

Focus Competition
Zurich Film Festival

"A modern fairy tale about a 14-year-old influencer and her biggest fan."

CINEUROPA

"GIRL GANG is extremely exciting and after 90 minutes, it leaves a very uneasy feeling about the media world we live in."

FILM-REZENSIONEN.DE

"The documentary tells the story of the steep rise of the young influencer Leonie and gives an insight into teenage years under the premise of social media"

BR24 KULTUR

"GIRL GANG is as addictive as Leonie's Instagram posts and TikTok videos which have hundreds and thousands of girls glued to their screens."

BUSINESSDOCEUROPE.COM

LOGLINE

*Millions of girls want to be like Leonie:
But the success of the 14-year-old influencer comes at a high price.*

SYNOPSIS

14-year-old Leonie from eastern Berlin is conquering the world as a teenage influencer. Millions of followers are at her feet, and companies shower her with products. When Leonie's parents recognize the enormous economic potential in their daughter, they decide to take over her management. They want Leonie to have a better life than they had. But Leonie's permanent self-reflection and the merciless pressure to produce content has a downside that adrenaline, fame and free sneakers can't compensate for.



THE REHEARSAL STAGE OF NORMAL LIFE

By Claudia Mäder, Feuilleton Neue Zürcher Zeitung

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In one of his essays, French author Michel Houellebecq reports on a strange practice: in a village in southern France, retired men have been commissioned by the municipality to regularly play pétanque, drink pastis and sit around in the village square. The municipality even gave them money for this, but in return the old men had to reach for the pastis at fixed times. Namely, whenever the buses of a tour operator drove through the village and took a short break: The pensioners had the job of giving the tourists an authentic impression of life in Provence.

At first glance, this anecdote could not be further from what Susanne Regina Meures shows in her film **GIRL GANG**. Instead of being about old men in a sleepy village, it's about a young woman living in Berlin and on the social networks. But in principle, one is faced with one and the same phenomenon in Provence and in the Berlin net world: people who pretend to other people an authentic life.

Of course, Leonie, the teenage protagonist, doesn't drink pastis. She does homework, laps up ice cream, removes her makeup and tries on new shoes. And while the Provençal pensioners show themselves in the village square, Leonie can only be found in the virtual world. But just as the tourists think they are observing the normal everyday life of the old men, the teenager's fans believe they are looking straight into the life of their idol.

This life is perfect, the fan girls say admiringly, wishing they could bite into chicken nuggets or test a new makeup removal puff as cheerfully as Leonie. From the point of view of her fans, the camera Leonie uses to film herself is a mirror of life: it hangs above the young woman, in front of her, beside her or behind her, and always shows what she is doing and saying at any given moment; it provides insight into everything she experiences around the clock.

The camera Susanne Regina Meures uses

to film young Leonie shatters this mirror, or at least the idea that Leonie's cell phone camera functions like a mirror: for an hour and a half, viewers can follow in the documentary how hard the teenager works to stage her normal life as such.

In this, the young influencer from Berlin differs from the old men in Provence. These don't have to do very much to do their job and come across as genuinely Provençal. However, their salaries are also quite modest. In the influencer business, on the other hand, there's a lot of money to be made - provided that the person who demonstrates the various products to his fans also comes across as really authentic in his commercials. But this effect can only be achieved with considerable effort.

„You need to become more authentic, you need to work on yourself," a social media manager tells young Leonie, adding, „No one wants to see theater." That's a sentence ready for the stage. Because the greatest theater is obviously staged

around authenticity: It has to be rehearsed with great effort, and Meures' film lets you look at the rehearsal stage, so to speak.

We see and hear sentences being tweaked until they really sound like Leonie, we follow how the wind disturbs the perfect setting, how the use of appropriate music is discussed, and how Leonie and her parents film and bicker, cut, time, edit and organize.

Through the broken illusion of the mirror, one thus enters a disturbing cabinet of pretenses. We are watching a documentary: a film that captures the reality of a life. But the reality of this life consists to a large extent of staging, playing and producing a reality of life - and selling this art product to an audience of millions as an insight into everyday life. What is real, and what is play, what is role, what is life, what is work, and what is leisure? In the theater of authenticity, all these things become blurred, nothing can be distinguished anymore.

But perhaps the biggest question that arises with regard to the great theater is that of freedom: to what extent does the protagonist choose her role, which

becomes more solidified with each video, entailing assignment after assignment and filling the teenager's agenda beyond the edge of what is bearable? It is this question, the one about the freedom of the individual, that connects the film to the earlier works of Susanne Regina Meures. At first glance, **GIRL GANG** seems to have as little to do with Meures' last films as the old pétanque players do with the young influencer. While **RAVING IRAN** was about the escape of two DJs from the God's state and **SAUDI RUNAWAY** documented the escape of a woman from Saudi Arabia, **GIRL GANG** is set in the liberal West. But all the films are essentially about young people and their chances for a self-determined life.

In the process, the protagonists move in opposite directions, and it is precisely this that can make you think. The Iranian DJ and Muna from Saudi Arabia are not prepared to take on the roles into which they are forced by their repressive states. Meures' films show how these people strive to shape their own lives away from patronizing controlling authorities. The young influencer, on the other hand, is watched as she gets caught up in the ever tighter corset of her own role-playing in a

country that guarantees her the greatest freedom imaginable. Where one struggles with all her might for freedom, the other seems to lose it between makeup tips and McDonald's promos.

THE CHARACTERS IN THE FILM



THE INFLUENCERCIN - Leonie (age in the film 14 - 17 years)

Leonie lives with her parents in a Berlin suburb. Since the age of 13 she earns her money as an influencer. She is a social media star under the name „**Leoobalys**“. She now has over 1.5 million followers on Instagram, Tiktok and YouTube. Since the beginning, she has been supported by her parents. Her productions are meticulously prepared and filmed with professional equipment. Every day follows a strict schedule, in addition to homework and soccer practice. To reach even more followers and satisfy her customers, Leonie often works late at night. At the beginning, the plan seems to work: She delivers top grades in school, and as an influencer she earns more and more money. But the illuminated backdrop has dark sides.



THE FATHER - Andreas (age in the film: 46 - 49 year)

Andreas does everything for his daughter. He wants a better life for her. At the beginning of the filming Andreas still works as a bartender, but as Leonie's career picks up speed and also becomes more financially lucrative, he takes over her management. He coordinates requests from companies and big brands. For Leonie's production ideas for her posts, he spares neither effort nor expense. At the same time, he tries to protect her as best he can, deleting hate comments together with his wife Sani that Leonie shouldn't see. Andreas is often like Leonie's buddy, cheering everyone up with his clowning around, but he also demands a lot of discipline from her. With his wife Sani, he forms a sworn team; important decisions concerning Leonie and the family are made jointly by the two of them.



THE MOTHER - Sani (age in the film: 44 - 47 years)

Sani, like her husband Andreas, also wants Leonie to work less for a good life. In their younger years, she and her husband had to work hard for their future. That's why Sani demands a lot from her daughter: she should not neglect school and her duties as an influencer. Sani can be strict with Leonie, even though the two are still very close. She's not as extroverted as her husband at first, doesn't like being the center of attention. But Sani also finds more and more like the work as an influencer and gets into the business herself.



THE FAN - Melanie (age in the film: 13 - 16 years)

Melanie lives with her mother and two cats in a small town in Bavaria. She has other interests than the children from the country. She finds her friends not in the village, but on the Internet. Melanie's life revolves almost exclusively around her idol Leonie aka Leoobalys. Her room is wallpapered with pictures of Leonie, she wants to be like her idol, puts on makeup, has manicured fingernails. She runs a fan page for Leoobalys, in which she invests a lot of time and spends 12 to 17 hours on her cell phone. Mostly to edit pictures and videos of Leonie and share them on social media. Melanie's biggest dream is to meet Leonie and finally hug her.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Susanne Regina Meures

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Why did you make a film about an influencer?

It all started in 2017. I was in Berlin when I saw a group of girls in a park doing slow-motion pantomime. Now we all know TikTok, but back then I felt like I was entering a new universe of presentation and self-reflection. I wondered what made up this modern girl gang, hence the title of the film. I wanted to know who they are and how they think.

When did you first learn about Leonie?

I talked to about 160 girls between the ages of 12 and 15 until I met Leonie at a social media event. She was 13 years old and already had half a million followers. She combined all the characteristics of a girl living her life on social media. Leonie's story seemed to be the perfect modern adventure about dreams, illusions, and self-perception at a time when 86% of teens surveyed say they want to become influencers.

The title indicates a group, although the film only follows a single influencer.

Why did you keep this distinction?

I had originally planned to make a film about a group of girls, Leonie and her friends. When I started shooting, I quickly realized that this film was not about Leonie and her friends, but about her and her family. That was the core of the story. As I delved into Leonie's social media spheres, it dawned on me that the modern girl gang is no longer the group of girls at the park. It's the millions of girls who congregate online to hang out. Although I shifted my focus, the movie title that was there from the beginning became even more relevant.

You followed Leonie and her parents over a period of four years. Aside from becoming rich and famous, how have they changed on a personal level?

They are incredibly busy today. Their daily lives are dictated by work assignments and the pressure to produce content. Family life has become a business, especially since Leonie's parents took over her management. I could see the lightness and laughter dwindling as

Leonie entered puberty - a time that is not easy in any household on the planet. Her parents find themselves in an even more difficult situation: having to protect Leonie as a parent while pushing her to pursue her work. Not an easy task. But I have never seen them seriously question their life choice. It has become their reality.

Sequences of Leonie visiting shopping malls amid a throng of screaming young fans are reminiscent of footage of the Beatles from the early 1960s. If this kind of teenage fanaticism has always had a certain intensity, how has that culture changed now that it's oriented around influencers rather than pop idols??

It's not the same as it was in the 1960s with the Beatles or in the 1990s with all the boy bands. Now we have fan - girls crying and swooning over their female influencer idols. Leonie's success is her accessibility. She is her friend and she shares almost every part of her life with her fans. Her fans can send her messages. She is seemingly

so close that they can almost touch her. Instagram is a bit like a schoolyard, Leonie is the popular and desired girl. The others project their dreams of a better self and Leonie is perfect for that, precisely because she is so similar.

They introduced the character of Melanie - a fan who develops a strong bond with Leonie - to reflect this.

Today, fans are more mobile, traveling internationally to gatherings, forming groups and communities. Often, fans themselves become leaders again, as Melanie does in the film. She is Leonie's biggest fan, but has thousands of followers on Instagram herself. Today, fans can engage in a much wider range of activities: Edit content, post comments, share photos and videos. As a result, fans are actively appropriating popular culture content and giving it new and original meaning. The balance has shifted, giving fans more power and control.

Why did you use framing elements like the fairy tale and a choral score? To work with or even against a very digitally driven narrative? The story has all the qualities of a modern fairy tale, and I knew the film needed an extra layer. The beginning of „Once Upon a

Time“ creates a distance from something we see every day: People, or girls for that matter, glued to their cell phones. I believe that through the fairy tale we look at the images again with a fresher eye and more curiously. We understand that we are witnessing something extraordinary. The music connects the audience to the religious quality of the theme, to the longing for belonging that we all feel within us.

Leonie and her family would probably not share the film's rather ambivalent view of the influencer economy. How important was it to find the right balance between the views? Since we started shooting **GIRL GANG**, a lot of films have come out about social media. The films are mostly educational in nature and try to warn viewers. That's fine. However, I have a different approach. To understand the world and portray it through my eyes, I like to crawl into the center of things and turn them inside out. Of course, I shape the story through my own understanding and interpret the protagonists' universe as I experience it. But it's not my job to judge their life choices.

INTERVIEW WITH LEONIE (LEOOBALYS)

The film shows three years of your life. Are there things you would do differently today? I would show my parents more that I appreciate what they do for me. In the film I was going through puberty and sometimes I was pretty mean to them.

What are the most important changes you went through during that time? I learned that people don't just mean well by me. That there are managers who don't pay enough attention to you. And I've learned to distinguish which friendships are really important and remain so.

Have you also become more suspicious? Yes, definitely. Especially in business. You have to be very careful and think everything through.

Is there anything you regret? No, nothing.

Do you spend too much time on your cell phone? I do spend a lot of time on my cell phone. But I have a balance to it. Soccer, for example. Or a game night

with my parents, where I put my cell phone away completely.

You're hardly ever seen on film in your free time. Do you find time for friends? For me, it's just that my job and my free time get mixed up. Most of the time, I document what I do in my private life on social media. And that often includes friends who are important to me. The film focuses very much on the business side and less on my free time.

What was it actually like for you to hand over control of your image to Sue, the director? It's a very hard feeling because there's something being cut that you can't control. But I have nothing to hide. You have arguments sometimes, you look like a potato sometimes. I even think it's good that you can see that. Also because other parents see that not only their children are in a bad mood.

How does it feel to have over 1 million followers? That's totally rad.

But does it also make you happy? Yes,

of course! Just that feeling that people are behind you. For example, when I post about my graduation and then people are happy for me. Or I also like that I get tips from people.

Do you have a dream that you still want to achieve? I prefer to keep my goals private. I don't want to announce them in a big way and then maybe not achieve them. I'd rather look back and say: I achieved that, that was my goal. But I definitely have dreams.

Is the Leonie on social media different from the private Leonie? No. I show myself the way I am in private. When I go out for vegan food and show myself like that, it's because I also like vegan food in my private life.

Your parents are also kind of like your work colleagues... You share job and family life. Yeah, which I think is totally awesome.

Isn't that a bit much sometimes? Yes, there are arguments. But I think it's totally

great that I can share everything with my parents. What happens at school, in soccer, business. My mother can be my best friend and go shopping with me at the same time.

Others your age are just breaking away from their parents. How does that work for you? Not much different. When I go to a bar with my friends, my parents aren't always there either. And vice versa, they get together for a couples' night out, for example, where I'm not there.

Did you never have the impression that you were missing out on something because you work so much as an influencer? No. For example, I never felt the need to go out partying in a big way and shoot myself down with alcohol. I've stayed the way I am. My youth is normal. I do a lot with girlfriends and I meet boys like any other girl. I do my job for fun, I got into it that way. And I still have time to try other things.

And what advice would you give to young people who want to become social media stars? There are dangers lurking in social networks. For example,

you have to be careful who you work with. You shouldn't trust just anyone. And be careful what you post. It's best to let your parents look over it. You shouldn't hide it from them, but confide in them.

What message in the film is important to you personally? Some people think you don't have to be able to do anything if you're an influencer. Nobody saw me editing videos until 3 a.m. when I was 13 years old. Thanks to the film, you can see how much work and planning goes into it.



CREDITS

DIRECTOR & CAMERA Susanne Regina Meures
EDITING Katja Dringenberg
PRODUCTION Christian Frei Filmproduktion
CO-PRODUCTION SRF - Schweizer Radio und Film Fernsehen
PRODUCERS Susanne Regina Meures/Christian Frei
WORLD SALES Rise and Shine World Sales

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

TITLE	GIRL GANG
YEAR OF PRODUCTION	2022
PRODUCTION COUNTRY	Switzerland
LENGTH	98 min
LANGUAGE	German
SUBTITLES	English
PRESENTATION FORMAT	DCP Flat, unencrypted, 1998x1080
ASPECT RATIO	16:9
FRAME RATE	25 fps
SOUND	5.1

FESTIVALS & AWARDS

WORLD PREMIERE



AWARDS



OTHER FESTIVALS

Docs Barcelona, Spain

Doc Edge, Auckland & Wellington, New Zealand

Docville, Leuven, Belgium

Millennium Docs Against Gravity, Warsaw, Poland

DOK.fest München, Germany

Hot Docs, Toronto, Canada

BIOGRAPHY DIRECTOR **Susanne Regina Meures**



Sue Meures is a Swiss-German director. She is known for her films about rebels and pioneers who rebel against political and social oppression. Meures studied photography and art history at the Courtauld Institute for Art in London. Later she worked as Arts Editor for The New York Times Magazine, The Guardian, Das Zeit „Magazin“, Das Süddeutsche „Magazin“, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, among others.

She realized her first filmic contributions for Channel 4, Al Jazeera and BBC in London. This was followed by a master's degree in film at the Zurich University of the Arts. In 2016, Meures made her feature film debut with **RAVING IRAN**. A portrait about two Iranian DJs who risk their lives for their passion and eventually have to flee. The documentary was screened at over 130 film festivals worldwide (including Berlinale, Hot Docs, IDFA etc), won numerous awards and became a box office success. In 2020, **SAUDI RUNAWAY** premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. The film documents the escape of a young Saudi woman through her own cell phone footage. It was followed by its European premiere at the Berlinale, where the film won the 2nd Panorama Audience Award. National Geographic / Disney Ltd acquired the world rights to the film. **SAUDI RUNAWAY** was nominated for the European Film Award and won the EUFA 2020.

GIRL GANG will follow in 2022. An intimate film about a 14-year-old influencer and her family. The director takes us into the claustrophobic backstage of social media. **GIRL GANG** premiered at CPH:Dox in Copenhagen in international competition. The film is currently screening at festivals worldwide and will be released in German and Swiss cinemas in October 2022. Sue Meures lives and works in Berlin and Zurich. She is a member of the Swiss Film Academy, the German Film Academy and the European Film Academy.

FILMOGRAPHY (Selection)



RAVING IRAN, Documentary, 84 min,
Switzerland 2016
Production: Frei Filmproduktion GmbH, ZHdK
Screener upon request

Festivals (Selection):

Berlin International Film Festival 2017,
Germany
Vision du Réel 2016, Nyon, France
Hots Docs 2016, Toronto, Canada
Locarno Film Festival 2016, Switzerland

International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam (IDFA) 2016,
Netherlands

Recontre Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal (RIDM)
2016, Canada

Stockholm International Film Festival 2016, Sweden

Mostra Internacional del Cinema de Sao Paulo 2016, Brazil

DocPoint Helsinki Documentary Film Festival 2016, Finland

Docs against Gravity Festival 2016, Warsaw, Poland

Docaviv International Documentary Film Festival 2017, Tel Aviv,
Israel

Istanbul Independent Film Festival 2017, Istanbul, Turkey

Muestra Internacional de Cine Documental 2016, Buenos Aires,
Argentina

Reykjavik International Film Festival 2016, Island

Krakow Film Festival 2016, Poland

DOK.fest International Documentary Film Festival 2016, Munich,
Germany

Awards (Selection):

Prix du Jury SSA/Suissimage pour le long métrage, Vision du Reel
2016.

Swiss Film Award, Best Documentary 2017 (Nomination)

First Steps Award, German Film Award 2016

Zurich Film Award, Main Award, Filmpreis Stadt Zürich 2016

German Documentary Award, Promotional Award 2017

Mejor Largometraje Documental Internacional, Guanajuato
International Film Festival 2016

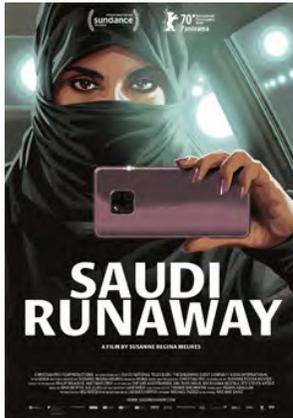
Best Documentary, Film Festival Kitzbühel 2016

The Best Film, Solo Positivo Film Festival 2016

Audience Award, Solo Positivo Film Festival 2016

Alexis Victor Thalberg Award 2018

FILMOGRAPHY (Selection)



SAUDI RUNAWAY, Documentary,
87 min, Switzerland 2020
Production: Frei Filmproduktion GmbH
Screener upon request

Festivals (Selection):
Sundance Film Festival 2020, World Cinema
Documentary Competition
Berlin International Film Festival 2020,
Panorama

Awards (Selection):
EUFA - European University Film Award 2020
Audience Award, Berlinale 2020
EFA - European Film Award 2020 (Nomination)
Swiss Film Award, Best Documentary 2021 (Nomination)
Amnesty Film Award 2020 (Special Mention)

After the Berlinale the film has been invited to numerous international festivals. Unfortunately, participation had to be renounced. Online festivals (due to Covid) did not fit into National Geographic's exploitation concept.

Festivals that could not be served (Selection):
Visions du Réel, Nyon, France
CPH:Dox, Copenhagen, Denmark
DOK.Fest, Munich, Germany
DocAviv, Tel Aviv, Israel
Moscow International Film Festival, Moscow, Russia
Sydney International Film Festival, Sydney, Australia
San Francisco International, San Francisco, USA
Film Festival Durham, Durham, England
Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, Durham, USA
Seattle International Film Festival, Seattle, USA
American Film Institute, Los Angeles, USA

THE PRODUCTION COMPANY

Christian Frei Filmproduktionen

The company **CHRISTIAN FREI FILMPRODUKTIONEN GMBH** in Zurich produces the films of Christian Frei - and 2016 **RAVING IRAN**, 2020 **SAUDI RUNAWAY** and 2022 **GIRL GANG** by Susanne Regina Meures.

Feature films by Susanne Regina Meures:

2022 **GIRL GANG**
2020 **SAUDI RUNAWAY**
2016 **RAVING IRAN**

Feature films by Christian Frei:

2018 **GENESIS 2.0**, Director Christian Frei & Maxim Arbugaev
2014 **SLEEPLESS IN NEW YORK**
2009 **SPACE TOURISTS**
2005 **THE GIANT BUDDHAS**
2001 **WAR PHOTOGRAPHER**
1997 **RICARDO, MIRIAM Y FIDEL**

WORLD SALES Rise and Shine World Sales

RISE AND SHINE WORLD SALES is one of the leading boutique sales agents for high-quality documentary films. Their repertoire includes many multi-award winning films from world-leading leading film festivals such as **COURAGE**, **THE WALL OF SHADOWS**, **GARAGE PEOPLE**, **ONCE UPON A TIME IN VENEZUELA**, **THE FORUM**, **GENESIS 2.0**, **RAVING IRAN**, **WHEN TOMATOES MET WAGER**, **SAKAWA**, **SILVANA**, **THE RUSSIAN JOB**, **THE TRIAL** and others.

LINKS TO PRESS MATERIAL

PRESS KIT WITH PHOTOS, GRAPHICS AND PRESS BOOKLET

www.riseandshine-cinema.de/portfolio/girl-gang

TRAILER

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiYSDW1u4Pk

PRESS PHOTOS: CAPTIONS AND PHOTO CREDITS

Photo 1

File name: GG_Filmstill_1.jpg

On the photo: Leonie

Photographer: Susanne Regina Meures

Copyright: Frei Filmproduktion

LINKING

FACEBOOK

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INSTAGRAM

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TIK TOK

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YOUTUBE

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HASHTAGS

#GirlGang #leobalys #suemeures

#luxury #fame #influencer #celeb #branding #surreal #obsession #puberty #darkside #teeninfluencer #teenager #hysteria #hardwork
#self-display #instastories #nightmare #dream #profit #fun #promo #opinionleader #responsibility #self-esteem #revenue #newyorker #dm
#athlete #soccer #fitness #streetstyle #lifestyle #realness #fake #audience
#fashion #traveling #beach #party #fairytale #lost #meetandgreet #fanobession #balysfamily #pressure #trolls #hater #noprivacy
#content247 #instacareer #sponsoring #shootings #familybusiness #makeuptips #fashionbrands #styling #illusion #popculture #likesharefollow