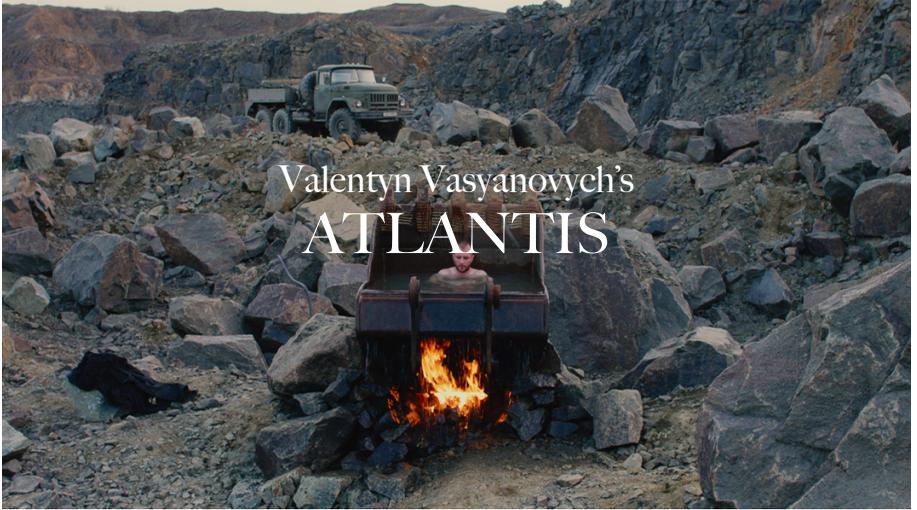


Acropolis Cinema  
presents:



January 29 - February 4, 2021 – Acropolis Virtual Cinema

# ABOUT THE FILM

A prize-winner at the Venice Film Festival and Ukraine's official selection for the 2021 Academy Awards, *Atlantis* is a gorgeous and visionary sci-fi drama. Eastern Ukraine, 2025. A desert unsuitable for human habitation. Water is a dear commodity brought by trucks. A Wall is being build-up on the border. Sergiy, a former soldier, is having trouble adapting to his new reality. He meets Katya while on the Black Tulip mission dedicated to exhuming the past. Together, they try to return to some sort of normal life in which they are also allowed to fall in love again. (Grasshopper)

106 min. | Ukraine | 2019

## Interview with Valentyn Vasyanovych by Lena Basse

*The following interview was originally published by GoldenGlobes.com, January 25, 2021*

### **How did you get your start in cinema?**

Like all good things in my life, it was purely accidental. My father is a conductor and composer and I studied music, although I didn't really have musical talent. I studied classical piano and, in my dreams, saw myself as Chopin. In reality, I preferred to take pictures of the girls in class than actually play piano. I learned how to take pictures from my dad, who was also an avid photographer. He developed prints with his friend and loved to hide in the dark room, drinking cognac together. There was a special atmosphere, although the smell of cognac irritated my mother.

### **Do you remember your first camera?**

I even remember the smell of it, it was a Kiev Ten SLR and it's absolutely gorgeous. Most of all, during my studies at school, I liked to photograph girls and print these pictures in a way to give people joy. Again, by chance, by the end of music school, my dad brought me a piece of paper, where the rules for joining the photography faculty of the theatrical institute were written. Well, I thought it was a good idea and applied. The knowledge about art theory from music school helped in my interview.

### **What attracted you to photography? Besides the girls.**

I wanted to do something with the image, not with the sounds. It gives me great joy, this process of forming a frame and defining a limitation in order to achieve a composition in this reality, as it were, into this flat wall with limited edges and with an aspect ratio. I liked it, and this is how I perceive the world, through this lens.

### **In other words, you're a typical introvert?**

Yes. For example, I'm completely comfortable in quarantine, turning off all my devices

and diving into myself. I almost forgot how wonderful solitude is, how happy I am to be alone. To lie on a couch and daydream. After all the craziness of production, it was interesting to rediscover this old feeling, something I haven't felt since I was a young man.

### **How do you come up with ideas for films?**

My very first film, a short documentary, I came up with from start to finish while lying on my couch. At that time, I squatted in an abandoned building in Old Kiev with other young artists, and we were completely free there. So, it was around that time that I came up with and did a full storyboard for the film, which was about my family, called *Keepsake*. For me, emotional experiences are always important. I make sure to write down powerful moments or I take a photo. And then over time, it pops up in my films. When there is a need for a scene, such an experience gives me an idea and I write a ready-made scene. Therefore, I never initially have a good script, it exists, at best, as a first draft, which I write within a month or so. The scripts are usually voluminous and will require lots of editing later, depending on the progression of development, research, and location scouting. I need background, structures that carry a certain energy, which dictate the development of the story itself.

### **What inspired you to make *Atlantis*?**

Firstly, the need to speak on the war that created such a huge impact on our lives. And secondly, the wonderful industrial landscape of eastern Ukraine. I have been there many times; I know its splendor and how mesmerizing it is. I will never forget my trip to a metallurgical plant, I had the impression that I flew to Mars and back. There I saw thousands of pipes, with diameters ranging from a few millimeters to several meters, which were quite ornate and unexpectedly interwoven. All of this created an incredible atmosphere with crazy colors. I felt like a little man in the midst of something great. And thus, this location has merged with the theme of war. That is, looking at this whole picture, as a documentary filmmaker, my own story was born. That is, it is very important for me to get into this visualization of the environment in order to push off of and move on. I don't like creating a story on paper. This is my weakness, but when I get to the filming location, I very quickly get a sense of direction.

### **This story takes place in 2025, one year after the end of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Do you have hope that the war will end by then?**

Well, now I'm afraid that I was a little too optimistic, unfortunately.

### ***Atlantis* is full of symbolism. Sometimes there are even references to Tarkovsky's compositions.**

Honestly, I don't try to make any special references when I shoot a film. I just try to be a person with open eyes and ears. As for symbolism, it appears at some point by itself, I just capture it. That is, I do not design it on purpose. In fact, it is much easier for me to work when half of the film has already been shot and all the material begins to guide me. The logic of the place itself determines the further course of events for me. I feel the story develop itself this way, better than when I try to prepare in advance and think

things through.

So even the fact that we can only see the protagonist's fully illuminated face for the first time when he drinks tea with his love interest, Katya, that wasn't intentional? The feminine theme in the film is extremely important to me. Already in the first scene of the film, when two men gather to shoot, one can recognize that their ambition and inability to compromise leads to the fact that they almost kill each other. That is, it turns out that male ambitions lead to conflicts, wars. They are actively showing their destructive beginning. And only a woman can come and structure this world and give it the opportunity to live. Of course, this topic is not accidental, but regarding the lighting in the frame, it is rather an organic decision.

### **And the idea to shoot infrared, was that also by chance?**

Of course! I say that all good things come by chance (laughs). When the film was almost ready, I realized that I was missing a few key scenes for the relationship of Man and Woman, and Life and Death, to work. I thought about this for about half a year. At this time, my friend got an infrared camera and once at a party, I had fun filming guests with it. I thought it would be nice to use this in a movie. At first, I decided that I would use it on the set of a sex scene. I even googled it and realized that I might be the first to shoot an infrared sex scene in a movie. But later, this scene was transformed into two scenes. One scene of the death of a person, which opens the film and another scene of the birth of love, which ends the film. Basically, sex is death and rebirth in one.

### **Why did you decide to cast non-professional actors in the film?**

That was the original concept. Since the film was about people who survived the war, I immediately decided that no professional actor who had not been to the war could convey the full range of those emotions that I needed. Especially because I myself have no traumatic experience. Therefore, we purposefully conducted the casting among the war veterans. Andriy Rymaruk (Sergiy) exudes both tragedy and hope. I continued to work with him, he stars in my next film. Working in cinema even became a kind of method of dealing with his own post-traumatic syndrome. ♦



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