

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREA ŠTAKA



**DIRECTOR OF "MARE",
A FEATURE FILM SUPPORTED
BY EURIMAGES**

JUNE 2018

BY TARA KARAJICA

Andrea Štaka © Goran Potkonjak

Swiss filmmaker Andrea Štaka graduated from the MFA film programme at the Zurich University of the Arts. Her films "Hotel Belgrad" and "Yugodivas" brought her recognition at festivals such as Locarno and Sundance and won several awards. Both films were nominated for Best Film at the Swiss Film Awards and theatrically released. Her first feature film "Das Fräulein" won the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival, the Heart of Sarajevo and the Swiss Film Award for Best Script. In 2007, Andrea Štaka founded Okofilm Productions in Zurich together with Thomas Imbach. Her film "Cure – The Life of Another" won the Max Ophüls Prize among others. Andrea Štaka is currently working on "Mare", her new Eurimages-supported project about her eponymous heroine, a woman who likes watching planes take off when she is home alone in the mornings and who embarks on a journey into a parallel universe that has little to do with her everyday life, when she meets a new neighbour.

Tara Karajica talks to her about "Mare" and women in film.

MARE IS A MOTHER, A WOMAN OF MODEST BACKGROUND WHO LIVES IN A BORDER REGION AND WHO IS IN A PHASE OF HER LIFE THAT IS DEFINED BY HER FAMILY AND WORK. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HER? HOW DO YOU SEE HER?

Mare is strong-willed and caring, devoted and funny. She takes her role as mother and wife seriously, but there is restlessness in her, a feeling that there is more to life. I was inspired by the surroundings of my cousin, who lives next to Dubrovnik airport with her husband and children. The planes literally take off over her head. The landscape there is beautiful and raw, like in a western. Something strong binds the two of us, maybe our desire for liberty within a "cosy" family system. I realised that we were in a similar phase of our lives as mothers and women, even if she lives in rural Čilipi and I live in urban Zurich. And then, there is Marija Škaričić, a great actress, who I've worked with on two of my feature films, "Das Fräulein" and "Cure – The Life

of Another". I wanted to write a part for her.

IN WHAT WAY IS SHE A CONTEMPORARY PROTAGONIST? BECAUSE SHE HAS THE COURAGE TO TAKE HER NEEDS SERIOUSLY? OR BECAUSE SHE IS TRYING TO FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN FAMILY AND AUTONOMY, BOTH OF WHICH SHE WANTS AND DESERVES?

Both. It's ridiculous to say this in 2018, but she doesn't want to be limited to one aspect of herself! In film and in life, women and men are still attached to old role models and expectations that are placed upon us by society, and we hold onto them, flourish in them and play our roles to perfection. Yet there comes a moment in life where those roles start to crack and we have the urge to find a more individual take on our lives and families.



Marija Škaričić © Okofilm Productions

THE FILM ADDRESSES ONE IMPORTANT AND UNIVERSAL ISSUE, ESPECIALLY TIMELY TODAY: THE FACT THAT, AS MOTHERS, WOMEN ARE AUTOMATICALLY PIGEONHOLED BY THEIR CHILDREN, THEIR PARTNERS AND SOCIETY. DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT IS A CHALLENGE FOR THEM. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THAT AND ON HOW YOUR FILM WILL SHOW THE WAY A WOMAN AND A MOTHER CAN TRANSCEND THE ROLES IMPOSED ON THEM BY SOCIETY WITHOUT HURTING THOSE AROUND THEM?

It's a risky process, like a mosaic of a person that the film reveals. At the end, all of Mare's "stones" (desire, courage, fear, gentleness, love, anger) are part of her. I try to show it through her emotions, the rollercoaster she goes through. Mare tries to deal with the situation with tenderness and being truthful to herself.

Ultimately, for her children, who are becoming more independent themselves, the important thing is that their parents are dealing with their problems frankly.

WHY DOES A RELATIONSHIP WITH ANOTHER MAN AS A REACTION TO HER CURRENT (FAMILY) SITUATION AUTOMATICALLY EQUAL FREEDOM AND FINDING HERSELF? WHY IS PIOTR SYNONYMOUS WITH FREEDOM FOR MARE?

Why not? He is a human being who looks at her. He wants to know who she is; they don't need to bother about roles, everyday life. This is something thrilling, giving her goosebumps and space, and we need that from time to time. It's simple and human.

IN YOUR DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT, YOU TALK ABOUT A STRAIGHTFORWARD STORYLINE AND REDUCED LOCATIONS. IN WHAT WAY DOES SIMPLICITY HELP YOU TELL YOUR STORY IN TERMS OF NARRATIVE?

Each scene is like a snapshot revealing something more about Mare; her emotions, her family life, her breaking out and her relationship with the past. The plot is simple and the locations are reduced: the house, the airport, the shop, the sea and the border with Montenegro.

YOUR CHARACTERS ARE FRAGILE AND AMBIVALENT IN THEIR NATURE. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THEM?

Mare is devoted to her family, she doesn't completely belong to the village where they live, and she is a caring mother. She would have loved to stay in Switzerland, where she worked as a chambermaid during the war. But she came back. Her father ordered her back to help them in the mountains. She has more aggression inside her than she recognises. For me, we are all strong and fragile; we all have different facets within us. Đuro, Mare's husband, has a past connected to the war. He is a charming man, but he built an "easygoing" bubble around him in order not to confront the fear he experienced during the war in 1991-1992. He would like to scream, say that he is scared and has nightmares, but he hides behind his job, food and TV.

YOU STATE THAT "MARE" IS INSPIRED BY "WANDA" BY BARBARA LODEN, "A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE" BY JOHN CASSAVETES, "LONGING" BY VALESKA GRISEBACH AND "L'AVENIR" BY MIA HANSEN-LØVE ON DIFFERENT LEVELS AND FOR DIFFERENT REASONS, BUT IN TERMS OF MARE GETTING COLD FEET AT THE END IT ALSO REMINDS ME OF "THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY" BY CLINT EASTWOOD. WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THAT SUGGESTION? AND CAN YOU ELABORATE ON YOUR PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED INSPIRATIONS?

Not quite, even if I love "The Bridges of Madison County"! I like the fact that both films talk about two adults who are both mature and thirsty for life. Mare doesn't get cold feet at the end. She won't decide between two men; she is at the centre of the ending. As an adult and as a woman, she can make her own choices and be herself.

As for my inspirations, it is the choice of moment and detail and the singular way in which they are visualised that intrigues me. Loden does not judge her eponymous protagonist, Wanda, even if her self-destructive side dominates. The landscape imagery mirrors her inner state, her loneliness and sense of isolation. In "Longing", the man does not fall in love with the other woman because his wife lacks something, but because the woman is different; she responds to another part of him. "A Woman Under the Influence" depicts the complex relationship of a marriage in such a raw, carefully detailed and strikingly undramatic way that watching it becomes a physical experience.

YOU WILL WORK WITH CINEMATOGRAPHER EROL EROL ZUBČEVIĆ, WHO HAS THE ABILITY TO WORK CLOSELY AND INTIMATELY WITH THE ACTORS, POSSESS INTUITION AND IS HIGHLY VISUAL, IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A NEOREALIST AESTHETIC. CAN YOU GIVE MORE DETAILS ON MARE'S VISUAL LOOK?

The scenes with the family and children will be shot in a lively, handheld, *cinéma vérité* style. The scenes with

Mare alone will have a different approach in lighting and image. Contrasts play an important role in each sector. I see the film as raw, with people in silhouettes, depending on their emotional state, and a sensual, flowing camera, with the presence of nature being important. Our choice of shooting on S-16mm enhances the sensual look of Mare's portrait, and forces us (cast and crew) to work much more concentrated on set. It's great!



Andrea Štaka on set of "Mare" © Hrvoje Margaretić

HOW MUCH IMPORTANCE DO YOU GIVE THE FEMALE GAZE AND HOW MUCH ROOM DO YOU GIVE IN YOUR WORK?

When I shot my short "Hotel Belgrad" (1999) and documentary "Yugodivas" (2000), and even with "Das Fräulein", people asked me why I made films with female protagonists. What a question! Yet I don't consciously think of the female gaze. I try to truthfully ask myself what angle of a story interests me, where I want to place the camera, what I want to point out within the characters, what sensibility I want, where I want the plot to go... So the gaze becomes a personal one.

WOMEN IN THE FILM INDUSTRY IS A HOT TOPIC TODAY. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE SUBJECT? WHAT IS THE SITUATION LIKE IN SWITZERLAND, WHERE YOU WORK, AND IN CROATIA, A COUNTRY WITH WHICH YOU HAVE STRONG BONDS?

In Switzerland, we have a number of successful female directors, but there is still no equality. We need more

women in leading positions in politics, the economy and culture, where they are still missing, so that younger generations could have different new role models. For me, diversity is an important goal to be achieved. Film is still a male domain because the attributes you need to make a film are associated with masculinity: power, hierarchy, resoluteness, etc. The international outcry by women will shake things up a bit: there are very successful female directors who talk about their way of working, and we will slowly get there. We still need more diversity, openness, courage and shifting of power in all directions.