

thing in the exact same way. And at the present moment, I can think of few worthier undertakings for a narrative cinema practice than one that challenges and is curious about the ways that humans perceive themselves, others, and the perceptions of others. ♦



### Coming soon to Acropolis:

- *Wood and Water* (Jonas Bak, 2021)—April 15-21 at the Lumiere Music Hall

## Acropolis Cinema presents:



April 13, 2022 – 2220 Arts + Archives

# ABOUT THE FILM

As her roommate Lisa prepares to move out of their apartment, Mara contemplates the end of an era. Furniture is moved, walls painted, cupboards built. Amid all the hustle and bustle, secret longings and desires come to the surface and coalesce around the roommates as well as around Lisa's mother Astrid, the movers, the girls' old neighbors, the neighbors' cat, Lisa's new neighbor and an ever-expanding cast of characters. Day turns into night and one final party in the apartment. When the last box is moved, the fragments of their lives remain.

The Zürcher brothers compose a poetic panopticon of forms of human relationships that is at once a study of everyday life, a fairytale and a psychological portrait of a brittle world. Following *The Strange Little Cat*, *The Girl and the Spider*—which won the best director prize in the Encounters section at the 2021 Berlinale—is the second installment in a trilogy about human togetherness, a ballad about the need for closeness and the pain of separation.

*Film to be preceded by a video introduction by Ramon and Silvan Zürcher.*

98 min. | Switzerland | 2021

## The Primacy of Perception by Blake Williams

*The following article was originally published in Cinema Scope 86, Spring 2021*

*“I will never know how you see red, and you will never know how I see it; but this separation of consciousnesses is recognized only after a failure of communication, and our first movement is to believe in an undivided being between us.”*

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Near the midpoint of *The Girl and the Spider*—Ramon and Silvan Zürcher's overdue, much anticipated follow-up to their masterful debut feature, *The Strange Little Cat* (2013)—a character launches into another of the Zürcher brothers' distinctive anecdotal monologues. Mara (Henriette Confurius), who is as close as this film gets to a protagonist, describes for her neighbour, Kerstin (Dagna Litzenberger-Vinet), an incident that occurred the previous day between herself and her newly ex-roommate (and perhaps ex-girlfriend) Lisa (Liliane Amuat). “I was in my room while Lisa was on the toilet,” she recounts. “She asked me to bring her a roll of toilet paper. Instead of giving it to her, I walked past the door from left to right, from Lisa's point of view.” The image cuts to the scene while she recalls it, privileging us with a more objective account of the incident: a fixed shot showing Mara stand up from her desk, grab a package of

toilet paper, and march past the door, her arms outstretched like a zombie. She ambles past the opened door three times—left to right, right to left, then, once again, left to right—at which point we hear Lisa break into laughter. Mara continues, “When I walked past the door the second time, Lisa wasn't looking. She thought that I walked from left to right twice, without turning around in between. Like a ghost.” At this point, we see the bathroom door suddenly slammed shut, right onto Mara's left middle finger—a moment of seemingly unprompted cruelty, and a detail that Mara opts not to tell her neighbour. “Can you imagine that?”

This scene, unassumingly, is a paragon of the Zürchers' project, an instructional map that teaches the viewer how to watch the surrounding scenes and sequences. It's all there: the visual joke that we, the audience, only truly experience via language (yet can nevertheless visualize); the capricious character manners, blinking from trivial amusement to nastiness to longing, irrationally yet within the realm of reason; the tenuous divisions between actions and words, words and images, images and the unseen—between ideas and bodies. It's a celebration of what is lost in reality's gaps, and the euphoria of discovering what you missed.

In that, *The Girl and the Spider* is a film of ruptures. Its first moving image, fittingly, is a jackhammer penetrating the earth, and its inciting narrative event—Lisa moving out of a shared living situation with Mara in order to live on her own—is one that the Zürchers understand to be an act of destruction, not of origination or development. As with all plot elements in their films, the occasion of Lisa's departure feels secondary to the film's sensual and formal engagements. Character motivation and cause-and-effect logic is either nonexistent or gets buried beneath myriad layers of movement and spoken phrases that may or may not make any sense to us. We can only get caught up and washed along in the film's beautiful display of things resuming, moving along, never being the same again. We can call it transience, or some kind of entropy: the ground breaks, wine leaks (from piercings plastic and corporeal), files corrupt, and Mara bleeds from no less than three physical wounds (to say nothing of the emotional ones) that she acquires across the film's overflowing 98 minutes. In the Zürchers' cinema, contentment, pleasure, or beauty of any kind is located in an embrace of and yearning for that which is irreparable. It's manufactured by the information missed when we weren't looking or couldn't see—when we were offered the task of communication.

A cut in a Zürcher film, especially this one, is almost always a revealing, never a suture. It exposes the mark that we heard being etched; the angle that reconfigures our understanding of the spatial dynamics of the setting or environment; the beholder that we and/or the character couldn't sense was present watching what we were watching—the subject we never knew our gaze belonged to. There's an acknowledgment, shot to shot, cut to cut, that there is more to the world than what we can presently see or say that we know. Which is to say that the Zürchers' cinema, which isn't remotely Gen Y, millennial, or whatever in spirit, is one that is actively, playfully, and quite deeply concerned with contemporary intersubjectivity—an apt project for a pair of identical twin brothers, who despite their similar features could never experience the exact same