



# Life of Marzouk

LADOC AND RAI CINEMA PRESENT IN COPRODUCTION WITH DUBLIN FILMS IN COLLABORATION WITH FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS FRANCE 3 CORSE VIASTELLA AND AL JAZEERA DOCUMENTARY CHANNEL WITH THE SUPPORT OF REGIONE CAMPANIA LIFE OF MARZOUK WITH MARZOUK MEJRI ALIA MEJRI JAMAL MEJRI ELVIRA ERMAN DIRECTED BY ERNESTO PAGANO WRITTEN BY ERNESTO PAGANO LORENZO CIOFFI MATTEO PARISINI PRODUCED BY LORENZO CIOFFI CO-PRODUCED BY DAVID HURST MUSIC MARZOUK MEJRI CINEMATOGRAPHY LORENZO CIOFFI SOUND FRANCESCO AMODEO ERNESTO PAGANO EDITING MATTEO PARISINI SOUND EDITING FRANCESCO AMODEO RÉGIS RAMADOUR SOUND MIXING FRANCESCO AMODEO PASCAL BUSOLIN COLOUR CORRECTION XAVIER CABANEL SIMONA INFANTE ASSISTANT PRODUCER DAMIEN CABUT ARMANDO ANDRIA GRAPHIC DESIGN ANDREA CIOFFI TRANSLATION JULIE DECLÉ PAOLO LUIS VINCENT MARRELLI INTERNATIONAL SALES AQUATIC FILMS | 2017 | 60'



dublinfilms



AQUATIC FILMS

# Life of Marzouk



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AQUATIC FILMS

## VITA DI MARZOUK / LIFE OF MARZOUK

2017 | 61' | 16:9 HD

**produced by** Ladoc with Rai Cinema

**co-produced by** Dublin Films, France Télévisions, Al Jazeera Documentary Channel

**supported by** Regione Campania

**directed by** Ernesto Pagano

**written by** Ernesto Pagano, Lorenzo Cioffi, Matteo Parisini

**cinematography** Lorenzo Cioffi

**editing** Matteo Parisini

**music** Marzouk Mejri and Fanfara Station

**sound mix** Francesco Amodeo

**color correction** Simona Infante

**executive producers** Lorenzo Cioffi (Ladoc), David Hurst (Dublin Films)

**international distribution** Aquatic Films

**trailer** <https://vimeo.com/236214459>



A Tunisian musician  
his Italian wife  
and a marriage in crisis.

## Synopsis

Marzouk's marriage is falling apart. For the past 20 years, the Tunisian-born musician has been living in Italy, where he married a local girl, Elvira. At her request, he is reluctantly attending marriage guidance counselling sessions, but they seem to be going nowhere. Marzouk and Elvira have two little children, Alia and Jamal. He talks to them in Arabic, in a determined attempt to foster their "Tunisian half". One summer, he takes them on a trip to his hometown of Tebourba. While the children seem to relish the new adventure of immersing themselves in their dad's culture, Marzouk is going in the opposite emotional direction, experiencing a new sense of estrangement from his own land, after so many years in exile. In the end, can he belong anywhere, anymore?



## The story

Marzouk has two children, of five and seven years of age: Jamal and Alya. He is blond and blue-eyed, she is dark haired and brown-eyed.

They were both born in Naples. He always speaks to them in Arabic in a determined attempt to foster the “Tunisian half” of their origins.

His partner Elvira has dragged him to the marriage counsellor’s couch. Because she cannot communicate with him: she feels she is alone, with an “absent man”, one who is also distant from the responsibilities of a modern Western father.

Marzouk, on the contrary, believes that the real problem lies with his being an immigrant, a Muslim, a musician, and a penniless one, on top of all that. “My hands have frozen up now” he explains to the therapist, breaking his usual silence. Through those very hands which now have trouble playing, as they hold the old letters from his father asking him to send money home, we witness the collective drama of Northern African emigration to Europe.

It’s from within the folds of this crisis that the depth of the relationship between Marzouk and his children emerges, they who have been raised in the heart of western middle-class bourgeoisie and who are suddenly catapulted to the Tunisian countryside, where their father has taken them to get to know his *bilad* for the first time.

In Tebourba, thirty kilometres from Tunis, Alya and Jamal discover a simpler world, where everything has its eternal place: his Uncle Nabil’s ramshackle workshop, the

kitchen forever crowded with the women of the household, the courtyard where the men play 'real-men's' games like boxing and arm wrestling, the back-end of the garage where the children witness, wide-eyed, the sacrifice and butchering of a ram, the family gatherings where everybody makes music together playing the *bendir* and singing *Malouf* songs, the music of nostalgia.

Nostalgia for an idealized past, where Marzouk's father - founder of Tebourba's musical band, and still vividly alive in the memories of the town's old timers - was an institution for everyone. That past which still sends out echoes of the Marseillaise and of French colonialism.

It's during this parenthesis of Tunisian life that Alya and Jamal begin to understand something of the meaning of this "half" of theirs.

For his part, Marzouk, more and more distant from Elvira, who has gone instead on holiday to Argentina by herself to a conference, feels the consistency of their relationship becoming thinner and thinner, as thin as Elvira's voice itself now sounds. With constant problems with the signal, she calls him regularly, from one continent to the other, to check that the children are fine, but without ever truly connecting with her partner himself: as, for instance, when Marzouk starts to tell her about how well the children are getting on with their Tunisian cousins and she replies worried only whether they are using their sunscreen cream.

Marzouk, who immigrated all of twenty years ago to Italy, seems to have also developed a subtle distance from Tunisia his "home" environment; since in this perpetual migrant condition, his only real home are Alya and Jamal, in the end. During the trip to Tebourba we see his idea of fatherhood emerge: as a father he must bequeath to his children, apart from the Arabic language, a whole treasury of "little things", such as how to saw a wooden door, how to keep the beat on a drum, how to preserve the memory of your ancestors. And it's on the very tomb of their paternal grandfather that Alya asks him with a touch of bewilderment whether she too will be buried in Tunisia or in Italy. This is a question to which Marzouk cannot give an answer. The future is open, and no one can predict the route their identities will take.

## Director's notes

Watching *Life of Marzouk* is like looking at our own lives and trying to draw the profile of our own society.

Observing it from the outside, through the prism of a family's microcosm, we see coming to light the "private or emotional side" of integration, that rather overused term with its ambiguous meaning so often exploited and manipulated for this or that political discourse and design.

The present film wishes instead to divest the "clash of cultures" of its exterior newsworthiness to reveal the universal threads which hold together human relations. These threads are first made of sentiments and emotions, and it's only afterwards that the points of contact and common ground (or grounds of conflict) can emerge between cultures.

Alya and Jamal's beauty is the ideal genetic synthesis which tells the story, solely through images, of the potentialities of the integration between peoples of the Mediterranean. Marzouk's music pervades the images, defining a truly ideal space of democracy, where the sounds of this or that shore of the Mediterranean come together. Music is the magic carpet on which Marzouk's life moves.

The visual approach of the film is that of pure observation. Everyday life is glimpsed from behind the scenes capturing areas of light and shadow in the relationships between Marzouk and his children, Marzouk and Elvira. Their marriage crisis is related through the 'confessional' at the counsellor's office, a place where the tale of the problems of integration between a North African and a European is perhaps told for the first time, although those sessions can also be read on the universal plane: that is, on that of the integration between a man and a woman, or simply, in general, between two people.



## The protagonist

**Marzouk Mejri** is a versatile multi-faceted musician who ranges between percussion and wind instruments, between electronic music and traditional Andalusian and Tunisian genres. With a Diploma in percussion from the Tunis Conservatory of Music, he arrived in Italy in 1995. He played at first in local shows before being discovered by the Neapolitan saxophonist Daniele Sepe and launched onto the World Music circuit. Since then, Marzouk has begun to work with internationally renowned artists such as Peppe Barra, James Senese, Enzo Avitabile, and La Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare. In 2008 he published his first album, *Medem*, also featuring the most prominent Neapolitan musicians. The soundtrack of *Life of Marzouk* consists of some unpublished pieces of his.



## The director

**Ernesto Pagano**, born in 1981, is a journalist, a screen writer for television and a documentary filmmaker. He wrote and directed the documentary film *Napolislam* (2015 | 68' Ladoc | which won the 2015 Biografilm Italia Award and was a finalist in the 2016 Nastri d'Argento awards). He has curated the journalistic aspects of various investigative documentaries for Arte and National Geographic Channel. For La7 tv channel he wrote *La scelta del Papa*. From 2011 to 2015 he collaborated with the RAI 3 *Report* series team. For the last ten years he has shared his time between Italy and Egypt where he made a series of documentaries on Egyptian society (among them *Lontano da Tabrir / Far from Tabrir* | 2013 | 26' | Ladoc), and he has translated from Arabic the Egyptian bestseller *Taxi*, on which he also based his first documentary, *Cairo Taxi Drivers* (2009 | 26' | Ladoc).



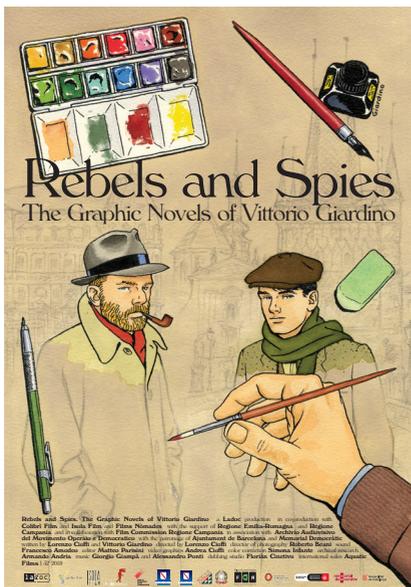
## The production

**Lorenzo Cioffi**, born in 1979, Naples, graduated in History of Cinema at the University of Rome Tre. He furthered his studies in documentary cinema at the Drop Out school in Milan and proceeded to spend two years in Paris working as productions assistant. In 2007 he returned to Italy as an author and filmmaker, specialising in documentaries. *Hector's Journey* (Cinecittà Luce – Torino Film Festival 2013) *Napoli24, L'ultima Chance*. In 2011 he set up Ladoc productions and has since produced (*Napolislam, La Natura delle Cose, Almost Tomorrow, Rebels and Spies – The Graphic Novels of Vittorio Giardino*) and directed (*Rustam Casanova, Il Viaggio di Ettore*) documentaries for cinema and television. In 2016 he was selected for Eurodoc and in 2017 took part in Berlinale Talents.

**Ladoc** is a production company specializing in documentary films for cinema and for television.

We favour the creative documentary genre, highlighting new points of view on issues, stories and significant people of social and topical interest, where diverse cultural perspectives may meet. We look for novel, surprising or unique angles from which to access a universal perspective. We enjoy mixing genres and styles, and we are aware of the unique force of narrative in understanding humanity.

TRACK RECORD



### **REBELS AND SPIES**

#### **The Graphic Novels of Vittorio Giardino**

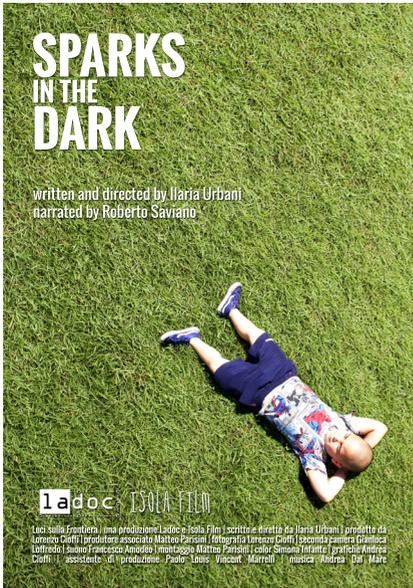
2018 | 52'

**in co-production with** Colibri Film, Isola Film, Filmsnòmades

**directed by** Lorenzo Cioffi

**category** arts and culture

The books of Vittorio Giardino, master of the graphic novel, explore the history of the 1900s. Today, the artist is working on the final chapter of his Jonas Fink trilogy, so it is the perfect moment to look back over this great master's work.



## SPARKS IN THE DARK

2017 | 52'

in co-production with Isola Film

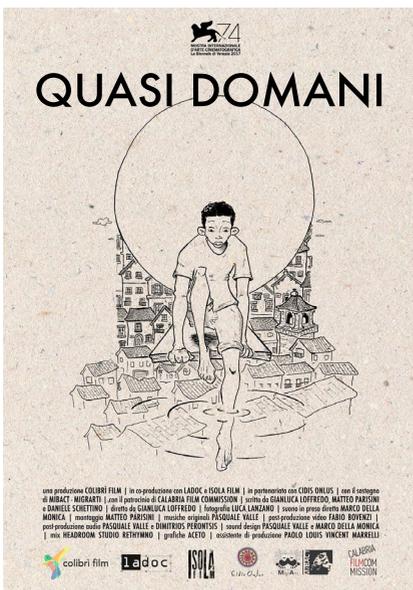
directed by Ilaria Urbani

narrated by Roberto Saviano

categories society; human interest

broadcasted RSI; TV2000

After Gomorrah, the shocking insider account of organised crime, *Sparks in the Dark* offers a new perspective on Naples and celebrates its unknown heroes. In districts brought to the brink by poverty and unemployment, tough and dedicated street priests try to keep communities alive. This film tells their stories, narrated by the peerless contemporary writer Roberto Saviano.



## ALMOST TOMORROW

2017 | 52'

in co-production with Colibri Film

directed by Gianluca Loffredo

categories society; current affairs

The lives of some migrants intertwine with villagers' in a small village in Calabria, Italy. Five stories reveal mutual hopes and fears, and paint a contradictory portrait of today's Italy.



## THE NATURE OF THINGS

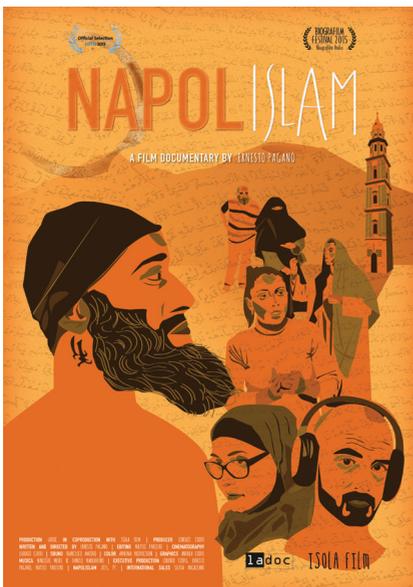
2016 | 70'

directed by Laura Viezzoli

categories human interest; point of view

broadcasted RSI

An emotional and philosophical immersion in that precious period of one's life which is the end of life, through one year of meetings and conversations between the author and the protagonist, a man terminally ill with ALS. A journey into the human soul where present merges with past and future becoming a landscape background for a dialogue about love, pain and the need for freedom.



## NAPOLISLAM

2015 | 52'

in co-production with Isola Film

directed by Ernesto Pagano

categories society; current affairs

broadcasted Sky Arte; Sky Cielo; France3; Al Jazeera Balkans; Al Arabiya; RSI

One fine day Naples wakes up and finds out it has become Islamic. A camera goes through the city and enters into the lives of ten people who have converted to Islam. The result is *Napolislam*: a documentary with a comic twist that explains why the message of Allah is slowly conquering Europe.





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