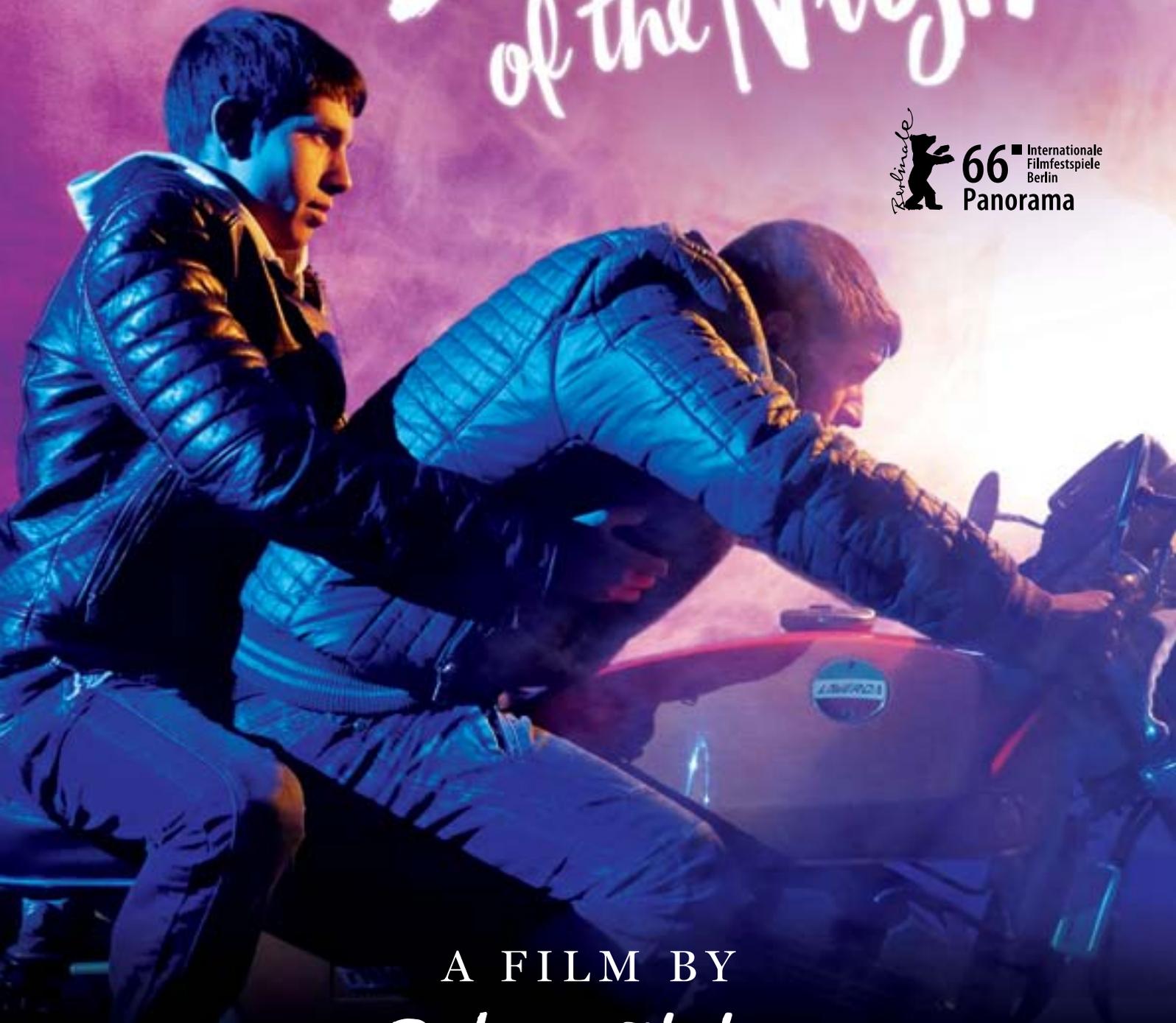


WILD
ART FILM
presents

Brothers of the Night

Berlinale
 66th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama



A FILM BY
Patric Chiha

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**WILD
ART FILM**

FILMREPUBLIC

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LOGLINE

Soft boys by day, kings by night. The film follows a group of young Bulgarian Roma who come to Vienna looking for freedom and a quick buck. They sell their bodies as if that's all they had. What comforts them, so far from home, is the feeling of being together. But the nights are long and unpredictable.



SYNOPSIS

One captain, one boat, two boatmen, the Danube, Vienna's skyline in the background... Whether it's reality or fiction isn't important. The protagonists in *Brothers of the Night* do exist in real life: They're Bulgarian Roma. Sometimes they're like tiger cubs, at other times they're the gay sailors from Fassbinder's "Querelle" or Marlon Brando's grandchildren, wearing their leather jackets like suits of armour.

Poverty and a sense of adventure has brought them to Vienna. They sell their bodies because they don't want to beg for money or peddle newspapers. Their customers are lonely, usually older men who live in public housing. The guys do "business" with them, a word they choose to make a clear distinction between work and pleasure.

It's a made-up world within the real one, and it's temporary. The Bulgarians have replaced the Romanians, who moved on to Italy. Truth and lies! Sobriety and drunkenness! A life lived between the two worlds. In Bulgaria, they get married at 16 and have children six months later. Their families need the money. They have to get away. And then they get to the blue and pink nightlife of the gay bar Café Rüdiger, the macho talk and fantasies of making big money that materializes into flashy belt buckles and crappy black cars. They boast and lie all the time. Anything's possible at night. Between brothers.



THE FILM

As long as you can still dream, life will go forward. Dreams keep you going and keep hope alive, the hope that they will come true some day. “Just dream something that has a chance of coming true” is the advice of people who have already stopped dreaming. After watching this film, you’ll want to reply that you should never stop believing in what you really want for yourself.

The young men in Patric Chiha’s *Brothers of the Night* dream about the future. But before their dreams come true, they live in the present. At a small café in Vienna they offer their services and sell their bodies, because a new life isn’t free. They’re Bulgarian Roma. Whoever comes to Austria with unrealistic expectations learns the truth at the café where these youths gather every night. But *Brothers of the Night*, says Chiha, is “not a film about these young men, it’s a film with them.” And it isn’t about poverty and exploitation, but optimism and affection.

To appreciate the world with all your senses, you must become immersed in it. You have to open yourself up to it before its doors will open to you. This requires trust, the trust that a filmmaker has to show people—and is rewarded with while working with them. Patric Chiha earned this trust by approaching the group slowly and without reservation. In this sense, *Brothers of the Night* is a kind of invitation to approach these young men in the theater not as a neutral observer, but to spend an hour and a half with them, experiencing their days—and most importantly their nights.

“I don’t have any problems here in Vienna,” claims one of them, “I just have problems in Bulgaria. With my wife.” This statement says a great deal, as it reflects not a denial of the harsh reality but an almost optimistic view of it. These men brought their pasts with them to Vienna, and their families, though they have been left behind, are omnipresent: Photos of women and children light up on the displays of their cell phones, memories and experiences are shared, judgments are proclaimed, fears are stated, and new plans are worked out without interruption.

Brothers of the Night is a film in which the harsh reality is repeatedly broken through by means of a high level of artificiality—which is what makes it tangible. Many of the staged scenes, which were worked out jointly, show the young men in a carefully arranged composition and bathed in a rich spotlight: A café gleams in violet, shining red candle bulbs cast their shadows on the bodies of men posing at the bar, a huge painting of a naked woman behind them. Chiha employs these and other alienating devices to literally create a stage for his protagonists, who can mount it as if it were a protected space: The greatest amount of safety can be found in a place where you don’t have to expose yourself. Intimacy depends not on how close the filmmaker gets to a protagonist, but the kind of empathy the protagonist is shown. For this reason, *Brothers of the Night* isn’t a social-realist film that observes, or even dissects, but one that attempts to understand. And circumstances can be most easily understood when you’re interested in the hopes and dreams of

others, no matter how unrealistic they seem. Chiha doesn't ask any questions and doesn't conduct any interviews, he gives his protagonists an opportunity to speak for themselves. The answers follow, are provided with every pose and gesture, often with nothing more than a shy smile or a defiant look, with no further prompting.

Each of these young men has his own story. Each one has pride and dignity. Each one looks at the world with defiance, knowing that Vienna isn't the end of the line, and that things won't just be the same somewhere else. But the day of their departure is nearing. So at its conclusion, Brothers of the Night says farewell to its protagonists at a bus station where they leave for home, knowing full well that this can't really be the end. That will happen in the form of a wonderful epilogue in which words are no longer necessary. Not because everything has already been said, but because certain feelings simply don't need them.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I found myself stuck in a very strange pub in Vienna one evening, I knew I'd found my next film: The bar was sleazy yet aesthetically pleasing in a tacky kind of way, as if from a different time. Lonely old men sat while proud, capricious young men pranced around the pool table, immediately reminding me of Pasolini or Fassbinder's broken heroes. It had been a long time since I'd seen bodies like theirs in film, the playful way in which they moved, danced, loitered and chatted away. I wanted to get to know these people and to film them.

The boys are young Bulgarian Roma who have left behind poverty, their families and social customs. But they're not really free in Vienna either. They're divided. On the one hand, they have to have sex with men they find physically repulsive, but, on the other hand, they can finally be young here, far away from their wives and children, far away from their responsibilities.

I didn't want to make a film about them, but rather with them. It had to be full of energy and playful. They play roles when they're at work. In their everyday lives, they're always acting. Their lives are full of fiction, full of the stories they tell each other. They're proud. Generous. Imaginative. Irresponsible. On the hunt. So I went in search of a style that would do them justice. We decided on everything that was directed and staged together. Fiction can be truer and more real than having a camera that just stares at economic or social ills. But in this film – as is the case with the boys' lives – the boundaries between reality and fiction, between looking in the mirror and fantasy, become blurred. *Brothers of the Night* is above all else a film about feelings.

Patric Chiha



INTERVIEW

<< The film is supposed to be a homage to these young guys. I wanted them to be heroes, their beauty to be visible. I wanted a film that sparkles. I'm not the police; I'm a film-maker. >>

Patric Chiha



The very young men you approach in *Brothers of the Night* are heterosexual, and many of them are married, but they make a living as sex workers in Vienna. This subject is hardly ever discussed in public here, and they presumably don't talk about it much with their families back in Bulgaria. How did you penetrate this taboo zone?

PATRIC CHIHA: I came across these guys in the course of research for another film on the subject of homosexuality and immigration. One evening I happened to end up in a very curious bar for rent boys in Vienna, and they were all standing there, and I spent the evening with them. They understood very quickly that I was neither a customer nor a rent boy myself – I was too young for one thing and too old for the other. And they appealed to me immediately – in a cinematic sense. I hadn't seen bodies like theirs in movies for a long time, the playful way they move, dance, pose,

lounge around and constantly talk to each other. They reminded me of the beautiful and unpredictable heroes in works by Fassbinder, Coppola or Pasolini. For me, the urge to make a film isn't down to a (social) subject; it's based on people. I wanted to film these people. They were very curious about what I was doing, but it did take a while till they understood what mattered to me. When they saw I respected them, they gradually started to trust me. I spent a year with them. We went out together a lot, to get to know each other and build up an atmosphere of trust, and so I could indicate what I wanted to do with them. And I stress **"with them"**. I didn't want to make a film *about* them: and I wanted it to be *with* them.

How big is this community in Vienna? How would you describe it?

PATRIC CHIHA: There were two bars in Vienna where these people used to hang out. One of them was closed just after we started filming, so there was only one left, and each night it was full. I first met Romanians there, and I wanted to make a film with them, but gradually they all disappeared. That's how it is in this community. It wasn't exactly easy for me to make a film with people who wouldn't wait for me, didn't need me and kept on disappearing.

The Romanians would complain about the Bulgarians, and especially the Bulgarian Roma, because they were driving prices down. In the end only the Bulgarians were left. It's a brutal *community* with groups like real gangs. They are friends or brothers or cousins, and altogether there are far too many of them for the available work. When they are new and young they can have a lot of success, but it very quickly vanishes.

You have just used the word "brutal" in connection with the gangs. That's an aspect which is immediately associated with this scene, but I felt it didn't appear in any direct way in the film. The whole "Mafia feel" seems to be missing.

PATRIC CHIHA: That's a good comment. I also noticed when I started editing that the feeling of danger I'd experienced when I was out with them didn't come across. The brutality vanishes as soon as you begin filming. The brutality is played out before then. But "brutality" is a big word: maybe it was more that they gave me a sense of fear. They fascinated me and frightened me at the same time... and after all, those two things often go together. But I didn't want to recreate or stage that fear... That would have been unfair to them.

I realized during the course of the work that I was really making a film about children. Their brutality in real life is also partly an act: they're acting the part of bad boys. It was important for me to show the people and what I value and find interesting about them. My view of them became more and more tender. When you start filming there's some sort of friendship or trust. After working together for a year our relationship became more like big brother/little brother.

Your last films have been works of fiction. Were you faced here with the question of whether to approach the subject in a purely fictional or purely documentary manner?

How did you develop this hybrid form?

PATRIC CHIHA: I was always certain that it was going to be a documentary film, while being aware that there is a very fine line between a documentary and a feature film. The exact position of that line remains a mystery. As soon as a camera is in the room, everything is artificial. Cinema is a very artificial thing. Even if the camera wobbles or the light is grey, we are still dealing with an artificial film. The Dardenne brothers also make artificial films. Ever since I came to realize this, I've felt much freer in my work as a filmmaker. This artificiality is my path to reality, to people and their feelings.

A second important point was the fact that the bars where they work were very similar to the bar in Fassbinder's *Querelle*: the red light, the kitsch lamps, the theatrical mood, the Bulgarian music with a Turkish flavor. These bars are so oddly outside time: shabby and at the same time glamorous. It's a bit like being in a movie costume department or on stage in a theatre. The guys with leather jackets and gel in their hair, speaking in a way that reminds you of Marlon Brando or men in early films by Pasolini. Reality can be theatrical too. These guys live mainly at night, and night is the world of artificial light, illusion. Questions arise such as: who are we? What game are we playing? What roles are we taking?

The film is supposed to be a homage to these young guys. I wanted them to be heroes, their beauty to be visible. I wanted a film that sparkles. I'm not the police; I'm a film-maker.

Apart from the first scenes, which are shot in daylight, the film takes place at night. The colors or the colored light takes on a dominant role. How did you arrive at this lighting concept?

PATRIC CHIHA: As a filmmaker I have two resources: rhythm and light. These are the ways I can show or create emotion. In this milieu, where everything takes place at night, nothing is simply black or white; it's all imprecise and mysterious, and probably that's why it appeals to these guys. Just as it does to us. I've attempted to convey this emotion with artificial light. Who knows where the truth lies? At the same time, I realized at a very early stage that artificial light could provide me with access to them. I wanted to construct a stage – a protected space – where they could perform as freely as possible. They didn't need to expose themselves to ridicule on that stage, they could play. I've made a film about guys aged 18 or 19. I was 18 myself once, and filming is very exciting at that age. The lighting expresses the fun with the guys, too: the staging, the costumes, the acting. But this artificiality also provided them with protection. It creates a kind of protective layer that makes it impossible for other people to distinguish between reality and non-reality. The combination of all this created the opportunity for us to make a film together.

Klemens Hufnagl's camera is an impressive companion in this work. How did you determine the position and movement of the camera? How did the authenticity and openness arise that these guys display as they act in front of the camera?

PATRIC CHIHA: It's a bit complicated: everything looks fake, and it's all genuine.

The method I invented for this film was "time and space". We simply allowed ourselves plenty of time and took shots lasting an hour or an hour and a half. I had a translator with me, so I knew more or less what was going on. There was no pressure of time, no goal, no subject that had to be dealt with. We simply spent time together, losing time and gaining time.

At the same time, we needed spaces: these young men don't have any place for themselves. They live together in a terrible apartment that you get to see once in the film. And then there is the bar where they sell their bodies. If I had only filmed in this bar I would never have got close to the human beings. So we invented artificial spaces: empty bars, empty discotheques, on the Danube Canal... We heated the places, there was food and drink, and we spent time together. It was like having a living room in the middle of the city. It was up to them whether they put costumes on or not, and they talked about whatever they felt like. And it was also important that they could say what they wanted to, tell lies, exaggerate... As I said before, I'm not the police.

While we were just hanging out there, drinking and smoking, Klemens Hufnagl had already started lighting. Working together with Klemens was wonderful. I showed him films by Douglas Sirk, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, but also by Kenneth Anger. I think it was a challenge for him to consider the question: "How do I make a documentary that sparkles without destroying the moment of the encounter?" And I think he was amused by this style, by these methods. He understood very well what my dream was, and he prepared our spaces – which weren't very big – so that something could happen. We used filters from the 1970s, lots of effects, smoke, lights pointing in all directions. I set myself the challenge: "How do I transform these guys into stars?" Of course, it was all about illusions, about lies and reconstructions in their work and in the film. And that's how the convergence of light and sexuality and lust and lies and speaking came about.

You edited the film yourself. How did you approach the raw footage if such unusually long sequences had been filmed?

PATRIC CHIHA: The most difficult thing was to find the structure of a group film. I knew that I was interested in the group, the community, the parallels between their stories... Probably editing would have been easier if I had made a film about one or two guys, but less exciting as well.

Did you also find inspiration from literature?

PATRIC CHIHA: Interestingly enough, Jean Genet turned out to be very important. I hardly read his work anymore, but during the editing process I realized there's a lot of him in the film. In his play *Le Balcon* there's a brothel called "la maison d'illusions". That's exactly what I was trying to create in my film – a house of illusions, where everything is genuine and fake, where lust is constructed and paid for. And in Genet's work there are frequently groups of men where it isn't entirely clear who is what, because everyone is playing roles or wearing masks. Nobody is who he pretends to be, and everything is at the same time genuine and a baroque ceremony. This combination of

people struggling with their own identity and the high baroque staging, as if they were all appearing on stage in a theatre, corresponded very closely to my idea of the film. It must have influenced me a great deal at a subconscious level, because I definitely didn't read anything by Genet while I was preparing to make the film. And in Genet the sentences are like clouds of smoke, like baroque spirals, turning round and dissolving. One of the things that fascinated me so much about these guys was their way of talking. Not so much what they said as how they said it. The central point of their ideas never becomes completely clear, it goes up and down, it spins round and repeats itself, full of exaggerations. I've always focused in my feature films on the way people talk around subjects. Talk as a form of action rather than information. How do they stand when they're talking? How do they smoke when they're talking? That's what cinema is for me: fascination with the way people move. And talking is also a movement.

The opulent lighting is integrated with very grandiose music.

PATRIC CHIHA: That's also something that came up in my last feature film. I love going a little over the top with music. Mahler is of course much too grand for the introduction to *Brothers of the Night*, for the simplicity of the situation, for the subject. And creating emotion in film by means of music is considered taboo these days. What I'm attempting there is to create an emotion and then to underline it in red. Although the scene itself isn't tragic, the music tells us something enormously complex.

The clash between the bodies of these guys on the one hand – who are in Vienna but don't really live in Vienna, who don't have any relationship to the city, their present or the people of the city apart from that of prostitution - and on the other hand the essence of being Austrian, the grandiose past: the Danube... of course it doesn't fit together. And implying that Vienna is a port is supposed to be a joke. There's some humor in there as well.

I don't adhere to any sort of concept in this film. For me, cinema doesn't have much to do with concepts. It's about emotions, and this overblown music is intended to underline these men's unwillingness to belong, their way of not being present. Cinema is always connected with time and space: these men, however, are timeless and dislocated. Either they have no past or they suppress it (apart from photographs on Facebook), and they don't really engage with the future. They are people who live in a kind of present, but in artificial places. That's tragic and beautiful at the same time.

I would still like to talk about the reality of these men, which seems to involve enormous contradictions. In my view, a single sentence summed up the situation very well. One of them, who is trying to provide a sensible explanation, says: "It's about being a decent man." That strikes me as a key sentence. You get the impression that of course the (fast) money is the ostensible driving force, but they also have a need for freedom, to be liberated from the straitjacket of their own families, which has turned them into fathers when they are still virtually children. And it must raise deep questions about their image of themselves as heterosexual men.

PATRIC CHIHA: This ambivalence is a very important point. These young men are trapped in a very complex and essentially tragic situation in Vienna. What they call mere business is in fact extremely complicated. How do you have sex with a body that you don't desire? How do you behave with the money that you supposedly earn so easily? The sums involved are actually very small. On the other hand, here they are far away from wives and children, from responsibility, and at last they can be young, they can be children. They live together, play billiards, go dancing, amuse themselves, get up to all sorts of mischief, and thanks to prostitution they have some pocket money to spend. They are childish and playful. They find themselves in a hugely ambivalent situation somewhere between imprisonment and freedom, lust and revulsion.

Among them there are some who don't ask any questions and prefer only to talk when they are stoned on hashish, to make a lot of noise in order to forget the reality. With others, the questions do come through: "What am I? What is going to become of me?" But generally they try to stay inside a maison d'illusions. They live in a very ambiguous world. And they often spend their money on other prostitutes. But in the end it turns out that these other prostitutes are mostly transsexuals. Everything is ambiguous. It certainly wasn't my intention to bring any order to the situation; it was much more that I wanted to capture this chaos in images, because I have the feeling that it also says something about us and our lives. In 1971 Fassbinder wrote this wonderful sentence about his great idol Douglas Sirk: "Sirk once said you can't make films about something, you can only make films with something: with people, with light, with flowers, with mirrors, with blood, with precisely all the crazy things that make it worthwhile."

Interview: Karin Schiefer
January 2016

Translated by Charles Osborne



FILMOGRAPHY PATRIC CHIHA



Born in Vienna in 1975, Patric studied fashion design in Paris, then film editing at INSAS film school in Brussels. He lives and works in Paris. Since 2001 he made short films which have received many awards. His first feature film **Domaine** starring Beatrice Dalle premiered at the Biennale di Venezia. His comedy **Boys Like Us** had its cinema release in 2014.

FILMS (selction)

- 2016 **Brothers of the Night** documentary, 88 min.
WILDart FILM (Vienna)
premiere: Berlinale/Panorama.
- 2014 **Boys like us** fiction, 90 min.
Aurora Films (Paris) & WILDart FILM (Vienna)
- 2012 **Sol LeWitt** documentary, 24 min.
Centre Pompidou (Metz) & M-Museum (Leuven)
- 2009 **Domaine** fiction, 110 min.
Aurora Films (Paris) & WILDart FILM (Vienna)
starring Béatrice Dalle, nominated for the Prix Louis Delluc 2010, Venice / Critics' Week
- 2007 **Où se trouve le chef de la prison ?** fiction, 18 min.
Aurora Films (Paris), award « Janine Bazin » - Belfort/Entrevue
- 2006 **Home** fiction, 50 min.
Aurora Films (Paris) & WILDart FILM (Vienna)
press award & prix Emergence - Pantin/Côté Court
- 2005 **Les Messieurs (Die Herren)** documentary, 52 min.
Kinoko Films (Paris)

CREDITS

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additional assistant camera	Marion Priglinger
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sound mixing	Alexander Koller
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