

# DON'T CALL ME MAMA

A FILM BY NINA KNAG



Karlovy Vary  
International Film Festival  
Crystal Globe Competition








# LOGLINE

Eva, a popular high school teacher and wife to the town's mayor, faces the ultimate test when she falls in love with a young asylum seeker, sparking a forbidden relationship with shattering consequences.



A person is swimming in a pool, viewed from above. The water is a deep blue, and the swimmer's arms and legs are visible as they move through the water. The background shows the pool's lane lines and the surrounding environment, all in a monochromatic blue tone.

# SYNOPSIS

Eva, 48, is a popular teacher and the wife of a local politician. While volunteering at an asylum centre to support his campaign, she meets Amir, an 18-year-old refugee and aspiring poet. Impressed by his talent, Eva mentors him and even invites him to live with them.

As her marriage unravels, Eva grows dangerously close to Amir. When she learns he's lied about his past, she tries to cut ties - but her desire overpowers her judgment. They begin an illicit affair which quickly consumes her, leading her to neglect her husband, her job and her best friend.

Thanks to Eva's support, Amir receives a residency permit and a shot at his dream. But when she discovers he's involved with one of her students, her obsession turns dark. As rumours swirl and her life collapses, Eva faces a harrowing choice: protect herself or expose Amir's secret and risk destroying him.

A story of passion, power and shifting sympathies, where the line between love and exploitation blurs.



A man and a woman are seen from behind, standing on a balcony and looking out at a body of water and mountains. The man is on the left, wearing a dark jacket, and the woman is on the right, wearing a dark jacket. They are both looking out at the water and mountains. The text "DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*Don't Call Me Mama* is a bold, intimate exploration of forbidden passion and power, seen through the eyes of a complex, boundary-pushing woman.

Eva is a character who both fascinates and unsettles me - she forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about longing, freedom and identity. I'm drawn to her contradictions, and I want the audience to feel that same ambivalence: to recognise the fragile line between empathy and judgment; desire and destruction.


What begins as a seemingly simple love story unfolds into something far more unsettling: a study of ego, exploitation and the subtle ways we justify selfishness while claiming it's love or care. As Eva's obsession deepens, she shifts from hero to antagonist in her own life.

On a broader level, the film reflects on how western societies treat those fleeing war and poverty, asking what happens when personal desire blinds us to structural injustice.

I don't aim to offer easy answers. I want to raise difficult questions about power, morality and what it means to feel truly seen - especially at a time in life when many women begin to feel invisible.

Nina Knag



A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a dark tank top and a thin necklace, is shown in profile from the chest up. She is looking towards the left. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of teal and yellow light. A quote is overlaid on the left side of the image.

*"Don't Call Me Mama  
embraces contradiction,  
discomfort and complexity -  
just like my main character."*

Nina Knag



# DIRECTOR

## NINA KNAG

Nina Knag is an award-winning writer and director known for several acclaimed short films, including *It's Alright* (2016) and *The First Days* (2019). She directed episodes of the youth series *Rumours* (NRK, 2023) and is currently developing her original drama series *Yosef Was Here*, produced by Monster Scripted. Nina also runs her own casting agency and teaches acting. *Don't Call Me Mama* is her feature debut.

### Filmography

*Don't Call Me Mama* (Se meg, 2025, feature).

*Rumours* (Rykter, 2023, drama series)

*The First Days* (De første dagene, 2019, short)

*It's Alright* (Vi kan ikke hjelpe alle, 2016, short)

*Towards the Sun* (Å snu seg mot solen, 2012, short)





# Q&A WITH WRITER/ DIRECTOR NINA KNAG

**How did the idea for the film begin to take shape for you? Are you a filmmaker who starts to think about a character or a situation or a mood?**

I'm always looking for ideas everywhere. Back in 2018, I was researching a TV series about refugees from Afghanistan, then I suddenly found news articles about Norwegian women volunteering in asylum centres who had developed sexual relationships with young men. At first, I was shocked and repelled by this but then I realised it was an intriguing idea for a film. I knew I wanted to focus on it from the woman's perspective.

Initially, I saw Eva as a woman I couldn't relate to at all. But then I started to ask myself the question, 'Could this be me or you?' That's when the story started to feel more interesting; that the audience feels this could be anyone. Although she steps over a line that most of us wouldn't step over.

**Eva's perspective is so crucial for this film - you could make a totally different film from Amir's point of view. Why was it so important to you that we're sticking so closely with her?**

It felt natural for me to write it from her point of view, because that was my way into this character and story. She's a troubling, complex character and I had to be in her mind to understand her. It was a balance, because Amir had to have a voice, too.

**Why did you want to give us little information about Amir but still have his journey be more mysterious?**

It was important that both Eva and Amir are real people with good and bad thoughts. Because we're with Eva's point of view, she doesn't know everything about Amir, so neither does the audience. I did a lot of research about young men who are fleeing to Norway, and they are told by traffickers that they often can't tell their whole truth if they want to get asylum in Norway. They are desperate, and their only hope to get to a better life might be to lie a little bit. Of course, I'm not trying to portray refugees in a bad light, but I wanted to show Amir's humanity. Since we're sticking with Eva's POV, we don't learn about all of Amir's sides. I wanted to ask a lot of difficult and complex questions, but I didn't want to provide the answers.



**I was fascinated to hear that you have a background in casting and you helped cast this film. What was the casting process like, especially for your three lead actors: Pia Tjelta, Tarek Zayat and Kristoffer Joner.**

Because I worked in casting, I thought the part of Eva would be a dream role for a lot of Norwegian actresses, but many of the first reactions casting director Camilla Glaister and I got from them were very negative. They didn't want to touch this story: they thought it was too problematic to play a mature woman having a relationship with a vulnerable young man. And some were afraid of the intimate scenes. The actresses were judging the character of Eva. Pia hadn't come up at first because I thought she could be too young. But she read the script and said, 'Finally! A director who wants to say something important!' I met her, we had two glasses of wine and we just clicked immediately. I asked her, 'Are you afraid of taking on a role like this?' She said, 'That's why I'm an actress, to push my boundaries.'

It was more difficult to cast Amir. We auditioned a lot of young men in Norway but there weren't that many actors who had experience and were from a Middle Eastern background. We started to look in Sweden and Denmark, and I remembered I had seen Tarek in a film called *Enforcement*. He was young in that film but was really good. After *Enforcement*, he had done other roles in Danish productions.

He came to Oslo for one audition with Pia and I immediately knew he had this chemistry we needed. When he got the part he did a lot of research and was very dedicated. He also wrote the poems that Amir writes in the film. When he sent me those poems, I started crying because he was so talented.

Kristoffer, I cast because Pia has a dialect from Stavanger and we knew we were setting the film in a small village, so it would be strange if they had different dialects. Kristoffer was perfect, not just because of the accent but because he's known for tough roles but also has a softer side to him. And, funnily enough, Pia and Kristoffer started their career together in the same film 23 years ago called *Mongoland*. So, this was their reunion many years later.

**Was it important to use an intimacy co-ordinator?**

Yes, we used Camilla Glaister, one of the first trained intimacy co-ordinators in Norway. It was great to have her with us because, for me as the director, I didn't want to push anything onto the actors. We rehearsed those intimate scenes with Pia and Tarek and it was all very planned out technically. It also helps that we were mostly women - the DOP, Alvilde Naterstad, and the



producers, Eléonore Anselme and Ingrid Skagestad. We all felt very prepared for those scenes, and we had to make sure Tarek was also comfortable given the themes of the film. I wouldn't have filmed this without an intimacy co-ordinator.

**The film has grand vistas of nature but also extreme close-ups. How did the visual language complement the story you were telling?**

We shot exteriors in Odda, a few hours outside of Bergen. It's a special place with a fjord surrounded by high mountains, and then we shot interiors in Bergen. We had 20 days of shooting and a lot of locations, so we had to work around that. I knew that I wanted to be very close to Eva because it's her story, and to make a strong, subjective dialogue from her point of view. And I also knew I wanted to feel close to the characters in the intimate scenes.

Our DOP, Alvilde, and I decided that we wanted to shoot it with hand-held cameras so that we would be able to follow the characters and be able to improvise and work freely with the actors. It also gives a sense of realism working that way. This small village of Odda is almost a character in itself, because the mountains are coming in closer and closer. This is a feeling

that is pushing Eva off a cliff almost; the paranoia she feels in this small town. It's also the sense of the outside looking in at them.

**Is this film ultimately about power?**

I think it's about the need to be seen and to connect on a deeper level. For Eva, she's been really hurt in her marriage and she can't connect with her husband anymore, so she seeks that connection with Amir. She feels unseen as a woman and I think that's something universal for middle-aged women. For Amir, it's life and death alongside his desperate need to feel secure. He's all alone without his family and needs to be seen as a human being, not just a refugee. He also needs someone to take care of him. Jostein needs to connect, he's lost Eva and he's trying to connect with her again.

Of course, it's about power and how far you're willing to go to protect your own skin. They have their lives and reputations to protect and, ultimately to them, Amir is not worth anything. I wanted to embrace the contradictions and discomfort in these situations. There is a fragile line between empathy and judgement.



**Do you think the audience will be shocked by the film?**

I think the audience might be surprised by some of the twists and turns. Some people will feel provoked by what she is doing. I hope it's a film that will inspire discussion.

Nina Knag was interviewed by Wendy Mitchell





# MAIN CAST







## PIA TJELTA

Pia Tjelta is an acclaimed Norwegian actress known for her powerful performances in both film and television. Her talent and dedication have established her as a prominent figure in Scandinavian cinema and television.

Tjelta made her screen debut in the cult hit *Mongoland* (2001) and gained wider recognition for her role in the award-winning film *Buddy* (2003). She has since appeared in a range of acclaimed projects, including *Mars & Venus* (2007), *Blind Spot* (*Blindsone*, 2018), and the critically acclaimed TV drama *Made in Oslo* (2022).

A graduate of the Norwegian National Academy of Theatre, Tjelta is also an established stage actress, frequently performing at the National Theatre in Oslo.





## TAREK ZAYAT

Tarek Zayat is a talented young Danish actor known for his compelling performances and rising presence in both films and TV series. With his charisma and dedication to his craft, Zayat is regarded as a promising upcoming talent in Danish cinema and television.

He gained recognition for his role in *Enforcement* (2020) and further showcased his versatility in the acclaimed series *Boys* (2022). Soon to come is his performance in *Crossing Lines* (2025).



## KRISTOFFER JONER

Kristoffer Joner is a critically acclaimed Norwegian actor, known for his intense and compelling performances. Renowned for his emotionally raw portrayals and commitment to complex roles - both in Scandinavian and international productions - Joner gained early recognition for his role in *Mongoland* (2001). He then went on to star in prominent Norwegian films, such as *The Man Who Loved Yngve* (2008), *The Wave* (2015), *The Quake* (2018) and *War Sailor* (2022). Internationally, he was cast in the Stephen Spielberg-produced thriller *The Revenant* (2015) and Paul Schrader's *First Reformed* (2017).





CREW







## ALVILDE HORJEN NATERSTAD

### Cinematographer

Alvilde Horjen Naterstad is an Oslo and London-based cinematographer, who has an MA in Cinematography from the National Film and Television School (2016) and a Film Certificate from Nordland College of Art and Film.

Her cinematography credits include the BAFTA-winning short *A Love Story* (2016) and the VIWIFF award-winning *The Egg and the Thieving Pie* (2019). She was also awarded a Gullruten for best cinematography for the acclaimed TV series *Kids in Crime* (2022). *Don't Call Me Mama* (2025), is her first feature film as cinematographer.



# VIDAR FLATAUKAN

## Editor

Vidar Flataukan is an established Norwegian film editor, known for his sharp narrative sense and long-standing collaborations in the industry. Flataukan has edited over 30 feature films and television series. He won the Amanda Award (Norway's top film Award) twice: in 2008 for *The Man Who Loved Yngve* and again in 2013 for *90 Minutes*. Other editing credits include such acclaimed films as *The Bothered Man* (2006), *Headhunters* (2011), and the recent feature *Shadow of Victory* (2024).

Flataukan's ability to shape emotional pacing and to elevate performance has created his distinctive cinematic style.







# PRODUCTION COMPANY

*Don't Call Me Mama* is produced by Eléonore Anselme and Ingrid Skagestad for The Global Ensemble Drama, the company created in 2020 by the internationally- acclaimed director Per-Olav Sørensen, best known for directing such miniseries as *Nobel* (2016), *The Saboteurs* (2015) and *The Playlist* (2022).

The Global Ensemble Drama is active both in the Nordic region and internationally, with offices in Norway, Sweden, and the UK, producing shorts, feature films, documentaries and television drama.

The company also produces drama series for Netflix and is the co-producer of the global hit *Home for Christmas*.

THE  
GLOBAL  
ENSEMBLE  
DRAMA



# PRODUCERS





# ELÉONORE ANSELME

## Producer

Over the past 25 years, Eléonore Anselme has worked on a broad range of feature films, television series and short films. She was one of the producers behind the TV series *Headhunters* (2022) and the feature film *Nothing to Laugh About* (2021). As a co-producer, she contributed to *So Damn Easy Going* (2022) and the Sundance award winning *Girls Will Be Girls* (2023). She was also part of the team behind the internationally acclaimed TV series *Occupied* (2015).





# INGRID SKAGESTAD

## Producer

Ingrid Skagestad graduated from the Norwegian Film School in 2014. Since then, she has produced the Netflix series *A Storm for Christmas* and the Netflix feature film *Royalteen Princess Margrethe* by Ingvild Söderlind. She previously worked as a production manager on several feature films and drama series, including the 2021 Academy Award-nominated *Triangle of Sadness* by Ruben Östlund, and *Borderline* by Gunnar Vikene.







# ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Director: Nina Knag

Script: Nina Knag & Kathrine Valen Zeiner

Producers: Eléonore Anselme and Ingrid Skagestad for The  
Global Ensemble Drama

Co-producers: Anders Hereid and Gunhild Oddsen for Screen  
Story

Cinematographer: Alvilde Horjen Naterstad FNF

Editor: Vidar Flataukan NFK

Music: Olav Røyarhus Øyehaug

Casting: Camilla Glaister & Nina Knag

Costume design: Maria Brinch

Production design: Fredrik Sivertsen

Sound design: Joakim Wieberg-Nielsen

Cast:

Eva: Pia Tjelta

Amir: Tarek Zayat

Jostein: Kristoffer Joner

Ingeborg: Kathrine Thorborg Johansen





Title: *Don't Call Me Mama*

Original Title: *Se meg*

Genre: Drama, Thriller

Production Year: 2025

Country of origine: Norway

Languages: Norwegian, Danish, English

Running time: 105 mins

Colour: Colour

Shot on: Digital

English, Danish, and Norwegian subtitles available

Delivery format: DCP/ ProRes / H:264

Domestic release date: October 2025





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