
VIRA CHUDNENKO

a film by Inês Oliveira

DCP 2K · 31 min

BEST PORTUGUESE FILM

DOCLISBOA'17



SYNOPSIS

“The Russian lady and I used to cross each other every day at 6 a.m., as every day she used to ride her bicycle to work. But that day she was on foot. The neighbor’s dogs were barking... barking and barking...”

“To me, the body looked more of a sheep. I’ve seen dead bodies but that wasn’t a dead person to me.”

A report by two witnesses of a hideous crime committed in the idyllic landscape of Sintra. The victim was a foreigner named Vira Chudnenko.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Vira Chudnenko's death shocked Portugal, shocked me. We were in the year 2007 when the news came out: Rottweiler dogs had killed a woman. They tore her body into pieces and ate her. It happened in the region of Sintra, whose “magic mountain” belong to UNESCO’s world heritage. It was difficult to believe that someone could die like this, there, in the beast's snouts. Sintra is not a jungle....

Every morning, around 6 o'clock the “Russian lady” used to go to work by bike, as confirmed the witness Amélia Dias. They crossed everyday on their way to work, Amélia on a car and the “Russian lady” on her bicycle. But on that day she had to go to the Migration Office because and so she went on foot. The fugitive dogs surprised the “Russian lady”, just few meters away from her house. Nobody saved her.

According to the other witness, the neighbour Lina Gomes, the majority of the guard dogs on that area live bored and lonely, and run away as much as they can.

It is an old rural region, nowadays a medium class suburb, where residents leave early and arrive late, letting their dogs to watch their houses. There are no squares, no coffee shops, and no parks – there is no public space. No community. Nobody heard, and nobody saw anything.

“ the majority of the guard dogs on that area live bored and lonely, and run away as much as they can.”



The case outraged the public opinion and the judgment of the dogs’ master had high media coverage. The more I investigated the case, the more I understood that this crime's victim couldn't have been a random person. Only the “Russian lady” and her husband (he worked as a bricklayer and she was an industrial cleaner), used to be walk there on foot or bicycle. They lived in a shack and didn't

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hold a car. “The man went down the way to catch the bus, and she went up the way. Later he said he had heard dogs barking, but he didn't pay attention”, recalled Amélia Dias.

I made this film driven by the wish to postpone the oblivion of Vira Chudnenko's death. It was avoidable and inhuman. Above all, it was an extremely lonely way to die there was not one soul to help her.

Later, I accompanied the transformation of this into “A case not to repeat”. The law changed. Even mentalities changed. “The issue” was heavily discussed.

The attempt to turn Vira Chudnenko's death into something useful and preventive, gave me an awkward feeling of some sort of sacrifice – as if it killed her even more. “To me, her body resembled a sheep”, said Amélia Dias in her testimony.

“later he said
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dogs barking,
but he didn't
pay attention...”





TEAM

Cast: ALEVTINA PUGATCH

Script: INÊS OLIVEIRA

based on the testimonies of AMÉLIA DIAS and LINA GOMES

Image: INÊS OLIVEIRA, PAULO MENEZES

Sound: TIAGO RAPOSINHO, HUGO LEITÃO

Editing: RUI MOURÃO, INÊS OLIVEIRA

Production: ISABEL MACHADO, JOANA FERREIRA

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DCP 2K · Color · 31 min · 5.1 ·

Russian with English or Portuguese subtitles ·



The director

INÊS OLIVEIRA

She was born in Lisbon, 1976 and studied Fine Arts (ar.co Lisbon) and Cinema (ESTC Lisbon) and attended an intensive Course in Videoart at Gulbenkian Foundation with the teachers Chantal Akerman, HarounFarocki, Jean Pierre Gorin.

Her first film, O NOME E O NIM / NAMES AND NUMBERS (2003) won the awards for the Best Film at Curtas - Vila do Conde, Festival Premiers Plans and Festival Nouveaux Cinema et Nouveaux Medias Montreal. Her feature films CINERAMA (2009) and BOBÔ (2013) were presented at several international film festivals, such as Toronto IFF, Stockholm IFF, Mostra Int. de Cinema de São Paulo, and were both commercially released in Portugal.

FILMOGRAPHY

NAMES AND NUMBERS (2003); fiction, 25 min

EATING YOUR HEART OUT (2005), doc., 33 min

CINERAMA (2009) fiction, 128 min

BOBÔ (2013); fiction, 80 min

VIRA CHUDNENKO (2018) doc, 31 min

THE FROG AND THE GIRL (2018) fiction, 18 min

PRESS REVIEW

“It surprises, mostly for the aesthetic choices and the narrative that drives us to another dimension, where the scenery is in between idyllic and mysterious on the surroundings of Sintra, contrasting with another reality, very different, of abandoned rural houses and an event of pure horror. (...) There is a will to give voice to a woman that came to look for a better life and ended up being torn in the middle of the road, attacked by four dogs. “Wrong place at the wrong time”, some say, as if regretting the unredeemable. Inês Oliveira offers the woman great dignity, which she possibly never had.”

Paulo Portugal in “Insider” 29.10.2017



“The filming on the locations of a heinous event, with the Pena Palace on the far distant background, suggests a thrilling investigation (...) but what really matters here is not the reconstitution of the shocking and absurd crime (which the film denies strongly), but the interrogations that “Vira Chudnenko” decides to set: how do they turn into fiction. The result is surprising.”

Francisco Ferreira in “Expresso” 28.10.2017

AWARDS

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