



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE 2024  
UN CERTAIN REGARD  
CAMÉRA D'OR

RENATE REINSVE

# ARMAND

A FILM BY

HALFDAN ULLMANN TØNDEL

# PERSMAP



**CAMÉRA D'OR**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

Drama - 2024 - NO - 118 minuten  
Bioscooprelease: 24 oktober 2024

## **Distributie**

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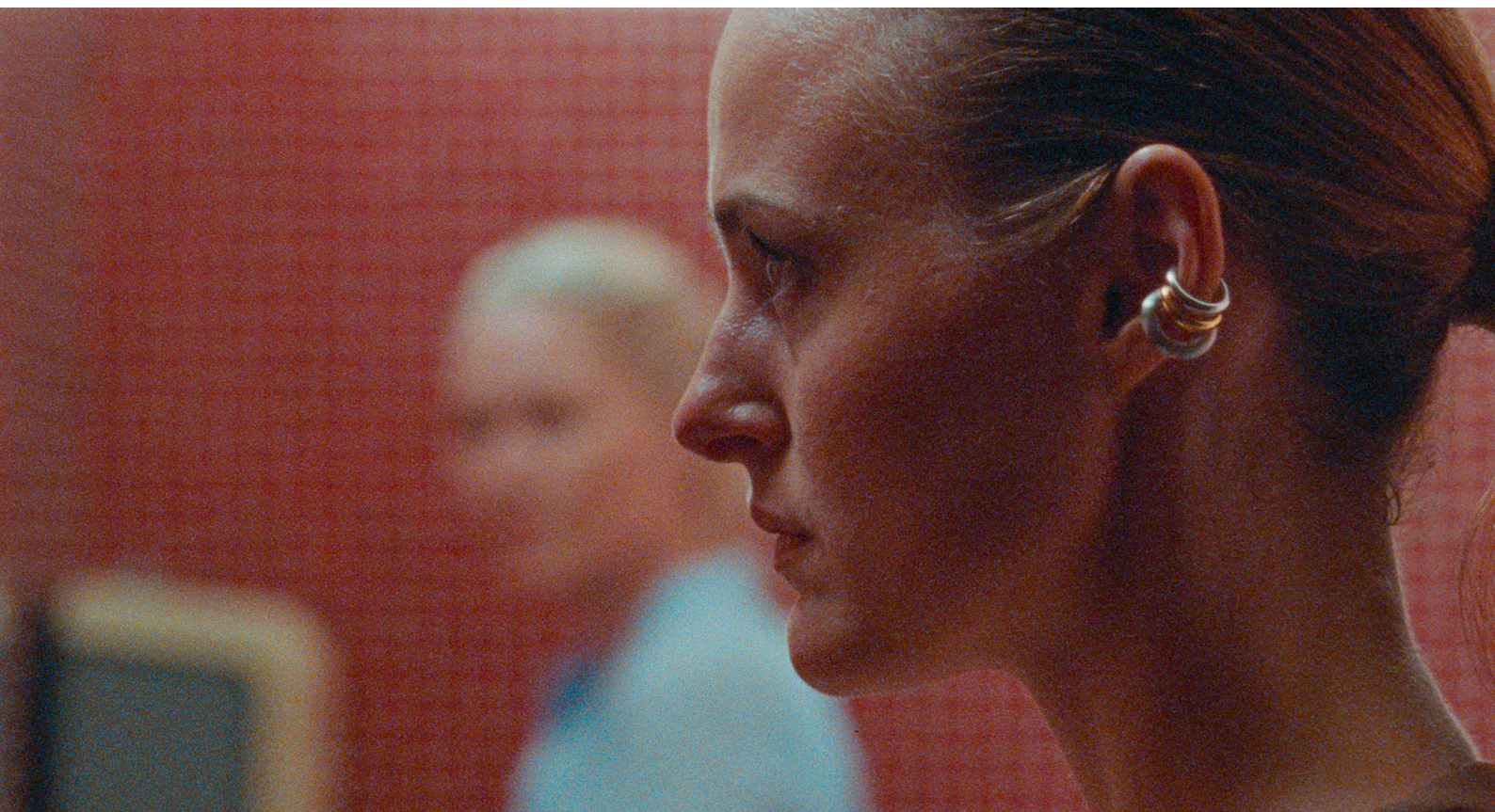
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## Synopsis

ARMAND is het speelfilmdebuut van de Noorse regisseur en scenarist Halfdan Ullmann Tøndel (tevens de kleinzoon van Liv Ullmann en Ingmar Bergman). Na een voorval tussen de 6-jarige Armand en zijn beste vriendje Jon, moeten hun ouders zich melden bij de schoolleiding. Met Renate Reinsve (THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD) in de hoofdrol: 'Renate Reinsve is riveting... her best work to date' (The Wrap).

Vlak voor de schoolvakantie begint zou de 6-jarige Armand ongewenst gedrag hebben vertoond tegen zijn vriendje Jon. De moeder van Armand (Renate Reinsve) en de ouders van Jon worden naar school geroepen. Niemand weet wat er precies gebeurd is, en samen met de schoolleiding proberen ze de waarheid boven tafel te krijgen. De spanning is om te snijden en al snel blijkt hoe makkelijk feiten te manipuleren zijn. Gaat het eigenlijk wel om de kinderen?

ARMAND ging op het Filmfestival van Cannes in première in het Un Certain Regard programma. Daar won regisseur Halfdan Ullmann Tøndel de Caméra d'Or voor Beste Debuut.





**Director: Halfdan Ullmann Tøndel**

## **Biography**

Halfdan Ullmann Tøndel studied directing at Westerdals School of Arts. He made his debut with the short film *BIRD HEARTS* (2015), which premiered in Karlovy Vary and won the 'Golden Chair' award at the Grimstad Short Film Festival in 2016. It was nominated for an Amanda award, and was selected on Cineuropa's list of the best European short films that year. In 2017, he made the short film *FANNY*, which premiered in Aspen and was also nominated for an Amanda award, as well as making the same list of Europe's best short films. Both films have been screened at festivals around the world.

In 2024 his debut feature *ARMAND*, starring Renate Reinsve and Ellen Dorrit Petersen, will have its world premiere in *Un Certain Regard* in Cannes. The film has already been sold around the world and will release in 2024/2025

## In conversation with

### Halfdan Ullmann Tøndel

#### **Can you tell us about the origins of the project?**

I heard a story from someone who had been on a camping trip with his class, they were six years old and there had been a conflict between two of the boys, when suddenly, one of the boys had become very aggressive and said something that a little boy normally wouldn't know anything of. This got me thinking, where and how did this six year old learn that kind of language? Then my mind started to spin on what his parents must have been like etc. and I was very intrigued about how much I could fantasise about the parents without actually knowing anything about them or the boy in question, but just with that little information of what had been said and done. I also worked in a primary school for many years and experienced how we can mirror children to their parents, for better and worse. And how every behaviour (from kids or parents) that was just a little bit outside of the norm was almost frowned upon, and paid very close attention to. Eventually it became obvious for me that there was a film to be made here. Where I could tell something about our society, how we deal with conflicts, but maybe, more importantly I could really explore the concept of boundaries, and how we relate to them.

I thought it was both interesting and funny to use the idea of something «adult» that had happened between two kids as a base for the story. I was especially looking forward to writing the scene where Sunna, the teacher, tells the parents what happened. Because we are very uncomfortable talking about sexuality when it comes to kids, those two words really don't fit together, and that makes it funny, but also allows for a lot of tension. Sexual exploration among kids is often a natural part of growing up. But when kids reach a certain age, that exploration once considered natural, can suddenly be considered deviant. In our research-period one of the principals I talked to said "Playing doctor is something we leave in kindergarten." (And I wrote that line into the movie), but what about first-graders who have just left kindergarten? It must be very confusing for a child for something to be natural one month, and then the next month the police can be called on the parents. For me it was the perfect set up for the exploration of boundaries, which is something that is very present in our society now. Nearly all the scenes in the movie concern situations with diffuse boundaries and difficult grey areas: Truth or lie? Victim or abuser? Guilty or innocent? Play or violence? Because, have we ever had such unclear boundaries between what's right and wrong - when such conflicting notions have been so close to each other? Today we have stronger and more unfiltered access to public figures than ever before, and I feel these people are the epicentre of this polarised 'moral' earthquake we are witnessing. This is why I made the character of Elisabeth (Renate Reinsve) a public figure.

Then I constructed this incident between Jon and Armand that could be completely innocent, or very serious depending on how you look at it, and how you choose to contextualize it. With that in mind I saw that the film could be more about how we, as adults, construct our own realities to fit with the perception of our identity and lives, rather than a story about two small boys having a conflict, which I was less interested in.

**The film unfolds entirely in a school. Can you tell us a little about why you decided on this singular setting and how you used this space?**

I have always liked one-location movies. It creates a very specific kind of tension and claustrophobia when you, as an audience, can't escape. And it also seemed smart from a production standpoint, given this was my first feature. Once I started writing there was really no limitations for what I saw inside this imaginary school, I really felt that every corner had a visual quality, which was super inspiring.

I had a very clear vision of the school from the very beginning. There are few buildings where the contrast between night and day is so great; during the day, when it is light, there is life and play and children running around, but after school these things are mere echoes. That energy and feeling lingers in the walls. I remember as a child once spending the night at school, and it became something mysterious, scary and magical. It was as if the 100-year-old-creature that the school building was, had come to life along with all the good and bad memories it had experienced.

It was important for me to create a lot of visual diversity despite the fact that we were stuck in the same building. I wanted the film to be a visually vibrant chamber play, so it was really important that every new location inside the school felt a little bit different. That all the rooms had different qualities, and that the hallways gave us the chance to breathe a little bit. I didn't want the audience to figure out the geography of the school, to be bound by anything «logical». For example all the bathroom scenes were initially written as many different locations; there was bathroom for the employees, there was one for boys, one for girls etc - but we ended up just using this one bathroom we built, because it made sense inside of the rules of the film. Of course there's a red bathroom in this school that everyone goes to once in a while. Everything inside the school was supposed to be free and almost dreamy. After school is over - there are no rules - was my thought.

I remember it being a difficult mental process though. After we had found our real location we had to transfer all these ideas from the imaginary school to something really specific. Because the school I imagined, was like a thing from a dream, not logical, not with «four walls». And I was forced to take every staircase, corner, door, lamp, window etc into my imagination, and after a while, not so long before shoot, I finally started to imagine the film in the school we were actually shooting in, and not the imaginary one. Fortunately.

**You mentioned that at first it can seem like children and parental issues are at the heart of the story, but it seems like you are actually much more interested in how we construct our own realities and identities as adults.**

I think my favourite kind of characters in films are the selfish ones. I just love seeing them try all sorts of tactics to get what they want, to me there is something pathetic about it, but also something very true about how we are as people, especially in our privileged western societies. Some people are altruistic, and thank god for that, but the cynic in me is not super convinced about them or their motives either. I believe there is almost always something selfish behind every action (even in just a very small ways), and I am not judging it, I just like to portray it in film. And I do it with love, because I

don't think selfish motives automatically make someone particularly bad. But maybe we are just really afraid of what might happen if we lose control of how we are being perceived.

**The teachers/administrators at the school are also definitely not spared. In your eyes, how do social institutions hold a significant share of the responsibility?**

Norwegian people are quite vague with their motives and intentions. We are very afraid of being direct or saying things as they are. We are afraid of sticking out. I guess since our state is responsible for running everything in our country (which is a good thing), it is maybe also more difficult for us to take personal action and responsibility for things that occur. Especially inside state driven institutions maybe. The satirical approach here is that if you don't have a paper describing the exact situation, and what do to with it, then nobody knows what to do. So every incident that's happening in schools, hospitals, social offices that are a little bit outside of the norm could be a big problem for each of those institutions, and you are in some way, dependent on people daring to take responsibility on an individual level.

It is the same in the movie. There is no exact routine for this exact situation that has occurred, and then the teachers first try to see if this can just blow over (by using euphemisms etc) But then when they are confronted for not being responsible, they end up overdoing it and make the situation even worse. But Jarle, the principal, never takes action because of his moral standpoint (at least not in the beginning), he takes action because he is afraid of being held accountable. And that is not the cleanest of intentions.

I think Sunna starts out with good intentions, she actually believes that talking about this in civilized matter is the best approach, but then her intentions are also compromised when her admiration and feelings for Elisabeth overshadow the case.



**At several points in the movie you play with the viewer's expectations of how far you can push something, or push a scene. Can you tell us a little about what attracts you as an artist and filmmaker to go so far as to make the everyday seem ridiculous or abstract?**

I just love seeing those kind of scenes myself. It creates unpredictability, tension, humour and I really believe that it is sometimes more accurate reflection of life also. For example the laughing scene, in many other films that scene may have lasted one minute just to illustrate the point: Elisabeth has lost it. But then you as an audience are not part of the experience, and that for me that is really important. Being forced to sit and witness something for so long that you then become part of it, and are forced to take a standing. I am very curious on how that scene will play with a bigger audience. Who will laugh? Who will be very uncomfortable? A few times I have been in a cinema where some people have cried, and some have laughed in the same exact moment. Then I feel the filmmaker has really achieved something, which is, constructing a scene where the audience is forced to bring themselves into the movie, and their reaction is based on themselves, not necessarily the scene itself.

**There's a certain physicality to the performances in the film almost to the point of a contemporary dance / choreography. Can you tell us how you worked with your cast to achieve this - what was the process and thinking behind these scenes?**

The scene where Elisabeth dances with Emmanuel, the cleaner, was something that developed a lot in the process. I initially wrote it as a very short sequence, maybe 30 seconds, wanted to say something about how the principal, Jarle (played by Øystein Røger), is starting to lose it. But then Renate, Patrice Demoniere (who plays Emmanuel) and the choreographer Sigyn Åsa Sætereng made it to a full dance which I really loved.

Because it said something about what state of mind Elisabeth is in, it said something about the principal's state of mind and also I could say to the audience: from now on, anything can happen. This scene is also the only scene in the movie that never changed from the first cut.

The other «dance-scene» is more symbolic maybe. I wanted it to be a visualization through dance and movement of one of the main questions asked in the film: where does the line between love and abuse go? Also, I wanted it to be an illustration of Elisabeth's life, how she is feeling her life is and what it has been. And in the end, she breaks free and leaves her traumas behind her. This is in any case just my interpretation, and not the single conclusion of the scene. I initially had this idea of all the hands touching Elisabeth, wanting a part of her. It was more of a «celebrity-focused» perspective, telling us something about our obsession with celebrities. But then as the story developed became more about Elisabeth also, her point of view, her feeling of being loved and admired in the beginning, but then that admiration getting more and more disturbing and dangerous, to the point of becoming abusive.

**Can you tell us about how you cast the film and why you chose to cast the two leads in particular - Renate Reinsve and Ellen Dorrit Petersen?**

A big shout out to Jannicke Stendal who did the excellent job with the main casting. I am so proud of the actors in this film. There's a very few people who have been



absolutely essential for this movie existing at all. And Renate is one of them. First of all, she was involved from the very beginning, before her character even had a name, before I knew what universe the film would take place in. This was back in 2016. Then I wrote the first draft, and Renate was super excited by the script which of course gave me a lot of confidence. Then many years followed where I was rejected for a production grant from the Norwegian film institute several times, and I started to lose hope in this project ever being realised, I was ready to give up. But the night Renate won best actress in Cannes she sent me a text message saying «Think about how great this is for our movie!» The fact she thought about our movie in the biggest night of her career touched me deeply, and I was ready to give it one more go. I am very glad I did. So yes, Renate's unconditional support for this film is something I will never forget, and was a bare essential for its realisation at all.

Except for Renate, the casting process was quite conventional I would say, we tested a lot of people for different roles. I am always very open in the casting process, I almost never say to the casting agent that this person should look like this or that. So the actors we ended up with in the latter rounds of audition were very different from each other. I like this because it opens up new things, and it forces me to reflect on a lot more compared to if I had decided beforehand how this character should look like. Ellen is one of the greatest actors we have in Norway, and her quality is undeniable. We did test quite a lot of actors for this role, and very different types. But with Ellen, I felt that our conversations in the casting process, she was open, curious and very brave, and she had a really interesting chemistry with Renate. These were the deciding factors. I am so extremely happy that Ellen accepted the role, and what she did with Sarah. Of course, in the end, I believe there is a real visual quality in the difference in how Ellen and Renate look also, and it adds to everything..

**Can you tell us how you worked with the cast to create such a unique dynamic between them. Renate mentioned that it was unlike anything she had done before. Could you tell us a little about the rehearsal process and preparations and the construction of these characters.**

I have to give almost all of the credit to the actors for that unique dynamic. We did have quite a lot of rehearsals beforehand, but its very individual how each of the actors responds to rehearsals, some use it to the test the material for themselves, others want to do it really really dry and simply in fear of «using up» a certain energy. But anyhow it was very important for me to see how the scenes were, since many of them are so long and quite complex, so I used rehearsals also to rewrite a little bit. Other than that I did talk quite extensively with each of them before shoot, so we were as sure as we could be on what each of the characters felt and thought in the different situations. For me it's also very important that every character got particular traits that they can use when they want to, and also small secrets that they kept from the others, and also from me sometimes. We talked also quite a bit on backstory, and a lot of details that were never even exposed in the movie. Everything that makes the character bigger, more human is good I believe. But then you are dependent on actors who can contain and use all that information in a constructive way, which the actors in this movie did to the fullest.

For me, being a director, is really about adjusting my method to what is best for each individual actor. Of course I will try to push them on some things, and some things I can trust are wise to do. But if an actor refuses to rehearse a scene for various reasons, I won't do it. I have to trust that they know themselves and their process.

**The film is a very original proposal but who and what could you say influenced the film, other films, directors or indeed artists, also those outside the realms of the cinema world?**

I have a very eclectic taste in music, film, art etc so I do pick up inspiration from many different places. I was super inspired by how Luis Buñuel made his satires. All the interruptions happening in ARMAND (the fire alarm, nosebleeds etc) are very inspired by the dinner party that gets interrupted all the time in THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE ... and how the invisible wall in THE EXTERMINATING ANGEL that just becomes an established truth, was also something I was inspired by. For the last choreographed sequence I was inspired by Pina Bausch and her work. I saw a David Hockney painting (California Art Collector), and that pretty much defined all of Sarah's development in the film (the last image of Sarah in the film has similarities with that of Hockney).

For the mood of the film I was very inspired by the 2018 version of SUSPIRIA and ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST (even though the film ended up looking quite different). Many of the compositions in the film were inspired by THE DOUBLE LIFE OF VERONIQUE (Kieslowski) and WILD AT HEART (Lynch). I was inspired by the playfulness from ALL THAT JAZZ (Bob Fosse), the ruthlessness of HOLIDAY (Isabella Eklöf), the tension from THE CELEBRATION (Thomas Vinterberg) and the sincerity of A PHANTOM THREAD (Paul Thomas Anderson).

Last, but not least I was very inspired by the bravery of ANGST (Gerard Kargl) and THE VIRGIN SUICIDES (Coppola) and how they decided to execute their first features. Not flawless, but with a lot of ideas and energy.



# Biographies

## Renate Reinsve

Renate Reinsve made her huge breakout with the role of Julie in the critically acclaimed film *THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD*. The film premiered in the main competition at Cannes in 2021, and Renate won the award for Best Actress. The film was later nominated for two Oscars, and two BAFTAs, one of which was for Best Female Lead.

The Norwegian actress's performances has received universal acclaim, as critics commend her natural charisma, emotional depth, and captivating presence on screen. Some of her recent projects releasing this year includes; *A DIFFERENT MAN* (2024) and *HANDLING THE UNDEAD* (2024), as well as the upcoming Apple+ series *PRESUMED INNOCENT* (2024) and the highly anticipated *ARMAND* (2024), which will debut at the 2024 UnCertain Regard at Cannes.



## Ellen Dorrit Petersen

Ellen Dorrit Petersen studied acting at Oslo National Academy of the Arts and is well-known for her performances in a wide range of productions on screen and on stage. Petersen has won the Amanda awards twice: in 2009 for her role in ICE KISS (director Knut Erik Jensen) and in 2014 for BLIND (Eskil Vogt). She was also nominated for her performance in THE MOUNTAIN (2011, Ole Giæver) and as the stepmom in THREE WISHES FOR CINDERELLA (2022, Cecilie Mosli).

Her roles in TROUBLED WATER (2008, Erik Poppe) and SHELLEY (2016, Ali Abbasi) were also praised by the critics. ARMAND is her second time in Cannes, after her supporting role in THE INNOCENTS (Eskil Vogt) in Un Certain Regard in 2021.



## Producer

### Eye Eye Pictures

Eye Eye Pictures was established in 2022 by producers Dyveke Bjørkly Graver and Andrea Berentsen Ottmar, both previously producers (and Graver CEO) in the production company Oslo Pictures. They were both among the producers on Joachim Trier's *THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD*, that brought home the prize for Best Actress to Renate Reinsve in Cannes, as well as two Academy Award nominations and two BAFTA nominations. In 2022 they brought the unromantic comedy *SICK OF MYSELF* by director Kristoffer Borgli to *Un Certain Regard* in Cannes. In 2024 they are back in *Un Certain Regard* with the debut feature *ARMAND* by Halfdan Ullmann Tøndel.

Eye Eye aims to continue producing director driven feature films and tv drama with high creative ambitions and international potential. Associated directors include Joachim Trier (in pre-production with *SENTIMENTAL VALUE*), Halfdan Ullmann Tøndel (*ARMAND*, 2024), Johanna Pyykkö (*MY WONDERFUL STRANGER*, 2024), Dara Van Dusen (in pre production with *A PRAYER FOR THE DYING* and Thea Hvistendahl (*HANDLING THE UNDEAD*, 2024) amongst others.

## Co-producer

### Keplerfilm

After having worked on award-winning films such as *THE LOBSTER* (Yorgos Lanthimos), *BULLHEAD* (Michaël R. Roskam), *BLIND* (Eskil Vogt) and *MONOS* (Alejandro Landes), longtime friends Derk-Jan Warrink and Koji Nelissen founded Keplerfilm in 2016. They currently work on a broad range of films: shorts and features, local productions and international (co)productions and for any platform available. Through EAVE, ACE and Binger Filmlab Koji and Derk-Jan were able to expand their international network. In 2022, Keplerfilm was selected as one of THE EURO 75 by Screen International, showcasing Europe's leading independent producers.

Keplerfilm strongly values building a creative breeding ground on which exceptional and talented writers and directors can grow into their full potential; inspiring them to find their own personal signatures and to dream big. Keplerfilm's ambition is to tell heartfelt stories - whether upbeat or sad, always deeply human and with a heart. Stories about real people, with inescapable struggles and genuine desires, while at the same time always aiming to entertain the audience intellectually.



## Cast

ELISABETH	Renate Reinsve
SARAH	Ellen Dorrit Petersen
ANDERS	Endre Hellestveit
SUNNA	Thea Lambrechts Vaulen
JARLE	Øystein Røger
AJSA	Vera Veljovic
FAIZAL	Assad Siddique
EMMANUEL	Patrice Demonière

## Crew

Written & Directed By	HALFDAN ULLMANN TØNDEL
Producer	ANDREA BERENTSEN OTTMAR
Co-producers	KOJI NELISSEN DERK-JAN WARRINK FRED BURLE SOL BONDY ALICIA HANSEN STINA ERIKSSON KRISTINA BÖRJESON MAGNUS THOMASSEN
Executive Producers	DYVEKE BJØRKLY GRAVER HARALD FAGERHEIM BUGGE RENATE REINSVE
Development Producer	RUBEN THORKILDSEN
Cinematography	PÅL ULVIK ROKSETH,FNF
Production Design	MIRJAM VESKE
Editor	ROBERT KRANTZ
Costume Design	ALVA BROSTEN
Hair & Makeup	EVALOTTE OOSTEROP
Sound design	MATS LID STØTEN
Music	ELLA VAN DER WOUDE
Casting	JANNICKE STENDAL HANSEN

