



JAR of TIME

A film by
Nevena Semova &
Swapnil Arjun

Documentary - 70 mins
Attic Films Bulgaria



Logline

"Jar of Time" follows one year in the life of Ayshe and Djemal, one of the last nomadic Pomaks who search for the finest grazing fields for their cows and sell their milk to support themselves. Even though dairy production regulations have made their livelihood illegal, the couple is dedicated to preserving their freedom and independence.

Ayshe (52) and Djemal (57) live modestly, taking care of a herd of cows. They spend summers in a temporary shack near the Shiroka Polyana dam in Rhodope mountain in Bulgaria. The two support themselves by selling the dairy products they produce, but regulations on dairy production have made their livelihood illegal. Still, for them, their independence and freedom are the most important.

Synopsis

With the onset of autumn, comes the hardest moment, when Ayshe and Djemal prepare to slaughter some of their calves and cows. Ayshe is devastated, but they cannot afford to keep and feed all their cows during the winter. The meat that they do not sell, becomes their main food supply for the winter months. They try to sell the cowhides, but that has become illegal too, with regular checks scaring merchants away. At the end of autumn, Ayshe and Djemal prepare to return to the village of Birkova, where they spend the winter months. The two, together with their cows, calves and horses make the journey there on foot traversing through the mountains and along the roads.

During the difficult winter, They live off of their supplies. With the limited touristic activity, they are having a hard time selling their dairy products - milk production is minimal in winter. The cold months give them the chance to spend time with family and rest. In winter many of their pregnant cows give birth and the herd starts to grow again.

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Spring brings new hope, both for Ayshe and Djemal and for the herd. Under the snow, the cows can feel the fresh grass sprouting. Nature awakens and as the warm days come, they return to their forest home, hoping to find it intact.

Ayshe and Jemal are Bulgarian muslims (“pomaks”) who make the journey to the shores of the Shiroka Polyana dam each spring. The fertile fields near the dam are the main reason for their seasonal migration, and the herbs in the area contribute to the incomparable taste of their cows’ milk.

The climate near the dam is too harsh in winter, which forces the couple to walk on foot to their native village of Birkova in the fall.

Ayshe is sweet, hospitable and the great master of yogurt. She doesn’t shy away from hard work, but she also likes to rest when given the opportunity. She usually checks what's going on with her friends on Facebook (she and Jemal share a profile, and often post moments from their lives).

Jemal, like Ayshe, has a warm smile and a genuine sense of humor. He treats his wife with love and respect. When a cow has a sore on its udder, he milks it so that Ayshe does not get hurt. He likes to walk with the cows, although they are independent and know their own way.



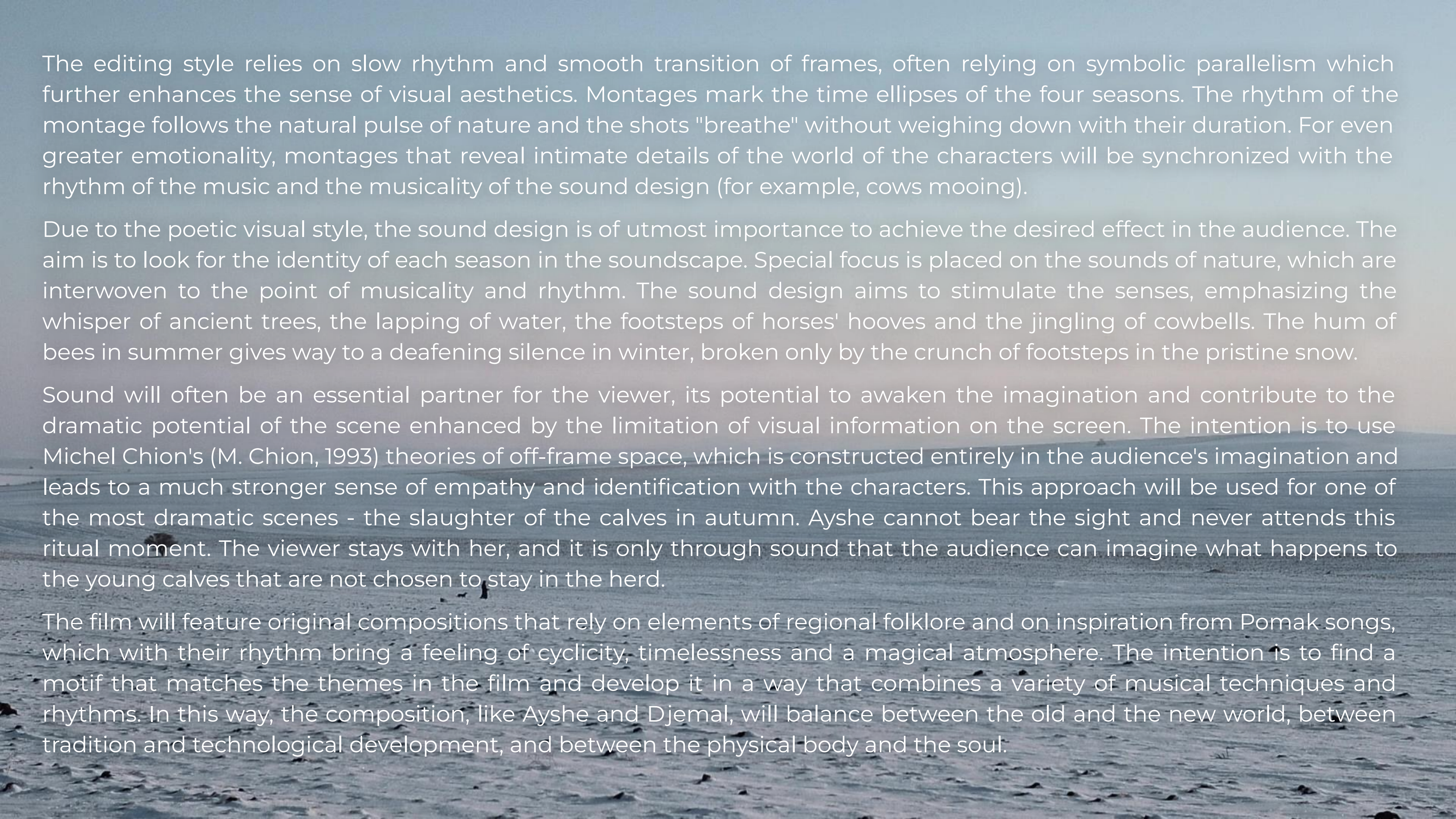
Artistic Statement

The nomadic lifestyle of Ayshe and Djemal and the cyclical nature of their life serve as the basis for the structure of the documentary. The couple's rhythm for a year is closely related to the needs of their cows, the inevitable deaths and the long-awaited births. "Jar of Time" tells an intimate story poetically, without the use of interviews or "talking heads". The camera is a silent observer, allowing Ayshe and Djemal's natural behaviour to evolve organically, allowing the viewer to get to know them better, but also leaving a mystery as certain details are explained or revealed later. The couple's difficulties and challenges are balanced in the film by the warmly humorous scenes that emerge from their interactions, while calm and routine moments are interrupted by hectic events such as their seasonal migration, which turns into complete chaos.

The main conflict of the story is the changing world that feels like an antagonist that threatens the life of Ayshe and Djemal - the milk of their cows has become illegal to sell, their habitats are becoming attractive tourist land, even in their native village they are pushed to the outskirts to make sure the cows do not bother anyone. This is their reality and Ayshe and Djemal have learned to coexist with the challenges it presents, trading their comfort for their freedom and independence.

The film language and structure draws inspiration from documentaries such as Honeyland (2019), The Birth of Sake (2015) and Smoke Sauna Sisterhood (2023).

Wide shots that reveal the magic of the Western Rhodopes are combined with close-ups and details that build the image of the main characters Ayshe and Djemal and reveal nuances in their daily lives and relationships. The camera remains invisible, a witness to life, and the story is revealed to the viewer in a subtle and non-literal way, staying close to the observational style. The change of seasons is presented through the prism of changing nature, with each season bringing its color scheme. And while the natural shots are total and fluid, the camera is handheld in the scenes between Ayshe and Djemal, which allows for their emotions to develop in the breathing shots.



The editing style relies on slow rhythm and smooth transition of frames, often relying on symbolic parallelism which further enhances the sense of visual aesthetics. Montages mark the time ellipses of the four seasons. The rhythm of the montage follows the natural pulse of nature and the shots "breathe" without weighing down with their duration. For even greater emotionality, montages that reveal intimate details of the world of the characters will be synchronized with the rhythm of the music and the musicality of the sound design (for example, cows mooing).

Due to the poetic visual style, the sound design is of utmost importance to achieve the desired effect in the audience. The aim is to look for the identity of each season in the soundscape. Special focus is placed on the sounds of nature, which are interwoven to the point of musicality and rhythm. The sound design aims to stimulate the senses, emphasizing the whisper of ancient trees, the lapping of water, the footsteps of horses' hooves and the jingling of cowbells. The hum of bees in summer gives way to a deafening silence in winter, broken only by the crunch of footsteps in the pristine snow.

Sound will often be an essential partner for the viewer, its potential to awaken the imagination and contribute to the dramatic potential of the scene enhanced by the limitation of visual information on the screen. The intention is to use Michel Chion's (M. Chion, 1993) theories of off-frame space, which is constructed entirely in the audience's imagination and leads to a much stronger sense of empathy and identification with the characters. This approach will be used for one of the most dramatic scenes - the slaughter of the calves in autumn. Ayshe cannot bear the sight and never attends this ritual moment. The viewer stays with her, and it is only through sound that the audience can imagine what happens to the young calves that are not chosen to stay in the herd.

The film will feature original compositions that rely on elements of regional folklore and on inspiration from Pomak songs, which with their rhythm bring a feeling of cyclicity, timelessness and a magical atmosphere. The intention is to find a motif that matches the themes in the film and develop it in a way that combines a variety of musical techniques and rhythms. In this way, the composition, like Ayshe and Djemal, will balance between the old and the new world, between tradition and technological development, and between the physical body and the soul.



TEASER

Scene Excerpt

Nevena Semova - director & producer

Nevena Semova is an independent film-maker based between Bulgaria and Estonia. Nevena works predominantly as producer and over the course of the last two years has produced four short films and a VR theater performance in Estonia. Her work has earned her a Young Producer award at the Golden Femi Festival in Bulgaria, Baltic MEDIA Producers Award at Baltic Pitching Forum 2022 and a selection to the New Producers Room initiative at Cannes Film Festival 2023.

1000, produced by Attic Films and awaiting its world premiere at the upcoming PÖFF Shorts as part of the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival 2023, is the directorial debut for Nevena after receiving her degree from the Erasmus Mundus KinoEyes Master's Program. The film is based on theories Nevena explored in her Master thesis "The power of the non-existent acousmêtre".

At the beginning of 2023, Nevena decided to return to Bulgaria, where she continues to make films and yogurt.

Full CV [here](#).

Links to previous projects:

- [Unfamiliar](#) (2023, short) pass: voorad2022
- [Hunger](#) (2022, short) pass: hunger_disclaimer



Links to previous short films together:

[1000](#) (2023) | [Rua da Solidão](#) (2021)

Swapnil Arjun - cinematographer & co-director

Swapnil Arjun completed his Masters degree in Cinematography under the KinoEyes programme. During the program, he shot a number of films and won a number of awards including twice Grand Prize in the National Film Competition (2021 and 2022), held by the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory and awarded by the Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, as well as the BOB award 2023 for Best Dance film. Swapnil holds a Bachelors in Fine Arts from the JJ Institute in Mumbai, India and has worked on a number of projects, including a documentary on Asiatic lions, *Khamma Gir Ne* (2018).

Swapnil is a connoisseur of Bulgarian yogurt and has been supporting Ayshe sourdough for a year.

Full CV [here](#).

Links to previous projects:

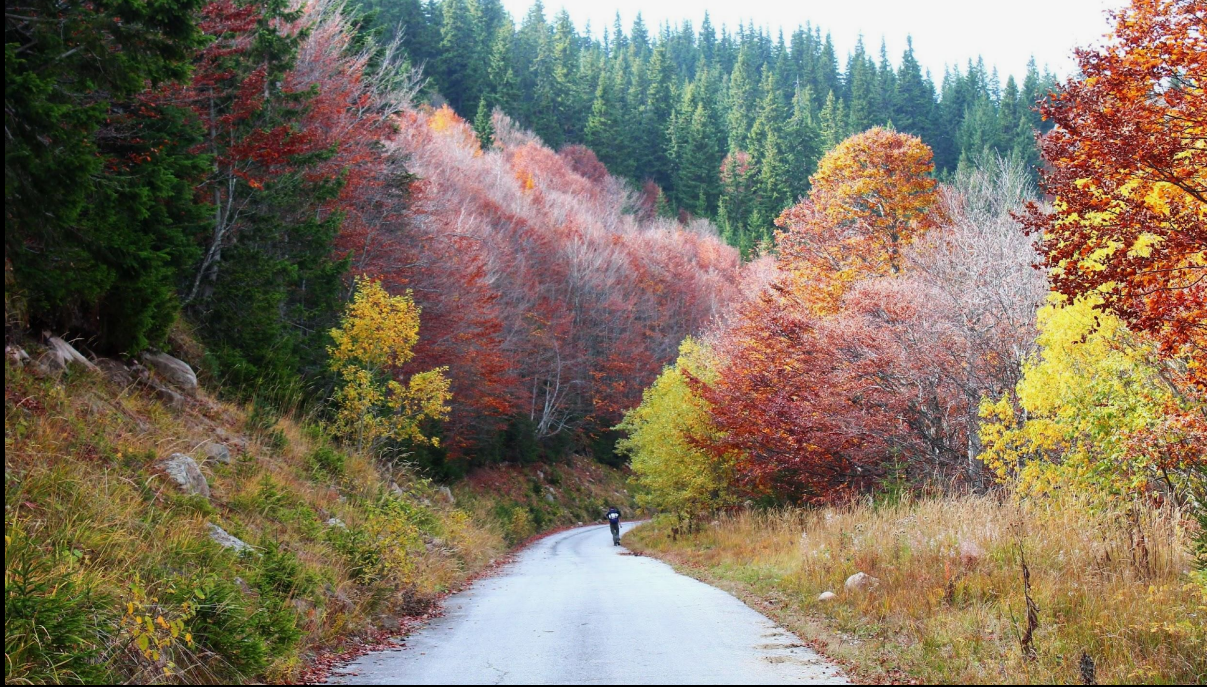
- [Earth is never dry](#) (2022, short)
- [Khamma Gir Ne](#) (2018, feature documentary)
- [We are MAVIM](#) (2019, Women empowerment documentary)

Stills from the footage











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