

Dying for Beginners

Kurt Langbein

Directors Statement

For fifteen years I have tried intensively to defeat my cancer. I documented this struggle and my worldwide search for effective therapies on film.

Now I know that I cannot win. It is time to think about dying and death.

In the meantime, I have accompanied two friends who died of cancer on their final journey – the thoughts and emotions that arose during that time have made the inner monologues more vivid and authentic.

I have written books and made films about death and dying. But when, at the beginning of 2024, I was confronted with the fact that only therapies remain for me that can postpone death, the fear returned nonetheless. Confronting this fear and giving it words – and then images – is meant not only to help me, but also to encourage associations and reflections in the viewers.

“Dying for Beginners” is conceived as both an inner and an outer journey into the subject of death.

The funeral forms the narrative framework for the inner journey. It will be staged with extras and actors and provides the background for my reflections, presented as inner monologues. The camera work in these sequences emphasizes the subjective perspective from my point of view. The handheld camera acts like a mourner. It looks between shoulders. People pass in front of it. Then it moves forward in POV toward the coffin. Through my personal gaze, the camera discovers many details that might otherwise seem insignificant: faces, hands, accessories. Through the way these details are observed, arranged, or focused on as small visual miniatures, viewers come closer not only to the theme itself but also to my perspective.

The “outer” journey through the individual thematic sections will be designed as a classic documentary. The subjective perspective of the camera will largely be maintained. Drone images will establish the respective locations and provide orientation.

All sequences are introduced by my concrete questions and fears – what awaits me when I am unconscious? What will I experience while dying? What happens afterwards?

A range of controversial topics will be explored from different perspectives (life extension at any cost, consciousness and the brain, brain death, assisted suicide, eternal life). The form and tone are open and serious so that people with different beliefs and attitudes can follow the stories.