

CARLA
JURI

ALBRECHT ABRAHAM
SCHUCH

ROXANE
DURAN

JOEL
BASMAN

STANLEY
WEBER



Festival del film Locarno
Piazza Grande

Paula

My life should be a celebration

DIRECTED BY
CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW

WRITTEN BY
STEFAN KOLDITZ AND STEPHAN SUSCHKE



Paula

directed by
Christian Schwochow

written by
Stefan Kolditz and Stephan Suschke

with
**Carla Juri, Albrecht Abraham Schuch,
Roxane Duran, Joel Basman and Stanley Weber**

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123 min | DCP / color / 1:2,39 / 5.1



Worpswede, northern Germany, 1900. From the moment they meet, Paula Becker and Otto Modersohn sense a special connection. Their shared passion for painting grows into a great love. They marry, but the life they lead as a couple is far removed from the conventions of their time. It's a relationship rendered in rich colors and bold strokes, and which bears battle scars. In fact, it's just like the art of this young woman who boldly seizes life and who will go down in art history as Paula Modersohn-Becker. Against all odds, she lives out her vision of artistic self-fulfilment and her romantic image of marriage and love.

In *PAULA*, director Christian Schwochow explores the fascinating life of a highly talented artist and radically modern woman living at the beginning of the 20th century. Full of sensuality, with gentle humor and playful levity, *PAULA* also tells the story of a mighty, passionate love. Today – a century later – the conflicts which threaten to tear the lovers apart are more relevant than ever. Carla Juri (*WETLANDS*) plays Paula Modersohn-Becker, Albrecht Abraham Schuch (*MEASURING THE WORLD, NSU: GERMAN HISTORY X*) plays her husband, Otto Modersohn, Roxane Duran (*THE WHITE RIBBON*) plays her best friend Clara Rilke-Westhoff and Joel Basman (*AS WE WERE DREAMING*) plays poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The screenplay was written by Stefan Kolditz and Stephan Suschke.

A woman with curly brown hair is looking intensely at the camera. She is holding a long, thin wooden plank against a light-colored wall. The plank is positioned diagonally across the frame. The woman's face is partially obscured by the plank, and she has a serious expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall with a dark wooden railing visible on the left side.

Synopsis

In 1900, budding artist Paula Becker's options are limited. The exuberant 24-year-old woman could become a wife or find work as a governess or teacher. Although painting is not an acceptable vocation for a woman in her provincial Germany, she is permitted to study at the Worpswede artists' colony under the tutelage of Fritz Mackensen. Frustrated with precision and accuracy, she risks letting her emotions guide her brush, and she boldly turns to village peasants as subjects. Paula flourishes in the countryside artistic community, where she develops close friendships with artist Clara Westhoff and poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

Paula is determined to first become a recognized artist, and then start a family. By marrying fellow Worpswede painter Otto Modersohn, she hopes to find also her creative soulmate. Widower Otto allows her to continue painting while assuming her domestic and social duties as a good wife and caretaker for his young daughter Elsbeth. Despite Otto's warnings, Paula continues to reject the conventional and explore her own style of scratching into wet paint to add a distinct texture.

Five years of domesticity take its toll on Paula's spirit, and bustling modern Paris calls. Paula travels alone to the City of Lights, where she is reunited with her old friends Clara and Rilke, and she studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. She soon begins a romantic affair with Parisian lover Georges. Influenced by the male chauvinistic attitudes of the time, alienated Otto becomes critical of Paula's new bohemian lifestyle and threatens to stop financing her Paris stays. But headstrong Paula is unstoppable: she embarks on a period that will become her strongest and most compelling; a long-awaited period of creative fulfilment and self-realization...



Interview with Christian Schwochow



You didn't write the script for PAULA. How did you come to shoot this movie?

The producer Ingelore König and dramatic advisor Cooky Ziesche sent me the script in the summer of 2012. At that point, it had already been developed quite extensively, as the authors Stefan Kolditz and Stephan Suschke had already studied Paula Modersohn-Becker back in East Germany. Just from reading it, I knew I had to make this movie. I saw the script as a wonderful gift.

... which you then developed further, together with the authors.

Yes. Stefan Kolditz and Stephan Suschke had already made some very wise decisions there concerning which moments and chapters of Paula's life should and should not be portrayed. Together, we basically worked out those decisions. Of course we were looking for a completely unique style and a particular aesthetic – the one thing PAULA shouldn't turn into was a classic biopic. We were much more concerned with questions such as: What does a movie about the life of Paula Modersohn-Becker tell us in current times? About the challenges that come with being a painter? The problems that a woman faced in Germany in the early 20th Century? Does the movie fill in any education gaps about German expressionism? Yes, it does that, too, but PAULA shouldn't be a movie only for art students and museum goers.

Did the project appeal to you because it's yet another unique story about women – something you've already explored in NOVEMBER CHILD, CRACKS IN THE SHELL and WEST?

Firstly, the story's universal questions fascinated me. Paula undoubtedly feared mediocrity and not leaving her mark. The fear of going unseen for who she was, the fear of having to accept a predetermined fate as a woman. But above all, her life was determined by her facing these fears with an almost unconquerable belief in herself to follow her own path. That makes her a modern hero whose strength and courage can captivate large audiences today. In a sense, Paula and the protagonists of my other movies behave inappropriately, are rebellious, and maintain their own minds despite their surroundings. In doing so, they face boundaries which they then attempt to cross. There's real spiritual kinship among these women. I'm quite sure about that.

Did you already know the history and works of Paula Modersohn-Becker before the movie was offered to you?

The first time I learned about her was in 1990 in Worpswede. The distinct light, the view of the moorlands with the grey

weather left an impression on me. I was familiar with a number of Paula's paintings as well. When you study the transition from impressionism to expressionism in Germany, you can't bypass Paula. But I had no idea her life story was so unique. As Ingelore König approached me back then, she couldn't have known that I actually wanted to study painting in my youth. In the end, I didn't become a painter. When this movie was offered to me, I felt all the more "recognized" as a director in a way that otherwise rarely happens.

In your movies such as THE TOWER and WEST, which focus on recent German history, the imagery plays an important role. How did you approach PAULA from a visual perspective?

In my periodic works, I basically try to avoid historicizing. I don't want to use any preserved facades or old costumes. I try to portray the period and the people naturally, and to relate to them as well as I can. You can see that in the imagery, but also in how I direct the actors. Paula and Otto are modern characters and I wanted to show that in the movie.

What exactly is so modern about Paula and Otto?

Paula was radical. She fought for her path as a woman without perceiving herself as an ideologue or a feminist. She didn't just paint decoratively, she wanted to look into people's souls. She was fascinated by imperfection. I was touched by her pronounced fear of being a mediocre painter, a fear I can empathize with as a filmmaker. Also, PAULA is an epic and passionate love story that touches me because the lovers refuse to cave in to conflicts that could cause innumerable separations in my generation. Paula and her husband Otto fight for the vision of a relationship in which both are happy as a couple and as parents, yet are still individually fulfilled. As the father of a young daughter, I know what I'm talking about.

What was important for you in the visual realization?

That we disconnect very early on from the impression we have based on old photographs from that time, these posed studio images in which people are wearing ironed suits, stiff frocks and have perfect haircuts. In PAULA, I wanted the people to look like they did when they were rarely photographed: people at work with ruffled up hair, sweaty faces – just normal. We also tried to use more modern costumes to level off the stiffness – the Worpswede artists were "cool" and to some extent the hipsters of yesterday. Our Otto Modersohn should look as if he could roll up to a vernissage in Mitte, Berlin, and blend right in.

Can too much research suppress the playfulness of a movie?

No, the opposite is true! For me, good research means I can forget all the facts on the first day of shooting. I research like crazy for a movie, I want to know everything so I can work freely afterwards. You always discover something during research that doesn't correspond with what you had previously assumed. This is when it becomes interesting! You stumble across distinctions between the pictures and language from back then. Would we automatically believe that Paula Modersohn-Becker used the word "screwing"? It's all there in her diary entries. She wrote down her thoughts in detail, which was priceless when it came to portraying her character. The most important research, however, was regarding and investigating her paintings.

There are lots of books about Paula Modersohn-Becker today: diaries, letters, biographies... Does this stimulate you or put you under pressure as a director?

Both. In my eyes, the use of original quotes in dialogs doesn't work. That often feels alien to me. The authors Stefan Kolditz and Stephan Suschke wanted modern language from the outset, though we did use one or two original quotes which the actors personalized and brought to life – sometimes by adding just one syllable to make them realistic.

Some viewers may have their own Paula in mind before they head to the cinema...

Of course there might be people who know exactly how Paula was, who have a clear picture of her, whom I may disappoint. But if I were to suggest to the audience that a historical figure in a movie must have been a certain way, then I'd be treating that historical figure unfairly. I wanted to search for and discover my own Paula. I encouraged Carla Juri to find her own Paula, too.

Why did you choose Carla Juri to play Paula?

I was looking for a rebel. Whoever knows Carla Juri will be familiar with her nonconformist nature. Carla can relate to this permanent struggle for recognition, despite being strong willed. I was looking for a performer who wasn't afraid to approach historical material in a natural, non-historicized manner, who was able to take on the character, although they may seem far apart at first glance. Last but not least, I wanted somebody who was willing to play the role in a way that wasn't always personable. Because Paula was certainly also annoying, high-strung and egotistical.

Above all else, what makes PAULA vibrant as a movie is its sensuality.

The wonderful thing was that Paula's longing, physicality and



desire for eroticism, as well as her hunger for life, could already be sensed and tasted in the very first version of the script. A scene such as the one in which Paula and her best friend Clara Westhoff ring the church tower bells while screaming with joy that they'll both get married, is pure youthful sensuality. You think to yourself: What a wonderful idea the authors had there. And then you discover that Paula and Clara really did exactly that.

Was there a casting for the leading actor?

Yes, for one and a half years. In Carla Juri's case, I even did something that I generally don't do: I flew to London and pleaded with her to work with me for two hours. There's something anarchistic about Carla that comes across in her acting, despite her professionalism. She acts intuitively, is extremely surprising and follows her impulses. I like that a lot. And it was just right for PAULA.

Just like Albrecht Abraham Schuch was just right for the role of Otto Modersohn? He's an actor you've worked with several times.

I watched Albrecht Abraham Schuch's graduation piece at the University of Music and Theater, Leipzig and sensed his power immediately. Of all the German actors around the age of 30, I think he's the most versatile. He has a distinct will to perform, insane instincts, humility towards the profession and the ability to lose himself in his character.

How did you want Modersohn to be? How did you envision him during research and create him in the end?

Modersohn is much older than Paula. He was described in biographies as a very taciturn, solitary man. That on its own didn't interest me. By casting Albrecht Abraham Schuch, I wanted to shrug off the cliché of "Old man meets young woman" while retaining Modersohn's oddness and lending him boyish characteristics. Above all, he should be able to learn and not give up on trying to understand his wife through her otherness.

An example of that would be his visit to Paris where he sees Paula's most recent paintings and is able to conquer her physically as well.

Exactly! The image of the two in bed could be interpreted as a visual reference to Joseph and Mary. But I was actually thinking about John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

Two artists in an exhausting love affair – completely different, both independently creative, united by hope.

... and with a penchant for self-dramatization. In that painting, the two of them seem to be posing like Lennon and Ono did for the camera. Like a reflection. The age gap between Paula and Otto should be annulled at that moment.

Interview with Stefan Kolditz & Stephan Suschke (Script)



You both began working on a script about Paula Modersohn-Becker in East Germany way back in 1988...

Stefan Kolditz: We offered the script to DEFA, the East German state-owned film studio, who saw an opportunity to establish themselves internationally with this project. Even a West German-East German coproduction seemed possible. We're not so sad about the movie never having been made back then, though, because the material has since had time to ripen and be tackled by a director of a different generation.

Stephan Suschke: There was an awareness of Paula Modersohn-Becker in East Germany because of her exemplary life story, which especially the women knew about.

A life basically made for cinema...

S. K.: If you thought her up as a movie character, people would say the story was devised and over the top.

S. S.: Some biographies read like movies, including all the basics of grand dramaturgy.

What did you most want to avoid in the script?

S. K.: We certainly didn't want the heavy, overly "German" artist drama, but rather something playful, with a lightness also traceable in Paula's character when reading her letters in detail. She wasn't embroiled in any permanent inner conflicts or didn't endure any great agonies. In Worpswede you would have known how to live carefree and let loose.

S. S.: It's a fatal habit to consider Paula's biography from the perspective of its end. Of course her death was tragic, but when regarding her work, I'd rather place emphasis on what she achieved at such a young age rather than how young she was when she died.

Can you describe your collaborative process of writing a script?

S. K.: Each person was responsible for certain sequences. We exchanged ideas occasionally, gave mutual critique and got back to work. It was extremely complex, on the one hand to capture Paula's biography in an exemplary way, and on the other not to feel bound by certain facts. Stephan Suschke and I have been friends for 30 years and have realized a number of projects together. Working on PAULA was particularly inspiring, a process in which we were repeatedly forced to question ourselves.

S. S.: Whereby I have to say that having worked exclusively in theatre, I've personally profited lots from Stephan's experience, knowledge and ability as a scriptwriter, as well as his insistence, precision and clarity of thinking.

Did the humor gradually creep into the script or was it present from the outset?

S. S.: To us, the humor was an essential counterpoint of this German soul story from the beginning.

Which sources did you use during research?

S. K.: Basically, all sources that were accessible to us. Of course the availability and diversity of source material increased dramatically between 1988 and 2010, when our work on the script was reinvigorated by Ingelore König. The number of publications about Paula has also increased exceptionally since the 100th anniversary of her death in 2007. But it was essential for our research to contact and locate the Modersohn family very early on.

What do you mean by family?

S. K.: We met Christian Modersohn, Otto's son from his third marriage, in Fischerhude in 1988. Our meetings with Otto Modersohn's granddaughter Antje Modersohn and her husband Rainer Noeres were also crucial for the research.

S. S.: They gave us access to previously unpublished letter exchanges between Otto and Paula, and also shared details about the family history. These verbal accounts were very stimulating for us and of course we used them.

Did their families have reservations concerning the movie?

S. K.: Not reservations. Maybe the underlying concern that Otto would be depicted as he's been depicted by art historians for decades: as a mediocre painter who neither understood nor encouraged his wife. I don't believe PAULA depicts that at all.

What's especially necessary when dealing with historical material?

S. K.: Knowledge and freedom.

S. S.: The knowledge hasn't yet been exhausted in the available biographies of Paula, Otto Modersohn, Rainer Maria Rilke or Heinrich Vogeler. But we did peruse art history, for example studies by Renate Berger that accurately and comprehensively explored the social constellations of female artists around 1900.

Constellations, parts of which haven't necessarily changed up to the present day...

S. S.: That's why we found the story so interesting: therein lies its modernity. The difficulties of balancing personal concepts of happiness, family, profession and art haven't subsided. So the material hasn't aged since it emerged almost 30 years ago.

S. K.: Paula's kudos considerably increased during these

years. She was a relatively well-known painter when we began, especially in artistic circles. But the real surge in popularity came afterwards.

You weren't only loose with the facts, but also with quotes that were passed down. What did you want to avoid there?

S. K.: As a rule, written language is difficult to use in dialog. It becomes a solemn gesture way too quickly, which we absolutely didn't want. Together with the producer and director, we increasingly stripped down the plot, but in the process also had to abandon some authentic material. Of course, our looseness with quotes was necessary to pay Paula's story some respect.

S. S.: In the end, after almost 30 years and with so many versions of the script, we didn't know which scenes had originated from the biographical reality and which we'd come up with ourselves. There were certain quotes which we had to research to see if they had originated from us or other sources. Even fabrications can be condensed into their own reality.

S. K.: You get sucked into the material, which is pretty exciting.
S. S.: Of course, our view of Paula, as well as our choice of quotes for her, changed over the years. At first, we had a rather idealized image of this struggling, disenfranchised woman and an ignorant, petty bourgeois husband. But our perception of Paula and Otto later became substantially more refined, one could even say more full of contradictions – and therefore richer.



Christian Schwochow

(Director)

Following his studies at the Baden-Württemberg Film Academy, Christian Schwochow gained attention in 2008 with his prominently casted feature film NOVEMBER CHILD, which was awarded the Audience Award at the Max Ophüls Festival. His directing of the two-part TV movie "The Tower" (2012) won the prestigious Grimme prize. Soon after, his next movie, CRACKS IN THE SHELL, received the German Film Prize for best supporting role, as well as other accolades. His movie WEST (2013) then won the German Film Prize, this time for best leading role. In November 2013, Christian Schwochow directed the theater production GIFT, which premiered at Deutsches Theater and in the following year was awarded "best performance" at the German Theater Prize. He was awarded the Grimme Prize again in 2015 for BORNHOLMER STRASSE. In early 2015, the first part of Schwochow's trilogy, NSU: THE PERPETRATORS – NOT YOUR AVERAGE DAY, aired on ARD (TV station).

Filmography (Selection)

- 2016 PAULA
- 2015 NSU: THE PERPETRATORS – NOT YOUR AVERAGE DAY (TV)
- 2014 BORNHOLMER STREET (TV)
- 2013 WEST
- 2012 THE TOWER (TV MINI-SERIES)
- 2010 CRACKS IN THE SHELL
- 2008 NOVEMBER CHILD





Stefan Kolditz

(Screenplay)

Stefan Kolditz was born in 1956 in Kleinmachnow. After high school he enrolled in theater studies in Berlin until 1987, where he acquired his doctorate in 1990. Until 2002, he taught at various higher education institutions. During the early 90s, he worked as dramatic advisor in the theater and later wrote the play EVA – HITLER'S MISTRESS, which premiered at the Berliner Ensemble and later had more than 20 German and foreign-language productions. Since the mid-80s, Stefan Kolditz has written screenplays for film and television that have been awarded various prizes both in Germany and abroad. These include the Golden Lola for the German Screenplay Award, the Grimme Award, the German Television and Golden Camera Awards. His internationally acclaimed three-part work, OUR MOTHERS, OUR FATHERS, received the International Emmy Award. In 2015 at the 10th Seoul International Drama Awards, NAKED AMONG WOLVES was awarded the Main Prize, the Grand Prize, and in 2016 the German Television Award.

Filmography (Selection)

- 2016 PAULA
- 2015 NAKED AMONG WOLVES (TV)
- 2013 OUR MOTHERS, OUR FATHERS (TV)
- 2007 ON THE BORDER (TV)
- 2006 DRESDEN (TV)
- 1994 BURNING LIFE
- 1988 THE DISTANCE BETWEEN ME, YOU AND THEM

Stephan Suschke (Screenplay)

Stephan Suschke was born in Weimar in 1958. Following his studies, he began working in the Greifswald Theater as a dramatic advisor and director. He had a long and intense working relationship with Heiner Müller up until the latter's death in 1995. During this time, they collaborated for example at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, the Berlin Ensemble, and the Bayreuther Festspiele. In 2003, Suschke wrote MÜLLER DOES THEATER, in which he documented the plays and thinking of Heiner Müller. In 1994, he celebrated his directorial debut at the Berlin Ensemble, where he worked as theater manager between 1995 and 1999, and also as artistic director after 1997. From 1999 until 2013, he was a freelance director at the Théâtre National in Brussels, the theatres in Córdoba (Argentina), Saarbrücken, New Delhi (India), Dresden, Ulm, Melbourne (Australia), Lübeck and Würzburg, among others. He wrote the script for and co-directed the documentary I'M ALONE WITH MY ANXIETY – THE POET MARTIN POLI. After the 2013/2014 season, Stephan Suschke was acting director at the Mainfranken Theater in Würzburg (for opera, plays and dance), and after September 2016 at the Landestheater Linz.

Writings

- 2016 PAULA
- 2013 HORST SAGERT: IN LIMBO
- 2004 FEAR OF HAPPINESS
- 2003 MÜLLER DOES THEATER





Carla Juri

(Paula Modersohn-Becker)

Born in 1985 in Italian Switzerland, Carla Juri studied acting in Los Angeles and London in 2005. Upon finishing her studies, she was awarded the Swiss Film Prize twice in a row: in 2011 as "Best Supporting Actor" for her appearance as Esther in the episodic movie 180°, and in 2012 as "Best Leading Actor" for her role in DÄLLEBACH KARI. At the 2013 Berlinale, she won the prestigious "Shooting Star Award". With the role of "Helen Memel" in the movie adaptation of Charlotte Roches' novel WETLANDS, she was nominated for "Best Actress" at the German Film Prize awards. In the fall of 2015, Juri appeared on camera in Peter Greenway's WALKING TO PARIS. She also appeared in two other international cinema productions: MORRIS FROM AMERICA, directed by US director Chad Hartigan, and alongside Guy Pearce and Dakota Fanning in the thrilling western BRIMSTONE by Dutch director Martin Koolhoven. In the summer of 2016, Juri appeared alongside Harrison Ford and Ryan Gosling in the sequel of Ridley Scott's cult movie BLADERUNNER.

Filmography (Selection)

- 2016 PAULA
- 2016 MORRIS FROM AMERICA
- 2016 WALKING TO PARIS
- 2013 WETLANDS
- 2012 SOMEONE LIKE ME
- 2011 180°

Albrecht Abraham Schuch

(Otto Modersohn)

Albrecht Abraham Schuch, born in 1985 in Jena, attended the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Academy of Music and Theater in Leipzig from 2006 to 2010. Since 2011, he has performed in various theaters in Jena, Leipzig, Vienna and Berlin. In 2002, alongside his theater work, he labored on his first movie and TV productions, including BUKOW AND KÖNIG (2009, "Shadows"), THE OLD FOX (2009, "Closed Season") and CRIME SCENE (2009, "Life Report"). In 2010, Schuch took on the role of "Harry Klein" in the adaptation of Sven Regener's novel NEUE VAHR SÜD, for which he was awarded the German Comedy Award 2010 as an ensemble member in the category "Best TV Comedy." The following year, he appeared in cinemas as Alexander von Humboldt

in the bestselling adaptation MEASURING THE WORLD. Subsequent roles followed in the movie WESTWIND by Robert Thalheim, the two-part Ken Follett adaptation A DANGEROUS FORTUNE, and in the first part of the NSU trilogy NSU: THE PERPETRATORS – NOT YOUR AVERAGE DAY. Current projects include the thesis film of six students at the Filmuniversität Babelsberg, ROUTE B96, which in 2016 was awarded the Audience Award at the Max Ophüls Film Festival, as well as the recent ZDF thriller TRAITOR, where he stars alongside Hannah Herzsprung. In addition to his movie and TV productions, this thespian also plays main roles on stage, for example he plays Tartuffe in the play of the same name.

Filmography (Selection)

- 2016 PAULA
- 2016 ROUTE B96
- 2015 NSU: THE PERPETRATORS – NOT YOUR AVERAGE DAY (TV)
- 2014 A DANGEROUS FORTUNE (TV)
- 2011 MEASURING THE WORLD



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