



— A RUSSIAN WINTER



76. Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Berlinale Panorama

A Film by Patric Chiha

PRESSKIT



— A RUSSIAN WINTER

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FRANCE

2026

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RUSSIAN

SCREENINGS IN BERLIN

FRI. FEB 13th, 2:30 PM @ Cinemaxx 10
(Market Screening)

TUE. FEB 17th, 1:00 PM @ Bluemax Theater
(World Premiere)

WED. FEB 18th, 4:00 PM @ Cubix 7 (Official)

THU. FEB 19th, 10:00 AM @ ADK am
Hanseatenweg (Official)

SAT. FEB 21st, 10:30 PM @ Cubix 5 (Official)

SUN. FEB 22nd, 10:15 AM @ Cubix 7 (Official)

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Best Friend Forever
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Martin Gondre – martin@bffsales.eu

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PR

The PR Factory
www.theprfactory.com

Barbara Van Lombeek
+32 (0) 486 54 64 80
barbara@theprfactory.com

Marie-France Dupagne
+32 (0) 477 62 67 70
mariefrance@theprfactory.com

Eugénie Malinjud
+33 7 62 65 39 08
eugenie@theprfactory.com

— SYNOPSIS

After the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a lot of Russian men and women faced a brutal choice: prison, the army— or exile. Margarita, Yuri and their friends, are part of a generation pushed into exile as they refuse to comply with the Russian regime. Caught in the crosscurrents of history, suspended between countries and searching for a place they can call home, with nowhere to return, and nowhere they feel truly welcome.



A CONVERSATION WITH PATRIC CHIHAI



What first drew you to the idea of *A Russian Winter*? Was it a specific encounter, a moment, or a broader intuition?

In September 2022, I was struck by images of young men crossing the border in the Georgian mountains, fleeing the Russian regime on foot, by bike, or by car. While these men were experiencing a situation unimaginable to me, their faces seemed to say a lot about the fragility and violence of our world. Where are we headed? Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we in the West feel that the peace we have been enjoying for some time is very fragile.

Was this film conceived from the beginning as a portrait of exile, or did that dimension emerge progressively during the process?

From the beginning, it was a film about men and women who fled their country because they refused to bow to the regime. Instinctively, I feel that France, but also Europe, is at a turning point. In the stories of these Russians, in the questions they ask themselves, I also recognize my own concerns.

A *Russian Winter* is a very evocative title. Where did it come from, and what does it suggest to you?

It took a long time to find. The waiting experienced by these men and women – the shock and state of uncertainty in which they are suspended – alters their perception of time and space. They are trapped in a permanent present. For me, the title evokes this frozen, static situation.

On what basis did you choose the people you follow in *A Russian Winter*? What qualities, emotional, relational, or cinematic... were you looking for in the individuals you filmed?

I went to Istanbul to meet young Russians who had fled their country. I met people from very different backgrounds, some very politically engaged, others less so, some wanted by the authorities, others not. Margarita—the main character in the film—accompanied me and translated the interviews. We talked a lot. Then, one day, it became obvious: I wanted to film her. I can't explain why, but her intelligence, strength, and sensitivity touched me deeply. The other people who appear in the film are her friends. They are a group of friends made up of very different people with Margarita as their secret center.

How much did the film's structure evolve in response to the personalities and relationships that unfolded in front of the camera?

My documentaries are highly improvised and therefore require a lot of time to edit. So when editing, I try to give shape to the lives and questions of the people I filmed. These people had no choice but to flee. Some tried to resist the regime, but they didn't succeed. In their comfortable lives in Moscow, they weren't prepared for the brutality of the system. In order to keep living, they had to give up their country, their identity, their lives. Now, in Paris or Istanbul, they live on the margins of life, paralyzed by powerlessness, doubt, guilt and maybe shame. *Was it right to flee to save one's life, or should they have stayed to fight the regime? Where can they be most useful, here or there? What role do they play in what is happening? Are they victims or responsible for the situation? Filming may have enabled them to put complex, difficult questions into words.*

How did you define the scope of your gaze as a filmmaker; where to stay, and where not to go?

One might wonder why I didn't shoot in Ukraine, where people are obviously suffering more and more violently. I realize that this question might even be off-putting. I have friends in Ukraine and I have spent some time there. I admire their strength and extraordinary determination. I went to Kiev for a festival in April 2024. I gave a workshop there to some very interesting young filmmakers: they are the ones who need to tell their stories.

How important was trust in shaping both the filming process and the final form of the film?

Over the course of filming, a relationship developed between us that was at once reflective, artistic, and friendly. I don't make films *about* people, but *with* them. What can we do together? These people represent nothing other than themselves. I watch them, I film them, and they contribute something to the film, to the moment. Perhaps above all, this is a film about friendship: caught up in the violence of history, we cling to our friends.

Music accompanies the film throughout in a subtle, almost hypnotic way. How did you conceive the role of the soundtrack?

The music, which strikes me as quite rock, even punk, was composed by one of the characters in the film, Yuri Nosenko. The work with him was very organic. He is a very interesting musician. When I shoot a documentary, I feel that it is important to let the people who participated in it have their say. In this case, that included the music.

While the film is deeply intimate, it inevitably resonates with a broader historical moment. How do you hope audiences will engage with it today?

The beauty of cinema, in my opinion, lies in being able to see something that you cannot see otherwise. And, as a director, I think that sometimes the best way to achieve this is to distance yourself from your immediate environment. I make films because I don't know. I search, I try to see more clearly, or at least learn to formulate questions. For me, making a film is a way of opening up a space for reflection, for myself and for others.



BIOGRAPHY

PATRIC CHIHA

Patric Chiha is an Austrian filmmaker of Hungarian and Lebanese descent. He studied fashion design at ESAA Duperré (Paris) and film editing in INSAS (Brussels). He lives and works in Paris. His films – both fiction and documentary – include “Domain” (2009), “Boys Like Us” (2014), “Brothers of the Night” (2016), “If It Were Love” (2020) and “The Beast In The Jungle” (2023). His work has been screened and awarded at numerous international film festivals, including Venice Film Festival and Berlinale.



(© ELSA OKAZAKI)

FILMOGRAPHY

PATRIC CHIHA

2023	<i>The Beast in the Jungle</i> – Berlinale Panorama
2020	<i>If It Were Love</i> – Berlinale Panorama & Teddy Award Winner
2016	<i>Brothers of the Night</i> – Berlinale Panorama
2014	<i>Boys Like Us</i>
2009	<i>Domain</i> – Venice Film Festival



CREW

Director	Patric Chiha
Director of Photography	Céline Bozon
Editing	Anna Riche
Sound	Pierre Bompoy, Amaury Arboun, Matthieu Perrot
Sound Edit/Mix	Mikaël Barre
Original Music	Yuri Nosenko
Line Producer Turkey	Irem Akbal
Production	Aurora Films
Producers	Katia Khazak, Charlotte Vincent
Coproduction	Le Fresnoy - Studio National des Arts Contemporains
Country	France
With the support of	Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Région Île-de-France, Image/Mouvement du Centre National des Arts Plastiques
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