

[Home](#) > [Film](#) > [News](#)

Feb 15, 2026 10:04am PT

## 'Rose' Review: Sandra Hüller Amazes, Again, in Markus Schleizer's Immaculately Controlled Tale of Gender Privilege

Eight years after premiering his superb but little-released 'Angelo,' the Austrian auteur returns to European history for a deceptively simple folk tragedy with searing emotional impact.

By [Guy Lodge](#) ▾

Courtesy of Gerald Kerkletz

---

While jumping through the hoops of her first U.S. awards season two years ago for “Anatomy of a Fall” and “The Zone of Interest,” it must have amused [Sandra Hüller](#) to be labeled a “breakthrough performer” — as if the “Toni Erdmann” star hadn’t repeatedly proven herself one of the world’s great working actors since her startling feature film debut in 2006’s “Requiem.” No one should be surprised that she’s again extraordinary in “[Rose](#),” as a 17th-century war veteran concealing a host of secrets (not least among them her gender) beneath a man’s rugged work clothes. Yet the performance itself is consistently and subtly surprising: still and observant when you might expect mannered fuss, raging when you expect retreat, never transparent or complacent regarding the character’s motives or sense of self.

## Related Stories

---

**Jill Zarin Fired From E!'s 'RHONY' Reunion Show 'The Golden Life' After Racist Bad Bunny Tirade (EXCLUSIVE)**

---

**BAFTA Film Awards to Air on E! in U.S.**

---

Yet for all the Olympian acting craft it showcases, “Rose” is no mere performance vehicle. The latest from radical Austrian formalist [Markus Schleiner](#), it’s a work so tightly disciplined in every aspect — from its haunted monochrome lensing to its razor-shaved final edit to the sea of tacit political commentary underpinning its no-word-wasted script — that any bum thespian note would shatter the whole immaculate construction. A casting director for the projects of Michael Haneke and Jessica Hausner before he turned to filmmaking,

Schleinzer needed and found a virtuoso who could also submit herself entirely to the film's quietly complex thesis on gender performativity and privilege, past and present.

The exactitude of Schleinzer's filmmaking doesn't come quickly, it would appear. "Rose" is just his third feature in 16 years, and arrives eight years after his astonishing sophomore effort "Angelo," a rigorously revisionist biopic of African-born slave turned Viennese courtier Angelo Soliman that was too austere confrontational to secure the distribution it merited in many territories. (His assured debut, the 2011 paedophile portrait "Michael," was no picnic for potential audiences either.) While no more compromising in its telling of a supremely sad and socially unforgiving story, "Rose's" linear elegance and delicate craft collaborate with Hüller's riveting work to make it the director's most accessible film, sure to interest discerning arthouse buyers following its Berlinale competition premiere.

Though she doesn't give it up readily, Rose (Hüller) has a simple explanation for why she's chosen to live as a man for much of her adult life. "There is more freedom in trousers," she says, "and they're just a piece of cloth, so I put them on." That is no casual act, however, in 17th-century Germany, least of all in the ascetic Protestant village she chooses to settle in, following a long, brutal stint as a soldier in the Thirty Years' War.

The villagers are initially wary of this scarred, soft-spoken, diminutive figure, who turns up claiming to be the long-absent heir to a crumbling local farmstead. But Rose — we never learn the male name she gives people, just as they never learn her female one, a typically geometric detail in Schleinzer and Alexander Brom's screenplay — gradually wins their approval with her work ethic and church attendance, to the point that a neighboring farmer offers her the hand of his eldest daughter Suzanna (Caro Braun). As part of a land exchange deal, of course: That a woman is shown to be such literal currency in this world is a

sharp reminder of why Rose has opted out of that identity.

Suzanna is a stolid and servile wife, less complaining than her father about her husband's reluctance to consummate the marriage, and a doting mother when baby eventually – and most unexpectedly, to Rose at least – makes three. There's a slender streak of humor, dry and combustible as kindling, in the film's exploration of this absurd domestic setup, which lays out the rigid expectations of women and men alike in a punishingly conservative society. Though predominantly a fictional narrative, "Rose" has been built from Schleizer's extensive research into various stories of male-presenting women through the centuries; even as it tilts into melodrama, it has the ring of historical truth. (So do the film's remarkably weathered production and costume design, in which every last patinated timber beam or scuffed boot heel appears excavated from the ground itself.)

Running narration, delivered with a kind of academic remove by actor Marisa Growaldt, provides some access to the inner life of our strategically taciturn, withdrawn protagonist, though it isn't quite omniscient either. Schleizer is content to let some ambiguities linger as the situation tautens and worsens, including the question of Rose's own sexuality, or asexuality, as the case may be. She doesn't identify as transgender or dysphoric, and describes her male presentation simply as a practical means of moving unimpeded through the world. Or mostly unimpeded: Marriage is another purely pragmatic move, though as Rose and Suzanna get to know each other better, a cautious tenderness builds between them – a flicker of warmth at the heart of this brisk exercise.

At once armored, guarded and intensely vulnerable, Hüller's performance is the human factor here – a volatile, unpredictable element, but one nonetheless attuned to the film's meticulous shaping and *mise-en-scène*. While editor  sjörg Weißbrich ("September 5") crops this spiraling folk saga to just 93

essential minutes, the stark, pooling dark black-and-white lensing by Schleiner's regular DP Gerald Kerkletz is concentrated and patient, often searching Hüller's face in compassionate close-up for just the right twitch or tell. Most sparsely effective of all is an *a capella* vocal score by singer-songwriter Tara Nome Doyle, whose high, moaning strains contain all the anguish that Rose, in all her stoic, assumed masculinity, keeps inside.

---

**Read More About:** Berlin Film Festival, Markus Schleiner, Rose, Sandra Hüller

---

[Jump To Comments](#)

**'Rose' Review: Sandra Hüller Amazes, Again, in Markus Schleiner's Immaculately Controlled Tale of Gender Privilege**

**Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Competition), Feb. 15, 2026. Running time: 93 MIN.**

Production: (Austria-Germany) A Schubert, ROW Pictures, Walker + Worm Film production in co-production with ORF, ZDF, ARTE. (World sales: The Match Factory, Cologne.) Producers: Johannes Schubert, Philipp Worm, Tobias Walker, Karsten Stöter.

Crew: Director: Markus Schleiner. Screenplay: Markus Schleiner, Alexander Brom. Camera: Gerald Kerkletz. Editor: Hansjörg Weißbrich. Music: Tara Nome Doyle.

With: Sandra Hüller, Caro Braun, Robert Gwisdek, Godehard Giese, Marisa Growaldt (narrator). (German dialogue)

---

**More from Variety**

---

