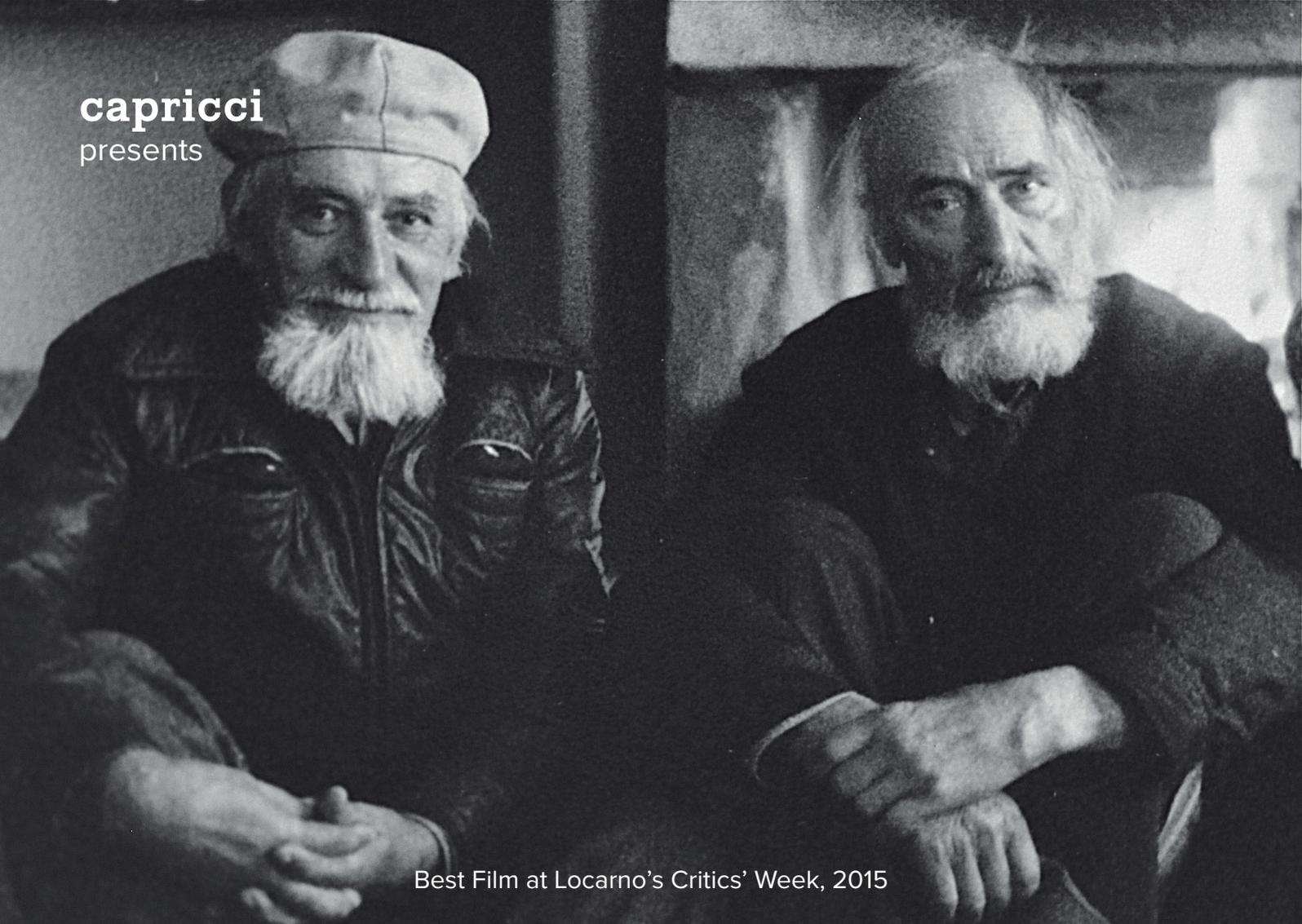


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Best Film at Locarno's Critics' Week, 2015

BROTHERS

a film by **Wojciech Staron**

Poland - Documentary - 2015 - 70'



Two old Polish brothers come back to their homeland, 70 years after having been deported to Siberia. Alfons is a painter, Mieczyslaw a cartographer: despite their differences they love and support each other, and together they face the passage of time and the hardships of life. To tell their story, Wojciech Staron paid recurring visits to the two brothers and took plenty of time to become a part of their daily lives. Mixing his work with the brothers' archive footage, he captures the passing of time in the old men's lives and reveals the deep bond that unites them.

Interview

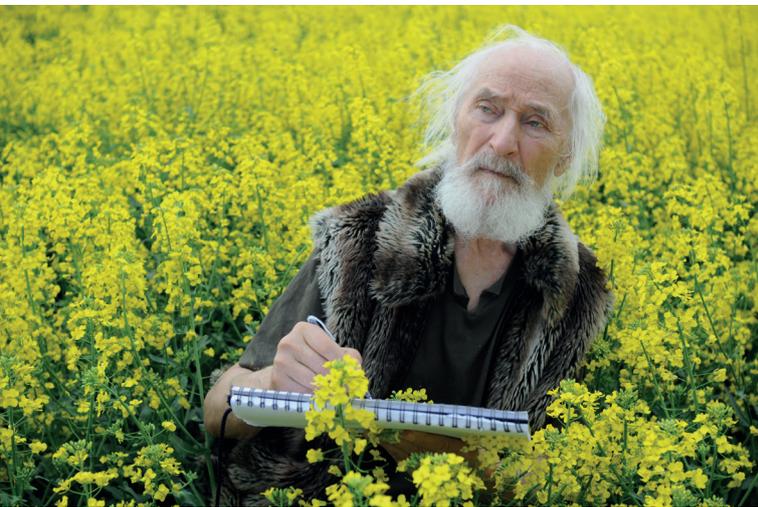
Wojciech Staroń on the making of Brothers

How did you meet the 2 brothers?

We met during my journey during studies of cinematography, when I traveled across Kazakhstan in summer 1994.

Where do the archive footage come from, and how did you select them? Did the brothers participate to the selection?

All the archive footage comes from Mieczysław, the older brother, who shot his professional expeditions as a cartographer, and his private life, on 8mm and 16 mm camera. I did the selection process alone, and it was very difficult. I chose parts that fit the topics and emotions of the story, such as moments when the two brothers are together, when Alfons is performing very difficult exercises or when we see the immense surface of tundra. I wanted the audience to feel the situation that they had to live in the communist USSR, but without judgment, only to build the atmosphere of mystery of the past.



The film shows some elements from the past but it is mostly a film anchored in the present. Is that correct?

For me the most important element in a documentary are the things that happen now. The past is only an additional layer, to which we have a limited access. I think even the most tragic events of the past do not have as much impact as the presence. I shot incredible interviews with the brothers presenting their exile to Siberia, their imprisonment in gulag, their escape, etc. but I preferred to show them in silence today and to look for the traces of the past in the observation of the present days.

How was your presence perceived during the shooting? Were you a quiet observer or did you interact with them?

I tried to be an observer only but they wanted to talk a lot, so I had to wait for a long time to catch the moment when they got used to my presence, were getting back to their privacy and did not

react when I was there. They needed me more as a friend than as a filmmaker. Most scenes happened accidentally and were difficult to predict.

How did you prepare the shooting? At which frequency were you visiting the brothers?

I shot once every one or two months, with my wife Gosia. We spent most of that time talking and listening to their stories. Alfons was always describing vividly their plans, which were the inspiration for the next scenes of the film. Apart from that I was filming the brothers' silence, existence, daily routines. For a long time I was looking for the answer what is this film about, what will be its main motive and its structure. However I knew from the very beginning that it will a film about brotherhood. The final structure of the film appeared as a result of a year-long process of editing. I had to eliminate many plots to achieve a kind of universal & clear story.



WOJCIECH STARON

Wojciech Staron was born in 1973 in Poland and studied at the Cinema School of Lodz until 1996. His first documentary, *Siberian Lesson*, was about his girlfriend teaching Polish migrants in Siberia how to speak their own mother tongue. A decade later it was followed by *Argentinean Lesson*, where the two were now a couple and had a child. The film focused on the friendship bond between their young son Janek and Marcia, a girl whose family lives in the poor Argentinean village where the couple just settled in. Staron works explore the theme of cultural identity, language and sense of belonging, in a compassionate and down-to-earth fashion. Having worked for a long time on the cinematography of different documentaries projects, he just directed his first long feature, *Brothers*.

FILMOGRAPHY

Brothers (2015), *Argentinian lesson* (2011, MoMA Documentary Fomrnight), *For a while* (2005, Cracow IFF), *El Misionero* (2000, Cinéma du Réel), *A Time to live* (1999, Leipzig IFF), *Siberian Lesson* (1998, Grand Prix Cinéma du Réel)

BROTHERS IN FESTIVALS

Best Films at Locarno's Critics' Week, Camerimage, Golden Dove at Dok Leipzig, East meets West at Trieste Film Festival, Warsaw Film Festival, Zurich Film Festival



« In a world struggling under major crisis we see a film that absorbs its viewer, a spectator becomes a part of the film, like being inside of a painting and being at the same time reminded of the history by means of art. For its extreme poetry and great cinematography the jury gives the Golden Dove to *Brothers*. »

Dok Leipzig's Jury



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Their lives have been troubled and sorrowful. When they were still children they were deported with their families to Siberia. In the 1940s they managed to escape and then lived in different places in the former USSR. Mieczysław worked as a cartographer, Alfons had a career as a respected painter. They only returned to their former home country in the late 1990s. Now that they are back in their ancestral house, they do not depend on outside help, but rely on and help each other. Alfons is more agile, the creative energy of his painting unbroken. Repeatedly, he stands outside in front of his easel, painting in vivid colours. During many years, the internationally acclaimed cinematographer Wojciech Staron paid recurring visits to the two brothers. He took plenty of time to become a part of their daily lives, also visiting them without his camera. Once he started filming, he still needed some patience until the brothers began behaving naturally. Capturing the slow passing of time in the old men's lives is one of the strong points of this film, creating a concentrated intimacy almost exclusively by means of the image. The 42-year-old filmmaker Staron is interested in real stories and attempts to capture people in their entirety. His calm images exude a fascinating vigour; they are intense paintings that inspire their viewers' imagination and create allegories of life. They fill the screen with a certain purity, giving the two protagonists ample space to develop. There is no unnecessary movement in the frame, and in their old age the two men are not exactly talkative. The past is rendered in skilfully incorporated 8mm clips, which serve to visualise the episodes in Siberia and their time in exile.

Madeleine Hirsiger, Locarno's Critics' Week

CONTACT

Capricci Films

103 rue Sainte Catherine
33000 Bordeaux, FRANCE
+33 (0) 5 35 54 51 89

Julien Rejl

Head of sales
julien.rejl@capricci.fr
+33 (0) 6 61 65 88 79

Pierre Boivin

Sales Agent
pierre.boivin@capricci.fr
+33 (0) 6 19 21 42 27