



**WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA PREVIEW
POWERED BY JAGUAR**

Small Body (Piccolo corpo)

+ Q&A with director Laura Samani

Director's Statement

In 2016, I discovered that in Trava, in my Friuli Venezia-Giulia, existed a sanctuary where up until the 19th century, particular miracles were said to occur: that stillborn children could be brought back to life for the space of one breath. A miracle such as this was necessary in order to baptise these babies, who were otherwise condemned to be buried in unconsecrated grounds, like burying a dead cat. Without baptism they could never have a name or an identity; their souls would wander eternally in Limbo. These kinds of places are called *à répit*, or sanctuaries of breath or truce, and were present throughout the Alps (France alone had nearly 200) and it is surprising that this history is nearly totally unknown despite the size of the phenomenon. The story of these miracles got snagged in some nook of my mind and stayed there, calling for attention.

I was struck by one thing in particular: it was mainly men who would travel to these sanctuaries with the small bodies of their infants. Naturally, the women who had just given birth were confined to their beds but I couldn't get past the helpless wait they were subject to.

The first question I asked the co-authors, Elisa Dondi and Marco Borrromei, who decided to stay with me on my journey, which began with *La santa che dorme*, was: what happens to the woman in bed? What if, instead, it is she who decides to go? Thus we began writing with only two certainties: the she is Agata, and this is her first pregnancy.

When the baby is stillborn, Agata grieves but is unable to simply go on, the way everybody else around her seems to. For me, the best part of a story is that moment in life when a character decides to rebel. Agata's choice is practically scandalous because it denotes pride and protest not only against her religion but also the laws of nature.

There comes a precise moment, usually at night, in which the possibilities before us suddenly appear to consist of only one choice and it is then that destiny is made. Agata decides to listen to the voices talking about the miracles. Following her instinct and without telling anybody, she sets off on a voyage with her baby in a small box. Alone.

Obviously, the practice of resuscitating babies was not seen kindly by the Church because it was an abuse of the sacraments and akin to witchcraft. Agata undertakes a voyage to the outer reaches of the unknown, abandoning her roots and risking the loss of self as well as death. Her conscious desire is to give her daughter a name in order to be able to let her go, both of them distinct individuals at that point, but the truth is that this voyage is a way to prolong the state of symbiosis with her daughter that Agata experienced for months – a sort of continuation of her pregnancy whereby the baby is transferred from her stomach to her back, becoming a weight she bears on her shoulders. Her voyage is physical but becomes transcendental.

Agata doesn't realise that in order to continue her mission she must transform herself, become dead among the living. Agata needed a travelling companion and this is how the character of Lynx came to be: wild and cunning, closed to everyone because to love is to be compromised, weakened. Lynx shows Agata the way, offering protection, but what he will receive from her in return is something just as necessary for survival: the profound sense of attachment to something loved; commitment, sacrifice, the sense of belonging to something you can't control and that renders you vulnerable. Thanks to Agata, Lynx is reunited with that part that is the archetype feminine side, which has the courage to accept the dark side of love: pain.

While I located the film in my homeland, this rooting to territory does not mean this story is only of that place. I think stories are the same everywhere. I shot in a chronological continuity undertaking the same kind of voyage that Agata takes, from the Caorle and Bibione lagoon to the Carnia and Tarvisiano mountains. This film has grown with us as we have with it.

While researching locations I met the people who have become characters in the film, or perhaps it was the other way around since neither can be considered without the other. Almost the entire cast is made up of people who have never acted before; in some cases, entire families. It is also for this reason that I decided to shoot the film in the Veneto and Friuli dialects, not just in order to provide the authentic language of that time, honouring the different variations so that the people could express themselves as much as possible in the most natural way. The process of imposing standardised Italian began in the second half of the 1800s and continued under fascism, a political operation to enable control over the territory that caused a huge cultural impoverishment but, luckily, did not succeed in entirely extinguishing the wide variety of different idioms. I think dialect is a precious and often moving enrichment: it's enough to note that the word for child in the Friuli dialect is *frut*, because a child is the fruit of its parents.

For various reasons and often unrelated to the story itself, all the people involved found something of themselves in the story and its themes. This is why we often ended up talking more about life than cinema, and learning from each other: at times I was the one directing them and at other times, they were the ones guiding me. Transversality is the best form of creating.

In the film, God is not to be found in miracles or prayer, or in dogma that divides the afterlife into paradise, hell and limbo. God exists on a different level: in Lynx, who believes in nothing and is thus untouched by the initial premise of miracles; in Agata, who harnesses anger in order to redraw the confines of what is possible; and in the relationship between these two solitary views that, for a moment, are less painful. There is a thin line that divides life from death, reality from magic, the possibilities we have hoped for and the time left to us. I hope that this film creates a greater shared space without the presumption of finding absolute answers in order to live in doubt together.

Production notes

Laura Samani was born in 1989 in Trieste. After graduating in Philosophy & Literature at the University of Pisa, she studied at Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (Rome), directing class. Her graduation short movie, *The Sleeping Saint*, premiered at Cannes Cinéfondation in 2016. Since then, it has gained international acclaim and awards in several international festivals.

In 2018 she worked for the Maremetraggio Association, conducting the participatory video workshop Città Visibile, financed by Siae Bando Sillumina – Periferie Urbane in Valmaura, Trieste. It is the first laboratory of this type ever conducted in Trieste, involving teenagers living in social marginality with the aim of making a self-narrative documentary. *Small Body*, a raw fairytale, is her first feature.

SMALL BODY (PICCOLO CORPO)

Director: Laura Samani

©: Nefertiti Film, Tomsa Films, Vertigo

Production Companies: Nefertiti Film, Rai Cinema, Tomsa Films, Vertigo

Supported by: Eurimages Conseil de l'Europe

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Supported by: Torino Film Lab Production Award, Creative Europe, MEDIA

International Sales: Alpha Violet

Executive Producer: Nadia Trevisan

Produced by: Nadia Trevisan, Alberto Fasulo

Unit Production Manager: Paolo Bogna

Production Managers: Davide Lamberti, Paola Pegoraro

Production Manager (Slovenia Unit): Matija Kozamernik

Production Manager (Underwater Unit): Ermanno Guida

Production Co-ordinator: Claudia Soranzo

Post-production Supervisor: Chiara Santo

Screenplay: Marco Borromei, Elisa Dondi, Laura Samani

From an idea by: Laura Samani

Director of Photography: Mitja Licen

Underwater Photographer: Aldo Chessari

Editing: Chiara Dainese

Art Director: Rachele Meliadó

Costume Designer: Loredana Buscemi

Original Music: Fredrika Stahl

Production Sound Mixer: Luca Bertolin

Re-recording Mixer: Nathalie Vidal

Sound Editor: Riccardo Spagnol

Cast

Celeste Cescutti (*Agata*)

Ondina Quadri (*Lince, 'Lynx'*)

Marco Geromin (*Ignac, the wise man*)

Giacomina Dereani (*Lia, the quarreller*)

Anna Pia Bernardis (*sanctuary hermit*)

Angelo Mattiussi (*wagon worker*)

Luca Sera (*island priest*)

Italy/France/Slovenia 2021©

89 mins

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