



Croatia, Italy, Slovenia | 2025 | 112'

a film by
Igor Bezinović



**OFFICIAL
SELECTION**

INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
ROTTERDAM
2025

PRESS NOTES

Further press materials can be downloaded [HERE](#)

Contacts

World Sales

Lightdox

Anna Berthollet
+33 6 20 65 33 03
anna@lightdox.com
lightdox.com

Publicist

NOISE Film & TV

Mirjam Wiekenkamp
+31 6 28652249
mirjam@noisefilmpr.com
noisefilmpr.com

Production

Restart

Vanja Jambrovic, Tibor Keser
Vanja: +385918930675
Tibor: +38598808988
vanja@restarted.hr
tibor@restarted.hr
www.restarted.hr

Videomante

Erica Barbiani
+393284364743
erica@videomante.it
www.videomante.it

Nosorogi

Marina Gumzi
+38631482637
marina@nosorogi.com
www.nosorogi.com



Short synopsis

In 1919 the Italian poet, dandy and preacher of war Gabriele D'Annunzio occupied the city of Fiume. The citizens of Fiume, today called Rijeka, retell and reinterpret the bizarre story about the 16-month occupation of their city in a brutally factual yet defiantly punk cinematic journey.

Synopsis

On 12 September 1919, a troop of some three hundred soldiers under the leadership of the flamboyant war loving Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio swooped into the Northern-Adriatic port town of Fiume, now Rijeka, wanting to annex the city to Italy. Over the course of the next 16 months, during what is regarded as one of the most bizarre militant sieges of all time, his official photography team captured over 10,000 images. A century later, Rijeka-born filmmaker Igor Bezinović, along with some three hundred citizens, orchestrates a direct-action history lesson focused on the siege and its modern-day implications. The communal undertaking in historical empowerment not only revisits both facts and legends but also puts forward a social counterweight to D'Annunzio's occupational agenda.

The result is a brutally factual yet defiantly punk cinematic journey, deadly serious yet hilariously surreal. It critically examines the tactics of performance, manipulation and propaganda employed during the siege and transgresses them to create a wild ride directly into the heart of chaos. An invitation to dare create new viewpoints, narratives, and experiences, it uncovers nationalist historiographies as effective and obstinate ideological instruments, no matter how absurd or ridiculous.

Fiume o morte! is a film on poetry, dynamite, cocaine, machine guns, football, airplanes, furniture flying out of windows, concerts, prisons, sunbathing, thousands of soldiers, millions of bullets, endless speeches, a platypus and on the power of political performativity. D'Annunzio might as well be considered its trailblazer heralding some of the biggest masters of ghastly political showmanship of our age.



About the director

Igor Bezinović

Igor Bezinović is a filmmaker born in Rijeka, which is now part of Croatia, but at that time belonged to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, before that partly the Kingdom of Italy and partly the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, before that the Free State of Fiume, before that the Italian Regency of Carnaro, before that Austria-Hungary...

His films include *The Blockade* (Oktavijan prize for Best Croatian Documentary 2012), *Veruda* (Oktavijan prize for Best Croatian Documentary 2015) and *A Brief Excursion* (Big Golden Arena prize for Best Croatian Feature 2017), along with many shorts of all shapes and sizes. His work has been shown internationally at events including IFFR, DOK Leipzig, Ji.hlava IDFF, CPH:DOX,

Kurzfilmtage Winterthur, Biennale of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean, Venice Biennale of Architecture (with Hrvošlava Brkušić for Pulska grupa), Museum of the Moving Image, Guanajuato IFF and Viennale, among others. He graduated in Film Directing at the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb, and in Philosophy, Sociology and Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb.

www.igorbezinovic.net



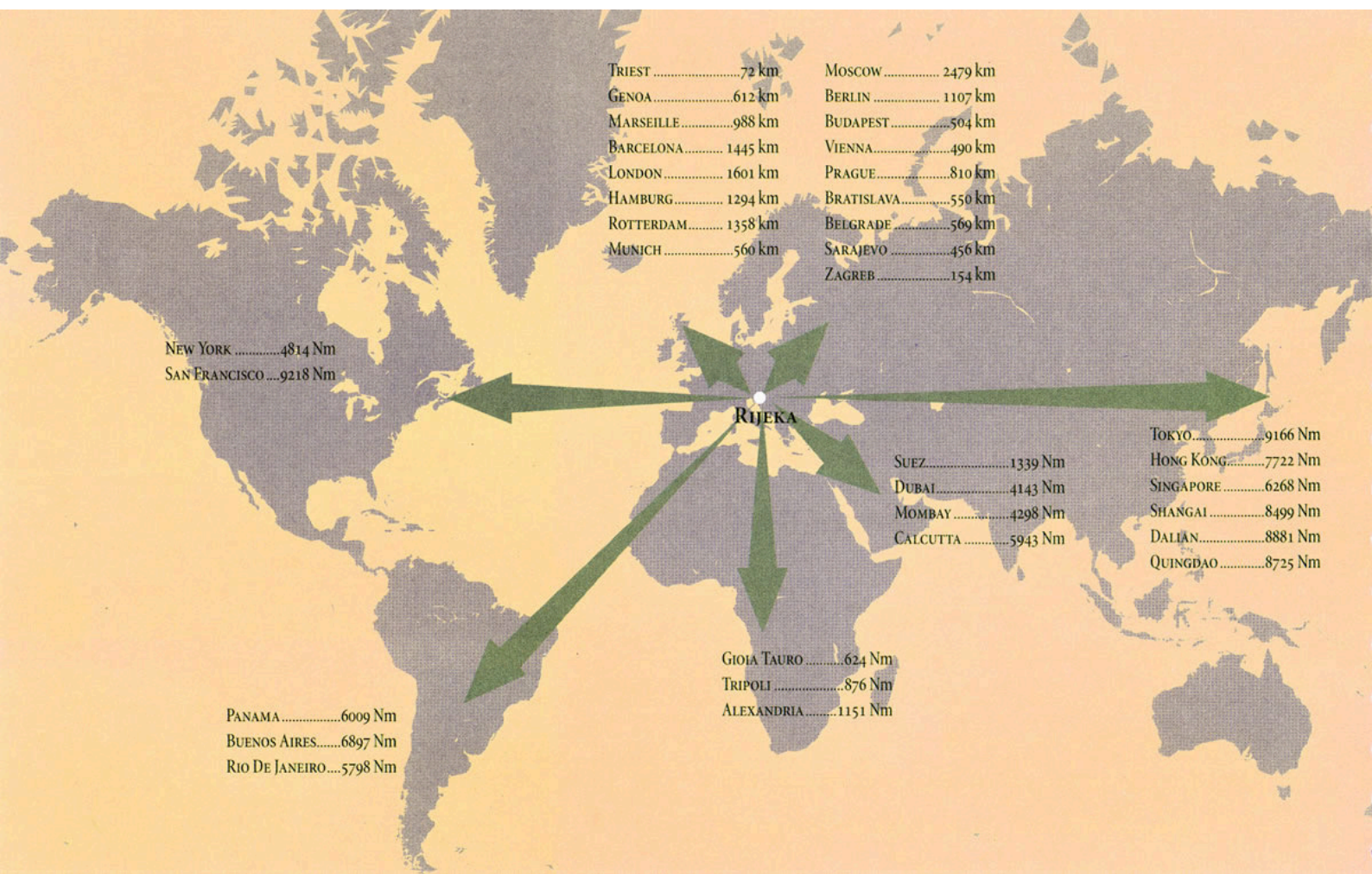
Filmography

FEATURES

Fiume o morte! (2025), *A Brief Excursion* (2017), *The Blockade* (2012)

SELECTED SHORTS

Microcassette: The Smallest Cassette I've Ever Seen (2020), *Postcards* (2018), *The Lovetts* (2018), *A Short Family Film* (2016), *Veruda - A Film About Bojan* (2015), *From Kršan to Peroj* (2015), *A Very Brief Excursion* (2014), *Waiting* (2014), *Unmediated Democracy Demands Unmediated Space* (2012)



THE RIJEKA ENDEAVOUR: Igor Bezinović on Fiume o morte!

Interview conducted and edited by Neil Young

NY: What relevance do you think Gabriele D'Annunzio has in terms of current politics – in Croatia, Italy, Europe and the world?

IB: I think a fantastic book could be written about the similarities between D'Annunzio and contemporary right-wing populists across Europe and elsewhere – his propaganda machine, his “fake news” agendas, his aristocratic hatred of democracy, the way he concealed his capitalistic financiers, his warmongering... all these are unfortunately very evident in contemporary politics.

I think D'Annunzio really thought his charisma could change the politics of Fiume, Italy and the world. As if he wasn't aware that without the protection of the regular Italian army, without the bankrolling by his capitalist colleagues his action would have ended much more quickly. He believed that his power came directly from his charisma, which I find ridiculous.

Are you concerned about D'Annunzio's recent “rehabilitation,” including the 2019 unveiling of the statue to him in Trieste?

Yes, D'Annunzio has been experiencing a revival... a revival of his ideas, and also a revival of his actions being celebrated. That statue was erected on the 100th anniversary of the occupation of Fiume. Italian PM Giorgia Meloni was photographed in front of it – at the time she wrote on Twitter that the inauguration of the statue “on the centenary of the Fiume feat is an extremely important initiative because it honors the memory of a great Italian who marked national history.”

She'd previously praised how D'Annunzio “with courage and audacity accomplished the feat of Fiume” and said he “has nothing to envy of any Che Guevara, whom many young people also love to wear on their t-shirts.”

The fact that he was one of the leading proto-fascists doesn't seem to be a problem...

Yes, D'Annunzio is seen as a hero although he literally declared war on Italy! He's seen as a courageous person even though his rebels and he himself were in fact guarded by soldiers from the regular Italian army for 16 months. Some people even see him as almost being like a character who would have been at home in the Woodstock era, the late 1960s of student and worker rebellions...

Then again, in Croatia the story of his time in Fiume/Rijeka never received a clear narrative, apart from the fact that he was some crazy bald guy who occupied our city before Mussolini. And to talk about D'Annunzio in Croatia you need to remember that Fiume/Rijeka has a cosmopolitan history, that it belonged to eight or nine different states in the 20th century.

And that's a discourse which wasn't acceptable to Yugoslavs, who tried to diminish the importance of Italy in the city's history, and it is also convenient to the Croatian nationalists who are in power now. Regarding Italy, many Italian nationalists, who are of course mainstream in that country today, simply also ignore the fact that the city of Fiume/Rijeka wasn't purely Italian at the beginning of 20th century, but a truly multicultural one...

The film is very overtly a “communal” exercise, we see you interviewing local people and getting them involved in the filming. How do you strike the balance between this being “an Igor Bezinović film” which is simultaneously a communal, collaborative creative endeavour?

My first feature-length documentary, *The Blockade* [2012] is a film about a collective of students who occupied a faculty building for seven weeks, fighting against the commercialisation of education. It was my personal take on an event that significantly determined the political vibe of my generation, and which shaped my political engagement and my path as a filmmaker.

Like *Fiume o morte!*, that film was also a chronology of an occupation, but of a 35-day occupation of a building. The idea was to give a personal interpretation of a collective story, which could later on be retold. And this is what has happened – It was filmed 15 years ago, and many student activists still use it as a reference-point.

I suppose the same impulses behind *The Blockade* also shaped *Fiume o morte!*. By including different citizens from all kinds of backgrounds, motivations and political options, I'm representing the city of Rijeka today. By passing my ideas through the filters of my fellow citizens, I wanted to tell a story which can be shared by many Rijeka people and also with future generations.

I wanted to create a story that many of them will see also as their story, no matter if they are Croatian or Italian. Finally, D'Annunzio was an elitist and an aristocrat obsessed with extremes, so I wanted to contrast and counterpoint him with the regular folks of contemporary Rijeka.

The film was in development and production for several years; did its focus change much over this period, including the filming and editing process?

Of course! I make films that allow me to change focus through time, to explore and play. I really can't relate to filmmakers who write a precise script and then develop it for years, and then in the end shoot it and edit it, and then they're proud that the finished film is similar to the one that was in their minds all along.

Over a period of ten years, from our first applications for script-development to the time we completed the final version of the film, I changed as a person – and so did my political and aesthetic viewpoints. By meeting new people, reading new facts and obtaining more insights my ideas were always changing.

But certain positions or concepts remained constant, too?

Yes, some things were always there, as a clear basis for my work. Politically speaking, I always knew that I was making a film about an *occupation* – not about a “revolution,” an “endeavour” or “exploit,” as some people call it. In Italian it's the difference between “*l'occupazione di Fiume*” and “*l'impresa di Fiume*.”

I wanted to present the episode as a “narcissistic escapade,” which is how Pasolini put it. Conceptually, I knew that I wanted to make a film about my city, not a biopic about D'Annunzio. I knew that I wanted my fellow citizens to be involved, so that the focus was on them, and partly on myself – not on D'Annunzio.

I also knew I wanted everything to be based on archive films and photos as much as possible, and to collaborate with many historians from the Italian and the Croatian sides of the border, and also internationally.

Lastly, I knew I wanted to tell a chronological story. Reading so many conflicting and confusing facts about the occupation, I felt a strong personal need to put the events in a chronological order and to present a story that my fellow citizens will be able to retell in the future.

Growing up in Rijeka, how aware were you of Gabriele D'Annunzio? Were his poetry and/or exploits taught about in school? Do you recall when you first became familiar with his name?

In school I don't remember anybody mentioning D'Annunzio or talking about him occupying our city, and there wasn't anything in the classes on literature or history. But I went to a Croatian school, and Rijeka also has four Italian elementary schools and an Italian high-school – I'm sure he's being taught in them.

I don't recall exactly when I first heard of D'Annunzio, but I do remember when he struck me as something important for my life. In my early twenties I was a philosophy and sociology student and I read *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone* [1991] by Hakim Bey, an American anarchist. In the book there is a chapter about D'Annunzio in Fiume/Rijeka and I remember re-reading it several times to make sure that he was writing about my home town.

Hakim Bey calls Rijeka a "pirate utopia." I really hoped he was right, because I wanted my city to have this anarchist background. But unfortunately, it turned out that Bey's theory wasn't based on proper research, but a superficial kind of guesswork.

How did you go about *your* research?

The detailed research into the archive footage and stills properly got underway in 2018. And while I always think I've seen every possible visual material of D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume, new materials keep re-emerging. He had groups of photographers engaged just to document as much of his propaganda as possible – the sheer amount of material is overwhelming. The research wasn't only about Rijeka's past, however, but also about life in the city today. By doing a long and extensive casting process, I got to learn more about my fellow citizens, to understand their way of thinking better and to see how the past resonates with them today.

How crucial is your ongoing collaboration with editor Hrvoslava Brkušić?

As in my previous two feature-length films *The Blockade* and *A Brief Excursion* [2017], the editor was my close friend Hrvoslava. We've now been working together for 15 years – we sit together in the editing room and we just try things out. With *Fiume o morte!*, the number of scenes, shots, characters, storylines and dilemmas I brought to the editing room was much bigger than in the case of two previous films. So Hrvoslava's calmness, creativity, patience and trust in the film were also a strong anchor for the project. Experimenting takes time and energy, but spending that time with her is always a precious experience.

The result can be called both a documentary (with acted recreations) and an essay-film, but is not easy to categorise. What attracts you to such modes and forms, and are there any creative touchstones which guided or inspired you?

I wasn't really thinking about labels or categories, I was just making it the way it seemed right. I've never been an eager follower of particular film genres. I'm more attracted to film forms which surprise me. The filmmakers and artists who I mainly see as my "soulmates" are the ones who emphasise play in their work... People like Nicole Hewitt, Nanni Moretti, Želimir Žilnik, Georges Perec, Peter Watkins, John Smith...

But in general, the fact that Rijeka is a carnival city – and also that it was the epicentre of Yugoslav punk – is something that determined my formation both as a filmmaker, and as a person.

You mention that Rijeka found itself in 8 or 9 different countries in the 20th century. Its situation in 1918 was, as we see in your film, very different from its situation in 1925, and in 1925 very different from today. What changes do you foresee by, say, 2035?

I was from the last generation of Tito's pioneers – at the age of six we had to swear an oath that we'd develop fraternity and unity and fight for Tito's ideas. A year later, Yugoslavia dissolved, the war started and we started living under capitalism, in a country now called Croatia.

So I have a first-hand experience of the changes I'm talking about in the film. I suppose most big changes in our city happened because of changes in the economy – rises and falls – or because of wars. Regarding the economy, the western part of the Rijeka container-port is now being built, so I expect more workers coming from abroad to work here. Regarding wars, one seems sufficient for a lifetime.

In a daily newspaper from 1922 I found a slogan that I love: "Long live Fiume free and independent from any kind of rescuers, liberators and protectors!" That's my motto for 2035 as well.



About the producers

Restart (Croatia)

Restart is an organisation focused on production, education, distribution and exhibition of creative documentary and hybrid films. Their films have been shown at film festivals across the world. Some of their latest productions include *Wishing on a Star* by Peter Kerekes (Venice 2024), *Between Revolutions* by Vlad Petri (Berlinale 2023), *Non-Aligned: Scenes from the Labudović Reels* by Mila Turajlić (IDFA 2022), *Museum of the Revolution* by Srđan Keča (IDFA 2021), *Speak So I Can See You* by Marija Stojnić (IDFA 2019) and *Srbenka* by Nebojša Slijepčević (Visions du Réel 2018). They also co-produced Stefan Djordjevic's *Wind, Talk to Me*, which also screens at IFFR 2025.

Videomante (Italy)

Videomante was set up in 2004 and it is dedicated to the production of creative documentaries and art-house films. The cinema production is managed by Erica Barbiani and Lucia Candelpergher, both of whom attended EURODOC. Key films produced by Videomante include: *The Special Need* (2013), directed by Carlo Zoratti, co-produced with Detailfilm and ZDF Das kleine Fernsehspiel, premiered at the Locarno Film Festival and won the Golden Dove at Dok Leipzig; *La Villa* (2019), directed by Claudia Brignone, co-produced with RAI Cinema, premiered at Alice nella Città – Rome Film Fest; *Wishing on a Star* (2024), directed by Peter Kerekes, co-produced with several international partners, premiered at the Venice Film Festival and selected for various international festivals including Toronto, Chicago, Tallinn, Leipzig, and Rotterdam. Videomante is also developing *Bakolori* by Penelope Bortoluzzi, supported by the French-Italian Fund for coproduction development from MiC and CNC.

About the producers

NOSOROGI (Slovenia)

Founded by a group of young filmmakers in 2008, NOSOROGI is a Ljubljana-based studio specialising in development and production of independent short and feature films, in particular such that blur the line between fiction and documentary. NOSOROGI provides comprehensive support for filmmakers' creative pursuits, approaching each production as a research initiative while fostering international cooperation to eventually reach different art-house audiences across the globe. Working on a small and carefully selected slate, the studio also strives to focus on and promote the overall sustainability and solidarity standards within creative and administration processes. NOSOROGI's filmography includes titles such as *Common Pear* (short by Gregor Božič, premiere at IFFR 2025), *Little Trouble Girls* (Urška Djukić, feature with SPOK Films, premiere at Berlinale 2025), *Stories from the Chestnut Woods* (Gregor Božič, premiere at TIFF 2019) and *Playing Men* (Matjaž Ivanišin, premiere at FIDMarseille 2017).

Credits

Written and directed by: Igor Bezinović

Starring as Gabriele D'Annunzio: Izet Medošević
Ćenan Beljulji
Albano Vučetić
Tihomir Buterin
Andrea Marsanich
Massimo Ronzani
Milovan Večerina Cico

Narrated by: Igor Bezinović
Renzo Chiepolo
Silvana Zorich
Noemi Dessardo
Sandro Ferletta
Lovro Mirth
Andrea Marsanich
Sara Marsanich

Produced by: Vanja Jambrović (Restart, Croatia)
Tibor Keser (Restart, Croatia)

Co-produced by: Erica Barbiani (Videomante, Italy)
Marina Gumzi (NOSOROGI, Slovenia)

Production management by: Lucia Candelpergher
Ivana Naceva
Bernard Koludrović
Sonir Srdoč

Casting director and manager: Sara Jakupec

Associate producer: Oliver Sertić

Credits

Director of photography:	Gregor Božič
Editor:	Hrvoslava Brkušić
Music composers:	Giovanni Maier Hrvoje Nikšić
Sound recordists:	Ana Jurčić Andrea Blasetig
Sound designer:	Eric Guerrino Nardin
Sound re-recording mixer:	Julij Zornik
Costume designers:	Tajči Čekada Manuela Paladin
Set designers:	Anton Spazzapan Tiziana De Mario
Historical consultants:	Federico Carlo Simonelli Ivan Jeličić
Archive researchers:	Nika Petković Carole Grand

This film has been supported by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, Eurimages, Ministero della cultura – Direzione Generale Cinema e audiovisivo, Fondo per l'Audiovisivo del Friuli Venezia Giulia, Slovenian Film Center, Film studio Viba Film Ljubljana, Media Programme of the European Commission, Croatian television – HRT, Slovenian television – RTV SLO, RE-ACT Co-Development Funding Scheme, the City of Rijeka, the City of Zagreb, Friuli Venezia Giulia Film Commission, ANGOA – PROCIREP and the Croatian Film Directors' Guild.