

PICTURE TREE INTERNATIONAL
PRESENTS

THE BLACK SQUARE

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
PETER MEISTER

 PICTURE TREE
INTERNATIONAL



OCEAN LINE
CRUISE



PURE ENTSPANNUNG • MS ATLANTIK • PURER LUXUS



Production Year: 2020
Production Country: Germany
Length: 95 min (tbc)
Production Company: Frisbeefilms GmbH & co KG
Co-Production Companies: Port au Prince Film & Kultur Produktion and
ZDF - Das kleine Fernsehspiel in collaboration with ARTE
Producers: Manuel Bickenbach & Alexander Bickenbach



World Sales: Picture Tree International
Sales Contact: Yuan Rothbauer – Co-Managing Director
Email: yuan@picturetree-international.com

SHORT SYNOPSIS

VINCENT, a struggling art-thief and failed artist, stole Malewitsch's legendary abstract painting "The Black Square". The sale and handover to a Russian oligarch and his designated art expert **MARTHA** is set to take place on a cruise ship. When Vincent and his younger partner **NILS** realise that their principal accomplice will not show-up to provide the boarding tickets and fake IDs, they desperately overbear two men in order to sneak their way onto the ship. To their horror they quickly learn that their victims

are part of the cruise ship's entertainment act. Desperate not to blow their cover, Vincent and Nils take on their roles as David Bowie and Elvis Presley doubles with varying degrees of success. Despite his best efforts, Vincent's talents hardly convince the passengers and it does not take long until various crew members discover their true identities and the value of their loot. A wild goose chase for "The Black Square" breaks loose in the belly of the cruise ship...





OCEAN LINE
CRUISE

OCEAN LINE
CRUISE



LONG SYNOPSIS

The aging art thief VINCENT KOWALSKI (59) stole the famous painting "The Black Square", which is worth \$ 60 million. His very last coup before retiring! The handover to the buyers is scheduled to take place on a cruise ship. Vincent and his inexperienced young partner NILS (29) wait in vain for their principal accomplice to show up with the tickets and fake IDs at the cruise ship terminal. In a desperate attempt to board the ship, they overbear two men. On board it turns out: the robbed men were part of the ship's entertainment programme. In order not to endanger the handover of the painting, Vincent and Nils

have to take on their roles as David Bowie and Elvis Presley's doubles. Despite their best efforts not to be exposed, several crew members soon learn about the real identity of the two and, more importantly, the value of their stolen property. A wild goose chase for "The Black Square" begins in the belly of the cruise ship, in the course of which Vincent and Nils themselves are robbed several times. Vincent, once a failed artist, therefore keeps counterfeiting the painting until eventually everybody loses track: Who is in possession of the real "Black Square"? Vincent's last mission brings him to his limits: not only do the Da-

vid Bowie performances torment him, he also falls in love with the mysterious MARTHA (41), who turns out to be the buyer's designated art expert. His new love, of all people, becomes his most persistent pursuer on the ship. Throughout the journey, the two art thieves' situation worsens and culminates when Nils is busted by the police. Ultimately Vincent is confronted with a dilemma: either he follows the plan and goes into hiding with the money, or he risks it all to save his accomplice. For the first time in his life, Vincent realises what he really needs: a friend.



BACK- GROUND

Kasimir Malewitsch's "The Black Square"

"The Black Square" by Kasimir Malewitsch is a 79 x79 centimeters oil painting on canvas. The painting was created in 1915 and is considered the beginning of Suprematism, an art movement that originated in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. Suprematism belongs to the modern age and lasted until the early 1930s. Within the visual arts, the suprematists are ascribed a non-representational ideology. Today the painting is exhibited in the Tretyakov Gallery, a national art museum in Moscow. "The Black Square" was first presented in a futurist exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1915.

It was fastened at the highest point in a corner of the room with the picture surface slightly inclined downwards, surrounded by other pictures by Malevich. "The Black Square" thus assumed the position that is reserved for religious symbols in a traditional Russian house. The black painted area is enclosed by a white-painted frame. Malevich called it a "quadrangle" in the exhibition catalog because it does not correspond to an exact square and the sides are not parallel to each other. It marks a radical end to everything man could imagine in art and the rest of the world. It ab-

solves this by demonstrating any previous painting form as a lie. Malevich called his art movement "Suprematism". The name stands for the domination of feelings over the object. It was about the liberation of art from the "heaviness of objects", a theory strongly influenced by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, and about turning away from a world, whose art used to strive to depicting objects as close to reality as possible. This movement was immensely influential. "The Black Square" became an icon in art history and one of the most famous paintings in the world.







PETER MEISTER

Writer and Director

Born in Bonn in 1987, Peter Meister studied film science, literature and philosophy, in Mainz and started working as a director's assistant and production coordinator. Following various jobs as a freelance writer and director for film and theatre he founded Kabakon Film & Medien in 2015 and directed various short films, which received numerous awards at festivals worldwide. Peter is a graduate of the Munich Filmschool's (HFF Mun chen) screenplay workshop, where he developed his debut feature screenplay *The Black Square (Das Schwarze Quadrat)*.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

by Peter Meister

For my debut film, I took Billy Wilder's commandments to heart. I want to make a film that is extremely entertaining. An art form that is extremely difficult to produce, but strangely often falls into disrepute. Comedies that are in the league of the craftsmanship of Billy Wilder's classics are very rare in my eyes, especially in Germany. I definitely strive toward such an accomplishment!

While I was developing the script, a lot of energy went into the psychology of my characters. They are so peculiar, so bizarre that they linger on your mind for a while: First of all, there is my protagonist VINCENT, whose self-image and idea of other people no longer possesses any congruence. Being a painfully failed artist, his work as an art robber is more than just another job for him: it is the

bitter revenge against the art world and its proponents, who once so coldly turned him down. He is now directing all his knowledge and energy against the art elite which he initially tried to join, but, in the end, he has to admit to himself that the person he hurts the most is himself. Then there is NILS, the naive petty criminal, who had spent his life without having been confronted with any serious life-altering decisions, thanks to his reserved, polite demeanor. He is not cut out for an art-theft career, for he realises during this trip, that his passion flourishes onstage. Lastly there's MARTHA, former employee of one of the most prestigious galleries of Germany, who, like Vincent, switched sides and now works for Russian oligarchs. She and Vincent meet in their *Thomas Bern-*



“I have ten commandments.
The first nine are, thou shalt not bore.”

Billy Wilder



hard - type contempt for the art business would be meant for each other ... if Malevich's square wouldn't get in their way. Does everything sound too absurd? It is not. For example, just this year it became known that Leonardo da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi" is supposedly on the Luxus yacht of the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Or Malevich's "Black Rectangle - Red Square", which headed a large exhibition of the NRW art collection a few years ago, has now turned out to be a fake from the 1970s. Insane! And therefore this storyline carries high cinematic potential in my opinion... Just like in my short films, I trap my characters in a locked space that they cannot escape. In the belly of the cruise ship, a rapid cat and mouse game develops, which demands everything from my protagonists.

It is about the acquaintance, and later on friendship, of two vastly different people. Their friendship only develops because the external pressure on them rapidly builds. As a result, their emotional wounds tear open and Vincent and Nils first find to each other and then, each for themselves - to their own. During the preparations I got to know fantastic actors. Talking about the book and the characters with, for example, Bernhard Schütz or Sandra Hüller, is a great pleasure and motivation, as they 100% share my vision and my humor. My entire ensemble consists of great dramatists who bring the necessary seriousness, tornness and loneliness that is elementary to the film I want to make. After the Tankred Dorst Prize I had various requests and also confirmations from production companies to tackle the project.

I chose the Berlin Bickenbach Brothers and Frisbeefilms for several reasons: On the one hand, their filmography fits very well with *The Black Square*: With films like *Playmaker* (2018), *Gravity (Schwerkraft)* (2009), *The System (Das System)* (2011), *King Ordinary (König von Deutschland)* (2013) and *66/67* (2009), the two of them show again and again that they know how to care for young directors and can conjure maximum results with the available budgets to the screen. We were in contact right off the bat, because of my book, and I am very happy that we are absolutely on the same wavelength when it comes to the content development, as well as the practical realisation.





PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

by Manuel Bickenbach

The Black Square has cast a spell over us. We are proud that we were able to attract top-class actors, such as Bernhard Schütz, Sandra Hüller and Jacob Matschenz, to our project. They too see an emerging comedic talent in Peter Meister, who is bursting with imagination, daringness and eagerness to get started.

After pitching at the screenplay workshop during Munich International Film Festival, the material was in great demand. People agreed, that finally there's a young, bold screenwriter, who dares to do comedy. After a first read, it was clear to us that it was deserving of the later on winning the "Tankred Dorst Prize" for the best screenplay of the year.

Here is the jury's reasoning:

"You are immediately taken on an irrefut-

able journey by the vivid character description. You are tied onto the cruise ship by a combination of funny dialogues, a situation that is constantly escalating and a depth beyond the comedic aspects. Right up to the surprising end."

We can only agree with that. We were thrilled by the rapid hide-and-seek game around the art theft of the world-famous Malevich picture. The project fits perfectly into our strategy of discovering new talents in the field of comedy in order to accompany them from the very first steps.

We really like Peter's way of telling stories. Not only as an author, but also as a director, he brings his real characters into bizarre worlds and memorable situations. After viewing his short films, it was clear that a feature film must follow and *The Black*

Square (*Das Schwarze Quadrat*) proved to be the right material for his debut film. His directorial talent was also honored by the Hessian Film Award, where his short film *Menschenjagd* won best short film. We love Peter's kind of humor and this story just needs to be on the big screen! He creates unusual heroes we would like to travel with, like in this case on a cruise ship.

We aim to create a turbulent, fast-paced, unusual comedy that promises great audience potential, in the style of films, such as *Oh Boy* or *Toni Erdmann*. Whether you're young, old, woman or man – everyone wants to know where *The Black Square* is hidden. We'll tell you, first at a film festival and then in cinemas across Europe and hopefully worldwide.



Frisbeefilms GmbH & Co KG

FRISBEEFILMS was founded in 2006 by the brothers Manuel & Alexander Bickenbach in Berlin. Both partners, who completed their studies at the renowned Film Academy Baden-Württemberg, jointly manage the company's creative and economic business.

The company's focus is on creating national and international cinematic films with challenging stories, a strong emotional bond and prospects for a large audience. Particular attention is paid to the development of series, in addition to the already successfully established division of "German Cinema".

PRODUCTION COMPANY

FRISBEEFILMS has shown a good intuition for outstanding talent and exceptional selection of cinematic material. Even before founding the company, the Bickenbach brothers shared their enthusiasm for opera, theater and cinema. Both gained diverse practical experience with broadcasters, distributors and production companies. The feature films produced by FRISBEEFILMS have been highly acclaimed in cinema, TV, as well as at national and international festivals and have won various awards and festival prizes worldwide.

A pioneering success was already achieved at the beginning of their production career with *Nevermore (Nimmermeer)* (2006), which was awarded the Student's Oscar by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts

& Science in Los Angeles. Further awards followed: *66/67 – Fairplay was Yesterday* (2009) was awarded the “Golden Icon Award” at the International Zurich Film Festival, *Gravity (Schwerkraft)* (2009), and *Let the Cat out of the Bag (Katze im Sack)* (2005) won the “First Steps Award” and received numerous awards at the renowned Max Ophüls Festival, where *Gravity (Schwerkraft)* also won in Competition. For the tragic comedy *King Ordinary (König von Deutschland)* (2013), director David Dietl was nominated for the First Steps Award, the Studio Hamburg Young Talent Award and the New Faces Award, which he then won. *Shores of Hope (Wir wollten ans Meer)* (2012) celebrated its international premiere at the renowned film festival in Toronto.

So far, FRISBEEFILMS has received two nominations for the German Film Award. Fabian Hinrichs was nominated best male leading actor for his role in *Schwerkraft (Gravity)* and Bernhard Schütz was nominated the best male supporting role for his performance in *The System (Das System)* (2011).

In recent years, FRISBEEFILMS has managed to build up a tight network of highly talented filmmakers - always with the aim for each to develop their own original handwriting and to establish a long-term collaboration.

The productions *The Black Square (Das Schwarze Quadrat)*, *Original Bliss (Gleisendes Glück)* (2016) and *Stereo* (2014) are strong references for visual and narrative courage and the wide range of the company.

SANDRA HÜLLER
as **MARTHA**

Sandra Hüller, born in 1978, studied at the renowned drama school “Ernst Busch” in Berlin between 1996 and 2000. In 2004, Sandra Hüller took on her first film role in the film *Requiem*, directed by Hans-Christian Schmid, for which she was awarded the German Film Award and the Bavarian Film Award. The actress also received a German Film Award nomination for her roles in Ina Weisse’s *The Architect (Der Architekt)* (2008) and Jan Schomburgs *Above Us only Sky (Über uns das All)* (2011), and she finally received it a second time for her supporting role in Frauke Finsterwalders *Finsterworld* in 2014. Sandra Hüller became known to a wider audience for her leading role in Maren Ades *Toni Erdmann*, for which she received the European Film Award for Best Actress in 2016. Since then, numerous major and minor roles in national and international cinema productions have followed, including in Thomas Stubers’ *In den Gängen (In The Aisles)*, Bora Dagtekin’s *Suck Me Shakespeer (Fack Ju Goehnte III)* or Markus Gollers’ *25 KM / H.*

BERNHARD SCHÜTZ
as **VINCENT KOWALSKI**

Bernhard Schütz, born in 1959, studied at the Berlin University of the Arts. Schütz made his film debut in 1986 in Martin Theo Krieger's TV production *Herz über Kopf*. Since then, over a hundred national and international TV and cinema productions have followed, such as Christoph Schlingensief's *The 120 Days of Bottrop (Die 120 Tage von Bottrop)*, Andreas Dresen’s *Halt auf freier Strecke*, Anton Corbijn’s *A most wanted Man* or Wolfgang Petersen's *Four Against the Bank (Vier gegen die Bank)*. For his role in *The System (Das System)* (2011) by Marc Bauder, Bernhard Schütz was nominated for the German Film Award in 2012 in the category Best Male Supporting Role.



JACOB MATSCHENZ
as **NILS FORSBERG**

Jacob Matschenz is one of the busiest German actors. Since his television debut in 2001, Jacob Matschenz has worked on over 70 feature film and television productions and has worked with renowned directors such as Christian Petzold, Caroline Link, Christoph Hochhäusler, Sherry Horman, Tom Tykwer, Dominik Graf, Dietrich Brüggemann or Franziska Meletzky. In Peter Meister’s *The Black Square (Das Schwarze Quadrat)* Jacob Matschenz will play another leading role alongside Bernhard Schütz.



PHELINE ROGGAN
as MIA

Pheline Roggan studied acting at the Hamburg School of Drama, where she was involved in several theater and short film productions between 2003 and 2004. With her role in Anno Saul's feature film *Kebab Connection*, the Hamburg-born artist finally made her theatrical debut in 2004. Since then, Pheline Roggan has appeared in numerous film productions, including in Birgit Möllers *Valerie* (2006), Fatih Akins *Soul Kitchen* (2008), Oliver Ziegenbalgs *Russian Disco (Russendisko)* (2011) or Marie Kreutzers *We Used to be Cool (Was hat uns bloß so ruiniert)* (2015). Pheline Roggan has been part of the main cast of the VOD-series *Jerks* since 2016.

CHRISTOPHER SHÄRF
as LEVI

Christopher Schärf, born in 1979, studied from 2011 to 2013 in the William Esper Studio – Professional Actor Training in New York. Christopher Schärf has appeared in numerous well-known film productions since 2003. He was awarded the Austrian Film Prize for his supporting role in Stephan Richter's *One of Us (Einer von uns)* (2015), and was nominated for a Romy in 2017 for Wolfgang Murnberger's *Nichts zu verlieren*. Since 2018 Christopher Schärf has been part of the cast of the Sky-produced series *Der Pass*.

VICTORIA TRAUTTMANSDORFF
as HELEN CARACAS

Victoria Trauttmansdorff studied at the Mozarteum Salzburg. Since 1992 she has been a permanent member of the Thalia Theater in Hamburg and appeared in numerous film and TV productions, directed by Christian Petzold, Christoph Hochhäusler, Margarethe von Trotta and Fatih Akin.

KEY CAST



CAST

VINCENT KOWALSKI
NILS FORSBERG
MARTHA
LEVI STAUDE
HELEN CARACAS
MIA RICARDUS
BERNHARD LOSSA
HARALD SIELIUS

Bernhard Schütz
Jacob Matschenz
Sandra Hüller
Christopher Schärf
Victoria Trauttmansdorff
Pheline Roggan
Wolfgang Pächhäuser
Tobias van Dieken



CREW

Director
Screenwriter
Production Designer
Costume Designer
Make-up Artist
Director of Photography
Editor
Composer
Producers

Peter Meister
Peter Meister
Tim Tamke
Kathrin Aschendorf
Tim Scheidig
Felix Novo de Oliveira
Jan Ruschke
Andreas Lucas
Manuel Bickenbach
Alexander Bickenbach
Jan Krüger
Jörg Trentmann
Christian Cloos (ZDF – DkF)
Olaf Grunert (ZDF/arte)
Daniela Muck (arte)
Kostas Kapsalos
Port au Prince Pictures
Picture Tree International

Co-Producers

Editorial Staff

Production Manager
Domestic Distributor
World Sales

WORLD SALES

Picture Tree International

Picture Tree International (PTI) is an energetic and fast-growing world sales company with its headquarters in Berlin. The core business is worldwide licensing across all platforms, with the company maintaining a presence at all the major film and television markets. Alongside licensing, PTI is also able to act as your German co-producer and local distributor via a fully integrated business model that offers producers individual sales and financing strategies in a results-driven and transparent partnership, something essential in today's ever changing audio-visual industry landscape. PTI's line-up of up to 15 films a year is designed to ensure the right mix of arthouse and crossover productions to fully maximize the revenue potential of each film. Picture Tree International was founded in December 2012 by Andreas Rothbauer and has been run jointly by his partner and Co-Managing Director Yuan Rothbauer since 2017.

Contact

Picture Tree International GmbH
Husemannstr. 7 10435 Berlin | Germany
Phone: +49 (0) 30 4208 248 - 0
Email: pti@picturetree-international.com

www.picturetree-international.com





 PICTURE TREE
INTERNATIONAL

www.picturetree-international.com