



#### WORLD SALES

**The Match Factory GmbH**

Balthasarstr. 79 - 81  
50670 Cologne/Germany

phone +49 221 539 709 - 0  
fax +49 221 539 709 - 10  
e-mail: [info@matchfactory.de](mailto:info@matchfactory.de)  
[www.the-match-factory.com](http://www.the-match-factory.com)

#### PRESS

**RICHARD LORMAND** world cinema publicity

[www.filmpressplus.com](http://www.filmpressplus.com)  
[intlpress@aol.com](mailto:intlpress@aol.com)

In Locarno:

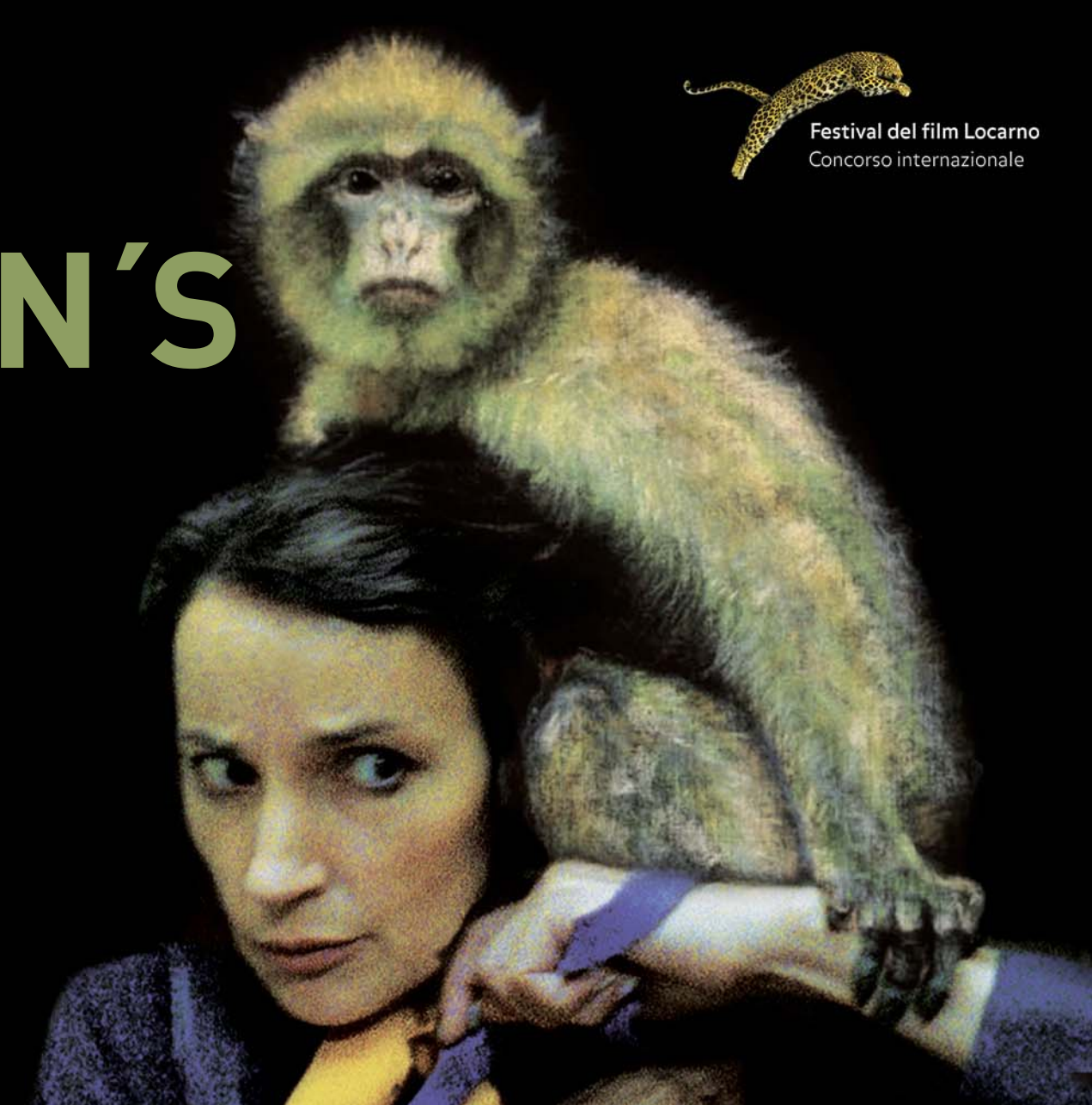
phone +33 9 7044 9865  
+33 6 0949 7925  
+39 347 256 4143

supported by



# AT ELLEN'S AGE

A FILM BY  
PIA MARAIS



Festival del film Locarno  
Concorso internazionale





## 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, Ellen may well modify this new challenge too, to fit her own needs...





## PIA MARAIS BIOGRAPHY

Pia Marais (Johannesburg) grew up in South Africa, Sweden and Spain. She studied sculpture and photography at art academies in London, Amsterdam and finally the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf before going on to study film at the Deutsche Film und Fernseh Akademie (Dffb) in Berlin. She made several shorts, including “Loop” (1996), “Deranged” (1998), “Tricky People” (1999), and “17” (2003), and after several engagements in film business as a casting director and assistant director, made her 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. Her second feature film „Im Alter von Ellen“ („At Ellen’s age“) was developed in the Résidence du Festival de Cannes.

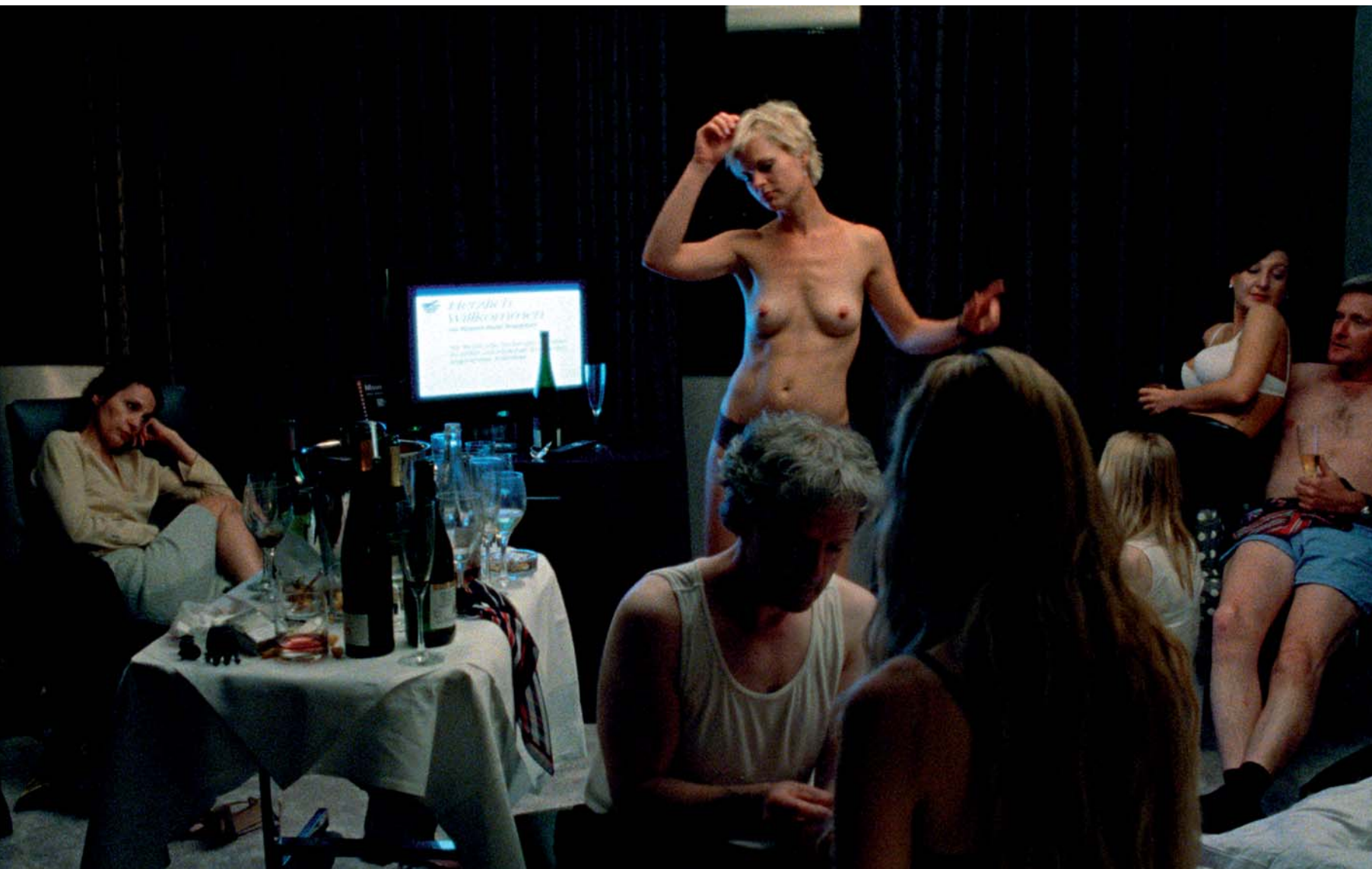


### FILMOGRAPHY:

	LAYLA FOURIE (in development)
2010	AT ELLEN’S AGE (Im Alter von Ellen)
2007	THE UNPOLISHED (Die Unerzogenen)
2002	17 - Seventeen (short)
1999	TRICKY PEOPLE (short)
1998	DERANGED (short)
1996	LOOP (short)







# COMMENTS FROM WRITER-DIRECTOR PIA MARAIS

## 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

I think 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.



## COMMENTS FROM JEANNE BALIBAR

----

I believe Ellen is a very fragile person at a moment of her life that makes her even more so. She is discovering throughout the film that there are means for her to become a lot stronger than she would ever have thought she could become.

----

The way she handles her emotional crisis is I think to let herself drown in other people, to renounce all her will and personality, nearly disappearing in the group of animal rights' activists where she has landed. I think this is her process of getting over the crisis. This is a sign of faith, of openness, that brings her strength.

----

Personally, I'm not interested at all in animal rights, which both my sons resent me very much for. I have been involved in political protests, for the defense of HIV positive people with Act Up in the 1990's and for the defense of illegal immigrants in France.

----

Maybe Ellen's age has a connection to the French expression „l'âge de raison"... „L'âge d'Ellen", Ellen's age, could be that moment in one's life when he or she finds one's own personal strength....



# JEANNE BALIBAR AS 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





# CAST

ELLEN	Jeanne Balibar
KARL	Stefan Stern
FLORIAN	Georg Friedrich
REBECCA	Julia Hummer
BENNETT	Alexander Scheer
SIMONE	Eva Löbau
CLAIRE	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

# CREW

DIRECTOR	Pia Marais
WRITERS	Horst Markgraf Pia Marais
PRODUCERS	Claudia Steffen Christoph Friedel
COMMISSIONING EDITORS	Andrea Hanke (WDR) Georg Seinert (ARTE)
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Katja Christochowitz
1st ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Regina Tiefenthaller
PRODUCTION AFRICA	Jeremy Nathan Michelle Wheatley
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Hélène Louvart
EDITOR	Mona Bräuer
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Petra Barchi
SOUND DESIGNER	Andreas Hildebrandt
RE-RECORDING MIXER	Bruno Tarrière
COMPOSERS	Horst Markgraf Yoyo Röhm
COSTUMES	Gabriella Ausonio
MAKE-UP & HAIR	Claudia Schaaf



## TECHNICAL DETAILS

Length \_\_\_\_\_ 95 min  
 Picture Format \_\_\_\_\_ S-16mm, digital blow-up 35mm, colour, 1:1,66  
 Sound Format \_\_\_\_\_ Dolby Digital  
 Languages \_\_\_\_\_ German



## AT ELLEN'S AGE

a film by  
 PANDORA FILM PRODUKTION

in co-production with  
 WESTDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK & ARTE

supported by  
 FILMSTIFTUNG NRW  
 DEUTSCHER FILMFÖRDERFONDS  
 BKM  
 HESSISCHE FILMFÖRDERUNG

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

[www.ellen.pandorafilm.com](http://www.ellen.pandorafilm.com)



PANDORA  
 FILM

WDR

arte

FILMSTIFTUNG  
 Nordrhein-Westfalen

DEUTSCHER  
 FILMFÖRDERFONDS

Der Beauftragte der Bundesregierung  
 für Kultur und Medien

Hessische Filmförderung

MEDIA  
 A programme of the European Union

DOLBY  
 DIGITAL  
 IN BESTIMMTEN KINOS

REALFICTION

Dv8 Films

THE MATCH FACTORY