

*Shellac presents*  
A Fünferfilm, Tita Productions &  
Helena Wittmann Co-Production



Locarno Film Festival  
Official Selection

# HUMAN FLOWERS of FLESH

*Press Notes*

# Human Flowers of Flesh

*A film by Helena Wittmann*

*starring* Angeliki Papoulia,  
Vladimir Vulevic, Ferhat Mouhali, Gustavo de Mattos Jahn,  
Mauro Soares, Steffen Danek, Ingo Martens, Nina Villanova  
and Denis Lavant

Germany, France / 1h 46 / 1.66:1 / colour / 2022  
English, French, Portuguese, Tamazight, Serbo-Croatian  
with English subtitles

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*International sales*  
SHELLAC  
Thomas Ordonneau, CEO & Founder  
Egle Cepaite, Sales Manager  
[sales@shellacfilms.com](mailto:sales@shellacfilms.com)

*International press*  
Wolfgang W. Werner Public Relations  
phone +49 89 38 38 67 0  
[info@werner-pr.de](mailto:info@werner-pr.de), [www.werner-pr.de](http://www.werner-pr.de)  
Christiane Leithardt  
cell +49 175 588 80 86, [leithardt@werner-pr.de](mailto:leithardt@werner-pr.de)  
Wolfgang Werner  
cell +49 170 333 93 53, [werner@werner-pr.de](mailto:werner@werner-pr.de)

# Synopsis

Ida lives on a ship with her crew of five men. In Marseille her attention is caught by the secretive male world of the French Foreign Legion and she decides to follow its traces across the Mediterranean. As Ida and her crew sail via Corsica to the historical headquarters of the Legion in Algeria, boundaries and certainties blur while life at sea produces a special kind of mutual understanding.

# Presskit

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Helena Wittmann on

# HUMAN FLOWERS of FLESH

Interview by  
Patrick Holzapfel

*Arriving at  
Greater Ambiguities*

Helena, I want to start our conversation with the first thing I heard about your film: its title. It's as beautiful as it is vague. Maybe you can tell me something about it.

In one of our conversations, a friend had mentioned this title as a title without a film. Almost like a wish, even if he didn't really expect me to make that film. From the moment I heard it, the title started to set my thoughts in motion. I had questions about it and that's what kept me sticking with it. Over time, the title attached itself to different aspects of the film that I had started to work on at that time, interweaving them in a way I felt to be very fitting. Luckily, I still have those questions, the title remained in movement. If I had answered them, I would have changed the title. For example, the relation of *human* and *flesh*. The terms seem to refer to the same, but they indicate a very different perception of being in the world. Flowers of Flesh. Human Flowers. It is about how these few words are set in the sentence and the ideas they provoke within this setting and in relation to each other. It's impossible to translate. That's why we decided to keep it in English.

If I had to give an interpretation of the title, I might have connected it with an aspect of your work that marks a notable difference to your previous film, *Drift*. It's the presence of men, male bodies, masculinity. Was that a conscious decision or did it grow out of other necessities? How can you describe your work with men?

I had this first encounter with French Foreign Legionnaires some seven years ago. It was in Marseille, at the coast. They had something concealed about them. They were not reachable, just watchable. I tried to make eye contact but they avoided it. Nothing happened. That awakened my interest. Through this one-directional gaze and the lack of interaction their appearance was reduced to male bodies. And this is what I imagine happens to them in the military context as well. The Legion is a male circle, as a woman I could never enter it. That opened up space for imagination, we could call it my field of action. But the first character in the film was female—*Ida*, the woman who owns the boat and decides the course. In my first notes she



observed the legionnaires while she was swimming in the sea, which is a very particular perspective, I would say. At some point, the ship crew came into the film and it was a clear decision to have a male crew only. I was interested in the constellation of Ida, the financially independent woman who follows her own way, and these five men working for her. It provided a kind of balance in terms of power, and that was necessary for the film I wanted to make. The first crew members I was certain about were Vladimir and Mauro. The roles were written having the real persons in mind. Vladimir's physicality and height fascinated me, I liked looking at him very much and quickly imagined him in gardens and between plants. With Mauro I had a long conversation when we first met, and I didn't even know he was an actor back then. He is quick and smart and loves to talk, to interact. All these qualities found their way into the film. They are not necessarily male. Or Gustavo, who is Carlos in the film, who you can see working in the engine room, he has this soft spot for order and aesthetics. Everywhere he goes he privately builds a little altar. In his case I didn't know before the shooting how much Carlos and Gustavo had in common. And it is especially he who does a lot of work in the film that is usually associated with women. There are many tasks that connect the world of the Legion and the crew and that are typically connoted as being female: making the beds, ironing the shirts, cooking etc. Claire Denis showed this in *Beau travail*, too. There is also a practice of caring. I think the ship crew can also be seen as a distorted mirror facing the Foreign Legion. But then there is a big difference, of course. The Legion preserves a certain image of masculinity. There is a whole marketing strategy to promote this image, a myth that is constantly being kept alive, with heroic tales and so on. The crew of Ida's ship is male, but their members are all tender and I look at them this way. I'd say the constellation is rather untypical. They all have many epicene features.

Can you talk a bit more about your approach to foreign legionnaires and their history?

What you can see in the film mirrors my research pretty well. Ida's journey is related to my own journey. When I had the first encounter with these legionnaires at the coast in Marseille, I asked myself: who are they? To me, there was something strange

to them, something that I didn't know and didn't understand. Two years later I had a bizarre encounter at Frankfurt main station, where a completely paranoid guy from Germany told me how he had never killed for Germany but for France. He felt he was persecuted by German authorities. And then he told me that he had been in the French Foreign Legion. After these encounters I began researching. I didn't even think I would make a film, at first I researched out of sheer curiosity. The only idea I had about the Foreign Legion derived from *Beau travail* by Claire Denis (the German title is *Der Fremdenlegionär* – The Foreign Legionnaire). To me, it all seemed like a strange colonial army related to the past. But in my readings I learned that the Foreign Legion was still in existence and that after a downsizing in the early 2010s, the Legion has been enlarged again since 2015 in response to Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe. It is still a very secretive unit of the French army, having its own administration and structure. I was curious, as if there was something to find out. And then I saw these legionnaires everywhere, in Marseille and also in Corsica. They gave a bodily shape to a militarization that I only knew from media. Under the surface everything was seething. The research also led me into history. The Legion was originally based in Algeria. For 130 years they maintained their headquarters in Sidi Bel Abbès and they only left to Aubagne in Southern France when Algeria gained independence in 1962. I tried to speak with people in France about the French colonization and the war in Algeria and I felt it's still a huge taboo. The extent of this silence surprised me a lot. So many Algerians live in France. The French occupation had been incredibly cruel. At some point it was clear that the film would take a historical direction and end in Sidi Bel Abbès, following the traces that are to be found in the present.

Towards the end, Ida visits a foreign legionnaire in his apartment. Did Ida and ultimately you as a filmmaker manage to get closer to these men? Is it a film about getting closer or is it a film about not getting close enough?

It's an approach and it's also a transgression. I felt it would have been too easy to remain a distant observer all the time. I felt the need to not make a moralistic film and this had to be reflected in the way I made this film. For example, there was the decision to shoot at real locations and with some real legionnaires. It wasn't easy but

it's important for me to expose myself and arrive at a greater ambiguity. I could easily condemn the structures on which the Foreign Legion has been built and the structures in which they operate. Yet, when encountering these men I had to ask myself many more questions and those were not as easy to answer. To me, that's a way of getting closer and it is through the film that I managed to get there. But it doesn't mean that I found the answers to these questions.

**Can you shortly say something about the presence of Denis Lavant?**

**He seems to play the same character as in *Beau travail*.**

He is playing Galoup again, some 25 years later, some 25 years older. There are these threads connecting films across decades. Denis Lavant told me how the character of Michel Subor in *Beau travail* was also an echo of his character in Godard's *Le petit soldat*. And now it was maybe similar with him. Through his role in *Beau travail*, Denis' face and physicality had formed my imagery of the ultimate foreign legionnaire, like an icon. So I wrote Galoup into the script. During my research I found many videos on YouTube celebrating the *golden age* of Sidi Bel Abbès. It refers to the time before Algeria's independence. The city had more or less been built by the Foreign Legion as a base with barracks and a military infrastructure, it grew and later it was even called Little Paris, for its European appearance. So there is this problematic nostalgia for the place that feels like a continuous occupation to me. Some people and former legionnaires try to preserve it like this. This is what I thought would happen to Galoup. He would return to live as a hermit in Sidi Bel Abbès. And then it was Denis' presence that had inspired the scenes with Galoup in *Human Flowers of Flesh*. I was very interested in his way of walking, for example. But also his singing. It was easy to work with Denis, he is very precise. I had the feeling he was keen on exploring Galoup a bit further. He also told me during the shooting that he had some physical memories playing the character again. Denis has an incredible memory anyway. He could still sing all the songs from *Beau travail* by heart.

**How would you describe the relation between research and the actual shooting in your work? My impression is that both happen almost at the same time.**

Yes, it's true, even if we had a script this time. Nevertheless, the process felt very organic. I researched for quite a long time, but it was never exhausting. It meant to go to places and to observe people and situations. To read and to talk to the people, to be in the landscapes, to smell the plants, to listen to the wind or the languages, to be in the water and to understand the rhythms. From there I developed the script, the writing itself didn't take me a long time. In my experience, the clearer you are in the research or the script, the more space you have to discover additional details, to dive deeper within the situations you create for shooting. During shooting many things fell into place. Magical coincidences happened. For example, when we were anchoring at Revellata bay in Corsica, I remember how we woke up one morning and saw this group of foreign legionnaires jogging along the coastline. That was exactly the formation that I wanted to hint at with the shot in the Calanques, in the prologue of the film, when Ida and three crew members march along the rocky coastline. We had shot this scene only a few days before. And now we were all observing this line of legionnaires from the ship. It was as if our fiction had become reality.

**I want to know more about your simultaneous interest in surfaces and the layers underneath them. In one scene you observe some soldiers in the woods and their camouflage lets them literally disappear in the image. In another scene your camera dives into the sea, reaching an airplane wreck on the seabed and moves over the sea plants occupying the sunken metal. To me, these scenes are emblematic for your work. There is geography and nature but at the same time there is history. Both have inscribed themselves into the other. To make it as big as possible: can we see history in the present outside world?**

I think we can see the traces of history if we look closely and take our time. They are to be found everywhere in the concrete world. However, it's also a question of how we look at things. The diving scene you mention is a good example because, I think, the time it takes the camera to dive is decisive. It's the key to be able to see and to comprehend the different layers and times of this scene. The different meanings start to reveal themselves. For me, making a film is also about creating a space to perceive



things that can easily get lost in daily life, overseen and overheard. Some people told me that I wouldn't show typical images of Marseille. However, for me, they are that. I find those rocks I show essential for this place and also how the city slopes down into the sea. The geographical conditions determine a lot, for example, how a city took shape, its connections to other countries and cities, the winds, the water systems and so on. So, for me, it makes a lot of sense to follow these conditions in order to understand things. Along with the surfaces there is of course also culture that preserves history. And the military uniforms could be read this way. They inform us about a certain relation to landscape, and warfare, as the camouflage pattern is created in a specific way to adapt to a landscape. To merge with it. And I think that becomes very clear in the film. Regarding history, I am interested in it whenever I find intersections with the present. And I understand it as something very chaotic, not as a sequence, more like a pile out of different material that sometimes collapses in parts. It is not stable.

**To me, this approach to history is related to an attribute given to your protagonist Ida in the film; it's fluid. Can you tell me more about Ida and also Angeliki Papoulia who plays her?**

While all the other roles in the film were rather clear to me, it was much more difficult with the role of Ida. I searched for a long time for someone to play her but I didn't really know what exactly I was looking for. Here a certain vagueness reemerged *in extremis*. I only knew she had to be a woman in her late 40s without motherly characteristics. At some point a Greek producer who liked the project proposed Angeliki. When I met her she had already watched *Drift* and had read the script. And she totally understood and accepted it. So she did accept this vagueness and now I think that this is a very important quality of Ida. I don't really know if it is the right word, but there is a certain "transmissibility" about her. Being on the ship was essential. Angeliki suffered from horrible seasickness, she later explained it to me as a state of existential instability. During the shooting on the boat, Ida became calmer, more permeable, and braver. There is always a certain sadness in Angeliki's face. But as there is no given reason for her to suffer in the film, or to be sad, this

becomes a layer of its own and I am interested in that. I very much like that Ida has become a very individual figure. Even if her journey resembles mine, she is not at all an alter ego or anything like that.

**Can you describe what it was like shooting on a ship? I am also interested in this beautiful ship. Are there any secrets about it?**

The ship is called *Le Don du vent*. It's anchored in Marseille and has been built in Germany for warfare originally, though it has never been used in action and was then converted into a sailing ship. I discovered it at an event and liked it right away. It has a warm and welcoming atmosphere and it was exactly what I was looking for. You can immediately imagine it as a home when you're on board. I wanted the ship to be a character. I love the tone of the wood, it's almost skin-coloured. That creates a kinship with the people on board. Even if it is not exactly a small boat, space was still very limited. We had to reduce everything. We spent around 10 days with 16 people on it. In one room there were three bunk beds for six people on nine square meters. So it was quite cramped. There was no alternative to becoming intimate as a group. As any boat, it made a lot of noises, as if it was communicating. Nika Son, who recorded the sound on set and made the sound design later, cursed that often during the shooting. But in the sound design, we were very happy about all these noises that are clearly part of this character. Some of the cast got seasick and I think seasickness is a very interesting state. I knew before the shooting that Vladimir would enter it and therefore I had written some scenes with him in this state. When you get seasick you are literally all at sea. It causes a further loss of control. Besides all that, a boat is a very concentrated and quiet place, the perception of time changes once you are at sea. If you want to abandon yourself to work and to the world, a boat is the perfect place to be.

**You employ some fascinating formalistic strategies. There is a sequence printed as cyanotype on film and one time you use microscope images. Can you tell me more about those two techniques?**

When I learned about cyanotypes, I felt an immediate connection to the sea and to the way I was understanding certain things. There is, of course, the aspect of color. Aesthetically, you can immerse anything underwater. There is also the aspect of chemistry and it was important to me to integrate this materiality. It is a great part of the film: Matter that interweaves and transports meaning. That's also why it is shot on film—another chemical process and medium. You can see the difference between film and the cyanotypes immediately—additionally to the difference in colors, it has a different quality, there is no grain, for example. In order to get good results, it needed one year of experimenting with the chemistry and the process. Every single frame of this sequence had been hand processed. It was like literally touching the subject, like grasping it. The microscopic sequence had already been in the script, but it changed subject, position and context during editing. It brings several aspects to the film. One of it is scale, of course, and this is a recurring aspect. It already appears in the first shot of the film, in a different way. But then there is something very special about these microscopic images, something magical. They are very concrete and abstract at the same time. They could be inside our bodies or in the outside world, the sea, for example. They even associate with a cosmic imagery. I would say that these little creatures become something like messengers.

Your location has not only been a ship, but also the Mediterranean. It's much more than a sea. It's a melting pot of cultures and also a culture in its own right. It's also connected to many urgent questions regarding Europe and the world. How do you look at the Mediterranean? Has it changed for you in the course of the film?

Before making the film the Mediterranean mainly represented something for me, or reflected something. It's incredibly occupied by topics, discourses, myths and tragedies. When I moved closer I could better understand how certain things move across cultures, this constant movement is probably one of the main characteristics that I can make out. The Mediterranean is buzzing for me, even if the Mediterranean lifestyle seems somehow less ambitious than in the north of Europe. There are many of these seeming contradictions. Mediterranean cultures that are very different

but share so much at the same time. Compared to the Atlantic Ocean I found the relation of the Mediterranean sea to the land and its coastlines much stronger. Being at sea, I would always feel the land, for example. It seems to me that fluidity determines this region. But using the term region doesn't feel quite right. Let me quote Predrag Matvejević here, he described it so much better than I ever could: "The Mediterranean is not only geography. Neither in space nor in time are its boundaries marked. We do not know how and on what basis we should determine them: They are not ethnic or historical, nor state or national. The 'Mediterranean chalk circle' is constantly drawn and erased, wind and waves, adventure and inspiration extend or narrow it to their measure." (Predrag Matvejević, in *The Mediterranean—Space and Time*) During the production of *Human Flowers of Flesh* we also faced complex political situations at that time. Just before the pandemic, the people of Algeria had gone out to protest against a corrupt military government. President Bouteflika resigned, but the situation didn't get better with the new president Tebboune. He made use of the pandemic situation and kept the land in extreme lockdown. There was no way to enter or exit the country for more than a year. That also affected us, for two years we tried many ways to enter the country, but we didn't succeed. Finally, we decided to shoot the Algerian part in Morocco. That was not an easy decision for me at all. But it integrated another reality into the film.

Your characters linger a lot, they look at the sea, they swim, they let time pass and life seems to float through them. Would you say their actions and non-actions are related to their environment and the Mediterranean?

Yes, absolutely. It's a way of life devoid of something that I usually have some difficulty with in Germany, where I come from. That is the need to clarify, to categorize, to determine. In Marseille, for example, I feel that chaos has more space, that complexity is okay and conflicts are part of it. The city can certainly be more demanding, daily life might not be as functional as in Hamburg. But there is also more space for improbable encounters, for surprises. When on sea with a sailing boat you are dependent on the winds, the streams, etc. Any moment can be different and cause a change of direction. I would love to take that as an example for life on land.



You not only work with this way of being in the world but also with actual objects and plants related to the sea. Were those there from the beginning of the project on?

What I find interesting about all the life in the oceans is that it is so huge, so directly connected to us, but still so difficult to access. It's like a huge parallel reality of the world we live in. Through certain beings and objects in the film, I wanted to make place for a dialogue between land and sea. There is the snail which goes at sea, the algae going to the boat. Again, they are like messengers to me, and when they come from the sea, they are messengers from the depth.

I think this is palpable in your film. To me *Human Flowers of Flesh* is not a film about the Mediterranean Sea, it's a film with the Mediterranean Sea. Is it also an utopia?

Yes, we could say so. As I said before, to me the sea is an example for how it could be. And *Human Flowers of Flesh* is probably an utopian film. It felt like this in many moments while making it. At the same time it deals with a history that is anything but utopian.

I also find something utopian in the way you deal with languages. We hear so many different languages in the film. They harmoniously exist next to each other.

I love to listen to different languages and also to learn them. And I think that fascinating accidents and beautiful surprises emerge from using foreign languages, also in terms of sound. In the Mediterranean many different languages are present, they mix, they include and they exclude. It can also be a way to enter different perspectives, it is about encounters. It felt very natural to include all these different languages into the film and also to have them on set. There were many languages I didn't fully understand and some I didn't understand at all. Ferhat's monologue in the film, for example, is in Tamashek, a Berber macro-language. He could have spoken

in Arabic, it was actually written in Arabic. However, Ferhat is from the Kabyle in Algeria and his first language is Tamashek. As on the sea, people from very different backgrounds come together in the Foreign Legion. They learn to speak a rudimentary French in the first four weeks, mainly to understand the orders. From that it is almost a language on its own that emerges. And the sound of it varies a lot. You can get an idea of it when you listen to the legionnaires that hang out at the pizza truck in the film. For our cast and crew the common language was English, but there were some members who didn't speak English. Then we found other languages and ways to communicate. We helped each other out, translation is a very interesting process.

Would you agree that *Human Flowers of Flesh* is a more open film than *Drift* in the sense that it gives more space to things happening outside of subjective perception?

Absolutely. *Human Flowers of Flesh* expands from the totally intimate approach of *Drift*.

Nevertheless I began to drift again when seeing the film. Especially when you film water surfaces but there is also a beautiful sequence filmed in a sort of dozing coma between darkness and light as well as a dancing scene.

It's about losing control. I'm interested in dreams or deep sleep whenever. I can get into these states relatively easily but I know that's not true for everyone. In those states thoughts connect differently. Intuition becomes more important.

Would you hope for the audience of your film to lose control while watching it?

I'd say it's an invitation to come along without questioning every step on the way. Of course, I can't really talk about the audience as such, but I hope that people will trust the film and that it is a bit as it was for me—that they accept the invitation to arrive somewhere else.



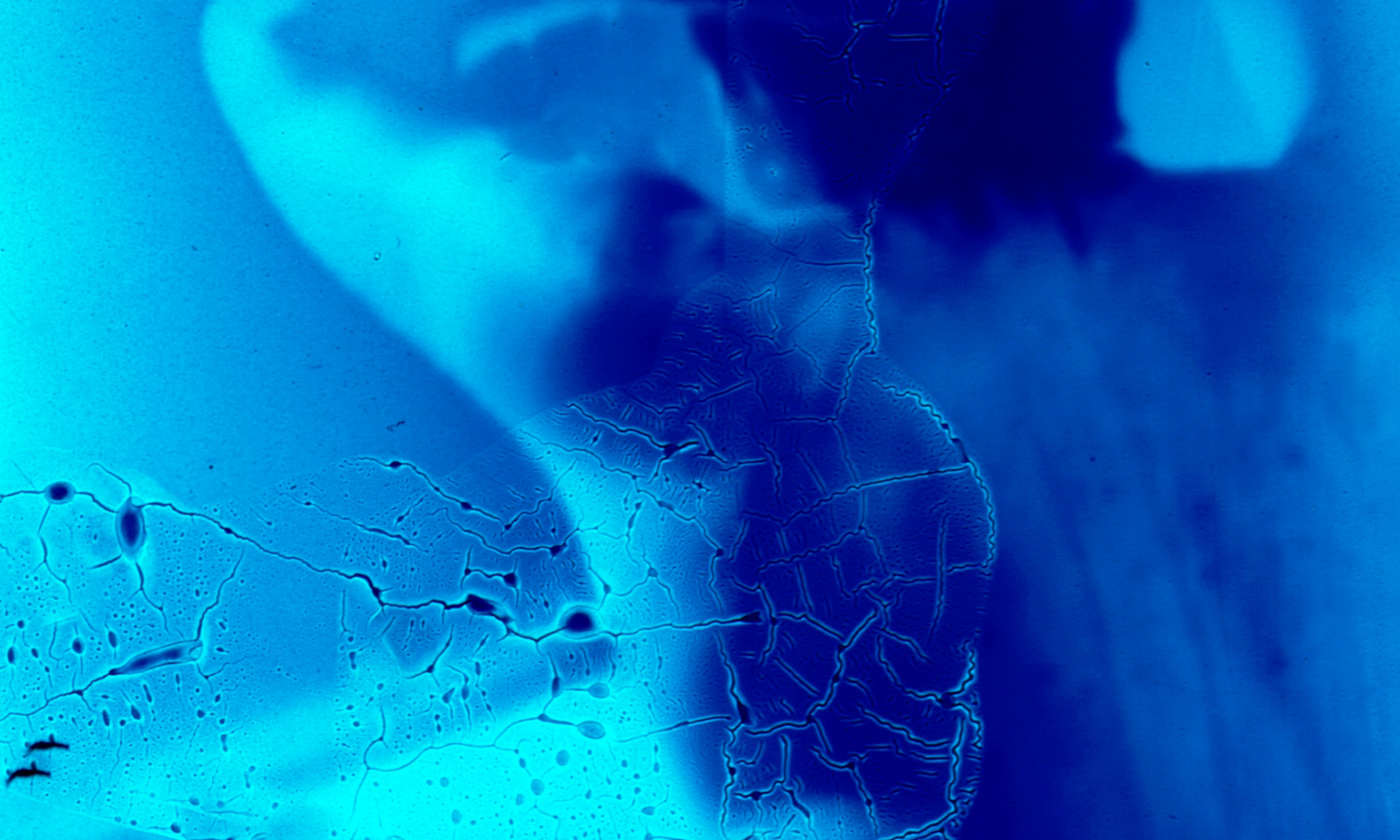












# Biography

## Helena Wittmann

Helena Wittmann, born 1982 in Neuss, Germany, is a filmmaker and visual artist based in Hamburg. Her films, among them her debut feature film *Drift* (2017), have been shown internationally at film festivals (including Venice Int. Film Festival, Toronto Int. Film Festival, Int. Film Festival New York, Int. Film Festival Rotterdam, Int. Shortfilmfestival Oberhausen, Int. Film Festival Ann Arbor, Viennale, FID Marseille, FICUNAM) as well as in exhibitions and have received several awards. She has been teaching at Hamburg Academy of Fine Arts from 2015–2018 and worked as mentor at Elias Querejeta Zine Eskola in San Sebastian, Spain. Besides for her own films she is also responsible for the cinematography for other directors and artists such as Luise Donschen, Adnan Softic or Philipp Hartmann etc.



# Filmography

*Ada Kaleh* 16 mm, HD, 5.1 Surround, 1.77:1, colour, 14 min, 2018

An indeterminate location, summer. The inhabitants of a shared apartment ask themselves where they might live.

(2018 at Toronto Int. Film Festival, Wavelengths / Special Jury Mention at Int. Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Germany / Best Experimental Film Award by the Association of German Film Critics)

*Drift* DCP 2K, 5.1 Surround, 1.77:1, colour, 96 min, 2017

Two women spend a weekend together at the North Sea. One of them will soon return to her family in Argentina, whereas the other one will try to come a step closer to the ocean. On a sailing vessel she crosses the Atlantic Ocean. Thoughts go astray, time leaves the beaten track and the sea takes over the narration. And when she returns to solid ground the other one could ask: *Have you changed?*

(2017 at Settimana della Critica, Venice Film Festival / Best Narrative Feature Film Award at Tacoma Int. Film Festival / Best Film Award at Int. Film Festival FILMadrid / Best Narrative Feature Film Award at Athens Int. Film & Video Festival / Special Jury Mention at Lima Independiente Film Festival / Laceno d'Oro Best Feature Film Award at Laceno d'Oro Film Festival / Special Jury Mention at ZINEBI Bilbao)



21,3°C

16 mm, Stereo, 1.66:1, colour, 16 min, 2014

A window. An opposite window facade. A room. Flowers.  
Luise and a phone call. An action scene. A construction site.  
A musician. The room temperature is 21,3°C.

(2014 Int. Short Film Festival Hamburg / Karl H. Ditze Award /  
HFBK Award Hamburgische Kulturstiftung)

Wildnis

HD, 5.1 Surround, 1.77:1, colour, 12 min, 2013

Potatoes have to be peeled, withered orchid blossoms must be  
plucked. Then everything is in order.

(2013 Int. Short Film Festival Oberhausen / Main Award  
Experimental Film at Int. Shortfilmfestival Flensburg)

# *Fleeting* by Helena Wittmann

Small, this room is very small and you enter through a door that opens inward. To close it again, you need to be completely in the room, turn around in place and make yourself thin. Then you are standing in a narrow corridor facing a wooden bunkbed, and the beds are narrow too, maybe seventy centimeters, and barely two meters long. The only window is round. We've adjusted to the room's narrowness, because here below, everything is like this: The doors are low, the bathtub is cramped, the steps are small and compact. In a room of nine square meters, six people can sleep in three bunkbeds. We've already been onboard for a few days and it is completely normal for us to turn around in place to close the doors. Waiting to let someone else pass is one of our everyday gestures.

Vladimir entered the room before me, and to do so bent his upper back forward and lowered his head. He is definitely two meters tall. He's slender, but long. It is already evening, dark outside. Vladimir lies down in the upper bunk and turns onto his side. The tripod legs fit the circumstances as best as possible and find their footing in the edges and corners. I somehow manage to position myself behind the camera and look through the viewfinder. Vladimir's face is turned towards the camera, we are close to each other. This is the only way possible.

It's been five years since I spent my first night on a sailboat. Back then, I lay there and followed the noises as if they could be caught. These noises were new to me and they came at me from every imaginable direction. My body moved along with the boat, with the waves and the sea. And since there is a movement behind every noise and, on a boat, everyone and everything is at the mercy of this movement, my body went along with the noises right away too. A strange entangled, intermingling, in which it became hard to feel the boundaries of one's own body anymore.

The script says:

*45 Int. Sailing Yacht Cabin – Night*

*Vladimir* is lying on his bunk in the dark, his eyes open. He listens attentively to the noises around him.

Low, droning sounds that echo through the entire body of the boat, and a lot of quieter noises that can hardly be pinpointed. Listening for long enough produces a sonic landscape with countless levels.

Now it is *Vladimir* experiencing his first night in the belly of a boat, his first night on the open sea. The directions are very simple: listen. *Vladimir's* eyes are open and from the start, they are directed more inwards than outwards. The cabin door is closed. There are three of us and we remain very quiet. And we've also asked everyone else on the boat for calm. Because every noise will be carried through the body of the boat and right now, we only want to hear the sea and the wind, and the boat in the sea and the wind. Wood, steel, sails. Water, air. All kinds of things move together here. Only the people onboard stay still during the take. I hear my own breath while I watch *Vladimir* through the viewfinder. And I think that everyone else onboard hears their own breath too while they stay still. That all sixteen people on the boat at this moment are in a similar state. Maybe they watch each other quietly if they are seated together at a table. Maybe they are looking down too, at the tabletop. Or they stare into the distance, the darkness over the sea.

And while wave after wave after wave after wave breaks, I continue looking at *Vladimir's* face. We both listen, protecting the calm as if it were fleeting and especially valuable. At some point, his eyelids fall out of rhythm with his eyes. They roll upwards, becoming white. The water in the tank slaps against the steel walls. The slapping is loud, very loud. The dark brown irises roll briefly back down, but then slip up again under the lids, which never cover the eyes completely. The sound of ropes can be heard, under tension. You can hear the power here. First, the sound drags out, then comes a series of sounds, almost crackling, then a new, muted thud

in the half-empty, steel water tank. Listening, *Vladimir's* eyes move in an in-between state, uncontrolled, their white surface brightening more and more. I know that he suffers from seasickness, and he's surrendered himself to the boat at sea. He's also surrendered himself to my gaze through the camera, which sits on the tripod half a meter away from his face. And everyone onboard the boat remains still. Everything is concentrated on this first night on the boat. If only this moment wouldn't end so soon, I think. The concentration, the dedication, this shared experience, this relived experience. But it will end. Of course, it has to end. I don't know how long we've been here below, listening. But I know I can't film forever. The situation cannot be maintained forever. I turn off the camera. Then a voice can be heard in the cabin. Just one single word, as few as possible to delay the dissipation of this state, to maintain it as long as possible. The voice: a soft *thank you*.

*Translated by Ted Fendt*



## Cast

Greek actress Angeliki Papoulia is best known internationally for her leading roles in Oscar nominated *Dogtooth*, *Alps* and Yorgos Lanthimos' first English speaking feature and Oscar nominated *The Lobster*. She also gives a blistering lead performance in *A Blast* by S. Tzoumerkas, which received the Golden Leopard nomination at the Locarno Film Festival. Film work also includes many other feature films along with extensive work as a theatre director in many European theatres and festivals.



Angeliki Papoulia as *Ida*



Vladimir Vulevic as *Vlad*

Vladimir Vulevic was born in 1984 in Priboj, ex-Yugoslavia. He studied Literature studies at Belgrade University and Film at Hamburg Academy of Fine Arts. After publishing two verse dramas: *Remembrance from Formaldehyde* (2010) and *Ananke Ferdidurke* (2012), he directed four short films—*Larva*, *Pupa* (2017) (with Nina Zeljkovic), *Allusion to Injuries* (2018), *Your Rooms, White and Purple* (2019) (with Nina Zeljkovic) and *How I beat Glue and Bronze* (2020).



Denis Lavant as *Galoup*

Trained at the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, Denis Lavant is an original and powerful figure in French cinema. In the cinema, he is the emblematic actor of the director Leos Carax, since *Boy meets girl* in 1983 until *Holy Motors* released in 2012, film phenomenon of the 65th Cannes Film Festival, in which Denis Lavant takes on eleven roles by himself. He also played, among others, under the direction of Patrice Chéreau, Diane Kurys, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Claude Lelouch, Claire Denis, Harmony Korine, Arnaud des Pallières, Wolfgang Becker, Emiliy Atef, Pierre Schoeller and more recently in the film by Matthieu Gerault *Sentinel South*.

Ferhat Mouhali is a kabyle actor and director, who acted in French and international films and series. He directed two short films and his first feature-length documentary, *Ne nous racontez plus d'histoires* (Don't tell us any more stories) about the transmission of the memory of the Algerian war on both sides of the Mediterranean, has been selected for international festivals. It received the Bouamari-Vautier Prize in Paris and the Special Mention of the FIFDH in Geneva 2022.



Ferhat Mouhali as *Farouk*



Mauro Soares is an awarded Portuguese actor. Having started his career in theater during his Integrated Masters in Chemical and Biochemical Engineering, he starred in films such as *António One Two Three* (2017), *Sol Alegria* (2018), *The Portuguese Woman* (2019), *Bela Mandil* (2018) and *Half a Light-Year* (2021). Mauro co-wrote and starred in *Rain Hums a Lullaby to Pain* (2020), *Life Lasts Two Days* (2022) and is a Berlinale Talents Acting Studio alumnus of 2019.

Mauro Soares as *Mauro*



Gustavo de Mattos Jahn as *Carlos*



Gustavo Jahn is a Brazilian director and actor. He has acted in the films *Neighboring Sounds* (2012) by Kleber Mendonça Filho and *Os Residentes* (2010) by Tiago Mata Machado. Besides several short films, he directed the feature films *Muito Romântico* (2016) and *Oráculo* (2020).



Steffen Danek as *Falco*

Steffen Danek was born 1980 in Hamburg and works there as a software engineer. He grew up around traditional sailing ships and has since not found his way out of dreams.

Born in Hamburg in 1977, the oceans have been Ingo Martens' home for many years as a captain on sailing ships. For her film *Drift* he travelled the Atlantic with Helena Wittmann. Ingo is a father of three, now somewhat more settled near Kiel at the Baltic Sea, with a furniture and boat workshop.



Ingo Martens as *Ingo*



## *And*

Nina Villanova *as Lou, the waitress*  
Leonardo Mouramateus *as young man at the table*  
Marie Hermann *as kissing woman*  
Suzie Montefusco *as Madame Montefusco*  
Nikola *as legionnaire making a bed*  
Vuko *as legionnaire in neoprene*  
Heddy Salem *as legionnaire looking out of the window*  
Marin Ordonneau *as legionnaire at the entrance gate*  
Dimitri Bonnet, Lissandru Giovanni & William Agier  
*as legionnaires at the pizza truck*  
The legionnaires in the forest remain anonymous.  
Fadel Taha Sebbane, Ahmed Elhonsali & Younes Belfqih  
*as young men in the café*  
Oussama Jmail *as Algerian soldier*

## *Crew*

*Screenplay, cinematography, directing and editing* Helena Wittmann  
*Composition and sound design* Nika Son  
*Assistant director* Luise Donschen  
*Production and costume design* Anna Ostby  
*Dramaturgical advice* Birgit Glombitza  
*Camera assistants* Tim Liebe & Gustavo de Mattos Jahn  
*Underwater images* Kevin Sempé  
*Microscopic images* Vilius Machiulskis  
*Color grading and mastering* Tim Liebe  
*Title design* Hanzer Liccini  
*Casting Marseille and production management* Julie Aguttes  
*Production* Frank Scheuffele, Karsten Krause & Julia Cölln  
(Fünferfilm, Germany)  
*Coproduction* Christophe Bouffil, Fred Prémel, Julie Aguttes  
(Tita Productions, France)

### *Funded by*

MOIN Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein  
BKM Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien  
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FFA Filmförderungsanstalt

### *Selected for*

Films After Tomorrow–Locarno Film Festival  
Industry Village–Les Arcs Film Festival  
FIDLab–FIDMarseille  
First Cut Lab

## Production Companies

**Fünferfilm** was launched in 2016 and has since established itself as a company in northern Germany and internationally with its repertoire of auteur films and exceptional cinematic signatures. Our first feature film *Drift* by Helena Wittmann had its world premiere at Venice Film Festival in September 2017. Our documentary *Olanda* by Bernd Schoch screened in the Forum of the Berlinale 2019. Karsten Krause's medium-length documentary *At the Bottom of the Sea* (2020) had its world premiere in Rotterdam.

Currently in development are the feature film debuts of Popo Fan (*Grammatik*) and Mate Ugrin (*Petty Thieves*), which is participating a Torino Scriptlab 2022. Willy Hans' feature film debut *Der Fleck* is in financing phase. Katharina Pethke's first feature-length documentary *Reproduktion* (WT) is being made in co-production with ZDF/3sat and will be shot in summer 2022, as will Pepa Hristova's documentary *Strandzha* (WT), which is being made in international co-production with the renowned Bulgarian production company Agitprop and SWR/arte. The documentary *Immersive Dark Tourism* (WT) by André Siegers is in editing.

Since 2006, **Tita Productions** has been producing feature films and documentaries for French and international markets.

The films have received selections and awards in the most important international events: Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, San Sebastián, Rome, Locarno and have been distributed worldwide. Its catalogue currently includes 12 feature films, 30 documentaries and 50 shorts. Its double base North/South (Marseille/Brittany) is a particularity in France. The producers are keen to develop local skills and talents, and have a curiosity for films that are rooted in the world's territories, and that tell their stories and cultures.













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