



FUOCOAMMARE

A film by Gianfranco Rosi

(FIRE AT SEA)

SYNOPSIS

Samuele is 12 years old and lives on an island in the middle of the sea. He goes to school, loves shooting his slingshot and going hunting. He likes land games, even though everything around him speaks of the sea and the men, women and children who try to cross it to get to his island. But his is not an island like the others, its name is Lampedusa and it is the most symbolic border of Europe, crossed by thousands of migrants in the last 20 years in search of freedom.

21 UNO FILM - STEMAL ENTERTAINMENT - RAI CINEMA S.P.A. - ISTITUTO LUCE - LES FILMS D'ICI - ARTE CINEMA
ITALY - FRANCE / 108' / HD / 2016 / DOCUMENTARY



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

by Gianfranco Rosi

I went to Lampedusa for the first time in the fall of 2014 to explore the idea of shooting a 10-minute film to show at an international festival. The producers' idea was to make a short piece, an instant movie, that would bring a different picture of Lampedusa to a lazy and complicit Europe whose sense of the burgeoning migration crisis was distorted and confused. This was true of me as well. For me, Lampedusa had long been just a snarl of voices and images generated by TV spots and shocking headlines about death, emergencies, invasions, and populist uprisings.

Once on the island, however, I discovered a reality that was far removed from that found in the media and the political narrative, and I realized that it would be impossible to compress a universe as complex as Lampedusa into just a few minutes.

Understanding it would require complete and prolonged immersion. It wouldn't be easy. I knew I would have to find a way in.

Then, as is often the case in documentary filmmaking, the unpredictable happened. I went to the local emergency room with a nasty case of bronchitis and met Dr. Pietro Bartolo, who I learned was the only doctor on the island and had been present at every landing of rescued migrants for the last thirty years. It was he that determines who is sent to the hospital, who goes to the detention center, and who is deceased.

Not knowing I was a director looking for a possible story, Dr. Bartolo told me of his experiences in medical and humanitarian emergencies. What he said, and the words he used, deeply affected me.



A mutual understanding developed between us, and I realized he was someone who could become a character in the film. After an hour and a half of intense discussion, the doctor turned on his computer to show me images, heartrending and never shown before, so that I could "touch with my hand" the reality of the migrant tragedy. At that moment I knew I had to transform the 10-minute short I'd been sent to shoot into my new film.

After setting up production for the project, I moved to Lampedusa and rented a little house in the old port where I stayed until the last moment I needed it. I wanted to tell the story of this tragedy through the eyes of the islanders, whose way of seeing and hearing things, and living, had undergone a massive change over the past 20 years

Thanks to the help of Peppino, a guardian angel of the island who later became my assistant director, I gradually came into contact with the locals and came to know their rhythms, their daily life, their way of seeing things. And as had happened with Dr. Bartolo, I had another fundamental encounter, with

Samuele, a 9-year-old boy and son of a fisherman, who won me over. I realized that through his clear and ingenuous eyes I could tell the story of the island and its inhabitants with greater freedom. I followed him as he played, with his friends, at school, at home with his grandmother and on the boat with his uncle. Samuele allowed me to see the island differently and with a clarity that I had not known before, and through him other characters were gradually introduced into the film, one after another.

My decision to move to Lampedusa changed everything. In my year on the island I weathered the long winter and then the sea-going months, and I came to know the true rhythm of the flood of migrants. It was necessary to go beyond the media's habit of rushing to Lampedusa only when there is an emergency. Living there I realized that the term emergency is meaningless. Every day there is an emergency. Every day something happens. To grasp a real sense of the tragedy you need to be not only close, but to have ongoing contact. Only in this way was I able to better

understand the feelings of the islanders, who had been watching this tragedy repeat itself for twenty years.

After the inauguration of rescue operations like Mare Nostrum, which tries to intercept boats at sea, migrants are no longer seen on Lampedusa. They pass through like phantoms. They are unloaded on a wharf in the old port, bussed to the detention center for assistance and identification, and a few days later dispatched to the mainland.

As with the landings, of which I filmed dozens, the only way to understand the detention center is to go in and see it up close. It is very difficult to shoot inside one, but thanks to the permit I obtained from the Sicilian authorities, I was able to show the center, its rhythms and rules, its guests and customs, its religions and its tragedies. A world within a world, sealed off from the daily life of the island. The greatest challenge was finding a way to film this universe that could convey a sense not only of truth and reality but also of the humanity within.



However, I soon realized that the border - which had once been Lampedusa itself, when the boats still landed right on the island - had moved out to sea. I asked permission to board an Italian naval vessel operating off the African coast and I spent about a month on the Cigala Fulgosi as it took part in two missions. There, too, I learned the rhythms, rules and customs of life on board until we ran into tragedies, one after another. The experience of filming these cannot be described here.

In my films I have often found myself depicting circumscribed worlds, whether literally or ideally so. These universes, at times as small as a room, have their own logic and internal movements. To capture and convey them is the most complicated part of my job. So it was with the community of dropouts in the American desert (Below Sea Level), an isolated world with its own rules where the border was one's affiliation with an idea, or one's condition. So it was with the narco-assassin turned informer, holed up in a motel room, re-enacting his crimes and explaining the rules of his criminal community (El Sicario). The same can be said for

that other human community that lives on the margins of the ring road around Rome (Sacro GRA). So, in Lampedusa, I found myself understanding the workings, if I can call it that, of another set of concentric worlds, with their own rules and their own sense of time: the island, the detention center, the Cigala Fulgosi.

It is impossible to leave Lampedusa, just as it is impossible to pinpoint the moment when filming is complete. If this is true for all my films it is especially so for this one. One incident made me realize that the circle was somehow closing. Because it was after meeting Dr. Bartolo that I decided to make this film on Lampedusa, to close the film I felt it was necessary to return to that encounter. I went to see Bartolo, but with a camera this time, which I turned on to film his testimony, his story. And as before, looking into the screen of his computer where his archive of twenty years of rescues is stored, Bartolo, with his immense humanity, and serenity, was able to communicate the magnitude of the tragedy, and the duty to offer assistance and shelter. Exactly what was needed to close the film.



GIANFRANCO ROSI

Biography

Born in Asmara, Eritrea. After attending university in Italy, in 1985 he moves to New York and graduates from the New York University Film School. Following a journey to India, he produces and directs his first documentary film, *Boatman*, screened with success at various international film festivals including the Sundance Film Festival, the Locarno Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival.

In 2008, *Below Sea Level*, shot in Slab City, California, wins the Orizzonti Award at the Venice Film Festival. The film also wins the Grand Prix and the Prix des Jeunes at the Cinéma du Réel festival in 2009, the prize for best documentary at the One World Film Festival in Prague, the Vittorio De Seta prize at the Bif&st 2009 for the best documentary and was nominated as best documentary at the European Film Awards in 2009.

In 2010, he shoots the feature *El Sicario - Room 164*, a film-interview about a killer turned informer

from the Mexican drug cartels and wins the Fipresci Award at the Venice International film Festival and the Doc/It prize as the best documentary of the year. It also won Best Film at DocLisboa in 2010 and at Doc Aviv in 2011.

In 2013, he makes the documentary feature, *Sacro GRA*, that wins the Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival.

FILMOGRAPHY

1993 **BOATMAN**

OFFICIAL SELECTION, SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

2001 **AFTERWORDS**

OFFICIAL SELECTION, VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

2008 **BELOW SEA LEVEL**

OFFICIAL SELECTION, VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL -
WINNER BEST FILM / ORIZZONTI AWARDS

2010 **EL SICARIO - ROOM 164**

OFFICIAL SELECTION, VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL -
FIPRESCI AWARD

2013 **SACRO GRA**

OFFICIAL SELECTION, VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL -
WINNER GOLDEN LION

2016 **FUOCOAMMARE (FIRE AT SEA)**

OFFICIAL COMPETITION, BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL



CAST AND CREW

DIRECTOR & DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

GIANFRANCO ROSI

EDITOR

JACOPO QUADRI

SOUND DESIGN

STEFANO GROSSO

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

GIUSEPPE DEL VOLGO

PRODUCTION MANAGER

FABRIZIO FEDERICO

PRODUCERS

DONATELLA PALERMO STEMAL ENTERTAINMENT (ITALY)

GIANFRANCO ROSI 21 UNO FILM (ITALY)

SERGE LALOU & CAMILLE LAEMLE LES FILMS D'ICI (FRANCE)

ROBERTO CICCUTTO ISTITUTO LUCE - CINECITTÀ (ITALY)

PAOLO DEL BROCCO RAI CINEMA (ITALY)

MARTINE SAADA & OLIVIER PERE ARTE FRANCE CINEMA (FRANCE)

Rai Cinema

arte C NEMA

MEBACI
Direzione
Generale
CINEMA



ARRI

GMFG

time line

doc & film
comunicazione

LABIANCA
Produzione e distribuzione
Cinema - TV - Teatro

LUCE
CINECITTÀ

01
RAI CINEMA S.p.A.

WORLD SALES

DOC& FILM INTERNATIONAL

13 rue Portefoin
75003 Paris France
DANIELA ELSTNER
d.elstner@docandfilm.com
www.docandfilm.com

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

RENDEZ-VOUS

VIVIANA ANDRIANI
T +33 1 42 66 36 35
viviana@rv-press.com
in Berlin : +33 6 80 16 81 39

DOWNLOAD PRESSKIT AND STILLs

www.rv-press.com