

### Mohammed Soudani on Ticino, Filmmaking and Family



Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival

From soccer to filmmaking, Premio Cinema Ticino-winner Mohammed Soudani has lit, directed, produced and taught cinema in the Swiss region of Ticino, his home for five decades.

Max Borg, August 7, 2023

TFV speaks to the acclaimed filmmaker, who's receiving Locarno's Premio Cinema Ticino.

At Mohammed Soudani's request, we meet at his home in Minusio, near Locarno. It's a place that's very dear to him, as he explains when we first arrive: "Tiziana and I built it. Well, we had it built. Mainly to her specifications. My

[Continues next page](#)

### CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE



Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival

#### STEPNE

**VERDICT:** Maryna Vroda's richly lensed feature debut is a melancholic look at a dying part of north-eastern Ukraine that's seemingly untouched by the present war, and while the narrative holds interest thanks especially to the protagonist, it's the documentary-like scenes that are the film's heart.

Jay Weissberg, August 7, 2023

It's a truism that wars and revolutions sweep away traditional lifestyles, but the truth is there's always been strife of that sort, and certain ways of life have stubbornly clung on in isolated pockets. The real game-changer is the inexorable juggernaut of capitalism in a world where a lack of connection equals death. Maryna Vroda's *Stepne*, a richly lensed meditation on loss –

of a mother, of ties to the land, of a traditional existence – is a melancholy recognition of a nearly extinct way of life in rural north-eastern Ukraine, a locale seemingly untouched by the Russian invasion, expiring from modernity rather than conflict. Shifting between narrative and ethnography, the film is at its best in the documentary-like sequences, which are wisely given

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UNTIL BRANCHES BEND  
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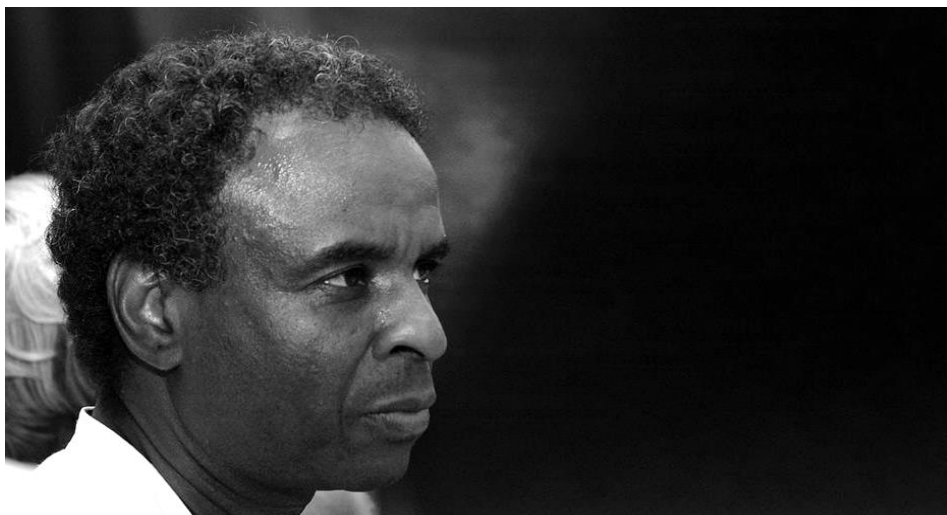


76 Locarno Film Festival  
2-12 | 8 | 2023



THE LAND WITHIN  
WEDNESDAY 09 | 08 | 2023, 10:30 · PALEXPO (FEVI)

**MOHAMMED SOUDANI** *(Continued)*



*Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival*

main contribution was adding the swings and the pool.”

Tiziana, his late wife, was a powerhouse in the world of Swiss film production, including co-productions with Italy (she worked with filmmakers like Alice Rohrwacher and the D’Innocenzo brothers), and he still sometimes reverts to the present tense when he mentions her, as though that fateful day in January 2020 never took place. In fact, he still talks to her every day. They met shortly after Soudani, born in Algeria in 1949, relocated to Switzerland in his early 20s, first making a name for himself in the Italian-speaking region as a soccer player. Already trilingual at the time (in addition to Arabic and French, he learned German in school), he quickly picked up the local dialect – during our conversation, he slips into Ticinese when he gets particularly carried away – and using it to his advantage: during a match, he

responded to a racist taunt by scoring a goal and then saying to the heckler, “Use that word again, and I’ll score another one.” So well-integrated is he, he’s commonly known among friends as “il Dani”, a typical Swiss-Italian nickname.

There’s a reason we’re talking to him: he’s receiving the Locarno Film Festival’s Premio Cinema Ticino, an award first introduced in 2009 and subsequently given every two years to an important film professional with ties to Ticino. In 2013, Tiziana Soudani accepted one on behalf of Amka Films, the production company she and Mohammed founded in 1988. Today, their daughter Amel, whose name inspired half of the company’s moniker, serves as the CCO and main producer. (The other half of “Amka” derives from her sister Karima, who works in the medical field).

[For Full Article, Click here](#)

**STEPHNE** *(Continued)*



*Photo courtesy of Locarno Film Festival*

the time to play out. Although the present war isn’t directly referenced and the events could just as easily have occurred before the invasion, the fact that this is a Ukrainian film practically guarantees a healthy festival life.

There’s one hitch though: life in the village of Stepne, close to the Russian border, has been one of hardship for centuries. The peasants (the word is used in a non-pejorative sense, as people of the land) have barely changed since the days of serfdom, eking out an existence in an often unforgiving landscape with few resources. The film seems on the fence about whether to mourn this atrophied mode of life, which has carried on for so long not because it’s valued, but because these people were always denied access to advancement of any sort. Trapped in a cycle of poverty, they’ve persisted until finally the young people have abandoned such villages, leaving them inhabited solely by the elderly whose homes are left to rot once they die.

[Full Review](#)



## CINESTE DEL PRESENTE



### TOUCHED

**VERDICT:** Claudia Rorarius's 'Touched' competently telegraphs a complex intimate relationship with unusual frankness and gorgeous visuals, and yet, it falls short of its own material in true emotional terms.

*Oris Aigbokhaevbolo, August 7, 2023*

A little over a decade ago, 'The Sessions', a film starring Helen Hunt as a sex surrogate and John Fawkes as a man paralysed from neck down, appeared at Sundance to critical acclaim. After several awards at that festival, it went all the way to the Oscars. Claudia Rorarius's Locarno premiere, 'Touched', is that film's European sibling.

However, it's not a copy of the American film in one major way: there are no sex surrogates anywhere here. But its plot does feature a man paralysed from neck down seeking (or acquiescing to) sexual activity.

We meet the protagonists within the first few minutes. Maria (Isold Halldórudóttir) has just resumed a job in which she has to tend to Alex (Stavros Zafeiris), whose lower limbs have muscles no longer in normal use. At this point, there are no real sparks flying, but Rorarius immediately establishes a frank, medically attuned depiction of the body, as an older nurse shows and teaches the younger woman to tend to Alex.

She moves him here and there, then she readies his genitals for the insertion of a catheter. This is shown without the clever blocking Hollywood deploys for these situations. We get a closeup of catheterisation with foreskin, tube and all. It's a bit shocking to be so frontloaded, but perhaps the idea is to signal the audience: "get comfortable, there's more nudity coming". It's no spoiler to say, for the squeamish or the prudish, that's as heightened as it gets.

Not long after, Maria becomes enamoured of her patient. Perhaps her being overweight and lonely has something to do with it, but it is regrettable that not much is made of the romantic process. Maria does come to her patient's rescue when he somehow wheels himself inside the institution's pool. And yet, it doesn't feel quite like that is the magic moment when affection dawns. Some connective tissue is missing in the storytelling.

It is doubly puzzling that not much is said about Maria's background and the reason for her extreme aloneness.

[Full Review](#)



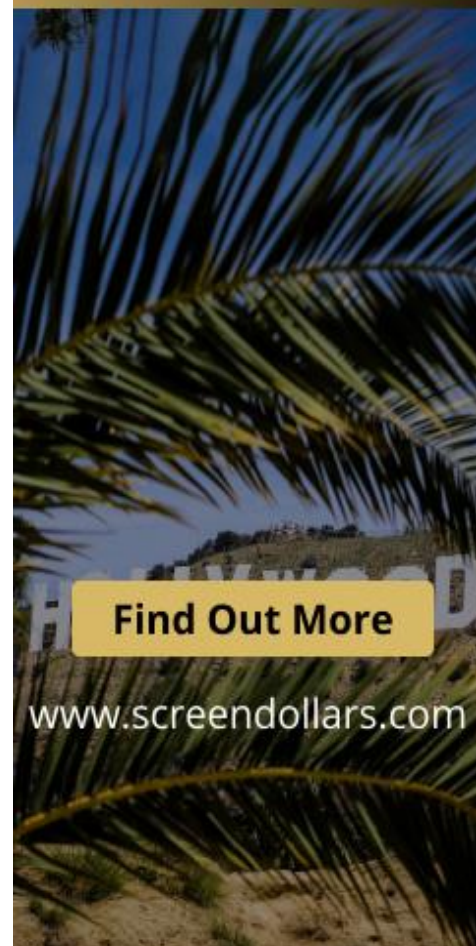
SCREEN  
DOLLARS

## EVERYTHING about the MOVIES

Profiles of Top Stars  
and Filmmakers

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# Spanish Screenings XXL

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Creative Inverstors' Conference

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# Locarno Events for August 8<sup>th</sup>



10:00 · Forum @Spazio Cinema  
 Open Doors Award Ceremony  
 Moderated by Paolo Bertolin



13:30 · Forum @Spazio Cinema  
 Conversations with Luc Jacquet  
 Locarno Kids Award la Mobbiare  
 Moderated by Daniela Persico

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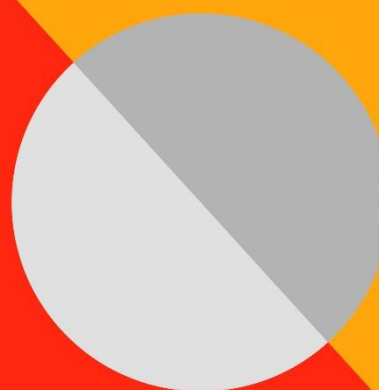




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# FEST clips



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

Ten projects based on metaverse, AI, machine learning and augmented reality, among others, to compete in the Zinema Startup Challenge.

The projects by Spanish startups and entrepreneurs will have a specific competition, part of 'Spanish Screening: Financing & Tech,' one of the initiatives of 'Spanish Screenings XXL' and part of the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (PRTR).

Zinemaldia & Technology, taking place on 28 September, will offer presentation of the ten projects and a round table AI.

The five finalists for the Spanish competition are Festival Infinito, a project which, through users a unique and participatory experience with visual content, and from any device; Union Avatars, which provides users and companies with the tools to manage their digital identities through avatars; VRMulticam, which unifies immersive audiovisual

technologies and broadcasts in a single service, offering a unique experience to the viewer; and WitScript which, thanks to machine learning, creates optimised processes for sound professionals, significantly minimizing the time associated with voice-over QA/QC for audio-books and audiovisual and multimedia content in general. Finally, an entrepreneurial team from the Basque Country will present Bonzo Studios, offering an integrated motion control system, high speed camera and LED Wall for making productions

*San Sebastian Film Festival takes place Sept 22-30*

*For complete story, [click here](#)*

## 2023 Austin Film Festival and Writers Conference Panelists

Among this year's 53 panelists are Karen Joseph Adcock, a writer on FX's *The Bear* and Showtimes' *Yellowjackets*; Megan Alderson, Creative Development Executive, Pixar Animation Studios and Matt Cook, writer/co-producer of *Triple Nine*, *By Way of Helen* and co writer of *Patriots Day*.



Karen Joseph Adcock is a drama comedy writer, who grew up in a small town in Louisiana, has a BA in film studies from Columbia University and an MFA in TV Writing and Producing from Marymount University. Karen writes about broken people doing the best they can and laughing along the way – what's the saying? "Write what you know..."



Matt Cook served two combat tours in Iraq and has written several articles for Texas Monthly about his experience. He also served as a correspondent in Afghanistan in 2012. He was raised in the tiny three stoplight town of Castorville, Texas, attended the University of Texas at Austin, and is a member of the Philosophical Society of Texas.



Megan Alderson supports project in early development, scouts screenwriters, collaborates with experts and spearheads research trips. Megan received her MFA from The American Film Institute as a directing fellow and holds a Bachelor's degree from Sarah Lawrence College. She lives in the Bay Area with her family and her dog Loki.

*The Austin Film Festival 2023 takes place Oct 26 – Nov 2*





# Spectacle Every Day



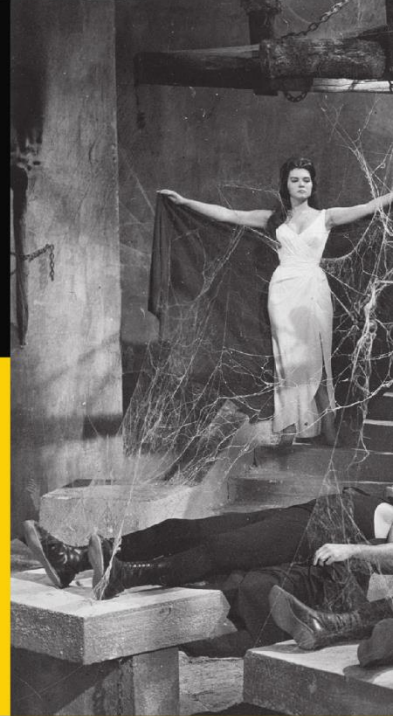
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