at the very end of the film. For these reasons, my goal was to build a certain relationship with the main character throughout the film. I wanted to keep a certain distance, observe him through a more forensic or anthropological lens, always taking great care not to deceive the audience through my directing choices. At the same time, I wanted to explain to myself how easy it can be to make the wrong choice in difficult circumstances, all with the aim of reaching some kind of promised utopia.

That kind of “cold” approach to directing seems to me to be crucial to understanding the complexity of the character.

## **This film takes place almost exclusively in the exterior – how important is nature in the film and what does it represent?**

The barren, rugged and merciless landscape of the Croatian region of Lika was a great inspiration for the visual identity and language of the film. The house we shot in is located in a tiny village that remains completely cut off from civilization, with no railway or bus stop, even though it is “in the very heart of Europe”. The mountain and the dense forest looming over the village are presented as equal characters in the film. Their monumental size and presence are simultaneously terrifying, while providing shelter.

The village houses, which remain inhabited to this day, look the same as they did a century ago. The only visible sign of the passage of time are the changing seasons. It is nature that, through its rhythmical changes, brings about gentleness and severity, abundance and scarcity – standing as a constant witness to the flow of life.

The coexistence of man and nature is one of the crucial focal points in the film. They are inseparable, demanding of each other, but it is also a relationship of respect, as if they were fully aware of their interconnectedness and mutual dependence. Each episode relates to a specific season, which does not only serve the mood of the film but as a representation of nature’s dialogue with the main character. Sometimes it is his ally, other times his enemy, sometimes it is in harmony and other times at odds with the character’s emotional state or the situation he is in.



**So the film is divided into four stories reflected in the four seasons; yet the concepts of the cyclical nature of life and trans-generational trauma are ideas taken from the novel – in what way did you try to highlight them in the film and why would that even be important to do?**

A new war could break out in the Balkans any day. The tensions are highest in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. But we could also add Montenegro and Macedonia to the list. All wars are deeply connected to transgenerational trauma, which results from the denial of crimes, lack of accountability, cover-ups and avoiding individual guilt. This is how the vicious circle of patriarchy comes to be, making history repeat itself. We have all got blood on our hands at some point in our family histories. There are very few families in the Balkans that haven't been executioners at one time and victims another.

The story in the film does not unfold linearly, as I do not think we live in a linear fashion. Simply put, as a civilization, we are constantly dancing on the precipice, where every step in the right direction is followed by another step back. This is most glaring in the state of empathy in our society, which is slowly disappearing.

This inability to achieve true change is mediated in the film by its elliptical structure divided into four chapters – four slices of our hero Mijo's life. These segments establish an archetype of time and space where nothing ever changes, the inexorable status quo that surrounds and binds us – despite the illusion of progress we allegedly live. It is for these reasons that we decided to avoid the chronological order, as chronology is implicitly linear, suggesting that walking through history means walking towards some impending change. But life unfolds differently, its logic is non-linear, pulling with it the fates of entire nations and countries.



## Crew

DIRECTOR

**Bruno Anković**

SCREENWRITER

**Jelena Paljan**

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY

**Damir Karakaš**

PRODUCERS

**Rea Rajčić, Tina Tišljar**

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

**Aleksandar Pavlović**

SET DESIGNER

**Bojan Drezgić**

COSTUME DESIGNER

**Morana Starčević**

MAKE-UP ARTIST

**Snježana Gorup**

EDITOR

**Tomislav Stojanović**

SOUND DESIGN AND MIX

**Julij Zornik**

COMPOSERS

**Alen Sinkauz, Nenad Sinkauz**

## Production company

**Eclectica**

Zagreb, Croatia

**Pakt media**

Ljubljana, Slovenia

Coproducers: Diego Zanco, Ira Cecić

## Cast

**Bernard Tomić** – MIJO

**Krešimir Mikić** – FATHER

**Klara Fiočić** – DRENKA

**Lars Štern** – YOUNG MIJO

**Jan Doležal** – LITTLE MIJO

**Nedim Nezirović** – RUDE

**Tanja Smoje** – MOTHER

**David Tasić Daf** – GRANDFATHER

**Izudin Bajrović** – DRENKA'S FATHER

PRODUCTION

# Eclectica

Eclectica is a film and TV production and post-production company based in Zagreb, Croatia. Run by producers Rea Rajčić, Tina Tišljar and Ivan Kelava along with film editor and colorist Tomislav Stojanović, Eclectica has quickly established itself as a notable player in the national and European markets. The company engages in the production of films, television series, and commercial projects, as well as providing extensive post-production services such as color grading, DCP mastering, and editing. Through its commitment to high-quality production and innovative storytelling, Eclectica has garnered recognition for its ambitious projects. “Celebration” is Eclectica’s second feature narrative film after “The Uncle” that had its premiere in 2022 at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. “The Uncle” film screened at over 40 international festivals, gathering over 10 awards.

Upcoming features include “Honey Bunny” by Igor Jelinić currently in postproduction, “Leave the Door Open” by Judita Gamulin developed at MIDPoint and Cinéfondation residence and “Pogana” the second feature by the team behind “The Uncle” recently presented at Berlinale Talent Project Market.

# Contacts

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**ECLECTICA**  
post&production



**PAKT MEDIA**  
**THINKS PICTURES**



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