

The Beauty of the Donkey

FEATURE DOCU-FICTION (77', 2025)

**A FILM BY
DEA GJINOVCI**

SCREENER AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST



PRODUCED BY ASTRAE PRODUCTIONS (CH),
UNSEEN FILM (KS), HAUT ET COURT DOC (FR)
FACET (USA)

PRESS KIT



Astrae productions



Facet

FILM INFO

Title: The Beauty of the Donkey

Original title: La Beauté de l'âne

Length: 77' min (52' cut will be available)

Planned release: Summer / Fall 2025

Genre: docu-fiction

Format: 4K

Budget: \$900K

Languages: French, Albanian, English

Subtitles available: English, French, Albanian

Filming location: Kosova

Countries of production: Switzerland, Kosova, France, USA

Shot with: Alexa Mini LF, Canon C500 + Supreme Zeiss Prime lenses

Rights: Worldwide available exc. Switzerland

In coproduction with RTS - SSR SRG (CH)



Supported by:

Suissimage Momentum Award (Switzerland)

Facet (executive producer Maida Lynn)

The Sundance Film Institute

Cinéforum and La Loterie Romande (Switzerland)

QKK - Kosovo Film Center (Kosovo)

BAK (Swiss National Fund - in development)

Ville de Genève (in development) (Switzerland)

Anne Marie Schindler Foundation (Switzerland)

Wali Dad Foundation (Switzerland)



LOGLINE

A filmmaker and her exiled father return to his forgotten village in Kosovo. By collectively recreating his childhood memories, imagination uncover hidden war truths but also brings back to life the remembrance of fragile moments of joy.

PITCH

The Beauty of the Donkey is a lyrical hybrid documentary tracing a daughter's journey to reconnect with her father's lost homeland. After sixty years in exile, Asllan returns with his daughter, Dea, to Makermal, the Kosovar village he once called home. They set out to revive his idyllic childhood memories, working with villagers to reconstruct a world erased by war. As playful re-enactments give way to haunting revelations, Dea and Asllan confront the painful disappearance of a beloved matriarch and the collective scars of a community grappling with memory and loss. The film becomes a moving meditation on the fragile architecture of remembrance, blending cinema du reel with magical realism.

SYNOPSIS

In 1968, Asllan, a 19-year-old Albanian political activist, was forced into exile, taking him away from his native Kosovo for more than fifty years. Despite this forced separation, Asllan keeps the memories of his past alive by telling his children the stories of his childhood in the peaceful village of Makermal. With an innate talent for storytelling, he transports his family into an enchanted world. Inspired by her father's captivating tales, his daughter, Dea, decides to revive these memories of a suspended past.

She embarks on an emotional journey to bring Asllan back to the village that shaped his identity. Back on the spot with Dea, Asllan realises that the village he once knew is no more: the old stone buildings have been destroyed by the unprecedented violence of the 1998 war, the old dirt road leading to the village is now covered in impeccable asphalt, everyone he spent his childhood with has died or gone into exile, and the cemetery has grown by several rows of graves.

Faced with this upsetting reality, Asllan and Dea embark on a bold artistic quest to reimagine and stage Asllan's stories in the new village. The villagers, who also have their own stories and memories from that time, join in this collective endeavour, bringing to life the customs and stories that marked the life of the community in the 50's. As the stories come to life, a more painful past emerges. For Asllan, this nostalgic experience becomes a way of coping with the tragic loss of his mother during the Kosovo war in 1998. Asllan attempts to understand the circumstances surrounding her disappearance, paving the way for healing and reconciliation.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I grew up in Switzerland, in a household suspended between two worlds—one rooted in Geneva, the other bound invisibly to Kosova. My father carried that second world with him: a place called Mokermal, spoken of in fragments, fables, and silences. During the Kosova war, my parents tried to protect me from the violence unfolding in our homeland, but I remember the change in their voices after a phone call—the moment the war crossed into our living room. Only later did I learn that my grandmother had been killed.



I approach memory not as a material archive but as something built in community—fragile, subjective, shaped by who is present to recall it. Villagers take part in the reenactments, embodying the past through their own understandings and emotions. Children play roles based on stories passed down; sets are made from local materials, standing like sculptures in the fields, somewhere between vestiges and theater. These are not literal reconstructions. They are spaces for encounter—between father and daughter, between generations, between grief and continuity.

Growing up, my father's stories transformed Kosova into a kind of legendary place. This film seeks to return those stories to the soil they came from, while preserving their imaginative force. Through *The Beauty of the Donkey*, we honor not only what was lost but what still lives: the voices that remember, the places that remain, and the enduring need to tell—and retell—our beginnings.



My father rarely returned to Kosova. He was driven by ideals, but distanced from the land itself. What remained of his connection were stories, often elliptical, vivid yet untethered. I began making films to find what he left unsaid. My earlier works, from *Sans le Kosovo* to *Wake Up on Mars*, shaped a path back to our origins—a space where exile and identity are in constant dialogue.

With *The Beauty of the Donkey*, I return to Mokermal not only as a filmmaker but as a bridge between generations. This film is both a gesture and a process—offering something to the village, to my father, and to myself. It's a collaborative act of remembering, shaped by those who stayed, those who left, and those—like me—who have lived in between.

The film unfolds across three layers: poetic reconstructions of my father's childhood memories, captured as dreamlike scenes within the village; candid conversations between us, as we navigate his return to a land he barely recognizes; and a personal investigation into what happened to his mother, whose funeral never took place, whose remains were never found. Each of these threads is an attempt to retrieve what war tried to erase.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Dea Gjinovci is a Swiss-Albanian director and producer whose work has been showcased at major international film festivals such as Tribeca Film Festival, IDFA, Dokufest, Visions du Réel, and CPH:DOX among others, and venues like the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Barbican in London and Museo M9 in Venice. With awards from Visions du Réel, FIFDH impact days, and recognitions including “Best National Film” at Dokufest and “Best new Talent” at ZagrebDox and Biografilm, Dea has established a unique cinematographic style that merges poetic narration, magical realism, and cinéma vérité. A Sundance alumna, member of the Swiss and European Film Academies, she's recognized for her “Best Documentary” nomination for Wake Up on Mars at the Swiss Film Awards 2022. Dea, who holds a BA in Economics and Politics from SOAS and an MA in Ethnographic and Documentary Film from UCL, is also an educator, delivering masterclasses worldwide. Fluent in French, English, Italian, and Albanian, her diverse background enriches her filmmaking approach.



CREW BIOGRAPHIES



Producer (Switzerland),
Palmyre Badinier

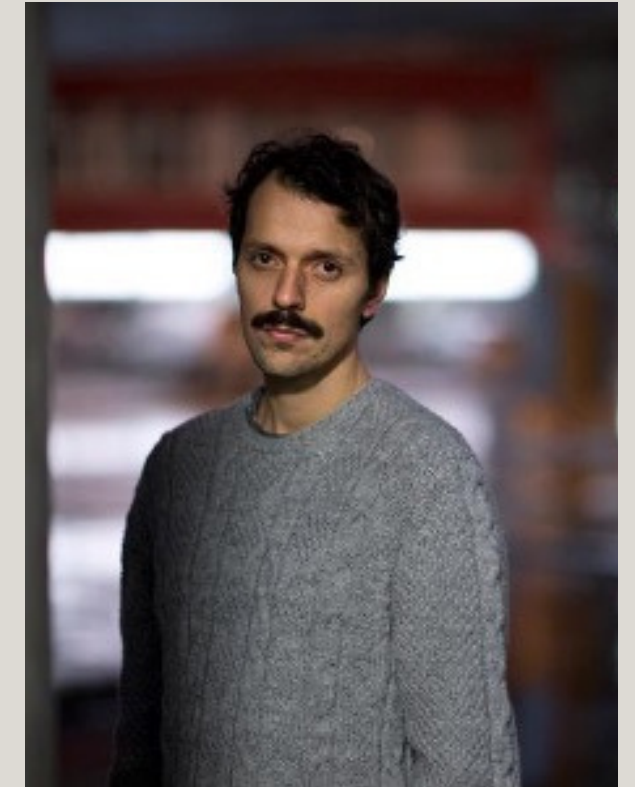
Palmyre Badinier, a French-born producer with a background in international relations and Arabic literature, launched her career in Palestine before establishing Les Films de Zayna in France, producing acclaimed documentaries and hybrids like Raed Andoni's *Ghost Hunting* (2017), which won Best Documentary at the Berlinale.

Based in Geneva since 2018, she works as an independent producer through Akka Films, producing notable works including *Manga D'Terra* by Basil Da Cunha (2023), *I Am Black* by Rachel M'Bon and Juliana Fanjul (2022), winner of the Swiss Film Award, and *A Thousand Fires* by Saeed Taji Farouky (2021). Currently, she is developing projects through Rita Productions like *Simon the Absurd* by Felipe Monroy. Occasionally, she supports directors' projects with other production houses, like *The Beauty of the Donkey* by Dea Gjinovci. A member of the EAVE network, Badinier contributes as a trainer for Eurodoc, tutor for HEAD – Geneva's film department, and consultant for the female directors' collective Rawiyat, showcasing her diverse expertise in the film industry.

Co-Producer (Kosova), Ilir Hasanaj

Ilir Hasanaj is a film director from Kosovo who grew up in Switzerland. Before earning his degree in cinema from the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), he worked for several years as a computer scientist. His documentary film *Me dasht' me dasht' me dasht* was selected for international festivals between 2017 and 2020, including at the Hot Docs Film Festival in Toronto, the Solothurn Film Days, and Dokufest, where it won the audience award.

Ilir lives in Pristina and focuses on films with social significance. He is also a film programmer at the alternative cinema Kino ARMATA in Pristina. Furthermore, Ilir Hasanaj won the Tiger Short Film Award at the Rotterdam Film Festival 2024 for his film "Worker's Wings."



Co-Producer, Emma Lepers (France)

Haut et Court Doc is the result of the association of the cinema production Haut et Court, founded in 1992 by Carole Scotta and the documentary production Petit Dragon founded in 2005 by Emma Lepers. Haut et Court Doc develops and produces contemporary and atypical films with talented and passionate authors and directors. Haut et Court Doc favors themes of society, culture and discovery bringing an opening and a decoding of the current world. Since its creation in 1992, the Haut et Court brand has become a guarantee of quality and high standards in all its fields of activity. During the last 25 years, the company has claimed an enlightened eclecticism and an assumed taste for artistic risk.



DOP, Maxime Kathari

After graduating from the HEAD (University of Art and Design, trajectory Filmmaking) in Switzerland and being selected for multiple festivals with his short film "+1", Maxime moved to Paris to work as Director and Director of Photography on documentaries and fiction films. In 2015, he received the Best Swiss Camera Award at the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur for his short "O som da casa", which he shot, edited and directed. In 2017, he made his first feature-length documentary as cinematographer (WAKE UP ON MARS, directed by Dea Gjinovci, Tribeca Film Festival, Visions du Réel). Over the course of 2019, he shot a feature documentary in the United States (Sundance-supported HOLLOW TREE, directed by Kira Akerman) and started pre-production on two other documentary features across Europe. For the past three years, Maxime has been writing his first feature LIA, 32 with his mom, inspired by his award-winning short "O som da casa."

Production designer, Aurélia Martin

Aurélia Martin is a designer, scenographer, and teacher. She advocates for playful, colorful, and socially engaged design. She graduated with a DNAP from the ESAD in Reims in object design and studied textiles in India at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad. Enriched by this textile experience, she moved to Brussels to pursue a MA's at La Cambre. Concurrently, she worked for Chevalier-Masson studio, where she appreciated the multidisciplinary aspect of materials. With a love for the stage, she undertakes various costume and scenography projects. Recently, she designed the temporary museum for Notre-Dame by repurposing the forecourt parking. She was awarded « création en cours » grant from Ateliers Médicis. Twice, she was in residence at « Transat (2021/2022) » - Ateliers Médicis, working in psychiatric institutions. The "Speaking Fabric" project took her to Congo with the French Institute of Goma, collaborating with young designers on clothing as a medium of resistance.



Composer, Gael Kyriakidis

Gael is a Swiss composer, performer, and writer. She creates music for film, theatre, and various stage productions. She has composed the score for several Swiss films, including *Le Rose et le Vert*, *Réveil sur Mars*, *La Beauté de l'Âne*, and *Dimanche*, for which she is also co-writer and co-director alongside Fanny Dreyer. In theatre, she collaborates as a musician and actress on productions such as *Cette fille-là* and *Rage, Festin*. She is also involved in collective projects like *Beaumont*, *Berceuses*, *Fulmine*, and *Saint-Alban*. She also develops *Pony del Sol*, her personal pop project, with two albums released and numerous tours.



Editor, Lizi Gelber

Lizi Gelber was raised in Italy by American parents and completed her education at Columbia University in NYC. She returned to Rome where she started working in film editing on features such as "Once Upon a Time in America" by Sergio Leone and participated in a prolific moment of filmmaking at Cinecittà. She moved to Los Angeles and was fortunate to work with directors such as Robert Altman, Paul Shrader, Roland Joffe, Michael Cimino and Roman Polansky.

After meeting her French husband on the set of "A Dry White Season" in Zimbabwe she moved to Paris. Here she discovered feature length documentaries when Mosco Boucault asked her to edit a documentary he shot in Philadelphia. This combined her love of drama and storytelling with her concern for social issues. When Jonathan Demme spent a year in Paris shooting a feature, she cut and associate produced his documentary "The Agronomist". She has continued to work on feature films but mainly documentaries, often supervising and helping to find solutions for problematic narratives. Over the years, in over 50 documentaries, each one has allowed a plunge onto a different reality and has been a wonderful challenge.

CREDITS

Directed by **Dea Gjinovci**

Written by **Dea Gjinovci** in collaboration with **Asllan Gjinovci**

Main cast: **Asllan Gjinovci, Leart Gjinovci**

First assistant director: **Aliosha Cheyko, Kit Vincent, Ilir Hasanaj**

Line producer: **Valmira Hyseni**

Location manager: **Fis Cahani**

Post production supervisor: **Léon Orlandi**

Writing consultant: **Benjamin Chevallier**

Documentalist: **Blerta Haziraj**

Research assistant: **Korab Mala**

Artistic advisor: **Mishka Cheyko**

Second assistant director: **Giacomo Belotti Lazzri**

Third assistant director: **Alba Çakalli**

Staging interns: **Albulena Caka, Jonila Muriqi, Vesa Shahini**

Production coordinator: **Besart Mehmeti**

Production assistants: **Ana Morina, Korab Mala, Shkelqim Talla, Erlise Beqiri**

Director of photography: **Maxime Kathari**

Camera A operators: **Maxime Kathari, Samir Karahoda**

First assistant camera: **Sami Shahini, Jetmir Zenelaj**

Second assistant camera: **Leotrim Lezi**



Renting manager: **Jetmir Zenelaj**

Documentary camera operators: **Samir Ljuma, Greta de Lazzaris**

Camera B assistant: **Nol Gashi**

Steadicam operator: **Maxime Kathari**

Additional cinematography: **Martin DiCicco**

DIT: **Leon Orlandi**

CREDITS

Gaffer: **Flamur Ahmeti**

Electricians: **Aziz Gashi, Flamur Hasani, Flamur Ahmeti, Ardit Merovic**

Stagehand: **Astrit Bicaj**

Sound editing: **Henry Sims**

Sound mix: **Maxence Ciekawy**

Sound engineers: **Pellumb Ballata, Adina Istrate, Ilù Seydoux**

Boom operators: **Michael Girod, Dren Suldashi**

Sound editor: **Henry Sims**

Sound effects engineer: **Jean-Baptiste Cornier**

Sound effects recording: **Ilian Wenger**

Vocal coach: **Claudio Todeschini**

Production designer: **Aurélia Martin**

Art director: **Jesse Wallace**

Set designer: **Armand de Benoist de Gentissart**

Assistant set designer: **Mathieu Dafflon**

Prop master: **Njomza Haziraj**

Set graphic designer: **Armand de Benoist de Gentissart**

Original music: **Gael Kyriakidis**

Musical orchestration voice, guitar, keys: **Gael Kyriakidis**

Singer: **A R B Ě R E S H Ě**

Guitar: **Claude Schneider**

Accordeon: **Mathieu Kyriakidis**

Clarinet: **Nicolas Georges Ducrest aka La Duchesse**

Original music mix: **Gael Kyriakidis**

Live musicians (wedding):

Voice: **A R B Ě R E S H Ě**

Fyell, Çifteli: **Gent Hoxha**

Çifteli: **Rrustem Xhekaj**

Llaud: **Gëzim Sadiku**

Def: **Mentor Xhekaj**

Clarinette: **Leon Hajdari**

Set constructor: **Armand de Benoist de Gentissart**

Assistant set constructor: **Pajtim Krasniqi**

Technical drawing: **Adrien Chevalley**

Costume designer: **Njomza Haziraj**

Dresser / Makeup artist / Hairstylist: **Rita Hasani**

Props - coloured hats: **Petrit Halilaj**

CREDITS

Editor: **Lizi Gelber**

First assistant editor: **Lisa Di Giannuario**

Editing assistants: **Nicolò Tettamanti, Noémie Ruben, Jacopo Balliana**

Image post-production coordinator: **Léon Orlandi**

Color grading : **Raphaël Dubach**

VFX artist: **Théo Donatantonio**

Graphic design credits: **Héloïse Laurent**

Graphic design poster: **Tiziana Poli, Armand de Benoist de Gentissart**

Lab: **Gazmend Nela, Léon Orlandi**

Set photographers: **Jesse Wallace, Thomas Krempke, Ferdi Limani, Eroll Biliban**

Management and delivery of dailies: **GROUNDSTATION**

Image post-production: **L'artifice**

Sound post-production: **DOWNTOWN STUDIO**

SFX: **Into the ODD**

Title design: **Héloïse Laurent**

Subtitles: **Rollin' Dice**

Translators: **Eljesa Beka, Aulona Kadriu, Léa Sierro**



CREDITS

Camera, light and machinery equipment: **Ikone, Photocinerent**
Steadicam: **Antoine Blanchet**
Rentals: **Petrit Gjinovci, Agron Gjinovci, Mohamet Gjinovci, Imer Gjinovci, Hamit Gjinovci, Musa Gjinovci**

Cooks: **Majlinda Gjinofci, Atife Tahiraj, Azem Uka, Rrahim Shabani, Luljeta Peci, Valbona Meha, Minire Zymeri**

Vehicles: **Venera Rent A Car, Elektika Mont**
Generator: **Ikone**
Catering: **Majlinda and Musa Gjinofci, Hotel Freskia**
Weapons master: **Fadil Shabani**
Animals: **Hasip**
Insurance provider: **TSM, Comptoir de l'assurance**
Trust company: **Bona Fide**

Original compositions:

"Oj Lulija Jöne", adaptation by Arbresha Latifa (A R B Ě R E S H Ě) and Gael Kyriakidis
"Oj Lulija Jöne " - part II, adaptation by A R B Ě R E S H Ě,
Gent Hoxha, Rrustem Xhekaj, Gëzim Sadiku, Mentor Xhekaj, Leon Hajdari
"O Nene", adaptation by Arbresha Latifa (A R B Ě R E S H Ě) and Gael Kyriakidis
"La Beauté de l'âne", Gael Kyriadkidis
"Les poires", Gael Kyriadkidis
"L'heure du coucher", Gael Kyriadkidis
"Dîner avec Dinore", Gael Kyriadkidis
"Consolation dans la cabane", Gael Kyriadkidis
"La valse du pain", Gael Kyriadkidis
"Jeux de monstre", Gael Kyriadkidis
"La chambre d'Asllan", Gael Kyriadkidis
"La course vers Issa", Gael Kyriadkidis
"L'âne (les poires 2)", Gael Kyriadkidis
"Générique - l'heure du coucher", Gael Kyriakidis

Additional music:

"Orchestra Eleni Karaindrou – To Proto Vlemma
(P) 2006 Minos - EMI SA
With kind permission of Universal Music GmbH (Switzerland)"
"The Pale Dawn - Baptiste Thiry [SACEM - CAE : 00467840912]
Album : D-DAY - 100 Jours pour la Liberté - Musique Originale de Baptiste Thiry
Date de sortie : 03/06/2024, Ref - Plage : CEO2164 - 17, LC : 10347
Editeur(s) : Frederic Leibovitz Editeur [SACEM - CAE : 00146928641]
Zed Productions [CAE : 00190105304], ISRC : FRZPA2423760"

Archives:

Family photos from the Gjinovci family

CREDITS

Co-production and executive production: **UNSEEN Films**
Producer: **Ilir Hasanaj**
Administrator / Accountant: **Ganimete Salihu Bahtijari**

Co-production: **HAUT ET COURT Doc**
Producer: **Emma Lepers**
Executive producer: **Julia Fangeaud**
Production manager: **Nathalie Ducrin**
Production coordinators: **Noé Comuau, Alice Goldberg**
Production intern: **Clara Jeany**
Camera assistant for prep: **Maxime Congi, Guillaume Brandt**
Associate producers: **Carole Scotta, Caroline Benjo, Simon Amal**
Chief Financial Officer: **Olivier Pasquier**
Business Affairs: **Philippe Banakas**
Royalties manager: **Leelou Hoffman**
Legal department: **Jeanne Blayau, Hélène Meister**
Production administration: **Julien Bertheuil, Stéphanie Lorient**
Production secretary: **Sabria Yahia Cherif**

Executive producer: **Maida Lynn (Facet)**

In association with: **Lumina Pictures**

In co-production with: **RTS Radio Télévision Suisse Documentaires / Bettina Hofmann, Steven Artels**

With support from: **Fondation Culturelle Suissimage, Facet, CINÉFOROM et la LOTERIE ROMANDE, Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program, Open Society Foundations, Office Fédéral de la Culture (OFC), QKK, Municipality of Prishtina, Municipality of Skenderaj, Wali Dad Foundation, Suisa, Anne-Marie Schindler Foundation, Ville de Genève**

ISAN: 0000-0006-38E6-0000-Y-0000-0000-9

Produced by: **ASTRAE Productions**
Producers: **Dea Gjinovci, Palmyre Badinier**
Production assistant: **Léa Sierro**
Legal advice / administrative management: **Laura Devin**
Accountant: **Romain Gabathuler**

