



CIFEJ



Issue: 02 | Dec. 2025

COSMOS

PERIODICAL
PUBLICATION
OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CENTER
OF FILMS FOR CHILDREN
& YOUNG PEOPLE

EKKOMEΔ
HELLENIC FILM & AUDIOVISUAL CENTER

- 03 **First Word**
President's Foreword
- 04 **Editorial**
- 05 **Interview**
Sherri Hope Culver: The Quality Question Interview
'Why Children's Media Must Aim High'
- 09 **Make Sure to Read it**
CIFEJ Global Educational Webinar Series 2025–2026
Empowering Education through Film, Creativity, and Media Literacy
- 14 CINEDU: Cinema for Education Nationwide in Greece
- 16 Beyond Stories: How Experimental Film Can Inspire Young Minds
- 17 **CIFEJ Global Footprints**
CIFEJ shines at UNESCO Global MIL Week 2025:
Reimagining Children's Cinema and Screen Literacy
- 19 A Season of Connection: Key International CIFEJ Engagements
in Autumn 2025
- 21 Report on the 13th Universal Kids Film Festival, Turkey
- 23 CIFEJ Prize at the 28th Olympia Int'l Film Festival for Children
and Youth, Greece
- 25 **Focusing on the Mediterranean**
'To Inspire the Young and the Young at Heart toward a Peace-Loving
Society': An Interview with Rowena Martinez Ulayan,
Director of Universal Kids Film Festival & Member of CIFEJ
- 29 **What Gift is Better than This?**
Report on CIFEJ Prize Winner Films, Autumn - Winter 2025





Jitendra Mishra
President - CIFEJ

i

Jitendra Mishra is an acclaimed Indian film producer and director, Festival Director of Smile International Film Festival for Children & Youth (SIFFCY). He is a promoter of children's and youth cinema globally, and has also served as former Goodwill Ambassador of CIFEJ.

President's Foreword

As we bid farewell to 2025 and welcome a new year, I am proud to reflect on the remarkable journey we have undertaken and milestones achieved together as one team and one family at CIFEJ. Over the past eight months of the new Board and following the relocation of our headquarters to Athens—we have made meaningful progress guided by clarity of vision, dedication, and teamwork.

A cornerstone of our efforts has been the launch of the UNIQUE Task Force – United in Diversity, Stronger in Action, through which eight specialized responsibility centers were created to enhance performance, accountability, and focus within the Board. Transparency has remained a priority, with the regular circulation of Board Meeting Minutes, reinforcing our commitment to the right to information.

We have significantly strengthened CIFEJ's **Global Presence**, participating in over 20 major international film festivals, forums, and conferences, including Cannes and the UNESCO MIL Conference. Our flagship initiative, **CIFEJ Days & CIFEJ Prize**, was hosted at four respected international film festivals, further reinforcing our mission and partnerships.

For the first time, CIFEJ proudly conferred Honorary Membership upon ten distinguished individuals in recognition of their significant contributions to children's and youth cinema.

Looking to the future, we embraced **New Voices**, welcoming over ten new members from seven countries. We introduced **Student Memberships**, member-sponsored entries, and flexible membership fee waivers to foster inclusivity and support.

Special Efforts are undertaken to encourage equality, diversity, and inclusion, honoring excellence across cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives.

Our **Digital Transformation** included the launch of a new logo, website and identity, reactivation of our YouTube channel, bimonthly webinars, consistent social media engagement, and the introduction of **COSMOS – The CIFEJ Quarterly Newsletter**.

With consistent governance through regular Board and Executive Committee meetings and result-oriented action plans, we stand well-prepared for the year ahead. Together, we will continue to grow, innovate, and inspire.

Wishing you peace, love, and a children-friendly New Year through Good Cinema!



Katerina Virvidaki

Editor-in-Chief,
CIFEJ Athens
HQ Coordinator

As we open the second issue of **CIFEJ COSMOS**, we continue our mission to spotlight the dynamic global landscape of children's media, celebrating the ideas, people, and practices shaping a more imaginative and media-literate future for young audiences.

We begin with an insightful contribution from **Sherri Hope Culver, Director of the Center for Media and Information Literacy at Temple University (USA)** whose wide-reaching research project titled '**The Quality Question – Why Children's Media Must Aim High**' (2024) forms the basis of her interview and invites us to reflect on what truly constitutes quality in children's media. In her discussion, the notion of quality emerges as both pragmatic and multifaceted, grounded in children's real needs and attentive to their authentic experiences. Her perspective sets the stage for the interconnected themes woven throughout this issue.

As we continue, we highlight the launch of the **CIFEJ Global Educational Webinar Series**, a major step forward in advancing knowledge-sharing and strengthening international dialogue on media literacy and film education. Complementing this, is a feature on **CINEDU**, an exemplary case study of a school-based film-streaming platform in Greece that embeds critical film viewing horizontally throughout the curriculum. The issue then turns to a thought-provoking discussion of how non-linear ways of seeing can enrich both the viewing and

the learning experience of young audiences in '**Beyond Stories: How Experimental Film Can Inspire Young Minds**'.

In our **CIFEJ Global Footprints** section, we capture CIFEJ's expanding engagements around the world, demonstrating the organization's ongoing commitment to intercultural collaboration. A major highlight has been CIFEJ's dynamic presence at the **2025 UNESCO Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Week** and its Feature Conference in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, held under the theme "**Minds Over AI – MIL in Digital Spaces**." CIFEJ contributed to key dialogues on the evolving challenges and opportunities presented by AI-driven media environments.

Focusing on the Mediterranean, this issue also features an inspiring interview with **Rowena Martinez Ulaya, Director of the Universal Kids Film Festival (Turkey)**, whose vision has long been dedicated to promoting world peace by creating activities and platforms for creators to spread a culture of peace, especially among children and youth.

Last but not least, our section on the **CIFEJ Prize** showcases a selection of films that illuminate the transformative power of courage in its many forms, with children's journeys at the heart of this exploration. Films that celebrate resilience, as well as imagination, or rather one could say, imagination as a *vital form of resilience*. Characters who challenge limits by embracing creativity and hope, transforming everyday obstacles into extraordinary – even magical – quests, reminding us of the inner strength and wonder of childhood.

Enjoy.

Interview

Sherri Hope Culver: The Quality Question Interview 'Why Children's Media Must Aim High'



Sherri Hope Culver

i

Interview by
Irene Andriopoulou
CIFEJ Executive Director
Katerina Virvidaki
CIFEJ Athens HQ
Coordinator

In an increasingly saturated media landscape, the question of what constitutes quality in children's content has never been more urgent. To address this critical issue, media literacy expert **Sherri Hope Culver, Director of the Center for Media and Information Literacy at Temple University, USA**, undertook a wide-reaching research project titled **'The Quality Question – Why Children's Media Must Aim High' (2024)**. Based on in-depth interviews with over 75 global leaders in the children's media industry, her research resulted in **15 practical and thought-provoking guidelines** for those creating, distributing, and evaluating media for young audiences.

In addition to her academic work, Ms. Culver hosts the podcast ***Kids Talk Media*** and has served as a consultant, educator, and advocate for children's media worldwide. She also served as Vice President of the ISC of UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Alliance, 2019-2022. Her work articulates a vision of content that is playful, inclusive, meaningful, and developmentally rich — while remaining attuned to the realities of industry, culture, and policy.

In this interview, conducted for the **CIFEJ COSMOS** Journal, Ms. Culver reflects on the findings of *The Quality Question* and shares her insights for creators and stakeholders striving to produce impactful and high-quality content for children and young people.



Interview

Sherri Hope Culver

1. The notion of 'quality' content, particularly within the realm of cultural production, often alludes to criteria of artistic or pedagogical value, criteria frequently positioned in contrast to the idea of 'popular' content. However, in the context of your research, you seem to adopt a more pragmatic approach, emphasizing that quality content for children must, above all, be **fun**. Could you elaborate on how you understand and define the concept of 'quality' in this context?

I am glad it is evident that the recommendations have a pragmatic approach. If adults aim to create media for children that is age appropriate and models core values of kindness and generosity among other goals, if we aim to create "good" media for children, those lofty goals have no chance of being absorbed if the media is not enjoyable to their child audience. Children's first judgment is going to be about enjoyment, about fun. But fun is not the opposite of quality. I learned the power of blending fun and quality by working in public television for many years. The example of Sesame Street comes to mind with its blend of fun and quality, but it is also true for Odd Squad, Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood and many other programs. I love that children assume they can learn positive values and also laugh and be playful, all at the same time. If we want to create quality media for kids, that's their standard!

2. What inspired you to launch *The Quality Question*, and what gaps did you see or what challenges did you encounter in how 'quality' is currently defined or pursued in children's media?

The report grew out of research I conducted as a Fulbright global scholar. I was about to launch a new Certificate in Children's Media for my university to equip students with the skills and knowledge to begin careers in the children's media industry. Media is a global enterprise and I knew that students would benefit from guidance from those leading the creative practices and programming decisions for children's media. I interviewed over 75 industry leaders starting with the question, "what does quality children's media mean to you?". The completed interviews were coded along common responses, ultimately revealing patterns. Those patterns became the 15 recommendations. The recommendations will ring true to many creators of children's media. The familiarity affirms the content. The report, *The Quality Question*, is an accessible compendium of these recommendations.



Learn more and download
*The Quality Question: Why Children's
Media Must Aim High* report.

Interview

Sherri Hope Culver

3. How do cultural differences (e.g. values, storytelling traditions, norms around what is appropriate for children) influence what ‘quality’ means in different parts of the world? Did you observe any tensions while thinking about the same guidelines globally?

Creating quality media for children is a balance of different goals. Children deserve to see (and play and listen and stream) media that reflects their lived experiences; media that is relevant to their lives. On the other hand, media is an opportunity to reflect common experiences across cultures and to show children that they share similarities with children in other parts of the world, even if those places have different weather or foods or family structures. For many years, there was an assumption that children would not want to watch television featuring children from other parts of the world, with different accents or skin color. But the algorithms of social media and global streaming services started offering children more international programs to watch and we learned that children were open to watching the experiences of children in other parts of the world, as long as the content had a thread of commonality. Going to school. Riding a bicycle. Eating a meal with family. Most children share those experiences. Layering shared experiences with culturally unique experiences is a way to help children see themselves in others.



4. Your research draws on interviews with 75 leaders from across the children’s media ecosystem. What were some of the most interesting points of agreement or disagreement among them about what makes media ‘high quality’ content?

It may be surprising to learn that there were rarely points of disagreement. When asked the core question of “what makes quality media for children?” a high percentage of the interviewees responded “authenticity” as their first response. I can honestly say that key points in the recommendations were not just spoken by one or two interviewees, they were included in almost every interview. Relevance to a child’s life. Authenticity. A caring adult connection. Even the suggestion to “make it a little gritty” was expressed often.

5. One of the most thought-provoking recommendations is “Let it be a little gritty, a little naughty.” What do you mean by that — and why is this important for children’s development?

This is one of my favorite recommendations. Of course, not everyone used the term “gritty”, but most interviewees felt that the imperfections or the transgressive behaviors included in children’s media helps children to feel that it really represents their lived experiences. Kids are not perfect. They make mistakes. They break a vase. They forget their homework. They play in mud. They get knots in their hair. They yell at their siblings. Authentic media for children connects to those “gritty” realities.



Interview

Sherri Hope Culver

6. As you note in your research, *‘there is growing global awareness that everyday stressors are affecting children’s mental health’* (Abrams, 2023). How can addressing this issue contribute to the broader discussion on quality-oriented children’s media, particularly in relation to the urgent need for fostering media literacy skills, as emphasized in Recommendation 13 of *The Quality Question*? What key practices or guidelines should educators and media practitioners adopt to support children in this area?

One of the easiest ways to be mindful of children’s mental health in the media space is by helping children to develop the practice of asking questions before, during and after consuming media. It’s a media literacy habit. Children can learn to ask themselves a few simple questions and then make choices about when, where and what media they consume based on their answers to those questions. How do I feel right now? How does this television show (or game or app) make me feel? When will I know I’ve had enough? Parents can make some decisions about what media their children should consume, but parents won’t be present for all the media decisions a child makes. Helping children to develop media literacy skills should be a community effort. Media literacy skills should be part of the educational curriculum. They should be discussed at home. Media needs some government regulation. And the media companies themselves should develop content assuming children will be there. Because they will.

7. One major concern presented in *The Quality Question* is the growing homogeneity of children’s media productions — with children across many countries exposed to the same shows promoted on streaming platforms or the same films shown in multiplexes (see *“A Homogeneous Global,” The Quality Question*). In what ways does this increasing uniformity in children’s media content challenge our understanding of what constitutes quality in children’s media?

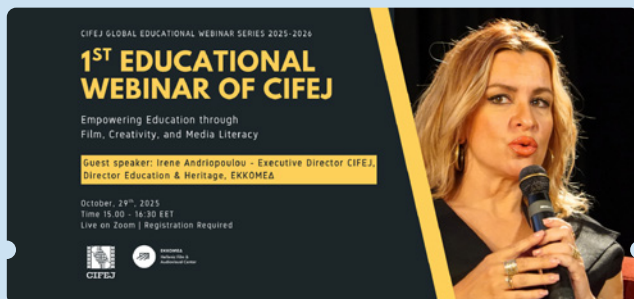
Anyone involved with the media industry will likely share these words at some point: Media is a business. Media may provide entertainment and information, but most of it would not exist if someone somewhere was not making money from it. The homogeneity of media content is driven by that reality. It’s simply cheaper to create a television program or a movie or an app and release the same one to the entire global child audience than it is to create nuanced content for the unique needs of children in each region of the world. Global content can still be of a high quality for children. As noted earlier, there is a benefit and an enjoyment for children in consuming media created in another part of the world, or knowing that children are having a shared experience watching the same global hit. But it cannot take the place of the need for children to see themselves and their lives reflected in media. They need both. Media is the world’s strongest socializing method. The value messages of media are repeated often, and that repetition builds deeper perceived value. Children learn early on that if it is important, it will be on television or online. A child who sees elements of their lives reflected in media interprets that as a valuing of their life. A child who does not see their life reflected, interprets that as having less value.

Make Sure to Read it

CIFEJ Global Educational Webinar Series 2025–2026 Empowering Education through Film, Creativity, and Media Literacy

i

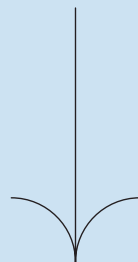
by
Irene Andriopoulou
CIFEJ Executive Director
Katerina Virvidaki
CIFEJ Athens HQ
Coordinator



The **CIFEJ Global Educational Webinar Series 2025–2026** renews CIFEJ's commitment to connecting cinema, education, and youth engagement through an international platform designed for shared learning, networking, and complementing media production. Conceived as a space that links professional exchange and latest developments with pedagogical reflection, the Series brings together educators, students, filmmakers, media professionals, and cultural practitioners committed to enriching learning through film and creative media, while also offering an upskilling competence framework.

Building on CIFEJ's longstanding mission to promote both the artistic and educational value of cinema, the Series highlights how storytelling encourages imagination, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding.

Throughout the 2025–2026 cycle, the webinars will explore themes shaped by contemporary educational needs.



Make Sure to Read it

Global Educational Webinar Series 2025–2026

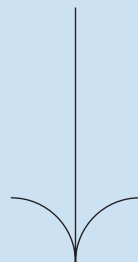
Main Strands of the CIFEJ Webinars 2025–2026

- **Media and Film Education**
- **Animation and New Media**
- **Media Literacy and Digital Well-Being**
- **Film Aesthetics and Philosophy in the Classroom**
- **Film Festivals & Networking: How to Promote Your Work Globally**
- **Repositioning the Film Industry: Production, Curation, and Promotion of Children's Content**

A central strand will focus on **Media and Film Education**, presenting practical approaches for integrating film analysis, visual literacy, and creative expression into school curricula. Complementing this, selected case studies will introduce digital tools and collaborative platforms that are transforming classrooms into creative practice hubs.

Additional sessions will cover **Animation Workshop Design**, offering step-by-step guidance for co-creating meaningful animation projects, as well as **Media Literacy and Cinematherapy**, featuring good practices for helping diverse communities navigate today's media landscape and use cinema as a space for reflection, emotional expression, and digital empowerment. The programme will also delve into **Cinema and Philosophy for Children**, emphasizing film's potential to spark inquiry, ethical dialogue, and empathy among young audiences.

Another major strand will highlight **Film Festival and Industry Outlines** on organization, **curation**, and production for children and youth. These webinars will explore how festivals for young audiences can serve as vibrant educational ecosystems and tools for audience development—sharing insights on curating age-appropriate programmes, involving young juries, and designing activities that engage schools and families. They will also showcase emerging practices in children's film production, offering guidance on supporting young creators and addressing ethical considerations when working with minors.



Make Sure to Read it

Global Educational Webinar Series 2025–2026

1st Webinar: ‘The 3 Cs in Education’

29 October 2025

by
Irene Andriopoulou
Executive Director CIFEJ,
Global Media and Film
Education Expert

The first webinar, titled ‘The 3 Cs in Education’ took place on 29 October 2025 as part of the celebrations for the 2025 UNESCO Global Media and Information Literacy Week, in which CIFEJ also participated. Grounded in the Film Education strand, the webinar focused on Abbas Kiarostami’s early filmography on children, exploring how cinema can foster media literacy, creativity, and reflection in the classroom through a popular pedagogical methodology for schools. Originally designed by EKKOMED, Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center – Unit of Education and Heritage, the webinar offered practical worksheets, creative exercises, and international best practices illustrating how film education can become an experience of ‘Happy Knowledge’ (Nietzsche)—where learning is both joyful and profound. The webinar was conducted by Ms. Irene Andriopoulou, Executive Director of CIFEJ and Director of Education & Heritage at EKKOMED, who has extensive global experience in practicing media and film literacy.

Together, the 2025–2026 webinars reaffirm CIFEJ’s core commitment to international knowledge sharing.

By bringing educators and creators into closer collaboration, the series seeks to strengthen the relationship between schools and the global film community, and to inspire new forms of children’s film production. Participants are warmly invited to join this exchange and discover how cinema can enrich education in meaningful, imaginative ways.



Watch the first webinar,
on CIFEJ’s
YouTube channel

Please send us your own proposals, ideas, or brief descriptions of relevant projects. Your input will help ensure that the Webinar Series remains truly global, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the communities we aim to serve.

All webinars will be uploaded on CIFEJ’s new online library.

Contact: cifej@ekkomed.gr

Make Sure to Read it

CINEDU:

Cinema for Education Nationwide in Greece

i

by
Ilias Tassopoulos
CINEDU
Project Manager

 CINEDU



CINEDU is a movie streaming platform specially designed for schools in Greece. Offering free access to a curated catalogue of films alongside specially developed educational resources, CINEDU empowers Primary, Middle, and High Schools across the country. Teachers can select films aligned with their curriculum and enrich classroom learning through accompanying materials that foster deeper student engagement.

The 2025–2026 academic year marks the third year of CINEDU's full integration into the Greek educational system. Today, more than 8.000 teachers from over 2.500 school units actively use the platform. During the previous school year alone, an estimated 2.760 CINEDU screenings were held in classrooms, each supported by tailored educational content.

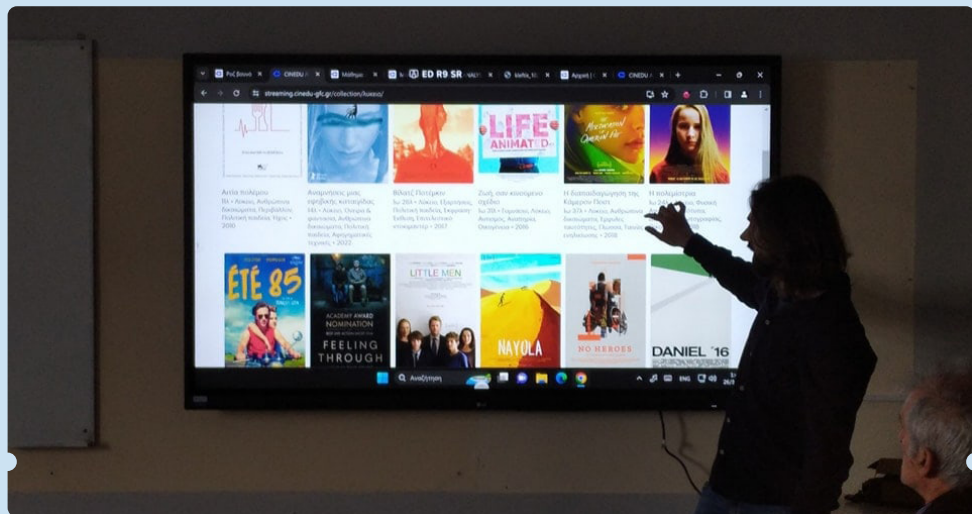
CINEDU has opened doors for schools in remote regions and on islands, where access to cinema is often limited. Remarkably, a significant proportion of registered schools come from Greece's regional areas rather than Attica, underscoring the platform's nationwide reach.

CINEDU is hosted by EKKOMED - Hellenic Film and Audio-visual Center / Greek Film Directorate / Education & Heritage Unit.



Make Sure to Read it

CINEDU: Cinema for Education Nationwide in Greece



In some cases, teachers—often in collaboration with their local municipalities—have expressed a strong desire to experience cinema in its natural setting: the movie theater. CINEDU has actively supported such initiatives—most notably in Trikala (northern central Greece)—bringing the magic of cinema beyond the classroom. Instead of holding lessons in the classroom, these screenings took place during morning hours in dedicated cinema halls, transforming the school day into a shared cultural experience. Students watched films together on the big screen, enjoying the authentic atmosphere of cinema as a community.



CINEDU website

Beyond streaming, CINEDU drives systematic initiatives to promote film literacy in education. These include professional development seminars for teachers in close cooperation with regional Directorates of Education and targeted presentations at specialized events. The effort to embed cinema as an accessible and valuable educational tool has been warmly embraced by the teaching community. Over the past two years, more than 400 seminars and presentations have been held, engaging educators from all disciplines. Between July and October 2025, CINEDU organized several online sessions showcasing best practices for integrating film into subjects such as science, history, art, and civic education. The enthusiastic response highlighted the growing demand for thematic teacher training.

CINEDU was developed under the initiative “*Digital Movie Platform for Schools*” by the Operational Program *Human Resource Development, Education and Lifelong Learning – NSRF*, co-financed by Greece and the European Union.

Make Sure to Read it

Beyond Stories: How Experimental Film Can Inspire Young Minds

Children's cinema and experimental film may seem like opposites: one tells clear stories, the other explores mystery and abstraction. Yet together, they open exciting new paths for learning and creativity. Around the world, educators and film festivals are discovering that abstract, avant-garde films can deeply engage young audiences — not despite their strangeness, but because of it.

Children are often thought to need simple plots and emotions, yet they naturally respond to rhythm, color, texture, and movement — elements at the core of experimental cinema. Before they can read or follow complex stories, they react instinctively to shapes, sounds, and light. A film by Len Lye¹ or Norman McLaren² might make a child laugh at flickering lines or describe colors as alive. Such encounters build visual literacy — the ability to notice and think critically about images — an essential skill in today's image-saturated world. When used thoughtfully, experimental cinema becomes a way to train perception and imagination.

i

by
Doros Demetriou
Film Historian, CIFEJ Board member



Blinkity Blank, Norman McLaren, 1955

The French theorist Alain Bergala, in *The Cinema Hypothesis* (2016), argued that cinema education should not rely on explanation but on encounter — a meeting between the child and the work of art. He describes the teacher as a *passreur*: a guide who shares enthusiasm and opens the way to discovery. The *passreur* doesn't simplify or impose meaning but encourages curiosity and wonder. The goal, Bergala says, is not to learn about cinema, but to learn to see.

This approach aligns perfectly with experimental film. Non-narrative works invite active viewing, asking children to trust their senses and let intuition lead. As Bergala wrote (2016), art's role is not to repeat what we already know, but to reveal what we never imagined we could see.

- 1 Len Lye (1901–1980) was a New Zealand-born experimental filmmaker and kinetic sculptor known for his direct animation technique, painting directly on film to create vibrant, rhythmic works such as *A Colour Box* (1935).
- 2 Norman McLaren (1914–1987) was a Scottish-Canadian filmmaker and animator celebrated for his innovative, non-narrative films for the National Film Board of Canada, blending sound, abstraction, and motion in works like *Begone Dull Care* (1949).

Make Sure to Read it

Beyond Stories: How Experimental Film Can Inspire Young Minds



Rainbow Dance, Len Lye, 1936

The filmmaker Robert Bresson once said, “I’d rather people feel a film before understanding it” (2016). Directors such as David Lynch (2006) and Stanley Kubrick (1982) expressed similar ideas — that cinema’s power lies in emotion, rhythm, and mood rather than explanation. For children, this emotional and sensory connection can be the most meaningful way to experience art.

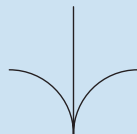
Around the world, several film festivals put these ideas into practice. Since 1978, the Oberhausen Short Film Festival in Germany has featured short films for children and youth, offering screenings and workshops that encourage open discussion rather than instruction. Other examples are the Festival des Cinémas Différents et Expérimentaux de Paris, which includes “Young Audience” screenings, and Cinema in Sneakers – Film Festival for Children and Youth in Warsaw, Poland. Such programs prove that young audiences don’t need simplified material — only the freedom to look, to feel, and to talk.

Learning also happens through making. When children paint directly on film, project colored light, or record short loops, they discover cinema as a tactile, playful art. They experiment with time, rhythm, and movement, learning through curiosity and chance. To experiment, in this sense, is to learn.

Introducing young people to experimental film is both artistic and ethical. It fosters independent thinking, respect for difference, and freedom from passive viewing. In a culture of speed and repetition, these films invite attention, patience, and reflection. They show that cinema is not only about telling stories, but about exploring perception itself.

As Bergala reminds us, the aim of film education is not to produce critics or technicians, but to awaken the freedom to look. Experimental cinema embodies that freedom. It is bold, sensory, and open-ended. It teaches that art is not about certainty, but curiosity; not about answers, but about discovery.

We do not watch to understand — we watch to wonder. And in that wonder, education truly begins.



Make Sure to Read it

Beyond Stories: How Experimental Film Can Inspire Young Minds

Bibliography

- Bergala, Alain. The Cinema Hypothesis: Teaching Cinema in the Classroom and Beyond. FilmmuseumSynemaPublikationen, Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2016.
- Bresson, Robert. Notes on the Cinematographer. New York Review Books, 2016.
- Deleuze, Gilles. Cinema 1: The Movement-Image. University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Deleuze, Gilles. Cinema 2: The Time-Image. University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Kubrick, Stanley. Interviews in Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze, edited by Thomas Allen Nelson. Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina. "Children's Films and the Avant-Garde." In The Oxford Handbook of Children's Film, edited by Noel Brown, Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Lye, Len. Figures of Motion. Edited by Roger Horrocks and Wystan Curnow. Auckland University Press, 2009.
- Lynch, David. Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity. Penguin, 2006.
- McLaren, Norman. McLaren on McLaren: Writings and Conversations. Edited by Don McWilliams. National Film Board of Canada, 2013.
- Rancière, Jacques. The Emancipated Spectator. Verso, 2009.

CIFEJ Global Footprints

CIFEJ shines at UNESCO Global MIL Week 2025: Reimagining Children's Cinema and Screen Literacy

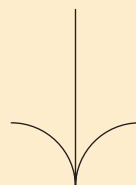
i

by
Irene Andriopoulou
CIFEJ Executive Director



The International Centre of Films for Children and Young People (CIFEJ) had a dynamic presence at the **2025 UNESCO Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Week** and its Feature Conference in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, held under the theme [Minds Over AI – MIL in Digital Spaces](#)".

As newly signed member of the UNESCO MIL Alliance and active participant to the consultation process with regards to the new profile of the Alliance, CIFEJ delegation was selected to co-organize with the its host organization in Greece, [EKKOMED – Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center](#), a Side Event entitled "**CIFEJ Reimagined: A Global Vision for Children's Cinema and Screen Literacy**," with prominent speakers from Greece, the United States, and Latin America. All speakers underscored the importance of integrating film education into school curricula and ensuring that all children have equitable access to high-quality audiovisual content - CIFEJ is willing to help make that a vast reality.



CIFEJ Global Footprints

CIFEJ shines at UNESCO Global MIL Week 2025:
Reimagining Children's Cinema and Screen Literacy



This session convened distinguished speakers from Greece, the United States, and Latin America, who explored how film and audiovisual media can serve as transformative tools for children's education, cultural understanding, and creative empowerment. Participants emphasized the critical importance of integrating film education into school curricula, ensuring that all children, regardless of background, have equitable access to high-quality audiovisual content that reflects diverse perspectives.

In her address, **Ms. Irene Andriopoulou, Executive Director of CIFEJ**, traced the organization's evolution since its founding by UNESCO in 1955. She reflected on CIFEJ's longstanding advocacy for children's rights, screen education, and intercultural dialogue, noting that the organization now enters a new era under its headquarters in Greece — one that bridges legacy and innovation. *"CIFEJ remains committed to building new pathways for international cooperation, creative learning, and the advancement of screen literacy,"* she stated.

Gerardo Neto, Director of [FestiCine Kids Festival](#), highlighted the achievements and impact to youth generation on film education as well as film cultural identity, through the 27 years old kids festival. His remarks illustrated how regional initiatives can meaningfully connect local creativity with global educational goals.

CIFEJ also co-hosted with EKKOMED, the Side Event **"Cultivating Critical Minds in a World Influenced by AI"**, that focused on the challenges and opportunities emerging from the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence. Through a constructive dialogue with media academics and industry professionals from USA, Canada, Portugal, and Greece, the discussion emphasized the need to foster skills of critical understanding and responsible use of audiovisual media—so that citizens, and especially young people, can navigate the digital world with awareness, discernment, and creativity.

Additionally, as part of its social program, CIFEJ with its local member, FestiCine Kids Festival, offered a free walking tour around the beautiful historical city of Cartagena with special guide, Gerardo Neto, Director of the Festival.

CIFEJ'S Greek delegation also paid a visit to the premises of local El Universal newspaper presenting CIFEJ's renewed vision and its new home in Athens, Greece.

CIFEJ's participation in this flagship UNESCO event reaffirmed its mission to empower children and young people through film and media literacy, fostering their capacity to think critically, engage creatively, and connect globally through the moving image towards reaching "cognitive euphoria".

CIFEJ Global Footprints

A Season of Connection:

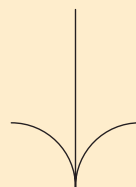
Key International CIFEJ Engagements in Autumn 2025



i

by
Vassilis C. Karamitsanis
CIFEJ Secretary General

In the beginning of October 2025, the CIFEJ Secretary General Mr. Vassilis C. Karamitsanis and Board member Ms. Pamela Bisson attended the **30th anniversary edition of SCHLINGEL International Film Festival for Children & Young Audience**, hosted in the city of Chemnitz, Germany, holding the title of the **European Capital of Culture 2025**. This renowned festival is founded and chaired by CIFEJ Goodwill Ambassador Michael Harbauer. The festival has hosted a special industry presentation about our organisation, awarded a CIFEJ Prize selected by a jury comprised by CIFEJ members and allowed us to spread the information about our organisation's new era and initiatives in a wide international audience.



CIFEJ Global Footprints

A Season of Connection:

Key International CIFEJ Engagements in Autumn 2025



Also in October, the CIFEJ Secretary General and the CIFEJ Vice President Ms. Emma Pendiuc attended the **18th China International Children's Film Festival**, which was hosted jointly in the cities of **Deyang, Chengdu, Jinan and Huzhou**, chaired by CIFEJ Board member Huang Jun. CIFEJ addressed keynote speeches during the opening ceremonies. We had the chance to promote the work of our organization and explain to the festival's numerous participants and audience, including many international professionals of the festival, the new era of the headquarters in Athens. We did have important exchanges on both a bilateral level between China and Greece, as well as on an international level regarding the activities and the networking efforts of our organization.

In late October, we had the chance to travel to **Tuzla, Istanbul, Turkey** to attend the **Universal Kids Film Festival**, hosted by CIFEJ member Rowena Martinez Ulayan. There, we had the chance to host a special CIFEJ working breakfast along with CIFEJ Board member Ms. Elham Shirvani, presenting the work of CIFEJ globally, attracting new members and promoting our vast networking opportunities (see more here).

In mid-November, we had the chance to attend the **Black Nights International Film Festival (PÖFF) and PÖFF Shorts 2025 in Tallinn**, Estonia on the occasion of the **Emiles - European Animation Awards official ceremony**. We had the chance to exchange information about CIFEJ and promote our organization's outreach on both European and international levels.



CIFEJ Global Footprints

Report:

13th Universal Kids Film Festival, Turkey

i

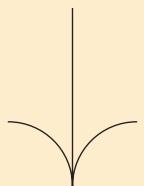
by
Elham Shirvani
CIFEJ Board member



The 13th Universal Kids Film Festival began on 25 October 2025 in the beautiful city of Istanbul, Turkey. Guests arrived one by one and were escorted to the hotel by a group of young volunteers. In the hotel lobby, they received their festival bags and were guided to their rooms.

The gala ceremony took place at Gebze Technical University. It began with the Flag Ceremony, followed by a welcome speech by Ms. Ceren Sarisaltık, the International Relations Director of Gebze Technical University; a keynote speech and inspirational talk by Prof. Dr. Hacı Ali Mantar, the Rector of Gebze Technical University; and an introductory note and acknowledgment by Ms. Rowena Martinez Ulayan, the UKFF Chairperson, who briefly introduced the international delegates and thanked the sponsors.

At 7 p.m., a film screening was held for the audience. The featured film was *Bird Boy*, directed by Joel Soisson from the USA. The screening was followed by a message from the director, a Q&A session, and further audience interaction.



CIFEJ Global Footprints

Report: 13th Universal Kids Film Festival, Turkey



The gala ceremony concluded with photo sessions and autograph signing.

The second day of the festival began with the CIFEJ Forum, presented by Vassilis Karamitsanis (Secretary General of CIFEJ) and myself, Elham Shirvani (CIFEJ Board Member). Ms. Shirvani spoke about the history of CIFEJ, its activities, and its past and upcoming projects. Mr. Karamitsanis discussed the relocation of the headquarters to Greece, the current Board structure, and the new hosting organization of CIFEJ—the Hellenic Film & Audiovisual Center, EKKOMED—as well as the organization's position in Greece.

After the forum, guests were transferred to the festival venue at Gebze Technical University. Three halls were dedicated to the festival: one for short film screenings, one for feature films, and one for educational workshops. The workshops were conducted by Ms. Anggi Frisca, a CIFEJ member from Indonesia, and Kousuke Sakoda from Japan.

The third day of the festival continued across two venues: Tuzla Canada College, ITU Tuzla Campus (Maritime Faculty), and Piri Reis University Maritime Campus. Both venues hosted screenings of short and feature films and animations, as well as master classes.

The fourth day of the festival took place at Altunizade Culture and Art Center, where two feature films—from Russia and Iran—were screened, along with two short films created by college students in collaboration with some of the young international guests.

The festival concluded with a warm and friendly dinner at Ms. Martinez's home, where the winners of this edition of the festival received their awards. UKFF presented its Lifetime Achievement Award to Mr. Mitsuo Tahira, CIFEJ Board Member and Director of the KINEKO Film Festival from Japan.



CIFEJ Global Footprints

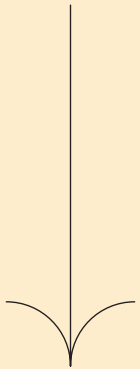
CIFEJ PRIZE:

At the 28th Olympia Int'l Film Festival for Children and Youth, Greece



We are proud to have hosted the prestigious **CIFEJ Prize** at the 28th Olympia International Film Festival for Children and Youth. The Prize was unanimously awarded by the jury to the feature film ***Sunshine***, directed by Antoinette Jad-aone from the Philippines.

Sunshine is a deeply moving film with a powerful heart, honoring every woman who dares to dream and rise beyond boundaries. It celebrates the resilience and triumph of a young girl's spirit against all odds.



CIFEJ Global Footprints

CIFEJ PRIZE at the 28th Olympia Int'l Film Festival for Children and Youth, Greece



The award was presented by **CIFEJ President Jitendra Mishra**, who himself is an internationally acclaimed and multiple award-winning filmmaker with extensive experience across more than 100 films in various capacities, and a distinguished jury member at over 50 international film festivals, forums, and awards worldwide.

The CIFEJ Prize was officially announced during the festival's Award Ceremony on **6 December 2025**.



Interview

‘To Inspire the Young and the Young at Heart toward a Peace-Loving Society’:

An Interview with **Rowena Martinez Ulayan**, Director of Universal Kids Film Festival & Member of CIFEJ



Rowena Martinez Ulayan

i

Interview by
Elham Shirvani
CIFEJ Board member,
Istanbul, Turkey,
October 2025

1. Tell us about yourself, your activities and what you are doing.

The majority of my life, and that is more than four decades, has been dedicated to promoting world peace by creating activities and providing platforms for creators to spread the culture of peace, especially among children and youth. My creative endeavors have been guided by one basic principle: *to create and inspire and inspire to create peace, for an inspired society will never create war.*

My interest in children's cinema started in the 80's with a workshop in films for children by Haro Senft, a German film director and advocate of children's films. As soon as I finished my bachelor's degree in Pedagogy, I went on to pursue my Master's in Educational Technology, focusing on teaching and learning process through various media, including films and television. In 1988, I was one of the top ten Film Scholars invited by the former Soviet Union to study at the All Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK- presently Gerasimov Film Institute) and specialize in Children's Film Directing. This was followed by a Graduate Fellowship in Educational Technology at the Yokohama National University focusing on Children's Film and Television. This academic background, provided me with a solid foundation in organizing and running the Cinematic program of the University of the Philippines Film Center, as Cinematic Arts Education Specialist.



Interview

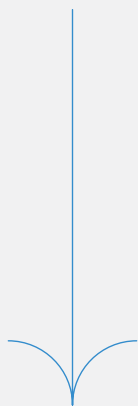
Rowena Martinez Ulayan

2. How did you become familiar with CIFEJ?

I became familiar with CIFEJ forty years ago as Cinematic Arts Education Specialist at the University of the Philippines Film Center. The Film Center was a member of CILECT (Association Internationale des Écoles de Cinéma, d'Audiovisuel et des Médias) and CIFEJ, both of which were UNESCO initiatives for the promotion of quality content in cinema and other audio-visual media. When I moved to Turkey, I continued my connection with CIFEJ through its individual membership scheme, and the Universal Kids Film Festival (UKFF) has benefitted from the network of the organization. As founder of the UKFF, I have had the chance to see how my CIFEJ membership has expanded the visibility of UKFF, as well as its credibility internationally.

3. What inspired you to initiate UKFF?

When I migrated to Turkey for marital considerations, I devoted my time to painting and raising a family with two children, while curating art exhibitions locally and internationally. During this period, I was able to refine my visual arts technique and won the Anglo-Italian Academy of Arts Award during the Chianciano Art Biennale and the London Art Biennale in 2011 and 2013 respectively. It is also during this period that I founded the International Forum of the Arts (IFA) and gathered the support of fellow artists and art enthusiasts, to create a hub for art exhibitions, workshops and several art gatherings, where we tried to inspire everyone through our creative works. IFA artists were also encouraged to donate their works to public hospitals and other public institutions where communities could view creative works. It is within this network that I initiated the Art Quake Biennale both in Istanbul and in Kyoto. It is also through the activities of IFA that the idea of the Universal Kids Film Festival (UKFF) was born.



Interview

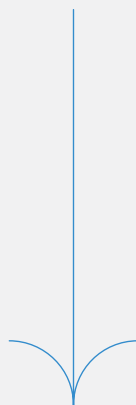
Rowena Martinez Ulayan

4. What was the main mission of Universal Kids Film Festival this year, and how do children participate in selection/jury/ programming during UKFF?

This UKFF is an attempt to inspire the young and the young at heart toward a peace-loving society. Already on its 13th year, this annual international film festival has consistently inspired everyone, and especially the young, through films and other corollary activities that promote friendship, understanding, tolerance and kindness, values and principles that serve as pillars to the festival's advocacy for world peace. Through the years, the festival has built a community of friends, families and relatives that compose its core secretariat, which runs the festival on a voluntary basis. The festival is funded privately through voluntary contributions and sponsorship by everyone who believes in promoting the festival's advocacy.

5. What is your view on the development of children's cinema in the Mediterranean?

The level of development and the degree of support for children's cinema vary across Mediterranean countries. The disparity may be viewed between two differing levels. Countries belonging to the northern half of the Mediterranean, from Greece to Spain, present a deep history and strong recognition of the value of film in education and cultural development for young audiences and, therefore, countries within this geographic divide have significant support in the production and promotion of children's films through film festivals and media education programs. On the other hand, in countries on the south and eastern side of the Mediterranean from Syria to Morocco – with the exception of Israel – the development and promotion of children's cinema are still in their infancy. Film productions for children are scarce and children's film festivals are not widely established.



Interview

Rowena Martinez Ulayan

6. How can CIFEJ support a Mediterranean cooperation road map (i.e. child juror exchange, film bank, educational tours)?

The gap between the two regional groups can be reduced by encouraging joint film projects, cooperation, and the exchange of expertise through workshops, as well as by creating platforms that connect content creators with audiences. More importantly, international organizations like CIFEJ, which are dedicated to the development and strengthening of children's cinema, should be promoted and made accessible to all interested parties. Furthermore, every country should strive to establish a Film Center dedicated to children's cinema, which could house a national archive of children's films and serve as a venue for regular screenings, lectures, and workshops.

7. What role do neighboring festivals (eg. Giffoni or Olympia) can play in the circulation of children films and what cooperation bridges can be built in practice?

When I migrated to Turkey for marital considerations, I devoted my time to painting and raising a family with two children, while curating art exhibitions locally and internationally. During this period, I was able to refine my visual arts technique and won the Anglo-Italian Academy of Arts Award during the Chianciano Art Biennale and the London Art Biennale in 2011 and 2013 respectively. It is also during this period that I founded the International Forum of the Arts (IFA) and gathered the support of fellow artists and art enthusiasts, to create a hub for art exhibitions, workshops and several art gatherings, where we tried to inspire everyone through our creative works. IFA artists were also encouraged to donate their works to public hospitals and

other public institutions where communities could view creative works. It is within this network that I initiated the Art Quake Biennale both in Istanbul and in Kyoto. It is also through the activities of IFA that the idea of the Universal Kids Film Festival (UKFF) was born.

8. If we were going to launch a "UKFF-CIFEJ" program, what would it be?

A joint venture between UKFF and CIFEJ may take the form of multilateral or bilateral activities, which could focus on themes such as friendship, understanding, and tolerance, and may be conducted either online or in person. Such activities or events could include workshops on strengthening and improving the content of film festivals organized by member institutions, as well as exploring avenues for cooperation among festival organizers. UKFF may also provide a venue and host the CIFEJ Annual General Meeting, which could be held during the UKFF film festival.

What Gift is Better than This?

Report on CIFEJ Prize Winner Films, Autumn - Winter 2025

i

by

Katerina Virvidaki
CIFEJ Athens HQ
Coordinator

Since its establishment, the CIFEJ Prize has stood as a widely respected international recognition in the field of children's and youth media. The prize honors films that not only demonstrate artistic excellence, but also uphold the core values of CIFEJ: promoting cultural understanding, respect for children's rights, and the power of storytelling to inspire, educate, and empower young audiences.

Each year, juries of international experts carefully select winning films from distinguished children's film festivals around the world. The awarded works reflect a deep sensitivity to the emotional and intellectual worlds of children, while encouraging imagination, empathy, and critical thinking.

As we present the CIFEJ Prize-winning films, we celebrate the filmmakers whose work resonates with CIFEJ's mission and who contribute to a more thoughtful and compassionate world through the language of cinema.

What Gift is Better than This?

AWARD

Football on the Roof

SCHINGEL INTERNATIONAL
CIFEJ
FILM FESTIVAL

i

China | 2024

Directed by: Feiyu Liao



Awarded at:

30th **SCHINGEL** International Film Festival, Germany, 2025.

Synopsis:

"Football? That's only for boys," says the village. But twelve-year-old Aimei refuses to accept that rule. With a grapefruit as their ball and the roof of her house as their field, Aimei and her friends reinvent the game in their own way. Through courage, creativity, and teamwork, they gradually build a team that challenges tradition—and discovers the true spirit of play.

About the Director:

Feiyu Liao is a filmmaker and screenwriter from Sichuan, China, known for his sensitive portrayals of childhood and community life. His debut feature, *Football on the Roof* (2024), tells a heartfelt story of young girls defying tradition through their love of the game, blending poetic realism with warmth and humor. Liao's work often centers on the power of imagination and friendship in the face of social expectations, establishing him as one of the emerging voices in contemporary Chinese children's cinema.



Award Info / Movie Trailer

What Gift is Better than This?

SPECIAL MENTION

Seeds

SCHINGEL INTERNATIONAL
CIFEJ
FILM FESTIVAL

i

Colombia, Spain | 2024
Directed by: Eliana Niño



CIFEJ is delighted to present a Special Mention to a film that captivated us with its visual storytelling. A work of art that offers an authentic human story and an insightful window into a culture rarely seen on the big screen.

Awarded at:

30th **SCHINGEL** International Film Festival, Germany, 2025.

Synopsis:

A magical-realist coming-of-age story set in the Colombian plains, *Seeds* follows Shaira, a young girl whose grandfather sells her beloved horse after a family tragedy. To comfort her, he tells her the clouds have taken the horse and only rain can bring it back. Determined, Shaira embarks on a journey to find a special seed that will make it rain—and reunite her with her horse.

About the Director:

Eliana Niño is a Colombian filmmaker trained at Université Paris 8 in France, where she developed a keen eye for storytelling that blends local culture with universal themes. She gained early recognition with award-winning short films, including *Bajo el Jardín*, which screened at festivals across Europe. Her work reflects a deep interest in place, myth, and human connection, establishing her as an emerging voice in contemporary Latin American cinema.



Info / Movie Trailer

What Gift is Better than This?

AWARD Miss Boots

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH
CIFEJ
IRAN

i

Canada | 2024
Directed by:
Yan Lanouette Turgeon



Awarded at:

International Film Festival for Children and Youth (ICFF),
Iran, 2025.

Synopsis:

When an orphaned girl loses her grandmother, her uncle — a once-famous opera composer with only one hit to his name — suddenly finds himself her temporary guardian. As he awaits the arrival of a foster family, he must navigate the chaos of caring for a child while struggling to rediscover his creative spark and complete his next great work.

About the Director:

Yan Lanouette Turgeon is a Canadian filmmaker known for his character-driven storytelling and strong visual style. His works often explore family dynamics and the complexity of human emotions. *Miss Boots* continues his signature approach, blending humor and heart in a touching narrative about love, loss, and artistic redemption.



Award Info

What Gift is Better than This?

AWARD Sunshine

i

Philippines | 2024
Directed by:
Antoinette Jadaone



Award Info / Trailer



Awarded at:

Filem'On – International Film Festival for Young Audiences, Belgium, 2025, and 28th **Olympia** International Film Festival for Children and Young People, Greece, 2025

Synopsis:

Sunshine is a talented young rhythmic gymnast on the verge of joining the national team when she unexpectedly becomes pregnant. In a society where abortion is illegal, she struggles to protect her dreams while navigating the pressures of her sport, her relationship, and a world that offers little room for deviation.

About the Director:

Antoinette Jadaone, born in 1984 in the Philippines, is an acclaimed filmmaker and screenwriter known for combining mainstream appeal with bold social commentary. She gained prominence with her indie hit *That Thing Called Tadhana* (2014) and has directed both romantic comedies and daring dramas, often exploring the challenges and aspirations of young people.



CIFEJ

International Center
of Films for Children
& Young People
Since 1955

Join Us!

**Global
Recognition
& Increased
Visibility**

**Unique
Collaboration
Opportunities**

**Diverse,
Cross-Cultural
Network**

**Professional
Development**

**Festival
& Market
Exposure**

**70+ Years of Legacy
& Impact**

APPLY NOW

cifej@ekkomed.gr

**Apply
and/or become
a jury member
for the CIFEJ Prize**

**Mentorship
Programs**

**Link with
UNESCO networks**

**Access to
Funding Alerts
& Educational
Programs**

**Exclusive
CIFEJ Resources**

**€100
Individual Member**

**€150
Member Organization**

**€50
Student Member**

Credits COSMOS



Copyright Notice

© 2025 The International Centre of Films for Children and Young People – CIFEJ

© 2025 Hellenic Film & Audiovisual Center

Credits

General Coordination

Vassilis C. Karamitsanis, CIFEJ Secretary General

Content Supervision

Irene Andriopoulou, CIFEJ Executive Director,
Director of Education & Heritage Unit EKKOMED

Head of Publications

Elham Shirvani, CIFEJ Board member

Editor-in-Chief

Katerina Virvidaki, CIFEJ Athens HQ Coordinator, EKKOMED

Editorial Design

Synthesee, Visual Communication Design, Athens

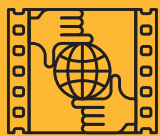
EKKOMEΔ
HELLENIC FILM & AUDIOVISUAL CENTER

CONTACT:

cifej@ekkomed.gr

ADDRESS:

Kanari 1 & Akadimias
106 71 Athens, Greece



CIFEJ



EKKOMEA
HELLENIC FILM & AUDIOVISUAL CENTER

cifej.online

