

a flea's skin

would be

too big

for

you

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A film by  
Anja Dornieden & Juan David González Monroy

# a flea's skin would be too big for you



## Synopsis

In the summer of 2009, a new theme park was inaugurated in China. It was called "The Kingdom of the Dwarves". From all over China recruits were brought in to live in the park and entertain its visitors. There were only two stipulated requirements for employment : the performers had to be between 18 and 40 years old and be shorter than 130 cm (4'3"). Twice a day they take the stage singing and dancing for the paying crowd.

"A flea's skin would be too big for you" was an epigram used by the Romans to address a dwarf, at the period of the decadence.



## Directors' statement

*A flea's skin would be too big for you* is a film about "The Kingdom of the Dwarves" a theme park inaugurated in the summer of 2009, as part of the World Ecological Butterfly Garden in the Yunnan province of China. The "kingdom" consists of around 60 dwarfs from all over China recruited to live and work in the park entertaining its visitors.

In the park there are only two stipulated requisites for employment: the performers have to be between 18 and 40 years old and be shorter than 130 cm (4'3"). No other special skills are required. The performers take the stage twice a day singing, dancing and doing magic and comedy sketches for the paying crowd. The park has mushroom-like houses and the performers dress as fairytale characters and pose for pictures with the guests. According to the park's founder, a businessman based in the city of Kunming, he created the park as a safe haven for the large dwarf population in China, which is subject to discrimination and very low employment opportunities. They earn between \$125 and \$175 dollars a month, about as much as a factory worker makes, but some say they have found there a camaraderie and lack of judgment that would not exist outside the park.

At the park it was our goal to document the dynamics that regulate and structure this community of performing dwarfs. Once there it became clear to us that the type of work the performers do at the park has similar characteristics to factory work. This product is intended to be in the style of western popular entertainments such as Disney Land but the structure that produces it resembles much more the current labor practices in China.

Most of the dwarfs are migrants that have come from outside provinces, and like many factory workers they live and work in the same closed environment. The park fits within a type of capitalist production of which China has become a pioneer, where every aspect of the worker's life is tied to the production cycle. However, the main difference is that the performers at the park are not manufacturing export goods but are instead creating entertainment for tourists that travel to the park. In this case the entertainment value comes from the workers' own physical traits. In this park the workers themselves are the product.

Our approach was then to look at how this type of "product" was created. Seeing as their entire daily routines are tied to the park, we accompanied the dwarfs throughout their days, from early morning to late at night with the purpose of trying to find out what the life of a dwarf entertainer was like. It was this play between what the park presents on the surface as fantasy and entertainment and what happens behind the scenes to produce this entertainment that we sought to explore.





## Bio

**Anja Dornieden and Juan David González Monroy** are filmmakers who live and work in Berlin. They met in New York where they both received graduate degrees in Media Studies from The New School University. Since 2010 they have been working together under the moniker OJOBACA. Working mainly with analog film their work encompasses films, performances, installations and workshops. They have presented their work internationally in a variety of festivals, galleries and museums. They are currently members of the artist-run film lab LaborBerlin.

## Filmography

**Come and dance with me** - 16mm, 4 min, color, 2013.

**A flea's skin would be too big for you** - 16mm/Super8, 47 min, color, 2013.

**Eigenheim** - 16mm, 16 min, color, 2012.

**The HandEye (Bone Ghosts)** - 16mm, 7 min, black & white, 2012.

**The EyeHand (Peeping Walls)** - 16mm, 6 min, black & white, 2012.

**Oro Parece** - 16mm, 6 min, black & white, 2012.

**Awe Shocks** - 16mm, 3 min, color, 2011.



## Technical specs

Running time : 47 min

Aspect Ratio : 1.85:1

Shooting Format : 16mm & Super 8

Screening Format : 35mm, DCP

Language : Chinese

Subtitles : English



## Credits

Directed and shot by Anja Dornieden and Juan David González Monroy

Produced by OJOBACA GbR

Edited by Juan David González Monroy

Sound Postproduction by Christian Obermaier

Postproduction Services by ARRI Film & TV Services and LaborBerlin

Graphic Design by Pierre Rousteau

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