

REVIEW

With a new title, INDIGEN: THE NORTH AMERICA FILM FESTIVAL celebrated its 10th anniversary from 13 to 16 February 2025. Following the motto 'Reaching for the Stars. Indigenous Cinema on the Rise', it presented current productions by Indigenous filmmakers to a European audience with a wide range of themes and genres.

Unique in Europe, INDIGEN: THE NORTH AMERICA FILM FESTIVAL presents a multifaceted film and supporting program to a broad interested public. It provides Indigenous people with room for their voices and Indigenous actors the opportunity to present their lives through the medium of film and other forms of artistic expression.

In 2025, INDIGEN: THE NORTH AMERICA FILM FESTIVAL welcomed the following distinguished guests from the United States and Canada:

Brian Adams, Iñupiaq, photo artist; Anchorage, Alaska;

Tiffany Kuliktana Ayalik and Kayley Inuksuk Mackay, Inuit, film and music artists, vocal duo PIQSIQ, which performs a modern interpretation of traditional Inuit throat singing (Katajjaq); Yellowknife, North West Territories;

Desmond Ukkuq Mackay and Aku Ayalik, members of the 'PIQSIQ family';

Katsitsionni Fox, Mohawk, filmmaker, artist; Mohawk Nation Territory of Akwesasne; New York State;

Jack Kohler, Hoopa Valley Tribe, filmmaker, photographer, author; Forestville, California;

James Lujan, Taos Pueblo, filmmaker, playwright, director of the Cinematic Arts and Technology department at the Institute of American Indian Arts; Santa Fe, New Mexico;

Julie McIlsac, director, dramaturge, librettist, multi-instrumentalist; Vancouver, British Columbia;

Corey Payette, Mattagami First Nation, author, composer, singer, director; Vancouver, British Columbia;

Pete Sands, Navajo, filmmaker and musician; Moab, Utah.

Jeremy Williams, filmmaker, producer, photographer, sports journalist; Bristol, Connecticut.

Julie McIlsac and Jeremy Williams were the first non-Indigenous filmmakers to be invited to the festival. They have distinguished themselves through close collaboration with Indigenous filmmakers and communities based on trust and mutual respect.

The supporting program of attractive cultural events was organized in collaboration with the festival guests: the artist talk with Iñupiaq photographer Brian Adams in the exhibition 'I am Inuit', the panel discussion 'From Lacrosse to Katajjaq: The Role of Games and Sports Among Indigenous Peoples' with Katsitsionni Fox, Jeremy Williams, Jack Kohler, Kayley Inusuk Mackay, Desmond Ukkuq Mackay and Dr. Nina Reuther as moderator, the concert evening 'Songs of the Land' with Navajo singer-songwriter Pete Sands and the Katajjaq-duo PIQSIQ with Tiffany Kuliktana Ayalik and Kayley Inusuk Mackay, and the workshop for educators with Tiffany Kuliktana Ayalik, James Lujan, Jack Kohler and Pete Sands.

The rich experiences of the Indigenous guests were complemented by a diverse film program.

A series of films focused on historical events. These included 'The Reign of Terror' by Boots Kennedy, about the murder of Osage women in the 1920s to gain access to their land and oil wealth, and 'Techqua Ikachi, Land – My Life' by Anka Schmid, James Danaqyumtewa and Agnes Barmettler on the Hopi's non-violent resistance to the US government's planned land expropriation in the early 20th century. Historical themes were also presented in two innovative productions. With the rock opera 'Something Inside is Broken', Jack Kohler and Megan Chesnut presented the situation of the Indigenous people of California during the Gold Rush, and the musical 'Les Filles du Roi' by Corey Payette and Julie McIsaac took the audience back to 1665, when the French king sent 'daughters' of his country to the colony of New France to establish French culture there.

Since the film festival was founded, the forced placement of Indigenous children in re-education facilities and its dramatic effects have been a central theme that filmmakers have explored from various perspectives. In 2025, 'Sugar Cane' by Julian Brave Noisecat and 'Bones of Crows' by Marie Clements in particular showed the inhumane spirit that prevailed in these 'residential schools' or 'boarding schools' and continues to cast its shadow to this day.

With these profound historical experiences, documentary films in particular focus on the resilience of Indigenous people and their commitment to strengthening cultural values. Katsitsionni Fox's film 'Ohero:kon – Under the Husk' shows how transition ceremonies are being revived to accompany young girls on their journey into adulthood. In his production 'Sacred Dog,' Jeremy Williams documents young Lakota who compete in dangerous horse races with their Indigenous neighbors to prove their mastery of horses. The film 'Aitamaako'tamisskapi Natosi: Before the Sun' shows how a young Siksika woman makes her way into this male-dominated domain.

Numerous films explore the balance between modern life and the preservation of traditional values in Indigenous North America. Some highlight the different experiences of Indigenous people living in cities and on reservations. Others shed light on current issues that receive little attention in Europe, such as the numerous unsolved cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Jack Kohler also tackles this difficult subject in his feature film 'Gift of Fear'. 'Our Sacred Obligation – Children of the Setting Sun' by Jordan Riber is about the resistance of Indigenous peoples in northern California who are campaigning to preserve the salmon population and thus against the construction of dams. In 'Pretendians,' Drew Hayden Talor draws attention to people who fake an Indigenous identity.

Films that show the profound changes that people in the Arctic are having to cope with are also very topical. Climate change has been posing dramatic challenges to

the local population for years, both in terms of their environment and their social relationships and cultural values.

Film portraits of artistic personalities such as photographer Cara Romero, painter Dr. Lana Whiskeyjack, silversmith Erik Lee and singer Elisapie Isaac are also impressive. Their works are an impressive expression of cultural strength.

In 2025, James Lujan, head of the Cinematic Arts and Technology department at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, once again personally presented five current short films by his students. With a high degree of artistic talent, cultural sensitivity and technical skill, these productions impress as a modern visual form of traditional storytelling.

The motto 'Reaching for the Stars' was explicitly expressed in numerous productions, such as in the animated film 'Time Traveller' by Skawennati, which presents a futuristic projection of living environments from an indigenous perspective.

Once again, a highlight was the Sunday matinee event, where 17 music videos were presented and the audience voted for the 'Best Music Video'. The audience award in 2025 went to the musical production 'I Can't Remember My Name' by Snotty Nose Rez Kids (feat. Shanks Sioux).

The public award ceremony for selected categories took place during the closing night.

The juries, consisting of students from the universities of Bremen (English/American Studies), Konstanz (North American Studies/Literature, Art, Media) and Tübingen (American Studies), viewed selected films and critically evaluated them according to their socio-political relevance, insight, artistic expression and technical quality.

Their votes for the 2025 award ceremony went to the following films:

The jury at the University of Bremen, chaired by Prof. Dr. Kerstin Knopf, selected 'Bones of Crows' by Marie Clements as the best feature film. Based on the life story of Aline Spears (Cree), the film deals in depth with the intergenerational trauma caused by forced assimilation, but also with unbreakable resilience.

The jury at the University of Konstanz, headed by Dr Eva Gruber, selected 'Mis Tik' by Dr Jules Koostachin as the best short film, which visually depicts young people's determination to keep the world alive.

The jury at the University of Tübingen, headed by Dr. Isabell Klaiber, selected 'One with the Whale' by Jim Wickens, Peter Chelkowsi and Yaari Walker as the best documentary film. This film shows how a young hunter harpoons his first whale and his family posts it on social media. While he is celebrated on St. Lawrence Island, where whaling is essential for survival, the young Yupik is mercilessly attacked by activists on social media.

The special prize for best short film from the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, was awarded by the jury consisting of Dr. Nina Reuther, Melika Rezapour and Dr. Sonja Schierle to 'Rise of the Tower House' by Tyrell Etsitty. The film impressively draws attention to uranium mining on Navajo land and the forces unleashed as a result.

On Friday, the student jury of the Albert Einstein Gymnasium in Reutlingen, led by their teacher Iryna Miller, awarded the prize for best children's film to 'Məca' by Richie Hemphill and Ryan Haché. This animated film tells the story of a mink who pretends to be someone else to impress a potential mate, a story of the Indigenous inhabitants of Vancouver Island. The award ceremony was attended by Katsitsionni Fox as UNICEF representative and Lisa Wolfgarten Kolmorgen on behalf of Petja Pucci, head of the UNICEF working group in Stuttgart.

The individually designed prize sculptures were once again created by ceramic artist Karin Ecker (Zauberhaus, Deggenhausen).

Since its founding in 2004, the INDIGEN: THE NORTH AMERICA FILM FESTIVAL organization team has maintained close ties with cooperation partners who contribute their expertise and professionalism as established cultural institutions: Linden Museum Stuttgart, German-American Centre/James F. Byrnes Institute e.V. Stuttgart, UNICEF Working Group Stuttgart and the vhs Stuttgart at the Treffpunkt Rotebühlzentrum.

In the USA and Canada, INDIGEN: THE NORTH AMERICA FILM FESTIVAL cooperates with the American Indian Film Institute and Festival, San Francisco, California, and the Dreamspeakers International Aboriginal Film Festival, Edmonton, Alberta, as patrons, as well as with the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The cooperation with vhs Stuttgart as a 'film location' is essential, with its professional technical equipment and support, provision of infrastructure and administration. The festival team's collaboration with Hannah Becker and her team was very constructive and extremely pleasant.

INDIGEN: THE NORTH AMERICA FILM FESTIVAL is also supported by the Stuttgart Cultural Office, the Canadian Embassy in Germany, the Native Nordamerica Museum in Zurich, Incomindios, the Society for Canadian Studies, the Society for Threatened Peoples, the Action Group Indigenous and Human Rights, and the K9 Cultural Centre in Konstanz. However, the festival would not be possible without the boundless commitment of the volunteers who make up the festival team and are willing to contribute their time and individual skills in a constructive manner. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all of them.

INDIGEN: THE NORTH AMERICA FILM FESTIVAL was a great success on its 10th anniversary in 2025, with a record number of 4,111 visitors. Written feedback underscores the high informational value of the festival. In addition, the Indigenous guests express their great appreciation and gratitude that the festival is the only one in Europe to promote their interests and provide a forum where the voices of the Indigenous peoples of North America can be heard.

We would like to thank the vhs Stuttgart for hosting the event and providing the Robert Bosch Hall and lounge facilities. We would also like to thank everyone who attended the festival and supported it with private donations.

Organisational Team: Gunter Lange, Dr. Sonja Schierle, Dr. Nina Reuther