

Official Selection

tiff

Toronto International  
Film Festival 2021

## SILENT LAND

By Aga Woszczyńska

### SYNOPSIS

A perfect couple rents a holiday home on a sunny Italian island. The reality does not live up to their expectations when they find out that the pool in the house is broken. Ignorant of the fact that the island faces water shortage, they ask for someone to fix it. The constant presence of a stranger invades the couple's idea of safety and starts a chain of events, which makes them act instinctively and irrationally, heading to the darkest place in their relationship.



## INTERVIEW WITH AGA WOSZCZYŃSKA

By Marta Bałaga

**In Silent Land, your feature debut set during summer holidays, you deal with dark subjects in broad daylight.**

What you call darkness, for me is this inability to feel emotions or to be in touch with them. When you don't have empathy, you are blind to whatever is happening around you. You opt for passivity and conformity, just like the main couple.

**They seem so perfect: tall, blond. Why did you choose these actors?**

They look like an Ikea commercial! Dobromir Dymecki and Agnieszka Żulewska are such good performers and friends of mine. I have already worked with both of them on my diploma film Fragments premiered at Cannes in Director Fortnight. With Dobromir, we made three shorts together. He is "my" actor – that's what I call him. With Agnieszka, I just couldn't imagine any other person as Anna. They just fit so well together.

I wanted to show "the perfect couple", even though nothing in their life is perfect. Their image stands in contrast to what's inside. I made Fragments with the same actors and the same characters. But I still had the impression that this short film was not enough to tell the story about emotional bankruptcy... as I like to call the state of my characters.



**Why did you want to set the film in Italy? It's usually portrayed as this ultimate holiday destination but in the film, everything is falling apart – starting with the pool.**

We tend to see it like that, especially Polish people. We all remember coming to Italy when we were children. My own relationship with the country changed 15 years ago. I spent some time in Calabria, there were almost no tourists and I wrote this story with it in mind – I felt like I really got to know this region. I fell in love! Later, we got funding from Sardinia so the location has changed, but it was still a very interesting place to explore. I have never been there before.

Italy is a cradle of beautiful culture, where suddenly beautiful values are starting to collapse. I choose this country also because when I was writing the script the biggest amount of immigrants was desperately trying to come to Italy. But I don't want to blame just Italy, but whole Europe, whole world exactly.

**You refer to the refugee crisis in Silent Land. When tragedy strikes, someone says about the immigrant: "He wasn't even legal." As if dismissing his entire existence.**

It's a very cruel sentence. When the catastrophe on Lampedusa happened, I wanted to make a commentary, but not in a literal way, on how Europe — through the viewpoint of my characters — can be so incredibly passive and blind to the plight of immigrants. I think it is a very timely story. Especially now, when a country like Afghanistan desperately needs help, we are closing our eyes and borders. But Silent Land is not a political statement – it's a humanistic statement.

**Did you want to talk about masculinity here as well? Adam tends to "act like a man" but the one time he doesn't.**

When the accident happens, they both don't react. I don't think Adam is supposed to do something just because he is a man – they both have two hands, two legs and a brain. Anna is trying to put the blame on him, that's true, but she doesn't have the right to do so. They were both there – they both saw it happen.

When I speak to men who have seen the film, they agree that it should be him. But to me, it's not like Adam doesn't feel "like a man" anymore. I constructed these characters thinking about specific psychological types and he is a narcissist. I had boyfriends like him [laughter]. Still, I like him the most – I don't actually like Anna that much. Mostly because he has the strength to change and to assume the guilt. He might seem weak at the beginning, but eventually he becomes strong. As I said before, it's the only character that changes, because Anna is afraid of change. She just wants to come back to Poland, to their normal routine. My cinematographer, Bartosz Świniarski, told me I would be accused of not liking men after this film. But I love them and I love Adam, because he evolves. Anna just seems strong. Whenever there is a problem, she is hiding.

**How did you start collaborating with Jean-Marc Barr? He is playing a diver here; a bit like in his breakthrough *The Big Blue*.**

I knew I wanted him in the film, but I was afraid he wouldn't agree – precisely because of that reason! He played that all the way back in 1988, when he was the most beautiful man in the world. Well still he is! (laugh). But he turned out to be an amazing collaborator, very professional and kind. Even though he is already a famous actor he was always reading a book on set, by the camera, ready to start working. I don't know if it's because of the casting or because of the energy on set, or both, but I ended up working with an amazing group of people.

When I think of his character, Arnaud, I am going back to that dark place we have discussed at the beginning. He needs to take care of his clients and he seems so peaceful, but then we get to know his other side too. I like that we have these two completely different couples here: Anna and Adam, Claire and Arnaud. They are different yet what they are dealing with is ultimately the same. Anna and Adam didn't help the man who was dying in front of them and Arnaud would do anything for money.



**You seem interested in different forms of selfishness – the moment when “putting yourself first” stops being an empowering slogan and starts to cause serious issues.**

We need to distinguish between the decision to not be too influenced by other people's problems and not helping out when we should. I could say that I am “taking care of myself” because I don't feel like seeing my grandmother, who was never really that nice to me for example. But what if she is really unwell, in need of help? These are two different things. I don't agree with this new life philosophy – focusing only on yourself is a bad thing. My film shows what happens when passivity takes over our life: the passivity of today's thirtysomethings or of Europe, not willing to take care of the immigrants.

Three days ago, I had to dial the emergency number for the first time in my life. There was a woman lying on the pavement, not moving. Right in front of other people's home and balconies – nobody reacted. People were just passing her by. She was drunk and you could tell, but only after the ambulance came people started to pay some attention. Later that day I met my producer and said: “We need to bring this film to cinemas a bit sooner.”

**I noticed you don't have any dramatic soundtrack or music in the film, there is a lot of silence. Why?**

To me, music emphasises emotions. You are trying to feel whatever the music wants you to feel: be sad, be happy. In my film, you don't have to do anything – it's just you and the screen. I prefer to ask questions rather than give any answers, so here, the sound is the music.

To me, cinema starts when the words end and the images start carrying emotions. Which is why I value my collaboration with Bartosz Świniarski so much. We worked together before too and sometimes I am afraid he is able to read my mind – he knows everything! He knew I wanted to achieve something similar to slow cinema, where form is as important as content. I didn't want to be close to these characters right from the start, we are approaching them only later. I didn't need any close-ups. I like it when the whole frame communicates something, not just the face.

## DIRECTOR



### **Aga Woszczyńska**

Born in 1984. Director, scriptwriter, anthropologist. Aga graduated from Applied Social Science (2008) and The Polish National Film School in Lodz - Directing Department (2014). For many years she has been working as Assistant Director in Poland and abroad. Her short films were presented and won awards at numerous film festivals, including Cannes Film Festival, Helsinki International Film Festival, T-Mobile New Horizons, Sao Paulo Kinoforum or Warsaw Film Festival and have been brought by national and international TV channels. Her graduation short film "Fragments" had its international Premiere at Cannes Film Festival in Directors' Fortnight (Quinzaine des Réalisateurs). „Silent Land”, which premiered in Toronto IFF Platform Competition is her first feature film. She is currently working on her second feature „Black Water”.

## CAST

### Dobromir Dymecki

Born in 1985. Actor. Graduated from The National Film School in Łódź from Acting Department in 2009. He starred in many award-winning short films e.g. **Poranek** dir. Justyna Tafel (Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay at Santiago International Film Festival), **Dzień Oszustka** dir. Bartosz Warwas (Best Student Film Award at Hamilton Film Festival) and **Fragments** dir. Aga Woszczyńska (Cannes Film Festival in Director's Fortnight competition). For his work in short film **Users** dir. Jakub Piątek, he collected two awards for Best Male Performance and Best Screenplay at Poland's Independent Film Awards. He starred in such feature films as **The Butler** dir. Filip Bajon (Gdynia Film Festival), **All for my Mother** dir. Małgorzata Imielska (Warsaw Film Festival) and **Prime Time** dir. Jakub Piątek (Sundance Film Festival). He often works in theatre, winning multiple awards for his stage performances.

### Agnieszka Żulewska

Born in 1987. Actress. Graduated from The National Film School in Łódź from Acting Department in 2010. She started her career in television and starred in multiple award-winning short films. Many of her films screened at international festivals including Warsaw Film Festival, Stockholm Film Festival, Fantastic Fest in Austin, Sicilia Queer Filmfest. She collected various awards for her performance in award-winning short film **The Kiss** dir. Filip Geldon - in Brno, Palermo, San Diego. For her performance in feature film **Chemo** dir. Bartosz Prokopowicz she won Zbyszek Cybulski Award for "young actors distinguished by outstanding individuality". She starred in such prominent Polish movies as **Demon** dir. Marcin Wrona (Best Director Award at Warsaw Film Festival) or **Love Tasting** dir. Dawid Nickel (Gdynia Film Festival). She is also very well known for her stage work in one of the most renowned theatres in Poland - TR Warszawa.

### Jean Marc Barr

Born in 1960. Actor, director, producer. He made his West End debut in Peter Hall's play **Orpheus Descending**. A breakthrough in his career was his role in **The Big Blue** dir. Luc Besson for which he received Cesar nomination in Best Actor category. He often works with Lars von Trier. They collaborated on such films like **Europa**, **Breaking the Waves**, **Dancer in the Dark**, **Dogville**, **The Nymphomaniac Part 2**. He is a prominent figure in French cinema, starred in such films as **Big Sur** dir. Michael Polish (Transatlantyk Film Festival), **Le Divorce** dir. James Ivory (Venice Film Festival) and **La Peste** dir. Luis Puenzo (Venice Film Festival). For his work in **Crustacés & Coquillages** dir. Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau (Berlinale Film Festival) he was nominated for European Film Award in Best Actor category.

## Alma Jodorowsky

Born in 1991. Actress, director. She starred in ***Blue is the Warmest Color*** dir. Abdellatif Kechiche (Palm d'Or Winner at Cannes Film Festival), ***The Shock of the Future*** dir. Marc Collin (Torino Film Festival), ***Selfie*** (SXSW Film Festival). She was nominated to UK National Film Awards for her role in ***Kids in Love*** dir. Chris Foggin. Most recently, she starred in Netflix' series ***The Serpent***.

## Marcello Romolo

Italian actor. Best known for his work with Paolo Sorrentino in ***Le voci di dentro*** and ***Sabato, domenica e lunedì***. He starred in ***A Children's Story*** dir. Andrea Frazzi, Antonio Frazzi (Karlovy Vary Film Festival, EFA Winner), ***The Professor*** dir. Giuseppe Tornatore, ***5 is the Perfect Number*** dir. Igor Tuveri (Venice Film Festival), ***Fortuna*** dir. Nicolangelo Gelormini (Hong Kong Film Festival). Most recently he starred in TV series ***Young Pope*** for HBO.

## PRODUCERS

### Lava Films

Lava Films is an independent film production company collaborating with aspiring and established filmmakers from Poland and abroad. The company's goal is to help artists transform their potential into features, documentaries bearing hallmarks of creative individuality, yet reflecting valid issues of our times. Believing that international co-productions are the most accurate answer to the needs of multicultural audience, Lava Films engages in projects with worldwide potential as the main or minor producer as well as conducts service productions. Lava Films projects have been developed at such programmes as ACE Producers, TorinoFilmLab, EAVE Producers Workshop, EP2C, Passion to Market, Berlinale Co-Production market, MIA Market, Ekran, CineKid, Cartoon Movie, Sheffield Doc Fest, Doc Lab, and many others. Their recent productions include ***Never Gonna Snow Again*** by Małgorzata Szumowska, co-directed by Michał Englert (Polish Oscar entry 2021, premiered at Venice IFF Main Competition 2020), ***Apples*** by Christos Nikou (Greek Oscar entry 2021, premiered at Venice IFF's Orizzonti 2020), Magnus von Horn's ***The Here After*** (Cannes IFF 2015) and ***Sweat*** (Cannes IFF 2020), EFA nominated ***21 x New York*** dir. Piotr Stasik, EFA Discovery Award winner ***Sole*** dir. Carlo Sironi (premiered at Venice and Toronto IFFs), ***The Harvesters*** dir. Etienne Kallos (premiered at Cannes IFF) among others. Lava's latest films are ***Silent Land*** dir. Aga Woszczyńska and Irish-Polish co-production ***Wolf*** dir. Nathalie Biancheri, both screening at 2021 Toronto IFF.



## Kino Produzioni

From its Rome headquarter, Kino reaches out towards international partners and filmmakers. The stories supported by Kino are those that expand the meaning of being human. Kino is working to develop a new generation of emerging talents and is often coproducing with international production companies. The company's latest works were presented at A-List International film festivals.

In 2019, Kino produzioni premiered **Sole**, Carlo Sironi's debut feature film, selected in Venice, Toronto and at Berlinale, and winner of the EFA's European Discovery Prize. Among the company's works that premiered in 2019 there are: **Il Mio Corpo** by Michele Pennetta, selected by Cannes' ACID, Visions du Réel, and Alice nella città; feature documentaries **Kentannos** by Victor Cruz, premiered at Visions du Réel, and **Celles Qui Restent** by Ester Sparatore (FR/IT/BE), premiered at Visions du Réel and winner of the Award for Best Italian film at the Biografilm Festival, supported by Eurimages and Cinema du Monde.

In 2018 several works produced by Kino had their premieres: **Coureur** by Kenneth Mercken (BE/IT), **Sugarlove** by Laura Luchetti, **The Imminent Immanent** by Carlo Francisco Manatad, premiered in Toronto (PH/SIN/IT) and **Delay** by Ali Asgari (IR/IT).

**I Was a Dreamer**, Michele Vannucci's film feature, premiered in Venice at Orizzonti in 2016.

Kino latest projects include: **Delta**, Michele Vannucci's second feature starring Alessandro Borghi, produced along with Groenlandia, and **Silent Land** by Aga Woszczyńska. Other projects in the pipeline are **Alcarras**, the second feature by the Spanish director Carla Simón, the second feature by Carlo Sironi and **La Bella Estate** by Laura Luchetti.

## i/o post

i/o post company was founded in 2005 and since then has taken care of complete visual post of more than 60 feature films. In most cases as local co-producer. Since 2012 i/o post started to take part in International co-productions. Their current projects include: in development: **I Don't Love You Anymore**, Z. Jirasky; in production: **Piargy**, I. Trajkov, **Absence**, A. Mosaffa, **Adasqaq**, E. Eskendir, **Marocco**, E. Parvu.

The company's selected works are **Shadow Country**, B. Sláma 2020 (Best film, Best director, Best Actress – Czech film critics' awards - Luminar Film), **Oroslan**, M. Ivanišin, 2019, **Punk never ends!** J. Šlauka, 2019, **A Certain kind of silence**, M. Hogenauer 2019 (East of West Karlovy Vary IFF, Busan IFF), **Little Crusader**, V. Kadrnka, 2017 (best feature: Karlovy Vary IFF), **Ice Mother**, B. Sláma, 2017 (best script: Tribeca), **A Very Ordinary Citizen**, M. Barzegar 2015, **We are Never Alone**, P. Václav 2015 (Berlinale Forum winner), **Honey Night**, I. Trajkov, 2015 (Macedonian Oscar entry), **In Silence**, Z. Jiráský, 2014 (best film and director Phoenix IFF), **Historia de la meva mort**, A. Serra, 2013 (winner at 66th IFF Locarno), **Third Half**, D. Mitrevski 2012 (Macedonian Oscar entry), **Flower Buds**, Z. Jirasky 2012 (Czech Lion: best movie, director, DOP, actor, IFF Busan best feature, IFF Chicago – best feature, Cineart).

## **FESTIVALS**

World Premiere: TIFF 2021 - PLATFORM

## **FILM INFORMATION**

Original Title: Cicha Ziemia

English Title: Silent Land

Genre: Drama

Country: Poland, Italy, Czechia

Language: Polish, English, Italian, French

Year: 2021

Duration: 113 min.

Picture: Color

Aspect Ratio: 1.85 : 1

Sound: 5.1

Available Format: DCP

## **CAST:**

Dobromir Dymecki

Agnieszka Żulewska

Jean Marc Barr

Alma Jodorowsky

Marcello Romolo

## **CREW:**

Director: Aga Woszczyńska

Screenplay: Aga Woszczyńska & Piotr Jaksa Litwin

Cinematography: Bartosz Świniarski

Editing: Jarosław Kamiński

Production Design: Ilaria Sadun

Sound Design: Marek Poledna

Production company: Lava Films

Co-production companies: Kino Produzioni, i/o post s.r.o.

With support of: Polish Film Institute, EC1 Łódź – the City of Culture, Eurimages, MIC – Ministero della cultura Direzione generale Cinema ed audiovisivo, Czech Film Fund

Producers: Agnieszka Wasiak

Co-producers: Giovanni Pompili, Jordi Niubó

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