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Locarno Film Festival

CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE

DONKEY DAYS

A film by Rosanne Pel



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2025 | DRAMA | 107' | COLOR | NETHERLANDS GERMANY | GERMAN

INTERNATIONAL SALES



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INTERNATIONAL PRESS

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PRODUCER

Family Affair Films
Floor Onrust
www.familyaffairfilms.nl

CO-PRODUCER

Junafilm
Verena Gräfe-Höft
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Synopsis

Sisters Anna and Charlotte have always fought for their mother's attention. As old wounds reopen and suck them back to their family home, they unravel mesmerizing mysteries, including anonymous ashes and their mother's love for a donkey. Will they come to terms with each other?



Interview Director

Rosanne Pel

What were some of your early conversations in relation to the making of this film?

My producer, Floor Onrust, and I, were in an early stage talking a lot about women and their relation to their body. I think many women know at least one period of time in their lives where this was a strong topic and where this had a direct connection to food. To eat or not eat. It hangs of course together with a broader idea, with a frame, of how a woman should be. To which standards she should commit. I think lots of women experience mental suffering from this from an early age onwards. To my opinion this should not be taken lightly, but as a symptom of a problematic social construct.

Nevertheless, this itself also felt like a facade to me, and I wanted to create something that goes beyond. It brought me to a story about a system of control, in which women themselves keep each other hostage... and then it turned out it became a black comedy.

How was the script developed?

The script is for me not a blueprint of the film, I really see it as just a starting point. As a search text. Together with the acting rehearsals I use it as a tool to research the topic

of the film. Which basically comes down to continuously adjusting the script over time; before shooting, but also during the shooting periods. We shot the film over 5 periods just over a year. In between we edit the film material and I rewrite the next part again.

For financiers this asks for reading the script with quite different glasses on, and I'm very grateful I got so much support and trust from everyone to allow me to work like this.

This is Jil Krammer's first film credit. How did you feel this added to the role of Anna?

In an early stage we were looking for established actresses to play Anna's role. To be honest; the options we had and those we found through agencies were very minimal. Together with Maris Eufinger we started street casting and came across Jil Krammer.

Since my debut film Light as Feathers I have a strong love for working from scratch with people who have no acting experience. It demands a strong preparation and rehearsal process. It's not an easy road to success but what I feel I get in return when it works out is that someone possibly completely embodies a very specific role. How Jil Krammer

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It is about a system of control, in which women themselves keep each other hostage... and then it became a black comedy.

was able to play Anna added an enormous emotional impact and credibility. Indirectly, this meant actress Susanne Wolff had to deliver the same. I think she truly did something quite special there as she made it completely and utterly believable that they are sisters.

How did you find working with both Jil and Susanne to manage the delicate and difficult dynamic between their characters?

It requires trust from all parties involved. I think I can say that the three of us have quite strong characters which lead also to strong opinions or ideas. So this trust was definitely tested, probably rightfully so. We needed this trust in order to let the most difficult scenes succeed. There was a lot of discussing, trying scenes out in very different ways. While doing so, I tried to remain close to my vision and intuition while simultaneously being very open to other options or interpretations.

Why donkeys?

It actually came from a small rehearsal exercise which spun slightly out of control. The daughters would find out about their mothers spending habits on charities. I thought a good charity would be a donkey farm. While playing, suddenly Jil and Susanne started to find donkeys everywhere. The masterpiece; a painting of a woman standing on a donkey, with a triangle behind her. We all found this very funny, but then there was also something else; how the daughters felt it almost as a betrayal, a hidden part of their mother's life they weren't a part of. I also thought; they actually don't



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We shot the film over 5 periods just over a year. In between we edit the film material and I rewrite the next part again.

really know who she is. So as funny as it seems, it could also be seen as a tragic symbol for their relationship. The actual painting made it into the film.

Can you talk about the mother and what it means when we see a younger version of her?

You are dealing as a family with the past, which can also be sometimes projected weirdly into the future. I wanted to create a mother figure which is almost more like an icon and with that remains abstract. I think the sisters are not only dealing with their own mother but with a problematic heritage which is caused by a social construct of how women have been shaped over time in how they should be and which standards to follow. With introducing a younger version, I could touch this side of the story.

Where is the film set, and when? Could you give us a sense of the setting of the film?

Hamburg. Current day.

Although the house of the mother always felt like something else to me. A surreal place, almost separate from the world and a specific time. Different rules count there. It's a place of chaos. I tried to play with this. Because I think for the characters it's the other way around. The world feels chaotic to them and living at their mother's house is where they feel in a strange way comfortable. It's what they know.

What to you are the core themes of this film?

A fractured female triangle in meltdown.

Tell us about your collaboration with Aafke Beernink. What decisions around the camera angles, movement, lenses, angles etc. make this film so visually interesting?

Because we work with improvisation we try to stay as flexible as possible. Which means working with a very small crew of just 4 people on set, and with a great support of many other crew members who stay around but not on set. This means technically we work within the limitations that are given. For both me and Aafke it's the most important to be able to jump in spontaneously, adjusting how we feel in the moment how a scene should be captured. I think Aafke has a very special ability to stay completely present for what is happening in front of the camera. She knows how to catch the right moments. I think it translates into a visual rough style, which stays true to the brutality of what happens while at other scenes captures the beauty or fragile intimacy.

Tell us about your collaboration with Ella Van Der Woude to produce the soundtrack.

I try in all my collaborations to continually question the work we are doing. That counts during the shooting, but also for the editing with Xander Nijsten or the sound with Mark Glynne. With this film, it was such a precarious balance. It tipped very quickly over to one or the other side. With the soundtrack Ella and I felt that happening maybe even more. In the end I think Ella created music which is not just a support for emotions, it does something else than that, it plays with an emotional state of being. ■

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Because we work with improvisation, together with the DOP we try to stay as flexible as possible. I think it translates into a visual rough style, which stays true to the brutality or captures the beauty or fragile intimacy.



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Director's Biography

ROSANNE PEL studied at the Utrecht School of Arts where she received her bachelor for directing and scenario fiction in 2011. In 2015 she received her master's degree at the Netherlands Film Academy. Her debut film **LIGHT AS FEATHERS** premiered in TIFF's Discovery program in 2018. The film received several awards like best feature film and best scenario in Cinemajove International Film Festival, the jury prize at Brussel International Film Festival, Dutch Film Critics Award and best actor at Premiers Plans D'Angers in 2019. **DONKEY DAYS** is Rosanne's second feature. With **DONKEY DAYS**, Rosanne participated Torino Script Lab 2020 and Cannes Cinefondation 2022.

Director's Filmography

2018

LIGHT AS FEATHERS
TIFF Discovery section

Producers

Family Affair Films is a female-led production company established by Floor Onrust, committed to creating authentic stories that bring fresh perspectives and resonate with audiences worldwide.

Our documentary credits include Steve McQueen's **OCCUPIED CITY** (Cannes 2023) and Bianca Stigter's **THREE MINUTES - A LENGTHENING** (Venice 2021).

Some highlights of our feature slate are Anthony Schatteman's **YOUNG HEARTS** (Berlinale 2024) Rosanne Pel's **LIGHT AS FEATHERS** (Toronto 2018) and Urszula Antoniak's **BEYOND WORDS** (San Sebastian 2017).

Rosanne Pel's second feature **DONKEY DAYS** (2025) will premiere in Locarno.



Main Cast

Anna

Jil Krammer

Charlotte

Susanne Wolff

Ines

Hildegard Schmahl

Crew

Screenplay:

Rosanne Pel

Direction of photography:

Aafke Beernink

Editor:

Xander Nijsten

Original music composed and produced by:

Ella van der Woude

Set designer:

Sophia Lund

Sound designer:

Mark Glynne

Costume Designer:

Petra Kilian

Totem

TOTEM is a Paris-based international sales and production company launched in 2019. We seek out talents that bring new perspectives. Films lead to emotions and emotions lead to reflection. We want films to travel and people to travel in film.

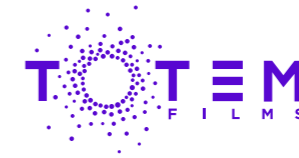
TOTEM ATELIER develops and produces early stage projects with a strong international potential.

TOTEM FILMS sells Totem Atelier productions worldwide and acquires handpicked feature films and documentaries for international distribution.

Selected filmography

TOTEM FILMS selected filmography includes among many others **KIKA** by Alexe Poukine (Cannes Critics Week, 2025) **MEASURES FOR A FUNERAL** by Sofia Bohdanowicz (Toronto Centrepiece program 2024), **SUDAN, REMEMBER US** by Hind Meddeb (Venice – Giornate degli Autori 2024), **THE VILLAGE NEXT TO PARADISE** by Mo Harawe (Cannes Un Certain Regard 2024), **MY FAVOURITE CAKE** by Maryam Moghaddam & Behtash Sanaeeha (Berlinale Competition 2024), **CROSSING** by Levan Akin (Berlinale Panorama 2024), **BLACKBIRD BLACKBIRD BLACKBERRY** by Elene Naveriani (Cannes Director's Fortnight 2023), **THE HYPNOSIS** by Ernst de Geer (Karlovy Vary 2023), **SLOW** by Marija Kavtaradze (Sundance 2023), Juho Kuosmanen's **COMPARTMENT N°6** (Cannes 2021 Competition – Grand Prix) **WE** by Alice Diop (Berlinale Documentary Award 2021) and **GAGARINE** by Fanny Liatard & Jérémy Trouilh (Cannes 2020).

TOTEM ATELIER filmography includes **SHORT SUMMER** by Nastia Korkia (Venice Days 2025), **THE HYPNOSIS** by Ernst de Geer (Karlovy Vary 2023 - Best Actor, Fipresci Jury Award, and Europa Cinemas Label), **DEAD GIRLS DANCING** by Anna Roller (Tribeca 2023), **MARCEL!** by Jasmine Trinca (Cannes Official Selection 2022).



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