



Presents

# INTERDEPENDENCE

Eleven filmmakers joining forces to raise awareness on  
Environment and the effects of Climate Change

FAOUZI BENSÄÏDI MAHMAT-SALEH HAROUN ÁSA HJÖRLEIFSDÓTTIR SALOME LAMAS  
BETTINA OBERLI NILA MADHAB PANDA SHAHRBANOO SADAT SILVIO SOLDINI  
DANIELA THOMAS LEON WANG KARIN WILLIAMS

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# FAOUZI BENZAÏDI

## *Morocco*

Born in Menkès, Morocco, in 1967. He lives and works in Casablanca and in Paris. After working in the theatre as a director and actor, he directed his first short film, “La Falaise”, in 1998, which won several awards at French and International Festivals. In 1999, he co-wrote André Téchiné’s film “Loin”. In 2000, he directed two short films: “Le Mur”, which won an award at the Cannes Film Festival and “Trajets”, which won an award at the Venice Film Festival. In 2003 his first feature film “Mille Mois”, which won two awards at the Cannes Film Festival for “a certain look”. In 2006, his second film “www-what a wonderful world” participates in the Venice Festival.

He returned to the theatre in 2008 with “Histoire d’amour en 12 chansons, 3 repas et 1 baiser”. He has also worked as an actor with Jaques Audiard, André Techiné, Daoud Aoulad Sayed, Bertrand Bonello or Nadir Mocknech.

“Death for Sale”, his third feature film was selected in Toronto and won a prize at the 62nd Berlin Film Festival.

His new film “Volubilis”, was present at the Venice 2017 Mostra and winner of the national film awards in Tangier 2018 including best film, best actress and actor.

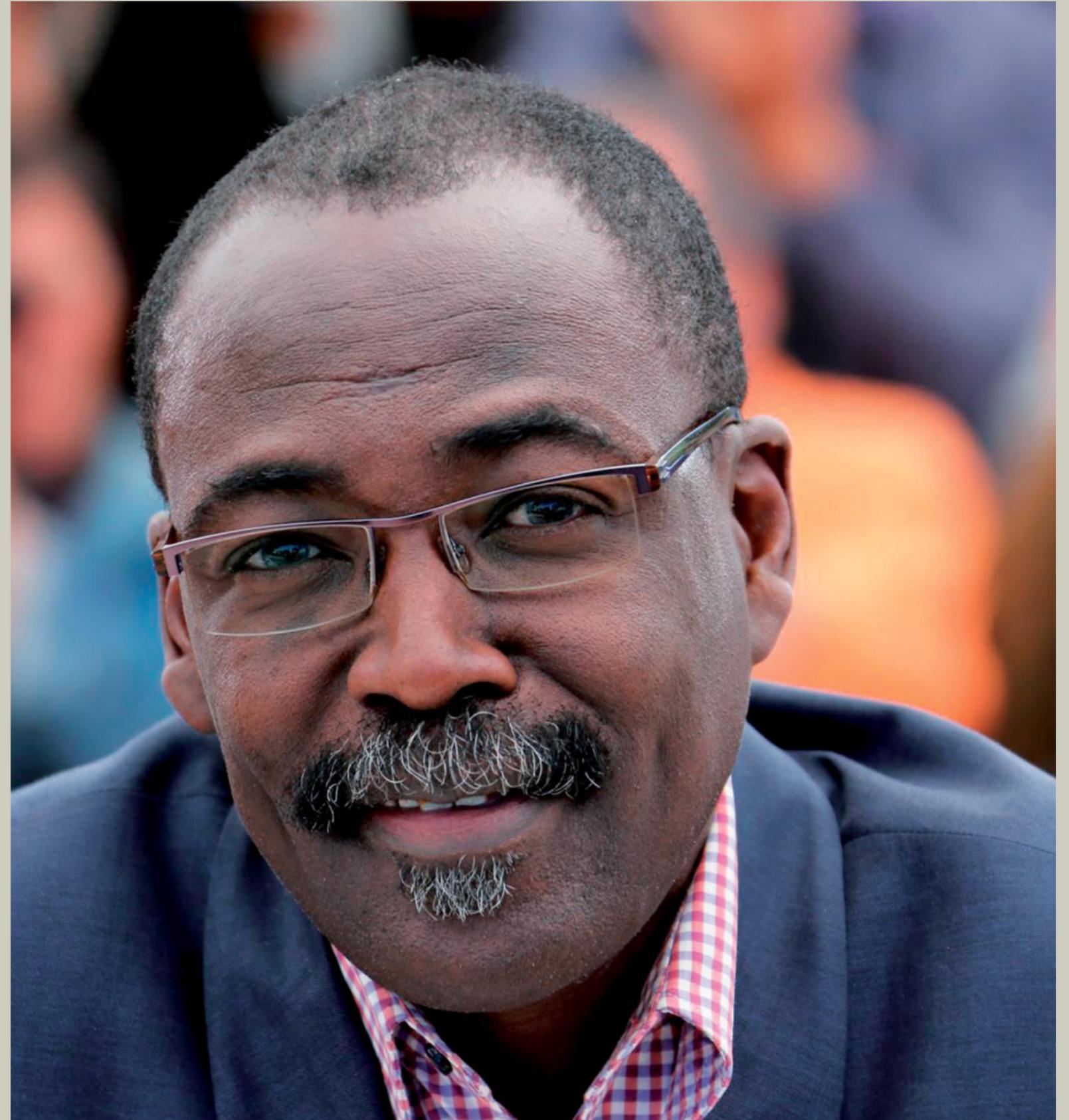


# MAHMAT-SALEH HAROUN

## *Chad*

Born in Abéché, Chad, in 1961. He moved to France where he studied film and worked as a journalist. In 1999 he directed “Bye-Bye Africa”, winning the Best Debut Film prize in Venice. In 2002, his second feature, “Our Father”, was selected at the Directors’ Fortnight.

In 2006, he was awarded the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival for “Dry Season”, while the Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) in New York presented a retrospective exhibition of his work. In 2010 “A Screaming Man” picked up the Jury Prize in Cannes. That same year, Haroun received the Robert Bresson Award at the Venice Film Festival, as well as the Humanity Prize at the 34th Mostra in São Paulo, Brazil. In 2013, he was once again in Competition at Cannes with “Grigris”. He also received the UNESCO Fellini Medal 2013.



# ÁSA HJÖRLEIFSDÓTTIR

## *Iceland*

Born in Reykjavík, Iceland, in 1984. She is one of the most important filmmaker of the new generation in Iceland.

Ása has written and directed a number of award-winning short films. “Ástarga” (“Love Story”) was a 2013 finalist for a Student Oscar. Her first feature film, “The Swan” premiered at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival, and still continues touring the festival circuit.



# SALOME LAMAS

## *Portugal*

Born in Lisboa, Portugal, in 1987. She is one of the most important filmmaker in the new generation in Portugal. She is known for “Terra de Ninguem”, “Eldorado XXI”, “Coup de Grâce” and “Fatamorgana”. In 2018 she participated in the Biennale de l’Image en Mouvement, Geneva. She works at the intersection of the ethnography of the history of the reception of the work between memory and fiction.

Her works has been screened both in art venues and film festivals such as Berlinale, BAFICI, Museo Arte Reina Sofia, FIAC, MNAC – Museu do Chiado, DocLisboa, Cinema du Réel, Visions du Réel, MoMA – Museum of Modern Art, Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, Harvard Film Archive, Museum of Moving Images NY, Jewish Museum NY, Fid Marseille, Arsenal Institut fur film und videokunst, Viennale, Culturgest, CCB - Centro Cultural de Belém, Hong Kong FF, Museu Serralves, Tate Modern, CPH: DOX, Centre d’Art Contemporain de Genève, Bozar , Tabakalera, ICA London, TBA 21 Foundation, Mostra de São Paulo, CAC Vilnius, MALBA, FAEMA, SESC São Paulo, MAAT, La Biennale di Venezia Architettura, among others.

Lamas was granted several fellowships such as The Gardner Film Study Center Fellowship – Harvard University, The Rockefeller Foundation – Bellagio Center, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Fundación Botín, Sundance, Bogliasco Foundation, The MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD.

She collaborates with Universidade Católica Portuguesa and Elias Querejeta Zine Eskola. She collaborates with the production company O Som e a Fúria and is represented by Miguel Nabinho Gallery. [salomelamas.info](http://salomelamas.info)

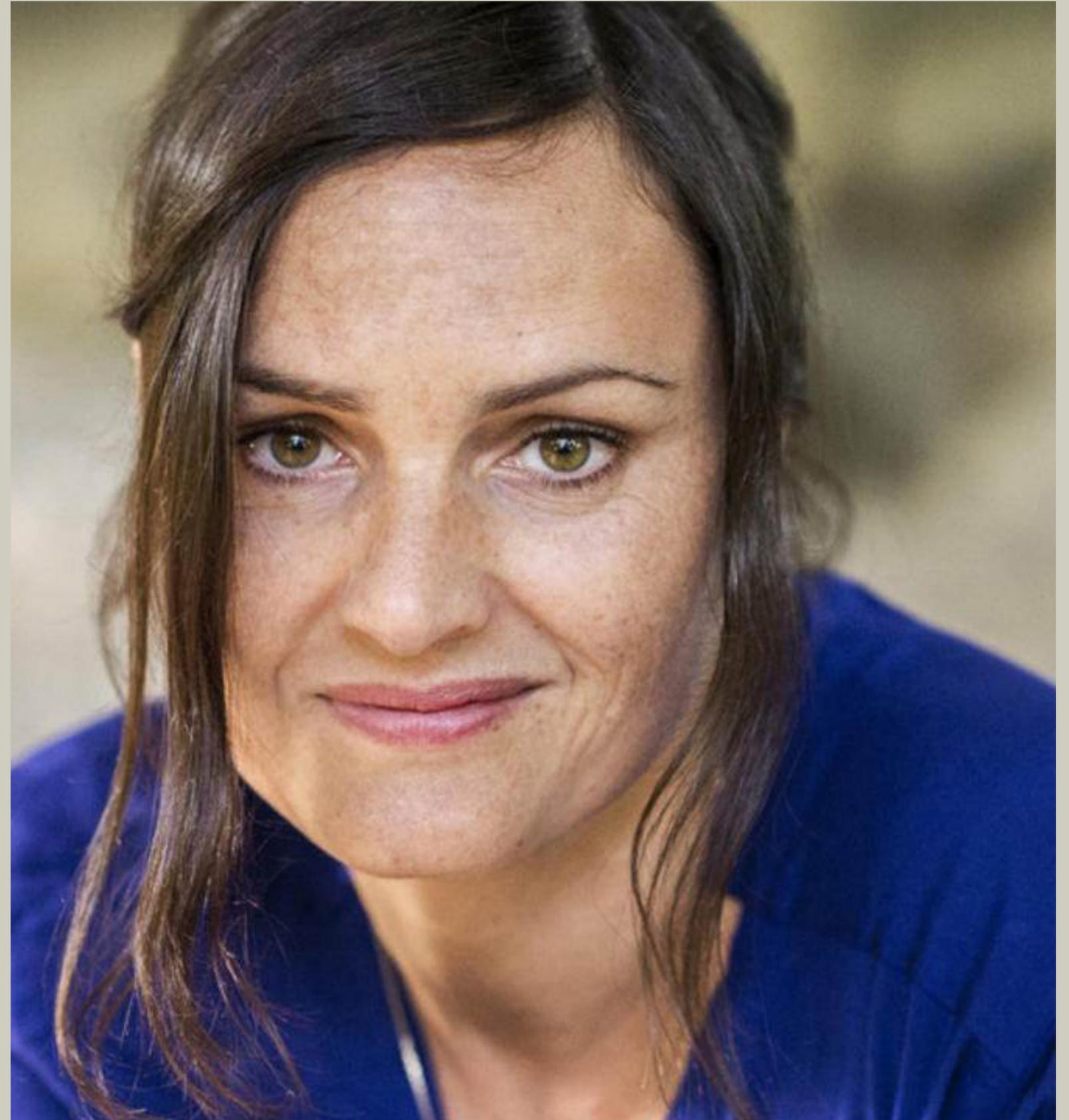


# BETTINA OBERLI

## *Switzerland*

Born in Interlaken, Switzerland, in 1972. She lives and works in Zurich. She is an important figure of the Swiss Cinema. From 1995 to 2000 she studied cinema at Zürcher Hochschule der Künste (ZHdK).

Her award-winning debut film “I’m Norwind” (2004), and her second feature film “Die Herbstzeitlosen” (2006) screened for over a year in Swiss theatres. In 2018 she directed “Le vent tourne”, screened at Locarno Film Festival.



# NILA MADHAB PANDA

## *India*

Born in Orissa, India, in 1973. The story teller's films have unique insights drawn from his own life, the metaphorical distance that he has traversed from a small obscure village based in one of the remotest parts of India, to metropolitan cities across the globe. His expression through cinema comes from the naturally stone crafted river "Mahanadi" where he spent his childhood.

His first feature film "I am Kalam" has become an iconic film winning 34 international awards along with a national award. His second feature film "Jalpari" (desert mermaid), received the MIP Junior award at Cannes. He has been honored "India's Creative Future in 2007" and got the "Longest Journey Award" from the IIM-B & the British Council. "United Nations Media Fellow" by UN, UK Film Fellowship in 2005.



# SHAHRBANOO SADAT

## *Afghanistan*

Born in Teheran, Iran in 1990. She lives and works between Copenhagen and Kabul.

She is a young Afghan scriptwriter, producer and director. She is based in Kabul, Afghanistan. Her first short fiction "Vice Versa One" (2010) was selected at Directors' Fortnight in Cannes in 2011.

In 2013, "Wolf and Sheep" (2016), her first feature film won the Art Cinema Award at Cannes "Un Certain Regard". In 2019, she participate at the Festival of Cannes with her second feature "The Orphanage".



# SILVIO SOLDINI

*Italy*

Silvio Soldini is born in 1958 in Milan where he lives and works. Writer and director, well known for his very successful film “Pane e tulipani” winner in 2000 of the David di Donatello and of the Nastri d’Argento.

In 2002 with “Brucio nel vento” he won a David di Donatello. In 2007, Margherita Buy whom played in his “Days and Clouds” received a David di Donatello for the best actress. His more recent film “Il colore nascosto delle cose” presented out of competition at the Venice Film Festival in 2017, was nominated for a David di Donatello and the Golden Globe.



# DANIELA THOMAS

## *Brazil*

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1959. She lives and works in Sao Paulo.

In 2016, Thomas was the artistic director of the Opening Ceremony of Rio's Olympics.

In 2008, she presents at the Festival of Cannes, "Linha de Passe" and in 2006, "Paris, Je t'aime". She is as well member of the Jury in 2014 at the Festival of Cannes for the section "Cinefoundation and Short Films".

Her first film as single director is "Vazante", a historical drama about slavery in Brazil in 1820. The film premiered at 67th Berlin Film Festival. Her last film, "O Banquete", that won the International Film Festival in Berlin in the section Panorama, in 2018.



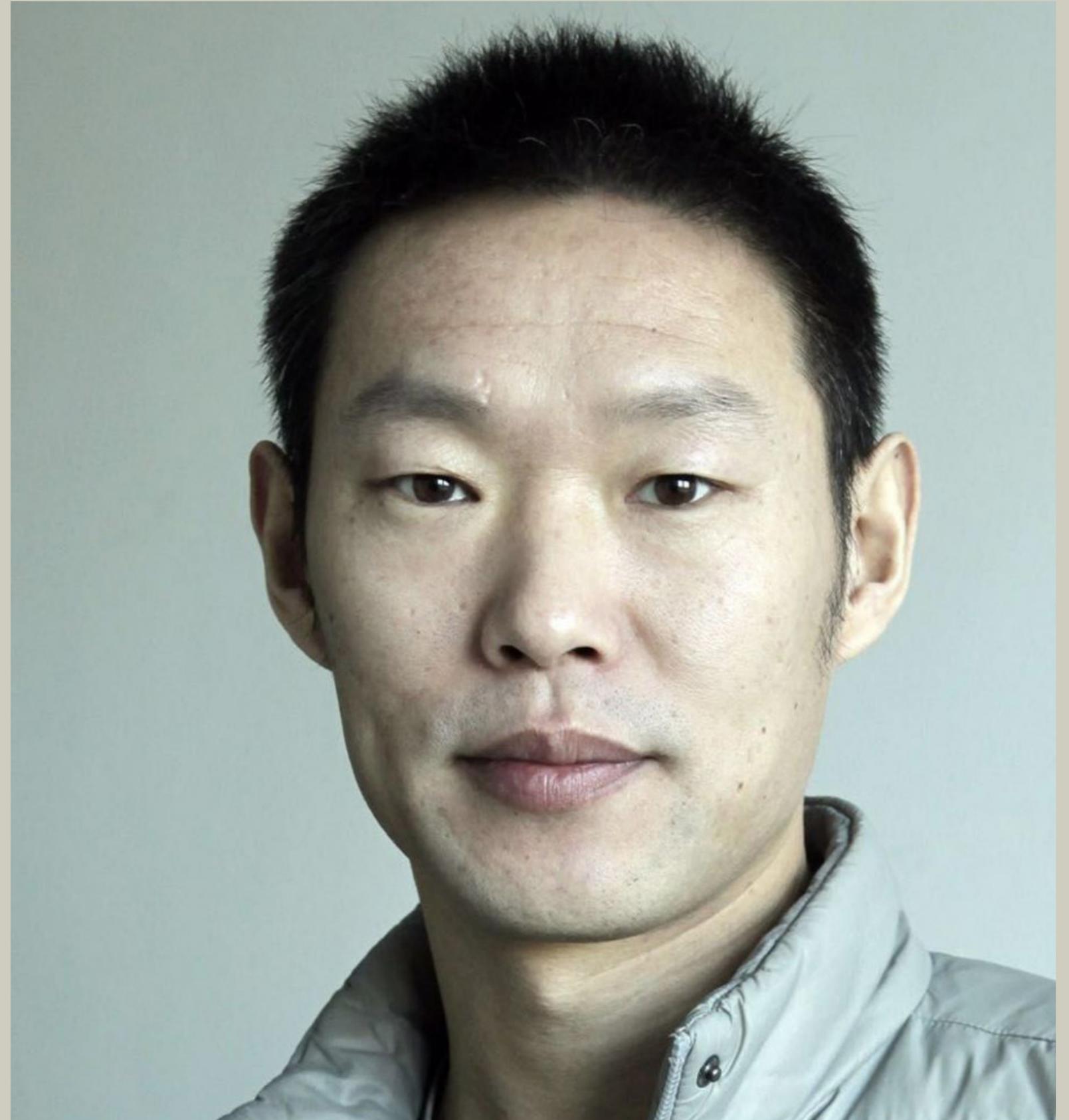
LEON WANG

*China*

Born in Anqiu, China, in 1976. Leon graduated from the Communication University of China. He works and lives in Beijing.

He won the price at the International Festival of Photography of Lianzhou, in 2009, thanks to his documentary “Beijing besieged by waste”

In 2002, his documentary « Plastic China” is the outcome of a journey of 18 months in a plastic recycling factory in Shandong province.



# KARIN WILLIAMS

## *New Zealand*

Born in Aotearoa Cook Island. She lives and works in broadcast journalism, in New Zealand. Her first independent documentary film project was funded by Pacific Islanders in Communications in 1996.

Other PIC funded projects include:

“Skin Stories” (2003) – PBS special on traditional tattoo of the Pacific Islands

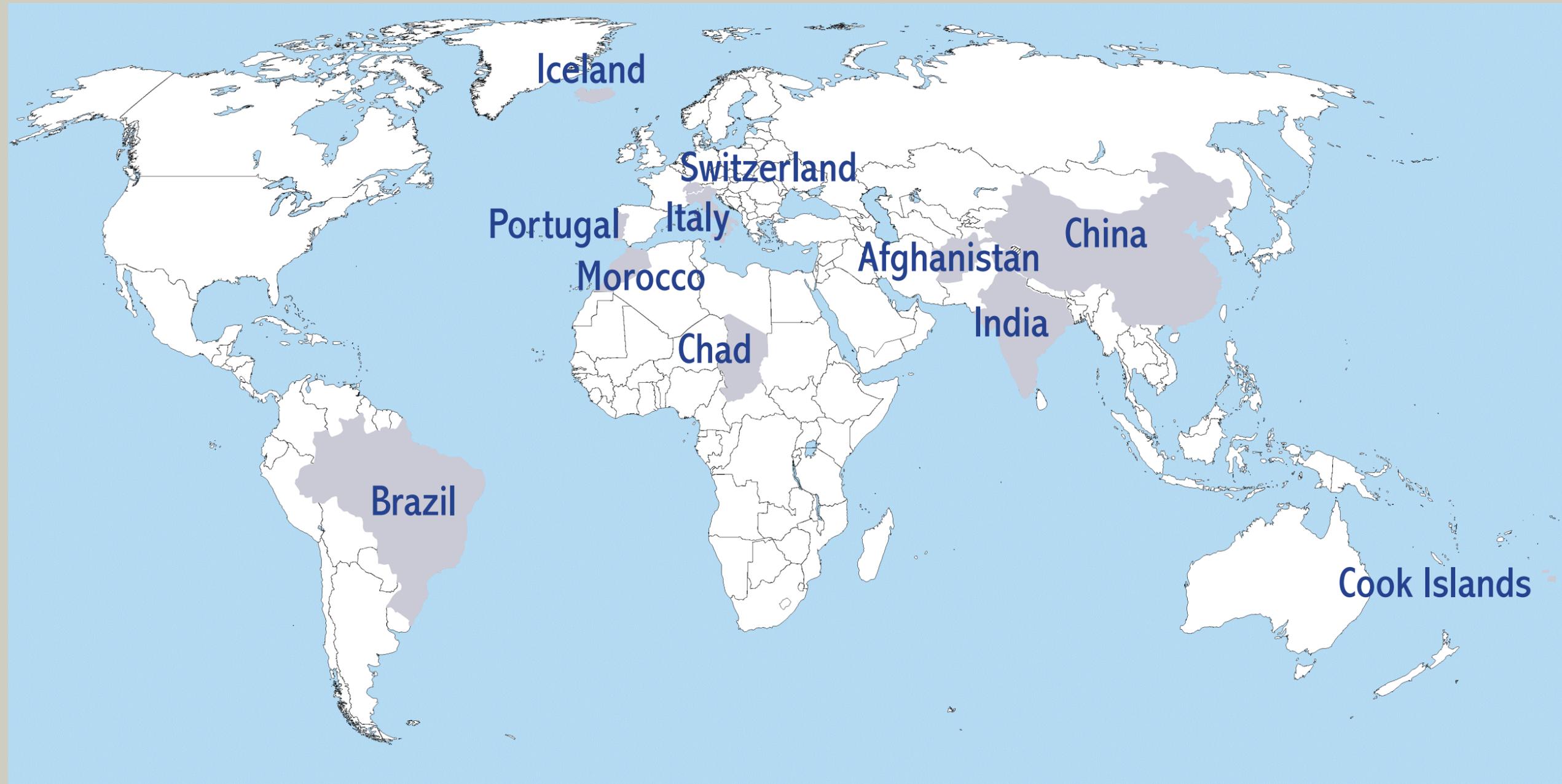
“The Meaning of Food” (2004) – PBS documentary series on food and cultures

“Fixing Juvie Justice” (2013) – PBS special produced with National Geographic about juvenile justice initiatives in New Zealand and Baltimore.

Her films have screened at the Hawaii International Film Festival (The Voyage Home, Mou Piri: A Rarotongan Love Song) and at festivals around the world.



# LOCATIONS



# DAWN ON A SUMMER EVENING

Synopsis by Faouzi Bensaidi

SYNOPSIS



Under the effects of climate change, the world changes, it has already changed.

In a distant and near future, both fantastic and absurd, men and women survive as they can.

Following a man, a slender figure between Tati and Buster Keaton, we discover through sketches of his daily life how devastating are the effects of climate change and their impact, on humans and nature.

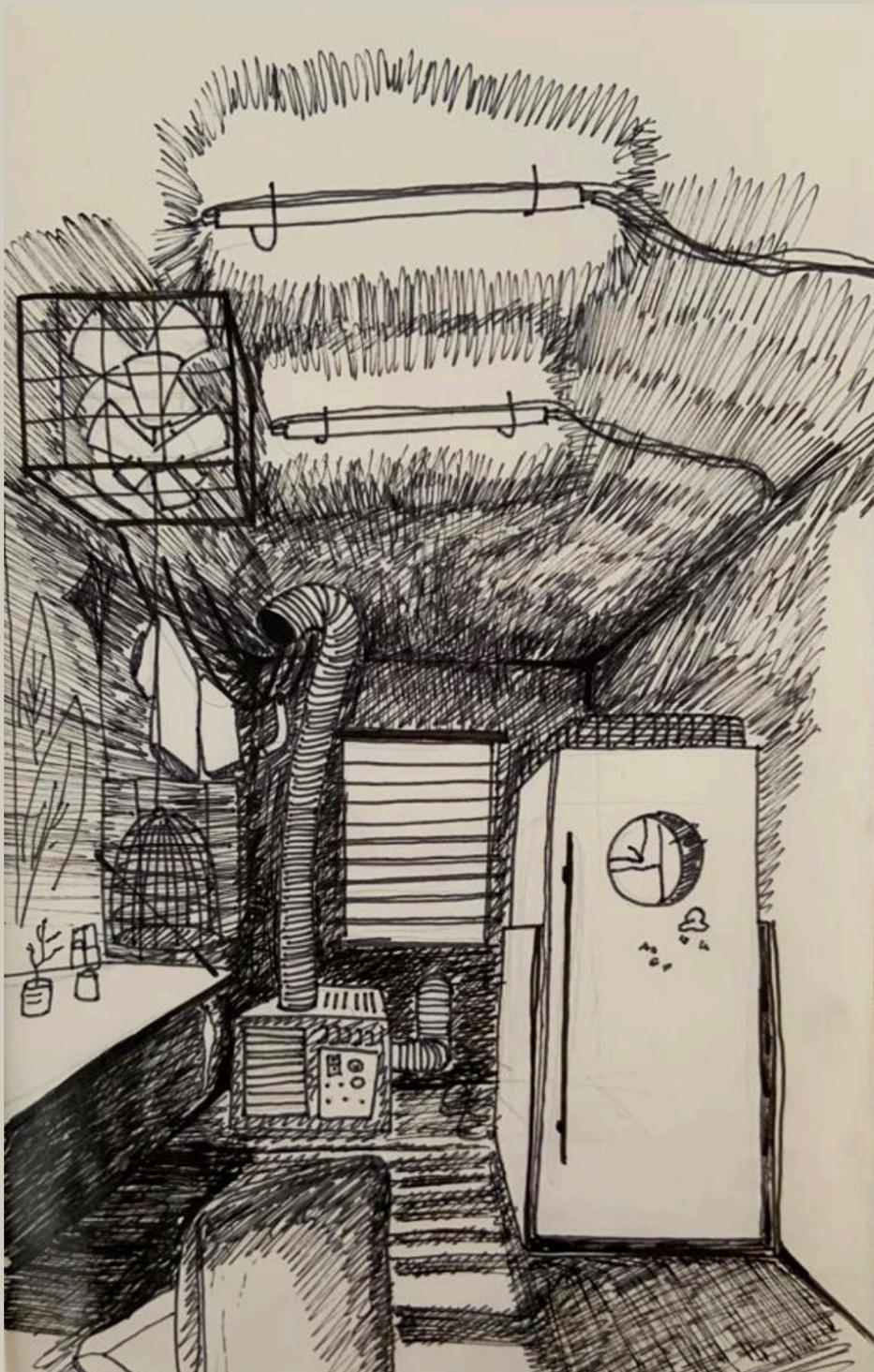
He's at the beach. Swimming and sunbathing are uncertain adventures. We can see through him, what oceans will become as well the marine life and the temperature of the water.

On his way home, the tensions and the pollution in the streets become unlivable.

A permanent fog that creates confusion makes him wear a mask. Feels confused in finding his way.  
How we barricade against excessive heat or cold?

How it will be to attend a super market, or a zoo filled with different animals and species?

A disturbing and hilarious ride in the future, that is already our present.





Kellou, la quarantaine, vit à Bol, le chef-lieu de la province de Sahel.

Elle est pêcheuse, un métier qui se transmet de mère en fille. Elle l'a appris de sa mère. Mais depuis quelque temps, le lac Tchad s'assèche, et le poisson se fait rare. Le métier de Kellou est menacé de disparition.

Un jour, après une pêche infructueuse, Mouna, sa fille de douze ans, lui donne une idée : ramasser les sacs en plastique qui envahissent le lac et en faire des cordes pour les vendre au marché... Dans ce geste simple, Kellou arrive, à son petit niveau, à lutter contre la pollution, et à s'adapter aux nouvelles conditions climatiques...

Comme chaque jour, Kellou, la quarantaine, se réveille aux aurores. Kellou n'est qu'une silhouette dont on distingue difficilement les traits. Elle se prépare à partir à son travail... Mouna, sa fille de douze ans, se réveille à son tour. Elle aimerait accompagner sa mère.

Mais cette dernière, qui a pourtant appris son métier à sa fille, refuse. Kellou préfère plutôt que sa fille aille à l'école...

La pêche n'a plus d'avenir ici... Kellou est au bord du lac, il est très tôt, la lumière est encore blafarde dans ce paysage recouvert par les eaux. Kellou charge ses affaires dans une pirogue, puis elle pousse l'embarcation avant de s'y installer. Elle s'éloigne dans l'étendue de l'eau en pagayant avec force... Maintenant, le soleil s'est levé. La lumière éclatante laisse voir la beauté du paysage... Les eaux du lac, divisées en plusieurs bras, s'étendent à perte de vue. On entend la voix de Kellou qui fredonne une chanson mélancolique, telle une plainte. Sa voix douce emplit la totalité de l'espace...



De nombreuses pirogues naviguent sur le lac, essentiellement tenues par des femmes pêcheuses. Elles lancent des filets dans l'eau, les remontent, tentent leur chance dans ce lac où le poisson se fait de plus en plus rare... Assise dans sa pirogue, Kellou continue de chanter en dérivant tout doucement. Nous découvrons enfin le visage de Kellou, marqué par de nombreuses scarifications, typiques des femmes de la région. Kellou est belle, même si on voit qu'elle est marquée par une vie de labeur... Elle se lève pour remonter peu à peu le filet de l'eau. Elle ne rapporte que des bouteilles en plastique, des cannettes, des boîtes de conserve, des déchets de toutes sortes, qu'elle vide dans sa pirogue. Elle prépare à nouveau son filet et le jette dans l'eau... Mouna arrive au bord du lac, habillée de son uniforme d'écolière, tenant ses cahiers sous le bras.

C'est une jeune fille pleine de vie, les yeux brillants et malicieux. Elle attend le retour de sa mère en fixant l'horizon, l'air inquiète. Puis un sourire éclaire son visage.

La pirogue de Kellou apparaît au loin. Mouna sourit. Kellou accoste, Mouna va à sa rencontre. Elle constate que sa mère n'a ramené qu'un seul poisson. Elles échangent un regard, dépitées. Puis Kellou parle à sa fille de l'assèchement du lac, de la raréfaction du poisson... Si elle ne peut plus pratiquer ce métier qu'elle a appris de sa mère, comment va-t-elle continuer à vivre ? Peut-être faudra-t-il songer à partir, loin d'ici... Kellou et sa fille marchent sur les bords du lac jonché de débris et autres sacs en plastique. Mouna ramasse un sac en plastique, elle réfléchit un moment, puis un sourire illumine son visage, comme si elle avait soudain une idée. Elle chuchote quelque chose dans l'oreille de sa mère. Elles échangent un sourire, les yeux traversés par une lueur d'espoir. Puis elles commencent à ramasser les sacs en plastique. Kellou et Mouna arpentent les rues ensablées de la ville, elles écument les sacs en plastique devant le regard intrigué des passants. De retour dans leur maison, Kellou et sa fille plongent les sacs dans l'eau avant de les tresser avec dextérité, obtenant de longues cordes solides qu'elles iront ensuite vendre à la criée au marché...



Dans cette région du Sahel, la pêche est une activité dévolue aux femmes. Elle se transmet de mère en fille depuis des temps immémoriaux. C'est une tradition séculaire.

Mais depuis quelques décennies, le lac se rétrécit, le poisson se fait rare. Les femmes sont les premières victimes de cette catastrophe dans une zone qui souffre aussi de la sécheresse, et de l'insécurité...

Face à ces difficultés de nombreuses femmes préfèrent migrer, pas Kellou. Elle refuse de quitter cette terre qui l'a vue naître. Elle se bat pour se réinventer, subvenir à ses besoins et construire un avenir à sa fille.

Kellou refuse de transmettre le métier de pêcheuse, elle préfère l'envoyer à l'école pour rompre le déterminisme. Elle a compris que si elle veut survivre, elle n'a pas d'autre choix que de s'adapter au changement climatique. Prenant conscience que la pollution du lac est aussi due aux sacs en plastique, elle décide d'aller en guerre contre ces déchets. Elle va les ramasser et les transformer, luttant ainsi contre la pollution et créant par la même occasion une nouvelle activité génératrice de revenus.

J'ai envie de montrer cette prise de conscience à l'œuvre.

Pour le rôle de Kellou, je compte faire appel à une vraie pêcheuse. Elle donnera à Kellou plus de crédibilité.

Pour faciliter le travail des comédiennes, j'envisage de tourner le film dans un dispositif quasi documentaire. Les dialogues ne seront pas écrits, mais ils viendront d'elles-mêmes. Bien entendu, je leur donnerai un cadre dans lequel elles décriront, avec leurs propres mots, la réalité de leur vie.

Au vu de la durée du film, il me semble qu'il faut privilégier les visages, les gestes, les couleurs avec une certaine poésie. Le tout sera filmé en lumière naturelle. Une lumière mordorée et éclatante... Pour le son, je laisserai exprimer la nature (eaux, oiseaux, vent).



# LAST DANCE

Synopsis by Ása Hjörleifsdóttir

SYNOPSIS



Morning light seeps into a bedroom. Helga and Bjarni (both in their 30's) lie fully dressed on top of the covers. Crumpled sheets, swollen eyes; an emptiness hangs in the air like a ghost from yesterday. From an open window we can hear the sounds of a city (Reykjavík) waking up; birds chirping, voices fading in and out, a woman laughing in the distance. Helga is the first to wake up, and watches Bjarni until he too opens his eyes. There's a sad nervousness in her look. She's about to say something but Bjarni cuts her off: "Don't... I can't talk more about this. I don't have any tears left. Let's go for a drive".

They drive together in silence, an ocean between them. As a means of not talking about themselves, they talk about trivial things, including tourism, joking about the "Everest climbers" (even when walking within Reykjavík most of the tourists seem to be dressed for severe mountain hiking). Helga sarcastically comments that maybe they should enjoy the tourist attention while it lasts, since soon the glaciers will all melt anyway, and no-one will come here. They leave the city, a silence falling over them again. Bjarni is driving, and after a while he comments: "There's the old road. We're on the new one now".

He becomes more and more engaged in the discussion of this road, explaining that instead of fixing the old one that was slowly being destroyed because of too much (tourist) traffic, the authorities chose to build a brand-new road next to it, "not giving a shit about the soil. He talks about "lack of long-term thinking, and bad management... Rushing to the new instead of strengthening the old".

The subtext of his words is clearly deeper and more personal. And indeed, as the scene unfolds we gather that Helga wants the relationship to end, while Bjarni is heartbroken and angry at her for not believing in them. Captivating landscapes pass them by, but they are immune to the beauty as they struggle in silence with their emotions.

They park the car by Kleifarvatn lake, a popular tourist destination on the Reykjanes peninsula. It's a stunning location, surrounded by high, dramatic cliffs, the black sand extending itself as far as the eye can see. They are not alone: a few tourists can be seen in the background, sight-seeing, taking photos. The doomed couple walks together on the beach, taking in the ebb and flow of the water. "I'm sorry, Bjarni", Helga says and reaches for his hand. Bjarni looks at for a moment before letting go. "This was a bad idea", he retorts as he walks away from her.



“You and me. The last 5 years!” Helga looks at him in silence, her tears flowing. Seen from the cliffs high above, they are small figures on a vast, black surface, the powerful ocean seeming very capable of washing them all away if it wanted to. Back on the ground, Bjarni walks towards the cliffs. He picks up a rock and **THROWS** it ahead. As the rock hits the cliff with the accompanying echo, we cut back to Helga. She looks quickly up to where Bjarni went. But he is nowhere to be seen. After a moment she continues walking, assuming that he willfully distanced himself from her. But the more time that passes, the more uneasy Helga (and we, the audience) become. She calls out to him; no response.

The camera pulls away from her, leaving her and this human drama behind, and we begin exploring and listening to nature instead. As the natural soundscape becomes louder and more overwhelming (the waves, the birds, the wind), so will the visuals: The majestic cliffs. The roaring ocean that eats away at the rocks. The mysterious, lava-like landscape surrounding the lake. The dark mountains beyond. The yellow eyes of a fox. And at some point, we glimpse Helga amidst all of this, alone now on the distant beach. No Bjarni. No tourists.

As a filmmaker I have always been interested in the connection between human nature and nature itself. How fleeting and fragile of our experiences are when compared to the vast, “eternal” nature. (In my film *The Swan*, for example, I am comparing and connecting the inner life of the characters to the wild nature that surrounds them). And indeed, here in Iceland, nature feels so close, so charged. Certainly, it’s a force to be reckoned with. Even now in the 21st century when most of us city folk have lost our connection to the natural world (landscapes reaching us at best through the screensavers on our laptops), the very “real” and raw nature on this young island pulls us towards itself like a magnet. And nature gives, and nature takes, and one must show respect. At least this is a strong sentiment here in Iceland. (For example, the belief in “hidden people” - our version of elves and fairies - that reside in rocks and mountains has caused even the authorities to sometimes hesitate when paving roads or building bridges, not wanting to disturb the hidden spirits, the hidden power). Mysticism or no mysticism, the rules of the game have been destroyed. We humans are only a small particle in the grand scheme that is the universe, but our hybrids have made us believe that we are not only separate from nature, but also masters of it. Any ability we once had to understand and to respect the needs of nature seems rapidly diminishing, and it’s ironic that it’s precisely the generation of Icelanders that grew up with the confidence of Iceland being a natural paradise that seems so determined to exploit it.



## *DIRECTOR'S NOTE*

In Iceland we see it very clearly that the soil can't take it anymore, not just the power plants and aluminum smelters, but also the onslaught of tourism: The car traffic and off-road driving, the flux of people going through places unable to carry pedestrian traffic. (But it should be noted that of course tourism - in itself - is not to blame, but rather the lack of long-term thinking in the management of it, an opinion that I have the character of Bjarni express in his “rant” about the two roads).

The situation now is marked by a total lack of communication with nature, something that can be extremely dangerous; I'm thinking of the many recent deaths and disappearances of travelers that fall into waterfalls, rivers, glacial crevices etc. The words of an old Icelandic lullaby come to mind: “sleep my babe / outside the rain is crying / and we hear the deep, dark aching of the glacier”. Nature expresses the emotions that the people cannot. And now, in 2019, nature is crying out, reminding us that - like a relationship - it needs love and respect to survive. In an ideal future it is my hope that people will really understand this spirituality of nature (here and elsewhere) and treat it more like the holy site that it is.

# EXTRACTION: THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA

SYNOPSIS

Synopsis by Salome Lamas



Extraction: The Raft of the Medusa is a short film directed by Salomé Lamas produced for Interdependence, an anthology of short films raising awareness on the effects of climate change with the conception and production of Adelina von Fürstenberg and with the patronage of the United Nations, produced by ART for the world (Geneva) and with the executive production of Art+Vibes (Milan) for the occasion of the 25th session of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 25) to be Held 11- 22 November 2019.

Extraction: The Raft of the Medusa portrays a brief moment of euphoria as the occupants on the raft spot a glimpse illusion for their drift, hoping and praying to be rescued. We can almost hear the hoarse cries in an attempt to draw attention to their desperate plight, mustering their last ounce of strength to the void. This is their last chance of survival.

Extraction: The Raft of the Medusa refers to the colonial paradigm, worldview, and technologies that mark out regions of high biodiversity in order to reduce life to capitalist resource conversion with an enormous environmental and social impact.

The film is an allegory for the state of emergency in environmental policy.



## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

By calling the project *Extraction: The Raft of the Medusa* we refer not only to one of the most influential and cited works of art, but also to extractive capitalism, that like any system of domination, is not totalizing in its destructive effects.

The term Anthropocene, which has been used by Western geologists and climatologists to term the period of human intervention from 1610 forward, now popularly identifies the crisis of future life on the planet. Scientists and scholars in the last ten years have written their visions of a planet in crisis, a spate of literature that addresses a “no future” paradigm and how life on the planet will soon be destroyed. The captivating visuals are a free adaptation of *The Raft of the Medusa* by Théodore Géricault, one of the first works to feature a subtle social and governmental criticism.

In 1819 the *Raft of the Medusa's* depiction of migrants abandoned at sea, as a consequence for the sinking of a colonial Western ship in the coast of Africa, outraged the world. Today, most of us ignore those dying to cross borders, the genocidal tragedy of our time. Géricault makes us feel the loss of each of the dead and the pain of each of the living. This painting is an act of empathy for our fellow human beings. But where is such empathy today?

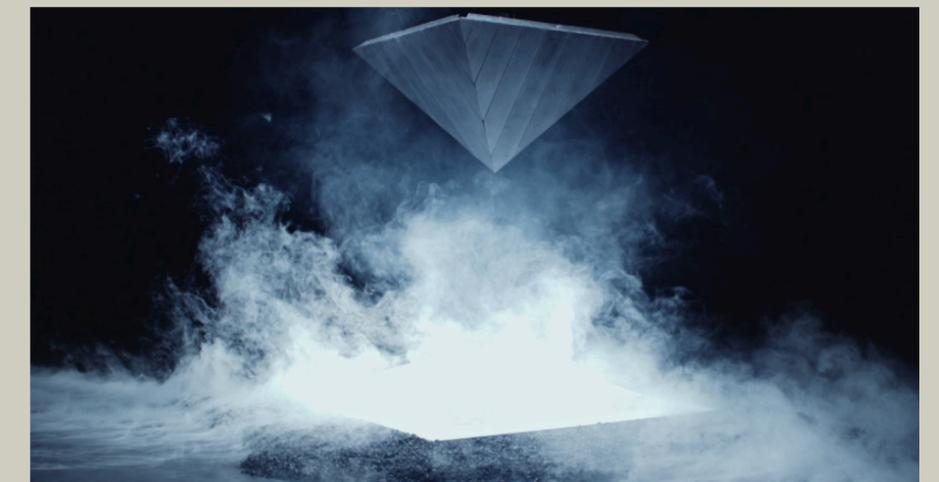
The narrative and composition will be modified to match our allegoric intentions. The raft is standing on sand denouncing desertification as a result of drought, deforestation, or inappropriate agriculture.



Above it we find vegetation and taxidermies animals denouncing the extinction crisis as a consequence to human activity, habitat destruction as farming land expand and forests are cut-down is the main cause of modern extinctions, along with pollution, the introduction of alien species, over fishing or hunting, increasingly, however, climate change is thought to be driving extinctions. The migrant bodies reflect the contemporary social crisis as they stand for the migrants fleeing from either conflict regions troubled by resource extraction, natural catastrophes, livelihood systems compromised by climate change impacts. The rigorous choreography and the symbolically composed *mise-en-scène* asks profound questions about the nature of survival, barbarism, and the miracle of human resilience in the face of the awesome and unforgiving power of nature, as well as the inner-struggle for meaning and purpose that we all face. The sound design will guide the audience through our ideas and urgencies. It opens with the myth of the creation of the first man and the end of the mankind and the world along with it as told by the Xingu tribes in Brazil.

The core is a dialogue between a human and a robot inspired by the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDG) and commenting on Anthropocene, and its connection with: extractive-colonial capitalism processes that historically subordinated African and Indigenous populations, ecocides and climate change. Thread with a patchwork of testimonies, music, soundscapes and archive sources from different regions of the world, it ends with the mourning and the chants of the Kuarup. The Kuarup is the principal funeral ritual of the Indians of the Xingu. It is a gathering of all neighboring tribes to celebrate life, death, and rebirth.

Inscribed in INTERDEPENDENCE and in direct dialogue with the other films in the anthology *Extraction: The Raft of the Medusa* is a disturbing sensorial testament to the power of human depravity that pretends to raise awareness on the effects of climate change. The film is inclusive and intends to reach a wide audience leaving them with sacred hope.



# KINGDOM

Synopsis by Bettina Oberli



Never a soul in sight, but her...

Early morning. Before the first light of the day. The sun barely shimmers behind the mountain-tops and peaks beyond a rocky vast desert. A woman in filthy rags makes her way up from the valley. It looks like she's been on her way all through the night. She is dressed like a Tuareg in dark garment that - at closer look - is a filthy patchwork from different fabrics.

She's dragging something that looks like a parachute filled with cloth, fabric of all sorts behind her.

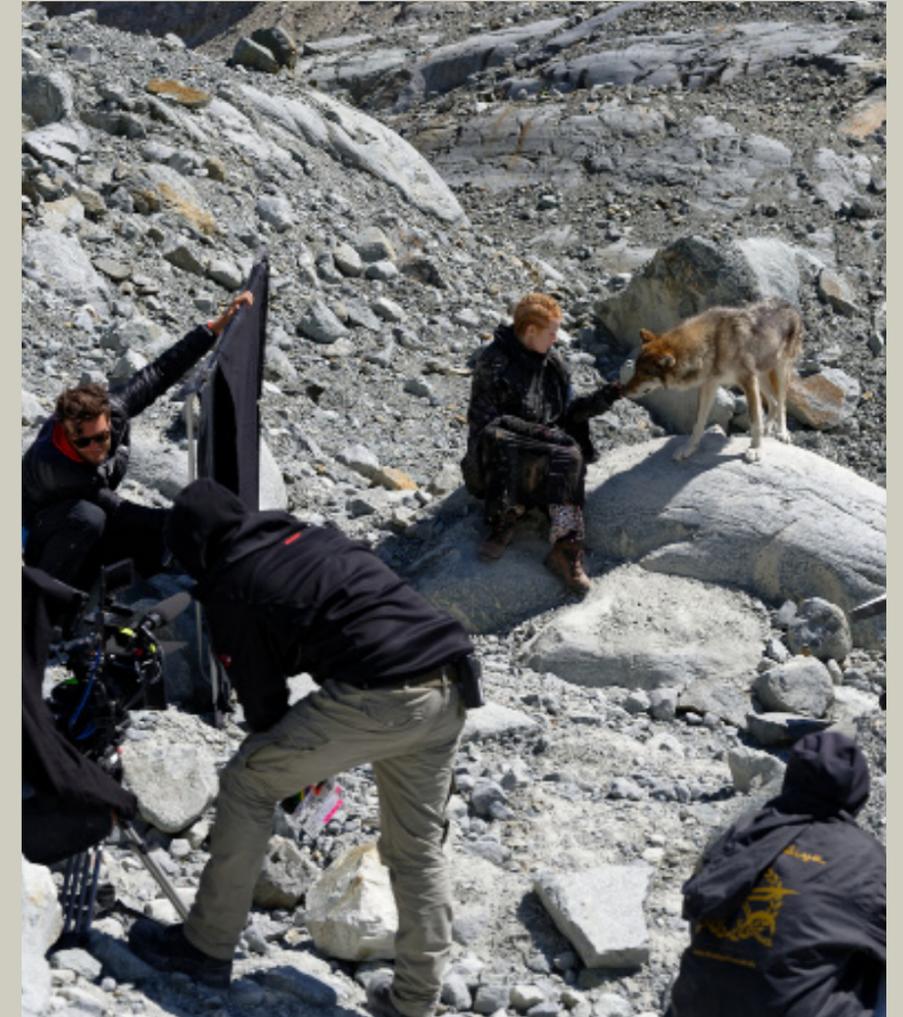
We know what is in there, as we see her stuff some random piece of fabric that she finds on her way into it. She is a Scavenger. One deserted cabin lies on her way. She quickly searches it for any kind of fabric. We see that the cabin has once been inhabited but evacuated a long time ago. She bags a torn tablecloth and some other rags. There's a bright blue T-Shirt with Sponge-Bob on it... As she finds it, she looks at it for a long moment. The sun shines through the broken window and she hurries on.

Her goal looks like scree high up. The scree is already covered with a wild patchwork of all kinds of tissues, fabrics, and cloths. A manifold patchwork of relics, logos and writings, fragments of civilization. And she is working on it in a frantic way. Working to extend the patchwork, make it denser, fill holes in it.

As the sun goes up an evil wind sets in. She must struggle to fix the patchwork to the ground, with stones, tightropes. It is hard work. The woman avoids the sun as if she were afraid of it. She's drinking from a bottle that she's carrying in the folds of her robe. And she's thirsty, from the strain and from the heat that is quickly rising. Painfully. Infernally. She needs to withdraw.

The woman flees the sun into a cave nearby the scree. The cave is her abode. It leads deep into the mountain and the deeper she goes in, the cooler it gets. What a relief! At the end of the cave she's built for herself something like a re-cluse, a dwelling, filled with the bare necessities and lit by a solar lamp.

## SYNOPSIS



She eats tinned food from her large supply and drinks, takes off her sweaty dress. Before lying down to rest, she produces the bright T-Shirt that she brought along. She carefully puts it down on what looks like an altar.

Children's toys, some of them high-tech, out-of-use for long, children's clothes, all of them bright blue... She closes her eyes and smiles.

She is thrown back in her old memories, into a dream, of the past.

FLASHBACK. The woman looks younger, healthier and in bright casual clothes, smiling, laughing as she's playing with her husband and her little daughter. In their garden, green and abundant, they spray each other with a water hose. There's a shepherd's dog jumping around. On the girl's T-shirt there is Sponge-Bob. Her frantically happy, ever happy face and the sound of her laughter... Silence. Black. When the woman wakes up, she's feeling disoriented. The light is out. She gets up, puts her dress on and leaves the cave again. She's got another task to fulfill. It is night. It is cold now outside and the dress that protects her from the sun in the day now warms her. She's shivering. She walks back to the scree. And she starts to uncover it at its edges. As she scoops some dirt away, we see that something white is underneath. Ice.

She takes a handful of ice; snow by now, licks it. And she fills the bottles that she brought along with it. There are noises in her back, as if somebody or something were approaching. But she doesn't flinch – but smiles. We see a pack of wolves approach the edge of the glacier that the woman uncovered. A group of capricorns follows, they are not afraid of the wolves.



The leader of the pack comes very close to the woman; he goes down and starts to lick the ice, right next to her. His head-brushing hair's like in a caress. All the other animals lick their water from the melting ice in unison. The woman strokes the wolves' thick fur. Kisses it. She is not alone any more. She will keep on working to protect their water from evaporating. Animals and a human, the last human, drinking from the last water hole. Under the bright old moon.



„Gletschersterben“ (Dying of the glaciers) has become a term not only in my country but also everywhere on the planet where there are high mountains. In one hundred years they say all the glaciers will have disappeared because it is just getting to warm. So, drawing veils over the ice is an attempt so protect it from melting.

When I saw the pictures of covered up ice for the first time it touched me in a strange way. I had the association of the artist Christo whose trademark is to wrap up objects. But in this case, it is not about art, it is a kind of helpless, sad attempt to stop a process that probably will not be stoppable anymore.

“Moraine” tells the short story of a woman, maybe the last woman on earth, who has to live on a post-apocalyptic planet. She has to survive the very hot days, hide from the burning sun, and the only source of water is the little piece of ice she tries to protect with remains of a lost world. Only at night she finds peace and consolation in her memories and with other living creatures.

The atmosphere in this film will be intense, physical, and sensual. The women, I think of someone like Juliette Binoche – a passionate climate change activist – is struggling with everyday challenges like a last warrior, all wrapped up herself in cloth like a nomad. Even under the hardest conditions she will not give up and finds strength in the encounter with the animals.

This should be the message: We have to fight like warriors but are gentle like fragile, sensitive creatures from the only planet we have.

# MEGHA'S DIVORCE

Synopsis by Nila Madhab Panda

SYNOPSIS



It is the worst of times for the tale of this city called Delhi.

We are introduced early on to one of our protagonists – Akaash, who seems to be a well-to-do Corporate Executive, residing in one of the poshest colonies of the city. However, there is an unhappy gloom hanging over the house, that has certainly seen better times. Very similar to the haze that hangs over the city, and we discover doors and windows locking out the outside air.

In such suffocating and sanitised interiors, we are introduced to Akaash, through his panting. First, we see him ineffectively chasing his own little kid in a haze-filled dream, and then on the treadmill trying to reluctantly follow an exercise routine. We only hear the whirr of machines and treadmills and clinking of ice and finally the doorbell, to establish how lonely and gloomy his life is within these 4 walls, even as we take in the rich interiors, devoid of aesthetics, and just strewn with memorabilia and unnecessary décor.

We also see enough signs of the life that recently played out in this house – pictures of his wife and child, especially one huge poster with his child holding a trophy after being declared Man of the Match! These family pictures aggravate the gloom as we must absorb the empty space.

Akaash's Dad has finished his morning walk and greets Akaash with a sharp reprimand for his casual attitude towards health, the missing servant who has skipped city, followed by fits of chronic coughing. He then proceeds to have a sarcasm-laden conversation with his estranged daughter-in-law over the phone, who has just driven back into the city in the morning. He definitely misses her. Through this conversation (which Akaash avoids participating in) we are introduced to Megha, the main protagonist, and her caring relationship with the father-in-law, and finally we learn that their impending Divorce hearing happens to be scheduled for today. Akaash and his Dad seem to be living in the shadow of Megha and the child's recent exit.

While Akaash walks out into their Parking area with a fancy protective mask on, we see a glimpse of the smog and other folk going about with masks on. We also find that there is some kind of an Exodus at play – cars parked for months, a neighbour's car and house on sale, etc. It gives us a glimpse of what has become of the city. Akaash drives away in his Audi, leaving some more smoke behind.

## SYNOPSIS

In the courtroom too, as if to validate this point, we find lawyers and the Judge and some of the audience also with masks on. The court make one realise that these claustrophobic rooms are the way of life now.

The breath of fresh air, in fact, comes in the form of the eccentric and fidgety Judge, who turns out to be the much-required voice of reason. Through the arguments - sometimes logical and sometimes, well just legal - we realise that Akaash and Megha's 10 year old relationship and 9 year old child are all suffering at the hands of a deeper unnamed turmoil. Megha has filed, and Akaash is still waiting for an opening, which becomes clear as the drama proceeds.

As in all court dramas, there are sparks and crackers flying from both ends, and we learn bit by bit, through sometimes hilarious and at times momentous conversations, what their relationship was like.. much to the Judge's amusement and sarcastic repartees. To a point where she almost dismisses the case, citing their arguments as very thin grounds for Divorce.

Megha's lawyer is also a loyal friend and tries to tarnish the image of her friend's estranged husband and takes pot shots at his relatively inept lawyer, while Akaash stands his ground about his inability to leave his ailing father and the city of his ancestors at this stage. Megha brings home the moot point when the Judge is interrupted with a phone call from her daughter who is in boarding college and wants to come home to Delhi, for the Diwali(lighting festival of india) festival holidays. She scolds the daughter for thinking of coming to this city in the most hazardous times. Megha picks on this point to emphasise that as a Mother, her rights will be denied if she is to raise her asthmatic child in this city.



The Judge understands finally what the root of Megha's problem is – the child's suffering at the hands of the city's Polluted environs. Once she understands, she wastes no time in reminding them that “Divorce is not the Solution for Pollution!” And that she can see they are still in love, and care about each other and their family very much.

She straightaway accosts Akaash to ask him how many cars he owns, and upon learning he has 4 cars, reprimands them and asks them to reduce it to 1 for only emergency usage.

She shows them the Metro pass to make the point that public transport should be used frequently, to reduce pollution.. She asserts to Megha that the solution is not to get away from the city but stay and contribute to bettering its health! After all, if we follow the same lifestyle in another city, Pollution will follow us in that city too.

She signs off by giving them the mandatory 6-month ‘Cooling Period’ by the Court, hoping aloud that some things change by then.. “Rishtey nahin, Hawa Badlo.”

(Don't change your relationship, rather change the environment)



I moved to Delhi in the year 1995 from my village for a better life. Things moved really fast in probably last 20 years. Indeed, I am thankful to this city for giving me the opportunities to stand today, but it has also cost a lot for family and me. We are just waiting my son's school to get over so that we can move out of this city. My son was born on 2004, healthy, handsome and beautiful chubby kid. Who loved sprint like me. He used to go for training early morning at 5 am before school, two years back we realized, he is developing sever cough and breathing problem, so we have to stop his practice due to pollution. We made him stay indoors with air filters. Year by year, we have witnessed Delhi's air getting worst. Unfortunately, due to current work here and my sons loved for his school and his friends stopped me from relocating to other states so far. It's just a matter of another winter and we will move out of this city. This film is a sincere effort of what is happening now. "Climate change" the word uses to be with scientist, environmentalist or policy makers. Now it has become a part of every conversation among people. We are in a situation not to think about tomorrow but to start taking measures right away as it has started affecting our health badly. And we are responsible for it. The pollution has and is affecting our daily life, economy, human emotions and even relationships.

I grew up on the bank of one of the most beautiful and longest rivers of Eastern India Mahanadi. The river, the village and the little forest taught us seasons and man nature's ecosystem. I learned seasons and weather patterns through the color, bird voice, and growth of food grain, fruits, flower and vegetable. Each season has its particular visibility of flowers, fruits and vegetables. Now it seems like we have changed seasons with science and technology. I can never imagine eating a mango in winter.

By the time I realized the changes it started effecting human life in way that I can't even bring back the nature to how it was those days.

# RECIPE OF AN ALMOST EXTINCT MEAL

Synopsis by Shahrbanoo Sadat



It is dawn. Rural central Afghanistan, far away in a village.

A young woman is milking a goat while her little boy assisting her by holding the horns of the goat. When she is finished, she pushes the goat and a new goat/ sheep is replaced and the same process applies to the new one. There is a queue of a flock with goats and sheep waiting to be milked before the young shepherd takes them to the mountains to graze all day long.

The woman adds the milk into a big pot where she has collected the milk of the entire week.

## SYNOPSIS

Then she empties the big pot into a bag made of dried skin of a sheep. She shakes the bag for about 20 minutes in a normal rhythm and then she adds some cold water into it and shakes it for few minutes more until the fat will be separated from the milk and comes on top.

She collects the fat with a big spoon and keeps it somewhere, then she boils the free fat milk on the oven.

After the cooked milk gets cold, she pours it in a cotton bag and hangs it for 48 hours, so all the water goes off. What remains is a white paste.

The woman adds salt and makes big balls out of it and puts them on a clean piece of fabric in shadow to be dried.

After a month they are ready, she collects them. The dried balls are not as big as the beginning. They are quite small now. The woman puts some of them into a huge wooden bowl and adds some boiled water until it covers the dried product completely and leaves it for half a day. Then she smashes them with her hands until they are as liquid as yogurt, but less soft but crunchier.

She fries some onion and garlic in the fat that she has collected from the milk before and then adds the smashed crunchy sauce on top of it. The not easy made meal is ready now and she eats it with her family.

Her children are licking a piece of the dry product. You can say from the impression on their faces while they are biting, chewing, licking this hard product that it is something very delicious and worth all the troubles to produce it.



This product is called Qurut and the dish they make out of it called Quruti that is one of the most popular foods in the entire Afghanistan but specifically central Afghanistan. Making Qurut requires a lot of milk and the amount of milk is connected to the amount of grass on the mountains, which is the main food of the sheep and goats and cows. And of course, the grass is connected to the rain. Since some years there is not enough rain or there is early rain which causes the flood and kills the trees and grasses because it rains a lot and very strong that earth is not able to take it. Since some years people making Qurut less and less as they have difficulties with feeding their animals because the mountains are dried. The price of a sheep goes really down and the price of Qurut goes really high but also this product gets very rare to find which was not usual at any time. I never took any natural phenomena as personal as climate change. Thinking that my favorite food product can be found less and less until it disappears completely, is horrifying to me.

The film will be in format of silent films from very early time of cinema, black and white mixed with intertitle with humor. I would like to make the narrative part of the story through the intertitle. I will have an epilogue at the end to tell the audience why this meal is about to extinct. The format of old films trying to support the idea of how quickly things can be changed, from present to past. And the recipe TV program content of the film will be emphasizing on how an irrelevant look like thing can be connected to something very big behind, fx extinction of a recipe to climate change.

I intentionally want to make something that in the first look doesn't look like the films about important serious issues. What I don't like on them is being too serious and reportage format that makes the ordinary audience to escape because people normally don't care about things that are not part of their every day's life or at least that's how I think. The reasons made me think of climate change was none of these informative stuff about the climate change that we hear from here and there at all but the signs of it in a very indirect way in my routine. I found this very interesting but of course also very scary how every little thing is connected to another, how everything is a part of a chain. I think to show this side would make people interested to the subject, to start thinking about it and in an advanced stage to take action.



Qurut is one of my addictions. I am used to spend so much time on the airports to explain the security people what it is, because it is filled half of my luggage. Imagining a day, I cannot find this product anymore makes me insane. My love to this product has made me to think of climate change every day. I am saving electricity, it even makes me feel prouder that I am vegetarian, and I am not eating this industrial meat at least and more than all, I am talking this subject with my family and friends.

# OLMO

Synopsis by Silvio Soldini

SYNOPSIS



Olmo, a man of approximately eighty years old, looks out of the window of a building in the suburban area of a city. Since he has an emphysema he must always be attached to an oxygen tank that helps him breathing regularly. He can't live without it, even at the house, while looking out of the kitchen's window seeing an airplane passing by, leaving a long trail over the concrete blocks blackened by the smog.

His eight year old nephew Giulio is reading him an article from the newspaper that is laying on the same table where he gets his homework done with the help of his grandfather. He reads about melting glaciers, the greenhouse effect, methane and CO2... "What is Ci-O-2 little one?" asks the child. "Do you remember the carbon dioxide we studied?" says the Grandpa. "The one the trees breathe?" asks Giulio.

The grandfather nods and, trying to be simple, explains to him that it is also a gas that surrounds the earth to keep it warm, like a blanket, but that now it has become too thick and the heat is becoming too much.

The kid then tells him about a few days earlier, when a gentleman arrived at his school and said that if everyone, and just everyone, planted a tree, we would be so much better. "I planted a tree once", says Olmo. When he was a child, he and his father had planted an Elm in the backyard... In that moment Teresa arrives, a 40 year old woman, daughter of Olmo and mother of Giulio. She is tired, coming back from work carrying a bunch of grocery bags and as soon as she sees the open newspaper laying on the table, she complains to her father: how many times did she tell him that she doesn't want Giulio to read the anguishing news from the newspaper? Teresa closes the newspaper and throws it over the refrigerator while beginning to put the groceries away.

That evening, when Olmo puts Giulio to sleep, the little boy asks the grandfather about the tree he had planted and he tells him that over the years it had become tall, strong and that they had attached two pieces of rope to it, to make a swing. "And is the swing still there?" asks Giulio. Olmo doesn't know what to answer. The next morning, rushing Teresa checks that Giulio has in his backpack everything he needs. Then she kisses her father on his cheek, makes him promise her not to be late to school and rushes out to work. Olmo and Giulio exchange an accomplice look and soon after, they are sitting on a tram that crosses the city whizzing through it. The shopping cart containing the Grandfather's oxygen tank is with them, Giulio's backpack on the other hand has been left at home.

They get off the tram to take a bus to get to their final destination. They walk hand-by-hand, dragging on the oxygen cart. The old man tries to find his way around, they are in the neighborhood where he lived when he was a boy but everything seems foreign to him, the square where he usually played football is not even there anymore. Then Olmo recognizes a door and they enter to discover the courtyard that they were looking for. However, what they see, it is not the big Elm from the stories of the grandfather. There are actually no trees at all thus not even swings.

There is only asphalt, concrete and recently built box shutters. The grandfather's breath is suddenly becoming shorter and gasping. Olmo needs to sit down, he can't even answer to Giulio who keeps calling him worried until he panics running for help. The old man stays alone and panting under the sun. An hour later, Teresa drives her car furiously. Olmo and Giulio, who are sitting at the back seats, do not dare to speak. When she gets home, Teresa puts her son in a time-out, to then attack her father: irresponsible, dangerous, unreliable, does he even realize that she had to make up an excuse at work to go and get them? Giulio listens to everything from a crack outside the bedroom's door...

The morning after, Olmo looks out of the usual window. Giulio quickly takes his last sip of milk while Teresa is already putting his backpack on his shoulders.



The old man, exhausted of his role as a companion looks at them. Teresa greets him with a nod and drags his son out of the house. Olmo remains alone in front of the kitchen's window. Until he decides to go out. Dragging on the oxygen cart, he walks along a busy avenue. Every time he walks by a tree, he looks at it carefully, but it is not the one that he is looking for. Until he stops. Beyond the cars that speed, in the middle of a roundabout, there is a lonely tree: it is an Elm. The old man looks at it and decides to cross, dragging his cart behind him, without caring too much about the traffic. The cars have to stop to let him through. Olmo reaches the other side, he walks towards the tree, he puts his hand on its wrinkled bark. Then he hugs it, holding himself tightly to the tree-trunk.



The thing that is most striking about climate change is that it is happening under our eyes without realizing it. Slowly, almost “invisibly” and by now dramatically irreversibly. And this is scary. Cities are a bit warmer every year, the air we breathe is full of carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, fine dust... and it has been scientifically proven that breathing it has deleterious effects on children and elderly people. We must reduce emissions, for sure. But I believe that it is also important to get closer to the trees. Whoever cares about the future of this planet must rethink the relationship between mankind and trees. Which has to change. After the evident restrictions that our anthropocentric vision has shown and it is showing - given the actual environmental disaster - we must at least have an alliance, a pact between men and trees, a pact between equals. And perhaps the time has also come to express our gratitude to them in a concrete way. Defending them, cultivating them, embracing them...



# TUÃ\_INGUGU (OLHOS D'AGUA)

Director's intention by Daniela Thomas

*DESCRIPTION*



Shooting in the Xingu National Park

The shooting will demonstrate, how water is used by the Indians in the village by fishing, eating, bathing and playing. All related to the issue of the river and the waters, and the relationship and the coexistence with them, by shooting the images at the lowest interference possible. The idea is to catch images of the daily life of the village, in relation to the waters, and to avoid filming the village itself. During the shooting of these images, there will be a member of the village who will talk about the relationship with the waters. There will be no formal interview, it will be a spontaneous capture of speech and the sound will always be used in off, never on. The speech will always be in off illustrating the images.



Shooting the images in São Paulo: Tietê River, Pinheiros River and Tamanduateí River.

On the way back from the Xingu, the footage will be captured on the Tietê, Pinheiros and Tamanduateí rivers in São Paulo. For this shooting, a man or a woman, will be brought from the village to accompany this filming of the images in the three rivers, and to capture the interaction. The idea is to bring someone who does not have so much contact with the cities, so that he/she can perceive the surprise of being in contact with these rivers, that are the extreme situation, and the opposite of the state of the village. The idea is to show this contrast between the waters, with the least interference possible. It is a human issue and not an aesthetic one, in a poetic perspective. The idea in both Xingu and São Paulo, is to capture the images in the most natural and spontaneous way.

In parallel of the shooting of the images, in both Xingu National Park and in the three rivers of São Paulo, the information will be collected and the chemical analysis of the waters will be developed. The preliminary idea is to read off the chemical analysis of the waters.



# HUNGRY SEAGULL

Synopsis by Leon Wang

SYNOPSIS



On an island not far from the mainland, the young father seagull is anxiously guarding the newborn gulls by the nest and awaiting the return of the mother seagull. The mother seagull has given up everything she has, but the baby seagull is still hungry. The father seagull had flown away in search of more food...

Every April and May, the island will gather a large number of black-tailed gulls to breed there. When the young gull is hatched, the couple took turns to look for food. But as the gulls' appetites grow, parents find less and less food.

The main diet of black-tailed gulls is pelagic fish in the sea, mollusks and aquatic insects in coastal wetlands and estuaries, etc. However, with the overfishing of offshore fish and the pollution of the marine environment, seagulls can catch fewer and fewer small fish in the upper layer. Meanwhile, with the over development of coastal beaches and the destruction of wetland ecology, seagulls have little chance to get food from coastal wetlands.

To feed hungry baby gulls, parents have to go wherever they can find food. Sometimes they even look for food like scavengers in the coastal garbage dump, and sometimes they go to the tourist area like beggars. But even so, it is difficult for seagull parents to ensure that every little gull has enough food to grow up healthily.

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The film will use anthropomorphic rhetoric. The seagull family is the main character of the film. The story of the seagull couple's hard foraging for offspring shows the impact of excessive coastal and marine development on the whole marine ecology, and then express the theme of interdependence.

The couple's foraging behavior is a clue throughout the film. Our aerial camera will simulate the perspective of seagulls and follow the flight path of seagulls 'foraging for food' to show the main content of the film: coastal development and marine pollution. These will be detailed in the shooting outline.

Finally, as for the form of film's presentation, except for the feeding scene shooting of seagulls by ground camera on the island, all the other pictures are taken by aerial camera. The basis for the selection of aerial photography is: one is to simulate the visual angle of birds, and the other is that only the perspective of high altitude can show the shocking effect brought by large-scale environmental changes on the ground and in the sea. At the same time, the content of the picture may be accompanied by necessary explanations.



© Leon Wang



© Leon Wang



# KA MUA KA MURI WALKING BACKWARDS INTO THE FUTURE

Synopsis by Karin Williams



The film follows a boy across time: from settlement of the island by Polynesian explorers, to European impact during the missionary period in the 19th Century, to recent history when the international airport was built by the American military during World War II, through the current tourist era, projecting into the future where the island's ecosystem has been destroyed and turning back into the past again.

He is the same boy, representing a continuous ancestral line. He could be my father, his ancestors and the generations to come – or any one of the island's inhabitants.

*SYNOPSIS*

He is both participant and observer, living his life and standing outside his own time to watch as human forces create rapid destruction in one short lifetime. We see him paddle his canoe across the lagoon, sing hymns in church, work as a deck hand on a tour boat, dive in pristine or polluted waters.

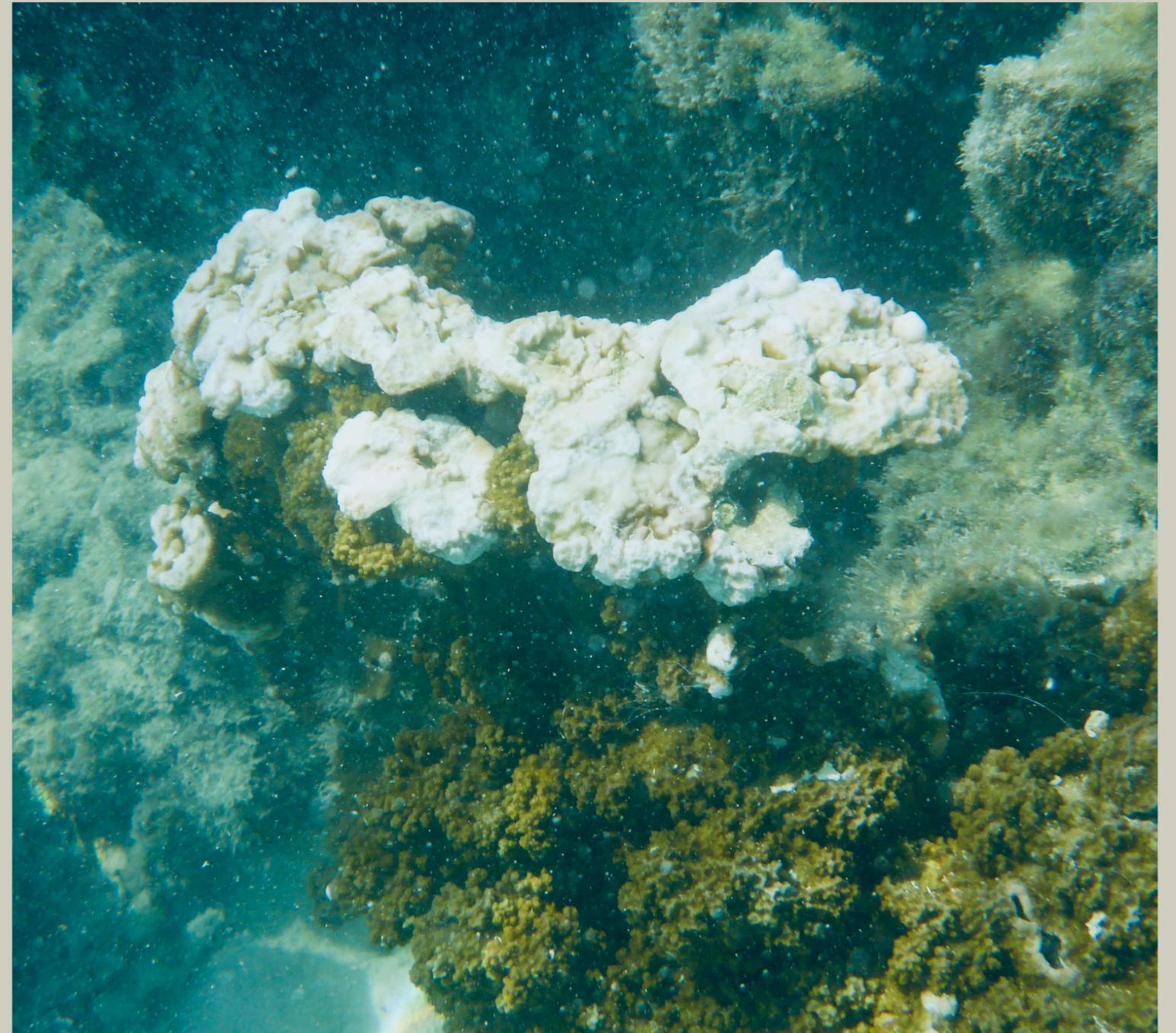
As time expands and contracts we experience the cycles of nature: tides turning; rising and setting of sun and moon; constellations wheeling across the night sky; movement of fish and fowl; drought and hurricane; calm and storm. These natural cycles contrast with images of human impact on the island: Polynesian settlers cut and burn the forest; Christian missionaries burn “idols” and build coral limestone churches and houses; American military engineers construct an airstrip during World War II; flying boats and airplanes bring loads of tourists; diesel engines replace horses; power boats replace canoes.

As our timeline passes through present day, time speeds up with a montage of technology and human action that accelerates climate change: fuel pumps, gas cylinders, air conditioners, toilets flushing, washing machines pumping detergent into the lagoon, agricultural chemicals leaching into groundwater, piles of rubbish and plastic bottles in the dump.

The final, disturbing image before the boy, Tāne, returns to the past is of a destroyed, desecrated lagoon, where the fish are skeletons, the water is choked with algae and the coral is bleached white as bone. The film features time-lapse photography of the natural world, spectacular aerial photography sweeping across motu (islands) and moana (ocean), beautiful underwater photography, imagery of our hero at key moments across time, and file footage/photos from the last hundred years. The score incorporates elements traditional drum and song, church 'imene (hymns) 20th Century and contemporary music.

The film incorporates the four elements of earth, air, fire and water, and themes of environment, people, politics and trade. Above all, it demonstrates the interdependence of people and place in this one specific location in the Pacific.

The effect is intimate and epic, alarming yet hopeful. Ultimately the film is a call to action, urging everyone to take immediate steps to save this precious ecosystem before it is lost forever.



## DIRECTOR'S NOTE



The island of Aitutaki in the South Pacific is imperiled by human impacts. This fragile tropical ecosystem supports a population of 2,000 residents on 18 square km of land, in a lagoon of 50 square km. Described in the tourist brochures as a “paradise” on one of the most beautiful lagoons in the world, Aitutaki stands at a crossroads where its people must decide what sort of development is appropriate for the island’s future.

The past 200 years have seen massive change, from Christianity in the 19th Century to colonization by New Zealand and nationhood as part of the Cook Islands in the 20th Century. Aitutaki’s isolation is both a blessing and a curse. Its remote location has kept it from being overrun by the outside world but its reliance on imports, particularly petroleum fuels and processed food, creates economic dependence and leaves the island vulnerable to cultural and environmental degradation.

Aitutaki is becoming a mecca for upmarket tourism. Cook Islands visitor numbers are growing at around 10% per annum, with an estimated 150,000 tourists per year. Aitutaki is the second-most visited island behind Rarotonga, which is also struggling with the impacts of growth.

While these numbers aren’t huge compared to major South Pacific tourist destinations like Fiji and Tahiti, the influx puts tremendous pressure on the islands’ environment and resources. The impact can already be seen in tourist areas around the airport, where runoff from septic systems and groundwater is causing algae bloom and seaweed growth. Warming water temperatures contribute to coral bleaching. Water quality in high traffic areas is poor, with low dissolved oxygen levels choking aquatic life. More visitors bring increased demand for goods and services along with associated issues of energy use, sanitation and waste management.

Aitutaki is my father’s homeland. He left as a young boy for education in New Zealand and returned as a medical graduate in the 1960s. Our family maintains close ties with the island and we visit often. I have always expected the next generations would be able to visit our father’s island and experience its special beauty and unique culture. But now that is at risk. Aitutaki’s fragile environment is at a crossroads. Our lagoon is home to sea turtles, tridachna gigas clams we call pa’ua, giant trevally or ‘urua, and a host of other fish and coral species, many of which are threatened. If immediate measures aren’t taken the lagoon and its creatures may be lost forever. We inherited this beautiful island from our forefathers. On the current path we might destroy our homeland in one generation. Yet there is still time to choose the future we want and avoid the mistakes of places like Papeete and Waikiki.