Participant presents

A Toinen Katse and Ma.Ja.De. Film Production

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INVISIBLE DEMONS

A Film by Rahul Jain

Running Time: 70 minutes



OFFICIAL SELECTION: 2021 Cannes Film Festival – World Premiere

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LOGLINE

Rising filmmaker Rahul Jain (Machines) returns to Delhi and explores the dramatic consequences of India's growing economy through stunning visuals, capturing not only a city in crisis but magnifying our collective climate realities.

SYNOPSIS

In a sprawling mega city where the dangers of climate change are present not future, acclaimed filmmaker Rahul Jain shows a world on the brink. Told through striking images and eye-opening accounts from everyday citizens, Invisible Demons delivers a visceral and immersive journey through the stories of just a few of Delhi's 30 million inhabitants fighting to survive. Invisible Demons offers a deeply experiential and new perspective on its subject: the clear and present climate reality. Jain engages the senses by directly stimulating our desire to live in a world with equitable access to clean air and water. Is it possible to imagine this future in Delhi, in India, or anywhere in the modern world?

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Conceived while the director was still a student at the California Institute of the Arts, Rahul Jain's debut feature *Machines* screened at the Sundance Film Festival in 2017. The stunning documentary, which chronicles the grueling conditions workers endure inside a textile factory in Gujarat, captivated festival audiences around the world. New York-based art-house cinema distributor Kino Lorber released it in the United States that year.

Following the success of that first project, Jain returned to college to pursue a Master's degree in Aesthetics and Politics. It was during this time that he started to think about the visual representation of the Anthropocene—the current geological age marked by the negative influence of human activity on the planet. His thesis centered on the intersection between cinema and this relevant concept.

Through his studies on visual semiotics, Jain became fascinated with the relationship between images and their meaning.

"I wanted to explore how artists in the last hundred years of filmmaking have been able to communicate our species' relationship to the natural world, because the most drastic changes came about in the 20th century, which was also the century of cinema," explained Jain. "I wanted to investigate whether my theories about this could be made into a film."

Jain had been developing *Invisible Demons* for a long time. However, given the sheer number of films made about climate change and other environmental issues in recent years, his goal was to produce a project that went beyond the headlines.

Although his process considers complex academic theories, Jain's guiding principle was to communicate his ideas on the Anthropocene in direct terms that could resonate with people on a visceral level. Rather than making informational content the basis of his work, he'd strive for evocative filmmaking.

By the time he finished his education, he had lived in the U.S. for a decade. Jain chose to return to India to pursue a personal undertaking, which eventually became *Invisible Demons*. Initially, he thought returning home would reconnect him with his family and the land itself.

Soon, however, he became consumed with working on his sophomore effort day in and day out. Jain admits that he was terrified of going back to Delhi, where he grew up. Throughout his childhood, which he now recognizes was a privileged one, he didn't engage with his surroundings, whether natural or urban, and spent most of his time indoors. In a sense, he was a stranger to his own hometown.

It was only after his time in California, where there is great access to nature, that his relationship to it changed. Jain refers to this revelation as an "interpersonal cataclysmic" that forced

him to reconsider his aversion to the intensity of Delhi. As these feelings intensified, he decided to carve them into something more concrete.

As he considered this project, Delhi was repeatedly in the news as the world's most polluted city, revealing his hometown as the perfect container for his vision. Tackling climate change globally would have been too large a task to manage. While troubling, his hometown provided the canvas he needed to achieve his goals.

"I didn't know what the result of all these feelings would be or the type of emotional clay I would get to build this experience from. I collected everything I could from my childhood memories, recent memories, perceptions, ideas, and feelings about this place," he noted.

Once those droplets of thought began to take form, returning to Delhi felt inevitable. Through the creation of *Invisible Demons*, a new appreciation for his birthplace emerged. Despite feeling like an alien in his birthplace, this was a process of endearment for him. Still, there's no denying that reacclimating to Delhi was a physical challenge. The taxing heat and humidity took a toll on him.

For Jain, his friendship with Finnish producer Iikka Vehkalahti, who also produced *Machines*, was fundamental. He represented an ally with whom to discuss his emotions even before the mechanics of the film came to be. Even as Jain wavered between the direction of his writing, he could always talk about the hurt he felt for the precarious situation in Delhi.

"When Rahul came with the idea for *Invisible Demons*, he told me it would focus on two different elements: Delhi and his personal experience," said Vehkalahti. "He told me that when he came back to India from the United States, he couldn't see Delhi from the plane because of the pollution and wanted to do something about it." Vehkalahti explained.

Vehkalahti was deeply invested in *Invisible Demons* from the onset. His wife encouraged him to support the project because she felt it was crucial for it to reach people across the globe. He agreed. Together director and producer attempted to make a film that is purely cinematic; one that could reach the public at large in addition to festival audiences.

Though *Machines* concentrated on a single factory, it had an ambitious proposition to examine the dynamics of labor. That broad scope, connecting emotions to fact, was similarly applied to *Invisible Demons*. Of course, since the setting expanded from an enclosed space to a massive location, the level of complication did too. Jain was now telling a story set in a densely populated city across seasons, social classes, and distinct elements that affect each of these.

"It's a much more complex film, but at the same time it has the same ambitious motivation that *Machines* did: to look at the way we live, not only the pollution but what kind of choices we have made in the past that are affecting us now and how they will continue to affect us in the future," said Vehkalahti.

Logistically, shooting in Delhi came with its own set of obstacles. Working 12-hour days, Jain and his team would film in two or three different locations each day. Mobility in a city of 30 million

people and three and a half million cars was one of the most challenging aspects of the production. Half of the time they had allocated to shoot was spent in traffic.

Unlike other works with a similar subject matter, *Invisible Demons* doesn't include on-screen text with data on the pollution and heat waves in Delhi. One of the most significant discussions among the team was how to still include this element in an unconventional manner. In that pursuit, the character of the weather woman, Divya Wadhwa, was key. Being a real weather news anchor for NDTV (New Delhi Television), the pioneer of independent news broadcasting in India, her appearances were folded into the fabric of the film to provide relevant context.

Jain didn't want to make another film grounded on informational overload because for the average person numbers alone don't have real value. Therefore, his focus became the first-hand experiences of those working and living in Delhi. He refused to make scientists the loudest voices.

Over the course of production, Jain interviewed around 120 people, from scientists, to politicians, and those who work for non-profits. Most of them, he felt, were very well trained in their own jargon and in how to handle the discourse around the issues. Ultimately, the decision was made to steer away from this initial approach in order to instead give the platform to the people of Delhi.

For editor Yaël Bitton, working for a second time with Jain, in a world that is largely media saturated, there is a great difference between a film aiming to create political change by being issue-based and making a political art film using all the scope of cinema. "That's what we tried to do, to avoid being issue-based and transcend that and be above the issue in a humble way," she noted.

Jain doesn't work from a script or a set story because his interest is in non-linear storytelling, which can represent a narrative challenge for an editor.

"We were more interested in something very raw, and filled with interrogation, that everyday people could identify with, both in India and in the West, and which is complicated because the means of questioning oneself are not necessarily the same in India as in America or in France for that matter," explained Bitton. To address this, she and Jain carved out the most subtle and yet simple expression of these contradictions from his exchanges with them.

Bitton recalls a test screening of the film in Paris where someone in the audience told them, "We're looking at India with this film, but India is also looking back at us." For Jain and the production this response was validating and proved the project was in fact capable of creating a dialogue across languages and borders about a crisis that affects everyone on the planet.

Since *Invisible Demons* isn't a traditional story centered on a character fighting for something specific, the engagement with audiences unfolds differently. This is a film without a straightforward narrative where the director mines deeper meaning from his collection of images in order to reach people subconsciously. Jain's latest has the power to leave an indelible mark on the viewer.

Visually, Jain wanted to create images that were part of the everyday experience and accessible to all. There's no desire to manipulate or treat as an exposé, rather, the intent is to be honest with the physical images as they are.

The structure of the film flows with the seasons as we experience the pollution through the eyes of those most affected by it. In order not to overwhelm the viewer, Jain and Bitton selected material that would more succinctly render the devastation.

One concrete example of an image that immediately conveys the horror of consumerism and inequality is that of a landfill. But since Jain shot for hours on end during different seasons over two years, Bitton was able to look for choices that were less evident. Still, even as some of these tropes became part of *Invisible Demons*, the paramount principle was refraining from being exploitative or leaning into voyeurism.

"We try to work from around contradictions, and how we can manifest them on a micro level and a macro level. We wanted it to be visual, sort of heart-wrenching for the viewer—both local and global. But we also try to manifest human contradictions, which is how humans grapple with their own status vis-à-vis what they have created," Bitton pointed out.

Ultimately, *Invisible Demons* doesn't offer any solutions; that's not its purpose. It's an exposé of human struggles and contradictions that hopes to confront the audience viscerally. During the editing process they concentrated on visual turning points or guttural experiences that would manifest the feelings of beauty and disgust they wanted to provoke. They were fascinated by the allure in the grotesque.

Just as those symbols of manmade destruction translate everywhere in the world, Jain and his team also aimed to depict religious and cultural events that would communicate with the Indian audience: such as the burning of large statues to fend off evil. These sequences were meant to speak specifically to the Indian audience even if others don't understand the subtext.

The filmmakers were aware of the possibility of pushback, not only from the Indian government but also from the public at large, because Western media has always portrayed India through poverty and extreme religious behaviors. With affection and understanding for the city he grew up in, Jain approaches the film with nuance, pointing his camera not only at his city, but also at himself.

Born into a financially privileged family, Jain also addressed his reality as someone not directly affected by the conditions in Delhi. To make his story part of Invisible Demons, Jain and the producers decided to use voiceover narration.

His role in the narrative is crucial because he is familiar with the country and the culture. At the same time, however, he has an outsider's point of view coming back to Delhi after being away for a few years.

Part of this reckoning involved thinking about his family's part in India's industrial development. The educational opportunities he was afforded abroad were tied to this economic boom. Conscious of his class agency and his cultural identity between the U.S. and India, Jain looked at the by-product of the construct of wealth that's expanded over the last 20 years in India and other developing nations.

Invisible Demons addresses how people with greater financial means have tried to avoid dealing with climate change. If there's a heat wave they invest in air conditioning. If the water is polluted, they buy a filter. Eventually, however, the effects become inescapable. This has been proven with the recurrent flight cancellations and school closures given the toxicity in the air of Delhi.

Now that those with more power are unable to run away from the problem, perhaps the crisis might finally be taken seriously. "When something is made visible and people can't emotionally stand it anymore that's when change happens. You just can't ignore it. Even the rich cannot ignore it anymore," added Deckert.

"It's affecting everybody. Wherever you are on the globe, whatever status you have, it's affecting you. Exactly like the COVID-19 pandemic," noted Vehkalahti about the parallels between two current worldwide crises. The coronavirus outbreak has both shown our vulnerability as a species, but also the collective power we have when confronting a catastrophe of such magnitude. While Delhi is a clear, even extreme example of the consequences of our inaction, our world is hyper-connected.

For Jain, the main connection he sees between *Machines* and *Invisible Demons* is the anger that fueled them at first. The anger about the way the world works and trying to make sense of it from his position as a storyteller. He believes that both works are about exploitation. One is about exploiting fellow human beings and the other is about the exploitation of the land, water, and air. In both cases the exploitation is carried out in service of capitalism.

Jain's work is a natural extension of things he feels vehemently. Therefore, the impact of *Invisible Demons* is key for Jain. In that regard, a partner like Participant, which marriages artistic vision with impact campaigns, was a perfect match.

For the company's Chief Content Officer Diane Weyermann, who first came across Jain's *Machines* at Sundance, having *Invisible Demons* as a Participant production made perfect sense. "The movie tackles the issue of pollution and climate change in a visceral and experiential manner, which can hopefully reach people who may not respond to a more traditional approach on that subject," she noted.

Invisible Demons deals with three major areas that Participant has consistently focused on over the years: climate change, public health, and equity. The decision to jump on board this vision aligned with the company's mission. "It's definitely less about putting issue first, and more about having a human, artistic, creative experience that takes us on a journey. And by the end of that journey, hopefully we understand the world we live in a different way," said Weyermann.

She was moved by the director's exploration of Delhi via interactions with its people. The power of those first-hand accounts expresses the human plight effectively.

"We're all connected and issues such as the state of our planet, climate change, is affecting everybody. And whether the story is an Indian story or a U.S. story or an African's story, that's the beauty of filmmaking, and these connections that artists make, that we can relate to a story in a very personal way, even if it's in a place and circumstances that we've never experienced. It transcends that. I really believe that Rahul's film achieved that transcendence," she concluded.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Rahul Jain | Director, Writer

Rahul Jain earned a Master of the Arts in Aesthetics and Politics from the California Institute of the Arts. His final thesis of studies was titled *The Anthropocene in the Cinema*.

Jain's debut film as a director, *Machines*, shot in a textile factory in Gujarat, India, screened at over 160 international festivals. Over the course of its festival run *Machines* received 17 international prizes including Best Film, Zurich Film Festival; Next Generation Director Award, Yamagata International Film Festival; Best Cinematography, Sundance Film Festival; Best Film, Moving Academy of Motion images, Mumbai; International Jury Award, Thessaloniki Documentary Festival; Best Single International Documentary, Thessaloniki Documentary Festival.

Produced by Participant, *Invisible Demons*, shot in its entirety in Delhi, is Jain's sophomore effort.

Iikka Vehkalahti | Producer, Writer

Iikka Vehkalahti is the owner and Executive Producer of IV Films Ltd, Toinen katse Ltd and Rough Cut Service. Among his numerous credits, he has been directly involved in the creation and production of worldwide series such as *Steps for the Future*, *Why Democracy*, *Dare to Dream*, and *Generation Africa*.

Rough Cut Service provides online support to documentary filmmakers with challenging productions. RCS has worked already with more than 100 films from nearly 40 countries, among them winners at Sundance, IDFA, Berlinale, among other top-tier festivals.

Vehkalahti has been involved in or supported numerous internationally acclaimed documentaries including *Three Rooms of Melancholy, The Act of Killing, The Look Of Silence, Armadillo, Happiness, Don't Breath, Placebo, Chris The Swiss, Machines,* and *Winnie.*

He is also the commissioning editor for the Finnish Broadcasting Company, Yle and a visiting professor at Tampere University. In addition, he has lectured, led workshops, and offered master classes across Europe, Australia, Kenya, Russia, U.S., India, South Africa, DRC, Nepal, and Canada.

Heino Deckert | Producer

Heino Deckert is the founder of production company Ma.ja.de. Film produktions GmbH, which has produced more than 120 award-winning documentaries such as the 2010 Academy Award® nominated *Rabbit á la Berlin* by Bartek Konoka; *Song From the Forest* by Michael Obert, winner of Best Feature-Length Documentary at the 2013 International Amsterdam Film Festival (IDFA); *Human Flow* directed by Ai WeiWei and *Aquarela* directed by Victor Kossakovsky both shortlisted for the Academy Awards® in 2018 and 2019 respectively; and Feras Fayyad's Academy Award® nominated documentary *The Cave*.

The catalogue of his sales company Deckert Distribution includes Emmy® Award winners *Minors Shot Down*, *No Burqars Behind Bars*, *The 3 Rooms of Melancholia*, two-time Oscar®nominee *Honeyland*, and several documentaries by acclaimed Ukrainian director Sergei Loznitsa.

Deckert is part of the educational team of Eurodoc, a European education program for producers supported by the European Union's MEDIA Program. He is also a co-owner of Pluto Films, a sales company for fiction films and has shares in Blinder Film in Cologne.

Jeff Skoll | Executive Producer

Jeff Skoll is an entrepreneur devoted to creating a sustainable world of peace and prosperity.

Inspired by the belief that a story well told can change the world, Jeff founded Participant in 2004. Participant is the world's leading entertainment company focused on advocacy and social impact. Participant has produced more than 100 full-length narrative and documentary films.

On the narrative side these include *Spotlight, Contagion, A Fantastic Woman, Lincoln, The Help*, and *Good Night and Good Luck*. Documentary films include *The Look of Silence, The Cove, Food Inc., He Named Me Malala, CITIZENFOUR, Waiting for "Superman"* and *An Inconvenient Truth*. These films collectively have garnered 73 Academy Award® nominations and 18 wins, including Best Picture for *Spotlight* and *Green Book* and Best Foreign Language Film for *Roma* and *A Fantastic Woman*.

In addition to Participant, Jeff's innovative portfolio of philanthropic and commercial enterprises includes the Skoll Foundation and Capricorn Investment Group – all coordinated under the Jeff Skoll Group umbrella.

Diane Weyermann | Executive Producer

Diane Weyermann is Chief Content Officer at Participant. In her role, she is responsible for the company's documentary feature film and TV slate. Participant's recent documentary projects include Oscar® winner American Factory, City So Real, John Lewis: Good Trouble, Slay the Dragon, Watson, Aquarela, Foster, America to Me, The Price of Free, Far from the Tree, Human Flow, An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth To Power, The Music of Strangers: Yo Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, Zero Days, Collective, and Sing Me a Song.

Previous releases include Academy Award® winning films, *CITIZENFOUR* and *An Inconvenient Truth*, Oscar®-nominated *RBG*, Academy Award nominated *The Look of Silence*, Academy Award® nominated and Emmy® winning *Food, Inc.*, and Emmy® nominated *The Great Invisible*.

Prior to joining Participant in 2005, Weyermann was the director of the Sundance Institute's Documentary Film Program. During her tenure at Sundance, she was responsible for the Sundance Documentary Fund and launched two annual documentary film labs, focusing on the creative process.

Before her time at Sundance, Weyermann was the director of the Open Society Institute New York's Arts and Culture Program where she launched the Soros Documentary Fund (which later became the Sundance Documentary Fund).

Frank Lehmann | Executive Producer

Frank Lehmann is a business consultant and executive producer. With his vast knowledge in banking and extensive experience in film finance, he provides executive producing services and business administration coaching with his company Alcina Media GmbH. He has served as financial council on more than 20 international co-productions and executive produced over 10 films. Recent award-winning documentaries include *Aquarela* and *The Cave*, full-length feature films *The Last Station, Black Death, Big Game* and series *Heirs of the Night* and *Carlos*. In addition to his provided services, he tutors young film industry talent in entrepreneurial ability to encounter the increasing film production challenges.

Yaël Bitton | Editor, Writer

Yaël Bitton is a documentary film editor, writer, story consultant, and director. She has been making films for over 25 years and pursues collaborations with filmmakers around the world.

She won the Sima editing award for *Radio Silence* by Juliana Fanjul in 2020, and the Best editing at Israel Documentary Forum for *Advocate* by Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaiche in 2019.

In addition to her work as an editor, Yaël works as a mentor, editing and story consultant independently, as well as for Rough Cut Service, Media Talents Lab, Dok Incubator, Doc Montevideo, Circle, Visions du Réel, Ex Oriente, Doc Aviv, and Doc Point.

She has been working as an editing tutor at the *HEAD/Cinéma du Réel* in Geneva since 2008.

Yaël is a member of *The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*® in the documentary branch.

Saumyananda "Somo" Sahi | Director of Photography

Born in Bangalore, Karnataka, in 1986, Saumyananda Sahi is a writer, director and cinematographer.

Over the last ten years Saumyananda has worked on both documentaries and fiction features with acclaimed directors including Anne Aghion, Thomas F. Lennon, Kamal Swaroop, Gitanjali Rao, Arun Karthick, Anamika Huksar and Sunanda Bhat. His work has been screened to critical acclaim at film festivals around the world, including at Sundance, Rotterdam, Locarno, Hot Docs Toronto, and IDFA.

While the bulk of his work in the film industry has been in the role of cinematographer, Saumyananda has directed two documentaries, and has been credited as an editor as well as art director. He also writes on cinema and teaches filmmaking.

Saumyananda graduated from St. Stephens College, Delhi, with a distinction in Philosophy, and studied Film Cinematography in the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune. He founded Skreen Films with his wife, Tanushree Das Sahi. He is currently based in Goa, India.

Tuomo Hutri | Director of Photography

Tuomo Hutri, born in Finland in 1973, has worked as cinematographer with several notable Nordic directors in both fiction films and documentaries, including *The Fencer* by Klaus Härö, *Little Wing* by Selma Vilhunen, *The Mine* by Aleksi Salmenperä, *Santa* by Marius Ivaskevicius, *I Won't Come Back* by Ivar Raag, *Naked Harbour* by Aku Louhimies, *The Visitor* by J-P Valkeapää, *Little Yellow Boots* by John Webster, and *Red Ring* by Joonas Bärghell. His work has been awarded at multiple festivals around the globe and he'd been regularly nominated for the Finnish Jussi Award.

Kimmo Pohjonen | Composer

Finnish self-described "accordion adventurist" Kimmo Pohjonen has revolutionized accordion music, sound and performance with an international career going back to the mid-1990s. Pohjonen has developed his own custom-made digital instrument that includes effects, MIDI, and other electronics. His recordings feature dynamic compositions with bold, new, and awe-inspiring accordion sounds; while his performances feature a combination of surround sound and a light show to make a unique and captivating experience.

Pohjonen performs worldwide as solo artist and in many ensembles and projects such as Kimmo Pohjonen Skin trio with Inka Pohjonen and Saana Pohjonen, Uniko with Kronos Quartet. In 2016 Kimmo Pohjonen was awarded the State Prize for Multidisciplinary Arts from the Finnish

government for outstanding achievement of high-quality art, experimentation, and diverse projects in multiple artforms.

Susmit "Bob" Nath | Sound Recorder and Designer

Born in the tiny little town of Silchar in the picturesque Barak Valley of southern Assam, Susmit graduated from Assam University with Statistics (Hons) and then moved to Delhi where he worked for a couple of years (in IBM) and subsequently moved to Pune to pursue Diploma in Sound Recording and Engineering from Film and Television Institute of India. Over the last few years he has worked in quite a few independent and commercial projects in a continuous pursuance to achieve "Zen" in the art of Sound Design and Mixing.

He was sound recordist and designer of the previous film of Rahul Jain, "Machines". He has been sound designer among others in the films "Raghu Rai" by Avani Rai, "Cecilie" by Pankaj Johar and "Bulbul Can sing" by Rima Das.

About Participant

Founded by Chairman Jeff Skoll and under the leadership of CEO David Linde, Participant (www.participant.com)combines the power of a good story well told with real world impact and awareness around today's most vital issues. Through its worldwide network of traditional and digital distribution, aligned with partnerships with key non-profit and NGO organizations, Participant speaks directly to the rise of today's "conscious consumer," representing the well over 2 billion consumers compelled to make meaningful content a priority focus. As an industry content leader, Participant annually produces up to six narrative feature films, six documentary films, three episodic television series, and more than 20 hours of digital short form programming. Participant's more than 100 films have collectively earned 82 Academy Award® nominations and 21 wins, including Best Picture for Spotlight and Green Book; Best Documentary Feature for An Inconvenient Truth, The Cove, CITIZENFOUR and American Factory; and Best Foreign Language Film for Roma and A Fantastic Woman. Follow Participant on Twitter (@Participant) and on Facebook and Instagram.

Director Rahul Jain

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Jeff Skoll

Executive Producer Frank Lehmann

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Very Special Thanks To Divya Wadhwa

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Jason Lester

Drone Technician Karan Parekh

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Assistant Editors Sakshi Gulati

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Vocal Inka Pohjonen

Additional Music "Delhi 14" By Kimmo Pohjonen And Tuomas Norvio

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