

A black and white close-up portrait of a woman, likely the lead character, looking slightly upwards and to the left. She is wearing a dark, wide-brimmed hat and a textured, high-collared garment. The background is out of focus, showing some foliage.

ROSE

A FILM BY
Markus Schleiner



SYNOPSIS

Amidst the turmoil of the Thirty Years' War, somewhere in Germany, a mysterious soldier appears in a secluded Protestant village. Small and quiet, his face disfigured by a scar, this stranger declares himself the heir of a long-abandoned farmstead and produces a document to support his claim to the suspicious villagers. With time, he overcomes their doubts and shows himself to be a hard-working, God-fearing man, becoming part of the community in a quest for acceptance made up of impossible deceit. The true and twisted tale of a deceiver of land and folk, who, defying her birth as a woman, comported herself as a man and committed many a wicked deed.



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Markus Schleiner, born in Vienna, spent 17 years as a casting director shaping the international success of Austrian cinema through his close collaborations with Jessica Hausner, Ulrich Seidl, and Michael Haneke.

For the Golden Globe winner and Oscar-nominated film *The White Ribbon*, he was responsible not only for casting the child actors but also for directing their performances on set.

His two debut feature films, *Michael* (2011) and *Angelo* (2018), premiered and won awards in the main competitions at the Cannes, Toronto, London, Mumbai, and Japan film festivals, among others.

Schleiner also works as an actor and teaches directing, currently at the Film Academy in Ludwigsburg.

Selected Director's Filmography:

2018 ANGELO

2011 MICHAEL



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

ROSE IS A WORK OF FICTION, BUT YOU'VE MENTIONED THAT TRUE STORIES OF 'WOMEN WHO WORE PANTS' INSPIRED YOU. WHAT ARE SOME NOTABLE CASES FROM THE PAST THAT INSPIRED YOU IN CRAFTING ROSE'S STORY?

A few years ago, a historian friend of mine called me to wish me a happy birthday and told me about an interesting German court case she associated with the date. Exactly 250 years before I was born, on the same day, a woman had been executed in Halberstadt, Germany, for pretending to be a man and being found guilty of sodomy. She is considered the last woman in German legal history to have been executed for this crime. At that time, sodomy was defined as same-sex love between men, bestiality, and penetration with an object.

This birthday greeting was the beginning of a lengthy research project in which I studied hundreds of women from different centuries who, for various reasons, had put on pants to publicly present themselves as men. Even if only for a short time. There were many reasons for this: easier access to work, escape, crime, the hope of avoiding rape, the hope of avoiding forced marriage, the hope of living a more self-determined life, the hope of gaining access to education, lesbian desire, transsexuality, patriotism, exoticism. I also came across a handful of female soldiers in knight's armor and female pirates.

However, the resulting screenplay does not follow a single biography, but represents a conglomeration of my imagination and individual fates that I encountered on my journey with the subject. "There's more freedom in pants," Rose says at one point.

That's exactly what connects all of the women's fates that I've encountered.

ROSE STRIVES TO CREATE AN IDENTITY, AGAINST ALL OBSTACLES, EVEN IF SOCIETY MAY ULTIMATELY CRUSH THESE

ASPIRATIONS. WHAT INSPIRES YOU ABOUT THESE KINDS OF FIGURES?

Her actions are certainly revolutionary. Rose's story is one of self-realisation. Her desire to live as a man stems from the freedom she gains from doing so on a personal level. She recognises opportunities for herself to lead a certain life and puts them into practice. Surrounded by irrefutable definitions in her time, Rose begins to tell her own story.

It is not meant to benefit anyone but herself—in that sense she is not a groundbreaking revolutionary—but it is nevertheless the conscious act of asserting herself against the pre-formulated path for women in those times that is her rebellion.

We learn little about her past life. On one hand, this is precisely the existence that Rose no longer remembers and with which she no longer wants to be identified. On the other hand, this keeps the material universal, appealing to all of us who have ever longed for something seemingly unattainable, and thus avoids the victim narrative. In return, the film does not hide the fact that Rose herself, in her irrepressible desire for freedom, limits the freedoms of others. She lies, mistreats, and abuses.

Anyone who truly desires something is vulnerable and susceptible to attack. They can also become unjust and blind to the desires of others. Rose is an ambivalent, fragile, and touching character. Finding one's place in the world, claiming it for oneself, and holding on to it is one of the most difficult things to achieve.

But wanting and desiring are inscribed in all of us. Overcoming limitations, powerlessness, and lethargy is a conscious act against hopelessness. Even if we might wish for Rose to achieve her goals by other means.

In the end, Rose regrets her actions and their consequences, especially when they have affected others, but she does not doubt the correctness of the path she has chosen. Rose is a pioneer, like others who have ventured into unknown worlds, been crucified, or poisoned by radiation. Because they held on to the possibility of their thoughts. And it is always the pioneers who expand the boundaries of this world. Do we live in a world where cheerful, optimistic stories help us? We will not all necessarily live to see our wishes fulfilled. But

everything, everything we do will have an impact on those who are yet to come.

Sometimes you are just the light in the window. Sometimes you are just the person who can point to a door that future generations will one day walk through. Sometimes you are just the person who has to intervene so that this door may not close forever.

But I feel so strongly that we are currently living in a time when it is not enough to be only a little courageous or a little attentive. Instead, we must take a stand. The greatest crime against society as a whole is to be lethargic, sedated, silent and, sadly, intimidated and fearful.

That's why I look for dialectical characters I can look up to.

WHY AND WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO WORK IN COLLABORATION WITH SANDRA HÜLLER FOR THIS FILM? HOW DID YOU WORK TOGETHER IN FORMING THE CHARACTER AND IDENTITY OF ROSE?

First and foremost, I am an author. Writing is my first love. But it would be wrong to give the impression that it is a linear process.

Together with my co-author, Alexander Brom, I have traveled, contacted scientists and historians, discussed various topics, done writing exercises, and together we have also despaired, expanded our circle, handed over texts, and discussed them with others. At the end of this process, I always retreat with a massive collection of notes and write a book. Some days it flows quickly, other days I struggle with every single word.

I think that's what appealed to Sandra most of all. My writing. The text. It appealed to all the actors I asked and to whom I was able to send the book. Much of what is unique to the characters is already very clearly formulated in the text. I have come a long way in my writing with Sandra in my mind.

For me, there was no alternative. I watched her films again or for the first time. My interpretation of her talent also shaped the text, giving rise to Rose, both in the quiet, imploding moments and in the strong, emotional exterior.

I also had two other people in mind while writing.

Marisa Growaldt, with whom I have a long history and who already starred in my last film, was someone I definitely wanted to ask to play the NARRATOR. Her lines were created with her way of speaking and thinking in mind.

And Sven-Eric Bechtolf as the judge. His eloquence and way of thinking in language have always impressed me.

I had the pleasure of working with Godehard Giese as an actor on another project for several weeks. It was a joy to watch him perform and observe him every day. So I gave him the script for ROSE and asked him to choose a role. And he chose the role of the head farmer and Suzanna's father. And the joy continued. Voilà.

ONCE AGAIN YOU MIXED ESTABLISHED PERFORMERS WITH AMATEURS IN CASTING FOR THIS FILM. WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS 'ALCHEMY' THAT WORKS FOR YOU AND YOUR STYLE OF DIRECTION?

Acting is definitely a craft that must be learned and developed throughout one's professional life. But storytelling takes place everywhere, like the hard work one has done all one's life, which has become inscribed in the body, or a lost arm, or deprivation and illness, or education and wealth.

And even if actors achieve a lot, even with the help of various external effects, there are sometimes limits to what can be achieved. So you have to go where life and reality have inscribed in people exactly what you need to tell the story.

That is the only logic I want to follow when casting, weighing up whether it needs the best actress in the world or a person with one predominant aspect. And if that is the case, if you want to surround yourself with so-called amateurs, then you have to go out and find the most talented among them. As always, it takes time, patience, and money. Anything else would be a betrayal of my own narrative. In the process itself, I follow my intuition and emotion more than fixed principles.

THE PHOTOGRAPHY IS INCREDIBLE- HOW DID YOU WORK WITH THE DOP TO CREATE THE VISUAL IDENTITY OF THE FILM?

I've come a long way with my DOP Gerald Kerkletz. This is our third film together. At this point, working with Gerald has become something very personal for me. Over time, we've developed a common language that goes beyond words. There's a shared sense of when to come close, when to step back, and when to wait. Gerald has an extraordinary feeling for that. His camera is never impatient. It never wants something from the person in front of it. And that's incredibly rare.

A lot of what defines the film happens long before we ever turn on a camera – sitting together, watching films, looking at paintings, discussing rhythm and material, slowly understanding what the film should not do. That slowness creates trust. And without that trust, I couldn't make the films I want to make. What others call detours, he calls a process of searching. In German we use the beautiful word for it – “Suchbewegung” – and I think it describes his way of working perfectly.

For Rose, this preparation became especially important. Early on, I spent time in the Netherlands looking at paintings – not courtly scenes, but images of everyday life. What fascinated me was how physical and unspectacular they are: bodies in space, work, movement, fabric, animals, dirt. Through those paintings, I suddenly understood something about the Western genre. Many images from the 16th to 18th centuries – with horses, carriages, hats, scarves – already contain a logic that later became the Western. European settlers carried that visual logic to America. In that sense, Rose can also be understood as a kind of European Western. That's why we watched Westerns together – early American ones and Japanese ones. Naturally, Seven Samurai was at the top of the list.

After my previous film *Angelo*, and again with Rose, the danger of a period film was always the museum effect – beautiful surfaces, reassuring images, a heritage gloss. I don't want comfort from images. I want them to confront you quietly, to make you feel that this is about now, not only about then.

Black and white was part of that trust between us. It's often described as a reduction, as if you simply take colour away. For me, it's the opposite. Black and

white introduces a new order. You're no longer dealing with surfaces in the same way – you're dealing with light as substance, contrast as structure, faces and bodies as landscapes. It removes a certain kind of seduction, especially in a historical film, where colour can quickly become decorative or reassuring. Black and white doesn't allow you to lean back and admire the world. It insists that you look.

There's also a moral dimension to it – not in the sense of moralising, but in removing false hierarchies. Blood is not more important because it's red. Uniforms don't signal power through colour codes. Everything has to earn its weight through presence, framing, and duration.

In that sense, black and white is also less forgiving.

Some people describe this approach as cold. For me, it's the opposite. It's about respect – for the characters and for the audience. I deeply distrust emotional manipulation, the kind of filmmaking that tells you what to feel at the very second! The image shouldn't add a second layer of moral theatre. It should hold the situation and allow the viewer to enter it.

To get there, I need Gerald to be involved very early, and also beyond what's usually considered the responsibility of a cinematographer – production design, locations, even scouting, because nature and space have to be chosen in relation to the scene itself. We watch and discuss casting tapes together. If I want, I can discuss everything with him. He doesn't see cinematography as control. He sees it as attentiveness. The camera listens. It waits. It doesn't try to be clever.

That's what I value most in his work.

In the end, our collaboration is not about style. It's an ethic. It's about restraint, precision, and trust. Or, as Gerald likes to say, it's just cooking with water – but paradoxically, that desire for simplicity is the hardest thing. I think it's the most difficult part of what we do.

PROTESTANT VALUES, PATRIARCHY, AND STRICT SOCIAL ROLES DOMINATE THIS WORLD. DO YOU ENVISION ROSE'S STORY AS A CRITIQUE OF THESE STRUCTURES?

We are undoubtedly living in a moment in which a deeply challenged patriarchy is pushing back. Even its youngest representatives are once again publicly voicing demands as extreme as the abolition of women's suffrage. How many examples should I list—how many regressive details, absurdities, and genuine dangers I encounter today?

Yes, of course: the present becomes more legible when viewed through the lens of the past. *ROSE* is situated within a specific historical context, but she also inevitably reflects the world we inhabit now.

That said, although this may sound old-fashioned, I am less interested in criticising religion itself than in questioning uniformity and hegemony as such—wherever they appear.

I am a committed advocate of dialectics and diversity, values that can ultimately only be sustained through democracy. This also means taking a stand for freedom and for my own vision of social justice across political and social intersections.

That is why I make films.

And if I were able to see the world with greater optimism, my films would undoubtedly be more cheerful.

THE FARM WORKERS' FEAR OF THE OUTSIDER FORMS A CENTRAL TENSION IN THE FILM - WE SEE SO MANY PARALLELS TO THE PRESENT DAY. HOW DO THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES ABOUT THE PAST RELATE TO OUR COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN THE PRESENT DAY?

Farmers today constitute a minority in Central Europe, and I have no interest in criticising a minority. In *Rose's* time, however, the situation was very different. The peasantry—closely intertwined with the court and the clergy—and their farmhands and maidservants formed the majority of society. In this sense, the village community into which *Rose* enters is representative of a

broader social system: one in which nothing is given freely, and in which each individual must decide whether to act for humanity or against it.

This dynamic is as simple as it is frightening—and it has not changed over the centuries. We need others in order to define ourselves. That is why it often seems important to deny others the opportunity to develop. Because if they were allowed to do so, we too would be forced to change, to reorient ourselves. Instead, we prefer to frame difference as deficiency. This makes others more manageable, more controllable. After all, no one wants to be excluded from the community and the advantages it offers.

And no one wants to be reduced to a single defining trait. Yet this is the war we wage against one another—every day. Those who truly want something, who have a goal, are often more persistent, more willing to act, sometimes even to the point of self-sacrifice. Others, by contrast, are willing to do anything to conform—to disappear into the norm—simply to avoid being singled out. Or because they fear for their lives. The world we inhabit still functions through the pyres that have been erected and preserved in our collective imagination.

We know that we have the power to send others into the flames. And we know that we ourselves could end up there. You do not have to look far to witness this. The so-called “others” are not fundamentally different from us. We already turn this violence against our so-called “own.” And often against all reason.

A society that refuses equal pay is not only unjust; it is also inefficient from a market-economic perspective. And yet we would rather bite off our own arm than finally grant women equal rights—than relinquish male ownership over them.

We would rather perpetuate global sexism than allow women genuine financial independence and autonomy on a broad scale.

Power and the structure of the world are determined by narratives—by how they are defined, redefined, or rigidly upheld.

We see this in the narrative of a “Greater Russian Empire” and its consequences; in the cultural history of women's hair; in the interpretation of

same-sex love, which is still criminalised in 65 countries, 62 of them members of the United Nations.

Not in Chechnya, of course—because there, according to the current head of state, homosexuality simply does not exist. This claim is difficult to reconcile with the videos that occasionally surface, showing alleged homosexuals being tortured or killed.

The human species is often described as weak due to its prolonged adolescence. Yet its true strength lies in its capacity for cooperation. That capacity emerges through thinking, planning, designing—and through communicating what has been thought, planned, and designed. Through shaping possible realities by means of communication.

Storytelling is the bond that connects us. It is the fence that encloses us as a herd, holding us together. What we tell one another binds us—but it also separates us. This is how identities, alliances, and groups are formed. Through stories and narratives, humans do not merely explain the world; they actively shape it.

Forms of government, monetary systems, religions—all of these rest on collective assertions. The discipline that examines our actions and their consequences is called history in all enlightened societies, and rightly so.

It would be comforting to believe that storytelling could have remained pure from the beginning.

But that is naïve.

From its very inception, storytelling has been exploited because of its power. Deviations are viewed with suspicion, or actively fought against—by any means necessary.

So where does change begin? Outside the norm. Outside established law. Outside the crowd. Until, eventually, someone allows themselves to be nailed to a cross, burned at the stake, or poisoned by radiation—because they refuse to abandon their thoughts.

By stepping into men's trousers, Rose turns an idea into lived reality. And by

being perceived and accepted as a man, her private truth ceases to be a diary entry meant for no one else's eyes. It becomes a narrative that others participate in and follow.

Rose offers an image of herself that is accepted—until it no longer aligns with someone else's truth. And yet, this is the paradox: until the moment of exposure, that image functioned as a shared, communal truth. (Of course, same-sex love may exist—but not publicly, and not with equal rights. Women may paint, write, invent—but their achievements will be credited to their male colleagues. And so on.)

With her arrest, Rose's story is cut short. Unfinished novels are nothing unusual. And yet this story must be told.

Those who take no offence at the world can consider themselves fortunate. The world appears coherent to them; they fit into it effortlessly. But what about those who are denied this fortune? Those with rough edges where the world demands smoothness? Those who do not appear in the dominant narrative, or who cannot find a place within it?

By stepping into men's trousers, Rose becomes the author of herself. And by recording her actions, she becomes a possible reference for others.

Which is precisely why it is so vital that storytelling does not disappear from our culture—or the social spaces in which it can take place. This begins with everyday customs and does not end with cinema.

ROSE ALSO FULFILS AN ESSENTIAL AND RARE POSITION OF RE-IMAGINING AN ERASED HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF QUEER PEOPLE. HOW DO YOU SEE ROSE IN TERMS OF QUEERNESS, QUEER HISTORY AND STORIES?

My research inevitably led me to the queer community. There, a recurring frustration emerged: for centuries, the story of the “woman in trousers” has been framed primarily as a tale of deception, rather than as an inquiry into why people act as they do—and what those actions mean to them. Gender crossing is repeatedly portrayed as something spicy, playful, or frivolous, instead of being taken seriously in the depth of its motivations.

The possibility of reassessing queer history is still relatively young—and in large parts of the world, it remains impossible. While historical research proved deeply enriching for *ROSE*, my engagement with film history was, frankly, sobering.

I watched every film I could find, no matter how loosely connected to the topic—from the earliest silent films to contemporary productions. What became painfully clear is that the woman in trousers (as well as the man in a dress) is still rarely free from voyeurism, embarrassment, deliberate humiliation, or the reflexive assumption that something about them is inherently “wrong.”

To this day, women in trousers—and men in dresses—are almost always caught in this same game: voyeurism, discomfort, forced comedy, or the hurried reduction of the story to the naked body.

Above all, these narratives are usually told with deliberate transparency from the outset. The deception must be visible immediately. Actresses may wear trousers, but unmistakable gender markers must remain: makeup, hairstyles, costume cuts coded as feminine. I recall an old black-and-white film in which the “deceiver” continues to wear high heels—yet everyone responds with polite astonishment: Ah, oh—won’t you take a seat, sir?

What is this meant to accomplish?

Is it designed to lull us into a false sense of security within the boundaries of our own gender perception? Because we fear being attracted to, approached by, or guided by something that does not offer the reassurance of clearly standardised categories?

Or is it meant to establish hopelessness from the outset—the suggestion that women could never, under any circumstances, convincingly inhabit positions of male authority?

I refuse to participate in that.

ROSE consciously avoids resolving gender ambiguity through nudity or the exposure of primary sexual characteristics. Why should it? I cannot count how many official documents I have filled out by checking the “male” box—with-

out any authority demanding photographic proof of my genitals.

ROSE is a story about decisions, about the consequences of those decisions, and about sovereignty over one’s own narrative. Because ultimately—or at least for me—that is where queerness begins: in narrative multiplicity.

In an interview with Eva Bester on 24 November 2025, Eva Illouz said: “Je suis queer au sens large du terme, je crois à la multiplicité des identités.”

“I am queer in the broad sense of the term; I believe in the multiplicity of identities.”

WHAT ABOUT OTHER SIMILAR CHARACTERS IN FILM HISTORY, WHICH DO APPEAR ALBEIT NOT SO OFTEN? WAS THERE ANYTHING YOU WANTED TO ADD TO THIS ‘LINEAGE’ WITH SANDRA’S PORTRAYAL OF ROSE THAT YOU FELT HADN’T BEEN SEEN BEFORE ON SCREEN?

In its narrative setup, *ROSE* can also be understood as a variation on the story of Martin Guerre. This tale originates from a well-known European court case of the sixteenth century and has been retold by figures such as Alexandre Dumas and Friedrich Schiller.

After twelve years, a man returns from war, reclaims his wife and his farm, and succeeds—only to be exposed years later as an impostor when, as so often happens, disputes over money arise.

Cinematic landmarks such as *Le Retour de Martin Guerre* and its American remake *Sommersby* have immortalised this story. One could argue that *ROSE* adds a gendered variation to this material.

The fascination with the past has captivated audiences since the earliest days of cinema. The motivations behind historical films are extraordinarily diverse, ranging from pure entertainment to pure instruction. Yet contextualisation is rarely free from propaganda or personal interpretation. For this very reason, historical films inevitably reveal the social tensions and ideological positions of the time in which they are made. Every historical film can—and must—be read through the lens of the present.

This becomes especially clear in stories that have been adapted repeatedly throughout cinema's nearly 130-year history. Take Joan of Arc, for example. Georges Méliès devoted an eleven-minute silent film to her, focusing heavily on the burning at the stake. Later adaptations shifted emphasis: Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) centred on suffering; Robert Bresson's *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962) on spirituality; Victor Fleming's *Joan of Arc* (1948), starring Ingrid Bergman, elevated womanhood in Technicolor; Luc Besson's *Joan of Arc* (1999), with Milla Jovovich, presented a combative heroine. Finally, Bruno Dumont reimagined Joan as a dancing child in a musical comedy (*Jeannette*, 2017; *Jeanne*, 2019).

Historical films are thus also educational artefacts. They chart the paths we have taken, the ones we are currently on, and those still ahead of us. They reveal which modes of representation we have abandoned—and which we are now prepared to rethink.

Within the framework of the hero's journey, the impostor or con artist occupies the role of the fool. We owe this figure a certain respect for their audacity and ingenuity. Their actions are often interpreted as a David-versus-Goliath struggle.

Although the cinematic tradition of tricksters and impostors remains heavily masculinised, film history does offer notable examples of gender crossing. Renate Müller (1933) and Julie Andrews in *Victor/Victoria* (1982); Jeanne Moreau in *Jules et Jim* (1962); Lilo Pulver in *Gustav Adolf's Page* (1958); Johanna Wokalek in *The Pope's Daughter* (2009); Gwyneth Paltrow in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998); Brooke Shields in *Sahara* (1983); Barbra Streisand in *Yentl* (1983); and Hilary Swank in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999).

More rarely, women have been cast directly in traditionally male roles: Cate Blanchett as Bob Dylan in *I'm Not There* (2007); Eva Mattes as Rainer Werner Fassbinder in *Ein Mann wie Eva* (1984); or Tilda Swinton in *Suspiria* (2017).

At times, the device has been reduced to comic effect, such as Selma Hayek's false beard in *Midnight Circus* (2009).

Beginning with one of cinema's first global stars, Sarah Bernhardt, women playing men has evolved into a genre in its own right—one that must be redefined again and again, decade by decade.

Sandra's charisma—and my strong conviction that she was the right person to embody Rose—became evident both during the casting process and on the many journeys we undertook while searching for locations.

More than 700 young women applied for the role of Suzanna. I did not meet them all, but those I did meet were unanimously captivated by Sandra. Of course, there is her extraordinary talent, which speaks for itself. But the admiration of her younger colleagues was directed above all toward the path she has forged and the doors she has opened for the next generation.

Sandra never takes detours. She never performs for effect, never seeks attention. Her acting is defined by honesty—or rather, by a search for honesty. A search for what is essential, and a deep trust in it.

What cannot be clarified cannot be acted. She does not strike poses. She works.

People often ask what it was like to collaborate with her, hoping for a cascade of compliments—phrases like it was magical or a miracle to witness. And yes, of course, it was all of that. Much was even left behind in the editing room that we would have loved to include—but each scene can only exist once.

Yet magic is only one truth.

The other—and the one that resonates more deeply with my own professional ethics—is the truth of labour.

Sandra is a hard worker.

From the beginning of her career, she has refused shortcuts, resisted imposed positions, and declined to perpetuate outdated role models. She remains contemporary—and above all, political.

For that reason, she is not only an important role model within an industry that remains structurally sexist, but also—for me—the most logical interpreter of Rose. I mentioned the location tours because their effect extended beyond the film itself. In every pub, people said, What a great thing.

That is artistic success. And that is socio-political success. Thank you, Sandra.

INTERVIEW WITH SANDRA HÜLLER

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO MARKUS' PROJECT? WHAT DREW YOU TO THE CHARACTER OF ROSE?

First of all Markus and Alexander are remarkable writers who created a script which is actually a poem. The character of Rose is so complex and bold, contradictory and moving that I wanted to learn about her. The language we speak in the film was a welcome challenge for me, it is unlike anything I've read before. Also I like to work with my whole body and that was very much needed here.

ROSE IS A VERY COMPLEX ROLE YET S/HE ARRIVES FULLY FLESHED OUT IN THE FILM. WITHOUT GIVING TOO MUCH AWAY, HOW DID YOU IMBUE THE CHARACTER WHO DOESN'T SAY MUCH WITH SUCH DETAIL?

In general I think characters don't need to speak to be characters. When I see someone in the street, I can guess who they are, sense their energy or troubles, so that isn't really the hard part. The hard part was to find the balance between trying to be believable as a male figure for the characters, Rose is meeting and at the same time keep a certain fear of being discovered, or make that fear the main drive of the character. That and the wish to simply have a life. The costumes of Doris Bartelt helped a lot, it was a whole procedure to get on every single detail of the male armour Rose is wearing, even if not visible. And of course there were a lot of conversations with Markus.

HOW DID YOU COLLABORATE WITH MARKUS? HOW WAS YOUR WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?

Our work relationship is built on respect of course. Markus has written the script and did an amazing amount of research for it that I could profit from. He is open about changes and thoughts, ideas we have and he trusts the instincts of his actors. Despite the strong boundaries of a black-and-white historical film, he was very flexible and had a unique and detailed vision.

THE FILM DRAWS ON MANY INFLUENCES – FROM KUROSAWA TO WESTERNS TO DREYER. DID YOU STUDY OR TAKE INSPIRATION FROM ANY EARLIER PORTRAYALS WHILE PREPARING FOR THE FILM?

I watched Albert Nobbs with Glenn Close to make sure I didn't miss anything.

THE ROLE OF ROSE SEEMED VERY PHYSICAL. BEING ON SET THROUGHOUT THE HARSH SEASONS AND THE PHYSICAL TOIL OF TRANSFORMING THE FARM SEEM VERY CONVINCING. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES ON SET? WAS IT AS DIFFICULT A SHOOT AS IT SEEMED?

On the other hand we had the luxury to be in the same place almost all the time, in this beautiful place in the Harz region, the houses, the church were especially built, Markus made sure the fields would not be harvested so that they are in full strength when we film, a lot was taken care of. But emotionally I admit, that playing someone with a secret this big and with a desire so strong to be free and who has survived a war was demanding.

HOW DO YOU SEE ROSE IN VIEW OF CURRENT POLITICS?

I am not a friend of heroes or heroines for anything. It's too easy to put the burden of bravery to single individuals. I think we all shape society together, it's our collective responsibility to make sure nobody needs to disguise themselves to be accepted by us ever again. And therefore I am convinced it is simply necessary to tell these kinds of stories about people like Rose, just because they exist.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE THE AUDIENCE WILL TAKE AWAY FROM SEEING YOUR PORTRAYAL OF ROSE?

I and we hope to move them in the first place and encourage to think about where in our lives are we excluding others or closing doors. What can, what must current politics do to make the world equally accessible for everyone? Or, looking from the other side, where are we hiding who we are and how much effort do we put into it and what would it take to stop doing that?

BIOGRAPHY OF SANDRA HÜLLER

Sandra Hüller is one of the most outstanding actresses in contemporary European cinema. She became widely known to international audiences through her lead role in Maren Ade's acclaimed film *TONI ERDMANN*. With extraordinary precision, emotional depth, and remarkable versatility, Hüller brings a unique intensity to every character she portrays, earning recognition far beyond German-speaking audiences.

She made her film debut in Hans-Christian Schmid's *REQUIEM* (2006), for which she received numerous awards, including the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival and the German Film Award. Subsequent notable roles include *BROWNIAN MOVEMENT* (Nanouk Leopold), *ABOVE US ONLY SKY* (Über uns das All, Jan Schomburg), and *FINSTERWORLD* (Frauke Finsterwalder), which earned her another German Film Award. *TONI ERDMANN* (2016) marked her international breakthrough: for her portrayal of Ines Conradi, she received multiple accolades, including the European Film Award, and the German Film Award. The film was also Germany's official Oscar submission for Best Foreign Language Film.

Alongside her film career, Sandra Hüller has been a defining presence on the German-speaking theatrical stage. She has received multiple prestigious theater awards.

Hüller has continued to work with renowned international directors in recent years. In *SIBYL*, she was cast by Justine Triet as a therapist on the edge of a breakdown, followed by a complex lead role in Triet's *ANATOMY OF A FALL*, which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2023 and earned Hüller an Oscar® nomination for Best Actress. In the same year, she also starred in Jonathan Glazer's *THE ZONE OF INTEREST*, which received the Grand Prix at Cannes. In this role, she portrayed Hedwig Höß, the wife of the Auschwitz camp commandant, delivering a chillingly precise performance of ordinary life in the face of unimaginable horror.

Other recent film work includes *I'M YOUR MAN* (Ich bin Dein Mensch, Maria Schrader), *SISI AND I* (Sisi und Ich, Frauke Finsterwalder), and the heist comedy *TWO TO ONE* (Zwei zu Eins, 2024). She has also completed work on several international productions, including Alejandro G. Iñárritu's *DIGGER*, Paweł Pawlikowski's *1949* (Vaterland), and Regina Schilling's *ES WAR MORD*. Additionally, she filmed *PROJECT HAIL MARY* (Der Astronaut), directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, which is set for theatrical release in spring 2026. In Markus Schleinzer's *ROSE*, she plays the title role of a woman who, through living as a man, gains a measure of personal freedom and self-realization.

INTERVIEW WITH CARO BRAUN

WHAT DREW YOU TO THE CHARACTER OF SUSANNAH? TELL US ABOUT THE CASTING PROCESS.

What immediately fascinated me was the language. So clear, so unambiguous, and yet so lyrical, so poetic.

And to be able to give a role that is introduced so pitifully, that has endured so much suffering, my voice and thus also another side, a rebellious side, and to honor her by allowing her to lead a life worth living. That's what I wanted for Susannah, and I wanted to give her that journey through my body and my acting.

Markus sent the casting call to pretty much all German-speaking acting schools, and I was lucky that I was still in the Signal Group of my acting school in Salzburg, the Mozarteum, even though I hadn't been studying there for six months at that point. Then we had to record two scenes on our cell phones and send them in, and then I was invited to Berlin for the live casting. And when I came back to Vienna a few weeks later, they took my measurements and we—Markus, Gerald (the cameraman), and I—read the script together. And then I asked, “Do I actually have the part now?” And Markus said, “Yes.” And then I walked through Vienna feeling completely happy and had to be careful not to run into a lamppost while dreaming with joy. And that same evening, I also met Sandra, and we had dinner together.

AND HOW WAS IT TO WORK ALONGSIDE SUCH A RENOWNED ACTOR AS SANDRA HULLER? HOW DID YOU WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE SUCH A UNIQUE AND BELIEVABLE RELATIONSHIP?

I immediately felt very comfortable with Sandra. I grew up in Bochum, where Sandra also performed in several plays at the theater, and when I traveled home from acting school in Salzburg to visit my parents during the holidays, I would see her on stage there. This gave me the feeling that I already knew her, but of course, that was one-sided.

In one of the first scenes I played with Sandra, we had to recite a poem in chorus, and Sandra accidentally deviated from the text of this old German prayer and said “And I wish ...” or “And I hope ...”. I looked at her, unsure whether she wanted to continue playing the scene, but then she burst out laughing—and so did I.

That's when I knew: Okay, acting in front of the camera here isn't about being desperately perfectionist, but that anything can really happen in front of the lens, even a mistake. That was very liberating for me. Acting happens in the moment, it can't be planned, and I don't know anyone in the German-speaking world with whom you could experience that better than with Sandra.

I am impressed by Sandra's way of understanding our profession. I love watching her perform. On set, but also last week at Hamlet at the Schauspielhaus Bochum. It was therapeutic for me to meet her on screen and off screen. Because she really sees you. And I don't know how else to say it, but she looks at you. Right down to your core and beyond.

SUSANNAH LIVES WITH THE DUALITY OF BEING BOTH SEEMINGLY NAIVE BUT ALSO VERY WISE BEYOND HER YEARS. WITHOUT GIVING TOO MUCH AWAY, HOW DID YOU CREATE THE CHARACTER OF SUSANNAH?

My role is introduced into the film with great passivity. One might think that I had to search long and hard to establish what a woman in the 17th century was like. But all the restrictions of patriarchy, my experiences as a female-socialized person, have inscribed all the characteristics that Suzanna possesses at the beginning into my own body: shyness, withdrawal, making myself small—things that might make one seem naive. I know all of this; it is accessible within me.

On the one hand, this is because we continue to live in a visible and palpable patriarchy that discriminates and restricts, but it is also due to epigenetics, i.e., the fact that the traumas of the women who came before me—women who actually experienced wars—have been inscribed in my body. I have now been able to overcome some of these things, and I look back fondly on a version of myself that made herself smaller than she is. But even today, there are still moments when I hold back, even though I could actually claim space.

Moments when I feel shy - cis men can feel this too, of course - but female socialisation reinforces this.

Suzanna is shaped by this hegemonic social order, but she seeks the light, or rather, she encounters it again and again. She is afraid of the unconventional, but she feels the power and hope that arise from honest contact with Rose on equal terms, and senses the call of their shared future. She is a character who ultimately turns to hope, because naivety always means curiosity and enthusiasm.

And even before she met Rose, Suzanna had already opened her life up to pleasure, contrary to the moral values of the community. She is carrying an illegitimate child, but of course she does not want to be rejected. She struggles with this: how much freedom can I take without losing everything? And then she is confronted with Rose's truly rule-breaking and non-conformist way of life, which defies all rules by appearing as a man. When she finds this out, she is initially disturbed, but even in Suzanna there is already a spark that wants to live in a true encounter, that wants to make its own decisions. So she too rebels against convention and turns toward a joyful, self-determined life. Suddenly, there are no more rules in the two women's house.

It was a lot of fun to play, to free myself from the constraints of convention. This is a story of two people who liberate themselves, and if they can't do it under the eyes of others, the village community, they have to do it somewhere else.

I can identify with Suzanna's nonconformity at the end, with her curiosity, her zest for life, her steadfastness, her will to find hope and to fight for hope and a life full of pleasure. I can relate to hiding parts of myself, avoiding eye contact out of fear because it means revealing myself, and then experiencing the greatest freedom and love when I do make eye contact. Suzanna stands up against all odds, intuitively seeking pleasure—that resonates with me and inspires me.

THE ROLE OF SUSANNAH SEEMED VERY PHYSICAL. BEING ON SET THROUGHOUT THE HARSH SEASONS AND THE PHYSICAL TOIL OF TRANSFORMING THE FARM SEEM VERY CONVINCING. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES ON SET? WAS IT AS DIFFICULT A SHOOT AS IT SEEMED?

Before filming, I spent a week on a farm doing harvest work and kept my cell phone turned off the whole time. Digital detox. That really helped me get into this role and also into the work Suzanna had to do.

THIS IS YOUR FIRST FEATURE FILM. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES IN ALLOWING YOURSELF TO BE SO BRAVELY OPEN, VULNERABLE AND EMOTIONAL ONSCREEN? HOW DID YOU COLLABORATE WITH MARKUS?

Markus has a very clear vision; he knows exactly what he wants and what he doesn't want. But when I playfully suggested something in a scene that deviated completely from his idea, he sometimes took the take anyway. His vision was very open to my interpretation and my ideas about the role and about me as a person and what I bring to the table. From the moment I understood how much playful freedom I was allowed to take on this set, it was great. And I was able to get involved. I was happy to have found a place where all the emotions and stories that lie dormant within me are welcome, where I can work on them and process them. As I mentioned before, it had something therapeutic about it.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE THE AUDIENCE WILL TAKE AWAY FROM SEEING ROSE?

Belief in freedom. Being able and allowed to live in freedom. And belief that there is always a way out of oppressive circumstances. That it takes courage, perhaps also confidence and patience, but that it is worth it.

And love for people, I very much hope. Being able to meet and love one another with all our scars, with all our stories, disagreements, and strokes of fate.

To rebel, to break out of the life plan intended for you and to allow yourself to do so if no one else does it for you. To challenge groups, to challenge yourself, to challenge your own thinking.

We live in a time when patriarchal and patriotic alliances are organizing and re-emerging, not only in Germany. If we feel powerless in this regard, I hope that this film will inspire us—just like Suzanna and Rose—to connect, to show solidarity with one another, to listen to one another, and thereby not feel the burden solely on our own shoulders.



MAIN CAST

Sandra Hüller
as Rose

Caro Braun
as Suzanna

Marisa Growaldt
as Narrator

Robert Gwisdek
as The Bailiff

Godehard Giese
as The Head Farmer

MAIN CREW

Director: Markus Schleinzner

Screenplay: Markus Schleinzner,
Alexander Brom

Cinematography: Gerald Kerkletz

Editing: Hansjörg Weißbrich

Production Design: Olivier
Meidinger

Music: Tara Nome Doyle

Costumes: Doris Bartelt

Make-Up: Anette Keiser

Sound Design: Manuel Grandpierre

Casting: Katrin Vorderwülbecke,
Markus Schleinzner, Carmen Loley

Producer: Johannes Schubert,
Philipp Worm, Tobias Walker,
Karsten Stöter

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original title: ROSE

International title: ROSE

Duration: 93 min

Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1

Format: DCP

Sound: 5.1

Year: 2026

Original language: German

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Production Companies: Schubert, ROW Pictures,
Walker + Worm Film

Co-production Companies: ORF, ZDF, ARTE

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WOLF

Gordon Spragg

gordon@wolf-con.com



FOR FURTHER QUESTIONS OR
SALES ENQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT

sales@matchfactory.de
The Match Factory GmbH
Domstrasse 60 / Cologne 50668 / Germany
info@matchfactory.de

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