

**KINO LORBER**  
i n c o r p o r a t e d

# BREATHING

A Film by Karl Markovics

Austria - 2011 - Color - 2.35  
93 Minutes

**A Kino Lorber Release**

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## THE CAST

Roman – **Thomas Schubert**  
Margit – **Karin Lischka**  
Walter Fakler – **Gerhard Liebmann**  
Rudolf Kienast – **Georg Friedrich**  
Gerhard Schorn – **Stefan Matousch**  
Jürgen Hefor – **Georg Veitl**  
Leopold Wesnik – **Klaus Rott**  
Mona – **Luna Mijovic**  
Josef Kallinger – **Reinhold G. Moritz**  
Prison guard #3 – **Martin Oberhauser**  
Young Lady – **Magdalena Kronschläger**  
Policeman #1 – **David Oberkogler**  
Policeman #2 – **Michael Duregger**  
Judge – **Peter Raffalt**  
Daughter-in-law – **Stephanie Taussig**  
Home help – **Gabriela Schmoll**  
Roberta – **Elena Dörfler**  
Man In Sweatsuit – **Werner Wultsch**  
Train Vendor – **Robert Putzinger**

## THE CREW

Written and directed by **Karl Markovics**  
Screenplay – **Karl Markovics**  
Producers – **Dieter Pochlatko & Nikolaus Wisiak, EPO Filmproduktion**  
Cinematographer – **Martin Gschlacht**  
Sound – **William Edouard Franck**  
Editor – **Alarich Lenz**  
Casting – **Nicole Schmied**  
Decor – **Isidor Wimmer**  
Costumes – **Caterina Czepek**  
Make Up – **Monika Fischer-Vorauer**  
Sound Design – **Philipp Mosser, Nils Kirchhoff**  
Mix – **Ralph Thiekötter**  
Music – **Herbert Tucmandl**  
Production Director – **Bernhard Schmatz**

With the collaboration **ORF Film/Television-Agreement**  
Supported by **Austrian Film Institute, Film Location Austria, Vienna Film Fund, Region of Lower Austria, Cinestyria Filmkunst**



## SHORT SYNOPSIS

Nineteen-year-old Roman Kogler is serving time in a juvenile detention center. He has already served half of his sentence, and could be released on probation, but his chances are poor: he doesn't have a family, and seems incapable of coping with society.

After many failed attempts, Roman finds a probation job at the municipal morgue in Vienna. One day, Roman is faced with a dead woman who bears his family name.

Even though it soon turns out that she is not his mother, Roman wonders about his past for the first time and starts looking for her.

## Interview with Karl Markovics

*What was your primary reason for switching from acting to filmmaking?*

Ever since I realized that I wanted to become an actor, I also knew that I wanted to do more. Acting was actually a detour; **Breathing** represents what I really want to do. Acting is simpler in the sense that, in the beginning, you're left to your own devices and you can lead a parallel life within a given framework. That was extremely exciting and fulfilling for a long time, and it still is, so much so that I haven't had enough time or felt the urge to admit that the most important thing's missing: what I've always wanted to do, real creativity, creating something from nothing. For a long time the greatest obstacle was my own perfectionism. With all the script ideas in various stages of completion inside me, I've never they were good enough to satisfy my requirements. In the end it was my wife who said, just finish something and have the courage to show it to someone instead of just brushing it aside from the beginning.

*Breathing represents a basic need and is also synonymous with freedom. Did you feel a need to tell the story of a young adult who started off in life with extreme limitations?*

To be honest, that's what it turned into. At first I didn't intend to do nearly as much with my story as the story was then able to do itself. That sounds a little esoteric, but when you have a good story to tell, it speaks to you and tells itself. My original idea was banal. In my case, all script ideas begin with an image, and the first image I had for **Breathing** gave birth to the curiosity about making a film involving morticians. I wanted to make an extremely incidental, everyday sort of film about people who have to deal with death in their work as service providers. Of course, that alone wasn't a story, and that's why it was predestined to end up like many of my ideas for scripts: on paper, without anything ever happening with it. But a short time after that a young man knocked on the door of my mind—that's what I mean when I say that a story can assert its rights. It was a kind of Pirandello experience, like in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, with a character showing up and saying, "I want to play a role this." And then you take responsibility for the story, and I must do everything I can to do justice to it.

*How would you characterize this young man who pushed his way into the story?*

It was about a person who really didn't have things that bad, who learned to deal with his life (childhood in a foster home, juvenile detention center), which we don't find out until near the end of the film. He didn't have it bad in those places. He's a loner, but people leave him in peace, he has everything he needs, because he has everything he's familiar with. Still, he develops a sense that although he doesn't really have any specific emotional pressure, there must be more. It requires a great deal of courage to jump into that, but Roman's reaction is at first determined by defiance. The decision to work at a mortuary triggers something that offers a prospect for the future, even if it's fairly dreary.

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*You show extremely realistic worlds in Breathing—life in prison, the world of work, work processes and the power structures involved, two worlds that are for the most part shut off from the public's eyes. Was it your intention to show these worlds on the basis of how society considers them taboo?*

Yes, I was interested in these two fields of tension and the motif of movement between them. Roman's a day-release prisoner, he has something to take care of and must then return to his cell the same evening. He moves from one area of social taboo to another, creating a field of tension where I saw a great deal of potential for a story, where I realized right away that it required specialized research.

At times research is overrated, but in this case it was absolutely necessary, particularly in light of my own experience, that I've never seen a dead body. That was one of the most memorable experiences of all, including for the story. Because I knew that whatever I expected of my main character, I would have to expect of myself. That triggered a great deal.

*There's a great deal of speechlessness, and taciturn individuals, in Breathing. Is that the reason you chose this narrative technique with clear images?*

That was the great challenge from the very beginning. As it involved something where language reaches its limits, from the beginning I wanted to create an extremely barren environment in terms of communication. It was important to me that an impression of being incidental was always present, and that, for example, long passages of silence aren't perceived as being too pregnant with meaning, because there isn't much talking beforehand either. What's then said, however, always has meaning.

*The swimming pool repeatedly plays a metaphorical role - in the form of going under, coming back up, swimming on the surface, breathing correctly, etc. How do you see these water images, why were they so important?*

I originally thought about running, because I wanted to establish the theme of breathing in prison. I asked myself what young inmates do when they're not in their cell or the workshop. I wouldn't have dared to make up swimming, but while doing research at Gerasdorf I found out there's a pool there, and then it became clear that it would have to be a swimming pool, even if I had doubts about whether the images might resemble scenes from a sanatorium.

The water brings another element into play, and breathing takes on meaning in a completely different way. It's necessary to get as much air as possible, and if you want to stay under water, you have to ration it, you have to be able to be alone with yourself, even though you're surrounded by others. Establishing the theme of the isolated individual in a group was important. In a swimming pool I can show how Roman does his thing without there being a great deal of interaction with others.

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*Can you say something about how you developed Breathing's visual grammar together with the cinematographer Martin Gschlacht?*

I could talk about that all day. The film became what it is together with Martin. I had certain ideas about the visual character, but they weren't nearly as concrete. The time I spent with Martin working on the solution was for me the most fulfilling part of the creation process. Scriptwriting's difficult and involves a great deal of doubt; research is interesting, but often time intensive. When working on the solution, on the other hand, I had an insight involving my own story at least once a day, because for the first time I realized what kind of potential it has and how little was necessary in many cases to tell something precisely. I was much more stuck in my reflexes stemming from the way I was accustomed to looking at things, and in many cases Martin opened my eyes as to how differently, how much more simply and precisely you can tell a story, because the story's language benefits in terms of its incidental nature and creation of tension in a relative uneventfulness, though without seeming indifferent. The cinematography concept works without ever becoming obviously subjective. There isn't a single shot where you could say that we're seeing something with the main character's eyes. We're right next to him, but it's always our point of view, we're accompanying him. I didn't choose the medium of film because I wanted to see my first film in theaters, but because it needs the screen and Cinemascope for its strong images.

*How did you approach such processes as casting and working with actors as a director? How did the search for the protagonists go?*

I couldn't cast an actor before choosing the lead. He would be decisive for the rest of the cast. At first Nicole Schmied put out ads at various schools, in subway newspapers and so on. Of about 300 candidates who showed up at the first date we picked Thomas Schubert in two more rounds. I was looking for a non-professional actor because I didn't want a 22-year-old acting-school dropout playing an 18 year old. I wanted an 18 year old who's still a child at certain moments. There were of course doubts when the decision was made, as to whether he'd be able to supply everything the role required. He knew what he was in for, which we didn't: 30 days of shooting, and he'd have to be on set every one of them. There's not a single scene and only few shots without him. I'm that much happier that it turned out so well.

*You talked about other scripts and ideas that you might make into films. Do you think that realism will not necessarily crystallize as the tenor of your film narrative?*

Realism is the absolute basis, but I don't want realism exclusively. Stories of simple people is what I want, they represent the source of my material. That's the environment I come from, where I feel comfortable, and I think that it's underrepresented in a certain way. That might sound silly, because a great deal of Austrian cinema's set in social fringe groups. However, I think that simple people are underrepresented when the goal is bringing them into film: by that I mean acknowledging the fact that they look good in close-ups, not being afraid of finely balanced lighting, placing them in front of an attractive background, framing them in a great way, and capturing them on film with a relatively complex camera movement. Not consistently in a thorough way, but at certain moments that I consider special.