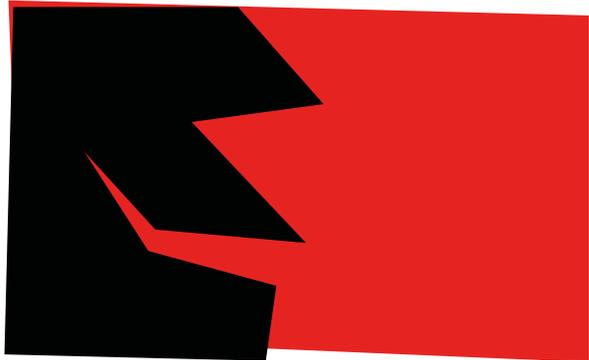
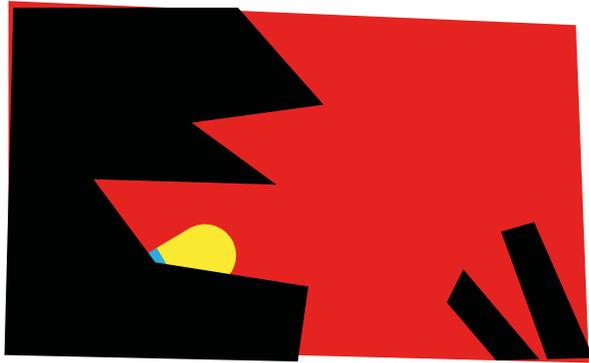


Intermezzo Films
presents



OFFICIAL
SELECTION
FESTIVAL del POPOLI
2022



HAPPY PILLS

A film by Arnaud Robert
and Paolo Woods

Production Intermezzo Films
Luc Peter & Kalia Montà directed
by Arnaud Robert & Paolo Woods
image Leandro Monti sound
Théo Vroton editing Nicolas
Hislaire music Camilla Sparkess
sound editing Benjamin Benoit
mix Denis Séchaud color
grading Robin Enard graphic
design & animation WeDoData
In coproduction with RTS
Radio Television Suisse, SSR, SRG,
ARTE, GE.I.E. supported by
Federal Office of Culture (FOC) with
the support of Cinéforum and
Loterie Romande, Suisseimage
Cultural Foundation, Ernst Götscher
Foundation, Stage Pool Focal



*I have chosen to be happy
because it's good for my health*

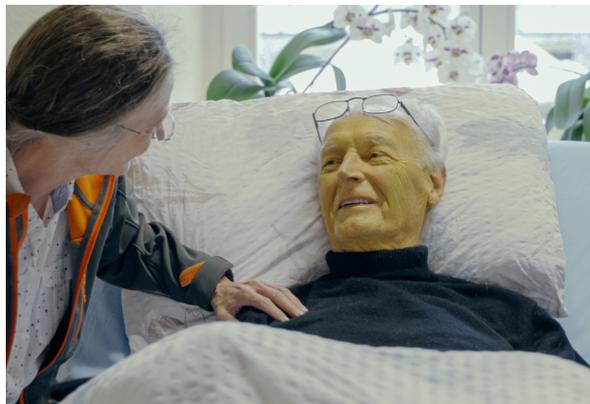
Voltaire

Synopsis

Can we put happiness into a pill?

A journey through six different countries into a world where chemistry is the ultimate response to every human aspiration. From antidepressants to opioids, from painkillers to stimulants, this film questions our entire consumer society and the Eldorado of prescribed happiness.

Six people, six places, six pills



Louis. Portugal and Switzerland. (Pentobarbital).

Suffering from pancreatic cancer, he decides to resort to assisted suicide. His drug will both help him die and set him free.

"People want to be saved at all costs. This term "at all costs" is a dangerous one. To depend on pills is to submit to a medical slavery against which the person no longer wishes to fight."



Patrick. Switzerland. Antidepressant (Sertraline), and anxiolytic (Temesta).

To cope with his chronic depression, he swallows a daily cocktail of anxiolytics and antidepressants that keep him functioning.

"With the medication I'm on, I have noticed that my mood is more stable. I don't have great highs, but I also don't feel rock bottom like I did before. So, my mood is stable. I would describe it as a sort of stable sadness."



Alzouma, Niger. Painkiller (Tramadol)

Farmer in a Sahelian village and street vendor in the capital, he withstands the heat and exhausting work thanks to a painkiller on which he is dependent.

"Our parents used the bark of certain trees to help them continue working despite their fatigue. Today, those trees are gone. Now only the tablets remain."



Addy, United States.
Amphetamine (Adderall)

This teenage girl from Massachusetts performed poorly in class. Her mother got her a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder and the associated prescription drug treatment.

"It sucks to be labeled with Attention Deficit Disorder and to take medication. But hey, if that helps me not to fail at everything, then that's fine with me."



Maris, Israel.
PreP (Truvada)

A member of Tel Aviv's gay community, every day he takes prophylactic pills that protect him from HIV and free him from the fear of infection.

"Condoms are old fashioned. Soon there will be pills to treat all diseases. We will have sex without fear and we will be happy."



Yurika, Peru.
Contraceptive injection (Cyclofem)

A single mother of 4 children, this 27-year-old Amerindian woman from the Peruvian Amazon uses a monthly contraceptive injection to avoid the financial burden of another pregnancy.

"I had my first child at 16. In my culture, men are irresponsible. So I protect myself, because the happiness of my children depends on my ability to earn a living."

Directors' Note



In 2016, the photographer Paolo Woods and the journalist Arnaud Robert met in Haiti, where they worked on a project that became the book **STATE** (publ. by Photosyntheses, Arles, 2013), which questioned the very nature of a country in which the state was collapsing. In the streets of Port-au-Prince, they regularly came across street vendors selling medicines. Their portable troves contain medications that are often counterfeit or expired, but these merchants offer a cornucopia of promises, colorful and dangerous, which make them seem as much doctors as magicians or charlatans.

“Something happened for us as we stood before those pyramids of shining blisters, those strange columns of chemical candies. In a country where everything is difficult, these improvised pharmacists promise immediate solutions to complicated problems. That is how we decided to examine the promise drugs offer globally, without delving into the world of manufacturers, but instead by focusing on consumers and our complex relationships with pills.

We have selected drugs that each address a different aspect of the contemporary quest for happiness: work (painkiller), academic and professional success (amphetamine), the need to continue to function (antidepressant), to push back fears (PreP), but also the desires for control (contraceptive) and for freedom (Pentobarbital). In each portrait, in each encounter, we discovered bridges connecting characters who, on the surface, seemed to be polar opposites. We found that the hypercapitalist quest for a body without weakness that leads a Nigerian farmer to rely on opioids resonated with an American mother who wants her teenage daughter to take amphetamine-based drugs in order to succeed in school and therefore in life. More than ever, to be happy is a duty.

The contemporary obligation to be happy has made chemistry its most radical tool yet.

These immersive portraits, more philosophical fables than journalistic investigation, can be seen as a response to today's bright and enticing drug advertisements that promise success, performance and freedom. In truth, they offer only an illusion of choice, bolstered by consumers' imaginations and marketing's exaggerated promises. At the bedside of Louis, who allowed us to stay by him in his last moments, we understood that the only pill that actually deserves the strange name of **HAPPY PILL** is the one that can give us our freedom."



HAPPY PILLS is also...

AN EXHIBITION / During the preparatory work for the film, Arnaud Robert and Paolo Woods traveled to India to meet, photograph and film bodybuilders who consume abundant steroids and growth hormones in order to sculpt a body they deem ideal. They also went to Italy to meet a gigolo who uses Viagra in order to perform impeccably. In the exhibition, these join the ranks of the project's other primary subjects. The exhibition also delves in the life of the characters by exploring social networks and through series of photographs such as the Home Pharma series, where, in around thirty countries around the world, families are asked to display all the medicine they keep in their homes. It presents a body of vernacular and original images whose main objective is to confront visitors with their own relationships with drugs. The artistic direction is curated by François Hébel, former director of the Rencontres de Arles and director of the Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation.

*Opening September 2021 at the Ferme des Tilleuls, Lausanne.
World tour from 2022.*

A BOOK / The authors are also preparing a book, which will be published upon the opening of the exhibition and which will be a direct extension of it. Constructed as an encyclopedia of happiness, the text will also make room for a more scientific and philosophical perspective on the way in which chemistry speaks to our contemporary perception of a successful life. The book is made to complement the film through its narrative. It takes up and amplifies the biographies of the documentary's subjects, explores their social networks and the problems that exist in their countries. This odyssey through our relationship with drugs also provides a basis for exploring contemporary constructs of happiness.

Editions Delpire, Paris, 2021.



Biographies of the directors



ARNAUD ROBERT (b. 1976) is a Swiss journalist, director and writer.

His work has been published in *National Geographic*, *Le Monde*, *Le Temps*, *La Repubblica*, *Néon*, *Les Inrockuptibles*, and *Vibrations*.

He is a regular contributor to Radio Télévision Suisse.

He has directed three documentaries (**Bamako is a Miracle**, **Bondyé Bon** and **Gangbé!**).

His films have won awards at the Vues d'Afrique festival in Montreal and at the Jean Rouch Festival in Paris. His most recent medium-length film was selected for official competition at Visions du Réel, but also in Agadir, Guadalajara, New York, Neubrandenburg, Moscow, Saint-Louis of Senegal, etc.

He is also the author of several books including **Hors-Bord**, a series of seven volumes co-written with the painter Frédéric Clot, **STATE** (publ. by Photosyntheses, Arles) with Paolo Woods, and **Journal d'un Blanc** (publ. by De L'Aire, Vevey), a compilation of his columns in the Haitian newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*. He also wrote the book **50 Summers of Music**, on the Montreux Jazz Festival (publ. by Textuel), in 2016.

In 2008, he was one of the designers of the exhibition **Vodou, un art de Vivre**, created at the Museum of Ethnography in Geneva and subsequently presented in ten countries.

Arnaud Robert has notably been awarded the Jean-Dumur Journalism Prize, the Francophone Public Radio Prize and, in 2020, the Swiss Press Award for his investigation into the toilet revolution, published on Heidi.News and in the magazine *XXI*.



PAOLO WOODS (1970) is a Canadian-Dutch photographer based in Florence, Italy. His focus is on long-term projects that combine photography with investigative journalism. He has published books on the oil industry, the wars of George W. Bush, and Iran. In 2007 and 2008, with journalist Serge Michel, he documented the rise of the Chinese presence in Africa. The book based on this work, **Chinafrique**, has been translated into 11 languages and has sold more than 40,000 copies of the French edition alone.

In 2011, Woods moved to Haiti. Working with director and journalist Arnaud Robert, he has published two books about the island, **STATE** and **PEPE**. The Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne presented these works for the first time. Then, together with photographer Gabriele Galimberti, for three years he focused on tax havens. The work that resulted from this investigation, **THE HEAVENS**, was shown at an exhibition at the Rencontres de la Photographie in Arles.

The most important publications in the world (*Time*, *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, *National Geographic*, etc.) regularly publish his photographs. His images feature in numerous public and private collections around the world.

He is also the recipient of two World Press Photos awards.

TECHNICAL TEAM

Directors	Arnaud Robert, Paolo Woods
Image	Leandro Monti
Sound	Théo Viroton
Editing	Nicolas Hilaire
Music	Camilla Sparksss
Sound editing	Benjamin Benoit
Mixing	Denis Séchaud
Color grading	Robin Erard
Animations/Graphics	Wedodata Julie Brunet, Lara Poix
Co-production	RTS Steven Artels, Gaspard Lamunière ARTE G.E.I.E Catherine Le Goff
Production	Intermezzo Films Luc Peter, Katia Monla
World Sales	Lightdox

Info

Duration	94 minutes
Genre	Documentary
Year	2022
Format	DCP / 16:9 / Color / 5.1
Shot on location in	Switzerland, USA, Peru, Niger, Israel, Portugal
Languages	English, French, Hebrew, Spanish, Shipibo, Zarma
Subtitles	English, French, German







World Sales

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Coproduction

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