

Jar of Time



Documentary - 70 mins
Attic Films Bulgaria



Logline

"Jar of Time" follows a year in the life of Ayshe, Jemal and the last herd of cows. The daily anxieties and relationship of the couple intertwine with their nomadic lifestyle in the rhythm of the changing seasons in the Rhodope mountain in Bulgaria.

Synopsis

Ayshe (52) and Jemal (57) live modestly, taking care of a herd of cows near the Shiroka Polyana dam in Rhodope mountain in Bulgaria. The summer months are full of hard work and the two support themselves by selling the dairy products they produce. The couple is still reeling from the loss of their shack by the dam, which burned to the ground after an arson attack. With the onset of autumn, Ayshe and Jemal prepare winter supplies by slaughtering some of their calves and cows. They are preparing to return to the village of Birkova, where they spend the winter months. The two, together with their cows and horse make the journey there on foot. During the difficult winter, the cows don't give milk and Ayshe and Jemal live off of their supplies. The cold months give them the chance to meet their family, who work spend the summers working in agricultural farms in France. Spring brings new hope, both for Ayshe and Jemal and for the herd. Under the melting snow, the cows can feel the fresh grass.

As the days grow longer and the ground gets warmer, 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 ("kiselo mlyako"). 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

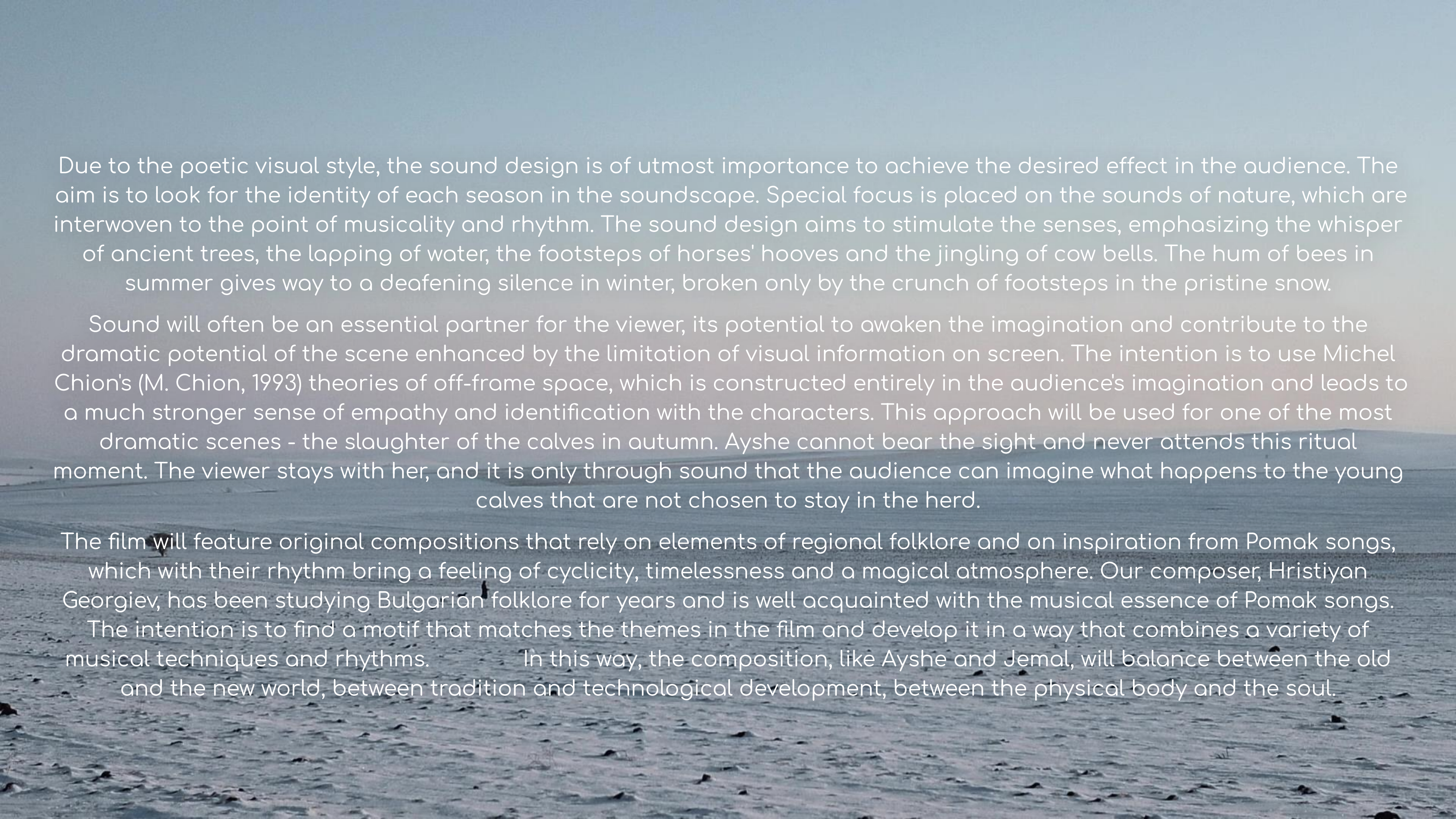
"Jar of Time" breaks the classical framework of documentary cinema and tells an intimate story in a poetic way without many words. In order to achieve an authentic and impactful visual identity, we intend to use a filmic language that is stylized and reminiscent of a feature film, staying true to its mission of presenting a real story. "Jar of Time" draws inspiration from documentaries such as Honeyland (2019), The Birth of Sake (2015) and Smoke Sauna Sisterhood (2023).

Wide shots and drone 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 Jemal and reveal nuances in their daily lives and relationship.

The camera remains invisible, a witness to life, and the story is revealed to the viewer in a subtle and non-literal way, without "talking head" shots. In order to achieve maximum natural behavior from Ayshe and Jemal, we plan to use long focus lenses that will give us distance from the characters. The change of seasons is presented through the prism of changing nature, using visual effects and time-lapse techniques, and each season brings its own color scheme. And while the natural shots are total and fluid, the camera is handheld in the scenes between Ayshe and Jemal, which allows for their emotions to develop in the breathing shots.

The editing style relies on slow rhythm and smooth transition of frames, which further enhances the sense of visual aesthetics. Close-ups emphasizing important details and character reactions alternate with general camera shots with bird's-eye aerial shots, which again can be linked to the changing seasons. Montages mark the time ellipses of the four seasons. The use of stock footage and visual effects is planned for these moments. 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).

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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 cow bells. 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 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. Our composer, Hristiyan Georgiev, has been studying Bulgarian folklore for years and is well acquainted with the musical essence of Pomak songs. 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 Jemal, will balance between the old and the new world, between tradition and technological development, between the physical body and the soul.



TEASER

<https://vimeo.com/854823054/e17d54680d?share=copy>

Nevena Semova - director and 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

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)

Script

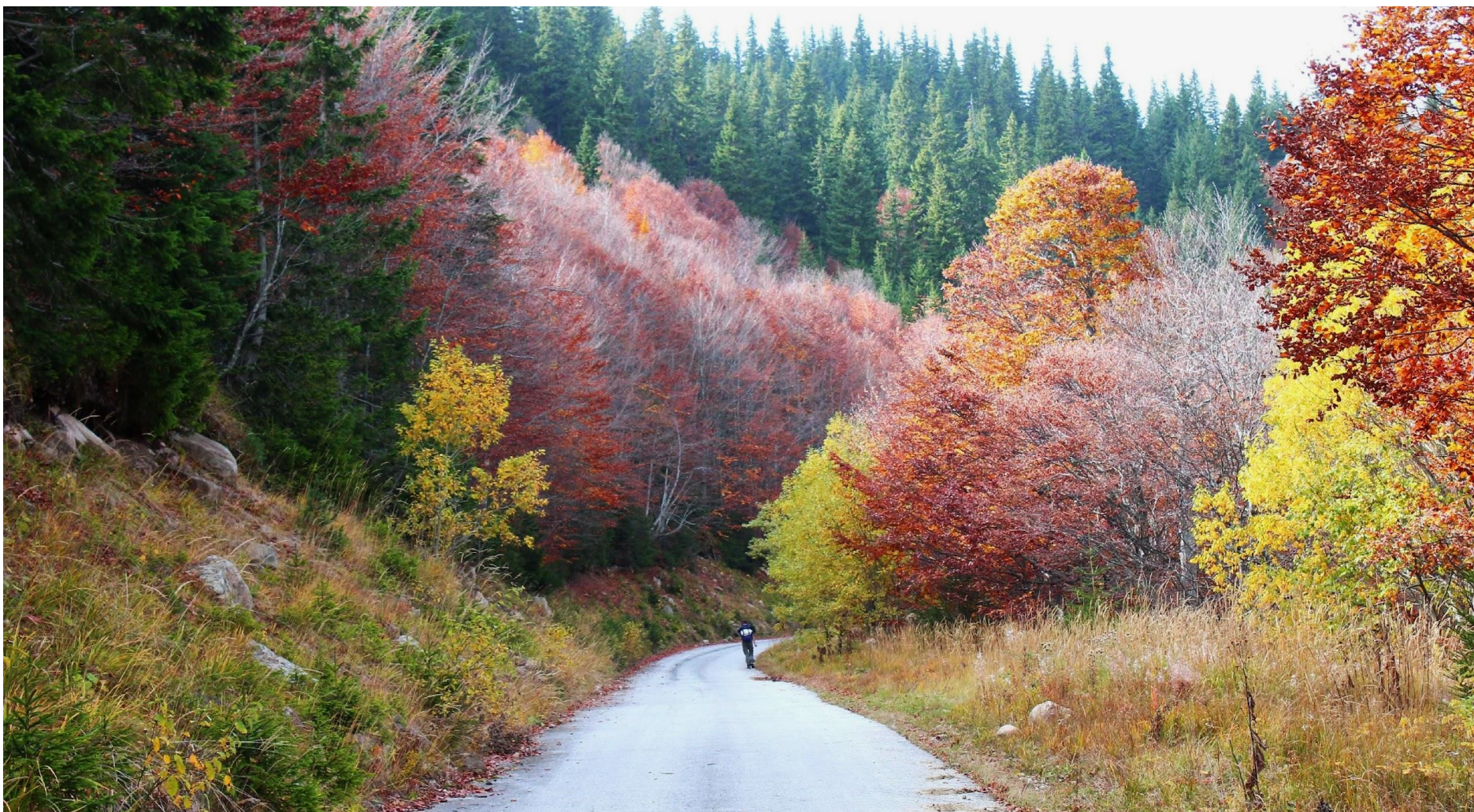
	SUMMER	VIDEO	AUDIO
1.	<p>EXT. RHODOPES</p> <p>Introduction; General shots of the Rhodopes, shots of the dam, shots of the forests, shots of the different buildings in the area.</p>	General footage, including aerial footage	Diegetic sound from the footage.
2.	<p>INT/EXT. BY THE SHIROKA POLYANA DAM</p> <p>Ayshe (52) and Jemal (57) live modestly, and in harmony, and their days are spent caring for the herd of cows, which is the last in the Shiroka Polyana Dam area. The cows live outside, eat herbs and fresh grass, and walk independently around the dam area. The only concern is the mosquitoes that do not give them peace.</p>	Shots of the couple in their natural rhythm	Diegetic sound from the footage.
3.	<p>INT. AT HOME</p> <p>Ayshe and Jemal are still mourning the temporary house they built with love and hard work until someone set it on fire last winter.</p>	Conversation between the two, archive footage	Diegetic sound from the footage.
4.	<p>EXT. BATAK / PESHTERA / ROAD</p> <p>Twice a week, Jemal and Ayshe get ready to go and sell their dairy products in local towns.</p>	Montage	Diegetic sound from the footage
5.	<p>EXT. NEAR THE DAM</p> <p>Although the surrounding temporary buildings are deserted, the cows fill the meadow with a resounding moo, and the smiles of Ayshe and Jemal bring warmth to the regulars they welcome into their home.</p>	Montage	The rhythm of the mooing and rattling of the cows is intertwined with the musical composition.

	AUTUMN	VIDEO	AUDIO
6.	<p>EXT. NEAR THE DAM</p> <p>In October is the hardest time for Ayshe - the time when the young calves and some of the cows are slaughtered. She is never present.</p>	<p>Footage of Ayshe,</p> <p>Images from nature</p>	<p>Musical composition blends into the diegetic sound of the calf slaughter</p>
7.	<p>INT/EXT. NEAR THE DAM</p> <p>Ayshe only shows up when it's time to cut the meat. The jars of meat they prepare now will be their main source of food in the months to come. The tender calf meat they sell and the cow meat they keep for themselves.</p>	<p>Shots of the couple in the process of preparing the winter meat</p>	<p>Diegetic sound from the footage</p>
8.	<p>EXT. ON THE ROAD</p> <p>In November, with the onset of autumn, the family, as well as their cattle and a few horses, head to the village of Birkova, where they spend the winter months in a modest house at the edge of the village - cows are not welcome in the more central part of the village. It is common for the herd guided by Ayshe and Jemal to walk the sixty kilometres, but this year Ayshe has decided to get on horseback for the first time. Jemal happily prepares her, but is worried about "Ashu" (Ayshe) falling off the horse.</p>	<p>Various shots of moments from the trip.</p> <p>Aerial footage.</p> <p>Visual effects changing seasons - snow</p>	<p>Diegetic sound from the footage.</p> <p>Musical elements</p>

	WINTER	VIDEO	AUDIO
9.	EXT. BIRKOVA It's winter and the cows' coats are growing to protect them from the cold. Every day they walk to the spring to drink water.	Footage of the snow-covered village and the cows	Diegetic sound from the footage
10.	INT. HOME BIRKOVA The milk yield is decreasing and Ayshe and Jemal are eating mainly the jars they prepared in autumn. They enjoy spending time with their children and grandchildren, and Ayshe spends time with her mother.	Footage from everyday life and family relationships	Diegetic sound from the footage
11.	INT. BARN BIRKOVA Unlike life by the dam, the winter months are difficult for the cows, who live in a cramped barn and have to eat dry hay.	Footage from the barn	Musical composition

	SPRING	VIDEO	AUDIO
12.	<p>EXT. BIRKOVA</p> <p>Early spring brings joy and hope not only to Ayshe and Jemal, but also to the cows, who sniff and taste the first fresh grass under the snow with hope and triumph. The moment is exaggerated with use of slow motion and exaggerated climax in the musical composition.</p>	<p>Shots of the cows.</p>	<p>Musical composition</p>
13.	<p>INT/EXT. BIRKOVA</p> <p>When cows eat the fresh and juicy grass, then their milk is at its best. Ayshe excitedly starts milking, boiling, souring and churning the butter.</p>	<p>Montage</p>	<p>Diegetic sound from the footage</p>
14.	<p>EXT. ON THE ROAD</p> <p>In May, the Pomaks and their herd head back to their forest home, where they don't know what to expect but mud. A hushed breath of anticipation, accentuated by the sound design.</p>	<p>Footage from the trip, including aerial footage</p>	<p>Diegetic sound from the footage</p>











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