

INTERVIEW WITH FILMMAKER ZHOU FEI



For **EuroAsia Shorts 2026**, the annual festival of short films from across Europe and Asia, presented by embassies and cultural centers based in Washington, DC, the Goethe-Institut Washington invited **media artist and experimental filmmaker Zhou Fei** to curate the German selections that explored the festival theme “Past/Present/Future.”

Zhou curated four films from Germany that offered unique perspectives on this theme: Helena Wittmann's *Wildnis*, Karsten Krause's *You and Me*, Bjørn Melhus's *I'm Not the Enemy* for our pairing program at Japan Information and Culture Center with the Embassy of Japan, and *Brand* by Jan Koester and Alexander Lahl for the festival's closing program where all festival partners showcased a film. Complementing her curatorial contributions to the wider festival, the Institut is proud to dedicate our media art space to Zhou's original work, offering audiences a comprehensive view of her impact as both a programmer and an artist.

How would you describe yourself as a curator and cultural programmer, and what perspectives are especially important to you in your work?

I consider myself first and foremost an artist. From this perspective, I understand curatorial and programming work as another form of artistic practice. Unlike individual artistic production, curating focuses more on creating relationships between them and placing different perspectives into conversation.

The aim of my work is to build bridges and create contexts in which artistic works can resonate not only with one another, but also with audiences and broader historical, social, and political realities.

I am particularly interested in questions of memory, identity, and transformation, as well as the relationship between individual experience and collective history. In my curatorial practice, I work across different perspectives—conceptual, aesthetic, formal, technological, and social. Rather than offering simplified conclusions, I believe art should open spaces for reflection and make complexity visible.

Can you tell us more about your curatorial selections for the Euro Asia Festival 2026 and the kinds of artistic conversations you hope to create through this year's theme, “Past/Present/Future”?

The theme “Past/Present/Future” offers a broad conceptual framework. Precisely because of its scale, I felt it was important to approach it through individual perspectives. Personal and family histories often reflect larger social developments and can reveal how historical transformations are experienced on a human level.

For this reason, my curatorial selection focuses on works that connect intimate experiences with broader societal contexts.

One example is *You and Me*. Through the perspective of a couple, the film offers a subtle portrait of postwar Germany, where private happiness and emotional intimacy become intertwined with the reconstruction and transformation of a country.

I'm Not the Enemy approaches war and trauma through a family perspective, revealing how large historical events shape personal memory and identity.

In current social debates, particularly around migration, intimate emotional experiences can also open unexpected perspectives—as seen in *Brand*. Rather than reducing reality to fixed positions, art allows more layered and human experiences to emerge.

My own artistic work, such as *Jinhua Road (Installation)*, similarly begins from a minimal and concrete point of departure. A wall becomes a carrier of memory across time, reflecting larger historical and social processes. These works demonstrate how seemingly small viewpoints can open wider reflections on history, society, and possible futures.

Through this selection, I hope to create a dialogue between personal narratives and historical transformation, encouraging audiences to reflect on how individual experiences are embedded within broader societal developments.

The festival brings together artists, ideas, and audiences across Europe and Asia. In your opinion, what role can festivals like EuroAsia Festival 2026 play in building dialogue between different cultural and political contexts today?

In a time of global uncertainty, political tension, and social transformation, transcontinental cultural exchange is more important than ever. Asia and Europe are regions with long cultural histories. While they differ in mentality, forms of expression, and historical experience, they also share important human and social values. It is precisely within this coexistence of difference and commonality that cultural exchange becomes meaningful.

Festivals such as the Euro Asia Festival 2026 can create spaces in which different perspectives encounter one another without being reduced to opposition or polarization. Art can function as a mediating language that moves beyond national and political boundaries and encourages reflection rather than confrontation.

Film plays a particularly important role in this context because it can make different realities, emotions, and viewpoints visible. It allows audiences to recognize both differences and shared experiences across cultures without simplifying complex issues.

A festival like this should therefore not only be understood as a presentation platform, but as a space of encounter and exchange. Its value lies in creating openness, dialogue, and mutual understanding at a moment when these qualities are increasingly necessary.

What kinds of projects or collaborations are you hoping to continue in the future, including with Goethe-Institut or other international partners?

In the future, I would like to continue developing projects that strengthen long-term international collaboration and artistic exchange across continents. I am especially interested in sustainable formats that go beyond single events and enable ongoing dialogue between artists, institutions, and audiences.

At the moment, I am working on a project focused on experimental film within the European historical context, particularly works produced from the postwar period to the present. The program is going to be presented in Germany, China, and the United States. Through these screenings, historical and artistic perspectives can enter into dialogue across different cultural contexts.

Looking ahead, I hope to expand this kind of exchange further between Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Africa. The goal is not only to explore differences, but also to recognize shared experiences and interconnected histories.

Collaboration with international institutions plays an important role in making these transcontinental exchanges possible. I hope to continue building networks that support artistic mobility, mutual learning, and long-term cultural cooperation.

What do you hope visitors will take away from this year's festival once it ends?

I hope visitors will leave the festival with a deeper awareness of the connections between past, present, and future, and of how personal experiences relate to larger social and historical developments.

More importantly, I hope the festival offers audiences a more personal and reflective way of engaging with the world. Art can create experiences that move beyond the speed and simplification often found in mainstream media, allowing people to encounter complexity in a more emotional and open-ended way.

I hope visitors feel encouraged to think independently, question established narratives, and develop their own perspectives on contemporary realities rather than simply following dominant opinions or media discourse.

If the festival can inspire greater openness, empathy, and curiosity toward different experiences and viewpoints, then it will have fulfilled its purpose.