

Press materials for the documentary film *Courage*

This longitudinal documentary film follows Jaroslav Róna as he works on the sculpture *Courage* in 2014 and 2015. In its style – a loose multi-year interview between the sculptor and the filmmaker – the film is something of a follow-up to *Description of a Struggle*, made 12 years earlier during the making of Róna's Franz Kafka monument in Prague.

The bronze equestrian statue, designed for the public space, is an allegory of Courage. With the statue's unveiling, Brno's Moravia Square thus possesses all four of the Platonic virtues as envisioned in the square's redesign by architect Petr Hruša. The sculpture is dedicated to Jobst of Luxembourg, Margrave of Moravia.

The sculpture's realization involved various ups and downs, a long public competition, and much media discussion. The City of Brno experienced numerous clashes of opinion and political arguments, which were covered in the local press and on the airwaves. The realization and unveiling of the sculpture – whose significance has more than once been compared to that of Myslbek's St. Wenceslas, was an important test of public dialogue about art in the public space, of coverage in publically-funded media outlets, and of communication between politicians and the artistic community across several electoral periods.

Over the course of two years, the small documentary crew (director Pavel Štingl and cameraman Miroslav Janek) shifted the interviews with Jaroslav Róna towards a broader context than just the work itself. During the months spent modelling the equestrian statue, the dialogues between the filmmaker and the artist expanded to include the sculptor's relationship to urban space over the course of changing political regimes, the relationship between traditional and conceptual art, the collaboration between sculptors and architects during various eras, and the courage of contemporary artists to work in public space that has been democratized by hypercritical public debate.

Courage the film is not a defense of *Courage* the statue. It is the documentarian's natural obligation to witness the creation of extraordinary things happening in contemporary art.

Directed by:	Pavel Štingl
Camera:	Miroslav Janek
Sound:	Michael Miček, Matěj Němec, Vladimír Chrástil
Edited by:	Tonička Janková, Jakub Voves
Dramaturgy:	Hana Jemelíková, Kateřina Ondřejková
Production:	Alice Tabery, Marta Hostinská, Jarmila Hoznauerová

The film was made possible by support from the State Cinema Fund.

A co-production of Czech Television + K2

Appendices:

a brief filmography of the filmmakers

biography of Jaroslav Róna

Jaroslav Róna's accompanying text for this competition design for *Courage*

an interview with director Pavel Štingl

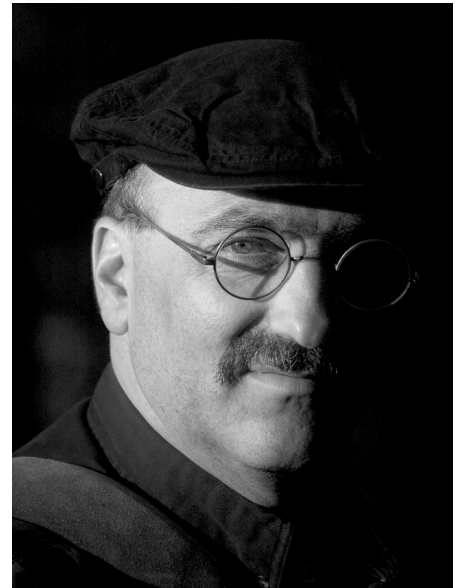
original documentary story idea

Filmmakers' biographies

Pavel Štingl – a brief filmography

Pavel Štingl graduated from FAMU's Department of Documentary Film in 1985 with **Learning to Be Fearful**, a film about young medical students' search for ethical principles.

Following the revolution in 1989, he began working on a series of films from the countries of the former Eastern Bloc: **Romania Libera** and **Quo Vadis, Romania...?** won prizes at the 1990 festival in Budapest, and **The Land without Graves** won the jury prize at the 1991 Hiroshima International Film Festival.



The grand narratives of the 20th century are explored in **A Student Love**, a documentary from Albania, and **An Ancient Story?**, a portrait of Mrs. Josefa Slánská.

Greetings from the Country Where Yesterday Meant Tomorrow won the main prize at the 1993 Prix Italia Festival.

Štingl explored how World War II affected various people's lives in **Four Pairs of Shoes, Failure, Three Friends, The Story of the Castaways from the Patria** (winner of the 1998 FIAT/IFTA award), **Mr. Pfitzner's Diary, A Story about a Bad Dream** (main prize at the 2000 Japan Prix festival), **The Second Life of Lidice**, and **What Language does the Lord Speak...?**

In 2000–2004, Štingl shot the feature-length “amateur theater film” **Peace to Their Souls**.

Large documentary projects from recent years include **Suchá Hora: A Village at the End of the Line** (main prize at the Nadotek festival), **A Ghetto Named Baluty** (nominated for a Czech Lion; two awards at festivals in Poland). Both films won the Trilobit awards in 2008. In 2013, Štingl completed the animated documentary film **Eugenic Minds**.

Pavel Štingl has also created various multimedia projects for museums and memorials: **And the Innocent Were Guilty** for the Lidice Memorial Museum, **Republic** for a seasonal exhibition at the National Museum, and **The Great War** for an exhibition at the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art.

Štingl's first documentary about art and artists was his portrait of blind artist Pavla Francová, **Painting in the Dark**. In 2003, he completed **Description of a Struggle**, about the creation of a monument to Franz Kafka. **Boris Rösner's Theatre of Crazy Dramas** was made in 2006, and **The Road to Calvary**, about the creation of 15 sculptures for a modern Stations of the Cross near Kuks, was completed in 2009.

Miroslav Janek

(born January 1954, Náchod)
Czech documentary director,
cameraman and editor.

In 1969–1979, Janek made nearly 40 short films in Czechoslovakia. In 1980, he moved to the USA, where he worked as an editor and cameraman and shot a dozen independent films (**Visitor, Heroes, Little City in Space, Now I Lay Me**).

He worked as an editor on Godfrey Reggio's Qatsi trilogy (the feature-length documentary films **Koyaanisqatsi, Powaqqatsi, and Naqoyqatsi**) and on Reggio's short film **Anima Mundi**.



Since 1993, Janek has been making hour-long documentaries for Czech Television, which have won numerous awards: **Seven Ten Nečtiny, Heaven on Earth, The Unseen, I Am Hamsa, The Musicians, Man and his Master, Battle for Life, Scarlet Sails, and Vierka**.

In his documentaries, Janek is more of a co-actor alongside his protagonists than a director. Sometimes his films lack a clear storyline and they are more like strips or collages of events. Janek has been a permanent member of the FAMU teaching staff since 1998.

Janek's most successful recent films include **Citizen Havel, Olga, and The Gospel According to Brabenec**.

JAROSLAV RÓNA



- 27 April 1957 born in Prague
- 1963–1972 nine-year primary school in Prague
- 1972–1975 Kara Hlinsko Trade School (trained as furrier)
- 1975–1978 Secondary Technical School of Art in Prague, Hollar Square
- 1978–1984 Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, glass art (prof. Stanislav Libenský)
- 1984 co-author (with T. Vorel) and director of *The Little Rascal* at the Mimoza Theatre, becomes a member of the “Prague Five” theatre movement
- 1985 assistant to prof. Libenský at the Pilchuck Summer Glass School, USA
- 1987 guest artist at the Pilchuck Summer Glass School. USA
- 1987 co-founder of the Tvrdohlaví (Hard-Heads) art group
- 1989 realizes four works of stained glass entitled *A Cross-Section of the Earth’s Crust*, House of Optics, Prague
- 1990 realizes the monumental mosaic *Night and Day*, Prague-Nové Butovice
- 1991 realization in architecture – the sculpture *Oskar* – South City, Prague
- 1992 realization of the sculpture *Labyrinth*, Hotel Minos Beach, Crete; art design for the film *Amerika*, based on the novel by F. Kafka, nominated for a Czech Lion
- 1994 realization of the sculpture *Knight with Dragon* – Klenová Castle near Klatovy
- 1996 realization of the sculpture *Sepia* – Klenová Castle near Klatovy
- 1998 exhibition at the Stone Bell House in Prague
- 2001 wins the competition for a monument to Franz Kafka; does the stage design for F. Schiller’s *Intrigue and Love*, Theatre on the Balustrades (dir. J. A. Pitínský)
- 2003 unveiling of the Franz Kafka monument, receives the Community of Architects’ Grand Prix; publishes a book of writings and drawings with *Umanuté kresby* (Obstinate Drawings, Torst)
- 2005 realizes the sculpture *The Little Martian*, Hadovka Park, Prague 6; begins teaching sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague
- 2007 realizes the sculpture *David and Goliath* for the “Špalíček” in Cheb; illustrates Franz Kafka’s *Description of a Struggle* and receives the Bibliophile of the Year award from the Hollar Graphic Arts Association
- 2008 realizes the sculpture *Mythical Ship* on the Bratislava riverfront; realizes a sculptural lamp in Liberec
- Every year, Róna holds several exhibitions of his paintings; he has spent several years teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague

Jaroslav Róna: text for competition design
AN EQUESTRIAN STATUE FOR MORAVIA SQUARE IN
BRNO

IN HONOR OF JOBST OF LUXEMBOURG

A knight on an enormous steed, in full battle gear – armor, shield and lance – is a mythological symbol that helped shape the spirit of the European Middle Ages and that represents many of the positive values without which we could not imagine the spiritual history of Christian Europe. The equestrian statue refers back to the Roman horseman, the classical roots of European culture. In fact, equestrian statues can be found in most European cities, and it is wonderful that Brno has decided to become a part of this tradition. I won't deny that the theme of a knight on horseback is one that is close to my heart, one that I have repeatedly explored in my art. In today's day and age, however, the motif cannot be approached without a certain sense of perspective, without an awareness of changing contexts, values, and artistic and aesthetic concepts. For these reasons, I have created an equestrian sculpture that is a symbol of an equestrian sculpture. I achieved this semantic shift through the distinct verticalization of both figures – horse and rider. I wanted to raise the Knight to the mythical heights from whence He comes when we are suffering and in need of his aid. At the same time, I consciously denied the tradition of monuments to important historical figures in armor by lowering the visor on the Knight's helm. In my view, a Knight with a lowered visor, ready to battle his enemy, is an ideal rendering of the subject of Courage, which was the theme of the competition. An equestrian sculpture measuring eight meters tall at the tip of the rider's lance will also be the perfect dominant feature for Moravia Square, one that won't be overshadowed by the neighboring Church of St. Thomas. The long and slender columns of the horse's legs will encourage passers-by to walk among them and admire the massive hooves of this mythical steed. The sculpture will also offer shelter against sudden rains. The work's distinctive verticalization also recalls the European significance of Jobst of Luxembourg – who held the post of King of the Romans – among the European aristocracy. I have chosen to create the sculpture out of bronze – a classical material that is resistant to both weather and vandals and that can be easily repaired if necessary. The sculpture's placement has already been defined, and I have no objections or comments – it is, in my view, a very suitable place for a sculpture.

An interview with director Pavel Štingl on making the film

In the past, various distributors worked with me as director and producer to create PR materials, including various interviews for journalists and film festivals. In today's lean times for documentary distribution, I have decided to save the State Cinema Fund money by interviewing myself...

How did you come to work with Jaroslav Róna?

The Tvrdohlaví art group is my generation from school. We served in the military together, had physical education together, and went hiking and rafting together. In fact, we still go to the mountains together, organized by Václav Marhoul – the Tvrdohlaví's former producer for our entire team of "Flying Ploughs."

Once recently (which at my age means about 15 years ago) I came across Jaroslav drawing something early in the day in the dining room of the Hájenka mountain hut. Like me, he can't sleep in the morning. He said he was working on a sculpture called *Slave*, a figure dragging a ball and chain... He climbed on the table to show how big the actual bronze ball would be. And so we agreed that, after our trip, I would visit his studio at the cemetery and he would talk into the camera, and once *Slave* was finished we would release the interview. When I arrived with my camera at his studio in the new Jewish cemetery, he was holding an envelope with a letter announcing that he had won the commission to create the Franz Kafka Monument. And so we spent the next three years talking in front of the camera about this famous equestrian statue of his.

Equestrian statue?

Yes, that is what he sometimes calls it: Mr. "K" is riding on the shoulders of an empty suit... Besides, equestrian statues are a great ambition for sculptors who take a more traditional approach to art. That is why the statue in Brno was such a prestigious commission for Jaroslav Róna, something like his life's work.

In other words, after the first monument it was understood that you would also film his other grand works?

No, it wasn't like that. He is too productive an artist. The Cinema Fund would not have had the resources to do it, and television doesn't produce that many pieces on culture. Years ago, we shot a few scenes of Jaroslav working on his ship by the Danube. But unfortunately that was the end of it, because apparently the Danube was more enthusiastic about this elegant sculpture than the cultural scene in Bratislava, and so it had to do without cinematic fame.

You mean nobody wanted to finance a documentary about it?

Finding money for public sculptures is just as complicated as financing large-scale documentary films. I personally feel that it is the duty of investors to shoot a film about a subject like a monument for a square in a large city. Not much footage has survived of Myslbek's work on St. Wenceslas, and it has been endlessly recycled for more than a century. I believe that it should have been a given that the City of Brno would fill its city archives with footage showing the creation of a new monument dedicated to the Margrave of Moravia. I continued to feel this way until I presented this opinion to the mayor in writing.

He wasn't interested in any footage with the working title *A Knight for Brno*?

He wrote that it was surely a good thing that I was doing, and that I should apply for one of their culture grants.

Did you apply?

No, because the nearest deadline from the time of this correspondence was after the sculpture was supposed to be unveiled.

So who ended up financing the film?

It is a co-production by K2, which also received funding from the Cinema Fund and from Czech Television.

In the beginning, when the sculpture was commissioned, the process of its realization was supposed to be filmed by Brno television. They were there once and after that weren't interested anymore. In the late stages of modeling, Jaroslav Róna asked me to shoot some footage for the archives, and said that he would help pay for the cameraman. So during the first round the sculptor himself ended up being the producer.

Does that mean that your original idea didn't even involve shooting an entire film? You only began when asked by the artist, like on commission?

It wasn't anything like that. Basically, I wasn't expecting to make a large-scale documentary, not even during those first days of filming. At the outset, for both Miroslav Janek and me it was a kind of cultural service for something unique that was being created and that wouldn't be repeated anytime soon. It soon became clear that we were watching the birth of an extraordinarily important sculpture, but I still didn't know how to approach the subject as a true documentary film – meaning more than just a chronicle or reportage about its creation.

What was the decisive factor?

Two things: I had witnessed the creation of several sculptural works, but this one is truly much bigger. Not just in height and volume. Work on this sculpture involved many remarkable approaches that recalled the birth of the world's greatest monuments. The process delved deep into art history and involved a confrontation of the present with various eras from the past. We were witnessing the birth of a statue, which is always a minor miracle. In addition, this one is modern and humorous, but also dignified and made in the same traditional manner as the old masters. We succeeded in capturing the artist's uncertainties and his search for artistic approaches that are only mobilized once every hundred years. The material began to demand a larger approach than merely providing witness.

And the other thing, besides the random chance with Brno television and with a subject that demanded its own approach...

The second to tenth other things were the basic themes that Jaroslav and I began to consciously discuss while we filmed the endless hours of modeling. Our discussions moved from knights and the dramatic details of the horse to the relationships of sculptors and architects within the modern city and a broad discussion of the importance of traditionally conceived sculptures for the contemporary world and for public space.

At some point I wrote a page of important questions that I turned to at the appropriate times. That was the future outline of the documentary. All of a sudden, this longitudinal documentary had also become a generation testimony, a reflection upon our current understanding of basic artistic, spiritual, and moral values... Bleh! That almost sounds like some universal cliché...

In this day and age, isn't it clichéd to create a figural sculpture for a public square in a historical city?

Not if the sculpture is imbued with a contemporary artistic viewpoint. If this is the case, then it opens up subjects that this era needs. We truly are missing a basic view of fundamental values and are losing respect for things that have been respected since time immemorial but that have not been discussed too much.

You mean that in the 21st century we should revive the values of knighthood, or we should bow to Jobst of Luxembourg and his moral values?

Jobst is a bit of a difficult case. Unfortunately, the City of Brno didn't realize in time that it is never a good idea to commission a statue with two meanings. The Margrave of Moravia is not an ideal model of behavior, no matter how important his status was at the time.

But courage, generosity, and a traditional respect for chivalry – those are values that we are missing today. We are also missing grand personalities and models. Actually, our current political representatives quite closely resemble the personal side of Margrave Jobst, whom historians are more likely to refer to as a schemer than someone who continued the legacy of his uncle Charles IV.

So Jobst's timeless legacy is as a political schemer and as an archaic holdover of the allegory of courage?

What is timeless is a respect for fundamental values, whether formulated by Charles IV, President Masaryk, or Václav Havel – all of whom I see as the knights of their times. Courage today means the courage to design a sculpture for a public square that will honor that place for hundreds of years.

Charles IV transformed Prague into a modern city by the will of God, laying it out according to the highest learning of the times. His will was fulfilled by the greatest artists of their era. He chose them and he chose wisely.

Today, we hold public competitions after which everyone contests the outcome in court. Then everyone haggles about the price. Then the media gets involved and turns a Platonic virtue into tabloid folksiness. Then a new city government takes office and, as is the custom in our country, ostentatiously distances itself from the whole matter. In the end, the mayor doesn't even come to the unveiling of "his" new sculpture – the tenth largest equestrian statue in the world – and tells the media that the monument isn't his problem because he only inherited it and that his view will be shaped by public opinion.

All that is in the movie?

No, it's just what accompanied our filming. The documentary is about the creation of a sculpture and about all the things a good artist has to deal with in order to get his sculpture onto the right place – meaning Moravia Square in Brno. And after all is said and done, then the sensitive viewer will think about it as he leaves the cinema – perhaps while walking across a square that is missing a statue.

So the film will be distributed in cinemas as well?

Yes, in art-house cinemas and also in small clubs. It certainly is not a blockbuster. Let's be realistic: there aren't that many viewers who are interested in a film about the creation of a work of art. But even if this type of documentary isn't the hit of the season, it will still interest its audiences 10 years from now.

So how do the moral values represented by a sculpture called Courage reach not just the artistic elite but also the general public?

The public has above all received valuable new work of art in an important location. Brno has a new symbol and something to be proud of. I won't try to guess who will understand the message of the knight on horseback and how long it will take them; it could even take a hundred years. Fortunately, bronze is a relatively durable material. As long as the knight isn't melted down for bullets during the next war, it'll be around for a long time.

And the film will be here as a witness to its creation. As it ages, it will become a valuable archive of the artistic perspective of our generation – which might already have one foot in the grave, but there is no chance of it being turned into ammunition.

And let us not forget the role of Czech Television. Besides having provided significant support for the film, it will also broadcast it – and hopefully more than once. I am convinced that it was not a bad investment for them, because the Knight for Brno is a public topic in the true sense of the word.

P. Št. with Pavel Štingl