TRIANGLE OF SADNESS
by Ruben Östlund
“From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.”
Karl Marx
**Cast**

Harris Dickinson, Charlbi Dean, Woody Harrelson, Viveik Kalra,
Henrik Dorsin, Filip Glinski, Jacob Cheung, Peter Roth, and many others.

In association with Heretic, Bord Cadre films, Sovereign Films, PIANO

**Director & scriptwriter:** Ruben Östlund

**DOP:** Fredrik Wenzel

**Production Design:** Josefin Åsberg

**Costume Design:** Sofie Krunegård

**Make Up & Hair:** Stefanie Gredig

**Sound Engineer:** Jonas Rudels, Jacob Ilgner

**Sound Design & Re-recording Mix:** Andreas Franck, Bent Holm

**Editing:** Ruben Östlund, Mikel Cee Karlsson

**Additional editing:** Esa Hennings-Berg, Susanne Margin

**Casting Director:** Pauline Hansson

**Production**

Impressive Entertainment presents

In co-production with Essential Films, FilmFond Danmark, Norsk Film, Arte France Cinema, TV Norge, TF1 Studio. The support of Svenska Filminstitutet, Eurimages - Council of Europe, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, The Danish Film Institute, FADN - Film Fund Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein and MIT. With the participation of Nordisk Film & TV Fond, Arte France, NRK, Canal+, and Cine+. In association with Heretic, Red Lake Films, Sovereign Films, PNG.

**Crew**

Conversations with director and actors conducted by Amy Raphael, April 2022

**Backstage photography:** Tobias Henriksson

Sweden / Germany / France / Denmark, 2022, 142 min, colour

**TRIANGLE OF SADNESS**

by Ruben Östlund

Sweden / Germany / France / Denmark, 2022, 142 min, colour
SYNOPSIS

An uninhibited satire where roles and class are inverted and the tawdry economic value of beauty is unveiled.

Models Carl and Yaya are navigating the world of fashion while exploring the boundaries of their relationship. The couple are invited for a luxury cruise with a rogues’ gallery of super-rich passengers, a Russian oligarch, British arms dealers and an idiosyncratic, alcoholic, Marx-quoting captain. At first, all appears Instagrammable. But a storm is brewing, and heavy seasickness hits the passengers during the seven-course captain’s dinner.

The cruise ends catastrophically. Carl and Yaya find themselves marooned on a desert island with a group of billionaires and one of the ship’s cleaners. Hierarchy is suddenly flipped upside down, as the housekeeper is the only one who knows how to fish.
Let’s start with the title: what does “triangle of sadness” refer to?

It’s a term used in the beauty industry. A friend sat next to a plastic surgeon at a party and, after a quick look at her face, he said, “Oh, you have a quite deep triangle of sadness... but I can fix that with Botox in 15 minutes.” He was referring to a wrinkle between her eyebrows. In Swedish it’s called ‘trouble wrinkle’ and it suggests you’ve had a lot of struggles in your life. I thought it said something about our era’s obsession with looks and that inner wellbeing is, in some respects, secondary.

FORCE MAJEURE was set in a ski resort and THE SQUARE in the contemporary art world. Why did you decide to set TRIANGLE OF SADNESS in the world of fashion?

I did some research into the fashion world in 2018, when I collaborated with my friend Per Andersson and developed a small line of clothing for his Swedish menswear label Velour. I also gained a detailed insider’s take on the industry through my partner, Sina, who is a fashion photographer. When we met, she told me a lot about the marketing strategies for different fashion brands and also about working conditions for models. For example, a male model generally earns only a third of what a female model does.
I thought it would be interesting to look at these differences through the main characters, a male and a female model called Carl and Yaya.

When I started to do research for the film, numerous male models told me that they often have to manoeuvre past powerful homosexual men in the industry who want to sleep with them, sometimes with the promise of a more successful career. In some respects, being a male model mirrors what women have to deal with in a patriarchal society.

So you are interested in how beauty has economical value, whether it’s in the fashion world or in the ‘normal’ world?

Yes! That was the initial idea. Our looks are one of the fundamental things we have to deal with as human beings. The way we look affects every social encounter. The fact that looks play such a key role in society is something of a universal inequality, but on the other hand you can be born beautiful wherever you come from and that beauty can be used to climb the socioeconomic ladder in a class-based society.

A running joke for the female models is that when their modelling career is over, they always can marry rich men and become trophy wives - something that is not really possible for the male models.

Ergo once again using the sociological gaze as a way into an idea?

As with all my films, my starting point is to look at human behaviour. Many scenes in TRIANGLE OF SADNESS have a connection to a sociological study or an anecdote that I think highlights something from a behaviouristic point of view.
There is one study in particular that I thought was extremely interesting: scientists observing zebras in the African savanna were trying to figure out why their fur is black and white when they live in the savanna. Wouldn’t it be better if their fur was as yellow as the sandy savanna? Studying individual zebras proved almost impossible as they disappeared into the herd, so a red dot was sprayed onto an individual zebra, making it easier to follow. However, the red dot made it stand out and it was almost immediately taken by lions. The scientists quickly realised that the black and white pattern is not about hiding in the environment, but rather about hiding in the herd.

The scientists drew parallels to us humans and pointed out something fascinating about the fashion industry. We use our clothes to try and hide in the social group to which we are connected. Our clothes are our camouflage. Just think about the concerns we have when we are going to a fancy evening party; we really don’t want to be over- or underdressed. If we get it wrong we feel exposed. From an economical perspective it really makes sense that fashion brands create new collections all the time. Then we have to change our clothes more often and consume more.

It’s no accident that I called the fashion line I created for Velour ‘Discreet Bourgeoisie’. One of the pieces was the "Lumière Tuxedo", which I named in homage to the cinema in Cannes where I was awarded the Palme d’Or for THE SQUARE in 2017. You can wear the tuxedo as a kind of camouflage amongst the educated middle-class. In the Lumière tuxedo, you can hide in the Cannes herd very efficiently!
You also address issues of gender roles and behavioural expectations, primarily with Carl and Yaya when they argue about who should pay for dinner at the start of the film.

The restaurant scene is inspired by my own experience with Sina. Near the start of our relationship, I wanted to impress her and invited her to Cannes. I paid the bill for dinner the first, second, and third night and then I thought, “Fuck, I have to take the bull by the horns and have a discussion about this. I like her too much to step into the role of man and woman, where the man always pays the bill.” What you see in the film is what happened between us: the argument took place in the Martinez lift; her stuffing the €50 bill in my shirt and me freaking out and yelling; me sitting in a room alone, thinking, “Now I’ve ruined this relationship” and then the sincere discussion we had when she finally returned. We were finally ready to expose ourselves, to make ourselves vulnerable and grow closer as a result.

What did you want to show by putting Carl and Yaya on a super yacht?

I knew that I wanted the last part of the film to take place on a deserted island so the yacht was a way of getting there and bringing some interesting characters along - the model couple, some billionaires and a cleaning lady. On the island, when it turns out that the cleaning lady knows how to fish and make a fire, the old hierarchy is turned upside down.

I understand your mother was a communist? What kind of values did she instil in you in your formative years?

She is still a communist. She was a primary school teacher and a painter, as such, was a very encouraging mother. Her method was basically to be supportive and say, “Wow, that’s great!” It didn’t matter what I drew, it was fantastic.
I think it helped me to trust myself when I make artistic decisions. I grew up on a small island called Styrsö on the west coast of Sweden, and not many on the island had the same left-wing politics as my parents. Mum had books by both Marx and Lenin and when friends came round, I’d turn the Lenin books around so that the spines were hidden. I understand that they were controversial in the eyes of others.

You decided to make the captain of the ship in TRIANGLE OF SADNESS a Marxist…

I would say he’s an idealist, an alcoholic, and a Marxist. In that order?

In whatever order you want! I had an idea that the captain should host the captain’s dinner, a seven-course meal, on the same evening as a storm approaches. The passengers get seasick and the captain becomes so drunk that he starts to read from “The Communist Manifesto” over the speaker system while the guest are puking. The captain had to be an idealist, an alcoholic and a Marxist for that to be possible.

The scenes in which Dimitriy’s wife and others vomit copiously during high seas is, I presume, a way of avenging them for their obscene wealth?

Yes, but I also wanted it to be the turning point; the audience should feel that they have suffered enough and want them to be saved.

What are your feelings about the ultra-rich?

I am interested in how we react when we are spoilt. For example, when I fly business class, I behave differently to when I fly economy. I sit there and read more slowly and drink more slowly as I watch passengers heading for economy class. It is almost impossible to not be affected by privilege.

Are you saying it’s human nature for the super-rich to behave in a privileged, spoilt manner?

I believe that rich people are nice. Successful people are often very socially skilled otherwise they wouldn’t be so successful. There’s an ongoing myth that successful and rich people are horrible, but it’s reductive. I wanted the sweet old English couple to be the most sympathetic characters in the film. The are nice and respectful to everyone – they just happen to have made their money on landmines and hand grenades. It’s probably a more accurate description of what the world looks like.

Your films are very much rooted in European cinema, but TRIANGLE OF SADNESS is your first English-language film. Did you find the process challenging?

Yes, because there are nuances that I don’t know about in the English language that I know in Swedish. Having said that, my scenarios and themes are simple, and they have a universality, so it is easy for the actors to relate to them. I always work in the same way: during casting and rehearsals, I improvise the scenes with the actors; and I later use some of that material in the script when it is better than the original dialogue. If I am working with English-speaking actors, they can fill in any gaps I may have and make the language richer, more nuanced and so on.
But I am ambivalent about making films in English since I’m critical about the dominance of Anglo-Saxon culture. It’s absurd what kind of influence it has over Sweden and Scandinavia.

Directors often talk about having ‘good’ or ‘bad’ luck when shooting – do you feel that you were blessed with TRiangle of Sadness?

It was interesting. Just before we started to shoot in Greece, conflict was building between Turkey and Greece and we started to get nervous about that. Then, on the first day of the shoot, a storm was coming in and we were supposed to do a long tracking shot on a beach. At that point we decided, “Let’s go with the weather. If that’s the weather, then that’s how the scene is going to play out. Let’s use what we have.” And I found that a happy-go-lucky kind of attitude made us much more relaxed, and very often issues solved themselves. Apart from the storm, we were very fortunate with the weather.

We shot the exteriors on Christina O, the old Onassis yacht, which turned out to add quite a fun meta layer when we blew her up. That yacht is such a strong symbol of the elite of the 60s and 70s, and myriad famous, powerful men like Churchill have spent a lot of time on her. So we had nine days on the yacht, which was very expensive, and Covid was getting closer and closer and another lockdown was looming. In fact, we just managed to finish the shooting on the day before we went into another lockdown. Had the lockdown come a few days earlier, I don’t know how we could have finished the film.
This is a rhetorical question really, but can films – and, in fact, culture in general – change society?

Of course. You’d have to be a little stupid to think otherwise. My mentor, the Swedish film producer Kalle Boman, was asked by one of my fellow students at film school if films can change society. He answered: “All films change society”. And of course that in itself can be problematic.

In Sweden we have had a lot of young men killed in so-called gang shootings and in the cultural pages there is an ongoing debate about the extent of the influence of gangster rap on our behaviour. To answer yes to that question is not the same as being pro-censorship. We believe in freedom of speech, but we should also be aware of the consequences that this cultural expression might create.

Finally, do you see FORCE MAJEURE, THE SQUARE and TRIANGLE OF SADNESS as a loosely-connected trilogy exploring masculinity in modern times?

Yes, I started to think about this when I was writing TRIANGLE OF SADNESS. All the men in these films are trying to deal with who they are supposed to be and what is expected of them. They are then put in a trap in order to see how they behave. For me, these three films have really been a way of setting up a dilemma for myself, of cornering myself. What would I do if I was dealing with this? As soon as the answer appears to be easy, then it’s not so interesting. But if it is hard, then I am interested.
Number of actors considered for the lead role: 120
Average takes per shot: 23
Hours of rushes: 171
Editing time: 22 months
Number of Covid Tests done during production: 1,061 / All were negative
Were you a fan of Ruben Östlund’s previous films?

I’d only seen FORCE MAJEURE. I then made the mistake of watching all of his films before the audition for TRIANGLE OF SADNESS and it made me want the job even more.

Did you read a script ahead of the audition?

No, but Ruben told me the story of the film and then, at the audition, he asked me to improvise the scene in which Carl and Yaya have dinner and argue about the bill. Ruben played Yaya wonderfully, I have to say.

What are your thoughts on the economy of beauty as the key theory underpinning the film?

It’s about the power you hold in a world where beauty is valuable. Initially Carl was a model who was losing his hair, but Ruben leant away from that idea when we started filming. The dynamic between Carl and Yaya is still stilted because she’s a beautiful, slightly older model who is on the rise while he’s on the way down. When they end up stranded on the island, he is able to use his beauty as economy.
When Carl gets together with Abigail, it seems they have some kind of connection beyond the transactional. It’s interesting; I saw Carl as this young guy searching for meaning in a relationship that was otherwise meaningless. Even though he really likes Yaya, it got to the point where Abigail was this beacon of strength and modernity. Carl isn’t happy with the traditional gender roles that define his relationship with Yaya and then he meets this powerful provider in Abigail and he finds that really attractive. I wanted the relationship between Carl and Abigail to be more nuanced than, ‘Oh, he’s sleeping with her to get extra pretzels’ – if only because he wouldn’t humiliate his girlfriend for extra pretzels alone. And then, in a weak moment, Carl’s relationship with Abigail spiralled into something more meaningful.

You have modelled for magazines, but you haven’t been a model per se. What kind of research did you do into that world?

I’ve been involved in that world in a small capacity, I have a few friends who model and I spoke to some fashion photographers. There are many different tiers in the world of fashion, so it was more about trying to figure out where Carl had been positioned at the height of his success and where he was positioned at the start of the film. According to his back story, he used to be a mechanic and he was scouted. It was about trying to ground the story in that context.

Is there a particular scene from the film that has stayed with you?

I loved the scene with the captain and Dimitriy. To see two drunk men rambling on about their politics – communist and capitalism respectively – was great fun. I’ve been thinking about it a lot since. Sadly I didn’t have the opportunity to meet Woody Harrelson, but I’m making it my mission to meet him at some point.

Where are you running to or from in the final scene of the film?

I always imagined that I was running towards Abigail and Yaya, having sensed that something is about to go very wrong. But there’s always a chance that Carl is being selfish and running away from everything.

Ruben Östlund talks generally about the way you give a part of yourself away in TRIANGLE OF SADNESS and specifically about it costing you to play the roles you take on because you dare to make a fool of yourself. Does this resonate with you?

I’ll take that! I’ll very happily put that on my CV. The goal is always to be free of ego in your performances, but it can be tough. I have, in the past, been ridiculed for daring to make a fool of myself, but part of being a performer is being willing to open yourself up to that kind of reaction. Certainly it’s the way Ruben likes to work – he’s very interested in who we are as people when it really comes down to it and we’re put in awkward situations. So I didn’t really have a choice on this film; I had to expose myself. You do go home feeling a little bit weird sometimes.

What did you learn from Ruben Östlund as a director?

He persists in searching for the truth and for a genuine reaction and I think that made me hyper aware of when I wasn’t listening or wasn’t present in the moment, which was invaluable.
Were you a fan of Ruben Östlund’s previous films?

I’d only seen one of Ruben’s films before auditioning for him – I randomly picked THE SQUARE and saw it at the Angelika in New York. I usually mix popcorn and chocolate as a movie treat, but I didn’t touch it because I didn’t want to miss out on such a unique, intriguing and brilliant film. By the end, I was so buzzing I felt like I could run a marathon.

What was your initial response to the script for TRIANGLE OF SADNESS?

Script? What script? The mysterious Rubens gave us no such thing! He told me a little about the premise, but things changed and grew until the very end of the shoot. We never even knew how it would end. Ruben clearly runs the show, but he is also incredibly adaptable and will change things if he thinks they could be better or more interesting. When I first spoke to him about the film, I had a feeling of sheer terror – but at the same time, it’s the kind of project you can’t wait to embark on.
What are your thoughts on the economy of beauty as the key theory underpinning the film?

I believe beauty in society is definitely a currency with deprecating value and therefore a curse if you assign too much value to it.

Does the film give an insight into the world of fashion?

One hundred percent yes. Ruben’s wife Sina – who put Ruben onto me – is a brilliant fashion photographer and she shared her experiences with him. He is definitely privy to the nitty-gritty of the fashion world.

Did the film make you reassess your opinion of the world of fashion?

I’m not sure to be honest, but I was certainly aware of how it must appear to someone outside the industry. Sometimes you’re so close to a thing that you don’t realize how absurd it is until you look at it from a third-person perspective. It was fun being “that model girl”; I had a free ticket to be outlandish and I love how unapologetic Yaya is.

How did you bond with the rest of the cast, particularly Harris?

The camaraderie that occurs when a bunch of people from all over the world come together for several months on a Greek island during a pandemic – well, you bet we are gonna be tight. I’m so bonded to all of the cast and crew – they are friends I’ll genuinely have forever. Having Harris to work with was an absolute gift; he is kind, patient and ridiculously talented. I know he would cringe reading this, but he is a gem.

Is it possible to compare acting to modelling?

I don’t think so – other than being adaptable to travel and being on the go a lot. And perhaps in the sense of internal dialogue. There is actually a lot of that with modelling and I prefer that kind of acting too; the inner dialogue that we as humans are always trying to hide from the outside world.

How do you think the audience will react to TRIANGLE OF SADNESS?

I have no idea! Hopefully people will leave the theatre wanting to talk about it and discuss it. Those are my favourite films: the ones that get my mind going, piss me off a little, make me laugh and cry.
Ruben Östlund was born in 1974 and grew up on an island on the West Coast of Sweden. He studied at the University of Gothenburg where he met Erik Hemmendorff with whom he later founded Plattform Produktion. An avid skier, Östlund directed three ski films, alluding to his taste for long sequence shots, a taste he structured and developed throughout his film studies and which to this day remains an important trademark of his work.

Östlund’s feature debut THE GUITAR MONGOLOID (2005) won the FIPRESCI Award at Moscow Film Festival.

All of Östlund’s subsequent feature films premiered at Cannes, starting with his second feature INVOLUNTARY (2008), which premiered in Un Certain Regard.

Östlund won the Golden Bear in Berlin for his short film INCIDENT BY A BANK (2010). This short film provided the opportunity for him to experiment with techniques and style. This experimentation would become apparent in his third feature PLAY (2011), which premiered at Cannes in the Directors’ Fortnight. It went on to win the Nordic Film Prize (the most important Scandinavian prize). His fourth feature FORCE MAJEURE (2014) premiered in Un Certain Regard and won the Jury Prize. It was also nominated for a Golden Globe and shortlisted for an Oscar.

Östlund returned to Cannes with his fifth feature THE SQUARE (2017), which was selected in Official Competition and won the Palme d’Or. It was nominated for a Golden Globe and an Oscar.

TRIANGLE OF SADNESS is his sixth feature and premieres in competition at Cannes 2022.

Filmography
- TRIANGLE OF SADNESS (2022)
- THE SQUARE (2017)
- Force Majeure (2014)
- Play (2011)
- Incident by a Bank (2010, short)
- Incident Number 6882 (2005, short)
- The Guitar Mongoloid (2004)
HARRIS DICKINSON

BAFTA-nominated Harris Dickinson has received critical acclaim for his diverse film and television work. He was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award and a Gotham Award for his breakout performance in Eliza Hittman’s 2017 BEACH RATS. His other film credits include Matthew Vaughn’s THE KING’S MAN, Joanna Hogg’s THE SOUVENIR: PART II, Xavier Dolan’s MATTHIAS AND MAXIME, Henry Blake’s COUNTY LINES and THE DARKEST MINDS. His TV roles include FX series TRUST. In 2022, he was selected as one of five EE BAFTA Rising Star nominees and his upcoming films include the adaptation of Delia Owens bestselling novel, WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING and the murder-mystery SEE HOW THEY RUN.

CHARLBI DEAN

Charlbi Dean is a fresh face on the rise in Hollywood. Born in Cape Town, South Africa, she began modeling at the age of six and has graced the pages of major international publications including Vogue and GQ. Dean makes her starring debut on the big screen in Ruben Östlund’s TRIANGLE OF SADNESS.
Woody Harrelson first endeared himself to millions of viewers as the affable bartender ‘Woody Boyd’ in NBC’s long-running hit comedy, Cheers, a role for which he won an Emmy. He would go on to receive multiple nominations for his film work, including an Academy Award nomination for Oren Moverman’s THE MESSENGER, Academy Award, Golden Globes, and SAG nominations for Milos Forman’s THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT, and most recently an Academy Award and BAFTA nomination for Martin McDonagh’s THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MISSOURI. He has recently finished filming Bobby Farrelly’s CHAMPIONS and the series The White House Plumbers for HBO.
Plattform Produktion, based in Gothenburg and Stockholm, is one of the most innovative and cutting-edge production companies in Sweden. After having met at the University of Gothenburg, producer Erik Hemmendorff and director Ruben Östlund founded the company in 2002. Erik Hemmendorff is one of the ACE producers (Ateliers du Cinéma Européen).

Plattform Produktion has won over a hundred international prizes worldwide including the Palme d’Or for THE SQUARE (2017). The company’s resume also includes FORCE MAJEURE (2014), which premiered at Un Certain Regard in Cannes 2014. It received the Jury Prize and went on to win six Swedish Guldbagge Awards, including Best Film. It was also nominated for a Golden Globe and a BAFTA and shortlisted for an Oscar.


Plattform Produktion has also produced several award-winning short films including INCIDENT BY A BANK (2009), winner of the Golden Bear in Berlin 2010, TEN METER TOWER (2016), which premiered at the Berlinale before moving on to compete in over 100 festivals including Sundance and Palm Springs, winning both the Jury and Audience Awards in Clermont-Ferrand as well as 14 other prizes. Millions saw the film online as it went viral through the New York Times’ website. It has been acquired by the Finnish Museum of Modern Art and exhibited at the Venice Biennale. FIGHT ON A SWEDISH BEACH!! (2016) competed for the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2016.

Founded in 1987 by French producer Philippe Bover, Coproduction Office produces and distributes bold and original films by visionary directors. As one of Europe’s leading international sales agents, Coproduction Office distinguishes itself through an outstanding catalogue of carefully chosen gems and the broad exploitation of exceptional, award-winning films.

Philippe Bover maintains long-lasting professional relationships with groundbreaking European directors: Roy Andersson, Michelangelo Frammartino, Jessica Hausner, Ruben Östlund... «The auteurs I work with are among those with the most personal ideas. I facilitate them pushing the borders of cinematic language, while simultaneously sharing the expression of these ideas with audiences’ he notes.

Together with Coproduction Office’s four production companies in Berlin, Paris, London and Copenhagen, Bover has worked as a producer on forty films to date. Over half of them premiered in competition in Cannes, Venice or Berlin, with twelve in Cannes. Recent awards include the Palme d’Or 2017 for THE SQUARE by Ruben Östlund, Cannes 2019 Best Actress for LITTLE JOE by Jessica Hausner, Venice 2021 Jury Prize for IL BUCO by Michelangelo Frammartino.
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