



Executive producer **JOAQUIN PHOENIX**
SANT & USANT / LOUVERTURE FILMS present

TRILLION

a film by **VICTOR KOSSAKOVSKY**

Norway, United States - 2025 - B&W - Ratio 2:1 - Sound Atmos, 7.1, 5.1 - 80 min

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

WOLF Consultants

hello@wolf-con.com

+49 171 6466 970

Download press materials from:

<https://www.wolf-con.com/download>

SYNOPSIS

Director Victor Kossakovsky offers a cinematic and wordless interpretation of the Myth of Sisyphus* in TRILLION, the second installment of his “empathy trilogy” that began with GUNDA (2020). Rooted in an unfolding, real-life event in collaboration with the artist known as K49814, the film transcends documentation. Provoking deeply relevant questions about the meaning and purpose of life in a time when all sentient beings face existential threat, Kossakovsky weaves balletic action and a deceptively simple story, gradually situating viewers within a dynamic process of discovery, provoking a sensual contemplation of our interbeing, and deftly revealing the pathos and joy that arises when defiantly putting a shoulder to the wheel of life.

*A king in Greek mythology, Sisyphus tried to rescue the living from Death, and was himself condemned to eternally roll a boulder uphill only to have it roll back down.



JOAQUIN PHOENIX - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

"Victor Kossakovsky's film TRILLION in collaboration with the artist K49814, brings us a much needed and ultimately revealing new perspective on our relationship with the natural world, and how that relationship should and needs to change. Just as with his prior film GUNDA, I immediately felt I had to support such a bold artistic and cinematic vision, as well as support a filmmaker for whom the value of empathy is the driving force and the defining focus."

- Joaquin Phoenix

INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR KOSSAKOVSKY

TRILLION is the second film after Gunda (2020) in your proposed 'Empathy' trilogy - could you tell us about the origins of the project and how TRILLION became the second chapter in the trilogy?

The film Trillion was inspired by the "Fish Scale Garden" project by the German artist K49814. After she saw my film *AQUARELA* in a cinema, she contacted me and asked for help creating a simple video record of her project's conclusion. However, once I understood the full scope of her work, I knew I had to create a proper documentary about her unique act of profound empathy and that it should become the second part of our empathy trilogy.

We found ourselves in a remarkable alignment of worldviews, yet faced a fundamental contradiction regarding the film's purpose: she insisted that the focus should not be on her, nor did she wish to use her real name. In her view, the story belonged entirely to the fish, not to a human.

While I respected her perspective, I also believed her actions were too extraordinary not to share with the world. My challenge was to honor both her selfless wishes and the story's profound significance. This is a reality I normally accept, but in this case, I deeply regret not possessing the filmmaking prowess to create a work that could resonate with the entire planet. This incredible act of empathy deserves to be seen by everyone.

What is it about fish scales that makes them such a powerful symbol? More broadly, can you talk about how fish, and their relationship with humans, seem to have an important and symbolic role in literature and cinema - in the stories we tell ourselves - throughout history?

Consider the beauty of a single fish scale. What purpose does such intricate beauty serve? Each fish carries thousands of these miniature masterpieces, and our oceans teem with trillions of fish. Nature, it seems, is a boundless artist, crafting quintillions of unique scales—a universe of beauty hidden beneath the waves. If a scale is like a fingerprint, does it follow that each fish possesses a unique personality? Science has yet to provide an answer. So then, why do we end their lives with such ease?

This moral dilemma resonates deeply within our stories. Alexander Pushkin's Russian tale, *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*, captures the duality of our relationship with nature. A fisherman catches a golden fish, who pleads in a human voice: "Let me go, my children will weep without me. Set me free, and I will grant any wish." The fisherman, in a moment of pure grace, replies, "I need nothing. Go home to your children. Be free."

Yet this moment of mercy is not the end of the story, nor is it reflective of our modern reality. Our relationship with the sea is far more fraught, a theme echoed in classics like *Moby-Dick* and *The Old Man and the Sea*—stories that romanticize the respectful, yet ultimately fatal, struggle. This same dynamic is viscerally documented in my favorite film, Robert J. Flaherty's *Man of Aran*, which portrays humanity's brutal battle with the ocean for survival.

But there is a profound difference. When these stories were born, humanity was not engaged in the industrial-scale harvesting that now kills fish by the trillions each year. Our epics spoke of a single, symbolic struggle; our reality is one of anonymous, wholesale extraction.

This forces upon us the ultimate question: Can we evolve from a relationship of conflict and domination to one of respectful and peaceful coexistence with the creatures who share our world?

Beyond fish, can you tell us about your use of myth in TRILLION (Sisyphus for example) and how they shaped the way the film was told? Were there any other the cultural touchstones that informed your process?

The ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus, condemned by the gods to eternally roll a stone up a mountain only for it to roll back down, is often interpreted as an allegory for the futility of human endeavour. In stark contrast, the film *Trillion* presents a protagonist who embodies meaningful purposeful action. Unlike the lethal conquests of the heroes created by Flaherty, Hemingway, and Melville, *Trillion*'s heroine offers a new paradigm for engaging with the world, one based not on domination but on a respectful connection to other living beings.

Can you tell us about the filming of TRILLION. Why this particular peninsula in Norway? What were the challenges of filming in such a hostile landscape? How did you also make sure that the production itself is 'green' and that the filmmaking process itself takes place in a sustainable way?

We chose this windswept location precisely because it bore no signs of civilization. Watching this place in the film, you remain uncertain for a long time: where is it? Earth? Mars? It's unknown. And until the middle of the film, the viewer won't understand when this story happened. Today? Thousands of years ago? This makes the film's meaning timeless and universal.

We tried to avoid doing anything superfluous. We simply followed the real actions of our heroine. We shot every scene only once and never asked her to repeat an action or do anything specifically for the camera. In this sense, the production of this film was a very ascetic process.

Like GUNDA, TRILLION is a wordless film. But this film also takes us into a different 'hybrid' aspect of documentary filmmaking. How did the precise cinematic device and storytelling approach take shape for you and K49814? In your opinion, should we maintain such strict boundaries between fiction and non-fiction filmmaking?

The central challenge in creating this film was to conceal its core intrigue until the final frame, as the true scale of the event is what gives it profound significance. To achieve this, I had to lean into how viewers are conditioned to anticipate inciting events, so that from the very beginning, the exercise of restraint provokes a feeling of expectation. When the revelation finally arrives at the very end, it recasts all the preceding episodes in a new light, imbuing them with a deeper, more powerful meaning

I had the immense privilege of collaborating with exceptionally talented individuals like sound designer Alexander Dudarev and cinematographer Egil Häskjold Larsen. Their artistry was instrumental in crafting a unique atmosphere—one where the film feels like a fiction one, and which serves to make the crucial revelation of its documentary truth at the end all the more impactful.

What do you hope people watching TRILLION will come away with?

Behold the profound beauty of this world. Humanity is but one part of it. Let us end the destruction of the life that surrounds us. It is time to erase the act of killing from the human repertoire.

ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT

Like a shimmering jewel, K49814 saw a fish scale by the river. She imagined a Japanese dry garden where it would be possible to meditate on the “Great ocean of emptiness.” Instead of the traditionally used grains of sand or white river pebbles, which symbolize water as a medium of formless indifference, the garden would consist of cleaned fish scales. As a repository of the experiences of the fish themselves, it would be a place where the dissolution of species differences could be experienced and the equality of life contemplated. The wind would gradually blow the fish scales back into the sea. It’s here that filmmaker Victor Kossakovsky collaborated with the artist to film the process of returning the scales to the wind and the sea.

In the places where she collected the fish scales, K49814 took photographs and wove in her book *Filamenta* (published by Kehrer-Verlag) the endless threads of the fishing industry into the (wounded) delicacies of blood vessels, swim bladders still filled with breath, or fish wings like sacred embroidery. The deadly, ocean-emptying, human-made threadwork stands in opposition to the filaments that run in magnificent nets through the cosmos and through all life forms on our planet, enabling a constant exchange of meaning and will, i.e. life. With the book she hopes to help untangle the destructive meshes and enter into the process of communication within this grand fabric of existence.

VICTOR KOSSAKOVSKY

Filmmaker Victor Kossakovsky has won more than a hundred international awards. Kossakovsky was born in 1961 in St. Petersburg (then called Leningrad), where he began his career as an assistant photographer, director and editor at Leningrad Studio of Documentaries in 1978, and is a trained screenwriter and director from the film school HCSF in Moscow. Kossakovsky's first full-length documentary as a director was LOSEV from 1989. In 1992, he received international recognition with THE BELOVS, which among a number of other awards won the VPRO Jaris Ivens Award and the Audience Award at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam (IDFA). His documentary ¡VIVAN LAS ANTIPODAS! was selected as the second opening film at the Venice Film Festival in 2011. The film was nominated for the European Film Award for Best Documentary, and won the award for best documentary at the Message to Man festival in St. Petersburg and the Cinematic Vision Award at the AFI Silverdocs Film Festival.

In the 1990s, Victor Kossakovsky turned to Europe to finance his films and ceased receiving monies from Russia after his critique of the Russian government for corruption. He began his collaboration with the Norwegian production company Sant og Usant in 2013 with the 25-minute VARICELLA. The film premiered in 2015 and was shown in Norwegian cinemas together with two other short documentaries for and with children. VARICELLA received honourable mention in the competition program for children's documentaries at IDFA in 2016, and the same year won the award for best photo and best documentary in less than 30 minutes at Nordic Docs. In 2017, Kossakovsky began working on SQUARELA, with Louverture Films as co-producers on the project. SQUARELA had its international premiere at the Venice Film Festival, and was shortlisted for an Oscar for best documentary. Kossakovsky's most recent collaboration with the two companies resulted in the film GUNDA, which Sant og Usant produced and Louverture Films co-produced. GUNDA was mainly filmed at Grøstad farm in Norway. The film had its world premiere at the Berlinale in 2020, where it was met with rave reviews and became one of the festival's great "talkies". The film had its North American premiere at the New York Film Festival. The film went on to be Oscar-shortlisted and won numerous awards internationally, as well as winning two Amanda Film awards for best cinematography and sound, and becoming the official Norwegian candidate to the Nordic Film prize. GUNDA was distributed in over seventy countries. Kossakovsky's last film ARCHITECTON premiered in 2024 In Competition at the Berlin Film Festival to great critical response.

VICTOR KOSSAKOVSKY - Filmography

Trillion (documentary) (2025)

Architecton (documentary) (2024)

Gunda (documentary) (2020)

Aquarela (documentary) (2018)

Varicella (documentary short) (2014)

Demonstration (documentary) (2013)

DisplAir (documentary short) (2012)

¡Vivan las Antipodas! / Long Live the Antipodes! (documentary) (2011)

Svyato (documentary short) (2005)

Tishe! Тише! / Hush / Russia from my Window (BBC title) (documentary) ((2002)

I Loved You / Я вас любил ... (documentary) (2000)

Pavel and Lyalya / Павел и Ляля (documentary) (1998)

Wednesday 19.07.1961 / Среда 19.07.61 (documentary) (1997)

The Belovs / Беловы / (documentary) (1992)

Losev / Лосев / (documentary) (1988)

K49814

Is the pseudonym for an artist whose primary artistic motivation is the well-being of nonhuman animals and preventing the cruelty inflicted on them. K49814 has dedicated herself to nonhuman animals. She remains anonymous because otherwise she would not be able to continue her work. She also wishes to remain in the background out of respect for the suffering caused to them by human beings.

K49814 continues with projects that establish non-human animals as members/actors (or: co-agents) in history and includes them in the human moral-legal circle.

PRODUCERS

Producers - Anita Rehoff Larsen/Tone Grøttjord-Glenne

Producers – Anita Rehoff Larsen & Tone Grøttjord-Glenne

The producing team of Anita Rehoff Larsen and Tone Grøttjord-Glenne has produced more than sixteen feature-length documentaries over the past decade, creating projects for both Norwegian and international audiences discovering universal themes that resonate across cultures. Their award-winning films, including the Academy Award–shortlisted *Gunda* (2020) by Victor Kossakovsky, which premiered at the Berlinale and went on to secure theatrical distribution in over 70 countries through NEON (US), Altitude (UK), Metropolitan (France and Belgium), and Filmwelt (Germany). Their track record also includes *Sisters on Track* (2021), which premiered at Tribeca and was directed by Corinne van der Borch and Tone Grøttjord-Glenne, later acquired by Netflix for global release. The team continues to collaborate on international co-productions, including the 2022 Oscar-nominated *Writing with Fire* (with Black Ticket Films) and *President* (with Final Cut for Real and Louverture Films), both of which premiered at Sundance 2021.

Joslyn Barnes / LOUVERTURE FILMS

Joslyn Barnes is a WGA award-winning, Oscar and BAFTA nominated screenwriter and three-time Oscar nominated and Emmy award winning producer of over 60 feature and documentary films, series and artworks shot in 26 countries. Since establishing Louverture Films in 2005 together with actor Danny Glover, she has forged relationships with top-tier directors, actors, producers, galleries, talent agencies, film institutes and funding bodies, foundations and other philanthropic institutions, distributors and exhibitors, film festivals and curators, as well as a wide network of individual investors and grantors across the planet. Among the filmmakers and artists she is currently working with are: RaMell Ross, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Lucrecia Martel, Mark Cousins, Victor Kossakovsky, Tala Hadid and William Kentridge.

CREW

writer / director

VICTOR KOSSAKOVSKY

cinematographer	EGIL HÅSKJOLD LARSEN
sound	ALEXANDER DUDAREV
editors	VICTOR KOSSAKOVSKY AINARA VERA
microscopy cinematographer / grip / gaffer	GIANMARCO DONAGGIO
first assistant camera / focus puller	CHRISTIAN KARLSEN
senior colourist / finishing	CHRISTIAN WIEBERG-NIELSEN
dolby atmos pre-recording mixer	EVGENIY ZHEBCHUK
re-recording mixers	EDGAR VIDAL & ROGER SOLÈ
music by	NASTASIA KHRUSHCHEVA "a book of grief and joy"
musicians	SARA ØVINGE, violin BENDIK BJØRNSTAD FOSS, viola GREGOR RIDDELL, cello ÅDNE SVALASTOG, piano
cello solo	EICCA TOPPINEN
music producer	PETER BADEN
producers	ANITA REHOFF LARSEN TONE GRØTTJORD-GLENNE JOSLYN BARNES
executive producers	JOAQUIN PHOENIX SUSAN ROCKEFELLER FRANK LEHMANN FRIDRIK H. MAR KAJA BJELKE
associate producers	ANDREAS HERZOG GRIMSØ ARILD KARLSEN
produced by	SANT & USANT LOUVERTURE FILMS
supported by	THE NORWEGIAN FILM INSTITUTE
co-funded by	THE EUROPEAN UNION EMPATHY ARTS VIKEN FILMSENTER BERGESENSSTIFTELSEN
in association with	OSLO FILMFOND STORYLINE STUDIOS YELLOW LOG