



NE GLED AJ MI U PIJAT

QUIT STARING AT MY PLATE

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED
BY HANA JUŠIĆ



GIORNATE
DEGLI AUTORI
VENICE DAYS

NEW
EUROPE
FILM
SALES



Beofilm
LAVER FILM

HRT

A woman in a dark blue swimsuit is swimming underwater in a pool, performing a butterfly stroke. She is looking directly at the camera. In the background, other swimmers are also in the water. The water is a clear, light blue.

When Marijana's dominant father falls seriously ill, she takes over his role as the head of the family, taking care of her irresponsible mother and mentally disabled older brother. The new power constellation allows her to explore her sexuality and her inner strength and gives her a taste of freedom.



SYNOPSIS

Marijana's life revolves around her family, whether she likes it or not. They live on top of one another in a tiny apartment, driving one another crazy. Then her controlling father has a stroke and is left completely bedridden, and Marijana takes his place as head of the clan. Soon, she is working two jobs to keep everything afloat, while her mother and disabled brother do their best to scupper the ship. Driven to the edge, Marijana finds comfort in seedy sex with random strangers; and this taste of freedom leaves her wanting more. But now that she has finally found freedom, what's she meant to do with it?

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I grew up in the city of Šibenik, with its distinctive blend of Renaissance grandeur and post-industrial decay, in an environment very similar to the one depicted in the film. Although this film is far from being my personal story, all the characters are loosely based on my family, relatives, and neighbours.

I have always felt that people are like warm little beasts – they need love and closeness, but they are often suffocating and cruel, especially to the ones they love. And they behave worst of all towards the rest of their pack, which is, in human terms, their family.

The style of the film hovers between Rabelaisian grotesque and psychological realism – my characters are animalistic and quirky, but with emotional depth and real conflicts. On the one hand I have tried to avoid the pitfalls of a typical social melodrama; the story has a lot of dark humour and it is slightly twisted, but my characters are not flat caricatures, and I do not want the viewer to be emotionally detached from Marijana, nor for her family to resemble cartoon villains.

In terms of the film's visual texture, my cinematographer and I agreed that the imagery should reveal the beauty in ugly things and give a sense of documentary authenticity combined with very precisely planned and intricate art direction. In this sense, the Petkovićs' apartment will be another character in the film, the proper setting for these bittersweet characters, but also their mirror. Images in the film will play with the dark, the horror vacui and clutter, the dirt, and the overcrowded space crammed with useless things. My basic intention in *Quit Staring at My Plate* was to give both an interesting aesthetic dimension and some dark, twisted charm to the mentality and people that I love and know so well.

A virtual prison built on mutual co-dependency, childish aggression, but above all on ferocious love; this is a world through which I tried to explore the eternal question – what does it mean to break free? Isn't it sometimes more comforting to stay under Mother Goose's wing? Even if, as it turns out, Mother Goose is nothing like the one in the fairytale.





QUIT STARING AT MY PLATE - PRESSBOOK

WORLD SALES

NEW EUROPE FILM SALES is a boutique world sales company based in Warsaw, Poland working with international content across the world. Founded in 2010 by Jan Naszewski, EAVE expert and industry manager for the T-Mobile New Horizons IFF. The company's feature film catalogue includes the Icelandic Rams, which won the Prix Un Certain Regard in Cannes in 2015 and was sold to over 40 countries around the world as well as 8 Berlinale titles (Including Silver Bear winner United States of Love as well as Generation winners Violet and Mother I Love You) and 3 Karlovy Vary FF competition titles (Including Latvia's Oscar candidate Rocks In My Pockets). New Europe also represents 6 Oscar® shortlisters and shorts by Ruben Östlund and Magnus von Horn, among others.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Quit Staring at My Plate was filmed in autumn 2015, on locations in Šibenik. The project was developed at screenwriting workshop Torino Film Lab, the programs Script & Pitch and TFL – FrameWork, intended for projects in pre-production, and later in post-production stage, presented at Les Arcs Coproduction Village 2015. Kinorama, the lead producer, made the film in co-production with Beofilm (Denmark) and Croatian Radiotelevision. Production was supported by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, the Danish Film Institute and the European fund Eurimages. International sales are handled by the Poland-based company New Europe Film Sales.

Q&A with HANA JUŠIĆ

Can you tell us what inspired you for this story?

I ventured into this story for two different but complementary reasons. I've always liked uncommunicative, resourceful and somewhat androgynous female characters – something like female versions of Clint Eastwood – and I wanted to make a film with a this kind of protagonist; a woman who seems cold and weak, but is actually passionate, explosive, brave, and even a bit rough. Then I took this woman and placed her in an environment with which I'm familiar, the environment I wanted to show and was confident I could show well. The other members of her family are characters that I find cinematically fascinating; they are composites, based on people I'm close to. The story then evolved from the characters, their interactions and their suffocating environment.

Why this title?

The story takes place in a coastal Croatian town, that is, in the Mediterranean region, and the dynamics and relations between the characters are strongly defined by the Mediterranean mentality. This environment, like so many small communities, is characterized by a tendency to pry into the personal lives of your neighbours and acquaintances. In Dalmatia, this prying is even more striking because so much of everyday life takes place in the street; the windows of your home are left open due to the heat, and people are inquisitive about other people's lives, with more than a hint of schadenfreude.

The title itself paraphrases the Croatian expression 'to peek into somebody's plate', which means to stick your nose into other people's business, especially among neighbours who often literally peer into each other's plates due to the narrow streets and open kitchen doors in Dalmatia. In our film, the phrase refers not only to the neighbours, but also to the family members, since they do not allow each other any privacy or independence, and they obsessively 'stare at one another's plates' in the frequent scenes where they are eating together.

The cast is combination of seasoned film actors and debutants – an experienced theatre actress who made her first appearance in film, and an amateur you entrusted with the main role. How was it to work with them?

Right from the start I had a very clear idea of the kind of actress I wanted for the role of Marijana Petković, and I was worried that I might not find someone suitable. After six months of searching in Croatia and other countries in the region, I started to lose hope and was ready to yield and compromise. Then a small wonder happened. In the summer of 2014, I was sitting on a beach when all of a sudden I saw the Marijana Petković I imagined. I worked up the nerve to approach the girl, and by some miracle she agreed to come to a casting session in Zagreb, although she had no acting experience. It turned out that Mia was not only talented; she also had some of Marijana's traits. We worked together for almost a year; we had exhausting and sometimes psychologically challenging rehearsals, just the two of us at first, and then with Nikša Butijer and Karla Brbić, actors I had worked with before and for whom, in a way, I had written the roles of Zoran and Andela. I had Nikša in mind when I started creating the character of Zoran, but the project took several years to develop and I was afraid he might no longer be right

for the role. Still, when he came to the casting, together with a dozen excellent, younger actors, I realized I didn't have to look any further and that he was definitely the one for the role. Before the first day of filming, both Mia and I were nervous about how she would cope in front of the camera, surrounded by so many other people on set. However, Mia is a very strong and brave person with innate acting intelligence intuition and; right from the start, she behaved as if she had spent her whole life in front of the camera. She held its attention with her personal charisma, penetrating gaze and actions, which is something not even professional actors cannot always pull off.

I had no idea who to take for the role of Vjera, until my producer Ankica Jurić Tilić suggested Arijana Čulina, who had never acted in a film before, but is an esteemed theatre actress and comedienne. We invited her for an audition in Zagreb. By a happy combination of circumstances, the other three 'members of the Petković family' also came to that audition, so all four of them went through all their scenes together. I felt that this was it; that I had found the Petković family I wanted. Arijana was used to a more expressive way of acting, and I had to tone her down at rehearsals. In the

end, she told me: 'Hana, you want me to act as if I were dead!' I'm grateful to her for the confidence she placed in me, and for the great result we achieved.

I was lucky that all four Petkovićs functioned like a family, and that I was able to rehearse with them every day for two weeks in a rented apartment in Šibenik. During that time they lived together, they bonded and got to know each other, which was a great help to all of them, but mostly to Mia, who no longer felt like an outsider among actors, but felt like one of them. I was particularly glad that Mia and Zlatko Burić clicked immediately, since Mia had been rather overawed by Zlatko, partly because of his striking looks, but mostly because she is a big fan of Pusher, in which Zlatko played the role of Milo. It was fine though. After just two days of sharing an apartment, Kićo and Mia started going to the market together all the time, Kićo taught her how to cook different fish specialties, and they soon had their own private in-jokes. I think that this closeness between them made an enormous difference to their key scenes, such as the one where Marijana changes Lazo's diapers or when she snaps at him at the dinner table and he hits her with the kitchen towel: these scenes were far more convincing as a result.



After making several successful short films, this is your first feature-length film. Was the work process different and did you feel that more was at stake, or that you were under greater pressure?

The stakes were definitely much higher and the responsibility much bigger, but I almost gave myself a stomach ulcer when I was making my first student film, while my colleagues all enjoyed their film-school shoots and described them as wonderful experiences. For me of course, every shoot means worry, anxiety, fear, panic and a huge effort. I made all my student films as if my life depended on them because that's the only way I can function on set: by having a tough time. While I was making this film, the responsibility was infinitely greater because I wasn't working with my fellow students, but with highly experienced professionals who are used to organized and efficient directors, and who were sometimes driven up the wall by my anxiety, my indecisiveness, my obsession with finding the best possible camera angle, or my insistence in constantly looking for new solutions. Another huge difference was something that may sound banal; a short is usually filmed over 5 days, while on this film we shot for 36 days. If you are coming from the world of short films, the amount of concentration that

a feature-length film requires and the stress it creates is something that is impossible to prepare for. Also, the division of labour is different on student films; everyone does a bit of everything. When I started making my first feature, I found it hard to resist involving myself in other people's work at first, and it took a while to realize that I could not have total control. I had to accept that even though I was in charge and the overall vision was mine, I needed to delegate control of the different aspects of filmmaking. In addition, pre-production was enormously different from what I was used to; for the first time, I could devote more time to working on the script, polishing it and developing it in line with suggestions from several expert readers. I was lucky to attend two Torino Film Lab workshops, Script&Pitch and FrameWork, where I further developed the script and as a result I was fully confident in it before we started filming.

In your film you decided to avoid the most beautiful and historically most important parts of Šibenik, and you set your protagonists and their story in a suburb. Can you explain why?

Dalmatia is a popular tourist destination and its stone streets and churches have been celebrated in art and in promotional films for the tourist industry, on postcards, souvenirs and fridge magnets so many times that they have become kitschy. I took it upon myself to show the 'real' face of the Mediterranean, far from the predictably pretty tourist centres. I've always admired Jean Vigo's *A propos de Nice*, where he switches from the trendy Cote d'Azur promenade to the back alleys where laundry is drying on washing lines between the houses, men are playing morra in the street, women are washing clothes in the canal, and cats are eating from garbage cans. I know Šibenik very well, and I wanted to show its shabby beauty and its true soul, which is usually hidden from visitors. I'm really glad that the famous cathedral was being renovated when we filmed, so we showed it with scaffolding – therefore the cathedral, which is the symbol of Šibenik, is in our film, but in an offbeat, atypical state, which is more in harmony with the rest of the town.



Your protagonists are at first unlikeable, and their actions are mostly reprehensible. Still, as the story unfolds, the viewers find themselves sympathizing with them. Was that difficult to achieve?

This approach to characters is something I prefer both as a viewer and as a reader; I never cared much for artists who go easy on their characters and want to show them in a good light.

The trickiest thing, if you ask me, is to create obnoxious characters that you end up liking and sympathizing with. It may sound like a cliché, but I think viewers can sense how the artist treats their characters, if they condescend to them, if they love them or not. I hope this film shows my true love and understanding of these characters. Some viewers may find it hard to relate to the Petković family, but I hope I will not disappoint those who prefer flawed characters that one can relate to.

How much is the family you are portraying in your film a typical example of the patriarchal Mediterranean family?

Interesting, but I never thought I was portraying a patriarchal family; I saw Lazo as an under-achieving man who is ashamed of himself and his origins, and takes it out on his family as an extension of himself. I never put him in a wider context, since he himself is an outsider in his own environment. I have to confess that in this sense (and this sense only!) I was a 'bad feminist' – not that I think gender politics are unimportant, but for me, Lazo's attitude towards his wife and children basically mirrors his disappointment and contempt for himself.

Why have you chosen this visual style and how was it achieved?

No Wolf Has a House, the short film I made before *Quit Staring at My Plate*, was rather ascetic, with wide, static shots and an attempt at Brechtian acting. I was a little disappointed with its emotionally distant style. I knew that a dirtier, more fluid approach would be much better for this film, and my regular DOP Jana Plečaš, agreed. When I realized how great my actors were, I wanted to be close to them and let the camera record all their emotions in an almost documentary fashion. As the characters are quite rough and violent, I wanted the camera movements to be 'raw' as well, with rough cuts between scenes. We insisted on the same dirty aesthetic for the set, costumes, locations and lighting, to underline the feel of the town and the micro-universe of the Petković family. I liked the combination of mild aesthetization and extreme naturalism, and I felt that the script justified this approach. In post-production, the editor Jan Klemsche and I emphasized that sense of filth and feverishness, and moreover, we tried to make the whole thing more bizarre and delve deeper into Marijana's mind. In that sense, I am especially proud of two scenes where the editing was particularly evocative: Lazo's stroke, and Marijana's 'multiplication' on the beach.

What can you tell us about the development process – how did it go on the both the professional level and personal level? Did you have any second thoughts about your choices during the long period of script development and financing?

When I started developing the idea for this film, I wrote the basic treatment in two days. I wrote it with great joy and delight; the story simply poured out of me, which was not surprising since some of its situations, themes and characters had been brewing inside me for a long time. However, in the first versions of the script I insisted on a romantic subplot, with Marijana falling in love with a renegade who saved her from her family. I was not happy with it, and my producer Ankica, who was my first reader, told me that something was amiss and she didn't like it. As I have already mentioned, I was lucky to attend a Torino Film Lab workshop where my mentor Anita Voorham and I wracked our brains over the knight in shining armour who freed Marijana; we both found it forced and affected. Anita was the one who put me out of misery when she said than not every film should have a love story. From that moment on, everything was much easier and I no longer questioned the script.

At Script&Pitch, Ankica and I found the Danish co-producer Peter Hyldahl. I was delighted that he approached us on his own initiative, having seen my short Terrarium, and showed interest in our project. He became our partner and assured co-production funds from Denmark. Together we applied for Eurimages funds. I can say that I was very lucky, but I also had a highly effective and dynamic producer who was very committed to the project.

It is safe to say that logline of your film 'Breaking free is a powerful myth, but what if it's cosier to stay home?' clearly expresses the main idea of your film, but would you care to explain it further?

The premise of self-realization and successful escape from a pathogenic or socially deprived environment is very common in film culture and that's why I wanted to challenge that myth. It is not all that easy to leave your life and build yourself anew as a person, and Hollywood preaches a simplistic message when it says that with persistence and ability the sky is the limit. Furthermore, the tiny prison where we live can be a comfortable prison at times, since we are surrounded by enemies that we know very well indeed, unlike the frightening anonymous enemies we encounter in the cold, unfamiliar outside world, which is full of strangers.

What are your expectations regarding the reception of your film and its international life?

I wish it all the best, of course. I know how tricky it is to gain success and that it depends on a thousand different things. For the time being, the fact that I haven't made a film I'm unhappy with is enough.

Any ideas for your next project?

I do have some ideas and part of me is really looking forward to the challenge of a new project, but I haven't settled on anything concrete yet. I think that after three years of intensive work on this project I need some time off. One thing I'm sure of, though: my next film will not be about family dynamics.



QUIT STARING AT MY PLATE - PRESSBOOK

TEAM

CAST Mia Petričević
Nikša Butijer
Arijana Čulina
Zlatko Burić

CREW

SCREENWRITER Hana Jušić
DIRECTOR Hana Jušić

PRODUCER Ankica Jurić Tilić
CO-PRODUCERS Peter Hyldahl, Morten Kjems Hytten
Juhl, Maria Møller Christoffersen

DOP Jana Plećaš
EDITOR Jan Klemsche
COMPOSER Hrvoje Nikšić
SOUND DESIGNER Roar Skau Olsen
ART DIRECTOR Mathilde Ridder-Nielsen
COSTUME DESIGNER Katarina Pilić
MAKE-UP ARTIST Martina Novaković

BIOS

HANA JUŠIĆ (screenwriter, director)

Hana Jušić obtained MA degree in film and TV directing at Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. She also graduated in comparative literature and English language and literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in 2007 and she enrolled in the Postgraduate Doctor's Study of Literature and Film.

So far, she has written and directed several short fiction and documentary films which have been shown at student, but also at some prominent European festivals. She has directed short films 'Zimica' / 'The Chill' (international premiere in competition at Oberhausen festival), 'Mušice, krpelji, pčele' / 'Gnats, Ticks and Bees', for which she has received Oktavijan award and the Jelena Rajković award and 'Terarij' / 'Terrarium', for which she received Oktavijan award for fiction film and Golden Pram award at Zagreb Film Festival. Her latest short 'Da je kuća dobra i vuk bi je imao' / 'No Wolf Has a House' was screened in Rotterdam and awarded Best Film at London Short Film Festival 2016. She has written the script for feature film 'Zagonetni dječak' / 'The Mysterious Boy', directed by Dražen Žarković.

'Quit Staring at My Plate' is her debut feature film as a director/screenwriter. The project was developed at screenwriting workshop Torino Film Lab, the programs Script & Pitch and TFL – FrameWork, intended for projects in pre-production.

ANKICA JURIĆ TILIĆ (producer)

Ankica Jurić Tilić graduated in comparative literature from the Faculty of Arts in Zagreb. She is a graduate of EAVE, a member of ACE, Producers on Move and the European Film Academy. She founded her production company Kinorama in 2003. Ankica's filmography numbers more than 20 feature-length films, several TV series and a number of shorts. Some of her films are among the top box-office hits in cinemas, and all of them were screened at numerous festivals around the world, winning more than 100 awards. Ankica's latest film 'The High Sun' directed by Dalibor Matanić was included in the official competition program 'Un Certain Regard' of the 68th Cannes Film Festival 2015, winning the Jury Prize afterwards.

CAST

MIA PETRIČEVIĆ

Mia Petričević was born in Tugare near Split. She has a degree in architecture from Sarajevo University. Architecture was a lucky combination of her two seemingly opposing interests in life – her interest in art, and her interest in maths. She always liked films, but never thought of a career in film, until the director Hana Jušić approached her at one Adriatic beach. She accepted the challenge out of curiosity.

NIKŠA BUTIJER

Nikša Butijer was born in Dubrovnik, but lives and works in Zagreb. He graduated from the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb, where he is an artistic assistant. He works in theatre, on film and television, and has received a number of awards, including two Golden Arenas at Pula Film Festival for his roles in 'The Blacks' by Zvonimir Jurić and Goran Dević, and 'The Priest's Children' by Vinko Brešan.

ARIJANA ČULINA

Arijana Čulina lives and works in Split. She graduated from the Academy of Arts in Belgrade, and has been a member of the Croatian National Theatre in Split for more than twenty years. She is known for her work in comedies, dramas and musicals, and recognized by a wider audience for her TV roles. She is the author of several novels, collections of short stories and dramas.

ZLATKO BURIĆ

Zlatko Burić is a Croat-Danish actor. He started his career in Drama Studio in 1970s and continued it in the experimental theatre group Kugla glumište in the 1980s. He landed many outstanding film roles in Denmark and USA, and is mostly remembered for the roles of Milo in Nicolas Winding's trilogy 'Pusher', and Karpov in Roland Emmerich's '2012'.

NE GLED AJ MI U PIJAT / QUIT STARING AT MY PLATE

GENRE drama
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