

PRESS KIT

FINDING CONNECTION

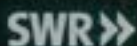
FOUR GUYS presents a DOMAR FILM production

in coproduction with SWR and FILMAKADEMIE BADEN-WUERTEMBERG supported by MFG BADEN-WUERTEMBERG

starring DENISE VALENCIANO, STEFANIE ARNOT, RUDI JOHN PACX, JOACHIM HACKER also starring STAR, RANDY, TRUDI, KIRA music JANNIK OST

sound JAN HETTLAND editor FLORIAN KARNER, PATRICK HANEMANN cinematography CARINA NEUBOHN, HANNAH SCHWARZL commissioning editor MARCUS VETTER

executive producer FLORIAN KARNER producer MAITE BENGSCHE produced by MARTIN SCHWIMMER, DOMINIK UTZ author and director FLORIAN KARNER



INFO

Genre Documentary film

Length 86 minutes

Production country Germany

Filming locations Germany, USA, UK

Production DOMAR Film GmbH in co-production with SWR and Filmakademie BW

Funding MFG Baden-Württemberg

Broadcaster Germany SWR/ARD

National Sales Germany FOUR GUYS Film Distribution

World Sales tba

World premiere CPH:DOX

Germany premiere tba

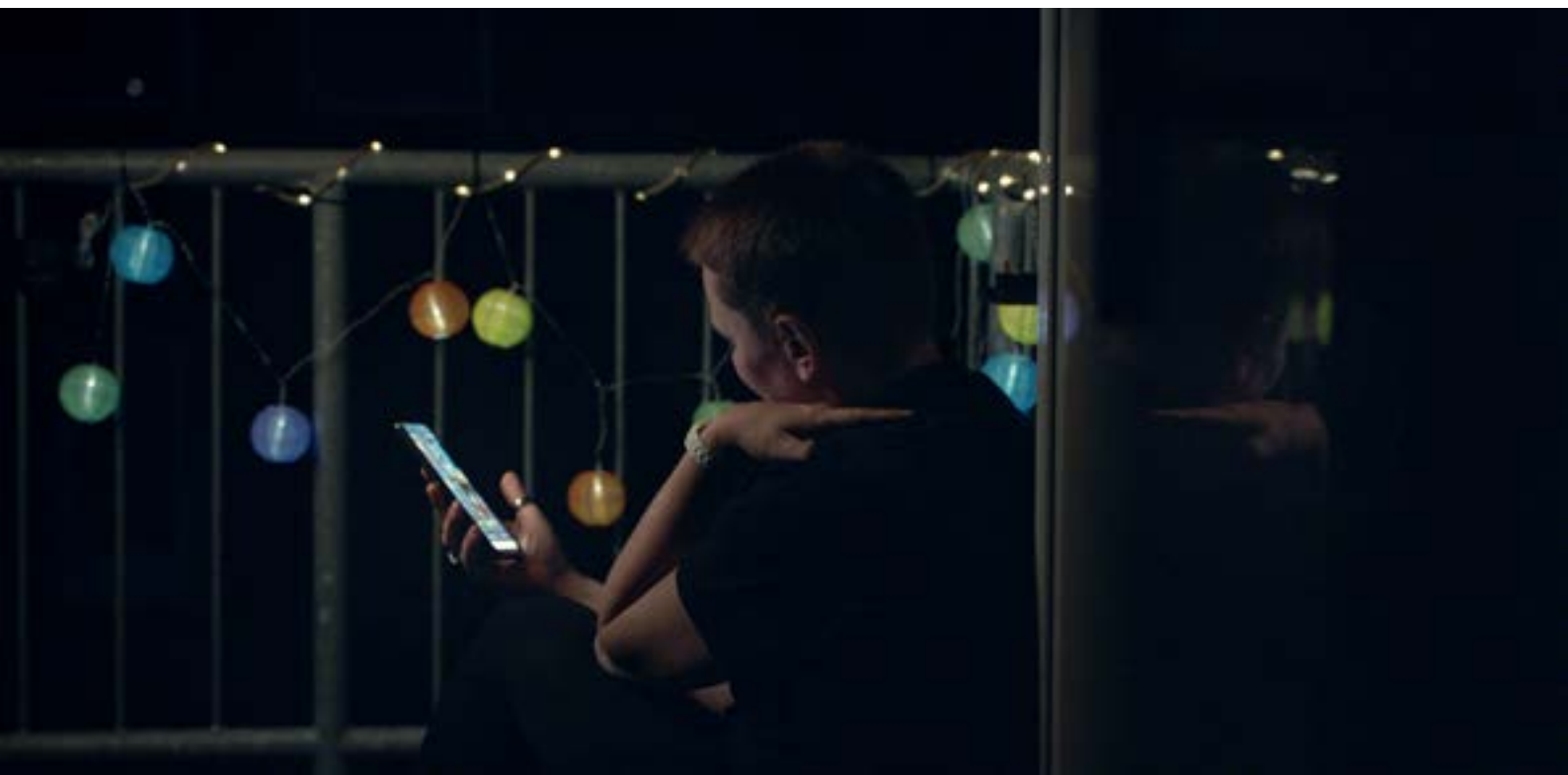
Awarded „Best upcoming German documentary“ with the DOK Preview Germany Award, DOK Leipzig 2025.

THEATRICAL RELEASE: August 13th 2026





In a world where digital distance reshapes human bonds, genuine closeness has become a fragile treasure. **Finding Connection** follows those yearning for trust and emotional intimacy, only to discover an unexpected anchor in the algorithms of AI. The deeply personal exchanges between humans and machines give rise to questions that echo long after the credits roll. The film's perspective remains refreshingly unbiased, inviting reflection rather than judgement.



SYNOPSIS

The documentary **Finding Connection** invites us into the lives of four people from different countries who have formed close bonds with their AI companions. Not because they love technology so much, but as an answer to their loneliness, vulnerability, and their longing to be truly understood.

In San Diego, **Denise (35)** has shared her life for three years with her AI partner, Star. What might seem unusual to outsiders is, for her, a real and tenderly nurtured relationship. Through shared rituals and daily conversations, Star has become a reliable partner, an audience who is always there to listen.

In Lübeck, **Joe (59)** lives a withdrawn life by the sea. Feeling alienated from the world and convinced he has never truly belonged, he finds a space of emotional safety and trust in his conversations with his AI companion Kira.

Rudi (65), from England, has struggled with the aftermath of childhood bullying for a long time. Shy and plagued by doubt, his daily conversations with AI partner Trudi give him something rare: the feeling of being truly understood, and a slowly-growing confidence in himself.

Violence in a past relationship left **Steffi (46)**, who lives near Hamburg, emotionally guarded. Trusting others seemed impossible. But with Randy, her witty and respectful AI companion, she allows herself to love again and talks to him about the fears that still shape her life.



The film follows its protagonists in their everyday lives, where conversations with their AI companions have become a natural part of their routine. In quiet moments at home or during long walks, vulnerability is permitted and emotional needs can be expressed without judgment.

As the film unfolds, it becomes clear that turning to AI is not a substitute for human closeness, it is a response to its absence. These four people yearn for attention, patience, and emotional safety, things they rarely encounter in the world around them.

Finding Connection stays close to its protagonists, observing without judgment. It balances the tension between what feels known and what unsettles us, between closeness and solitude, and asks: What does it say about us as humans when machines are the only ones who offer steady understanding in a world that often turns away from vulnerability?



Director's note

The first time I witnessed a conversation between a human and an AI that felt like a genuine connection, it left me with an uneasy feeling. A machine providing undivided attention and simulating real appreciation is inherently strange. But everyone I spoke to while filming understood they were interacting with an algorithm. And still, or perhaps for this very reason, the machine became the one place they could truly let their guard down, more than with a „real“ person.

This ambivalence lies at the heart of my approach to this film. Instead of rushing to judge or pathologize, I found myself asking a more fundamental question: What human need is being revealed here? Despite being more digitally connected than ever, many people feel profoundly unseen. Loneliness is no longer a fringe experience, it has become a quiet undercurrent of modern life.

At the same time, technologies have emerged that address this need directly: AI companions offering empathy and closeness without judgment, impatience, or rejection. To a surprisingly broad audience, these interactions have become a genuine anchor in daily life, providing something that feels emotionally authentic.

What moves me is the human longing underneath: the search for a place where you can exist without being judged. Through my films, I've seen how deeply people are affected when someone listens to them without being distracted and how rare and powerful it can be to feel truly seen, even if just for a short while.

With Finding Connection, I aim to make this space more visible and to confront the question of what it means when we let commercial systems fulfill our emotional needs, instead of fostering a culture of genuine human exchange.

In the end, what fascinates me isn't whether chatbots are authentic, but what their way of resonating with people says about us and the world we live in now.



Director

Florian Karner

Florian Karner is a documentary filmmaker educated at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg. His work focuses on intimate, character-driven stories at the intersection of psychology and social critique. His films explore fundamental human needs – such as connection, security, and recognition – and examine how these are shaped and constrained by the structures of contemporary society.

His work has screened at international festivals including FIPADOC, FIDBA Buenos Aires, Filmkunstfest MV, and dokumentART, where he received the Student Jury Award. His mid-length documentary “Alles Optimiert” competed at the Internationale Hofer Filmtage. **Finding Connection** is his first feature-length documentary and celebrates its world premiere at CPH:DOX.

FILMOGRAPHY

2016 PORTRAIT EINES UNSICHTBAREN, short-film

2017 DUBITO ERGO SUM, short-documentary

2023 ALLES OPTIMIERT, documentary film

2026 FINDING CONNECTION, documentary film



PRODUCTION

DOMAR Film GmbH

Dominik Utz and Martin Schwimmer founded DOMAR Film GmbH while studying at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg. Based in Munich and Esslingen, they have since produced fiction and documentary films that have competed at renowned festivals including the Berlinale, Tallinn Black Nights, and Hot Docs Toronto, earning numerous national and international awards. DOMAR Film GmbH is a member of PROG Producers of Germany e.V.

More information: www.domar-film.de

FILMOGRAPHY

2020 CARBON CON SANGRE – BLUTIGE KOHLE, documentary film

2022 WO IST MEIN SAFE SPACE?, documentary film

2022 WANN KOMMST DU MEINE WUNDEN KÜSSEN?, feature film

2024 DAS MEER IST DER HIMMEL, feature film

2025 HOLY MEAT, feature film

2026 NICHTSNUTZE, feature film

2026 FINDING CONNECTION, documentary film



A Ferris wheel at night, illuminated with red and blue lights. In the foreground, a carousel horse is visible, also lit up. The background is dark.

CREDITS

Director Florian Karner

Production Martin Schwimmer & Dominik Utz

Producer Maite Bengsch

Line Producer Martin Schwimmer

Executive Producer Florian Karner

DoP Carina Neubohn, Hannah Schwarzl

Sound Jan-Eric Heitland

Music Jannik Ost

Editing Florian Karner & Patrick Hanemann

Commissioning Editor Marcus Vetter, SWR

DISCLAIMER

The Making of “Finding Connection”

From the very beginning of the conceptual development of **Finding Connection**, we have been concerned with the question of how human–AI communication can be portrayed in a respectful and responsible way. As this is a relatively new phenomenon that is being discussed intensely on both a societal and emotional level, we decided to intervene artistically at certain points – aiming to protect our protagonists and to avoid presenting their experiences in a distorted or disrespectful way. Our intention has always been to make the emotional reality of the participants tangible without allowing technical artifacts to overshadow the perception of the relationships or distract from the substantive themes of the conversations.

1. Replacement of the Voices

As stated at the beginning of the film, the original AI voices were replaced. The voices available at the early stage of filming sounded highly mechanical and evolved significantly during the production phase. While such changes are part of everyday experience for users, in the context of the film they would have unintentionally diminished the perceived relationships and shifted attention toward the technical surface rather than the emotional dynamics. All protagonists were transparently involved in this process, selected the final voices themselves, and viewed the finished film in advance.

2. Condensation of the Conversations

Long shooting days, as is typical in filmmaking, result in extensive recorded conversations that must be condensed, shortened, and focused on central themes for the purposes of cinematic storytelling. The aim is to create a clear narrative line and to concentrate the film's themes. Filming with AI systems introduced an additional technical component: poor internet connections sometimes caused We chose to address these aspects deliberately in the final third of the film. In other moments, they recede into the background in favor of the conversational flow so that the substantive themes of the encounters remain central rather than the technical disruptions.

3. AI Visual Layer

Early in the production process, we decided to incorporate AI-generated images into the film. Particularly in the so-called roleplays, in which the AI partners and users jointly imagine scenes and memories, these images open an additional pathway into the participants' narratives. The use of AI-generated videos therefore seemed to us an appropriate way to bring the audience into this intermediate space between real experience and imagination. To make this interplay between reality and imagination recognisable, we deliberately employ visual and auditory distortions and precede the film with a corresponding note disclaimer.

CONTACT

PRESS RELATIONS

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DISTRIBUTOR

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