



# A DONKEY CALLED GERONIMO

Creative Documentary (80min)

Direction: Arjun Talwar, Bigna Tomschin

Production: Lo-Fi Films / Arjun Talwar

mail@lofi-films.com / www.lofi-films.com



# FILM INFO



## Logline

A group of sailors live on a tiny island in the Baltic sea, until their community falls apart. They return to the mainland, haunted by memories of paradise. A luminous documentary poem on the border between myth and reality.

## Synopsis

There's a beautiful island in the Baltic Sea, where a group of sailors built their own kingdom. They had it all: seventeen acres of land, endless freedom and a donkey called Geronimo. But when their community breaks apart, the sailors are forced to return to the mainland. Expelled from paradise, they live on rusty ships parked in an grey harbor town. At night they meet on deck, drinking and cursing each other for the failure of a perfect utopia. Each of them is haunted by the island's dark and compelling promise. Can they ever break through the spell it cast on them?

A beautifully composed and haunting documentary, *A Donkey Called Geronimo* invites us into a dark and absurd world of seamen, drifters and outcasts. A luminous documentary poem about human resilience, of stranded sailors and malediction, fed by the imaginary world of the desert island and community-based utopias.

## Reviews

«Timeless and universal, a cinematic tale.» (Cineman)

«An escape into the middle of the Baltic Sea - where paradise and hell, utopia and dystopia coexist.» (Kino Zeit)

«Imbued with a seductive sense of melancholy, *A Donkey Called Geronimo* plays skilfully with the perception of reality as a single and immutable thing. In the mysterious universe created by Talwar and Tomschin, reality is multiple and multifaceted; a culmination of myths, legends and a nostalgic way of life. **A documentary which transforms imperfection and diversity into great, majestic beauty.**» (Cineuropa)

«A strange and exciting tale about being enthralled by memories and ideas, and about the intersection between myth and normal everyday life.» (BIFF, Jesper Brevik)

«Arjun Talwar and Bigna Tomschin have made a spirited portrait of a group of sailors and a mini-island, with irony, honesty and light-heartedness. A handful of good-natured guys blame each other for the collapse of their utopia on Ox Island. **Amusing and gorgeously put together. Life as it is.**» (Leipziger Volkszeitung)

«Eccentric and funny!» (cinema.de)

«A story about dreams and longing, and the virtue that they bring, even in failure.» (Filmrezensionen)

«Bigna Tomschin and Arjun Talwar make **a film with floating contours**, a film that pitches to the syncopated rhythm of its protagonists, guided by a sailor-cook going by the name of Bim, a gentle dreamer who makes himself the narrator of an eternal story—that of a man who dreamed of an island.» (Céline Guénot - Visions du Réel)

„A dream... A hypnotic-poetic vision. The mood of the film comes from its proximity and intimacy. With its serene, dreamy rhythm, we peek into the half-gloom of ship cabins, where things unfold in an artificial light and the fog of cigarette smoke. The poetic style transforms the characters into fictional heroes of a filmic universe.. **And it is like with the heroes of John Ford: when they lose, they do it with pride. Ford called it „Glory in defeat“ and the same principle runs through „Geronimo“.** The Indian rebel leader, referred to in the title, fought an impossible fight. The white man's rule came anyway. Defeat is inevitable. No philosophy is perfect, no utopia really exists.“

(Martin Abraham - Flensburg Avis)

«The conversations between the sailors in their old, rusty ships are soaked with melancholy and nostalgia. Despite everything, the men retain their warmth and charmingly eccentric nature. They meet on deck or in the galley, drinking and telling their stories. **Their humor is typically North German – dry and laconic.** One grows fond of them quickly and it is a big pleasure to watch them.» (programmokino.de)

«The residents of Store Okseø in the Baltic Sea managed to withstand all this adversity for more than ten years. Then they quarrelled and left the island, almost all of them with a broken heart. Nobody got over this place and what happened there. **The island is a subject of conversation, a niggling gap, a throbbing wound.**» (Carlin Weidner - DOK Leipzig)

# TECHNICAL INFO

## Technical Info

Original Title	Der Esel hieß Geronimo
International Title	A Donkey Called Geronimo
Producer	Lo-Fi Films, Arjun Talwar
Country	Germany, Switzerland
Genre	Documentary
Length	80min
Language	German, English
Subtitles	German, English
Screening Format	DCP, Blu-Ray
Sound	Dolby 5.1
First Screening	30.10.2018
Release Germany	19.09.2019 (GM Films, Berlin)
Trailer	<a href="https://vimeo.com/275145972">https://vimeo.com/275145972</a>
Download media:	<a href="https://bit.ly/32SkLMO">https://bit.ly/32SkLMO</a>

## Festival Screenings

**DOK Leipzig 2018 - German Competition (World Premiere)**

**Vision du Réel 2019 - Official Competition (International Premiere)**

## Festivals 2019 / 2020

TRT Documentary Awards 2019, Istanbul - International Panorama  
 Filmfest Schleswig-Holstein 2019, Kiel, Germany  
 Ischia Documentary Film Festival 2019, Ischia, Italy  
 Ierapetra Documentary Film Festival, Crete, Greece  
 Apricot Tree Documentary Film Festival, Yerevan, Armenia  
 Bergen International Film Festival, Bergen, Norway  
 Husumer Filmtage, Husum, Germany  
 Close-Up Edinburgh Docufest, Edinburgh, UK  
 Territorium Filmfestival, Kaliningrad, Russia  
 Ceme DOC Festival about Migration and Exile, Mexico City, Mexico  
 Festival Cinemistica, Granada, Spain  
 Dokumenter Film Festival, Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
 Arctic Open, Arkhangelsk, Russia  
 Iran Documentary Film Festival, Cinema Vérité, Teheran, Iran  
 Dhaka International Film Festival, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
 Solothurner Filmtage, Solothurn, Switzerland  
 Norddeutsche Filmtage Rendsburg, Germany

**Cast & Crew**

Directors	Arjun Talwar Bigna Tomschin
Production	Lo-Fi Films   Bigna Tomschin Arjun Talwar
Word Sales	Lo-Fi Films / mail@lofi-films.com
Camera	Arjun Talwar
Camera assitant	Thomas Raake Fredrik Olsson
Sound	Bigna Tomschin Leon Daniel
Editor	Bigna Tomschin
Assistant editor	Yasmin Joerg
Consult	Franziska Reck
Sounddesign	Franciszek Kozłowski Jerzy Pieniążek
Colorgrading	Joanna Skórka
Music	Daniel Sinaisky
Poster	Maria Zaikina Dawid Ryski
Cast	Bimsara Pasqual Olaf Kienke Lars Lieberich Rüdiger Fleck Tonco Sander Tina Bötticher
Funded by	Filmwekrstatt Kiel Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein Gmbh Kulturbüro Flensburg Geman Films GmbH

# BIOGRAPHIES

## Arjun Talwar

Arjun Talwar was born in 1984 and grew up in Bombay. He left India to study Mathematics at Stanford University and later worked as mathematician, cartoonist and journalist before joining the cinematography department of the Polish Film School in Lodz. His documentaries «WHERE I CAN'T BE FOUND» and «HABITAT» both premiered at Vision du Réel in Nyon, and were acclaimed internationally. In 2015, he was nominated for the „Manuel Rivera-Ortiz Documentary Prize“ and for the „Silver Eye Award“ at Jihlava. He currently lives between Germany and Poland.

Filmography: A Donkey Called Geronimo (feature, 2018) / Deportation (short, 2018) / Habitat (short, 2015) / Where I can't be Found (short, 2014) / [www.arjuntalwar.com](http://www.arjuntalwar.com)

## Bigna Tomschin

Bigna Tomschin is an editor and director from Switzerland. She studied film at the Zurich University of the Arts and has lived in Hamburg, Warsaw and Zurich. Her graduation film *Blue Blue Sky* won the German Camera Prize in 2014 and the Newcomer Award of the ZHdK. Bigna works as editor on feature films and documentaries for Cinema and TV. In 2016 she was part of *Berlinale Talents*. Never having stopped making movies herself, she founded her own production company Lo-Fi Films in 2014. Lo-Fi Films aims to produce truly independent documentary films for cinema with high stylistic value.

Filmography: A Donkey Called Geronimo (feature, 2018) / Blue Blue Sky (short, 2014) / Wallpapers (short, 2013) / [www.bignatomschin.ch](http://www.bignatomschin.ch)



# FAQ

## **Why did this story interest you?**

Three years ago, we stumbled upon these islanders on a dark street in the harbor town of Flensburg. Since then, we've been filming their story: it is a story that has the form of a classic myth, one that is uniquely relevant today. It is about loss and new beginnings, about Utopia and the limits of society. Our protagonists' mission to escape society failed, so they have to find a place on its perimeter. They feel that there is something fundamentally wrong with the world, something they might not be able to express. This feeling of displacement interested us. The film explores their world of longing and plays with the sentiments of memory, myth and oral history.

## **Why is the island the central motive of the film?**

The longing for paradise is old. From the Odyssey to colonial expeditions, Robinson Crusoe to Atlantis. The island as a place of yearning and a place of horror are recurring themes in culture. Islands awaken in us the hope for an effortless life free from society's rules and expectations. But there is always a curse on the island and its promise. At the core of the island utopia lies a great contradiction: Man *is* society and can never escape it. The island remains an impossible dream. Today the imaginary landscapes of islands are still as magnetic as ever. In contemporary society, most people are looking for their place in this world, for something that is not going to change in an age full of abstractions. Dreaming of an island is an easy solution and still it contains much more. It is an ancient and fundamental yearning for another world.

## **The film was made with a small crew and low budget. Was this intended?**

When filming began three years ago, we needed to move fast. The collapse of the island community was underway and we had no time to seek funds conventionally. With a grant from Filmwerkstatt Kiel, we were able to cover running costs. A small crew meant an intimate working environment, which suited the film and helped build trust with the protagonists. After a few weeks, we were a well-rehearsed team with a lot of freedom. We wouldn't have had this with a hierarchical production.

## **What challenges did you experience as co-directors?**

The idea of working together to create a vision for the film appealed to both of us. Filmmaking is a constant riddle, so it's good to talk to a partner. The only reason it worked is because we have similar ideas about cinema. For both of us, documentary films are more about storytelling than simple observation. We look for fables that are bigger than life. Of course, a plenty of discussion takes place and disagreements appear. That is part of the process.

## **The images are unusual for a documentary. Which cinematic inspirations did you have?**

While editing and shooting, we wanted to create an atmosphere of fiction. Instead of trivializing reality, we tried to transform and exaggerate the reality of our characters until it became something bigger, something cinematic. We used old photography lenses and worked freely with staging or lighting to create a certain atmosphere. So it becomes more like a hybrid fictional documentary experience. The island remains in the distance, the figures wrapped in mystery. It is a vast fable, a poetic story and an intimate view on a society of dreamers and outcasts. We didn't want to give answers easily, but creates a vivid world in front of the viewer's eyes, a nightmarish fairy tale that reflects the absurdity of the human experience. We were fortunate to come across these characters, but we were also lucky that this was a story where our notions about cinema happened to fit and that the protagonists were ready to embark on this adventure. Some people have called the film a Kaurismäki-like documentary, and we feel that this is a great comparison.

DOK LEIPZIG  
GERMAN  
COMPETITION  
2018

visions  
du'feel  
2019



# A Donkey Called Geronimo

A DOCUMENTARY BY **ARJUN TALWAR** AND **BIGNA TOMSCHIN**

WITH: **BIMSARA PASQUAL** · **OLAF KIENKE** · **LARS LIEBERICH** · **RÜDIGER FLECK** · **TONGÇ SANDER**

CINEMATOGRAPHY: **ARJUN TALWAR** · EDITING: **BIGNA TOMSCHIN** · SOUND DESIGN & MIX: **UCHO STUDIO** · FRANEK KOZŁOWSKI · MUSIC BY: **DANIEL SINAISKY** · COLOR GRADING: **JOANNA SKÓRKA, A.T.M. SYSTEM** · POSTER: **DAWID RYSKI**

PRODUCTION: **LO-FI FILMS / ARJUN TALWAR** | © **LO-FI FILMS 2018**

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FILMS

Filmförderung Hamburg  
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