

KALIAK

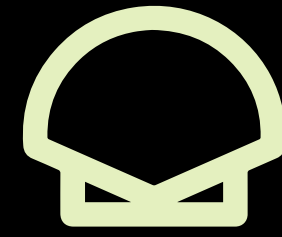
a film by ISABELLA EKLÖF



Donostia Zinemaldia
Festival de San Sebastián
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MANNA FILM PRESENTS



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Donostia Zinemaldia
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KALAK

a film by
ISABELLA EKLÖF

INTERNATIONAL SALES



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2023 | DRAMA

DENMARK, SWEDEN, NORWAY,
FINLAND, GREENLAND, THE NETHERLANDS

COLOR | 120'

LANGUAGES: DANISH, GREENLANDIC, ENGLISH

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

PREMIER COMMS

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JAN IS ON THE RUN FROM HIMSELF
AFTER BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED BY HIS FATHER.
WORKING AS A NURSE IN GREENLAND,
HE LONGS FOR DEEPER CONNECTION AT ANY COST.



Synopsis

Jan is on the run from himself after being sexually abused by his father. Living in Greenland with his little family, he yearns to be a part of the open, collectivist culture and become a Kalak, a "dirty Greenlander".



Director's note

MY ARTISTIC DRIVE IS ALL ABOUT ADDRESSING STEREOTYPES AND PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS. And there is so much to unpack within the Danish-Greenlandic relationship. Victim and perpetrator, collectivism and individualism, oppression and revolt. Jan wants to be a real Kalak, he wants to eat all the seal fat and raw liver, drink the cheap Danish beer and whore his way through the high and low society of Greenland, longing to be a part of the extended family of a collectivist culture. He's brought his little family along and at its core this film is about fathers, and how trauma is brought down through the generations. Jan has been raped by his father just like the Greenlandic culture has been raped by a chauvinist and overwhelmingly powerful foreign culture. How can Jan raise his own children while desperately running around trying to be everything his father was not? The film deals with trying to reconcile the hurt with the life-force, the highs with their inevitable lows, the love and the desperation with the frightened child's intense need to protect itself.

Isabella Eklöf



From page to screen

KALAK is the debut novel from Kim Leine, based on his own personal experience working as a nurse in Greenland. The novel was published in 2007 by Gyldendal and produced in collaboration with Gyldendal Group Agency, the largest publishing company in Denmark. KALAK stands out as an important benchmark in Nordic literature and has sold more than 35,000 copies in Denmark alone as well as being published in Sweden, Norway, Hungary and Iceland.

Director's interview



“ The book was just as compelling and pivotal as my intuition told me it would be. ”

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT HOW YOU CAME TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?

I found the book in my bookshelf one day when I was bored - I must have bought it at some point and when I read the back of the book, I couldn't understand why I hadn't already devoured it on the spot. I instantly wrote to the author to ask if the book was optioned - and only then I sat down to actually read it. Luckily, the book was just as compelling and pivotal as my intuition told me it would be. It speaks to me on so many layers - I resonate with the trauma of an overbearing and all-encompassing father, I share Kim's curiosity and fascination with collective societies in general and Greenland in particular, and I deeply relate to his and the main character's longing to belong and be immersed in a bigger family, a bigger togetherness and purpose.

THE CONFLICTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JAN AND HIS FATHER IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE STORYLINE, BUT OF COURSE AN INCREDIBLY DELICATE SUBJECT MATTER. WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES OF THIS? AND ULTIMATELY, WHAT DO YOU FEEL THE FILM GETS RIGHT ABOUT THIS STORY?

One of the challenges when it came to this project was how we could condense years of abuse and a very complicated relationship psychology into just a couple of scenes. The opening scene is sort of a snapshot of all those years of abuse. It's a challenging way to open a film, but it should put the complexity of the intense emotions connected to abuse at the back of everyone's minds throughout the film, a mixture of pleasure, shame, wrath and despair. It's very common for victims of abuse to struggle with conflicting emotions, and to try and contain that in one single scene was important to get right - but I am proud of the way it does play out. Emil does such an incredible job; you can see it all in his face. And then the final scenes between Jan and his father were incredibly poignant, I think you get a pretty good sense of what their relationship is. It's a semi-intellectual banter, where the father is overly familiar - a very obvious grooming technique the father used on Jan/Kim to make him feel smart and involved.

WHAT WAS IMPORTANT TO YOU WHEN ADAPTING THIS FILM FROM ITS SOURCE MATERIAL?

Inevitably, we had many challenges. There are so many delicate subject matters, there is a fine balance of getting it right – from colonial elements and post-colonialism, sexist elements, different aspects of feminism, and of course, abuse. Who is the victim? Who is the perpetrator? And what about all the characters - first and foremost the main character - who are both? There was a serious question to be asked whether this film should even be made. My answer to that must be yes - censorship is surely not the answer. But how do you then navigate all these complex questions? Because Jan is a victim, but he's also victimising others – and as the main character, we do see the story and the characters in it through his perspective. How then do we bring the women's stories to life in a way that is nuanced, genuine and most importantly, not revictimising?

AS THE BOOK IS BASED ON A TRUE STORY, WAS THERE ANYTHING IMPORTANT THAT YOU WANTED TO REALLY GET RIGHT FOR THE FILM ADAPTATION?

As my personal angle on the story, the idea of immersing yourself in a culture, understanding it from the inside, and celebrating it was important. As is natural with visual media, we focused on the material aspects of Jan's experience - the food, the colours, the materials of the houses and textures of the clothes. We also held workshops in Nuuk to get perspectives on being a woman in Greenland and navigating romantic relationships to get other voices and angles on the community than the one Kim conveyed through the book.

I also chose to shift the focus of the story away from the drugs, which are very central in the book, and more towards the sexual and communal aspects of the story, which were more important and compelling to me personally.

In addition to this, the history of the complex Danish-Greenlandic relationship was also paramount to dive into and explore as a backdrop for the story. Danish colonization began in the 18th century and persisted until 1953, when Greenland became an integral part of the Kingdom of Denmark. In 1979, Greenland gained home rule, and in 2009, it achieved self-rule, giving it extensive control over domestic affairs while Denmark retained foreign policy and defense responsibilities. Today, the relationship is characterized by a cooperative partnership, with Denmark providing financial support and Greenland maintaining its own government. Needless to say, it is a history and relationship full of many layers, difficult power dynamics and traumas still in the need of reconciliation. The layers of oppression and indoctrination range from religious to sexual to the use of language, education and the right to make laws and regulations.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO FILM IN LOCATIONS THAT WERE SO TRUE TO THE SOURCE MATERIAL?

We had to use our network in Greenland a lot to get access to places. In Nuuk, there is a housing shortage and we had to pay a family to temporarily rehome to get access to the apartment which is Jan's and Lærke's apartment in the film. In Kulusuk, some of the people we worked with were family members of some of those who the story is based on some 20 years ago. In Greenland, everybody knows who Kim is, and everybody knows about the scandal involved – it became a challenge sometimes.



Some people we met were very suspicious, while others got really excited that a film was being made in their town and loved to take part as actors, extras, and crew. By a lucky chance, we actually got to shoot in the real apartment where Kim lived with his father in his teens. It would have been impossible to recreate such an old-fashioned lived-in space so perfectly - most of what you see in the film is actual decor that hasn't been changed by us.

IN PRE-PRODUCTION, DID KIM LEINE PLAY ANY PART / ROLE IN HELPING SHAPE THE STORY AND THE SCRIPT BEFORE YOU GOT TO FILMING?

Kim Leine and I wrote the script together and the final product was very much a 50/50-type of collaboration. All through the process Kim was incredibly generous and open, he gave me the freedom to adapt and to change the story to suit the film format, which was immeasurably valuable, as it allowed me to use all the available cinematic tools to optimise the story while still retaining its inner truth. We also got the excellent writer Sissel Dalsgaard Thomsen on board, who helped streamline the script and smooth out the inevitable dramatic flaws of mine and Kim's attempts to stay true to real life.

UNDERSTANDABLY, THE SEX/INTIMATE SCENES MUST HAVE BEEN TRICKY TO APPROACH AS A FILMMAKER. WHAT WAS IMPORTANT TO YOU ABOUT THESE THAT WOULD IN TURN HELP PORTRAY THE STORY TO THE VIEWER? WAS AN INTIMACY COORDINATOR USED ON SET?

Yes, an intimacy coordinator was used, but I also feel that after having done as many sex scenes as I have throughout my short career, I've developed the tools to keep the actors safe and importantly, with a feeling of agency and control.

As a female filmmaker, I've always been very conscious of the male gaze and it's been crucial for me to steer away from replicating it - in fact, I've rather enjoyed replacing it with a heterosexual female gaze and confusing parts of the male audience with what they're supposed to think and feel. With this film, I felt we needed to be very clear about the nature of the abuse that happens to Jan - non-ambiguous, real, stark and almost clinical. But what happens between him and the women in the film is more about the relationship between them, and so it wasn't necessary to be explicit about the sex.

THE LOCATIONS AND SETTING REALLY PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE FILM; TELL US ABOUT THE PROCESS OF SCOUTING FOR THE PERFECT DANISH / GREENLANDIC LANDSCAPES TO SHOOT? AND WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES OF FILMING THERE?

For Greenland, there were two main locations: Nuuk which is the capital, and Kulusuk which is a village on the east coast. We were warned that shooting in the village was simply not possible, but it was important to all of us as we wanted to get the feel of the location just right. Of course, the people who warned us were right - on route to Kulusuk our plane had to turn around because the wings were iced over and the de-icing machine in Kulusuk had broken down several months ago! That delayed us quite a few days and the team had to scramble to get everything in place for the second part of the shoot. Additionally, we got home right on time but after our flight there was a two-week delay where nobody could get in or out of the area because of snow storms!



CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR CREATIVE TEAM AND WHAT THEY BRING TO THE FILM?

I met Nadim Carlsen, our Director of Photography, at film school and we've now worked together on several projects. We've developed a style together which reached its peak in HOLIDAY, but this film was almost a 180 and a bit of an experiment for both of us; moving away from wide, stylised, choreographed shots to a tight, intense and reactive hand camera. Nadim is really fantastic with light, even though he had so few resources to play with, since every single piece of equipment we used had to be shipped in the fall, stay the winter and then be shipped back in the spring. Nadim had to work a lot with natural light and enhancing that to achieve the look of the film. It helps that he's got a lot of experience with documentary still photography, not least because we were working with real people and authentic locations - we arrived with a documentary mindset to try and capture the heart of the location.

I'd also worked with Josephine Farsø (production designer) and Sascha Valbjørn (costume designer) before. It's very helpful to bring people to set who you have an established relationship with, and you feel comfortable letting go of, and allowing them the creative control and to trust their vision. The whole film was established to have this 90s look and feel, colourful but at the same time muted and subdued. Resources were limited, but everyone did an incredible job of it.

The musicality of a film is very central to me. The sound editor, Mark Glynn, and I have an amazing collaboration and we really enjoyed working together on this project. We brought with us as much as we could of the unique sounds of Greenland and a lot of it ended up in the film.

Anna Eborn, who I worked collaboratively with as co-editors on the project, is a director herself and the experience of working with her was unique and another exciting experiment to me. We sat in the same office in different rooms editing different scenes and sequences, came together and talked and went away to refine and reshape our own and each other's work. It was exciting to be able to be so hands on and at the same time have the support of someone who has the eye of a director as well as an editor's skill. Anna does slow cinema herself and for once I had to be the one to say that we should cut out sooner and pick up the pace. Very refreshing!

Assistant Director Mikisoq Lyngé was an important creative sparring partner and crucial in bridging the gap of a Swede portraying Danish and Greenlandic culture, especially in his home town Nuuk and as a point of reference and a safe space for actors and other collaborators.

Of course, working with renown VFX supervisor Peter Hjorth was a pleasure and a privilege. Without him we wouldn't have been able to tell dramatic stories of sex, violence and death with the realistic and gritty vibe I think the film has today.

“ There is a sense of anarchy to the word *Kalak*. To be dirty and genuine are two sides of the same coin. ”

TO YOU WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE WORD KALAK?

I wouldn't presume to define it myself, since I'm not Greenlandic. I love the ambiguity of it: to be dirty and genuine are two sides of the same coin, to dare to live. There is a sort of sense of anarchy to it, the liberation of not giving a fuck about social norms, especially the ones people try to force on you from above. I think that's a very crucial part of why Jan feels at home with the word. There's so much collective trauma within the Greenlandic community, that his trauma doesn't feel so foreign. He doesn't have to feel shamed and an outcast because it's more common, especially with the people he seeks out and hangs out with. I think there's a tolerance to the word, like lovingly calling someone a slut or a slob.

I think all of our definitions of the word changed while filming. The speech Karina gives at the table while explaining what *Kalak* means is written by the actress Berda Larsen, it isn't mine or Kim's words. That was important to her and a very good call on her side. We also improvised the banter around the word in the bar scene, which wasn't in the script. It's lucky we did, because I think Jan's journey to understand and embody the word is a thread that helps us navigate the film - it's the name of the film and the book, after all.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DIFFER FROM YOUR PREVIOUS FILMS?

For many of my projects, I've been a bit afraid of being "psychological" because I kind of hate the standardised Hollywood narrative: you take a person, subject them to a crisis, they resist at first, then learn and grow, happy ending. It's too neat. Life isn't that simple and art shouldn't be either. But I had to go into that world for this project because that is exactly what happened to Kim Leine in his story. So we went closer, tried to capture the nuances of the feelings of the characters through an inquisitive and intuitive camera. I also felt I had to be slightly more anarchistic in my general visual approach and let go of control because of the many real locations, non-actor characters and gung-ho production style of the film.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE THAT AUDIENCES, IN DENMARK, GREENLAND AND ACROSS THE WORLD, TAKE FROM THIS STORY?

I guess that there are many ways to live your life, and that it's important to not be judgmental about how people deal with their trauma. At the same time, we should be mindful of each other. Being hurt is certainly no excuse to hurt others. I hope that's clear in the film.

Isabella Eklöf

Born in Stockholm, Sweden, Isabella moved to Copenhagen to attend the Danish Film School as a director. Upon graduating in 2011, she received the prestigious Bisballe Award for her graduation film NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND. Eklöf has directed 11 short films.

Isabella Eklöf's feature debut HOLIDAY debuted in Sundance in 2018 and then travelled the festival circuit, winning the Grand Prix at New Horizons FF as well as four awards at the Danish Film Critics Association Bodil Prize, including the Best Film award.

She co-wrote the screenplay for acclaimed BORDER by Ali Abbasi that won Un Certain Regard at Cannes Film Festival in 2018. In 2019 she received the respected art award The Carl Th. Dreyer Prize for her work. In 2020 Eklöf directed two episodes of Apple TV series THE SERVANT, showrun by appraised director M. Night Shyamalan. In 2021 she directed four episodes of acclaimed HBO TV series Industry. She has many stories to tell and will do so with her signature move; to unapologetically expose both the beauty and ugliness of human nature with a crisp and analytical, yet tender, lens.



Filmography

2018 - **HOLIDAY**

Director and co-writer, Feature Film

2018 - **BORDER**

Writer, Feature Film

2011 - **NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND**

Short



Emil Johnsen | ACTOR

Emil Johnsen grew up in Botswana, Africa, with five elder siblings, in the rural villages of Molepolole and Maun, where he spent most of his childhood and teenage years. His interest for acting started early on in life, and immediately after finishing school, he moved to New York to study at The Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute and then to Sweden where he continued his studies at The Swedish Academy of Performing Arts.

He is one of Norway's most prominent and well-respected actors, known for his diverse character portrayals and riveting presence. He recently won the prestigious Hedda Stage Award for Best Male Lead Actor of 2023, for his portrayal of Edouard in his latest stage adaptation of the French writer Edouard Louis books. Emil is a company member of The Norwegian Theatre in Oslo and has also worked extensively at The National Theatre of Norway as well as The Royal Dramatic Theater in Stockholm.

Early on in his career, Emil was a Rising Star nominee at the Stockholm International Film Festival, after winning great recognition for his two lead roles in the feature films *CORRIDOR* and *GUIDANCE*, for which he won the Jean Carmet Award for Best Male actor in European and French Feature Film. Besides his work on stage, Emil is known for his extensive work in Norwegian and Swedish Films and Television series, and as of late his strong lead performances in feature films such as *HIM* (dir.: Guro Bruusgård) and *ALL THE BEAUTY* (dir.: Aasne Vaa Greibrokk).

Asta Kamma August | ACTRESS

Asta Kamma August is a versatile actress working in the Swedish-Danish film industry. Her recent projects include *THE HYPNOSIS*, directed by Ernst de Geer, which received three awards at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2023.

August's career highlights include her role as Benedicte in *THE PACT*, directed by the renowned Bille August. In 2022, she made her mark in *BURN ALL MY LETTERS*, sharing the screen with esteemed actors Bill Skarsgård and Gustav Lindh. Her involvement in *THE KINGDOM*, helmed by director Lars von Trier, further solidified her reputation as a sought-after actress in the industry.



On television, August's talent shines in series like *SEX* (2020), where her portrayal of Cathrine earned her a nomination for a Danish Film Award, a testament to her ability to engage audiences on the small screen. She also made her mark in *THE NEW NURSES* (2019) and *FOLLOW THE MONEY*.

August's stage performances, including *MENS – THE MUSICAL* (2015) and *DE RENE RUM* (2016), have garnered acclaim. Her involvement in *THE LEGACY* (DR, 2014) showcased her versatility. In 2017, August won the theatre awards: The Believe in You Award at the Lauritzen Award and the Reumert Talent Award.

Totem Films

TOTEM is an international sales & production company based in Paris and launched in 2019.

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

TOTEM FILMS acquires feature films to export them all over the world.

TOTEM FILMS selected filmography includes, among many others, BLACKBIRD BLACKBIRD BLACKBERRY by Elene Naveriani (Directors' Fortnight 2023), A SONG SUNG BLUE by Zihan Geng (Directors' Fortnight 2023), ANIMALIA by Sofia Alaoui (Sundance 2023 - Special Jury Award), SLOW by Marija Kavtaradze (Sundance 2023 - Best Director Award), THE SUPER EIGHT YEARS by Annie Ernaux & David Ernaux-Briot (Directors' Fortnight 2022), COMPARTMENT N°6 by Juho Kuosmanen (Cannes Competition 2021 – Grand Prix), MONEYBOYS by C.B. Yi (Cannes Un Certain Regard 2021), BALLAD OF A WHITE COW by Beh-tash Sanaeaha & Maryam Moghaddam (Berlinale Competition 2021), WE by Alice Diop (Berlinale Encounters 2021 – Best Film) & AND THEN WE DANCED by Levan Akin (Directors' Fortnight 2019).

TOTEM ATELIER filmography includes THE HYPNOSIS by Ernst de Geer (Karlovy Vary 2023, where it won 3 awards), DEAD GIRLS DANCING by Anna Roller (Tribeca 2023), MARCEL! by Jasmine Trinca (Cannes Official Selection 2022).



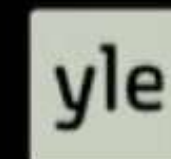
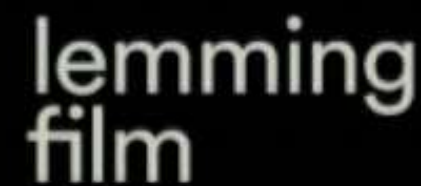
Cast

JAN	Emil Johnsen
LÆRKE	Asta Kamma August
KARINA	Berda Larsen
ELLA	Connie Kristoffersen
NIKOLINE	Vigga Tukula
AMANDA	Allie Maggie Kvist
MARKUS	Bertram Krassèl
OLE	Søren Hellerup
SÖREN	Anders Mossling



Crew

SCREENPLAY BY	Kim Leine, Isabella Eklöf & Sissel Dalsgaard Thomsen
ADAPTED FROM THE NOVEL BY	Kim Leine
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Nadim Carlsen
COSTUME DESIGNER	Sascha Valbjørn
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Josephine Farsø
PRODUCER	Maria Møller Kjeldgaard
EDITOR	Anna Eborn & Isabella Eklöf
SOUND EDITING	Mark Glynne
PRODUCTION COMPANY	Manna Film (DK)
CO-PRODUCTION COMPANIES	Mer Film (NO), Memento Film (SE), Film i VÄST (SE), Made (FI), Lemming Film (NL), Polarama Greenland (GL), Beofilm (DK)
INSTITUTIONS SUPPORTING THE FILM	Danish Film Institute, Filmfyn, Norwegian Film Institute, Mediefondet Zefyr, The Netherlands Film Fund, The Netherlands Film production Incentive, Swedish Film Institute, Finnish Film Foundation, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, The Government of Greenland, NAPA – The Nordic Institute in Greenland, Kommuneqarfiq Sermersooq, The Creative Europe Programme – Media, DR, SVT, NRK, YLE
DISTRIBUTION IN SCANDINAVIA	Mer film, Scanbox, Polarama Greenland
DISTRIBUTION IN BENELUX	Gusto
INTERNATIONAL SALES	Totem Films



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