

Laudatio für Prof. Isabel Herguera **6. Mai 2026**

Liebe Isabel, Kaixo Isabel!

I am pleased that I was asked to write this laudation for you, because I consider it not only as an appreciation for your artistic work, but I'm also holding it as a fan of yours.

And that's also **how we met**: 10 years ago, we as the AG Animationsfilm organized the so called Werkschau at WDR in Cologne and you were invited as a professor of the KHM to come with your students. At that time, I didn't know your work yet and I googled it and found the WIP teaser of Sultana's Dream. I was shocked – I didn't expect anything like that and immediately wrote to you that I would be happy to support you if you would need support. First no, then yes and the rest is history. Today I am sooo grateful for your trust and that we were on this extraordinary journey together. For me, this film is more than one film of yours, for me, it is a film that connects so many elements of what unites you personally and your artistic work.

Sultana's Dream took us to **San Sebastian**, the place where you originally come from and which also plays a central role in the film itself. At the world premiere the next big surprise waited for me: a huge exhibition on the making of the film in Tabakalera and even more exciting for me, a solo exhibition in a gallery as a retrospective, where I was able to see many of your early works and some there for the first time.

Let's go a few years back: First, you studied **fine arts** at the University of the Basque Country in Bilbao and then at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. After an amazing experiment with fried eggs - people please research or ask Isabel if she wants to tell it to you a bit later - you have taken a radically new path and found your way into the animation.

At **CalArts** in Los Angeles, you graduated 1993 with a master's degree for the film Los Muertitos, an animated short about the wall separating Mexico and the United States. It was one of your first films that combined elements of documentary with animation. After film school, you founded your own studio **LOKO PICTURES** and you started to work on commissioned productions, including some with director **Raimund Krumme**, but most importantly you continued to make your own

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animated shorts. From now, it gets a bit wild in your history as many events, places and stations in your life overlap - so I try to sew it together like a patchwork quilt:

In 2003 you came back to Spain to work for around 8 years as artistic director of the **ANIMAC** Festival in Lleida – until today it's a fantastic place for animation in Catalonia. At the same time, you were coordinator for the **Laboratory** of Moving Images in San Sebastian and in the meantime, you kept on making short films, including *La gallina ciega* (2005), which won many awards and was nominated for the **GOYA**.

Also, in 2005 you had your **first professorship** at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, India. As a sought-after artist and teacher, you have been appointed as professor at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing professor and invited to give workshops in Ethiopia, Cuba, Australia, Korea, Colombia, Mexico and Italy.

Nevertheless, you spent most of your time in various places in India. The place in the world that was to shape you and make *Sultana's Dream* possible. **Your short films** from this period play between documentary and fiction - your own experiences and observations. Important to mention here is the film *Amar* (2010) in which **INÉS**, the main character from *Sultana's Dream*, appears for the first time. The short description of the film reads as follows:

"Inés travels to India to visit her friend **Ámár**, who has been living in a mental institution for years. Inés remembers the last days they spent together and her promise to return." In *Sultana's Dream* Inés has returned 13 years later and continued her journey.

Let's talk a little about **collaboration**: For *Sultana's Dream*, you worked with Mehendi artists from India and an animation studio of former students, to translate the authentic style of traditional crafts into animation.

Your partner in crime, in life and the arts **Gianmarco Serra** has carefully recorded original sounds in locations all over the country and collected them in an inexhaustible archive in order to be able to design sound authentically and accurately to bring the drawn pictures to life. The perfection of your work doesn't lie in a flawless image, but in the

symbiosis of line and movement, into which Gianmarco's work fits seamlessly to complete the picture.

Among other things, I was impressed by your casting process for the animators you wanted to work with. You had the artists tested anonymously and selected them based on the results. To the surprise of many, it was not the experienced senior artists who made it through, but young women who had just graduated from the university. An encouraging experience that I remember very much.

Since 2017 we have you back in Germany as Professor of Animation at the **KHM Cologne**, where you teach alongside your artistic work. Your predecessor was (here he comes again:) Raimund Krumme and even though both of you and your works are very different, you have in common the open-mind-ness and the infinite interest in animation, its teaching and your students.

When you invited me to the KHM to share my work with your students, I could feel how strongly you shaped their openness and curiosity for the art and the form of the medium. **You inspire!** And it's like your work: these students mean a lot to you. **You care!** Even after graduation, you will still connect them with people and enable them to find their way.

You accompany and encourage! You are an excellent teacher because you are accurate and you expect them to be accurate and precise within their personal work. At the same time, you encourage them to be open and true to themselves so that the young people can develop artistically.

Our mutual friend **Upamanyu Bhattacharyya** is a great example for that. He was your student in India, and you hired him as storyboarder for Sultana's Dream. From this job experience he emerged so strengthened that he started to develop his own debut feature, which he actually produces today. Here are some words from him:

"Not everyone has the patience of a guru, the skill and eye of an artist, and the leadership qualities and ambition of a director—which is what makes Isa such a truly rare individual. Above all, though, she has welcomed me into her home, and in every way, she is the person I hope to become when I grow up."



You are a role model! Not only for your students and colleagues, but also for me. It's a pleasure to work with you Isabel. I saw you solving conflicts by uniting people and by helping people to change perspective. I was able to experience how a true vision breaks convention, enchants viewers, amazes them and, above all, is remembered!

Your work stays! Because it's authentic, personal, and genuine. Your films and drawings are so inviting: In exhibitions, they let you get closer and closer and marvel at the details. The lightness of the stroke and the precession in the frame make it irresistible to me and to many, many others.

I'm obviously not the only fan here and I am very happy to appoint you, on behalf of the AG Animationsfilm, as our honorary member. We are pleased to officially welcome you to the German animation industry, as a source of inspiration and as a friend.

Congratulations!

Fabian