

# Koki, Ciao

*An autobiography starring,  
narrated and coauthored by*  
**Koki**

*Featuring*

**Josip Broz Tito, Sophia Loren,  
Lanka, Nikita Khrushchev, Sukarno,  
Jovanka Broz, Muammar Gaddafi,  
Indira Ghandi, Carlo Ponti,  
Gamal Abdel Nasser, Nicolae and  
Elena Ceaușescu**





*Directed by*  
**Quenton Miller**

*Edited by*  
**Misho Antadze**

*Sound Design*  
**Luka Barajević**

*Narrator and coauthor*  
**Koki (Sulphur-crested cockatoo)**

*Featured*  
**Josip Broz Tito, Sophia Loren,  
Lanka (Indian elephant), Nikita  
Khrushchev, Sukarno, Jovanka Broz,  
Muammar Gaddafi, Indira Ghandi,  
Carlo Ponti, Gamal Abdel Nasser,  
Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu**

*Additional writing by*  
**Koki, Quenton Miller, Misho Antadze**

*Photography*  
**Quenton Miller**

*Archives*  
**Museum of Yugoslavia, RTV Slovenia**

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**Mondriaan Fund, Museum of Yugoslavia  
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*Production*  
**When Site Lost the Plot, Amsterdam  
with Aram Lee**

*Details*  
**11:10mins, 1.78:1,  
DCP, 5.1 Sound  
Completion date December 2024**



## Synopsis

Co-written and narrated by Koki, the 67 year old speaking cockatoo of Tito, leader of Yugoslavia for 35 years, *Koki, Ciao* is a short experimental documentary and autobiography, featuring a non-human animal as its central creative figure.

Koki was part of the diplomacy and entertainment routine on the Brijuni islands, Tito's late residence and a key location during the the Non-Aligned Movement. The Koki show still continues where he's caged on public display for tourists.

Featuring recordings made with Koki over four years and previously unseen footage and images from state archives, the film weaves together fragments of Koki's life on Brijuni Island during state visits from political figures, such as Nikita Khrushchev, Sukarno, the Ceaușescus and Indira Gandhi, as well as celebrities such as Sophia Loren and Carlo Ponti.

Brijuni remains the location of animals who arrived as diplomatic gifts and state-defining symbols, a disorientating place of border crossings between species and states. Among elephants and zebras, Koki still steals the show, performing memories of his former high life from a cage.

## Press contact

Quenton Miller  
[quenton.miller@gmail.com](mailto:quenton.miller@gmail.com)  
+31(0)639853989

## Director's statement

The animal-narrated story is a favorite form of storytelling for me, from blockbuster children's animations to the cultured cocker spaniel of Virginia Woolf's *Flush* (1933). But there's always something disappointing: an aspect of ventriloquism. I've always wanted to see whether it's possible to do it following the mysterious perspective a real animal voice.

After many failed attempts to make this happen, in 2020 I met Koki, who is a type of cockatoo I grew up around. Koki has a large vocabulary and decades of experience in entertainment, he had been at the center of Tito's diplomacy on the Brijuni Islands, a group of islands off the Istrian peninsula with animals who arrived as state-defining symbols during the time of the Non-Aligned movement. As I was going back and forth to the island, I went through the tens of thousands of archival photos in the Museum of Yugoslavia and different post-Yugoslavian state media archives, I started to find pictures of a white cockatoo not only with Tito and Jovanka Broz, but with Sukarno, the Ceaușescus, Elisabeth Taylor and many others. I could start to see exactly what Koki was talking about. Like the geopolitical narrators of Yoko Tawada's *Memoirs of a Polar Bear* (2016), Koki is a very dislocated kind of speaking-state-animal. Over the years of filming I saw people approaching Koki with historical curiosity and often anger at Koki – which flipped my idea of the supposed innocence of animals.

Meanwhile, making people listen to Koki was a problem. I treat narrative as a sort of literary contract between a speaker and a listener. Although it appears to just happen there's a negotiation of who is trusted and how, and this contract with Koki and human ears took a lot of editing to arrive at. Perhaps it's still too uncanny for some humans. On the Brijuni Islands Koki would sometimes say a phrase to someone, for example, "come here", and then the recipient, instead of going to Koki, would say "haha, sounds like Koki says come here" and then Koki responds

"bye" and they go "hahaha, sounds like he says bye" as Koki exits.

As far as I know (and please contact me if I'm wrong) this might be the first film written by a nonhuman animal. Koki was already very familiar with recorded images and audio: it's a popular activity for tourists and school groups to play him videos on their phone: Tito speeches, Yugo pop, rap, a song he sings a bit out of tune in the film... So I brought images and footage that we showed to Koki to see what associations and reactions he might have. The film is based on his reactions which often took us by surprise, for example Koki's take on fluffy white dogs, or his familiarity with diplomatic language. In making the film we tried very hard not to make the story out of our preconceptions and human-centered history, but to start from this alienated perspective of Koki locked in a cage, and all the associations that built the story came from Koki. The word alienated could be used to describe Koki's narration in all the legal, Brechtian and sci-fi senses. And then Koki is alienated from other cockatoos, they are gregarious and non-domestic so caging them is problematic and requires more infrastructure than a regular parrot.

Koki's position is not only between species, but also between states. Koki is an Australian species of bird gifted – possibly via Indonesia, who also identify with cockatoos – to a zoo of world animals as part of the international diplomacy of the Non-Aligned Movement, on a border-shifting island that has been at different times Roman, Austro-Hungarian, French, Italian, and then a diplomatic center for a now non-existent country. While all migratory birds are geopolitical, Koki's identity has a weird floating aspect. Parrots can live longer than humans, and Koki seemed to have flown out of a different timeline of the Yugoslav state, and it's interesting to see people searching for something, in this topology of relations where human and nonhuman people look at each other across the blurry borders of states, species and time.

## Director's Bio

Quenton Miller (b. Naarm, 1981) is an Australian/UK filmmaker and artist based in the Netherlands since 2012. He studied at Van Eyck Academy and the Master of Artistic Research programme at KABK Den Haag, where his focus on film developed out of playfully disorientating video installations, as well as writing and designing for literary publications.

He usually makes comedic work, depicting alienated characters struggling with language, truth, time and history. His work looks at diverse experiences of language and dislocating experiences of the world, often repurposing documentary and realism with frameworks and modes of address from literature, sci-fi and comedy. "Although Quenton Miller's work may seem ironic at times" one reviewer wrote "it is characterised by a romanticism and razor-sharp lightness."



Older works include ***The Trial*** (2021), a docufiction made with investigators at the International Criminal Court in the Hague looking towards Africa, ***Dying Marxists*** (2018) for the Athens Biennale, and ***The Confidence Man, His Masquerade*** (2015) an adaptation of Herman Melville's final novel of characters without bearings. He has shown work at IFFR, the Athens Biennale, the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam and Apexart New York and published in *the Believer* and *Guernica*. With Aram Lee he co-founded ***When Site Lost the Plot***, an art organization "dedicated to exploring the topography of site-specific identity through film and media" as well as the collective ***the Department of Speculative Facts***, which looks at speculative approaches in documentary. "The more unreflective formats of documentary - especially nature documentaries no longer seem like a good orientation in terminal times. I try to merge documentary research with the literary side of art films, as well as pun-based comedies, aliens, anime, and the mind-bending word-image and space-time relations from experimental comics and cartoons."

## Director's Projects in Development

1. A nature documentary that takes the form of a hi-tech action sci-fi monster movie - working with a real situation where David Attenborough may have inadvertently cursed an environment by reporting on it.

*Mid-Length to feature docufiction with a local producer already involved, looking for international co-producers.*

2. A film and new media project, collaboration with artist Aram Lee. *Mid-length docufiction with a new media version using Google Maps/Earth imagery, as part of Filmfonds NL Immerse/Interact programme, looking for producers.*

2. A feature length biopic about the birth of a language and the history of communicating with disability, very dark comedy. *Feature fiction, early script stage, looking for producers and development support.*

Please contact me for more information on these projects at [quenton.miller@gmail.com](mailto:quenton.miller@gmail.com)



Koki, hello, how are you?



Why are you mad?



Thank you!