

# Projekt Lesbos – Between hope and suffering

- Two young filmmakers from East Westphalia present a documentary about their journey to the external border of the European Union
- At the height of the refugee crisis, they captured raw images on the coast of the Greek island

Bielefeld, July 7, 2018 - The issue of migration is shaping the social and political debate in Germany like no other since thousands and thousands of people from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries have set out in 2015 to flee from war and persecution to reach Europe. In January 2016, at the height of the refugee crisis, two young filmmakers from Germany set off to Lesbos to seek answers at the external border of the European Union. Jan Erdl (25) from Gütersloh and Artur Klassen (26) from Bielefeld traveled for three weeks with light camera equipment to the Greek island and captured scenes of the humanitarian crisis, human hopes and abysses.

Jan Erdl: "In the beginning there was a very simple idea: we wanted to get an unfiltered picture of what we were seeing on television and in social media every day. Overfilled inflatables and refugee camps. People who were in mortal danger trying to reach Europe and get through to Germany. It all seemed so unreal and almost happened on our doorstep." They found the situation multifaceted, sometimes even within their own circle of friends where the two young men experienced heated discussions, while other times also seeing their friends spontaneously stand up and help where they could.

"We sensed that a crisis of historical proportions was taking place here, which would put Europe to the test and change our society," explains Artur Klassen. "We wanted to go to Lesbos, to the hotspot of this crisis, to document the happenings, to see with our own eyes, what happens there, and to help the people. At that time, dozens of unseaworthy, mostly overcrowded boats made their way from the Turkish coast to Lesbos every day – but not all of them made their way."

Supported by the German Television Studio WDR Bielefeld and the Newspaper Neue Westfälische, who later published daily videos and blog posts by the two filmmakers, they received private donations from a crowdfunding campaign. Jan Erdl and Artur Klassen booked their flights at the turn of the year.

"Our claim was clear: we wanted to help and we wanted to collect unadulterated impressions on site. Without a script, without a fixed travel plan, only equipped with light camera gear", reports Jan Erdl. Most often they used small actioncams that can be worn directly on the body. "So we had our hands free to help during the boat landings - and we made very authentic shots of what was happening right around us."

Jan Erdl and Artur Klassen helped many refugees that arrived in ice cold nights in January, seeing crying, hypothermic children and parents vacillating between panic and boundless relief about the successful crossing. They joined lifeguards on their patrols on the open sea and experienced a community of many volunteers who had come to Lesbos from all over the world to alleviate the plight. In refugee camps like Moria, they talked to newcomers and helped distribute donated clothing. And they visited the 'graveyard of rescue vests' on Lesbos, where piles of used, mostly fake life vests piled up in a memorial.

"Images can convey the suffering, the powerlessness, but also the hope that we have experienced better than words", Artur Klassen is convinced. "This trip has made clear to us how fragile our idea of freedom and solidarity is. And we felt very clearly that here on the coasts of Lesbos, it shows whether our European values are sustainable."

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Documentary by Jan Erdl and Artur Klassen

July 2018, 50 minutes

**Jan Erdl (25)** is a business economist and filmmaker, lives in Gütersloh and frequently travels the world. In 2015, he founded the independent production company Marmot Films and since then has shot image and documentary films and more in Iran, Sierra Leone, Iceland and Lesbos.

**Artur Klassen (26)** is a media manager and filmmaker, lives in Bielefeld and deals with documentary and scenic narrative methods on identity and personal boundaries. In 2015, he founded the independent production company Filmreiz and has been producing short and long formats ever since.

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