



Competition for
Short Documentary
2026



FROM A

VERTEBRAL COLLAPSE

MOUNTAINS AROSE

a film by Giovanni Benini

FROM A VERTEBRAL COLLAPSE MOUNTAINS AROSE

a film by Giovanni Benini

FROM A VERTEBRAL COLLAPSE MOUNTAINS AROSE

Italy, Belgium | 11 min.
16mm and found footage | Color
Italian

DESCRIPTION

Hybrid documentary, Experimental documentary

LOGLINE

A woman looks back on a childhood spent watching the world from a hospital window, tracing the invisible marks left by growing up with a non-conforming body.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In the 1970s, confined in a seaside hospital for a spinal condition, Anna watches other children playing on the beach. From that distance, a sense of invisibility takes root, shaping her identity and desire.

SYNOPSIS

In the 1970s, Anna spends one week each month immobilized in a plaster cast in the orthopedic ward of the Marino hospital, overlooking the sea of Cagliari, Sardinia. From the window, she watches other children playing freely on the beach. Anna has congenital idiopathic scoliosis: her vertebrae are compressed, merged together. The world around her – her family, a patriarchal culture – tends to conceal what is perceived as a «monstrous body». As she grows up, Anna studies, gains independence and leaves Sardinia. Yet a form of invisibility continues to follow her, in her emotional life and in her desire. It is only later that Anna finds her own way of expressing herself, choosing to bring her body into view and turning it into a space of affirmation and recognition. *From a Vertebral Collapse Mountains Arose* is a film built around Anna's writings. Through archival materials and images shot on film, it attempts to restore visibility to what has long been kept out of frame.

KEYWORDS

Disability, Body politics, Female body, Visibility, Desire, Identity, Patriarchy, Crip theory, Memory, Counter-archive, Found footage, 16mm film, Hybrid documentary, Experimental documentary, Sardinia, Cagliari, Poetto Beach

Fig 5.

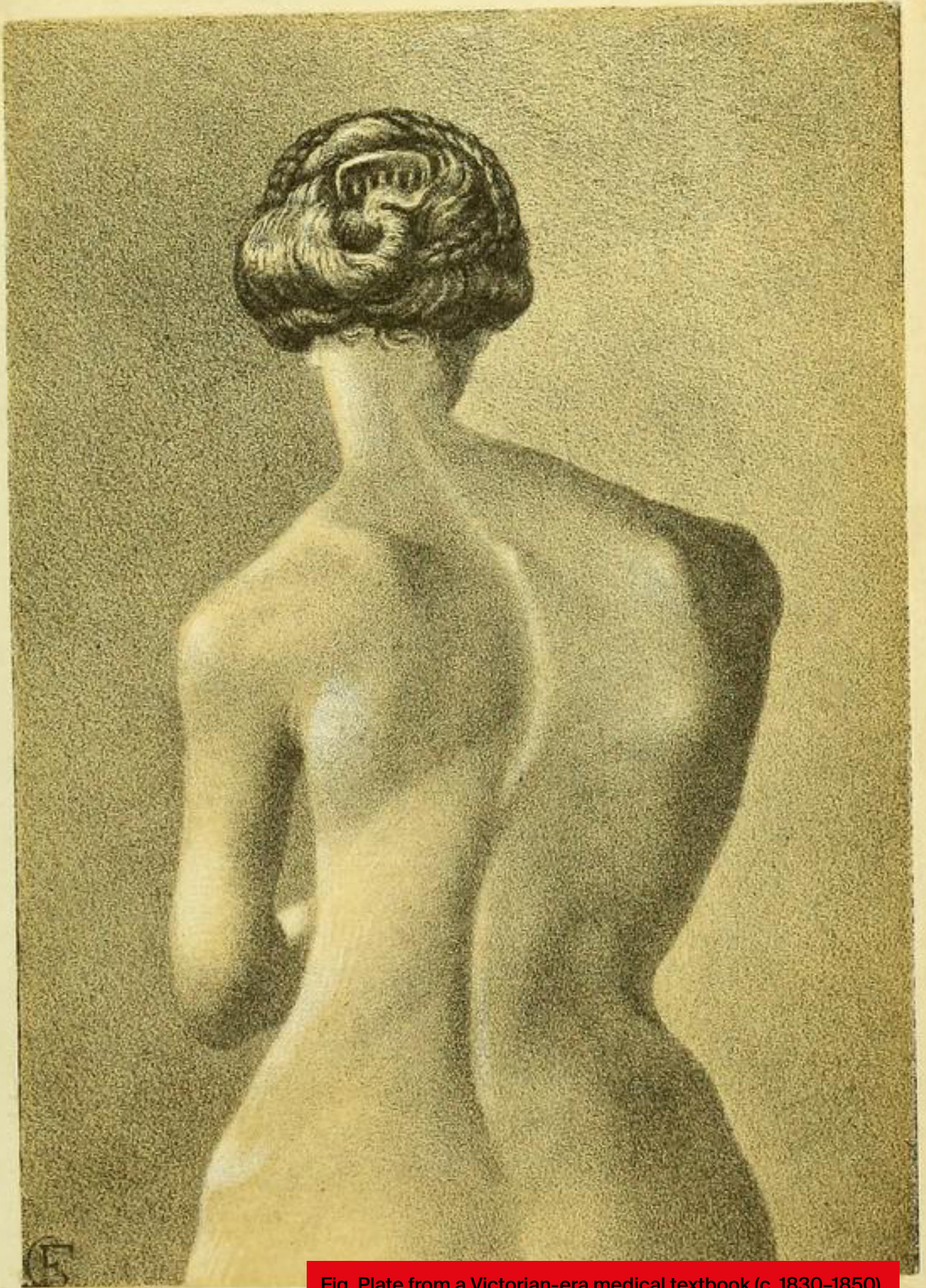


Fig. Plate from a Victorian-era medical textbook (c. 1830-1850).

FROM A

MOUNTAINS AROSE

VERTEBRAL COLLAPSE

a film by Giovanni Benini

Ezme Film
presents ↓

From a Vertebral Collapse Mountains Arose

A short film by
Giovanni Benini

With
Anna Maria Pes

Direction and cinematography
Giovanni Benini

Original writings by
Anna Maria Pes

Text adaptation
Giovanni Benini

Editing
Pierpaolo Filomeno
Giovanni Benini

Voice recording and music
Tobia Poltronieri

Animation
Nicholas Bertini

Sound design
Giulia Vismara

Archive producer
Luca Mantovani

Sound Mix
Pierre Dozin at Sonic Shelter

Color grading
Benjamin Grinand

Produced by
Giovanni Benini
Anna Maria Pes
Zyanya Castilla

Executive producer
Francesca Riccardi

Text design and graphics
Lorenzo Ballarini

Poster illustration
Giulia Vetri

Sales & Festival Distribution
Ezme Film

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Anna is a family friend. Our relationship grew closer after the making of my first feature film, *Marana*, which portrays a community of young people on the autism spectrum.

Anna, who worked professionally as a psychologist, showed a deep curiosity for the film. From there, a dialogue began that gradually shifted toward her own story, and toward the ways in which the body can shape emotional life — how form itself molds identity.

A few years later, Anna entrusted me with a series of short writings. Initially written in the third person, they retrace the moments in which she became aware of her “non-conformity” and of the difficulty of being recognized within male desire.

«I see many (heterosexual) couples where the man has a disability and the woman does not; I have never encountered the opposite», she told me.

These writings — the core of the film — adopt a childlike perspective, where a small gesture seems to anticipate an entire destiny. Archival materials contribute to reconstructing the cultural atmosphere in which Anna grew up: a patriarchal world structured by norms and hierarchies, where visibility and recognition were granted only to those who conformed.

In recent years, Anna's curiosity has led her increasingly toward the theatre. She has collaborated in several productions by Chiara Bersani, an Italian performer whose work centers on the concept of the political body and on disability communities.

Now approaching seventy, with a body that increasingly compresses her breath, Anna encounters crip theory — a perspective born at the intersection of queer thought and disability, questioning what we consider “normal” bodies and desires — and makes her stage debut at the Triennale di Milano in *Michel – The Animals I Am*, a performance by Chiara Bersani.

In this film I seek to construct a counter-archive, where fragments of the past enter into dialogue with Anna's writings and with images of her in the present, shot on film.

The materiality of film becomes part of the narrative: a living body that carries traces, imperfections, and resistance. Through this interplay, I aim to bring to light the invisible fabric of non-conforming existences, long excluded from dominant representations.

From a Vertebral Collapse Mountains Arose is a title borrowed from Chiara Bersani's work *Sottobosco*, and it encapsulates the radical shift in perspective the film proposes: the world we live in does not emerge from perfection, but «from catastrophes, from debris, from broken bodies».



01 UNIVERSE

The human microcosm is connected to the unpredictable forces of the macrocosm. The film moves between personal memory and a broader reflection on chance, transformation, and the invisible connections that shape existence.

Fig. Maria Lai, *Il dio distratto*, 1990



02 THE SUMMER CITY

A few kilometers from Cagliari lies Poetto beach, a defining landscape of Sardinian summer life. Its iconic wooden beach huts – the *casotti* – form a temporary city facing the sea. Nearby stands a Fascist-era building that once housed the Marino orthopedic hospital, where Anna spent long periods of her childhood.

Fig. Giorgio de Chirico, *I bagni misteriosi*, c. 1935



03 ANNA

Anna was born and raised in the Campidano region of Sardinia, in a modest farming family. Through education and determination, she built an independent life and a professional career as a child neuropsychiatrist. Yet the memory of how her body was perceived – and the difficulty of being recognized within male desire – continues to inhabit her story.

Fig. Photograph of Anna, c. 1980



04 ORTHOPEDIC WARDS

Orthopedic wards are the spaces that marked long periods of Anna's childhood. Diagnosed with congenital idiopathic scoliosis, her vertebrae were compressed and fused together. From these rooms, overlooking the sea, Anna began observing the world from a distance – a gaze that would shape her identity and her relationship with visibility.

Fig. Illustration from an orthopedic medical textbook, c. 1850



05 CHIARA BERSANI

In recent years, Anna has encountered the artistic practice of Chiara Bersani, whose theatrical research – influenced by contemporary dance and performance – explores the political meaning of the body and its relationship with society. Through this encounter, Anna approaches new ways of inhabiting and representing her own body.

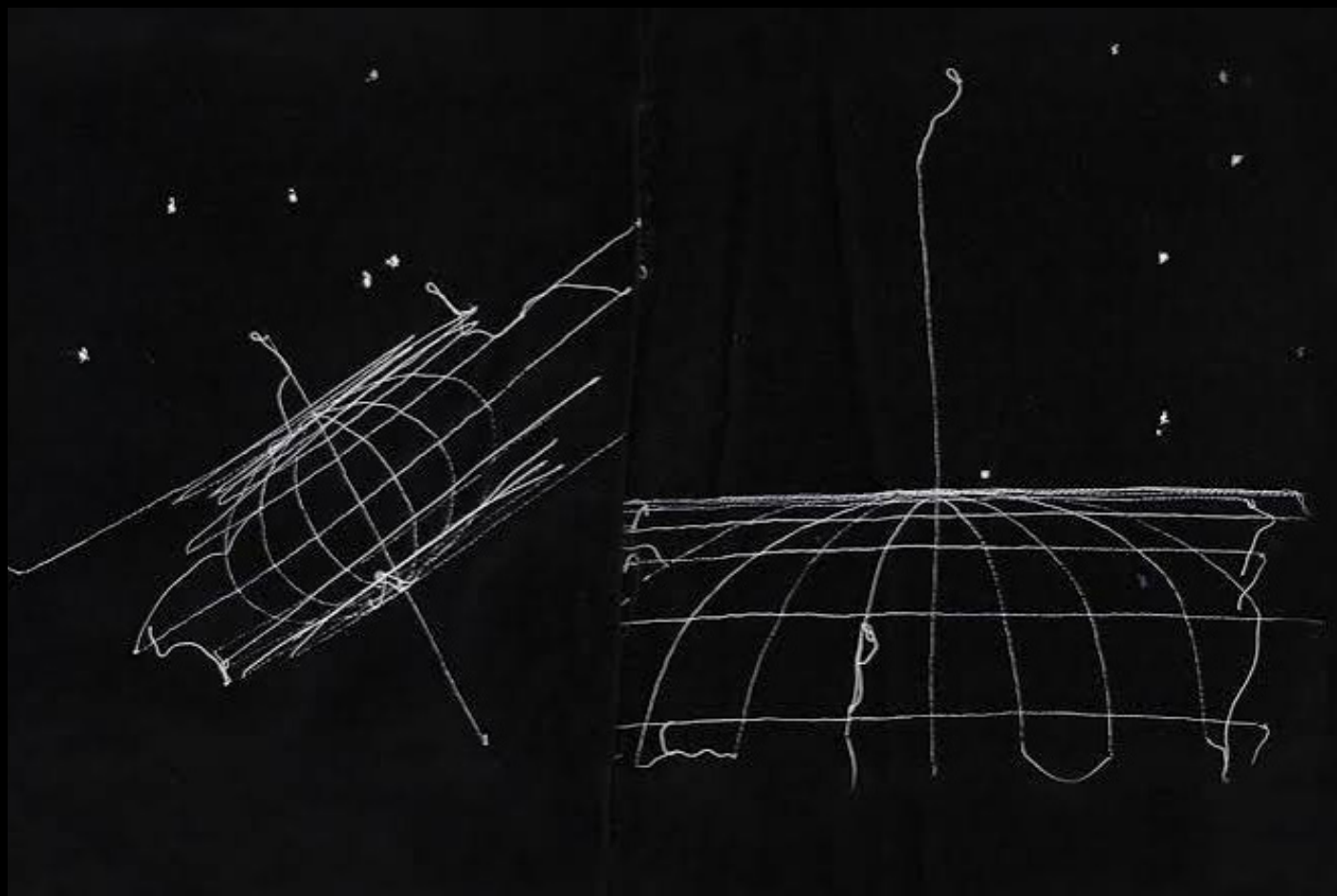
Fig. Chiara Bersani, *Seeking Unicorns*, © Roberta Segata, Centrale Fies

FROM A

MOUNTAINS AROSE

VERTEBRAL COLLAPSE

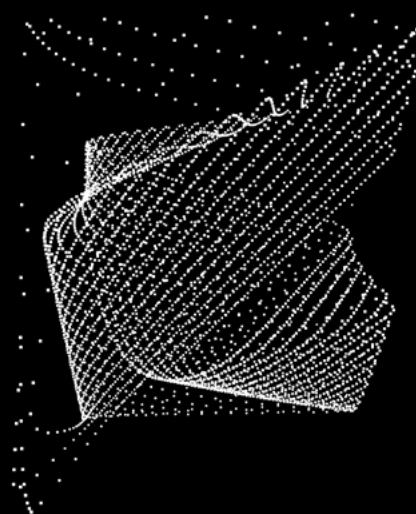
a film by Giovanni Benini



01 UNIVERSE

Inspired by Sardinian mythology and the figure of the Janas – female beings associated with weaving, transformation, and the transmission of ancestral knowledge – Maria Lai built her artistic universe through sewing. In her work, stitching becomes a feminine gesture of creation and connection: a way of linking the intimate and the cosmic, the fragment and the whole.

In *From a Vertebral Collapse Mountains Arose*, this relationship between microcosm and macrocosm reappears through the “curve of chance”, a digital form generated by an algorithm that randomly processes RGB values. A structure born from randomness, where invisible forces become visible.



FROM A

MOUNTAINS AROSE

VERTEBRAL COLLAPSE

a film by Giovanni Benini



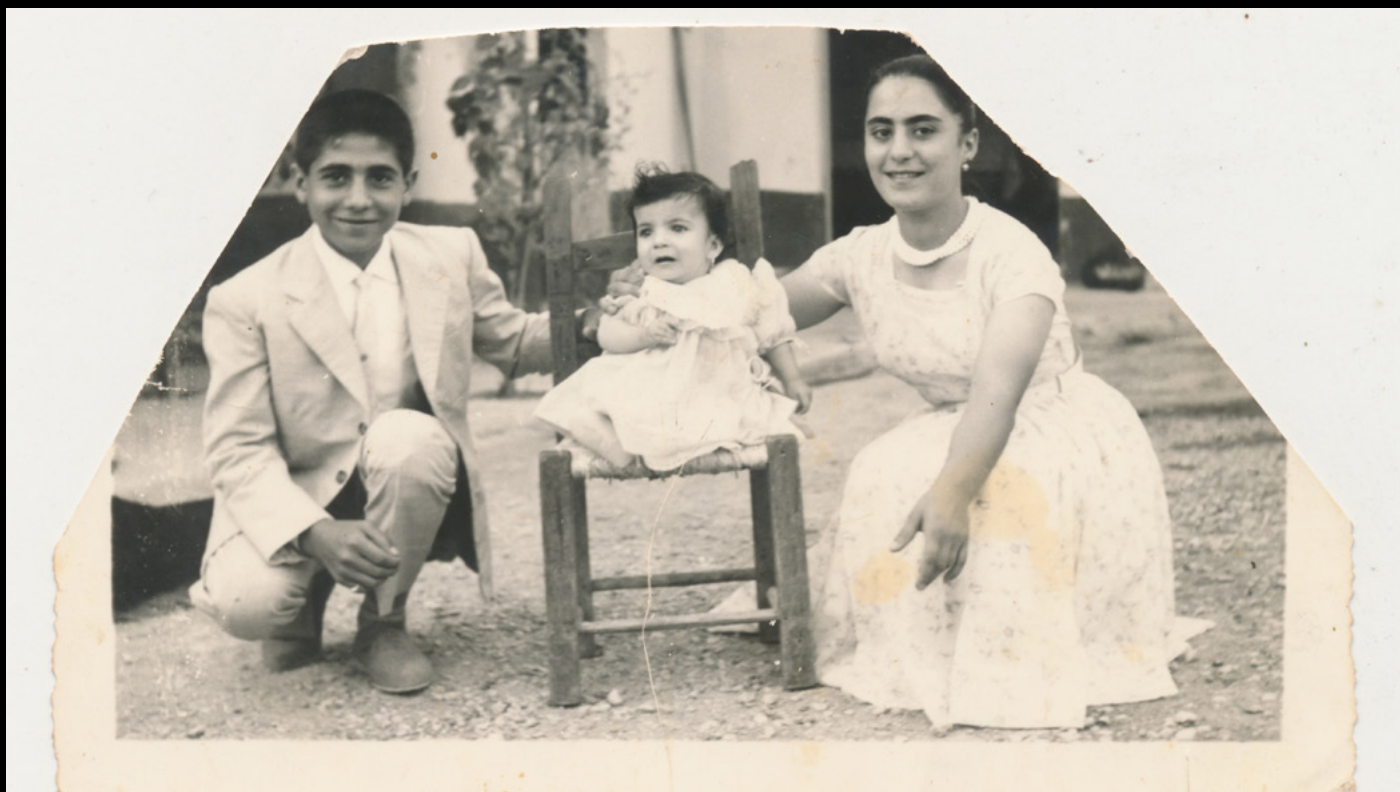
02 THE SUMMER CITY

Just a few kilometers from the center of Cagliari stretches Poetto beach: eight kilometers of white sand and open horizons, the symbolic landscape of the city's summer life.

Here once stood the casotti: small seasonal dwellings that, during the summer months, formed an ephemeral neighborhood facing the sea. Their simple yet imaginative architectures created a temporary city suspended between everyday life and imagination – a landscape that recalls the metaphysical atmosphere of Giorgio de Chirico's works, where familiar spaces become dreamlike.

Next to this popular landscape stood a monumental concrete building of Sardinian Rationalism: originally built as a Fascist colony and later converted into the Marino hospital, where Anna spent long periods of her childhood immobilized in a plaster cast.





03 ANNA

Born in 1957, Anna grew up in the Campidano region of Sardinia, in a modest farming family. From an early age, her body was perceived as different: she did not grow like her peers, her movements were limited, and her physical appearance became the object of a gaze shaped by fear and concealment.

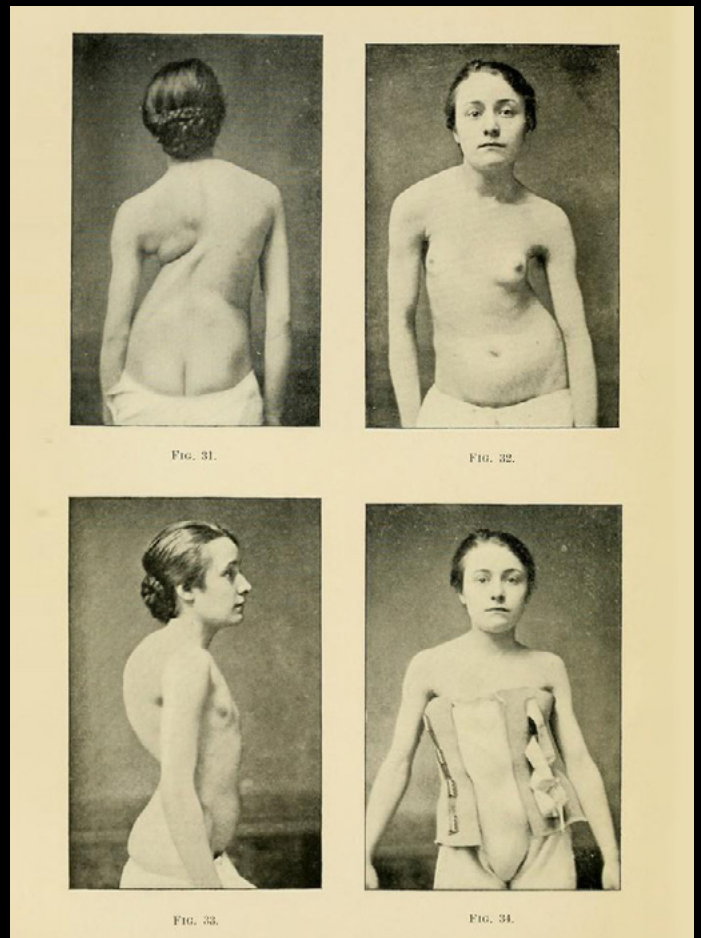
Unable to fully confront her condition, her family responded by protecting and hiding what they perceived as a «monstrous» body. Her mother imagined for her a future of protection and seclusion, within the walls of a convent.

Anna, however, found another path. She excelled in her studies and, as soon as she became independent, left Sardinia for Padua – a city marked at the time by intense political and cultural ferment – where she developed her own intellectual and political awareness.

After university, she built a professional career in child neuropsychiatry.

Yet, while achieving personal and professional independence, another dimension remained unresolved: the possibility of a recognized emotional and sexual life. Within a patriarchal culture, her body continued to be made invisible, excluded from the field of desire and representation.





04 ORTHOPEDIC WARDS

Anna was diagnosed with congenital idiopathic scoliosis: her vertebrae were compressed and fused together. Her medical journey began at the age of five, through radiology wards both in Sardinia and on the mainland. Unlike many children, Anna's first memory of the sea is connected to hospitalization: the Marino hospital stood directly on Poetto beach, at the heart of Cagliari's summer landscape. From her room, she listened to the voices and laughter of children playing outside, becoming aware that her body was different from theirs.

The film also reflects on the visual language of orthopedic medicine and scientific imagery, focusing on the representation of the female body and on the ways medical gazes have historically classified, observed, and shaped bodies. For many of these non-conforming bodies, medical manuals remain the primary visual archive through which they have been recorded and remembered.



05 CHIARA BERSANI

As an adult, Anna had always practiced theatre as an amateur. After the Covid-19 pandemic, she encountered the artistic practice of Chiara Bersani in Cagliari, during the workshop connected to *Sottobosco*.

Bersani's practice is rooted in the political dimension of the body and in the relationship between performance and disability communities. Through this encounter, Anna was invited to participate as a performer in *Deserters* (2023) and later in *Michel – The Animals I Am*, which premiered at Triennale Milano in 2025.

Through theatre, Anna encounters new ways of inhabiting her body and approaches crip theory – a perspective born at the intersection of queer thought and disability studies, questioning the concepts of “normal” bodies and desires.



Giovanni Benini DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY S/L/XL

S Giovanni Benini (1986) is an Italian filmmaker based in Belgium. After a degree in engineering, he graduated in cinematography from ZeLIG – School for Documentary, Television and New Media (Bolzano, Italy) in 2016. His work moves between documentary, hybrid cinema, and visual research. His graduation film *Per chi vuole sparare (For Those Who Want to Fire)* premiered at Visions du Réel, while his first feature documentary *Marana* (2020) was screened at several European festivals. He is co-founder of Ezme Film and artistic director of Euganea Film Festival.

L Giovanni Benini (1986) is an Italian filmmaker, producer, and film educator based in Belgium. After earning a degree in engineering, he studied cinematography at ZeLIG – School for Documentary, Television and New Media (Bolzano), graduating in 2016. His practice explores the boundaries between documentary, fiction, and visual experimentation. His graduation film *Per chi vuole sparare (For Those Who Want to Fire)* premiered at the 48th edition of Visions du Réel. In 2020, he directed his first feature-length documentary *Marana*, which premiered at Beldocs and was subsequently presented at several European festivals. In 2023, he directed the hybrid short film *La casa del bosco (The House in the Woods)*, screened at festivals including Lago Film Fest and Beijing International Short Film Festival. He is co-founder of Ezme Film, a collective exploring socially engaged practices at the intersection of cinema, visual arts, and participatory processes. Since 2023, he has been artistic director of Euganea Film Festival. His work also includes film education projects and collaborations with documentary training programs.

XL Giovanni Benini (1986) is an Italian filmmaker, film programmer, and film educator based in Belgium. After earning a degree in engineering, he studied at ZeLIG – School for Documentary, Television and New Media (Bolzano, Italy), where he graduated in 2016 in cinematography. Over the years, he has developed a hybrid practice that moves between filmmaking (directing, producing, cinematography, and editing), festival programming, and film education. His graduation film *Per chi vuole sparare (For Those Who Want to Fire)* premiered at the 48th edition of Visions du Réel. In 2020, he directed his first feature-length documentary, *Marana*, which premiered at Beldocs and was subsequently screened at numerous European festivals. In 2023, he directed the hybrid short film *La casa del bosco (The House in the Woods)*, presented at festivals including Lago Film Fest and the Beijing International Short Film Festival. From 2014 to 2021, he worked as a film programmer and head of production at the Film Festival della Lessinia. Since 2023, he has been the artistic director of the Euganea Film Festival, now in its 25th edition (2026), and a partner in several advanced training initiatives, particularly in documentary cinema, such as Nord/Est/Doc/Camp. In 2020, he co-founded Ezme Film, a collective exploring socially engaged practices at the intersection of visual arts and participatory processes. Within this framework, he has led workshops and educational projects, notably in programs supported by the Italian Ministries of Education and Culture focused on film in schools. Since 2022, he has been based in Brussels, where he collaborates with Italian broadcasters (RAI, Mediaset) on reportage from Northern Europe. In 2024, he worked as an editor on the video installation *Listening All Night To The Rain* by John Akomfrah, presented at the British Pavilion of the Venice Biennale.

FILMOGRAPHY

- *Marana*, doc. 63' - IT 2020
- *The House in the Woods*, exp. 16' - IT 2023

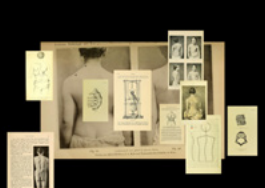
VERTEBRAL COLLAPSE

a film by Giovanni Benini

FROM A

MOUNTAINS AROSE

FILM STILLS



FROM A

VERTEBRAL COLLAPSE

MOUNTAINS AROSE

a film by Giovanni Benini

CONTACTS

Director, producer
Giovanni Benini
giovanni@ezmefilm.com

Executive producer
Francesca Riccardi
francesca@ezmefilm.com

Sales & Festivals
Zyanya Castilla
zyanya@ezmefilm.com
Francesca Riccardi
francesca@ezmefilm.com

www.ezmefilm.com