FOR SOME THE JOURNEY STARTS
FOR OTHERS IT ABRUPTLY ENDS

AIRPORT

ANIMATED SHORT FILM BY MICHAELA MÜLLER

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Synopsis

The film explores the borders between the right to freedom of movement and the restrictions national security requirements put on society.

In a modern day airport, the flow of passengers is broken by sudden irregularities. Security forces try to get to the cause of the disruption, the atmosphere turns menacing at the slightest irregularity - a stranger becomes a suspect, and there is no room for outsiders.

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Interview with Michaela Müller

What was your original impulse to make a film about the airport?

A few years ago I heard an interview on the radio with a detainee at an airport prison. The sound of planes taking off was audible in the background. Later I found out that all major airports have a prison nearby, and I started to research stories of people getting stuck at airports, being deported, or trying to get through security and onto a plane without the necessary documents.

Airports have become the paradigm of a modern mobile life. They look alike all over the world: check-in, fast food, duty free area, security scan, boarding zone. Human interactions are standardized and anonymized. Terminals are the most surveilled public areas nowadays. And in spite of the airports internationality, there is only little contact between people from different cultures.

The right to freedom of movement is always in question there. Airports are critical points of entry where the limits of laws, security, tolerance are constantly tested. Tragedy and panic are always just one step away.

Though I enjoy the privilege of being able to move freely, airports immediately make me uneasy. The time before take-off is almost unbearable. I wonder if, in the eyes of the inscrutable security guard, I might be suspicious, and what wrong move of mine could inadvertently catch their attention. I try to pass through the security zones as compliant and invisible as possible, fitting into the flow of the passengers. My conversations with many well-versed travelers revealed that most of them experience similar feelings in airports.

Just as in your previous film Miramare (2010), you use the technique of paint on glass animation. What attracts you to this particular technique, as an artist?

The technique of paint on glass animation is magical and very rewarding, despite being a painfully slow process that only allows for minimal retroactive corrections. The texture of liquid paint and the visibility of rough brush strokes become elements of the storytelling and are tied to the design of the film. This makes a lot of sense to me, especially in the context of the rather heavy topic.

The storytelling in the film is not classical, but associative and very complex. What themes did you want to address?

The scenes in the film are connected in a way that they create a dramatic convergence of atmospheres. The thread of the narrative works on several levels: the first is based on experiences familiar to every air traveler. On a psychological level, it spins an exaggerated nightmare resulting in a hopeless attempt to get away. From a philosophical point of view, the film explores the borders between the right to freedom of movement and the restrictions national security requirements put on society.

"Airport" juxtaposes realistic scenes based on personal experiences with abstract situations. In the course of the film, the atmosphere intensifies and becomes increasingly distressing. The paranoid quest to get away becomes more urgent. Escape routes disappear, are deflected and cut down altogether. Space becomes sparse, things get confusing.

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The narrator's perspective is in constant motion, just as the technique of the animation is. Is there nonetheless a central point of view in the film?

The camera takes the position of the main character. It is steadily on the move while changing perspectives. The viewer is thus taken on a trip through an airport, having to submit to the stop and go of proceedings at a transit hub. The ever changing angles and points of view should leave us in a limbo: are we among the hapless travelers trying to get through check-in, or on a journey to escape?

You started to develop the film 6 years ago. Meantime, the topic of international migration and the endeavors to control it have escalated. Did you have to adjust certain elements during the process in order to keep the film corresponding to the actual situation?

Airports have been critical places of transit for a long time already, and the topic of migration has been present for over 20 years at least, but it just recently became even more urgent and inevitable. I have a growing collection of material on the topic, from all kinds of news sources, but also from my frequent stopovers at international airports. Since its inception, the project Airport has been developed in close consultations with co-author Aleksandar Battista Ilić. I travelled between Switzerland, New York and Zagreb, where we discussed the development of the project. The film is thus shaped by the mutual reflection on the topic, as well as the tide of actual geopolitical events which were always present during the process of the making of the film.
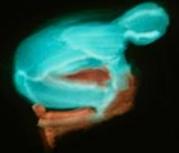
The sound design perfectly matches the speed and rhythm of the narration. How did you work on it?

Basic elements of the sounds are documentary, drawing from a huge archive of airport sounds created for this project by sound designer Fa Ventilato. Before I started to paint the film, we spent a day together at the JFK airport in New York and recorded first sound impressions with a binaural microphone. Some of these sounds served as an inspiration for certain scenes in the film. For three years, Ventilato collected ambisonic recordings from various international airports. Then we assembled the recordings into a dense soundscape that allows for certain specific sounds to be highlighted, to support the narrative. In some moments the sound takes the role of furthering the narrative development, while the visuals are abstract and vice versa.

Another component of the sound design is the beautiful singing of Gordana Kovačić. Croatian sound designer Hrvoje Štefotić recorded the songs with her in several sessions and I am very happy with the result. The singing is intended to be very expressive and intense, without relying on the meaning of lyrics, and to be strongly integrated into the atmosphere of the film. Image and sound work hand in hand to create a unified film experience.

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Photo Carrie Francis Park

Michaela Müller

Director, Writer, Animator

Michaela Müller was born in St. Gallen, Switzerland. She graduated with an MA in Animation and New Media from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, Croatia and holds a diploma as drawing and crafts teacher from the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

Müller's animated film, Miramare, made its international premiere at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival and has been screened at more than 100 international film festivals, winning 18 awards.

Fa Ventilato

Sound Artist

Fa Ventilato was born in Switzerland and lives in New York. His work, always within the variety of contemporary music, finds its way into film, animation, performance, art installations, dance theatre or conceptual pop albums. Recent activities include the sound design and music for the animated short film Miramare by Michaela Müller. Currently he works on a contemporary operetta buffa with talking birds.

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Team

Director
Michaela Müller

Co-Author
Aleksandar Battista Ilić

Screenplay
Michaela Müller / Aleksandar Battista Ilić

Animation / Cinematography / Storyboard / Design
Michaela Müller

Sound Design / Ambisonic Field Recordings
Fa Ventilato

Original Music / Additional Sound Design
Hrvoje Štefotić

Voice of the Singing Woman
Gordana Kovačić

Voice Breathing
Eva Perrotta

Compositing
Brigae Haelg

Color Grading
Ueli Nüesch

Additional Sound Support
Peter Bräker / Trond Lossius

Artistic Supervision
Aleksandar Battista Ilić

Production
Ruedi Schick, Schick Productions, Switzerland

Co-Production
Ankica Jurić Tilić, Kinorama, Croatia

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Zürcher Filmstiftung

Migros Kulturprozent

SRF SRG SSG

Technical Information

Duration: **11 min**

Countries of Production: **Switzerland / Croatia**

Year of Production: **2017**

Dialogue: **No Dialogue**

Animation Technique: **Paint On Glass**

Screening Copies: **DCP, quicktime HD file**

Aspect Ratio: **1:1,85**

Sound: **5.1 Surround**

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