

DOKUARTS Visual Alterity

"If the stranger didn't exist, we would have to invent him within ourselves!" (Roberto Ciulli)

In his essay film "Absent God" (German premiere DOKUARTS 2016), filmmaker Yoram Ron explored the current interest in and political significance of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy within the Israeli context. The surprising success of the film's presentation at the time and the subsequent discussion prompted us to create this new project, with the intention to further broaden the understanding of the philosophical thinking about the Other with respect to the documentary film.

The project DOKUARTS Visual Alterity presents and examines the filmic look at the Other. How is the self, understood here as "identity in flux", shaped through the encounter with the Other? Since the beginnings of philosophy, philosophers, particularly in the field of ethics, have engaged in the thinking about the Other/ the stranger. Among them, Emmanuel Levinas is known for his lifelong preoccupation with the Other, and the alterity of the Other, which forms the center piece of his ethics. Today, his work is experiencing a renaissance not only in the realm of identity politics and universalistic thought but also notably in the field of film studies. Even though Levinas himself rarely references the arts, his ethical concept of the "Face-to-Face relation" provides countless possibilities for re-evaluating the complex relationship between ethics and aesthetics. DOKUARTS Visual Alterity addresses this relationship with a focus on the expressiveness, diversity, and reflexivity of documentary film.

DOKUARTS Visual Alterity presents the documentary as an artform that is both historically charged and forward-looking. The nowadays much-talked-about contextualization of the artistic work is realized in many of the selected documentary films which explore their subjects in a personal and unformatted way, outside the rules and standards of the TV broadcasting companies. For documentary film, an artform with a very specific relationship to the depicted reality, reflections on the act of "Looking at the Other" are key. Inspired by Levinas' concept of "Distance and Proximity", Visual Alterity delves into the examination of the theme "Looking at the Other" in cinema.

The selection of films focusses on artistic work processes, unusual biographies and essay films that testify to the transformational potential of identities. Instead of assigning fixed group identities, it is our intention to explore identities in flux which always inevitably will contain unexplainable or unidentifiable parts. The presented films offer a cinematographic experience which is intended to promote openness and empathy in the audience and to broaden the capacity of discernment in respect of the relationship with the Other. To contemplate Alterity means to uncover nuances and ambivalences, and to develop the viewers' perception and awareness both toward the Other and toward themselves.

With this new project, we hope to participate in finding fresh philosophical perspectives to move away from the rigid identity-political debates. Visual Alterity considers the vulnerability in the face of the Other and our responsibility in response to this vulnerability: "The face is exposed, vulnerable, as if inviting an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what prohibits us from killing." Our project uses Levinas' ethical concept of the "Face-to-Face" as a springboard and as inspiration in order to rethink the meaning of the Other/ the stranger within the arts. Which aesthetic strategies are characteristic for the ethical practices within the context of documentary film? How does the art of documentary film empower the voice of the Other? Which philosophies and ethical concepts have inspired and influenced the filmmakers whose work is presented during the festival?