

# KINO LORBER

*Presents*



## **BLOOM UP** **A SWINGER COUPLE STORY**

A film by **Mauro Russo Rouge**



**Italy | 2020 | 88 min | Color | In Italian with English subtitles**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

Pet shop owners by day and swingers by night, Italian couple Hermes and Betta are, in most ways, regular people. In this honest, sex-positive look at the swinger lifestyle, director and cinematographer Mauro Russo Rouge is invited into their lives with no moment off-limits, crafting a portrait of a relationship that gives equal weight to the mundane yet strangely fascinating logistics of organizing sex parties as it does to the act itself. Shot in a rich visual style that is deeply sensual without ever feeling vulgar or exploitative, the film is "more emotionally than sexually voyeuristic" (Screen Daily), an intimate exploration of the deep love and complex challenges one polyamorous couple shares.

## **DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

When I began thinking about the film that became *Bloom Up*, my first intention was to explore an unconventional way of experiencing sexuality. I am not a consumer of pornography but I have always been fascinated by stories far from my everyday life, and I was longing for something real. I'm an impromptu person by nature and my approach is very instinctive. Some of my fiction movies never had a script: modest scenarios, actors from the street and lots of improvisation. I like to provide actors with different circumstances, drawing a lot from their experiences, and my stories tend to develop on the set, while filming.

I signed up for several dedicated platforms and started to contact several couples from northern Italy with private messages. Later, I met several couples to get to know them better and understand how interesting they could be for my documentary. After a rather long search lasting at least four months, I met Hermes and Betta and it was love at first sight. It was the couple I was looking for, the right one for my film. A couple with different qualities: dynamic, exuberant, transgressive, exhibitionist, kind, and with a heart of gold. And above all, they had no fear of opening themselves up.

We were sitting at a coffee table in a café. We talked about anything and everything. Actually, they were talking; I just listened, but I had already made my decision. I wanted to film their lives, their intimacy, and from the beginning they were completely open and offered no limitations and no restrictions – ever.

I filmed with them over the course of a year, but with rather long breaks throughout for a total of 30-35 shooting days and over 40 hours of footage. I think that any story, whether it is fiction or a documentary, must be presented to the viewer through a well-finished visual style, and I definitely didn't want to make a documentary with a classic television cut, with long half-length interviews and a glossy look. The composition of the picture and the choice of perspective are fundamental for me but still, it was a very quick creative process. I had little time to think about how to light up each scene. I filmed the real life of people with their rhythms, times and spaces. Hermes and Betta held parties with different couples and single people at least twice a month – from house parties to parties in real private clubs – and while filming, I had only one restriction towards all the other couples that participated: not to film their faces. I decided to use a lot of diegetic light to have the shooting field as free as possible and move freely without extradiegetic obstacles, and used rather narrow viewpoints to film the whole context around the two protagonists.

Hermes and Betta were subjects that every director would like to work with, and they empathized right away with the camera. They enjoyed every aspect of the filming

process, both being filmed during the erotic scenes and during the simplest daily actions. They had an immense desire to tell their life and show it to the whole world without inhibitions or fears. They gave me the opportunity to enter this world, introducing me to many couples and singles, who have always been extremely helpful. I shot some heavy situations, obviously, but also lighter ones, where the genuine soul of these people became very tangible. It was by far the most easy-going set I have worked in. But towards the end of the process, a turn of events shocked me, and for quite some time we were all incredulous and embarrassed. Ultimately it became a key part of the narrative, leading to the very emotional and symbolic moment with the balloons in the finale.

I hope that the audience watches the film with objectivity and without prejudice towards this couple who, despite being unscrupulous and transgressive, also have amazing heart and honesty. Hermes and Betta live an uninhibited but serene sexuality. "We are just like you." Betta has been repeating this phrase to me for over a year. I can now confirm it is absolutely true!

*Mauro Russo Rouge*

## **About Mauro Russo Rouge**

Mauro Russo Rouge was born on September 24, 1979 in Castel San Giorgio, Salerno, Italy. In 2014 he made his first feature film "CENSURADO: Ode to Love", selected in several international festivals: Sanford (USA), San Antonio (USA), Veracruz (Mexico) and Rome (Italy). His second feature film "ABERRANT" premiered in March 2017, taking part in many international festivals and winning the Best Film award at the Texas Independent Film Festival and the Sutter Creek International Film Festival. The third feature film "IRA", presented at the 42nd Denver Film Festival, was released in Italian theatres in November 2019, distributed by Mescalito Film. His fourth feature film, "C.L.A.B.", has the tones of the action movie and is completely devoid of dialogue. It was bought for the North American market by Osiris/Paragon.

"Bloom Up", his fifth film, represents the director's debut in the documentary genre. It has been sold in France, Germany, South Korea, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Poland, Spain, Taiwan, and the United States and it was selected at Hot Docs Toronto 2021, Biografilm 2021 and Atlantida Mallorca FilmFest 2021.

In 2022, his new docufilm RADIOPORNOPANDA about the world of sex workers will be released. The film is being presented at Biografilm in Bologna in the Special Events section in mid-June. RADIOPORNOPANDA is his second documentary on eroticism and has been acquired by Italian distributor I Wonder Pictures. He is currently about to begin filming a new docufilm on 70-year-old Italian gigolo Maurizio Candidi.

## ***DATA SHEET***

***Title:*** BLOOM UP – A swinger couple story

***Country:*** Italy

***Year of Production:*** 2020

***Duration:*** 88'

***Color Type:*** Color

***Screening Format:*** DCP

## ***CREDITS***

***Direction:*** Mauro Russo Rouge

***Production:*** ACSD ArtInMovimento, AC SystemOut

***Executive producer:*** Annunziato Gentiluomo

***Photography:*** Mauro Russo Rouge

***Sound design and Mix:*** Paolo Armao

***Editing:*** Davis Alfano

***Music:*** Christian Löffler, Hexlogic

***Color Grading:*** Davis Alfano

***Boom Operator:*** Guglielmo Francavilla

***Set Designer:*** Mauro Russo Rouge