

A Film by Cyril Schäublin



# Unruheh

Unrest





## SYNOPSIS

New technologies are transforming a 19th-century watchmaking town in Switzerland. Josephine, a young factory worker, produces the unrest wheel, swinging in the heart of the mechanical watch. Exposed to new ways of organizing money, time and labour, she gets involved with the local movement of the anarchist watchmakers, where she meets Russian traveller Pyotr Kropotkin.

## TECHNICAL INFOS

93 Minutes  
DCP 1:1,78  
Color, 2K, 25fps  
VO Swiss-German, French, Russian  
English subtitles  
Digital 5.1  
Switzerland  
2022





## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My grandmother produced the mechanical heart of the watch, the so-called “Unrueh” (unrest) or balance wheel, as did many other women in my family who worked in a Swiss watch factory in the 19th and the 20th century. I wished to somehow bring their work and the time they spent in the factories into a film. And to bring the history of the anarchist watchmaker movement of the 19th century to our attention. Their ideas for reconsidering how we organise our societies, how we cooperate in producing things and how we engage in mutual aid deserve to be revisited.

Based on the historical events which made the watchmaking valley of Saint-Imier in northwestern Switzerland the political epicentre of the growing international anarchist movement in the second half of the 19th century, the film reconstructs events in 1870s. The film also tells the encounter between Josephine Gräbli, a watch factory worker producing the unrest wheel, and Pyotr Kropotkin, a Russian traveller and cartographer. The character of Pyotr is inspired by the real Pyotr Kropotkin (1842 – 1921). His book *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, which discusses his time spent in Switzerland where he became an anarchist, constituted an essential source for writing the film. The encounter between Josephine and Pyotr unfolds in an era when new technologies, such as time measurement, photography and the telegraph, were transforming the social order and anarchist narratives started competing with an emerging nationalism. By re-enacting certain situations of the past, I would like to invite the spectators to reconsider the construction of the present that we inhabit together.

Are the definitions of time and work, developed and established during industrial capitalism, mere fictions perhaps? How are narratives, such as the “nation” and other inventions of people living in the 19th century defining the ways we work together and how we organise and experience time today? Is there something like a capitalist mythology discreetly guiding out everyday life? What are its fairy tales? And what other tales might be possible?









## BIOGRAPHY

Cyril Schäublin (\*1984 in Zürich), descendant of a watchmaker family, grew up in Switzerland. Between 2004 and 2006, he lived in China where he studied Mandarin and Cinema at Zhongxi Academy in Beijing. He went on to study Film Directing at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (DFFB) where he graduated in 2012. Returning to Switzerland, he directed and produced his debut feature DENE WOS GUET GEIT / THOSE WHO ARE FINE (2017) which premiered in Locarno and screened at numerous film festivals including Rotterdam and New Directors / New Films in New York. The film received several international awards and honours, including the award for best film at the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2018 or a nomination for the European Film Awards 2018 (European Discovery). UNRUEH / UNREST (2022) is his second feature film.

## FILMOGRAPHY

(Screenwriter, Director, Editor)

- 2022 UNRUEH / UNREST (Feature)
- 2021 IL FAUT FABRIQUER SES CADEAUX /  
GOTTA FABRICATE YOUR OWN GIFTS (Short)
- 2017 DENE WOS GUET GEIT / THOSE WHO ARE FINE (Feature)
- 2013 MODERN TIMES (Short)
- 2011 PORTRAIT (Short)
- 2009 LENNY (Short)



The independence of thought and expression which I found in the Swiss Jura Mountains appealed far more strongly to my feelings; and after staying a few weeks with the watchmakers, my views upon socialism were settled: I was an anarchist.

Pyotr Kropotkin, 1877

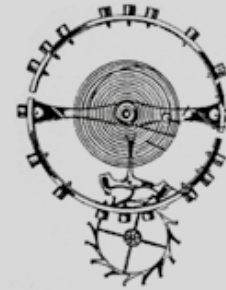




# Interview Cyril Schäublin

**What is the title of your film about?**

The so-called “Unrueh” (unrest) is the Swiss-German word for the balance wheel located in the mechanical heart of the watch. The production of the unrest balance wheel was mainly performed by women. My own grandmother and grand-aunts worked in a watch factory in the North West of Switzerland, and when I interviewed them for my researches, they told me already their own grandmothers spent their lives producing this unrest balance wheel.



**Could you tell a little bit more about your research and how you developed the idea for the film?**

I had the idea to make a film about a watch factory when I was still in film school in Berlin, so I started to visit my relatives who had worked in the factories to collect their memories and experiences. I was also influenced by the book *La condition ouvrière* by the anarchist philosopher Simone Weil, in which she describes her memoirs working in a steel factory. I became very interested in the everyday life in a watch factory and how it shapes people’s experience of time. Simone Weil speaks about the cadence as a pressure on workers to fulfil repetitive tasks according to time intervals that are imposed upon them and often leave no room for their own working rhythms.

### How did you come up with the anarchist subject of your film?

During his studies of anthropology in England, my elder brother Emanuel, who later supported the production of this film as ethnographic adviser, discovered the anarchist theory and movement of the 19th century and its ties to the Swiss watch industry. He made me discover the writings of Pyotr Kropotkin. When I stumbled across the autobiographic citation that Kropotkin became an anarchist after visiting a Swiss watchmaker valley and its anarchist movement, I immediately knew that this must be part of the movie, next to a character inspired by my own grandmother, a watch factory worker producing the unrest balance wheel.



### What is the connection between watchmaking and anarchism?

In its beginnings, the socialist movement in the 19th century fighting for the rights of the working class was a giant organisation called the First International with Marx and Engels as its more or less self-declared leaders. In 1871, a Swiss watchmaking worker movement from Sonceboz published a circulation letter critically questioning the authoritarian roles of Marx and Engels within the socialist movement. The letter received a lot of attention and sympathy among the international socialist movement, up to the point that a new group within the socialist movement was created. It referred to itself as the First Anti-Authoritarian International in opposition to the communist First International. The first congress of this new group took place in 1872 in Saint Imier,

a Swiss watchmaking town. It attracted members and visitors from all over Europe and Russia. In the following years, the valley became the meeting point of the new international anarchist movement. Most of the Swiss anarchists, such as Adhémar Schwitzguébel or Auguste Spichiger, were watchmakers. This also has to do with the fact that the Swiss watch industry was on the one hand a giant industry, exporting already millions of watches each year in the early 1870s producing the majority of watches in the global market. On the other hand, the watch industry was still very decentralised compared to other industries at the time. This decentralization in the production can be partly explained by the fact that it was still very complex to produce a watch, with more than 315 different professional working steps. This allowed workshops producing different parts to maintain certain economic and political independence that appears to have encouraged the autonomous and anarchist spirit among its workers, which Pyotr Kropotkin tries to capture in his memoirs.

### What about the love story in your film?

My original idea was to put the “romantic” aspect, the famous “boy meets girl” aspect in cinema into a kind of persiflage or caricature of the genre, culminating in the final scene when their love, their encounter, is fictionalised and merchandised by the people buying their photographs. Amusingly, the “love story” also fictionalises and merchandises the final film itself, maybe lifting up its value because it has the love story element in it. But then, to me at least, the film takes a position which is far from satire or persiflage. That love is undefinable and indescribable in the end, even though their pictures are visible and for sale. I hope through this, it might give place to a secret place beyond us, beyond the film: A potential point of departure for eluding the mechanisms of time discipline and nationalist storytelling that continue to shape our lives today. Arthur Rimbaud said about love, that it needs to be reinvented (*L’amour est à réinventer*). I think love also makes you reinvent your world, and your ideas of the world and how to cope in it.



## What about your decision not to work with professional actors?

I wished to re-enact situations of the past, situated in the 1870s, with people of the present. I decided to work with people who have ties to the contemporary watch industry, but also regular people like truck drivers, rappers, former criminals, architects, academics or carpenters. Maybe I hoped that with this choice I can kind of reproduce a language of the past which does not sound “historical”. I was interested in an everyday language to be spoken by the people appearing in the film. I imagined that that kind of marginalised and random everyday language had existed in the 1870s as it does today.



**There is no music in the film, with the exceptions of two choirs. Why are they in the film?**

For me it was crucial to not only show the anarchist movement in the watchmaker town with its internationalist, pacifist and egalitarian approach. I also wished to recreate situations with the opposite political party, the liberal, authoritarian, patriarchal and nationalist movement, which was, as we all know, much more influential and historically prevailed in Switzerland and also in Europe. By juxtaposing situations of these two movements the spectators are invited to form their own opinion, about how communities imagine the past in order to shape their present. The two choirs and their songs whose texts are taken from the historical period of the late 19th century represent this idea of a symmetrically juxtaposing the two dominant political movements in a Swiss

watchmaker town. One is the ancient Swiss national anthem and the other is an anarchist song called *The worker has no fatherland* (*L'ouvrier n'a pas de patrie*).



**Does your film, even though historical, try to also shed a light on our actual present?**

I guess that there are parallels of the 1870s and our present. One could argue that many bricks of the construction of our present have been first laid out in that epoch, most importantly, of course, the creation of nation states based on nationalist historical narratives taught in school and perpetuated in the press as beautifully described by the historian Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities*. And of course the repercussions of new technologies at that time continue to be felt today. The far-distance communication initially enabled by the telegraph, the spread of photography and visual representations transforming political consciousness, as well as time measurement through easily available watches and its impact on organising work and everyday life according to fix schedules and strict time discipline. Right now, we are maybe also confronted to new technologies reshaping and restructuring how we organise ourselves. By building our own future with new technologies we continue to build on our own past. I think one of the biggest questions of our present is how we relate or possibly rewrite our own history, how we define history and what information we take from it in order to build new constructions in our present. In this film, the protagonists also re-enact the past in an attempt to shape the present:

The anarchist movement re-enacts the Paris Commune, with its ideals of equal wages between man and woman and an even distribution of wealth among people. Meanwhile, the liberal party re-enacts a medieval battle pitching a presumably united force of the Swiss against Burgundy, in order to incite nationalist feelings among the population and garner support for the nascent Swiss Federal State. Which elements of historical memory are re-enacted and performed today and how will such choices shape our present and future?

### **Where was the film shot, and how was the work on set like?**

The entire film was shot in and around the valley where the first international anarchist congress took place in 1871, in the valley of Saint Imier in the Northern part in the canton of Berne. We worked with a small crew for the camera, working exclusively with natural light. The challenges for the production were the historical settings and the costumes for the many extras.



### **How did you work on the dialogues and the script?**

Already thinking from the chosen frames and shots which were developed next to working on the script, I came up with scenes which would work as dynamic patterns for situations unfolding once we would be shooting. In the end, most of the dialogues I wrote in the script are now

in the film, but also, some dialogues were created while filming on the set. It was really important to develop the script with different kinds of advisers, most obviously the historical advisor of the project, Florian Eitel. His book *Anarchist watchmakers in the 19th century in Switzerland* with its micro-historical approach were essential for writing the film and deciding what kind of historical facts and sources to select and how to integrate them into the film. My brother Emanuel provided ethnographic advice on how to integrate the knowledge of various people I encountered during my exploratory trips in the region into the script.

### **Could you mention other artists or filmmakers which have inspired or influenced you?**

While working on this film, I read a lot of poets and writers, like Teju Cole, Patrizia Cavalli, Anton Čechov or the essays by Ursula K. Le Guin. Also the photographic works of Iris Lacoudre and paintings by Luo Ping or Franz Gertsch encouraged and helped me a lot.

### **What about filmmakers?**

Of course I like to watch and engage with contemporary cinema, but I really love a quote by Fritz Lang from the 1960s, who said that when he started working in the beginnings of the 1920s, there were no genres yet, and how he felt pity for young filmmakers having to think in so many channels and genres and about what they actually do. In this sense I like to go back to the beginnings of cinema, to Friedrich Murnau, Elvira Notari or Yasujiro Ozu, when cinema was still being invented and was maybe not so caught up in its own definitions yet. I somehow wish to take that spirit into the present and try to start from there.











CAST

With

CLARA GOSTYNSKI  
ALEXEI EVSTRATOV

And

MONIKA STALDER  
HÉLIO THIÉMARD  
ALICE-MARIE HUMBERT  
ESTHER FLÜCKIGER  
ALISA MILOGLYADOVA  
ELISAVETA KRIMAN  
OLGA BUSHKOVA  
TATIANA KULMINSKA  
FREDI MÜLLER  
MIRIAM LEONARDI  
VALENTIN MERZ  
DANIEL STÄHLI  
MICHAEL FEHR  
LAURENT FERRERO  
ROLAND MERZ  
MAYO IRION  
BEAT GILOMEN  
LI TAVOR  
LAURENCE BRETIGNIER  
GEORGE CATTIN  
HENRI CATTIN  
JONAS AEGERTER  
PAOLO MERICO

MICHAIL MAIATSKY  
SALOMÉ GUYOT  
JULIA KÜNZI  
DANIEL BACHMANN  
NIKOLAI BOSSHARDT  
RAPHAËL THIÉMARD  
HANNA PEREKHODA  
MICHEL NEMITZ  
STEFANO KNUCHEL  
EMANUEL GOGNIAT

TEAM

Screenwriter, Director, Editor  
CYRIL SCHÄUBLIN

Cinematography  
SILVAN HILLMANN

Production  
LINDA VOGEL, MICHELA PINI

Sound  
MIGUEL CABRAL MORAES

Costumes  
LINDA HARPER

Production Design  
SARA B. WEINGART

Make-Up  
JEAN COTTER

Line Producer  
ANDREA BLASER

Music  
LI TAVOR

Sound Design  
ROLAND WIDMER /  
ZENTRALTON GMBH

Sound Mix  
GUIDO KELLER /  
MAGNETIX AG

Color Grading  
DAVID RÖTHLISBERGER /  
LOMOTION AG

Casting  
RHEA PLANGG  
IO BAUR

PRODUCTION

SEELAND FILMPRODUKTION

In Co-Production with

CINÉDOKKE  
SWISS RADIO AND  
TELEVISION / SRG SSR  
ENTRÉES MULTIPLES

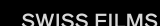
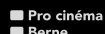
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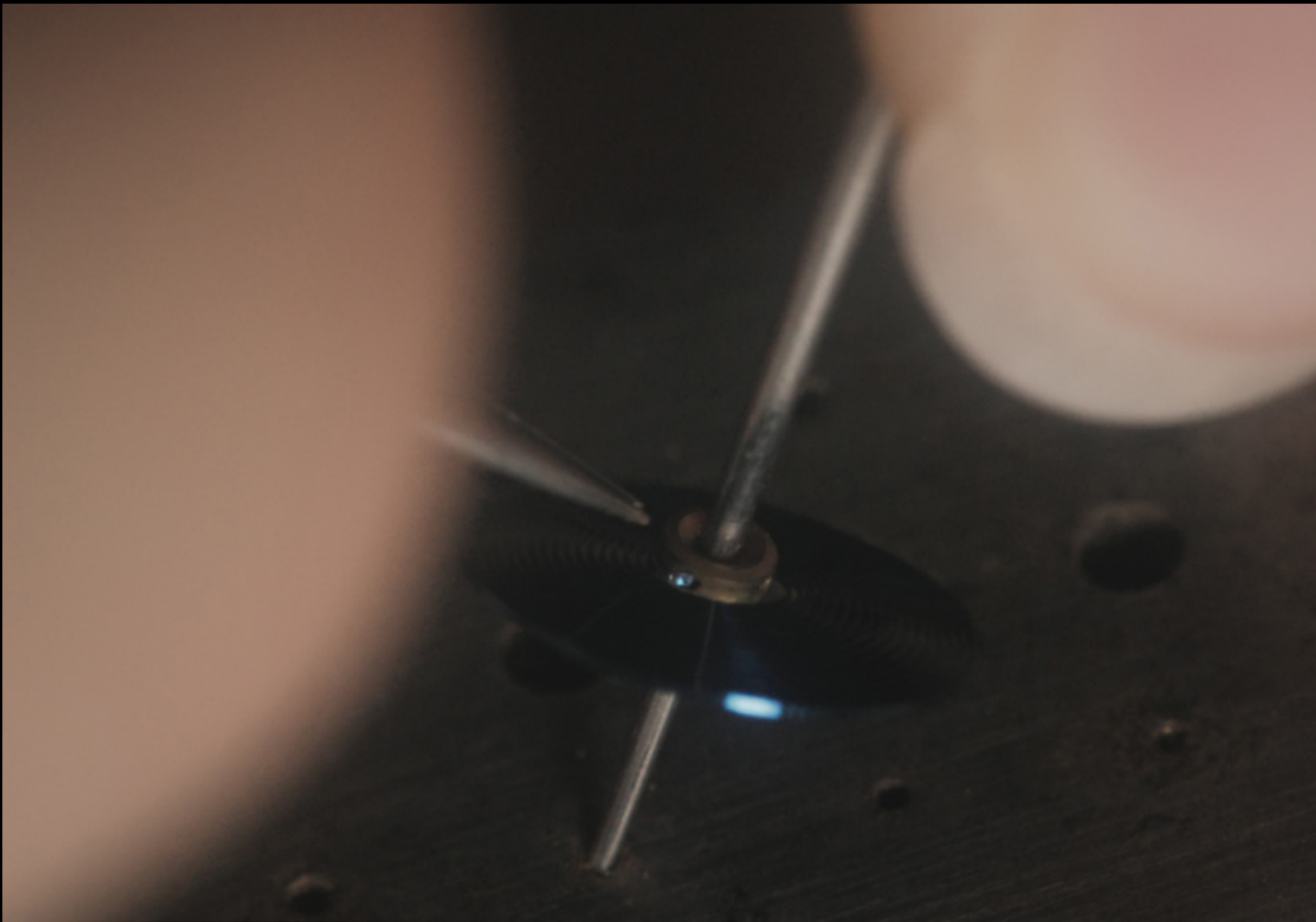
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ZURICH FILM FOUNDATION  
PRO CINÉMA BERNE  
MEDIA DESK SUISSE

And

TORINOFILMLAB  
PRODUCTION AWARD  
FIDLAB MARSEILLE  
ARTEKINO INTERNATIONAL  
PRIZE

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GMBH 2022







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