

OBON, winner of the GROSSE KLAPPE award



OBON, by German filmmakers André Hörmann and Anna “Samo” Bergmann, won the GROSSE KLAPPE award at the 2018 doxs! festival, a prize chosen by the youth jury for the best political film for children and adolescents.

“Fire everywhere, burning bodies and an insufferable heat – all hell was breaking loose over the city.” In OBON, the nuclear attack on Hiroshima is remembered by one of its last survivors. Despite the memory still being painfully vivid, the 93 year-old managed to find a spark of light in the devastating darkness the catastrophe caused: While her father was an authoritarian traditionalist, the horrors of the event changed him. Finally, she is able to experience the fatherly love she was longing for.

For their film, Andre Hörmann and animator Anna “Samo” Bergmann set off on unusual paths regarding its form. They combined their protagonist’s

detailed story with drastic animated images, thus creating a hybrid documentary composition.

The youth jury, comprised of students from Bochum, Moers and Duisburg, proved impressed by the film’s ability to present an historical event intertwined with a touching family story. *“The filmmakers forego the use of demonstrative archive material, using animation to revive the past instead – which can occasionally have an unsettling effect on its viewers. The film’s imagery and realistic sound design induce a touching effect.”*

Thomas Krüger, president of the Federal Agency for Civic Education and award donor, emphasised OBON’s potential for political education: *“You cannot talk about history without addressing the present. Particularly questions revolving around armed conflict resolution are more present than ever.*



The youth jury’s decision reminds us that peace has to be earned and actively maintained.”

The GROSSE KLAPPE award is endowed with €5,000 and presented in cooperation with the Federal Agency for Civic Education to honour documentaries promoting an aesthetic approach to documentary culture and the political consciousness of children and adolescents.

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ANDRE HÖRMANN ABOUT OBON

At the doxs! closing ceremony we met with director Andre Hörmann during a vivid Q&A with the young GROSSE KLAPPE jury members.

Andre Hörmann: In 2012 a stipendium allowed me to go on a research trip to Hiroshima where I interviewed survivors of the atom bomb. Their stories were dark and gruesome. Then I met Akiko Takakura, she was the only one who had a ray of hope shining through her story.

We only see her as an animated character.

Hörmann: We’ve been considering a



long time whether to show her picture in the end. It was my gut feeling telling me not to do it, to sustain a more collective feel to the story. The animation is based on drawings that survivors made about the disaster, which seamlessly guarantees a certain subjectivity in a project that didn't ask for an objective approach.

There exists a collection of such drawings?

Hörmann: They are collected in a book, and they've all drawn very similar scenes, with the same traumatic elements recurring: melting faces, eyeballs falling out, fire that is everywhere.... Also those fire demons came up in many of those drawings. The opening scene with the dead bodies floating on water, refers to a nightmare that haunts many of the survivors, even till today.

That's where the animation started.

Hörmann: We figured out the style very quickly. Anna made a rough animatic and we recorded the voices of the Japanese actors to define the rhythm of the scenes. That was all new to me, as this was the first time I worked with animation. I'm used to the rhythm of documentary making, which means you can make a 15' film

in approx. 10 days. While this 15' film took us two years. For me that was a struggle. Only after half a year, when we had about five minutes ready, I could get a proper feeling of the film. One thing about animation is that you have total control, while usually filmmaking is the total loss of control, because the bloody world acts different from what you imagined. We could discuss every single detail. In that sense the animation process was nice and smooth, even if it was difficult for me to be so patient, but I'd love to do it again.



You entwine the tragic historic event with an element of family history.

Hörmann: In my films I always put a strong emotional connection in the heart of the story to create an emotional bond with the protagonists. In this case the father-daughter bonding created the storyline. Without that, the film would have been unbearably

cruel to digest. That week in Hiroshima was really tough and I had difficulties falling asleep at night.

Are you still in touch with Akiko Takakura?

Hörmann: Somehow. She is 93 years old now and bed-ridden. But I've sent her a copy of the film, and since it took us so long to finish it, I'm happy she was still alive to see it.

How does it feel to actually be in Hiroshima nowadays?

Hörmann: Every time when being in Japan I felt alienated. But Hiroshima felt much more alive, as if people there are celebrating life more intensively. Due to the element of 'surviving', they have reasons to embrace life. The city was destroyed and had to be rebuilt completely. Not many buildings remain from those days except a few, like one bank that we used as a reference for our bank scenes. And there are these incredible shadows of people, whose contours are now burned into stone by the lightning of the bomb, as a horrible visual memory of that specific moment in time.

You tried to capture one of the biggest catastrophes in modern histo-

ry, one split second of pure horror. Did it put any pressure on you for trying to capture something that big?

Hörmann: That's why I choose one personal perspective and just followed that. It's not my film anymore: it's her words, her experiences. And I constructed a story out of it.

OBON is actually the name of a Japanese celebration.

Hörmann: Like on the Mexican Day of the Dead, people visit the graves of their beloved ones. Especially in Hiroshima Obon is celebrated very intensively, because of their shared memory.

Will you give animated documentaries another try?

Hörmann: I already started working on one. We're currently recording stories in Mexico City in a home for retired prostitutes, where I find myself surrounded by 75-year-old ladies. Most of them are retired now, but not all. And I'm preparing a fiction project for the Besondere Kinderfilm programme.

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Gert Hermans