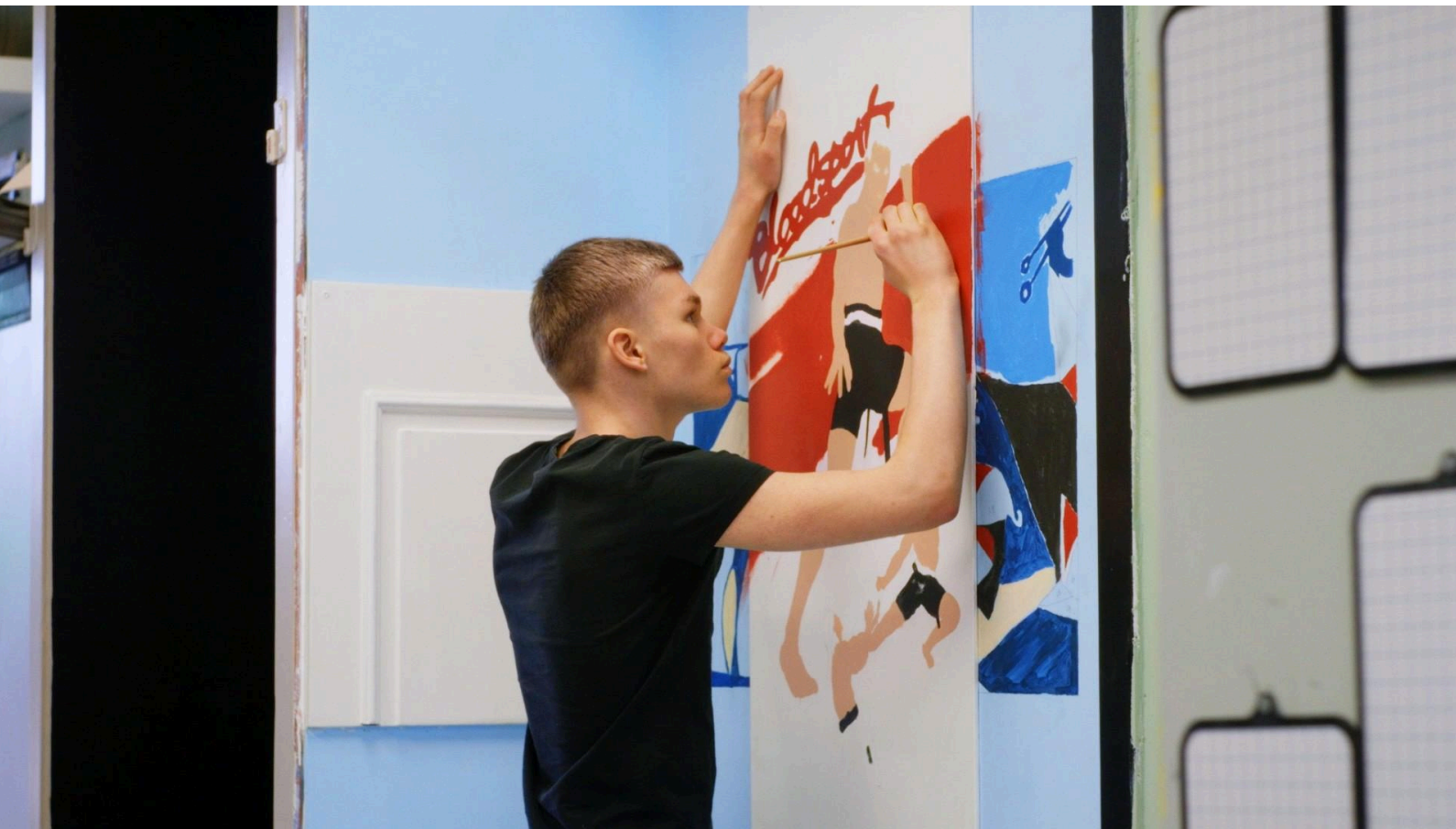


Press kit

Jean

Jolke Van Aerde

Belgium / 2026 / 93'



Official Competition

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↓ TAGLINE

Eight years in the life of Jean, a teenager from Antwerp who, having changed schools repeatedly while growing up, tries to find his place within the education system. As he gets older, his need for change grows. A mosaic-like portrait of a young identity in formation.

↓ SYNOPSIS

Over the course of eight years, the film draws an intimate portrait of Jean Ciesielski, a teenager growing up in Antwerp. Moving through a succession of schools and educational tracks, Jean searches for a place within a system that has defined him from a young age. At twelve years old, he speaks about his situation with a striking maturity and clarity. As he gets older, Jean feels an increasing urgency for change. Unable to obtain a regular secondary school diploma within his current track, he decides to change schools once more. His journey reveals how strongly the language and expectations of education have shaped the way he sees himself and his place in society.

At intervals, the film returns to Jean. Conversations, silences and fragments from his daily life are gathered, gradually forming a mosaic-like portrait of a young identity in formation, and of the vulnerability and turbulence that come with it. At the same time, the film reflects on what it means to film someone as they change.



↓ ABOUT THE DIRECTOR



Jolke Van Aerde (Antwerp, 1997) is a Brussels-based filmmaker and cinematographer. She graduated from KASK School of Arts in 2021 with the film *Come, Sweet Death*. During her studies, she developed a practice rooted in documentary and experimental film, working closely with her environment, friends, and family through a rather intuitive and improvisational methodology. Later, she pursued a Master's in education. During this time, she began to work on her first feature-length documentary *Jean* (2026). Jolke Van Aerde frequently collaborates with her sister, visual artist and costume designer Sietske Van Aerde, as well as filmmakers Kumail Syed, Martijn Van de Wiele, Mika Baudoux, and Ziya Lemin. In 2026, alongside Martijn Van de Wiele and Tillo Huygelen, she co-founded the production company Gran Cavallo.

↓ DISTRIBUTOR'S STATEMENT

Jean is the result of an exceptionally long encounter. For eight years, Jolke Van Aerde follows a boy as he grows up, changes and tries to find his place at school, at home and in the world. We first meet Jean as an eight-year-old, sliding down a sand hill, and follow him into his teenage years, when playfulness and carefree innocence increasingly give way to worries about his future.

After changing schools six times, Jean is now in BUSO (special secondary education). He wonders what he is worth, what diploma he can obtain and where it will take him. The pressure he experiences comes from the outside, but gradually becomes something he puts on himself. His turbulent school career reveals how strongly education determines what is expected of children and what opportunities they are given. His journey shows how difficult it can be for those who learn, move or think differently to find a place within a system that is heavily structured around categories.

Over the eight years of filming, Jean and Jolke grow alongside each other. Jolke operates the camera herself, and filming becomes a way for them to spend time together. The camera gradually becomes part of the relationship they build. We see a boy who is given the space to exist on screen, who speaks, doubts and longs, and whom the film takes the time to listen to.

Jean tells a deeply personal, yet universal story. The film never judges Jean, but instead invites us to look at him for longer, but also at the world that confronts him with questions about his future from such a young age. How much freedom do children have to decide for themselves who they want to become? And what happens when their desires do not fit within the path mapped out for them? Jean resists and tries, despite everything, to find his own way.

We want to bring *Jean* to cinemas because it embodies the kind of cinema Avila stands for: films with a strong cinematic signature and a unique perspective on reality, made with respect for the people being filmed. At the same time, *Jean* can open up a conversation between different generations and worlds: students, parents, teachers, and people working within the education system, as well as anyone confronted with its expectations.

Jean is Jolke Van Aerde's first feature film and immediately earned a place in the Official Competition of Film Fest Gent, where it will premiere alongside films by established filmmakers. On 3 February 2027, Avila will bring the film to cinemas across Belgium, with screenings on both sides of the language border and a particular focus on collaborations with schools.

We are proud to present *Jean*, produced by Accattone Films, and hope that the film will create space for conversation and reflection beyond the cinema as well.

The Avila team
Brussels, September 2026



School is... a sort of story.

Jean Ciesielski

↓ CAST & CREW

A film by

Jolke Van Aerde

With

Jean Ciesielski, Barbara Vermeiren, Emile Ciesielski, Benancio Leonard

Image

Jolke Van Aerde

Sound

Kumail Syed

Producers

Marguerite de Saint André, Ruben Desiere

Editing

Dieter Diependaele

Sound editing

Sabrina Calmels

Sound mix

Aline Gavroy

Music by

Mika Baudox, Laura Conant, Sam Comerford

Colour correction

Olivier Ogneux

Poster design

Myrthe Van Rompaey

Production

Accatone Films

Co-production

VRT

With the support of
deAuteurs, KASK School of Arts, the Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF), the
Belgian Tax Shelter of the Federal Government, managed by Gallop Tax Shelter



*Parfois y a des moments dans la vie qui sont
plus grands que nous.*

Priester Constantin Papakonstantinou

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