

Official Selection

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Toronto International
Film Festival 2018

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SSIFF

NEW DIRECTORS
DONOSTIA ZINEMALDIA
FESTIVAL DE SAN SEBASTIÁN
2018

Core of the World

SCREENING SCHEDULE

TIFF CONTEMPORY WORLD CINEMA

FRI. 7, 6:15 PM @ TIFF BELL LIGHTBOX 4 (PUBLIC)

SAT. 8, 9:00 AM @ TIFF BELL LIGHTBOX 4 (PUBLIC)

SUN. 9, 7:00 PM @ SCOTIABANK 6 (P&I)

SAT. 15, 9:30 AM @ SCOTIABANK 6 (PUBLIC)

SAN SEBASTIAN NEW DIRECTORS COMPETITION
TBC



CORE OF THE WORLD

(SERDTSE MIRA)

A FILM BY NATALIA MESHCHANINOVA

Starring

Stepan Devonin - Egor
Yana Sekste - Dasha

Runtime: 124min – Russia, Lithuania – 2018 – 1:85 – Dolby 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES
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Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_NvujVqKMI



SYNOPSIS

Russia, today.

Egor is a 25-year-old veterinarian on a rural farm which doubles as a hunting dog special training center using domesticated foxes. He is a grown man, but deep inside he is a child and it's easier for him to get along with animals than with people.

In desperate need of a controlled environment after a violent past relationship with his mother, all he wants is to care for the animals and to feel part of the close-knit family he works for.

When animal rights activists invade this fragile microcosm, throwing off its delicate balance, Egor's world begins to crumble...



NATALIA MESHCHANINOVA'S NOTE

The story is in a way inspired by my nephew Oleg. His family did not want him anymore so he took to the street, ending up in a remand house and then in an orphanage. Core of the World is an attempt to find a better life for Oleg through cinema. To invent a character who is unable to forgive his mother and grow up or to deal with his own anger, fear and grievances, and yet finally meets a family he can rely on. He is offered a chance of recovery. It is very important for me to raise the issue of pain and of dealing with it both from the inside and the outside. One's bad past is not a life sentence, not even a diagnosis. The past is not there anymore, so there is a chance of working with the present to find a way out of the deep pit.

After The Hope Factory I had to begin something new but I could not see what. So I started thinking together with Stepan Devonin who is not only my husband but an intimate friend and co-writer. At first we came upon the issue of eco-terrorists. A friend of ours who had provided some documentary material for Arrythmia offered a lot of footage on the life of environmental activists. But in Russia the movement of eco-terrorists is not as strong as in Europe or the US. Moreover, any kind of actionism is banned and likely to get you to jail. In all that footage there was nothing to trigger me although we did get as far as writing a synopsis. I felt it was not my kind of story at all. We spent some time despairing over it and not knowing what to do and then we decided to turn the story around.

In a way the main character reflects the personality of Stepan Devonin, they are people of the same kind. His lines were written with Stepan in mind, I could not but take his personality into account. Moreover, Stepan

had also trained as a vet at some point. We did not have to teach him the ways of the medical workers. He knew it all better than anyone, he even treats our own dogs and performs most manipulations without professional help. We have three terriers and we've been through many dangerous places. Sometimes I thought the dog was really dying and my heart almost stopped but he would carry on in a calm and neat way.

Stepan had to lose 30 kilos for the film and make special exercises. This way he looked younger, which was what I actually wanted: a plump forlorn guy doesn't really seem right.

When I create a character I want people to relate to this person. I don't really know how it works, there are no precise recipes. Egor is not a rigid substance, he has many different feelings that you get involved in while you watch the movie, and you end up loving him. I did not mean to narrate his whole life story, it was enough to suggest that Egor had had a difficult past and his relationship with his mother was really problematic. He feels a great pain inside, and his feelings towards the past he is trying to escape are very intense and very ambiguous, he loves and hates it at the same time.

I kept thinking how to show the lack of affection in my character's life in an indirect way. The people in the film hardly know how to communicate with each other, and the protagonist is no exception. He is always afraid to be punished, unloved, rejected. This is the reason the animal world is so sweet to him. Animals are never going to reject him, dogs will not chase him away from their cage, their love is unconditional.

We wrote the script in three: Stepan, myself, and Boris Khlebnikov. Boris met up with us at all stages, read what we had written, and picked it to pieces. I am going to be mean, he would say. So Stepan provided the emotional part and Boris the rational, and the resulting synthesis was really fine.

We have many animals in the film but the most difficult parts were the episodes with Belka, the dog. We worked with the best animal handler of St. Petersburg, Sasha Ivanova. She had warned us from the start that it was very difficult to make alabai shepherd dogs follow orders, even the simplest ones. So we bought three alabai girl cubs and Sasha spent three months training them. In the end we had three dogs playing Belka: one knew perfectly well how to lie on camera, the other rested on people's shoulders, and the third one swam although normally shepherd dogs do not like water. But the trickiest part of all was the episode where Stepan's character walks into a dog cage. Alabais are not really social, they cannot live with each other and they are even known to attack humans. Some people suggested that I tried a different breed of dog. But I wanted these ones that look like polar bears. Stepan had spent two months walking and feeding the dogs to get them used to him but as soon as he opened the cage they started growling and fighting each other, each one wanted him for herself. We had to proceed very carefully: we knew that one wrong step could end up in a total mayhem. I never suspected it was so difficult to make three dogs lie down at a man's feet. But our handlers said they had never met people who knew their ways around dogs so well.

We have three dogs in our family and I know what training facilities are like. I introduced them deliberately into my film. It offers an ambivalent stand on issues of hunting, training, captive foxes, hunting dogs, and the relations

between them all. It is not exactly what you would expect. There is no right and no wrong in our film, no good and no evil. Everyone is in their own subjective right, and there is actually no such thing as objective, impersonal reality.

I am actually willing to start a discussion on training facilities for hunting dogs. It is not going to be easy, and the debate might even become a distraction from the actual story unfolding in the film. I will have to try and put a stop to it during all the Q&A sessions because the training facility is only there to provide a background. My own feelings are mixed and I would not like to offend or slander anyone, not even the environmental activists. An attack where they let the foxes loose was a pure invention of ours, and when the production was already over it actually happened at a training station we knew. The only difference was that they let loose three wild boar families instead of foxes. All the animals were eventually eaten by the wolves, the owner of the station lost many young ones and went on a drinking spree.

Some of the episodes were shot at a legal training station. The one in our film is also perfectly legal, all the cages meet the required standards, and the foxes are treated well. No sane person would let a dog bite his own fox to death if he had raised it himself. It is even harder to imagine offering a dog to be bitten to death if the dog is your own. The foxes are treated very well there, and their keeping costs a hell of a lot of money. But alas, poachers do exist, hence the terrible scene with the baited fox-cub.

It is, in fact, an important debate but it should take place outside the discussions about our film. Our relations with the animal world are important, too important to simply label them bad or good.





FILMOGRAPHY & BIOGRAPHY NATALIA MESHCHANINOVA

Natalia Meschaninova was born in 1982 in Krasnodar. She graduated from Kuban State University of Culture and Art with a degree in ‘Cinema and TV director’ in 2005. She graduated from documentary cinematography school ‘Real time - 2’, Autonomous Non-governmental Organization ‘INTERNEWS’, Workshop of Marina Razbezhkina.

- 2018 **Core of the world**, 124 minutes
• Kinotavr 2018 - Grand Prix, Best Actor, Critics Award
- 2015 **The Red bracelets** (with participation of Sergey Sentsov), 12 series 46 minutes, series.
• Festival ‘Movement’, Omsk 2015 - Grand prix, best director.
- 2014 **The Hope Factory**, 90 minutes
• Rotterdam 2014 - main competition
• Go East, Wiesbaden 2014 - main competition
• Vilnius Film Festival 2014 Baltic Gaze - Grand prix
• Kinotavr 2014 main competition
• Karlovy Vary 2014 - ‘Other sight’
• ‘Listapad’, in sk, 2014 – Feature film competition ‘Youth on March’, best actress prize.
• Film critics prize «Elephant» 2015 - best debut.
- 2010 **School** (co-authored with Valeriya Gai Germanika, Ruslan Malikov), 69 series, 30 minutes, series.
- 2007 **Herbarium**, 55 minutes, documentary
• ‘Kinoteatr. DOC’ 2007 first prize
• National prize ‘Lavr’ 2007 – best debut.
- As script writer
- 2017 **Arrhythmia** (directed by Boris Khlebnikov)
• Kinotavr 2017 - Grand Prix, Best Actor, Audience Award
• Karlovy Vary IFF 2017 - competition - Best Actor
• Toronto IFF - Contemporary Cinema
• Haifa IFF - Grand Prix
• nominated for the BEST SCRIPT at Asia Pacific Screen Awards
- 2017 **Anna’s war**
• Rotterdam 2018
- 2015 **The Red Bracelets**
2014 **The Hope Factory**
2013 **Another year**, 107 minutes (directed by Oxana Bychkov)
• Kinotavr 2014
• Rotterdam 2014 The Big Screen award
• Festival International du Film de la Roche-Sur-Yon – Grand Prix
• Movie script prize ‘Slovo’ 2015 – film script debut.



CREW

Script by **NATALIA MESHCHANINOVA** in association with **BORIS KHLEBNIKOV** and **STEPAN DEVONIN**

Director **NATALIA MESHCHANINOVA**

Producers **SERGEY SELYANOV** **NATALIA DROZD**

Co-producer **DAGNE VILDZIUNAITE**

DOP **EVGENIY TSVETKOV**

Art director **KIRILL SHUVALOV**

Costume Designer **ALANA SNETKOVA**

make-up **DARIA PALAMARCHUK**

Casting **ELENA ANISIMOVA** **TATIANA ZAKHAROVA**

Edit **DASHA DANILOVA**

Sound **SAULIUS URBANAVICIUS**

Line producer **TANYA BONAKOVA**

Produced by **CTB FILM COMPANY** (Russia) and **JUST A MOMENT** (Lithuania)


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International Sales **Indie Sales Company**



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