



NEW RELEASES

# Triangle of Sadness

## Ruben Östlund on 'Triangle of Sadness'

*Let's start with the title: what does 'triangle of sadness' refer to?*

It's a term used in the beauty industry. A friend sat next to a plastic surgeon at a party and, after a quick look at her face, he said, 'Oh, you have a quite deep triangle of sadness... but I can fix that with Botox in 15 minutes.' He was referring to a wrinkle between her eyebrows. In Swedish it's called 'trouble wrinkle' and it suggests you've had a lot of struggles in your life. I thought it said something about our era's obsession with looks and that inner wellbeing is, in some respects, secondary.

*Force Majeure was set in a ski resort and The Square in the contemporary art world. Why did you decide to set Triangle of Sadness in the world of fashion?*

I did some research into the fashion world in 2018, when I collaborated with my friend Per Andersson and developed a small line of clothing for his Swedish menswear label Velour. I also gained a detailed insider's take on the industry through my partner, Sina, who is a fashion photographer. When we met, she told me a lot about the marketing strategies for different fashion brands and also about working conditions for models. For example, a male model generally earns only a third of what a female model does. I thought it would be interesting to look at these differences through the main characters, a male and a female model called Carl and Yaya.

When I started to do research for the film, numerous male models told me that they often have to manoeuvre past powerful men in the industry who want to sleep with them, sometimes with the promise of a more successful career. In some respects, being a male model mirrors what women have to deal with in a patriarchal society.

*So you are interested in how beauty has economical value, whether it's in the fashion world or in the 'normal' world?*

Yes! That was the initial idea. Our looks are one of the fundamental things we have to deal with as human beings. The way we look affects every social encounter. The fact that looks play such a key role in society is something of a universal inequality, but on the other hand you can be born beautiful wherever you come from and that beauty can be used to climb the socioeconomic ladder in a class-based society.

A running joke for the female models is that when their modelling career is over, they always can marry rich men and become trophy wives – something that is not really possible for the male models.

*Ergo once again using the sociological gaze as a way into an idea?*

As with all my films, my starting point is to look at human behaviour. Many scenes in *Triangle of Sadness* have a connection to a sociological study or an anecdote that I think highlights something from a behaviouristic point of view.

There is one study in particular that I thought was extremely interesting: scientists observing zebras in the African savannah were trying to figure out why their fur is black and white when they live in the savannah. Wouldn't it be

better if their fur was as yellow as the sandy savannah? Studying individual zebras proved almost impossible as they disappeared into the herd, so a red dot was sprayed onto an individual zebra, making it easier to follow. However, the red dot made it stand out and it was almost immediately taken by lions. The scientists quickly realised that the black and white pattern is not about hiding in the environment, but rather about hiding in the herd.

The scientists drew parallels to us humans and pointed out something fascinating about the fashion industry. We use our clothes to try and hide in the social group to which we are connected. Our clothes are our camouflage. Just think about the concerns we have when we are going to a fancy evening party; we really don't want to be over- or underdressed. If we get it wrong we feel exposed. From an economical perspective it really makes sense that fashion brands create new collections all the time. Then we have to change our clothes more often and consume more.

It's no accident that I called the fashion line I created for Velour 'Discreet Bourgeoisie'. One of the pieces was the 'Lumière Tuxedo', which I named in homage to the cinema in Cannes where I was awarded the Palme d'Or for *The Square* in 2017. You can wear the tuxedo as a kind of camouflage amongst the educated middle-class. In the Lumière tuxedo, you can hide in the Cannes herd very efficiently!

*Your films are very much rooted in European cinema, but Triangle of Sadness is your first English-language film. Did you find the process challenging?*

Yes, because there are nuances that I don't know about in the English language that I know in Swedish. Having said that, my scenarios and themes are simple, and they have a universality, so it is easy for the actors to relate to them. I always work in the same way: during casting and rehearsals, I improvise the scenes with the actors; and I later use some of that material in the script when it is better than the original dialogue. If I am working with English-speaking actors, they can fill in any gaps I may have and make the language richer, more nuanced and so on. But I am ambivalent about making films in English since I'm critical about the dominance of Anglo-Saxon culture. It's absurd what kind of influence it has over Sweden and Scandinavia.

*Directors often talk about having 'good' or 'bad' luck when shooting – do you feel that you were blessed with Triangle of Sadness?*

It was interesting. Just before we started to shoot in Greece, conflict was building between Turkey and Greece and we started to get nervous about that. Then, on the first day of the shoot, a storm was coming in and we were supposed to do a long tracking shot on a beach. At that point we decided, 'Let's go with the weather. If that's the weather, then that's how the scene is going to play out. Let's use what we have.' And I found that a happy-go-lucky kind of attitude made us much more relaxed, and very often issues solved themselves. Apart from the storm, we were very fortunate with the weather.

We shot the exteriors on Christina O, the old Onassis yacht, which turned out to add quite a fun meta layer when we blew her up. That yacht is such a strong symbol of the elite of the 60s and 70s, and myriad famous, powerful men like Churchill have spent a lot of time on her. So we had nine days on the yacht, which was very expensive, and Covid was getting closer and closer and another lockdown was looming. In fact, we just managed to finish the shooting on the day before we went into another lockdown. Had the lockdown come a few days earlier, I don't know how we could have finished the film.

*Finally, do you see Force Majeure, The Square and Triangle of Sadness as a loosely connected trilogy exploring masculinity in modern times?*

Yes, I started to think about this when I was writing *Triangle of Sadness*. All the men in these films are trying to deal with who they are supposed to be and what is expected of them. They are then put in a trap in order to see how they behave. For me, these three films have really been a way of setting up a dilemma for myself, of cornering myself. What would I do if I was dealing with this? As soon as the answer appears to be easy, then it's not so interesting. But if it is hard, then I am interested.

## Production notes

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### TRIANGLE OF SADNESS

*Director:* Ruben Östlund

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*In co-production with:* Essential Films, Coproduction Office, Sveriges Television, ZDF/Arte, Arte France Cinéma, TRT Sinema

*Presented by:* Imperative Entertainment

*In association with:* Film i Väst, BBC Film, BFI, 30West

*International Sales:* The Coproduction Office

*Executive Producers:* Dan Friedkin, Bradley Thomas, Ryan Friedkin, Micah Green, Daniel Steinman, Peter Possne, Mikael Fellenius, Rose Garnett, Lizzie Francke, Giorgos Karnavas, Konstantinos Kontovrakis, Dan Wechsler, Jamal Zeinal-Zade, Andreas Roald, Jim Stark, Anna Croneman, Michel Merkt, Regina Solórzano, Brina Elizabeta Blaz, Alessandro Del Vigna

*Produced by:* Erik Hemmendorff, Philippe Bober

*Co-producers:* Marina Perales Marhuenda, Mike Goodridge, Clemens Köstlin, Per Damgaard Hansen, Julio Chavezmontes

*Casting Director:* Pauline Hansson

*Screenplay:* Ruben Östlund

*Director of Photography:* Fredrik Wenzel

*Editing:* Ruben Östlund, Mikel Cee Karlsson

*Additional Editing:* Jacob Schulesinger, Benjamin Mirguet

*Production Design:* Josefin Åsberg

*Costume Design:* Sofie Krunegård

*Make-up & Hair:* Stefanie Gredig

*Sound Engineers:* Jonas Rudels, Jacob Ilgner

*Sound Design & Re-recording Mix:* Andreas Franck, Bent Holm

### Cast

Harris Dickinson (*Carl*)

Charlbi Dean (*Yaya*)

Woody Harrelson (*The Captain*)

Vicki Berlin (*Paula*)

Henrik Dorsin (*Jarmo*)

Zlatko Buric (*Dimitry*)

Jean-Christophe Folly (*Nelson*)

Iris Berben (*Therese*)

Dolly De Leon (*Abigail*)

Sunny Melles (*Vera*)

Amanda Walker (*Clementine*)

Oliver Ford Davies (*Winston*)

Arvin Kananian (*Darius*)

Carolina Gynning (*Ludmilla*)

Ralph Schicha (*Uli*)

Sweden-France-UK-Germany-Turkey-Greece 2022©

150 mins

A Curzon release

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From Fri 28 Oct

#### The Greenaway Alphabet

From Fri 11 Nov

#### Aftersun

From Fri 18 Nov

#### What Do We See When We Look at the Sky?

(*Ras vkhedavt, rodesac cas vukurebt?*)

From Fri 25 Nov

### RE-RELEASES

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From Mon 17 Oct

#### Poltergeist

From Fri 21 Oct

#### Nil by Mouth

From Fri 4 Nov (Preview on Thu 20 Oct 20:20; extended intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large on Fri 4 Nov 17:50; intro by Kieron Webb, Head of Conservation, BFI Archive on Mon 7 Nov 18:00)

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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