

A film by
CAROLINA HELLSGÅRD
with **ANNE RATTE-POLLE**
and **NELE TREBS**

WANJA

Press screening: Sa, 7.2., 14:00, CinemaxX 5
Berlinale-Premiere: Sa, 7.2., 19:30, CinemaxX 3
second screening: So, 8.2., 13:00, Colosseum
third screening: So, 8.2., 20:30, CinemaxX 1
EFM-Screening: Di, 10.2., 13:15, Marriott 1

FILM INFO

WANJA

Feature film, 4K, 87 min., Germany, 2015

Written and directed by Carolina Hellsgård

Produced by Johanna Aust / FLICKFILM GbR

Co-Production: STORYTELLERS GmbH & CO KG

Funded by BKM, Kuratorium junger deutscher Film and the nordmedia Fonds

with Anne Ratte-Polle & Nele Trebs

SYNOPSIS

The former bank robber Wanja is released from a long prison sentence. As her feelings of loneliness escalate, Wanja sets out to find work and hereby a new identity. Against all odds she lands an internship at a horse race track. In the stable she gets to know the troubled teenager Emma, and a tentative friendship develops between the two women. When Emma slips deeper into drug abuse, Wanja decides to rescue her.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The film depicts Wanja's struggle to reintegrate into society and the attempts to break her own isolation. In many ways Wanja tries to get out of her inner prison. In the search for personal freedom she makes choices which lead to her own downfall. Ultimately, WANJA is a portrait of people who have never had anything in life, and hardly exist in society, other than as numbers in criminal statistics reports.

STILLS



INTERVIEWS

Your own prison

– *Carolina Hellsgård about her debut feature film WANJA*

Your film WANJA tells the story of a woman who has spent seven years in prison for a bank robbery, and now is trying to gain a foothold in society. She moves to the countryside and begins to work as an assistant at a horse racing track. What gave you the idea for this material?

There is the famous case of a Swedish woman, Annika Östberg, who spent nearly 30 years in a Californian prison. Three or four years ago she was released and told her story: she could no longer connect to other people. She had completely forgotten how she should deal with them and because of this surrounded herself with animals, above all dogs. That was enough at first. It fascinated me that you can sit in jail for 30 years and when you come out you are in another sort of prison.

So WANJA is a film about isolation and a lack of freedom?

I definitely wanted to direct a story about people I know: they struggle and fight, they do everything right, but they fail nonetheless. That may sound pessimistic, but they simply do not escape themselves. I find that generally only very few people manage this.

At the end Wanja also fails, almost inevitably, but basically undeservedly.

I know that this is a bit mean towards Wanja, because she actually does everything right. But very often our lives are determined by chance, by circumstances and by people that we seemingly have no power over. Wanja thinks that it will all be okay if she does everything right. But she doesn't understand that other people are not perfect. They too have their own stories, their own difficulties, problems and murky motivations. Wanja is not naïve, but she is convinced that she alone is the problem. She expects that if she could only make everything right, everything will proceed in the right way. But of course it doesn't work like that. Simply because we don't live in a fair and equal society.

And then on top of everything Wanja meets Emma, a young girl with drug problems.

That's right, like in a Film Noir. Wanja encounters the femme fatale, the blonde. Although Emma is very young, she could almost be Wanja's daughter, but she is just the wrong daughter. But that is like in real life. There are many people who always choose the wrong friends. They could be together with the right person, but then nevertheless decide on the wrong one.

Is WANJA a women's story?

Wanja is a woman and a mother, but that's not the main point. Actually it's a very classic story; someone gets out of prison and tries to find their way.

Anne Ratte-Polle gives Wanja incredible strength. How did you come across her?

For the role of Wanja I didn't make a casting, I had met Anne, and found her to be an incredibly captivating person. I gave her the script, and that's how we got to know each other. I never thought of another Wanja, it was always Anne; this particular face and the special aura and personal history that she carries with her, and which proved to be perfect for the role. We often shot in very long takes, so that we wouldn't disrupt her acting. I wanted to have as few cuts as possible. I think that this continuity is good for the film, and that one can simply watch the actors. They are mostly stage actors, and can sustain long scenes.

How did you do your research?

Anne and I were often in the women's prison in Berlin-Lichtenberg. Anne had a conversation there with a prisoner, whereas I mostly spoke with the social workers. I wanted more of a view from the outside and to know what happens with drug addicts upon their release. The story with the horse racing track however, that is my own story. I grew up near a racing track in a suburb of Stockholm in an incredibly bleak area. My best friend was a lot like the young Emma, who gets into trouble in the film.

Did you model Wanja on someone?

For WANJA we watched first and foremost the film *Le Samourai* by Jean-Pierre Melville. You can see that at the beginning. Wanja lies there on the couch and counts her money. That is exactly like with Alain Delon in *Le Samourai*. There are a few other references as well, like for example the bird. And Melville also uses these desaturated colours, these grey-brown landscapes. The cinematographer, Kathrin Krottenthaler and I let ourselves be inspired by his films. We also looked to Melville regarding the special atmosphere that surrounds a solitary person, with all the interpersonal problems that come with it. In WANJA the communication is minimalist and often means something else than that what is actually being said. Some people can see through that, but for Wanja it proves to be problematic. I'm Swedish and this is how people often talk where I come from, at the same time you can find it in the films of Melville or Antonioni; not much is said, but every word counts, and often alludes to another meaning.

In your film everything appears rigorous and cool: the people, the landscapes, the camera.

We shot in winter and early spring, in the north of Germany. Of course that was a bit depressing. And it's really cold in a horse stable. But we definitely did not want to shoot a summer film. And yes, Kathrin Krottenthaler's camera is very rigorous, very observant, and very exact. Above all we tried to keep the film as simple as possible, simple to resolve, with few settings and precise scenes. There are no long crane shots for example, deliberately, we didn't want the distraction. I stayed true to André Bazin in that sense and his theory of realism: long takes, and as few cuts as possible. We also worked really simply with sound. And ultimately we trusted Anne: she would be able to carry the film.

How was the shooting?

We shot very precisely. We had to work very quickly and more concentratedly, since we only had 27 days for shooting. We hardly produced any superfluous material. We didn't experiment and we didn't improvise. We researched and rehearsed a lot beforehand, but on location we strictly realized everything immediately. As if on command.

Interview made by Thekla Dannenberg, Berlin 10. 01.2015

A hollowness that can't be overcome
– Actress Anne Ratte-Polle about the role as Wanja

In WANJA you play a woman who tries to build a new life after seven years in prison. She goes to a small place in the north German countryside, works as an assistant at a horse trotting track, and from the first moment on, one has the feeling, that she is not going to make it. What excited you about the role?

As I read the script I had to laugh a lot, I found it pretty funny. And I thought that was great: to be able to laugh about a character who even after getting out of prison is still oddly locked in and trapped. Wanja tries to make the best of her situation, in her own special way, which is not everybody's idea of normal. But for Wanja, the world has ceased to be a normal place.

How did you approach the character of Wanja?

It is a classic story. Wanja tries to start over again, and almost succeeds, until she meets a younger version of herself: Emma, a sixteen-year-old girl with heavy drug problems. Ironically her attempts to save Emma, ultimately leads to her own relapse and downfall. This is the classical theme of how the rescuer often drowns while rescuing. But the way in which Carolina tells it in her film I found extraordinary: the story moves forward in an incidental way, and the somewhat laconic scenes are underlined with thriller like suspense. Carolina told me about Marguerite Duras and her female characters, about women who fell through the cracks and lost themselves, and for whom there is no way back into society. I thought that was great inspiration for how to approach the character of Wanja.

Do you have a weakness for women who don't fit into society?

I'm mainly interested in roles that are not easy to classify. I find it very exciting to dive into a fantasy, an imaginative space, and create a character based on experiences that are not easily categorized. A great advantage with WANJA was that I had a lot of time to prepare. Eighteen months before we started shooting, I knew that I was going to make the film with Carolina. That is an enormous luxury that I never had before. I had a particular vision for the character and Carolina immediately said, that's also what she imagined. Then we discussed the backstory and history of Wanja very intensely for the course of the whole preparation period.

How did you research for the role?

I went to the women's prison in Berlin Lichtenberg. I even had them shut me in a cell, but that was only allowed for a few seconds. But even in this short amount of time you get a sense of how it feels to be shut out of society, because you represent a threat to it. I found that very hard. I think that it tears up something inside of you. And so an abyss is created, a deep distrust not only towards other people and what they might think of you, but also a distrust of yourself. A female inmate told me: "I cannot trust anybody, not even myself, because I deceive myself." And it doesn't matter what one has done; the fact that one must be locked up, or becomes locked up, is something that you carry within. It creates an abyss within that cannot easily be overcome.

Did you talk to many women prisoners?

I spoke for a long time with one woman, she was a completely different type of person than Wanja, but had a similar background with robberies and drug addiction. I was sitting in her cell and she told me that being on heroin feels like being an embryo in the womb. And I was well able to imagine how one can pass one's time in jail like that. This woman had started using heroin in prison since almost everyone does. Beforehand she was an alcoholic but had never taken hard drugs. The fact that Wanja stops using drugs while in prison, shows how incredibly strong she is.

Did you model Wanja on any filmic characters?

I found no female figure to model her on. First and foremost I watched male characters, like for example Alain Delon in *Le Samourai* by Melville, Vincent Gallo in *Buffalo 66* or Ryan Gosling in *Drive*. I also found the film *Raumfahrer* by Georg Nonnenmacher interesting. The film is about a prisoner transport, they travel through the country in their prison bus and look at the world through the windows. One of them says: the true enemy is time. One has too much of it and it helps to just check off the daily duties of each day in prison. Don't use your brain too much. That I saw also in Wanja. She is pragmatic, she doesn't busy herself with things that she cannot change, and she tries to make the best of it. That's what I like about the character, how she goes through life and the film. She does it without fear.

But she withdraws herself from the world. She moves to Sulingen in the north German countryside.

I come from a village in the north, so I enjoyed being in that region once again. And I understand well why Wanja goes there. She has gone through a lot. Wanja lived in a city before, probably a place like Bremen, but she left her past behind there. In this respect she is grown up, enough that she knows herself and also the potential dangers. She wants to live a simple, normal life. By the way, I could never have imagined how loud it is in prison. I experienced it myself in there. Keys are constantly rattling in locks on the doors, it echoes incessantly in the barred corridors. No surprise that afterwards one wants to move to the country and simply have some peace.

Is WANJA about the lack of freedom?

I was interested in this hollowness that one senses, when others no longer trust you and when one starts to mistrust oneself. And that is an actuality right now. Surveillance and controls are rigorous and forces people to become more adaptable and conformist. In the past it was religion that was monitoring you – God sees everything; today it is the security checks at the airport and the cookies in your mobile phone.

Interview made by Thekla Dannenberg, Berlin 14.01.2015

PRODUCER'S NOTE

Relentlessly and with reduced means, Carolina Hellsgård tells the story of Wanja, a woman who tries to reintegrate into society after many years in prison. Although we never get to know exactly what happened in the past, we accept her situation without question as well as her decision to rigorously reject the role of the victim repeatedly offered to her. Her passiveness is only superficial though. As Wanja finally dares to assert herself and allow personal contact, she initially appears to have succeeded – until her past threatens to catch up with her.

I have known and collaborated with the filmmaker and author for over 10 years. Carolina Hellsgård's sense of humour and her distinctive feeling for atmosphere, concise dialogue and authentic living conditions, which she couples with politically charged themes, has always impressed me greatly. I find it necessary to make films such as WANJA, which offer unadorned yet empathetic insights into the fates of luckless and socially-underprivileged people. In today's society, there simply can't be too many films like this.

Johanna Aust, *Producer*

MAIN CAST

Anne Ratte-Polle (Wanja)

Nele Trebs (Emma)

Robert Viktor Minich (Rudi)

Marko Dyrlich (Ulf)

Michael Baderschneider (Otto)

Mehmet Yilmaz (Nicolas)

Jan Bülow (Kevin)

Tim Blochwitz (Robbe)

Hauke Petersen (Dennis)

Joachim Schönfeld (social worker)

Florian Anderer (social worker, job center)

Rike Eckermann (social worker, job center)

Cornelius Schwalm (robber)

Laura Kiehne (nurse)

Stefan Dietrich (drug user)

Katharina Blaschke (group leader)

Karin Tomzik (veterinary)



CREW

Writer/Director: Carolina Hellsgård
Cinematographer: Kathrin Krottenthaler
Sound recorder: Robert Fuhrmann
Light: Sebastian Fuhrmann
Editing: Carolina Hellsgård, Antonella Sarubbi
Scenography: Nadin Meister, Lea Walloschke
Costume design: Elena Neuthinger, Lena Nienaber
Make-up: Jessica Krause
Sound design: Christian Obermaier
Sound mix: Jochen Jezussek
Foley: Martin Langenbach
Mastering: Chaussee Filmton
Music: Steffen W. Scholz
Produced by: FLICKFILM GbR
Producer: Johanna Aust
Co-producer: Kim Neumann, Jürgen Schaum, Sebastian Wolters / STORYTELLERS GmbH
& CO KG

PRODUCTION DETAILS / TECHNICAL CREDITS

Original title: WANJA
English title: WANJA
Production country: Germany
Year: 2015
Country: Germany
Genre: Fiction feature
Duration: 87 min
Frames per second: 24
Color/Bw: Color
Available formats: DCP, Blu-Ray, DVD
Aspect ratio: 1.85:1, 16:9
Sound: 5.1, Dolby E, Stereo
Language: German
Subtitles: English

Financial support by

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production funding
nordmedia – Film- und Mediengesellschaft Niedersachsen/Bremen mbH -
production, distribution funding

BIOGRAPHIES

CAROLINA HELLSGÅRD

WRITER / DIRECTOR / EDITOR

Carolina Hellsgård works as a writer, editor and director in Berlin. After completing a MFA from the Berlin University of Arts, she received a DAAD-postgraduate grant for Los Angeles, where she studied film directing and screenwriting at the California Institute of the Arts. Hellsgård's award-winning films have screened in film festivals such as the Berlinale, Clermont Ferrand International Film festival, Films des Femmes and Oberhausen Short Film Festival. She is a former participant of the Berlinale Talent Campus, a Sweden-America Fellowship and a recipient of the Berliner Künstlerinnenförderung. Her short film LÄUFER was nominated for the German Critic's Award 2013.



FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

WANJA (2015), Berlinale, Perspektive deutsches Kino 2015

LÄUFER (2013) Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival „Soirée Allemande“, France; Kyiv International Short Film Festival, Ukraine; „Germany Shorts“ in Cannes, Shortfilmcorner Cannes International Film Festival; Festival Tous Ecrans, exground filmfest, Wiesbaden, Gothenburg Filmfestival, Sweden; Landshuter Kurzfilmfestival, Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival, UK, Young Nordics at Nordisk Panorama, Malmö, Sweden, Filmfest Osnabrück „Nord Shorts - Awardwinning Short Films“

Nominated for the German Critic's Award 2013, nominated for Startsladden, Best Swedish Short, Gothenburg International Film Festival 2014

Awards: Best short film „Youth Days“, exground filmfest, Wiesbaden

1st Prize at Mostra de Cinema de frontera, Spain

HJÄLTAR (2012) Berlinale, Generation; Gothenburg Filmfestival, Sweden; BUFF Filmfestival Malmö, Sweden; Swedish Shortfilm c/o Folkets Bio, Sweden; Filmes de Femmes, France; International Women's Film Festival, Dortmund; Seen & Heard Film Festival, Sydney, Australia; Film Capalbio Cinema, Italy; Olympia International Film Festival for Children & Young People, Greece; ZUBROFFKA - International Short Film Festival, Poland; Sofia International Film Festival, Bulgaria

HUNGER (2009) Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen; Leeds International Film Festival, UK; Open Air Filmfest Weiterstadt; Huesca Film Festival, Spain; Molodist Kyiv International Film Festival, Ukraine; Rio de Janeiro International Short Film Festival Curta Cinema, Brazil; Festival Courts Devant, France; Internationales Filmfest Braunschweig; Stuttgarter Filmwinter; Psarokokalo International Short Film Festival of Athens, Greece; Glasgow Film Festival, UK; Alpine, Austria; Festival Internacional de cine Cinema Jove, Spain.

Awards: Jury Preis, Festival Internacional de cine Cinema Jove, Spain 2010; Jury Preis, Festival Internacional de Curtas de Belo Horizonte, Brazil 2009; 1. Preis, Konstanzer Kurzfilmspiele, 2009; Honourable Mention Curta Cinema, Rio de Janeiro Film Festival, 2009

**KATHRIN KROTTENTHALER
CINEMATOGRAPHER**

Kathrin Krottenthaler is a cinematographer and film editor based in Berlin. From 2002 until 2010 she was a member of Christoph Schlingensiefs team with many productions for example at Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz Berlin, Burgtheatre Vienna, Haus der Kunst Munich, Deutsche Oper Berlin and Filmgalerie 451. Her film work has been shown at numerous venues and film festivals internationally (Berlinale, Int. Filmfestival Göteborg, Festival des Deutschen Films, Int. Hofer Filmtage, Max Ophüls Preis, Filmes de Femmes, Paris, and Clermont-Ferrand).



She was nominated twice for the national Women's Director of Photography Award at IFFF Cologne, for example with her camera work for the Max Ophüls Prize award winning movie TORPEDO by Helene Hegemann and HJÄLTAR / HEROES directed by Carolina Hellsgård.

She also works as a live cinematographer and video artist for theatre plays by René Pollesch as well as for the german-english performance group Gob Squad and the art collective Chicks on Speed.

Wanja is her third collaboration with Carolina Hellsgård and her first feature length film.

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

ATHEN – ORIENTIERUNGSLOSIGKEIT IST KEIN VERBRECHEN ca 90 min,
2015 – in postproduction - by Tatjana Turanskyj & Marita Neher

WANJA (2015) 87 min, by Carolina Hellsgård, Flickfilm GbR und
Storytellers GmbH

THREE STONES FOR JEAN GENET (2014) 7min, by Frieder Schlaich,
Filmgalerie 451

LÄUFER (2013) 14min, by Carolina Hellsgård, Flickfilm GbR

HJÄLTAR (2012) 14:30 min, by Carolina Hellsgård, Hellsgård
Filmproduktion

TORPEDO (2008) 45min, by Helene Hegemann, credofilm

THE AFRICAN TWINTOWERS (2005-2009) 84min, by Christoph Schlingensief,
Filmgalerie 451 / ZDF

WANJA (LEAD)
ANNE RATTE-POLLE

Anne Ratte-Polle studied at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Rostock from 1996-2000. In addition to engagements at various theaters, such as the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus, Schauspielhaus Zürich, Deutschen Theater, Maxim Gorki Theater and the Hebbel am Ufer, Anne Ratte-Polle was a permanent ensemble member at the Schauspiel Hannover and the Volksbühne Berlin. She is currently performing "Murmelmurmeln", directed by Herbert Fritsch at the Volksbühne Berlin, and can be seen in the "Discreet charm of the Bourgeoisie", directed by Sebastian Nübling at the Schauspielhaus Zürich. Alongside her numerous theatrical engagements, Anne Ratte-Polle frequently performs in front of the camera. She is well-known to the wider cinema-going public from films such as Andreas Dresen's WILLENBROCK (2005), and Romuald Karmakar's DIE NACHT SINGT IHRE LIEDER (2004). She plays the leading part in two feature films at the Berlinale 2015 ("Perspektive Deutsches Kino"). In WANJA, the debut feature film by director Carolina Hellsgård, as well as in SIBYLLE, directed by Michael Krümmenacher. Anne Ratte-Polle lives in Berlin since 2005.

**FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION) CINEMA**

WANJA (2015) 87 min, by Carolina Hellsgård

SIBYLLE (2015) main character, by Michael Krümmenacher, HFF München

DIRTY YOUNG LOOSE (2013) main character ensemble,
by Lene Berg, Studio Fjordholm

DIE WELT DANACH (2012) main character, short, by Jens Wischniewski,
Filmakademie

HALBSCHATTEN (2011) main character, by Nicolas Wackerbarth, Unafilm

SHAHADA (2009) by Burhan Qurbani, Bittersuess

ILLUSION (2007) main character, short, by Burhan Qurbani, Arte

UMDEINLEBEN (2007) main character ensemble, by Gesine Danckwart,
Danckwart & Hansen Film

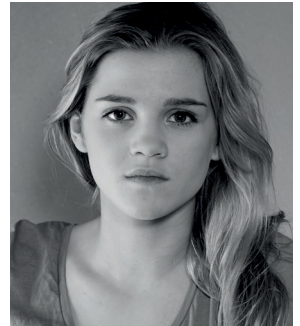
AUF NUMMER SICHER (2006) main character, by David Dietl, Kinoherz, ZDF

WILLENBROCK (2005) main character ensemble, by Andreas Dresen,
Arte, Ufa Filmproduktion

DIE NACHT SINGT IHRE LIEDER (2004) main character ensemble,
by Romuald Karmakar, Babelsberg Film, Eikon Film

**EMMA (LEAD)
NELE TREBS**

Nele Trebs lives with her family in the north of Berlin. She started acting at the age of 6. Since then she has taken part in a number of award winning film- and TV-productions such as LORE, DIE TÜR, DIE PATIN, WANJA. She is currently in the 10th grade of a Brandenburger school.

**FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION) CINEMA / TV**

WANJA (2015) 87 min, by Carolina Hellsgård

STADT, LAND, TOD (2012) by Felix Herzogenrath, Cinecentrum

LORE (2011) by Cate Shortland, Rohfilm

MENSCH KOTSCHI (2011) by Norbert Baumgarten, Junifilm

KRUPP EINE DEUTSCHE FAMILIE (2011) by Carlo Rola,
Moovie-the art of entertainment

WENN FISCHE SCHREIEN (2010) by Annasophie Hartmann, dffb

UNSER CHARLIE (2009) by Zinneberg, Phoenix

DER KÖNIG VON THULE (2009) by Ciril Braem, Anna Wendt
Filmproduktion

ROSAMUNDE PILCHER- IN ZWEIFEL FÜR DIE LIEBE (2009) by
Dieter Kehler, NdF

DIE TÜR (2008) by Anno Saoul, Wüstefilm

DIE PATIN (2007) by Miguel Alexandre ,Teamworx

FLICKFILM

FLICKFILM was founded by Carolina Hellsgård and Johanna Aust in 2011 and is an independent film production company based in Berlin. Regardless if it's about fiction or documentary film, our focus is on authentic stories with a strong cinematic conviction, aiming for a socially engaged audience.

PRODUCER

Johanna Aust studied experimental mediadesign at the Berlin University of Arts and documentary filmproduction at Dramatiska Institutet in Stockholm. In 2011 she founded FLICKFILM together with Carolina Hellsgard in Berlin. She works as a producer and director in Sweden and Germany and has produced both fiction and documentary films such as HEIMAT SCHWEDEN (2011), LÄUFER (2013), OUR OWN TRACKS (2015) und WANJA (2015).

STORYTELLERS

STORYTELLERS produces feature films, series and documentaries for theatrical release, television, web and mobile. The producers are Jürgen Schaum (CEO), Sebastian Wolters (COO) and Kim Neumann. STORYTELLERS is a member of the CHROMA GROUP and runs offices in Hamburg, Berlin and Munich.

CONTACT

FLICKFILM GbR

PRODUCER

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