

EX NIHILO
presents

DARK TOUCH

A MARINA DE VAN film

Starring

MISSY KEATING

MARCELLA PLUNKETT

PADRAIC DELANEY



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High definition pictures and press kit can be downloaded from
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SYNOPSIS

At night, an isolated house deep in the countryside takes on a monstrous life of its own.

Objects and furniture run riot against the inhabitants, leaving 11-year-old Neve the only survivor of a bloody massacre that destroys the bodies of her parents and culminates in the death of her little brother, Ciaran.

Suspecting a gang of homicidal vandals, the police ignore Neve when she tries to tell them about the murderous rage of the house. She is taken in by friends of her parents who, with the help of a local social worker, try to ease her trauma by surrounding her with love and rebuilding the semblance of a normal life. But Neve doesn't find peace. Far from it...

All around her, signs of danger continue to manifest, and her surroundings remain imbued with a lurking violence that soon unleashes itself again, erupting into further slaughter and claiming more victims.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The subject matter and development of this film are structured around eleven-year-old NEVE's realisation of her telekinetic powers in situations that scare her or make her cry, as a result of a childhood trauma that she cannot initially figure out.

This realisation brings with it a subsequent awareness of her inability to establish relationships with other people, as she is incapable of recognising when people are showing her affection or tenderness.

As the film progresses, it provides enough signs so that viewers are not left with a sense of arbitrary, unexplained violence at the end of the story, but are instead able to understand fully the reasons for what they have seen. There is none of the gratuitous violence of a slasher film. These signs are gradual – it is important to protect the mystery that fuels the film's suspense and allows the audience's thoughts and emotions to evolve until the subject finally becomes clear – as does its pessimistic conclusion.

There must be more to a horror film than mere nuts and bolts if it is to work. It requires a slightly transgressive theme, be it sexuality (as is often the case in more conventional horror films) or, in this case, child abuse. I leave the nature of this abuse unclear, but the subject is not calculated for cinematographic effect: it is one that moves me.

The beginning of the film will give the viewer the impression that Neve's and her younger brother CIARAN's problem is that they have been abused by their parents. However, nothing should confirm this potential theory or underscore visually how it is linked to the 'magical' and murderous frenzy of domestic appliances taking place around Neve.

Since they know that they are watching a genre film, i.e. a film bound by certain conventions, I think the audience will spontaneously opt for the most exciting, improbable and magical leads that involve the presence of supernatural forces concealed in Neve's surroundings.

At the start of the film, I would like viewers first of all to be scared *with* Neve – until she herself realises, at the same time as we do, that she is the source of the magic, whereas she believed she was a victim. Then I would like them also to be scared *for* her, since these threatening forces choose to manifest themselves around her.

I would wish that viewers would initially reject the obvious explanation of identifying the young girl as the source and embodiment of evil (of violence), and that they would tremble with her as we tremble with the innocent girl in *Poltergeist*.

The audience should see Neve as a victim, caught up in a story she has trouble getting incredulous adults to believe. Her misgivings will later turn out to be an aggressive rejection of all that she has so cruelly lacked; rejection that develops because she cannot recognise it and is perhaps exacerbated by the resentment she feels towards all of the happy households, such as the Galins.

I like the traditional use of a child character as a vector of horror, a mixture of the inscrutability of Damien (*The Omen*) and the irascible fragility of a victim such as Carrie (*Carrie*).

I have chosen telekinesis, as in *Carrie*, for two reasons:

1. A psychological reason, i.e. telekinesis fits well with the feelings and symptoms of abused children. These children are not able to accuse their parents, nor can they feel and freely express the anger that continues to grow inside them.

Whatever the therapy offered to such children, they develop a systematic powerlessness to identify, let alone resist, their parents' aggression – as well as, later, that of other adults. The resulting malaise always expresses itself in a fairly passive manner. I also think that brutally replacing this permanent blow to their understanding of love and relationships with the lost ideal and happy representatives of a successful childhood is not the smartest of answers.

In any case, Neve's rage and reactive hatred are so powerful that she cannot act using her own body and words; they translate into the unwitting development of her telekinetic powers.

2. The second reason for choosing telekinesis is to satisfy my desire for the film's victims to be executed in a certain way. 'Those' doing the killing and destroying, mutilating people terribly, are the mundane and daily objects of our ordinary, happy homes as we find them in adverts which present them as part of a peaceful – and thus *successful* – family life.

These objects create a misleadingly protective veneer, a guarantee of opacity and therefore impunity, even for highly dysfunctional families which appear to be perfectly functioning units, just like any other one, and showing all signs of lawfulness and health to the outside world.

For abused children, such surroundings epitomize the unshakeable serenity of the family universe and how others perceive it. This steadfast material serenity conceals – or denies – their own malaise.

The countryside setting implies a sense of remoteness and the scattering of population and houses. It is a magnified version of our society that also emphasises the emotional seclusion of the children in a world dominated by the forces of nature.

As for tackling the visual aspects of telekinesis, I don't have objects flying around in all directions in spectacular, magical scenes. We combine digital special effects with more classical techniques for depicting supernatural phenomena such as those used in films made prior to the 1990s.

With such a sensitive subject, I find it necessary to make one more thing clear regarding the ethics of making this film. I would like to turn this story into a genre film, i.e. for it to be 'entertainment' like any other horror film, even if all horror films feed off the audience's need to feel scared and to be surprised. Of course, I am doing this not because I am at all fascinated by or lenient about child abuse and children's suffering, but because I am sensitive to and compassionate about this subject.

Making a horror film is a way for me to convey the horror and the fear experienced by mistreated children. At the same time, the "playful" nature of a horror film – both for the viewer and the director – is a way of staging a form of revenge and a 'triumphal' riposte by the victims against a world that inflicts, ignores or hides this kind of violence.

Marina de Van

Marina de VAN



ACTRESS

CINEMA

2006	JE PENSE A VOUS	Pascal BONITZER
2002	DANS MA PEAU aka IN MY SKIN	Marina de VAN
1998	SITCOM	François OZON
1997	REGARDE LA MER (short film)	François OZON

DIRECTOR

FEATURE FILMS

2011	LE PETIT POU CET ARTE TV movie Production: Flach Films TV
2009	NE TE RETOURNE PAS aka DON'T LOOK BACK Production: AGAT FILMS / EX NIHILO Co-production: ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP, SAMSA, STUDIO URANIA Pay TV CANAL+ France / TPS French Distribution: WILD BUNCH International Sales: WILD BUNCH Official Selection CANNES 2009 Copenhagen Film Festival
2002	DANS MA PEAU aka IN MY SKIN Production: LAZENNEC – Fiction Pay TV CANAL+ France French Distribution: REZO Films International Sales: Celluloïd Dreams (sold in South Korea, Russia, Belgium, Switzerland, England, US) Video release: Les Editions Montparnasse

SHORT FILMS

1999	PSY-SHOW Fiction, 35 mm, 20' Production: LAZENNEC TOUT COURT with the support of the CNC
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Festivals: Pantin (Panorama), Brest, Turin, Aix-en-Provence, Clermont-Ferrand, Buenos Aires, Paris, Mons, Sao Paulo
Broadcast on Arte 2000 and 2001: TPS Cinéma 2001
Released by Arte Vidéo - Collection 'Les Femmes s'emparent du Cinéma' 2000

CNC Quality Prize, 2000

Special Jury Award, Torino Festival 1999

Special Jury Award, Aix en Provence Festival 1999

1998

ALIAS

Fiction, 35 mm, 13'

Production: LAZENNEC TOUT COURT coproduced with
LA SEPT CINÉMA

Festivals: Pantin, Palerme, Padoue, Angers,
Clermont-Ferrand, Mamers, Séoul, Seattle, Chicago

CNC Quality Prize, 1999

1997

RÉTENTION

Fiction, 35 mm, 15' – FEMIS

Festivals: Pantin, Dublin, Poitiers

1996

BIEN SOUS TOUS LES RAPPORTS

Fiction, 35 mm, 12' – FEMIS

Festivals: Grenoble, Locarno, Nevers, Saint-Denis, Angers, Vienne, Montreal,
Toronto, Leipzig, Hambourg, Kiev, Londres, Bristol

Press Award in Clermont-Ferrand 1997

Second Prize – Munich Film Festival 1996

Second Prize – Turin Film Festival 1996

Certificate of Merit – Chicago 1997

SCREENWRITER

JE PENSE A VOUS by Pascal BONITZER

Feature Film – co-writer

DANS MA PEAU aka IN MY SKIN

Feature Film – Screenwriter

8 FEMMES aka 8 WOMEN by François OZON

Feature Film 2002 – co-writer

SOUS LE SABLE aka UNDER THE SAND by François OZON

Feature Film 2001 – co-writer

CAST

MISSY KEATING

MARCELLA PLUNKETT

PADRAIC DELANEY

CATHERINE WALKER

RICHARD DORMER

CHARLOTTE FLYVHOLM

STEPHEN WALL

SUSIE POWER

ROBERT DONNELLY

ELLA HAYES

ART PARKINSON

MARK HUBERMAN

OLGA WEHRLY

LAOISE MURPHY

CLARE BARRETT

CREW

Screenplay/Director

MARINA DE VAN

Cinematography

JOHN CONROY

Sound

TOBIAS RÖNNERTZ

NIKLAS SKARP

Editing

MIKE FROMENTIN

Original Music

CHRISTOPHE CHASSOL

Production Design

TAMARA CONBOY

Costumes

LARA CAMPBELL

Casting

LOUISE KIELY

Special Effects Supervision

ANDERS MUAMMAR

Vfx supervision

TORBJÖRN OLSSON

1st Assistant Director

FRED NICOLAS

Production Managers
CATHLEEN DORE – Ireland
MIKE LUNDIN – Sweden

Executive Producer
ANDREW LOWE

Associate Producers
PAUL BLOMGREN DO VAN
CHRISTIAN HOLM

Co-producers Sweden
SEAN WHEELAN
JESSICA ASK

Co-producers Ireland
MARTINA NILAND
ED GUINEY

Producers
PATRICK SOBELMAN
JEAN-LUC ORMIERES

A Co-Production

EX NIHILO – FRANCE
ELEMENT PICTURES – IRELAND
FILMGATE FILMS / FILM I VÄST – SWEDEN

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