

Presskit


# The Strange Little Cat

## SCREENING DATES

- 02/10/13, 09.45 pm CinemaxX6 (press screening)  
02/11/13, 07.15 pm Delphi-Filmpalast (World premiere)  
02/13/13, 10.00 pm CineStar Event  
02/15/13, 08.00 pm Colosseum 1  
02/17/13, 12.30 pm Arsenal 1

OV with English subtitles

a film by Ramon ZÜRCHER

A watercolor illustration on a textured, aged paper background. On the right side, a large, stylized cat is depicted in shades of blue, grey, and white, with a colorful, abstract pattern on its back. In the bottom left corner, there is a simple drawing of a glass of water and a red, round object, possibly a fruit or a toy. The overall style is artistic and hand-drawn.



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SILVAN ZÜRCHER (PRODUCER)

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Jenny Schily

## CONTENTS

LOGLINE   SYNOPSIS   CAST	04
CREW	05
MUSIC   FILM DETAILS	06
DIRECTOR'S NOTE	07
INTERVIEW WITH RAMON ZÜRCHER	07
BIO-   FILMOGRAPHY RAMON ZÜRCHER (SCREENPLAY   DIRECTOR)	12
BIO-   FILMOGRAPHY ALEXANDER HASSKERL (DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY)	13
BIO-   FILMOGRAPHY SILVAN ZÜRCHER (PRODUCER)	14
BIO-   FILMOGRAPHY JOHANNA BERGEL (PRODUCER)	15
FILM STILLS	16

## LOGLINE

Group Portrait with Cat

## SYNOPSIS

It is a Saturday in autumn, and Karin and Simon are visiting their parents and youngest sister Clara. This family gathering provides the occasion for a dinner together, at which other relatives appear over the course of the day. While the family members animate the apartment's space with their conversations, everyday activities and cooking preparations, the cat and dog range through the various rooms. They too become a central element in this quotidian familial dance that repeatedly manifests stylized elements, disrupting any naturalistic mode of presentation. In this way, adjoining spaces open up between family drama, fairy tale and the psychological study of a mother.

## CAST

Mother	Jenny Schily
Karin	Anjorka Strechel
Clara	Mia Kasalo
Simon	Luk Pfaff
Father	Matthias Dittmer
Uncle	Armin Marewski
Jonas	Leon Alan Beiersdorf
Aunt	Sabine Werner
Hanna	Kathleen Morgeneyer
Grandmother	Monika Hetterle
Little Boy	Gustav Körner
Woman on Balcony	Lea Draeger

## CREW

Screenplay   Director	Ramon Zürcher
Director of Photography	Alexander Haßkerl
Producer	Silvan Zürcher, Johanna Bergel
1st Assistant Director	Nicole Schink
Script/Continuity	Lars Ostmann
1st Assistant Camera	Nicolai Wolf, Hanna Mayser, Julia Lemke, Johannes Greisle, Clemens Kirchner, Markus Koob, David Winnerstam, Christoph Schwantuschke, Antje Heidemann
Gaffer	Mario Krause, Agnes Pakozdi, Matilda Mester, Gernot Bayer, Paul Rohlf
Light	Jeffrey Liedtke, Philipp Assilin, Sebastian Kubatz, Krzysztof Jarzebinski
Grip	Philipp Assilin
Production Design	Matthias Werner, Sabine Kassebaum
Costume Design	Dorothee Bach
Make Up Artist	Vivien Rahn
Sound Recordist	Benjamin Kalisch
Boom Operator	Karl Gerhardt, Malte Audik, Jakob Gehrman
Assistant Producer	Nicole Schink, Liza Cramer, Christoph Krüger
Unit Manager	Liza Cramer, Johannes Steinert
Animal Coach	Jana Döbler
Executive Producer DFFB	Myriam Eichler
Editor	Ramon Zürcher
Editing Supervisor	Bettina Böhrer
VFX Artist	Alexander Haßkerl, Ramon Zürcher, Niklas Gutberlet, Felix Höhne
Color Grading	Alexander Haßkerl
Sound Design	Ramon Zürcher
Foley Artist	Peter Roigk
Sound Mixing DFFB	Silvio Naumann
Translation	Liza Cramer, Franziska Brune
Painting (film poster)	Mara Diener

Produced by - German Film and Television Academy Berlin (DFFB)

## MUSIC

»Pulchritude« performed by Thee More Shallows

written and produced by Thee More Shallows

© 2002 Monotreme Records Ltd.

original version appears on the album »A History of Sport Fishing«

[www.monotremerecords.com](http://www.monotremerecords.com)

electronic music (scene with woman on balcony)

written and produced by Stephane Leonard

© 2010 Stephane Leonard

[www.naivsuper.de](http://www.naivsuper.de)

## FILM DETAILS

Original title (German)	Das merkwürdige Kätzchen
English title	The Strange Little Cat
French title	L'étrange petit chat
Country of production	Germany
Year of production	2013
Premiere status	World premiere
Category	Feature film
Genre	Drama
Running time	72 min
Color   BW	Color
Shooting format	HD (ARRI Alexa)
Frames per second	24
Screening format	DCP
Resolution	2K
Aspect ratio	1:1,66
Sound	Dolby 5.1
Original language	German
Subtitles	English, French

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

„The Strange Little Cat“ plays out for the most part in the enclosed area of a family apartment. In this model space, I want to create a condensed universe in which the „thrownness“ of an absurd existence glimmers from behind everyday actions and conversations; in which the difficulty of communicating experiences and feelings continually renews the characters' isolation from one another. The characters are repeatedly compelled to act, simply in order to fill the emptiness of their surroundings. Fleeting moments of mutual understanding, recognition and deep intimacy flicker and reoccur throughout. In these moments, the apartment's pulsing emptiness is stilled, and the scream of the space's silence recedes. This cycle continues until the mundane choreography of everyday life comes to a halt, and the day comes to an end.

## INTERVIEW WITH RAMON ZÜRCHER

***„The Strange Little Cat“ is your first feature-length film. Can you tell us something about its origins?***

The project was initiated in the context of a dffb seminar with director Béla Tarr. We had various Kafka texts to choose from, and I opted for *The Metamorphosis*. The idea was to adapt the literary source very freely, without constraints, to look at the text and see what kind of cinematic universe might emerge. With „*The Metamorphosis*“, I found myself interested in the juxtaposition of a non-social space (the bedroom, where the insect is located), and a social space (the kitchen). This contrast between the vibrantly animated space of the kitchen and the static space in which characters sleep, where they escape from life (and are allowed to be asocial, so to speak), as well as the presence of animals and the work with a family ensemble were elements of the text that attracted me. I also knew I wanted to do a chamber drama. In other respects, the film ultimately has little to do with Kafka's novella. It would be absurd to speak of this as a film adaptation.

I've tried a number of things in my recent short films that I revisited here in „*The Strange Little Cat*“: a real-time choreography with hardly any temporal jumps, a static camera in contrast to a lively, dynamic staging. However, I had no desire to think in the mode of a short film. Rather, I wanted to make a feature film, particularly as I've often had the feeling of creating cinematic sketches with my previous short pieces.



### ***How did you write the screenplay?***

I had a collection of ideas in a sketchbook that I imagined would be good for a movie. The first image that interested me during the script's development consisted of a character sleeping in a room, a cat that scratches on the outside of the closed door, and a mother who watches the cat and lets it continue scratching. I found it interesting enough to use this situation as a basis for further thinking, and as an associative stimulus for the development of additional scenes. In this way a whole web of moments, relationships between spaces, and characters developed. It was like playing billiards: You hit one ball, which knocks against other balls, and these in turn scatter and bump against each other... A network of ideas was set into motion, and gradually a model of the apartment took shape in my mind.

Before I came to Berlin, I painted as a part of my art studies. Even then, it was important to me to avoid settling on a theme for a new painting from the start, for fear of becoming a slave to the idea, or of feeling obligated to commit to it. I simply paint and see what I discover in the brushstrokes, see what develops. Something similar happens to me when writing. It's like improvised painting with physical actions, dialogue and sounds. A little like automatic writing. Specific themes only came up little by little. The child-mother theme for instance, then to a certain extent the story of a mother who maybe isn't a mother in the classic sense.

After about five months of script development I had a 40-page treatment, which I rewrote into the first draft of a script (170 pages) that still had to be cut down considerably.

I also find that „The Strange Little Cat“ is like an audiovisual sculpture. The film came together additively at first, by collecting and fitting together a wealth of material that could afterwards be sculpted more extensively.

### ***Were the illustrated monologues and still-life montage sequences in the script from the beginning?***

Yes. I wanted from the beginning to work with illustrated monologues. I find moments in which characters digress into monologues or into the exact description of a past situation interesting. I also like breaks in which the speaker abruptly leaves the level of the image and we enter into the memory-picture being depicted, so to speak. The character continues to speak, so the language to a certain extent breaks away from the body and generates a memory-space. The memory-pictures are like „alien shots“ in the film, breaking up the chamber drama and the apartment space.

From a formal perspective, the montage sequences with the various still lives were like punctuation marks, used to separate chapters from one another and to bring the objects previously



associated with the characters' actions into the spotlight, almost as if in a museum. The fascinating thing is that the objects in a certain sense take on emotional resonance because they were associated with an action. In this way, the objects almost become characters. In a classic story, there is a rigorous system of significance and values: This character or some object is important, another less so. Although the viewer doesn't regard the objects as being particularly important while watching, they are given an unusual level of significance.

### ***Did much change during the shooting and editing processes?***

No, in fact. The film remained quite close to the script. A few pieces of dialogue are improvised. The improvised moments have a nice liveliness in what is otherwise a rather austere space. It was important to me that a choreography emerge out of movement and animation, creating a contrast to the stasis. Unlike the other characters, the mother was always presented rather statically. The other characters are considerably more lively, particularly Clara, the young daughter, who is loud even to the point of screaming. Clara is a body of life, while the mother is rather a body of stasis, tending almost towards death. It was important to me to show this liveliness vividly, presenting a contrast to the mother.

### ***How was the choreography developed? How did you work with the animals?***

While I was writing, I had the ideal apartment in my head, and knew how the ideal floor plan was laid out – for instance, where the coffee machine and the sideboard were located. I also knew how characters should move through the space, and how their physical actions should take place. So I had a choreography in mind. Since the real apartment didn't correspond completely to this imaginary model apartment, the actions had to be adapted to the real apartment, and the apartment to the actions.

An economical, in a certain sense even simple editing style was very important to me. The actions needed to be carefully planned in order to make a static camera and a low cut frequency possible. The actions were adapted to the edit. One consequence of this was that off-camera events were registered quite strongly, which I quite like. As with the memory-pictures, the scene breaks away from the characters as a result of the off-camera voices and sounds, so that things are taking place unseen.

The points at which the cat and the moth were embedded in this choreography were also set. But you can't direct a cat. We always waited until the cat jumped to where it needed to be. The animals forced us to back off from the strict shooting rhythm. It was almost a meditative experience, waiting for the cat to jump onto the table.

### ***How was the collaboration with the cinematographer?***

Alex and I had already worked together on a short film, and I'm glad we made „The Strange Little Cat“ together as well. We're very similar, in that it reassures us to make decisions on the scenes as accurately as possible in advance. In this regard, Alex is very precise and focused on specifics. I have a strong need for a static camera, in order to be able to accurately determine the composition of the images and the division of the on- and off-camera action.

Before shooting, we divided the script into shots from beginning to end. If this process showed that something in the text didn't work (because it would have resulted in too many cuts, for example), I revised the script. The rhythm of the edits thus in a way co-wrote the screenplay.

### ***Many small details point to an incredible tension in this family. The characters are intimate, but don't listen to one another. Can you comment on this?***

The mother is the character that displays the most passive aggression. For example, she interrupts communication with the use of the loudly droning, nearly screaming mixer. Now and then, it's as if a pressure cooker suddenly explodes and a surge of violence is released. The film portrays a kind of relay-race of small humiliations and violent acts. Through writing, the mother has come to be the queen of this particular realm. She impresses her psyche on other characters and on the space.

Speech in „The Strange Little Cat“ often wanders off into monologues. Someone being spoken to fails to take up an offer of dialogue, and the speaker notes that no dialogue is taking place. Language is no longer a means of connection; instead, it is perverted, isolating the characters further. They're locked in their own lives, but have the intense desire to communicate, to share their experience and experiences with others. But they lack a medium enabling them to accomplish this. Language no longer functions.

### ***How did you happen upon the music? Did you always intend to have a musical motif?***

A few musical ideas were described in the script, but not all. I originally wanted to use as little music as possible, because for me speech and sounds are the abstract music of the film medium. During the edit, I wanted cello music at certain points. The assistant director, Nicole Schink, suggested the piece that was ultimately used in the film. At the beginning I thought it was too emotional, too dramatic for the film, and for this reason insincere. But I gradually found both courage and pleasure in rendering emotions through music, by using it consciously. I'm no longer concerned that it might produce false emotions. The music has become very important for the film.

### ***And the title?***

It suggested itself to me at the beginning, and simply stuck. I like that it conveys something naive, fairy-tale-like, even romantic. It reminds me of titles like „Peter Schlemihl’s Miraculous Story“. It’s also a title that raises certain questions, and is even a bit vexing. Beyond this, I simply loved this title.



*Berlin, 11th January 2013*

*Interview | Cécile Tollu-Polonowski*





**BIOGRAPHY**  
**RAMON ZÜRCHER**  
**(SCREENPLAY |**  
**DIRECTOR)**

\*1982 IN AARBERG /  
SWITZERLAND

From 2002 to 2005, he attended Bern University of the Arts (HKB), completing an art degree with a focus on video. In 2005, he received the Kiefer Hablitzel Award for Visual Arts for his video work. Since 2006, he has studied directing at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (dffb). „The Strange Little Cat“ is his first feature-length film.

## FILMOGRAPHY

- 2013 THE STRANGE LITTLE CAT | Das merkwürdige Kätzchen (feature film, HD, 72 min, dffb)
- 2011 YESTERDAY MY FRIEND BOUGHT A BIKE | Gestern hat sich meine Freundin ein Fahrrad gekauft (short film, 4K Red One, 9 min, dffb)
- 2010 PASSERSBY | Passanten (short film, 4K Red One, 9 min, dffb/ARTE)
- 2009 REINHARDTSTRASSE | Reinhardtstraße (medium-length film, S16mm, 34 min, dffb)
- 2007 TODAY I LIKE THIS SONG | Heute mag ich dieses Lied (short film, S16mm, 11 min, dffb)



**BIOGRAPHY**  
**ALEXANDER HASSKERL**  
**(DIRECTOR OF**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY)**

\*1985 IN MUNICH /  
GERMANY

He wins the German Youth Photography Award in 2004. In 2005, he founds the S-i-N short film festival as part of his artist's scholarship awarded by the City of Straubing. He also works as a video project counselor at Media Center Windberg. After working at several film productions as well as for the Film- and Medienstiftung NRW, he studies European Ethnology, Philosophy and Religion at Ludwig-Maximilian-University in Munich from 2005-2007. Alexander Haßkerl is a student of cinematography at the German Film and Television Academy (dffb) since 2007 and works as a visual artist.

**FILMOGRAPHY (CHOICE)**

- 2013 THE STRANGE LITTLE CAT | Das merkwürdige Kätzchen (feature film, HD, 72 min, dffb, Director: Ramon Zürcher)
- 2012 GATED (short film, 35mm, 8 min, dffb/ARTE, Director: Ingo Biermann)
- 2012 SHOOTING PANIHIDA (documentary, HD, 70 min, Weydemann Bros.)
- 2011 REAPING | Ernten (short film, 35mm, 9 min, dffb, Director: Maxim Lebedev)
- 2010 HUNTING GROUNDS | Jagdgründe (medium-length film, 16mm, 30 min, dffb/rbb, Director: Jonas Rothlaender)
- 2010 YESTERDAY MY FRIEND BOUGHT A BIKE | Gestern hat sich meine Freundin ein Fahrrad gekauft (short film, 4K Red One, 9 min, dffb, Director: Ramon Zürcher)
- 2009 HELGOLAND - ISLAND IN THE STORM | Helgoland - Insel im Sturm (documentary, HD, 45 min, NRW, Director: Robert Morgenstern)
- 2009 THE SHIRT | Das Hemd (short film, 4K Red One, 6 min, dffb/ARTE, Director: Jonas Rothlaender)



## **BIOGRAPHY** **SILVAN ZÜRCHER**

### **(PRODUCER)**

\*1982 IN AARBERG /  
SWITZERLAND

He studies philosophy, film studies and German literature at the universities of Bern and Zurich from 2002 to 2009. Additionally, he works as a projectionist at the arthouse cinema Camera in Bern and is a student research assistant at the institute of Philosophy at the university of Bern, before rendering his civilian service at a nursing home. Since 2009, he studies film production at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (dffb). The short film PORTRAIT was selected by German Films for the „Next Generation Short Tiger“-programme, celebrating its premiere at the 65th Festival de Cannes in 2012.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

- 2013 TEEN AGE (short film, HD, 25 min, dffb, Director: Lisa Bierwirth)
- 2013 PORCELAIN | Porzellan (short film, 4K Red One, 25 min, dffb, Director: Katinka Narjes)
- 2013 THE STRANGE LITTLE CAT | Das merkwürdige Kätzchen (feature film, HD, 72 min, dffb, Director: Ramon Zürcher)
- 2011 PORTRAIT (short film, HD, 6 min, dffb/ARTE, Director: Cyril Amon Schäublin)
- 2010 ZOMBIE (short film, S16mm, 11 min, dffb, Director: Silvan Zürcher)



## **BIOGRAPHY** **JOHANNA BERGEL**

### **(PRODUCER)**

\*1983 IN BERLIN /  
GERMANY

Before starting to work as a production manager for theater, film and opera projects, she worked in

several fields - as a sculptor, as a fashion editor and as a lector for a novel. From 2004 to 2008, she studies art history at Humboldt University Berlin. She studies film production at German Film and Television Academy Berlin (dffb) since 2008. She produces the short film BABUSCHKA, which was selected by German Films for the „Next Generation Short Tiger“-programme, celebrating its premiere at the 65th Festival de Cannes in 2012. Also, the film was awarded the Seal of Approval „Highly Recommended“ by the German Film Review Board.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

- 2013 THE STRANGE LITTLE CAT | Das merkwürdige Kätzchen (feature film, HD, 72 min, dffb, Director: Ramon Zürcher)
- 2012 BABUSCHKA (short film, 16mm, 13 min, dffb, Director: Simona Feldmann)
- 2010 MARTA (short film, HD, 15 min, dffb, Director: Daria Belova)
- 2009 GOD AT LENI´S PLACE | Gott bei Leni (short film, 16mm, 4 min, dffb, Director: Simona Feldmann)
- 2009 THE LAST UNICORN | Das letzte Einhorn (short film, 16mm, 5 min, dffb, Director: Johanna Bergel)



## FILM STILLS



Clara (Mia Kasalo)



Karin (Anjorka Strechel)



Clara (Mia Kasalo),  
Karin (Anjorka Strechel)



Mother (Jenny Schily)

## FILM STILLS



Jonas (Leon Alan Beiersdorf)



Mother (Jenny Schily),  
Uncle (Armin Marewski)



Jonas (Leon Alan Beiersdorf),  
Father (Matthias Dittmer),  
Uncle (Armin Marewski)



Mother (Jenny Schily)



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