

AT ELLEN'S AGE

IM ALTER VON ELLEN

A film by Pia Marais

with
Jeanne Balibar
Stefan Stern
Georg Friedrich

press dossier
August 2010

world premiere
International Competition
Locarno Film Festival

directed by
Pia Marais
written by
Horst Markgraf
Pia Marais

Logline

As everything that has given her life the necessary security falls apart, Ellen, a 40-year-old flight attendant sets out to seek a new purpose and a place to belong. In doing so, she becomes a tourist in the lives of the people and groups she encounters. Leading her towards a surprising catharsis...

Starring Jeanne Balibar (Sagan, Va Savoir, Code 46, The Duchess of Langeais). From the director of The Unpolished (2007 Rotterdam Best Film, 2008 German Critics Best First Feature Debut)

Synopsis

Ellen must come to face some new turns in life. Although her job as a flight attendant keeps her rotating around the globe, she finds her private life has become a placebo, lending the sensation of security she needs so badly.

When Florian, Ellen's partner of many years, leaves her, she is not entirely without blame. Yet the fact that he is also expecting a child with another woman is more than Ellen can handle. An appointment at the doctor only makes her unease grow. In the following days, Ellen suffers a panic attack whilst on duty, causing her to disembark and abandon an airplane that is preparing to start. As she crosses the airfield, she knows instinctively that she is leaving her old life behind.

Now in a strange city and unable to be alone, she finds herself lodged up in an airport hotel in Frankfurt, trying to recruit colleagues passing through, to keep her company.

It is during this period, that Ellen becomes acquainted with a group of young activists. Amongst them is Karl. The two are instantly drawn to one another and following his trail, Ellen soon finds herself in the midst of an animal-rights group, consisting of students and punks. Whilst her ex-partner Florian desperately tries to relocate Ellen and incorporate her into his new family, she attempts to become part of this cluster of idealists.

Ellen, impressed by the group's passionate commitment, is aware that she has never been involved in any meaningful cause. Yet the ulterior motive for her engagement remains her secret - her inability to be alone. A detail in her character that only Karl comes close enough to observe. It is with this knowledge that he is able to functionalize Ellen, in a similar way as she does him. Yet what bonds the two, is that they are both trying to escape the circumstances of their lives. Ellen decides to marry Karl. Perhaps a tactic that will help Karl out of his very troubled situation or is it a manoeuvre forcing her further from Florian? Now wedded, Ellen and Karl form a bizarrely unsuited couple. Whilst Ellen has a certain sophistication derived from her years of travelling the world, Karl, who is much younger, radiates a youthful unruliness. They become accomplices. But are Ellen and Karl still impartial towards each other? Ellen soon realizes that their platonic arrangement has disintegrated into unspoken feelings and expectations. For a brief moment, Ellen allows herself to experience love in an unconditional way.

She finds herself shackled up at Karl's side, in a former squat with the other animal activists. Dressed in black, they set out on a crusade to destroy the industry of animal torture and liberate as many of its victims as they can. Yet however unbalanced this situation has become, Ellen finds she's growing stronger. Unbeknown to the group, they have aroused in Ellen a sense of purpose. But is their purpose equivalent to hers?

Convinced that there must be a specific place in the world where she is needed. Inwardly matured, strangely happy and ready to venture a new beginning, Ellen may well modify this new challenge too, to fit her own needs...

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a film by
PANDORA FILM PRODUKTION

in co-production with
WESTDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK & ARTE

supported by
FILMSTIFTUNG NRW
BKM
HESSISCHE FILMFÖRDERUNG
DEUTSCHER FILMFÖRDERFONDS

project development supported by
CANNES FESTIVAL – LA RESIDENCE
FILMSTIFTUNG NRW
MEDIA Programm der Europäischen Union

german cinema release by
REAL FICTION FILMVERLEIH

world sales
THE MATCH FACTORY

Director's Notes

FRAGILE THREADS

At the beginning of Ellen's story, everything which has given her the necessary security in her daily life begins to crumble away and spontaneously she decides to disappear. Like many others in modern society, the frame of her existence has been held together by fragile threads, needing only a small jolt to disrupt. Unavoidably, Ellen becomes a vehicle for a certain sense of emotional and existential dislocation.

SOMETHING REMINISCENT OF FAMILY

As she journeys into the undefined future, Ellen tackles her unease in an unusual and optimistic way. It is this unease that drives her to search for something reminiscent of family and the warmth of belonging. Comically, Ellen finds this in the most uncomfortable places. The cluster of young people she attaches herself to, are far beyond anything she has known before.

CONNECTION TO KARL

Ellen's unspoken connection to Karl pulls her into this group of animal activists. But *AT ELLEN'S AGE* is not a portrait of a woman struggling with loneliness, far more it is about human interaction. This is reflected in the behaviour and cause of Ellen's surrogate "family".

AT ELLEN'S AGE

One of the main themes we were thinking about in the film is how does someone find grounding in this time or a purpose. Things that previously gave us stability like family structures, the church, or just living in the place you were born and knowing your surroundings through generations seems to be dissolving. Relationships seem to be more transient. The notion of growing old with one person has evaporated.

I think that for a woman at Ellen's age who comes to a point of having to redefine her life, this is an interesting process. Because nothing can be taken for granted. It might be too late to settle down and have a family in the traditional sense. It was very important that the character be optimistic, even though the circumstances are hard.

Ellen is forced to become more open to things in order to move on.

In her relationship with Florian, the conditions were important. With Karl, they are so different that these conditions are not impossible and for a brief moment, she is able to experience a feeling to someone which is perhaps unconditional. Yet this is not static and she has the intelligence to move on before it can become anything but that.

RADICAL OPINIONS

Although Karl is young, he is full of radical opinions for which he - like the others - are prepared to fight. It is the contrast between the bourgeois life Ellen emerges from and the marginal existence she submerges into, that accentuates the intended sensuality and vulnerability of her character and gives her the possibility to grow. Allowing her inner development to become visible in the end. I am interested in the development a character makes under the circumstances that Ellen finds herself confronted with.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

This is not a film about doing the right thing, much more it is about a personal journey of someone trying to find meaning in a complex and contradictory world. Therefore the story reflects themes of looking for something natural in an increasingly artificial world. I didn't want the film to take any political standpoints, instead it attempts to give insight into a way of living and thinking and why people make the choices they do, without moralizing.

THE FURY OF IDEALISM

Regarding the animal activists, I believe it was important to keep the ambiguity of this issue. Their work or cause is for a good reason: an animal is innocent. It is unable to defend itself or consent to what is imposed upon it. Yet in the fury of their idealism, do they cross a boundary? Much more the film questions: when does doing good turn into doing bad? I don't think that my film looks for easy solutions, far more the story allows the elements such as a "cause" or "movement" to co-exist with its adversary. Perhaps even ironically so.

Pia Marais – August 2010

Technical Details

Lengths	95 min
Picture Format	35mm, colour, 1:1,66
Sound Format	Dolby Digital
Languages	German English & French Subtitles available

CAST

ellen	JEANNE BALIBAR
karl	STEFAN STERN
florian	GEORG FRIEDRICH
rebecca	JULIA HUMMER
bennett	ALEXANDER SCHEER
simone	EVA LÖBAU
clare	CLARE MORTIMER
hagan	IAN ROBERTS
billy	JASNA BAUER
paul	PATRICK BARTSCH
louis	BENNO LEHMANN
christian	FABIAN ASTOR
raffael	LUIS LÜPS
josche	MORITZ NEUFFER
joseph	TSEPHANG MOHLOMI
fred	JOHANN KÖNIG
personalchefin	CAY HELLMICH

among others

Jeanne Balibar – «ellen»

French actress and singer Jeanne Balibar stars as Ellen in the German-language feature AT ELLEN'S AGE (IM ALTER VON ELLEN).

Jeanne is perhaps best known for her French-language film work with prestigious directors like Jacques Rivette (THE DUCHESS OF LANGEAIS and VA SAVOIR), Olivier Assayas (LATE AUGUST, EARLY SEPTEMBER and CLEAN), Mathieu Amalric (LE STADE DE WIMBLEDON, MANGE TA SOUP) and Arnaud Desplechin (MY SEX LIFE and LA SENTINELLE).

Jeanne has been nominated four times for the César (French Academy Awards) - for her roles in SAGAN, TOMORROW'S ANOTHER DAY, I HATE LOVE and MY SEX LIFE. She has also received Best Actress awards at the San Sebastian Festival (for LATE AUGUST, EARLY SEPTEMBER) and at the Thessaloniki Festival (for ONLY GOD SEES ME).

An accomplished stage actress, Jeanne studied at the French Conservatory of Dramatic Art and performed with Paris' Comedie Francaise early in her career.

As a songstress, Balibar has released two albums, 2003's Paramour and 2006's Slalom Dame.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

CHANGE NOTHING (NE CHANGE RIEN)	Pedro COSTA
SAGAN	Diane KURYS
THE IDIOT (L'IDIOT)	Pierre LEON
THE GIRL FROM MONACO	Anne FONTAINE
THE ACTRESS' BALL	Maiwenn LE BESCO
THE JOY OF SINGING (LE PLAISIR DE CHANTER)	Ilan DURAN COHEN
THE DUCHESS OF LANGEAIS	Jacques RIVETTE
GONE FOR A DANCE	Alain BERLINER
CALL ME AGOSTINO	Christine LAURENT
CLEAN	Olivier ASSAYAS
CODE 46	Michael WINTERBOTTOM
ALL THE FINE PROMISES	Jean-Paul CIVEYRAC
SALTIMBANK	Jean-Claude BIETTE
17 TIMES CÉCILE CASSARD	Christophe HONORÉ
UNE AFFAIRE PRIVÉE	Guillaume NICLOUX
VA SAVOIR	Jacques RIVETTE
LE STADE DE WIMBLEDON	Mathieu AMALRIC
TOMORROW'S ANOTHER DAY (CA IRA MIEUX DEMAIN)	Jeanne LABRUNE
COMEDY OF INNOCENCE	Raoul RUIZ
SADE	Benoît JACQUOT
THREE BRIDGES ON THE RIVER	Jean-Claude BIETTE
LATE AUGUST, EARLY SEPTEMBER	Olivier ASSAYAS
ONLY GOD SEES ME (DIEU SEUL ME VOIT)	Bruno PODALYDES
MANGE TA SOUPE	Mathieu AMALRIC
I HATE LOVE (J'AI HORREUR DE L'AMOUR)	Laurence FERREIRA BARBOSA
MY SEX LIFE (OR HOW I GOT INTO AN ARGUMENT)	Arnaud DESPLECHIN

Team

director	PIA MARAIS
writers	HORST MARKGRAF PIA MARAIS
producers	CLAUDIA STEFFEN CHRISTOPH FRIEDEL
commissioning editors	ANDREA HANKE (Wdr) GEORG STEINERT (Arte)
production manager	KATJA CHRISTOCHOWITZ
1st assistant director	REGINA TIEFENTHALLER
production africa	JEREMY NATHAN (Dv8 films) MICHELLE WHEATLEY
director of photography	HÉLENE LOUVART
editor	MONA BRÄUER
production designer	PETRA BARCHI
sound designer	ANDREAS HILDEBRANDT
re-recording mixer	BRUNO TARRIÈRE
composer	HORST MARKGRAF YOYO RÖHM
wardrobe	GABRIELLA AUSONIO
make-up & hair	CLAUDIA SCHAAF

Pia Marais – «writer & director»

I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa. My father was a lunatic actor trained at RADA and a descendent of the French Huguenots and English colonials who had settled in South Africa. My mother is Swedish and was responsible for the sanity in my upbringing and the Waldorf School education. Most of my upbringing was spent in Southern Africa, except for a few years in Sweden and Spain. Initially I studied sculpture, then went on to photography before realising that due to the narrative character of what I was doing, film would be the appropriate medium.

Having studied art at Chelsea School of Art (London), The Rietveld Akademie (Amsterdam) and KunstAkademie (Duesseldorf), I went on to study film at the Deutsche Film- und Fernseh-Akademie (DFFB) in Berlin.

After several engagements in film business as casting director, assistant director and writer, I made my feature debut with "Die Unerzogenen" ("The Unpolished"), which has screened at many international film festivals and has won various prizes, including Tiger Award in 2007 in Rotterdam. My second feature film "IM ALTER VON ELLEN" ("AT ELLEN'S AGE"), starring Jeanne Balibar, was developed in the Résidence du Festival de Cannes and has it's world premiere in the International Competition at Locarno Film Festival.

FILMS

Im Alter von Ellen (At Ellen's Age), 2010, 35mm, feature film, 95 min

Pandora Film in co-production with WDR & Arte

Supported by Filmstiftung NRW, Hessische Filmförderung, BKM, DFFF

Media Development, Cinemart, Cannes Festival La Residence

Die Unerzogenen (The Unpolished), 2007, 35mm, colour, 95 min

Pandora Film in co-production with WDR/SWR, supported by Filmstiftung NRW, FFA

Distributor Germany: Real Fiction, Distributor France: Pierre Grise, Intern. Sales: The Match Factory

(Winner Tiger Award Rotterdam 2007, German Critic Award 2007

selection: Crossing Europe Award Linz 2007, Signis Award BAFICI B. Aires 2007, Best First Feature Durban 2007, Best Actress Award Las Palmas 2007, ARD Treatmentpreis Saarbrücken 2002 etc.)

www.theunpolished.com

Layla Fourie, feature film, ca. 90 min - **in development**

development supported by Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg & Media Development

Arte France Cinema Development Award Rotterdam 2010

17(Seventeen), 35mm, colour, 20 min, short feature film

Tricky People 16mm, colour, 19 min, short feature film

Deranged 16mm, colour, 13 min, short feature film

Loop 16mm, s/w, 5 min, short feature film

Horst Markgraf – «writer & composer»

Although he was born in Stuttgart, Horst Markgraf's interest in music and the super-8 scene brought him to West Berlin in the early 80's. There his film *Cut Up* won the first prize in the Friends of the German Cinema's (Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek) S-8 Competition.

His started the Multi-Media group *Craex-Apart*, then later the band *Mesrine* (Universal).

Then collaborations on different film scores with amongst others Frank Tenge and Roland Wolf (of Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds).

In the late eighties, he began his studies at the Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB). His film "Elegie Bitterfeld" won the first prize at the Intern. Short Film Festival in Oberhausen. He casts Oskar Roehler as the lead in his feature film "Pochmann", later they collaborate, writing Horst's next feature project "Teichs Welt". His graduation film "Jenseits der Gleise" was nominated for the German Short Film prize (Bundeskurzfilmpreis)...

He still does camera work, amongst others for Christoph Dreher (Bass Guitarist from the German cult band Die Haut). The music documentaries emerging from this collaboration are *Beach Boys and the Devil*, *Sonic Youth*, *House of the Rising Punk*, *Chicago Connections*, *Beck*, *Psychedelic Revolution*, *Fantastic Voyages etc.*

As an author, the collaboration with Pia Marais has led to short films and the script for the feature film projects "Die Unerzogenen" (The Unpolished), "IM ALTER VON ELLEN" (At Ellen's Age) and "Layla Fourie" (in development).

Pandora Film – «production company» **Claudia Steffen & Christoph Friedel** **«producers»**

PANDORA FILM was founded in 1981 and established itself as distributor in Frankfurt and became a leading distribution company of international arthouse movies. In 1997 PANDORA FILM Produktion was founded as production division based in Cologne. Their aim is to cooperate continuously with writers and directors who develop their own and unmistakable cinematic language.

Company production credits include over 80 titles.

www.pandorafilm.com

FILMS & CO-PRODUCTION SELECTION 1995-2010

2010	IM ALTER VON ELLEN HOME FOR CHRISTMAS HOCHZEITSPOLKA RUMPE & TULI LA PRINCESSE DE MONTPENSIER ON THE PATH MAMMA GOGO	Pia Marais Bent Hamer Lars Jessen Challah, Nachtmann, Silies Bertrand Tavernier Jasmila Žbanić Fridrik Thór Fridriksson	D NR/S/D D/PL D D/F Bos/D/Ö ISL/NOR/D
2009	GIGANTE THE STRENGTH OF WATER HUACHO UNTER BAUERN SHIRLEY ADAMS RATIONAL SOLUTION	Adrian Biniez Armagan Ballantyne Alejandro Fernandez Ludi Boeken Oliver Hermanus Jörgen Bergmark	URG/D/NL NZ/D Chile/D/F D/F SA S/D
2008	O'HORTEN TULPAN 33 SCENES FROM LIFE TEZA 35 RHUMS TANDOORI LOVE	Bent Hamer Sergey Dvortsevoy Malgorzata Szumowska Haile Gerima Claire Denis Oliver Paulus	NR/D D/KAZ D/PL D/F/ ETH F/D CH/D
2007	DIE UNERZOGENEN (THE UNPOLISHED) MADONNEN HOPE DISENGAGEMENT (TRENNUNG)	Pia Marais Maria Speth Stanislaw Mucha Amos Gitai	D D/CH/B D/PL F/D/I
2006	FELTRINELLI VALLEY OF FLOWERS LIGHTS IN THE DUSK TO GET TO HEAVEN FIRST YOU HAVE TO DIE YOU AM I EL CUSTUDIO	Alessandro Rossetto Pan Nalin Aki Kaurismäki Damshed Usmanov Kristijonas Vildziunas Rodrigo Moreno	ITL/D D/F Finl/D/F FR/CH/D Lit/D Urug/Arg/D
2005	FACTOTUM OBABA	Bent Hamer Montxo Armendanz	NOR/D SP/D
2004	STRANGER LE CHIAVI DI CASA WHISKY FAMILIA RODANTE THE LAST TRAPPER PARADISE GIRLS	Malgorzata Szumowska Gianni Amelio Juan Rebella, Pablo Stoll Pablo Trapero Nicolas Vanier Fow Pyng Hu	D/PL I/F/D Urug/Arg/D Arg/D/F F/D/CAN NL/D

2003	SPRING, SUMMER, FALL, WINTER JAGGED HARMONIES HAPPY END MARIA STRATOSPHERE GIRL	Kim Ki-Duk Dominique de Rivaz Amos Kollek Peter Nezter M.X. Oberg	Kor/D CH/D D/F/USA RUM/D D/F/CH/I/GB
2002	THE MAN WITHOUT A PAST VIVRE ME TUE THE MAGIC GLOVES WHALE RIDER	Aki Kaurismäki Jean Pierre Sinapi Martin Rejtman Niki Caro	Fin/D/F D/F Arg/F/D Neuseel/D
2001	MONSOON WEDDING SAMSARA BEAR'S KISS SHIK BRIDGET ABSOLUT WARHOLA	Mira Nair Pan Nalin Sergei Bodrov Bakhtiar Khudojnazarov Amos Kollek Stanislaw Mucha	USA/IN/D D/F/CH D/SP/F/I/SW D/F D/F/Jap D
2000	FAST FOOD FAST WOMEN IN VANDAS ROOM AYURVEDA – ART OF BEING THE QUICKIE SUPER 8 STORIES MY SWEET HOME MOSTLY MARTHA	Amos Kollek Pedro Costa Pan Nalin Sergei Bodrov Emir Kusturica Filippos Tsitos Sandra Nettelbeck	USA/F/D P/D D/CH D/USA D/I D/G D/CH/A/I
1999	ANNA WUNDER HIMALAYA	Ulla Wagner Eric Valli	D/CH F/D/CH
1998	POLA X GHOST DOG KATJA'S ADVENTURE LUNA PAPA WINGED MIGRATION	Leos Carax Jim Jarmusch Lars Hesselholdt Bakhtiar Khudojnazarov Jacques Perrin	F/D/CH USA/D DK/S/N/D/I D/CH/F/Ö F/D/I
1997	DANCE OF THE WIND OSCAR WILDE FULLMOON OS MUTANTES BLACK CAT, WHITE CAT	Rajan Khosa Brian Gilbert Fredi Murer Theresa Villaverde Emir Kusturica	D/GB GB/D CH/D F/SP/D F/D
1996	TANGO LESSON KAMA SUTRA GUY BAJO LA PIEL	Sally Potter Mira Nair Michael Lindsay-Hogg Francisco Lombardi	GB/F/D USA/D GB/D SP/D
1995	UNDERGROUND DEAD MAN FLIRT	Emir Kusturica Jim Jarmusch Hal Hartley	D/F/Y US/D US/D

AT ELLEN'S AGE

IM ALTER VON ELLEN

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