

FILM FEST, ACEA AWARDS THE PRIZE TO THE SHORT FILM ABOUT WATER

**“I Custodi dell’Acqua” by director Hari Bertoja won first place in the competition
that explored water resources in the age of climate change**

Rome, 15 October 2025 - “**I Custodi dell’Acqua**” (“Guardians of Water”) **won the Acea Award** for the best short film on the theme from which it takes its title, as part of the **I Mille Volti dell’Acqua** (The Thousand Faces of Water) contest. Directed by **Hari Bertoja**, it is set in a museum where Botticelli’s Renaissance masterpiece “The Birth of Venus” becomes interactive thanks to an AI capable of transforming it through the ages. When a visitor asks for a future version, an unexpected “bug” opens a real portal to a barren, waterless world, where an enigmatic figure warns him of the fate of humanity and the hidden cost of technology. (Watch the short film [here](#)).

The two juries, one technical, composed of ACEA’s top management and experts from the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, and the other made up of company employees, selected three short films among the **150** submitted to the contest, which was created to raise public awareness about **water conservation** and talk about **water in the age of climate change**.

The award ceremony, hosted by SKY journalist **Alessio Viola**, was held at the **Teatro Studio Borgna** of the Auditorium Parco della Musica during the opening night of the **Film Fest**. The event was attended by the competing authors, **Barbara Marinali**, President of Acea, **Gabriella Buontempo**, President of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, and **Salvatore Nastasi**, President of the Fondazione Cinema and of the Rome Film Fest.

Acea, in collaboration with the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia di Roma and the Fondazione Cinema per Roma, presented the retrospective “**Gocce di cinema**” (“Drops of Cinema”) and the contest “**I mille volti dell’acqua**” at the Casa del Cinema, two initiatives launched as part of the 20th edition of the Rome Film Fest, which kicks off on 15 October. Both aim to explore the theme of water through the eyes of renowned directors and young videomakers. The main event will take place on 24 October, during the evening dedicated to ACEA at the Sala Sinopoli, when “**Dracula - A Love Tale**” by **Luc Besson**, one of the most eagerly awaited films of this year’s festival, will have its premiere.

The “**I Mille Volti dell’Acqua**” contest featured a new theme this year, “I custodi dell’acqua” (“Guardians of Water”), and saw young directors and filmmakers create original short films exploring the theme of water through fiction, documentary, or animation, with the goal of raising public awareness of the importance of water conservation and reuse, in line with the Acea Group’s sustainability strategies, led by CEO Fabrizio Palermo. The best work among the three finalists, selected from 150 entries, was chosen by a jury composed of ACEA and critics from the Centro Sperimentale, and was screened today at the Teatro Studio Gianni Borgna of the Auditorium Parco della Musica Ennio Morricone. The winning videomaker received a prize of 5,000 euros.

*“Once again this year, with ACEA at the Rome Film Fest, the real star is water. We believe it is increasingly necessary to focus attention on the theme of reuse and highlight how important the protection of water resources is for a more sustainable future. Cinema thus becomes a means of reflection on the value of this precious blue resource, and the initiative “I mille volti dell’acqua” goes in this direction: each of us can become a ‘guardian of water’; the decisive drop for a future marked by a new awareness, one in which being informed is not enough, we must play an active role in defending and safeguarding the natural resources”, stated **Barbara Marinali, President of ACEA.***

Starting today, the opening day of the event, and throughout the entire Film Fest, the historic Teatro Olimpico in Rome will host several films from the programme and will become the **Teatro Olimpico ACEA**. The foyer has been set with an exhibition of images, artworks, and industrial engineering objects from “ACEA Heritage”, an exhibition created to tell the story and culture of ACEA at the company’s Roman headquarters in Piazzale Ostiense. During the festival, visitors will also be able to meet the protagonists of the featured films and watch the **short films competing in the *I mille volti dell’acqua* contest** at the Acea stand located in the Auditorium Parco della musica. Access to the stand will be via the **Blue Carpet**, which reminds us of and highlights the importance of water resources.

THE FINALIST SHORT FILMS

GOCCE CONTATE by RICCARDO RIANDE (Fiction)

Martina, a 21-year-old woman, launches a challenge on social media: to live for three days with only 20 litres of water. What begins as a game soon turns into a journey of awareness and confrontation with her sister Valentina. Balancing irony and realism, the challenge becomes a viral message about the value of water, the need to save it, and the importance of small everyday actions.

BIOGRAPHY. Riccardo Riande (Rome, 1984) is an Italian-Mexican photographer and videomaker. After graduating from DAMS and completing two master’s degrees in screenwriting and television production, he began working as a theatre director and videomaker. During that time, he developed a passion for photography, which led him to collaborate with entertainment agencies and actors, producing photo shoots for actors and cinema events. He has directed web series, short films, and music videos, winning several national and international awards.

I CUSTODI DELL’ACQUA by HARI BERTOJA (Fantasy)

In a museum, a Renaissance masterpiece becomes interactive thanks to an AI capable of transforming it through the ages. When a visitor asks for a future version, a sudden “bug” opens a real portal to an arid, waterless world, where an enigmatic figure warns him about the fate of humanity and the hidden cost of technology.

BIOGRAPHY. Born in Trieste in 1993, he lived and worked in his hometown as a videomaker and filmmaker for over 12 years. He has taken part in dozens of short films, films, and documentaries, often in technical or supporting roles in directing and production, including the film *Verità Artificiale* (2023) as DOP. His main works as a director include the short film *Scialuppa di Salvataggio* (2023) and the documentary *Ultima Cena* (2024). His experience ranges from directing to photography, editing, and music composition, reflecting a creative and multifaceted approach to audiovisual language.

ONDA 28 by SIMONA BURSI (Animation)

In a submerged, imaginary world, young girls await their destiny: they are Onde (Waves), with numbers engraved on their chests and hearts, unaware of their identity until the moment of the leap that transforms them into the living force of the sea. Beside them move *I Guardiani* (The Guardians), silent creatures forged by man from roots, stones, and water, symbols of a humanity that strives to protect what it has already wounded. Through the eyes of *Onda 28*, the film tells the story of training, waiting, and revelation: no longer an isolated voice, but part of an endless chorus. A poetic parable about the fragility of water and the need to protect it in order to save ourselves.

BIOGRAPHY. Simona Bursi (Fano, 1974) is an animator, illustrator, author, and director. After training at the Scuola del Libro in Urbino, she worked in Milan on numerous animated film productions, including *Bozzetto*, *deMas* and partners, *Mix film Gertie*, and *Animation Band*, and collaborated on television series and short films. She is the creator of the animated series *I BIBI*, produced by Rai. Since 2008, she has worked as an illustrator for Italian and international publishing houses, including *Usborne Publishing* and *Mondadori*. She participated as an animator in the multi-award-winning film *Linda veut du poulet!* (*Cristal Annecy* 2023, *César Award* 2024) and has created short films and personal projects that combine painting, illustration, animation, and artificial intelligence.