Ich will dich

I WANT YOU – MEETING HILDE DOMIN

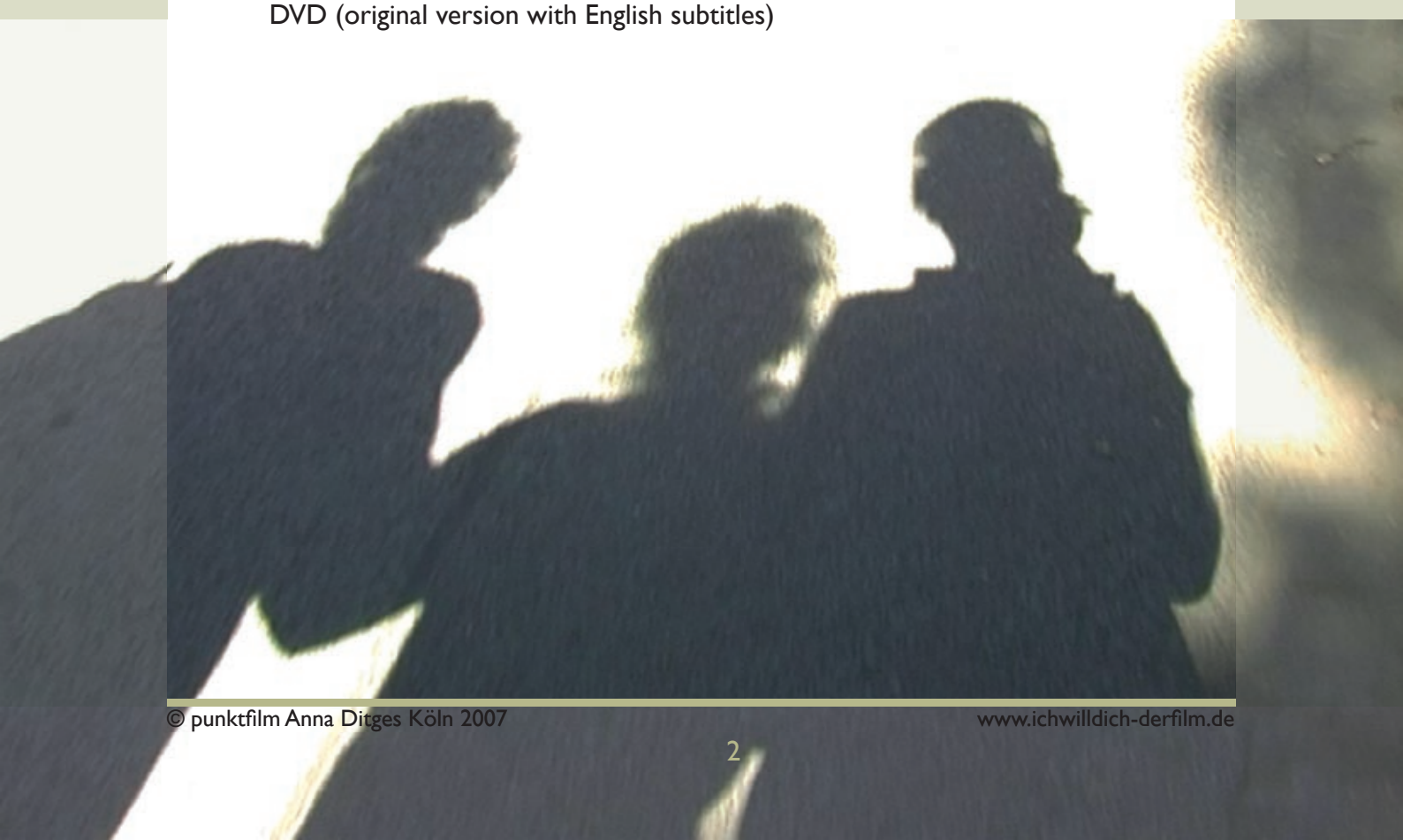
A documentary film by Anna Ditges

PRESS BOOK

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

CONTENTS

The Film	3
Short Synopsis	4
Summary	5
Credits	8
Technical Details	9
An Interview with Anna Ditges	10
An Interview with Felix Kuballa	12
The Protagonist	14
Biography	15
Publications and Awards	16
The Director	17
Filmography	18
Contact / Impressum	19
Material	
Press	
English Subtitles	
CD (film stills, set photography, texts)	
DVD (original version with English subtitles)	



© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

THE FILM

"I want you - Meeting Hilde Domin" is a very personal and direct documentary film about the life and work of poetess Hilde Domin: film-maker Anna Ditges, almost 70 years younger than Domin, accompanied and filmed the Grande Dame of German post-war literature during the last two years of her long and eventful life.

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A young film-maker discovers Hilde Domin‘s lyric poetry and decides to get in touch with the celebrated poetess herself. She encounters a highly unconventional 95 year-old in an apartment full of books, roses and memories – with a life story that mirrors the last century.

Hilde Domin, born in 1909, tells openly about her turbulent and troubled life: of her childhood as an assimilated Jewess in Cologne, of more than two decades spent in exile, of the return to post-war Germany and her late career as a writer. For the first time in front of a camera, she speaks about Erwin, the love of her life, and about her loneliness in old age. Carefully observing, challenging and listening to her protagonist, the author manages to capture even the most sensitive topics on film, in direct and highly expressive images.

Anna Ditges, born in 1978, visited Hilde Domin regularly over a period of almost two years, until the old lady‘s death in February 2006. The two women shared everyday experiences and went travelling together – to poetry readings, on holiday, and through Domin‘s memories. The outcome of these numerous encounters is an uncommonly intimate and touching documentary: “I want you”, a filmic statement as precise and haunting as the famously straightforward poetry of Hilde Domin.

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

SUMMARY

In a bookstore, by sheer coincidence, 26-year old film-maker Anna Ditges comes across a small book entitled "Only a Rose for Support" – the first collection of poems by Hilde Domin. Profoundly moved by the power and lucidity of Domin's lyrical voice, she gets in contact with the 95 year-old poetess, takes up her camera and a bunch of roses and travels to Heidelberg, the town where Hilde Domin has found a new home after long years in exile.

The encounter between the two women is a great surprise: the Grande Dame of German Post-War literature, generally feared by journalists because of her distant and arrogant attitude, welcomes the unknown young film-maker with warmth and curiosity. At their very first meeting, Hilde Domin takes her filming visitor on a tour around her apartment: the walls covered with bookshelves, the wooden dove that is to be buried together with her, the framed pictures of her three long-dead loved ones – and roses in each and every corner. Anna Ditges is fascinated: to her, a woman young enough to be the poetess' great-grandchild, Hilde Domin seems like a live relic of the past century, an embodiment of German culture and history.

Through a period of almost two years, until the poetess' death in February 2006, the film-maker visits Hilde Domin regularly and travels with her to readings and on holiday. During this time, the two dissimilar women are accompanied by a third one: the camera. Anna Ditges records Hilde Domin's everyday life, private and professional, she films her at the typewriter, on the phone, feeding the birds on her balcony, or sitting as model for a portrait. She asks questions, provokes discussions, keeps challenging and insisting – and thereby manages to get remarkably close to the poetess. In the course of their numerous encounters, a relationship evolves between director and protagonist: an intense friendship, despite the many tensions between them, and despite an age gap of almost 70 years.

The documentary film "I want you" offers a subjective and very direct access to the personality and to the artistic work of the poetess. The audience witnesses how the old lady gets accustomed to the company of the young woman. Step by step she loses her fear of the camera and begins to gain trust.

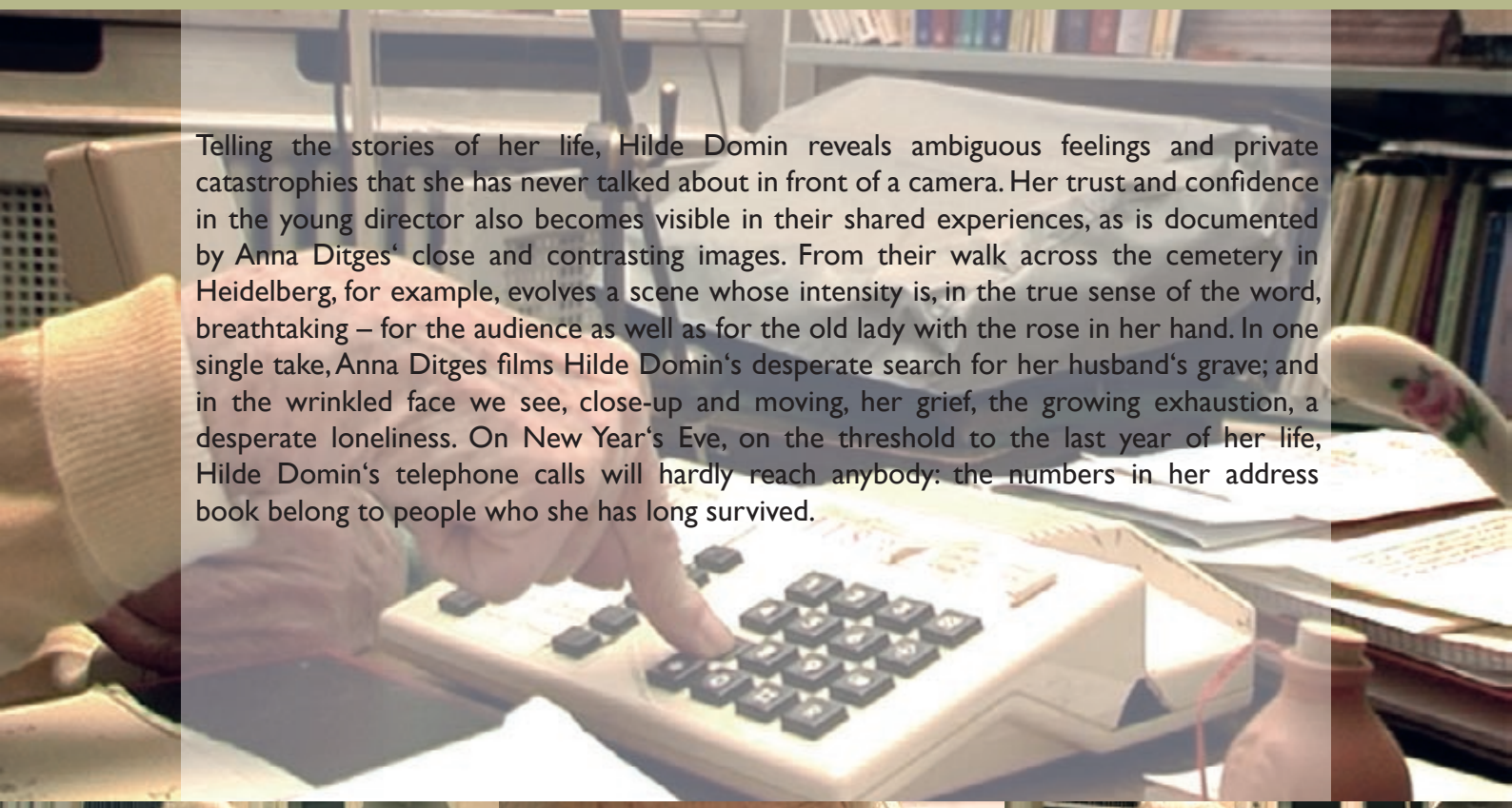
© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

Using quotations from her poems, her prose and the pictures from her private albums, the film remembers and brings to life the many different stages in the life of Hilde Domin: her childhood as a Jewish child in Cologne, her student life in Heidelberg, the escape from Hitler and the following 22 years in exile, the return to post-war Germany and her late fame as a poetess. In Domin's everyday life as well as in the film, there is one constant figure: Erwin Walter Palm, the love of her life, and also a poet. He died in 1988 but his name still remains on the doorbell. When Hilde speaks of Erwin, the audience learns even more about herself: weak points are touched, such as the rivalries in her long marriage, her childlessness and her solitude in old age.

Home, Identity, Love, Loss – these are central themes in Domin's poems taken up by the film. In Cologne, for her the "sunken city", 95 year-old Hilde Domin climbs once again up the stairs of the old upper-class house where she grew up – with Catholic maids, Goethe after bed-time and Social Democrat comrades in the drawing room. It was the feeling of safety in this first home, Domin says, that gave her the strength to later survive more than 20 troubled years abroad: "from one dictatorship into the next", "the suicide pills always in our pockets".

In 1932, as a politically engaged student, she could foresee the upcoming threat of the Nazis' seizure of power and decided to emigrate to Rome, together with Erwin Walter Palm. In 1939, out of fear of the Italian fascists, the couple moved on to London and from there to Santo Domingo. In the Dominican Republic, dictator Trujillo was granting asylum to European Jews. Here, at the age of 42, Hilde Palm wrote her first poem – an event that marked her "second birth" as Hilde Domin, a poetess "with the name of an island" that had become her second home. It was the longing for words, in her own language, that made her decide to move back to Germany in 1954: a "return home into the word".

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007



Telling the stories of her life, Hilde Domin reveals ambiguous feelings and private catastrophies that she has never talked about in front of a camera. Her trust and confidence in the young director also becomes visible in their shared experiences, as is documented by Anna Ditges' close and contrasting images. From their walk across the cemetery in Heidelberg, for example, evolves a scene whose intensity is, in the true sense of the word, breathtaking – for the audience as well as for the old lady with the rose in her hand. In one single take, Anna Ditges films Hilde Domin's desperate search for her husband's grave; and in the wrinkled face we see, close-up and moving, her grief, the growing exhaustion, a desperate loneliness. On New Year's Eve, on the threshold to the last year of her life, Hilde Domin's telephone calls will hardly reach anybody: the numbers in her address book belong to people who she has long survived.

However, not all of the encounters in the film are that somber. In one of the key scenes of the film, the camera observes renowned sculptor Thomas Duttenhoefer creating a bust of Hilde Domin in front of a devoted audience: a situation full of dynamics and subtle irony, thanks to the film-maker's unconventional montage technique. Anna Ditges contrasts drastic images with moments of discrete participation and humorous observation. One change in atmosphere follows the other like a chain of memories, linked by a poem, an image, a conversation. Or by a rose, symbolizing language in Domin's poetry and one of the key motifs of the film.

"I want you – Meeting Hilde Domin" is the first feature-length documentary of a young film-maker. Through her extraordinary involvement with her protagonist, Anna Ditges succeeds in portraying the famous poetess in a very intimate way. She shows the Hilde Domin she met herself: sensitive, self-centered and strong-willed, a diva with biting humour and great girlish charm – and with a growing affection towards the young woman with the camera.

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

CREDITS

Screenwriter and Director
Anna Ditges

Cinematographer and Editor
Anna Ditges

Poems and Prose read by
Anna Thalbach

Music
Andreas Schäfer

Sound Design
Roland Platz
Emil Klotzsch

Sound Mixing
Dirk Hülsenbusch

Colour Correction
Markus Ohrem

Graphic Design
Wieslaw Prus

Commissioning Editors
Felix Kuballa
Jutta Krug
Kurt Schneider
Reinhard Wulf
Rolf Bergmann

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

TECHNICAL DETAILS

title
I want you - Meeting Hilde Domin

genre
documentary film

format
digibeta 16:9 letterbox (stereo)
35 mm 1:1,85 (dolby-SR)

length
95 min
2730 m

available versions
original version (German)
original version with English subtitles

production
punktfilm Anna Ditges

and WDR, SWR, 3sat, RBB

supported by Filmstiftung NRW

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANNA DITGES

Anna Ditges, graduate of the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, spent two years shooting for her debut film "I want you – Meeting Hilde Domin". The result was 130 hours of material documenting her intense involvement with a famous poet who was almost 70 years older than her.

How did you become interested in making a film about Hilde Domin?

I had come across her poems by coincidence and wanted to get to know her. The first meeting was surprising for me because there was an immediate understanding and curiousity between us. And of course I was fascinated by her distinct personality and exciting life story. Hilde seemed to me like a living history book, I could read about the last century in her. She was 95, but amazingly awake and sharp, one could talk openly to her.

Domin was generally regarded as a diva. What was it like to work with her?

The film brings it out it very clearly: it was not easy. Each time I got too close to her with the camera, we got into a fight. In the beginning, I did turn off the camera whenever she started screaming at me. At some point, however, I realized that these difficulties must become part of the film. So I let the camera run. Actually, I believe that after a while it turned into a kind of a game between us. It was almost like a flirt, always testing out the borders of affection and distance. Hilde was mainly interested in my company. She liked the attention I gave her by filming her, but sometimes she felt that the camera was disturbing our being together. But she accepted it, even learned to ignore it. She knew how important it was for me to make a film that shows more than "la Domin" the way everybody knew her.

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

Had you been planning from the start to work as a one-woman-team?

At first I was thinking about hiring a female cinematographer. But on the one hand, I had no money, and on the other, I soon realized that the close relationship that we had and that I wanted for the film would be destroyed if I involved a proper team. Sometimes I waited for an entire day just for one situation, so it was necessary to get to know and adapt to Hilde and her everyday routine. We had breakfast together and I brought her a cup of milk at bedtime. This created a very intimate atmosphere between the two of us.

Had you already finished shooting when Hilde Domin died in 2006?

Two weeks before her death we spent a beautiful weekend together and I got a couple of very important shots. The very last images I filmed at her funeral. But it was only when I started editing the material that I realized how painful and difficult it would be to deal with her death. In the editing studio, she stayed alive for me, and even months alter I found it difficult to edit the end of the film because it tells about her loneliness and her death.

What do you hope to achieve with this film?

"Light the lanterns in the hearts along the path" – to put it in Hilde's words. It would be great if the film offered an opportunity to access her poetry. But most of all, I hope that the film will make people experience the many facets and unique character of Hilde Domin. This is of course also a very personal wish because I liked her so much. And I reckon the film does show why.

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

AN INTERVIEW WITH FELIX KUBALLA

Felix Kuballa, himself a director/producer of numerous tv documentaries and honoured with three Grimme awards, has been involved in the production of the film "I want you - Meeting Hilde Domin" as a commissioning editor for WDR television, and as a devoted editorial supervisor.

What was it that drew your attention to this project?

When I had the film-maker's exposé on my desk in 2005, there was one detail that captured me: the fact that Hilde Domin was 95 and Anna Ditges 26. I was wondering why such a young film-maker would make a film about such an old poetess. So I called Anna Ditges. When I discovered that she had already been working on the project for two years, all alone and without any budget, I really became curious. This kind of persistence is quite rare. And when I saw the material, I quickly realized that this colleague had achieved something very special – that her persistence was justified after all.

What was so special about it?

The dynamics between the two women, their close and tense relationship. They resembled each other – the same stubbornness, the same ambition. And they really trusted each other. I was amazed to see how openly Domin was reacting. Even when the young one asked whether her husband had been a good lover, the old one answered very naturally. On the other hand, they were always fighting. And all the time there was the camera, as a third party, so to say. Even though she was doing everything herself and at the same time – camera, sound, direction – Anna Ditges managed to film even in the most impossible situations.

For example?

Driving a car, for example: she puts one hand on the wheel, and with the other she holds the camera on her lap, and while she is driving down a steep hillside road at high speed, she shoots a very precise portrait of Hilde Domin on the passenger seat. Thanks to her unorthodox and – in the positive sense – unrestrained approach, she was able to produce images that are very direct, very authentic. When they walk across the cemetery, for example,

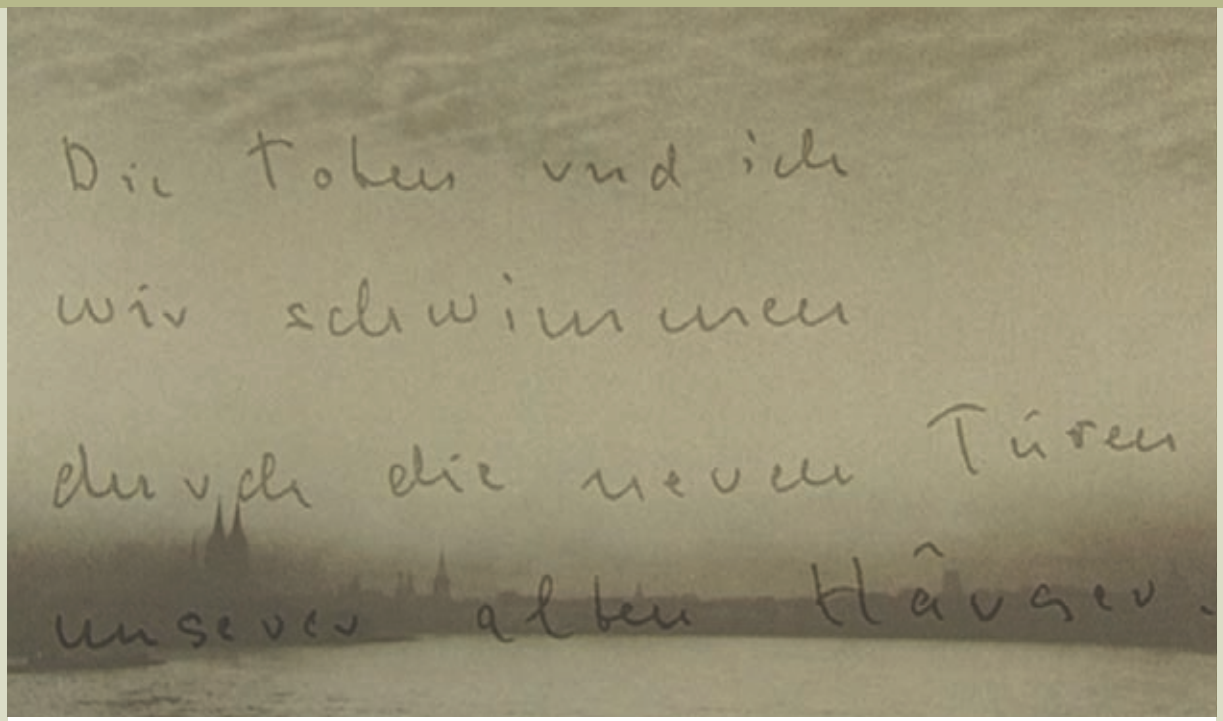
© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

the director is supporting the old lady with her left arm and the camera with her right arm, and the outcome of this is one single take: in the original, it lasts 30 minutes. Hilde Domin cannot find the place where her husband is buried, she breathes heavily as she is walking up the path, and in her wrinkled face you see her despair. This is moving, breathtaking – in the true sense of the word.

And how does the film differ from other documentaries?

There are none of the usual "smoothing" images. Anna Ditges has a style of her own, plus a remarkable intuition for storytelling, and she decided to focus exactly on what was important to her: Hilde Domin. There is no distraction, no harmonizing in-between images. The film was made beyond all rules, so to say, a "dogma film without dogma". Anna Ditges never even set up a light. When Domin hits the camera lens, she kept filming and made use of the picture. During the editing, she followed very precisely and meticulously the aesthetics she had set up with her spontaneous camera work: by reducing it all to the essential, with hard jump cuts. Thus, it has become a rough and direct film without compromise, a film that tells an exciting story in a sensitive way and does not care at all about conventions. A work from a young director for whom I have a whole lot of respect.

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007



THE PROTAGONIST

Hilde Domin (1909-2006) is widely regarded as the most important German poetess of her generation. Her poetry was translated into more than twenty languages and has won numerous international awards. "I want you" – also the title of one of her poems – is the first documentary about the extraordinary life and work of this German-Jewish intellectual who started writing poetry at the age of 42 and rose to late fame as "the poetess of homecoming" in post-war Germany.

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

BIOGRAPHY

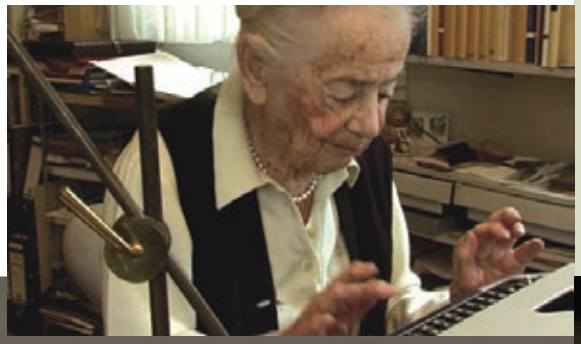
Hilde Domin was born as Hilde Löwenstein on July 27th, 1909, in Cologne, Germany. (Until her 90th birthday, Domin claimed 1912 as her year of birth.) The Löwensteins were a wealthy and thoroughly assimilated Jewish family; Hilde's father worked as a lawyer, her mother had trained as a professional singer. After graduating from an all-girls grammar school in Cologne, Hilde studied at the universities of Heidelberg, Cologne, Bonn and Berlin. Between 1929 to 1932, she read Law, then changed to Economics, Sociology and Philosophy.

In 1932, to escape the threatening persecution by the Nazis, she emigrated to Rome together with her partner, art historian Erwin Walter Palm. There she worked as a language teacher and completed a PhD in Political Science at Florence University. In 1936, she married Erwin Walter Palm. In 1939, the couple moved from Italy to London and later went on from there to Santo Domingo. In the Dominican Republic, Hilde Palm worked as a translator and photographer, later (1947 to 1952) as a lecturer of German language at the University of Santo Domingo. In 1951, influenced by the death of her mother, Hilde Palm started writing poetry. Her pseudonym "Domin" was chosen as a reminiscence of her exile home.

In 1954, after 22 years abroad, Hilde Domin and her husband returned to Germany. Her first poems were published in journals in 1957; in 1961, the Palm-Domins settled down in Heidelberg. Apart from poetry, short stories and one novel, Hilde Domin wrote essays and academic articles on literature. In the winter semester of 1987/88, she was invited to give the renowned "Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen". In August 1988, Erwin Walter Palm died. Hilde Domin stayed in Heidelberg. On the event of her 95th birthday, she was made Citizen of Honour in Heidelberg. Here she died on February 22nd, 2006, at the age of 96.

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

PUBLICATIONS AND AWARDS



Publications (selection)

Nur eine Rose als Stütze, poems
1959, S. Fischer
Das zweite Paradies, novel
1962, Piper/S. Fischer
Rückkehr der Schiffe, poems
1962, S. Fischer
Hier, poems
1964, S. Fischer
Wozu Lyrik heute - Dichtung und Leser in der gesteuerten Gesellschaft
1968, Piper
Ich will dich, poems
1970, Piper/S. Fischer TB
Von der Natur nicht vorgesehen, autobiography
1974/1981, Piper/S. Fischer
Aber die Hoffnung, autobiographical prose
1982, Piper
Gesammelte Gedichte, poems
1987, S. Fischer
Hier, poems
1993, S. Fischer
Der Baum blüht trotzdem, poems
1999, S. Fischer

Awards (selection)

Heinrich Heine Medal, Düsseldorf (1972)
Rilke Award (1976)
Nelly Sachs Award (1983)
Carl Zuckmayer Medal (1991)
Hölderlin Award (1992)
Great Order of the Federal Republic of Germany (1994)
Literature Award Konrad Adenauer Foundation (1995)
State Medal of Honour of the Dominican Republic (2005)

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

THE DIRECTOR

Anna Ditges, born 1978 in Bonn, is a professional film-maker with a focus on documentary film. She works as a director and screenwriter, cinematographer and film/video editor. At the age of 16, she went to live in Spain for two years where she passed Spanish and German A-levels in 1996. Having gained first-hand experience in TV, radio, and theatre, she studied Film/Television at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne, Germany. Her diploma work, a 45 min documentary about a Russian-German family, was broadcast on WDR (German public television channel) in 2003. "I want you – Meeting Hilde Domin" (95 min, 2007) is her debut film for cinema and television; apart from directing, she was also responsible for cinematography and montage.

© punkt.film Anna Ditges Köln 2007

FILMOGRAPHY

Project work at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne

2000-2001 THE DREAM OF THE FIVE-STOREY HOUSE FOUR WOMEN IN HONDURAS documentary 60 min	director and editor
2002-2003 I AM GERMAN JUST LIKE YOU PORTRAIT OF A GERMAN-RUSSIAN FAMILY documentary 45 min	director and editor

Freelance work

since 2001 working as a film/video editor for WDR and others	editor
01 2004 THE DOWSER tv documentary 30 min Kigali Films Ralph Weihermann for Deutsche Welle / WDR	cinematographer
2000-2002 I WANT YOU MEETING HILDE DOMIN documentary 95 min coproduction punktfilm Anna Ditges and WDR / SWR / 3sat / RBB, supported by Filmstiftung NRW	director, cinematographer, editor
2006-2007 MY STORY interviews with contemporary witnesses, 15 min each WDR / Phoenix	director, cinematographer, editor

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

CONTACT / IMPRESSUM

film production

punktfilm Anna Ditges
Krefelder Wall 50
50670 Köln, Germany

phone +49 (0)221 45 34 735
fax +49 (0)221 45 34 736
info@punktfilm.com
www.punktfilm.com

film distribution
(for German-speaking countries)

Film Kino Text
Jürgen Lütz

phone +49 (0)228 42 07 67
juergen.luetz@filmkinotext.de

more information about the film

info@ichwilldich-derfilm.de
www.ichwilldich-derfilm.de

texts and layout

Sarah Kirkegaard

post@sarahkirkegaard.de
www.sarahkirkegaard.de

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007

A FILM PRODUCTION BY

punktfilm

WDR SWR 3sat rbb

SUPPORTED BY

Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen

© punktfilm Anna Ditges Köln 2007