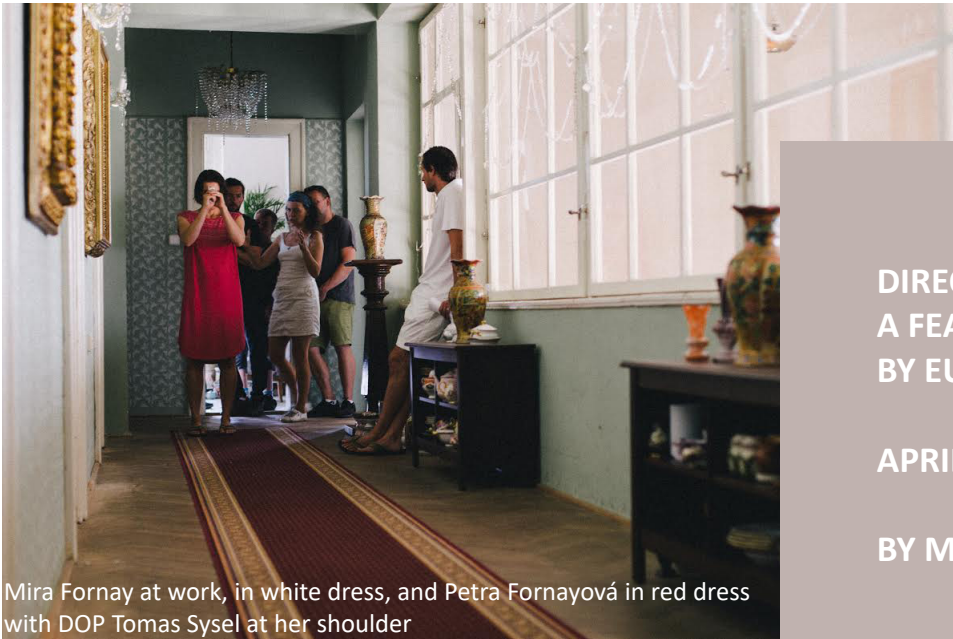


INTERVIEW WITH MIRA FORNAY



Mira Fornay at work, in white dress, and Petra Fornayová in red dress with DOP Tomas Sysel at her shoulder

DIRECTOR OF "COOK F**K KILL",
A FEATURE FILM SUPPORTED
BY EURIMAGES

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BY MARIAN EVANS

"COOK FK KILL" IS YOUR THIRD FEATURE AFTER "FOXES" (2009) AND THE AWARD-WINNING "MY DOG KILLER" (2013), BOTH SELECTED FOR MANY MAJOR FESTIVALS. "FOXES" IS ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS, "MY DOG KILLER" IS ABOUT RACISM AND "COOK F**K KILL" IS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. HOW DO YOU PREPARE TO WRITE PROJECTS FOR FILMS ON THESE BIG SUBJECTS AND "COOK F**K KILL" IN PARTICULAR?**

"Cook F**k Kill" is an intimate story about human beings, told in metaphors. It is not about social and political issues that relate to domestic violence. To show how absurd domestic violence is, the film is a game about games and the "family programming" that leads to unhealthy behaviour and violence in families.

I prepared to write "Cook F**k Kill" in the same way as I do with each film: long research. I spent two years within a therapy group for people who had problems with violence and aggression (half women and half men) and then I went to a male prison a few times, to meet people who had killed. Most of them had killed someone close. It was a very powerful experience. After this I did extensive work within my own family to understand my own "family programming" and my own aggressiveness, because all of us are some-

times aggressive towards those we love the most.

Gradually, I realised that it was not possible for me to make this film as a realistic drama. It was more than I could handle because the research material was so painful. But the material was also absurd. So I decided to handle it differently, by going into the world of fairytales, folk tales and metaphors and risking more as the author than I did in my previous films.

This decision influenced my approach to the film's structure. During my research I often heard from both genders: "If I could go back, I would do this and this differently", so I applied this idea in a pretty extreme way.

I believe that a game is a basic tool for human communication. We love to play games. We play them constantly in everyday life and through them we learn how to succeed and survive and be happy and recognised by others. There are safe and innocent games and there are dangerous and dark games.

HOW WAS WRITING "COOK FK KILL" AS A FORM OF GAME DIFFERENT THAN WRITING A CONVENTIONAL FEATURE FILM SCRIPT?**

I've never been hired to work on some-

one else's film, so I don't know. I applied the skills I learned in film school, more or less.

Lesiak – to keep the horizons in mind on my behalf.

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR INFLUENCES?



Irena Bendová, Jan Alexander, Bobo Zárýchta, Jazmína Ciganeková, Roman Lipka, Regina Rázlová

This is how I do it. I go through the research material and apply my imagination to gather up the ideas that I feel are the most interesting and the strongest, and the ones that profoundly puzzle me. I love questions, because the questions “make the case” not sophisticated answers. I would call myself a vertical writer, because I love to go deep down into the soul of the story but not to be lost in the depths.

I can do this only when I have enough material from outside and from inside myself. It's very intuitive. I embrace what I know intuitively but I believe that intuition isn't possible without a basis of concrete information.

After I choose the material, I make maps of places, characters and images, and write a first draft where I consciously and strictly apply Aristotle's structure for Greek drama. Then I listen carefully to my characters and to myself, so I can break out of that structure and create my own structure.

Basically I rewrite the researched and experienced reality in a separate layer, beyond the reality, very gently. It is as if you look at the reality, what we can call the objective, through delicate, almost invisible, tracing paper. Tiny lines, words, images on that tracing paper from me, as the author, connect the moments of external reality in a new way, but stay in a relationship to it. I had a dramaturge – Ivan Arsenev – for the first draft and later an editing supervisor – Urszula

Because I work from inside, very intuitively, I don't make conscious artistic choices on any film and that's why it is impossible for me to give exact names or sources of my creativity. I've lived in many different places around Europe and met some very inspiring people. There are many names and things and they all influence me but I feel that what influences me most is my family. I come from a very unconventional family and

we are very close. Another major influence is my education. I studied drama in the afternoons after regular school. I met amazing teachers and through them books, visual art, films, photography, science, philosophy, etc. Then I was lucky to study film at the Film and TV School at The Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague and the National Film and Television School (NFTS) in London and it became very obvious that I was into stories – or approaches to stories – that are more internal than external and very fragile. I love metaphors and I love to juxtapose them with reality.

THERE ARE ELEMENTS IN “COOK F**K KILL” THAT ARE MATTER-OF-FACT BUT QUITE SHOCKING. IS TRANSGRESSION INEVITABLE WHEN YOU GO DEEPLY INTO REALITIES AND EXPLORE THEM THROUGH METAPHOR? DOES THIS EVER CAUSE FUNDING DIFFICULTIES?

We received Creative Europe and Eurimages support, as well as television in the Czech Republic and



Lucia Steinerová, Tereza Krasňanská, Cyprián Sulej, Petra Fornayová, Mrs. Surkova



Regina Rázlová, Jaroslav Plesl

Slovakia. The only problem we faced was with the Slovak Audiovisual Fund (AVF). The AVF committee – mostly men at that time (there was one woman once) – refused to support this film even for development. It was hard to understand this after the festival success of “My Dog Killer”, which was the national entry for the Best Foreign Language Oscar.

It is hard to say what their problem was. However, after we received funding and television support in the Czech Republic, television support from Slovakia and funding from Eurimages, we applied again to AVF, for minority co-production funding. It was an amazing committee where men and women members were balanced and we received the support immediately. I was glad, because it is nice to feel welcome at home despite my authorial difference. I am truly grateful to all the courageous institutions that supported our risky film.

YOU MOVE BETWEEN PRAGUE, PARIS AND BRATISLAVA. WHERE IS YOUR PRIMARY AUDIENCE?

My primary audience is an audience for a very demanding, some people would say “difficult” film. I don’t think nationality plays any role in this. It is more about people who like different films and who are open-minded and curious.

YOU WORK WITH ACTORS AND NON-ACTORS?

Yes I do. I was a bit worried at the beginning about combining actors who have professional skills with those who do not have any acting experience at

all. But it worked out beyond my expectations. Regina Rázlová, Petra Fornayová and Jaroslav Plesl were the only three professionals in “Cook F**k Kill” and they were not only talented, but supportive of me and very empathic. The very talented non-actors were amazing to work with. There was a great mix of chemistry among them. I worked with everyone as usual, with rehearsals and they had homework. But I gave scripts only to the professionals.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE LANGUAGE FOR YOUR FILMS?

The language is chosen partly by the story. For example, “Foxes” was set in Ireland, so it is partly in English, and “My Dog Killer” is based in a specific border area between the Czech Republic and Slovakia so they speak in the dialect of this region. “Cook F**k Kill” is financed by the Czech Republic and Slovakia and we use both languages. But it could be English or even French – it’s metaphorical so it isn’t based in any country. The language is not important here.

DO YOU HAVE CREW MEMBERS WITH WHOM YOU’VE WORKED ON SEVERAL PROJECTS, SO THAT YOU’VE DEVELOPED A COMMON LANGUAGE WITH THEM OVER TIME?

I prefer to work with crew that I’ve worked with for a while and regularly. It’s about trust and a safe place for my ideas. I employ soulmates and I don’t care if they are men or women. I’ve worked with the Director of Photography (DOP) Tomáš Sysel since my FAMU studies as well as with makeup artist Jana



Jazmína Ciganečková, Petra Fornayová



Irena Bendová, Jazmína Ciganeková, Bobo Zárýchta, Roman Lipka Bílková. The only parameters should be a professional approach and talent and creativity. But I always try to involve some new souls, like Denisa Buranová, a great young female DOP, or Dominik Dolejší, a sound designer, both from a younger generation, because fresh blood is important and we can learn from them and examine our common language.

SLOVAKIA IS UNIQUE, BECAUSE YOU HAVE MORE WOMEN DIRECTORS THAN MEN DIRECTORS?

I am not a sociologist and I don't know statistics, but I feel it is very much equal. Or, perhaps it's better to say that there are more women directors with high visibility. I don't feel discrimination when I make my films or finance my work. I am treated very equally and all the women I know personally in the film industry are happy and equally treated. I am paid equally to any man around me who does the same work. I do not work with any company where women are still paid less for the same responsibilities as their men colleagues.

Sure, if they (men or women) do more commercial projects, they are paid more, but that is not about gender. Sometimes I face positive discrimination which I try to refuse peacefully, with grace. A woman or man should get the job with equal payment or be in a position not because someone is a woman (positive discrimination for women) or a man (positive discrimination for men), but simply because that person is better than anyone else and it doesn't matter what gender he or she is.

SLOVAKIA IS ALSO UNIQUE BECAUSE YOU HAVE A WOMAN PRESIDENT, ZUZANA ČAPUTOVÁ?

Yes, it is a real miracle to me that 42% of Slovakia voted for a female president and the rest allowed this to happen. I perceive Slovakia as a very conservative country where women have had the right to vote for over a hundred years, but outside my social bubble there is still a clear dominance of men, within households and in those professions that involve big money. So I really don't know how we have a female president and a wave of Slovak women directors. But I am proud that it is happening.

I agree with my friend from the Czech Film Center, Markéta Šantrochová, that women and men who go against gender or other stereotypes in Slovakia and central Europe are something like *partizani*, the so-called guerrilla fighters of the Second World War. The main rule of guerrillas is to avoid confrontation with large units of enemy troops; it is essential to use very unconventional and surprising methods to destabilise majority forces. This has happened now with our new female president – she completely destabilised the system of the majority in power (I don't mean men only!) with her integrity, empathy and a peaceful approach that we were painfully missing in politics. Her mixed gender team shows the same qualities. It is really a joy to watch.

The media asked Mrs Čaputová how she perceived the fact she was elected as a woman. Her answer was brilliant: "I didn't work with the fact that I am a woman in my presidential campaign – I found this fact obvious". I love



Jazmína Ciganeková

her calm, consistent integrity and I hope this will inspire everyone, women and men, and not only in Slovakia.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE, WITHIN THE SLOVAK INDUSTRY OR WITHIN THE EUROPEAN INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE?

Those who make auteur films in Europe are really privileged. I believe that if we want to make auteur films with national funding or EU support, it would be great if filmmakers – especially the technical and supportive professionals like location managers and production workers – understood that, although they can be paid very well and far more than teachers or doctors in their own countries, they cannot be paid the same as they are paid when they work on commercial projects or American movies. I am grateful for having a chance to finance my film in times when other people need money to survive.

But the distribution of auteur films is problematic. It's great that we have festival distribution but it is so sad to make a film and then not be able to share it with others in my own country.

I think too that there is a problem because filmmaking is starting to be only an "industry" and this is, in my opinion, killing European cinema, especially auteur cinema. I am not against the industry. I love to see films that are not auteur films. Industry is great if it is healthy and not corrupt. It can be very supportive for society. But I am worried about culture.

Culture has been the soul of Europe since Aristotle, the essence of Europe, and we should be careful to create different systems for supporting culture and supporting industry. Auteur films are part of culture and culture is not here to make money, so these films need freedom and state support. They cannot turn into businesses, because that would be the end of Europe. Culture helps you to take care of your soul, art is here to pose you questions that are essential – culture-art is not a cook book.

HOW WILL YOU RELEASE "COOK F**K KILL"?

We all hope for a festival premiere first. As I said, festivals are the best platform for auteur films. After that we will continue with a national premiere and I hope that with help from our sales agents – Cercamon – we will get distribution in some countries in and around Europe. Fingers crossed.