

PRESSKIT



PIGGY BANK

A MOCKUMENTARY BY CHRISTOPH SCHWARZ

SYNOPSIS

Filmmaker Christoph Schwarz is broke. Fortunately, he gets an offer from an Austrian TV documentary series: “Striking Years”.

But does Schwarz really want to start a self-experiment as an environmental activist? Wouldn't it be better to turn the project into a critique of capitalism, to live one year without money and secretly buy a desired weekend house with the film budget?



»Couldn't I really just buy the house with the film budget, and then shoot a low-budget film about living with no money? As in: the money is gone, but that's actually the plot?«

PERSPECTIVES

Schwarz discovers self-sufficient lifestyles, rescues food from bins, grows potatoes on roundabouts and protests against the dominance of cars in our cities with a yellow convertible upcycled into a herb garden.

He organises bicycle demonstrations, hikes through the Austrian hills without money and blocks the construction of a motorway with activists from #LobauBleibt.

The problem of having earned money while supposedly living without it for a year, however, is not so easy to get rid of.



ATTITUDE

PIGGY BANK is an ironic mockumentary about double standards in times of climate crisis, about the privileges of car traffic in the city and the possibilities of fighting against it, humorously told with Christoph Schwarz's typical, playful handling of truth and lies.

PIGGY BANK is the international version of Christoph Schwarz' first feature film SPARSCHWEIN which won the Hof Critics Award "Best Production" at the 58th Hof International Film. **PIGGY BANK** will start its festival journey at Glasgow Film Festival in February 2025.

The border between fact and fiction in **PIGGY BANK** is unclear. The catastrophic consequences of man-made global warming are foreseeable.

»A few days later, there are rumors of a potential eviction. The more people that spend the night here, the better. But nothing happens, no police. So, the next morning, we carry on and occupy a third construction site.«



CREDITS

written & directed by **Christoph Schwarz**
Offvoice narrator **Robert Stadlober**
Directors of photography **Georg Glück, Marie-Thérèse Zumtobel**
Lukas Schöffel, Sonja Aufderklamm, Christian Schwab
Editing **Christian Schwab**
Sounddesign **Matthias Peyker**
Audiomix **Wolfgang Lehmann**
Color Grading **Daniel Hollerweger**
Artwork **Stefanie Hilgarth**
Script consultants **Rafael Haider, Johanna Hieblinger, Magdalena Schrefel**
Production **Daniel Bleninger ARGE SCHWARZ**

funded by **BMKÖS Filmabteilung / ORF Film/Fernseh-Abkommen**
Stadt Wien Kultur / Land Niederösterreich

with

Judith Revers	Florian Rainer	Leonie Kohut
David Sonnenbaum	Elisabeth Falkinger	Vero Eli Schwarz
Georg Glück	Camilla Henrich	Karl-Heinz Drlo
Hanna Schwarz	Johanna Hieblinger	Anna Kontriner
Michaela Schwarz	Stefanie Hilgarth	Christa Staudinger
Rosa Schwarz	Christoph Loibl	Ulya Lekhiv
Rafael Haider	Robert Neiser	Miguel Schauer
Catalina Molina	Josef Etzelsdorfer	Ferris Schwarz
Lisa Weber	Adrian Focke	Werner Maierhofer
Ani Gülgün-Mayr	Thomas Garcia	Lena Freimüller
Sabine Muhar	Constanze Oedl	Günther Cermak

Director & Production assistant **Constanze Oedl** Narration collaborators **Anna Rot, Fabian Faltin**
Johanna Hieblinger Artistic Collaboration **Coelestine Engels, Thomas Garcia, Daniel Hafner,**
Nikolaus Kantner Additional camera **Victor Kössl Leo Lehner, Jakob Synek, Georg Gusti Wiblinger**
Stills photographer **Florian Rainer** Sound mixer "ORF Striking Years" **Matthias Kassmannhuber**
Graphic design "ORF Striking Years" **Benjamin Wehr** Photos "ORF Striking Years" **Tom Poe**

PIGGY BANK PRESS REVIEWS

‘How do you finance capitalism by criticising capitalism? Christoph Schwarz dares to try it out for himself: he gives up money for a year for his own well-being and founds his own production company in favour of his art project. The boundaries between actionism and activism, fact and fiction become increasingly blurred. We observe the odyssey of a man who has to put his own egotism aside in order to recognise the seriousness of the situation. With a great deal of humour and self-irony, the film shows how difficult it is to really make a difference on the climate issue. Because, and the film understands this extremely well, global warming is anything but a joke. Our production prize goes to Piggy Bank.’

Jury statement for the Hofer Critics' Award 2024

‘Humorous film activism against the beer-serious car lobby’

Marian Wilhelm, DER STANDARD, 22.5.2024

‘Subversively ecological: ‘Piggy Bank’ succeeds in drawing attention to the ecological catastrophe on a small scale with a laugh and a more than stale aftertaste.’

Otto Friedrich, Furche, 22.5.2024

‘Christoph Schwarz hits a nerve with his first feature-length film: in ‘Piggy Bank’, he tells of the contradiction between personal desires for a happy, secure life and political action. The film illustrates what is known as ambiguity tolerance: a person’s ability to tolerate ambiguous or contradictory situations. But also how to act. The audience learns in ‘Piggy Bank’ about many initiatives that actually exist and take on local problems.’

Maria Motter, FM4, 22.5.2024

‘A year can be a long time, especially if you have no money. But there are new tasks for the person striking: Planting potatoes as an art project on a roundabout, bicycle demonstrations and car blockades, waiting for charity invitations and, last but not least, occupying the Lobau nature reserve to prevent the planned ‘city road’. But fun turns into seriousness, even if the laconic tone and the joyful play with truth and lies retain the upper hand until the end.’

Michael Pekler, Diagonale catalogue

15 QUESTIONS FOR CHRISTOPH SCHWARZ

Classic opening question: How did you come up with PIGGY BANK?

After producing several auto-fictional short films, I was tempted to see if I could bring my style of filmmaking to a feature-length project. I developed the concept for “Piggy Bank” in 2019 with a working grant and then shot it over three years. I’m using the same ingredients of my short films, but content-wise I’m engaged with the topics of climate, post-growth economics and public space.



How would you describe your film language?

Non-moving, documentary images, fictionalised by a voiceover in the style of a video diary. The boundary between fact and fiction is playful. I myself am the protagonist and really get involved in a great adventure, constantly adapting my script. The leap to a meta-layer is a reflex that always occurs to me. My films are always also films about filmmaking.

Why is it labelled mockumentary everywhere?

This label is actually part of the meta-plot, for the filmmaker’s self-protection. Christoph’s idea is to tell the naked truth under the guise of a mockumentary. In traditional fake documentaries, the audience believes everything during the film and finds out afterwards where lies were told. In PIGGY BANK it’s the other way round: the audience watches it as a mockumentary but starts to realize afterwards that there might be more truth in it.

How do you draw the line between yourself and the protagonist Christoph?

Revealing this border is impossible for me. The shooting of this film was too intense and too long for that, and the money strike and my climate activism were really meant seriously. An important stylistic factor in my artistic work is the self-fulfilling prophecy: the filmmaker, who performs the climate activist for his camera and becomes one himself in the end, is an obvious development that is described in the film. At the same time, it could also have been the other way round: the filmmaker who always wanted to be a climate activist and uses a funded film project as a protected framework to be allowed to become one. I was anxiously on the fringes of the climate movement in 2019 and with the help of my camera, I have become an activist who dares to stand up for his convictions. I use this unclear boundary between person and persona and I also make fun of it.

Is your activism just a show for your camera?

All the actions in the film are serious attempts to deal with the climate issue in an artistic and activist way. This mixture of art and activism has enriched both sides. With the presence of my camera, I was able to produce videos of our actions very promptly for social media, and at the same time integrate these images into my film.

Did you actually buy a house in the countryside for the film budget?

Of course not. The guidelines for public film funding clearly restrict how much money a single person can receive from a film budget. It would not be possible to pay myself all the fees. With the funding, I was able to devote a large part of the last three years to this film project, but obviously I couldn't buy a house with it. We found other ways to buy the house. And to make it clear: I was actually on a money strike in 2021, which really saved me a lot of costs.

»I don't quite believe I'm really doing this: did I just spend the budget for a documentary film about a money strike on a property?«



How has your view of climate activism changed in recent years?

I lost myself in climate activism over these years but at the same time found myself in it. This process is revealed in 'Piggy Bank'. With the mass protests of Fridays for Future in 2019, the climate question received a lot of attention, which was suddenly gone after the pandemic and never really returned. During the pandemic, politicians made astonishingly ambitious and also unpopular decisions. This has led to great expectations: everything can change from one day to the next if the necessary laws are clearly communicated and a big majority understands the need for it. Unfortunately, these hopes have not been realised. The best example of this is the discussion on the 100 km/h speed limit in Austria: it was not possible to implement such a simple measure that would have a multitude of positive effects – instead the 'individual responsibility' is being invoked.

Two hearts beat in the body of your protagonist: he's a climate activist who is critical of consumerism, but at the same time a calculating crook who enriches himself by fooling all his friends. How does that fit together?

The conflict between morality and our comfort zone is a fundamental question. And thus provides fertile ground for intelligent entertainment and funny moments. I want to tell a story about capitalism, which always manages to turn resistance to itself into money. A supposedly burnt director's fee is tax-free as an investment in the artistic career of the protagonist, and later even reimbursed by the system. The act of burning money becomes a performance, the charred banknotes an art object that you can hang on your wall. Perhaps I want to break out of my own high moral standards precisely by making films in which these standards no longer apply to me.

Climate activists are repeatedly accused of double standards. With your film, you undoubtedly take the side of the activists, but you also offer many points of attack. Why is that?

In my artistic practice, I am interested in double standards, venality and nepotism. I've always taken childish pleasure in ironizing the struggle between high ideals and one's own small advancement. From the beginning, I was enthusiastic about the plot of using a money strike to accumulate social, activist and moral capital as well as to save a lot of money. At the same time I wanted to use the film to help us take a closer look at how the accusation of "double-standards" is levelled against climate activists.

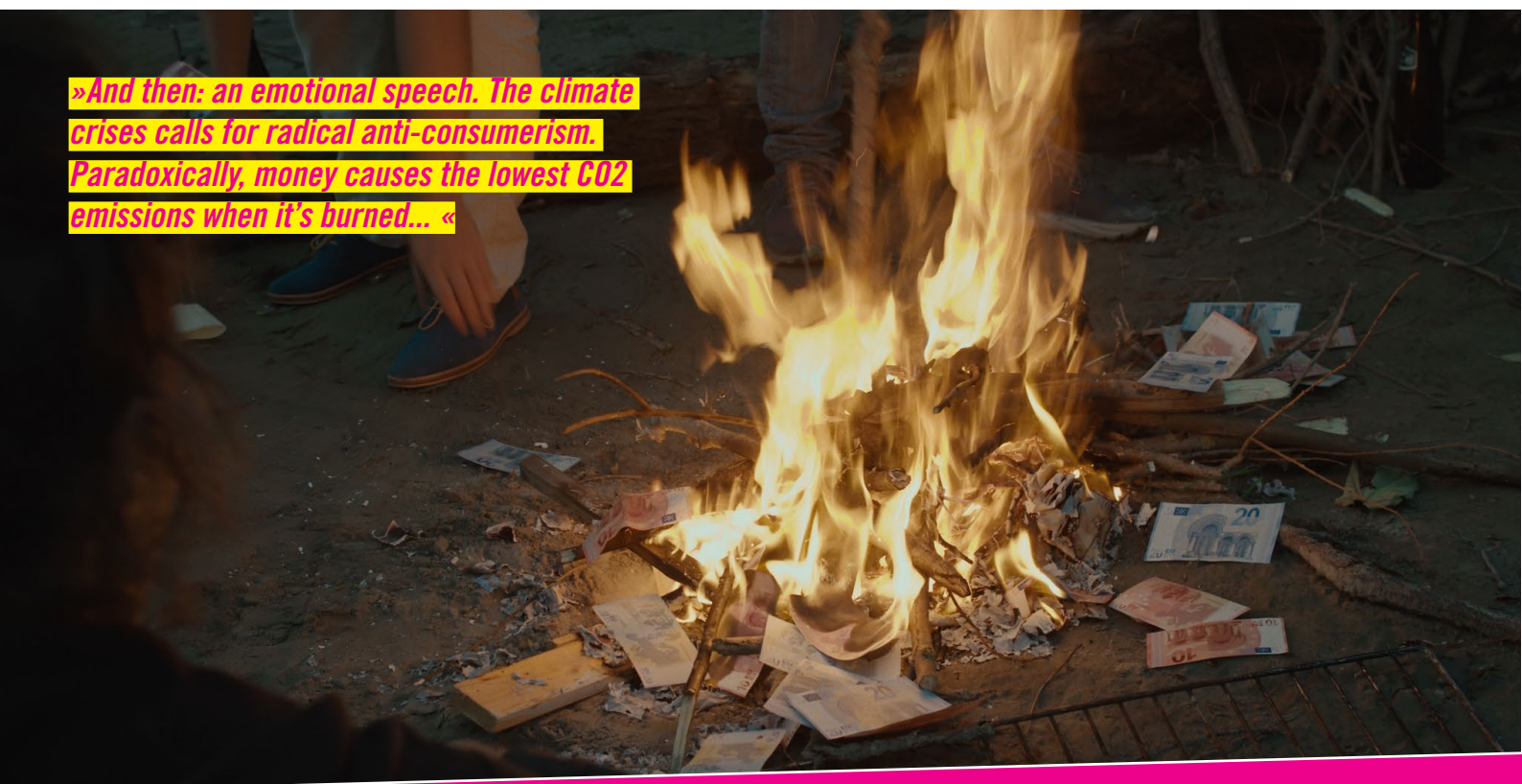


At a road blockade, for instance, I invited an elderly couple to sit on the street with us. They immediately refused and asked in return if I had finished school and completed my final exams. They then asked if I had taken a plane to the customary post-graduation summer celebration somewhere in the south with my classmates. Of course I did, I went to Rhodes in 1999. The couple felt wonderfully vindicated in their understanding of the world. From their point of view, climate activists have no legitimacy if they have ever been a user or beneficiary of fossil capitalism. I am yet to understand why it is not a problem if “normal people” get on a plane to Bali while it is a problem if climate activists do, and that only they should be forbidden from doing so. This reasoning only fuels the neoliberal view that climate protection is a private matter. This is exactly what we have been taking to the streets against for 5 years. We want climate protection to become a matter of state policy and not just the responsibility of citizens. We climate activists should actually go to Thailand to show how absurdly normal climate-damaging behaviour is. We should make it clear that these double standards for activists are fundamentally a distraction, and one of the many excuses for not changing big business-as-usual.

Will it take a massive catastrophe for everyone to take to the streets in favour of climate protection?

There is no doubt that a massive extreme weather event in Austria could increase the acceptance of stricter climate laws. But the idea that forest fires should be started by climate activists is absurd. I would even introduce a semantic distancing: an arsonist cannot be a climate activist. I see more realistic escalation potential in attacks against fossil infrastructure. However, without the fatal accident in Chernobyl, the anti-nuclear movement would certainly not have become so strong; the reactor catastrophe in Fukushima brought about the German nuclear phase-out. At the same time, no-one would ever think that anti-nuclear activists should sabotage reactors to prove a point. I like to write to climate deniers on social media: ‘I hope you’re right, then I’ll invite you for a drink in 2050 and we can laugh about the “apocalyptic doom madness” of the 2020s.’ It would make me very happy to have fallen for “hysteria”.

»And then: an emotional speech. The climate crises calls for radical anti-consumerism. Paradoxically, money causes the lowest CO2 emissions when it's burned... «



In public discussions about the film, I've repeatedly heard people praise your courage.

Did you have any legal problems with the film?

My answer to that is quite clear: the film is a mockumentary, it claims things that are not true. Of course we are not going to solve the climate crisis in Austria. Of course a new district in the north of Vienna needs a motorway connection. Of course it's a law of nature to park your car on public space in front of your house. Okay, but irony aside: the legal problems of my actions have already been pointed out in the film: there was a discussion with the authorities about the "Cabriobeet" (the herb garden in a convertible) and "Kreiskartoffel St. Marx" (potatoes grown on a roundabout) projects. There was a threat of legal action from the City of Vienna for the occupations of the construction sites – the fact that I received this shows how dilletantantically their research was carried out here. My personal details were never recorded at the construction sites, the only reason they assumed 'solidarity liability' and 'mental support' was because of my lively activity on social media.

Under the title 'cute sabotage', however, you refer to the concept of disarming fossil infrastructure and flattening tyres. Isn't that legally more problematic?

The cute thing about my sabotage is that I inflated the tyres again as soon as the TV camera was gone. Apart from that, I have a clear stance on the 'tyre extinguishers' who let the air out of SUVs tyres: I think any action that peacefully makes driving in the city less attractive and thus reduces our emissions is a good thing. The discussion about this reveals a blind spot in our society: we knowingly accept that several hundred people are killed on the roads every year while scandalising flat tyres and concocting possible accidents that could result from this. Why don't we talk more about the people and the tens of thousands of cats, hares, toads and deer that are killed by car traffic every year in Austria, and why this judged acceptable collateral damage? We should instead be talking about that.



»Abstract knowledge turns into tangible reality. Shelves forever filled with fresh food – but behind the scenes: tonnes of perfectly fine produce, ending up in bins. As seen in organic supermarkets.«

Doesn't your film inflame tensions between climate activists and the "normal people" even more?

Of course you can have a lively debate about the film and I would be happy if that happened. The more discussion the better, we need to get out of our filter bubbles and talk seriously about climate politics. Perhaps humour and self-irony will help. The aim is clear, I want to encourage people to pluck up the courage and take a stand: against the dominance cars have over our cities, against senseless sealing, against the hypocrisy of shiny green-washed climate targets in the absence of real measures.

Were you really on a money strike?

Yes, I lived in this constellation in 2021. I had deals with other people for running costs, I rescued food from the trash bins, and simply stopped buying anything. I think that could also serve as a blueprint for how we could deal with the climate crisis: simply try it out collectively for a few years to see if it's possible to live quite well with less. In *The Ends of Capitalism*, German author Ulrike Hermann describes the need to reduce energy consumption to the levels of 1978, but with the convenience of digital technologies. I don't think we have to decide now to do this once and for all. We could simply try it out temporarily. The same applies to speed reductions and car-free days.

Isn't it terribly cynical to pretend that you can live without money so easily?

You come from a secure background, your parents paid your rent.

I agree that I still had a comfortable life during my money strike. But I don't understand what's cynical about facing problems that I, as a privileged person, wouldn't otherwise know: How can I get food that's still edible in the city? How can I guarantee mobility, health? Isn't it much more cynical to pretend that these problems don't exist? I'm interested in framing low-emission lifestyles as cool. I want mended clothes, rescued food and biking in the city to seem worth emulating. I want that people post photos of their money-free hiking holidays instead of the Christmas holiday in Mauritius that you treat yourself to once a year because you carefully separated your rubbish.

»At the roundabout: a potatoe beetle attack in the middle of a concrete desert.«



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

'I have been experimenting with the overlapping of different levels of reality for many years. The plot of PIGGY BANK fascinates me: a protagonist who, under the guise of a mockumentary, gives a disarmingly honest account of a major coup without being unmasked in the film's plot, leaving the audience still searching for the truth as they leave the cinema. A strong driving force behind the content of all my films is my own search for identity, which I examine for its narrative potential. In doing so, I become entangled in assertions that, if they are made long enough, become part of my life and flow back into the film as some kind of feedback loops. Climate protection has been close to my heart for many years. My work on Piggy Bank combines my love of storytelling with a conviction that a major ecological transformation of our society is unavoidable.'



»I shoot a video in support of the mobilisation, "How to Occupy a Digger". Everyone opposed to new highways gathers in Hirschstetten.«

BIOGRAPHY CHRISTOPH SCHWARZ

*born 1981 in Vienna, where he lives and sometimes works.

Studied **Visual Media Design** at the University of Applied Arts Vienna under Peter Weibel, Thomas Fürstner and Karel Dudesek, graduating in 2006 and Conceptual Art for a year at UMRUM Prague under Jiri David.

Typical of Schwarz's artistic work are **autofictive experimental arrangements** as content, self-fulfilling prophecies as method, the cinema as an ideal reception space. His works often deal with problems of media reality in humorous ways. He has participated in numerous exhibitions and film festivals.

Important milestones: participation twice in the **ORF3 Artist in Residence programme**; and participation at the Sarajevo Film Festival, the Winterthur Short Film Festival, the Dresden Film Festival and the Hof International Film Festival. His film essay "The Best City Is No City At All" won the **Austrian Short Film Award** in 2020.

Austrian Short Film Award 2020 at Vienna Shorts for The Best City is No City At All

K3 Short Film Award 2018 and 2016 at the K3 Film Festival in Villach for CSL and Ibiza

Audience Award 2015 at the Vienna Shorts for Beingwhale

Arbeitswelten Förderpreis 2014 AK Salzburg for Der Sender schläft

Main prize of the Bayerischer Rundfunk 2012 at the Regensburger Kurzfilmwoche for Supercargo

VAM Newcomer Award & Audience Award 2011 at the Vienna Shorts for Supercargo



FILMOGRAPHY CHRISTOPH SCHWARZ

directed / written / edited / produced

wieso es gibt 3633 emojis 2022, 7min

Ich werde nicht dulden, dass ihr mich alleine lasst 2022, 23min

Civilization 2021, 23min

Die beste Stadt ist keine Stadt 2019, 15min

CSL 2018, 35min

LDAE 2017, 30min

Ibiza 2016, 22min

Supercargo 2015, 25min

Beingwhale 2014, 17min

Krochacarraldo 2013, 18min

Der Sender schläft 2013, 25min

Rhodia 2012, 12min

Gift Economy Worker 2011, 12min

Supercargo 2010, 12min

European Advertising Agency 2001-2005, 30min



»Wouldn't it be great if the City had to officially recognize street blockades as a "good deed" for the climate?«

CONTACT

ARGE SCHWARZ

cristianoronaldo@christophschwarz.net

Währinger Gürtel 168/11 – 1090 Wien

+43 650 7612805

www.christophschwarz.net

Distribution

sixpackfilm

Neubaugasse 45/13

A-1070 Wien, Österreich

Tel: +43 1 526 09 90 0

office@sixpackfilm.com



sixpackfilm

»In my imagination, it was so
easy to ask for dinner left-overs
and a place to sleep.
Now, I feel like a crook.«

