SCREENDAILY

'Corsage': Cannes Review

BY WENDY IDE | 20 MAY 2022

Vicky Krieps is a 'chain-smoking self-absorbed uber-bitch' in her performance of Empress Elisabeth of Austria



SOURCE: MK2 FILMS © FELIX VRATNY 'CORSAGE'

Dir/scr: Marie Kreutzer.

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Vienna, 1877. The Empthe nervous fawning f

y. It is not, despite celebrate. For a

woman internationally renowned for her beauty and style, whose role in the empire has been that of a

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highly decorative figurehead, the age signals the approach of decrepitude and irrelevance. Already impulsive and restless by nature, the Empress causes ripples of scandal in the austere Hapsburg court with her increasingly unconventional behaviour, in this playful, puckish portrait by Marie Kreutzer. Winking anachronistic details, particularly in the bold score choices, suggest that Elisabeth was a woman who was ahead of her time, constrained by conventions as well as her wasp-waisted corset. Krieps is terrific in a role which depicts Elisabeth as both a victim of her gilded cage circumstances and a chain-smoking self-absorbed uber-bitch.

A title which should be of considerable interest to high end arthouse distributors.

The fifth film from Kreutzer, whose most recent picture, *The Ground Beneath My Feet*, screened in Competition in Berlin, *Corsage* takes a fair few liberties with the legacy of the Empress. Previously played by Romy Schneider in the frothy 1950s *Sissi* trilogy, this version of Elisabeth is markedly less romanticised. There is a thematic kinship with Pablo Larrain's *Spencer*, but in terms of its approach, *Corsage* perhaps has more in common with Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*: both films bring a touch of punky iconoclasm and irreverence to the propriety of the period drama, both embrace the unlovable elements of their difficult, misunderstood subjects. It's a title which should be of considerable interest to high end arthouse distributors.

The world through which Elisabeth glides, impassive and impenetrable, is a world of highly polished surfaces, of impeccable first impressions. The Empress is regarded as an exquisite ornament, but her perfection comes at considerable cost: she eats a single slice of orange while around her the great and the good of Europe's aristocracy trough themselves stupid on delicacies conjured up in the Imperial kitchens. The palatial backdrops, however, are worn and crumbling, a suggestion of the decay of the institution that Elisabeth represents.

There are certain details in this colourful character study which feel slightly on the nose in terms of their symbolism – Elisabeth's trademark rib-crushing corsetry, her daily recorded waist measurements; her fondness for visiting the melancholic women of the local lunatic asylum, where she has a moment of recognition when she sees a woman shackled and caged. But in fact, while other elements diverge from historical accuracy all of this is true. Elisabeth's constricted waist measured 16 inches at its most slender; she had a life

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way that Diana did a

century or so later. It's not surprising that she has been the focus of and inspiration for numerous

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other films, plays and several ballets.

What is rewarding about this picture, however, is the way that it interrogates her iconic status. By focusing on the Empress in middle age (or old age, given that forty was the average life expectancy for Austrian women in the late 19th century), the film touches on the loss of status of a woman who was valued almost entirely for her appearance. But more interestingly, it also suggests that aging can be a release, capturing that liberating, relatable moment of realisation that she is finally running out of fucks to give.

Production company: Film AG

International sales: MK2 Films, intsales@mk2.com

Producers: Alexander Glehr, Johanna Scherz

Cinematography: Judith Kaufmann

Editing: Ulrike Kofler

Production design: Martin Reiter

Music: Camille

Main cast: Vicky Krieps, Florian Teichtmeister, Katharina Lorenz, Colin Morgan, Aaron Friesz, Jeanne

Werner, Finnegan Oldfield

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