

# grace

directed by Ilya Povolotsky

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grace/blazh

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**QUINZAINE**  
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT  
CANNES 2023

 **SSIFF** Donostia Zinemaldia  
Festival de San Sebastián  
International Film Festival

  
THESSALONIKI  
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL  
INTERNATIONAL  
COMPETITION 2023  
TIFF64

  
WINNER  
INLAGUNA  
FILM FESTIVAL  
2023

**41TFF**  
TORINO FILM FESTIVAL  
OFFICIAL  
SELECTION

  
STOCKHOLM  
INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY  
2023

**47MOSTRA**  
INTERNACIONAL DE CINEMA  
SÃO PAULO INT'L FILM FESTIVAL

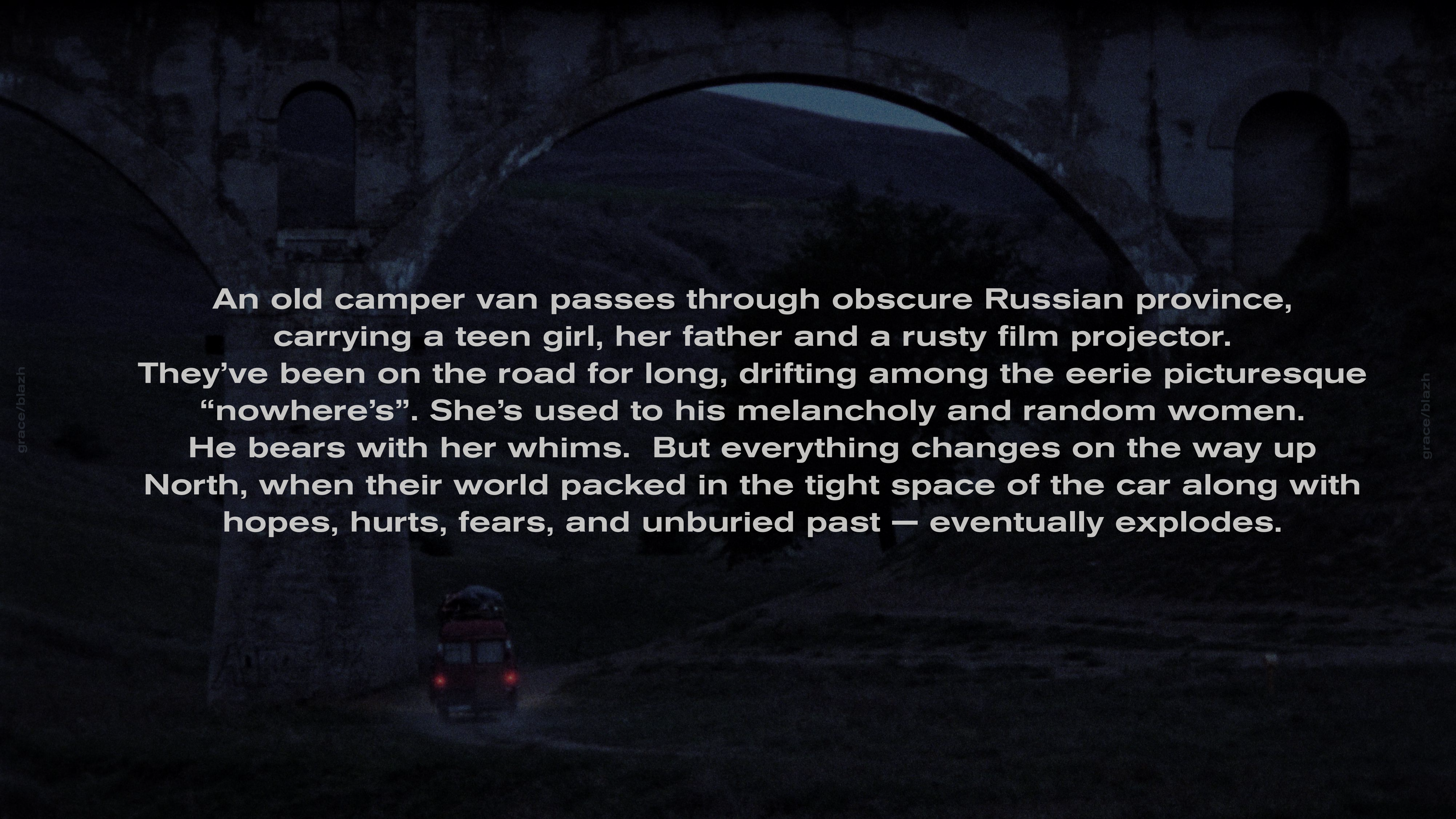
**F4** FESTIVAL  
AUTORSKOG  
FILMA

  
IFFI  
International Film Festival  
of Kerala 2023  
WORLD CINEMA

  
OFFICIAL SELECTION  
Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival  
2023

  
**LEFFEST**  
Lisboa Film Festival  
Official Selection

  
NEW DIRECTORS  
NEW FILMS 2024  
OFFICIAL SELECTION



**An old camper van passes through obscure Russian province, carrying a teen girl, her father and a rusty film projector. They've been on the road for long, drifting among the eerie picturesque "nowhere's". She's used to his melancholy and random women. He bears with her whims. But everything changes on the way up North, when their world packed in the tight space of the car along with hopes, hurts, fears, and unburied past — eventually explodes.**

# story

A pebble covered dirt track is trembling behind the window glass. It's scratching and chattering over the bottom of the old camper van. There is all sorts of junk on the dashboard: pocketbooks, crumpled map, two toothbrushes in a glass and an instant camera. Grinning peaks of Caucasus are shaking in the back view mirror, and the navigation voice demands to turn left in thousand kilometres.

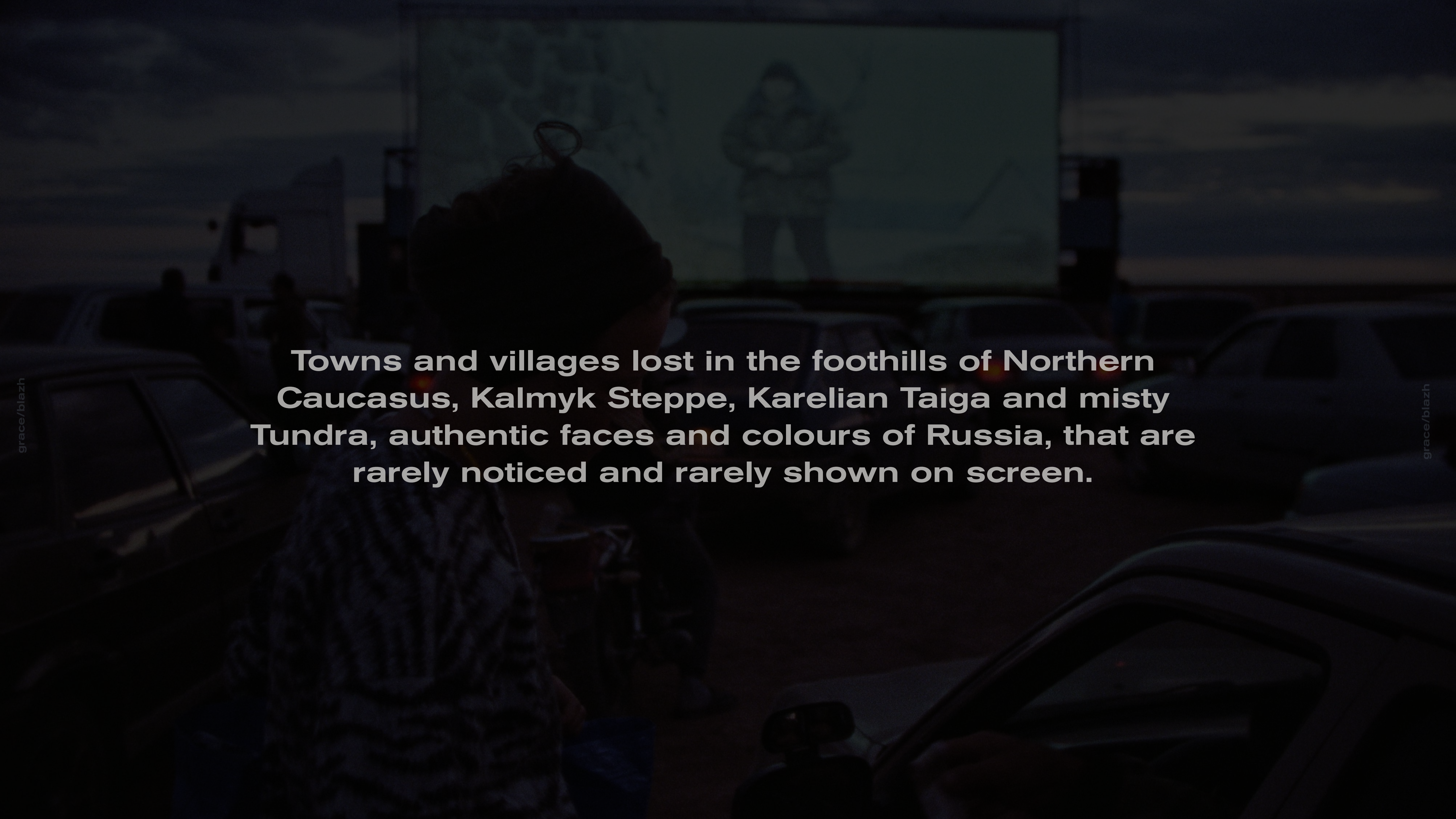
“In summer - the North, in winter - the South” - says dad.

They have been on the road for ten years or more. She doesn't remember if it ever was different. She, her father and an urn with her mother's ashes, which she preserves together with old discoloured photographs. She hides it in her sleeping bag when the father has women over.

They drive around the remote provincial areas and show movies in villages, which are yet not reached by internet. They have open-air screenings, sell DVDs, drinks and chips.

They trade while on the road too, providing long-haul truckers with pirated films, series and porn. Keeping low, not staying anywhere long, avoiding the cities and getting all that they need in large shopping malls on the highways. They drift on, lost among the breathtaking picturesque “nowheres”. It becomes apparent that things have to change when on the way to the North, a guy on a motorcycle starts following them...





**Towns and villages lost in the foothills of Northern  
Caucasus, Kalmyk Steppe, Karelian Taiga and misty  
Tundra, authentic faces and colours of Russia, that are  
rarely noticed and rarely shown on screen.**

# director's statement

This film came about as a coming-of-age fable, formally inspired by the Eastern European folklore. I was interested to examine the deep generational conflict in my society, conflict between free children, open to the world and unaccepting of violence, and their adults numbed and traumatised by the early post-soviet years, “good” people full of bitter disappointment and distrust. The conflict that seemed to equally resist to screaming and to suffocating silence; the conflict that like a wound grows deeper and deeper without articulation, grows throughout thousands of kilometres of confused, discrepant, stripped naked Russian reality.

The film was written and shaped during pandemic, and shot in the fall of 2021, the now ongoing violent war was at that time not its primary focus (or context). It wouldn't be correct to link its story to the events of today, (though I imagine it will be), yet I cannot help it: as if we made an accidental document of something awful cooking, boiling, being ignored; as if my characters on their journey became witnesses to the frightening turn the country was about to take.



# interview with the director

**Could you tell us about your background? You have made several documentaries and Grace is your first fiction film? Why did you switch to fiction?**

I am a self-trained filmmaker, no formal schooling, just an organic growth by trying. I don't see it as "switch"... I never believed in a strict boundary between fiction and non-fiction. Of course, my co-authors and I inevitably intervene into reality while constructing a scene, contrast to just capturing it. And vice versa, although GRACE was scripted on paper, visually a lot of it was woven from authentic documentary material we encountered. I like to collide the acted and the observed reality, experiment inside this in-between zone... The only thing that matters is whether the result breathes truth or not.

**How would you introduce Grace, in a few words ?**

GRACE is a coming-of-age fable. I was interested to examine the deep generational conflict in the society around me.

The conflict which seems to equally resist to screaming and to suffocating silence; the conflict that like a wound grows deeper and deeper without articulation, grows throughout thousands of kilometres of confused, discrepant, stripped naked, Russian reality.

**How did you come up with the idea of this film, of this father and daughter on the road?**

I've had this image in my mind of two people making a long travel, and in every configuration they would appear to be close relatives bonded by an invisible third. And then one day me and Nikolay Zheludovich, my long time friend, DP and roving partner, were standing on the edge of an empty road waiting for light, and saw two strangers arrive at our spot in a camper van. They started setting up topographical surveying tripods, and we watched one another like in a mirror, and at that moment it was obvious that the film should happen. It was the middle of the pandemic lockdown.

**You wrote the script alone, is that right?  
Was it a long process ?**

I wrote the script alone. In seven days— it was a friendly bet with Nikolay. We then adapted some scenes later, after our first scouting trips.

**You produced the film in your own production company Blackchamber. Was the production long? How did you finance the film?**

I had a small studio, a collective of 5 persons making commissioned and commercial work so that every few years we could afford developing and shooting our own cinema projects. GRACE presented new challenges - scripted, shot on film - we looked for external financing, but for different reasons nothing worked out. Then an investment angel and since recently an independent producer Ivan Nechaev supported the project, and we just went for it. On the other hand, we were privileged to have 17 likeminded people (including the two actors) who were ready to undertake this risky expedition with us, and so many others that helped us along the way with various and strangest struggles. We didn't use any fund support for the post-production either, so it took us a while to gradually finish the film with our personal money.

**How did you make particular choices of direction? Did you have a working method?**

Meticulous location scouting, inhabiting the real life documentary setting, and filming chronologically were the three non-negotiable elements for me in this picture.

**How was the choice of your actors?  
Did you first look for the Farther or the Daughter?**

This is a first big film experience for Maria Lukyanova who played the Daughter, and finding her was the decisive casting moment.

**Where and when did you shoot? Were you looking for a specific setting, a specific atmosphere? Special difficulties during the shooting?**

The film crew made the same trip as the characters, from the southern Kabardino-Balkaria all the way up to the shores of White Sea. Every imaginable disruption happened from the unprecedented snowstorm in the middle of summer to the picture vehicle (camper van) which kept braking down every so many kilometres. We feel that the fact that this film was made is a small miracle, and a real act of resilience of our incredible crew.



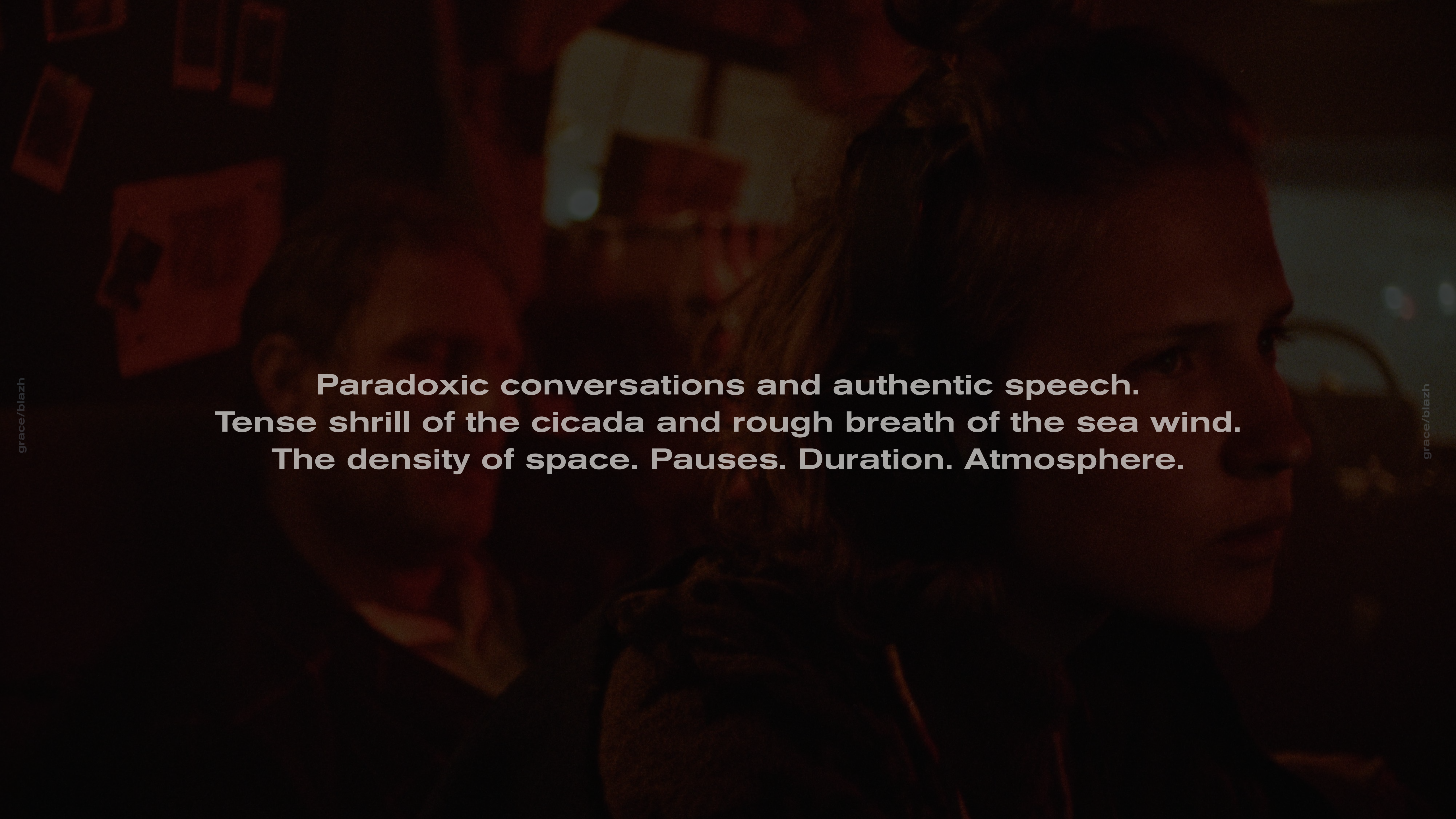
### **When was the film finally finished?**

We finished filming in November 2021, and completed the film by the end of 2022.

### **How do you see the situation of independent cinema in Russia? Is it very difficult? Do you have to produce your films by yourself?**

I wouldn't want to analyse the film industry prospects in current Russia, too many truly tragic things are happening... One thing I know, is if one wants to make honest cinema one tries to find a way.





**Paradoxical conversations and authentic speech.  
Tense shrill of the cicada and rough breath of the sea wind.  
The density of space. Pauses. Duration. Atmosphere.**

## director's bio

Ilya Povolotsky (1987, Izhevsk) studied Law, and soon after graduation started a small production company.

Directing commercial and commissioned work he gradually shifted to developing independent film projects. His first short film *Northerners* was presented in competitions of Krakow Film Festival and Camerimage, and was soon followed by a feature-length *Froth*, which received a Special Mention at IDFA 2019 and numerous distinctions worldwide. *Grace* is the director's first scripted picture.



## selected reviews

“One of the most stunning feature debuts in recent memory” — [International Cinephile Society](#)

“Dazzling work, seizing the entire expanse of the screen, inhabiting it like never before, and completely rejuvenating the viewer's gaze” — [Le Monde](#)

“This impressive debut drifts outside of time, through steppes and deserts, to create a landscape that is more mental than contemporary Russia.” — [Cahiers du Cinéma](#)

“This is atmospheric, if inscrutable, filmmaking from Ilya Povolotsky, a picture that explores generational tensions and a coming-of-age narrative distinctively and originally” — [Screen Daily](#)

“GRACE portrays a process that is both an awakening and a farewell” — [Caimán Cuadernos de Cine](#)

“La Grâce” is actually a journey that loops back, reflecting, constantly resuming, changing course, veering in both directions of time<> Life, for Ilya Povolotsky, the young Russian director of this impressive debut feature , seems to be something that appears to move forward but never stops restarting.” — [Libération](#)

# credits

Блажь | Blazh

Russia | 2023 | 119 min | color | 1.66

Russian, Georgian, Balkar | Drama

screenplay

Ilya Povolotsky

cinematography

Nikolay Zheludovich

music

Zurkas Tepla

cast

Maria Lukyanova, Gela Chitava,  
Eldar Safikanov, Ksenia Kutepova

creative producer

Victoria E. Chernukha

producers

Ivan Nechaev, Ilya Povolotsky

[Grace \(2023\) - IMDb](#)



# contact

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International sales: BLACKCHAMBER Collective

Press requests: Victoria E. Chernukha



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Gela Chitava  
Eldar Safikanov  
Ksenia Kutepova  
Alexander Cherednik  
Semen Shteinberg

director of photography  
Nikolay Zheludovich  
composer  
Zurkas Tepla  
edit  
Alexander Kletsov  
Ilya Povolotsky  
sound  
Alexander Krotov  
Andrey Dergachev

executive producers  
Irakli Beridze  
Yaroslav Kozlov  
producers  
Ivan Nechaev  
Ilya Povolotsky

BLACKCHAMBER

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