

Iryna Tsilyk about THE EARTH IS BLUE AS AN ORANGE

“What does it mean to live in that absurd world of war every day”

Since 2014 war between pro-Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists rages in the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine. What that means for people living their everyday lives in the frontline zone, is shown in a documentary written and directed by Kiev-based Iryna Tsilyk. This Ukrainian-Lithuanian co-production had its world premiere at Sundance back in January, where it was awarded for Best World Cinema Documentary Director. **THE EARTH IS BLUE AS AN ORANGE** has collected many more festival awards ever since, and was picked for the Documentary Selection 2020 of the European Film Academy.

What a bizarre title you chose for your feature documentary debut?

Iryna Tsilyk: It is a quote from a poem by French surrealist writer Paul Eluard recalling the sense of surrealism I felt when entering the frontline zone for the first time, realising about all those unbelievable situations and nuances existing there so close and parallel to each other. For example



kids, even the youngest ones, not paying any attention to the bombing or the marching soldiers, as they can very well distinguish the sounds that indicate ‘danger’ from the ones that don’t.

How did you approach this project?



Tsilyk: After my graduation at the Kyiv University I made several short films - three fictions and two documentaries and I have written poetry, stories, and children’s books. All my work – both printed and filmed – somehow relates to this topic of war. We have so much collective drama piled up in

the Ukrainian society. But sometimes I wonder if Ukrainian people know each other well enough. We have established this balance between war and peace, but do we really understand what is going on? For example life in Kyiv is so different then in the Donbas region. It was important for me to visit the place over and over again, as I had to dig deeper to really understand what it means to live in that absurd world of war every day.

You captured the daily life of a single mother with four children, living in the war zone and making a film about themselves. We see them acting, filming and discussing their experiences, feelings and memories. Like a human laboratory.

Tsilyk: I met Myroslava Trofymchuk during a cinema camp for teenagers, together with her sister Anastasiia she participated in the “Yellow Bus”, a super cool Ukrainian project in terms of culture and media. Myroslava had this dream of becoming a cinematographer and that passion had infected her entire family. I was a tutor in that



camp, and afterwards the girls invited me, my DoP and my sound engineer to their home in Krasnohorivka. It was so strange to see the entire family working like a small production unit. Even their mother had learned film editing by herself to assist the kids in making their short videos. We fell in love immediately with that family, we felt a special atmosphere in the house, a seemingly safe haven full of life and light, in a stark contrast with the chaotic world outside. The four kids played different music instruments, had different hobbies, but all joined forces when shooting films. Ganna, their wonderful warm hearted mother was so strong and optimistic. It was clear to us who was the real director of both their lives and their films.

How much of an artificial situation was created here?

Tsilyk: I didn't realise how this specific situation – a girl shooting a short doc about the beginning of war to get a scholarship for studying film - could be so relevant for us. I hesitated, until several people told me this was a unique chance for our film. We observed them coping with a daily trauma and managing to keep their home a safe place. At the same time they were observing us. In this process we learned a lot about ourselves. It is really important to show that these people are not passive war victims, they're actually making things happen.

"Strong women, children, cats and other pets, but no men," someone

said after seeing your film. What about the girls' father?

Tsilyk: Unfortunately he is dead. Krasnohorivka is a village without men, except for the soldiers.

In the final sequence the family's short film "2014" is presented in the bomb scarred local music academy. We don't see the screen, but we see the overwhelmed faces of friends, relatives and neighbours. This touching scene in particular raised a discussion about the power of art in wartime.

Tsilyk: Over the last six years I have often asked myself whether my writing and filming could be of any use in these times of war. I am not sure whether I have found the answer. But I believe that art and cinema can make a difference in breaking the ice between people, and opening a dialogue. Therefore it is important to present our film and our country in other parts of the world, but it is equally important to present this film in every part of Ukraine.

–

Uta Beth

Lobby

In an open letter, published on 30 October 2020, 110 pan-European cultural networks and associations, including ECFA and KIDS Regio, called upon the European Union (EU) and EU member states to protect culture as part of the coronavirus recovery plans and dedicate at the very least 2% of the national Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) budget to culture and creative sectors.

This lobby activity was initiated by Culture Action Europe which approached both institutions to join the call. A first contact was established during the summer. We are looking forward to a close cooperation, representing the children's media industry when it comes to giving a voice to the cultural and creative sector in Europe.

You can find the letters [here](#).