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## > INTERVIEW

### ANJA FROMM

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*Art Director, Anja Fromm talks exclusively to Junsui Films about her work on David Cronenberg's period drama, **A DANGEROUS METHOD...***

### **Junsui Films: Let's start with your artistic roots and your journey into Art Direction for film.**

**Anja Fromm:** I studied interior design and architecture. After getting my academic degree [Diplom-Ingenieur (FH)] I went on to work in various architecture offices in Berlin and Switzerland. Returning to Germany I started to get more and more interested in stage design. I encountered the film business more or less by coincidence, even though I'd done the production design for a short film before. I was recommended to a French-German co-production, where I worked as a draughtsman. Since then I worked different positions in the Art Department before working my way up to Art Director.

### **JF: You've also completed design and costume work for various stage productions. What are the differences between the two mediums?**

They're very different working environments. You don't find the separation of the creative and logistic part in theatre. Whereas working as an art director in productions of a certain dimension always stands for a huge and complex organisation and structured thinking. That doesn't mean that you are not involved in research and designing, but in theatre I feel more immersed in the collective artistic process.

This is supported by the locally centred situation – you deal with one stage and the workshops. In a film you care about dozens of locations and sets, which is also fascinating. Working on theatre is like living in a small village – you have to deal with comparable advantages and disadvantages... Working on a film is in a sense more open-minded, a lot quicker, varied, exciting and a lot more stressful.

### **JF: Tell us a little bit about your creative process. What is a typical journey from design to finished set?**

Depending on the director and his/her wishes, we either sit together to discuss the aspired film atmosphere and background information all together with the

production designer, set designer and prop master or the production designer transfers the basic approaches to us.

Some aspects will develop later during the design process. The options to reflect a personality in the design of a set are multifarious. If a production designer for example wants to mirror the emotional state of a gambling addict in a casino, it might lead to a very claustrophobic, strange architecture.

At the same time the Art Department team is doing a lot of research and selects hundreds of photos, books, catalogues that represent the real historic situation or convey an interesting atmosphere we want to integrate.

Additionally we have to choose a studio whilst making the first sketches of the ground floor plans of sets to be built. Locations have to be found and inspected. Also for them we start to design and make technical drawings. I dispose and supervise the work to be done. Materials have to be found, a construction crew authorised...

The site management is comparable to an architect's work, every single working step has to be checked and I am happy to work together with amazing, competent and reliable local carpenters and painters.

One of some 'magic steps' during the prep time is when the painters get the patina on the walls, doors, flooring etc. You sometimes join a very quick time travel in the past and everything becomes authentic and unique.

When the set dressers have got a good briefing they can furnish and set up a flat very quickly. I support the production designer in getting his visions implemented. A lot of details will be discussed but nobody can supervise every position of every single pen or note on a desk and so it's always a question of confidence in a good team too.



**JF: Let's talk *A Dangerous Method*. How did you come to be involved in the project?**

I was recommended. In 2007-08 I was working for *The Reader* and the film gained a lot of recognition in Germany. For *A Dangerous Method* there were a lot of sets to be built in the big studios of Cologne. For there are not that many art directors experienced in extensive productions in the western part of Germany and I know the local studios, construction crews etc, so it seemed to be almost comprehensible that I was asked.

**JF: David Cronenberg is known for his attention to detail, how involved was he during the design process and set builds?**

David Cronenberg is a very intellectual, attentive, analytic and polite personality. Even though the design process had already started in Canada with production designer and the structure of our crew was complex, David was very much concerned with props and details, such as the reproduction of the galvanometer, C.G. Jung's measurement device for his psychophysical investigations.

He sets a high value on being precise with regards to content, technical and historical background. During the prep time there are a lot of discussions and meetings with the head of the departments, also concerning the set design and all the details but at the same time David was so well versed to confide in the crew.



**JF: Tell us a little bit about the production and the challenges you encountered whilst on set.**

We had to design and build three flats of Freud, Jung and Spielrein, the hospital Burghölzli and a part of the S.S. George Washington. One logistic challenge was how to fit all these sets into two studios. Even though their sizes were quite huge, for a while it seemed like a mutated puzzle. So we optimized floor plans. After a while everything expanded again and wonderful ideas arose, as a water basin along the ship's wall. This always entailed a lot of complex shifting during the design period.

I also remember us fiddling about small and partially unfocused photos of Freud's Study, trying to unravel details of f.e. shelves that had to be reconstructed. It is investigative work sometimes. Likewise challenging was to rebuild two façades of Jung's Villa in Küsnacht (CH) and to find an adequate site at the Bodensee (Ger) to build it up.

My favourite set though, was the S.S. George Washington because it was an absolutely new task to design and build a part of the biggest passenger ship of the beginning of the 20th century with the route Bremerhaven- New York. The artistic challenge of how to convey the impression of a solid, metal starboard side of a ship was fascinating.

**JF: You also served as Art Director on Stephen Daldry's *The Reader*, what is it that attracts you to the period genre?**

The challenge of the period genre is that you are concerned with the architecture, design, art and even the political background of each period. I like the research work and when a production gives you the time for this important basis it really helps with the honing of every single detail. The diversified cultures, times, countries and characters you have to deal with are energising and an unmatched advantage of the profession.



**JF: What next for Anja Fromm?**

I am always curious about new options to create a special atmosphere or any spatial installation. It doesn't matter if it's on stage, in a film, art or architecture. I like to work in all the different categories because I'm convinced that they are able to cross-fertilise and ultimately complete each other.