

*Chi ha detto, amico e fratello,
che devi morire fra mille tormenti?
Sai che il tormento è una voce?
Sai che il dolore canta?
(...)*

(quote from 'Francesco, Canto di una creatura', published in 2007, one of the most beautiful poem dedicated to our Saint Francis written by a contemporary poet, **Alda Merini**, visceral and filled with love. In 2008, the poems were set to music and read in public by the singer Lucio Dalla in the beautiful location of the Basica of San Francis in Assisi)



**FESTA
DEL CINEMA
DI ROMA 2024
SPECIAL SCREENING**

A documentary by
GREGORIO SASSOLI and ALEJANDRO CIFUENTES
SAINT DAMIAN

Produced by Gregorio Sassoli and Red Sparrow
with the support from: MiC - Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivo

with
**DAMIAN EUGENIUSZ BIELICKI
SOFIA NOVIELLO
ALESSIO, CHRISTOPHER, COSTANTINO, VINCENT, DOROTA, FELICE**

Genre: Hybrid documentary
Runtime: 86'
Country of origin: Italy
Year: 2024
Language: Italian, Polish
DCP | Aspect ratio: 2.00:1 | Sound: 5.1 | color

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LOGLINE

From his home atop an ancient Roman tower, ‘Saint’ Damian’s search for love and family anchors him deep within the inferno of those lost-in-transit at Roma’s Termini Station.

SYNOPSIS

Running from the ghosts of his past, Damian (35, Polish) heads to Rome searching a new life. With little money in his pocket, he arrives at Termini Station. Instead of sleeping on the ground with the homeless, he climbs to the top of a tower on the ancient Roman walls overlooking the station, making it his new home. Dreaming of becoming a singer and longing for love, Damian surrenders to Sofia, a strong and charismatic homeless woman. Their love story ignites against the chaotic backdrop of Termini, throwing Damian into the upside-down world of camaraderie and conflicts of the station's marginalized community. Here, Damian finds the family he never had. But with a fragile psyche, will he be able to forge a new life for himself in the messy whirlwind of Termini?

DIRECTORS’ NOTE

Termini Station sees over 150 million people pass through every year: hundreds of them, however, never leave the area of the station. These are the unhouse ‘travellers’ who have made the Termini Station their home, and they spill out onto the streets of Roma.

We were once among the passersby looking the other way, suppressing the discomfort of seeing people who appeared reduced to living in such conditions. Yet, these individuals, though marginalized from organized society, are part of us, part of humanity.

This film was born from the desire to give a human face to those made invisible to the average passerby, through a raw and uncompromising narrative. We were inspired by filmmakers like Roberto Minervini and documentaries such as *On the Bowery*, aiming to create a documentary that feels like a narrative film. We wanted to tell a story with an emotional arc, one that engages the audience not just as observers, but as participants in this hidden world.

After a year of volunteering to distribute meals to the homeless, one evening, driven by the desire to delve deeper into this reality, we decided to spend a night in Termini. Just before lying down, a young Polish man with a curious Calabrian accent, Damiano, approached us. He told us a joke, breaking the ice immediately. Then he revealed that, unlike the other homeless people, he didn’t sleep on the ground—he had made an ancient Roman tower next to the station his home.

Fascinated by this unique character and his vibrant energy, we embarked on a journey into his life.

A rollercoaster ride between dreams of becoming a famous singer and the harshness of life on the streets, between alcoholism and the struggle to survive. We spent two years regularly visiting Termini Station, one of which was dedicated to filming. Thanks to Damian, we deeply immersed ourselves in the world of the homeless who populate the station's surroundings. At first, some of them eyed us with suspicion; there were even moments when bottles were thrown.

Over time, those hostile gestures turned into embraces. They understood we weren't there to "steal" a glimpse of their lives and vanish, but to stay, observe, and tell their stories. This allowed us to forge deep relationships, like the one with Damian, whom we still talk to every Sunday, despite him now living in a psychiatric prison in Poland.

The time we spent at Termini allowed us to create a film that doesn't merely observe from the outside but offers an inside perspective, without filters, providing an authentic closeness to the lives of these people.

(Gregorio Sassoli, Alejandro Cifuentes)

DAMIAN EUGENIUSZ BIELICKI

«Mom, I don't know what I should choose, whether to be a god or a devil.

If I become a god, they'll kill me right away. But, mom, if I become a devil, they'll be afraid of me».

Damiano, of Polish origin, is a fascinating and contradictory figure, caught between the innocence of an angel and the ambiguity of a devil. He speaks Italian with a Calabrian accent, having spent part of his childhood there. At 35, he chose to start over in Rome, the city of emperors and gladiators, and like a gladiator, he fights every day, even when the world seems to have forgotten him.

At Termini station, Damiano stands out as a flicker of hope amidst difficulties, always seeking redemption. To be seen and recognized, he made a tower on the Aurelian Walls his home. His personality is unpredictable, marked by a grotesque, childlike humour, and moments of brilliance.

Damiano is "saintly" because of his relentless drive to dream and create, even as life has led him to the streets, prison cells, and psychiatric hospitals. His dreams go beyond mere surviving; he wants to be a singer, an artist, leaving his mark. Despite the world's rejection, Damiano remains true to himself, refusing to compromise or surrender to the banality of life.

MUSIC

The music in the film plays a pivotal role, reflecting the soul of the protagonist and the world around him. Damian dreams of becoming a singer and enjoys improvising over hip-hop beats, with a melodic touch that occasionally comes through. Although he lacks refined technique, when he sings, something pure and uncontaminated emerges from him—a raw energy that carries the power of true art, whether it's liked or not. Through his music, Damian reveals intimate parts of himself.

The original soundtrack, composed by Damiano Colosimo, a musician from Rome's underground scene, serves as a binding force, creating a sonic world that envelops and immerses us in the atmosphere of Termini. On a secondary level, we also included pop songs listened to by the documentary's subjects, helping us better understand their reality.

DIRECTORS' BIOS

GREGORIO SASSOLI - After graduating from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Gregorio worked as an assistant on set for renowned directors including Paolo Sorrentino, Woody Allen, and Roger Spottiswoode. His debut film as director and screenwriter, *The Wisdom Tooth*, premiered at the Oaxaca IFF and won Best Film at the Derby FF.

In 2022, he wrote, produced, and directed *Il Provino*, while his short film *San Damiano* competed at the 2023 Odense Film Festival, Filmmaker Milano, and won Best Documentary at Visioni Italiane (Cineteca di Bologna Festival).

ALEJANDRO CIFUENTES - Focusing primarily on informative writing and storytelling, he worked with the television production company Stand by Me. He also collaborated on research projects for Fondazione Leonardo - Civiltà delle Macchine and contributed to its journalistic publication. From 2018 to 2021, he worked as a writer for the production company Corima on the television program *Forum* (Canale 5), where he was responsible for actor preparation and casting.

In 2022, he wrote the short film *Il Provino*, and in 2023, he wrote and directed along with Gregorio Sassoli the short film *San Damiano*, which was screened at the Odense Film Festival and Filmmaker Milano, and won Best Documentary at Visioni Italiane, the Cineteca di Bologna festival.

ARTISTIC, CREATIVE AND PRODUCTION TEAM

RED SPARROW PRESENTS A FILM BY GREGORIO SASSOLI AND ALEJANDRO CIFUENTES WITH DAMIAN EUGENIUSZ BIELICKI SOFIA NOVIELLO ALESSIO CHRISTOPHER COSTANTINO VINCENT DOROTA FELICE – WRITTEN BY GREGORIO SASSOLI AND ALEJANDRO CIFUENTES SOUND MATTEO EUSEPI FRANCESCO LILLI MARCO FALLONI COLOR CORRECTION SERENA PERLA ORIGINAL SCORE DAMIANO COLOSIMO EDITING CECILIA ZANUSO GREGORIO SASSOLI ALEJANDRO CIFUENTES CINEMATOGRAPHY GREGORIO SASSOLI CONSULTING PRODUCER GUENDALINA FOLADOR PRODUCED BY GREGORIO SASSOLI FOR RED SPARROW S.R.L. DIRECTED BY GREGORIO SASSOLI AND ALEJANDRO CIFUENTES