



LA SARRAZ PICTURES

# VISIONS DU RÉEL

*in Competition*

**Alessandro Borrelli**

*presents*

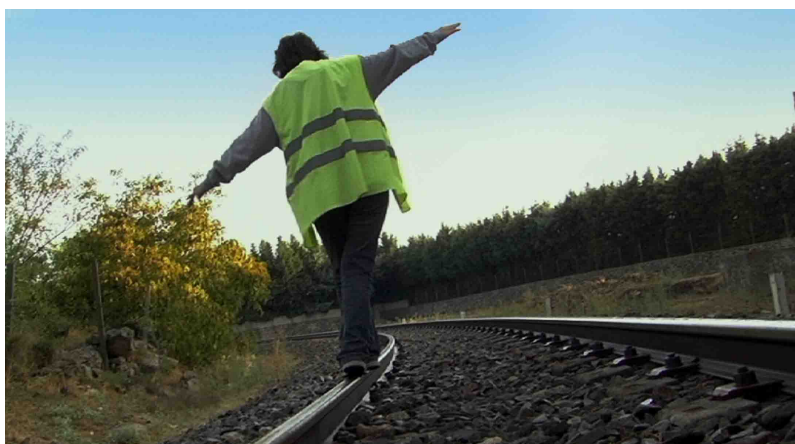
# CADENAS

(CHAINS)

a documentary film by

**Francesca Balbo**

*...the very special task assigned to Sardinian Railway's female level-crossing guards is only a pretext to describe their life, problems, hopes, jobs and Time.*



First Award “Solinas 2009”

and awarded by Società Umanitaria – Cineteca Sarda  
“La Sardegna racconta il lavoro”

Produced with the support of MiBAC - Direzione Generale per il Cinema-  
Film d'interesse culturale

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1

## CADENAS by Francesca Balbo

### PLOT

In that part of Sardinia which winds its way between the Trexenta, Campidano and Gennargentu areas runs a timeless train, whose passage is waved on by small yellow dots brandishing a green and red signal paddle, the level-crossing keepers.

A job that has been passed down from mother to daughter to niece for generations.

They are there to halt the traffic to let the train pass, just a few hundred kilometres of secondary track which crosses secondary roads travelled by cars, tractors, sheep and three wheeled Ape's.

Each crossing is manned by a woman wearing a fluorescent jacket, the train driver pulls a cord and waves. The train past the crossing keeper with a whistle and plunged on in a cloud of dust, disappearing round the corner: men, cars and animals are finally released from the chain the cuts off access to the tracks.

The landscape shifts from yellow fields to stone walls, plains dotted with cacti, forests and narrow mountain gorges.

Manning the level crossing is all-encompassing: it implies care, attention and responsibility and becomes an obsession that even overwhelms their dreams.

It's an ancient job assigned to women, who dedicate themselves totally to it with an almost ritual repetitiveness, for the entire day, every day of the year.

The level crossing and its chains determine every aspect of these people's lives: their wake up call, their lunch hour, their dinner time, everything is set by the train timetable, the long waits in the sentry boxes or in cars are a result of the train's delays, the day's rhythm is syncopated, uncertain, broken, while the gestures performed are always relentlessly the same.

The film gives an account of these women's lives, the life of these level crossing keepers working along the tracks of the Sardinian railways: their life, their job, their relationship with the time and space of the Railway.

They are women like there are many others in the world, fighting for their rights as workers and for a better quality of living, while they live almost on hold, surrounded by an unchanging nature, where every element of progress represents a threat.

## CADENAS by Francesca Balbo

### STATEMENT BY THE AUTHOR

When I climbed aboard the train time seemed to swell and the space open up. When I stopped and spent time with the level-crossing keepers, time itself became a slot between the passing of the trains while the space was trapped between two chains. Sardinia, the part without the sea. An unknown place, an unknown tongue, with a natural landscape that fills ones gaze as soon as one leaves the built up areas.

I met the “railway girls” by chance, following up on a photographic reportage I’d seen in a magazine. And I found myself in Mandas, 50 kilometres north of Cagliari, a town that up until the mid Seventies was an important intersection for the Sardinian Railway network: all the branch routes to Arbatax and Sorgono left from here. Many railway workers’ families lived in this little village, the travellers would stop in the inns and eat in the taverns, the area’s economy travelled along the train tracks.

Mandas was one of the stopovers of every writer’s travels through Sardinia.

D.H. Lawrence left Cagliari with his wife headed for Sorgono, in 1921. He described his journey in a book, “Sea and Sardinia”, which at one point reads “...at a level crossing, the woman who oversaw it dashed out with great purpose waiving a red flag”.

Now the power of the train is little more than a memory. The company’s reorganization has led to the dismantling of almost all the branches of the railway line, in favour of road haulage. Only a few stumps are left of what used to be a widespread network built to link up all the villages of the interior to the coastal regions and therefore to the “continent”, with tracks which wound their way up the mountains and then plunged down towards the sea.

The level crossing is a magical kind of place, it appears suddenly behind a corner, or hidden among the vegetation, or on a mountain top. In almost all of them the old rail man’s homes are still there, now derelict and unusable, yet still the only protection when the storms blow.

I’ve met the women “manning” the level crossings. “Custodire”, which essentially means “taking care of” is the verb they use to describe their job: they are the custodians of our safety, they are responsible for stopping the traffic with a chain which they close while the train passes then open once it’s flashed past. The chain forces them into those remote areas for long hours, waiting for the few trains to chug by carrying the occasional traveller.

Describing the life of the Sardinian level-crossing keepers is like delving into a complex normality where each day is a kind of puzzle for which they have to find the pieces that fit. Their strength is matched only by their warmth and affection.

*Francesca Balbo was born in Milan where she currently lives with her child.*

## CREDITS

Director and screenwriter: *Francesca Balbo*  
DOP: *Francesca Balbo e Andrea Turri*  
Editor: *Carlotta Cristiani e Bruno Oliviero*  
Music: *Dario Miranda*  
Sound editor and mix: *Mirko Guerra, Alberto Gallo*  
Distribution and festival: *Antonietta Bruni*

Producer: *Alessandro Borrelli*  
Production: *La Sarraz Pictures srl*  
Original format: *HDV*  
Screening format: *HD*  
Origin: Italy, 2012  
Lenght: 60'

Distribution: *La Sarraz Pictures Distribuzione cinema DOC*  
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**La Sarraz Pictures** is an Italian film company based in *Turin* and *Rome* founded in 2004 by *Alessandro Borrelli*.

La Sarraz Pictures produces creative documentaries thru the slot “*doc@lasarraz*” and thru the project “*Discovering talents*” develops and produces first features film of talented young European directors and screenwriters.

For cinema field attended the most important European film markets as EFM Berlin, Marché du film Cannes, Rotterdam Cine Mart, Locarno Open Doors and many others.

In the documentaries field in 2004 La Sarraz Pictures became a member of *European Documentary Network* and a partner of “*Doc.It*”, every year for the documentary field attended several pitching sessions and documentaries market as Merca Doc (Malaga), DocsBarcelona, Doc In Europe (Bardonecchia), Docs in Thessaloniki, DocsBarcelona, IDFA (Amsterdam) and Sunny Side of the doc (La Rochelle).

La Sarraz Pictures is the first Italian filmcompany which works on cross/transmedia projects with partners such as Corriere della Sera, Rai Net and others.

In May 2010 the city of Milan made a complete tribute to La Sarraz Pictures.

In 2011 La Sarraz Pictures became member of the ACE network.

In May 2012 Alessandro Borrelli is selected from EFP to take part to “Producers on the move” during the Cannes film festival.

#### FILMOGRAPHY:

Feature lenght film:

“***Sette opere di misericordia***” by Gianluca e Massimiliano De Serio 95’ – 35mm. cinemascope, colore – 2011

#### *IN DEVELOPMENT*

“***La Sapience***” by Eugène Green Delivery 2012.  
in co-production with MACT Productions (Francia).



**“E adesso torniamo a casa”** by Sergio Basso Delivery 2013.  
in co-production for transmedia project “Facelessbook/Enter reality” with I Die Asta Experience (DK)

**“Ti ho sulla punta delle dita”** by Sergio Basso

### **doc@lasarraz documentaries**

**“Cadenas”** by Francesca Balbo 60’ – HD colore – 2012  
**“Raunch girl”** by Giangiacomo De Stefano 54’ – HD colore – 2011  
**“Bakroman”** by Gianluca e Massimiliano De Serio 90’ – HD colore – 2010  
**“Pink gang”** di Enrico Bisi 72’ – HD colore – 2010  
**“L’ultima battaglia delle Alpi”** by Roberto Cena e Fabio Canepa 52’ – HDV col-B/n – 2010  
**“Giallo a Milano”** by Sergio Basso 74’ – HD colore – 2009  
**“Diario di uno scuro”** by Lorenzo Conte, Davide Barletti (fluid video crew) 62’ – HD colore – 2008  
**“L’esame di Xhodi”** by Gianluca e Massimiliano De Serio 62’ – HDV colore – 2007  
**“Io non sono un moderato”** by Andrea Nobile 52’/ 70’ - HDV colore - 2007

### **IN DEVELOPMENT:**

**“IPM”** by Alessandro Di Gregorio, Delivery 2013  
**“At the matiné”** by Giangiacomo De Stefano, Delivery 2013  
**“Walking in the dark”** by Valentina Pedicini, Delivery 2013