

## SCREENINGS

Thur May 19th 11h30 Miramar  
Thur, May 19th 17h Miramar  
Thur, May 19th 22h Miramar  
Fri May 20th 8h30 Miramar  
Fri May 20th 15h Studio 13  
Fri May 20th 21h30 Alexandre III

## INTERNATIONAL PRESS

WOLF Consultants

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AAMU FILM COMPANY presents

# THE WOOD CUT TER STORY

(METSURIN TARINA)



## PRODUCTION

Aamu Film Company  
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FINLAND, NETHERLANDS, DENMARK, GERMANY / 99 MIN / 2.39:1 / 35MM / 5.1 / FINNISH



## SYNOPSIS

Pepe is a woodcutter in an idyllic small town in northern Finland. Over the span of a couple of days, a series of events gradually destroys the quiet and happy life he once had. But Pepe seems to be totally fine with it all. As the ensuing days throw all sorts of chaos and strife and surreal adventure at him, Pepe remains determined to look on the bright side of life. Always smiling, always optimistic. As if he knew a secret to existence that no one else did...



A photograph of a man in a red and white jacket, smiling and holding a glass of beer, standing in a crowded bar. He is surrounded by people, some of whom are also holding glasses of beer. The bar has a warm, orange-toned lighting and wooden walls. The text "DIRECTORS NOTE" is overlaid in large, bold, red letters on the left side of the image.

# DIRECTORS NOTE

I once encountered a peculiar woodcutter from the North, not far from my hometown. He told me about his life, how he was forced to leave the village and his family, how he lost everything. It was a sad story, but he seemed to be surprisingly fine with it. He accepted his ordeals with a smile on his face. I was baffled by the faith of this benevolent man. As if he knew a meaning of his own, but wasn't sharing it with us and this secret is rooted deep in his existence. The more I thought of him and his attitude towards life I started to realize a potential for a story, a tale about the possibility of hope in our modern world filled with uncertainty and fear. I wanted to create a poetic universe where my kind woodcutter could live in, a quirky little village covered in snow and darkness, accompanied with the ensemble of strange characters, like the Barber and the Psychic Singer, or Miners trudging in the snow while pondering philosophical questions. This is how The Woodcutter Story was born.

It is a film that is very comical and very serious, metaphorical and plot-driven at the same time. I felt that in order to put the audience inside this world that was in my head while writing the script I needed to use all the power of a classical, wide screen cinema. Shooting on 35mm film and using real locations and landscapes in Lapland was crucial — as was the use of a choir score! There are fantastic, versatile actors in Finland and I was lucky enough to get the cast I wanted. Together with them we were able to create a tonality and acting method that matched the literate aspects of the screenplay, and the dead pan humor that one can find pretty much everywhere in rural Finland.

To me cinema is poetry. This is also where my background is: I started out as a poet when I was 23. Any poetry - be it literature or cinema - is a contemplation on the language. A cinema that relies solely on the storytelling mechanics is inevitably just a visualized oral tale, a mere pale representation of reality without being that reality. Whereas a cinema that is structured on more layered approach, reaches out to transcendence beyond words and is able even in the year 2022 to shake us, or "to shock our soul" as Tarkovsky put it, and create a lasting magnitude. This is also what I want to achieve with The Woodcutter Story. And to give a little glimpse of hope. It might not be hope in the form that we are used to, but rather a peculiar form of laconic northern hope that can be only found in the likes of Pepe.

- Mikko Myllylahti







# IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKKO MYLLYLÄHTI

**The film is called THE WOODCUTTER STORY but narratively at least, you resist a simple beginning, middle and conclusion. Can you tell us a little about the decisions you made in the scriptwriting process with regards to your original way of telling a ‘story’?**

The very first draft of the screenplay came out quite easily, I wrote the first draft over a weekend and it actually has a lot of scenes and arcs that remained in the final film. From the first moment it was clear to me that I needed to write a plot with twists and turns, but I still very much wanted to avoid any “usual patterns” or generic structures. I guess it was a very bold idea to try and write a film that would be metaphorical and full of surprises in the plot at the same time. I was lucky to work with some of the very best script consultants and one of them said to me that there is a structure where “everything disappears around him and in the end he is alone”. This felt intriguing to me as writer, since it is actually something very simple structure-wise but it allowed me to play and exaggerate with the plot. It is so often the case that when you reach the middle part of the film, you can guess where it will go in the end. I think it’s nice to surprise the audience. But it took me a lot of rewriting to keep the thematic unity of the film, and I still feel that all the strands are there for a reason, for example there is a side character named Pauli who is working at the mine in the second chapter, and he goes through a little spiritual journey where he first embraces the freedom to do whatever he wants and ends up falling for the psychic singer and eventually killing him. All the side characters are like mirrors that reflect Pepe’s unconscious optimism: they struggle against their ordeals, trying to find a meaning which there doesn’t seem to be, not even in the spiritual community of the psychic singer Jaakko, and this allowed me to paint a picture of Pepe, who is a rather passive main character, but I felt that he needs to be. All the times I tried to force him into action the whole story fell apart. So it was a matter of juggling with the twists and turns of the story and the side characters in order to keep the film exciting and at the same time I needed to give room for my main character to strive.









HÄNEN  
YHTEYDE  
-ISIIN

# IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKKO MYLLYLÄHTI

**Can you tell us little about your approach to the interesting characters of this strange town?**

From very early on I had in my mind a vision of the town and the people, a very strange place far away up north covered in frost and snow and darkness. I could also see and feel them in a mise-en-scene, almost stationary, or trudging in the snow in the mine in formation. But when I started to write the dialogue it was another thing: there was no way I could write it in “the usual way”, keeping it more or less realistic. I tried it of course but it didn’t make any sense, it diminished the whole screenplay into mundane. I got frustrated and took some time off with the script. I was reading a novelette by Peter Handke called “The Left-Handed Woman” - a marvellous piece of literature - and I realised that the slightly surreal and existential atmosphere in that book is mostly created with the characters speaking out aloud the subtext, something he also did in the script of Wim Wender’s *Wings of Desire*, where we can hear the thoughts and prayers of the humans being observed by the angels. That was a revelation for me and when I started to write the dialogues keeping this in mind, it all started to make sense to me. I could keep the dialogues in minimum, but whenever they started to talk it wasn’t mundane, but rather deep and literate. And when I started to have rehearsals with the actors it became quite obvious that it was also a source of laconic comedy.







Sigmund Freud



# IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKKO MYLLYLÄHTI

**You have said that Pepe and other characters in the film were initially inspired by real people and communities in Finland, can you elaborate?**

It's true that the film is in many ways not realistic, on purpose. But the initial idea of the film came from a real life person. After I had finished the screenplay for *The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Mäki*, directed by Juho Kuosmanen, I was searching for a new subject or idea. I live in the countryside, one hour outside Helsinki, and I have an old wooden house with an old garden. There was a tree in my yard I wanted to hew down, but since I am a poet and a filmmaker I thought that I shouldn't try to do it myself. So I searched the yellow pages and found an ad of a woodcutter. A peculiar, ageless little man arrived. He was extremely calm and friendly, but there was something about him I couldn't quite put my finger on. I discovered that he was originally from the North, not that far from where I come from, from a small town near the Russian border. He said he had a family, but he had to move to South since there wasn't any work for him in his hometown. So now he was alone. But it seemed to be fine with him. Suddenly I realised that everyone I know who are from that area are just like him, extremely calm and unwavering no matter what happens. My brother-in-law is from there and I don't think that I have never seen him angry. It is as if there was something mythical in the region that produces these stoic but very likeable characters. I started to fantasise about a setting, a kind woodcutter and his story. How can it be that someone is so sustainable, so clear-cut as a character? What happens if I put this kind of harmless man into a horrible test? I started to have almost an sadistic urge to torment him, to see if I can break him. This sadism led me to writing. When the first treatment of the story was beginning to take shape I began to think of the Book of Job - and the question of evil. It was obvious. But unlike in the story of Job I wasn't that interested in the question of theodicy (at least in terms of Old Testament), but rather what happens if I "take God out of the equation"? For me the dilemma was purely existential: how can he be like that in a world that is suffering from the lack of meaning? As if he knew a meaning of his own, but wasn't sharing it with us and this secret is rooted deep in his existence.

So the idea of the characters is truly based on real people, but the handling in the film is far from it. On the other hand, sometimes I feel as Finn that the way we socialise with the others is very different from let's say how the culture is in France for example and perhaps this handling is not that far away from reality after all.





# IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKKO MYLLYLÄHTI

**Many images in the film have a beautiful and ethereal, painterly quality and your visual approach contributes to the tone of the film as much as anything else. What was your approach to shooting and how did you work with your cinematographer and other key contributors on the crew to create these images with a quality slightly beyond reality?**

When we started the pre-production it was pretty soon obvious for us that in order to make this film we simply can't just document the reality as it is and then create the film in the editing table. We had a pretty long and thorough pre-production with my cinematographer Arsen Sarkisants and production designer Milja Aho where we gathered a lot of material, mostly paintings and photographs.

Creating a surreal atmosphere in a film is hard work, it is very similar to working in a period piece, where every detail and object needs to be brought into the set. It took us a lot of time to find the real locations in the North. Most of Lapland was burned into ruins in second world war by the retreating Nazi troops and unfortunately the reconstruction they made after the war is pretty much an architectural mess which didn't fit into our plans very well. But we were able to find the missing pieces by combining different locations around the region of Kainuu and Koillismaa which are located in the south-eastern part of Northern Finland, just below Lapland.

After we had find the locations, there was still a lot of questions regarding the visual narrative of the film. Together with the cinematographer we felt that we need something special to elevate the narration and to create the same feeling that was in my script. One big decision was to shoot on 35mm film, which we both adored, but at the same time we understood that it creates some restrictions. We couldn't have the same coverage as shooting in digital and also it makes the shooting much slower. But we knew that it was only film stock that could create this very timeless and peculiar feel and eventually elevate the whole film away from everyday realism, which we felt was really important for the outcome. Another key thing was our approach to mise-en-scene. We studied a lot of older films and wanted to create a similar kind of way of blocking the actors in cinemascope, using medium and long shots over close-ups, which we deliberately wanted to spare in the end of the film. One very important aspect was also the costume design and especially the costume of main character Pepe. We wanted to have an iconic clothing on him, so that he could pop out in even in the widest frame. This led us also to design the narration so that it resembled a graphic novel's aesthetics.





# IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKKO MYLLYLAHTI

**The film has a very unique voice but there are also many nods to classic moments in cinema. Can you tell us a little about your influences as a director?**

In general I have always enjoyed (maybe because of my background as a poet) cinema that is able to reach for transcendence, to reach beyond storytelling and words and reveal the mystery of existence in a way that is more common in poetry or abstract fine arts. The whole body of work of Robert Bresson is a great example, my favorite films are *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* and *Au hasard Balthazar*, which is a most deeply spiritual film for me. Also Pasolini's *Teorema* for its strong allegory and striking ending in the desert, or Bunuel's absurdism and surrealism. I would say that my influences on *The Woodcutter Story* have been the following films / filmmakers:

Vittorio De Sica: *Miracle in Milan* - for its surprising combination of neo-realism and magical realism. Also the message of hope is embodied in the main character in a similar way than in my film. And the fable-like straight-forward storytelling and comedy. Takeshi Kitano: *Sonatine* - for its acting method that creates a surprising tone for a comedy. Tarkovsky: *Nostalgia* - not perhaps the best film in his oeuvre, but one that is also deeply spiritual and is an attempt to reach for the transcend in a most beautiful way Bergman: *Wild Strawberries* - especially the nightmare sequence with the horse carriage

Of course one cannot avoid David Lynch, whom I admire very much (and who by the way has some Finnish roots!). His earlier films like *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart* are my favorites for how they combine nightmare and surrealism to a very emotional storytelling, and the use of music and singing. With the cinematographer we also talked a lot about photographs of american photographer Gregory Crewdson, his use of frame and posture of the characters.

Besides cinema, my main influences for *The Woodcutter Story* are from literature, for example short stories of Franz Kafka or his un-finished novel "America" for creating this haunting and surreal atmosphere. And also a lot of Finnish paintings that depict the arctic in a very surreal way, for example a northern painter Kalervo Palsa (few pictures attached). I am a huge fan of Aki Kaurismäki, he is truly a master and one of the most influential filmmakers in the history of Finnish cinema. But I also feel that there are many differences how I approach filmmaking compared to his works, perhaps I'm more into surrealism and absurdism and my dialogue is more detached from the scene, more elevated and poetic in a very different way. But we definitely share the same influences from older cinema.











# IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKKO MYLLYLÄHTI

**This is your debut as a director, after working as a scriptwriter for several films, one being THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE LIFE OF OLLI MAKI How was the experience to leave the writing table and take control over a full set, and embrace all aspects of filmmaking for you?**

I had directed several short films, but there was nothing that could really prepare me for diving into this production. There is of course the craft of the director one must know, at least the basics of it, in order to direct a feature film, but it is still a jump into cold water. Our budget was slightly bigger than what one can usually get for feature debut in Finland, but still the resources were very limited and it forced us really to prioritise and to think what is important and what is not. Pretty soon when the shooting started I realised that I was in a crossroad, where the other path would leave me to a more conventional and secured way of filmmaking, cutting some of the rough edges and leaving more room in the editing process to decide what to do with the material.

The other path was to be very bold and make all the big decisions already on set and basically trust that what we are doing will eventually work. I chose the latter one, and I felt that it was like putting all in in a poker game, without looking at your own cards. It was crazy. I'm not a very brave person usually, but there was something in the script that said to me that there is no way of turning back, we just had to trust that the script will work eventually. There are scenes that don't necessary move the plot forward, like the scene with the electric sphere, or there are scenes that are not fully explainable, like the scene with burning car in the end, and there were definitely moments in the production when either me or someone else were forced to raise the question that are those scenes really needed, would they just be cut out from the film in the end? But there was one thing I had learned from writing four collections of poetry that was useful in this directing business, and it was the importance of tolerating ambiguity. If you start to question the absurd or the surreal, you risk losing something unique.



# IN CONVERSATION WITH MIKKO MYLLYLÄHTI

**Pepe is an eternal optimist in the face of rather daunting and sometimes dark moments in the film. Did you want to see him as some sort of modern day hero? How do you see the role of comedy and hope even in the face of such overwhelming darkness sometimes?**

For me the whole idea of the film came from the mystery of this real character I encountered, his unshaken optimism, which there was no explanation - or if there should be, we would lose it. But there is a climax or a turning point for him that takes place in the end of the film, when the boy leaves with the burning car and he arrives at his house on top of the mountain. He crosses the border, it's like arriving into purgatory - into a place in between the reality and afterlife. We have a chance to project our own fears and desires into him, and in this moment - at least for me - his optimism is put into a different light. What if there is no meaning in life? Perhaps the whole question is absurd, and this is what I see in him, still smiling in the cabin with bruises on his face. But we all have to cross that border one day, our existence as a subject in space time continuum will come to an end some day, and we cannot even imagine how would it be not to be. It's a mystery. But so is the benevolence of humans - and hope.

I guess there are a lot of similarities also in the character of Pepe and myself. I am also a very optimistic person and I strongly believe that eventually things will turn out good, I don't know why, but that's how I have always been.











# MIKKO MYLLYLAHTI

Mikko Myllylahti was born and raised in Northern Finland, in a small town called Tornio. He has a background in poetry yet graduated as a MA in Screenwriting and Fiction Directing from ELO Helsinki Film School. He has written four collections of poetry that have been published in Finland and have won prizes and gained critical acclaim. His short films include **THE TIGER** (Cannes Critics' Week 2018) and **LOVE IN VAIN** (Locarno 2009). His first feature script was Juho Kuosmanen's debut **THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE LIFE OF OLLI M KI**, which won the Prix un Certain Regard in Cannes 2016. His feature film directorial debut **THE WOODCUTTER STORY** has been selected to L'Atelier Cannes 2019 and labs such as Next Step 2018 (Next Step Award 2018), Torino FeatureLab 2018 (TFL Production Award 2018), Toronto Filmmaker Lab 2018, Jerusalem Film Lab 2016 and Berlinale Script Station 2015.

## FILMOGRAPHY

- |      |                                                                                                     |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2022 | <b>THE WOODCUTTER STORY</b><br>premiere Cannes Critics' Week                                        |
| 2018 | <b>THE TIGER</b><br>(SHORT) premiere Cannes Critics' Week                                           |
| 2010 | <b>THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE LIFE OF OLLI MAKI</b><br>as screenwriter, Prix Un Certain Regard, Cannes |
| 2012 | <b>HANDBAG</b>                                                                                      |
| 2009 | <b>LOVE IN VAIN</b><br>premiere Locarno IFF                                                         |



# JARKKO LAHTI

Jarkko Lahti (1978) is one of Finland's best loved actors. His breakthrough lead performance was in Juho Kuosmanen's feature *THE HAPPIEST DAY OF OLLI MÄKI*, which was screened in the Un Certain Regard section at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival, where it won the top prize. The film's success brought Jarkko to the attention of mainstream audiences, and also delivered him his first Jussi Award for Best Leading Actor at the Finnish Film Academy Awards.

Since then Jarkko has worked consistently in numerous film and TV productions as well as on stage, in projects such as Aku Louhimies's "THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER"; Veiko Ounpuu's "THE LAST ONES"; Antti Jokinen's "HELENE"; as well as in tv-series "SHADOW LINES" by A-J Annila, "MAN IN ROOM 301" by Mikko Kuparinen and "ZONE B" by Khadar Ayderus Ahmed, Siiri Halko and Juho Kuosmanen.

In 2018 Jarkko played the lead in Mikko Myllylahti's short film "TIGER" which was nominated for Best Short at the Cannes Critics' Week. Most recently Jarkko has worked in Mikko Myllylahti's debut feature "THE WOODCUTTER STORY" which has been selected for the International Critics' Week at the 75th edition of Cannes Film Festival. The film is due for its release later this year.







# AAMU FILM COMPANY

AAMU FILM COMPANY is a film production company founded in 2001. We've produced fiction and documentary films as well as tv-series, both in short and long formats. Our goal is to bring high quality art house cinema to broad international audiences. We work in long term relationships with devoted directors. All directors make films for individual reasons and we produce the content they are personally drawn to. We know that the content of a film defines its form and production. By supporting and strengthening the directors' unique insight and vision in cinema we can challenge and expand the existing genres. Aamu Film Company is owned by Jussi Rantamäki and Emilia Haukka.

**2022**

**THE WOODCUTTER STORY**

dir. Mikko Myllylahti, premiere Cannes Critics' Week 2022

**2022**

**ZONE B**

dir. Khadar Ayderus Ahmed, Siiri Halko, Juho Kuosmanen

**2021**

**COMPARTMENT NO6**

dir. Juho Kuosmanen Grand Prix, Cannes 2021

**2021**

**ANY DAY NOW**

dir. Hamy Ramezan Premiere in Berlinale Generation

**2020**

**FUCKING WITH NOBODY**

dir. Hannaleena Hauru Premiere in Venice International Film Festival

**2019**

**LADY TIME**

dir. Elina Talvensaari Premeire in International Documentary Festival Amsterdam

**2018**

**THE TIGER**

dir. Mikko Myllylhti, premiere Cannes Critics' Week 2018

**2017**

**THICK LASHES OF LAURI MÄNTYVAARA**

dir. Hannaleena Hauru Premiere in Torino IFF

**2016**

**THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE LIFE OF OLLI MÄKI**

dir. Juho Kuosmanen, Prix Un Certain Regard Cannes 2016



# CAST

Pepe	Jarkko Lahti
Tuomas	HP Björkman
Little Tuomas	Iivo Tuuri
Jaakko	Marc Gassot
Kaisa	Katja Küttner
Irmeli	Ulla Tapaninen
Maija	Armi Toivanen

# CREW

Screenplay	Mikko Myllylahti
Cinematographer	Arsen Sarkisants
Editor	Jussi Rautaniemi
Music	Jonas Struck
Direction of photography	Arsen Sarkisants
Picture editing	Jussi Rautaniemi
Set designer	Milja Aho
Sound editing	Jorma Kaulanen, Peter Albrechtsen
Costume Designer	Minke Lunter
Make-up designer	Lindelotte van der Meer
Visual effects	Filmmore

With the support of

The Finnish Film Foundation  
Yle  
Arte / ZDF  
Koillis-Suomen kehitt misyhti Naturpolis Oy  
Kainuun liitto – Kainuun tulevaisuusrahasto  
Creative Europe Media  
TorinoFilmLab  
NEXT STEP Prize  
Church Media Foundation  
Danish Film Institute  
DR  
Beo Post  
Netherlands Film Fund  
Netherlands Film Incentive

**THE WOODCUTTER STORY was a participant of:**

2015 Berlinale Script Station  
2017 JSFL – The Sam Spiegel International Film Lab  
2018 TorinoFilmLab Feature Lab  
2018 Toronto Filmmaker Lab  
2018 Next Step – Cannes Critics' Week  
2019 Cinéfondation L'Atelier  
2020 A Post Lab



with **JARKKO LAHTI HANNU-PEKKA BJÖRKMAN IIVO TUURI MARC GASSOT ULLA TAPANINEN KATJA KÜTTNER**

in co-production with **ACHTUNG PANDA! BEOFILM KEPLERFILM**

cinematographer **ARSEN SARKISIAN** editor **JUSSI RAUTANIEMI F.C.E.** sound designers **JORMA KAULANEN PETER ALBRECHTSEN** composer **JONAS STRUCK** production designer **MILJA AHO**  
costume designer **MINKE LUNTER** make up designer **LINDELLOTTE VAN DER MEER** co-producers **JAMILA WENSKE, MELANIE BLOCKSDORF, PETER HYLDAHL, KOJI NELISSEN, DERK-JAN WARRINK**  
produced by **EMILIA HAUKKA** and **JUSSI RANTAMÄKI** international sales **TOTEM FILMS** written and directed by **MIKKO MYLLYLÄHTI**

