

# FILM FOCUS

## IN CONVERSATION WITH DOCLISBOA



**Doclisboa Programmers Joana Galhardas and Joana Sousa**  
**Interviewed by Daniel Fawcett & Clara Pais**  
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**CLARA PAIS:** So maybe to start with, could you tell us your names, something about yourselves and how you are involved with the festivals?

**JOANA GALHARDAS:** I am Joana Galhardas, I have a degree in Anthropology and I started to come to **doclisboa** as a student. That's the first contact I had with the festival, I saw some films that my teachers recommended, and then I had a film showing in 2013 in the Green Years section, which Joana and I are now curating, and I also do the print traffic for the festival.

**CP:** So you're a filmmaker as well? You make films?

**JG:** Yes, I made one and I have a few in my pocket to think about... It's kind of difficult when you work in a festival trying to keep up with your job and your projects but yes. I never thought if I am a filmmaker or not, I only made one short film.

**CP:** What was your film about?

**JG:** Well, I found a VHS tape recorded with my uncle in the early '90s, it's of an ethnological survey, he could draw really well so people invited him to draw the stones and the artefacts that they had discovered. Then I found an audio tape with a political statement about the Portuguese Revolution, so I just made a short experimental film using these two materials. I think it's a little bit political, experimental, and documental but also a little bit fictional. I didn't shoot anything of my own, but I was working with these materials because in some way his speech resonated with me, the audio tape is from 1987 when I was 3 months old, and when I found it I was 25 years old and the things he was saying about the Portuguese political system and economics, I was feeling the same 25 years later. And I think



*Sleep Has Her House* (Scott Barley / 2017)

also the stones in the video have some symbolism, “it is written in stone”, that’s the title of the film because that is how history is written, we find things after so many years and we try to understand them. I was looking through and inside the film so I think it is like an archaeological survey as well.

**JOANA SOUSA:** I am Joana Sousa, I have studied cinema, more specifically documentary, and my first real contact with the festival was also through Green Years because I also had a film there, not about stones but about cows actually. It was an experimental film about how organic systems like bodies can actually be re-composed, changed and be modified like artificial systems. So it was about these cows that are actually a product of interbreeding, they are an extreme breed of cows, they are very muscular and there is a system of fairs that work exactly like a body builder competition, the cows eat a lot and then they shrink so the muscles get really ripped, and they are shaved in a specific way to show the muscles so it’s a very extreme kind of body modification but this time it’s animals. And at the festival now I programme for different sections and I also assist in the programme coordination.

**CP:** What section are you both involved in this year?

**JS:** We are both involved in the Green Years, I programme for Heart Beat and also of course we interact with the rest of the programme, the competition, the New Visions and the different strands.

**CP:** We got the press kit yesterday when we arrived and I was reading through the book with all the information about all the films in the festival, which is a really amazing thing that you got this and that everybody that comes as a guest gets it, it’s a very good document. But also there was this message from the directors of the festival and there was something there that we were particularly excited about, they say that “Festivals do not serve to confirm categories”, that festivals are about the experience of cinema and this festival specifically is an opportunity to provoke and disturb and explore what these films are beyond categories. I think that especially in a festival that is about documentary but is showing work like Scott Barley’s film *Sleep Has Her House*, which is not what you would think of as a documentary film, that this was really exciting. So I would just like to ask what you have to say about this philosophy and how this manifests in the programme for you?

**JS:** Well, it is a philosophy that not only permeates **doclisboa** but also **Apordoc**, which is the association behind **doclisboa**, and even though the name of the association is “for documentary” we try exactly to make those boundaries and those categories greyer and greyer because what really matters is the reflection and the thought behind the works and how you can present them to the audience and discuss them in different contexts. Yeah, even though that sometimes plays with people’s expectations of what **doclisboa** is, we even have sometimes directors asking

us “Do you really want to screen my film? It is not a documentary” and we explain how we try actively to challenge these hard categories like documentary, fiction, shorts, features. So even in our competition we screen both, I mean the shorts and features are at the same level, we don’t have different competitions for length, even though they have different prizes, awards. For example in this year’s programme, in the international competition we have a 5 minute short by Manel Raga Raga and we have a film by Elisabeth Perceval and Nicolas Klotz which is 3 hours long. Sometimes of course people can say that they don’t have the same strength, but we try to say actually they have, one film that is 5 minutes can have as powerful a moment as a 3 hour film, strength is not measured by metre. Also with the categories of fiction and documentary, for us it is so hard, even more recent films where we see that the directors are actively trying to just convey something and using any means by which they can convey that... it depends on your message, it is not “I want to do fiction” or “I want to do documentary”. So it’s in our work as programmers but we are also receiving that energy from the filmmakers that send us the films to the festival.

And the New Visions section you could say is the most extreme in that sense, as the name says “New Visions” it’s not just about the boundaries that we programme: experimental, documentary, fictions, but also about how people see these films. In the New Visions we don’t only screen experimental recent films but also films about cinema that can be more conventional in the way they are structured but that are saying “Let’s see differently”. For example, in this New Visions we have *Le moindre geste* (Jean-Pierre Daniel, Fernand Deligny, Josée Manenti / 1971), you could say it’s a more conventional direct cinema documentary but by being programmed in New Visions and by giving the context, we try to build more narratives around the films that could be different from the way they have been perceived before.

**CP:** It is very interesting because our mission with **FILM PANIC** is similar, to try and create a platform for films that are in the cracks of the different categories, so that we can look at a film and see what it is in itself. And see not how it doesn’t fit into some category but maybe how it fits into several and what it reveals of these different things, and that’s really exciting because I think we are living at a time when there’s many more possibilities available for filmmakers for how we can work more freely, because we have technology available to us and access to all these different ideas and films in way that we haven’t had in the past. So the work can be very complex, and the more complex you are the less categories you fit into, or at least not in a way that is so easily identifiable. So it really becomes a space for us to confront expectations and discover new things.

**JS:** It’s funny that you say about these new technologies because we actually have a lot of films by people who use archives but archives from online platforms, like youtube or other videos that are out there, and it’s very interesting how people use them. It’s not only on the New Visions, we also have *RIP in Pieces America* (Dominic Gagnon / 2009) in the Quebec retrospective, and he uses youtube videos to construct the identity of Quebec, of this very specific area. It’s interesting to see how this imagery permeates the work of people because it’s something that belongs to their daily lives, so people might say “I want this and I am going to film it”, but also “this video that exists online also belongs to me in a certain way”. Of course this has all these legal issues concerning the rights and all that, but for me personally it’s an interesting idea that these videos are used, as they are so present in our daily life and become so personal to you, because you can stop them, you can see them, you can download them, even if it’s illegally. There are a lot of directors that also use this means in their work and sometimes, like in the case of Dominic Gagnon, it’s the entire film that is made of parts of youtube clips so that’s also a new way to think. Of course we are screening them in a cinema room, but how does this context of screening them in a cinema room make you think, or validate or not validate online content? But people from the ‘60s also found archive footage in the garbage or whatever and they used that, and for me personally it’s a bit the same, even though they are very different formats.

**DANIEL FAWCETT:** I guess one of the things is the early found footage films made by filmmakers like Joseph Cornell and similar artists to start with were using Hollywood movies, whereas now filmmakers can be using other people’s home movies, it’s not just films that are available in the industry or in the collective fantasy, it’s actually now reworking people’s personal films, and there is obviously lots of questions and issues around this at the moment which are quite interesting. It would be interesting to think about how that has changed, that relationship to found footage, because we have a very different relationship to moving image now than we did in the ‘30s and ‘40s when this kind of work was beginning. We are in a very different place, aren’t we?

**JS:** Yes.

**JG:** I just wanted to mention that, for instance, in those home made movies from the ‘50s, people were thinking



*Tell Me When You Die* (Amber Bemak and Nadia Granados / 2015)

“what will I film”, you know, but now it is really more spontaneous, you have your iPhone so you can film something and then put it on youtube. I think the meaning has also changed from the point of view of who is doing these images because it is a lot more spontaneous and accessible, you have more access now.

**CP:** Yes, there is footage available out there for people to use as found footage that is created in a very different way than it was in the early days of re-using Hollywood films. What I mean is there is a lot of footage available that is not created with an artistic intent or even a commercial intent, it is created almost just as an act of being in the world, you create all this footage that then you put out, so there is something there that is interesting but different from artistic creation.

**JS:** That really makes me think of these two short films we have in New Visions, one is *Borderhole* (2017) and the other is *Tell Me When You Die* (2015), made by two artists, Amber Bemak and Nadia Granados. They are actually a couple and there is all this immediacy of online and found footage in their home videos, it is all these plays on intimacy, like what is intimate and what is public. Their work, especially in these two films, is very interesting because they work over the relationship that they have, one is American and one is Columbian, and of course that is a very intimate thing, they are a couple and these are their nationalities, but these intimate details actually have a wider geopolitical context that influences their relationship. So in both of the films they also use footage from George W. Bush meeting the Columbian, or Mexican president? Because I think Nadia lives in Mexico. So obviously this is public, it is an online youtube video mixed with their own videos in very intimate moments, just for sharing frustrations because Nadia cannot enter easily into the United States. So it makes me think about how they actually make you question what is intimate and why is it intimate, and why something is public and why they are related, and how actually all these political things, economics, even George W. Bush influences their relationship.

**DF:** In a way to make a film about yourself and not include all of this media that we see is to leave out a major part of our contemporary experience, in some ways it has to be in there if it is going to be a truthful document of our experience now, as so much of our experience is through a screen...

**JS:** And through other people’s media and other people’s contents. It is so weird that you actually in your entire existence now live through other people’s media and with other people’s media.

**DF:** And other people’s narratives blend with yours, simply how we are always interacting on Facebook with other people’s narratives. Their experiences that they are going through become injected into our own experiences constantly. There is a much more fragmented sense of experience because of this.

**JS:** We have a film in Green Years called *Brthr* (Inma Veiga / 2017) that the director made about her teenage brother who is 15 and lives in a small village somewhere in Galicia, and – this is a bit of a spoiler – he’s gay and he doesn’t like to live in the tiny village, and actually most of his existence is online, seeing people with lives that he would like to have, using Grindr and all these online platforms, and she puts it very well how you build your identity, the identity

you want to have. So these narratives are existing there and influencing us also.

**CP:** I think one of the interesting things at this time is just how much you can build your own narrative, it is almost like that's what we are experiencing on a collective level, all of us now. We somehow have the ability to build our own narrative constantly, but also have to deal with hitting those walls of the difference between your real self and what you put out on social media and all of that, also of finding discrepancies in other people that you have relationships with, but then also becoming aware of how everybody on a certain sense has that dimension to them. I mean like when you think of history and public figures who are on that spot between being public but also having their own personal and intimate histories, somehow it opens up the awareness that history is a thing that is always being constructed at any point and is always being constructed from specific points of view that are all fictions really, depending on your perspectives and your consciousness. So there is something quite exciting but almost impossible to control about that, you somehow have to be in this constantly unfolding dynamic of history and identity, where all is fluid and you can use it creatively.

**JS:** Actually, in the film by Filipa César, *Spell Reel* (2017), she makes an incredible work about how history is fluid and subjective. She has made an extensive work in Guinea-Bissau but in this specific film, that is in the competition at doclisboa, she found a lot of archives and home movies from the guerillas and the fighters that wanted independence from Portugal and their narratives were completely hidden from the colonisers, which was Portugal at that time. So she found this footage and is going from village to village screening it and she's actually building not a new narrative but a narrative that was completely smothered and erased before. It's confronting to the people, not only some of the people that are older that lived through it but also teenagers who actually didn't know so many details or that had a vision of their own history and identity that was very different before they were faced with this archive footage.

**DF:** What I find interesting in this is a potential for us to not have an official history, we can have multiple histories that are all in conflict and more chaotic. I think until now we've really just had official history, which is the one we are taught. Even in the sense of art history, at the moment we are finding out about filmmakers and artists who maybe weren't given recognition at the time but are emerging finally, such as the discovery of the history of women filmmakers or black filmmakers which has always been suppressed and under the surface of the 'official' history.

**JS:** Yes, even this year with our retrospective of Věra Chytilová. I mean some of her films are very well-known now but it is crazy you know, because we tried to build this full retrospective and it was so hard to find some of her films. Not because she was forgotten, because she is very known, but really only two or three films are shown continuously. Some films were thought lost, one film she did during the time she was banned, *Kamarádi* (1971), it was crazy to find the film, people thought it was impossible to find it. We didn't even know what it was about, we didn't have any dialogue lists, we had to find everything. But just that physically someone can be forgotten, it's kind of scary when you think about it, that it is so easy for this person not to exist just because it cannot be shown.

**CP:** Especially filmmakers who are working in smaller and more intimate and personal ways. I think immediately of British filmmaker Jeff Keen, he is probably the best artist filmmaker in the UK and completely a hidden gem, all his films are amazing and so many of the things that artists were exploring in cinema separately he was doing all of them. He was a very exciting person but his work wasn't very well known, and now even though there is a very good DVD release by the BFI of some of his work, it is only a selection, he has done a lot more and it is not known, and if it is not known then it might not survive. And it's terrible because it's a major contribution that is missing from the history of cinema and becomes something that is not available for other filmmakers to add to their language and their experience of what cinema can be. It is really scary and we, as filmmakers, we think a lot about how we can protect our work and how we can make it visible in ways that we can make sure the work survives beyond us.

**JS:** What was the name of the Portuguese horror film director, the one that died recently?

**JG:** António de Macedo. He was always considered as a defiant filmmaker because he was doing these really, I don't want to say crazy films, but horror and science fiction films.

**JS:** But with a lot of very culturally Portuguese references, which is very unique, because Portuguese directors doing horror is already rare. Last year we screened the documentary about him and there was a retrospective of his work at another festival and it's weird because he was not known, even people who studied cinema didn't know about



Věra Chytilová

his existence because his films were so out of the box for the time. I don't remember which film it was, but he even had a demonstration of the church and of religious people in front of the cinema for one of his films because it was so outrageous. There were some catholic references in the film, I don't remember exactly.

**JG:** I think it was *As Horas de Maria* (1979).

**JS:** So there was a systematic erasure of his work. He didn't get any more funding so he tried to make films with crowdfunding but in the '80s, when there was no online platform, and it was hard for him to get people to know his work. So by this very systematic erasure it was actually possible to make him not known at all.

**JG:** And actually the documentary that we showed last year about him went online for crowdfunding as well because they had a lot of problems with getting funding for the documentary itself.

**JS:** Because no one knew about him. But then they managed to do it and make the retrospective. The director, João Monteiro, made it his life goal to make António's work known and to show it. António de Macedo died this month but he managed to see his work being shown again before he passed away.

**DF:** This is one of the amazing things that a festival can do, any festival has this power. Actually they do have a certain amount of power to really have an impact, like when they show a retrospective of someone, even if that person isn't known the very fact that a festival is grouping together all of their work gives them a sort of validation, which is really what is needed to survive as a filmmaker, you need to be validated unfortunately. Often people won't look at your work until someone else has said it is good. That is one of the things about retrospectives of lesser known filmmakers that has an immediate effect could even lead to DVD releases, it could influence the fact that people might consider releasing these things.

**JS:** And also, more specifically about **doclisboa** because we know better about how we work, it is the sheer work of actually finding the copies and getting the contacts, and then we build the catalogue that exists and this can be seen by other people. So if someone out there sees it, even if they might not be present here for the festival, they can see where this film exists. Of course it is harder for another person to get the film outside of a festival because there are issues with the copies.

**JG:** Yes, especially with the archives because they are very protective of their film prints. Especially if there is only one film print and it is in a bad shape, so you can't project it from the film print, sometimes people might find those kinds of difficulties.

**DF:** So did you find everything made by Věra Chytilová?

**JS:** We didn't programme certain television films that she made, the more commercial ones. We have the films she produced for Czech television. So it is almost a full retrospective, it is just a few TV shows that we chose not to program. But we even have her school films, her first film, and we have representatives from FAMU coming, the Czech film school, so that is also interesting to have films that she did when she was 20 and then the most recent one that she made 3 years before she passed away, so as to have this perception of how a director grows in their work. It is very interesting to do these full retrospectives, a bit crazy sometimes but it is interesting sometimes just to understand someone. We have certain people in our audience, which is amazing, who will actually see all the films, we try to make the programme so you can actually see all of them.

**JG:** For the Věra Chytilová retrospective we have almost 30 films.

**JS:** And we have an audience that wants that... We had this person at the Cinemateca who told us, "You made a mistake in your programming because I can't see this one, it is going to be screened at the same time as another one" so as it was quite an easy film to deal with in terms of print traffic, we made a special screening just so he could see the full retrospective. But that was a very special occasion, it doesn't happen often for logistic reasons.

**CP:** The festival programme is massive, you are showing a huge amount of films.

**JG:** Yes, this year we have 231 films.

**JS:** We actually have less films than last year. Last year we had 273, but there were also programmes with very short films. We had a programme of 1 minute short films that were made for a specific project in the Netherlands. So that is also interesting, to play with different lengths and to see how you can build on them, if they are all put together, if they are separate, and how the conversations go over that.

**CP:** And in relation to the New Visions section for example, I think you have about 25 films, how many of them come from submissions and how many are curated? How do you come across them and build the programme?

**JS:** It depends, I don't know by heart how many came from submissions but basically the films come to the festival by different ways, or by submissions to our call for entries.

**JG:** And by our programmers that go to other festivals and see these films, or someone brings us a film and says they think we should see it. But I think it is half and half maybe.

**JS:** Yes I think it is, or maybe through some other programmers from other festivals, because it is a network, and they also recommend films to us and say "this film should be seen by you, it is really important", so it comes from different directions and then we try to make a programme. Because it is not just about programming one film but thinking about the entire festival. Even though it is easier to perceive that in the Chytilová and Quebec programmes because there is a theme, but in the New Visions also, in the section as a whole and also in each screening session, there is an intention behind it, it's not just putting the films together.

**CP:** Yes, we also organised a festival a couple of years ago and this year we have done a showcase of contemporary experimental work which was monthly screenings in Porto, and in some ways one of the things we put a lot of thought into was creating a programme that was coherent, especially when screening work that is very distinctive from each other, but somehow trying to create a journey that people can go through. Because sometimes if you present works and you don't think about that the works can actually damage each other, there's a rhythm and people might not be prepared for the next film because they are like different energies, but you can also play with that. There is definitely an art to programming.

**JG:** That balance is hard to find sometimes.

**JS:** Yes, especially if you have a session with a lot of short films and they all have their worlds and narratives and structures and energies, and it is really important to think about them not individually but how they relate, or if one eats the other one. Some of the films can get forgotten or lost, so we try to make it so they do not lose themselves in the programmes because, of course, it is important when you finish the session to feel how these points of view



*Who Is Bárbara Virgínia?* (Luísa Sequeira / 2017)

match together or not, how they actually build new narratives or new ideas from it. So we try to do that.

Oh, and about lost filmmakers, we actually have also in the New Visions section Bárbara Virgínia. We're showing *Who is Bárbara Virgínia?* by Luísa Sequeira, she is doing research on her work. Virgínia was actually the first female Portuguese filmmaker.

**JG:** She made a film that was lost called *Três Dias Sem Deus*.

**JS:** It was screened in the first edition of Cannes but she didn't go because she had the film programmed in a festival here in Porto. She made one feature film and one short and then she moved to Brazil and didn't make anything else. We are going to screen the documentary about her and before it we are showing the only existing excerpt of *Três Dias Sem Deus*, which is only 26 minutes and without sound, but we wanted to show it even just to see a bit, and then we are also going to screen the short film, that also exists only without sound, which was lost.

**DF:** What years was she working?

**JS:** In the '40s, I think.

**CP:** Yes, it was the mid-40s, I think. I was reading about her and one of the interesting things I read in this article was how she was making these genre films, which is an uncommon thing in Portuguese cinema.

**JS:** I know, and she was this posh lady from the '40s, doing something totally unconventional. *Três Dias Sem Deus* was from 1946 and actually it is incredible, it is about this village whose priest dies and they have no one to guide them spiritually and then these very weird apocalyptic things start to happen. We know this by the excerpt that survived but also from the synopsis, because we can't see the whole film. But it is so cool that she made this film that questions what people do if there is no church. She was not religious but the church at that time gave structure to people's lives, so what happens when they don't have this? For some reason the new priest doesn't come, he's stuck somewhere, and then all hell breaks loose. She also acts in the film and it looks like a German expressionist film. This is her in these images, this very posh and chic woman, and her personality permeates into her films, with all their vamp imagery.

**CP:** Now to wrap up, if there was one film that you would like to recommend, which film are you most excited about in this year's festival?

**JS:** Just one! It is so hard... well, ok! We are screening one film I really like after the festival, because the Quebec retrospective continues at the Cinemateca after this. One of the films I really like in the retrospective is this one, *Of Whales, The Moon And Men* (Pierre Perrault, Michel Brault / 1962). This film is about a community in Quebec who are trying to make this tradition of hunting beluga whales again – there are issues with the beluga whales hunting, of course

– but the film is really, really beautiful and interesting in the way that it is not just a conventional ethnological documentary that looks at people hunting beluga whales, it is actually about these people trying to artificially turn this into a tradition again, and there are all these questions about how you artificially make a tradition traditional again.

**JG:** Just one film is really difficult, but if I was a spectator of doclisboa I would immediately buy a ticket for *Who is Bárbara Virgínia?* because I think it is still in the shadows.

**JS:** And because you want to work in a film archive!

**JG:** Yes, it is because I want to work in a film archive. But I think it would be very interesting to discover this filmmaker that has been in the shadows for so many years. I would immediately buy a ticket for that.

**CP:** Thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us.

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