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**Panorama**

# THE BLACK FROST

(La helada negra)

by Maximiliano Schonfeld

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# THE BLACK FROST

(La helada negra)

by Maximiliano Schonfeld

Presented at Official Selection Panorama at Berlin Film Festival

Produced by Pasto with the support of the INCAA, Doha Institute, Best WIP Mar del Plata Film Festival. Developed at Jerusalem Film Lab, Eave- Puentes workshop with Arte award and Raymundo Gleyzer prize.

## SYNOPSIS

In a world disconnected from time, descendants of European immigrants cultivate their land and traditions, but the plantations of the Lell brothers farm are threatened by a frost. And yet when a mysterious young woman appears, the frost stops. Hope emerges among the villagers, who start to worship her like a saint.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

The plantations in Entre Ríos are being devastated by a frost that spreads and burns the plants, turning them black.

At the Lell brothers' farm, where they live with their nephew Lucas, a young woman appears and starts assisting them with the day-to-day chores.

Since the moment she arrives, the farm starts to recover mysteriously: the vegetables survive the frost, Lucas's greyhound makes it in the racetrack and fish appear swimming in an abandoned pond.

The Lell brothers are in awe at how their crop has remained intact. However, the presence of the young woman grows them restless. Yet Lucas sees something different in her: she is a saint that has come to save them.

Word spreads and soon the villagers start coming in, looking for a miracle. They worship her more and more as she goes along with her new role of saint.

The young woman has to decide whether she accepts her new position within the community or she continues on her way.



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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

### THE LITTLE SAINT

Some years ago, near the place I was born and raised, in Crespo, Entre Ríos, appeared Bruno, a 9-year old boy who was said to have the ability to contact Jesus and the Virgin of Lourdes. Not long after, the locals approached Bruno, either to seek for cure or to purify their souls. Every day, they would travel to the countryside, hoping to find some sort of miracle, as Bruno's mother offered her son and organized the appointments. Whenever a popular saint would emerge, the village celebrated.

So then I go looking for Bruno, the little saint: I ask him if I can tape him or take pictures, or stand by his side during the day at the rural school. He closes his eyes and tells me that the Virgin is giving him the order of not being taped today, but maybe some other day. What the Virgin also tells him is that she doesn't like t-shirt with inscriptions in English, or *reggaeton* music. I go back later with a plain t-shirt, but the Virgin orders the same. I leave a tip and walk away, banished. So then the fiction starts, when I start wondering about the destiny of people. Did Bruno have the chance to choose his role in the village? Or was he appointed to go after a commandment by something or someone?

### MY HOMETOWN

In my first film *Germania* I looked into the connection between men and nature. I explored the spirit of those wanting to search for a different life, had an effect on the farm animals. Over the years, this connection proved to be unbreakable. When I was a little boy, we were already talking about that. Whenever my dad went out with his truck loaded with hens, if he was in a good spirit that day, fewer hens died on the road.

### THE LAND

But the association between workingman and setting has changed abruptly. Nowadays, there are almost no places to run to. Machines and toxic clouds fall down on the bodies of the few that still resist the charge of single crop farming and overproduction. The soil is bleeding. In my province, the countryside has become the most dangerous place to live. In a country with no regulations over agrochemicals use and testing, the fertile soils have become a big graveyard. Small farms and manual work are disappearing, where ten men were needed, now they need only one. There are fewer peasants, yet richer, with their modern trucks that look like spaceships. But what happened to the children of those farm workers, the humble villagers that went unemployed after the soy revolution? How do they rejoin the social and economic system? As the production system makes a switch, new paradigms emerge, along with new beliefs and social players. We can see the rich peasants used to need cheap workforce. Do they need the children of those peasants, like Bruno, to intercede with nature? How is that new connection between men, God and the new farming forms of production? Where are those families headed?



### LANDSCAPE AND FILM

This is how *The Black Frost* was born: as a film about nature, hope, and about the small miseries surrounding a passing cult in my village, the same village I portrayed in Germania, inspired by the landscapes. This is why every frame was a picture that could be easily removed and still describe the place. But, in order to portray the fleeting vibe of the sacred as it emerges, we must dive in those landscapes yet maintaining the life within them. That is why we chose purplish and bright shades. We imagined a space illuminated by the hope that the young woman brings along, first into the farm and then into the village, where the last and most intimate miracle takes place: the dance. Purple is associated with magic and mystery and is used in the film mainly in low-key lighting. We also searched for an uneven and layered feel to the picture. In order to reach these textures, we used worn-out fabric, plastic and also analogic photographs taken in the actual locations by experimental photographer Vera Somlo.



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## IMAGE AND SOUND

In regard to the camera work, we established a quite deep-focused *mise en scène*, so that life in the farm would be portrayed in different layers. To enhance this concept, we worked with an off-screen soundtrack to try and express a feeling of discomfort in the young woman. In addition, we sound-recorded farm animals and then post-produced them using synthesizers to create a strained atmosphere and a wide modulation range, especially for pan shots and other camera movements.

## INFLUENCES AND NON PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

My first influence was Robert Bresson: his minimalism and precise *mise en scène*, as well as his work with non-actors. There is so much humanity in each one of them. My work with non-actors started off back when I made my short films and continued in *Germania*. For *The Black Frost*, we thought that the best option to stress the contrast between the young woman and the inhabitants of that space was to work with a professional actress. The energy around Ailín Salas, the protagonist, was quite similar to the mystery that the character awakens in the Lell brothers and Lucas. That was our starting point. And even Ailín settled down at the actual film location and offered herself for farming chores: she would silently milk the cows or feed the pigs under the watchful eye of the locals. Regarding the rest of the cast, I have been working with some of them for several years in similar roles: the challenge with Benigno and Lucas was to build new tools for the new characters. And those who joined the cast for this project rehearsed with us for over a year. They were guided individually, yet we made sure to maintain the “magic” we had seen in them throughout the casting process around the villages of Entre Ríos.

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## **DIRECTOR'S BIO**

Maximiliano Schonfeld was born in 1982, in Crespo, Entre Ríos, Argentina. He moved to Buenos Aires where he graduated from ENERC (National School of Cinema). In 2012 Maximiliano wrote and directed *Germania*, produced by Pasto with the support of the INCAA, the Hubert Bals Fund and the government of Entre Ríos.

*Germania* was awarded with the NDR Hamburg, the Special Jury Award at Bafici, and the Best Film and Best Director Awards at Punta del Este. It was also selected at Chicago, Gothenburg, Toulouse, Nantes, Río, among others.

Schonfeld was invited to participate at the DOX:LAB program held by the Copenhagen Film Festival, for which he directed the medium-length feature *Auster* with Estonian director Kadri Kõusaar.

He is currently presenting at Berlinale- Panorama his second feature film *The Black Frost (La Helada Negra)* with the support of the INCAA, Doha Institute, and Best WIP at Mar del Plata Film Festival. Selected for the Jerusalem Film Lab and Puentes Eave Workshops, developed with the ARTE award at BAL and Raymundo Gleyzer's Prize.

Previously, Schonfeld wrote and directed the TV series *ANDER EGG* and *EL LOBO* and three short films: *Esnorquel*, *Entreluces*, *Invernario*.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

2016- *La Helada Negra* (The Black Frost) Feature Film

Selected at Panorama- Berlin Film Festival

2013- *Auster* (Medium Length film)

2013- *El lobo*- Tv Series

2013- *Germania* Feature Film

2012- *Ander Egg* Tv Series

2011- *Invernario* Shortfilm

2007- *Entreluces* Shortfilm

2005- *Esnorquel* Shortfilm



## CAST

Ailín Salas  
Lucas Schell

## AILÍN SALAS

She was born in Brazil in 1993 and then she moved to Buenos Aires. At an early age, she started taking acting classes with Nora Moseinco. She is one of the most promising actors of her generation. She has worked with the most renowned filmmakers in the local scene, like Pablo Fendrik in “La Sangre Brota”, honored with the Critics Award at the Cannes Film Festival, Lucia Puenzo in “XXY” –alongside Ricardo Darín- and “El Niño Pez”, both premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, Luis Ortega in “Lulú” premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, Marco Berger in “Mariposa”, premiered at Berlinale, among others. She was nominated for the *Martín Fierro* Awards on her role in the television series “En Terapia”.

## CREW

<b>Written and Directed by</b>	Maximiliano Schonfeld
<b>Produced by</b>	Pasto
<b>Executive Producer</b>	Bárbara Francisco
<b>Cinematography</b>	Soledad Rodriguez
<b>Sound Director</b>	Nahuel Palenque
<b>Editor</b>	Anita Remón
<b>Production Design</b>	Adrián Suárez
<b>Costume Design</b>	Beatriz De Bendetto
<b>Coach</b>	María Alché
<b>Production Manager</b>	Georgina Baisch / Delfina Montecchia





### **PRODUCTION COMPANY**

Founded by Bárbara Francisco, Pasto is an independent creative production company based in Buenos Aires, whose aim is to produce art-house films and reveal new local talent. In 2013, Delfina Montecchia joined the company after studying in Paris and working for Cannes Film Festival.

At Pasto, we believe in the interaction between the director and the producer. Our challenge is to adjust our production work to the director's universe, whether the filmmaker is established or a newcomer. Our goal is to approach every film holistically, from initial concept through to distribution.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

2016- El Rey del Once by Daniel Burman – Official Selection Panorama Special Berlin  
2016- La Helada Negra by Maximiliano Schonfeld- Official Selection Panorama Berlin  
2015- EL Incendio by Juan Schnitman- Official Selection Panorama Berlin  
2013- Germania by Maximiliano Schonfeld- Special Jury Award Bafici  
2011- El Estudiante by Santiago Mitre- Special Jury Award Locarno Film Festival

### **PROJECTS**

2017- La Familia Sumergida by María Alché.

2016/ ARGENTINA/ SPANISH/ DCP/ COLOR / 5.1 / 82 MINUTES





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