

# BLIND

a film by *ESKIL VOGT*









## Synopsis



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### Logline:

Having recently lost her sight, Ingrid retreats to the safety of her home, a place where she can feel in control, alone with her husband and her thoughts. In an effort to maintain a connection to reality, she begins to write a series of sexually-charged stories, whose fictional begin to inhabit her everyday reality.

### MEDIUM:

"Blind" focuses on Ingrid (Ellen Dorrit Pettersen), a woman contending with the loss of vision. In trying to navigate a world without sight, she spends her days attempting to reconstruct the visual world as she once knew it. As she struggles with her new found predicament, she begins writing salacious fictional stories that slowly morph into fantasies of what her husband does when she's not around. When real-life events seamlessly give way to Ingrid's creations, she is able to find a means to come to terms with her disability. Provocative, sexy and deeply-felt, "Blind" won raves out of its premiere at Sundance where it won the World Cinema Screenwriting Award as well as the Label Europa Cinemas Award at the Berlin International Film Festival the following month.

## LONG:

After losing her sight, Ingrid (Ellen Dorrit Petersen) rarely leaves her apartment. She can still remember how the world around her looks, but the images that were once so clear are slowly replaced by darker visions. Ingrid suspects her husband Morten (Henrik Rafaelsen) doesn't always leave for work when he says he does. Is Morten there in the apartment, sneaking around, silently observing her? Or when he claims to be writing e-mails to colleagues, is he actually chatting with his lover online? Determined to maintain her hold on reality, Ingrid begins writing salacious stories for her memories and thoughts to inhabit. It's within these imaginative fabrications that she introduces us to Einar (Marius Kolbenstvedt), Morten's old college friend. Einar is a film and music aficionado who is lonely and when not immersed in the world of online porn, roams the streets of Oslo ogling pretty women. Einar soon finds himself spying on Elin (Vera Vitali), a pretty young single mother who lives across the street whose life was lost through divorce.

Elin then begins experiencing absurd, inexplicable events that seem to be related to Ellen's mounting insecurities over her husband's possible infidelities.

*Blind* is the outstanding directorial debut of Eskil Vogt, the co-writer of Joachim Trier's acclaimed *Reprise* and *Oslo, August 31st*.

Scooping the World Cinema Screenwriting Award at Sundance, *Blind* has gone on to win numerous awards internationally, including the Europa Cinemas Label for Best European film at Berlin, the New Talent Grand Prix at CPH PIX in Copenhagen and the Golden Tulip at Istanbul.





## FILM INFO

Year of production: **2014**  
Country of production: **Norway**  
Runtime: **96 mins**  
Genre: **Drama**  
**Color**  
Language: **Norwegian**  
Subtitles: **English**

## CREW

Directed by **Eskil Vogt**  
Screenplay **Eskil Vogt**  
Producer(s) **Sigve Endresen , Hans-Jørgen Osnes**  
Music **Henk Hofstede**  
Cinematography **Thimios Bakatakis**  
Film Editing **Jens Christian Fodstad**  
Sound **Gisle Tveito**  
Set Design **Jørgen Stangebye Larsen, Solfrid Kjetså**

## cast



*ELLEN DORRIT Petersen*  
[ Ingrid ]

Ellen launched her film career in 2008, with a double-feature film debut: leading roles in Erik Poppe's *Troubled Water* and Knut Erik Jensen's *Ice Kiss*. Ellen was awarded an Amanda (the Norwegian Oscar equivalent) for Best Female Lead in *Ice Kiss*. Since 2008, she appeared in several films, including Marius Holst's *King of Devil's Island*, 2010 and Ole Giæver's *The Mountain*, 2011. Ellen trained at the Norwegian National Academy of Theatre and a current member of the permanent ensemble at The Norwegian Theatre.



## cast



*HENRIK Rafaelsen*  
[ M o r t e n ]

The lead in Martin Lund's *The Almost Man*, 2012, Henrik was awarded the Best Actor Award at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival. He is known for his roles in *Happy Happy*, (World Cinema Grand Jury Prize, Sundance 2011) and *Limbo*, 2010. Henrik trained at The Theatre Academy in Stockholm and appeared in several Swedish films. He has worked with acclaimed playwrights such as Lars Norén, and acted in productions at the Swedish Riksteater and Stockholm's Stadsteater.

## cast



### *VERA Vitali* [ E l i n ]

Vera has filmmaking flowing in her blood. The daughter of costume designer Kersti Vitali and actor Leon Vitali. After acting in *Barry Lyndon*, Leon was Kubrick's personal assistant for many years. At the age of five, Vera decided to become an actor while wandering the set of *Full Metal Jacket*. Her feature film debut was in Ruben Östlund's *Involuntary*, 2008. In 2012, she earned the leading role in the Swedish miniseries *Hinsehäxan* – a widely acclaimed performance that established her as one of Sweden's most promising young actors. Vera plays the lead in Ulf Malmros's upcoming *My socalled Father*.



## cast



*MARIUS Kolbenstvedt*  
[ E i n a r ]

In the role as the lonely and yearning Einar in *Blind*, Marius makes his acting debut. Prior *Blind*, Marius was known as a playwright, theatre director, musician and stage artist. In 1993, Marius was a founding member of the theatre collective, *The Chosen*, who are internationally recognized for their documentary and experimental approach to stage art.

## crew

*ESKIL Vogt*

*Writer & Director*

With *Blind*, Eskil makes his debut as feature film Director. Eskil is recognized as one of Norway's leading screenwriters, known for his collaboration with Joachim Trier on films such as *Reprise*, *Oslo, August 31st* and *Louder Than Bombs* (in pre-production). He received his directorial training at the national French film school, La fémis in Paris. Eskil directed award-winning short films including *An Embrace* and *Strangers* as well as television comedies.



*THIMIOS Bakatakis*  
*Cinematographer*

Born and raised in Greece, Thimios was the Director of Photography of the acclaimed films, *Dogtooth* (Prix Un Certain Regard: Cannes, 2009, Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film, 2010) and *Attenberg* (prizewinner at the Venice International Film Festival). Thimios is sought after internationally for his work, and was Director of Photography for *Porfirio* and *Keep the Lights On*, Colombian and U.S. productions.



## crew

### *JENS CHRISTIAN Fodstad* *Editor*

Jens Christian is a well-established film editor in Norway. Editing films including, *I Belong*, *Limbo*, *A Somewhat Gentle Man* and the TV series *Norwegian Cozy*. Most recently he edited Hans Petter Moland's forthcoming film, *The Prize Idiot*. Jens Christian received his education at the National Film & Television School in London.



### *JØRGEN Stangebye Larsen* *Production Designer*

Just a few years after graduating from the Norwegian Film School, Jørgen is known as one of Norway's most prominent production designers. He was nominated for an Amanda for his work on both Joachim Trier's *Oslo, August 31st* and Sara Johnsen's *All That Matters is Past*. Jørgen recently completed work on the soon to be released, Hans Petter Moland's *The Prize Idiot*.







*HANS-JØRGEN Osnes  
& SIGVE Endresen  
Producers*

Hans-Jørgen has worked closely with Eskil Vogt on a number of films prior to *Blind*. As the Producer of *Oslo, August 31st* and as First Assistant Director on both *Reprise* and *Oslo, August 31st*.

In 1983, Sigve co-founded one of Norway's oldest independent production companies, Motlys. Since then, Endresen has produced dozens of feature films and documentaries, titles such as *North*, *The Orheim Company*, *Turn Me On*, *Dammit* and the TV series *Buzz Aldrin*.

*MOTLYS as*

With thirty years of production experience, Motlys is one of Norway's leading feature film production companies. In the last five years, Motlys has produced films such as *I Belong*, *The Orheim Company*, *Oslo, August 31st*, *Turn Me On*, *Dammit*, *North* and *The Man Who Loved Yngve*. Motlys' films have received national acclaim and premiered at international film festivals including Cannes, Berlin and Tribeca.

## *DIRECTOR'S NOTE*

Blindness. Is there anything more cinematic, closer to the essence of the art of cinema than the theme of seeing/not seeing? Light and darkness? To observe or be observed?

At the same time blindness gives us a unique take on the most contemporary of themes: the exaggerated importance of the visual in our modern world, how we are bombarded with pictures, our obsessive preoccupation with our image, our desire to see and to be seen and desired.

In our visual culture our experiences tend to be tainted by all we have seen – everything is reduced to a cliché before we can experience it for ourselves. In relation to the theme of blindness it is interesting to note that the tactile, the touch, is much harder to exploit in media. It could be argued that touching someone – and even more importantly: being touched – might be the purest experience left to us, certainly the most intimate. Maybe that is what the characters in this story long for more than anything: a kind caress, a passionate embrace.

Since we live in a constant flood of visual clichés I feel the obligation to make something original and vital. My ambition is no less than to make a truly unique film, a film with a punk attitude, one that might just pull us out of our viewing habits and see things afresh, see ourselves and the world we live in a new and twisted way.

“Blind” is a celebration of storytelling, the urge to manipulate in order to create something beautiful, funny, interesting and touching, our need to invent stories to make sense of the world and of our inner turmoil.

It is interesting to note that the first storyteller we know of, Homer, is represented as blind. And that this also was the fate of Jorge Luis Borges.

In “Blind” Ingrid has lost her sight and retreated to a place where she can feel in control, inventing and invents a world where she is all-powerful. But, of course, Ingrid’s problems aren’t outside of her flat, they are within her, and soon her innermost fears and repressed fantasies take a hold of her fictions.

But in the beginning we have no idea that Ingrid is pulling the strings. The fact that Einar and Eline later are revealed as more or less fictional doesn’t mean they will appear as such from the outset. It is essential that they feel real and believable making us as invested in their fates as we are in Ingrid’s. And when the narrator’s manipulations become apparent – and I want it to become apparent, to be a game the spectator can participate in – it is



crucial that we never lose our compassion and interest. Einar and Eline aren't lifeless marionettes – through the actors' faces and reactions we will feel their very human disorientation every time Ingrid pulls the rug out from under them, see them struggling to adapt to constant changes, sharing our bewilderment about what is going on.

At the same time we can't help but be entertained by all the surprising situations they are pushed into, to get a perverse enjoyment from seeing how far the blind narrator will go in abusing these poor people. The more we care, as when Eline opens her heart to her daughter telling her she feels like a higher power is out to get her – the more the absurd and dark humour will be apparent. And at the same time it all takes on an added meaning: everything Einar and especially Eline go through become more or less direct expressions of Ingrid's innermost urges and anxieties.

The film will feel refreshingly disrespectful in its treatment of serious and difficult subject matter. But even at the most darkly comic or twisted moments there will be an undercurrent of real emotion: Einar's crying need for intimacy; Eline's awkward way of hiding her loneliness – and of course Ingrid's inability to cope with her handicap, her fear of becoming a mother (or not) or that Morten will end up abandoning her, leaving her all alone. Losing one's sight is after all a very human and moving tragedy.

Oslo, January 2012  
Eskil Vogt









## *INTERVIEW with director ESKIL Vogt*

*This is your debut as feature film director  
— what was the experience like going from being the writer  
to being the director of what you have written yourself?*

I've never actually seen myself purely as a screenwriter. This is my first feature film as a director, but I've always kept up with both directing, writing and my formal training is as a director. For me, writing and directing are inextricably intertwined. One writes not to produce a script, but a film. With strong screenwriting there ought to be clear thoughts about how a film should be made present within the text.

*Where did the idea of making a film about a blind woman come from?*

While I was developing another film as Director, I was reading a book written by a friend of mine, Terje Holtet Larsen, where one of the characters is blind. The text was completely un-filmable, an inner monologue of someone who can't see. Despite that obstacle, it just stayed with me, I couldn't shake it. When I put the other film aside and began to write, thinking about losing sight, just flowed out of me. There are so many interesting, exciting and funny things that fit into a film with a blind main character.

*What did you learn about being blind from working on the script?*

A lot. From the basic knowledge that most blind people have remnants of sight, to the more peripheral, like how in the USA they train miniature ponies to help the blind because guide dogs lives are so short... The impetus for my writing came from within and from my own preconceptions about what it would be like to lose sight. I tried to imagine it, both the totally fundamental existential transformation, but also the small everyday uncertainties, how one's fantasy could easily run amok without having sight as a kind of constant "reality check." When I was already a good ways into developing the film, I sat down with people who had actually gone through what I was playing with during the writing process. I read books and talked to ophthalmologists, but it was nothing in comparison to meeting those folks who actually were living it and who shared their experiences. A lot of what I imagined turned out to be not so far off, other things had to be adjusted, but I felt by using this method I made the story, in a way, more personal – I could use myself.

*How was the writing process on this film different than the work with Reprise and Oslo, August 31st?*

Since I wrote this script entirely on my own, I could rely even more on intuition. I am analytical by nature, so that part of me always comes out at some point in the process and cleans things up. With *Blind*, the subconscious and the un-articulated were allowed to dominate the writing much longer than usual. This left its mark on the film.

*Blind is a film about blindness and isolation, but could also be described as being funny – how do you manage to combine these two elements?*

I wanted to make something that completely had its own logic, something freewheeling and surprising which could move from an exciting scene to more of an everyday scene to a scene that is broadly comic. It was important to me the film be an expression of creativity and liveliness. I wanted to show a person's innermost being. And for that, the whole spectrum must be part of it. Our sexual thoughts, our fantasies, our humor ...

*How did you approach and conceptualize the visual expression of a theme that is about not being able to see?*

How does one show blindness on film? The most obvious would be to let the screen go black, to let the viewers orientate themselves with sound – but using that method would mean quickly losing all contact with the character who is experiencing it. At the same time you'd be ignoring that other sense that is so important for someone who has lost their sight: the sense of touch. For me, it was often about limiting the visual input by isolating a detail or holding an image longer. One hears a sound, but instead of cutting to the source of the sound, a close up of the person hearing the sound is held longer. She doesn't know what made the sound – so why should we? What I found out in my research is that the blind don't feel they live in an all-encompassing darkness; images appear, especially for people who weren't born blind, representations of what is around them. This is the key to the film's form and style for me; I wanted to capture these interior images, not cling to an *idée fixe* of a life in the dark. And blindness, paradoxically enough is in and of itself, very filmic; it contains the most fundamental aspects of film: to see and be seen, light and dark...



*How would you describe your approach to the notions of physicality, sensuality and sexuality in the film?*

It was very important to me, if I was going to delve into the world of blindness, to do this credibly. I couldn't avoid Ingrid's sexuality. I talked to women who have lost their sight and they told me that they still want to be seen, to be desired visually. This linked in an interesting way to the exaggerated importance of the visual in our lives, how we are constantly bombarded with visual material in advertising, TV and online content in general. Nothing is fresh to our eyes anymore, everything becomes used up and ordinary before we even have a chance to experience it for ourselves. Yet, as the media is predominantly visual, one thing that hasn't been tamed that way and that remains truly personal as a feeling and as an emotion is the tactile. To touch someone – or be touched by someone – is perhaps the purest and most intimate form of connection. I guess the way I treated and represented a physical, sensual and sexual world in *Blind* had to reflect that reality. And by referencing people's relationship to pornography, the contrast becomes evident: even though everything is accessible visually speaking, we can't necessarily touch everything. You can watch all the porn you want, you'll still long for someone to caress your cheek.

*Blind is an Oslo film; could it be set in any other place?*

The story could easily have taken place somewhere else – but then it would also have become another film. I like to let the personality of the places where I shoot play an important role in the film. The story gave me plenty of opportunities to capitalize on the exteriors. Ingrid, the blind woman, doesn't go out, she stays inside her apartment. Everything that happens outside becomes an expression of her yearning, her longing for the visual input that abounds in every big city.

*How did you make the decision to work with the Greek cinematographer Thimios Bakatakis?*

I was without a regular Director of Photography, so when I got the chance to make my first feature film I naively started my search with the top names on the international list. Thimios was responsible for the striking visual compositions in the Oscar nominated *Dogtooth*. Not only does he have an unusually good eye for composition, but also a strikingly simple and natural way of using light. The strangest things might happen in his films, but thanks to the natural lighting he never loses contact with reality. I sent the script to his agent, but had no expectations especially since Thimios had just completed his first U.S. film. Very quickly thereafter he contacted

*You went to Sweden to find Vera Vitali,  
and Marius Kolbenstvedt is a theatre director and not really an actor  
— what was the process for choosing your leads like?*

Together with my assistant director Tove Undheim, who was responsible for casting, we tested everyone we could get ahold of – from amateurs to well-known actors. One of the roles called for a woman who just moved to Oslo from the west coast of Norway, recently divorced and lonely in Oslo. For some reason I never felt I got what I was looking for from those I met. When time was running out, I convinced myself to widen my search to Sweden. There I met Vera, who had precisely that difficult mix of comic timing and warm vulnerability that Elin (the character in the film) needed to have. And as a Swede, Elin's loneliness in a Norwegian city grew even stronger. The role of Einar needed to be grounded in an immediate believability for people to relate to him. I wanted a new face, one the audience had no choice but to identify 100% with the role. Marius is a great theatre director who I originally turned to for casting tips. Luckily, I got the idea of auditioning him, and it quickly became apparent that he was an extremely gifted actor whose low-key approach affected everyone who played opposite him.

*What kind of person is Ingrid and how did you work  
with Ellen Dorrit Petersen to bring out her character?*

It was important for me that Ingrid wouldn't just be defined by her blindness. She is a hip and intelligent woman with a sophisticated sexuality and a lively fantasy... and she continues to be this after losing her sight. At the same time, this loss poses an immense challenge for an independent and proud woman. She keeps up a facade of handling things, but deep inside she has enormous problems adjusting to and accepting the loss of control that is forced upon her. Ellen Dorrit Petersen was the first one who came to mind for this role. I felt she could handle this very technically demanding role and at the same time instill the strength and intelligence that makes Ingrid more than just a victim. I auditioned many other actors, only to confirm my initial intuition: that Ellen was the one who could bring this character to life. Ellen risked everything for this film. It's an acting feat that I am extremely proud of having in my movie.

*How did you work with Ellen and Vera regarding the blindness  
— what was important for them to "learn" about being blind?*

Ellen worked for months to master the body language that is particular to the blind. She worked with a vision rehabilitation therapist, met blind people and took a rehabilitation course for people who have lost their sight. Most of the films with blind characters choose to use expressions for blindness that are very exaggerated. People who were

once able to see don't stare stiffly into space the way Al Pacino did in *Scent of a Woman*. We tried to develop a more realistic means of expression; the blind people I met whose disease had run a similar course to Ingrid's, can focus their gaze and move their eyes to follow sounds. Sometimes they didn't even look blind at all.

For the most part, Ingrid remains inside her apartment where she knows where everything is – so she can't stumble about fumbling for things to appear blind. Ellen's preparation for this role was so thorough that the blindness was just there in her body language, in the small gestures. Her performance is, quite simply, impressively authentic. Her gaze somehow seems emptied of sight even though it shifts and expresses feelings. With Vera it is was a little different – she also worked with a vision rehabilitation therapist, but since her blindness is more an expression of Ingrid's fear than anything else, it made sense to make it more stylized.

*Sound must be incredibly important in a film about someone who can't see  
— could you say a few words about the sound work?*

Starting during the writing phase, sound was an essential part of the film. Our sound designer, Gisle Tveito, was one of the first people I discussed the film. A number of the sequences in the film are built up with sound as the driving force and the soundscape was often created completely from scratch during post-production.

*The composer is Dutch — how did your collaboration function,  
and what does the music contribute to the film?*

Henk Hofstede was sort of a 80s pop star in Holland with his group The Nits. And a cult band in France, which a friend of mine turned me on to. Henk had made film music before, but it was his sense of melody and the filmic soundscape in his records that attracted me. The music in the film was quite difficult to get right. It was only after my editor Jens Christian Fodstad and I heard a piano riff that Henk had made, which was just as wild and unpredictable as Ingrid's inner life, that the music began to fall into place.

*What do you hope to achieve with *Blind*  
— what would like your audience to take away from the film?*

The most important thing for me is to make a film that is sincere – one should never do something that one doesn't believe in because someone claims this is what "people" want to see. My guiding star has been to make a film that I myself would like to see in the theatre: something unexpected, surprising, thought provoking, intelligent and entertaining. I hope that this is the film that *Blind* has become.





*US distribution*

KimStim  
417 13th Street #2  
Brooklyn, NY 11215  
[www.kimstim.com](http://www.kimstim.com)  
[info@kimstim.com](mailto:info@kimstim.com)