

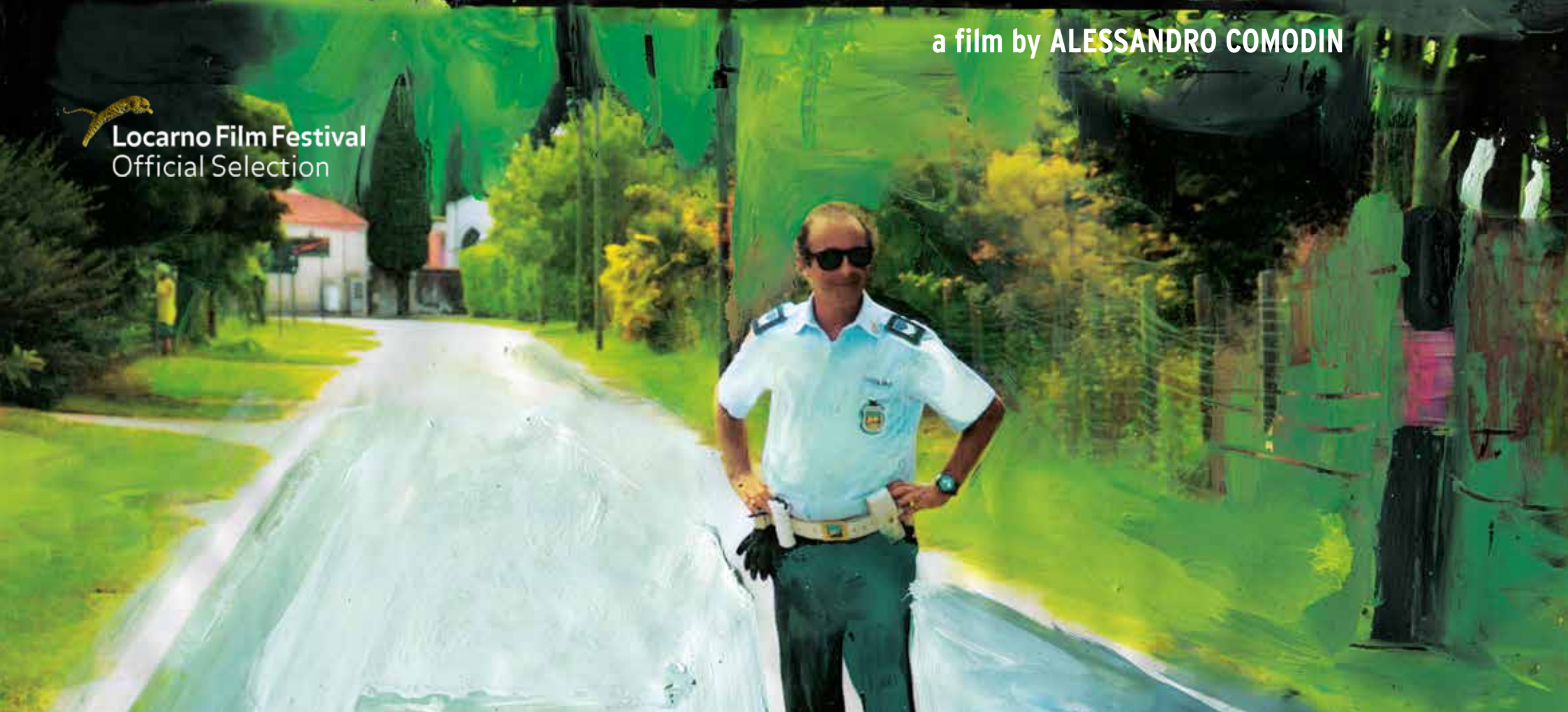
GIGILA LEGGE

(THE ADVENTURES OF GIGI THE LAW)

a film by ALESSANDRO COMODIN



Locarno Film Festival
Official Selection





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Shellac presents
an Okta Film, Idéale Audience, Michigan Films production

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a film by
Alessandro Comodin

Italy/France/Belgium, 2022 - 1h42 - 1.85:1 - colour - DCP 2K - 5.1

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Screenings at 75 Locarno Film Festival

Press Sun 08/07 - 14:00 - Teatro Kursaal
World Premiere Mon 08/08 - 14:00 - Palexpo (FEVI)
Next screenings Tue 08/09 - 10:30 - Cinema Otello @Ascona
Tue 08/09 - 18:00 - L'altra Sala
Wed 08/10 - 21:00 - La Sala

with Pier Luigi Mecchia
Ester Vergolini
Annalisa Ferrari
Tomaso Cecotto
Massimo Piazza

assistant director Giulio Squarci
cinematographer Tristan Bordmann
sound Julien Courroye
art director Tiziana De Mario
editing João Nicolau
sound editing Ingrid Simon
mix Emmanuel De Boissieu
grading Loup Brenta
production manager Francesca Bennett

produced by Paolo Benzi (Okta Film)
Pierre-Olivier Bardet e Hélène Le Cœur (Idéale Audience)
Alice Lemaire e Sébastien Andres (Michigan Films)

a production by Okta Film (Italia)
Idéale Audience (Francia)
Michigan Films (Belgio)

in collaboration with Rai Cinema

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SYNOPSIS

Gigi is a police officer in a countryside where nothing ever happens. One day however, a young girl throws herself under a train. This is not the first time. Facing this unexplainable suicide wave, Gigi starts investigating a strange world, between reality and fantasy, where a garden turns into a jungle and where an ever-smiling policeman keeps his heart open to love.



GIGI'S GARDEN: WHERE ALL STORIES BEGAN

It's been thirty years since I was a child climbing trees. Those trees have grown, as have I, and the iron farm tools have rusted, as has my hair; but nothing has changed much in this garden, for the caretaker of this paradise isn't just anybody, it's Gigi.

He and I share the feeling that the whole world is a densely grown garden, crowded with trees, sometimes boundless and sometimes closed off by barbed wire and borders, a benevolent place to defend, constantly under threat.

The story of *The Adventures of Gigi the Law* comes from this garden and returns to it constantly, because Gigi's plants and trees are so lush they grow out of his head and become extensions of his fingers.

Outside of his garden, for his entire life Gigi has been a local traffic cop, a simple, quaint law enforcement officer in this peculiarly remote area. More than anything, this film is a portrait of Gigi, and therefore it could only be a detective film.

A detective film that resembles its subversive and original, authentic and disarming, gentle and provocative main character. Gigi wonders and, in his own way, investigates, overwhelmed by his contradictory and unexplainable curiosity. He becomes the one who smuggles us into his world. Sincerely and fearlessly, he lets himself be observed. Through his eyes and emotions, we see and experience a little bit of his plant-filled world and there, with him, we share the mysteries that obsess him, the passions that move him and that spontaneous, forthright laughter.



INTERVIEW WITH ALESSANDRO COMODIN

What was the initial impulse for the film?

The “prehistoric” origin of the film is my grandmother’s garden in my hometown, where I used to play a lot as a kid. It contains this primordial chaos and is where all my stories have come to me. Since my grandmother passed away, Gigi has been taking care of it, letting the trees grow endlessly, like in a Japanese anime. I felt the urge to make a thriller but, to be clear, a countryside thriller starring my uncle as a detective speaking in dialect. Like my other films, this one grew out of a feeling, a movement, an investigation into this place that reveals itself in the dead of summer, with this overwhelming heat, when nothing really happens on the surface, but everything is simmering beneath it.

So, I had the place and the character, but what was this investigation about?

In July 2017, while out on patrol, Gigi discovered the dismembered remains of a woman who had thrown herself on the railway. Several trains had passed over the body without anyone noticing. That just reminded me of how often a year people would kill themselves there, under a train, in the stillness of the plain by the cemetery. I actually lost a friend there as a teenager. So, this automatically became the other centre of the film: the railway crossing around which Gigi would conduct his investigation, where people commit suicide for no particular reason, always mysteriously at the same place. That road, the via del Macello - “Slaughterhouse Road”- is seemingly like any other; except that it bears the weight of these suicides that have happened over the past twenty years and which, strangely, correspond to other episodes that took place during the war.

How did Gigi come into the project? Who is he in real life?

Gigi is my uncle, my mother’s little brother. He’s the fun uncle, the adult who used to fool around with the kids and took me for rides on his Vespa. He’s grown older, but still has this childish side to him. He was born in the 1960s, during the economic boom but in the countryside, which was experiencing the artificial highs of the consumer society, with the introduction of DDT and, later, heroin. For me, Gigi has remained one of these few rural living legends whose deeds are still being talked about in bars. Like any self-respecting character, Gigi also has a nickname, “Gigi la Legge” - “Gigi the Law” - a mocking reference to the numerous pranks that

eventually led him to being stripped of his badge. Now, he only takes care of menial tasks like residency checks and admin. To ward off the gossips, and as some form of revenge, his nickname became the film’s title, upholding his legendary status and as a tribute to all these characters populating my personal Olympus and for whom I feel such tremendous tenderness.

You returned to the location where you shot Summer of Giacomo. The characters in both films seem to share an unusual relationship to the world, outside social norms. Do you identify much with this type of character?

My uncle is legendary because he is a misfit in this little provincial world! There might indeed be a strong identification on my side, maybe even more with Gigi than with Giacomo, since we’re related but also because we look alike. My assistant Giulio and I often joked that had I stayed in the village, I would have ended up just like him. Space, in the film, is really limited and there is this border in the form of the railway: I crossed it, but he did not. My uncle’s marginality is his way of defending himself, of rejecting the norm through laughter, jokes and questioning any established order. One never quite knows whether he’s playing up this marginality or if he truly is like that. He’s a dandy, an eccentric: had he lived elsewhere, he would have been an artist.

In Summer of Giacomo, the character’s deafness isolates him from the world; then there’s the prison in Happy Times Will Come Soon and here, the psychiatric hospital: the questions of norms and confinement seem to be a leitmotiv.

I’ve thought about that too: the psychiatric hospital was in the script from the beginning and Gigi did spend some time there. I probably feel the need to go and see these places of confinement, just to know I can easily escape from them. It is quite a big issue for me, but I couldn’t say where it comes from. It is an unconscious questioning, but it’s true that I tell stories of people escaping the world to seek shelter in the forest. Sometimes it ends well, sometimes badly, but there’s always a sense of melancholy. Gigi has a rather altered relationship with reality which enables him to rearrange it in his own way. The film can be seen as the story of someone projecting his own desires upon reality. Everything is true and real but could very much be seen as delusional. With Gigi, it’s always difficult to work out the extent to which he’s just fooling around or actually rambling. I often have the feeling he does it on purpose, for fun, and then he gets trapped in it until he ends up in the psychiatric ward. I have tried to respect this ambiguity of



his, the seeds of doubt he's constantly planting. This echoes my previous films, in which you never know what is true or false and then you get caught in it. Maybe it runs in the family...

How did the car become the motive and the matrix for your direction?

The idea for the car came while scouting. I followed Gigi during his work hours. He was already quite an outcast within the police force, tasked with doing residency checks, but he was still in his uniform. I loved going on the beat with him, it felt like going back to childhood, the nephew and his gunless policeman of an uncle. In the storyline, I imagined the residency checks as a trigger for encounters, a way to see Gigi at work and for me to portray the locals with a strong documentary approach. However, this fell away right before filming, when I felt the need to simplify and just keep the car journeys.

In your past films, most of your directing consisted of following what was happening with a lot of framing. But here, this seems to have changed a lot.

I moved away from the camera considerably, choosing to work with much greater focal length than usual and, above all, I almost never used a handheld camera. The frames that differ the most from my previous camerawork are the car shots: the camera cannot move. It is also a way to establish constraints, so I can tell my story within them and maybe find a new, more personal way to build my narrative, perhaps even surprise myself too. With Giulio, my assistant, we have been looking for the "master shot" for a long time, the shot from which the entire story unfolds. For instance, right up until filming began, I was wondering how I would shoot the discovery of the corpse. In the script, it was written in a very straightforward way and I even considered having a prop for the body. But when we started shooting, that seemed unthinkable: it would remove all the ambiguity I was looking for - are these events really happening or not? And right then, the "master" revealed itself. The windshield, a frame within a frame, through which we would film the railway crossing. Then, we just had to organise the reality around it: trains passing by, on- and offscreen events, the radio, the extras. A master frame and offscreen sound: everything was set up for the viewer to actually wonder about the truth in what they're seeing.

Did you still manage to find freedom within those constraints you are talking about?

It allowed us to do very interesting things in terms of plot construction. Shots and reverse shots were filmed hours apart, which is normal, but as we were working

documentary-style, I deliberately paid no attention to continuity. From one shot to the next things were not the same, Gigi and his interlocutor discussed different things, except for one or two specific moments necessary for the story. This way, a reverse-shot can only continue a shot, it can't complete it or give another perspective on it as it usually does. The characters come and go, creating a space-time continuum, but it is fragmented. The shots match one another, but not really. The constraints are what enabled me to achieve this weird perception of time, which also lets us participate in Gigi's feeling of an altered reality. Another fundamental constraint was working only with people with whom we had created strong bonds or were deeply rooted in the place. The idea was to separate the reality from the film shoot as little as possible. Paola, for example, is called Ester in real life and is a midwife. She works a lot and has a complicated schedule. Before shooting began, Ester told us she could only get one day off a week in the first few weeks, and then one full week to play the part that was written for her (most of which did not make it to the final cut). As she'd never acted before and since I had never filmed her, we agreed that she wouldn't be filmed in the first few weeks because it felt too soon. Instead, we used the radio to set up her meeting with Gigi and, at the same time, create a sense of suspense around this new colleague. Their radio relationship and their date were not written anywhere, it just happened like that... The constraints imposed by Ester's night shifts ended up helping our story.

Was the filming very ritualised with the traditional "action!" and "cut!"?

Yes, but we also let it roll a lot, so the characters forgot about the camera. It was nonetheless a true fiction shoot: even though a lot of the script was left aside when we started filming, we only had very few if not just one take per shot in most cases. But the initial script helped anyway, it gave the film a structure, an organisation: the car, the places, the streets that had to be blocked off, the encounters with the characters, the actors' schedules...

In what time and space does the film actually take place?

Very much Gigi's, where his village and daily life are his sole elements for measuring the world. There is nothing else, he has never left the village. The town's space is really limited, we explore it, but it truly is microscopic, just a few square kilometres. The long takes give a sharp sense of being in the present, experiencing this daily life yet with a certain ambiguity, a wavering due to the missing beginning and end of the sequences. Tomaso appears as a wandering, ghostly silhouette. Yet, he bears the same name as



the main character in *Happy Days Will Come Soon*, haunting the film and its forest. True, but it was definitely not intended, simply a coincidence. We were adamant about one thing: none of the characters should do anything we wouldn't do ourselves. So we experienced the film a few times before *Gigi*, before filming began. We rang at the doors on Via del Macello, asking about the suicides. It was during this investigation of ours that we met Tomaso. As we talked, we realised we were the same age, had been to the same high school and had a very close friend in common. We met two days later and he told us he had attempted to kill himself two weeks before, and that he had just been discharged from the psychiatric ward where we had been "casting" for a year. This encounter was shocking and disturbing yet, as time went by (and time often makes a difference), being around Tomaso forced me to clarify how I wanted to film this character. I couldn't ask him to do things he would not have been capable of before the camera, it had to come from the bonds Tomaso had established, first with *Gigi* then with me. In the script, the relationship between *Gigi* and Tomaso was much more interactive, explicit and real. What eventually made it to the cut was what I managed to obtain through "decantation". Nothing in the film is here by chance, any character is the product of an encounter, a personal relationship. There is a genuine excitement in making films this way, but it also means taking risks, even for the people on screen.

How did the locals perceive the filming?

We were a tiny, very unobtrusive crew - this is how I conceive the ideal film shoot: be like a little roadwork team, ephemeral, almost invisible and yet wearing fluorescent vests. That being said, *Gigi* in his car drew some attention as he is loved and loathed in equal measure. So it sparked some envy. Thankfully, *Gigi* considered the film as a revenge, parading in the uniform that was taken away from him, but which remained a large part of his identity. I reminded him he had to enjoy it, that he was free and could say anything. When he calls his commanding officer "the Pheasant", parodying the name of his actual former boss, this one guy becomes all the superiors he had in his real life, a symbol. The film feels like a brief interlude of freedom; but one wonders how the film will be received, because the people being discussed really exist and might recognise themselves.

What language do the characters speak?

The script was written in Italian but in reality, people in Friuli, especially elderly people in the country, speak Friulian dialect and Italian only if they have to. I'm delighted that most of the film was made in my mother tongue. It is a very lively language which blends

an infinity of nuances with Italian and even Venetian. Even the Friulian dialect spoken in the film sometimes differs, like between *Gigi* and *Annalisa*. It is extremely rich and so extremely hard to translate, if not impossible.

This is the second film you've made in this part of Friuli where you are from. Is this a region that still has to be explored in terms of cinema?

Certainly. I drifted away from it with my second film, but it feels so good working there. I know it inside out; I experience it in a very emotional way, there's nothing rational about it. I can get away but I always come back. It's fascinating, and yet absolutely uninteresting at first sight. Just like in the film, nothing happens on the surface but it's all boiling underneath. There is an exemplary, microscopic nature about this place that brings it close to something universal. To me, it is perfect for filmmaking. In the nineteen years I have been living there, I have collected a whole lot of emotions, so much so that it feels like I never left. That might be why my films give the impression of going in circles, of being trapped, that we always find a prison or a hospital. With my characters, I explore the parallel lives of another self, a potential double who would have stayed in the village.

In this film as in the others, one notices a fantastical, magical approach to the forest which is really fictitious here.

I'd be lying if I told you my career was carefully planned out in advance with my first three films forming a forest trilogy...Quite simply, shooting in the forest is fantastic: it makes an ideal set and, as I am peculiarly responsive to it, I can't think of any better place to tell stories on a small budget. *Gigi's* garden in particular is small but big enough for it to turn into a world of its own. It represents childhood to me, everything I love or hate about myself comes from there. It is a primal place from which all the other forests, including those in my past films, come from. It is at the same time beautiful and nothing special; a very real and yet totally fake nature that both protects and endangers. It's also a place of artifice, where brightly lit dreamlike sequences take place. I loved the challenge of making an adventure film in a tiny garden. There's even a train passing through it! By contrast, I can say pretty confidently that there will be no forest in my next film and that the young girl who is the protagonist will leave the village. Will she come back or leave forever?

Interview by Arnaud Hée June 2022

BIOFILMOGRAPHY

Alessandro Comodin is an Italian director who studied cinema in Brussels. He lives in Paris, but he likes to shoot his films in the region where he comes from, Friuli Venezia Giulia, in the north-east of Italy, in the countryside and in the forest. This is where he feels comfortable doing his work. He has made three films for the cinema and he has never been able to say whether they are fictions or documentaries

2019 *Fleurs Blanches* (30 min)
Film made for the Jean Giono exhibition at the Mucem in Marseille (October 2019)

2016 *Happy Times Will Come Soon* (102 min)
Cannes Film Festival 2016 - Semaine de la Critique
Prix Beatrice Sartori de la Critique indépendante

Ficunam Film Festival 2017
Silver Puma for the best film.

2011 *Summer of Giacomo* (78 min)
Festival del Film di Locarno 2011 - Cineasti del Presente
Golden Leopard

Belfort International Film Festival 2011
Grand Prix du Jury and Prix Documentaire Grand Ecran

Jeonju International Film Festival 2012
Woosuk Award/Grand Prize International Competition

Magritte Awards 2012
Nomination for Best Documentary

2008 *Jagdfieber* (21 min)
Cannes Film Festival 2009 - Quinzaine des Réalisateurs



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