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|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| (Best Documentary
Polish Film Academy
Award 2017) | (Critic's Week Award
Festival del Film Locarno
2016) | (Best Documentary
Warsaw Film Festival
2016) | (Young Eyes Award
DOK Leipzig
2016) | (Silver Eye Award
Jihlava IDFF
2016) | (Best Documentary
Minsk IFF Listapad
2016) |
| (Best Documentary
Bratislava IFF
2016) | (Best Documentary
Trieste IFF
2017) | (Best Documentary
Man In Danger FF
2016) | (The Gate of Freedom Award
Grand Prix Gdansk DocFilm
Festival 2017) | (SOS-Kinderdörfer
Weltweit Award
DOK Fest München 2017) | (Grand Prix
9th International TRT
Istanbul 2017) |
| (Grand Prix
It's All True IFF
2017) | (Grand Prix
Yamagata IDFF
2017) | (White Goose Award
Grand Prix DMZ Docs
IDFF 2017) | (Grand Prix
Anú-rú Áboro IFF
2017) | (Best Documentary
Central & Eastern Europe
Astra Film Festival 2017) | (Grand Prix
Solatin Film Festival
2017) |
| (Golden Castle Award
Grand Prix
Off Cinema, 2017) | (Grand Prix
FilmPolska Festival
2017) | (Honourable Mention
Zagreb Dox
2017) | (Honourable Mention
Flahertiana Film Festival
2017) | (Official Selection
IDFA
2016) | (Official Selection
HOT Docs
2016) |

communion

A film by Anna Zamecka

produced by **HBO EUROPE**, **WAJDA STUDIO**, **OTTER FILMS** in association with **MX35**
co-financed by **POLISH FILM INSTITUTE** world sales **CAT&DOCS**
sound designer **MARCIN KASIŃSKI** sound **ANNA ROK**, **KATARZYNA SZCZERBA**
editors **AGNIESZKA GLIŃSKA PSM**, **ANNA ZAMECKA** director of photography **MAŁGORZATA SZYŁAK**
producers **ANNA WYDRA**, **ANNA ZAMECKA**, **ZUZANNA KRÓL**, **IZABELA ŁOPUCH**, **HANKA KASTELICOVÁ**
writer and director **ANNA ZAMECKA**



WAJDA STUDIO

Otterfilms



DI FACTORY

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EUROPEAN FILM AWARDS 2017



N O M I N A T I O N
EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY

press kit



communion

a film by Anna Zamecka Poland/2016/72'

Communion, the documentary debut feature film directed by Anna Zamecka, produced in 2017 by HBO Europe, Wajda Studio and Otter Films, has been nominated in the category EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY at the European Film Awards 2017.

logline

When the adults are ineffective, the children have to grow up quickly. Ola is 14 and takes care of her dysfunctional father, her autistic brother, and her mother, who lives away from home. Dreaming of reuniting the family, she masterminds her brother's First Communion.

awards

Best Documentary, Polish Film Academy 2016 • Critic's Week Award, Festival del Film Locarno 2016 • Best Documentary Film, Warsaw Film Festival 2016 • Young Eyes Award, DOK Leipzig 2016 • Silver Eye Award, Jihlava IDFF 2016 • Best Documentary, Minsk IFF Listapad 2016 • Best Documentary, Bratislava IFF 2016 • Best Documentary, Trieste IFF 2017 • Best Documentary, Man In Danger FF 2016 • "The Gate of Freedom" Award (Grand Prix), Gdańsk DocFilm Festival 2017 • SOS-Kinderdörfer Weltweit Award, DOK Fest München 2017 • Grand Prix, 9th International TRT Istanbul 2017 • Grand Prix, International Film Festival It's All True 2017 • Grand Prix, Yamagata IDFF 2017 • White Goose Award, Grand Prix, DMZ Docs IDFF 2017 • Grand Prix, Ânûû-rû Âboro FF 2017 • Best Documentary Central & Eastern Europe, Astra Film Festival 2017 • Grand Prix, Solanin Film Festival 2017 • Golden Castle Award/Grand Prix, Off Cinema 2017 • Grand Prix, FilmPolska Festival 2017 • Honourable Mention, Zagreb Dox 2017 • Honourable Mention Flahertiana Film Festival 2017 • Official Selection, IDFA 2016 • Official Selection, HOT Docs 2016

synopsis

Ola is 14 and she takes care of her father, autistic brother and a mother who lives apart from them; but most of all she tries to reunite the family. She lives in the hope of bringing her mother back home. Her 13-year-old brother Nikodem's Holy Communion is a pretext for the family to meet up. Ola is entirely responsible for preparing the perfect family celebration. *Communion* reveals the beauty of the rejected, the strength of the weak and the need for change when change seems impossible. This crash course in growing up teaches us that no failure is final. Especially when love is in question.

director's note

After several meetings with Ola, Nikodem, and their father, I knew I wanted to make a film: about the power of unconditional family love, about bonds securing it forever. Inside a cramped apartment – where everything gets lost, deteriorates, or falls apart – I saw three people connected so strongly that a mere gesture of one of them led to an avalanche of reactions: anger, fear, concealed emotions. *Communion* is not a film about the preparations to the first communion ceremony in a Polish family (though this is the narrative). It is an existential tale about the impossible communion – seen as a bond, a loving family united. I was just like any child when it came to fairy tales – I loved them. Hansel and Gretel was one of my favourites. *Communion* is a realistic, non-black-and-white version of the tale about Hansel and Gretel looking for their path in the forest of the world, where parents cannot perform their roles. How much can a child bear? Just as much as hope enables them to – their hope that mother will return, that family can be brought together again; and most of all, hope that someone will finally absolve them from responsibility.



cv anna zamecka

Polish film director, screenwriter and producer. She studied journalism, anthropology, and photography in Warsaw and Copenhagen. She completed the Dok Pro Documentary Programme at Wajda School. Her feature-length debut, *Communion* (2016), has won a number of awards at international film festivals, including Critic's Week Award at the 69th Locarno Film Festival, and the Polish Film Academy Award EAGLE 2017; in November 2017, it was nominated for best documentary at EFA 2017.

interview by anna zamecka to dimitra kouzi

Communion is your feature-length debut – what was the driving force that kept you going?

Most probably the fact that this story is related to my own experience and inspired by my own childhood. The main protagonist is a fourteen-year-old child with adult responsibilities – just as I had been. In Ola's family, roles are turned upside down: She is the one who cares for her parents and for her disabled brother. Her own needs are pushed to the background. Such 'grown-up children' aren't rare, and not just in Poland, but they rarely become the subject of conversation. One can't expect that a film will change the world, but if it provokes discussion, that's something. I decided to talk about things that are important to me, and when I realised that the film was also important to its protagonists, I felt a kick of energy to push it and never ease up.

Could you describe Ola, Nikodem, and Marek in your own words?

They are like characters from a fairy tale. The father is like a widower from the Brothers Grimm world: kind-hearted but completely helpless. The evil stepmother is replaced by the mother – a big girl who escaped from her children ('Because I'm sad,' she explains). And the son and daughter who have to cope with that. Ola decides to be an adult to fill the role others fail to deliver: She cleans the apartment, rebukes her brother, and tries to foster him and her father. She wants to organise Nikodem's communion at all costs – so it would be 'normal'. And she only breaks sometimes. Nikodem sees himself as a chimpanzee, or a horse. He hides inside a poetic world of his own – and from its depth, he makes the most acute comments.

Why did you choose to tell the story through Ola's perspective?

Because she feels closest to me. I could understand her feelings perfectly because I know them from my own life, just as I have experienced some of the situations presented in the film. However, it's more about emotional images than specific events.

How did you earn your protagonists' trust?

The hardest thing was to win Ola's trust. In her eyes, I represented the adult world from which she had suffered many wrongs. From the very beginning, the most important thing for me was to make sure that Ola and Nikodem felt safe with me. It was essential that they knew my intentions. Of course, I am aware of the fact that they didn't really understand what they were taking part in. I had ethical dilemmas because of that: I was filming children, one of them autistic – I had a head start on all levels. I knew they were unable to defend themselves from me, to mark a borderline. Because of that I had to accept full responsibility for all that could have happened while we were making the film and after that.

A woman director, a women's crew, a women's point of view, a girl protagonist. Does this make for a different perspective?

'A woman's point of view?' I don't know what that is. Moreover, it wasn't until after the premiere that I realised that almost only women made *Communion*. I've had to explain that in interviews and at meetings with viewers. But there was no conspiracy, no manifesto. The editor, Agnieszka Glińska, and the cinematographer, Gosia Szyłak, are both amazing artists and personalities, and that is why I invited them to work together on this project. Gender was of no importance at all. It turns out that men in film are something natural, while women are still perceived as an aberration. I can't fully agree that Ola is the main protagonist in this film. Ola and Nikodem are both the leading characters; they are equally important. I wouldn't decide to make a film about any one of them. They function together – one leads to the other, and one cannot exist without the other.

You once said, 'It is easy in Poland to judge and blame a woman.' Why?

Motherhood is perceived as a mission in Poland, not as a woman's free choice. The society expects much more from mothers than it does from fathers. But in Catholic Poland, 8 out of 10 men leave their families when a disabled child is born. Almost half a million fathers avoid paying child support for their own children, and it is socially accepted. It's been years since anyone tried to tackle this issue in a systemic manner. But there is no social acceptance for women leaving their homes and children. They are judged very rigidly – with no regard to the circumstances that led them to their decisions. Ola, our protagonist, told me that she feels stigmatised, not just because she comes from a broken home, but also because her mother 'abandoned' her.

In another interview you said, ‘I was listening to their needs – not to what I wanted’. What decisions did you make while directing the film?

What I meant was that I didn’t try to forcibly arrange certain situations, if I felt that this was contrary to what Ola and Nikodem actually wanted. It wasn’t only about ethical issues and not crossing borders: Without listening to their needs, there would be no truth on the screen. That is why the preparation period was so important. I spent a lot of time with them – without the camera. I watched their reactions in a number of situations. That enabled me to predict their reaction to certain events when I was writing the script.

What was your ‘scripted’ intention, and what happened ‘magically’ during shooting?

The film was – to a significant extent – based on a script. At first, I had trouble telling the story. There was no starting point, no foothold. I didn’t know where to begin, or where to end. When I came up with Nikodem’s communion, everything seemed easier. It wasn’t even because the protagonist was about to go through a process; the communion turned out to be a good metaphor of Ola’s growing up to be an adult – it served as a pretext to tell about her situation. In Poland, the first communion sacrament is a very important ceremony. It is an occasion for the entire family to meet and integrate. I knew that Ola, who lived in the hope of bringing her mother back home, would use this event as an opportunity for a family reunion. I wrote many scenes related to the ceremony using my own memories from my communion. Of course, I hoped that Nikodem would begin an interesting dialogue with the realm of religion – and he did. I wanted to show that he was very thoughtful when it came to spirituality – much more than I was, more than most children are. The scene with the priest leading Nikodem through an examination of conscience in church was my idea. But Nikodem’s brilliant lines about virtues and sins, as well as his performance at the altar, obviously happened, as you said, ‘magically’ during shooting.

How does the story unfold through the use of portraits?

Camera motion wasn’t necessarily following the action. Camera movement was mainly used to provide an emotional interpretation and describe relationships between the characters and their complicated dynamics. But by insisting on getting as close as possible, we ended up being able to create a narrative through intimate portraiture.

There is no need for, or reliance on, exposition, verbal cues, or any kind of reverse shot to what or whom Ola is reacting at any given moment. You can see this, for example, in the scene when the social worker comes to visit. The camera rests only on her face. In that face, we know everything. In this, we can see the system failing this family, time and time again. The girl is forced to lie in order to keep them from doing any more damage. At such a tender age, she has learned how to protect herself and her family.

How did you manage to track emotions without betraying the characters’ trust?

I did my best to be cautious, not to cross certain lines, not to invade potentially painful situations with the camera. We decided on fixed lenses, 35mm and 28mm, to help us achieve both a specific approach to the characters and to acquire as much intimacy as possible. Closing the distance was difficult, but very important, as it meant overcoming barriers. Honestly, at the beginning of the shooting, we both felt very ill at ease, like intruders. It was difficult for us on many levels – as it was for the family, too. On the one hand, this makes it seem as if the camera is ‘invisible,’ but we were the ones evoking these emotions sometimes just by our presence and by how close the camera was to them. The emotions we see are sometimes a precise reaction to this, not necessarily to what’s going on. So, while there may be anger at the situation they are finding themselves in, there was also aggression because of the camera’s close proximity. The tension apparent in the film was with us throughout the whole process. At the same time, a true emotional bond developed between us – the crew – and the protagonists. At a point, we may have become a family, and everything is allowed in a family. No one held down.

I know you edited for quite a long time (how long?). How did you go about editing the film?

I was lucky to work with Agnieszka Glinska, a prolific master editor working in fiction. I learned so much from her. We were working together for seven months and after that, Agnieszka had to start another project, so I edited on my own for another four months. It took this long to find the smoothest way of telling the story. But just to be clear, I did shoot with a script, so this is not a film constructed in the editing room – but it was still a lot of work to find the rhythm and the way the scenes needed to flow together.

What is not in the film?

The process of Ola and Nikodem growing up as a topic made it necessary to limit all other threads of their story. The documentary genre carries an ethical dilemma that troubles me: As you decide to make a film about one person, everyone else remain just a sketch. Other people are not shown in the way they might deserve. I mean Marek and Magda, the protagonists' parents. They are very interesting characters who deserve a complete portrait.

What element is it that makes your film universal?

I made a film about the strength of unconditional family love. But I also wanted to talk about growing up and the association of growing up with disappointments, sometimes painful ones – especially when dealing with our parents. We see Ola growing up – from a girl who believes that, despite all obstacles, her family can be united, to a teenager who accepts the fact that it will never happen. Accepting one's limitations is a necessary prerequisite for maturity.

What changed in your life after completing this film?

Making something so close to your heart obviously has cathartic power. I felt that I wasn't looking for the goal on the outside, but inside me. It was an urge to work through something of my own, something very difficult. *Communion* cleansed me. I went through a long process alongside the protagonists.

How do you deal with the film's success?

Viewers' very lively and authentic reactions bring me the most joy. I participated in many meetings after screenings. They are sometimes so full of emotion. I receive moving emails from all around the world. This motivates me to work on another film.

Why should EFA members vote for your film?

I don't know if they should. But one thing is for certain: I would like them to watch *Communion*.

crew

Written and Directed by Anna Zamecka

DOP: Małgorzata Szyłak

Editors: Agnieszka Glińska, Anna Zamecka, Wojciech Janas

Sound: Anna Rok, Katarzyna Szczerba

Sound Design: Dreamsound: Kacper Habisiak, Marcin Kasiński, Marcin Lenarczyk

Post Production: DI Factory

protagonists

Ola Kaczanowska, Nikodem Kaczanowski, Marek Kaczanowski, Magdalena Kaczanowska, Aleksandra Bociańska, Marek Gorczyński, Ks. Jan Kasiński, Karolina Kucharska, Artur Miętek

producers

PRODUCERS: Anna Wydra, Anna Zamecka, Zuzanna Król, Izabela Łopuch, Hanka Kastelicova.

PRODUCTION COMPANIES: HBO Europe, Wajda Studio, Otter Films

ASSOCIATED PRODUCER – MX35

tech specs

Length: 72'

Year of Production: 2016

Country of Production: Poland

Language: Polish



In Europe HBO offers programming to subscribers through three services covering seventeen countries: In Scandinavia HBO Nordic has established itself as The Home of Series, offering a premium Subscription Video on Demand Service directly to consumers and through operator partners in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark. In Spain HBO España is available to subscribers as an SVOD service and through its exclusive partnership with Vodafone Spain, allowing Vodafone customers in Spain to access the streaming service via Vodafone TV or on their computers, smart phones and tablets. In Central Europe HBO is available to subscribers in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina.



Wajda Studio was founded in 2011 by two directors, Andrzej Wajda and Wojciech Marczewski. Thanks to the close co-operation and support of the Polish Film Institute, Wajda Studio has produced over 80 documentaries and short features. The Studio runs EKRAN+ European Training Programme for Film Professionals. In 2012, Wajda Studio produced its first feature-length international co-production, *Sanctuary*, a joint project with Ireland, directed by Norah McGettigan. In 2013, Wajda Studio produced *Joanna*, an Academy Award nominee for Best Short Subject in 2015. Wajda Studio's *The Performer*, directed by Maciej Sobieszczkański and Łukasz Ronduda, premiered internationally at IFF Rotterdam 2015 and was presented at the 65th Berlinale, where it received the Think: Film Award.



The Warsaw based production company established by Anna Wydra, focused on art-house fiction and documentary films for cinema and TV, with an emphasis on the international market. Most of our projects are international co-productions shot in many places all over the world (incl. Haiti, USA, Mexico, Abkhazia, Morocco, Mongolia). We are very proud that we work on projects with great filmmakers. With B. Konopka and P. Rosołowski we have completed *Rabbit a la Berlin* (Oscar nomination) and *The Art of Disappearing*. Among our completed productions are: *Noiseless (Sans Bruit)* by MML Collective (PL/ FR), *Deep Love* by J. P. Matuszyński, *6 Degrees* by B. Dombrowski, *Domino Effect* by E. Niewiera and P. Rosołowski (PL/D) and *ZUD* by Marta Minorowicz ((PL/D), which premiered at Berlinale 2016. Currently in production of documentary essay *And there was Love in the Ghetto* by J. Dylewska, A. Wajda and A. Holland (PL/D), new features: *Ayka* by S. Dvortsevov and *The MUTE* by B. Konopka.

PRODUCED BY:

HBO Europe Wajda Studio Otter Films

FILM CO-FINANCED BY THE POLISH FILM INSTITUTE:

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