

# DIE WAND

A FILM BY JULIAN ROMAN PÖLSLER



62<sup>nd</sup> Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Panorama

*Martina Gedeck, the brilliant interpreter of the Oscar winning THE LIVES OF OTHERS, is now starring in THE WALL, a contemporary female Robinson Crusoe story. Based on Marlen Haushofer's eponymous best-selling novel, the film, set in a spectacularly beautiful Austrian mountain landscape, is a highly original exploration of the experience of solitude and survival. Martina Gedeck brings to the role a rare and vivid intensity.*



## **SYNOPSIS**

The cawing of the crows breaks through the biting cold whilst, inside a bare hunting cabin, a woman (Martina Gedeck) forces her words into tight narrow lines on her last sheet of paper. Her fingernails are filthy from all the work. The expression on her face mirrors her fate. This woman is not writing her story out of pleasure, this woman is writing to save herself from losing her mind.

The rays of sunlight on a beautiful day in May evoke her memories. With her friends Hugo and Luise and their dog Luchs, she drives through the stunning landscape of the Austrian mountains to their lodge for a weekend getaway. The couple sets off that evening on a short hike to the village to catch some of the excellent fresh air. They promise to return before dawn. The woman and the dog remain behind, sitting on the rustically romantic wooden porch. She appears out of place in her urban clothes. This is not her world.

The next morning, the couple has not yet returned. The woman wonders what might have happened. Her friends would never have been so inconsiderate as to leave her in the hut alone overnight. She decides to go and look for them, setting off in her city shoes with Luchs down the stony path to the valley. Suddenly the dog begins to howl and stops walking. The woman hits against an invisible wall. Bewildered, her hands move through the air touching the inexplicable barrier that separates her from the rest of the world. The blue sky and the nature around her seem as normal as always. The birds are chirping as if nothing has happened. She hears a loud thumping but then realizes it's coming from inside her. Her heart is gripped with fear long before she even realizes it. What has happened? Surely someone must have sounded the alarm by now. Even more puzzling than this wall: There is not a single person in sight.

She is convinced that she will not be able to survive. And yet she knows that she must survive; there's no way out for her. The second time the woman sets off to explore the area bounded by this wall, she is better equipped: Through her binoculars she can see the people in the



*There is no emotion more sensible than love. It makes life more bearable for both the lover and the loved. Only, we should have recognized early enough that this was our only chance, our only hope for a better life.* The woman in "The Wall"

neighboring hut, frozen in mid-motion as if turned to stone. A swift death must have caught them by surprise. Perhaps it would have been wiser had she gone with her friends into the village.

With time the woman manages to come to terms with her new surroundings. She finds a cow, which she names Bella. She plants potatoes, goes hunting, survives the winter. In the summer she moves to a nearby alpine hut and, inspired by the fascinating mountain scenery, she falls into the delicate experience of connecting with herself. The thought of someone ever finding her no longer haunts her, she realizes.

But one day, the time comes and she is found. But not as she had expected. This meeting changes her life a second time and, in her own way, she resolves the questions that will never let her go.



## WRITER & DIRECTOR

### FILMOGRAPHY / SELECTION

CINEMA 2011 *The Wall*

TELEVISION 2009 *Anna und der Prinz*

2007 *Bella Block*

2006 *Daniel Käfer und die Schattenuhr*

2005 *Daniel Käfer und die Villen*

*der Frau Hürsch*

2004 *Hubert von Goisern TRAD 2*

2003 *Polterabend*

2002 *Himmel Polt und Hölle*

2001 *Blumen für Polt, Sommer und Bolten*

### AWARDS / SELECTION

2010 Golden Romy for *Geliebter Johann*

*Geliebte Anna (Anna und der Prinz)*

in the categories Best Director,

Best Cinematography and Best Producer

2002 Golden Romy together with

Alfred Komarek for Best Screenplay

and Erwin Steinhauer as

Best Actor for *Inspektor Simon Polt*

Nomination for the Adolf Grimme Award

for *Polt muss weinen*

2000 Bavarian Television Award

Blue Panther for *Der Schandfleck*

1998 Erich Neuberg Award for

*Die Fernsaga*



*I believe each one of us  
has a soul friend,  
a soul tree, and a soul  
book. My soul book is  
“The Wall”. Julian Roman Pölsler*

**JULIAN ROMAN PÖLSLER** Julian Pölsler was born on the Kreuzberg, a mountain overlooking the village of St. Lorenzen in the Paltental, a valley in Styria, Austria. He studied Directing and Production at the Vienna Film Academy as well as Directing and Dramaturgy at the Max Reinhardt Seminar, working among others as the assistant director to Axel Corti. Since 1990 he has been making TV movies and directing for the opera. Furthermore, he holds a teaching position at the Konservatorium of The City of Vienna in the Drama department and at the Institute for Computer Science & Media of the Vienna University of Technology. He lives and works in Vienna and Munich.

## INTERVIEW

WITH DIRECTOR  
JULIAN ROMAN PÖLSLER



**Why did you absolutely want to make a film of the novel “The Wall”?** Does it play a special role in your life? The novel does indeed play a special role in my life. I read the book for the first time 25 years ago, because a good friend, the actress Julia Stemberger, had recommended it to me. Since then it has never let me go. Perhaps the film was my attempt to finally let it go. But instead the effect has become even stronger.

**Before you could acquire the film rights, the material was in the hands of other producers for a long time. How did you finally get the project and what was your intention?** The rights were initially taken and so I was forced to wait patiently for almost 20 years. In 2003 I finally managed to acquire the rights. I was perhaps predestined to make this film. I had to be the one to make it. My chief intention with this film was to create a platform for a wonderful novel that I consider one of German literature’s most impressive works. Many people today no longer read books, but prefer to go to the cinema. With his film I hope that Marlen Haushofer gains an even bigger place in the hearts and minds of people that she so greatly deserves.

**You wrote the screenplay yourself. What was important for you in the process?** From the first time I read the novel 25 years ago, I have been tracking the path of this novel’s film adaptation. I finally ended up working for 7 years on the script. It was a slow and lengthy process. The most challenging aspect was dealing with the reactions of the script readers in Germany and Austria. Everyone who had read the novel wanted to see his or her vision implemented in the script. French, British, and American readers who didn’t know the novel, however, encouraged me to go my own way. Especially the Americans would often say to me: “What others say is bullshit, what your heart says is right.” It was important for me to adapt as much of the novel as possible into the film – hence the off-screen voice. I set a clear maxim for myself: Make changes only by cutting things out, and don’t add anything.



**How was your collaboration with Martina Gedeck?** We had an extremely intensive and, in the course of filming, almost silent collaboration. Once I had invited my students to visit the set and they were so astounded at the way I worked with Martina Gedeck. They thought we weren’t getting along very well because we hardly spoke to one another. We of course discussed the work before and after the filming. But during the filming we communicated using very reduced signs. Often a single look was enough to say everything that needed to be said. This was highly concentrated work, based on mutual trust. We didn’t have to discuss anything but chose to focus on the larger themes: Fear, doubt and how you deal with them. All that’s needed in this case is a look, a nod, a shaking of the head or a telling smile.

**Does nature play a central role?** I grew up on a mountain farm above the Paltental valley in the Steiermark in Austria, completely isolated from the rest of the world, nurtured by a wonderful family and surrounded by magnificent nature. Perhaps this is why nature is so important for me. I’m not an urban neurotic. I’m a nature neurotic. Humility in the face of creation is unfortunately something that we’ve lost today. I find that nature could almost have played a greater lead role in this film. Along with the off-screen commentary and the Bach partitas, a third form of language in the film deserves more space: the silence of nature.

**The film was shot in several stages and in different seasons. What was the reason for that?** The long filming period was important for me. I wanted to see real snow in the film. I wanted the light in the mountains to be authentic, exactly as I had imagined it. For urban people, who regard the forest and the mountains as something alien, this may seem quite kitschy. But it isn’t for me. I would have loved to spend 14 months living with the film team in a hunting cabin. I wanted to come as close as possible to the truth that is the strength of this novel. Authenticity is the truth in this film. For me, this also meant living in a secluded hut during the scriptwriting phase – which almost led to my falling into a depression. (laughs)



**You trained your own dog Luchs... This was a double pressure for me but Luchs made it easy. My dog had to step in because his brother, who was initially intended for the role, would not be trained. Bavarian mountain hounds are quite stubborn. In the past I had filmed extensively with animals and I had always disliked this trained behavior, especially how dogs are fixated on the rewards and so step out of their relationship with the actor in the film. I wanted Luchs to develop an invisible connection to Martina Gedeck. So my role was less of a dog trainer and more of a dog whisperer. I tried to “convince Luchs with good arguments”. When I was at the end of my tether as far as my actors leading skills were concerned, then my last argument was a liver sausage spread. Perhaps in future I should also keep liver pate up my sleeve for my actors. (laughs)**

**What was important for you in the way the wall is portrayed in the film?**

**I didn't want the wall to be shown. I wanted it to appear as non-physical as possible. It had to be clear that the wall is neither tangible nor graspable. Aside from the woman's first encounter with the wall, it only appears visible in her nightmares and in the scenes where the Bach partitas continue the narrative, which are used every time the woman approaches the wall physically or in her thoughts.**

**What was your idea for the special sound design of the wall? I looked for a**

**long time for the right sound for the wall. I talked to Hubert von Goisern about it, who was to write the score, and then finally to Michael Haneke. He suggested using absolute silence, but I found that too radical as one had the impression that the sound had failed. By chance I discovered that there are people who can supposedly hear the earth's rotation. A scientist friend of mine then told me that it sounded like an electromagnetic field. I then tried to use this tone as the basic sound of the wall.**

**In one scene you hear the voice of the Burmese Nobel Peace Prize winner**

**Aung San Suu Kyi. Actually I had wanted to dedicate this film to her. But now that she has reappeared behind her wall due to the positive political developments in Burma, the message of the film remains more broad: It pays homage to all the women who are forced today to live behind an invisible wall of ignorance and intolerance.**



## *THE NOVEL*

FROM A DIFFICULT START TO  
RESOUNDING SUCCESS



**“I doubt that I shall ever succeed in producing such an achievement again, because you probably only ever encounter such material once in your life”, Marlen Haushofer (1920–1970) revealed in a interview about her novel “The Wall” with the culture journalist Elisabeth Pablé in 1968. Thanks to a reading in ORF radio that same year, Marlen Haushofer gained solid recognition for her work as a writer in her native Austria. When her fifth book “The Wall” was published in 1963, she was depressed, as she confided to her friend and mentor Hans Weigel in a letter, because the book received no mention in the press for over a year. In her lifetime, her work was not a big seller.**

**Today, Haushofer's novel has been translated into 19 languages and considered a favorite book by Germans and Austrians alike. As a cult novel of the emancipation and freedom movement, it stood at number two on the paperback bestseller list in 1985**

**This work, awarded with the Arthur Schnitzler Prize, touches on fundamental questions of human existence and explores the origin of the psyche of fear and loneliness, making this novel timelessly contemporary. How do you deal with the feelings that emerge from a sudden and complete loss of security and prosperity? “The Wall” offers a possible answer, which may be one reason why this work still captures the minds of readers today.**



## MARTINA GEDECK

### FILMOGRAPHY / SELECTION

2013 *Night Train to Lisbon* D: Bille August

2012 *Halbe Hundert*

D: Matthias Tiefenbacher

*The Wall* D: Julian Roman Pölsler

*The Door* D: István Szabó

2010 *Bastard* D: Carsten Unger

2009 *Agnosia* D: Eugenio Mira

*Tatort – Wie einst Lilly*

D: Achim von Borries

*Jew Suss – Rise and Fall* D: Oskar Röhler

*Sisi* D: Xaver Schwarzenberger

2008 *Tris di Donne* D: Vincenzo Terracciano

2007 *Clara* D: Helma Sanders-Brahms

*The Baader Meinhof Complex*

D: Ulrich Edel

*Merry Christmas* D: Vanessa Jopp

2006 *Aus dem Nest gefallen*

D: Christoph Stark

2005 *Un ami parfait* D: Francis Girod

*The Good Shepherd* D: Robert de Niro

*Summer of '04* D: Stephan Krohmer

*The Elementary Particles* D: Oskar Röhler

2004 *The Lives of Others*

D: Florian Henckel v. Donnersmarck

2003 *Der Stich des Skorpion*

D: Stefan Wagner

*Hunger auf Leben* D: Markus Imboden

2002 *Mostly Martha*

D: Sandra Nettelbeck

**THE WOMAN** Martina Gedeck is one of the most influential and respected character actresses in Germany.

With her lead role as the GDR actress Christa-Maria Sieland in the German Oscar® winner *The Lives of Others* and as Ulrike Meinhof in *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (nominated for the Oscar® for “Best Foreign Language Film” and Golden Globe), Martina Gedeck has not only made an international name for herself but has also interpreted episodes of German history for the coming future generations.

In recent years Martina Gedeck appeared in a number of outstanding film projects including: István Szabó's *The Door* opposite Helen Mirren, Robert De Niro's *The Good Shepherd* (2006), Oskar Roehler's Houellebecq novel adaptation *The Elementary Particles* (2006), Stefan Krohmer's relationship drama *Summer of '04* (2006), Markus Imboden's sensitive TV drama *Auf ewig und einen Tag*, (2006) Xaver Schwarzenberger's *Sisi* (2009) and Helma Sanders-Brahms' *Clara* (2008).

Recently she opened the Hof Film Festival 2011 with her role as a police psychologist in Carsten Unger's thriller “*Bastard*”. In fall 2011 she completed work on Matthias Tiefenbacher's comedy *Halbe Hundert* in Cologne. At the end of January 2012 shooting began for the remake of the Dennis Diderot literary classic *The Nun* at the Bronnbach convent in Taubertal. Martina Gedeck plays the nun's mother opposite Isabelle Huppert. Soon Martina Gedeck will be seen playing opposite Jeremy Irons in *Night Train to Lisbon*.

Martina Gedeck is a member of the European Film Academy, the German Film Academy, and the German Academy of Performing Arts.

## PRODUCTION COMPANIES

### CONTACT DETAILS / COOP 99

Wasagasse 12/1, 1090 Vienna, Austria

Tel: 0043 13 19 58 25

### CONTACT DETAILS /

### STARHAUS FILMPRODUKTION

Belfortstrasse 8, 81667 Munich, Germany

Tel: 0049 89 55 05 74-0

## TECHNICAL INFOS

FORMAT 35 mm Cinemascope

RUNNING TIME 108 min

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE German

SCREENING RATIO 1:2.35

SOUND Dolby 5.1

YEAR OF PRODUCTION 2012

MUSIC "Freedom is a Journey"

Music: Bernd Jungmair,

Cornelius Dix, Jürgen Haiden

Text: Julian Roman Pölsler

Vocals: Zabine

Bach Partitas Performed by

Julia Fischer

Radio Text Speech by

Aung San Suu Kyi

With kind permission of the

Democratic Voice of Burma

COOP99 coop 99 is the product of a continuing longstanding collaboration that began at the Vienna Film Academy. Barbara Albert (director), Jessica Hausner (director), Martin Gschlacht (director of photography) and Antonin Svoboda (director) gained their first international successes while at the school with their short film projects. Together they founded the production company coop99, which to this day defines itself as a platform for a new generation of filmmakers who have written "authenticity, personal opinion, and individual style" on their banners.

Since early 2002, Bruno Wagner has been an integral part of the company. Besides working as a line producer, he also assumes the responsibilities of a producer at the company (Grbavica, Fallen, Na Putu, The Wall). Projects currently in post-production are *The Boundary Man* by Antonin Svoboda and *Die Lebenden und die Toten* by Barbara Albert. Currently in preproduction are *Amour Fou* by Jessica Hausner and *October, November* by Götz Spielmann.

The filmography of coop99 includes the following films (selection): *The Wall* (2011), *Na putu – On The Path* (2010), *The Educators 2.0* (2010), *Women Without Men* (2009), *Lourdes* (2009), *Who is Afraid of Wilhelm Reich* (2009), *Pepperminta* (2009), *March* (2008), *Free Rainer* (2007), *Forever Never Anywhere* (2007), *Fallen* (2006), *Grbavica* (2006), *Sleeper* (2005), *You Bet Your Life* (2005), *Darwin's Nightmare* (2004), *The Educators* (2004), and *Hotel* (2004).

STARHAUS Starhaus Filmproduktion GmbH was founded in 1994 under the name of Kinowelt Filmproduktion GmbH by Dr. Rainer Kolmel and is since 2003 a 100% subsidiary of Starhaus Productions, based in Munich. The name change took place in 2008. In 2010, Wasiliki Bleser joined the company's management as a second producer and managing director to lead the company, which is dedicated to the production of international and national projects.

Successful international productions include: *Young Poisoner's Hard Book* (1995, Benjamin Ross), *Female Perversions* (1996, Susan Streitfeld), *Crimetime* (1996, George Sluizer), *Sunshine* (1999, István Szabó) and *Mama Africa* (2011, Mika Kaurismaki)

In German-speaking countries Starhaus productions include films by Dominik Graf (*A Map of the Heart*, 2002), Ben Verbong (*The Slurb*, 2001), Christian Alvart (*Antibodies*, 2005), Achim Bornhak (*Eight Miles High!*, 2007), Dominik Wessely (*Reverse Angle – Rebellion of the Filmmakers*, 2008) and most recently a film directed by Maggie Peren (*Color of the Ocean*, 2011).

THE WALL IS A PRODUCTION OF COOP99 FILMPRODUKTION IN VIENNA AND STARHAUS FILMPRODUKTION IN MUNICH, IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH THE BAYERISCHE RUNDFUNK, ARTE AND IN COOPERATION WITH THE ORF (FILM / FERNSEH-ABKOMMEN), FUNDED BY THE AUSTRIAN FILM INSTITUTE, VIENNA FILM FUND, LAND OÖ KULTUR, FFF BAYERN, DFFF AND EURIMAGES.



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*The Match Factory*

*Balthasarstraße 79–81*

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*Phone: +49 221 539 70 90*

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*E-Mail: [info@matchfactory.de](mailto:info@matchfactory.de)*

*[www.the-match-factory.com](http://www.the-match-factory.com)*

***INTERNATIONAL PRESS***

*Jenny Scheubeck*

*Film Promotion International*

*6, rue Tournefort*

*75005 Paris / France*

*Phone: +33 1 45 87 81 70*

*Cell: +33 6 16 23 09 60*

*E-Mail: [jenny.scheubeck@noos.fr](mailto:jenny.scheubeck@noos.fr)*

*In Berlin: +49 176 17 36 88 17*