

STUDIO ZENTRAL

PRESENTS



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2025 OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION

SOUND OF FALLING

a film by MASCHA SCHILINSKI

2025 – GERMANY – DRAMA – GERMAN – 149'

mk2
FILMS

SYNOPSIS

Four girls, Alma, Erika, Angelika, and Lenka, each spend their youth on the same farm in northern Germany. As the home evolves over a century, echoes of the past linger in its walls. Though separated by time, their lives begin to mirror each other.

INTERVIEW WITH MASCHA SCHILINSKI

SOUND OF FALLING follows four protagonists over a period of 100 years, with a large cast in each episode. How did you deal with this challenge as the author of the screenplay?

I developed the film together with my co-writer Louise Peter. We spent a summer on the farm in the Altmark region in the deep countryside halfway between Berlin and Hamburg where SOUND OF FALLING is set. We actually planned to work on our own projects. And while procrastinating and drinking wine in the evening, we asked ourselves, who or what lived in this place? We began to write down images and small scenes that rose up in us. We then weaved this loose material together. That's how our characters came into being.

The Altmark was always a very rural part of Germany. Not much happens there, but it still carries the load of Germany's complex history. It is bordered by the river Elbe, which in WWII marked the final reach of the Russian army's advance and after the war became part of the Iron Curtain between East and West Germany. After the fall of the Wall, people from Berlin looked for weekend retreats there, looking for somewhere empty and quiet.

Because the farm we stayed in stood vacant for 50 years, we were able to walk through the individual rooms and walk through its past. You could see where the farmer put his spoon down for the last time. Everything was still in place. Then we found an old photograph that looked like a snapshot. A picture of three women who stood in the farmyard and looked directly at us. That did something to us, because we were on the other side, in our present, as if these women were breaking the fourth wall and looking directly at us from the past. That basically gave us the atmosphere that runs through the whole film. We were interested in the simultaneity of time levels, that in the same place one person does something very mundane and the other perhaps has an existential, life-changing experience.

During our long research, we noticed that there was hardly a trace of this type of female gaze in the historical material. There were childhood stories in which we stumbled across some very strange remarks, for example, that the maids had to be "adjusted" so that they were harmless to the men. That's all it said. There were many such blank spaces, things that were not talked about, but which showed in the margins. Where such secrets became palpable, we tried to explore what might have been there with the help of our characters.

The images in SOUND OF FALLING, from rural idyll to tragic events, have a luminous beauty. What was your aesthetic concept, and how did you implement it with your DoP and your other colleagues?

It was clear to me from the beginning that SOUND OF FALLING is, among other things, a film about the act of remembering itself, about how perception and memory work. And I have found for myself that I can remember from the body, that I can look at myself from the outside in the aftermath of an experience, although I didn't look at myself that way in the situation, of course. It quickly became clear to me that I wanted to tell the film from these

extremely subjective points of view, with every new break when characters look at themselves again from the vantage point of another time.

I then spent a very long time looking for a visual translation for this feeling with my DoP Fabian Gamper. Our camera is present in the scenes like a kind of protagonist, without us knowing exactly who this gaze belongs to. I sometimes don't know either. I had the feeling that there was suddenly this view from the outside and that the characters instantly felt it themselves. And in doing so, they see something that we will never know. Fabian and I looked for a very long time for images with a lucid luminosity that can show this. An important inspiration was Francesca Woodman, in whose photographs there are transparently shimmering ghostly figures. This floating, flying mood has always fascinated me. On the other hand, it was very important to me to portray the feeling of unavailability when a veil falls over our memories over time.

It took us a while to find appropriate technical solutions. We shot with different objectives, a lot with steady cam, sometimes even with a pinhole camera, to capture this feeling of alienation and dissociation.

The camera itself almost becomes a part of the protagonists' bodies.

One of the central themes of your film is psychological and physical violence, mostly, but not exclusively, against women.

In our research, we came across many examples of the horrible treatment of dairy maids in eyewitness accounts or history books. There are very few statements on this from dairy maids themselves, who often could not write. One of the few quotes we found has burned itself into our memory. A maid looks back on her life and says: "In truth, I have lived completely in vain." That did so much to us, and we asked ourselves what such a terrible sentence means today and to what extent such traumatic experiences affect women's lives through time. In her time as a maid, our character Trudi has no other option than to survive her life. Even today, there are many people, not only women, who only survive every day instead of being able to live.

This is one of the big topics that occupied us, especially with regard to children – is there such a thing as a transmission of trauma across the generations? These traumas are often not the big war stories that are retold in collective memory but rather tiny quiet tremors within the characters. It can simply be a look that has burned itself under the skin, as Lenka experiences in the film.

At the same time, however, we were interested in subtle little things, for example why the body withholds itself from you or why your own body sometimes betrays you. There is a passage in the film that says: why is it that you blush on the head so that everyone sees your own shame when you are trying to hide it, and why are our bodies constituted to make this visible to everyone.

SOUND OF FALLING is a German film because of its setting and the story, to which you repeatedly set points of connection, and on the other hand, you deal with very universal themes. How did you balance particular and universal?

We could have set a similar story in any other place. Certain everyday things would have looked different. But this very subjective view through the eyes of the individual women and girls, who simply observe what is happening around them and we are thus thrown directly into their experience of their everyday life, that could have taken place anywhere in the world. The attempt to track down the gaps in people's felt experience for which there are no words, where language is not yet present. I believe that at some point you usually don't remember words and sentences, but the feelings remain present. That's why there is little dialogue in our film – it isn't essential for the function of memory.

Your narrators in the film are usually the four protagonists, but sometimes there is a perspective that is not clearly assigned to any one of your characters.

Yes, this is certainly my approach to how memory processes work. Memories are also subject to time. And yet an essence burns itself into our minds that we feel our way towards without ever fully reaching it, because we may have repressed something or something has completely tipped over into the subconscious. For me, there is always the uncertainty that you can never be sure whether something really happened like this and where dreams and reality intertwine.

How do you see your protagonists' attempts to make sense of their world within the different episodes?

My characters all simply live in their worlds, Alma in the almost archaic era in the beginning of the 20th century, Erika in 1940s under the immediate, physical impression of WWII, Angelika in the German Democratic Republic during the 1980s and Lenka in our present, long after the fall of the Wall. They are subject to their everyday lives, which they describe very pragmatically and soberly, even things that sound cruel or strange from today's perspective. For the characters in their time, it's just like that - the horse's hooves have to be shod, the maid is sterilized, the grandmother's corpse has its mouth tied shut so that no fly crawls in. This can be mentioned in the same breath because it is simply everyday life. And yet, little by little, they try to understand and question the preconceptions they are subject to. What unites all the characters is the longing to exist in this world for once without anything having preceded them. It's a longing that I know well and that I share with my characters.

As a director, how did you approach the implementation of such an ambitious project in a very practical way?

The shoot was a big challenge. In many ways, I look at SOUND OF FALLING as my debut film. While I had some experience through my previous project THE DAUGHTER, that film was the final project in my third year at the film academy, and it wasn't supposed to be a feature. I went to the house of family friends in Greece with the actors and a minimal crew and just shot the film in three weeks. SOUND OF FALLING was a very different animal. Despite

wonderful partners, we had the tight budget of a debut film, which was only enough for 34 days of shooting, without time for rehearsals. That's not a lot of time for a film of two and a half hours that works with a big cast including many children. So we had to plan very carefully. We had no alternative or weather options – and it rained constantly. For each of the four time periods, we had to completely redesign the set, i.e. this real farm, from top to bottom and therefore could hardly reshoot any scenes.

The film wouldn't have worked at all if the village where we shot hadn't supported us so generously. You could say that it takes a village to make a film, at least in this case. Because everyone there unlocked their barns and brought out old carts and the historical tools that we used in this film. We also received stories and photo material from the village during our research, which was enormously helpful.

But the limitations we had to work with forced us all to use the greatest possible precision and concentration. There was a positive tension on set because all the departments knew we had a maximum of two or three takes. In the end, it was an incredibly good experience, so I didn't miss rehearsing at all. I had to and could completely follow my intuition. Despite the tough shooting conditions, I like to think back to this experience. I'm just very happy that despite everything, we managed not to make any compromises, and that the whole team and above all the great ensemble of actors stuck together in such a way that my vision could turn into this film. To me, that is a great gift.

ABOUT MASCHA SCHILINSKI

Mascha Schilinski is a writer and director born in Berlin.

She completed the "Drehbuch-Masterclass" at the Filmschule Hamburg and worked as a writer. Schilinski then began her film directing studies at the Film Academy Baden-Württemberg. Her award-winning medium-length film DIE KATZE (THE CAT) was made in her second year of study. In her third year of study, she directed her feature film DIE TOCHTER (DARK BLUE GIRL). The film premiered at the Berlinale in 2017 and was nominated for the GWFF Award - Best First Feature. DIE TOCHTER (DARK BLUE GIRL) screened at more than forty festivals worldwide and won several international awards.

In 2023, she and her co-writer Louise Peter won the Thomas Strittmatter Award for their screenplay SOUND OF FALLING.

SOUND OF FALLING is premiering in Official Selection - Competition at the 78th Cannes Film Festival.

CAST

Alma	Hanna Heckt
Lia	Greta Krämer
Frit	Filip Schnack
Gerti	Helena Lüer
Hedda	Anastasia Cherepakha
Emma	Susanne Wuest
Max	Gode Benedix
Trudi	Luzia Oppermann
Berta	Bärbel Schwarz
Frieda	Liane Düsterhöft
Erika	Lea Drinda
Fritz	Martin Rother
Angelika	Lena Urzendowsky
Rainer	Florian Geißelmann
Uwe	Konstantin Lindhorst
Irm	Claudia Geisler-Bading
Albat	Andreas Anke
Lenka	Laeni Geiseler
Nelly	Zoë Baier
Kaya	Ninel Geiger
Christa	Luise Heyer
Hannes	Lucas Prisor

CREW

Casting	Jacqueline Rietz, Karimah El-Giamal
Script Consultant	Franz Rodenkirchen
1st AD	Oliver Grüttner
Production Sound Mixer	Claudio Demel
Supervising Sound Editor	Billie Mind
Sound Editor	Billie Mind, Jürgen Schulz
Re-recording Mixer	Kai Tebbel
Original Score	Michael Fiedler, Eike Hosenfeld
Hair and Make-up Artist	Anne-Marie Walther, Irina Schwarz
Costume Design	Sabrina Krämer
Production Design	Cosima Vellenzer
Director of Photography	Fabian Gamper
Editing	Evelyn Rack
Commissioning Editors ZDF /Das Kleine Fernsehspiel	Burkhard Althoff, Melvina Kotios
Unit Production Manager	Maximilian Seidel
Line Producers	Henning Falk, Alexandra Kret
Executive Producer	Lasse Scharpen
Produced by	Maren Schmitt, Lucas Schmidt
Written by	Mascha Schilinski, Louise Peter
Directed by	Mascha Schilinski
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International Sales	mk2 Films

INTERNATIONAL PRESS & SALES

US PRESS - CINETIC

Ryan Werner - ryan@cineticmedia.com

Emilie Spiegel - emilie@cineticmedia.com

INTERNATIONAL PRESS - CLAUDIA TOMASSINI

claudia@claudiatomassini.com

lorenzo@claudiatomassini.com

paola@claudiatomassini.com



INTERNATIONAL SALES

Fionnuala Jamison, Managing Director

fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com

Emmanuel Pissarra, Head of Acquisitions

emmanuel.pissarra@mk2.com

Quentin Bohanna, International Sales

quentin.bohanna@mk2.com

Elise Cochin, International Sales

elise.cochin@mk2.com

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager

anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com

Mathilde Martin, Head of Marketing

mathilde.martini@mk2.com

Lucie Cottet, Marketing

lucie.cottet@mk2.com

Visit our website www.mk2films.com