

## Press report *Unanimal*

CPH:DOX 2025

- [Press quotes here](#)
- [Press overview here](#)
- [Articles here](#)

Last updated: 7 April 2025

**PRESS QUOTES**

“competent, beautiful”

**In Review Online**

“Ironic, amusing and gently insightful.”

**Business Doc Europe**

“Offers invaluable insights into the human condition, as filtered through the lens of other beings that reveal much more about our nature than we would anticipate”

"Through crafting an elegant, intricately woven documentary, the directors make some profoundly bold assertions about human nature and our relationship with other beings, creating a wildly ambitious film that is deeply insightful on both the strange and the familiar.”

“Consistently compelling and quite insightful”

“The creative visual approach, where the animals are shot in a way that implies they are observing us just as much as we do them, creates a fascinating dynamic that ultimately bolsters the central themes and makes the underlying conversations so much more rigorous and engaging.”

**International Cinephile Society**

## PRESS OVERVIEW

- 25 February 2025 **The Hollywood Reporter**  
Film trailer release  
[Isabella Rossellini Narrates 'Unanimal' on Relationship Between "Humans and Other Animals" \(Exclusive Trailer\)](#)
- 22 March 2025 **International Cinephile Society**  
Positive review  
[CPH:DOX 2025 review: Unanimal \(Tuva Björk & Sally Jacobson\)](#)
- 25 March 2025 **Business Doc Europe**  
Positive review  
[CPH:DOX NEXT:WAVE review: Unanimal by Sally Jacobson, Tuva Bjork](#)
- 2 April 2025 **In Review Online**  
Mixed review  
[The Case of Nonhuman Cinema: Animal Documentaries at CPH:DOX '25](#)

ARTICLES

25 February 2025 **The Hollywood Reporter**

Film trailer release

[Isabella Rossellini Narrates 'Unanimal' on Relationship Between "Humans and Other Animals" \(Exclusive Trailer\)](#)

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying an article from The Hollywood Reporter. The article title is "Isabella Rossellini Narrates 'Unanimal' on Relationship Between 'Humans and Other Animals' (Exclusive Trailer)". The byline is "BY GEORGE SZALAI" and the date is "FEBRUARY 25, 2025 12:30AM". The article features a large image of a group of people in a dark, tunnel-like setting, possibly a subway station, with a person's legs visible in the air above them. The article text includes a quote from Isabella Rossellini: "Imagine that you are a jellyfish," says the voice of Oscar nominee Isabella Rossellini at the start of a trailer for Unanimal, a new documentary by directors Tuva Björk and Sally Jacobson, which The Hollywood Reporter can exclusively reveal. In the movie, Rossellini's voice leads viewers through "a self-reflecting journey into the complex relationship between humans and other animals." The article also mentions that the film will world premiere in the Next:Wave Competition lineup of CPH:DOX, the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival. To the right of the article is a LinkedIn advertisement with the text "Your LinkedIn target audience is within easy reach" and a "Learn more" button. Below the advertisement is a "SHOPPING WITH THR" section with two items: "Surprise: Amazon's Big Spring Sale Includes Designer Deals on These Finds from Chanel, Gucci, Dior, Goyard, Hermès and More" and "The Best Hollywood Facialist-Approved LED Light Therapy Face Masks and Beauty Devices on Sale at Amazon".

## ARTICLES

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[Isabella Rossellini Narrates 'Unanimal' on Relationship Between "Humans and Other Animals" \(Exclusive Trailer\)](#)

One key question explored is what we can learn about ourselves “by looking at other animals.” Or: “What can we learn about ourselves by looking at the line that separates us from the rest of the living?” as narrator **Rossellini** puts it in the film

“To stimulate an active, reflective reading, we have worked together with famous Swedish writer Zara Kjellner and, with input from narrator **Isabella Rossellini**, added a series of philosophical, historical anecdotes between the chapters,” the filmmakers said. “Since Isabella boarded the project, she has been an important co-creator of the script with a unique ability to make complex topics available for a broader audience and her humor and playfulness have influenced the writing.”



'Unanimal' COURTESY OF STORY AB

Jacobson was born in Stockholm, Sweden, while Björk was raised in Helsinki, Finland. “We are interested in the relationship between physical reality and visual culture,” the directors explain in their directors’ statement about the film. “How can images challenge the dominant chrono-normative human-animal relationship?”

They also highlight: “Rather than presenting moral statements on relations between human and other animals, we want to allow the viewer to meditate on the subject on their own premises. It is impossible to see from the perspective of the nonhuman, but we can position the camera inside the cages at the zoo, behind the display glass in the pet shop, and in front of the crowd at the racecourse in order to study the human observing the nonhuman.”

## ARTICLES

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Film trailer release

[Isabella Rossellini Narrates 'Unanimal' on Relationship Between "Humans and Other Animals" \(Exclusive Trailer\).](#)

They say the time is ripe. "With the climate crisis, we are now witnessing a tipping point, where the separation we have made for ourselves has become a limitation, alienating us from the ecosystem we are inseparable from and depended on," Björk and Jacobson highlight. Instead of separating, it's time to explore and celebrate the connections between us and other animals, the possibilities for adaptation, learning, and living together."

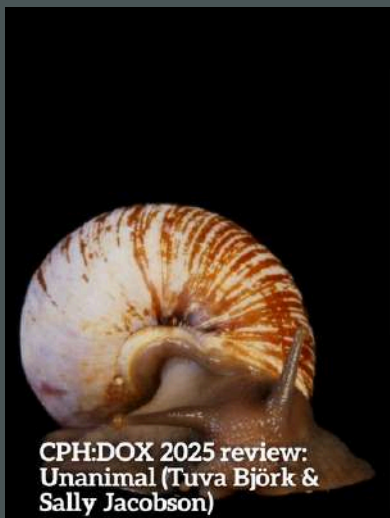
Written by the directors and Zara Kjellner, *Unanimal* was produced by Sweden's Story AB in co-production with Cinephage. Tobias Janson and Melissa Lindgren served as producers for Story AB, in co-production with Victor Ede of France's Cinephage and LCTV , and in partnership with Image Fantôme Films. Sales are handled by Open Kitchen Films.

Watch the trailer for *Unanimal* below.



ARTICLES

22 March 2025 International Cinephile Society  
 Positive review  
[CPH:DOX 2025 review: Unanimal \(Tuva Björk & Sally Jacobson\)](#)



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*"Unanimal offers invaluable insights into the human condition, as filtered through the lens of other beings that reveal much more about our nature than we would anticipate."*



"Animals – they're just like us!" – a phrase that commonly accompanies videos and stories showing animals demonstrating behavior similar to our own, mostly trivial (and sometimes borderline exploitative) moments designed to amuse and entertain. Yet, there is something to be said about efforts to draw correlations between our behavior and that of creatures who exist in the natural world. A concept that Tuva Björk and Sally Jacobson explore beautifully in *Unanimal*, in which they set out to accomplish an ambitious task: highlight and examine the relationship between humans and animals, determining whether there is any common ground between them. Whether for survival, pleasure or merely companionship, we have had a fascinating relationship with animals, and this documentary tries to outline the various ways in which we not only forge these connections, but also create a symbiotic relationship that is far more complex than we would imagine. Through crafting an elegant, intricately woven documentary, the directors make some profoundly bold assertions about human nature and our relationship with other beings, creating a wildly ambitious film that is deeply insightful on both the strange and the familiar.

For about as long as we have been sentient, we have been fascinated by the correlations that exist between species, which includes instances where other creatures demonstrate traits or behaviors that are oddly similar to our own. Whether this spurred research into biology and animal behavior (fields that are continuously becoming more curious about the connections between the natural kingdoms and our own), or was simply a source of entertainment, there is something to be said about these observations. *Unanimal* has a slightly different approach, albeit one that still feels analogous to the works that have come before, which is to function as an exploration of human nature through observing certain aspects of animal behavior that imply that there are deeper connections than just the quirky, superficial moments usually associated with these ideas. Utilizing a hypnotic and ethereal approach, Björk and Jacobson offer us an intriguing addition to the 'us and them' concept, proving that species are not as different as we would expect, and instead have many similarities rooted in a past that theorists are still attempting to understand. The creative visual approach, where the animals are shot in a way that implies they are observing us just as much as we do them, creates a fascinating dynamic that ultimately bolsters the central themes and makes the underlying conversations so much more rigorous and engaging.

To explore the ambitious ideas that inspired them, the directors' technique is effortlessly simple – they visit establishments that house animals in some way, whether zoos, farms, museums or simply domestic spaces. The story unfolds anywhere in which humans and animals can share the same space, observing one another (even if only in a single direction, such as at museums that house now-extinct species) and where they can interact in some cases. The film is mainly constructed as a series of vignettes, combining material recorded by the directors as well as archival footage, showing our long and storied relationships with the animal kingdom. The connective tissue between these scenes is Isabella Rossellini, whose own history as a lover of the natural world and observer of the animal kingdom made her a terrific candidate to narrate this film, offering us brief but meaningful observations that do not envelop the images we are seeing, but rather provide insights to help the viewer understand the context that guided the filmmakers in creating this film. We're witness to several very intimate moments in the lives of these animals, the camera being used as a tool for observation more than guiding us to certain points, while choosing a loose, free-wheeling structure offers the directors a sense of added flexibility rather than binding them to a particular method that would not have yielded such incredible results.

Towards the end of the film, Rossellini relays a story about philosopher Jacques Derrida, who famously conducted a thought experiment (which he titled *The Animal That Therefore I Am*) in which he stood sans clothing in front of his cat – two creatures in their barest and most natural state, yet he claimed that only one of them felt any shame in being uncovered, which he found to be one of the defining differences between humans and animals. This is described as his voyage to "the outer contour of humanity", and is a concept on which much of this fascinating film is constructed. We are invited to accompany the filmmakers as they set out to craft this loose-form, experimental journey into the past, whereby they ask questions that are designed to fundamentally explore our humanity, pondering the divisions between us and animals, in the hopes of understanding the roots of such boundaries and whether they are necessary or even serve any logical purpose other than to perpetuate a false sense of superiority over other species. The film moves at a steady pace and makes the most out of its oddly paltry duration (running just over an hour), becoming a fascinating diversion into the natural world and how our view of it has changed over the years. Consistently compelling and quite insightful, *Unanimal* offers invaluable insights into the human condition, as filtered through the lens of other beings that reveal much more about our nature than we would anticipate.



This entry was posted in 2025 - CPH:DOX, CPH:DOX, Reviews and tagged CPH:DOX, isabella rossellini, Sally Jacobson, Tuva Björk, Unanimal, Bookmark the permalink.

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ARTICLES

25 March 2025

**Business Doc Europe**

Positive review

[CPH:DOX NEXT:WAVE review: Unanimal by Sally Jacobson, Tuva Bjork](#)

Home > CPH:DOX 2025 > CPH:DOX NEXT:WAVE review: Unanimal by Sally Jacobson, Tuva Bjork

CPH:DOX 2025 REVIEWS

## CPH:DOX NEXT:WAVE review: Unanimal by Sally Jacobson, Tuva Bjork

By Mark Adams - 25 March 2025



*Unanimal by Sally Jacobson, Tuva Bjork*

An engagingly oddball and gently philosophical examination into the relationship between humans and animals, Sally Jacobson and Tuva Bjork's breezy, thoughtful and amusing *Unanimal* muses on how we have looked at animals over the years. Ironic, amusing and gently insightful, *Unanimal* offers an alternate way to look at how we share the planet.

The addition of actress and filmmaker Isabella Rossellini as narrator (she offers punchy insights now-and then, rather than dominating the film) helps reinforce the film's more quirky qualities as it veers through the challenging and often absurd relationship between humans and animals.

The film skips across the world as it details animals and their interactions with mankind, sometimes dwelling on the uncomfortable (the skinning of a turkey is not an easy watch) as well as the amusing (from pandas to swimming polar bears), and while never offering firm conclusions or withering commentary it ultimately suggests that we should stop looking at animals, and let them look at us.

A series of vignettes set the tone. A cat gives birth to a bunch of kittens; an elderly couple play with their dog; a man explains the resilience of his cockroach; a woman bonds with her menagerie in her sitting room, which includes dogs, cats, two parrots (named Jackie and Jakob) and a small horse; and a dog named Yoda (with a camera on his collar) that walks through a city with his chatty owner.



### ARTICLES

25 March 2025 **Business Doc Europe**

Positive review

[CPH:DOX NEXT:WAVE review: Unanimal by Sally Jacobson, Tuva Bjork](#)

The film then pivots to black-and-white archival archive footage of vast herds of elephants on the plains and of hunters heading into the bush to kill them, before changing tack again with footage of a large cargo plane landing at a Finnish airport as pandas Lumi and Pyry arrive from China and are delivered to Ähtäri Zoo, Finland's oldest natural wildlife park.

A group of young French women in wetsuits who work with dolphins at a water show muse that "animals are true, they are sincere" before the film cuts to a dog show; sheep being judged; horses being sold for thousands of euros and then being loaded onto large cargo airplanes (where they exercise and are well looked after) to take part in buggy racing events around the world.

A police dog is wrangled by its handler; dogs chase rats in garbage; rats roam through a maze, and a pig is inseminated before the film reverts back to panting domestic dogs. In the narration Isabella Rossellini tells the story of a hospice in Rhode Island where a cat named Oscar jumped up and lay down by a patient a few hours before that person died. The cat did the same thing with 25 more patients before patient deaths, and as a response staff began contacting families as soon as their ill relatives start to receive special attention from the cat.

To an extent *Unanimal* might be perceived as slight and certainly it could easily have been expanded and driven by a narrative arc, but the film is ironic, amusing and gently insightful. What's more, it aims to deliver its message in creative fashion as it muses on how humans have developed into the dominant 'animal,' leading to increasingly complex relationships with the myriad birds, beasts and insects we share the planet with.

Sweden-France, 2025, 72mins

Dirs/cinematography: Sally Jacobson, Tuva Bjork

Production: Story, Cinephage

International sales: Open Kitchen Films

Producers: Victor Ede, Tobias Janson, Melissa Lindgren

Scr: Sally Jacobson, Tuva Bjork, Zara Kjellner

Editor: Neil Wigardt

Music: Marek Hunhap

With: (narrator) Isabella Rossellini

ARTICLES

2 April 2025

In Review Online

Mixed review

[The Case of Nonhuman Cinema: Animal Documentaries at CPH:DOX '25](#)

The screenshot shows the website 'In Review Online' with a navigation bar containing 'NEW RELEASES', 'FESTIVAL COVERAGE', 'KICKING THE CANON', 'FEATURE ARTICLES', and 'MUSIC ARCHIVES'. The main article is titled 'The Case of Nonhuman Cinema: Animal Documentaries at CPH:DOX '25' by Savina Petkova, dated April 2, 2025. The article features a large image of a person riding a horse on a beach. Below the image is a 'FEBRUARY RELEASES' sidebar with a list of film reviews including 'The Monkey', 'Broken Rage', 'The Klezmer Project', 'SLY LIVES!', 'Rats!', 'Timestalker', 'Captain America: Brave N...', 'The Gorge', 'Bridget Jones: Mad About...', and 'Jazzy'. The article text discusses the relationship between animal documentaries and capitalism, citing John Berger's 'Why Look at Animals?' and mentioning the inclusion of Disney animations and TikTok content.

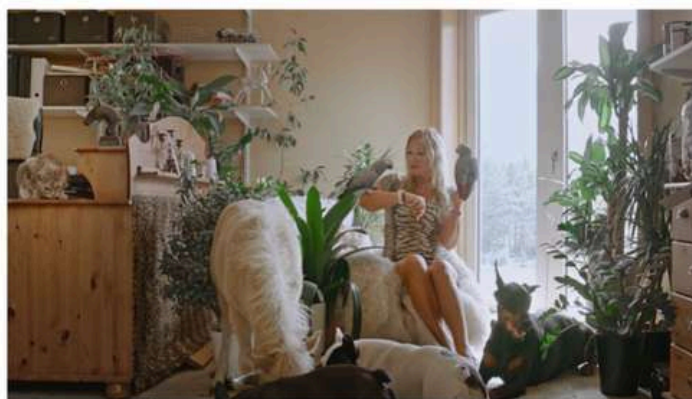
ARTICLES

2 April 2025

In Review Online

Mixed review

The Case of Nonhuman Cinema: Animal Documentaries at CPH:DOX '25



Credit: CPH:DOX

If there was one documentary that promised a knowledgeable, comprehensive treatment of the human-animal divide, it was the Swedish-French co-production *Unanimal*. Narrated by actor and filmmaker-biologist Isabella Rossellini (whose *Green Porno* you should most definitely see), *Unanimal* begins by directly addressing the viewer with an ask to try and leave their anthropocentric bias behind going in. What's phrased like a meditation of sorts is the filmmakers (Sally Jacobson and Tuva Björk) taking issue with the human-based hierarchy in the natural world. Since consciousness and rationality are considered superior in the Western philosophical tradition, animals have fallen under a sub-species category; in any case, way less than humans are. However, Jacobson and Björk take a rather encyclopedic approach to relaying scholarly truths from the fields mentioned above, mixing philosophy with long-take observations of zoos, beauty pageants, pets, and their humans. Still, it's a much better way to engage with the material than to be didactic and offer one single interpretation of the imbalanced human-animal relationship. But as a whole, *Unanimal* will not offer compelling new findings for audience members who are already familiar with the research and seminal texts on the matter (Jacques Derrida, Peter Singer, Donna Haraway, etc.). It's safe to assume that the majority of viewers are not, and for them, it will be compelling, nevertheless.

But for the clued-in, *Unanimal* won't satisfy those who want to see a rather novel, medium-specific way of engaging with animals by way of dismantling the human-animal dichotomy. Wide shots, occasional close-ups, long takes, and a meditative pace are part and parcel of how animal documentaries look today: we have festival favorites dating back decades now, but to mention a few — *Bestiaire*, *Stray*, or even *Our Daily Bread* — yet the camera's distance and the time passing, when left unreflected upon, can potentially make out of the living animals a filmic taxidermy, even with the best intentions in place. It's a similar conundrum I have been forced to acknowledge as a scholar and critic when writing about animals on screen and to constantly interrogate the way my words see them. What becomes of the solid philosophical underpinnings of a film, if its cinematic form does not engage with them critically enough to allow for its own transformations?

Certainly, the competent, beautiful *Unanimal* does not deserve such a harsh verdict. Perhaps this dead end, too, is a result of the proliferation of animal images, videos, and films — be it real or CGI. Slow cinema was first conceptualized as a form of resistance and an attempt to savor something precious for the medium that might soon be lost: naturally, "slow" and "arthouse" animal documentaries became a way to push against the "mainstream" wildlife documentaries, but now, the resistance has ossified into a new norm. Not surprising to say the least, since festival filmmaking begets more of the same films that get awarded and rewarded year after year. That said, I personally felt like *How Deep Is Your Love?* went further in dismantling the human-animal relation by asking the biologists what would they say if they could "meet" a certain deep sea animal; them recounting their animal-infused dreams on the research vessel — the positionality of a human filmmaker using a mechanical tool to understand better what hangs in the balance: a relationship.

While all animal documentaries tackle the question of speciesism — the assumption of human superiority leading to the exploitation of animals — in one way or another, both these films directly mention the father of animal taxonomy, Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus. Linnaeus lived in 18th century Sweden and originated the bipartite system of naming organisms (e.g. *Homo sapiens*). Of course, the man himself is not a subject for any of those documentaries, but the act of naming a species has since been a formal recognition of its existence. "Only after an animal has a name can its existence be accounted for," Mortimer aptly remarks, and her inquisitive tone holds no grudge: for biologists of the deep sea, there is always so much more to discover and so many species are still unknown (as it may take more than a dozen years for an official name to be approved).