



A film by Teona STRUGAR MITEVSKA

The WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS

 62nd Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama

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Vertigo Emotionfilm/Slovenia, Entre Chien et Loup/Belgium,
Luminary Media/Macedonia

THE WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS

In Paris, Helena witnesses her son's suicide. Noah confesses the horrible truth of his father's abuse, but Helena refuses to believe him. Her son falls over the balcony railing into the night. From this moment on, Helena's world is turned upside down as her struggle for survival transforms into a hunt for revenge.

Ajsun is a dreamer who lives with her father and her son Ilkin. In the high mountains of Macedonia, their existence is simple and harsh. Life has a different pace and purpose there, the daily survival is what drives them all. Ajsun dreams to be reunited with Lucien, the father of her son.

This is a story of two very different mothers: one that needs to punish in order to get by and the other that is forced to accept daily punishment in order to exist. This is a story of inner rage and of suffering a silent violence and of one woman's need to externalize it in order to justify her own existence. The other woman has to fight against traditions, patriarchy, religious and ethnic barriers just to be with the man she loves and to reunite her family. These two women from different parts of the world will end up affecting each other's lives in the most unexpected ways.

THE WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS tells a story about the various types of imprisonment we create for ourselves or are forced into. Helena's path is precisely traced; a path she is unable to change. Ajsun wants to live. Both aspire to be free.

This is a story of two destinies coming into one, of two women coming into one, and of two worlds becoming one.

Synopsis



VICTORIA ABRIL as Helena

One of Europe's most respected actresses, European diva Victoria Abril has made her mark in more than 80 films produced in Europe and America. Best known to the international audience through the work of Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, who directed her in the controversial *Atame!* (Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!, 1990) and her most remarkable appearances in two other movies from Almodovar's most creative period, *Kika* and *High Heels*.

Victoria Abril began her career as a ballerina. At the age of 15, she hosted a TV game show and kick-started her film career with her debut role in Francisco Lara Polop's *Obsession* (1976). In the following two decades, she dominated the Spanish cinematography and has been nominated eight times for Goya Awards in the Lead Actress category marking her collaboration with Vicente Arande on seven films, from *Sex Change*, where she transforms from a boy to a girl, via the triple role in *If They Tell You I Fell*, where her partners, as on many other occasions are Antonio Banderas and Jorge Sanz. She won the Silver Bear for Best Actress at the 41st Berlin International Film Festival for her role in *Amantes*. Two years later, she was awarded the Berlinale Camera at the 43rd Berlin International Film Festival. Other notable roles include Jean-Jacques Beineix's *The Moon in the Gutter* (1983), Denis Amar's *L'Addition* (1984), and Nagisa Oshima's masterful black comedy *Max, My Love* (1986). Based in Paris for the past twenty years, Victoria has continued her acting career in numerous French productions as well as throughout Europe, as in *101 Reykjavik* (2000), and in her homeland Spain, being invited time and again by Spanish directors like Agustin Diaz Yanes and many others. This is her first collaboration with Teona Mitevska and most probably not the last one.





LABINA MITEVSKA as Ajsun

She started her acting career as a teenager in 1993, playing Zamira in Milcho Mancevski's Golden Lion award winning *Before the Rain*. In the years that followed she resumed her studies.

In 1996 she entered into a successful collaboration with Michael Winterbottom. Following *Welcome to Sarajevo* they worked together in *I Want You*. For these accomplishments she was chosen as one of the Shooting Stars at the Berlinale in 1998. Her acting carrier continued around Europe, as she has filmed in Germany, Czech Republic, Turkey, Italy, Bulgaria, and Slovenia.

In 2001, Labina, her sister Teona and their brother Vuk established the production company SISTERS AND BROTHER MITEVSKI. Apart from finishing the production of *The Women Who Brushed off Her Tears*, their company just finished the short stop animation movie *Alerik*, animated and directed by Vuk. All their films are European co-productions involving partners from Slovenia, France, Belgium, and Germany.

In 2007, Labina played the extraordinary complex role of Afrodita in *I Am from Titov Veles*, a performance that brought her a number of awards. In their last film *The Woman Who Brushed off Her Tears* she is playing one of the main roles together with Victoria Abril.





TEONA STRUGAR MITEVSKA

Director and writer

Teona Strugar Mitevska was born in 1974 into an artistic family, in Skopje, Macedonia. Between the ages of six to twelve, Teona was a child actor. Later on she trained as a painter and obtained her BA in Graphic Design. She ditched a successful career as art director for internationally renowned companies (Saatchi and Saatchi, Virgo Publicis) for filmmaking. In 1998, she enrolled in the MFA film program at New York University's Tisch School of Arts.

She made her debut as short film director in 2001 with *Veta*, which received the Special Jury award at the Berlin Film Festival. *How I Killed a Saint* is her first feature film, which was made under the auspices of SISTERS AND BROTHER MITEVSKI, a company she established together with her brother and sister. The film premiered at the 2004 Rotterdam Film festival, Tiger Competition and has won numerous prizes around the world like Best European Film at the Crossing Europe Film festival, Linz, Austria. Her penultimate film *I Am from Titov Veles* has been theatrically distributed in 15 countries in 2008/2009, including in the USA, and was screened in the official competition at the following festivals: Berlin Film Festival – Panorama Section; Sarajevo Film Festival, where it won Special Jury Award; Toronto Film Festival -Discovery section. The film also screened at 2008 Cannes Film Festival - ACID selection. The film was invited to more than 80 festivals around the world and won over 20 international awards.

Her third feature *The Woman Who Brushed off Her Tears* with Victoria Abril made its world premiere at the 2012 Berlin Film Festival (Panorama Special).

FEATURES

2011 - THE WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS
(Macedonia, Germany, Slovenia, Belgium - 103')

2008 - I AM FROM TITOV VELES
(Macedonia, France, Belgium, Slovenia - 102')

2004 - HOW I KILLED A SAINT
(Macedonia, Slovenia, France - 87')



HELENA FINDING HER HUMANITY

The character of Helene, portrayed by Victoria Abril, is a personification of a modern Western person, one who accepts the comforts of life and slowly makes compromises in regards to her real needs. It is a question of comfort vs. truth. The further we go from the basic needs and actions connected to our sense of survival, the further we travel away from ourselves. By losing this instinct for survival, we risk becoming more and more like machines, fulfilling functions yet losing touch with who we really are. In her search for humanity Helene chooses violence.

THE WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS is a film in search of humanity. The story told is of people out of place, of individuals who defy their society's chains in the attempt to free themselves.

EMPTINESS

Emptiness is the profound sentiment Helena carries within her interior life. Translating emptiness onto the screen was one of my challenges with THE WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS. How to depict emptiness within the frame, in the mise-en-scene? How to minimize the visual experience in order to deliver such a minimal experience? My idea to express Helena's emptiness visually was through the monochrome colors of her wardrobe put against the backdrop of the quite lively and colorful environment that surrounds her. The orderly environment she functions within, the stillness and the feeling of almost perfection. However, by carefully positioning her within the frame, she always feels detached, as if she does not belong there. Helena doesn't walk through life, she floats, carried by the stream.

comments from writer-director
Teona Strugar Mitevska

AJSUN IS A CONTINUATION OF HELENA

Ajsun wants to reunite with the father of her child. She wants to reconstruct her family, while Helena must destroy. Ultimate nothingness is the only point where things can restart again for her. As Ajsun's story is a continuation of Helena's ideal, Ajsun herself is a continuation of Helena. Only through Helena's actions will Ajsun be set free of her social chains. In the end, when the two women meet and their destinies mix, it is for the first time we start seeing Helena through Ajsun's eyes. But, like life, we cannot predict what Ajsun's story will be. The ending does not offer a definite answer. There is simply hope for these characters we have grown to like, sympathize with, and love.

SHE-WOLVES

The common traits between Ajsun and Helena are their endurance, their persistence and their belief in their cause. They share an idea of family, one that is lost and the other that is to be reconstructed. The obvious contrast is in their surroundings: old and new Europe, the traditional vs. the modern, today vs. yesterday. But besides all the differences - cultural, ideological, economical - these two women are still women who live, love and who share the same fears, basically. Emotionally there is no big difference, no matter the difference in price or quality of their make-up! The beauty of humanity is that the traits that make us human can be found in all of us. We are not so different, just as Ajsun and Helena are not: they are two she-wolves fighting for their cubs.

AJSUN THE REBEL

Ajsun survives by following the order of life. Our perception is that she comes from another century because of her wardrobe, her lifestyle. She follows ancient traditions. She is well aware of the "modern" world outside her own, yet she chooses to live as she does. A few years ago we would have labeled her old-fashioned, but today maybe she could actually be considered as avant-garde. Ajsun is actually a sort of rebel by choosing to live the way she does.

THE JURUCI

I am a strong believer in doing current stories in cinema, reflecting on issues and dilemmas that are important for one's society and culture. I have chosen to place the Macedonian story within a very traditional people named Juruci. They are of Turkish origin that only exists today in the mountains surrounding the small town of Radovich. The Juruci are particular, not only by their refusal to accept modernization, but by their insistence to follow their traditions by rigorously following their ancient rules. Everything is out of time with the Juruci. They are very few in numbers and by filming them I hope that I am preserving a part of the European heritage that is perishing as we speak. Their elaborate colored clothing is a true visual feast.

TWO PARTS MAKE A WHOLE

The two parts of the film – France and Macedonia - are interdependent. They complete the puzzle and hold together the essence of the story of these two very different women. The Macedonian part of the story is inspired by the Flaherty documentary approach, where ethnicity is not a novelty or a spectacle. By careful observation of everyday tasks, the true nature of characters is revealed. Visually, the entirely directional/interior treatment of the French part of story contrasts with the poetic observational treatment of the Macedonian part in order to create a hybrid of the two.

It was definitely a challenge to tell two stories and make them feel as one. Helena's story was always about emotion, while Ajsun was more about action. Even when Helena takes action, she does it in the name of both women. This idea helped me work through the writing as if I was dealing with one character and not two. From the beginning I knew that the two stories would be completely opposite in all possible ways: visually, but even more importantly in philosophy, in the way the two women view the world. In a way, I am referring to myself, these two parts of me: a Macedonian woman now living in the West.

VICTORIA ABRIL

My sister Labina is also the current director of the Manaki Brothers Film Festival, one of the oldest film festivals for cinematography in the world. We met Victoria Abril when she came to the festival for a Lifetime Achievement Award. Upon meeting her, I rewrote the character of Helena to fit Victoria more appropriately. We sent her the script and she was hooked!

I always considered having a "foreigner" play Helena would be a positive aspect for the character. We were worried about accommodating an actress of Victoria's stature with our limited means: no trailer, no heat, not many of the things she is used to on a big production. We resorted to our famous Macedonian hospitality. The shooting conditions were not the most comfortable, especially in the mountains of Macedonia. But Victoria worked with us and our limited means, and I think she used this to better construct the character of Helena. Victoria kept telling us: "Here, it's just like Malaga when I was growing up!"

SHOOTING OUTSIDE MACEDONIA

I was quite nervous about shooting the film outside of Macedonia. I believe it's a concern for any director the first time. Surprisingly enough it ended up being the least of my problems. Directing is directing anywhere in the world. But working with actors from other parts of the world can inevitably carry with it different schools and techniques.

But in the end, it's all part of the work. Through practice, you learn more about the actor and his or her ways of creating a character and you adapt in order to help them do the best they can. Language was not an issue for me since I speak also French. My French cast also helped me to capture the true music of the language.

SISTERS AND BROTHER

My sister Labina (actress and producer) and I, we are Yin and Yang. My brother Vuk (production designer in our films and a visual artist in his own right) and I, we are male and female versions of the same. On the set, we are inseparable, we protect each other against the obstacles. In private, we fight a lot. In the end, it works rather well. Michi, our post-production coordinator, always says: "Don't mess with the Mitevski sisters and brother!"

CAST

Helena – Victoria Abril
Ajsun - Labina Mitevska
Emil - Jean Marie Galey
Lucian - Arben Bajraktaraj
Ismail - Firdaus Nebi
Ilkin - Kaeliok Fonenimum Varka
Noah - Dimitar Gjorgjievski

CREW

SCREENWRITER & DIRECTOR Teona Strugar Mitevska
DOP Matyas Erdely
PRODUCTION DESIGNER Vuk Mitevski
PRODUCTION DESIGNER (Germany) Stephan von Tresckow
EDITOR Nicolas Gaster
COSTUME DESIGNER Monika Lorber
MAKE UP ARTIST Mojca Gorogranc Petrushevska
SOUND RECORDING Paul Heymans and Fred Meert
SOUND EDITOR Fred Meert
SOUND MIXER Philippe Baudhuin
SCREENPLAY ADVISOR Jean Samouillan
SCREENPLAY EDITOR Franz Rodenkirchen
PRODUCER Labina Mitevska
PRODUCERS Marcel Lenz, Guido Schwab, Danijel Hočevar, Sebastien Delloye, Diana Elbaum
EXECUTIVE CO- PRODUCER (Macedonia) Ana Jordanova

SUPPORTED BY

Macedonian Film Fund, MDM –Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung, Eurimages, Slovenian Film Centre, FS Viba Film, Casa Kafka Pictures, Luminary Media



THE WOMAN WHO BRUSHED OFF HER TEARS
35 mm, CinemaScope, Color, Dolby Digital SR-D, 103'



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Stand in Berlin: Martin Gropius Bau Unifrance #38

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