



# IMAGO

a film by  
**Olga Chajdas**



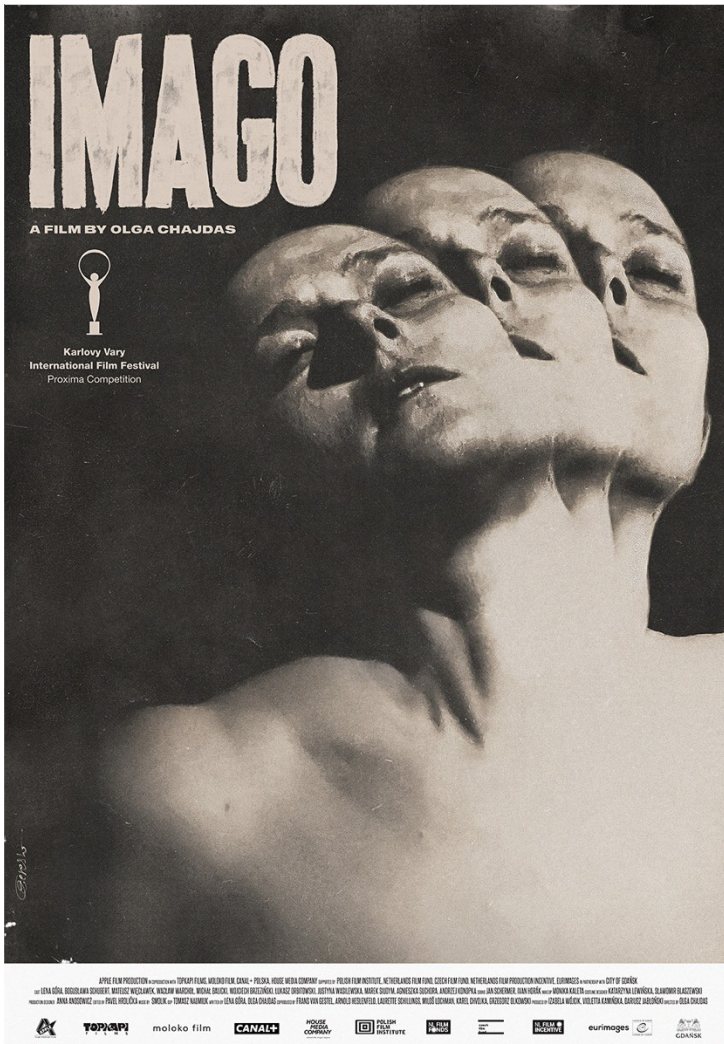
**Karlovy Vary  
International Film Festival**  
Proxima Competition

Apple Film Production  
ul. Marii Kazimiery 23E  
01-670 Warszawa  
applefilm@applefilm.pl

**Press contact**  
Marijana Harder  
+49 (0)177 79 42 871  
mail@marijanaharder.com

## IMAGO

Director	Olga Chajdas
Scriptwriters	Lena Góra, Olga Chajdas
Director of Photography	Tomasz Naumiuk
Music	Smolik
Production Designer	Anna Anosowicz
Sound Designers	Jan Schermer, Ivan Horák
Costume designers	Katarzyna Lewińska, Sławomir Blaszewski
Editor	Pavel Hrdlička
Make-up Artist	Monika Kaleta
Producers	Izabela Wójcik, Violetta Kamińska, Dariusz Jabłoński
Co-producers	Frans van Gestel, Arnold Heslenfeld, Laurette Schillings, Miloš Lochman, Karel Chvojka, Grzegorz Olkowski
Cast	Lena Góra Bogusława Schubert Mateusz Więclawek Wacław Warchoł Michał Balicki Wojciech Brzeziński Łukasz Orbitowski Justyna Wasilewska Marek Siudym Agnieszka Suchora Andrzej Konopka
Produced by	Apple Film Production  in co-production with Topkapi Films, Moloko Film, CANAL+ Polska, House Media Company
Supported by	Polish Film Institute, Netherlands Film Fund, Czech Film Fund, Netherlands Film Production Incentive, Eurimages, the City of Gdańsk (partnership)



Olga Chajdas' new film IMAGO will have its world premiere in the PROXIMA competition of the Karlovy Vary Film Festival, which is dedicated to new voices in world cinema. IMAGO is the second feature film by Olga Chajdas, whose first film, NINA, won awards at, among others, the Rotterdam International Film Festival, Camerimage, the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia, the Eagle Polish Film Awards and also received a nomination for the "Polityka" magazine's Passports.

IMAGO is a complex, post-punk psychological drama. It is a story about otherness, the desire for freedom, and of a woman failing to conform to the the expectations of her surroundings. Above all, however, it is a story about the deep and complicated bond between a mother and a daughter.

The story begins in Tricity in 1987 and ends in 1989 - after the first free elections in Poland. The story's backdrop is the rebellious Tricity music scene of the late 1980s, a cultural and social phenomenon of the period and a harbinger of revolutionary changes in Poland. IMAGO is a powerful and resounding piece of cinema about the various shades of transformation that tooplace back then and a portrait of a woman unlike any other in the history of the Polish cinema.

Lena Góra (known, among others, for "Roving Woman") stars in the leading role and also co-wrote the screenplay of the film, with the remarkable Polish musician Andrzej Smolik composing the music and Tomasz Naumiuk providing atmospheric cinematography.

**Karlovy Vary IFF  
the world premiere  
2nd July (Sunday) 7 pm  
(Municipal Theatre Official)**

the press screening:  
1st July (Saturday) at 8.00 pm  
(Cinema A)

the screening with Q&A:  
3rd July (Monday) at 3.00 pm  
(Čas Cinema Official)

other screenings:  
4th July (Tuesday) at 1.00 pm  
(Lazne III Cinema)  
5th July (Wednesday) at 2.00 pm

(Cinema B)



#### **SYNOPSIS**

Late 1980s, at the Polish Coast. The old communist order, with its greyness and rigid set of prohibitions and commands, is in decline. But a new order is yet to be established. Ela, the youngest of nine siblings, is just entering adulthood - already knowing she will not fit into any of these worlds. She finds a sanctuary in the Tricity counterculture. And so she drifts along...carried by the wind of her dreams and hunger for life - until the moment she is faced with reality.

#### **STILLS:**

[https://applefilmpl-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/person/applefilm\\_applefilmpl\\_onmicrosoft\\_com/EvIMSrHofqIHglvsilpyoKwB38BgfBCDJgzKOPgtScREg?e=2NPMJN](https://applefilmpl-my.sharepoint.com/:f:/g/person/applefilm_applefilmpl_onmicrosoft_com/EvIMSrHofqIHglvsilpyoKwB38BgfBCDJgzKOPgtScREg?e=2NPMJN)

#### **TRAILER**

<https://vimeo.com/841115012?share=copy>  
Password: AppleFilmIMAGO23

#### **THE FESTIVAL DESCRIPTION**

<https://www.kviff.com/en/programme/film/63/40213-imag>



## **THE BEAUTY OF TAMED DIRT**

**Olga Chajdas, the director and the co-writer of the film, is interviewed by Krzysztof Kwiatkowski**

### **What does 'Imago' mean?**

It is a Latin term signifying the ideal form that an insect achieves in its life. When I was searching for the title, I kept thinking about what this film means to me: looking for one's 'ideal' form, this search for oneself and the process of transformation. In "Imago", this process of transformation of a woman is what matters most to me. A young girl, an artist, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, becomes pregnant. I wanted the viewers to be kept on their toes as to where the story was really going. Ela's actions are sometimes illogical, chaotic, emotional. Her process of searching for herself is crucial here.

### **Among other things: maturing into motherhood. And the question of whether Ela is able to truly find herself in it.**

In Poland, we constantly need to be reminded of our right to decide. But this story is also about the bond between mother and daughter. While working on the script, Lena Góra and I talked about our mothers. They had a lot in common - and, like everyone else, they made mistakes. They were at war with themselves - which reflected heavily on their daughters. Our relationships were strong, frequently full of pain and manipulation, but also of incredible closeness. These feelings formed a truly complex mosaic.

### **Did you know right from the start that Lena Góra would play the lead role?**

After our conversation about mothers, we quickly realised that the story of this bond was something we thought was missing in films nowadays. Working on the script was a journey through our memories and observations. We agreed straight away that this was a role for Lena, I just wanted to tell a story and to focus on the dissection of a bond that was so close after all. After we finished writing, we came to an agreement: "You play, I direct". Lena captivated me with freshness and a natural quality that cannot be substituted by some acting tricks. The plot of the script revolves around the story of Ela Góra at the time when she performed in alternative bands in Gdynia, but I made a point of not wanting to shoot anyone's biography: the emotional portrait is way more important to me than the facts. I love female characters who are unpredictable and react to the world in unexpected ways. To this day, I am still searching for the key to understanding the character of Ela...to how I feel about her. I give myself the freedom not to answer all these questions. I think the portrait we have created here allows for a whole range of emotions and this lack of easy answers is an inherent part of it.

### **The film begins in a psychiatric ward.**

It is so easy to judge the behaviour of other people through simplistic terms. To label an alternative perception of reality as a disorder. My protagonist handles her demons quite well. She calms her mind with New Age methods, joints, music, meditation, mantras, and yoga. Today, this would hardly impress anyone. Although even today it is easier to admit one's homosexuality than, for example, schizophrenia in front of the family. The shooting for this part of the film was done in Kocborów. In general, Tricity served as the backdrop for our film and we shot most of the scenes there.

### **The character of Ela sometimes resembles a living torch...**

Her life suddenly accelerates. She begins to understand that she needs to create a real home for herself, one which is not necessarily made up of family and relatives. Although Ela's mother - raising nine children - is not a negative character. She carries true drama within her. Something grounded her in front of the television. Something led to the situation in which her only form of contact with and tenderness towards her children is putting food on the table. And she doesn't know how to ask them how they feel...

### **The protagonist seeks to escape from this world into art.**

Through photography, painting, music, she strives to reach others with her own truth. Whatever artists do, it's always some attempt at communication. This is also the case with me: whether it's the "Colours of Happiness" series or theatre, I do it all for the audience.

### **While preparing for 'Imago', you and your actors had to immerse yourselves in the world of the alternative music of the 1980s in Tricity, right?**

I listened to this music a lot. I discovered its beautiful uncompromising quality - one which the composer and I tried to remain faithful to. We gave up on the idea of recording covers or using archive recordings. Andrzej Smolik found young musicians who even had the look from that era. He wrote original songs, with original lyrics. The actors on set sang live, no playback - I wanted the truth and energy of authentic concerts. That's how we formed the "Bathing is banned" band. To this day I sometimes see our musicians playing with the band's stickers on their instruments.

We were very fortunate that we were able to assemble a cast of actors open to such crazy ideas. This was the job of the casting director, Paulina Krajnik, with whom I have worked many times before. Paulina has a unique talent for assembling "constellations of actors". She understands that the most important thing in a movie is the characters' chemistry. It is precisely this chemistry and truth that she seeks. I already knew Mateusz Więclawek. As a really young actor he starred in our episode of "The Deep End". Michał Balicki appeared for a moment in an episode of the "Cracow Monsters" series, and I immediately knew that I was attracted to his originality and focus. Wacek Warchoń is a mystic possessing great acting intuition and magnetism. Same goes for Justyna Wasilewska, Wojtek Brzezinski, Agnieszka Przepiórska or 'old' friends like "Queen" Bogusia Schubert, Andrzej Konopka and Agnieszka Suchora. I am also delighted that writer Łukasz Orbitowski - this wonderful, great and warm man with a sense of humour - accepted our offer to play one of the brothers. They all contributed to building an image of that era, rebellion, family, burdens and freedom.

### **This isn't your first collaboration with Smolik.**

For "Nina" I was looking for both a great composer and someone able to do the club tracks. I've always liked Smolik's music and so I reached out to him. It turned out that he lives just a hop away from me...which, by the way, cost me a lot of sleepless nights. We developed a wonderful rapport, giving each other a lot of freedom. And on "Imago" we were helped to keep the rhythm of the story by Pavel Hrdlička, a highly regarded Czech editor.

### **Editor?**

Yes, from the Czech Republic..a very renowned one. And at the same time a member of the band Mig21, so he understood very well what we wanted to accomplish and took care of the rhythm. He doesn't speak English, I don't speak Czech, but we communicated very well in...Pilsner language. In general, we were lucky with foreign

artists on our project, who, although they didn't know the Polish reality of that era, perfectly found their way into our punk concept.

### **And how did you reconstruct the reality of the late 1980s and early 1990s?**

I like when space and time are not indifferent to the story - when they reflect the situation of the protagonist. In "Nina", a contemporary story, we looked for locations that are under construction or under renovation. Here we went a step further: when the protagonist is engulfed in choices that will decide the course of her life, the country is in transition. We did our homework on the set and costumes of the era, but without a documentary-like obsession. Ania Anosowicz, who is an incorrigible perfectionist with great talent and taste - and a sense of textures - was responsible for the production design. In addition, I was looking for less obvious events from history, such as the solar eclipse of 1987. However, the viewer is most powerfully transported back in time by the style of camera-work. We wanted to preserve the effect of old music videos or concert recordings. With our cinematographer, Tomek Naumiuk, we referred to this as "grainy intimacy".

### **Something like an over-used VHS tape?**

Yeah, something like that. We're used to reliable stories where everything comes together perfectly. In "Imago" I wanted to keep as much dirt as possible - to preserve a kind of imperfection. Our vision of reality is based on controlled mistakes. The camera became the protagonist of sorts - one who sees our characters in a very interesting way, and we only had to listen to that voice. While working on the sound in the Netherlands, with Jan Schermer, we kept reminding ourselves of that principle of "controlled mistakes" - that the sound has to be as subjective and, in a way, selective as the camera. It's up to us to decide on that grainy quality. At times I wanted the kind of effect as if we fell asleep at the console. I'm happy that I dared to go that crazy. That's why I call "Imago" a post-punk psychological drama.

### **You think we lack that punk-like energy today?**

We lack freedom. And we even lack the awareness that we fail to give this freedom to ourselves...that we are the ones who decide about our transformation and our path, and whether it is filled with noise or meditation. It is good to hear yourself yelling. It is good to rebel, to fight for ourselves. Regardless of the era, the political climate and where we come from, it is good to nurture our voice. Because it has power. That's what punk is to me - the belief that we don't have to remain stuck in rigid frameworks. It is very much like emotions: it will never fit into algorithms.

### **Olga Chajdas the director and the co-writer**

As an 8 year old, she wanted to become an astrophysicist, but instead of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology she enrolled at the Łódź Film School where she studies film production, while simultaneously studying directing at the Academy of Film and Television in Warsaw.

While she was a student, she worked on the sets of numerous films and series in the production department.

She also worked with Warsaw's Na Woli Theatre, where she prepared a play titled "The Last Jew in Europe", based on a drama by Tuvia Tenenbom. It was an important play about Antisemitism and the hypocrisy of contemporary society and about the need for tolerance and respect for otherness.

She worked an assistant on the "Prime Minister" series by Agnieszka Holland, Magdalena Łazarkiewicz and Kasia Adamik, which turned out to be an important professional experience for her. She continued to work with Agnieszka Holland on her subsequent films, including the Oscar-nominated "In Darkness" and "Mr. Jones".

Chajdas has directed many television productions and tv series including "The Deep End" and "The Border" for HBO, "Cracow Monsters" and "1983" for Netflix, and co-directed first Polish feature film for Netflix "Erotica 2022".

When it comes to films, she started with two short films about women at a turning point in their lives. In “3x LOVE”, the female protagonist told her partner three times that she was pregnant. Each time she used the same words - but the mood of the conversation turned out to be completely different. Her short film titled “Morning has broken” was a story of a wife and mother who committed a terrible crime.

In 2018, Chajdas made her feature debut with “Nina”, about a woman who is looking for a surrogate but suddenly finds herself in a situation that changes her whole life and makes her answer the question of who she truly is.

**Major festivals and awards:**

2018	NINA	VPRO Rotterdam IFF, Big Screen Award Camerimage IFF, main award of the Polish competition Gdynia, Polish Feature Film Festival, Onet's "Discovery of the Festival" Award Gdynia, Festival of Polish Feature Films, Golden Claw Award for <i>"personal tone of expression, exploration of a subject which is almost absolutely missing in Polish cinema and excellent execution"</i>
2017	MORNING HAS BROKEN	Raindance IFF
2016	3XLOVE	Grand Prix at "Distances" Short IFF in Dublin





#### **BETWEEN THE ART AND THE AFTERPARTY**

**Lena Góra, the lead actress and the co-writer of “Imago” interviewed by Krzysztof Kwiatkowski**

**Is it true that the idea for “Imago” was born out of coincidence?**

I don't believe in coincidences. It all started when I met Olga Chajdas in Los Angeles. Olga was looking for an actress for a project that never came to fruition, but we decided to start working on something new. We talked about our families, our past. I told her about my mother, Ela a.k.a. Malwina, and the artistic ferment of the Polish seaside and the *Tricity*, where I came from. When I left Los Angeles and flew to Poland a while later, Olga was waiting for me. And together we set off for the Polish coast.

**“Imago” is a story inspired by your mother's life.**

Yes, the script is based on the story of Ela Góra... Her love, family, unrest and magic. But it was important for me to complete my conversation with my past as the scriptwriter - and then, as the actress, I gave myself to the director. For me, “Imago” tells a story of a woman who became pregnant at the worst possible time for her - and yet chose not to have an abortion. Maybe she smoked, drugged and drank too much, maybe she was lost and confused. Still, she was the best mother she could be with the tools she has been given. That's why I wanted to write this script: to thank her for deciding to give birth to me in spite of everything.

**Even if there was no hot soup served at home and no family dinner every Sunday?**

That's true, I lacked this sense of regularity and security in my childhood. It was no coincidence that I left Poland at the age of sixteen and lived on my own since then. And yes, it wasn't always easy but what does "easy" even mean? In the process of working on “Imago” I realized that instead of a traditional family, a home and a warm chicken soup every Sunday my parents gave me a whole lot of courage, a wild heart, a sharp eye, and the right to decide for myself. I guess that's called freedom.

### **So what do you remember about your adolescence?**

Just like in "Imago", my mother, Ela, was a girl with eight siblings - six brothers and two sisters. Some ended up in prison, some never moved out of my Grandma's house (in real life, like in the film, her nickname was also: "Chip"). When I was born, and we had nowhere to live, my father's parents wouldn't let us stay with them in their big cottage. But for Grandma Chip? No problem! And the artists, the musicians, the painters and the punks of Tricity have become my aunts and uncles. I remember the omnipresent smell of my father's turpentine, Leons's (Theiry Mugler's partner) wild performances, all the bonfires on the beach, industrial spaces and my father's exhibitions. That together with all the time I spent with my family while they were wine drinking among the burning candles at the graveyard, because the graveyard was the only "attraction" by the council estate blocks we lived in with Chip, may seem like Polish poverty to some. But I only realized how special and incredible those people and moments were when I travelled across the United States. The artistic enclaves there, even in New York, were hardly more progressive than those I remembered from my childhood in Tricity...

**Your mother was a singer - first in "Armored Bicycles" ("Pancerne Rowery") and " then in "Pharmacy" („Apteka").**

She had no formal training, no musical education, couldn't read sheet music - and couldn't even be bothered to write lyrics. She would just step on the stage, close her eyes and feel the energy in the room. She would then slowly start making sounds, throwing out words, and the band would join her, one member at the time. One rhythm, one energy. She would make-up lyrics, live. They called her the Polish Nina Hagen. The intelligence, humor, wit and freedom of their art was, and still is, uncommon. Their life, thoughts and music had merged into one and they dove into it, fully.

**Today, more and more stories of the Tricity Alternative Scene are resurfacing.**

At last! This cultural and social ferment was born out of the disagreement with communist Poland, all the shortcomings, and anger at the opposition but also from this wit, sarcasm and brilliance of the artists of the Tricity. That and the cool Baltic sea breeze and the sailors bringing in fresh music from abroad. It was only years later that I discovered what great artists my mother and these uncles of mine truly were.

**Still, 'Imago' is set in a specific historical moment: between 1987 and 1989.**

History tends to repeat itself. And the events of the 80s in Poland can be painfully connected to the ones of the present day. Yet again, we have to fight for freedom and our place within the society. Things are no better when it comes to the women's rights. And an unexpected pregnancy for a young artist who owns nothing but her talent is one of the toughest moment's and decisions one can face. I have had many conversations with my girlfriends whose maternal instincts have not awakened so easily. I don't have a child myself yet, and as much as I want to have one, I feel completely not ready yet, and I'm older than my mother was when she gave birth to me. I believe her story can be relevant and somewhat soothing to many women out there.

**Is it possible to forget who her prototype was?**

With a project that personal, it was difficult not to drift off into memories. I worked with an intimacy coordinator name Marta Lachacz - not necessarily because of the sex scenes or the nudity, but in the field of the emotional weight. I remember when Andrzej Konopka and Agnieszka Suchora, who played Ela's in-laws, appeared on the set. And because they are such brilliant actors - my past and the film set started to merge into one right before my eyes. Or when we were shooting at the psychiatric ward in "Kocborowo". We got a permission to shot at the exact location where I used to visit my mother. In that scene, we had identical socks on our feet - knitted by my grandmother, Chip. It was like a metaphysical flight. But thanks to professionalism on set, the support of the producers, and my craft I somehow survived. Although my relationship suffered... Well, it turned out my former partner didn't want to live with my mother.

**Lena Góra**  
**the lead actress and the co-writer**

Lena Góra is an actresses and a screenwriter. She is starring as the lead character alongside Academy Award nominee John Hawkes in “Roving Woman”, a feature film, which she also co-wrote, Executive Produced by Oscar nominee, Wim Wenders which premiered at Tribeca Film Festival in New York, 2022.

Born in Poland to Slawek Gora, a painter and Ela a.k.a Malwina, a Polish post-punk singer, who performed in a number of Polish bands including "Pancerne Rowery" or "Apteka", co-creating the Tricity alternative scene of the 1980s. Lena began her acting career in Polish theater and at 16 she went on to perform on stage in London and New York and eventually settled in Los Angeles.

Her TV debut was the female lead role in the 2019 CANAL+ awarded TV series “The King of Warsaw”. In 2021 Lena starred in the feature film “Traveling Light” alongside Danny Huston, shot in Los Angeles, directed by a British director Bernard Rose (“Candyman”). Upon wrapping Lena immediately returned to Warsaw to shoot the feature film “Saint”, a crime-romance based in 1986, where she is the lead alongside Polish star Mateusz Kosciukiewicz.

Lena is now starring in her first NETFLIX Original Feature, a dark comedy titled “Night At The Kindergarten” available worldwide. Lena stars in and also co-wrote and received the Kieslowski Award during the 72nd Cannes Film Festival for the feature film “Imago”, directed by Olga Chajdas, which completed principle photography and was presented during the 2021 Cannes Marche du Film. The script is based on Ela vel Malwina, Lena's mother's life. Film will be released in 2023.

Lena is the winner of the Bella Women's Golden Angel Award for Best European Actress 2023 and is represented by the agencies LBI Entertainment and High Spot.



## **THE END OF AN ERA**

**by author Maciej Zaremba, IMAGO's historical consultant**

The end of the communist regime in Poland was a truly strange moment. It is difficult to capture it with one apt description or label it. One of such descriptions would be "fatigue". People were fatigued by the same faces, slogans...communism in general.

People were also physically fatigued: the effect of constant scrambling to find goods all over the city or secure more gigs. After a period of relative stability, the queues outside shops grew longer again and the feeling of hopelessness and lack of prospects became dominant. "Nothing is ever going to change here" was the sentiment of those who opted to emigrate from Poland at that time.

The low level of trust towards institutions - often treated as hostile and unfriendly - drove individuals to close themselves in small communities: family or friend groups.

The same applied to young people, who escaped into privacy, sought asylum and focused on their own lives as well as places that offered peace and security.

An important cultural phenomenon of the time was the eruption of rock music, a phenomenon unprecedented on such a scale in other socialist countries. It expressed rebellion and discontent - simultaneously shaping identities. Young people defined themselves by the type of music they listened.

The late 1980s were also the peak of Polish religiousness, and in 1987 John Paul II came to the country with another pilgrimage. In 1988, mass strikes broke out in Poland once again. The communist authorities chose to take a step forward and begin talks with "Solidarity", which led to partially free elections on 4 June 1989 - and the subsequent collapse of communism.

## **Crew, among others:**

### **Tomasz Naumiuk**

#### **Director of Photography**

Director of photography for films for, among others: "Knights of the Zodiac" (2023) dir. Tomasz Bagiński, "Mr. Jones" (2019) dir. Agnieszka Holland, "High Life" (2018) dir. Claire Denis, "53 Wars" (2018) dir. Ewa Bukowska. Naumiuk is also the cinematographer for series such as "Thaw" (2022) dir. Xawery Żuławski, "Cormoran Strike" (2020) dir. Susan Tully.

He previously worked with Olga Chajdas on the series "The Border", as well as on the award-winning film "Nina" (2018). He received the main prize in the Polish film competition at the Camerimage Festival for his cinematography in this film. More films with his cinematography are waiting for their premiere: Agnieszka Holland's "The Green Border" and James Napier Robertson's "Joika" and the series "Absolute debutants" by Kamila Tarabury and Katarzyna Warzecha.

### **Andrzej Smolik**

#### **Composer**

One of the most influential Polish composers and arrangers. A musician and multi-instrumentalist.

He was struck off the list of students at the Naval Academy when, instead of doing his internship, he went to a punk festival in Jarocin. He replaced his cargo management studies with music. He started out on keyboards in the Wilki band. He has since worked with groups such as Hey and Myslovitz, Maciej Cieślak and Maria Peszek. He has produced music albums by, among others, Kasia Nosowska, Robert Gawliński, Jan Borysewicz, Artur Rojek, Krzysztof Krawczyk. He releases his own music albums.

Winner of the Polityka magazine's "Passport" award, the Fryderyk awards - among others, the production award in 2006, for the best composer in 2003 and 2006 and for "Smolik / Kev Fox" for the best album of the year in the electronic and alternative category in 2016. Twice nominated for the MTV European Music Award and for Kreatura 2008 for his contribution to commercial music. Produced music for theatre, radio performances and several films. He worked with Olga Chajdas on "Nina"

## **About the Producers**

Apple Film Production is one of the most experienced production companies in the region. It has been run for twenty years by Dariusz Jabłoński, Izabela Wójcik and Violetta Kamińska and has produced over 60 productions, including 40 feature films, a number of documentaries and several tv series. In total, their productions have won over three hundred Polish and international awards.

Recent Apple productions include: "Imago" dir. Olga Chajdas (Proxima Karlovy Vary 2023), "Anxiety" dir. Slawomir Fabicki, "Rhinoceros" dir. Oleg Sentsov (Orrizzonti IFF Venice 2021), "Numbers" dir. Oleg Sentsov (Berlinale Special 2020), "Under Electric Clouds" dir. by Alexei German (Silver Bear Berlinale 2018) and "When the Trees Fall" dir. by Marysia Nikitiuk (Panorama Berlinale 2018).