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Militantropos Review: Adopting a War Persona

 LAST UPDATE: MAY 21, 2025



***Militantropos* is a fascinating documentary tracking the war in Ukraine and its impact as the war becomes a part of the nation.**

Directors: Alina Gorlova, Simon Mozgovyi & Yelizaveta Smit

Genre: Documentary

Run Time: 111'

Cannes Premiere: May 21-22, 2025 (Quinzaine des Cinéastes)

Release Date: TBA

Where to watch: Théâtre Croisette, Le Raimu

There is a deeper meaning behind the title of the new documentary *Militantropos*, which has just premiered at Cannes' Directors' Fortnight. It's a portmanteau that combines the Latin word for soldier ('milit') and the Greek word for human ('anthropos'). And as explained in the film's first moments, it refers to **"a persona adopted by humans entering a state of war."** And it is this neologism that represents the lofty ambitions of the writers-editors-directors, Yelizaveta Smith, Alina Gorlova (who are both part of the TABOR collective) and Simon Mozgovyi.

As TABOR claims, *Militantropos* is **the first in a planned triptych** exploring Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which began in 2022 and has become increasingly prolonged and destructive. Starting on the first day of the invasion (and progressing through until August 2024), *Militantropos* looks at the unfurling aftermath of the war through the **Ukrainian people and their individual and collective experiences**. Some flee the violence, boarding evacuation trains out of the country. Others choose to stay and fight. Others try to live their everyday lives against the backdrop of this conflict. But for all of them, the war has become a part of them.

There has been no shortage of recent films about the war in Ukraine, from Sergei Loznitsa (<https://loudandclearreviews.com/two-prosecutors-film-review/>)s *The Invasion* to the work done by Mstyslav Chernov (both *2000 Meters to Andriivka* and the Oscar-winning *20 Days in Mariupol*). Smith, Gorlova and Mozgovyi's unique angle here (devised by co-writer Maksym Nakonechnyi) is anthropological, as they **use the war to probe the human condition in times of conflict**. In particular, how war changes a country and its thinking, as it becomes a whole whilst being torn apart. All that is examined in a stark and thoughtful documentary full of quietly powerful moments.

Militantropos Teaser (*Mischief Films*)

Some of these moments come from images we've grown accustomed to in recent years, caught from a ground-level, eyewitness perspective. In early scenes, we see evacuations, new soldiers being taught how to use rifles and rubble being cleared away following missile strikes. Rubble becomes a major visual motif here. Whether in the city or strewn on the sides of village roads, it is a reminder of **the physical and human loss that Ukraine has suffered**. And they combine to give us a sense of the instantaneous change and transformation forced upon the country. They have had to adopt this persona of war.

And then, things change somewhat. The city squares become full of people again. We see a sunny park filled with people and noise. Perhaps a sense of normality has returned. However, at the same time, barbed wire barricades and abandoned military vehicles are dotted around to suspend that normalcy, or at least put it into some context. **Not one corner of the film is left untouched by this war** (in another scene, a farmer is working around an unexploded missile in his field). And as time passes, war (and this war in particular) becomes the new normal, "the one and only option to exist" (as one of the philosophical intertitles describes). Although, as later scenes prove, there is still a feeling of unimaginable loss and sorrow.

One of *Militantropos*' biggest achievements is how it builds this comprehensive human picture whilst **remaining visually gripping throughout**. The film's team of DPs – Khrystyna Lizogub, Denys Melnyk and Vyacheslav Tsvetkov – allow us to take in these tableaux of everyday life, sometimes opting for wide shots. There are arty nighttime shots that invert black and white. The trio even showcase the agricultural and natural sides of Ukraine, from wheat and bees to burnt-out trees.

That extends to the shots of weather that acquire a metaphorical edge.

After all, the first images we see are dark clouds merging into plumes of smoke from a fire. With the reminder that the film begins on the first day of the war, it takes on a foreboding meaning. Then there are numerous landscape shots of the country under thick, ambiguous fog that obscure the horizon, as if to suggest the uncertainty of this war will take the nation (and what will happen afterwards).

A still from *Militantropos* (*Tabor Productions & Mischief Films / Cannes Film Festival*)

Militantropos is **perhaps a bit too long in places**. And as much time as we spend up close amongst the soldiers fighting this war, those scenes are never as interesting as the ones following the world they are trying to defend. If anything though, that proves Smith, Gorlova and Mozgoyvi have succeeded in their **wholly observational mission**. This is a film that captures how the war has transformed and fractured Ukrainian lives and society, and how a persona of war has been adopted out of necessity.

Yet it also highlights soft moments of humanity, togetherness and solidarity. Where there are shots of destroyed villages and battles, there are also signs of the nation continuing some of its traditions or children playing and eating outside. It makes *Militantropos* **a demonstration of both devastation and resilience**, and a fascinating watch overall.

MILITANTROPOS: MOVIE PLOT & RECAP

SYNOPSIS:

The film chronicles the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as citizens try to live their everyday lives and the war becomes a part of them.

PROS:

- A fascinating watch that tracks the war in Ukraine as the country undergoes a sudden transformation.
- Smith, Gorlova and Mozgovyi have found a fresh way to portray a conflict that has been well-documented, and back it up with quietly powerful tableaux of everyday life.
- Remains visually gripping throughout thanks to its team of DPs.

CONS:

- It's perhaps a bit too long in places.
- Whilst the soldier scenes are good, they aren't as interesting as the ones that follow the wider world around them.

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Militantropos premiered at the Cannes Film Festival (<https://loudandclearreviews.com/2025-cannes-festival-movies-watch/>) on **May 21, 2025**, in the Quinzaine des Cinéastes. The film will be screened again on May 21-22 at the Théâtre Croisette and Le Raimu.

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