



MAGDALENA POPŁAWSKA / MICHAŁ ŻURAWSKI



Karlovy Vary  
International Film Festival

5 3 W A R S



## SYNOPSIS

Anna and Witek, a young married couple, are very much in love. He is a war correspondent who spends the better part of the year at the heart of raging conflicts. Her days are spent waiting for him to come home. She tries to lead a normal life, but her fears for Witek start to overcome her efforts. She begins preparing herself for the worst...



**DIRECTOR**

Ewa Bukowska

**SCRIPT**

Ewa Bukowska

(based on a book by Grażyna Jagielska)

**CINEMATOGRAPHY**

Tomasz Naumiuk

**MAKE-UP**

Magdalena Kakietek

**COSTUMES**

Marta Ostrowicz

**SET DESIGN**

Anna Anosowicz

**SOUND**

Maria Chilarecka

**EDITING**

Agnieszka Glińska

**MUSIC**

Natalia Fiedorczyk-Cieślak

**PRODUCTION MANAGER**

Sylwia Rajdaszka

**PRODUCTION COMPANY**

Munk Studio-Polish Filmmakers Association

**CO-PRODUCTION**

Canal+ Poland, The Chimney Poland,  
Wojciech Kabarowski Digital Movies

**CO-FINANCED BY**

Polish Film Institute

**CAST**

Magdalena Popławska, Michał Żurawski,  
Kinga Preis, Dorota Kolak, Krzysztof Stroiński

**WORLD SALES**

open





## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*53 Wars* is a multifaceted story which plays out on several levels. War, violence, local conflicts, terrorism and general destabilisation are all elements of everyday reality nowadays. Twenty years of wars waged in strategic parts of the world constitute one level of the film and serve as the background to the story, while the structure of the film sets up an opposition between the intimate relationship of the two protagonists and the seemingly distant world of local conflicts.

Contemporary war and its explosive power provides another level. This touches on the fates of the people involved both indirectly and directly in modern-day conflicts, fates which are almost always tragic and noble, but can sometimes be humorous. These are the fates of unique individuals living under constant constraint and the pressure to be normal in times of never-ending war, of war which is liberating, just as the will to step beyond the boundaries of good and evil once was. It intensifies actions and concentrates their outcome. It offers a special power which can lead some people to success and others to failure.

The third level is a love story. A story of various shades of love. The tale of a woman who chooses madness in order to achieve her goal. The tale of a woman and a man who have become two parallel lines. Who are put to the test several times. And, in the end, they pass that test. It is the story of having an idea in life which makes striving to stay together despite everything worthwhile. *53 Wars* is a story about the will to survive at any cost in the era of contemporary wars.

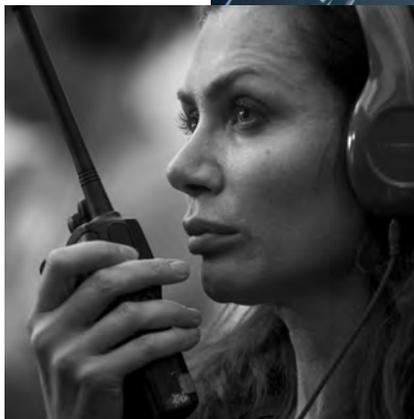
In my directing, I draw inspiration from Michael Haneke's films and from his precise, engrossing narrative, which culminates in a powerful, and surprising, pay-off. I want to follow my characters and their emotions and I aim to create portrayals which are as psychologically credible as is possible. I will set out to seize the audience's attention by avoiding easy solutions, impelling them to ask questions and form their own opinions about the characters.

The visual form of the film will be extremely important. Picturesque and photographic frames will be supported by subtle, minimalist music, thus setting the tone of the drama. I would like to steer clear of the sharp lines and viewpoints presented in contemporary cinema. Many of the frames will be filmed statically, but we will employ master shots, as well, which will give the story the proper rhythm. We will also use the colours of the seasons and the natural setting to the utmost. This will underscore the moments when a new stage in life begins and enable the audience to experience the emotions associated with yet another loss.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### EWA BUKOWSKA

A graduate of the Ludwik Solski National Academy of Theatre Arts in Krakow, Ewa Bukowska has appeared in numerous film and television roles and commercials both in Poland and abroad, while working in parallel as a screenwriter, producer and author of television programmes. She worked for two well-known production studios, Studio A and Prasa i Film, for several years as not only a screenwriter, with credits including sitcom *Miodowe lata*, the Polish version of *The Honeymooners*, but also as a screenplay reviewer and producer. She made her short feature debut in 2013 with *The Return*, for which she also wrote the screenplay.



### TOMASZ NAUMIUK

Born in 1981, Polish cinematographer Tomasz Naumiuk graduated from the Direction of Photography Department at the Łódź Film School in 2008.

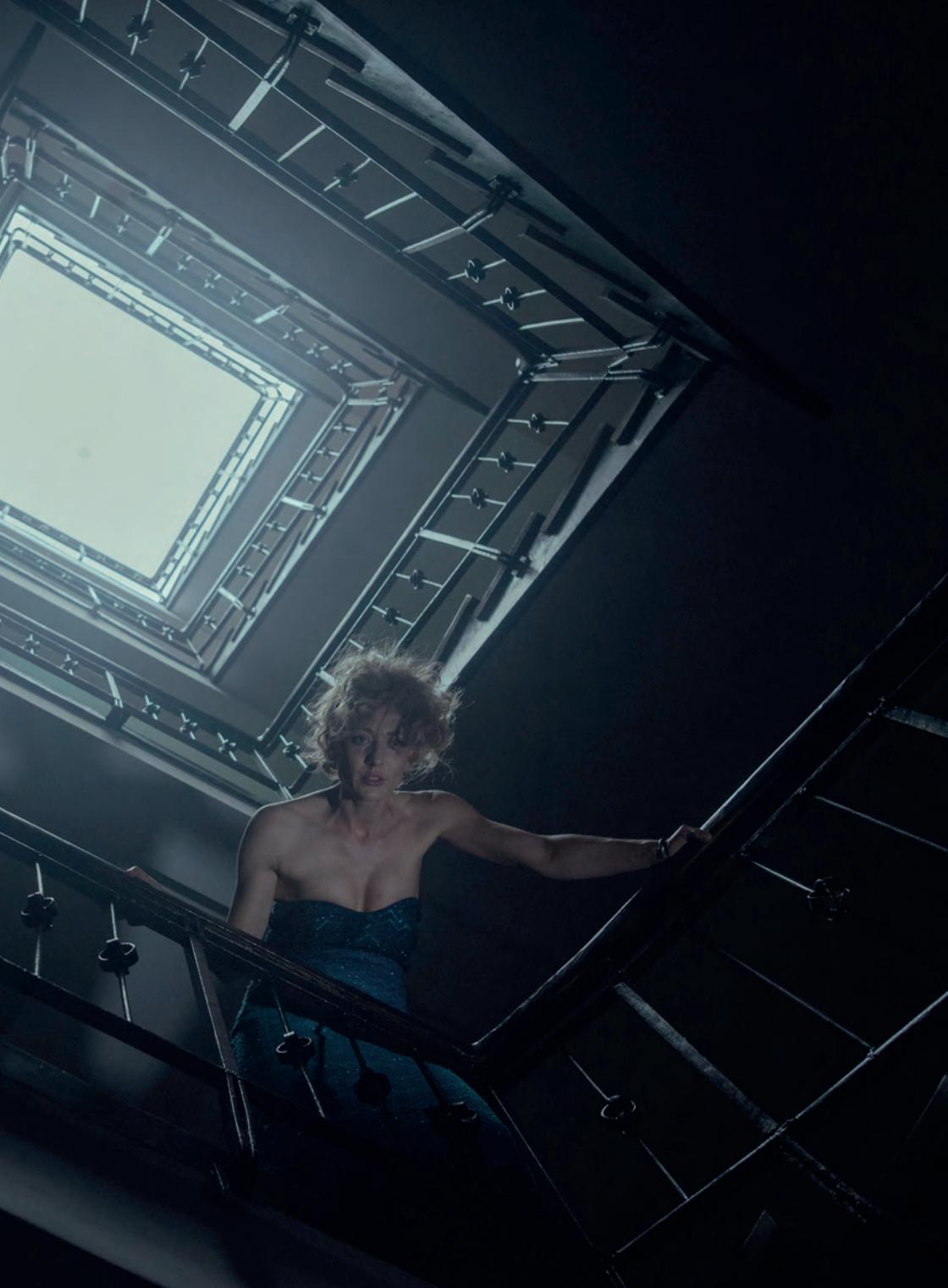
#### AWARDS

- 2015 | *Disco Polo*; the Jantar for Cinematography at the Youth and Film Debut Film Festival, Koszalin
- 2012 | *Being Like Kazimierz Deyna*; the Jantar for Cinematography at the Youth and Film Debut Film Festival, Koszalin

#### SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

- 2017 | *Nina*, dir. Olga Chajdas (in post-production)
- 2017 | *53 wars*, dir. Ewa Bukowska (in post-production)
- 2016 | *Amok*, dir. Kasia Adamik
- 2016 | *Spoor*, dir. Agnieszka Holland, 2nd unit
- 2015 | *Summer's Blood*, dir. Jan Komasa, Season 2, TV Series
- 2014 | *Disco Polo*, dir. Maciej Bochniak
- 2014 | *The Passing Bells*, dir. Brendan Maher, series for the BBC
- 2011 | *The Vulture*, dir. Eugeniusz Korin, 2nd unit
- 2010 | *Being Like Kazimierz Deyna*, dir. Anna Wieczur-Bluszcz





## 53 WARS AND LOVE. AN INTERVIEW WITH EWA BUKOWSKA

*"53 Wars is a study of loneliness in a relationship. A love story, a story of dependency on love, dependency on a partner, dependency on war. A tale of a gradual internal collapse and disintegration. I hope the film will forge a place for itself in the discussion on the condition of contemporary humanity, contemporary women,"* says Ewa Bukowska, who directed *53 Wars* and wrote the screenplay



*53 Wars is a film about love. That's a theme which crops up fairly often in contemporary cinema. So what's distinctive about your take on it?*

It's a film about loneliness in love. I didn't try to be distinctive. All that interests me is truth. And because truth is a subjective phenomenon, any work, in this case, a film, becomes a personal statement and perhaps that's what makes it distinctive. I'm addressing everything that unites two people and which we call a relationship; love, desire, passion, ambition, yearning, fear, lack of fulfilment, a sense of loss and the emotions which spring from that.

*You say that the film's a personal statement. What does that mean?*

I wouldn't discern any other meanings in the phrase 'personal statement' apart from this one; every creative artist, not just the creators of auteur cinema, but any artist hired to accomplish some kind of idea, leaves their mark on the work.

I'm telling a story from a woman's perspective and that undoubtedly makes me closer to the central character. Anka and I are women. When I was writing the screenplay, I was thinking about the mythical Penelope and about the endeavour to bring about a cultural change between men and women and how it's continually impossible to achieve. He goes away, or walks out of the home, to conquer the world. She waits, even though she'd also like to get out. I was interested in the struggle that Anka undertakes with a myth that's written into her at the subconscious level. Which means that, consciously, she should master it. Yet that's not what happens.

**Let's start at the beginning. Two ambitious people, Anka and Witek, want to establish themselves professionally, but only Witek fulfils his ambition. He becomes a war correspondent. Anka gives up work because she's 'keeping the home fire burning'. You could say that she's safeguarding the rear while her beloved's in the vanguard on the front line...**

That's exactly what happens. When Anka gives up her job, she gives up herself. She never goes back to the plan she drew up for herself when she first stepped into adult life. In fact, this is a really widespread phenomenon. Women enter into a relationship and set up a company called 'family'. Within that company they hold the noble position of 'mother' and 'wife'. At the same time, they still have the professional plans they spent years preparing themselves for before it came to the point of setting up the company called 'family'. Of course, the duties and responsibilities that arise from running the company are so extensive that they make it impossible for the women to accomplish their original plans. Everyday life quickly vets ambitions. But the hunger for self-fulfilment doesn't pass and disillusionment, lack of fulfilment and frustration mount as a consequence.

**Women are in a losing position on account of the fact that they're women.**

It's biologically conditioned, of course. In the modern world, women have more tasks to carry out. The tasks that stem from the very fact that they're women and the ones that are the accomplishment of their personal needs, talents and callings.

There's a classic mechanism at work in this story. The man develops professionally. Basically, nobody asks Anka about her priorities. It's obvious that a woman will step into several roles at once. Such are society's expectations. Women must offer up their freedom in sacrifice, as it were. This isn't anyone's fault, of course. It happens automatically.

**Well, yes, but couldn't people consciously prevent it?**

Exactly. I'm telling a story about unusual people. As a war correspondent, his profession is an uncommon one and she's also equipped for interesting professional possibilities. And despite the fact that they're people who are aware, who understand what partnership in a relationship and mutual respect are, to say nothing of love, they still let themselves be caught in the trap of the Penelope myth. Life slips out of their control. The destructive force of war also has its effect.

**In Poland, a woman who doesn't want to stay in the background on account of a man's needs and attitudes is perceived as...**

A feminist.

**A demanding feminist.**

It's a wider phenomenon. It doesn't only apply to Poland. The perception of ourselves in a relationship is an individual matter because, after all, not every woman is ready to be self-reliant and independent in her relationship with a man. Women are often unaware of the fact that taking responsibility for themselves and living with someone on a partnership basis is healthier on every account. Of course, men aren't prepared for that, either. A battle begins. Women set up feminist organisations and so on. But really, it's simply about mutual respect and listening. Nothing else.

My central character, Anka, is utterly dependent on her husband. She's as co-dependent on war as he is. That's the reason for her suffering and internal disintegration. Self-knowledge and taking up the fight with one's own self is life's most important lesson. It's a lesson that's incomparable to anything else. Even though it's a painful one.

**Anka is diagnosed with combat stress reaction, which she, rather than Witek, is wrestling with.**

Anka suffers from her husband's condition. Which is exactly what dependence and co-dependence is about. Thanks to that, he can do his job.

### **Is Witek's profession his mission?**

Yes, he's undoubtedly called to it. He belongs to that small, tight-knit group of people from around the world who are capable of describing modern conflicts truthfully and credibly. He has the ability both to win the trust of the people who are involved in those conflicts or who create them in the name of an idea and to recognise and predict the consequences. He's the right person in the right place, but people like that pay a price for their genius. As a rule, it's their private lives. I decided to tell the story of something that's unseen. The story of the person closest to him, of a woman.

### **You built the film around an opposition.**

Yes, the intimacy of the central character versus the distant world of local conflicts. It was important to me to show the wounding power of modern war so that audiences will realise that even the most far-flung of wars affects us all.

### **I have the impression that you used the frameworks of a cinema genre, the melodrama, in order to tell a story about people entangled in war both directly and indirectly.**

To be frank, I don't know if the film can be forced into any kind of framework at all. The words you've used unquestionably fit the story, with one exception; 'framework'. The world that Anka lets us into has such an immense emotional load that there's no way of setting it within classical boundaries. However, it's well worth undertaking a discussion about the condition of contemporary women and the role they have to play. About the fact that there's nowhere to hide from war. These are recurring themes and they still haven't been resolved.

### **Anka is played by Magdalena Popławska, with Michał Żurawski as Witek.**

I made Anka, played by Magda, the centre of gravity. Magda's an uncommonly interesting person and personality. She's an added value to my story. Then there's Michał, who's the 'strong man' type. And that strength is exactly what he brought to the film.

### **You invited interesting, experienced filmmakers to work with you. Agnieszka Glińska was the editor, Tomasz Naumiuk was the cinematographer and the music is by Natalia Fiedorczyk. What was important to you when you were putting your team together?**

Communication and understanding. I think we all wanted to make the journey through the story together. To get to know Anka-the-woman, to get to know ourselves, we women and men who are interested in that phenomenon which is woman.

The screenplay of *53 Wars* is my own, original proposal, but the film's a work by the entire team. Of course, the story would never have been told if Grażyna Jagielska hadn't wanted to tell the story of herself in her book. She was the reason the film was born. One thing that's extremely interesting is the direction that story took as it unfolded. It became a universal tale of women fighting for their own selves. It's a tale of the search for the self. And that's the power of the film.

EWA BUKOWSKA WAS TALKING TO ANNA SERDIUKOW



**Munk Studio** has been functioning within the structure of the Polish Filmmakers Association since 2008. The studio produces short and feature-length debut films and young filmmakers who want to make their first film in a professional environment can count on the artistic, production and promotional assistance we provide.

The studio runs three programmes for the production of shorts; *30 Minutes*, *First Documentary* and *Young Animation*. Script submissions take place twice a year for each programme and a maximum of ten live-action shorts, ten documentary shorts and five short animations are produced annually.

To date, five full-length feature debuts have been made at Munk Studio; Bartosz Konopka's *Fear of Falling*, Maria Sadowska's *Women's Day*, Dariusz Glazer's *The Wall*, Grzegorz Zariczny's *Waves* and Kuba Czekaj's *The Erlprince*. As we go to press, three more are in the pipeline; editing is underway on Ewa Bukowska's *53 Wars* and work is in progress on the screenplay for Piotr Domalewski's *Silent Night*, while Karolina Bielawska's full-length feature debut is currently under development.

*At Munk Studio, our overriding concern is enabling young filmmakers to develop their talents in a supportive environment. We operate in the belief that, for any director making their most crucial film, in other words, their debut, a creative atmosphere and individualised conditions for development are vital. We are constantly expanding our fields of interest and, as the studio's Artistic Director, I would like to see us producing genre films such as contemporary comedies, biopics and crime stories, as well. Debuting with a genre movie is equally as feasible, especially given that genre in no way precludes auteurism. Munk Studio is open to students and graduates not only of film schools, but of every educational institution with an artistic profile. The camera is also frequently used by art academy and theatre school students as a tool for artistic expression. What is paramount is a good idea and artistic vision.*

JERZY KAPUŚCIŃSKI, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF MUNK STUDIO

#### MUNK STUDIO

Polish Filmmakers Association

85, Pańska Str.

00-834 Warsaw, Poland

phone: +48 22 556 54 83

MUNKSTUDIO.EU

FACEBOOK.COM/MUNKSTUDIO

#### PROMOTION & FESTIVALS

ANNA KOT

e-mail: a.kot@sfp.org.pl

phone: +48 22 557 54 88

mobile: +48 721 622 755

**MUNK  
STUDIO**

 Polish  
Filmmakers  
Association