

# AI Dominated Every Conversation at the 5th Zinemaldia & Technology Startup Challenge

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Lithuanian sound design platform Sonic Alchemist has won the European competition at this year's San Sebastián's Zinemaldia & Technology Startup Challenge. Spanish voice dubbing software Dubme won the strand's domestic competition. Both projects secured purses of €10,000 (\$11,168).

A special mention entrepreneur prize of €3,000 (\$3,350) was awarded to Danish company Kaspar K1, an editing program that allows filmmakers to search through thousands of hours of footage using text prompts.

In addition to their cash prizes, this year's winners are also conditionally eligible for free access to an incubation space during the first year following their visit at one of the Business Innovation Centers (BIC) belonging to the Basque Technology Park Network. They are also now qualified for possible funding of up to €500,000 (\$559,000) to develop their project from subsidies managed by the Basque BIC Network and articulated by the Basque Government Department of Economic Development, Sustainability and Environment through the SPRI and the Provincial Councils.

In 2019, the San Sebastián Film Festival launched its Zinemaldia & Technology Startup Challenge, and the first winner was an AI-based company, LargoAI. In the five years since, little



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seems to have changed except that AI has gone from a buzzy bit of tech to the most talked-about force in the audiovisual industry. Things are no different in San Sebastián, where every Zinemaldia & Tech pitch, roundtable and watercooler discussion seemed to center on artificial intelligence.

With its ubiquitous rise, AI has become a bogeyman for many working in the industry. Nobody at Thursday's presentations pretended otherwise, and many of the day's pitches included assurances that their software was developed within an ethical and legal framework. When it wasn't address-

ed during a pitch, the first question from the event's panels of judges was often about the legality of the product being promoted.

Another trend common in many of the day's discussions was the rise of independent content creators as a commercial force in the screen industries. Nearly half of the day's pitches were designed not only for large media companies but included B2C business plans for solo digital-first content creators such as YouTubers, influencers and independent animators.

This year's European winner, Sonic Alchemist, uses computer vision to syn-

chronize and adapt sound effects for film, creating editable multitrack sketches. Kaspar K1 works like a search engine that scans through an editor's library of footage for specific shots and will eventually allow for AI-generated rough cuts using the original footage.

Other European pitches came from Filmanize, a U.K.-based company developing a platform that allows filmmakers to streamline the movie-making process by semi-automating processes from pre-production, script analysis, and call sheet creation. Phont is a German-developed software that

evolves the long-unchanged art of subtitle display by using AI to jazz up on-screen text, similar to how comic book fonts are used to convey emotion on the page. Thol is a sound design suite for content creators and companies that scans video footage and creates sound effects to match on-screen action.

Spanish winner Dubme was one of the day's most professional pitches, delivered by company executive Elias Moreno, a former 10-year YouTube executive for Southern Europe. Dubme's ambitious goal is to "eliminate language barriers in professional audiovisual content using artificial intelligence and human professionals" by streamlining and drastically lowering the cost of dubbing.

Fellow Spanish startup Current Anima received a special mention. The software suite allows users to create 3D virtual videos using text prompts. Emotional Films – from Spain's Professor Octopus AI Lab – is a new audiovisual format between video games and films that monitors users' emotions to adapt to what happens on screen. Hulahoop is an investment platform that allows any user to invest in film projects and can offer a return on investment by cataloging each person's stake via blockchain. The day's final pitch came from Vocality, which creates cloned voices with generative AI.

## Ethics, Exile and Eric Cantona: Compelling New Projects Shine at Lau Haizetara Co-Pro Forum



In the middle Cleo Veger.

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On the left Rakel Martin Matellanes.

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Xixi Sofia Ye Chen with her prize.

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CALLUM MCLENNAN

Projects exploring the ethical dilemmas of an AP photojournalist, the transformation of a Spanish-Chinese gangster into a monk, and a personal journey by Eric Cantona stood out Thursday at the 20th Lau Haizetara Documentary Co-Production Forum, part of the San Sebastián Festival.

A who's who of commissioning execs, including Al Jazeera's Mehdi Bekkar and Dogwoof's Cleo Veger, evaluated the pitches. Elsa Rodríguez Monje from Movistar Plus+ emphasized the focus on relevance over format.

A major award winner, *Barrabás*, directed by Daniel Martínez-Quintanilla Pérez, partners with Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Rodrigo Abd. Produced by SUICAFilms, the documentary critically examines the role of photojournalism in war, showcasing Abd's revisits to conflict zones with a large wooden analog camera, questioning the glorification of war reporting.

Xixi Sofia Ye Chen's *From Dawn to Dawn* gains unusual access to the Chinese underworld in Spain. The documentary, produced by Lacima Producciones, captures her brother grappling with his gangster past and how

to form himself in his future.

Gaudi-nominated director Tian Riba's *The Retreat* tells three stories from the Spanish Civil War, sparked by Robert Capa's rediscovered photographs. The film, presented by Sábado Películas, follows Eric Cantona and his brothers as they uncover their family history and its ties to the war.

Kelly Nyks' *Good and Evil - How To Sell The World a Lie*, produced by Solent Production, challenges the narrative of the Stanford Prison Experiment, exposing media distortions and debunking Professor Zimbardo's conclusions. The documentary relies solely on archival footage to explore

the nature of truth in modern society.

Early-stage projects also made an impact, such as *Peter* by Lucía Montero Sánchez de las Matas, produced by Carlota Darnell at Cornelius Films. This documentary traces Lucía's collaboration with three amateur actors in recreating the elusive figure of Peter, an Englishman she met in London.

*Adelina*, directed by Aurela Berila and produced by Tabahana Films, examines the rise of 1990s ex-Yugoslavia pop star Adelina, whose bold performances challenged ethnic repression and patriarchal norms. The session was graced by the 'Albanian Madonna's' attendance.

### XX Lau Haizetara Documentary Co-Production Forum Awards

**MUSIC LIBRARY AWARD**  
**"LA NOCHE DE LA INFANCIA"** Xixi Sofia Ye Chen **Produced by:** Lacima Producciones - The South Project - La Fábrica Nocturna (Spain)

**DOGWOOF AWARD**  
**"BARRABÁS"** Daniel Martínez-Quintanilla **Produced by:** Muyuna, SUICAFilms, Associated Press (Spain - Peru)

**EPE-IBAIA-ELKARGI AWARD**  
**"BARRABÁS"** Daniel Martínez-Quintanilla **Produced by:** Muyuna, SUICAFilms, Associated Press (Spain - Peru)

"This is a very good market," Proinsias Ní Ghraíne, commissioning editor at Ireland's TG4 said, "year on year the projects are quite exceptional as compared to the bigger markets."

The forum showcased 15 projects, two Basque and 13 from countries including Germany, Kosovo, Denmark, and Argentina.