

Born in St. Gall in 1951, Peter Liechti completed his studies at the Zurich University of Art and Design with a diploma as a secondary-school drawing teacher and subsequently free-lanced as a graphics and drawing instructor. He spent 1981–82 in Crete, where he devoted himself to painting and writing. He embarked on his first film experiments and film performances in 1983. A co-founder of the K59 (Kinok) programme cinema in St. Gall in 1985, Liechti also belonged to the Achziger Film group in Zurich between 1988 and 1995. The first retrospectives of Liechti's films were soon being staged in Graz, Geneva, Berne and Zurich. Since 1990 he has been living and working in Zurich, with sporadic sojourns in Wald, Canton Appenzell Ausserrhoden.

Author, director and cameraman Peter Liechti is an independent film-maker. He has carried out several film projects featuring such well-known artists and musicians as Roman Signer, Norbert Möslang, Fredy Studer and Nam June Paik.

Thanks to Liechti's keen eye for images with many layers of meaning and for artistic reduction, there is a fascination in the human-made, even if the object in question is a dreary waste of grey concrete. His films are shown at numerous international film festivals and broadcast on television. Since 2003 several retrospectives of Liechti's films have been staged in Zurich, Lucerne, New York and Vienna.

## PETER LIECHTI



### Tracking Peter Liechti's cinematic journeys

From the start, Peter Liechti's films injected a new mood into Swiss documentary film-making. Already his first pieces, produced in the second half of the 1980s, convincingly demonstrated how productively Liechti, born in eastern Switzerland in 1951, was able to interweave documentary material with products of the imagination. His **Ausflug ins Gebirg** (A Trip to the Mountains, 1968) points the way: in characteristically quirky language, this film essay appears, at first, to be chronicling a melancholy trip

to the Austrian mountains, but gradually unfolds into a complex reflection on film-making itself. In **Ausflug ins Gebirg**, Liechti is both collector and commentator of images: his rough Super-8 and video images engage with clichés (which the viewer is expected to know) surrounding the Alpine landscape and with personal experiences in the mountains. Liechti translates his critical perspective on "having to enjoy" the nature experience, his spontaneously anti-sentimentalist response, into wonderfully cantankerous narrative ("The mountain destroys my thoughts. The mountain saps my brain."). And the mood is mirrored in the weather (rain, fog, hail), the monotonous landscapes ("Nothing to write home about") and the dreariness of everyday life (the gloomy hotel room, the raspberry gateau he has to eat). **Ausflug ins Gebirg** is a sketch and at the same time a first cinematic stroke of inspiration: a passionate search for "an individual perspective", a kind of "auto-ethnographic study" composed by combining direct observation with ironically distanced criticism of what he sees.

His approach in the short, polemic, political essay **Théâtre de l'espérance** (Theatre of Hope, 1987) is similar. But this time Liechti's cinematic excursion offers an angle, not on mountain summits but on a summit conference: in the mid-eighties, Geneva was the scene of an encounter between two powerful heads of state, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. With the benefit of hindsight, Liechti confronts Super-8 glimpses he himself caught on the spot with other visual and acoustic found footage: with the stereotypical television images of the event, a selection of musical numbers and several repetitions of an art action by Roman Signer (whose "Suitcase Action" becomes the actual fulcrum of the piece). **Théâtre de l'espérance** is a montage film that glaringly demonstrates the monstrousness of this kind of media event (the smiling masks of Nancy and Ronald Reagan!) through radical juxtaposition of material. Where **Ausflug ins Gebirg** still uses spoken commentary as a powerful vehicle of opposition, this time round the purpose is served by music and allusions to the art world: central axes of Liechti's further work, with the help of which he will continue to develop his cinematic poetics of resistance.

## FILMOGRAPHY

2009	<b>The Sound of Insects – Record Of A Mummy</b>
2006	<b>Hardcore Chambermusic</b>
2004	<b>Namibia Crossings</b>
2003	<b>Hans im Glück (Lucky Jack)</b>
1997	<b>Marthas Garten (Martha's Garden)</b>
1995	<b>Signers Koffer (Signer's Suit- case)</b>
1991	<b>A Hole in the Hat</b>
1990	<b>Roman Signer, Zündschnur  Grimsel – Ein Augenschein (Grimsel – An On-Site Inspec- tion)</b>
1989	<b>Kick That Habit</b>
1987	<b>Tauwetter (Nice Weather)  Théâtre de l'espérance (Theatre of Hope)  Drei Kunst-Editionen zu Roman Signer</b>
1986	<b>Ausflug ins Gebirg (A Trip to the Mountains)</b>
1985	<b>Senkrecht/Waagrecht (Vertical/Horizontal)</b>
1984	<b>Sommerhügel</b>

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In his next film, **Kick That Habit** (1989), music, audiovisual performances and filmic movement form a fascinating whole. Going out from the dark trash sound of eastern Swiss electro-musicians Norbert Möslang and Andy Guhl, Liechti charts sound and noise worlds, not only documenting or illustrating them, but allowing them to communicate with his own visual worlds. Though there is a tendency to describe **Kick That Habit** as the “music film” in Liechti's oeuvre (in part to distinguish it from his “text films”), there is far more to it than that. As we might expect from Liechti, **Kick That Habit** is a sort of travelogue: a wondrous stream of images and sounds, of riskily complex montages once again taking us on a roam through eastern Switzerland, and giving us a chance to watch and listen to like-minded artists at work. The forty-minute film immensely expanded Liechti's cinematic range, attaining a resoluteness of expression that anticipated much that would be so admirable in his later “big” motion pictures.

Shortly thereafter, Liechti put out a piece seemingly located at the other end of the documentary spectrum: **Grimsel** (1990). Originally conceived as a militant polemic against the planned construction of a new power station in the mountains, the parameters of the project changed shortly before shooting began: the project was cancelled, for economic reasons. Nonetheless, as the subtitle “Augenschein” implies, Liechti (and the initiator of the film, Res Balzli) embarked on an on-site inspection of the scene, patiently questioning the locals, documenting the austerity of the surroundings and approaching the natural environment from a variety of perspectives. Although **Grimsel** does not differ significantly from comparable pieces in its methods, the results of its enquiry extend far beyond the film's political intentions. Instead of propounding theses, **Grimsel** turns into a critical reflection on the politically committed cinema per se: in its own amazing way, the film demonstrates how the landscapes, language and perceptions of the affected population give rise to ideas and attitudes.

Liechti's quest for timely forms of expression and his interest in cinematographic experiments ultimately led to his first internationally acknowledged masterpiece: **Signers Koffer** (Signer's Suitcase, 1996), a portrait of the eastern Swiss artist Roman Signer, who is exceedingly important to Liechti's oeuvre (and not only because of his frequent appearances in the films). Far more than a traditional artist portrait, **Signers Koffer** is the outcome of fruitful complicity between portrayer and portrayed. Signer's art actions, which are staged as surprising cinematographic moments, form the point of departure for a polyphonic composition virtuosically amalgamating the acoustic and the visual in a breathtaking synthesis. Created over many years and in the course of extensive travels, **Signers Koffer** fits in perfectly with Signer's own world of art and artifice and

“Working on a film – particularly during the very long phases of editing – becomes a personal research process that can lead to a certain degree of clarification and insight. If I manage to get this experience across, to share it with the audience, I'm already very satisfied.”

Peter Liechti, 2004

## AWARDS

- 2005 **Namibia Crossings**  
Nomination for the Swiss Film Prize
- 2004 **Hans im Glück**  
3.sat Documentary Film Prize for best German-language documentary, Duisburg Film Week
- 2003 **Hans im Glück**  
Nomination for the Joris Ivens Prize, International Documentary Film Festival, Amsterdam, Zurich Film Prize
- 1998 **Marthas Garten**  
Berne Film Prize
- 1997 **Marthas Garten**  
Saarbrücken Festival Prize (Special Mention for Marthas Garten), Solothurn Festival Prize (film music)
- 1996 **Signers Koffer**  
Zurich Film Prize, Berne Film Prize, Leipzig Festival Prize (Bronze Dove), Viennale Festival Prize (Audience Prize)
- 1995 **Signers Koffer**  
Prix Action Light Festival Prize, Locarno, Prix SSA Festival Prize (script)
- Grimsel**  
Turin Festival Prize
- 1990 **Grimsel**  
Berne Film Prize
- 1986 **Ausflug ins Gebirg**  
Cultural Promotion Prize of the Canton of St. Gall

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Constantin Wulff is a writer, journalist, curator and film practitioner. He was a member of the Selection Committee of the Duisburg Film Week from 1995 to 1997 and director of DIAGONALE – Festival of Austrian Films in Graz (with Christine Dollhofer) from 1997 to 2003.

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extensive travels, **Signers Koffer** fits in perfectly with Signer's own world of art and artifice and can be regarded as emblematic of Liechti's entire body of work: a film that documents a thoroughly independent spirit.

Liechti continued to pursue this path in his subsequent cinema documentaries: in **Hans im Glück** (Lucky Jack, 2003) the film-maker tells of his attempts to give up smoking by taking cross-country hikes. His efforts to break the habit are presented as autobiographical journeys between Zurich, his current home, and St. Gall, where he was born: three times he takes different routes through eastern Switzerland and each time the "narrating I" cum "film-making I" returns (home, the cutting room) with a plethora of images, sounds, events and thoughts. **Hans im Glück** takes up a variety of ideas touched on in **Ausflug ins Gebirg**: the connection between the physical strain of walking and the (equally physical and palpable) work of film-making itself; critical reflections on the meaning of "Heimat", the feeling of rootedness (by way of everyday observations); ironically melancholy self-questioning as cinematic method. **Hans im Glück** is an image-filled travel diary that continually draws energy from the friction between obstinate wilfulness and social norms. And, like **Ausflug ins Gebirg**, which ends in images of sick fish ("Everywhere in the green water, the white blooms of disease"), the structure of **Hans im Glück**, too, is shaped by progressive thematic concentration on basic questions of life and death.

"Peter Liechti doesn't approach his subjects head on, he works associatively, circumscribing them. Sometimes he also takes off and then there's no catching up with him. For him, making a film means learning to understand something, the result no longer interests him. Nothing could be further from his mind than to shoot a didactic film or hold up a cautioning finger: That's how it is, this is good, that's bad, this is right, that's wrong."

Marianne Fehr, *WOZ*, 23. Mai 1990

Like all of Liechti's films, **Hans im Glück** is also a multifaceted story about the relationship between the individual and society. This confrontation moves centre stage in **Namibia Crossings** (2004), his most recent cinema film, for which Liechti accompanies the Hambana Sound Company, an ensemble of musicians and singers of widely diverse national origins, on their concert tour of Namibia. **Namibia Crossings** documents an ambitious music project (which grew out of a local workshop) that not only aims to bring together a variety of musical styles, from jazz and classical to traditional African music, but is designed to initiate basic encounters between cultures. Against the backdrop of magnificent scenic views and numerous travel impressions, Liechti captures the results of this art laboratory – both the successful, usually musical moments, and the mounting conflicts among the members of the heterogeneous ensemble – in his typically laconic way. And yet, the film is not a document of failure. On the contrary: it merely brings out where the boundaries lie, and must be respected, or where they can possibly be transcended. And perhaps that is the common denominator of Peter Liechti's film oeuvre: cinema understood as an art form that allows boundaries to be transcended in a multiplicity of ways. Constantin Wulff, Vienna 2004

Peter Liechti in conversation with Constantin Wulff

## INTERVIEW

**"Film-making is my way of thinking about my life."**

***All of your films are documentary and experimental at the same time. Like other documentaries, they revolve around a subject, but their actual purpose seems to be the attempt to trace cinematic associations evoked by your chosen subject.*** PL: It's true, I tend to digress. I always have, already when I was at school. You can view that negatively, and call it a lack of concentration. Or positively, and see it as a strength that an associative process begins as soon as something touches me. Obviously, I need a clear structure for my film work, a line that leads me from A to B. That has to be clearly set out, as well because it allows me to improvise. The way it works in music. I like to think in musical structures in my film work. And I'd like to preserve the ability not always to know in advance what I'm going to do, to stay curious and a seeker in what I do. At the risk of things going totally wrong or taking a completely different direction from what I expected. If I can preserve that, I'm satisfied as an artist.

***The music in NAMIBIA CROSSINGS obviously plays a central role – but the film isn't an ordinary music film.*** PL: From the start, I was always less concerned with the music than with the encounter. The encounter of Swiss and other Europeans with African men and women; the encounter with another country and the encounter with myself. The music project is documented, that's clear, but it was actually only a means of conveying something else. The film shows that it's only a vehicle via which we can travel around the country. In a wonderful way, because music is probably the most elegant means of communication: an immediately comprehensible language that makes it easier for people to establish contact with one another. And as I saw it, the twelve-member ensemble was a microcosm of the heterogeneity and internationalism I ordinarily experience in different form as well.

***So as a location, Namibia, Africa, is more than just a scenic backdrop for the music.*** PL: Yes, I always try not to view art, or what is generally defined as art, in isolation, but to see it in a context. Films are an ideal instrument for that. In the cinema I can make thoughts readable, I can inject meaning into images of landscape, I can associate images, sounds and texts – like in a dream.

Africa has always radiated a positive aura for me, particularly because of the music, because of jazz and blues and their African roots. And I've always been fascinated by the beauty of the people, above all the way they move. It may sound like an exaggeration, but for me Africa is the place that's most alien and yet closest to me. I have the impression, which I've never experienced to this extent elsewhere, that Africa makes a form of direct encounter possible – encounter with the

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> **“Film-making is my way of thinking about my life.”**

human condition, with one’s own identity as a human being, and with the possibilities and limits of being human.

***What is striking about reactions to NAMIBIA CROSSINGS is the frequently positive response to the fact that the film doesn’t shy away from the conflicts emerging in the course of the multicultural music project. Did you know from the start that conflicts would arise and that you would document them?*** PL: Actually, no. It took me a while to realize what the point of the experiment might be. I somehow swam along, let myself go with the flow and often didn’t notice what was happening in the background. It took a long time for that to sink in. Until at some point people came and said: we’ve had some heated discussions today. It took a while for that to reach me and so the camera was often in the wrong place. And then I used the small camera, which is fast, and which I started taking along all the time, so I could really react immediately. On average there were twenty or thirty of us, and most things – particularly when there were problems – happened when I was around. In that situation, stepping back and considering what’s really going on during those six weeks, that takes some time.

For **Namibia Crossings**, where the film takes such an open approach, there were actually only two ways for the film to develop: it could trigger a productive conflict that was exciting and touching, or it could all become very boring and make people yawn. I was really afraid of those two possibilities. But luckily, that’s not what happened. There really was an open clash, with disappointments and moments of encounter, and the will to go on. Although for many people it was a very concrete and painful experience to realize that – even with all the good will in the world – encounter simply has its limits.

***The openness that characterizes the documentary technique of NAMIBIA CROSSINGS is even more pronounced in HANS IM GLÜCK. A film that starts out documenting attempts to quit smoking and progressively develops into a treatment of more fundamental topics.*** PL: It’s true, the two films can be compared very well. Both films are somehow positioned in the midst of life. Which I naturally wasn’t aware of in either case. I understand film-making, which is a part of my life, as a process through which to make discoveries. Film-making is my way of thinking about my life. And in the best case an opportunity to make personal progress. And in **Hans im Glück** I was radically alone besides. My points of departure were largely given: for instance, the attempt to break my smoking habit by hiking from A to B. The results were totally unpredictable. Even more unpredictable than in **Namibia Crossings**. For instance, I had no idea that there would be three attempts. And for

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a long time it wasn't clear that it was going to be a cinema film. What interested me about the hikes, once the material was there, was: is there a development within these three similar trajectories. Because, for me, the three hikes were very different. The first was tough, and I was insecure and had no idea what lay ahead. On the second hike I already knew what to expect and I generally enjoyed being on the road alone with my little camera, in a sort of "back-to-the-roots" exercise – wonderful. And the third hike was tough again: it was winter and eastern Switzerland did nothing but depress me, and all that smoking, too. In the end it was so tough that I decided I definitely didn't want to go on a fourth hike. And the editing really reflects the moods I experienced.

***HANS IM GLÜCK is a complex mosaic of moods and movements. I would consider two of them as central: for one thing, the viewer watches your quest to discover where you come from (family, region, sense of home). On the other, you confront yourself with situations and images of death. Two classic subjects of the self-reflexive road movie.*** PL: Remember, I've experienced this form of film-making before: fifteen years ago, when I made **Ausflug ins Gebirg**. When I virtually re-invented the cinema for myself. And I'm fairly familiar with the way I function when I'm on the road, when I'm suddenly alone and exposed to certain moods. "Moodiness" and openness are problematic and interesting situations for my way of working. I was already well aware of that. And naturally I knew that there's nothing more boring than talking about smoking. Those are the conversations that peter out after two minutes. Everyone knows it's unhealthy. Smoking could only be the starting point. Breaking the habit – the withdrawal process – is more interesting. Because there are many levels to it. Giving something up. The feeling of homelessness familiar to so many people, artists foremost among them, that's a form of withdrawal, too: withdrawal from roots or the forces that tie you down. How do you deal with that? By perpetually creating the world anew, literally, every day a new world. And the over-alertness that goes with withdrawal, physical withdrawal, makes a person irritable. And being irritable means being aggressive. But it also means being very responsive to stimuli, which I regard as having a very positive, constructive facet. I really do see more and I'm extremely motivated to do things: because if I don't do anything, then all there is, is that bloody smoking. And that was a starting point I was aware of before I set off. And it worked.

I always find it fascinating and entertaining in other art forms, in literature or the theatre, when people can talk about themselves and manage to achieve a certain distance and remain honest and let in emotions. I'm not as good at inventing stories I haven't experienced personally as I am at telling my own stories.

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> **“Film-making is my way of thinking about my life.”**

**Telling your own stories to discover your own longings and desires, too?** PL: Yes, I distributed points pretty clearly in the area. St. Gall is neither better nor worse than Appenzell. But I have a sentimental attachment to little Appenzell, with its old rituals that somehow live on, that can still be sensed somewhere. That’s a form of longing I make room for. And I very consciously make room for my own predilections. **Hans im Glück** fulfilled a whole catalogue of wishes I had written down beforehand. Everything I wanted to have in the film. For that Polish song to be played; for me to show my grandmother in a film; to be able to satisfy my penchant for planes; to ride on a chairlift, etc. A number of things are left. And I’m also very keen on helicopters, I find them fabulous machines. There’s hardly a film of mine that doesn’t have one. **Namibia Crossings** was the exception. But they don’t have as many over there.

**The word “helicopter” leads us directly to SIGNERS KOFFER. Would you agree with the assessment that your film work has a lot in common with Roman Signer and his art?** PL: I met Roman Signer much earlier, even before I made my first film. I thought his work was fabulous from the start and we did a lot together. I often helped him with his actions, as a documenter or an assistant, when there was something to set up or take down. And his little films, some of which I made for him. Neither of us had any money, so he took part in my work too. It was always incredibly inspiring to experience his unique way of looking at things. He made many things clear to me. And he really made me aware of myself. Without ever saying anything. On the contrary: he’s a total egomaniac, he isn’t much interested in other people. But being with him has an enormous effect, because he’s a wonderful artist. And because, in all his modesty, he’s also a very open person.

And that modesty is important to me. In contrast to all the opulence we experience everywhere else in our management-driven, design-oriented world, it’s a restrictive modesty and precision that impressed me enormously. He really doesn’t let himself be influenced. I had already documented many of his actions prior to making **Signers Koffer**, and had always found it a great pity that our films could never do them justice because they had to be no-budget productions. And the desire to do it with a little more money, for once, was the origin of **Signers Koffer**. I think the film’s success also has to do with the fact that the resources were used the right way. Both Roman Signer’s and my own. That his actions were orchestrated to give them the visual power needed for the cinema rather than simply remaining documents.

**SIGNERS KOFFER is a cinema film that was shot primarily on film; HANS IM GLÜCK could not have been made with anything but a little video camera; NAMIBIA CROSSINGS is a mixed form. Are the various media important to your work?** PL: I wouldn’t have needed digital tech-

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### > "Film-making is my way of thinking about my life."

nology. I was in the midst of the process of moving forward in the film medium. This whole development actually did more to confuse and disturb me, and it took me a long time to get used to it. That was another reason for making **Hans im Glück**. I told myself that I absolutely had to make an extreme video film, a film shot exclusively on video, so the whole thing would really make sense to me. Of course, I could never have made a film like **Hans im Glück** before, that's obvious. And in that respect, it's great. But I'll be happy when the HD format comes, because the picture quality is supposed to be better. It's more than fine with me if work has to get more meticulous again, because in my opinion it's a good thing to work on the visual side a little without having to sacrifice spontaneity. That's why I sometimes went back to 35mm film in **Namibia Crossings**. There were times when I said, wait, everyone is having a two- or three-hour break, let's get out the 35mm camera. You simply can't capture landscapes the same way on video. And making sure that the 35mm shots didn't stand out from the video footage, and actually enhanced it, really paid off. It's always a question of how you use your resources. Right now, if I were making a movie like the one with Roman Signer or about a painter, where colours play such an important part, I'd go for motion-picture film or for a hybrid form. But now I'm really looking forward to finding out how the new HD format is going to turn out. Whether it genuinely creates new possibilities and will maybe replace film. As much as I like film, I wouldn't mourn its passing. Interview and transcription: Constantin

Wulff, November 2004

Script: Peter Liechti,  
Co-author Martin Witz  
Camera: Werner Penzel  
Sound: Ingrid Städeli

Editing: Dieter Gränicher  
Music: Martin Schütz

Cast: Stefan Kurt, Susanne Lüning,  
László I. Kish, Karl-Ulrich Meves,  
Nina Hoyer, Nikola Weisse, Fr. Ingrid  
Von Bothmer, Christian Schneller a.o.

Production: Balzli & Fahrner GmbH, SF  
DRS, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Suissimage  
World Rights: Balzli & Fahrner GmbH  
Original Version: German

"Martha's Garden is a winter garden, but not like the conservatories for beer- and coffee-drinkers that were so fashionable in the cosmopolitan capitals of the world at the turn of the twentieth century. It is a garden in winter, a place where growth and blossoming turn into a windswept drawing in black-and-white. A surrealistic one, where the familiar meanings of things can become alien and normality can turn into madness. It is probably wrong to want to classify Liechti's film, because categories like detective, fantasy or even horror movie seem so inappropriate and flat in comparison with a work that lives above all through its very personal cinematic language and, out of atmospherically dense, meticulously composed images, constructs a puzzle of fear and desire, frenzy and wit into a complex whole that serves as both a parable of our time and an enigmatic representation of our society.

With his finely calibrated performance, Bernese actor Stefan Kurt succeeds in maintaining and lending psychological credibility to the tensions of the counter-currents of winter life. The audience experience his self-loss along with him, and yet remain spectators: identification and observation coalesce."

Fred Zaugg, *Der Bund*, 7 Nov. 1997



| 1997 | 35mm, DVD | b/w | 89'

**K**arl lives a secluded life. He likes to keep his flat in perfect order, enjoys spending quiet hours in a café, likes to sleep. One evening, in somewhat sinister circumstances, he meets Martha, a woman who exercises an enigmatic fascination. A fatal love story is set in motion; even at the very end, Karl will not be able say what really happened – or how it could. He soon realizes that love has also brought something uncanny into his life. Gradually, even the best-repressed demons in him are unleashed. Even the jolly "stag outings" with his old friend Uwe can no longer provide the relaxation he is used to. Karl experiences his encounter with Martha as a convulsion, a fall from on high. The violence of his feelings shatters his thin veneer of "security"; he plummets to hitherto unknown depths. Ultimately he experiences his surroundings as no more than a macabre backdrop for his own decline and fall. Convinced that the whole city has been infiltrated by the "undead", he barricades himself in his home. But that is precisely where he finds his pallid neighbours sitting, and above all where Mr. Tepesch, the old vampire, has settled down: it is a carefully laid conspiracy. Meanwhile Martha's ties to the neighbourhood are growing ever stronger. Karl has been drawn into a murderous maelstrom that can only lead to bloodshed.

Script: Peter Liechti  
Text: Shimada Masahiko  
Camera: Matthias Kälin,  
Peter Liechti

Sound: Christian Beusch,  
Balthasar Jucker  
Editing: Tania Stöcklin

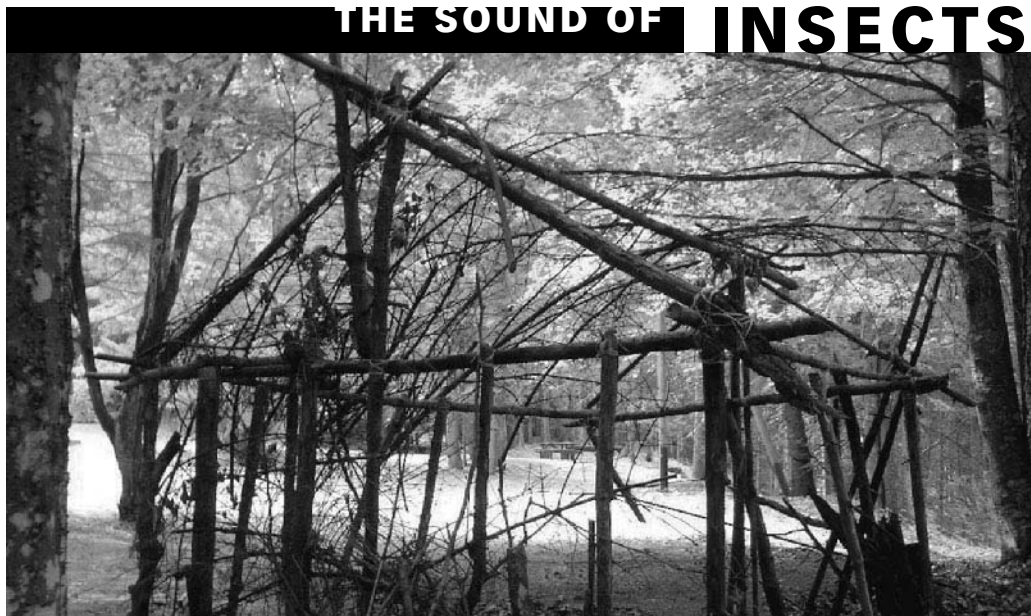
Music: Norbert Möslang,  
Christoph Homberger  
Narrators: Peter Mettler (English),  
Alexander Tschernek (German)

Production: Liechti Filmproduktion,  
Schweizer Fernsehen  
World Rights: Liechti Filmproduktion  
Original Version: German

«*The Sound Of Insects – Record Of A Mummy* is not a film adaptation of literature, but rather the cinematic rapprochement of a fictional text. X's dramatic monologue is not addressed to anyone in particular. It is neither descriptive nor retrospective, but deals entirely with the moment. There is no lamentation, no self-pity, no sentimentality. On the contrary, a subliminal self-irony even emerges at times. The text is unobtrusive; it suggests no morals and refrains from measuring value, thereby rendering its impact very direct. (...)

Ultimately, the nameless man's manner of dying also constitutes the most radical form of renouncement: a total retreat from the hustle and bustle in an achievement-oriented society, the unmitigated refusal to consume, to partake in the haste of this life. The underlying criticism of today's materialism is palpable. Shimada clearly demands that one take a stance on the unique potential of life. The absence of any comment on the part of the author offers no solace or reconciliation whatsoever, leaving instead the answers to such vexing questions entirely to the viewer. Therein lies the profound provocation of this story for me; it arouses not only compassion, but above all the need to object – without moralising – and to affirm the value of one's own personhood as well.» Peter Liechti

## THE SOUND OF INSECTS



| 2009 | 35mm | colour | 88' | Record Of A Mummy

Liechti's film tells the incredible story of how the mummified corpse of a 40-year-old man was discovered by a hunter in one of the most remote parts of the country. The dead man's detailed notes reveal that he actually committed suicide through self-imposed starvation only the summer before. A stunning rapprochement of a fictional text, which itself is based upon a true event: a cinematic manifesto for life, challenged by the main character's radical renunciation of life itself. Based on the novel "miira ni narumade" by Shimada Masahiko, according to a true story.

Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Liechti  
Sound: Peter Guyer, Res Balzli,  
Ingrid Städeli

Editing: Dieter Gränicher  
Music: Knut Remond  
Artist Action: Roman Signer

Production: Peter Liechti in co-  
production with Rec TV, Berne, and  
the Alfred Richterich Stiftung

World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: Swiss German / various

## SIGNERS KOFFER

"Signer's passion is to experiment. He fires ribbons across Stromboli to watch them defy the heat. He explodes kitchen stools from a decommissioned hotel and walks the shores of the polar sea in rubber boots equipped with screamers. These are dreamlike, unrepeatable, isolated moments. The film gives them duration and an audience without destroying the dream: we travel with Signer, wait to see what will happen, and experience child-like joy when the rocket tears the cap off the artist's head. Mad experiments prompt us to look and listen more closely. Gradually one understands Signer's quest for archaic worlds. The man who spent many years travelling through Poland loves earthy objects like the Trabi [a meanwhile iconic, ramshackle car built in the old GDR] and mourns their disappearance as a result of the rapid pace of consumerism."

Andreas Furler, *Tages-Anzeiger*, Sept. 1995



1996 | 16mm/35mm, DVD | colour and b/w | 80'

**S**igners Koffer (Signer's Suitcase) is a kind of road movie that takes us right across Europe. From the Swiss Alps to eastern Poland, from Stromboli to Iceland. Always following the magically charged "groove" of the landscape. A wide-ranging attempt to find the ideal travelling speed. Roman Signer uses his very personal bag of tricks to mark the stations along the way: strikingly simple operations brimming with subtle humour. But the film is also a journey through mental states. A tightrope walk between whimsy and melancholy. Danger – both physical and psychological – becomes a stimulus to the senses. Sudden plunges, abrupt mood changes shape the rhythm and atmosphere of this cinematic journey.

Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Liechti  
Sound: Dieter Lengacher

Editing: Tania Stöcklin  
Music: Norbert Möslang  
Text: Peter Liechti

Voice: Hanspeter Müller  
Production: Peter Liechti, SF DRS  
World Rights: Liechti Filmproduktion

Original Version: German,  
Swiss German

"The cinematic diary of three attempts to break the habit is simply fantastic; non-smokers will also understand the torments and the poetry of an undertaking directed against an addiction the addict doesn't really want to shake. Because, in the final analysis, it's no longer so much a matter of cigarettes as of the search for the home where one discovered them. Images and commentary unite in a haunting poem of the quest for roots."

Cristoph Schneider, *Züritipp*, 2003

"A fascinating journey into the country and into a person's own emotional landscape. With a delight we are rarely offered in the cinema, we follow the angry reflections of a hiker who just 'swisses along', a non-smoking smoker doing his own stations of the cross."

Christoph Egger, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*,  
24 Oct.2003



2003 | 35mm, DVD | colour | 90'

**Hans im Glück** (Lucky Jack) is the story of a man who sets out to shake his smoking habit. He decides to hike from Zurich, where he currently lives, to St. Gall, where he grew up and started smoking. He is prepared to keep repeating the journey – always choosing another route – until he has achieved his goal: finally becoming a non-smoker!

He hopes that through the ritual cross-country trek and the strict smoking ban he imposes on himself along the way, he will be able to rid himself of some emotional baggage, and of his addiction. On his search for the sources of his addiction, the haunting yet comic quest for his spiritual home increasingly becomes the central theme. All of the images, "insights" and memories he comes across on his non-smoking treks ultimately form the basis of a cinematic ride through heaven and hell in his own country – with the occasional foray far beyond national borders.

**Hans im Glück** is a reckoning and a declaration of love. A road movie for pedestrians, a regionalist film for the homeless. It is dedicated to all the smokers and other addicts, to all the unlucky devils who have managed to remain decent anyway – and of course to Lucky Jacks everywhere.

Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Guyer, Peter Liechti  
Sound: Dieter Meyer

Editing: Lorendana Cristelli  
Music: Hambana Sound Company  
Text: Peter Liechti

Voice: Hanspeter Müller  
Production: Reck Filmproduktion,  
co-production Liechti Filmproduktion

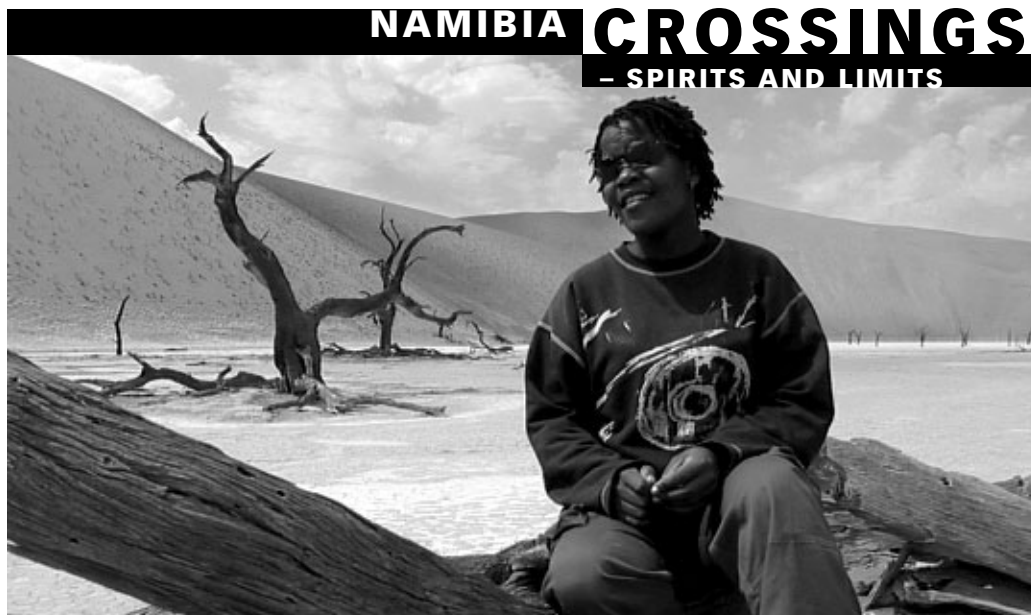
World Rights: Reck Filmproduktion  
Original Version: Various/English/  
German

"By way of landscape shots, stays with indigenous communities, but also the off-camera commentary, Liechti's road movie questions one's own attitude towards the continent and one's longing for 'the Other'. The utopia of the music project remains unattainable – tensions arise among the artists, more and more often the instruments are played solo, and the journey breaks down into single moments. But that is precisely the reality that makes *Namibia Crossings* so instructive and authentic!"

*Der Standard*, Vienna, 26 Apr.2004

"The music becomes fascinatingly visible here. Not only in concert, in the sparkling *Sprechgesang* of the two singers at the big closing concert. But also in the people's everyday lives, shown as oppressively impoverished and almost incomprehensibly cheerful, which reveal a joy of life that takes advantage of even the smallest occasion to perform a few tiny, highly precise dance steps or begin some infectious clapping."

Christoph Egger, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*,  
19 Sept. 2004



| 2004 | 35mm, DVD | colour | 92'

**H**ambana Sound Company: 12 musicians and singers from Namibia, Zimbabwe, Switzerland and Russia go on tour together. Twelve different dreams on the way to a country that, like the newly founded ensemble, has to re-invent itself from scratch: Namibia, formerly German Southwest Africa. The communal quest for the deeper sources of music progressively metamorphoses into individual borderline experiences, above all through the encounter with groups of local musicians in remote provinces – euphoric, sad, intense encounters...

**Namibia Crossings** is a journey through a country of archaic beauty, full of bizarre contrasts and contradictions – a constant echo to the polyphony of the mental landscapes created by the highs and lows of our ensemble.

Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Guyer, Peter Liechti,  
Matthias Kälin

Sound: Balthasar Jucker  
Editing: Tania Stöcklin  
Music: Koch-Schütz-Studer

Production: Liechti Filmproduktion,  
Schweizer Fernsehen

World Rights: Liechti Filmproduktion  
Original Version: Swiss-German

*"Hardcore Chambermusic is a captivating, witty film in perfect harmony with Koch-Schütz-Studer's improvised music, to which Liechti devoted himself for the duration of a 30-day performance in Zurich West. The result is sound and speech translated into the rhythm and fascination of images photographed with great delicacy and attention to detail, of cuts made with an instinctive sense of the cinematic value of the music as revealed by the rapt, concentrated faces and the instruments in live communication. It was a way for Liechti to come to terms with his general «envy» of musicians: «They can react so quickly!» as he puts it. The film-maker let the cameras join in the improvisation and then restored the formal structure in the cutting room. This grants the music enormous latitude – which, given its long-arching development, it clearly needs."* Martin Walder, *NZZ am Sonntag*, 26 Nov. 2006

*"Peter Liechti has cut together an intense, in places electrifying, music documentary. The camera is constantly on the lookout for momentary images. The way the three soloists respond to one another and drive the sound forward also constitutes the story of the film. Their playing sometimes has a genuinely narrative quality. Liechti demonstrates with rare clarity how music actually comes into being."* Pascal Blum, *Züri Tipp*, 30 Nov. 2006



| 2006 | 35mm | colour | 72'

The well-known Swiss ensemble of Koch-Schütz-Studer have been intensely involved in the European music scene for over fifteen years. Their music is forceful and direct: never "other-worldly", though always sensitive, never "primitive", though always passionate – music that is challenging and authentic. For one month straight, they played two sets a night in the same place at the same time... 30 days of single-minded concentration on one thing. Equalling the excitement in cinematic form, **Hardcore Chambermusic** aims to convey the thrill and exhilaration of these 30 live concerts to an audience that was not physically present. Music and film become an entertaining synthesis of two independent expressive means – a musical adventure as cinematic chamber piece. A musical marathon is compressed into one hour of film. **Hardcore Chambermusic** invites viewers to immerse themselves, to share in the joy and suffering – to experience music in a new way.

# SOMMERHÜGEL

| 1984 | Experimental S-8, DVD | b/w | 50'

What is interesting about the film **Sommerhügel** is its portrayal of opposites, of the fractured relationship of the protagonists to the area, which is also expressed in one of the title links: 'Firstly: Love of nature – Secondly: The Contrary'. 'None of us ever really "landed" in these hills,' says the director, 'although some of us have tried again and again – fascinated by nature, seduced by the kitschy urban longing for the 'purity' of rural life. We were interested in both directions that the pendulum swings – and the Appenzell region offers an abundance of inspiring images and sounds to accompany the process.'" *St. Galler Tagblatt, 1985*



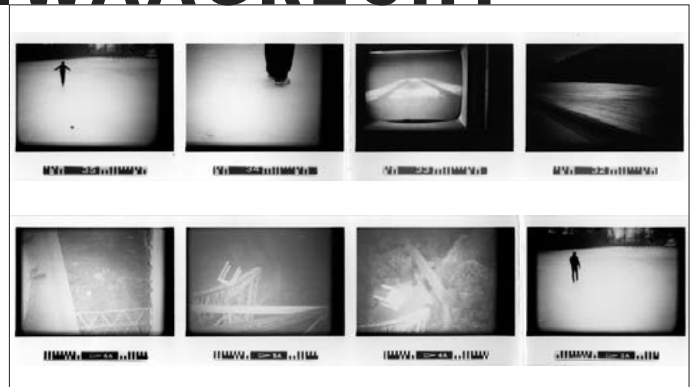
Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Liechti, Hugo Keller  
Sound: Peter Liechti, Hugo Keller  
Editing: Peter Liechti  
Music: Original "Striichmuusig Alderbuebe" u.a.

Cast: Felix Kälin, Walter Grawit, Walter Siering, Roman Signer, Johanna Schuler  
Production: Peter Liechti  
World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: No text/dialogue

# SENKRECHT / WAAGRECHT

| 1985 | Experimental S-8, blow-up 16mm, DVD | colour, b/w | 8'

In their sequence of movements and events, Roman Signer's actions are conceived as space/time sculptures. In keeping with the opposing directions taken in these documents, the film is simply called **Senkrecht/Waagrecht** (Vertical/Horizontal). This oppositional tendency is underlined by the locations: winter/ice/water/summer/clouds/air. The "commentary" to the story is provided by the abstract signs of the sign-language used by the hearing impaired and above all by the music of Möslang/Guhl.



Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Liechti  
Action: Roman Signer  
Editing: Peter Liechti

Music: Norbert Möslang, Andy Guhl  
Production: Peter Liechti  
World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: No text/dialogue

# DREI KUNST-EDITIONEN ZU ROMAN SIGNER

| 1987 | VHS | b/w & colour | 3x10'

Three tapes documenting Roman Signer's action in conjunction with the opening of the St. Gall Museum of Fine Arts in September 1987.

"The videos are rife with slapstick and insidious comedy. We are given a clear view of the lunacy of human rituals of self-destruction: when Signer sets off rockets in his own direction and then seeks refuge behind a wooden hoarding. The liberating laughter that follows Signer's actions is surely an unconscious reaction to the relief of once again having managed to escape disaster by the skin of one's teeth." *Ernst Grohotolsky, Neue Zeit, Graz 1997*



Action: Roman Signer  
Camera: Peter Liechti, Jörg Eigenmann (assistant)

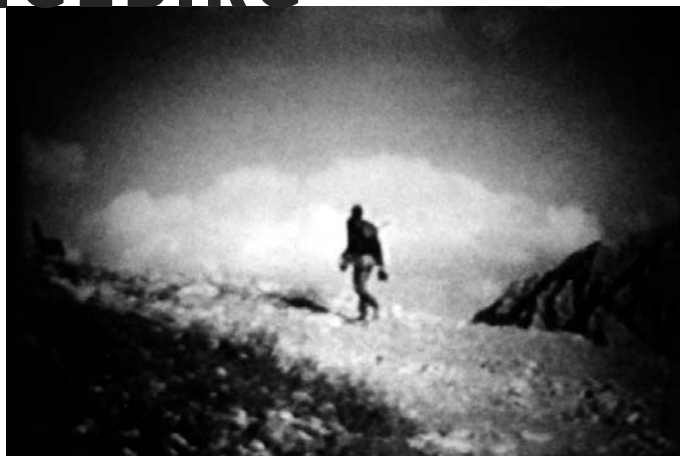
Production: Peter Liechti  
World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: No text/dialogue

## AUSFLUG INS GEBIRG

1986 | Essay S-8, blow-up 16mm, DVD | colour | 33'

A man takes a holiday trip to an unidentified neighbouring country. The oppressive atmosphere of the Alps is the ideal counterpart to the morose mood he has brought with him: sick of the Alps, sick of civilization, sick of mentalities... sometimes all this uninhibited spleen can be fun. He needs these trips to the mountains. He needs the anger to get a handle on his anxiety.

"St. Gall-born Peter Liechti's mountain- and civilization-sickness film was also shot in S-8. With shameless narcissism, the 'Eastern Swiss Achternbusch' indulges his obsession as he treks through the mountains he evidently cannot and does not want to escape, since it is among them that he is at home. His provocative statement 'Mountains sap the brain', his excursion to the mountains itself, are formulated, visualized indications of the discomfort his surroundings produce in him. One is reminded of the undigested 1980s slogan: 'Down with the Alps, a direct view of the Mediterranean'." Beatrice Leuthold, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 21 Jan. 1986



Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Liechti  
Video Camera: Jörg Eigenmann  
Sound: Peter Liechti  
Editing: Peter Liechti

Music: Res Wegmann  
Text: Peter Liechti  
Production: Peter Liechti  
World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: German

## THEATRE DE L'ESPÉRANCE

1987 | 16mm, DVD | colour | 19'

// World peace, disarmament and re-armament are hackneyed phrases, and the images we see on television and in the paper are hackneyed images. It was with this in mind that I set out – with more than a little delight – to drag the long-worn-out images of the Geneva summit between Reagan and Gorbachev into the spotlight once again. ...The film revives those days gone by as exactly as possible, in accordance with the wonderfully flickering pictures that had branded themselves in my memory. I gathered some of the material as a spectator in Geneva, but also tweaked the old TV images until they had been prodded into obedience. The framework for the story was provided by Roman Signer: refrain, commentary and fresh air." Peter Liechti

"How close can we actually get to something? That was among the questions that brought Liechti, attracted by the fascination of the monumental enterprise known as a 'summit conference', to Geneva. His companion, artist Roman Signer, used his camera to look for the reality otherwise accessible to the ordinary citizen only via the TV screen. Instead of falling into the hands of security men and 'gorillas', they managed to get unexpectedly close to events." Ralph Hug, *Ostschweizer AZ*, 16 Jan. 1987



Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Clemens Steiger (16mm);  
Peter Liechti, Roman Signer (S-8)  
Sound: Florian Eidenbenz  
Editing: Peter Liechti  
Music: Sun Ra, Elvis Presley,

American & Soviet national anthems  
Action: Roman Signer  
Voice: Aleksandra Signer  
Production: Peter Liechti  
World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: Div. languages

# TAUWETTER

1987 | 16mm blow-up, DVD | colour | 8'

**W**hen the snow melts and the hills of Appenzell are dotted with green and white, buckets of water slowly make their way up and down the slope. After a time, the gentle movement turns into violent swaying. Shots ring through the air, the buckets are punctured. Slowly the water begins to flow. This is the high point of a ritual that begins deep within the bowels of the mountain. Then trails of water spurt through the air to the thawing slopes and the water begins to gush, nearly causing the well in the valley to overflow...

"A lyrical, musical film that is the conscious reverse of the mountain-slendering *Ausflug ins Gebirg* [A Trip to the Mountains], Liechti's previous film. Moving at arm's length from the Achternbusch cliché, Liechti allowed himself to fall under the spell of the vibrating wires, gliding ski lifts and resonating ice sculptures in the wintry Wildkirchli Cave in nearby Appenzell. *Tauwetter* [Nice Weather], a short film that resembles the filmed score of a musical composition, is pervaded by first impressions of burgeoning spring." *Ostschweizer AZ*, 16 Jan. 1987



Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Liechti  
Sound: Florian Eidenbenz  
Editing: Peter Liechti  
Music: Andreas Wegmann

Production: Peter Liechti, Roman Signer (co-production)  
World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: No text/dialogue

# KICK THAT HABIT

1989 | 16mm, DVD | colour b/w | 45'

**K**ick That Habit is neither a conventional portrait of a musician nor a psychedelic illustration of Recycling Noise Music or video-clip tarted up with documentary frills. It is a subtle attempt to mesh a visual and an acoustic world of expression that ends up creating a fine-spun synthesis. The portrait of two musicians (Norbert Möslang and Andy Guhl) who recycle discarded electronic equipment to produce innovative sounds is the starting point of an enigmatic search for lost, destroyed, deranged experiential worlds. Footage of the two musicians' rehearsals and concerts is juxtaposed with visual shards of the film-maker's own memory. The sense of doom that Peter Liechti can coax out of everyday occurrences is vitally present in the music, too. These autonomous parts are interwoven with a "Trip to the Mountains", to the Alpstein, and down to Lake Constance – two magic pillars delimiting eastern Switzerland, the native region of both the film-maker and the musicians.



Script: Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Liechti, Thomas Imbach (assistant)  
Sound: Norbert Möslang, Andy Guhl, Thomas Imbach  
Editing: Dieter Gränicher  
Music: Norbert Möslang, Andy Guhl, Knut Remond

With: Norbert Möslang, Andy Guhl, Knut Remond, Thomas Imbach, Carole Forster, Bea Hadorn, Monika Sennhauser, Alex Hanimann, Roman Signer, Peter Kamm, Peter Liechti  
Production: Peter Liechti  
World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: No text/dialogue

# GRIMSEL – EIN AUGENSCHWEIN

| 1990 | 16mm, DVD | colour | 50'

**G**rimsel-West was the name of a project for the expansion of the hydroelectric plant in the Hasli Valley. Submitted on 30 June 1988, its realization seems fairly improbable for the moment. Originally conceived as an expression of opposition to the construction of a new dam, the film tries to fathom the undercurrent of apprehension caused by such plans to exploit the environment.

"After decades of indifference, have Swiss film-makers finally recognized the urgency of ecological issues? Peter Liechti's *Grimsel* addresses the dubiousness of robbing nature of its last vestiges of intactness, as would result from the plans for the Grimsel-West pumped storage works. Without losing sight of political and economic aspects, the film focuses on essential, meaningful ecological questions. And as if to remind us that nature unfolds in a different timeframe from our own, Peter Liechti lets events unfold at a somewhat slowed-down pace. That, in conjunction with the lighting shifts in the landscape shots and the urgently alienating music by Martin Schütz, grants the film a raptly strange dimension that prevents over-hasty comprehension and cooption." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 26 Jan. 1990



Script: Res Balzli, Peter Liechti  
Camera: Peter Liechti, Peter Guyer (assistant)  
Sound: Andreas Litmanowitsch  
Editing: Pius Morger  
Music: Martin Schütz

With: Adolf Urweider, Albert Streich, Dr. Klaus Ammann  
Production: Balzli & Cie., Nidau  
World Rights: Peter Liechti  
Original Version: Swiss German

# ROMAN SIGNER ZÜNDSCHNUR

| 1990 | VHS, S-VHS | b/w | 22'

**S**tarting from the Appenzell railway station, a fuse (German: **Zündschnur**) was laid along the 20.06-km-long Appenzell – Gais – St. Gall railway line, burning its way along the tracks for 35 days at a speed of 150 sec/metre.

Artist Roman Signer lit the fuse by gunpowder ignition at 4 p.m. on 11 September 1989, and brought the action to an end with an analogous smoke signal at the St. Gall railway station at 12.04 p.m. on 15 October. The final minutes were accompanied by a musical composition by Peter Groll, premiered by members of the Musikgesellschaft Harmonie Appenzell brass band.



Action: Roman Signer  
Camera: Peter Liechti  
Sound: Peter Liechti  
Editing: Peter Liechti  
With: Marek Rogowiec, Marco Magnaquagno, Harry Sivec, Alexandra Signer, Heidi Wider, Thomas Götz, Stefan Rohner, Gret Graf, Jan Käser, Michael Walther

Production: Agathe Nisple  
World Rights: Galerie u. Edition Agathe Nisple, Appenzell  
Original Version: Swiss German