



PASSION

DESPAIR

a film by Steff Gruber



KINO.NET presents **DANIEL LEUENBERGER, ROMINA JURAVSKAIA, LARISA SIRBU, KATIA NEUGODNIKOVA, OLGA STEPANOVA, ANA NASUSHNAIA, TAMARA ZAITEVA, VALENTINA GLATKOVA** a.o. Directed and Produced by **STEFF GRUBER** Photography: **JÜRIG HASSLER**

Original Score by **JIMMY GELHAAR** "Temptation" performed by **ARASH** and **BLESTJASHIE** Associate Producer: **CYRILLE KAZIS**
Casting Transnistria / Pridnestrovia: **LUBA VOITETCAIA** Film and Content Research: **DIANA BÄRMANN** German Narrator: **PETER RICHNER**

Produced by **KINO.NET AG** Zurich Switzerland in association with **INOWORKS SRL** Moldova and **KAZIS & CO.** Bale Switzerland

PASSION-DESPAIR.COM

© 2011 by KINO.NET AG | ISAN 0000-0002-035C-0000-G-0000-0000-0



film.ch



Kazis & Co.



PASSION DESPAIR

A film by Steff Gruber

Documentary film
Switzerland 2011

Running time 93 minutes

Shooting locations Moldova, Transnistria

Languages German, English, Russian, Moldovan, French

Subtitles German, English

Colour Colour/black&white

Producer Steff Gruber

Associate Producer Cyrille Kazis

Production Company KINO.NET AG, Zurich Switzerland

KINO.NET AG

Hafnerstrasse 60 | CH-8005 Zurich

phone ++41 44 270 80 90

email kino@kino.net | www.kino.net

PRESS SERVICE

email diana.baermann@kino.net

www.passion-despair.com

CREDITS

Director | Producer STEFF GRUBER
Photography JÜRIG HASSLER
STEFF GRUBER
Narrator PETER RICHNER
Original Score JIMMY GELHAAR
Additional Music „Temptation“ by ARASH
Associate Producer CYRILLE KAZIS
Production KINO.NET AG

With DANIEL LEUENBERGER
ROMINA JURAVSKAIA
OLGA STEPNOVA
KATJA NEUGODNIKOVA
ANA NEUGODNIKOVA
ANA NASUSHNAIA
LARISA SIRBU
LUBA VOITETCAIA
TAMARA ZAITSEVA
TATIANA GLATKOVA
VALENTINA GLATKOVA
SVETLANA REICH
a.o.



SHORT SYNOPSIS

The documentary film portrays the Swiss Daniel, who lives in Moldova and specialises in photographing girls aged between 9 and 14. He has caused much controversy with the photos of his models which he sells via the internet.

The film raises questions of how images are used and their effects in a world increasingly dominated by the media. However, it also shows girls' lives in Moldova's neighbour Transnistria, which does not officially exist. Modelling is not just an important additional source of income for the girls, but more importantly provides a change from the dullness of everyday life.



SYNOPSIS | Passion Despair

The film is a portrait of the Swiss photographer Daniel, who lives in Moldova and specialises in photographing girls. Aged between 9 and 14, most of his models come from the neighbouring splinter state of Transnistria. For many of these girls, living in one of the poorest countries of Europe, their work as a model is not only one of the few ways of escaping from the dreariness of daily life – it is also the only way of keeping their frequently fatherless families afloat.

But the portraits of the girls which Daniel makes and publishes for sale on the internet have drawn criticism. People accuse the photographer of immorality. These guardians of morals base their argument above all on the fact that the majority of his customers are interested in young girls.

Daniel finds himself marginalised and pushed to the edge. In the film he talks about how he deals with his feelings, about prejudice and about his work as a photographer of girls.

The film accompanies Daniel in his daily life and work, and shows his pictures, which make a rather harmless impression on the viewer. But why then do the guardians of morality think these pictures are dangerous?

The film casts a critical light on issues connected with the effects and instrumentalisation of pictures on the internet, and reflects on the transformation of social standards and values which has led to the result that the sensuous beauty of young girls can no longer be shown or viewed in public.

As well as dealing with these aspects, the film highlights the life situation of the girl models and their families. This extended perspective puts the issues in a larger frame.



FILM LOCATIONS

Moldova



The little Republic of Moldova is situated in the southeast of Europe, in the historic region of Bessarabia. The country became a part of the Soviet Union in 1947. Until the early 1990s it was one of the richest of the Soviet republics. With the collapse of Communism, Moldova – which had suffered from a past history of permanent oppression – acquired its long-wished-for independence. At the same time, however, this fertile country lost the major purchaser of the products of its plentiful vineyards and orchards. Since then its economic situation has deteriorated progressively. Today Moldova is one of the poorest European countries. A third of the population has to manage on one dollar a day. People have hardly any future prospects in a country where social structures, civil society, opportunities of education and jobs are completely lacking. Instead, there is a flourishing trade in arms, human beings and organs. Of the official 4.5 million inhabitants, today only 3 million still live in the country. The others have emigrated abroad, and support their family members at home with their earnings.

Transnistria

In the course of Moldova's becoming independent, the region of Transnistria, in the north of the country, revolted against the Moldovan government. Ever since, the predominantly Russian and Ukrainian population have been fighting for separation from Moldova. The self-proclaimed Transnistrian Republic, under the government of Igor Smirnov, is supported by Russia – which is trying in this way to hold onto its loyal satellite state of the past. The splinter state comprises around 550,000 inhabitants. It has its own capital, Tiraspol, as well as an army, a parliament, a currency and passports which no one recognises. Up to the present day the Republic of Transnistria is not acknowledged as a state internationally, but still officially belongs to the former Soviet republic of Moldova.



QUOTES

I never thought I'd become a photographer and make a living from it. Also, I never thought that I would be surrounded by dozens or even hundreds of young girls. That was never my ambition!

Daniel Leuenberger

There's a big problem. The girls are not from Moldova. They are from Transnistria. They have nothing. These are girls from a country that does not exist!

Daniel Leuenberger

When I was young, I wanted to be a model. Now I'm proud, that my daughters are fulfilling my dream. What's most important is that the girls enjoy what they're doing.

Natasha Neugodnikov (mother), Bender, Transnistria

In the internet you can't exclude anyone or lay down the law. The images aren't vulgar, but one can look at them also differently.

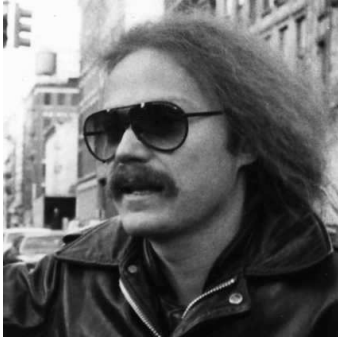
Aurelia Simonova (mother), Bender, Transnistria

The possibility of abusing the images exists of course, like for example for collages or the like. I'm also concerned that friends could see such manipulated images.

Olga (13)

You don't have another choice as to act your sexuality out in fantasy, because there are no alternatives.

Daniel Leuenberger



FILM MAKER | Steff Gruber

Steff Gruber was born in 1953 in Zurich, Switzerland. From 1972 till 1979 he attended film lectures and courses at the University of Zurich, ETH Zurich and F+F Zurich College of Design. In 1976 he studied mass media philosophy at the University of Georgia (USA) where he became the assistant of the Professor and film maker James Herbert. Since 1978 Gruber works as an independent film maker.

He has taught at various schools and colleges, including a post as lecturer in film and electronic media at the Konstanz University of Applied Sciences (1994-1997). Among his activities today, he is director of the production company KINO.NET AG.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

PASSION DESPAIR

CH 2011, 93 min., Documentary film, DigiBeta, colour/black&white

SECRET MOMENTS

CH 1991-2006, 82 min, Docudrama, DigiBeta, colour/black&white
SF / KINO.NET AG

LOCATION AFRICA

CH 1987, 65 min., Documentary film, 16mm, colour
Mit Klaus Kinski und Werner Herzog
Cine International, München / ARD / SF

FETISH & DREAMS

CH 1985, 82 min., Docudrama, 35mm, colour
Filmcoopi AG / SF

MOON IN TAURUS

CH 1980, 97 min., Docudrama, 35mm, colour
Starfilm / Paramount / ZDF „Der besondere Film“ / SF



PHOTOGRAPHY | Jürg Hassler

Jürg Hassler was born in Zurich in 1938. While still at school, he worked as an assistant to the sculptor Hans Josephsohn. From 1959 to 1960 he attended a photographic college in Vevey, working subsequently for two years as a photographer and sculptor in Naples. On returning to Switzerland he worked as an independent photographic journalist, taking pictures for the *Tages-Anzeiger*, the *Berliner Illustrierte* and other periodicals. In 1968 he attended a film course at the Zurich University of Art and Design. Since then Hassler has been working as an independent film maker, camera man, cutter and sculptor.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY as cinematographer

PASSION DESPAIR

CH 2011, Documentary film, Director: Steff Gruber

BAYIRI

Burkina Faso/CH 2011, Feature film, Director: S. Pierre Yaméogo

I WAS A SWISS BANKER

CH 2007, Feature film, Director: Thomas Imbach

LENZ

CH 2006, Feature film, Director: Thomas Imbach

DELWENDE

Burkina Faso/CH 2005, Feature film, Director: S. Pierre Yaméogo

HAPPINESS IS A WARM GUN

CH 1997, Feature film, Director: Thomas Imbach

GHETTO

CH 1994, Documentary film, Director: Thomas Imbach

WELL DONE

CH 1993, Documentary film, Director: Thomas Imbach

HINTERLAND. EINE VATER-SOHN-GESCHICHTE

CH 1990, Documentary film, Director: Dieter Gränicher

DANI, MICHİ, RENATO & MAX

CH 1987, Documentary film, Director: Richard Dindo

ZÜRI BRÄNNT

CH 1980, Documentary film, Director: Patrizia Loggia, Werner Schweizer u.a.

KRAWALL

CH 1970, Documentary film, Director: Jürg Hassler



STEFF GRUBER ABOUT *PASSION DESPAIR*

I met Swiss photographer Daniel Leuenberger in Moldova some years ago, while doing research for another film project. He wrote me that he runs a photo studio, specialising for young girls ages 9 to 14.

I remember that as a teenager I once had a poster of David Hamilton on my wall showing a young, naked nymph. This kind of art photography was never connected with paedophilia. All the more I was irritated when I had to follow the development of the last couple of years. Exhibitions of internationally accepted photographers of young girls are increasingly seen as a threat and the photo books were even prohibited in some countries already.

Although the photographs of Daniel have little relation to art photography I started to get interested in his extraordinary life. After telling Swiss friends of Daniel I noticed, that his business met with complete rejection. Especially because of the connection with the topic paedophilia I was warned about the social and professional consequences were I to deal with this subject. The way the mass media deal with the subject paedophilia in connection with acts of violence has made its impact: I noticed that on this subject everybody is in complete agreement.

In the summer of 2005 I travelled for the first time to Moldova to research about Daniel and his business. One year later I started shooting.

Since I made this film, a lot of things have happened.

As a result of political pressures, access to Daniel's photographic pages was forbidden in many countries. In the USA his pages are already regarded as pornography. People who download or possess such pictures have to reckon with drastic fines or imprisonment. The new sexual offences legislation in Germany prescribes similar penalties.

With Daniel's business coming to an end, the models are no longer able to work and lose an important source of income.

Our increasing sensitivity on the subject of paedophilia is in large part due to the mass media. But it is the mass media themselves which use paedophilia as a source of profit, and encourage these dangerous developments for lack of discrimination in the way they are presented. This lends support to conservative groups, who use the hysteria about paedophilia in order to enforce a repressive sexual morality.

Not only has this triggered a worldwide witchhunt against anyone suspected of paedophilia – it has also led to a new idea of morality coming to be accepted, with implications for many areas of life.

In my opinion Daniel's photos are harmless. They do not represent any kind of danger or show girls being abused.

I wouldn't dispute the fact that there are people whose fantasies are stimulated by these pictures. Which is more dangerous – private fantasies, or a society that tries to forbid them?

Out of a vague concern about encouraging criminality, girls' bodies may no longer be shown today. And what is more, the beauty and sensuous radiance of young girls is no longer a legitimate object of perception.

A critical examination of these issues is not only regarded as undesirable – it is one of the most powerful social taboos today.



ABOUT THE FILM TOPIC

- Vladimir Nabokov** Nabokov describes the particular attraction of girls between the age of nine and fourteen in his world-famous novel *Lolita*. The nymphs, as he calls them, have appeared in tales from throughout the world since time immemorial. The roots of this concept go back to the ancient world. These natural spirits or tiny goddesses were symbols and guardians of nature, who were said to have not immortality, but eternal youth. The nymphs also had an angelic appearance and alluring powers of attraction, but never actually satisfied the interest they awakened.
- Cultural history** The subject of fascination for young girls can be traced right back in cultural history. It was not only in the Middle Ages that they believed that adolescent girls represented a kind of fountain of youth for the ageing man. You will also find this image in the works of Goethe, for example.
- Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe** The centuries-old myth of nymphs, fairies and elves, who spring from the woods and waters in the shape of young girls to entrance humans, was most recently brought back to life in Nabokov's novel *Lolita*. It is about the love of Humbert, a 37-year-old professor of literature, for a 12-year-old school girl. Apart from this story, there are many stories in early literature which tell of love between grown men and young girls. Many years before Nabokov, Curd Goetz wrote the novella *Tatjana*, telling a very similar story. And grown men become enchanted by girls between childhood and womanhood in many of the novels by Nobel Prize-winning Gabriel Garcia Marquez.
- Gabriel Garcia Marquez**
- Photography** In photography, the American Jock Sturges succeeds in expressing the projection of dreams and fantasy in an artistic way. He uses his elves to create a connection between myth, fiction and reality, building a bridge for the observer back into to the past, when the sensual beauty of young girls was not yet associated with the concepts of violence and

	<p>criminality.</p> <p>These are examples of art forms in literature, film and photography. Fiction - which has nothing whatsoever to do with monstrous perversion, such as the acts committed by the Belgian murderer Dutroux or the abduction of Natascha Kampusch.</p> <p>And yet these two areas are becoming increasingly confused: this is demonstrated by the development and various applications of the concept of paedophilia.</p>
Terms paedophilic and paedosexual	<p>Although doctors distinguish between the two terms paedophilic and paedosexual, no distinction is made between the two in common parlance. These days, both are understood to be sexual activity between an adult and a child or young person.</p>
Change in attitude	<p>This change in attitude is becoming more and more distinct in the art and literature industry. Photographers who dedicate themselves to the subject of young girls have great difficulty publishing their books or holding exhibitions. In the USA, especially, the pressure on photographers showing nude pictures of children and young people increased rapidly by the end of the 1990s. Well-known artists such as Jock Sturges, Nan Goldin and Sally Mann were being accused of child pornography. But in the background, the message of the work was still there: capturing dreams, naturalness, and innocence.</p>
Art	
Sexualisation of eroticism	<p>The erotic originally denoted the sensual and spiritual attraction to a person, and was defined according to Plato through wish and desire. But since Sigmund Freud, the erotic has been increasingly sexualised.</p>
Alice Schwarzer	<p>In her book <i>Alice im Männerland</i>, Alice Schwarzer states that the erotic has been killed by pornography.</p> <p>Today's all-pervasive pornography has reduced the erotic to the sexual act. This development from passive desire to sexual activity also corresponds to the change in the concept of paedophilia.</p> <p>Not only are young people not allowed to have erotic feelings – adults are seen as suspect if they feel this way about young people. Eroticism has been displaced by sexuality.</p> <p>This trend is clear from the paradoxical demands that have been made in some European countries for the age for the right to vote to be reduced to 16, but for the age of sexual self-determination to be raised to 18.</p>
Jean-Christoph Ammann	
Instrumentalisation of images	<p>As Jean-Christoph Ammann finds, "the boundary between personal and instrumentalised pictures is frequently blurred" today. As a result, pictures are increasingly attracting criticism which would hardly have upset anybody a few years ago. FKK [Free Body Culture] magazines used to be on sale at kiosks everywhere, for example, but they are no longer seen today.</p>

Iconoclasm	<p>But history shows that the harmless and dangerous qualities of the various media are not the only things under interpretation. Burning books was not the only way of suppressing ideas - the rejection of iconic imagery of the Old Testament, referred to by iconoclasts during the 16th Reformation is an example of this.</p>
Impact of images	<p>Experts disagree as to whether pictures of young girls lead to sexual assault or whether they may have a preventive effect instead, because they satisfy fantasies.</p> <p>In our society, where the glorification of violence in films and video games is a business worth millions, we must ask ourselves the question about the effect images have sooner or later.</p>
Dieter E. Zimmer	<p>In his book <i>Wirbelsturm Lolita [Hurricane Lolita]</i>, Dieter E. Zimmer points to three empirical studies which have demonstrated experimentally that many men who are not paedophiles also respond to the charms of young girls. So if these charms are not just a recurrent theme in art, but are also systematically used for advertising purposes, there is no reason why we should be surprised.</p>
Experts	<p>It is estimated, however, that only a very small percentage of all men are paedophiles. But, as with other sexual preferences, experts can only speculate on the causes of paedophilia. On the other hand, specialists agree in one respect: there is no cure for paedophilia.</p>
Klaus M. Beier	<p>The only way of dealing with such a sexual orientation is the "total life-long control of behaviour", says Prof. Dr. Klaus M. Beier, head of the Institute of Sexology and Sexual Medicine at Berlin's Charité hospital.</p> <p>Unlike other people, where we naturally accept that they know how to manage their fantasies, paedophiles are not trusted to do so.</p>
Perception of images	<p>The perception and handling of images have long since been undergoing change. Digitalisation and the Internet have fundamentally changed the way images are received. Individual morality also plays a strong role.</p> <p>The same image can elicit different responses, ranging from a metaphysical experience, to complete disinterest, to sexual desire. In general, a metaphysical experience is ascribed to art while sexual desire is assigned to pornography.</p> <p>The judgment as to what constitutes pornography or obscenity is dependent on the culture, the period and the individual. The perception of the object is always influenced by context. Digitalisation and the internet have caused fundamental changes in the reception of pictures. A picture of a girl seen anonymous on the internet may have quite a different effect from the same image viewed in a photo album.</p> <p>But true pornography is not within the picture itself, but in the eye of the beholder.</p>



CONTACTS

Production | Distribution | World Sales



KINO.NET AG

Hafnerstr. 60 | CH 8005 Zurich
phone ++41 44 270 80 90
email kino@kino.net | www.kino.net

PRESS SERVICE

KINO.NET AG

Hafnerstr. 60 | CH 8005 Zurich
phone ++41 44 270 80 90
email diana.baermann@kino.net
www.passion-despair.com