



KVIFF
Eastern Promises
Works in Progress
2022



elephant





elephant

drama, romance / 93min.
Poland/ 2022

writer and director: Kamil Krawczycki
starring: Jan Hrynkiewicz, Paweł Tomaszewski,
Ewa Skibińska
Language: polish

PR – Joanna Lipiecka
joanna.lipiecka@tongariro.pl
+48 787 543 006

Promotional materials:
<https://media.tongariro.pl/slon>

Production - Tongariro Releasing
Jakub Mróz
jakub.mroz@tongariro.pl
+48 515 270 800





Bartek (22) runs a small horse farm in the mountains in Poland. He had to become head of the family when his father left and his mother fell apart. One day their neighbour dies and his son Dawid (32) comes back to the village for funeral. Bartek becomes fascinated by Dawid and his carefreeness. First love will force him to decide if he's ready to choose his freedom above family obligations.

A scene from the film "Elephant" set in a dimly lit room. Four characters are gathered around a table covered with a green cloth. On the left, a woman in a floral dress stands looking towards the right. In the center-left, a man in a grey sweater sits with his hand near his chin, looking towards the center. In the center-right, a man in a brown jacket and white turtleneck sits with his hand near his ear, looking towards the right. On the far right, a man in a plaid shirt is seen from the side, holding a pen over a piece of paper. A bottle of wine and two glasses are on the table. The background features wooden paneling and a large, illuminated lamp.

DIRECTOR - KAMIL KRAWCZYCKI

Kamil Krawczycki was born in 1990 in Zakopane. He graduated from Warsaw Film School and Wajda School. He directed two short films ("The End of My World", "The Last One") and several music videos.

"Elephant" is his debut feature film.

In his films he wants to focus on characters which are often marginalized by society in Poland.

DIRECTOR'S INTERVIEW

„Elephant“ is a universal love story. However, can you tell us more about the balance between a universal topic and the fact that this story is much different from what we have seen before?

First of all, it is a story that gives voice to Polish queer characters. Although problems related to growing up or moving out of home are universal, queer people struggle with additional challenges like their coming out or exclusion from family. Also, their president calls them an ideology, or they get some feedback from the Internet that 140 thousand of Poles signed the law „Stop LGBT“. They cannot bear with their own problems, and yet they are forced to hear such nonsense.

In the context of international cinema, the story of Bartek and Dawid is not very surprising. Although it is told with the help of simple means, such stories really contribute to the process of building Polish queer cinema which finally starts to grow. The stories told in our native language, on our yard, with Polish characters. We should never forget how important representation is. I directed a film which I wanted to see years ago, but nobody gave that to me then. From the moment when I decided to be a director, which was seven years ago, I knew that I wanted to debut with a simple love story with queer characters. In the Polish language.

Is there a lot of your own story in Bartek's character?

It is not an autobiographical film. However, I covered many situations and emotions which I had lived through or observed while growing up in the region of Podhale. It has been 13 years since I left my hometown and although mass media says differently, I have been noticing major changes in the society. Especially when it comes to young people. When I had my coming out at 18 years old, I was the first „open gay“ in my town. There was no Robert Biedroń or RuPaul in the TV. We were a mystery - something that is easy to be afraid of. It was an intensive time in my life, obviously in a negative way. However, nowadays, I do not think that anyone in Nowy Targ is interested in someone's coming out as much as then. Naturally, it does not mean that everything is colourful. I very often listen to the stories of my friends, who are being insulted, physically attacked, or discriminated. Some of them cannot leave their village due to family obligations or because they simply like it. Similarly to Bartek. Polish reality take away their right to live by their own rules.

„Elephant“ is not only the story of Bartek and Dawid.

It is also a story of Bartek and his mother. A relation which is hard for both characters and which experiences various stages throughout the film. I think that if Bartek met a girl from a big city, mother would react similarly as to Dawid. She is afraid of loneliness as well as worried about herself and her son. She does not trust anyone. They have problems with communication and touch. Nobody has taught her that. Despite the fact that mother seems to be an antagonist in the film, I hope that everyone notices her dramatic situation. Life did not treat her well and as we hear her saying, she did not have an easy childhood. Bartek's potential departure from home would mean leaving both his and her comfort zone.



„Elephant” is your debutant feature film. How do you find working with a low budget?

It has its pros and cons. From one hand, it drives creativity, but from the other hand, it may be restraining, if all you think about is money. The truth is that if you do not have people who know what they are doing and who are committed to the project, you cannot set up a low budget. Every day you think about each zloty, the ways to save it, what can be done cheaper or for free, and what can be changed in the script so that the story would not lose its value and at the same time the budget would not be exceeded. Before each shooting day you dwell on importance of every shot because what will happen if it turns out to be irrelevant in editing and you lost time and money which could be dedicated to something else? Very often you need to resign from a given quantity of shots in order to film another scene during the same day. With a low budget, you need to make compromises but at the same time you must know which ones you cannot make. In spite of a low budget, we have a scene of gallop or rain. Obviously, I was asked to give up on rain because it was too expensive. In such situations, it is crucial to be aware of the final version of the film, which is really difficult in debuts. Making a film is a craft. It can be only learnt in practice, so, working with a low budget surely taught me many lessons.

This film cost 700 thousand zlotys. I know that for someone not related to the film industry this sum of money seems high, but it is around three or four times less than we should spend on such a production. When you start sharing the costs for dozens of people, 19 shooting days, food, transport, equipment, locations, scenography, costumes, musical licenses, recordings of music, and postproduction, these 700 thousand disappear in a second. When it comes to salaries, everyone works for one third or one fourth of their normal rate, so, you have to persuade them to sacrifice their time and reject other projects which they would get more money from.

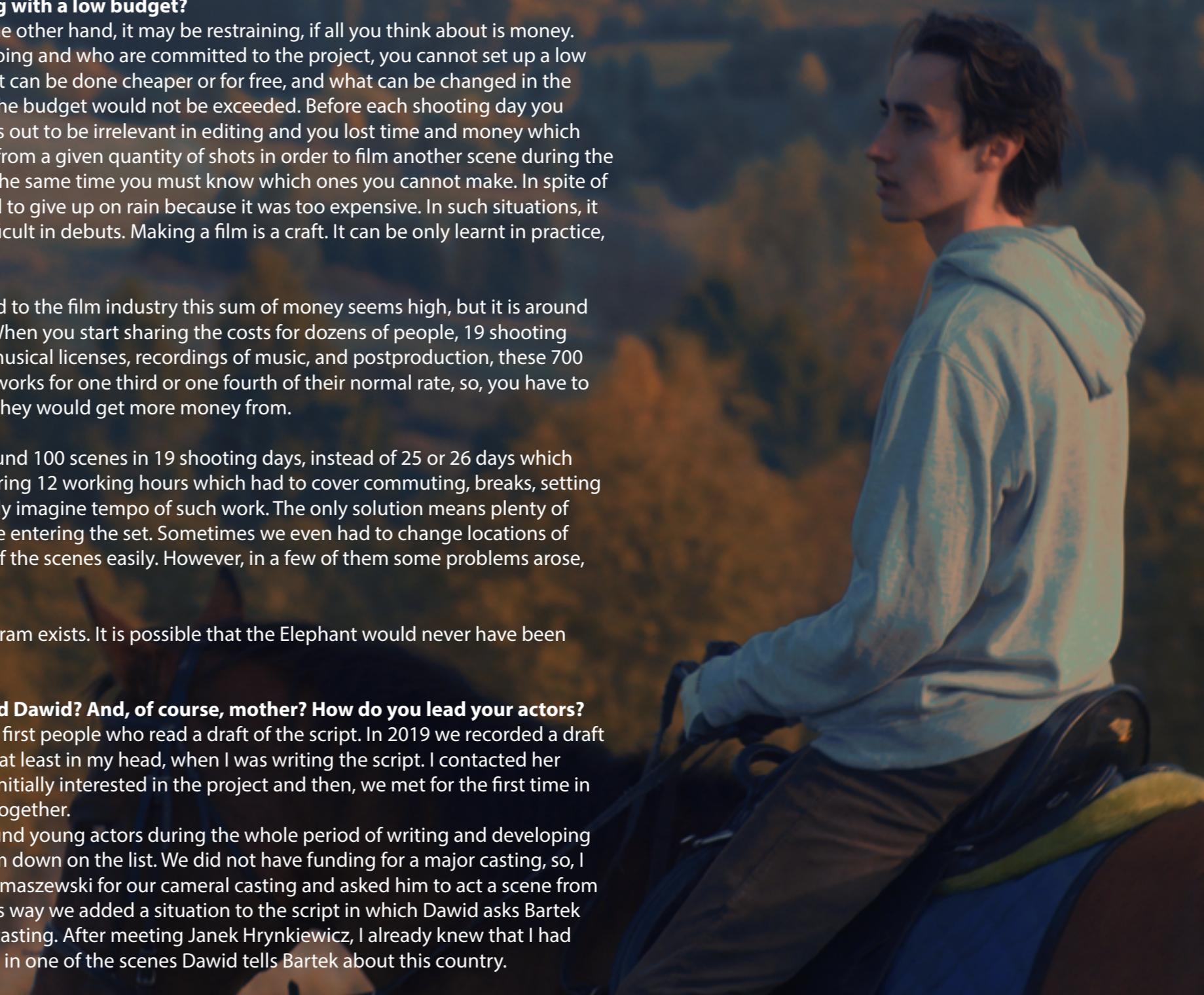
A low budget can be perfectly pictured by the fact that we filmed around 100 scenes in 19 shooting days, instead of 25 or 26 days which we should have. Accordingly, we had to film five or six scenes daily during 12 working hours which had to cover commuting, breaks, setting out light, and packing equipment at the end of each day. You can easily imagine tempo of such work. The only solution means plenty of rehearsals as well as conversations with actors and the operator before entering the set. Sometimes we even had to change locations of given scenes or, if possible, combining them. We filmed the majority of the scenes easily. However, in a few of them some problems arose, and we had to talk it over and find new solutions under pressure.

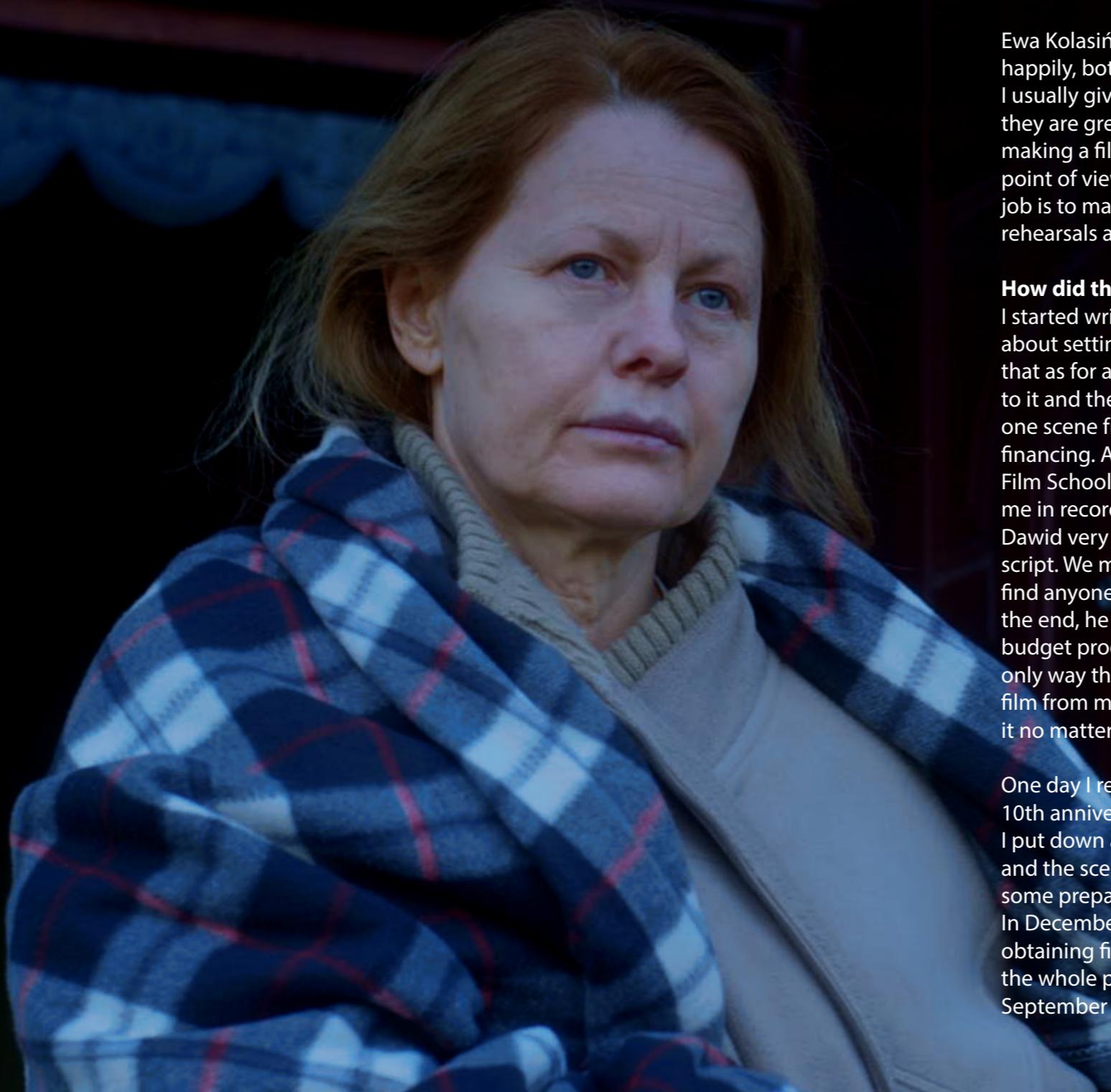
Despite the limitations of the micro-budget, I am happy that this program exists. It is possible that the Elephant would never have been made without it.

Did you know from the very beginning who would play Bartek and Dawid? And, of course, mother? How do you lead your actors?

Paweł Tomaszewski was the first person in this project. He was among first people who read a draft of the script. In 2019 we recorded a draft scene from the film together. Ewa Skibińska appeared quite early too, at least in my head, when I was writing the script. I contacted her moments before submitting the application to the institute. She was initially interested in the project and then, we met for the first time in 2021. After our meeting, we already knew that we would do this film together.

I was looking for Bartek for a long time. I was very vigilant in order to find young actors during the whole period of writing and developing the project. So, whenever someone appeared on the horizon, I put him down on the list. We did not have funding for a major casting, so, I invited three out of twelve actors for a meeting. I invited also Paweł Tomaszewski for our cameral casting and asked him to act a scene from the script and improvise the first meeting with each actor. Besides, this way we added a situation to the script in which Dawid asks Bartek if he can smell him. Paweł asked Janek the same question during the casting. After meeting Janek Hrynkiewicz, I already knew that I had Bartek. Interestingly, Janek was in Iceland while reading the script and in one of the scenes Dawid tells Bartek about this country.





Ewa Kolasińska as Danuta and Wiktoria Filus as Bartek's sister were my first ideas and happily, both of them agreed to take part in the film.

I usually give freedom to my actors and let them try their own ideas. Sometimes they are great, sometimes they do not work out, but we need to remember that making a film is a collective thing. I cannot imagine telling a story from only my point of view. When actors feel their characters, they often have a great intuition. My job is to make a decision and fully accept their ideas. Before shooting, we had many rehearsals and meetings on which we changed a significant part of the script.

How did the process of making this film look like?

I started writing the script in 2018 and for a long time, I was fighting with myself about setting this film in my homeland. Although I was not sure about it, I knew that as for a debut, I should depict a region close to my heart. I finally came round to it and the first draft was ready around the holidays of 2019. I decided to film one scene from the script, which was supposed to help in finding a producer and financing. At the same time, I was making a short film ("The Last One") at Warsaw Film School together with Kuba Sztuk, an operator. Naturally, I asked him to help me in recording that scene. I chose the scene of the horse-riding lesson. I casted Dawid very quickly, because Paweł Tomaszewski caught my eye and I sent him the script. We met to talk it over and he agreed to be a part of it. However, I could not find anyone for Bartek's role. So, I invited an actor who did a wonderful job, but in the end, he did not fit to Bartek's character. One year before filming that scene, a low budget programme just fell from the sky. When I read about it, I knew that it was the only way that this film could be made. It was either the programme or making the film from my own means. I just knew that I had to make this film and that I would do it no matter what. I just needed an inspiration.

One day I read an interview with Kuba Mróz from Tongariro Releasing on their 10th anniversary, in which he said that their dream was to produce their own film. I put down a newspaper or my laptop, I am not sure what it was, and sent a draft and the scene to Kuba. In the following months we were meeting in order to make some preparations, for example, submit an application to Polish Film Institute. In December 2020 we presented our project to the institute's committee. After obtaining financing and finding a brilliant production director - Kasia Staszczyk, the whole project was set in motion. We were shooting with slight breaks from September to the middle of November of 2021.

„ELEPHANT”

(SŁOŃ)

Poland / 2022 / 93'

COLOR / DCP / 4K / 2.39:1 Scope

Language: polish

Production TONGARIRO RELEASING

CAST

Bartek - Jan Hrynkiewicz

Dawid - Paweł Tomaszewski

Matka - Ewa Skibińska

AND Ewa Kolasińska, Wiktoria Filus,

Maciej Kosiacki, Michał Pawlik

CREW

Direction and screenplay Kamil Krawczycki

Producer Jakub Mróz

DOP Jakub Sztuk

Editing Kamil Krawczycki, Agnieszka Białek-Zaborowska

Music Jan Ignacy Królikowski

Set design Ewa Mroczkowska, Marcin Malisz

Sound Mikołaj Tyrakowski, Stanisław Najmiec

Costume design Zofia Jocek

Film co-financed by POLISH FILM INSTITUTE

