

VENICE 2023 International Film Critics' Week

Luna Carmoon • Director of *Hoard*

“The door is always ajar when it comes to memories and grief”

by MARTA BAŁAGA

01/09/2023 - VENICE 2023: The debuting director proves there is no escaping the past, so we might as well just learn to accept it



Maria (**Lily-Beau Leach** and **Saura Lightfoot Leon**) loves being around her mum (**Hayley Squires**), but the home they created for themselves, with random objects stacked up to the roof, terrifies other people. She grows up, rarely thinking about the past, until it catches up with her, threatening to take over her life. We talked to **Luna Carmoon** about her feature debut, *Hoard* [+], which is about to screen in Venice's International Film Critics' Week.

Cineuropa: You talk about trauma, but you also show that embracing certain things, and understanding that they stay with you forever, doesn't have to be a tragedy. You can survive it.

Luna Carmoon: That's the thing with grief: as a child, you experience it differently to when you are an adult. I lost my nan when I was little, and escaping into fantasy helped me survive that time. But when you get older, the real knowledge of what was happening can hit you like a double-decker bus.

I started writing this story in 2020, when COVID-19 hit. We were all in this weird limbo of not knowing what the future could even look like. All of a sudden, I could remember these sensations; I could remember how it felt when I was around my nan. I believe that time is non-linear and that all the things that have ever happened, or will happen, are just cat's-cradled on top of each other. The door is always ajar when it comes to memories and grief. They surprise you, and play hide and seek. That's what *Hoard* is about: the fact that grief never truly disappears.

Whenever Maria thinks about the past, it's very sensual. It's not your usual flashback.

I didn't want flashbacks at all. I didn't want to use any footage from the first half. I was fasci- but how do you show it on screen? Sometimes, there are these little soundscapes from the

can discern them, but hopefully, you can feel the sensation. I would ask Joe [Joseph Quinn, playing Michael] to listen to the way Hayley delivered a line of dialogue and make him imitate the tone, for example.

These characters don't really talk about their past, which also means they don't spell things out for the audience. Were you afraid of that?

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I don't like to assume the audience is lazy. These people come from a world I know very well, and they don't articulate what's happening inside of them. They don't have these conversations. Michael went through foster care, left school early and went straight to work. Maria is in that weird, dormant stage. They are in survival mode. I'm interested in that animal inside of us, and sometimes, it can be more communicative than words. The way they look and grunt at each other? It's a conversation. It's childlike, but you can already tell they are quite fragile, trying to reenact the kind of childhood they never had.

What about those first few scenes with Hayley? As you said, you decided not to have flashbacks, but you had to make sure we would remember them anyway.

Before it became a script, *Hoard* was a 20-page story. I wanted to capture these two "magpies", creating their own routine and their nest with these findings. But what happens when the outside world starts to unseal it? I don't want to speak for everyone, but I feel I have never seen a working-class mum with that sort of vibrancy. She is a mixture of my mother and my grandmother, who seemed so beautiful, fabulous and exciting to me as a child. That's what I wanted to capture, even though the reality of hoarding as a mental-health issue is that from the outside, it looks disastrous. My nan was like that, and when she passed away, I discovered all of these newspaper clippings of optical illusions. She would collect things off the street and give them to me, and it just felt like Christmas. These are some really visceral memories, and even when there is shame and embarrassment attached to them, there is also this feeling of utter love.

You added a very poetic voiceover that invites people in. Why did you want to have it?

I love the film *Sundays and Cybèle*. It's told with a sense of childlike magic, and I wanted to see my world in a similar way. Also, I can't remember the last time I heard a voiceover that sounded like me. Maria can't verbalise her feelings, so this way, we can believe there is this internal monologue happening inside of her. Still, she is only allowing us to hear a small part of it: the rest is for her and her mum.

It offers me comfort that these memories are as alive in my present as they were in my past. Sometimes, they are locked away in your brain, and you haven't figured out how to access these vaults. But you have to hold on to what you have experienced. At the end of the day, memories are all we really have.

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