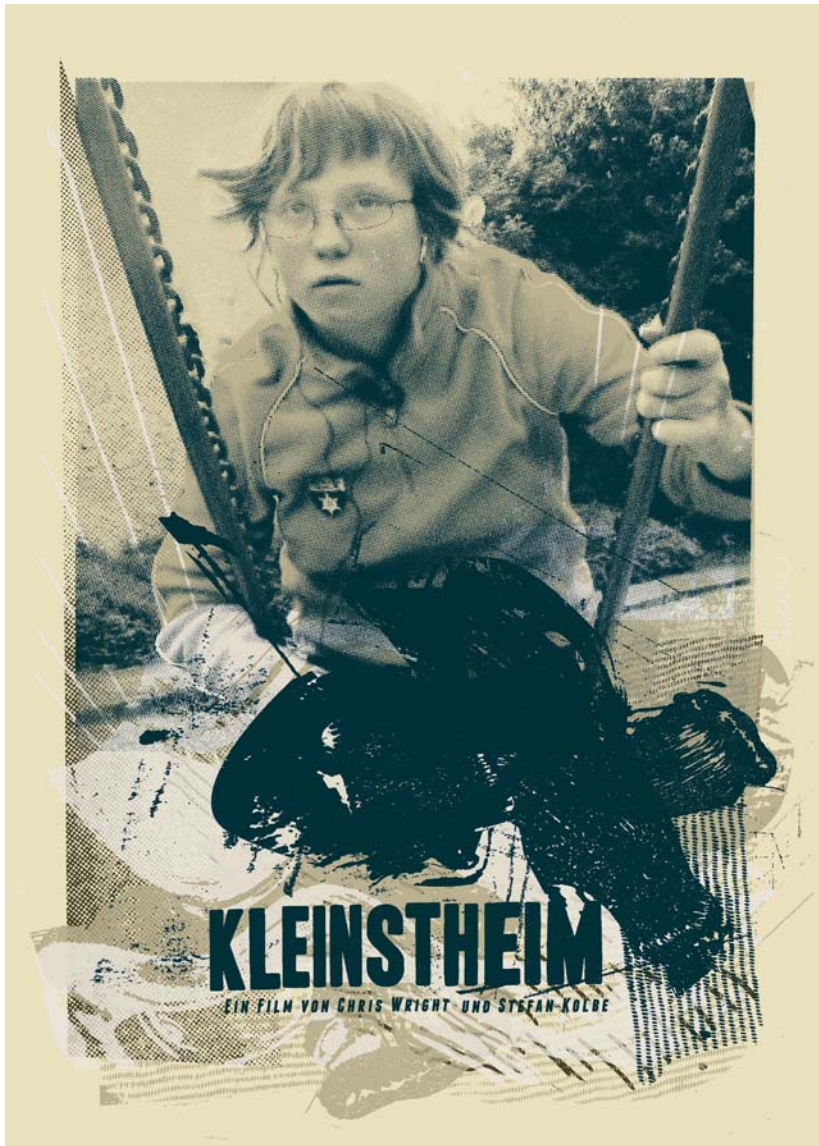


KLEINSTHEIM | THE HOME



Synopsis (short)

On the black earth of Germany's agricultural heartland stands a medieval castle. Upstairs, seven teenagers and their carers. The boundaries of life are school and chatroom, clandestine date and job interview. Gradually, a year passes and the world grows with us. This is a film about finding your place in this world, in this time. And, inevitably, about carrying the burdens parents can lay on us.

Synopsis (long)

First we see a girl. It's dark outside, the location unknown. The girl wears pink striped pyjamas, her tousled hair in a clip. She is playing with a telephone and crying. When we join her, the action has already passed. But a new scene follows – the girl's hair covers her face, billowing in the blow of a drier. She smiles, forgotten the tear that still clings beneath her eye.

Sarah lives in a castle, in the backwoods of Eastern Germany. The soil here is black and rich, for centuries a source of wealth for landowners, knights and the bishops of Magdeburg. The ancient castle walls are now home to seven teenagers and a small team of carers. Sarah is the youngest here, at 12; her sister Nancy also lives in the home.

The tousled mane again half-covers the face peering at the computer in the hallway. Sarah is battling her way through a letter to the head carer (her typical way of communicating when a less-favoured staff-member is on duty). She writes, "Dad," later, "Mum." Nancy reaches over her shoulder, chuckling as she finishes her sisters clumsy sentences.

KLEINSTHEIM | THE HOME tries to capture life in this place. In a quiet, observational style, without a commentary, the film gradually builds a picture of the protagonists and their world. Between school and work, job centre and the home, we meet children and young adults: Peggy, vacillating between love-affairs with the village males; Adriano, fresh out of rehab and intending to stay clean; Moni, who left the home a year ago and is trying life on her own two feet. At 20, Moni is at the opposite end of puberty to Sarah. And, with her self-reflection, she's reaching the calm after the storm. "People make mistakes. I don't want to turn back time. Without my past, I wouldn't be me."

This film does not choose a conventional form. Scenes often remain fragments, reduced to gestures or exemplary phrases. Sound and picture take independent routes – we hear two lovers argue, but see a slow pan across the village. Some characters remain nebulous. Instead, the parts come together to form a picture of youth, in this place, in this time. They echo the experiences and revelations, pains and release we all go through in our formative years.

Sarah gradually becomes the centre of the film. She speaks what cannot be spoken about. From the hardened winter landscape, the seeds and blossoms emerge. Life has its beauty, whether we like it or not. The stalks buckle under the weight of what they've grown. And in the end, what's sown, is reaped.

At the end, the girl again. She runs from us, but we hear her breath close. She can't sleep alone. But tonight, someone's there with her.

Press Notes

Where does the inspiration for a documentary project come from? In our case, we have found it is usually born from a previous work. A germ of an idea, or question, continues to hang in the mind. After our last film, DAS BLOCK, that question concerned one of our protagonists. Silvio grew up in a children's home, after a murder in the family. What pre-occupied us was his emotional intelligence, far beyond his 20 years. We wondered if that was in some way a result of the surroundings he grew up in.

It took many attempts to find an institution that would accept the presence of a camera, and where the chemistry seemed right. We finally happened across the village of Krottorf, in rural East Germany. There stands a castle, once a residence of court officials to the bishop of Brandenburg, now home to a handful of teenagers. The structure of this home was ideally suited to our interest and method. It is unusually small (7 children, 4 carers), and this intimacy creates an openness that is not far removed from a family. At the same time, much of life unfolds in the "public" sphere of the office, kitchen and hallway, without the closed doors of a typical family environment.

We filmed from winter through till summer. Mostly, that meant waiting. We wanted to be ready for the children who approached us. We were open to surprise. There were just the two of us, with a small consumer camera. We tried to react, develop situations with the children. There are no staged interviews in this film – questions were always put spontaneously, on the back of situation. We wanted to document the developing relations with those we filmed.

This was not intended to be a "problem" film. At the outset, we consciously decided NOT to ask anything about family backgrounds. (Of course, Sarah soon forced us to reconsider that.) We also weren't interested in making a social-issues film. We may well be looking at the fringes of society, but our concentration is elsewhere. We are interested in emotional resonance – how does it to feel to go through certain things? And in moral implications – questions of care and responsibility; which decisions shape a life; and whether a child has the strength for those decisions when it first has to struggle with the burdens placed on it by parents.

The film's fragmentary form was, in part, born of our interaction with the children. With some, we had only fleeting, fractured relations. But this fragmentation also seems to correspond to the experience of life at this age. Young people are pupils, potential employees, form-fillers and writers of love letters, inconsolable and incomprehensible, adults and children – all in one day. At the end of the film, the hope is that the parts will form a whole, beyond these individuals, a portrait of a period we all go through. No broadcasters wanted to make our film. So we did it ourselves. It cost us 3 thousand euros and over a year's work, for nothing. A regional grant, after completion, allowed us to cover post-production costs. This is not a model we recommend.

Still



Sarah © kolbewright

Biographies

Chris Wright, born 1972 in Radcliffe, England. Studied German and French in Cambridge and Leipzig, before training as a film editor at Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen Konrad Wolf in Potsdam-Babelsberg. Works as a freelance documentary-maker, film editor and journalist. Lives in Berlin with two sons, Leo und Sascha.

Stefan Kolbe, born 1972 in Halle, East Germany. He worked as a newspaper photographer and journalist before training as a film cameraman at Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen Konrad Wolf in Potsdam-Babelsberg. Works as a freelance documentary-maker and cameraman. Lives in Berlin with one son, Oskar.

Filmography

AUF DEM WACHSTUMSPFAD | THE DISCIPLE

documentary, 29min, ma.ja.de | Kolbe | 3sat 2010
funded by German Culture Ministry, MDM and MEDIA

DAS BLOCK | THE BLOCK

documentary, 75min, ma.ja.de | Kolbe | 3sat | arte france 2006
Visions du Réel 2007, Crossing Europe Linz 2007, Duisburger Filmwoche 2007

TECHNIK DES GLÜCKS | THE PROGRESS OF HAPPINESS

documentary, 68min, Kolbe | HFF 2003
Broadcast by 3Sat, MDR, Vpro Holland and TSRI Switzerland
Leipzig International Festival for Documentary and Animation 2003:
Intl. Competition, special mention of the Fipresci jury
Visions du Réel, Nyon 2004: Prix Kodak Suisse
Shadow Festival, Amsterdam 2004: Kodak Shadow Award
Duisburger Filmwoche 2003, Göteborg 2004

NERNICH - NIRGENDS NICHTS | NOWHERE NOTHING

documentary, 76min, Kolbe | HFF 1999
Visions du Réel 2000, Ethnofilmfest Berlin 2001

GURKE & BROT | BREAD & PICKLE

documentary, 42min, HFF 1997
Duisburger Filmwoche 1997, Visions du Réel 1998
Young Artists' Award of Hessen State Minister of Culture 1998

Team

Directors: Chris Wright & Stefan Kolbe

Camera & Production: Stefan Kolbe

Sound & Editing: Chris Wright

Sound Design: Rainer Schwarte

Sound Mix: Holger Lehmann

Colour Grading: Tobias Schaarschmidt

Postproduction Supervisor: Niklas Bäumer

Co-Producer: Meike Martens

Music: THIS WILL DESTROY YOU "The Mighty Rio Grande", "Freedom Blade", "Brutalism & the Worship of the Machine", "Leather Wings", "They Move an Tracks of Never-Ending Light" © Magic Bullet Records 2008/2009

A Stefan Kolbe production in co-production with Blinker-Film

Postproduction supported by the Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung

Technical Details

Running time: 87 Min.

Picutre format: 16:9, colour

Sound format: stereo, German dialogue with English subtitles

Screening formats: HDCAM, DigiBeta, DVD, Blu-ray

Festivals

DOK Leipzig 2010, Germany, German competition (special mention)

Duisburger Filmwoche 2010, Germany

Achtung Berlin 2011, Germany, Competition

Dokumentarfilmwoche Hamburg 2011, Germany