

Mira Film, CORSO Film and Sakdoc Film
present

TAMING THE GARDEN

A film by Salomé Jashi

92 min. | Switzerland, Germany, Georgia | 2021



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An ode to the rivalry between men and nature, *Taming the Garden* is the story of how a powerful man indulges in an unusual hobby by having century-old trees uprooted in communities along the Georgian coast and transplanted to his private garden.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A powerful man and anonymous man has developed an unusual hobby. He buys century-old trees, some as tall as 15-story buildings, from communities along the Georgian coast and has them excavated to collect them for his private garden. In order to transplant trees of such dimensions, the landscape surrounding them is ripped apart and the people living around them are forced to adapt to the disruption. As the film follows this process, it portrays the needs and values of today's Georgian society and reflects on the theme of forced migration, where "uprooting" is more than a metaphor.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Some time ago, the entire country of Georgia witnessed a surreal scene – a large tree floating in the sea. That was when we learned that the most powerful man in the country had a new passion – to own century-old trees on his private estate.

Witnessing this image was like seeing a glitch in the real. It was as if I had seen something I should have never seen. It was beautiful, like real-life poetry, but at the same time it seemed to be a mistake, a kind of discomfort.

I embarked on filming this process as Georgia's whole coastline was involved in implementing one man's desire. I wanted to explore what was behind this mesmerizingly strange image; to tell about the ambition of a powerful man, who alters landscapes, moves trees, leaves witnesses perplexed – all for the sake of his pleasure.

I am fascinated by environments and how these environments affect people. More precisely, how we perceive others, and ourselves, in specific environments. The contradiction between settings and the people in them is what often drives my vision.

To me, the film does not have a one-dimensional line as to what it is about. The material spoke of many different aspects of life, which found symbolic expressions in the film, such as the idea of manhood, or forced migration, or uprooting, which is not just a physical process. I also relate the theme of uprooting to my country, where values and a sense of stability is constantly floating. I see the film as an evocative journey into a surreal world, which paradoxically is also fact-based.

We were filming for almost two years. I would travel with my small team to the coast each month to try to capture elements for the film. It was a challenging process as nothing was properly planned. We were dependent on the natural elements like wind, rain, unexpected circumstances in the workers' routine, even the general political situation of the day. The process of transplanting trees was very slow and key elements would happen very fast. But the biggest challenge was connected to the local inhabitants. Since the wealthy man behind the scenes is also the most politically powerful man in the country, they were often scared to even appear in front of the camera fearing possible consequences, the fear which we, like other fragile democracies, have in our blood.

– Salomé Jashi

BIOS

SALOMÉ JASHI - Director, Writer, Cinematographer, Producer

Salomé Jashi was born in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1981. She first studied journalism and worked as a reporter for several years. In 2005 she was awarded a British Council scholarship to study documentary filmmaking at Royal Holloway, University of London. Salomé's *The Dazzling Light of Sunset* (2016) was awarded the Main Prize at Visions du Réel's Regard Neuf Competition as well as at ZagrebDox, Jihlava IDFF, Valdivia IDFF, and several other festivals. Her earlier work, *Bakhmaro* (2011), made in co-production with ma.ja.de. filmproduktion and MDR/Arte, received an Honorary Mention for a Young Documentary Talent at DOK Leipzig, was awarded as the Best Central and Eastern European Documentary at Jihlava IDFF, and was nominated for the Asia Pacific Screen Awards and Silver Eye Awards. Salomé is the founder of two production companies: Sakdoc Film and Microcosmos, both producing documentaries and fiction of high artistic quality. She was a fellow of Nipkow Scholarship in 2017 and DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program in 2020.

VADIM JENDREYKO - Producer

Vadim Jendreyko is a director, author and producer living in Switzerland. In 2002 he and Hercli Bundi founded the film production company Mira Film (Zurich and Basel), which focuses on the development, production and exploitation of independent documentaries for cinema and television. With his feature documentaries *Bashkim* and *The Woman with the 5 Elephants* he won as a director the Swiss Film Award for Best Documentary (2002 and 2009) and received nominations for the German Film Award and the European Film Award in addition to numerous festival awards. Vadim supports numerous film projects as an advisor, teaches at film schools and is engaged as a mentor for international workshops such as dok.incubator. He is a member of the Swiss Film Academy and the European Film Academy.

ERIK WINKER - Producer

Erik Winker holds a Masters degree in TV Production from the University of Manchester and a diploma in film directing from the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. For over 15 years he has been working in the field of documentary both as a director and a producer. In 2008 he co-founded the production company HUPE Film, which has been running under the new name CORSO Film since 2016. Erik teaches at the University Of Applied Sciences Mainz and the ifs Cologne. He serves as a mentor for international workshops like dok.incubator, Ex Oriente and Documentary Campus and is a regular member of festival and funding juries. He is a former chairman of the regional filmmakers association Filmbüro NW, a member of the German Film Academy and a founding member of the Documentary Association of Europe (DAE).

MARTIN ROELLY - Producer

Martin Roelly studied film direction at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne from 1999 to 2004 where he graduated with a Masters degree with *Böse (Evil)*, a short film developed for children. Martin later worked as an independent head of production for various short films and as producer of music videos and corporate films. In 2008 he co-founded the production company HUPE Film, which has been running under the new name CORSO Film since 2016. Besides his

work as a producer, Martin also works as theater manager for the Odeon Cinema in Cologne.

GOGA DEVDARIANI - Cinematographer

Goga Devdariani is a Leningrad-born cinematographer living in Tbilisi, Georgia. He was the cinematographer for *Mediator* (2007/2008) by Dito Tsintsadze and *A Fold in My Blanket* (2013) by Zaza Rusadze, the opening film at Berlinale's Panorama section. Together with the director of *Taming the Garden*, Salomé Jashi, he contributed to the cinematography of *The Dazzling Light of Sunset* (2016).

CHRIS WRIGHT - Editor

Chris Wright was born in the Northern English town of Bolton, studied in Cambridge and then at film school in Babelsberg. Since the mid-90s, he has lived in Berlin, working as an editor and documentary-maker. His recent credits include Thomas Heise's *Heimat Is A Space in Time*, which won him a nomination for the VG Bildkunst Editing Award. In 2017 he won the German Camera Prize in the category best feature-length editing for Susanne Binniger's *Fighter*. He teaches the documentary course at the German Film and Television Academy (dffb) and works as editing consultant on documentaries and fiction films. His own documentaries (together with Stefan Kolbe) have been shown at festivals worldwide. Their new film, *Anamnesis*, will be released in 2021.

PHILIPPE CIOMPI - Sound Designer

Philippe Ciompi is a film sound designer and dubbing mixer active in Britain, Switzerland, China, France, and other countries. His work explores the ways in which sound creates perceptual networks of space and time. He occasionally also works as a film editor, composer and sound artist, and is a visiting lecturer for sound design at the Royal College of Art and Goldsmiths College in London, as well as at HEAD in Geneva. Recent projects include collaborations with directors such as Salomé Jashi, Ben Rivers & Ben Russell, Jumana Manna, Dieudo Hamadi, Elene Naveriani, Andrew Kötting, and Sarah Vanagt, among others.

CELIA STROOM - Music Supervisor

Celia Stroom is a multidisciplinary artist in full swing. She has studied several disciplines and works in all of them, creating multifold artworks. After completing a Masters and BA at Sorbonne University and Paris Conservatory in Museology, Cultural Management, Contemporary Dance, Sound studies & Opera singing, she has dedicated her work to the exploration of the neurological phenomenon of synesthesia in several kinds of artistic experiences, film, literature, sound performances and exhibitions. In her work, film music is not considered an additional decorative layer to the images, but rather as a chemical fusion of sound and vision. The French artist lives and works in Berlin. She heads Heroines Wave, a feminist collective for research and creation.

CREDITS

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Salomé Jashi

Written by
Salomé Jashi

Producers
Vadim Jendreyko, Erik Winker, Martin Roelly, Salomé Jashi

Directors of Photography
Goga Devdariani, Salomé Jashi

Editor
Chris Wright

Sound Design
Philippe Ciompi

Music Supervisor
Celia Stroom

Researcher
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Line Producer
Pascal Moor

Associate Producers
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