



Press release
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Kirsten Johnson, First Guest of Visions du Réel 2022



Visions du Réel is extremely happy to welcome Kirsten Johnson as Special Guest of its 53rd edition, which will take place from 7 to 17 April. The renowned, multi-award-winning filmmaker and cinematographer from the United States, who has some 60 films under her belt will be in Nyon to present a retrospective of her films as well as a selection of films to which she has contributed. As much in the films she has directed – particularly with *Dick Johnson is Dead* (2020), a winner at Sundance – as in her collaborations – which include, for example, *Citizenfour* (2014) by Laura Poitras, which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary – Kirsten Johnson has never stopped questioning the ethical issues of documentary filmmaking and assumed the presence of a person behind the camera.

This tribute resonates this year in the visuals of the Festival's 53rd edition. Designed by the Geneva-based studio Schaffter Sahli, the triptych of posters presents photographs taken by Kirsten Johnson and Vincent Sahli during a trip to the Midwest in 2003. The portraits depict participants in a twins gathering, the Twins Days Festival, held in Twinsburg, Ohio. Visions du Réel finds an echo here, particularly in relation to the hybrid character of some of the films included in each year's selection, and the understanding of a contemporary non-fiction film that espouses the complexity and strangeness of the real, resolutely open to staging, on both sides of the camera.

"It is a great honour and pleasure to welcome Kirsten Johnson, an essential and eminent figure in documentary filmmaking, in the United States and elsewhere, and whose films have never been presented at Visions du Réel," comments Emilie Bujès, Artistic Director of the Festival.



Born in Washington State, Kirsten Johnson studied Fine Arts and Literature at Brown University before graduating from Fémis. Following two short films, dealing with excision – *Bintou in Paris* (1995) – and US surveillance in Afghanistan – *The Above* (2015), and two feature-length films looking at the American justice system – *Deadline* (2004) and *Innocent Until Proven Guilty* (1999) –, she gained international recognition with *Cameraperson* (2016), which premiered at Sundance, was preselected at the Academy Awards and won three Cinema Eye Honors. Composed of rushes shot over several decades for various directors as a cinematographer, the film interweaves documentary and autobiography, and questions the relationship between the filmer and the filmed subject, as well as the tension between reality and narrative construction. These ideas underpin all her work. In 2020, her latest film, *Dick Johnson is Dead* (2020), produced by Netflix, further experiments with the possibilities of cinema, this time in a more roundabout way and humoristic manner, so as to exorcise fate – that of the dreaded death of her father. It won the Special Jury Award for Innovation in Non-fiction Storytelling at Sundance, Best Director and Best Documentary Feature at the Critics' Choice Awards, and was preselected for the Academy Awards.

In addition to her own films, Kirsten Johnson is a major cinematographer in the United States. She has contributed to over 60 films, in particular *Derrida* (by Kirby Dick, 2002 – a portrait of the French philosopher), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (by Michael Moore, 2004 – Palme d'or at the Cannes Film Festival), and *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* (by Gini Reticker, 2008 – Best Documentary Feature at the Tribeca Film Festival). Her fruitful collaboration with the director Laura Poitras has led her to participate to, among other films, *The Oath* (2010 – about Osama bin Laden's driver – winning the Excellence in Cinematography Award at Sundance) and *Citizenfour* (2014, on Edward Snowden and his revelations about the NSA, which took the Academy Award for Best Documentary).

The Guest of Honour of the 53rd edition of Visions du Réel will be unveiled in January 2022. The full programme will be revealed on 15 March 2022.

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