

MAIA - PORTRET CU MÂINI aka MAIA - PORTRAIT WITH HANDS

90 min Romania / Germany 2024
By Alexandra Gulea



LOGLINE

Maia (Alexandra Gulea) was born into a semi-nomadic population under ethnic cleansing. Her granddaughter has produced a vivid visual reconstruction of her journey through the 20th century. Her history blends into the larger History.

From the Pindus Mountains in Greece to Bucharest, an Aromanian woman traverses the 20th century hand in hand with History. A performative and transgressive documentary about remembrance and translocation.

SYNOPSIS

One night I saw my grandmother Maia (Alexandra Gulea 1905-1999) in a dream. She was a child, walking alongside the donkey carrying the body of her father killed by Greek troops. They were going up the rocky mountain path to her village, Paticina, in Ottoman Macedonia. After her father was buried, she discreetly left the group of women who were mourning for their husbands and fall asleep under a walnut tree. She dreamed that another Alexandra Gulea, her descendant, a grown woman, was weaving a kilim that foretold her future: the sea voyage from Thessaloniki to Constanța, crossing the Danube on a cable ferry, wearing a bridal veil at the funeral of her four children.

My grandmother believed in dreams and knew how to interpret them to keep a connection to the world beyond. The traces she, a nomad Aromanian woman left are almost wiped off. The traces her existence left in me, as a heritage across generations, lead my perception on sea and on land. I will recompose the destiny of the woman who's name I am carrying. And the accidents of history that conditioned her small clan of Romance language-speaking shepherds to come down from the mountains of Greece and end up in a Communist concrete apartment block on Victoria Socialismului boulevard in Bucharest.

I weaved, drew, mould, build, frame, stage the Kilim of Maia's life throughout the century in a stylized manner. There are 3 protagonists and I incarnate her in different periods of life, in a superimposition of characters and historical events. Her culture is essentially oral and as it happens with myths, she passed on to me the Macedo-Romanian dialect that I am using in the voiceover. It is a lyrical film with a multi-layered imagery merging myth, history, poetry, ethnography, dance and ritual. Facets of the same world are assembled from fragmentary recollections. My approach to film is as a primarily visual medium rather than as a narrative tool, conceived as an overlay of cinema essay, documentary and art installation.

These hundred years in the life of an Aromanian woman with personal and conjunctural dramas become, in the film, an exemplary destiny, an archetype of the "Aromanian woman". In analysing her history, we attempt a closer description of the History of her small people of nomadic Macedo-Romanians, forever at risk of extinction.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

"I share the same name as my grandmother. We are both Alexandra Gulea". There is therefore a mixture, an intricacy of the two women, as Maia lives in Alexandra. It is my role to evoke Maia, as one would evoke a spirit. Like a shamanic incarnation, Alexandra becomes Maia, embodies her, imagining and reinventing her: "I am the only person who can piece together the story of my grandmother". This is a film about transmission and memory. As Alexandra I represent both the heiress of the spirit of Maia (and through Maia of all Aromanian women) and above all, I am the only one who can collect the scattered memories and documents to reconstitute the portrait in the form of a shattered mosaic."

Aromanians have never had a written language; their History, their histories, their ballads, their merry or mourning songs were passed on from mouth to mouth and transformed in a way similar to myths. Historians themselves have different theories on their origins. Aromanians, Aromână, Râmâni, Βλάχοι, Tchobans, Tsintsars, Zinzares, Machedons, Macedo-Români, Koutso-Vlahoi, Wallachians, Vlachs, Makedo-Walachen... The very fact that they were given so many names by the people they encountered puts us in front of an unknown history, a misunderstanding or a mystery sparked by this population in perpetual motion. The ethnographic dimension of the film is illustrated by the amazing archive of Manakia Brothers who, at the turn of XX century bought a camera and set off to film the Aromanians, a semi-nomadic population of shepherds. Their most famous footage, filmed in 1905, represents an old woman, "Grandmother Despina" weaving wool.

The idea of weaving it is a central motif in the film. Each in its own way, grandmother and granddaughter are weavers. Maia never threw anything, everything had to be reused, sewn up in patchwork, in a permanent weaving and reweaving. In the same manner, Alexandra, a visual artist trained at Beaux-Arts de Paris and an established filmmaker uses the tools of contemporary art to weave Maia's life. It is a superimposed, multimedia odyssey through archive material, interviews, photographs, performances, music, sculptures and art installations. There are four protagonists playing the same character: Vava Stefanescu who choreographed and danced Maia's tragic destiny, the actress Emilia Dobrin who embodies the character at several ages, Maria Cuzmin who plays the two Alexandra Gulea at the age of childhood and adolescence and the author, making several female characters merge into one. It is filmed over the course of several years, in winter at -25° in northern Greece, in spring in the Danube Delta or in Bucharest and its suburbs, in autumn in the arid and

sunburned Dobrogea. Nicu Ilfoveanu's Super 8mm photography has the grainy materiality of a contemporary archive footage and is confronted with the concreteness of the symmetrical digital framing of George Chiper - Lillemark. Vlaicu Golcea and Stephan Dunkelman's original score together with the musicality and the strangeness of the Aromanian dialect compared to other Romance languages is giving the film its own singularity.

CAST & CREW

Cast

Maria Cuzmin
Vava Ștefănescu
Emilia Dobrin

Aromanians from the Archive Photo and Film Archive
Fishermen of the Danube Delta

Producer
Ana Maria Pîrvan

Co producers
Alexandra Gulea
Kristina Konrad
Ruxandra Șerban

Director of Photography Digital
George Chiper - Lillemark
Director of Photography Super 8mm
Nicu Ilfoveanu

Additional Images
Andreas Bolm

Film archives
Milton & Ianaki Manakia

Sound
Andreas Bolm
Flora Pop

Set Designer
Ramona Stanca

First AD
Vladimir Nițescu
Ciprian Panaite

Second AD
Dragoș Hanciu

Choreography

Vava Ștefănescu

Original Score
Vlaicu Golcea
Stephan Dunkelman
Stéphane Karo

Edit
Frédéric Fichet & Alexandra Gulea

An Anchor Films
Production
Co-produced by
WeltFilm
Trident Film & Media
Vent d'Est
2024

Supported by the Romanian National Film Center

VITAE - FILMOGRAPHY

Alexandra Gulea

Lives and works between Berlin and Bucharest

Alexandra Gulea (1970, București, România) graduated in 1997 'cum laude' Degree at "Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts " in Paris. After participating in several painting exhibitions, she studied documentary film at Munich Film School and since 1999 directed **Documentary Films, Shorts, Video Installations** and a **Feature Fiction**. She also worked as an **Editor** on several movies.

FILMOGRAPHY AUTHOR

- 2017/2024 **“Maia - “Portret cu mâini”** aka **“Maia – A portrait with hands”** Essay
IFF Rotterdam, Official Selection, Harbour, 2024
TIFF, Cluj, TIFF, Chișinău, BIEFF Bucharest, Astra FF, Sibiu, 2024
Astra Film Sibiu, Work in Progress, 2017
IFF Sarajevo, Work in Progress, 2018
Les Films de Cannes a Bucharest, Work in Progress, 2019
First Cut Lab, Transilvania International FF, 2021
- 2023 **Retrospective - Profile - Alexandra Gulea** in Internationale
Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen. Member of the International Jury.
- 2022/2023 **“Ñeale azbuirătoare”** aka **“Flying sheep”** aka Experimental
68 Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, 2022
International Documentary FF Astra, Sibiu, 2022
Les Films de Cannes à Bucarest, 2022
BEAST International Film Festival, Porto, 2023

Thessaloniki International Film Festival, 2023
Prize: Best German Film, IKF Oberhausen, 2022
Special Mention FF Astra, Sibiu, 2022
“Gopo” Nomination, Best Short Film, 2023
Best Romanian Film, BIEFF, Bucharest, 2023

2019 **“Sheep on ship” - 3 X 12'**
 Video instalation, Gallery “UnSpațiu”, Bucarest, Romania, 2019

2018 **“Valea Jiului Notes” - 13:30' Experimental**
 Rencontres Internationales Paris - Berlin, 2018
 Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, 2018
 OneWorld Romania, 2018
 Astra International Documentary Film Festival, Sibiu, 2018
 Posibila Gallery, Bucharest, 2020
Prize: Best German Film, IKF Oberhausen, 2018

2017 **“Baiat de lemn”, aka “Wooden Boy” - 9' Experimental**
 Rencontres Internationales Paris - Berlin, 2017
 Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, 2017
 Art Encounters, Timisoara – Arad, 2017
 BIEFF (Bucharest International Experimental FF), 2017

WDR

2013 **“Matei Copil Miner” aka “Matei – L'enfant des mines”,**
 aka **“Matei Child Miner” – 80' Fiction**
 FIF Rotterdam, Cinema Jove Valencia IFF Spain, Zlin IFF for Children and
 Youth Czech Republic, Festival du Film d'Education, Evreux, France, Festival
 du Film de Toulouse, France, 16eme Rencontres du Cinéma d'Europe,
 Aubenas, France, TIFF Romania, Anonimul Romania, Regiofun IFF
 Katowice, Poland. International Women Film Festival, Köln, Germany. 2013
 Art Encounters, Timisoara – Arad, 2017
 Posibila Gallery, 2019

Prizes: Nomination “Big Screen Award” IFF Rotterdam 2013
Sarajevo FF, Best “Work in Progress” 2012
Prize “Lino Micciché” and “Young Critics Award” la Pesaro IFF
New Cinema, Italy, 2013
Best Film, IFP “Regiofun” – Katowice, Polonia 2013

Cinema:
Distributed by Independența Film in the Romanian Movie
Theaters, 2014
Werkstatt Kino, München, Germany, 2015

TVR, BR Bayerisches Fernsehen

2007 **“Azi eram Frumoasa, Juna” aka “Today I was young and pretty”-**

- 52' Documentary
 Festival dei Popoli, Firenze, Italy , 2007
 Cronograf, Moldova, 2008
 Transilvania Int. Film Fest., Cluj, Romania, 2008
 MNAC Bucuresti, Work of the Month

Cinema: "Elvire Popesco" Bucarest, 2008
- 2004 **"Dumnezeu la saxofon, Dracu' la vioara"** aka **"God plays sax, the Devil violin"** aka **"Die Daumendreher"** 45' Documentary
 IFF Rotterdam, Cinema du Reel Paris, IDFF München, IDAFF Leipzig, IDVF Kassel, Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen, **MoMA, MNAC**, etc

Prizes: German Short Film Prize, (Best German medium length film), 2004
Golden Key, Kassel Documentary Film & Video Festival, Germany, 2004
Best student film, Molodist, Kyiv, Ukraine, 2004
DAAD Prize, Germany, 2004
Prix du Film Long, Les Ecrans Documentaires, France 2004
Mention Henry Langlois, Poitiers, France, 2004
- 2003 **"Hacker"**, 5 x 52'. TV-fiction

Prize APTR Best Fiction TV Series
- 2001 **"The fourth wall"** aka **"Al patrulea zid"**- 17', Fiction with Werner Schröter
 German competition Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen
- 2000 **"Anonim"** aka **"Anonymous"** - 11' Documentary
 International competition Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen

Prizes: FFF Bayern, Dok.Fest Munchen, 2000
Minority Prize Mediawave, Györ-Hungary, 2000

FILMOGRAPHY FILM EDITOR

- 2024 **"Moromete Family III"** by par Stere Gulea
- 2018 **"Moromete Family: On the Edge of Time"** by par Stere Gulea
Prize "Gopo" for Best Editor with Dana Bunesco.
- 2016 **"Alin"** by par Andreas Bolm
- 2013 **"Sunt o Baba Comunista"** aka **"I am an old Communist Hag"** by Stere Gulea
- 2009 **"Week-end cu mama"** aka **"Week-end with mom"**, by Stere Gulea
- 2007 **"Podul de Flori"** aka **"Le Pont des fleurs"** by Thomas Ciulei,
 Prizes: Cinema du Réel (Paris), GoEast (Wiesbaden), TIFF (Romania) etc.

2006 "Când se stinge lumina" aka "When the lights go out" by Igor Cobileanski.

2001 "asta e" by Thomas Ciulei. Prizes in Firenze, Belfort, Kalamata, etc.

FESTIVALS

IFF ROTTERDAM

<https://iffr.com/en/iffr/2024/films/maia-%E2%80%93-portrait-with-hands?fbclid=IwAR3rjrw1Sli9OYOkuu-awkHDJ7x15AbqNQBhP2IJ826S5eLUEgHXXzofe3I>

The Aromanians (Rrămânji) are an ethnic group found mainly in today's Albania, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. For filmmaker Alexandra Gulea, this question of heritage is connected to the name she shares with her grandmother, who was born into a traditional Aromanian life, and is fluent only in an Aromanian language. The older Alexandra's father suffered a violent death in an uprising for his people's rights, which forced the family out of Greece and into a politically treacherous Balkan landscape deep in the throes of nationalist upheavals, until finally, they found a home in Romania.

Through early documentaries from the period, ethnographic objects and importantly, through her own imagination, Alexandra begins her journey back into her grandmother's world. **Maia – Portrait with Hands** delights with a mix of techniques which include proto-animation (the drawing of sheep on a meadow tacked against the side window of a car), puppetry (the play with the floating velvet dress) and simple reenactments, all lending her journey a desire for a lost simplicity, an earthiness.

– *Olaf Möller*

PRESS

<https://ilmanifesto.it/rotterdam-e-il-marxismo-cosmico>

Donatello Fumarola

CINEMA . At the International Film Festival in the Dutch city, Alexander Kluge, among others, presented his latest work, «Cosmic Miniatures», and the Romanian director Alexandra Gulea her «Maia – portrait with hands»

Alexandra Gulea, the Aromanians and Romania

The origin of a people, of a culture, is the superimposition of the passages, of the landscapes, of the multiple elements that it has passed through, in time and space. It is their contamination, their mixing to the point of confusing the starting points, which are very rarely monolithic (especially on the European continent), being fragmented and scattered throughout historical evolution, constituting its becoming, its becoming rooted.

The Aromanians come from what today are territories that belong to Albania, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, and over time they migrated through the central-southern part of the Balkans, finally settling in Romania. It is from this culture that Alexandra Gulea comes, daughter of the director Stere Gulea, graduated from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des

Beaux Arts in Paris in 1997, painter and filmmaker: she has various short films and two feature films to her credit, including her latest, *Maia – Portret cu maini* (Maia – portrait with hands) premiered in Rotterdam. A portrait of the grandmother, of the same name, which acts as a mirror and prism.

Mirror of Alexandra who makes a film to measure her own heritage and rediscover her own identity (through the language of her grandmother, who speaks exclusively Aromanian), and a prism of a century of history of a people (the Aromanians precisely) and of a country (Romania) which overlap in the impossibility of drawing clear lines of demarcation, in an exquisitely anti-nationalist key, without proclamations, through a discourse in which images and memories speak, those of the personal family repertoire and those of the historical repertoire, moved by an entirely feminine, sweetly penetrating sensitivity and intelligence, where the elements (dreams, symbols, things, faces, songs) are brought into the field sentimentally, empathically, in an intimate relationship, whose strength it lies precisely in exhibiting its fragility, its openness, its regenerative capacity.

The choice of a simple woman from which to start to describe a culture has in itself something radical and revolutionary compared to the historical tradition to which we were accustomed until the beginning of the 20th century, when some key figures (just think of Marc Bloch...) opened new paths of research, but which contemporary culture seems to have forgotten, returning to the top-down demands of the 19th century (the spectacular obsession with the "leaders" of the moment or with the English monarchs, for example, is one of the most evident and disturbing signs).

Gulea's choice helps us, for example, to grasp more precisely something real in that story, a truth that is often filtered by the dynamics of power games (almost exclusively male), of dual clashes, of identity arrogance. In this sense, *Maia – Portret cu maini* shows us how the conflict is a stratification, a superimposition of many elements, of images that we do not see entirely, that we cannot see or that the film contrasts with its own, which show a less obvious conflict, less banal, more profound, around the question of identity, of inheritance, which involves a comparison and acceptance of forces and dynamics that are even painful, even traumatic, but which represent the richness of a culture, its liveliness, its capacity for transformation, for questioning.

The film embodies all this in its own form, anything but canonical, through a work of research, excavation and construction, without allowing itself to be enchanted by easy aesthetic or intellectual games, remaining attached to the very strong need to transform and connect the elements from which draws on it, restoring its dignity and meaning, through a use of superimposition that brings to mind Jean Vigo and Jean Epstein, for example, rather than Godard (that of the *Histoire(s) du Cinema*).

This is how Gulea's film progresses, in its own light way, like the velvet dress that Alexandra's grandmother received for the wedding and which she bequeathed to her granddaughter, somehow having it worn in the film, carrying it around, and filming it along the path that we imagine Alexandra of the early 1900s traveled on foot, giving back a vision, a possibility.

It takes us a while, at least halfway through the film, to understand that that dress that we see 'walking' shot from behind does not contain any body, but it is the ghost that allows the film to advance, in its Shakespearean way, to reveal the political reasons which led the grandmother's father to emigrate to present-day Romania, who died to defend the rights of the weakest in the face of nationalist barbarism.

Personal memory and collective memory are therefore superimposed and inseparable. Identity, territory, migrations (including aesthetic ones: from art, to theatre, to cinema). Gulea brings us something extraordinarily broad, which touches for example one of the great themes with which so much of humanity has to deal, leading to wars and persecutions: the origin. Revealing how this origin is always impure, like cinema. And impure is Gulea's art, his cinema in search of an original image (the grandmother, whose name it bears) which nevertheless relaunched the mystery (this yes, original) of the birth not only of every image, real or symbolic, but of the function that images have in our culture, the personal one as well as the collective one (since the two dimensions are not separable, they are not separate as some economic propaganda would have us believe).

Maia – Portret cu maini ultimately leaves us with more questions than we had, leaving us with the responsibility of formulating possible answers (changing, random, provisional, open).

It invites us to see the opening that the power system of knowledge transmission hides, because in the opening of the field the dominion is forced to get involved and cannot entrench itself behind acquired truths or easy-to-use formulas. Alexandra Gulea, personally, gets involved and plays a losing game with cinema, without the fear of being naked in front of the game we call reality.

<https://www.filmsinframe.com/en/festival-focus/romanian-features-rotterdam/?fbclid=IwAR2Wt7gWEyklof4rCB32M1MLc-TbzD8xL2ymyTwKGyG11vqotdHQgPz72yg>

[Victor Morozov](#)

Maia – Portrait with Hands (dir. Alexandra Gulea)

Screened in the experimental section 'Harbour', *Maia – Portrait with Hands* by Alexandra Gulea is an important film. This is due to its many virtues, as well as through the lens of a few limitations that allow us to formulate several thoughts about the current state of Romanian documentary (and not only). In fact, it wouldn't hurt to see in this directorial effort a culmination, an advanced point of a certain international tradition – that of the essay film –, but also to ask ourselves where/how far it can go from here. For all this openness of the essay – the centrifugal nature, the fragment as foundation, the conversation not carried through to the end – which the filmmaker abundantly uses, risks nesting, even within itself, the beginnings of stagnation or, if you will, conditioning.

Conditioning is, of course, the opposite of natural. And there is no doubt that the film essay's fundamentally incomplete, yet playful, and clever approach comes to resemble more and more something crafted, something strategic, an option that concerns not the film itself but its image, the discourse we anticipate it will generate. It's a trend today, working in the essay style. In other words, rejecting completeness. The shortlist sheets of documentary festivals abound in patchworks, hybrid films, more or less successful experiments. It's more practical: a film that refuses today to go "all the way" – that willingly stops before (before what? Revelation, the end, the truth) – is respected. And

rightly so: after years and years of absolute films, it was time to shake up this lack of ambiguity a bit. The trouble is when this refusal becomes the opportunistic camouflage of convenience. Since nothing is complete, nothing can be criticized. In the name of which regressive ideal should one criticize? Everything is, as they say, a work in progress.

The main problem here is that *Maia – Portrait with Hands* comes after other films like it. And I say this because the way the director utilizes the potential of the essay is perfectly suited to what she has to say: I can hardly imagine her film any other way. It needs indecision and indeterminacy, open conclusions, and dispersion. It fights on too many fronts to be able to bring everything together in a plausible, satisfying way. The “essay” is that discreet glue – far more discreet than the classic narrative – that allows the distinct elements of the film freedom to play, leeway, an increased elasticity – just as much as it holds them together in extremis. The essay is what makes these separate, even contradictory, threads ultimately a film.

Going back to the fronts the film touches upon, they range from cultural heritage to the struggle for ethnic emancipation, and from identity to becoming. I should be more specific. I should detail them as in any self-respecting review: “The film talks about...” I won’t. Because untangling these threads would mean to spoil the film. Its beauty lies precisely in its making, interweaving, the resulting aesthetic object, the way one image plus another image never yields the same result. Everything is movement, interference. The montage establishes a network, a web of themes, of motifs begun with hesitation, developed maniacally, abandoned, resumed, forgotten. Never completed. At one end, there is a woman: Alexandra Gulea – the grandmother, filmed on video in the late ’90s, when she had accumulated a lot of bitterness, even more longing, and very little time left. At the other end is emptiness: the film is not brought to a close. Or, barely, now and then, there is another woman: young Alexandra Gulea, a contemporary double bearing her name, who is now making a film about her, mixing everything.

At one point, Alexandra Gulea films her father. Not to show us “who he is”, but to remind herself. Stere Gulea looks firmly and lucidly back at his past, his mother Alexandra, and the corner of Greece they all come from. Above all – unlike his mother and daughter, who flank his destiny through a strange rhyme –, he speaks Romanian. The voice-over delimits itself, professionally, from this imposing figure: she says that at first, she avoided a career in cinema, then she ended up making films anyway, but went for a different approach – not that of dramatization, so dear to her father, but for a minority one, content with its periphery existence, that of the essay. There are no stories in her films, no unity or linear course of events. There are at most beginnings of sentences, pieces of thought, clashes of approaches. As she herself mentions, the film starts from such a micro-unit (a glimpse of life) and tries to reveal something of the overall picture – never the other way around.

The voice is reminiscent of creating a tapestry, a carpet. The metaphor couldn’t be more fitting. The images emerge one by one, woven from nothing before they become visible. That quilting point anchoring the fabric – a Lacanian *point de capiton* capable of imparting coherence to meaning – is, in this case, Grandma Alexandra: everything starts from her “poor” images, taken from a family video, while the film was nothing more than an obscure intuition. From there, from that origin, is the way paved for the images captured later on digital and film, as well as other techniques (reenactment, animation, political happening, interview, observational) – by which a documentary filmmaker today can claim not so much to penetrate the material but to circumnavigate it anthropologically.

Who is Alexandra? We don't know. But by resorting to history, memories, geography, tradition, we can shed light on some aspects of what she was at a certain point in time. Between the limits of our knowledge and the truth, the film intervenes with its partial method, reluctant to accept any absolute.

I mentioned at the beginning that the film is important. It is perhaps the first one to take an assertive, polemical, compensatory – and not anecdotal or folkloric – look at the journey of an entire ethnic group: the Aromanians. The real beginning in *Maia – Portrait with Hands* takes place during the Balkan Wars over a century ago. Alexandra Gulea sets out in search of that rebellious tassel in the carpet – then follows the thread to the opposite end, passing through the years of communist repression, where something, however, manages to survive. In fact, there are few Romanian films in which the issue of survival is articulated so acutely – both on a personal-biographical level (see Grandma Alexandra's father, killed in Greece during the emancipation struggles) and on a cultural-ethnic level. There is a scene showing Stere Gulea, who had returned to his native Dobrogea, at a village feast with people from the community. They talk “as equals” and at one point, start singing an almost elegiac Aromanian song, which Gulea is very much unfamiliar with. One must see the wonder in this citizen of the world's eyes, who has lost touch with his roots – and has thus been absent from the process of passing on, of perpetuating the ethnic spirit.

There is a remarkable dialogue between Stere and Alexandra, which gives the film extra interest. For what separates them is not only the artistic approach – it's also, more prosaically and more fundamentally, the issue of generation. In the community tableau painted by the filmmaker, her father is more of a separate figure: we feel in him the desire – under the impulse of youth and, perhaps, the communist regime – to break away from the original environment. A respected director who succeeded in Bucharest, among Romanians, telling “our” dramas (nothing more intrinsically Romanian than the novel *Moromeții*), Stere Gulea saw the idea of emancipation as an escape, as a better integration into the “accentless” environment of the capital. From the daughter's point of view, things are different. Perhaps because the father's struggle is no longer relevant – it is already won. Now is the time to return, to revalue a cultural heritage that otherwise risks being lost. It was believed that progress meant a more or less forced assimilation of data from the center. Today, however, what matters more is differentiation, the clear affirmation of where you come from – geographically, but above all in terms of identity.

Maia – Portrait with Hands is a fresh film, propelled by Alexandra Gulea's claim to speak for herself about everything that is hers. Strictly related to the Romanian space, it has every reason to intrigue but also to repair: more precisely, to build from scratch a plural image to replace this missing image of Aromanian culture. In a wider context, however, the film is somewhat haunted by the specter of déjà-vu. This idea of a cinema made from the remnants of others should be shaken up a bit. Of course, there is something positive – something ecological – about turning remnants into autonomous matter. But I believe the essay film risks complacency in the role of recycling forms, formats, and ideas: a bit of Straub-Huillet (the landscape that “speaks”), a bit of Pedro Costa (the protagonists filmed with an aura around their heads), a bit of Godard (the collage, the intertitles), etc. I think we're approaching the threshold where this remix needs to open up to a more significant element of aesthetic novelty.

<https://www.panorama-cinema.com/V2/article.php?categorie=2&id=1154&fbclid=IwZXhobgNhZWOCMTEAARooZ1evBUJHRkHkEbDBoZG2>

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ROTTERDAM 2024 : PARTIE 5

PAR OLIVIER THIBODEAU

JOUR 9



prod. Anchor Films / Weltfilm gmbh / et al.

MAIA – PORTRAIT WITH HANDS

Alexandra Gulea | Roumanie / Allemagne | 2024 | 90 minutes | Section Harbour

Je ne connaissais pas le travail de l'artiste roumaine, peintre et réalisatrice, Alexandra Gulea, mais maintenant, mes yeux sont grand ouverts. Je me suis présenté à la projection de Maia en espérant retrouver le génie du *Self-Portrait Along the Borderline* (2023) d'Anna Dzipshipa, un autre film où l'identité individuelle recoupe l'identité familiale et ethnique dans un documentaire à la première personne où le passé répond au présent. Or, j'y ai trouvé beaucoup plus : une profondeur et une complexité inattendues, presque insondables, certainement inestimables, dans la narration d'un récit de soi dont les racines s'étendent loin en amont, à travers les lieux et les époques, mais aussi les médias artistiques, résultant en un document à la fois puissant et hypnotique, évocateur et foisonnant de symbolisme. Une œuvre où le spécifique s'épanche dans l'universel à la façon liquoreuse de l'éther, où l'épaisseur stratigraphique révèle un exercice de spéléologie ethnographique et généalogique qui frise sans cesse le sublime tout en restant solidement ancré dans la réalité prosaïque d'un peuple traqué, apatride, dépossédé, dont il importe de narrer le récit. *Portrait with Hands* est certainement le meilleur film que j'ai vu cette année, et il demeurera sans doute l'un des meilleurs films que je verrai cette année, ne serait-ce que pour sa capacité à faire mémoire en créant l'histoire vivante, vibrante, palpable d'un peuple qu'il aide ainsi à se prémunir contre l'oubli que voudraient lui imposer ses ennemis.

Le tout commence par l'entrevue vidéo d'une aïeule mourante tournée en 1995 ; c'est la grand-mère de la réalisatrice, qui porte également le nom d'Alexandra Gulea. Or, cette correspondance nominale sera exploitée de manière particulièrement féconde par la réalisatrice, qui en fera la pierre d'assise d'une structure narrative axée sur la simultanéité et les renvois historiques. « Je suis Alexandra Gulea », dit-elle souvent (un peu à la manière de Dziapshipa lorsqu'elle répète son patronyme, question de réitérer et de revendiquer son identité), permettant ainsi de se connecter au passé en narrant de façon subjective l'époque de sa grand-mère et en maillant les temporalités présentes et passées. Alexandra hérite également d'une robe d'Alexandra, qu'elle fera se promener dans le décor à la manière d'un fantôme, comme l'empreinte indélébile laissée par son ancêtre lors du processus d'élaboration de l'œuvre. L'autrice établit ensuite un lien entre les habits mortuaires de la défunte et ses propres habits de mariage, entre les cérémonies matrimoniales de la grand-mère et les siennes, entre les enfants d'hier et les enfants d'aujourd'hui, entrouvrant les portes de l'Histoire jusqu'à plier complètement cette dernière sur elle-même. Elle retrace ainsi le récit de sa famille et de son peuple d'une façon antichronologique qui s'apparente presque à une forme d'évocation chamanique, où l'anecdote révélatrice, la sensation, la douleur, le souvenir deviennent artéfacts historiques. Le résultat est une riche courtepointe de superpositions visuelles, narratives, sonores, voire eisensteiniennes, qui combinent différents témoignages et différents types de documents d'époque avec des créations dramatiques et conceptuelles, incarnées dans une gamme impressionnante de manifestations artistiques (théâtrales, picturales, sculpturales, performatives) qui se mêlent subrepticement au récit, faisant de la vérité d'un peuple un spectacle tout aussi déchirant qu'envoûtant.