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DERIVES & PETIT CHAOS present "HAIR, PAPER, WATER..." with CAO THI HAU, CAO XUAN DOANH, CAO THI HIEU, CAO THI BAT, NICOLAS GRAUX Editing THƯƠNG MINH QUÝ Sound Design ERNST KAREL, TRƯƠNG MINH QUÝ Mixing ERNST KAREL Color Grading LIONEL KOPP Prod. used by JULIE FRERES, THOMAS HAKIM, JULIEN GRAPP Line Production NGUYỄN THỊ XUÂN TRANG, GAËLLE BALTHAZART A co-production DERIVES - PETIT CHAOS in co-production with WIP - WALLONIE IMAGE PRODUCTION Line production LAGI FILMS Sales LIGHTS ON Distribution AVILA

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Cao Thi Hâu

Cao Xuan Doanh

HAIR ~~PAPER~~ PAPER Water

A film by
Nicolas Graux Trương Minh Quý



Press kit

Hair, Paper, Water.. (Tóc, Giấy và Nước...)

Nicolas Graux, Trương Minh Quý

Belgium, France, Vietnam / 2025 / 71'



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↓ TAGLINE

In a small village on the border of Vietnam and Laos, an elderly woman teaches her grandchildren the language and traditional knowledge of the Rục, an ethnic minority. This tactile, poetic documentary, filmed on grainy 16 mm, evokes a sense of quiet wonder.

↓ SYNOPSIS

The warm voice of Cao Thị Hậu, an elderly woman from a rural region in Vietnam, carries this tactile documentary. She belongs to the Rục community, an ethnic minority that lived in isolation in caves until the 1950s, when the government relocated them to villages. Today she lives with her grandchildren, to whom she lovingly passes on the fragile Rục language and traditional knowledge. Intimate observations, filmed on grainy 16 mm, reveal the beauty of small everyday moments, the tenderness of family ties and the quiet strength with which she keeps her culture and tradition alive. The result is a poetic family portrait, in which the sound of leaves, mud, and dripping water forms an acoustic score that stimulates the senses and evokes quiet wonder.



↓ AWARDS & MENTIONS

- Golden Leopard in the Filmmakers of the Present Competition, Locarno Film Festival (2025)
- Boccacino d'Oro for Best Cinematography, Locarno Film Festival (2025)
- Special Mention from the Jury for the Pardo Verde, Locarno Film Festival (2025)
- Golden Coconut Award for Best Documentary Film, Hainan Island International Film Festival (2025)
- Montgolfière d'Argent Award, Festival des 3 Continents (2025)
- Special Mention from the Green Spike Jury, Valladolid International Film Festival (2025)
- Special Mention in the New Voices Competition, Bangkok International Film Festival (2025)
- Grand Prize, Taiwan International Documentary Festival (2026)
- Grand Prize for Best International Feature Film Award, Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente (2026)
- Jury Award for Best Eco Feature, Sprouts Film Festival (2026)
- Honorable Mention from ADF (Argentine Association of Film Photographers), Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente (2026)
- Living Heritage Award, Jean Rouch International Film Festival (2026)
- Mondes en regards Prize, Jean Rouch International Film Festival (2026)
- Best Feature Documentary Award, TerraLenta Film Festival (2026)
- CineRebels Award, Munich International Film Festival (2026)



↓ FESTIVAL SELECTIONS

- Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland (2025)
- Athens Avant-Garde Film Festival, Greece (2025)
- Bangkok International Film Festival, Thailand (2025)
- BFI London Film Festival, England (2025)
- Busan International Film Festival, South Korea (2025)
- Denver Film Festival, USA (2025)
- DocLisboa, Portugal (2025)
- Doha Film Festival, Qatar (2025)
- European Film Festival Scanorama, Lithuania (2025)
- Festival des 3 Continents, France (2025)
- Festival du Nouveau Cinéma, Canada (2025)
- Film Fest Gent, Belgium (2025)
- Hainan Island International Film Festival, China (2025)
- International Film Festival of India, India (2025)
- Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival, Indonesia (2025)
- Montreal Festival du Nouveau Cinéma, Canada (2025)
- Mostra – São Paulo International Film Festival, Brazil (2025)
- New York Film Festival, USA (2025)
- Singapore International Film Festival, Singapore (2025)
- Transcinema Festival Internacional de Cine, Peru (2025)
- Valladolid International Film Festival (Seminci), Spain (2025)
- Viennale, Austria (2025)
- Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Japan (2025)
- Antenna Documentary Film Festival, Australia (2026)
- Bellaria Film Festival, Italy (2026)
- Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente (BAFICI), Argentina (2026)
- CPH:DOX, Denmark (2026)
- Docudays UA International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival, Ukraine (2026)
- Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital, USA (2026)
- European Film Festival, Romania (2026)
- Festival de cinéma En ville !, Belgium (2026)
- Festival Internacional de Cine de Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (2026)
- Festival Internacional de Cine de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain (2026)
- Festival Internacional de Cine Play-Doc, Spain (2026)
- Fipadoc International Documentary Festival, France (2026)
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, USA (2026)
- Hong Kong International Film Festival, Hong Kong (2026)
- International Film Festival of Uruguay, Uruguay (2026)
- Jean Rouch International Film Festival, France (2026)
- LIFE AFTER OIL International Film Festival, Italy (2026)

- Monsoon Film Festival, France (2026)
- Pune International Film Festival, India (2026)
- San Francisco International Film Festival, USA (2026)
- Seoul International Eco Film Festival, South Korea (2026)
- Shanghai International Film Festival, China (2026)
- Sprouts Film Festival, Netherlands (2026)
- Taiwan International Documentary Festival, Taiwan (2026)
- True/False Film Fest, USA (2026)
- Durban International Film Festival, South Africa (2026)
- New Horizons International Film Festival, Poland (2026)
- Golden Apricot Yerevan International Film Festival, Armenia (2026)
- TerraLenta Film Festival, Italy (2026)
- Cinehill Motovun Film Festival, Croatia (2026)
- Guanajuato International Film Festival, Mexico (2026)
- Melbourne International Film Festival, Australia (2026)
- PriDox - Prishtine International Film Festival, Kosovo (2026)



Official Competition



↓ DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

We remember that day when being surrounded by total darkness and the thick silence of the cave. It was the first time we truly saw the dark and felt it on our skin. We had entered that cave to film the skeleton of a snake, perhaps a python. Almost half of the skeleton had already been encrusted with calcite deposits. Water trickled, drop by drop, from the stalactites above. In a cave like that, the deepest fear is a simple practical one: that all lighting devices might suddenly die. There's always the chance that just a few meters ahead, in the pitch dark, lies a cliff.

Caves, vast and narrow, are abundant in this region of Central Vietnam, near the Lao-tian border. Over millions of years, water has hollowed out the limestone mountains, forming these caverns. And it is in caves that Mrs. Cao Thị Hậu's childhood memories are housed. She was born in a cave and now lives in a village not so far from her childhood zone, reachable by narrow, half-hidden dirt paths winding through the jungle. Once, about seven years ago in 2018, she half-jokingly told us that if the valleys were submerged during flood season, she could return to her caves by boat.

The image of her floating on jade-green floodwater, passing submerged trees and traffic signs, rowing slowly toward the mouth of a cave—has stayed with us ever since.

Then came a revelation from daily life: about five years ago, out of the blue, we remembered that under our bed, buried among dusty suitcases and forgotten objects, was a metal case. Inside it was a Bolex 16mm camera with a set of lenses from a filmmaker friend. Turning it in our hands, we thought it would be an interesting challenge to make a film with this old camera, embracing all its technical limitations such as hand-rewinding before each take, short rolling time—around 25 seconds, shaky film strip, a small, dark viewfinder that makes focusing a delicate task for the fingers.

This technical intrigue, merged with the imagery of Mrs. Hậu returning home on water, gave shape and form to "Hair, Paper, Water..."

At the outset, before anything became concrete, we made a quiet decision: we would make this film for pleasure. We didn't want the film's scale to be overgrown. There is a certain joy in making something close at hand, in quietness and with a calm rhythm. Most of the time on set, we were waiting—waiting for the rain to come or to go away, for the valley to transform into a temporary lake, for the children to finish school, for Mrs. Hậu to retrieve her wandering calf. And while waiting, we found ourselves listening to many beautiful things.

The film emits the spirit of a 1960s-70s home movie, filled with fleeting glimpses of “occasional beauty”: people cooking and eating, children playing in the fields, buffaloes bathing in mud, flowers soaked in rain, a newborn baby crying...

It unfolds like a children’s book with colorful images and simple words:

Water - Fire - Blood - Bat - Dream - Hair - Remember - Rain - Sky - Earth - Light
- Night - ...



When editing, we tried to avoid falling into the trap of over-rationalization or overstructuring. The trickles of images and sounds gathered into a current of spontaneity and we were pleased to let ourselves be carried away by that current.

In a continuous flow of memory and imagination, we embraced the shifts and changes that the two-year hiatus between filming periods had quietly introduced to the film's protagonists: Mrs. Hậu's hair has grown longer, her face marked with deeper wrinkles; the little boy, no longer quite so little, now bears sorrowful thoughts of adolescence.

Growing up and then going away seems to be what awaits most of the young people in her hometown.

In making this film, we returned—if only for a short time.

Trương Minh Quý & Nicolas Graux



↓ ABOUT THE DIRECTORS

Nicolas Graux (Belgium, 1988) explores sociopolitical realities through immersive research as a filmmaker. With a poetic and sensitive eye, he works at the intersection of documentary and fiction. He graduated from the Belgian IAD (Institut des Arts de Diffusion) and co-founded the production company Replica. His debut feature, *Century of Smoke* (2019), a portrait of a Laotian family struggling with opium addiction, premiered at Visions du Réel in Switzerland and screened at international festivals in São Paulo, Munich, and Cartagena. Since 2020, he has collaborated across borders and forms with Vietnamese filmmaker Trương Minh Quý. They co-directed *Tóc, Giấy và Nước...* [Hair, Paper, Water...] (2025), a sensorial and poetic documentary that premiered at the Locarno Film Festival, where it won, among other prizes, the Golden Leopard in the Filmmakers of the Present competition.



© Trương Minh Quý



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Trương Minh Quý (Vietnam, 1990) creates films at the intersection of documentary and fiction. He graduated from Le Fresnoy, National Studio of Contemporary Arts in France, in 2021. His narratives and images balance the personal and the impersonal and draw on the landscape of his homeland, childhood memories, and the history of Vietnam. His films have been selected for international film festivals and exhibitions such as Cannes, Berlinale, Locarno, IFFR and the New York Film Festival. *Việt and Nam* (2024) premiered at Cannes and was selected for Un Certain Regard. His latest film *Tóc, Giấy và Nước...* [Hair, Paper, Water...] (2025), a sensorial and poetic documentary co-directed with Nicolas Graux, premiered at the Locarno Film Festival, where it won, among other prizes, the Golden Leopard in the Filmmakers of the Present competition.

↓ REACTIONS FROM THE PRESS

"As images reach us in fragments, sound weaves a continuity from off-screen to on-screen, carrying the emotion through the film and irrigating the streams of images, like water flowing."

- Cátia Rodrigues & Charlyne Genoud / Variety

"Observationally rich and overwhelmingly beautiful [...] the kind of handmade intimacy that recalls Jonas Mekas. *Hair, Paper, Water...* shows that even in a modern world, the knowledge of language and the sense of community that binds us to the past may ultimately guide us toward the future."

- Robert Daniels / RogerEbert.com

"It is all too easy to label certain types of impressionistic cinema 'poetic'. But Vietnamese character study *Hair, Paper, Water...* genuinely merits the term for the connections it makes between words, images and consciousness. This concise feature serves as a reminder that documentary can be immersive in a genuine sense, taking the viewer deep into the intimacy of unfamiliar places and cultures – and sometimes of its subjects' interiority."

- Jonathan Romney / ScreenDaily

"A poem of words and gestures to be passed on, repeated, so as not to forget."

- Clarisse Fabre / Le Monde

"*Hair, Paper, Water* is a sensorial wonder first and foremost, inviting any outsiders to feel the contrast themselves with its immersive sound and careful camerawork honing in on the most minute details that are the building blocks for any environment (...)."

- Stephen Saito / The Moveable Fest

"The beauty of life is on full display in *Hair, Paper, Water...* It's a moving ode to the ways we interact with one another and the nature of the planet, but also how we communicate. How we put the love of each other and our

home into a means of communication that can be understood far and wide. It's a reminder that this Earth connects all of us, and it's utterly magnificent. The 16mm richness and graininess are imperfect in the way that humans are. We make mistakes, experience unimaginable sorrow, and still have a chance of finding beauty in this world. *Hair, Paper, Water...* is remarkable in a simple way. In the way that we all find purpose and pain throughout life, but discover something to believe in every morning."

- Beyond the Cinerama Dome / Medium

"Words, images and sounds take on each other's guise. A sense of synaesthesia is kindled as the film plays on the border between language and the audiovisual. Words are sounds, images speak as language and sounds evoke an image of the "fire", the "river", the "hair" you remember from your own world."

- Kumail Syed & Hannes Verhoustraete / Sabzian

BENELUX PRESS

French

- [“*Hair, Paper, Water...*”, *Retour aux fondamentaux*’](#), Gaëlle Moury / Le Soir, 2026
- [“*Hair, Paper, Water...*”, *le quotidien d'une grand-mère Ruc qui nous invite à l'humilité*’](#), Victor Vandenbulke / RTBF, 2026
- [‘*L'invité culture, Nicolas Graux pour le documentaire Hair, Paper, Water...*’](#), RTBF, 2026
- [‘*Hair, Paper, Water de Nicolas Graux et Minh Quý Trương*’](#), Nastasja Caneve / Cinergie, 2025
- [‘*Entrevue avec Truong Minh Quý et Nicolas Graux, réalisateurs de Hair, Paper, Water...*’](#), Dimitra Bouras & Vinnie Ky-Maka / Cinergie, 2026
- [‘*Hair, Paper, Water : Transmettre un héritage en voie de disparition*’](#), Darika Peou / Surimpressions, 2026
- [‘*Cheveux, Papier, eau, un documentaire délicat sur le contraste entre deux modes de vie*’](#), BX1, 2026
- [‘*LCR - Nicolas Graux et Truong Minh Quy*’](#), BX1, 2026
- [‘*Coup de projecteur : Nicolas Graux, pour le documentaire "Hair, Paper, Water"*’](#), Delphine Freyssinet / RCF Bruxelles, 2026
- [‘*Hair, Paper, Water... C'est l'amour qui crée la culture*’](#), Orlyna Ekila / Le Suricate, 2026

- [‘Hair, Paper, Water... Entre résistance et fragilité culturelle,’](#) Elise Debière / Karoo, 2026
- [“‘Hair, Paper, Water...”, film-livre d’images’](#), We Love Cinema, 2026
- [‘Rencontre avec Truong Minh Quy et Nicolas Graux pour “Hair, Paper, Water”](#)’, We Love Cinema, 2026

Dutch

- [‘Voor het eerst de wereld zien,’](#) Maarten Jochems / Fantômas, 2026
- [‘Hair, Paper, Water ... \(Tóc, Giấy và Nước ...\),’](#) Marc Bussens / Fast Forward, 2026
- [‘Hair, Paper, Water...,’](#) BRUZZ

English

- [‘A Simple Sign by the Road Truong Minh Quý and Nicolas Graux on Hair, Paper, Water...,’](#) Kumail Syed & Hannes Verhoustraete / Sabzian, 2026
- [‘Ancestral Knowledge and Inter-Generational Intimacy in Hair, Paper, Water...,’](#) Wilco Van Petegem / Rephrase Magazine, 2026

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

English

- [‘Locarno Filmmakers of the Present Golden Leopard Winner ‘Hair, Paper, Water’ Marks Directors’ Homecoming to Poetic Documentary,’](#) Cátia Rodrigues & Charlyne Genoud / Variety, 2025
- [‘Truong Minh Quy And Nicolas Graux On The Story Behind Their Locarno Title ‘Hair, Paper, Water...’ & How Technological Shifts Are Affecting Filmmaking,’](#) Zac Ntim / Deadline, 2025
- [“‘Hair, Paper, Water...’ review: Poetic documentary shines a light on Vietnam’s Indigenous Ruc people,’](#) Jonathan Romney / Screen Daily, 2025
- [‘Locarno Film Festival 2025: “Tabi to Hibi,” “Hair, Paper, Water...,” “Yakushima’s Illusion”,’](#) Robert Daniels / RogerEbert.com, 2025
- [‘Trương Minh Quý • Co-director of Hair, Paper, Water...,’](#) David Katz / Cineuropa, 2025
- [‘Hair, Paper, Water... - The Language of Film,’](#) Đặng Tùng Bạch / Reverse Shot, 2025
- [‘Hair, Paper, Water...,’](#) Fareyah Kaukab / Filmexplorer, 2025
- [‘Hair, Paper, Water... — Trúóng Minh Quy & Nicolas Graux \[Locarno ’25 Review\],’](#) Zachary Goldkind / In Review Online, 2025

- '[Locarno 2025 Review: Nicolas Gaux & Trương Minh Quý's "Hair, Paper, Water" Reveals the Secret Life of Words](#),' Stephen Saito / The Moveable Fest, 2025
- '[HAIR, PAPER, WATER...: A Cinematic Tapestry of Rich Values and Intriguing Family Dynamics](#),' Thomas Duffy / FilmBook, 2025
- '[Hair, Paper, Water... \(2025\) by Truong Minh Quy and Nicolas Gaux Documentary Review](#),' Adriana Rosati / Asian Movie Pulse, 2025
- '[Hair, Paper, Water... \(Tóc, Giấy Và Nước, 2025\) Locarno Movie Review: Wondrously Porous Distillation of Language-Memory](#),' Debanjan Dhar / High on Films, 2025
- '[NYFF 2025: "Hair, Paper, Water..." is a Gentle Masterpiece](#),' Beyond the Cinerama Dome / Medium, 2025
- '[Locarno 2025 review: Hair, Paper, Water...](#),' Marc van de Klashorst / International Cinephile Society, 2025
- '[69th BFI London Film Festival: "Hair, Paper, Water" Review](#),' Maggie Gogler / View of the Arts, 2025
- '[A grandmother floats homeward in "Hair, Paper, Water..."](#),' Siddhant Adlakha / JoySauce, 2025
- '[Hair, Paper, Water...](#),' Bernardo Rondeau / Screen Slate, 2026
- '[HAIR, PAPER, WATER... In conversation with Nicolas Gaux & Truong Minh Quy](#),' Katerína Papanikolopoulos / Athens Design Forum, 2026

French

- '[Au Festival des 3 continents, à Nantes, le livre d'images « Hair, Paper, Water... » illumine la compétition](#),' Clarisse Fabre / Le Monde, 2025
- '[Critique : Hair, Paper, Water...](#),' David Katz / Cineuropa, 2025
- '[« Hair, Paper, Water... » réalisé par Nicolas Gaux et Truong Minh Quy : Critique](#),' Kino Wombat, 2025
- '[Hair, Paper, Water sans fard au festival de cinéma En Ville ! à Bruxelles](#),' Le Courrier du Vietnam, 2026
- '[Festival du Film Mousson 2026 – Hair, Paper, Water... de Trương Minh Quý et Nicolas Gaux](#),' Florent Dichy / East Asia, 2026

German

- '[Hair, Paper, Water](#),' Lida Bach / MovieBreak.de, 2025
- '[Was ist das für ein Ort?](#),' Du Pham / Südostasien, 2025

↓ CAST & CREW

A film by

Nicolas Graux, Trương Minh Quý

With

Cao Thị Hậu, Cao Xuân Doanh, Cao Thị Hiệu, Cao Thị Bát

Image

Nicolas Graux

Sound

Ngô Quốc Kiên, Nguyễn Ngọc Tân, Lê Hoàng Anh

Producer

Julie Freres, Thomas Hakim, Julien Graff

Line Producer

Nguyễn Thị Xuân Trang, Gaëlle Balthasart

Editing

Trương Minh Quý

Sound editing

Ernst Karel, Trương Minh Quý

Sound mix

Ernst Karel

Music by

Michael Stearns

Colour correction

Lionel Kopp

Poster artwork

Mi Fa

Poster design

Anhar Salem

Production

Dérives, petit chaos

Co-production

Wallonie Image Production, Lagi films

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