

Last May in Theaters
Short - experimental
22 minutes
2025

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Short Synopsis

This work tells the story of the daily lives of two ticketing cinema staff during two incidents that sparked the birth of democracy in Jakarta in 1998 and Gwangju in 1980. They never experienced it directly or went onto the streets to face the soldiers, yet the stories they heard and the voices that reached them felt like an endless war film replaying in their minds.

Long Synopsis


Jakarta and Gwangju are two significant cities that sparked the birth of democracy in Indonesia and South Korea, toppling dictators through people's power. May of 1998 and 1980 stand as witnesses to how people united with immense strength and solidarity in the face of state violence. The stories of people helping each other and mutual assistance at the front lines for what we call freedom are familiar when we open discussions about May 98 or May 18.

This film tells the story of the daily lives of two ticketing cinema staff in Jakarta and Gwangju during those May incidents. They never experienced it directly or went onto the streets to face the soldiers, yet the stories they heard and the voices that reached them felt like an endless war film replaying in their minds.

This story is woven from fragments of memories of people living around Jakarta and Gwangju and represented through found footage, film clips, and significant cinematic events that occurred in the same month.

Preview : <https://vimeo.com/1118284405?fl=ip&fe=ec> (password: lastmay)

Film Still :  FILM STILL

Trailer :  Last May in Theaters - TRAILER.mp4

Poster :  FILM POSTER.png

Screening History

DMZ International Documentary Film Festival (2025) - Grand Prize Short Korean Competition

Wuhan bailin Film Festival (2025)

Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival (2025)

Festival Film Dokumenter (2025)

Seoul Independent Film Festival (2025)

DOXA Documentary Film Festival (2026)

Images Festival (2026)

Visions du Reel (2026)

Director's Statement

May 1980 in Gwangju and May 1998 in Jakarta illustrate how military brutality can destroy a society's freedom. Citizens have the right to criticize government decisions, especially when their leader acts as a dictator. However, what happened instead was violence and repressive actions by the government.

I was not part of these historical events—May 1998 and May 1980 are events I never personally experienced—but their impact still lingers today. Then what about the stories of those in the same place but lacked the chance or ability to join the fight? Are they also considered part of that struggle and that historic moment?

This film is an effort to gather personal memories from those who felt the impact of these events as part of a transnational solidarity between May 1980 and May 1998. The people of Gwangju and Jakarta have proven that through collective strength and solidarity, they could overthrow a corrupt state system and transform it into a democracy. This film serves as a reminder that every person, including workers in the film industry, must take a role in protecting democracy.

Director's Biography

Arief Budiman is an artist-filmmaker based in Yogyakarta, working with sonic traces, distorted histories, fabricated realities, desktop cinema, collage film, and media installations.

His practice engages with speculative histories, public archives, and collective memory to uncover hidden and erased narratives. Using archives and technology as tools, he opens up alternative ways of reading the past, blending fiction and non-fiction to construct multi-layered narratives that function as alternative histories. His works often draw from personal memories, oral histories, and popular culture—such as novels, music, and film. More recently, he has developed methods involving non-human elements to trace histories of violence in Indonesia and across Asia.

His works have received several awards, including the Grand Prize for Short Competition at DMZ International Documentary Film Festival (2025), Best Short Documentary at the Indonesian Film Festival (2023), and the Julius Baer – Next Generation Art Prize in the Moving Image category (2021). He is a recipient of the SGIFF SEA-Shorts Grant (2025), and his short documentary received the Sharjah Art Foundation – Short Film Production Grant (2023). He is currently a member of two collectives in Yogyakarta, MES 56 and Piring Tirbing.

Selected screenings and exhibitions include International Film Festival Rotterdam, Images Festival (Toronto), DMZ International Documentary Film Festival (Gyeonggi), Visions du Reel (Nyon), Muan Seungwoo Oh Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (Manila), Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Gwangju Media Art Platform, Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival, Sharjah Film Platform, Jogja Biennale XVI, ISCP (New York), Gerobak Cinema at Dhaka Art Summit, Arkipel (Jakarta), Kasseler Dokfest, and Festival Video NodoCCS (Caracas).

Selected residencies include Treasure Hill Artist Village (Taipei), G.MAP Project Lab Global Residency Program (Gwangju), Koganecho Area Management Center (Yokohama), Art Center Ongoing (Tokyo), MIRO Center (Gwangju), Pekan Kebudayaan Nasional (Kepulauan Seribu), and Jogja Biennale.

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Filmography

Golden Island / 2026 / 22 min / Hybrid

Shadow of The Sakura / 2025 / 28 / Experimental

Last May in Theaters / 2025 / 22 min / Experimental

Journey of Island People / 2024 / 29 min / Documentary

Our Wisisi Music / 2023 / 40 min / Documentary

Jogja_Kronik / 2020 / 15 min / Experimental

Missing Scene from The Mysterious Shooter - draft#4 / 2019 / 5 min / Experimental

Tangan-Tengen / 2019 / 55 min / Multi-screen

Thieves of The Heart / 2019 / 30 min / Experimental