LOGLINE

A satire that mirrors Europe's pressing political issues through the daily ups and downs in the relationships of neighbouring cats.

TRAILER

vimeo.com/886210288

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Animation technique: **2D digital cut-out**
Aspect ratio (theaters): **1:1,85**
Aspect ratio (TV, video): **16:9**
Sound: **Stereo, 5.1, No Dialogue**
Year of production: **2024**
Co-production: **URGH!, RTV SLOVENIJA (SI) / BONOBOSTUDIO (HR)**
With the support of: **Slovenian Film Centre, Croatian Audiovisual Centre, Viba film**

DISTRIBUTION

International sales: **BONOBOSTUDIO** ✉ **info@bonobostudio.hr**
Art Gallery screenings: **ANA ČIGON** ✉ **mail@anacigon.si**
Available prints: **DCP, ProRes HD, H264 HD**

CREW

Scriptwriter, director and art director: **ANA ČIGON**
Animators: **KATA GUGIĆ, ANA ČIGON, ANA HORVAT,**
BERNARDA KRISTAN, LEA VUČKO, DAMIR GRBANOVIĆ
Background design: **JULIJANA BOŽIČ**
Editing: **IVA KRALJEVIĆ**
Music: **TOMAŽ GROM**
Sound design: **BOŠTJAN KAČIČNIK**
Voice actors: **APHRA TESLA, TEA VIDMAR,**
JOŠT JESENOVEC, BLAŽ ŠEF, ANA ČIGON
Image postproduction: **TEO RIŽNAR**
Producer: **VIVA VIDENOVIĆ (URGH!)**
Co-producer: **VANJA ANDRIJEVIĆ (BONOBOSTUDIO)**

SYNOPSIS

The film takes place in Catlands, the union of distinct feline territories inhabited by cats of various social statuses. The delicate established status quo is disrupted by newcomers trespassing the lawns of the cats' united territories. To address this international issue, the most prominent residents devise a cunning plan, one that cannot be executed without harming some innocent victims.
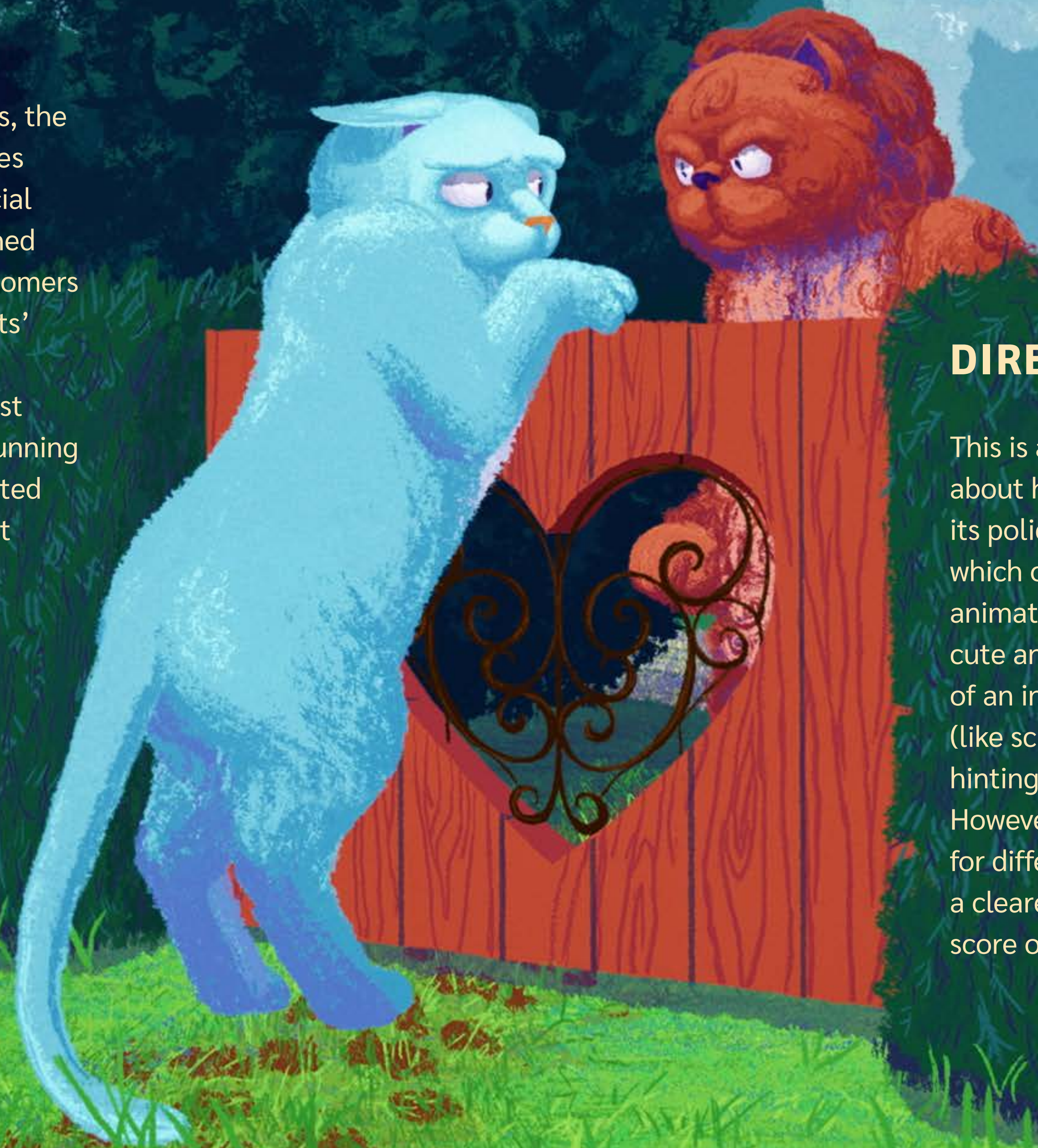
DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This is a story about the European Union – specifically about how its ideals of unity and democracy collide with its policies regarding refugees. The EU's appearance, which often contradicts its politics, is reflected in the animation, where an idyllic environment with colourful, cute and funny cats eventually clashes with the brutality of an inhumane deportation. The scenery is full of details (like scratches and bandages on the newcomer cats) hinting at a less civilized story about to be revealed. However, all these elements are subtle and leave space for different interpretations until the final scene when a clearer statement is amplified by the politically tinted score of Beethoven's Ode to Joy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANA ČIGON (1982) is an established Slovene artist known for her video art, films and performances dealing with social issues which often contain elements of humour, irony and satire. She has made documentaries, experimental films and has worked in animation. It is in the latter that she recently found the most inspiration because of her academic background in painting and video art.

PHONEY SIGHTS, 2019, experimental film

REBELLIOUS ESSENCE, 2017, short animated film

REMEMBERING THE OTHERS, 2015, documentary film

DISCOVERY BEYOND THE TRANSPARENCY, 2009, video art

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Ana Čigon, photo: Nada Žgank

CATLANDS

ORIGINS OF THE IDEA FOR THE FILM

In September 2015 news of refugees stranded at the Slovenian borders was becoming more frequent. A friend invited me to join her on a trip to the southern border of Slovenia -- to take blankets to the refugees and investigate what is going on – and film, if it felt right. Walking the line between the refugees, tents, and help desks on one side of the road, and police, cars and tourist buses on the other side, I froze – I didn't know what to do. I just felt enormous shame and anger. When I got home, I turned on the TV and I couldn't believe how inhumane and unhelpful the evening news was. I remember a politician expressing worry about how much money we were spending on refugees. The only investment I had seen the state make was to bring in the police, fences and helicopters; and the only ones who actually helped were regular people, grassroot initiatives and NGOs. Our then prime minister suggested to European leaders more security at the Macedonian-Greek border which would prevent "irregular migrations" (as he defined them) to EU countries, and in this way also prevent people from coming to Slovenia. While he suggested deploying the police force, no suggestion of humanitarian aid or refugee integration was made. The Prime Minister was very proud of his idea. I, as a citizen of Slovenia, was ashamed as I am still ashamed today eight years later, with razor wire still lining our southern border with nobody willing to remove it and EU leaders focusing on how to prevent people from coming to Europe instead of how to save the lives of people who are drowning in the Adriatic Sea.

The idea for the animated film *Catlands* was born out of this anger about such inhumane political decisions. The main blue cat Mirnjav in the film is the Slovene politician, he blocks the arriving cats' path to the "promised land" of the western EU countries. The English title *Catlands* evokes the idea of a unity of nations like the European Union, while the original title is *A cat at the door* hinting at the special position Slovenia holds in this context. It is a country that is not the main refugee destination, just a transit territory – and still its politics are brutal. The film is dedicated to all European citizens, to help us connect with the shame we should feel about our heartless refugee politics. By embracing the shame, maybe we will be able to rediscover some of our own humanity.

CATLANDS

VISUAL STYLE

I started my artistic career as a painter and in my work I make use of vivid and saturated colours. I used a similar principle in *Catlands* with the intent for the animation to be, in a way, deceptive - to appear lighthearted and carefree when at its core it is not. I avoid using silhouette lines and prefer building the form and volume through simplified shadows aiming to give the colours the chance to affect each other. The technique of 2D computer cut-out animation allows the cats to appear softer in their bodies and facilitates the animation of fluid head turns which appear slightly three-dimensional, which all adds to its visual appeal. Animating with a computer, I had to translate my painting experience into a digital world, which was difficult because of its flatness and sense of artifice, but at the same time I have always liked working with computers because they give me more room for experimentation.

For the characterisation of the cats through their form, I studied different breeds of cats and compared them to various photographs of European politicians trying to find similarities. I tried to find a good balance between animal elements and a more humanised version of the cats. The same is true for behaviour – sometimes the cats sit like humans, but they never walk like humans—for example, they lick their paws. I think that more animal-like behaviours have a disarming effect on the viewer, who feels more at ease as an outside observer, but then on the other hand some elements are more humanlike – like dinner parties – so there is always a feeling that something is not quite right, that *there might be something rotten in the state of Catlands.*

CATLANDS

MUSIC AND SOUND

The sound and music in the film posed significant challenges. I knew right away that I wanted to use Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, but because the first part of the film is very subtle in its political connotations and the underlying refugee story is revealed gradually, I had to find the right spot in the film for such a powerful score – and that turned out to be the ending scene. Bits of the score are also imperceptibly present in the dinner party scene at the villa, but the melody is intentionally hard to grasp and clearly detect. I have been collaborating with the musician and composer Tomaž Grom for several years, but this time we finally had the chance to work together on a film. I have always admired his experimentation with sound and music, and the way he uses instruments in the most unusual ways – all the electronically driven acoustic drums and exotic instruments, materials and toys he uses to produce amazing sounds. His concerts are very performative and visually expressive, which is why I decided to have the cats playing music on-screen as well.

Many people contributed to the look and the sound of the film. The support and ideas of the whole team were very valuable, and I would like to thank them all for their contributions.

NEXT

I am interested in continuing working in animation and perhaps combining it with documentary film. Lately I have been interested in labour, workers' rights, destructive work ethics, "bullshit jobs" (as David Graeber defines them) and similar issues that affect an increasing number of people. But before I embark on any of that, first and foremost I hope *Catlands* finds its audience and moves some hearts, minds and bodies.