



SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2021

SMALL BODY

a film by **Laura Samani**

World Premiere
60th Semaine de la Critique Cannes 2021
Feature Film Competition

LOGLINE

A grief-stricken young woman leaves her seaside village behind to try and free her stillborn baby's soul, setting out on a perilous journey to a remote mountain sanctuary where she holds faith in a miracle.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Italy, 1900. Young Agata's baby is stillborn and so, condemned to Limbo. Agata hears about a place in the mountains, where infants can be brought back to life for just one breath, to baptize them. She undertakes a voyage with her daughter's small body hidden in a box and meets Lynx, a solitary boy who offers to help her. They set off on an adventure which will enable both to come close to a miracle that seems impossible.

Italy / France / Slovenia – 2021 – 89min – 1:1.85 – 5.1
Italian dialect – first feature film
Original title: Piccolo Corpo

LONG SYNOPSIS

A small island in northeastern Italy, winter of early 1900. Young Agata's baby is stillborn. In the Catholic tradition, an infant that has not taken the first breath cannot be baptized, and its soul is condemned to Limbo without a name and without peace. But Agata has heard about a place in the mountains up north where infants can be brought back to life for just that one breath necessary to baptize them. So, Agata secretly leaves the island and undertakes a dangerous voyage with nothing but hope to guide her, her daughter's small body hidden in a box. She doesn't know the way and she has never seen snow in her life. She meets Lynx, a wild, solitary boy who knows the territory and offers to help her in exchange for the mysterious contents of the box. Despite their mutual distrust, they set off on an adventure during which their courage and friendship will enable both to come close to a miracle that seems impossible.



CAST

Celeste Cescutti (Agata)

Ondina Quadri (Lynx)

CREW

Director

Laura Samani

Producers

Nadia Trevisan

Alberto Fasulo

Co-produceers

Thomas Lambert

Danijel Hočevan

Subject

Laura Samani

Screenplay

Marco Borromei

Elisa Dondi

Laura Samani

Direction of photography

Mitja Ličen

Art direction

Rachele Meliadò

Editing

Chiara Dainese

Costum design

Loredana Buscemi

Original music

Fredrika Stahl

Sound recordist

Luca Bertolin

Sound design

Riccardo Spagnol

Re-recording mixer

Nathalie Vidal

Production

Nefertiti Film with

Rai Cinema

Co-production

Tomsa Films and Vertigo

SUPPORTED BY

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Friuli Venezia Giulia Film Commission

Slovenski Filmski Center

Filmski Studio Viba Film

Arte/Cofinova 16

Torino Film Lab Production Award

Creative Europe Media

When East Meets West Development Award

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY



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, it has involved teenagers living in social marginality with the aim of making a self-narrative documentary. *Small Body*, a raw fairytale, is her first feature.







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 baptize 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 two hundred) 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 realize 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 laguna 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, honoring the different variations so that the people could express themselves as much as possible in the most natural way. The process of imposing standardized Italian began in the second half of the 1800's 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.



PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

The journey of *Small Body* began in 2016, thanks to a meeting between Nadia Trevisan, the producer for Nefertiti Film, and Laura Samani, a brilliant, young, debuting director.

It all started in Friuli Venezia Giulia: *Small Body* is a film born of this territory because stories such as Agata's, the protagonist of the film, are part of the Friuli people's cultural memories.

The producers, having already brought a "little" local story to European cinemas with *Menocchio*, by Alberto Fasulo (International Locarno Festival Competition 2018), once again bet on their region of origin, which, unsurprisingly, is also where Laura Samani and Nefertiti Film originate.

Given this important starting point, the producers built a tailor-made project for a very ambitious debut work: a period film with mostly non-actors, almost entirely filmed out-of-doors, covering significant geographical distances from an organizational and logistics point of view. What enabled the development of this film was, in fact, a constant exchange between the creative and production elements. Seeing as this is a debut film, an open dialogue with both the financial representatives, who were constantly updated with regards to the steps undertaken, and the creative team was fundamental. Every decision taken was made in agreement and this generated a climate of reciprocal trust that enabled the production structure to become ever more solid.

The high levels of training that accompanied the film

during specific moments of development, production and post-production, were also fundamental. The training enriched the dialogue of the film, giving it an international flavor. This open attitude resulted in a series of successes, both in terms of the financing and the recognition received from the most important European Co-production Markets and Pitching Forums. In fact, *Small Body* grew year-by-year and, little by little, as the credibility of the project grew stronger so did the artistic and production contributions from abroad.

Thomas Lambert's French Tomsa Films production company and Danijel Hočevár's Slovenian Vertigo entered a coproduction structure, actively cooperating and providing the project their particular perspectives.

The solidity of production permitted us to face difficult situations, such as the suspension of work due to the pandemic. In fact, shooting was split between two main sessions in 2020 – one in February-March and one in the fall, requiring significant effort from a logistic and production point of view.

Shooting was done almost entirely in Friuli Venezia Giulia, starting in Veneto and ending in Rome; the international crew received Italian, French and Slovenian contributions both during shooting and in post-production.



WORKSHOPS & AWARDS

Torino Film Lab ScriptLab2017 and FeatureLab2018

Production award

When East Meets West 2018

Film Centre Serbia Development Award

Maia Workshop 2018

Venice Gap - Financing Market 2020

Les Arcs Work in Progress 2020

First Cut Lab RE-ACT 2021

NEFERTITI FILM

Nefertiti Film, founded by Nadia Trevisan and Alberto Fasulo, is an independent cinematographic and audiovisual production company headquartered in Friuli Venezia Giulia and Rome.

Nefertiti operates both nationally and internationally, and strongly favors stories that speak honestly to the hearts of its audience, dedicating particular attention to the discovery of new talents but also involving prominent directors and authors. Nefertiti Film has also been an independent distributor since 2018.

Tir, by Alberto Fasulo, wins the Marc'Aurelio d'Oro award for best film at Rome International Film Festival. It is then selected in more than thirty international film festivals. In 2015, Nefertiti Film joins the 68th Locarno Festival with the documentary *Genitori (Parents)* by Alberto Fasulo. In 2018 Nefertiti co-produces *History of Love* by Sonja Prosenc, premiered in Official Competition at the 53rd-Karlovy Vary IFF, where it gains the Grand Jury Special Mention, and selected as the Slovenian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards 2020.

In the same year Nefertiti produces *Menocchio* by Alberto Fasulo: premiered in Official Competition in the 71st Locarno Festival, winner of the Grand Prix du Jury of the Annecy Cinéma Italien 2018, "Film della Critica (critics award)" by SNCCI, Nastro d'Argento for Best Cinematography nominee. In 2021 will be release *Small body*, by Laura Samani and *Brotherhood*, by Francesco Montagner.

TOMSA FILMS

Mid 2018, Thomas Lambert creates his own production company, Tomsa Films. Former cinema student at the Sorbonne Nouvelle's school, Thomas Lambert began at Lumina Films in 2011, where he is assisting Marie Napoli in the production and broadcasting of shorts films and TV documentaries. Late 2012, he joins Rouge International's team where he works side by side with Julie Gayet and Nadia Turincev. During 5 years, he has been involved in the executive production of features french-initiative films (*The Boss's Daughter* by Olivier Loustau, *Jailbirds* by Audrey Estrougo, *Raw* by Julia Ducournau) and to international coproduction (*The Treasure* by Corneliu Porumboiu, *Mimosas* by Oliver Laxe, *The Insult* by Ziad Doueiri).

Tomsa Films purpose is to produce feature films for cinema and television - fiction and documentaries - directed by emerging talents from all horizons. Driven by the desire to be the closest from each film's identity, Tomsa Films aims to be a careful partner serving authors through their creative paths and at all steps of production. Seeking to focus on diversity and mix of genres, Tomsa Films defends strong and singular points of view and would like to develop long time partnerships with its authors to make sure they will get the best national and international coverage.

Since its creation, Tomsa Films has been driven by a determination to accompany films of every category – from first films to work by experienced directors, from experimental films to international and broad-interest films. Tomsa Films is member of 50/50 collective since 2021.

VERTIGO

Vertigo is a Ljubljana (Slovenia)-based production company established in 1994, with a distinctive track record and extensive working experience on international co-productions and narrow budget films.

They produced around 50 feature films, more than 10 documentaries and 50 short films and TV productions, incl. the award-winning films such as *Reconciliation* (2021 CPH: DOX Next Wave Competition), *Otac / Father* (2020, Berlinale Panorama: Audience Award and Ecumenical Prize) and *Circles* (2013, Sundance FF World Cinema Competition's Jury Prize), both directed by Srđan Golubović, *God Exists, Her Name is Petrunya* (2019, Berlinale Competition: Ecumenical Award and Guild Prize, Lux Prize) by Teona Mitevska, *Half-Sister* (2019, Karlovy Vary IFF Main Competition), *Nightlife* (2016, Karlovy Vary IFF's Best Director Award), *Slovenian Girl* (2009, Toronto IFF) and *Spare Parts* (2003, Berlinale Competition), all directed by Damjan Kozole, *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker* (2013, 2 Berlinale Silver Bears) by Danis Tanović, *Alexandrians* (2011, Trieste Film Festival Best Documentary) by Metod Pevec and *Bread and Milk* (2001, Venice FF's Lion of the Future Award) by Jan Cvitkovič.

Three producers are working in the company: Zala Opara, Katja Lenarčič, and Danijel Hočevar, who established the company (together with film directors Damjan Kozole and Metod Pevec).

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