



Screen Directors: Shaping a Rich and Diverse Future Through Stories



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Strengthen
MEDIA

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I come from Estonia, a small country of just 1.3 million people, and my roots lie in the indigenous Võro and Seto communities of South-East Estonia.

My feature **documentary *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*** is deeply rooted in the intimate stories of women and the culture of this region.

Yet this deeply **local story travelled across the world, connecting with audiences from very different cultures and backgrounds**, winning over 40 awards, including the Directing Award at Sundance and the European Film Award for Best Documentary.

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Through workshops, development opportunities and international film distribution, the **MEDIA Programme** has helped me **grow as a filmmaker**.

More importantly, it has given me the courage to trust my own roots, my voice and my imagination: **to believe that the stories born from my culture belong in the world**, and that I don't need to make them less local, less specific or less rooted in where I come from for them to resonate across borders.

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We need to **protect the space for artistic risk, for voices that have not yet been heard, and for stories that challenge the way we see ourselves and each other.** If we only support stories that are already expected to succeed, we will never discover the stories we don't yet know we need.

This is why **Europe needs to keep investing in independent cinema** — not only in what is already familiar, but in what has not yet been imagined.

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