# IF PIGEONS TURNED TO GOLD

Czech Republic / Slovakia, 2026, 110 min

a film by
PEPA LUBOJACKI

# PRESS NOTES

World Premiere: Berlinale Forum 2026

Press materials can be downloaded here

# CONTACTS

**PRODUCTION:**

CLAW films

Klára Mamojková
+420 776 369 325
k.mamojkova@gmail.com

Wanda Kaprálová
+420 608 614 221
wanda.kapralova@gmail.com

**INTERNATIONAL PUBLICIST:**

NOISE Film & TV

Kai Hermann
+49 152 534 509 55
kai@noisefilmpr.com

# LOGLINE

Have you ever grieved someone who hasn't died yet?

# SYNOPSIS

A raw, self-made and deeply personal work, IF PIGEONS TURNED TO GOLD cuts into addiction and intergenerational trauma, capturing several years in the lives of four family members. Pepa, the director, records on an iPhone and tries to understand why their beloved older brother and cousins live unhoused and experience substance addiction. Formally inventive and playful, diaristic footage enters into dialogue with stylised memories, AI-animated photographs and graphic interventions, shaping a plural voice that negotiates with the past. Unsentimentally, the film traces the causes and fallout of addiction, asking where love ends, control begins, and what respect truly demands: to save, or to let go.

# ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

**Josefina ‘Pepa’ Lubojacki** (they/she) is a Prague-based scriptwriter and documentary film director. Their first short documentary film About-hair was nominated for the Magnesia Award in 2019. It was screened at the Ji.hlava IDFF, Prague shorts (Czech Republic), River Film festival (Italy), where it won the Cineffable (France), MakeDox (Macedonia), Filmfest Weiterstadt (Germany) and Art200 (Romania). Pepa lived for two years in London, where they organized the Short Film Festival for a small independent gallery. For several years they worked as a programmer for the QFF Mezipatra, and co-organised the cultural festival Queer eye. They worked as a programmer of FAMUFEST. They also worked as a discussion moderator at the Ji.hlava IDFF.
Their work focuses on topics such as gender binarity and stereotypes, family trauma, addiction, and co- dependency. Pepa loves strawberries and pigeons, and they are vegan for the animals, owning many. For the past two years, they have been working on their first fiction book about non-binarity, human-eating creatures and addiction. They are also working on their first feature film script.

**Filmography**: *O-chlup / About-hair / 2019 / 17 min*

# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

**Why did you decide to make this film?**

Once, when my brother was missing for some time, the police officer laughed at me after finding out that he was unhoused. Then my cousin lost both legs after lying on a bench, rotting alive for days as people kept passing him, and after he was refused treatment in the hospital more than once. I've experienced more times than I ever wanted how the world sees and treats addicted people and those who live unhoused. Simply being with my relatives was often enough for others to see me the same way. The isolation, the contempt, and the lack of attempts to understand hurt. And so I decided to tell our story.

The ostracising approach to addiction and living unhoused fails to address the root causes, trauma, poverty, and social exclusion, and instead further marginalises people who experience them. It fails to see addiction as a way of coping with pain, a survival strategy, often not the original problem at all. I wanted to challenge the belief that addiction is a failure of will and to offer a trauma-sensitive perspective that uses memories, shared childhood and love as a lens through which to look at my older brother and cousins who live unhoused and with addiction. It understands addiction not as a personal failure, but as an adaptive response to pain, disconnection, and unmet emotional needs.

I talk about what it means to be a child of an addict, a sibling. What it does to a family. I always wanted to be like my brother. He used to be that beautiful skater boy. Then addiction took over and I strongly believe it's because of transgenerational trauma and repetitive patterns.

**You tell the story through your own eyes and address both the past and the present. How did you approach shaping such a broad, narrative and deeply personal form of storytelling?**

Through brutal honesty. I used this term in the film, but it's so true. I think it was the only way for me to tell the story authentically. But, to be honest, it was also brutal for me. To revisit certain memories, to dig into topics I was not entirely ready to touch to such an extent.

It's very important to be careful when one works with their own trauma (and in general when filmmakers work with someone else's trauma). Extra special care must be taken. And I was not fully ready for what the process of making this film would mean to me. That is why I would like to focus on the use of our own or someone else's trauma in film, what it can mean, its causes, and how to prevent certain fallouts and minimise the damage.

**The film explores sibling love and the notion that a person is not defined by their addiction, but by the complex set of values they carry. Was it a long journey for you to come to this understanding and acceptance?**

It's often a difficult thing to see other qualities in a person who lives with addiction, because many times it's the addiction and its crushing impact on the person's behaviour, the lack of accountability, responsibility, and motivation, and the hurt it causes to family members and loved ones that are what we see and feel the most.

I was so angry at my brother for not being able to change for me or for our mom, when he saw the suffering his addiction was causing us. I almost forgot who my brother was behind the addiction, because it shaped him greatly. I really thought I could find a way to save him, to make him see that he could have a different, a better life. It took me a long time (meaning a decade) before I realised such an approach was patronising. It's his life, and if he wants to change, he will do it for himself (as harsh as it can be to accept.) What I can do is see him again as a person who deserves my respect. And support him when and if he is ever ready. My job was to set boundaries for my own life and mental health and to stop abandoning myself in attempts to help him.

I had to change my position towards him not only for him and for our relationship, which for a very long time was greatly shaped by his addiction and failures, but first for myself. Because expectations always lead to disappointment, and we can't want someone's sobriety more than they do. Some people will never be ready to want sobriety, to face all the things that come up with sobriety.

I was exhausted by my expectations and hopes, and they corroded my own agency. It was acceptance that set me free and let me see my brother as a person who is carrying a lot of pain, with which he is dealing in the best possible way he can, with the capacity and skills he has at the moment.

People who live with addiction carry a lot of shame that shows outwardly to the outside world as offensiveness, aggression, indifference, or shutdown, as it is oftentimes the only protective mechanism they have left. I didn't want to add to this shame. I love my brother. Would I want him to live without addiction? Of course. Can I change it? No.

But what I need to say is that my position is specific. If your parent or partner lives with addiction and they are, for example, responsible for children or a shared household, it's obviously not so easy to try to see behind their addiction. I'm not saying stay with a person with addiction. It is, even when it's very difficult, necessary to save ourselves before we can help anyone else. This film is rather my personal journey of realising this for myself. A journey of trying to understand my brother not as my childhood hero and the popular teenager anymore, but as his present self, a perhaps much more messy but still magnificent self, to understand addiction itself and its roots and core, and a message for people who have a loved one living with addiction, to say that they are not alone. And for the world to see the human behind addiction.

**The film brings together several formal and visual principles. What was your authorial approach, and what do they represent?**

I use my phone to capture moments with my brother and cousins, as well as my video diaries that are often reactions to those situations.

We were testing what can be told with a camera and a cinematographer and people around us, only to find out that the phone gave me true freedom, the opportunity to really be together, especially with my brother. Things were unfolding so unpredictably, and using the phone was the best way to show what was happening through my eyes.

The phone quickly became invisible for me and my brother and cousins, and after so many years, it was so automatic for me to reach for it, that it was actually strange to stop filming. I ended up recording over 200 hours of material. During the years when I was capturing our lives, I had to stop the censoring in my head because it was making it very difficult for me to record anything at the beginning. It was in the editing room where I had to decide where the ethical line lay for me and for my brother and cousins.

The animated childhood photographs and the Pigeon, the storyteller, help me tell the story made up of memories, a repressed past and a clash with the present, in a way that is not only heavy, but is somewhat playful. They can say things that I could not. The animated archive photographs are a collective voice of me, my relatives and our memories, and the research I did into addiction, trauma and being unhoused.

The highly stylised parts represent our core memory we share with my brother, the one we both remember so clearly despite my memory of childhood being otherwise pretty jagged. It was the moment we fell off a bike and hurt ourselves, and this memory is so happy for both of us. I think that for him, it was about the fun of it. For me, it was about the shared pain, about not being alone.
Last but not least, music was always a crucial part of the film for me. It is used to strengthen the film's repetitive principle. I feel very lucky to have collaborated with Adam Matej, aka DJ GAP, who fully embodied my vision of the music.

# CREDITS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Screening Format** | DCP, ProRes, H264 |
| **Shooting Format** | digital – iPhone and Alexa Mini |
| **Aspect Ratio** | 16:9 |
| **Sound** | 5.1 & Stereo |
| **Spoken language** | Czech, English |
| **Subtitles** | English |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Written and directed by** | Pepa Lubojacki |
| **Producer** | Klára Mamojková, Wanda Kaprálová, CLAW films |
| **Co-producer** | Matej Sotník, Guča films |
| **Cinematographer** | Tomáš Šťastný, Pepa Lubojacki |
| **Music** | Adam Matej |
| **Editor** | Pepa Lubojacki |
| **Dramaturgy** | Lucie Králová, Lubor Mier Dohnal, Viera Čakányová |
| **Coproduced by** | Guča films<br>Czech Television<br>FAMU Film School |
| **With financial support of** | Czech Audiovisual Fund<br>Slovak Audiovisual Fund<br>Prague Audiovisual Fund<br>Eurimages<br>Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic<br>Czech Recovery and Resilience Plan,<br>Next Generation EU |
| **Markets and Forums** | CPH:FORUM<br>New Vision Ji.hlava IFF (Winner of the most promising European project)<br>East Doc Platform<br>Pitch it! Berlinale |