

# SNAIL

MIKHAIL  
SENKOV

A FILM BY  
**ELSA KREMSER**  
AND LEVIN PETER

PROTAGONISTI E MONDRIENISTI: ALEXANDER KOLJA DE VICTOR A TUGAITE, MARIA ROSA RUFFO E MARIAL SANCHEZ, "WHITE CHALK" / CON LA MUSICA DI LUISA KERSBERG E LEON PETER, DANCE A TROVARE MONIKA HUBERSTEIN, CON STEPHAN RECHBERGER, CON JOHN COLELEY E JAY MOSKOW / CON LA MUSICA DI LEON PETER E JENNIFER SCHNEIDER, DANCE A TROVARE JONATHAN SCHNEIDER E MONDRIEN / CON LA MUSICA DI KRISTINE WITLA, DANCE A TROVARE LEON PETER / DANCE A TROVARE LANA KLIN, CON ROSA CAVELLE CHASE, DANCE A TROVARE PIERO DECELY E DINA HOFMEYER / CON LA MUSICA DI LUISA KERSBERG E LEON PETER

WATER

Panama Film and Raumzeitfilm in co-production with Ma.ja.de Fiction present

# WHITE SNAIL

Locarno Film Festival - Concorso Internazionale



Sarajevo Film Festival - Feature Film Competition



a film by Elsa Kremser & Levin Peter  
with Marya Imbro & Mikhail Senkov

Austria/Germany | 2025 | 115 min | 1:2.39 | Color | 4K | Dolby 5.1  
Russian, Belarusian, English and Mandarin OV | available with English, German & French Subtitles





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## SYNOPSIS

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A Belarusian model dreaming of a career in China finds herself unexpectedly drawn to a reclusive night-shift worker at a morgue.

Their connection begins with a chance encounter: again and again, Masha is drawn to the morgue. Under false pretenses, she finally gets inside. But it's not the morgue itself - it's the moment the mysterious Misha steps into her life that turns everything upside down.

Between two seemingly different outsiders, a maelstrom of mutual attraction and shy desire evolves. Carried away by summer recklessness, they drift through the twilight of Minsk's summer nights. At Misha's place, a new world is revealed to her: countless opulent oil paintings show the dead from the morgue - rendered with sensuality and a tender sense of life.

To their surprise, Masha is drawn to his dark, beautiful world, while he finds in her someone who truly sees him and understands his art. Their bond challenges her ideas of beauty, body, and mortality, igniting a quiet spark in both of their lives.

Meanwhile, Masha's parents urge her to leave the country, and her agent pushes her to build an international career. With European borders closing, only a casting in China offers an opportunity. And yet, Masha and Misha leave the city behind, bound by hope and the chance of discovering the unknown. But can such an unconventional love bloom in the barren world around them?

The fragile love story of two contemporary outsiders who reweave each other's threads and discover they are not alone.





## PRESS QUOTES

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*"A wonderful romantic drama"*

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

*"An unpredictable narrative arc and moody visual aesthetic"*

SCREEN DAILY

*„Imbro and Senkov's performances feel deeply authentic, as if they had spent a lifetime in front of the camera."*

CINEUROPA

*"A charmingly delicate and light film"*

DMOVIES

*"White Snail stands out as a rare gem, marked by expressive imagery and an almost magical atmosphere."*

FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE

*„Impressively nuanced performances"*

SLANT

*"A film that is not afraid to push boundaries and investigate the complex recesses of the human soul."*

INTERNATIONAL CINEPHILE SOCIETY

*„A love story marked by psychological trauma, rituals, and desire."*

VHS CUT

*"A rare and empathetic perspective on life in a country rarely seen on screen."*

MOVEABLE FEST

*"A striking screen presence in their very first acting roles."*

THE SPOT



## DIRECTORS

**Elsa Kremser** (\*1985 Wolfsberg/Austria) and **Levin Peter** (\*1985 Jena/Germany) are a directing-duo and the founders of the Vienna based production company **RAUMZEIT-FILM**. After they started their collaboration during their film studies in 2009, their first documentary **SPACE DOGS** premiered in 2019 in Locarno and was shown at more than 70 festivals worldwide.

This was followed by **DREAMING DOGS**, a feature-length experimental film that received significant international attention by curators and festivals. They were awarded with the Carinthian Cultural Award for Film, the Nipkow fellowship, the Gerd Ruge fellowship and the ExtraValue Artist Residency New York. **WHITE SNAIL** is their first fiction feature.

## FILMOGRAPHY

**WHITE SNAIL** / Elsa Kremser & Levin Peter / 2025 / 115 min / fiction

**DREAMING DOGS** / Elsa Kremser & Levin Peter / 2024 / 77 min / experimental

**SPACE DOGS** / Elsa Kremser & Levin Peter / 2019 / 90 min / documentary



## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

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In WHITE SNAIL, we devote ourselves to two outsiders - strikingly different in their lives and ways of being - yet united by an unyielding, fragile glow that sets them apart from the world around them.

The film is based on the real lives of Masha and Misha, who make their acting debut in WHITE SNAIL. The screenplay is deeply rooted in their personal biographies. When we first met them ten years ago, it became clear that they would challenge each other, provoke one another, and set each other in motion - turning their lives upside down. In real life, Masha works as a model and struggles with the psychological pressures that come with her profession. Misha has spent twenty years working in a morgue and is also an artist. He creates large-scale oil paintings that abstractly process his experiences from the morgue.

These are two rich, contrasting worlds - both centered on the body and its representation, yet expressed in profoundly different ways - which we deliberately bring into collision within a fictional framework. Together, these characters dream of breaking free,

yet their hopes are restrained by fear and self-shame - shame for being unseen as an artist, shame from battling depression, shame that keeps them from opening up to others for fear of humiliation. At the heart of the story lies a fundamental conflict: the choice between opening oneself up to another, risking vulnerability, or withdrawing into isolation and accepting loneliness and stagnation. On top of this, Masha faces a pressing decision: whether to stay in Belarus and give her relationship with Misha a chance, or to leave everything behind in pursuit of a new life as a model in China.

Through WHITE SNAIL, we seek to awaken a sense of connection, helping us feel less alone in our struggles while rousing the courage not to hide our flaws and the willingness to show vulnerability. Our work seeks to reveal what often remains unseen - a perspective free from nostalgia and Eastern European stereotypes. We tell stories from a country whose stories rarely reach beyond its borders.

*Elsa Kremser & Levin Peter*

## INTERVIEW

# 'White Snail' Directors Explain Why They Worked in a Morgue to Prepare for the Shoot and the Importance of Avoiding Clichés

by Georg Szalai **THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER**

***In an interview at Sarajevo, Elsa Kremser and Levin Peter also discuss how they approached representing depression and suicidal thoughts in their romantic drama that is set in Belarus and won Locarno awards.***

**You two have mentioned that you actually worked in a morgue for a few days to prepare for the film. Can you share some insight into how this came about?**

**LEVIN PETER:** Misha brought us to several morgues in Minsk. This was the starting encounter. We were amazed by how actual dead people look. It's very different from the image that we see in mainstream cinema. And then we understood that we needed to spend time in the morgue for practical reasons – to understand the movements there, the working methods, etc. It was a long negotiation until we were allowed in like medical students. We arrived with our

DOP, and the person who worked in the morgue said, "No, you're not going to watch me. That's annoying. You're going to work with me."

**ELSA KREMSE:** "There is so much to do here. Please give me a helping hand." It was not easy. And it was different for each of us. I think for the DOP, it was mainly to understand all the movements and how this work is physically, because it's a very tough job. I mean, the human bodies are heavy. Misha, in his real life, is really suffering from 20 years of working there, in terms of back pain. Of course, there was COVID when we were there. So there were many, many people in the morgue. There was no vaccination, so for us, it was a crucial point to do this. We worked there for three weeks on a daily basis before we started to shoot, also to understand Misha's kind of natural habitat.



**LEVIN PETER:** There's an obscure but still very touching love scene when they both put makeup on this elderly lady who died. These things we also did to understand how delicate this all is, how much you struggle to touch, how much you think about profound things to honor these people.

**The characters Misha and Masha in the film discuss suicide attempts and thoughts. As filmmakers, how did you approach such a sensitive subject?**

**ELSA KREMSEER:** For us, it was very important to really get close to Masha's real feelings to understand where this depression and suicidal thoughts can come from. And so we were researching with many young people, not only in Belarus, talking to them to find out what the reason for this is. And there are multiple reasons for depression and for being lonely, and we tried not to make it cliché, but to understand what you actually see from depression. It's not an easy thing, because people usually hide when they are depressed, and we talked to a lot of people who had been in touch with people who had [died by] suicide. The hardest thing is that you don't see it, and we wanted to show something you don't see. Because as soon as you make it simple, cinematic, and put up an image, it could be very wrong.

**LEVIN PETER:** I think the most challenging and harmful question for youngsters with suicidal thoughts is the question why. There can never be an answer. That is why it was so important that our other main character, Misha, is never asking why. And it was important for us that, in the movie, he is shown as someone who already knows and who does not need to ask. And this is, for us, the most profound way of understanding each other.

**Tell me about this scene with a tree. Misha says people believe that if they take their clothes off, leave a piece on the tree, and crawl through a hole in the trunk, it can help them. That felt a bit like shamanism. Does this tree really exist?**

**ELSA KREMSEER:** In our time in Belarus, we witnessed so many young people who actually believe in all these mythological methods. We were looking for a seer, one of these old women in villages who read from the water or whisper or make all these kinds of rituals. In one of the first drafts of the script, it was always such a woman that they went to visit together. Then we were casting for such a woman, we found several really traditional, old, Belarusian-speaking women in faraway villages. But we felt it was a depiction of a cliché from Eastern Europe, a

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post-Soviet cliché, and we didn't want to romanticize this region. But one of these ladies was actually showing us the tree and said, "They come here from Minsk all the time with chic cars, and then they go and undress and go through this tree." Of course, we were amazed and thought, now we have a tool which we want to use in the film, a real tree.

*LEVIN PETER:* Most of the clothes are real. They hang there for years. And the tree was central, because we didn't want to romanticize. We also believe that in the post-Soviet countries, nostalgia has been misused in the last decade in a political way. And we really don't agree with this nostalgia. When I first started to encounter art nostalgia, for me, it was about aesthetics, and I think politics took over. In a lot of countries, they try to make us believe that there's so little hope in the future that they want us to believe that everything was better in the past, and that's why we try to play with this to show that there is a mythology. It's very important for us as a metaphor.

**You have mentioned metaphors and images. Misha paints images and has them on his body in the form of tattoos. In contrast, Masha is pale white. I had the feeling that you were playing with that, too, right?**

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*ELSA KREMSER:* Of course. She's even as a projection as a model. And she has that white appearance. We can project everything onto a white wall, let's say, and in the modeling school, you have to be that clean. And then the phone screen is again making things cleaner than they may actually be. These two surfaces, the screen and the canvas that he paints on, were interesting for us. We wanted to bring them together somehow.

*LEVIN PETER:* Also, when I think about classic coming of age, the sun and the summer always bring light and hope. In Masha's case, and this is tragic to us too, it's the opposite. Sun is very harmful to her, to her skin, so she needs to hide under an umbrella. But the night is embracing her. It suits her much, much better, because she can shine. So, that was bringing so much to the film that we could work with visually.





## MAIN CAST

**Marya Imbro** was born in 2000 in Minsk, Belarus. At the age of 16, she began her international modeling career with a debut in Tokyo. After her first jobs in Japan, she attended a modeling school in Minsk to further develop her skills. Since then, she has worked in major fashion hubs including Guangzhou, Beijing, Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei, and Milan. Her modeling portfolio includes features in Harper's Bazaar and collaborations with brands such as Overcool, Mageasy, Abscense, and Calie. At 19, Marya was cast for her first film role in *White Snail*. Over several years, numerous interviews and conversations with the directing duo Elsa Kremser & Levin Peter about Marya's life and upbringing shaped the film's screenplay. *White Snail* marks Marya's debut as a film actress.



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Belarusian artist **Mikhail Senkov**, known as A.R.Ch. in his artistic work, was born in 1982 in Karelia and lives in Minsk. He studied fine arts at the Belarusian State Academy of Arts. His distinctive painting style—described as "Academic Art Brut"—blends the contrasting concepts of art brut and academism. He has presented solo exhibitions and taken part in over 15 group shows in Belarus, Russia, Lithuania, Poland, and Austria. For over 20 years, Mikhail worked in a morgue in Minsk — an experience that has profoundly influenced his art. About a decade ago, he began a close collaboration with the directing duo Kremser & Peter. The screenplay for *White Snail* is deeply rooted in his personal history and the realities of his life. His role in the film marks his debut as an actor.



© Elsa Okazaki

## Crew

*Directors & Scriptwriters*  
*Producers*

*Coproducers*  
*Junior Producer*  
*Cinematographer*  
*Editor*  
*Music*  
*Original Sound*

*Sound Design*  
*Re-recording Mixer*  
*Colorist*  
*Art Director*  
*Costume Designer*  
*Makeup Artist*  
*Casting*

*A production by*

*Funded by*

*In collaboration with*

Elsa Kremser & Levin Peter  
Lixi Frank, David Bohun,  
Elsa Kremser, Levin Peter  
Heino Deckert, Tina Börner  
Camille Chanel  
Mikhail Khursevich  
Stephan Bechinger  
John Gürtler, Jan Misserre  
Simon Peter, Johannes  
Schmelzer-Ziringer

Jonathan Schorr  
Lars Ginzler  
Peter Bernaers  
Kristine Vitola  
Lena Oger  
Lana Kaun  
Olga Travkina

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Eurimages  
ÖFI+  
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Mitteldeutsche Medien  
Creative Europe MEDIA

ARTE  
ORF Film/Television Agreement

## Cast

*Masha*  
*Misha*  
*Masha's Mother*  
*Masha's Father*

*Models*

*Model School Director*  
*Exorcist*  
*Psychologist*  
*Doctor*  
*Misha's Colleague*

Marya Imbro  
Mikhail Senkov  
Olga Reptuh  
Andrei Sauchanka

Anzhelika Prakopenia  
Roman Kiselev  
Katrasya Yasnovskaya  
Tako Chan  
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