PRESS RELEASE

FROM THE WITCHER AND AVATAR TO BREAKING BAD, UNREAL AND CROATIA'S BEST-KNOWN ACTORS: ZAGREB BECOMES A HUB FOR FILM AND GAMING

BLEND: Film & Games 2026 – two days of international speakers, film and gaming stars, free workshops, quizzes and film screenings at Algebra Bernays University

Zagreb, 20 October 2026 – Can a single film bring one million players back to a video game? Can a television series reignite interest in the game it is based on years after its original release? And how are technologies developed for video games now being used to create Hollywood's biggest spectacles? These and many other questions will be explored at this year's BLEND: Film & Games conference, taking place on 23 and 24 October at Algebra Bernays University in Zagreb.

Over two days, BLEND will bring together Croatian and international experts from the film, television and gaming industries, creators behind globally recognised projects, creative producers, directors, game designers, visual effects specialists and new-technology experts. Alongside talks, panels and case studies, visitors can look forward to free hands-on workshops, film screenings and entertaining film-and-gaming quizzes.

FILM AND VIDEO GAMES ARE NO LONGER SEPARATE WORLDS – THE NUMBERS PROVE IT

The close relationship between film and gaming is also reflected in data from analytics platform PlayTracker, which examined how film and television adaptations affect interest in video games. According to its analysis, more than one million players returned to the Resident Evil franchise, or played it for the first time, following the release of a film adaptation, while the premiere of A Minecraft Movie was followed by a 75% increase in Minecraft's active player count.

Interestingly, one of this year's BLEND speakers worked on film projects from both franchises: Croatian visual effects specialist Željko Barčan, now an FX Supervisor at New Zealand-based studio Wētā FX.

A similar phenomenon can be seen with the globally successful The Witcher franchise. Each new season of the Netflix series sparked renewed interest in The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, showing that a successful adaptation can do more than build on the popularity of its source material: it can revive interest in it. At BLEND, Maria Małgorzata Głowacka, Senior Franchise Manager at CD PROJEKT RED, the studio behind The Witcher and Cyberpunk 2077, will discuss the development of major gaming franchises beyond video games themselves.

These examples underscore one of BLEND's central ideas: the future of entertainment increasingly lies not in individual formats, but in stories, characters and creative worlds that exist simultaneously in cinemas, on television and in video games.

(Data source: PlayTracker, Film & Games BLEND analysis)

CROATIAN ACTING STARS, THE SVADBA PHENOMENON AND A NEW GENERATION OF CREATORS

One of this year's BLEND highlights will be the discussion "One Actor, Many Worlds: From Theatre and Video Games to Film, Television and Beyond", taking place on Friday, 23 October at 4:30 p.m. The panel brings together well-known actors Janko Popović Volarić, Sanja Vejnović, Fabijan Pavao Medvešek, Zoran Pribičević, Iva Šimić Šakoronja and Jan Kovačić, whose voice can also be heard in the popular video game VALORANT. Moderated by actor, director and producer Dominik Čičak, the conversation will explore how acting changes across media, how video-game characters are created and what happens when actors from traditional film or theatre enter an interactive environment.

Another highlight will be the panel "The Svadba Phenomenon and What's Next in Svadba 2!", in which director and screenwriter Igor Šeregi and producer Ivan Kelava will reveal how one of Croatia's most talked-about film projects came to life and what audiences can expect from its sequel. The discussion will be moderated by Mia Pećina Drašković, producer and Head of the Zagreb Film Office.

The programme also features "AI with an Authorial Signature", bringing together multimedia artist and director Dalibor Barić, director and creative professional Filip Filković, and Ivan Murat from Nanobit. Their discussion of the real possibilities of artificial intelligence in the creative industries will address a central question: where does technology end and artistic authorship begin?

BLEND also makes room for Croatia's next generation of creators with "And They're Not Even 30 Yet!", showcasing young talents already achieving notable results in film, music and the audiovisual industries. In doing so, this year's conference emphasises the importance of connecting established professionals with emerging creators, as well as the active role Croatia's creative scene plays in developing contemporary film, television and gaming content.

FROM INTERSTELLAR AND AVATAR TO BREAKING BAD AND THE WITCHER

Among the most prominent names in this year's programme is Željko Barčan, a Croatian specialist with more than 25 years of international experience in visual effects. His career includes work on major productions such as Interstellar, Minecraft and Avatar: Fire and Ash. In his talk "Beyond the Impossible", he will reveal how visual worlds that push the boundaries of cinematic imagination are brought to life.

Joining from Los Angeles is Thomas Golubić, one of television's leading music supervisors, whose credits include the acclaimed series Breaking Bad, Better Call Saul, Six Feet Under, The Walking Dead and Pluribus. In a conversation about music as an essential element of television storytelling, he will explain how the distinctive musical identities of era-defining television series are created.

FROM THE SMURFS AND TINTIN TO ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND VIRTUAL FILM SETS

A significant part of the programme focuses on the evolution of familiar characters and stories across different media.

Belgian experts Jean Gréban, associated with the global Smurfs franchise, and Yves Février, a long-standing specialist in digital strategy and the development of Tintin's universe, will discuss how European cultural icons are reaching new audiences through video games, animation and contemporary digital platforms. They will be joined by representatives of the world of Professor Balthazar for a panel on European transmedia icons.

The technological side of modern production will be presented by experts including virtual production specialist Andrei Goaga and Elodie Moog, who will examine both the possibilities and misconceptions surrounding the use of Unreal Engine in film and television production.

Other topics include the future of Europe's audiovisual industry, the growth of Italy's gaming scene, independent game production, educating new generations of creators, film costume design and the increasingly important role of actors in creating interactive characters and worlds. The programme

connects international expertise with Croatia's creative community, creating opportunities for new collaborations among filmmakers, producers, developers and professionals from different disciplines.

FREE WORKSHOPS: FROM GAME DEVELOPMENT TO ACTING AND DIALOGUE WRITING

This year, BLEND places particular emphasis on hands-on learning through a series of free specialist workshops for film and gaming professionals, students and creatives seeking to build new skills.

Film professionals interested in entering the gaming industry can take part in "Thinking in Games: How Filmmakers Can Press Play", led by Pierre Puget, founder of Berlin-based BRAINS Narrative Studio.

Italian experts Daniele Barone and Marco Mazzaglia will introduce new opportunities for collaboration between film, television and video games. Olga Moskvina, writer and game designer of the cult game Disco Elysium, will lead "Virtual Voices: Creating Memorable Dialogue", a workshop dedicated to crafting convincing dialogue and unforgettable video-game characters.

Ivan Glavinović will introduce participants to working with Unreal Engine, while Hrvoje Mitić will explain the key stages of video-game development, from the initial concept and production to business models and market launch.

Two workshops on role-playing game (RPG) performance, led by professional actors Laura Bošnjak and Jan Kovačić from the ARMOR CAST association, will also be of special interest. Through improvisation and work with voice, body and character, participants will explore how to create convincing characters in interactive worlds.

All workshops are free, but places are limited. Advance registration is required by 4:00 p.m. on 22 October at info@blendzagreb.eu, specifying the workshop you wish to attend.

FILM SCREENING: BOG NEĆE POMOĆI AND A DISCUSSION WITH ITS CREATORS

BLEND goes beyond discussions about cinema to offer audiences a special film event. On Friday, 23 October at 6:00 p.m., the programme features a screening of Bog neće pomoći, directed by Hana Jušić, Croatia's candidate for the Goya Awards and an Oscar contender.

Earlier that day, at 2:30 p.m., director and screenwriter Hana Jušić and producer Ankica J. Tilić will discuss the film in a conversation moderated by film critic Boško Picula.

Alongside the evening screening, student films from the Academy of Dramatic Art and VERN University will be shown throughout both conference days, continuing BLEND's commitment to providing visibility and a platform for the next generation of audiovisual creators.

STEP INTO THE WORLD OF IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

BLEND extends beyond its conference rooms! Throughout both days, visitors to the lobby of Algebra Bernays University will be able to explore an innovative immersive project that blurs the boundaries between cinema, video games and interactive storytelling. OCTOPOCALYPSE: ALIENS & UFOS is an interactive immersive experience by Berlin-based creators Max Sacker and Arita Szadkowski, recently presented in the official Venice Immersive competition at the Venice International Film Festival.

The experience takes visitors into an unusual encounter with an octopus-like alien creature, with their choices and interactions shaping how the story unfolds. Visitors should also not miss Max Sacker's talk "Octopocalypse: Aliens & UFOs – Generative AI and the Future of Filmmaking", which will introduce the project and explore the potential of new technologies in the creation of immersive content.

FILM & GAMES QUIZ: HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW FILMS AND VIDEO GAMES?

BLEND is not just about serious industry discussions – there is plenty of entertainment on the programme too. During the lunch breaks on both conference days, visitors can take part in the Film &

Games Quiz powered by VGHM & Kino Tuškanac & Quahwa, putting their knowledge of blockbuster films, cult video games, iconic characters and pop-culture worlds to the test. The quizzes offer a relaxed atmosphere, prizes for the winners and opportunities to meet and connect with participants from across the creative industries, reflecting the spirit of BLEND.

Admission to the conference is free with advance registration, open until 6:00 p.m. on 22 October via the registration link. BLEND is organised by the Zagreb Film Office and Games Croatia / the Croatian Audiovisual Centre (HAVC), with Algebra Bernays University as academic partner.

For updates and the full conference programme, visit www.blendzagreb.eu and follow BLEND, the Zagreb Film Office, Games Croatia, the Croatian Audiovisual Centre and Algebra Bernays University on social media.

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