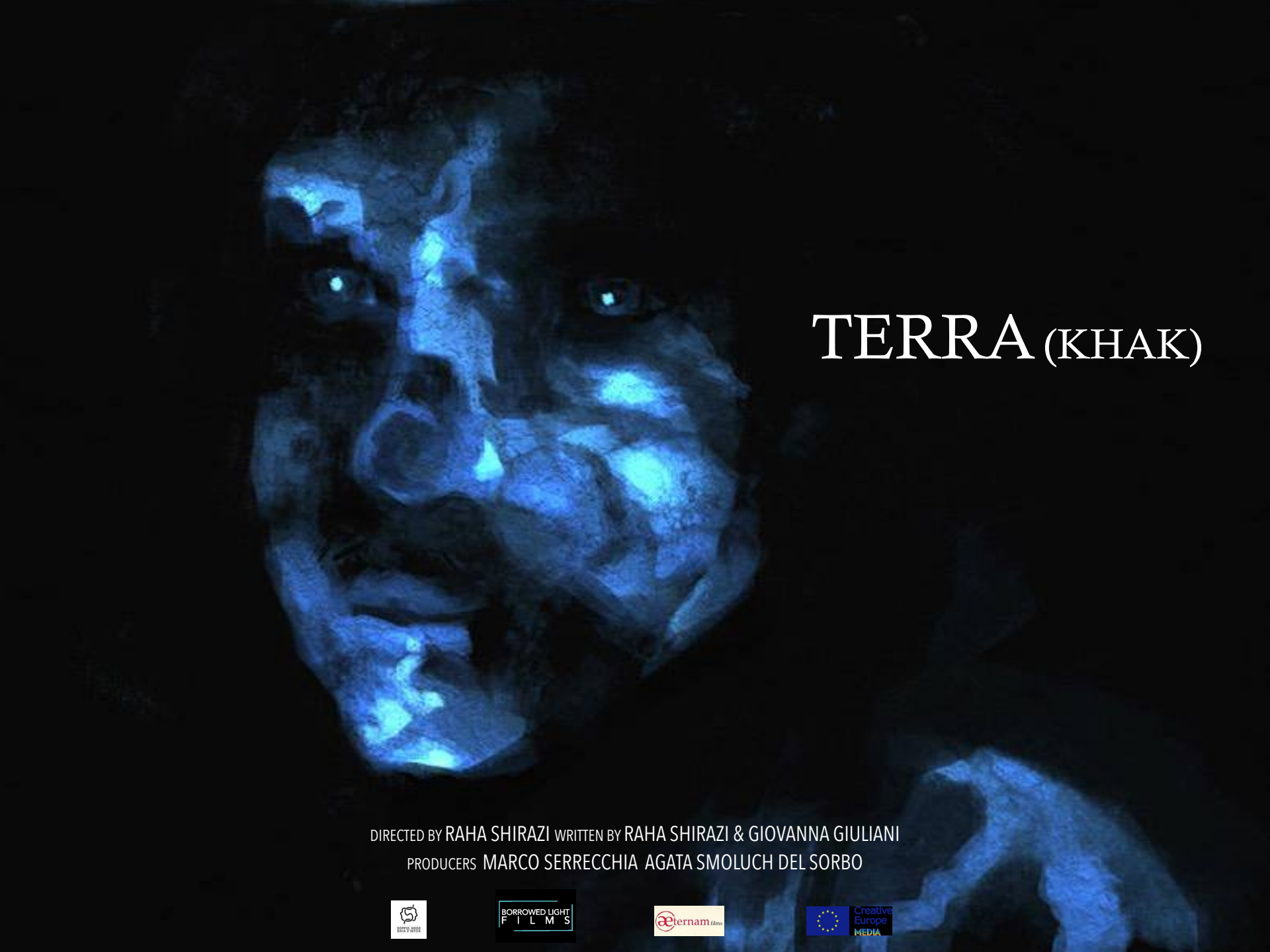
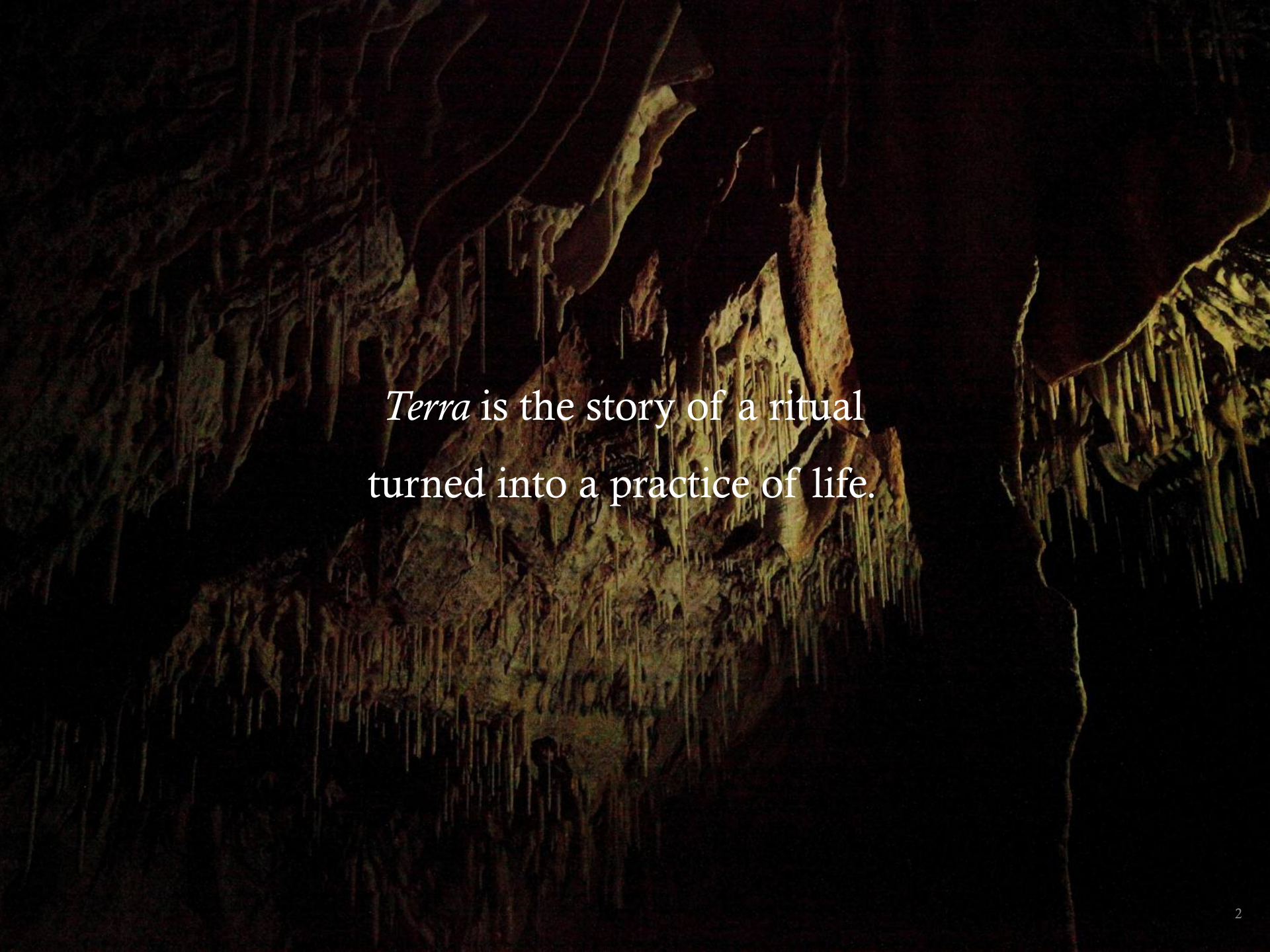




TERRA (KHAK)

DIRECTED BY RAHA SHIRAZI WRITTEN BY RAHA SHIRAZI & GIOVANNA GIULIANI
PRODUCERS MARCO SERRECCHIA AGATA SMOLUCH DEL SORBO





Terra is the story of a ritual
turned into a practice of life.

Fantasy, 90 min

Comparative films:

Where the Wild Things Are / Border / The Lobster / Big Fish / Cemetery of Splendour

In a time unknown, children are grown Underground, bursting through soil and roots at the age of sixteen to lead a life of synchronicity with the Earth. But two will struggle to adapt to surface life, their fate uncertain, in this remarkable ecological fable.

SYNOPSIS

Human life as we know it has failed. The world has fallen still. We are transported to an unknown time, where the protagonist, Earth, is entrusted with children delivered from their maternal wombs into her Underground insides. She is pictured raising the children to sharpen their senses in the *chiaroscuro* of her subterranean sanctuary. In these depths, the small humans blend with the rock and wear minerals like a second skin; these same minerals nourish them to survive. The children are only visible when their bodies rub against the frame of the Underground limestone cavity, producing luminescent sparks.

There are no adults, only children up to the age of sixteen. When they come of age, the Children of the Earth venture to the most perilous regions of the Underground. A thunderstorm floods the cave and forces them to look for exits to the unknown world of the outside. Thus, the Children of the Earth give themselves a second birth into a new life on the surface world.

Their eyes and nostrils, acquainted only with a dayless perennial night, struggle to adapt to the light exposure and newfound air density. The outer world is a feast of the senses, stimulated by discovery: the wind, the sunlight, the sound of bugs buzzing in the air. Flocks of birds attract them to wide clearings, up to the foot of a mountain.

The natives of the Underground are freed from their original element by climbing up the mountaintop. Here, they lose their Earth-skin, peeling it off like thick crusts. They begin to differentiate from one another, and start expressing sexual traits. They slowly open their eyes to the sun and look into the distance. After several days, they discover other humans: older members of their tribe, former Underground children. This is the first time the sixteen-year-olds have ever met anyone older than them. They are absorbed into the elders'

community and learn how to live during the day and sleep at night. Life on the surface of Earth takes hold. *Terra* is a place of magic where humans and Earth are completely synchronized. Plants sprout from the roots of heads. Moss, pine needles and chestnut shells attach themselves to bodies. The humans preserve their umbilical cord with the original element through ritualistic behavior: they conceive new Children in the Earth, using the same soil that will give them passage to deliver their babies.

Guided by instinct alone, half-human and half-earth, the community returns to its origins in death, culminating in complete coalescence with the planet. Dead bodies, covered with Earth, are left on the edge of the Great Tower near the entrance of the Underground. Over time, exposed and consumed by wind, sun, and rain, their forms decay, draining back into the abyssal darkness of the Underground.

Two characters, however, struggle to adapt to surface life: the first, a sixteen-year-old, whose hair and body remain encrusted with Earth, *Pesare Moo Ferferi*, cannot manage to detach from the original element. The second is a mature woman with a distinct birthmark on her skin, *Khale Khaki*. Not out of rejection, but rather due to an inability to keep up, they lose the rest of the group, and stay outside of the community: isolated, continuing to live at night and sleep out the day, in danger, and destined never to meet with the others again.

Shirazi crafts a rare sensory experience that explores both humanity's relationship with the Earth and the language of cinema. Inspired by the stories of rituals practiced in ancient Zoroastrian culture, and propelled by a desire to tell the story of the Earth visually, *Terra* is a remarkable mythological and ecological fable.



WRITER & DIRECTOR



Raha Shirazi

Raha Shirazi is an award winning Iranian Canadian film director and screenwriter whose work spans fiction, documentary and experimental cinema. Her films explore the complexities of human experience, questioning the structures of power, identity, gender and social control, while bringing attention to stories and realities that often remain unseen.

Driven by a curiosity for storytelling in all its forms, Shirazi believes that each story demands its own cinematic language. She approaches cinema as a collective experience, inviting audiences to immerse themselves in unfamiliar worlds and encounter different ways of seeing and understanding reality.

Born in Tehran and raised in Canada, Shirazi holds an MFA in Film Production from York University in Toronto, specializing in directing and the philosophy of screenwriting, and pursued further studies at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and FAMU in Prague.

Her films have screened at international festivals including Toronto, Stockholm and Vancouver. Her latest feature documentary, *A War on Women* (2026), has been selected for more than nineteen international film festivals and received four distinctions, including the Fearless Wahine Award at New Zealand's Doc Edge International Documentary Film Festival, Best Feature Documentary and the overall Nebrodi Cinema Doc Award 2026.

She is currently in production on *Terra*, her new fiction feature film.





I would like to take a few minutes to speak about my own personal experiences and background, which I believe had a strong impact in pushing me to create this project. I was born in *Tehran, Iran* and lived there until I was eleven years old and Persian is my mother tongue; due to political turmoil and other matters, my mother immigrated to *Canada* and raised us there. At that point, English replaced Persian for me, and although I continued to study my native tongue, it took a back seat to the language that took its place.

I mention language because I strongly believe that whatever culture we come from and we start to associate ourselves with, begins with language. Our rituals, daily practices and beliefs all stem from the language through which we communicate with one another. But the older I got, the more I understood what it meant to be part of this diaspora - I had two selves. One was the Iranian girl always in search of an Iranian friend with whom she could tell jokes that no one else understood, and the other had friends that came from all different countries and with whom she shared *Canada, Toronto*, the idea of displacement and searching for one's identity.

In my late twenties I found myself in Europe, a place even more foreign than the one I had experienced as a teen. Here, most people had a strong culture and once again there was a new language to be learned. I was immediately attracted to it for its strong sense of Identity, for its search to be European, to connect countries, cultures, where borders didn't exist and where language was no longer a barrier. After two years of back and forth, I finally decided to settle down in Italy and live here. "Why Italy", you may ask? One, the landscapes of this country take me back to my childhood and the older I get, the more I miss what I knew as home over twenty years ago. The other aspect is its strong sense of culture; the importance that ancient rituals play in their modern lives which connects my Iranian culture so much to this place. I learned another language and made my way again in this new world. Now, nine years later, living here I find myself understanding their jokes, taking part in their culture, and always searching for connections between my Persian/Canadian self and this new home. What does all this have to do with a film about children who are grown underground? The story of the Earth? A Fantasy film that exists in neither of these cultures? In reality, it has everything to do with who I am and where I come from. I can't make Iranian cinema because I'm not only *Iranian*, and I never fully related to *Canadian* Cinema because I never found myself within it.

As for Europe, its cinema has had a huge influence on who I am, and although the subject matter does not emerge from a specific *European* country, it takes me into account - a person whose life, border and language have changed almost every decade of her life. Europe, I feel, is a place that welcomes a person such as myself; one that crosses borders, connects cultures and finds fragments of herself in each new place which then becomes her home.

This project has been transformed into a myth of its own - inspired by stories of rituals practiced in ancient Zoroastrian culture, the story of the Earth has become its own ritual, its own myth. After reflecting on how the story of the Earth can be told, I reached the conclusion that the first step would be to have the humans in this story play objects, and not subjects. This act allows me to explore the parameters of narrative filmmaking: who/what can be the subject of the narrative? What do beginnings/middle/endings look like when you shift settings? Earth, landscape as subject and subjects (humans) as objects. Thus creating a world of our own, a world in which the humans, even though central, play the objects in the story. They are what we can relate to best, but the force that drives them to do what they do is the Earth itself.

I grew up with the cinema of *Kiarostami, Béla Tarr, Tarkovsky*. They taught me to look at the world and observe it; they showed me what a human story could look like and the many layers of a simple frame; then I learned about the cinema of *Cronenberg, Tim Burton, González, Roy Anderson, Iñárritu and Apichatpong*. Their extreme taste for situations takes us by parallel hands into the abyss of the human soul. These undisputed masters of contemporary cinema, with their use of diegetic space-time, create a pronois and ambiguous world in which the real and the unreal merge, leaving emotions to flow. As my cultural background is a mix of three different continents, so is my cinematic vision of the world.

In this world, on this Earth, magic is prevalent. The people that live in it believe Earth to be the true source of life and thus put their lives in its hands - the earth takes care of the rest. They are synchronized with it and their stories are told through it.

I use magical elements in order to freely express the beauty that we see around us, to push our own fantasy even further. What if we are all made out of Earth? (and aren't we in some way...) Fantasy was a choice to create more connection between the viewer and the film. Cinema is the perfect tool to amplify the magic of everyday life; Cinema is a blank moving canvas onto which you project your own imagined world. Plants that grow from the roots of our heads, children that need nothing except the minerals of the Earth to survive, a world in which vision is secondary and all other senses prevail. Where we are all creators. What happens is magic, but magic can help us see the things that are real in a clear way.

There is also the strong element of dance, a contemporary modern dance through which the humans in this story express themselves; dance in itself is a very cinematic element. It's a relationship that began in the 19th century with cultural pioneers such as the Lumiere Brothers and George Méliès. Their early exploration of movement and cinema set the tone for years of experimentation; the unchanging heart of the matter is still choreography, the moving body an ever universally relatable concept. Dance too will give me the possibility of rethinking the narrative. Approaching film from a choreographic perspective will help change my focus - it changes what I'm looking at and how I'm looking at it. There are so many political but also poetic things that we can transmit through film, if we're able to shift our perspective from narrative to rhythmic; choreography helps us with this. I plan on working closely with a choreographer who has experience working with non-dancers as well, to create a piece that is subtle in its movements but clear. I have been taking contemporary dance lessons to familiarize myself with the language of dance, making sure I can express my vision both to the choreographer and actors. We are not making a musical as there is no singing to accompany the dance; dance as a collective will allow us to tell a story of differing and shifting viewpoints; we use the body as a mode of communication, a way to transfer the emotions to the viewer; no words, just movement. Almost two centuries on, the relationship between the moving body and the camera remains as vital as ever. It has spiraled in complexity, allowing filmmakers like myself to explore what it means to move and have a body.

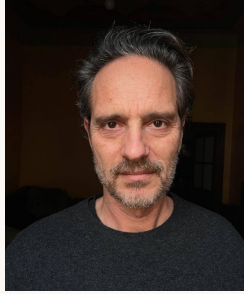
When filming, I plan to use long and still frames; when there is camera movement, it is always with a dolly on tracks or Steadicam. There is no use of handheld camera foreseen in this film. The camera moves to the rhythm of the scenes, steady and controlled. In still frames, the subjects move further and closer, in and out of the frame to create movement within an otherwise still frame. For the dance sections, we envision that sound will play an integral part and be a sort of music created from the natural sounds in various locations. We plan on using the sounds of insects, wind, birds, the sound of mud, dirt, water as they walk, run or pass through them. Biomusic will be a great example of what we are looking into, as it is our reference for these "musical" pieces. There will be very precise work done with the sound designer. We will use these "musical" tracks in rehearsal to make sure that the movements are in sync with the created sound; this work will be done before the start of filming to make sure that choreographed pieces have been created based on the soundtrack/"music" of the film.

The elements and style of this film are truly unique. We are trying to make a kind of cinema that pushes the barriers and language of film further into its own, and perhaps a new direction. Considering the fact that cinema is a young form, there is vast potential in exploring its visual possibility and in this film, we have the right elements for this exploration. Combining experimentation with the narrative form through magic, dance, sound and the style of filming, I strive to create a sensory experience for the audience, one that is akin to what the humans in the film experience; a film meant to be viewed in cinema. When the children leave the underground world, we leave with them, and when they see the light for the first time, we do too. The first twenty minutes of the film take place in the dark Underground of Earth. Twenty minutes in the darkness...imagine what you will feel when you see the light for the first time in a dark space together collectively.

-Raha Shirazi



PRODUCER



Marco Serrecchia, Doppio Nodo Double Bind ITALY

Doppio Nodo Double Bind is a bespoke production company making feature films and documentaries. Although young, the company's members have over twenty years of experience working in the field of cinema internationally. The company's mission is to produce author-driven European films and cross-media projects. Marco Serrecchia is the leading producer of the company. He has vast international experience in this field and has worked with award-winning directors such as Martin Scorsese, Luca Guadagnino, Jonathan Nossiter and Michelangelo Frammartino.

Doppio Nodo first feature production, *Il Buco* (2021), directed by Michelangelo Frammartino, premiered in competition at the 78th Venice International Film Festival, where it received the Special Jury Prize. The film subsequently received international recognition, including the European Film Award for Excellence in Sound, and was distributed in more than thirty countries.

The company's productions include *Sacred Creatures* (2024), an Italian Canadian coproduction, and *A War on Women* (2026), a feature documentary directed by Raha Shirazi. Developed and produced over three years, the documentary traces the history of Iranian women's resistance from the 1979 Revolution to the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, drawing on extensive archival research and testimonies from women across generations. *A War on Women* has been selected for more than nineteen international film festivals and received four distinctions, including the Fearless Wahine Award at New Zealand's Doc Edge International Documentary Film Festival, Best Feature Documentary and the overall Nebrodi Cinema Doc Award 2026.

Its North American distribution is handled by Women Make Movies.

PRODUCER



Agata Smoluch Del Sorbo, Borrowed Light Films CANADA

Borrowed Light Films was founded by former Toronto International Film Festival programmer Agata Smoluch Del Sorbo in 2017, and is a Canadian production company committed to making bold, story-driven films by marginalized filmmakers. The company's most recent production, *The Young Arsonists*, was written and directed by internationally acclaimed visual artist Sheila Pye. It premiered at TIFF in 2022 and screened at prestigious festivals around the world including the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, International Film Festival of India, Cairo International Film Festival and Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

Agata is the Executive Producer of the award-winning Afghan-Canadian feature film *Black Kite* by refugee-turned-filmmaker Tarique Qayumi, which premiered at the TIFF in 2017 and screened at many notable festivals including the Munich International Film Festival, Göteborg Film Festival and Hong Kong International Film Festival. *Black Kite* won three Leo Awards, for Best Film, Director and Screenplay and was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for Best Score.

Agata has over 20 years experience in the film industry. Prior to producing, she was a Programmer at TIFF for nine years and was responsible for selecting Canadian feature and short films. In this role, she introduced audiences to many notable Canadian films, including Sarah Polley's *Stories We Tell* and Denis Villeneuve's *Incendies*, and discovered some of the country's key emerging filmmakers, such as Kazik Radwanski, Lindsay MacKay and Albert Shin. She has sat on juries for the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival, the National Screen Institute, Women in Film and Television, and Canada's Top Ten Film Festival. Her writing on filmmaker Patricia Rozema has appeared in several publications, including the anthology *The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers* (2010). Prior to TIFF, she served as a lecturer in American cinema at the University of Genova in Italy. She holds a Master of Arts in Film Studies from York University and is an alumna of Trans Atlantic Partners (TAP).





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