



INTERVIEW WITH DK WELCHMAN AND HUGH WELCHMAN

Why did you want to explore Władysław Reymont's novel, which is not that well-known outside of Poland?

HW: When we were making Loving Vincent, DK was trying to increase my knowledge of Polish culture. She bought me all these famous books, including The Peasants. It was the longest by far and we were incredibly busy, so I kept putting off reading it. When I finally went on holidays after the Oscars, I thought: "If I don't read this now, it will never happen." I read it from cover to cover – four times over as it was the 1924 translation in four parts.

Right away, I knew it was a masterpiece. In the vein of Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Émile Zola. Peasant farmers were the backbone of society for over a thousand years in Europe, up until the industrial revolution and beyond. I felt excited to bring this great work to an audience outside of Poland. It deserves it. That's why we also organized a new English translation with Penguin Classics, hoping it will encourage people to read the novel as well.

















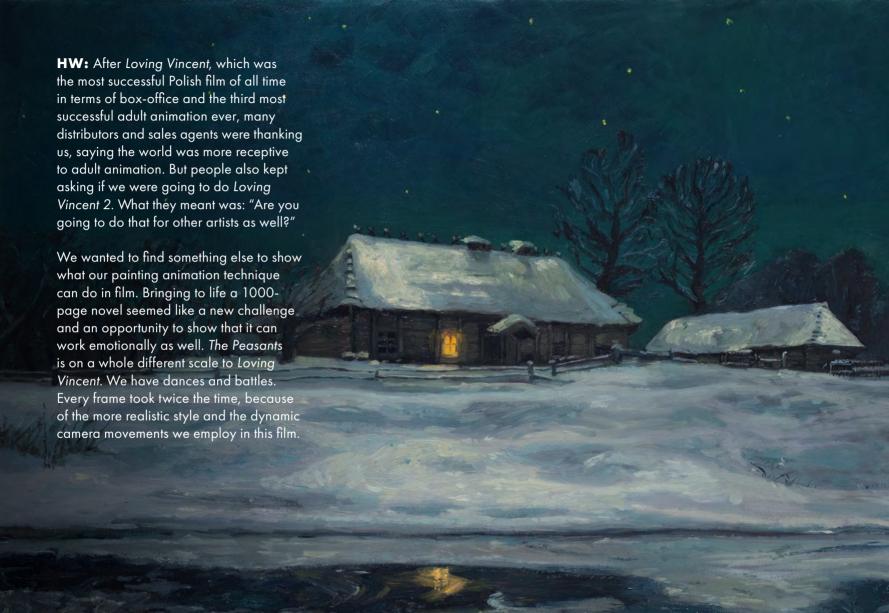












DIRECTORS

DK WELCHMAN

a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, awarded the *Minister of Culture scholarship* for special achievements in painting and graphics 4 times. Upon graduation, DK became interested in film and animation, and directed 5 short films before her first feature film, the Oscar-nominated *Loving Vincent*. Filmography:

Loving Vincent, 2017, Feature Little Postman, 2017, Short Chopin's Drawings, 2017, Short Świadek Czasu, 2006, Documentary Serce na dłonie, 2006, Short



co-wrote and directed Loving Vincent with his wife DK Welchman (formerly Dorota Kobiela). The film grossed \$43 million at the international box office and was nominated at the BAFTAs, Golden Globes, and for an Academy Award. Previously Hugh won an Oscar for Best Short Animation for producing BreakThru Film's Peter and the Wolf.







DK WELCHMAN

I had my first contact with The Peasants; in high school, at the age of 17, because it is required in all schools in Poland. I came back to this many years later when I was listening to an audiobook while painting a shot for my previous film, Loving Vincent. Listening to it as an adult was a completely different experience. What struck me as an animator and director were the elements that didn't impress me as a teenager: his tour de force description of a year in community life; the poetic artistry of descriptions of nature; and the proud and challenging struggles of the characters in the novel, interspersed with meticulously observed moments of tenderness and poignant personal tragedies.

I saw how I could respect what Reymont had created with such piety and love; how to show these intricate descriptions of nature, this delight in life, nature, earth, and human nature: by turning them back into a feature film made in our painting animation technique.

I was delighted with the idea of adapting this book in this technique, which would allow both the story to be told and the nuances of detailed poetic descriptions of nature that are so significant in the novel and are so much a part of the work. Shooting a feature-length film with actors and then repainting frame-by-frame in post-production would allow both of these aspects – tense personal dramas and painterly visions – to be combined in a coherent way.

After years of working on a film about Vincent van Gogh, I also felt a strong need to tell a story about women: to show their struggles and passion, and strength. Jagna and Hanka are both distinct and important characters in Polish literature, each representing different values, but

both connected by their struggles in a society very much defined by men. Their gender reflects negatively on their position in a male-driven society and causes them to struggle in life in the village of Lipce. There is incredible realism in the portrayal of Reymont's character. He shows deep understanding, admiration and sympathy for these people, never rejecting the truth about his faults and weaknesses. Jagna is an expression of faith in the freedom of the individual, but at the same time, it symbolizes the tragedy and rejection that such a person can encounter in a small community.

Reymont's *The Peasants*; stands out from other realistic novels because it not only tells about the hardships of peasant life but also shows something more. Throughout the four seasons in which the story unfolds, many tragedies happen to both individual characters and the entire village. Peasants protect their rights with great passion. Even though they fight unevenly and are often on the losing side, they always try to defend their freedom and the right to be the masters of their destiny.

However, Reymont is far from idealizing Polish peasants. It shows that they can be greedy, proud, petty, jealous, and intolerant. From the point of view of history, these features have often determined the fate of our nation.

I think this is a great novel that deserves an extraordinary and innovative adaptation. It deserves to be rediscovered not only nationally but also internationally and is rightly recognized for what it is one of the great works of European prose. I understand how challenging it is, especially at the script level where we take 1,000 pages of prose and distill it into a 100-minute movie. There were important cuts made in the script while staying true to the source material. I tried to introduce modern methods of storytelling into my structure and associate them not only with the rhythm of the seasons, as in the novel, but also with the characters who influence the lives of others. I wanted to show the synergy of the characters with their influence on each other; sensuality, sexuality, and brutality of their world, and the contrast with the superior majesty and beauty of nature.

PRODUCER

SEAN BOBBITT

Sean grew up in Kansas City, Missouri and then graduated from the University of Virginia with B.A. in International Relations. Two weeks after graduation in 1991 he went to Poland with the Peace Corps where he spent two years in a small town near the Ukrainian border. Following his Peace Corps assignment, he stayed in Poland where he worked as a journalist and then helped set up Silver Screen cinemas, a leading multiplex operator in Poland where he held positions as Director of Finance and then CEO.

During his time at Silver Screen, Sean met Hugh Welchman who was producing Peter & the Wolf, and once he sold his company, he came on board Hugh's next production Magic Piano & The Chopin Shorts as a co-producer. In 2012, Hugh showed Sean the trailer for his next project Loving Vincent, and Sean was immediately hooked on the project, and accepted Hugh's invitation to join him as his business partner in BreakThru.

PRODUCTION NOTES

While The Peasants incorporates the same painting animation technique made popular with our previous film Loving Vincent, our approach to the painting animation for The Peasants varied significantly from Vincent. With The Peasants the heart of the film is Wladyslaw Reymont's epic story, and the painting is a device to draw viewers into and immerse them in the world of the Polish countryside in the late 1800s. Therefore rather than focusing on showing as many actual paintings as possible, the artists from whom we drew inspiration were used more to help in creating a mood and atmosphere.

The over 100 painting animators who worked on the film did so on specially designed PAWS units (Painting Animation Work Stations), which Breakthru developed for Loving Vincent, in four studios in Poland, Serbia, Lithuania, and Ukraine.

Despite the film being animated, all of the characters in *The Peasants* are played

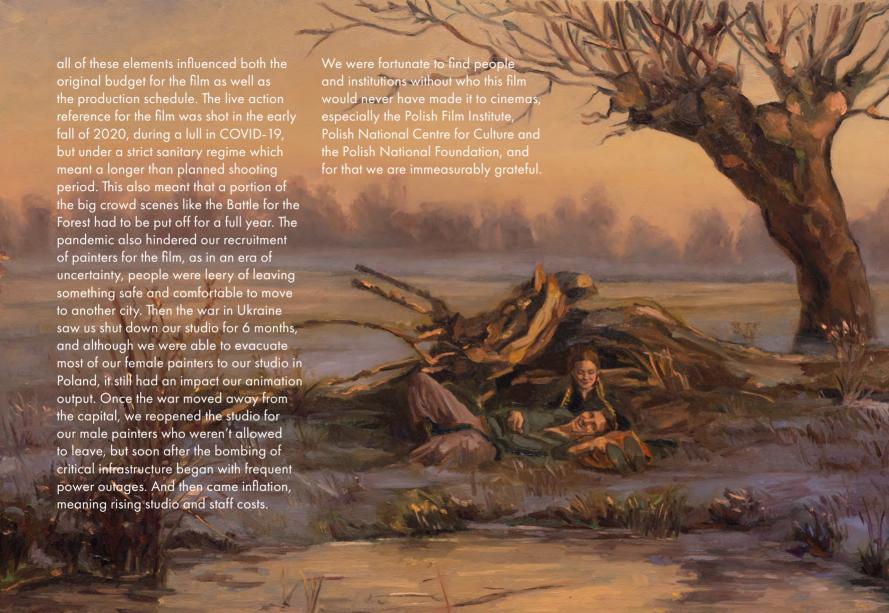
by actors. These actors worked either on sets specially constructed to look like real locations, or against green screens, with matte paintings being composited in, along with computer-generated animation, after the shoot. For the purpose of layout, we created the village of Lipce in the Unreal engine to give the actors a sense of location while shooting against the sea of green. The live-action shoot took place primarily at Transcolor in Warsaw, and select scenes were shot on location. The experienced film crew included cinematographers Radosław Radczuk (Nightingale, Babadook, Suicide Room), Kamil Polak (The Lost Town of Switez), and Szymon Kuriata. The footage from the liveaction shoot then becomes the reference footage for the painting animators.

The painting animators then use this reference footage and paint over this with reference to the style (brushstrokes, colours, level of detail) set by the design paintings to paint the first frame of their

shot on canvas, sized 67cm by 49cm. They then animate the shot by painting the subsequent keyframe, matching the brushstrokes, colour, and impasto of their previous frame, for all parts of the shot that are moving. At the end, they are left with a painting of the last frame of the shot. Each frame is recorded with a Canon 6D digital stills camera at 6k resolution.

The keyframes created by the oil painting animators are then sent to the inbetweening process which takes the style and brushstrokes of the original oil paintings and adding some digital brushstrokes to come up with the inbetweened frames. The amount of oil painting done per shot varied from every frame to every 4 frames at 12 frames per second.

To make *The Peasants*, we had to survive a global pandemic, a war in Ukraine where 30% of our painters were meant to work, and rampant inflation, reaching 25% at its height. Of course







DIRECTOR OF ANIMATION

PIOTR DOMINIAK

Our starting point is the painting style of the Young Poland period, but the visual style is much more than that, we also drew inspiration from the Hague and Barbizon schools. The Peasants is the essence of half a century of European painting at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The leading artists who inspired us were Józef Chełmoński, Ferdynand Ruszczyc, Jan Stanisławski, Julian Fałat, Leon Wyczółkowski, Piotr Michałowski, Jules Breton and Jean-Francois Millet.

In our previous film, Loving Vincent each of the characters had their representation in van Gogh's painting. For most shots, we used ready-made painting quotes, such as Starry Night, Night Café or Ravens over the Fields. In The Peasants you will also see well-known works like The Gleaners by Millet, but mostly we are looking for our way amidst the paintings of the masters.

We have a database of several hundred painting inspirations from the turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries, Each famous artist painted a little differently, each of our painters also has their painting style. The visual style of The Peasants was developed over time and we tried not to lose too many of the painting quotes, to convey a fascinating story, showcase the great acting, and to combine everything into a coherent, visually captivating whole.

PAINTING PROCESS



CAST

KAMILA URZĘDOWSKA

is an upcoming film and television actress born in 1994 in Poland. In 2020 she received a degree from The Academy of Dramatic Arts in Wroclaw. She has appeared in TV series including Ślad (Polsat), Żmijowisko (Canal+), and Komisarz Alex (TVP). Selected Filmography:

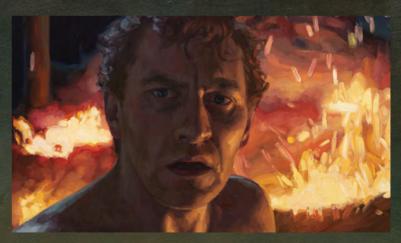
How Became a Gangster. True Story, 2019, dir. Maciej Kawulski 25 Years Of Innocence, 2020, dir. Jan Holoubek



ROBERT GULACZYK

is a film, television, and theatre actor born in 1983. In 2006 he got a degree from The Academy of Dramatic Arts in Wroclaw. Robert Gulaczyk has appeared in many television series including Pierwsza Miłość (Polsat), Signs (Polsat), Father Mateusz (TVP), Chyłka (TVN). He is the president of the off-theater foundation and a member of the Board of the Polish Actors Trade Union. A theater he is playing at is Helena Modrzejewska Theatre in Legnica and has appeared in over 60 different roles. Selected Filmography:

Loving Vincent, 2016, dir. Dorota Kobiela, Hugh Welchman Autsajder, 2017, dir. Adam Sikora

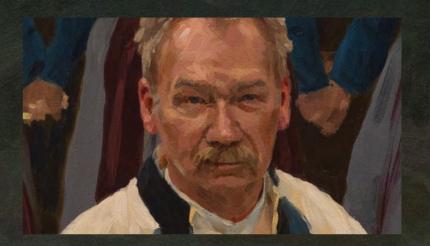


CAST

MIROSŁAW BAKA

is a film, television, and theatre actor born in 1963 in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, Poland, and residing in Gdynia, Poland. He began his film acting career with a lead role in Krzysztof Kieślowski's A Short Film About Killing, and has played in over 70 films and TV series. Mirosław Baka has appeared in over 50 theatrical roles. In 2014 he was awarded with the medal of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage "Gloria Artis". Selected Filmography:

A Short Film about Killing, 1987, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski On the River that's Not There, 1991, dir. Andrzej Barański The Crowned-Eagle Ring, 1992, dir. Andrzej Wajda Boys Don't Cry, 2000, dir. Olaf Lubaszenko Reich, 2001, dir. Władysław Pasikowski The Call of The Toad, 2005, dir. Robert Gliński Battle of Westerplatte, 2013, dir. Paweł Chochlew Walesa: Man of Hope, 2013, dir. Andrzej Wajda Run Boy Run, 2013, dir. Pepe Danquart Jack Strong, 2014, dir. Władysław Pasikowski Courier, 2019), dir. Władysław Pasikowski Legions, 2019), dir. Dariusz Gajewski



PRODUCERS

B R E A K T H R U P R O D U C T I O N S

is known for its groundbreaking, artistic, and commercially successful animations. The Company's founder Hugh Welchman – co-wrote and directed Loving Vincent with his wife DK Welchman (formerly known as Dorota Kobiela). Due to both the critical and financial success of that film, which was the first fully painted feature film, Breakthru is continuing to explore new forms of expression using the medium of painting animation to demonstrate the versatility of the technique and how painting animation can work to enhance storytelling.

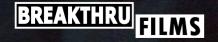
CO PRODUCERS

DIGITALKRAFT

was founded in 2003 by Ivan Pribićević, who brought together highly experienced freelance artists from around the region. The company is committed to producing and supervising high-quality, value-added projects. We take pride in having the highest standards of CGI design and production, compositing and special effects. In production, we are dedicated to animated and genre films.

ART SHOT

founded in 2012 by Agnė Adomėnė, Art Shot is a Lithuanian animation production company, focused on development and international coproduction of artistic animated films. High production value, artistic sensibility and international collaboration are the three main principles of the company. Art Shot produced films have been recognised internationally at festivals like Sundance, Toronto, Annecy, Rotterdam, Clermont-Ferrand and multiply awarded, including 2 Lithuanian Film Academy Awards.







CO PRODUCERS

CANAL+ POLSKA S.A.

CANAL+ Polska is a leading producer and broadcaster of premium and thematic channels, as well as being an aggregator offering a unique combination of premium content (films, TV series, sports events, lifestyle and kid's content), modern technology and broad distribution, via linear and online services.

CANAL+ is also a major producer of films and series in Poland, including such acclaimed productions as Bread and Salt by Damian Kocur, Agnieszka Smoczynska's Silent Twins and the upcoming Green Border by Agnieszka Holland.

Successful premium Original series include The King of Warsaw, The Teach, Raven, Klangor, and Black Daisies. The production division of CANAL+ overlooks the development of new ideas, the production and postproduction process, to festival appearances, and international distribution.

CANAL+ Poland productions have been aired and streamed in many countries and awarded at multiple festivals, both at home and abroad. Just to name a few, Klangor has been awarded at CannesSeries, and King of Warsaw gained a cinematography award at PSC gala and has been nominated for C21's International Drama Awards.

CANAL+ Poland nurtures new talent by sponsoring scriptwriting programs, like Atelier Scenariuszowe and Doc Lab, and by funding prizes in festival competitions, including Koszalin Mlodzi i Film Festival short film competition and Docs Against Gravity festival pitching program.

CANAL+

MAZOWIECKI INSTYTUT KULTURY

The Mazovia and Warsaw Film Fund operates within the structures of the Mazovian Institute of Culture since 2010. Our goal is to support film projects: fiction, documentaries or animations, produced in Warsaw and Mazovia region which can contribute both to the touristic and economic promotion of the region. The decisive criteria for receiving financial support are the film project's cultural and artistic significance for Warsaw and Mazovia, as well as the number of the shooting days, the participation of filmmakers and entrepreneurs and the proportion of the budget spent in the region.

As a result MWFF has supported more than 100 titles that have undoubtedly contributed to the prestige and interest in the city and region.



CO PRODUCERS

NARODOWE CENTRUM KULTURY

The National Centre for Culture Poland (NCCP) is one of the largest cultural institutions in Poland with a broad scope of operation. The NCC organises national and international events, such as festivals, concerts, reviews, and conferences. It conducts educational, research, and exhibition activities, including the management of the Kordegarda Gallery, where it presents works by leading Polish artists. The NCCP actively supports the development, promotion, and professionalisation of culture and commemorates important events and persons in Polish history. It manages national subsidy and scholarship programmes, providing support to institutions, organisations, and artists. The NCCP publishes books, games, and records and produces films (including pioneer VR projects), podcasts, and murals on culture. In 2021, the NCC was honoured with the Visegrad Prize by the ministers of culture of the V4 countries (Czechia,

Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) for the organisation of the International Music Festival of Central and Eastern Europe 'Eufonie'. The NCC is also the laureate of the Złoty BohaterON 2021, a prestigious Polish award for the popularisation of history and the strongest leading brand in the cultural sector in the Top Marka 2021 and 2022 media rankings.



SKP ŚLUSAREK KUBIAK PIECZYK SP. K.

SKP is a comprehensive law firm specialising in advising the creative, media, new technology, life science, and science and business innovation sectors. SKP law firm has gained significant recognition and acclaim for its in-depth expertise in the film industry. The founders, Maciei Ślusarek and Maciej Kubiak have supported Polish Oscar nominees, producers of streaming hits, and winners of leading film festivals. The SKP team has experience in handling projects produced and licensed for the biggest streaming platforms in the world and has supported producers on more than 150 audiovisual projects (films, series, TV programmes). The total value of budgets for audiovisual projects on which the SKP team worked for producers last year exceeded PLN 600 million.



PREMIERE

World Premiere: Toronto International

Film Festival 2023 Special Presentations

FILM INFORMATION

Original Title: Chłopi

International title: The Peasants

Genre: oil-painting animation

Countries of production: Poland, Serbia,

Lithuania

Language: Polish Year: 2023

Duration: 114 min.

Picture: oil painted animation

Exhibition format (DCP): 1998x1080

Framerate (DCP): 24 Aspect Ratio: 1:85

Sound: 5.1
Available Format: DCP

CREW

Director: DK Welchman

(aka Kobiela), Hugh Welchman

Screenplay: DK Welchman,

Hugh Welchman

Cinematography: Radosław Ładczuk,

Kamil Polak, Szvmon Kuriata

Director of Animation: Piotr Dominiak

Editing: DK Welchman,

Patrycja Piróg, Miki Węcel

Production Design: Elwira Pluta Production Manager: Artur Polański,

Bartosz Jodłowski,

Anna Karcz-Bartkowska

Costume Design: Katarzyna Lewińska Music / Composer: Łukasz "L.U.C" Rostkowski

> Sound on set: Michał Jankowski, Mariusz Bielecki

Sound design: Michał Jankowski

Casting: Ewa Brodzka

Hair and Make-Up: Waldemar Pokromski Mirosława Wojtczak

Costume Designer: Katarzyna Lewińska Diaital Post: Łukasz Mackiewicz.

Michał Janicki

CAST

Kamila Urzędowska, Robert Gulaczyk, Mirosław Baka, Sonia Mietielica, Ewa Kasprzyk, Cezary Łukaszewicz, Małgorzata Kożuchowska, Sonia Bohosiewicz, Dorota Stalińska, Andrzej Konopka, Mateusz Rusin, and Maciej Musiał Produced by: Chłopi Sp. z o.o., Breakthru Films (Loving Vincent)

Producers: Sean Bobbitt and Hugh Welchman

Co-produced by:
Digitalkraft d o.o., Art. Shot vsį,
Breakthru Productions Sp. z o.o.,
Canal + Polska S.A., Narodowe Centrum
Kultury, Mazowiecki Instytut Kultury,
SKP Ślusarek Kubiak Pieczyk Sp. k.

Co-producers: Digitalkraft doo: Ivan Pribicevic, Jelena Angelovski, Art. Shot: Agne Adomene

Executive Producers: Laurie Ubben, Steve Muench, Sita Saviolo, DK Welchman, Kyle Stroud, Tom Ogden

With the support of:
Polish Film Institute, Film Center Serbia,
Lithuanian Film Center

Co-financed by: The Polish National Foundation Financed by funds from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage

From the creators of Oscar-nominated

Loving Vincent

PRODUCER'S CONTACT

BREAKTHRU PRODUCTIONS SP. ZO.O.

Sean Bobbitt
ul. Cieszyńskiego 1
5-17, 81-881 Sopot, Poland
sean@breakthrufilms.pl
www.chlopifilm.pl/english
+48 601 297 600

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42WEST
Annalee Paulo, Scott Feinstein,
Hilda Somarriba, Lauren Denker
thepeasants@42west.net

New York 42West, LLC 600 Third Avenue 23rd Floor New York, NY 10016 T: 212.277.7555 F: 212.277.7550

Los Angeles 42West, LLC 1840 Century Park East Suite 700 Los Angeles, CA 90067 T: 310.477.4442 F: 310.477.8442































