

THE STORY OF DOCUMENTARY FILM



Hopscotch Films and Louverture Films

Directed and Written by Mark Cousins

Produced by John Archer

Edited by Timo Langer

946 minutes / UK & USA / 2026 / English

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LOGLINE

Spanning 16 hours, this epic documentary traces the global evolution of nonfiction film, revealing the filmmakers who discovered, innovated, and shaped documentary cinema into a dynamic lens for life.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In last 120 years we have built a new world wonder, New York, and made Auschwitz. LGBT rights have been won. Ella Fitzgerald sang. This is what the sixteen hours of *The Story of Documentary Film* is about. Fascinated by our times, the mountain top and the valley of tears.

Revolution, music, work, feminism, bodies.

Can documentary kill fascism? We believe it can.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Documentary is thought of as a genre of cinema, like the gangster movie or superhero films, but it's more than that. Half of all films ever made have been documentary and so it is half of cinema, a multi-verse, a range of genres. Unlike fiction cinema, whose premieres and red carpets were filmed, whose movie stars were photographed, documentary has been more in the shadow, less sexy. And yet its shadowy history fascinates. Shocks. There are observational films, campaigning movies, portrait docs, archive-based films, personal essays, music films, journey documentaries, experimental and animated non-fiction cinema.

In *The Story of Documentary Film* we encounter all of these. This is the story of what happened in the last twelve decades. We'll focus on the films which innovated, which had new insights, which revealed worlds, issues, people or places which had not been properly seen before. Most non-fiction films are formulaic or boring. You will not see those here.

We will certainly look at films which lied about the world, or veiled the truth about power, war and lived experience but the six hundred films in the following 16 hours are here because they cared about life and cinema in bold ways.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

More than a decade ago, with Hopscotch Films, I made *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*. It was shown around the world, is still screening and taught on most continents, and changed film culture. It won a Peabody and many other prizes, received rave reviews, and is watched regularly by filmmakers. Michael Moore called it one of the best documentaries ever made.

Now, together with its producer John Archer of Hopscotch Films, I have directed its follow up, *The Story of Documentary Film*. It's just as wide-reaching as its predecessor, and more revelatory, told in 16 chapters.

Half of all films ever made have been documentaries, which means that there are an estimated two million of them. What is their story? Which are the most compelling and revealing? As we scroll nightly through Netflix, we can feel numbed by choice. And in the era of fake news, image manipulation, AI and TikTok, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and confused by reality imagery.

And yet, for the last thirteen decades, documentary at its best, its most inventive and dedicated, has told us more about our times than anything else. That's why its story matters. *The Story of Documentary Film* is a portrait of our lives, our societies, our wars, our families, journeys, creativity, relationships and struggles as well as the things we make, and the planet itself.

It is time to tell this story in a new, compelling way.

This is a truly global story, an epic survey of world filmmaking. It is boldly feminist, profiling many of the great female filmmakers who've been written out of history. Like *The Story of Film*, it's jargon-free, meant to be enjoyed by audiences around the world.

LANGUAGES

English

BIOS

Mark Cousins - Director

Mark is a Scottish-Irish filmmaker and writer. His themes are politics, visual culture, history, cities, childhood and recovery. Recovery in particular is relevant to him because he grew up in working class Belfast during the Troubles, was in the siege of Sarajevo, and made a film about childhood and creativity in Kurdish Iraq during the war.

At the start of his career he made TV documentaries on childhood, neo-Nazis and Mikhael Gorbachev. In the mid-90s he and the Edinburgh International Film Festival showed films in Sarajevo to support its besieged citizens. His first book was *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary* ("Indispensable" - Times Literary Supplement). He co-edited with Kevin Macdonald. 30 years later it is still in print.

His 930 minute film, *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* ("The place from which all future film revisionism should begin" - New York Times), played in the major film festivals and cinemas, and has had an influence on film education. Michael Moore gave it the Stanley Kubrick Award, it

won the Peabody Award, was BAFTA Scotland nominated, and received other prizes. In 2021 he added a sequel film, *The Story of Film: A New Generation*. It premiered as the launch film of Cannes, was called "poetry in motion" by the Hollywood Reporter and "the soul of the festival" by Cannes director Thierry Frémaux. Empire magazine called it "a poetic opus" and it was nominated for a Grierson award.

His 14 hour film *Women Make Film* premiered at the Venice, Toronto and Telluride film festivals, is narrated by Jane Fonda, Sharmila Tagore, Debra Winger, Adjoa Andoh, Kerry Fox and Tilda Swinton ("Exquisite, emotionally resonant and intellectually unassailable. Pure poetry." The Times) Hopscotch Films has also produced several of Mark's other films. *I am Belfast*, his first full feature about Northern Ireland, which Variety compared to the great director Dziga Vertov. His BBC/BFI film *Atomic*, a collaboration with the band Mogwai, played in Hiroshima, near Chernobyl and Coventry Cathedral and at the Edinburgh International Festival. *My Name Is Alfred Hitchcock* was called the best work about Hitchcock since Francois Truffaut by Historia Del Cine in Spain.

Mark has received various career awards (The Persistence of Vision at the San Francisco Film Festival, the Silver Medallion in Telluride), plus the lifetime achievement awards in Sarajevo, Egypt and Portugal. He has been given honorary professorships (University of Glasgow, Queen's University, Belfast) and honorary doctorates (the University of Edinburgh, Stirling University). He has had retrospectives of his films in many countries, including Brazil, Finland, Estonia, Italy, Spain, Poland, the UK and Egypt.

He has walked across Los Angeles, Belfast, Moscow, Beijing, London, Paris, Berlin, Dakar and Mexico City. He drove from Edinburgh to Mumbai, and loves night swimming.

John Archer - Producer

John Archer runs Hopscotch Films, specialists in feature documentaries and drama from Scotland.

John and Mark have been creative collaborators since 2004 when they travelled to Iran together to make *Cinema Iran* for Channel 4. This was followed by *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* (2011) which is still the definitive history of innovation in cinema. Then *I Am Belfast* (2015), *Atomic: Living in Dread and Promise* (2015) and *Women Make Film: A New Road Movie Through Cinema*, (Venice, TIFF 2019) which was awarded the inaugural Innovation in Storytelling Award from European Film Academy. *The Story of Film A New Generation* premiered in Cannes in 2020 and *My Name is Alfred Hitchcock* at Telluride in 2022.

Other recent films John has produced include *My Old School*, from director Jono Mcleod (Sundance 22), *Loch Ness: They Created a Monster* (John MacLavery), screened as part of Cannes Docs before its premiere in Sitges (2023); *Tish* (Paul Sng) opened the Sheffield

Documentary Festival in 2023 and then *Bill Douglas My Best Friend* (Jack Archer) premiered in Venice. In 2024 *Janey*, directed by John, was the closing film for Glasgow Film Festival and *Life and Other Problems* (Max Kestner) opened CPH:DOX two days later.

In 2024 Ben Rivers' *Bogancloch* premiered in Locarno and Edinburgh. In 2025, *The Golden Spurtle* (Constantine Costi) and *Lost For Words* (Hannah Papacek Harper) had their world premieres at CPH:DOX.

Clara Glynn - Executive Producer

Clara is an executive producer at Hopscotch Films, where her many credits include films *Make Me Up* and *My Old School*. She has worked closely with producer John Archer and director Mark Cousins over a number of years on the 14 hour epic *Women Make Film*, the Peabody award winning series *Story of Film*, and the feature documentary *My Name Is Alfred Hitchcock*. Clara's background is documentary where her director credits include *Accidental Anarchist* (Storyville) the feature length *I Met Adolf Eichmann* for BBC2 and the award winning *Hidden Jews of Berlin*.

Clara is also a writer, which gives her a deep understanding of story structure that is invaluable. She's written 19 dramas for Radio 4, a theatre play and an opera libretto. She recently adapted *Northanger Abbey* for Radio 4.

Joslyn Barnes - Executive Producer

Joslyn Barnes is an Oscar and BAFTA nominated screenwriter, and three-time Oscar nominated and Emmy award winning producer of over 60 feature and documentary films, series and artworks shot in 26 countries. Since establishing Louverture Films in 2005 together with actor Danny Glover, she has forged relationships with top-tier directors, actors, producers, galleries, talent agencies, film institutes and funding bodies, foundations and other philanthropic institutions, distributors and exhibitors, film festivals and curators, as well as a wide network of individual investors and grantors across the world. Among the filmmakers and artists she is currently working with are: RaMell Ross, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Lucrecia Martel, Tala Hadid and William Kentridge.

Frank Lehman - Executive Producer

Frank began his career in 1990 at Dresdner Bank AG, where he spent over 15 years, including work on film-financing funds and as CFO/COO of a bank-owned animation group, leading its restructuring. In 2006, he joined an international film production company as CFO and CEO of several affiliates, overseeing organizational development and complex financing models for films such as *The Last Station*, *Carlos*, *Rush*, and *Big Game*. He also arranged gap financing facilities together with financial institutions. In 2008 Frank co-founded Alcina Media GmbH and has focused on consulting since 2015. He advises on corporate and project-level financing for international films and series. As Executive Producer his credits include *Harvest*, *Architecton*

and the German Film Award winner *The Path*. He also consults for Berlin's development bank and works with European financiers to support film production cash flow. In 2024 he joined Louverture Films as Chief Financial Officer.

Diana Bustaman - Executive Producer

Producer, director, and cultural manager. Bustamante's career began while she was studying film at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Her filmography as a producer includes outstanding films such as: *Los viajes del viento*, *El vuelco del cangrejo*, *La sirga*, *La tierra y la sombra*, and *Memoria*, which projected contemporary Colombian cinema into transnational currents, debates, and production models. Diana was the artistic director of the FICCI from 2015 to 2018, during which time the festival was known as a disruptive space that also ensured affectionate treatment of its own traditions. Bustamante's directorial debut, the documentary *Nuestra película* (2022), was a return to one of the central concerns of her career: the link between art, memory, and society.

Timo Langer - Editor

In 2008 Timo started working with Mark Cousins and has been editing his films ever since. Festival screenings of their collaboration include Venice, Telluride, Sundance, Toronto, London, Edinburgh, Berlin, Karlovy Vary, SXSW and Cannes. The films have won many awards including the European Film Award, Peabody Award, Prix Italia and Golden Eye Documentary prize at Cannes.

Timo wrote and directed his first feature drama *I am Anna* in 2017 which won Best Screenplay at the Director's Cut Film Festival as well as the Golden World Award at the World Film Awards and was selected by film festivals in North America, Europe and Asia.