



Press release

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SPECIAL GUEST 2024: John Wilson – Life: A User's Manual



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Visions du Réel is delighted to announce that the Special Guest for the 55th edition of the Festival (12 – 21 April) will be American filmmaker John Wilson. He is mainly known for his documentary series *How To with John Wilson*, nominated for the 2022 Primetime Emmy Awards, in which he explores the eccentricities of daily life through a succession of quirky and hilarious comic detours. To accompany a selection of episodes from his series and earlier works presented during the Festival, John Wilson will take part in a public discussion of his work as well as curate a *carte blanche*.

John Wilson has been working in American television for a decade, alternating between commissions and more personal projects, all with his trademark offbeat approach. His landmark HBO series *How To with John Wilson* (2020-2023) is an invitation to explore the eccentricities of daily life, and proved a runaway success. Armed with a camera and a keen sense of observation, John Wilson uses the streets of his native New York as his backdrop. Pasticheing the video tutorials ubiquitous on social media, *How To with John Wilson* proposes a series of life lessons on trivial themes which border on the absurd: "How To Cook the Perfect Risotto", "How To Put Up Scaffolding", "How To Clean Your Ears"... Each exploration sparks a succession of improbable meetings with strangers, some bizarre and fascinating, following an idiosyncratic logic and offbeat association of ideas.

From an always unassuming starting point, John Wilson's work always reaches for disconcerting depth. His anti-spectacular cinematography, incorporating a kind of formal austerity inspired by Gonzo journalism, showcases the comic potential hidden in the banality of the everyday. Without ever distracting from the highly entertaining premise of his project, John Wilson implicitly questions the human condition, the absurdity of existence, and the complexity of the modern world in a set of remarkably effective DIY wild goose chases. The third (and final!) season of this unmissable series was broadcast last summer, and garnered its director a Primetime Emmy Award nomination.

"The aim of Visions du Réel is to ceaselessly explore the full spectrum of non-fiction cinema, in all its richness and diversity, and in all its freedom. Welcoming a filmmaker such as John Wilson is both a great honour and an incredible opportunity to showcase a singular and original body of work: joyful, personal, droll, collaborative and highly contemporary, all with cinephile eye" explains Emilie Bujès, Artistic Director of the Festival. "I'm really flattered that Visions du Réel asked me to screen some work at the festival this year. I always wanted to travel internationally and screen my work but no foreign festivals ever accepted my submissions. I'm very excited to watch documentaries in Switzerland."

Director biography

Born in the famed New York borough of Queens, John Wilson is a filmmaker, cameraman and director. After studying documentary filmmaking at the Binghamton University, he shortly worked editing clips of surveillance footage for a private investigator. Alongside this, he started his career as a director with several shorts and a few commissions, including one for David Byrne (*Talking Heads*) in 2015, and for Vimeo documenting the 2017 Sundance Festival.

John Wilson's offbeat humour and quirky eye attracted the attention of Canadian director and producer Nathan Fielder (*Nathan For You*), and the two then started a highly fruitful collaboration with the successful series *How To with John Wilson* (2020-2023), earlier forms of which were initially created completely independently and streamed for free on the internet.

Then produced by HBO, the three seasons of *How To with John Wilson* earned the director international acclaim. Initially made almost solely by the filmmaker with a handheld camera and an iPhone, the scriptwriting, image shooting and editing team gradually grew over subsequent seasons to include around fifty people. In total, the team behind the series gathered thousands of unscripted minutes and images shot covertly in the streets of New York, Las Vegas and Los Angeles. In 2021, John Wilson was nominated for a Gotham Award, followed by a Primetime Emmy Award the following year.

The full programme will be announced in detail on 19 March 2024. Accreditation for professionals are now open.

[Press area](#)
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Robin Corminboeuf
Press Office Manager
rcorminboeuf@visionsdureel.ch
+41 22 365 44 58

Gloria Zerbinati
International Press Officer
gloria.zerbinati@gmail.com
+33 7 86 80 02 82

Further information: visionsdureel.ch
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