

Persistence of Vision

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[Me, My Romani Family, and Woody Allen](#)

[Chale Nafus](#) | Jan 26, 2012 |

A documentary directed by Laura Halilovic, Italy, 2010, 60 min.

19-year-old Laura Halilovic has made a completely charming documentary about her Romani family and her own interests and dreams. With her behind the camera and guided by her delightful narration, we get fascinating conversations with her mother (who wants Laura to get married), her father (who wants Laura to get married), and her grandmother (who wants Laura to get married). A friendly family even brings in their son to ask for Laura's hand in marriage, but she stays in her bedroom and makes it abundantly clear that she doesn't want to marry yet. Instead, as she documents the lives of those around her, we are taken more deeply into the situation of Romani in Italy today. Although Laura and her immediate family live comfortably in a nice apartment, keep the children in school, and have settled in with their Gadjo (non-Gypsy) neighbors, much of the rest of the family lives in encampments. One of her uncles has even bought the land on which 60 members of the extended family (clan?) live in mobile homes. Even so, the nearby Gadjo get the city council to issue eviction notices to throw them off their own property. We never know if zoning laws are being broken, but it all seems quite unfair, especially since the land is between the city dump and the dog pound. An Italian lawyer seems to be of little help. There is some very tragic news footage of Romani camps being attacked and burned to the ground in the present, providing an eerie echo of the past, when the Nazi hatred of Romani in the 1930s and 1940s drove "Gypsies" to the death camps along with Jews, homosexuals, Communists, and others who didn't "fit" into the "ideal" Nazi community. With the resurgence of right-wing anti-Semitism and the new Islamophobia in Europe, perhaps it is no coincidence that attacks on Romani settlements are taking place.

But not only does Laura reveal social problems, she also admits to a lifelong fascination with Woody Allen. Please reread that sentence and then continue.... Like a starstruck fan of days gone by, she even writes him a letter (content unknown). Her anguish over the appropriate way to begin the letter is charming. Interspersed with serious topics throughout the film are shots of Laura (the camera) approaching the mailbox, only to find nothing inside, not even a bill. Then one day she announces that she and another young woman are traveling to some other city. Why? We don't know until suddenly we see George Clooney and a very familiar face to which she can't attach a name (Brad Pitt) walking on a red carpet. Then wonder of wonders, there is Woody Allen (with Soon-Yi, but Laura doesn't take notice of her). The young fan yells out to Woody (probably the only one to do so when Clooney and Pitt are around), and he actually comes over to Laura. She asks him to sign his autograph, which he obligingly does and then walks away – with her pen. We learn that he is the reason she wants to become a film director and not yet get married. So, we can thank Woody Allen for being the voice of Z in ANTZ (Laura's first encounter with him) and for inspiring a young Romani woman to make her first movie. The very least I can do is add the title of her film to Woody's IMDB filmography, where he appears as "Himself." Hopefully one of his assistants will see his new film credit and write Laura a letter of thanks (and send her a new pen).

[Note: I watched this documentary in preparation for the new AFS Essential Cinema series focused on Cinema of Southeast Europe, which we will present in April and May this year, with the assistance and attendance of Vera Mijojlic, a great friend and generous director of the Southeast European Film Festival of Los Angeles. Judging from this documentary, the first of 30-40 films sent to me by Vera, I am going to learn a lot and have a good time making hard choices]. – **Chale Nafus**, Director of Programming, Austin Film Society