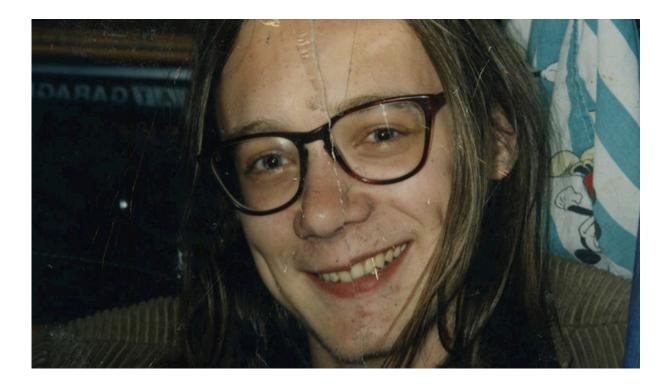
# King of the Airs – Notes on a Friendship

Zaunkönig – Tagebuch einer Freundschaft Le Roi des airs – Notes sur une amitié

a film by Ivo Zen / ein Film von Ivo Zen / un film de Ivo Zen / CH 2016 / 78 Min.



I'll write this diary as if it concerned only myself. If one day I have enough distance, then it should come into someone else's hands. So as to amuse them, or bore them, or fascinate them, or warn them, or whatever.

(Excerpt from Martin's diary, May 16 1990)



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## Synopsis

Martin indulged in his excessive use of drugs. He recorded his frenzied life in his diaries while his friend lvo passionately captured everything on film with his Super 8 camera. Both sought for the absolute – average was not an option. Through the lens of this journal, lvo

Both sought for the absolute – average was not an option. Through the lens of this journal, lvo Zen tells the story of his generation, a story about friendship and the desire to fly higher than anybody else.

### Filmmaker's note

Ivo will be in Chur this weekend. I'm looking forward to seeing him. My role model in many ways, my sometimes somewhat annoying Ivo. My dear friend. (Excerpt from Martin's diary, January 17, 1998)

Martin was my friend. He died at an early age as a result of his drug use. He threw his life away. I'm alive. The facts seem plain enough. Until I get his diaries.

I open my laptop and click on the file that Martin's mother sent me. The first thing that appears is a picture, an abstract design of roses made up of the little colored squares on a piece of graph paper. It's one of Martin's drawings. Written under that is: Martin Felix (1971 – 2005) Diaries.

Reading, I seem to hear Martin's voice. It takes me back to the days towards the end of high school. Although we barely heard from each other in the years before he died, I still feel close to him. Martin also writes about things that happened to us together. He's witty and entertaining. Many of my recollections are at odds with his descriptions.

Were we truly friends? What is it that really defines friendship? We laughed a lot; we had a similarly quirky sense of humor. What probably brought us closest was our dissatisfaction with the world. We lamented the disenchantedness of modern life and sought to satisfy our longing for the sensations absent from our daily life through the use of hashish and LSD.

When I read certain passages from his diaries, I long to call out to him, to cry out my support when he writes about getting his life back on track. I wish I could lock him up in his flat to prevent him from going out to get another dose of heroin or cocaine – the starting point for every new breakdown. Alternately entranced, moved, appalled, I discover how Martin's life gives him moments of love and happiness while relentlessly bringing him closer to his untimely death.

Martin played the main character in my first short film, "Murphy". Was I fascinated by his extreme way of life, and did that lead me to exploit him for my own artistic purposes, using him as a freak? When we parted ways again, I blamed myself for having demanded too much of my friend for the sake of my film. But I wanted to continue along that path, and I was disappointed that Martin wasn't capable of showing me more support.

I was already enrolled in the Geneva film school when we spent several days together for the last time. We hiked together up to the Cresta Lake. I took pictures of Martin and his mother for a photography assignment. They both lived a couple of minutes away from each other in the Lacuna neighborhood in Chur. On Saturday evenings he always ate at his mother's, after which they played scrabble, both of them boasting an extensive vocabulary.

I wasn't well during that period. Following a recent separation, I was terrified at the idea of losing everything that had defined my life until then. The photography assignment took on a vital importance for me. When I look at Martin in the black and white pictures, I remember what he was like back then. He already bore the marks of his drug abuse and was somewhat apathetic, yet there was also a certain calm and confidence about him. Martin documented that visit too, writing extensively about it in a green notebook. He related how, sleepless and plagued by panic attacks, I would wake him up at night to smoke. When I read that he found me selfish because I didn't let him sleep in his own bed, I was somewhat taken aback at first. Didn't he have more sympathy for the difficult situation I was in at the time?

Now I know that those crazy days I spent with Martin were important for me. In spite of our differences, Martin's gentleness did me good. I took the pictures I needed and returned to Geneva with renewed confidence, and successfully completed my year at the film school.

The film "King of the Airs – Notes on a Friendship" is about Martin and me, about who we were and what we wanted to be. It's the story of a friendship that also had its dark sides.

Working on this film made me realize the vital importance of having ambitions and goals, both realistic and utopic ones. Does one need a strong will for that, or lots of luck? Probably both.



#### Martin's diaries

Maybe it would do me good to have a girlfriend again, even if it should be just a short and unhappy romance, as has mostly been my experience. Even unhappy love helps us to keep love alive within our heart. Besides, the beloved is like a mirror to the lover. And if you never have a mirror to look into, the image you have of yourself will progressively deviate and you won't notice the changes in your own features.

(Excerpt from Martin's diary, January 28, 2001)

Martin's life as a drug addict reads like a self-experiment. He closely observes himself and his own drug use and meticulously describes the consequences of his actions in his notebooks. But his set-up, in which he is both the observer and the observed, turns against him. He is unable to resist the dynamics of addiction.

Martin's diaries cover 15 years of his life, from the sensitive, intelligent high school student who tries to overcome his inhibitions through alcohol and hashish, to the ravaged drug addict. He writes in old exercise books or on lose pages, which he meticulously dates and numbers. He always keeps these writings with him, even during the years he spends moving through various night shelters and rehab clinics. To protect his texts from the curious eyes of other patients, he learns the old German Kurrent script.

Once Martin realizes that he is never going to write his big autobiographical novel, he concentrates his energy entirely on his diary. His ambitions grow along with the texts. He sees his journal as a literary work that must satisfy even the highest standards. He hopes for recognition after his death.

In the main part of his diary Martin reports almost fanatically about his drug consumption. He also recounts desperate attempts to get a handle on things. He feels the need for a meaningful life, and longs for love and affection. After a failed suicide attempt, Martin makes one last bid to free himself from drugs, and asks to be admitted to the monastery in Disentis. This spiritual life gives him the support he needs, he immerses himself in the Bible and has long theological discussions with the priests. During long, sleepless nights he thinks of his childhood and tries to understand the events that marked his life.

After Martin's death, Christine Felix was presented with a box containing her son's writings. She decided to publish these in a book form, for others to read, just as Martin had wished.

"What Are You writing in this little Book? – Martin Felix (1971-2005) Tagebücher" (ISBN 978-3-033-03538-6) was published in February 2013 by Christine Felix with the help of Ivo Zen. Several of the photos that appear in the book are from an earlier work by the filmmaker. Ursina Landolt and Lea Pfister created the graphic design, capturing the versatility of Martin's original diaries.

In the film "King of the Airs – Notes on a Friendship", Martin's mother, his friends and the filmmaker himself read excerpts from the diaries, giving rise to a dialogue between the past and these different people's present circumstances. Martin's texts also make up the film's voice-over, read by the young actor Flurin Giger.

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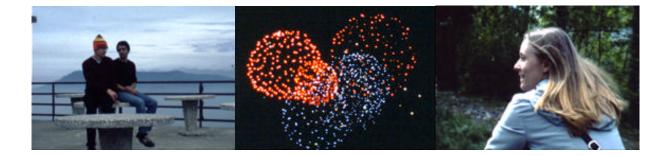
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#### Ivo Zen's Super 8 diary

Ivo Zen starts his Super 8 diary shortly after finishing his first short film "Murphy". His early shots capture the fall and the advancing winter. He awaits every new film roll with much anticipation. The flickering light the projector beams on the walls of his tiny room seems magical to him.

In his quest for stability, Ivo Zen films his life over many years. He documents his co-students at the Geneva film school, the fire station across the street, his father chopping wood, his daughter on the swing. He learns to wait patiently by the window for his children to return from school to play in the first snow. Ivo Zen makes numerous self-portraits and at times entrusts his subjects with the camera. The topic of friendship fascinates him from the beginning, and when he films he tries to capture the feelings he has for his subjects in their faces.

The relation between Martin's diaries and the Super 8 footage varies throughout the film. Sometimes the images echo the text, at others they diverge, creating new associations. In its celebration of light, color and movement, the Super 8 footage departs from the narrative level of the film, giving rise to moments of purely visual character. In conjunction with the music, these rhythmical sequences are a tribute to the beauty and magic of the world.





### Quotes from the film

"We both aimed high, we wanted to fly away where nobody would be able to follow us. Until the fear crept in of not being up to life's demands."

Ivo Zen, director

*"I liked the fact that Martin loved me. He was a sort of big brother to me, he protected me when I was mistreated and looked after me in the streets."* 

Katarina V., girlfriend

*"I could have taken Martin to our summerhouse, and kept him away from drugs for a few months. Why didn't I do it? I don't know."* 

Martin Ghisletti, classmate

*"I think that to a large extent my need to get high, to get stoned, was a way of repressing the fact that I shirked my responsibility towards my mother when she was dying. Unfortunately it took me 20 years to realize that."* 

Jean-Claude Campell, Ivo's oldest friend

"Every life that's worthwhile comes with a risk. Martin took it. He took a big risk and paid the price."

Ivan Beer, school friend

"After Martin died, after he was buried, I would observe the young people in town and think: You're all so alive, so alive! It sounds silly now, but those are the thoughts I had at the time."

Christine Felix, mother

*"Pull yourself together! What a great expression! Life is a jewel."* Martin Felix

### Interview with Ivo Zen

#### How did you decide to make such a personal film?

Martin's mother gave me the diaries. It was very peculiar to read my deceased friend's journal, sometimes I almost got into a sort of trance. The opportunity to learn about the life of someone close to you in such a way, to have access to their most intimate desires, is something absolutely unique. On top of that, there's the fact that he mentions me several times throughout the texts. Reading them sent me on a journey into my own past. It was clear to me from the beginning that I could only do Martin's diaries justice with a very personal film. But what do I mean by personal? I always wanted to make a film that would be intimate, yet at the same time tell a story that's universal. In order to achieve that, it was necessary for me to first filter and transpose my own experiences so as to make them communicable.

## Would you say that "King of the Airs – Notes on a friendship" is also about coming to terms with the death of a friend?

For me it was more about reminiscing, going back to the times we'd spent together. Martin's texts gave me the first impetus, my memory did the rest. It was quite surprising to see all that I could recall. Asking myself: How was it exactly? Where did he live? What did we talk about? Who else was there? Such questions kept bringing new elements to the surface. Memory isn't something static. Thinking about those years so intensively brought me closer to Martin. I think I managed to catch up on something that I may have missed while he was still alive. Recently I noticed time and again that people who lose someone close to them are often left with a sense of failure. They didn't have time to make up, to clear up a misunderstanding, to show affection. I think that the film touches upon something that's familiar to many people.

#### Did the film help you to discover something about friendship?

At one point in the film I say that I never went easy on Martin just because he was a junkie. That was fine to the extent that I also entirely accepted him as an addict, and it didn't prevent me from believing in him. But I also lacked empathy, I didn't realize how incredibly difficult it is to come off drugs. In friendships it's also important to be sensitive and forgiving. Today I try to accept people's weaknesses. I have enough of my own. But I have to admit that in spite of this insight I still tend to be too critical towards people that are close to me, I expect too much of them. There's still a lot of room for improvement.

#### And with respect to your late friend Martin?

The film enabled me to rediscover Martin's sensitivity, his intelligence and his talent. But it also brought back his stubborn and lethargic personality. That made him human again, a real friend (laughs). Most of all, though, I realized how much I owe him, and that our friendship is still a part of my life today.

# How did you go about convincing Martin's friends and family to participate in the film? Some of them are evidently fighting their own issues of addiction or guilt.

I gave myself a lot of time to meet with everyone who had something to do with the film. Martin's mother, Christine Felix, was in from the start. We published the book together, which gave rise to a very strong relationship – definitely a prerequisite for working on the film.

Ivan, an old friend of Martin's and mine, was keen on participating from the beginning. He still feels a strong connection to Martin, even though more than 20 years have passed since the last time they saw each other. He too saw the project as a means of reviving Martin's extraordinary personality and talent.

It was important to me for the person Martin describes as "the last unconditional friend before the storms of puberty" to appear in the film. By coincidence his name is Martin too, which elegantly suggests the way the diaries act as a mirror.

It was much more difficult in the case of Katarina and Martin's father. The film confronted Katarina with her own addiction issues. Martin was someone who was important to her and hadn't made it. And she's still fighting addiction, even after several years of abstinence. In the case of Martin's father, I could feel his need to give something to his son through the film, something that he maybe hadn't been able to give him during his lifetime. Integrating this scene in the film was quite a balancing act. I confronted him with a short text in spite of the fact that he had changed his mind at the last minute about reading from the diary. I find this scene with Martin's father very moving and I'm convinced of its importance in the film. It lays bare the act of filming and clearly reveals what it means to talk about intimate feelings in front of a camera.

Where did you get the idea for the title of the film? How did the wren get mixed up in the story of your friendship with Martin? If I'm not mistaken, it's the smallest bird to be found in our latitudes.

When she gave me his diaries, Martin's mother also included his high school essay entitled "Zaunkönig – Strich an der Wand" ("Zaunkönig – A Streak on the Wall). In it, Martin describes a neighborhood eccentric from Chur who lived on the streets when he wasn't in the psychiatric clinic. We sometimes ran into him in the old town, where he used to sell his short stories for a few francs. So Martin's fascination for the life of an outsider is already documented in his high school work. This interest in people living at the margins of society was something that both Martin and I shared. When we were together we used to attract all sorts of strange people and made the most incredible encounters. But he then pursued this path very radically. Anyway, that essay aroused my curiosity in the wren, or Zaunkönig. Later I learned from Ivan that the tiny bird was a sort of symbol for Martin, who used to doodle it on his textbooks. Then I came across Aesop's fable about the wren, and I immediately saw the relationship to the film.

### Could you be more specific?

The king (König in German) represents the desire to be something special, to stand out from the crowd. The way the wren outwits the other birds is a metaphor for drug use, which is really a way of flying higher than everyone else without tiring your wings. That's also what Martin and I longed for. But the other birds don't appreciate being tricked, and they ban the wren. The strength of that particular fable is that it evokes images that enrich the fabric of the film without proposing a clear interpretation.

#### What is the relationship between your Super 8 journal and Martin's diaries?

In a way, the two approaches are diametrically opposed. The more he wrote, the more Martin withdrew into himself. He gave up the idea of publishing his writings during his lifetime. In my case, the Super 8 diary was above all a way for me to make films on my own -1 felt that my earlier attempts had been a bit hard on my friendships. But I soon realized that my films lacked something when I tried to make them without people, without faces in which to read the reflection of my feelings for them. That made me change my course, and I began to expose myself more through the camera. I used the visible as a mirror to reveal my inner world.

# Did you know from the beginning that you would use your Super 8 footage, or did that idea come along later?

The idea wasn't there from the start, but it came quite early on, as soon as I got more deeply involved with Martin's writings and started thinking about a possible film. The turning point was when I realized that I could use these two different journals in contrast to one another. That's when I knew that I had a good idea for a film: two different people trying to capture their lives at the same time – one of them in words, the other on film. That synchronicity gives rise to endless possibilities. The text and the image can drift apart, or they can completely converge and both relate the same event, like in the sequence about the 1999 solar eclipse. Martin wrote about it in his diary, and I filmed what some friends and I were doing at that same moment. I'm certain that most people remember exactly where they were at the time.

## The music, or rather the soundtrack, creates quite a range of different atmospheres. How did it become so intricate?

The sound is really very multilayered. Just like the image, it also consists of both archive recordings and new compositions by musicians Ilja Komarov and Trixa Arnold. My old band recordings allow the film to really dive into the past and evoke the atmosphere of parties held in musty basements and such. Disco Doom made the soundtrack for my first short film, "Murphy", in which Martin played the main character. As far as I know that's the first recording made by that band. Ilja Komarov and Trixa Arnold started with these old recordings, enhancing and contrasting the different tunings. Then they created electronic birdcalls, and used the accordion to introduce a tone that's completely different from the archival sounds from the 80s and 90s. The guitar builds a sort of bridge between the new and the old soundscapes – in its distorted form it bores itself deep into your brain, whereas played in a soft melody it can transform a forest into an enchanted place. I'm thrilled with the soundtrack.

## So during the editing process you had to weave in these different archival elements with the new footage. How did you proceed?

My editor Tania Stöcklin's contribution to this project is immeasurable. When I film, I try to create scenes that can later be combined in many different ways. During the editing process, the challenge was to figure out what could work together from the point of view of the content, and what could function on an associative level. Tania Stöcklin liked the idea of a film centered on two parallel lives that intersect, and she was enthusiastic about the Super 8 footage and the music. She completely committed herself to the film, and we edited it together over a time span of around two years. Our motto in the editing room was: there are no bad ideas. That way we also tried things out that didn't seem too promising at first glance. But experimenting with them led us to discover other solutions.

#### The film was produced by Mira Film. How did you come to work together?

The producer Hercli Bundi of Mira Film had liked my graduation film "Pizzet". We also both happen to be founding members of the group "Cineasts independents rumantschs", an association representing the interests of independent Romansh filmmakers. When I approached Hercli I already had a treatment for the film based on the story of my friendship with Martin and excerpts from his diaries. Hercli grew up in Chur himself and can identify with the longing – the need – to break free from the constraints of a small town. He found the material interesting and proposed to submit the project to the European script development workshop Sources 2. We then continued working on the idea together over several years up to the finished film. We were both convinced that Martin's diaries were an incredible starting point for a film, a real treasure trove. Working on the project was a very enriching experience that

required us to always take our ideas one step further. That's also what helped us overcome moments of discouragement or disappointment.



Ivo Zen was born and raised in Santa Maria, in the Val Müstair. He left the remote valley at the age of 15 to go to high school in Chur. After a somewhat turbulent gap year, he enrolled to study architecture at the ETH in Zurich, where he became acquainted with video and photography. He quit after two years and worked in a bookstore. During this time he started making experimental films. He began his Super 8 film journal in 1996. Ivo Zen graduated from the Geneva film school in 2003. The following year he co-founded the independent production house Alva Film. He gave several workshops in documentary filmmaking at the University of Art and Design (HEAD) in Geneva. In 2010 he became president of the group "Cineasts independents rumantschs", promoting the interests of Romansh filmmakers. He has twice been the recipient of the Graubünden canton's grant for artists. Ivo Zen is married and lives in

Zurich with his wife and two children.

#### Selected filmography

- 2016 «Zaunkönig Tagebuch einer Freundschaft» ("King of the Airs Notes on a Friendship") HD, 78', documentary feature, produced by Mira Film GmbH, SSR SRG; festivals: world premiere Visions du Réel Nyon
- 2015 «Esser da chasa» HD, 25', TV documentary, produced by Alva film, RTR
- 2014 «In'experientscha musicala» HD, 25', TV documentary, produced by Alva film, RTR
- 2010 «Films d'amaturs Amaturs da films» HD, 25', TV documentary, produced by Alva film, RTR. World Film Festival Tartu, Solothurn Film Festival
- 2009 «Maurus, Nadia, Flurina» HDV, 60', documentary film, produced by Alva film, TSR, 3sat, festivals: NAFA Film Festival, Trento Film Festival «Eurorama» Selection of Outstanding Anthropological Films, World Film Festival Tartu
- 2004 «Pizzet Forsa l'ultim on» 35 mm, 52', documentary film, produced by Alva film, ESBA Geneva, RTR, festivals (selection): world premiere Visions du Réel Nyon, DOK Leipzig, Duisburger Filmwoche, Message to Man St. Petersburg, Yamagata Film Festival, awards: special mention of the jury, Aux Ecrans du Réel, Le Mans (F), canton of Geneva quality award, selected by the Swiss federal office of culture for "Le cinéma suisse de demain"
- 2001 «Frédéric» 35 mm, 15', fiction, produced by ESBA Geneva, festivals (selection): world premiere Locarno Film Festival, Tous Ecrans Geneva, Solothurn Film Festival

### Mira Film

Mira Film was founded in 2002 by authors, filmmakers and producers Vadim Jendreyko and Hercli Bundi. Since 1990 they have produced or coproduced (both nationally and internationally) many films for cinema and TV, widely shown in festivals, in cinemas and on television.

### Filmography

- 2016 «Zaunkönig Tagebuch einer Freundschaft» by Ivo Zen, 78 minutes
- 2016 «The Beekeeper and his Son» by Diedie Weng, 85 minutes
- 2016 «Calabria» by Pierre-François Sauter, 116 minutes
- 2016 «Ama-San» by Cláudia Varejão, 99 minutes,
- 2015 «UNESCO Welterbe Schweiz» 34 short films for UNESCO Switzerland
- 2014 «The Chimpanzee Complex» by Marc Schmidt, 75 minutes
- 2014 «Padrone e Sotto» by Michele Cirigliano, 72 minutes
- 2014 «Eine Familie kämpft Leben mit einer unheimlichen Krankheit» by Michael Werder, 51 minutes
- 2013 «Everyday Rebellion» by Arash & Arman T. Riahi, 110 minutes
- 2013 «Die Reise zum sichersten Ort der Erde", documentary feature by Edgar Hagen, 100 minutes
- 2012 «Where the Condors Fly», documentary feature by Carlos Klein, 90 minutes
- 2012 «Zwei Flüsse Zwei Lieder», TV documentary by Sarah Derendinger, 52 minutes
- 2011 «Marchesa», TV documentary by Hercli Bundi, 26 minutes
- 2011 «Flying Home», documentary feature by Tobias Wyss, 80 minutes
- 2010 «The House in the Park», documentary feature by Hercli Bundi, 86 minutes
- 2009 «Die Frau mit den 5 Elefanten», documentary feature by Vadim Jendreyko, 93 minutes
- 2008 «Geheiligtes Gebein», TV documentary by Dominik Wessely, 57 minutes
- 2005 «Play don't Play», TV documentary by Manfred Ferrari, 52 minutes
- 2005 «La savur dil palc» TV documentary by Manfred Ferrari, 25 minutes
- 2004 «Leistung am Limit», TV documentary by Vadim Jendreyko, 53 minutes
- 2004 «Pastiziers Zucker, Heimweh, Abenteuer», TV documentary by Manfred Ferrari, 25 minutes
- 2003 «Transit: Zürich Flughafen», TV documentary by Vadim Jendreyko, 53 minutes

#### Cast & Crew

With

Directed by Script Editing Camera Sound Music

Archival music

Martin's voice Ivo's voice Ivo's voice in English

Producer Production company Associate producer Production management Marketing and outreach

Online/DCP Color grading

Sound mix Mastering

Co-producer SRF editor

With the financial support of

Ivo Zen Christine Felix Ivan Beer Martin Ghisletti Katarina V. Lorenz Felix Jean-Claude Campell Marry, Philipp

Ivo Zen Ivo Zen, Hercli Bundi Tania Stöcklin Ulrich Grossenbacher Ivo Schläpfer, Mike Lawson Ilja Komarov, Trixa Arnold

Disco Doom, Fragment

Flurin Giger Henrik Zimmermann Kaleo La Belle

Hercli Bundi Mira Film Vadim Jendreyko Peter Zwierko Susanne Guggenberger

Andromeda Film Paul Abydet

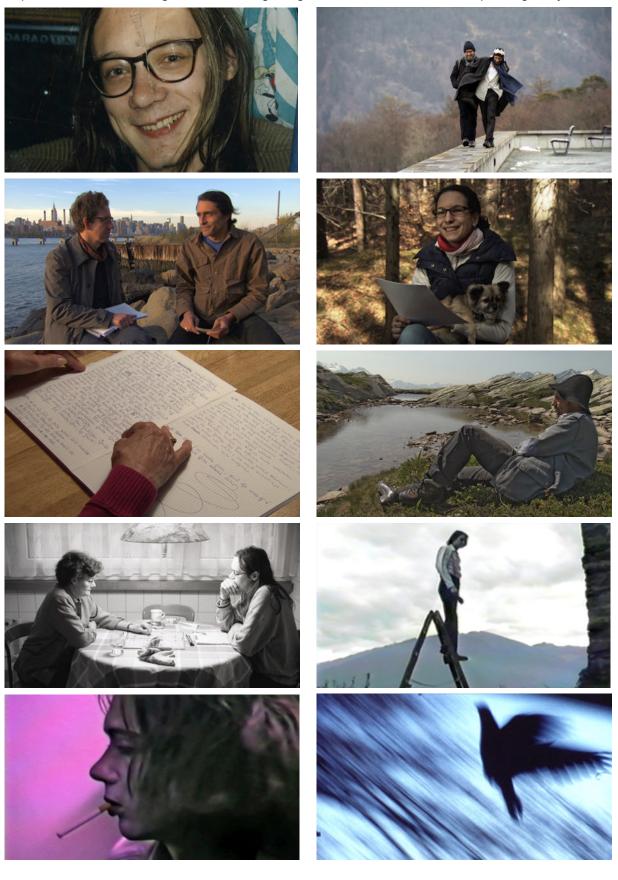
Daniel Hobi Christof Steinmann, Magnetix

Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen SRG SSR Urs Augstburger

Zurich Film Foundation Canton of Graubünden cultural funding Fachausschuss Film und Medienkunst BS/BL Suissimage Cultural Fund Swiss Ministry of Culture Succès Passage Antenne Ernst Göhner Foundation UBS Cultural Foundation Bündner Suchthilfe Foundation Stavros S. Niarchos Foundation, Chur City of Chur Graubünden Cantonal Bank Script developed through a Sources 2 Script Development Workshop

## Stills

To download film stills und director's portrait: http://vincafilm.ch/katalog/27-zaunkoenig---tagebuch-einer-freundschaft/#press-gallery



### Contact

## **Production / World Rights**

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