



A documentary film by Anastasia Shubina and Timofey Glinin

PIBLOKTO

*Piblokto, also known as pibloktoq and Arctic hysteria, is a culture-specific hysterical reaction during which people may perform irrational or dangerous acts, followed by amnesia for the event.

Synopsis

On the Arctic Ocean coast of Chukotka live a people cut off from the world.

Their life revolves around hunting walruses and whales and protecting villages from bears coming from the tundra. This theme turns the film into a **reflection on death**. Marine animals become the primary source of food for the people, animal leftovers are used to feed arctic foxes on a fur farm, human cemeteries become targets for bears. It appears that all the inhabitants of this region are involved in the **cycle of food and death**. The film departs from the typical rhythmic structure of cinema and instead adopts the structure of a shamanic ritual, which is a meaning-forming event for the northern peoples.

Credits

Directed Cinematography Editing:

Producer:

Sound:

Colorist:

Translation:

Title design:

Associate producer:

Co-production (USA):

Sound and music recording:

Anastasia Shubina and Timofey Glinin

Timofey Glinin

Ilya Dunaev

Grigory Karapetyan

Ariadna Arendt

Anastasia Razubaeva

Gregory Bagaev

Dzen Documentary

Rhizome films

Film specs

Original title:
Production countries:
Filming location:
Original language:
Subtitles:
Year:
Length:

Piblokto
Russia, USA
Russia
Russian
English, French
2023
38'

> **FILM WEBSITE** <

> **TRAILER** <

> **Film stills & press materials** <

Directors' biography

Anastasia Shubina and Timofey Glinin are multidisciplinary artists who work across various media, including documentary and experimental film, video art, photography, and performance. They have been collaborating since 2018. Currently based in San Francisco, USA.

Anastasia Shubina graduated from Saint Petersburg State University (philosophy) in 2015, Docdocdoc School of Modern Photography in 2022 and attended lectures by the Saint Petersburg School of New Cinema as an auditor. Her films have been shown at numerous international film festivals and have received awards. Her photographic projects have been presented at solo and group exhibitions, won international competitions and have been published in photographic magazines and online platforms. In her personal projects, Anastasia explores the themes of **mythology, anthropology, and historical trauma.**

Timofey Glinin graduated from Saint Petersburg State University (biology) and attended courses at Saint Petersburg School of New Cinema (directing). His works have been presented at numerous international film festivals and have received awards. His photographic projects have been shown at solo and group exhibitions. He is the author of science art performances. In his personal projects, Timofey explores the themes of **cultural practices, ethnography, and modern science.**

Awards:

The mid-length documentary film **'Piblokto'** has been selected for the competition at the International Festival of Documentaries **Cinéma du Réel** (Paris, France, **2023**).

Short film **'Dislocations'** won first prize at the **KinoDrome: International Motion Picture & Screenplay Festival** in the United States in **2021**.

Short film **'Dislocations'** has been officially selected by more than 20 international film festivals, including International Short Film Festival **Accordi Disaccordi** (Italy), **17th Athens Digital Arts Festival** (Greece), **18 Festival Transterritorial de Cine Underground** (Argentina), **Engauge Experimental Film Festival** (USA), **Fisura, International Experimental Film and Video Festival** (Mexico), **Interface Video Art Festival** (Croatia), **Non-syntax Experimental Image Festival** (Japan).

The documentary feature film **'The Art of Falling Apart'** was an official selection at the **DMZ International Documentary Film Festival** (Republic of Korea, **2019**).

The artists' work has won the **Bartur Photo Award** twice in **2022** and was a finalist for **Pictures of the Year Asia** in **2022**, was **shortlisted** for the **Lenscratch Student Award**, **Street Photo Russia** in **2021**, **International Women in Photo Association Award** in **2021/2022**. Additionally, the performance **'Forest. Mushrooms'** was **longlisted** for the **Golden Mask** theater award (as part of the **'Forest'** project).

The artists have held personal photo exhibitions, including the **'Amanita Muscaria'** exhibition at the **Head On Photo Festival 2022** in Sydney, Australia and at the **Art Kvartal Photo Gallery** in Yerevan, Armenia, as well as the **'The Second Sun'** exhibition at the **Zerno Photo Gallery** in Saint Petersburg, Russia in **2021**. They have also participated in numerous group exhibitions worldwide.

Director's statement 1/2

The film '**Piblokto**' was born as a result of our long-term interest and research into the traditions of the **North, shamanism, and the folk collective unconscious**. Anastasia Shubina, one of the directors of the film, is an anthropologist and philosopher who has been studying Eastern culture and shamanism since 2016. Our previous documentary, '**The Art of Falling Apart**', was dedicated to reindeer shamans in the North of Mongolia. Through cinema, we aim to explore the cultural traditions of indigenous peoples who, despite being part of the Russian Federation, retain their cultural identity and unique patterns of thinking.

The main cultural event for the **Chukchi and Eskimos** has traditionally been a shamanic ritual — a symbolic death event, during which the animal and human spirits tear the shaman's body apart and consume it. It is believed that this initiation grants the shaman control over the spirits, and for the people of his community, it serves as an introduction to the **cycle of life and death**, where the deceased and spirits are a part of reality.

In our film, we used the sound of a **shamanic ritual** that we recorded during the expedition. It served not only as the **soundtrack**, but we also **structured** the film according to the **rhythm** of the ritual. Its dramaturgy is based on repetitions and cycles and reflects the rhythm of life and the mythological stories of the Northern peoples. The lives of the **Chukchi and Eskimos** are strongly connected to the cycles of nature, which repeat themselves day by day, and revolve around sea hunting for big marine animals such as whales and walruses.

Director's statement 2/2

People living in the **Inchoun** and **Uelen** villages on the coast of the Arctic Ocean are **completely isolated** from the rest of the world. Food is brought to their stores by ship only once a year, and sea hunting is the only means of survival. For them, hunting and killing animals is routine and necessary in order to obtain enough food.

The film's title, '**Piblokto**' (**Arctic hysteria**), refers to a disease that affects people in the Far North, which is similar in its manifestations to shamanism. Afflicted individuals sing in non-existent languages, repeat the same actions, and exhibit aggressive and seemingly meaningless behavior. To an external observer, this behavior resembles that of a shaman during a ritual trance.

However, the phenomenon of '**Piblokto**' is controversial. On the one hand, it reflects unique cultural events in the North and its traditions. On the other hand, the term '**Piblokto**' (despite its seemingly authentic sound) does not exist in the Eskimo or Chukchi language and was **invented** by **external observers**. Additionally, indigenous people themselves do not always consider this condition to be a disease. In the film, we aimed to convey a sense of this ambiguity.

During the filming process, we spent several months in the remote villages of Chukotka, near the Bering Strait, in the summer of 2020. For us, this film represented an opportunity to experience the otherness of a culture without imposing our own patterns of thinking on their way of life. We aimed to allow the **rhythm** and **atmosphere** of the film to emerge from the people's inner lives and their own cultural practices.

Review from Cinéma du Réel

From the outset, the shaman's drum beats twist the seemingly "direct" images of *Piblokto*: although the anthropologist Anastasia Shubina and her associate Timofey Glinin film a community living on the Arctic fringes of Siberia, their approach is not designed to simply render a scientific or picturesque account, but to make a film that draws its poetry from the reality of a people for whom hunting marine mammals is still a means of survival. A poetry that bites like the cold and roars like the sea, from where men drag a whale or walrus that will be sliced into pieces. To depict this existence, the filmmakers relinquish any didactic mission as well as narrative continuity, and privilege a sensory logic. The sharp, contrasted images portray an immersion in collective movements where men and beasts intermingle. No contextualisation is offered, as the filmmakers prefer to emphasize the ritual aspects of these actions by including repeated motifs. The spoken word gives rise to stories that take on a mythical dimension (a man once gifted two of his fingers to the sea). "*Piblokto*", a term coined by Westerners, denotes what they viewed as mental illness, but which could also indicate the presence of spirits. In taking it as the title, the filmmakers lay claim to the necessary ambiguity of their stance *vis-à-vis* this territory, and of our gaze on these images: we cannot help but project our vision of the world. Like this shamanistic practice that invites a person to visualise their own skeleton and be liberated from fear forever, the film offers us an intercultural ritual that organises the encounter between different relationships to nature and to death.

Olivia Cooper-Hadjian

Contacts



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'Piblokto' is an independent film produced by **Rhizome films**,
(Timofey Glinin & Anastasia Shubina production company)
and co-produced by **Dzen Documentary (USA)**.