

Vermiglio [15]

2024 Italy/France/Belgium

119 mins

UK release	17 January 2025
Director	Maura Delpero
Screenplay	Maura Delpero
Cinematography	Mikhail Krichman
Music	Matteo Franceschini
Cast	Tommaso Ragno (Cesare); Giuseppe De Domenico (Pietro); Roberta Rovelli (Adele); Martina Scrinzi (Lucia); Patrick Gardner (Dino); Carlotta Gamba (Virginia); Rachele Potrich (Ada); Anna Thaler (Flavia)

Following on from *Maternal*, Maura Delpero is returning to the theme of motherhood with *Vermiglio*, though this time she's exploring it within a family context. The Bolzano-born director is returning home, geographically speaking, with a new story set in Vermiglio, in the mountains of Trentino-South Tyrol, within a community comprising several dozen individuals in the final year of the Second World War. That is, when the person who passed on his memories to her – her father – was just a child.

The film starts in a harsh, snowy winter and follows the life of a large family to the rhythm of the passing of the seasons. The father (Tommaso Ragno) is the only person in the village who has studied: he listens to Chopin and Vivaldi, he's the teacher at the local school, he's authoritarian but he teaches the children about beauty in a world of war. Their mother (Roberta Rovelli) is a woman whose beauty has faded after giving birth ten times and following the arduous task of raising children and cows. A cousin who has run away from the front has returned to the village with another deserter, young Sicilian, Pietro (Giuseppe De Domenico), with both of them now hiding in a farm on the mountaintop.

The Sicilian falls in love with the eldest sister, Lucia (Martina Scrinzi), who returns his affections, and, in an especially brilliant scene, he asks her father for her hand in marriage during the weekly lesson the teacher organises for the adults in the village.

Once the war is over, the newly wed is allowed to travel to Sicily to see his family. Months go by without even a letter, and people begin to suspect the young man won't ever return again. Lucia must bear the stigma of an "abandoned pregnant woman" in a poor, patriarchal society where every new arrival is first and foremost another mouth to feed before becoming an asset. The young woman soon finds herself wrestling with motherhood at a time when it has lost all meaning for her, and she does so with rare determination. Lucia, is a female figure who is already evolving: she goes from being subjugated by a man, having always occupied a secondary role in a chauvinist society, to stepping into the shoes of a woman who undermines obsolete and sexist discrimination and ideologies.

The film's photography, courtesy of Mikhail Krichman, transports us to modest and closed-off rural settings where we can practically smell the snow, the wood, the wine and the cigarettes smoked in the village's only tavern, where everyone comes together. The brilliant Tommaso Ragno is the only well-known professional actor in the cast; all the others play their part - speaking the dialect of the valleys - with well-directed spontaneity. The aesthetic rigour of Delpero's historical reconstruction and the film's essential dialogue are visually captivating and mentally rousing, but they fail to warm our hearts at moments when pure emotion should dominate.

Camillo De Marco, *Cineuropa*, 3 September 2024 (abridged).

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