

**Local**  
CONC  
O

# MIKHAIL SENKOV


78

**Locarno Film Festival**  
CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE  
OFFICIAL SELECTION



# SNAIL

A FILM BY  
ELSA KRAJČOVÁ  
AND LEV DOLGOPIETROV

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

PANAMA FILM & RADIOKINEMAL in association with MALAJE, FICTION & DOZIERART in association with MARTHA MÜRR in association with MIKHAEL SCHMIDT in association with "WHITE SMALL" in association with ELISA BÄCKSTRÖM & LEVIN PETER in association with MIKHAEL KROSTWITZ in association with STEPHAN BÖCHNERMEIER in association with JOHN GÜRTLER & JAN WISSEBACH in association with SIMON PETER & JONATHAN SCHÖPP in association with LARS GRENZ in association with KRISTINE MITTLER in association with LENA PÖGG in association with LINA KAHN in association with CAMILLE CHAMBER in association with BENEDICT & TINA BÖHMER in association with LISA FRANK & DAVID BOHLEN & ELISA KREISER & LEVIN PETER in association with
















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



# WHITE SNAIL

**World Premiere - Locarno Film Festival 2025**  
**Concorso Internazionale**

August 8th | 14:00 | Palexpo (FEVI)  
followed by Q&A at the Forum @Spazio Cinema

August 8th | 08:45 | Teatro Kursaal - *PRESS SCREENING*  
August 8th | 10:30 | Press Village Museo Casorella - *PRESS CONFERENCE and PHOTO CALL*

*REPETITION SCREENING*

August 9th | 18:00 | L'altra Sala  
August 10th | 21:00 | La Sala

**WHITE SNAIL** 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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Panama Film

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## **DISTRIBUTOR AUSTRIA**

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## **PRODUCTION**

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Ma.ja.de. Fiction

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## **GERMAN PRESS**

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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.





## 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*



## 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



## INTERVIEW

by Karin Schiefer (Austrian Films)  
translation by Charles Osborne

**Can you tell us more about the genesis of the film, a film that was mostly shot in Belarus?**

**ELSA KREMSER:** The genesis of *WHITE SNAIL* extended over a long period. Ten years ago, I was at a festival in Minsk with my diploma film when I was introduced to the painter Mikhail Senkov, our leading actor. I met him in a morgue, where I saw the first corpse I'd ever encountered: a suicide victim. Immediately afterwards we went to his apartment, which was packed with oil paintings. In one painting, a young woman was depicted as a corpse but with very alert eyes. He explained to me that this woman had survived a suicide attempt, and that he was in contact with her. That was the starting point, and from then on, we were hooked.

**In *WHITE SNAIL*, you are once again active at the interface between fiction and documentary. Did you have to search for a long time to find the second character after your chance encounter with the first?**

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**LEVIN PETER:** Our films always transcend the boundaries between forms. We also considered using documentary forms here. But we felt strongly that Misha is so withdrawn, we wanted to prompt some radical movement in his life, so something would burst out. A documentary portrait would have been an inventory. We needed a character who would make him open up to another person for the first time. We wanted a woman who had never been in front of the camera before. And then it all happened fast.

**ELSA KREMSER:** We knew instinctively, immediately, that Masha was the right person. We weren't trying to cast a model; she approached us because of her thoughts about her body and her problems with depression, which she was open about. The two of them didn't fit together at all, but we had a good gut feeling.

**The two main characters embody a very striking polarity, among other things in terms of skin: Masha's is very light and fragile, while Misha is tattooed all over. How did skin become a fundamental component of the narrative?**

**ELSA KREMSER:** We were originally focused on forms of representation. As well as their skin, mobile phone screens were very important to us; they function as a kind of mirror. For Masha, the main point was the image of herself on display, while Misha concentrated on the canvas. All surfaces where you present yourself in some form, whether



using your own skin with tattoos or creating an image of a feeling in a selfie. This was a very important motif, especially in the counter-world of Masha's model school, where it's all about looking at skin and people, which contrasts with the examination of a body in a morgue.

**How did the process of Masha and Misha getting to know each other work?**

*LEVIN PETER:* The most important thing for all of us was that they should only meet on the first day of shooting. We had sleepless nights about that, because we'd based everything on the premise that it had to work out. It was part of the experiment, with us accompanying two people while they won each other over and opened up. We actually built up suspense over several years, a bit like a dating agency. The two of them became curious about each other somehow, even though they were increasingly dubious, the closer we got to filming. The camera, a film crew, and then this stranger; that was unimaginable for them. At the beginning it was really difficult.

*ELSA KREMSER:* There was no preparation in the classic feature film sense. No learning lines, no rehearsals. We just talked to them and explained at length, and independently of each other, what we wanted. They only came together for the first time the moment the camera was running.

**How did you deal with the risk that this approach entailed?**

*ELSA KREMSER:* Yes, it really was a risk. We prepared a lot of narrative options as a back-up, in case something didn't work out. We were aware that the film is an experiment in many ways. Despite the different locations, we tried to shoot as chronologically as possible, so the two of them could really experience and live through the process. It was similar to a documentary, in that we were sort of gathering together various elements, but since it was in the realm of fiction, that created special situations for the departments involved.

**The film focuses on the very different presence of the two bodies, but they're both also connected with the subject of depression. Did you feel it was important to include the element of mental wellbeing?**

*ELSA KREMSER:* Misha virtually celebrates flaws in his paintings. The modeling world opposes them to the extreme. In principle, the point is to confront the self-doubts you're familiar with in your own life, in the context of finality. Why are we so preoccupied solely with perfection, making such huge efforts to distance ourselves from death, from the abyss, from horror, even though we're so close to it? Before the shoot, we did an internship

in a morgue for a week, together with our cameraman. If, like Misha, you get close to death when the person isn't a close relative, so the physical aspect of death is in the foreground, it makes you think about self-doubt, self-image and depression in a completely different way.

**In the interplay between city and countryside, the use of light is also very interesting. What role does artificial, colored light – whether from mobile phones or city lights – play as an essential aesthetic moment?**

*LEVIN PETER:* It was clear to us that we had to combat clichés, because we ourselves were surprised when we realized what preconceptions we had about Minsk before we went there. We had imagined dreary prefabricated buildings.

We were amazed at the wild colors that dominated the nights there, and the architecture is also very adventurous because everything is juxtaposed. There are satellite towns built according to the Chinese model, which look very futuristic, malls with extremely colorful decor.

*ELSA KREMSER:* We were impressed by the modernity of the city; Minsk is clinically clean with modern planning. That influenced our use of light, as well as the fact that light penetrates into every corner, so there's no unlit space.

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**What prompted you to draw inspiration from fairy tale motifs, incorporating spiritual and intuitive elements?**

*ELSA KREMSER:* Shamanism and superstition are powerful, deep-rooted elements for the people of Belarus. Constraints and the yearning to break free of them feature strongly in this thematic complex. That's why we used a symbolism that is inherent in the country.

**How did Belarus turn out, as a filming location?**

*ELSA KREMSER:* The original idea for the project goes back almost ten years. A lot has changed in Belarus during that time. That put our project in doubt repeatedly and also changed the film. We stuck to our idea, because hardly any stories from this region come to us anymore. We shot most of the film in Belarus, with some locations in Latvia.

*LEVIN PETER:* We had an incredibly open, motivated crew on site. People who love cinema and were prepared to work in a completely different way. It was certainly challenging to shoot so much on location. We wanted to film a lot in the street, and we always felt that including extras should mean showing something about a country which we see so little of in pictures. It was important for us to show as much as possible about real life there.

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## 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.



© Elsa Okazaki

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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## 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  
Anastasia Satskevich  
Erika Amiri

Nina Drako  
Inna Ivanova  
Iryna Smirnova  
Evgeny Sheremet  
Dmitri Muravijovs

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