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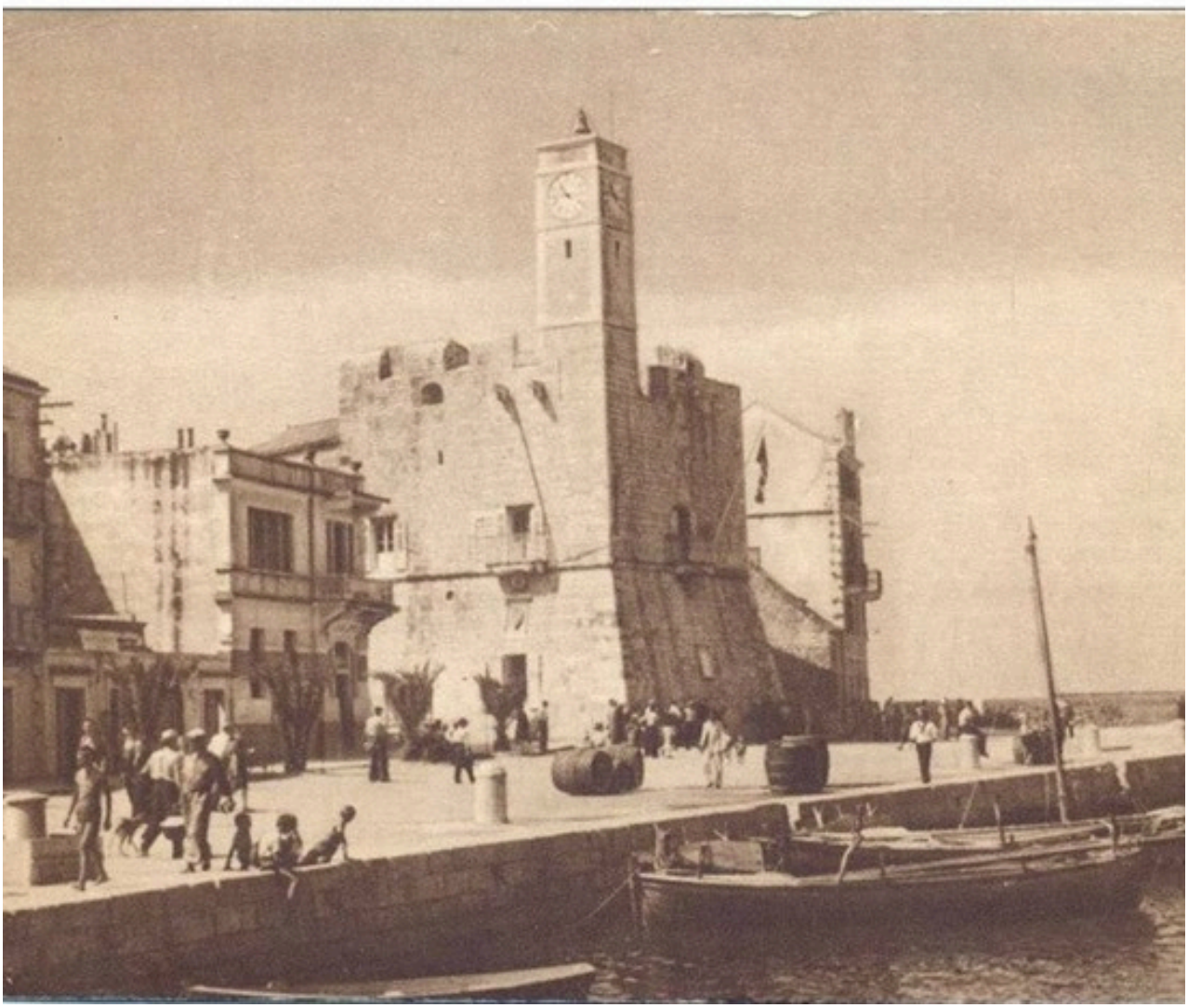
TRAST

Leaving = Arriving

Documentary

ABOUT THE FILM



Leaving = Arriving is a 40-minute creative documentary that traces the layered, collective memory of the Croatian island of Vis and its diaspora. Told through personal testimonies, family photographs, home movies, and archival footage, the film offers an intimate portrait of intergenerational lives shaped by the sea, labour, migration, and remembrance.

The falkuša, the traditional Komiža fishing boat, becomes a recurring metaphor in the film: a vessel of memory, legacy, and the enduring bond between sea and identity, between ancestors and the future. On the other side of the world, plivarice — purse seine boats used to catch small blue fish like sardines and anchovies — and canning factories become new vessels of that same heritage: an American Falkuša

JOURNEYS: LEAVING AND ARRIVING

The film explores two intertwined perspectives: departure and continuity. Each path carries sacrifice — whether it's letting go of the culture that shaped you, or safeguarding that culture at the cost of change.

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ANCIENT GREECE FIRST DEMONstrated to the world how a great city, with the center of its population living inland, could reach out to the seacoast for a harbor. Athens established its port at Piraeus, seven miles away from the Acropolis. In the twentieth century the City of Los Angeles reached three times as far to build a port at San Pedro and Wilmington. The Athenean and the Los Angeles "shoestring" strips were both provided with the best means of transportation known at the time of building.

Greece, with her harbor assured, set about in a systematic manner to develop her trade. Soon every port in the eastern Mediterranean was well acquainted with galleys owned by Athenean shipping magnates. Even the distant ports of the Black Sea were reached, where goods of the Western world of the time were traded for Russian grain.

California South, with its harbor assured, set out to acquire a goodly share of Pacific and world commerce, and has been most successful. Cargoes of all classes, passing over Los Angeles Harbor docks during the fiscal year ended June 30, 1929, had a total weight of 27,280,856 tons and were valued at $1,009,647,083.

Behind this astounding record of harbor development is the story of a great engineering feat. Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, the Spanish navigator, sailed into San Pedro Bay in 1542, a few days less than fifty years after Columbus first landed in America. He found little more than a series of flat lands, marshes and dry hills. A scant Indian population met him at the water's edge.

Today, the San Pedro and Wilmington waterfronts of Los Angeles Harbor and the adjoining Long Beach Harbor present nearly forty miles of deep water, well protected from the surge of the open sea. Nearly twenty miles of this combined deep-water frontage is highly improved with modern steamship terminals. The outer harbor district provides safe anchorage for scores of merchant ships, and is for seven months of each year the operating base of the United States battle fleet, the most powerful single unit of Uncle Sam's navy.

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PRACTICE RECIPROCITY BY ALWAYS PATRONIZING GRIZZLY BEAR ADVERTISERS

Through the voices of elders, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, the film presents two intertwined perspectives: one of departure — the transformation of life from the known to the unknown — and the other of continuity, the quiet insistence on preserving life as it was, regardless of the cost. While some chose to leave, trying to carry with them what was familiar — culture, habits, values, food, and language — others stayed, safeguarding tradition and identity through shifting circumstances.Some returned, bringing back fragments of distant lives.

These patterns persist today. Descendants of emigrants arrive on the island with a vision shaped more by inherited memory than lived experience. For them, arrival is not a return, but a reification — the materialization of an imagined place formed through stories passed down across generations. At the same time, newcomers — Filipina and Nepali caregivers, a former postman from Chile — come to Vis seeking safety, work, or the possibility of a different life. They represent a kind of reverse migration. Each path carries its own sacrifice. Whether leaving or staying, something is always given up: one lets go of the culture that once shaped them; the other, the possibility of transformation.

THE ISLAND AS MEMORY

Vis is more than a place — it is a keeper of stories. Even when people left, their language, customs, and memories remained, binding them to the island across oceans and decades.

The film portrays the historical, emotional, and metaphorical journeys of a small insular community. It follows the stories of those who stayed, endured, and turned everyday survival into legacy; those who left due to war, poverty, or ambition — especially toward the Pacific Northwest of the United States — but whose traces remained on the island in the stories passed down and the language preserved; those who returned, and those who arrived.

Through deeply human accounts, the film reveals how cultural identity stretches from Palagruža in the Adriatic Sea to the fishing towns of Alaska. Customs and memories were carried across the ocean to the Pacific Northwest, where a Croatian immigrant neighborhood known as “Garlic Gulch” became a new Komiža — echoing the island town they left behind. The island of Vis becomes both witness and guardian of these (hi)stories: a place people leave, but never quite abandon.

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IMG_0008-9 Nepalka Mont.mp4

IMG_9976 samo o kopanju.mp4

IMG_9977-79 sound.mp4

IMG_9979 samo 2. gosp ustase.mp4

IMG_0011 Mont.mp4

IMG_0022-23 Mont.mp4

IMG_0106_1.mp4

A STORYTELLING APPROACH

There are no actors. No voice-over. No imposed storyline. The film unfolds through unscripted conversations — at kitchen tables, over coffee, while flipping through old photos — allowing stories to surface naturally, in their own rhythm.

Unlike traditional documentaries shaped by an interviewer's agenda, where the filmmaker directs the conversation and drives the narrative with predefined themes and questions, this film is rooted in first-person oral storytelling. The participants chose what to say, how, and when — speaking freely in spaces and rhythms familiar to them. There are no actors, no voice-over narration, and no imposed storyline — only a storytelling approach rooted in trust and co-presence.

The narrative unfolds through the natural flow of memory, captured with a discreet, small, unobtrusive camera. Stories were shared in informal, spontaneous settings — around kitchen tables, over coffee, while flipping through old photos, or simply in the quiet act of remembering. In these intimate moments, memories surfaced gradually and organically.

The storytelling style is informal and relational, with a focus on emotional openness. Rather than structuring stories from the outside, the film listens from within — allowing its form to be shaped by the rhythm, texture, and breath of real speech. It resonates more with the logic of oral tradition than with conventional documentary form, offering a space where remembering becomes both method and meaning.

ETHICS AND AUTHORSHIP

Though unscripted, the film is not unshaped. It is carefully composed — through pacing, silences, and resonance — with a deep sense of responsibility to honour the voices and stories entrusted to it.

At its core, Leaving = Arriving is an act of careful listening and ethical authorship. Although unscripted, the film is not unshaped. Its structure emerges from deliberate choices — how stories are sequenced, how silences are held, how one voice answers another across time and space. The writing resides not in a script, but in the composition of memory: in pacing, rhythm, resonance, and juxtaposition. Rather than directing the subjects, the filmmakers created a space in which stories could surface on their own terms — privileging presence over performance, and authenticity over orchestration. This approach reflects a deep responsibility to those who speak in the film: not to extract or reframe their narratives, but to honour them as they were shared. The result is a narrative that feels lived rather than constructed — a quiet, dignified testimony to the emotional landscapes that define migration, continuity, and return.

As participants reveal aspects of themselves often kept private, storytelling becomes not only a form of expression, but a way to create shared understanding — enabling storyteller and listener to meet through empathy, memory, and meaning.

REMEMBERING IN REAL TIME

In Leaving = Arriving, the past is not reconstructed — it is remembered in real time, through gesture, voice, and silence, across the fragile distances between memory, place, and belonging — with **memory becoming both the method and the meaning of the film.**

CREDITS

Cinematography & Editing:
Dalibor Martinis

Producer:
Irena Sertić

Second Camera (Vis)
Dinko Božanić

16mm and 8mm – filming on purse seiner:
Paul V. Martinis Jr

Drone Operator:
Branimir Ambreković

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