



Wild Pear Arts and Servia Film present

FLOTACIJA

a feature documentary by Eluned Zoë Aiano and Alesandra Tatić

LOGLINE

Living conditions in Majdanpek, Eastern Serbia, are so bad that even the dragons are leaving. With a long tradition as both miners and dragon hunters, the Marković family struggle to keep the magic alive as their town gets swallowed up by the demands of industry.

TEASER

<https://vimeo.com/417110626>



FOREWORD

“Flotacija”, in English literally “froth flotation”, is a process used in industrial mining to separate minerals from ore, which produces otherworldly black bubbles that simmer in pits. Despite the dangerous effects of its by-products, it is shrouded in a sense of reverence and awe by the locals, just like the notorious dragons living in the forests. For us, it is the precise point where the industrial meets the mythological and a reflection of the complexity of the relationships between the town and its inhabitants.

SYNOPSIS

In Majdanpek, Serbia, a culture historically renowned for magical practices and supernatural creatures is being eaten away by an ever-expanding copper mine. A giver and taker of life, the mine is central to the regional economy but a major threat to traditional practices of the local Vlach population, a minority ethnicity within the Balkans that is often stigmatised and overlooked. The pollution is so critical it's even driving out the dragons said to live in the forests.

These conflicts between nature/tradition and industry/modernity shape the lives of the family of Dragan Marković, a miner by profession and dragon hunter by tradition. His 90-year old father "Grandpa" Pera was a dragon hunting legend whose fame crossed borders, but how is Dragan supposed to continue his legacy when there are no dragons left? In any case, he has more pressing concerns, such as the chronic health problems he's struggling with as a result of decades of inhaling toxic dust. Moreover, his own son Cvele doesn't seem to have any option but to follow him into the mine and keep perpetuating the cycle.

The fate of Dragan's feisty, larger-than-life sister Desa is also interconnected with the mine. Her husband Ilija was the head of the union, but he died just as he retired, plunging their family into instability. When the mine is bought from the Serbian state by a Chinese company, Desa is worried that her last remaining rights might be taken away from her. She becomes determined to rally the city's old spirit of resistance and solidarity, but she has no idea where to start.

Caught in the middle of global socio-political forces, the Markovics continue in their optimism and keep dreaming of striking gold, both literally and metaphorically, against all odds. Flotacija follows them over several years, with humour and tenderness, bizarreness and humanity.



ARTISTIC APPROACH

The core of the film is character driven and consists of scenes of family life shown through an intimate observational style. We get a glimpse of the banality and repetition of life in a dead-end town, but also the caring and complex nature of their meaningful relationships. As such, the tone shifts between serious and poignant to funny and lively, reflecting the nuanced reality there.

These scenes are combined with more expressive footage intended to capture the magic of Ma-janpek through a series of abstract and poetic visual sequences that evoke the atmosphere by focussing on textures and colours. Through this, we conjure traces of the elusive dragons, whose presence is felt in the tree bark, rotting tyres and crumbling buildings and merges with the monstrous machines that have taken their place.

The sound design heightens both the mysticism and the oppressive din of the mine. Indeed, work in the mine never stops, and in the city we hear the constant noise of trucks, sirens and explosions.

TEAM STATEMENT

This film has evolved hand-in-hand with our relationship to Majdanpek in general and the Marković family in particular. Unsurprisingly, we were initially drawn to the topic of dragon hunting as a phenomenon, but as we grew closer to our protagonists we realised that it is they themselves and the social context they are embedded in that are what truly make the situation interesting and relevant to the wider world.

Our approach as filmmakers has always been based on the bonds of intimacy and trust we established with the protagonists over the years, and throughout the filming process we've striven to portray them and their culture ethically and respectfully. We feel a particular responsibility as Vlachs are so rarely depicted on screen except in the context of "spooky stories", and so it's been important to us to really show the humanity and context of our characters, beyond the magic.

We chose to work as a close-knit team, partly to keep our presence as non-invasive as possible but also out of a shared commitment to creative collaboration that subverts traditional hierarchies. However, in addition to our joint visions, each of us also has our own particular interest within the film.

Serbian director Alesandra Tatić has a background working with labour rights, and she is particularly interested in transgenerational minority exploitation and marginalisation.

British director Eluned Zoë Aiano graduated in Eastern European Studies and is determined to show the region in a non-stereotypical way by focussing on aspects that often get overlooked internationally. Artistically, the representation of intangible cultural heritage is a recurring theme in her work.

Producer Greta Rauleac's work addresses practices of community resistance and, as a member of the Romanian diaspora, she is interested in this culture's representation abroad.

Finally, producer Miloš Ljubomirović is local to the region and multiple generations of his family worked in mining, so he has first-hand experience of the effects that the industry has on the health of both people and the environment.

CONTEXT

Majdanpek is a small mountain town in Eastern Serbia home to a large Vlach population, an ethnicity closely related to Romanians that is renowned (and often discriminated against) for its mysterious supernatural practices and its notoriously potent magic. Their culture is strongly connected to nature, especially water and medicinal plants, and traditionally the local forests are viewed as a mystical place home to magical creatures, notably dragons. The dragons could pose a threat to the citizens, either in their true form or disguised as something else, in which case hunters such as the Markovics would go to expel them with fires and potions. However, the local copper mine is eradicating the landscape, driving them out of their usual habitat.

The mine has been present in the region for millennia but began to be fully exploited during Tito's Yugoslavia, when Majdanpek experienced a boom. However, in the Post-Socialist era it became neglected and working conditions deteriorated. Aside from a lack of protections for labourers within the mine, the dust produced by the extraction process is massively polluting, causing health issues for the entire population and poisoning the vegetation. While Serbia already has the worst air quality in Europe, life expectancy in the region is ten years less than in the rest of the country.

The mine was then sold by the Serbian state to the Chinese company Zi Jin in 2019. While employment has increased as a result, extraction activities have massively intensified meaning that pollution has too. Moreover, the mine has always held a monopoly over the entire town with ownership of all major amenities and the majority of the housing. Zi Jin also acquired these rights but refuses to offer any security to those living in its properties, most of whom are already living in extreme precarity.



THE TEAM



Eluned Zoë Aiano is a filmmaker, editor and translator with a background in Visual Anthropology whose work is generally centred on Central/Eastern Europe. Her short *All Her Dying Lovers*, an animated documentary made in collaboration with Anna Benner, premiered at Hot Docs and was published on the New York Times Op Docs section. She attended IFDA Academy 2022. She has been selected for various residencies, including the Wapping Artist Residency in Berlin, the Pèpinières Européennes de Création residency in Quebec. She is currently artist in residence with the Aix- en-Provence Opera Festival. She also writes about film and is a regular contributor to the East European Film Bulletin.

Selected projects:

2021: Marija+Toma (Serbia, short)

2020: All Her Dying Lovers (Czech Republic/Germany, short)

2019: Black&White (Czech Republic/Germany, short)



Alesandra Tatić is a visual anthropologist based in France. Her ethnographic fieldwork is global, yet mostly focused on the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Alesandra works with and for the women's labour movement, exploring feminist resistance, and migration phenomena. Extending feminist collaborative work methods from academia and activism to filmmaking, she co-founded the Wild Pear Arts collective. Her academic work has been published in *Journal des anthropologues*, and *Nuevo mundo, nuevos mundos*, among others. Alesandra is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS).

Selected projects:

2021: Marija+Toma (Serbia, short)

2019: I Have a Song to Sing You (Serbia/UK, short)

THE TEAM



Greta Rauleac is an Italian-Romanian producer specialised in visual anthropology. She has worked with various documentary production companies in Italy and is a founding member of the Wild Pear Arts. Parallel to her film work, she is a researcher interested in resistance practices, popular culture and urban issues. Currently, she is a PhD Candidate in Sociology and Social Anthropology at Central European University.

Selected projects:

2021: *Marija+Toma (Serbia, short)*

2019: *I Have a Song to Sing You (Serbia/UK, short)*



Miloš Ljubomirović is a film producer and the founder of Serbia Film. His recent co-production "North Pole" premiered in the Official Selection in Cannes 2021 and was screened at more than 100 festivals, winning more than 15 awards and becoming an EFA Short Film Candidate. His 2020 executive production "Armadila" won the Oscar-qualifying Best Film Award at Vienna Shorts, also becoming an EFA Short Film Candidate. "Portrait of a Dying Giant", his latest production, was part of the Serbian pavilion at Venice Biennale of Architecture. Miloš is an IDFAcademy, Sarajevo Talent Campus and CEE Animation Workshop alumnus.

Selected projects:

2021: *North Pole*

2020: *Armadillo*

2018: *My Brother on Eighteen Wheels*

2018: *The Call*

2014: *Shadows*

CREDITS

Directors

Eluned Zoë Aiano
Alesandra Tatić

Producers

Miloš Ljubomirović
Greta Rauleac

Camera

Eluned Zoë Aiano
Milica Drakulić
Vincent Laurin

Sound Recording and Design

Bojan Palikuća

Editing

Eluned Zoë Aiano
Marija Kovačina

Colour

Goran Todorić

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Serbia, 2023
77 minutes

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Development support from Brouillon d'un rêve, SCAM, France.

Selected for the IDFA Project Space Rough Cut Lab, 2022.

Winner of the East Silver Caravan Award from the Institute of Documentary Film.



Scam*

