

## THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

Director Vibeke Løkkeberg

Norway | 2025

80 min. | English, German, Norwegian with English subtitles

**Screenplay** Vibeke Løkkeberg. **Cinematography** Georg Helgevoll Sagen. **Editing** Mina Nybakke. **Sound Design** Bror Kristiansen. **Producers** Anders Tangen, Terje Kristiansen. **Executive Producers** Vibeke Løkkeberg, Anders Tangen, Knut-Jørgen Erichsen. **Production companies** The Norway Film Development (Oslo, Norway), Viafilm (Oslo, Norway). **With** Claudia von Alemann, Vibeke Løkkeberg, Helke Sander, Alice Schwarzer, Karin Howard, Nurith Aviv, Annabella Miscuglio, Ariel Dougherty, Angelika Wittlich, Christiane Schaefer, Valeska von Roques.

### Synopsis

The "First International Women's Film Seminar" organised by filmmakers Claudia von Alemann and Helke Sander in 1973 can be regarded as one of the very first feminist film festivals. Held in Berlin, it was hosted in the "old" Arsenal cinema in Welserstraße and the primary school opposite. Vibeke Løkkeberg, a 28-year-old filmmaker and former actress from Norway, was among the guests travelling to the event. She came to present her film *ABORT* and to document the festival. Almost fifty years later, Løkkeberg found the raw footage – sound and images – once thought lost, and turned it into a film resembling a journey through time: interviews with the participants sharing experiences as equals, patient listening, the crowds in the foyer, the comings and goings outside the cinema, the gatherings at the seminar. The air was full of new beginnings and cigarette smoke, solidarity and openness, the determination and confidence of women who wanted fundamental change in film and television – against the dominance of men. Today, this retrospective confronts us with unfinished battles and possibly – lost hopes. (Gaby Babić)

**Vibeke Løkkeberg**, born 1945 in Bergen, is one of Norway's most prolific filmmakers and authors. Married to producer Terje Kristiansen and mother to two children, she created a unique concept of blending her personal life with her filmmaking, often working with her family. She began her career as an actress and has starred in most of her own films. Her works have been screened at festivals and venues worldwide. Løkkeberg is also a prolific novelist. In 2015, Løkkeberg was the recipient of the Honorary Amanda Award for her contribution to Norwegian cinema.

**Films:** 1971: *Abort* (Abortion). 1974: *Prostitusjon* / Prostitution. 1975: *Regn* / Rain (short film). 1977: *Åpenbaringen* / The Upbringing. 1981: *Løperjenten* / The Story of Camilla. 1986: *Hud* / Skin. 1991: *Måker* / Seagulls. 1993: *Der gudene er døde* / Where the Gods Are Dead. 2010: *Gazas tårer* / Tears of Gaza. 2025: *The Long Road to the Director's Chair*.

### Director's Statement

#### To Feel the Essence of the Time

Every major turning point creates a new canvas for artists

In 1973, the world was turned upside down following the upheavals of the late 1960s, which culminated in the militant uprisings of 1968. These events also influenced the world of cinema, dominated by the Nouvelle Vague (New Wave) from France. Feminism was born, and the introduction of the birth control pill offered women a new sense of freedom.

The era was politically transformative, influenced, as it is today, by ongoing wars, then in Vietnam and the Middle East. French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard emerged as a leading figure opposing the American industrial film dramaturgy.

I participated in several films that were inspired by the Nouvelle Vague as a writer, actress, and director.

In *THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR*, the direction intentionally preserves an archival quality. This approach allows the viewer to feel the essence of the time, both behind and in front of the camera.

For artists, the time has come to deglamorize their cinematic expressions and to prioritize closeness to content over a polished form that risks creating distance or obscuring the message.

Every major turning point in the world creates a new canvas for artists. I would argue that our turbulent world today is experiencing such a turning point.

Vibeke Løkkeberg

### Interview

#### We Cannot Just Continue Like We Were Before

**Vibeke Løkkeberg** talks to Gaby Babić and Barbara Wurm about the historical context of her film and the long road to its completion

*Barbara Wurm: Vibeke, welcome to Forum 2025. I'm extremely happy and also grateful to Gaby Babić to have arranged this conversation – and to you for giving us the opportunity to show your film, a film so important for female and feminist filmmaking and also for Arsenal.*

**Vibeke Løkkeberg:** Yes, I'm happy and surprised, too, because I thought this film would never get any help for completing it, but now, finally, it did.

*BW: The First International Women's Film Seminar took place in November 1973 in the 'old' Kino Arsenal on Welserstraße. I was five months old then. 50 years ago, you managed to shoot this film, now you've managed to finish it. THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR was itself a long road it seems.*

VL: It was, yes. I experienced exactly the same thing. It is so difficult to make a movie, for women especially. This is very good footage, and I have been walking around with it and trying to screen it and ask people for some money. And they said, 'Well, you know, this is an old movie, it's better to start by making a new one or mixing it with a little of today, because this is not good enough. It's not interesting enough.' And I tried to say, 'Well, in Berlin they thought it was interesting enough.' But they insisted that this was *passato*, you understand, something belonging to the past. Anyway, I was very much backed up by this screening in Berlin at Archival Assembly #3 in June 2023, organised in cooperation with the "feminist elsewheres" collective. I was so happy, because the featured filmmakers came in with all their feelings to this movie. And there were young people who liked looking into this room of young women in 1973 who really started the feminist movement.

*BW: Claudia von Alemann and Helke Sander are the two prominent directors who initiated the Women's Film Seminar. Did you know them before you came to Berlin in 1973?*

VL: Sort of, yes, because I was following the lists of German women and movies, and I got to know them. My friend Ulrich Gregor also thought that these women were very good filmmakers. I felt I knew them, and of course, they invited my film *ABORT* (1971). This energy you can see in *THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR*, in the conversations we have, they are so fantastic because we were complete strangers to each other. QUOTE: And I finally re-appeared as a very radical woman. That surprised everybody and then the aggression started to come because they didn't like me changing the role I'd had.

*GB: Back in 1973, in Norway, were you already involved in the women's movement or connected to it, or even to women fighting for their rights elsewhere in the world? Or did you mainly consider yourself a filmmaker?*

VL: I had made two features, not as a director, but as a lead actress with involvement in the scripts, where I played women in revolt. These films were invited to the Berlin Film Festival and the Moscow Film Festival, so I was quite known already. But then I broke out of it completely because I felt that even if I played these modern women, they were not received or understood enough by the director because he was a male. I was supposed to be sexy and people looked at me, at my breasts, instead of listening to what I had to tell them. Thus, I revolted against it, and said that I'd like to make a movie about abortion, and that took me three years in which I did interviews, wrote scripts, got a little money here and there. And I finally re-appeared as a very radical woman. That surprised everybody and then the aggression started to come, because they didn't like me changing the role I'd had.

*GB: When you then were invited to the seminar, were you the one who suggested to producers or TV that you wanted to travel to Berlin to document it?*

VL: Yes, I asked a producer if he could lend me some money to make this movie. When I came back, he tried to sell it to Norwegian state television, and they said no. They didn't want it because of course it was critical, and they didn't like listening to all these women with all these opinions in 1973, because, you see, in 1973, at the state television in Norway and also in Germany, we had to say 'Sir' when we addressed people. We had guys wearing suits, sitting there and having discussions, while us women were not part of the discussions at all.

*BW: How were you addressed by the men in the suits? 'Girl'?*

VL: Yeah, very much in a way to keep me down. 'Don't speak too loud here', I was told. They didn't want to accept me being so serious. Nice looking women really weren't accepted as serious at that time.

*GB: Did you lose the footage right away or did you try for a while to make something out of it?*

VL: It was such a strong no that there was no hope. I went on making very radical TV productions, but not critical about the TV or film situation. They were about groups who it was important to talk about. Three years later, I made a movie called *ÄPENBARINGEN* (THE REVELATION, 1977). Ulrich Gregor discovered it and he invited me to the Berlin Film Festival, to Forum. And that movie created such a war in Norway because the critics didn't like me putting a fat woman in the main role. And I even undressed her and there was sexual stuff in the movie. So, from that movie on, there was a shame around my name, but abroad, in America and all those places where there was a bigger system for intellectual movies, they very much appreciated it. This is really a movie that goes against all these systems we are talking about.

*BW: Do you think that this system has gotten better or worse over the last 50 years?*

VL: Worse. And I would also say that this system is a kind of censure, because you don't get as close to people as you want. All the aesthetics are kind of boring. These are the aesthetics they use and which the system demands of people who are in front of the camera. To make people feel secure, but in the end, they don't come across naturally.

*BW: While we are talking, Arsenal is moving its cinema once again. 25 years ago, the cinema left Welserstraße, where the Women's Film Seminar took place, and moved to Potsdamer Platz. Now we're moving to Silent Green in Wedding. During the move, we had a lot of farewell evenings and reunions, and a lot of photos were shown. One of the most fascinating aspects of your film is the crowds of people meeting and talking in front of the cinema and in the foyer. It is so clear that the actual place, the building and the cinema, became a space for all these encounters and the human aspect of what you describe could take place. How did you film this density and the vibes that were in this place?*

VL: It was important for the photographer to be among these women all the time and to observe their faces and to record their moods and their vibes, as you say. And this was something which we had been talking about because sometimes I had to be in the picture, so I couldn't be with him, and he had to know how he should film. That was the style I wanted. I didn't want the movie to be like a stranger coming to this event, to be a kind of report. I wanted to keep this atmosphere and this mood, which was present in 1973, and which today is very valuable because you can see we didn't wear makeup, they are smoking like hell, and we didn't have bras because that was the consensus at that time: We should be clean from any selling of ourselves. Everything should be organic. Also, the way we used the camera and the sound. I remind you that in this time we had had '68, a big difference, a big revolution. We had the Vietnam War ongoing and wars in the Middle East. The pill came out at the end of the '60s, and this changed a lot for women. And I think that artists, unconsciously, are also very influenced by the political status in the world. We were very conscious of what was happening around us. Today we also have a very unpleasant situation with all the wars, and that should also influence artists to simplify the way they make movies and try to catch not the glamour, but the situation itself we really are in. We know what is happening, we cannot just continue like we were before. We must do as we did in 1973. And that's why this movie is a good example of where I think we should turn nowadays.

*GB: It's very beautiful how you leave the footage you found after 50 years quite raw. Sometimes you hear the camera person or the sound person talking. The way you edit really makes it possible for us as viewers to experience the mood back then, all the listening to each other, the tenderness amongst the women.*

*It lets us sense what we've lost as a society. A certain way of talking with each other or maybe also a kind of optimism. Could you describe the moment you rediscovered the footage and the process of deciding how to work with it?*

VL: Thank you for that. I was very moved when I saw it because I saw the same thing you saw. We have lost a lot. We had ambitions, but we have also gone in the wrong directions. And we lost opportunities because we weren't given the right to be in the director's chair, to seriously influence the media and the film industry. And I was very much disappointed that this footage didn't really affect the few people who saw it in Norway, but it was maybe because I was asking for money. But in the 1960s and 1970s, we had Godard, who changed the whole way of filmmaking with the New Wave. They are much more naked movies and much more based on real contact with people. And I feel that this film reflects on some of that and my continuation of making movies. The feeling I had with this movie was very important for me. I worked together with the Norwegian National Library very much, they were very enthusiastic and helped me a lot.

*BW: Speaking of the National Library, whose idea was it to come back to this film?*

VL: They just found some reels with my name on them and the name of your cinema. They opened them and understood that this was something that belonged to me. And then one of the main people there, Ingrid Holtar, came with us to Berlin for the screening in 2023. She was writing a book about me and was researching what I did in the 1970s. And then she found an article which said I was making a movie in Berlin. That was the way they found out that this footage was connected to Arsenal. They were so enthusiastic and so passionate, and they wanted to find the whole thing. But it took another year to find the sound. I looked with them and made phone calls to everybody involved in the project, and at last we succeeded.

*BW: Where did you find the original sound tapes? Were they stored separately from the negative?*

VL: In the Norwegian archives located in the north of Norway, in the mountains – and, yes, separately, that was what was difficult. This is also where you send all the prints now. They really had to go into this mountain to find the sound. Isn't that fantastic?

*BW: When you showed the silent version at Archival Assembly #3 and you had all the participants who were still alive in the audience commenting on the images, did you already have the sound back then?*

VL: No, I found it afterwards. But at that screening, the fantastic Claudia von Alemann really entertained the whole 100 people who were sitting there, and she did it excellently. Also, she did a great job identifying and finding out all the names of these people and the stories around them. And she did it. I want people to see the time behind the camera and the time before the camera. I feel it's very important to keep the archival atmosphere. You can see how important what we want to say is. When the film camera stopped recording, we continued to speak. And that is something which would never happen to any interview subject on TV today because it is so important for them to keep everything like it should be.

*GB: You were a crew of three, right? A cameraman and a sound recordist. Was it a consideration to have an all-female crew back then or not at all?*

VL: At the time, you couldn't find a camerawoman or a female sound recordist. And my husband was also in the background there. He was following me to help.

*GB: I was asking about the male participants because I felt that the women are at ease and talk freely, even if there are men present. I was wondering about that.*

VL: At that time, that was the usual picture. We knew it would be men or guys in the roles of photographer and sound recordist, but I had a feeling that he was a very good photographer. He wanted to be very close to the women. They felt that we were coming there with the right questions. And of course, they related to me first because I was the director.

*BW: What has been the main emotional or intellectual aspect in coming back to this film? What is the most striking aspect of what you see in this footage?*

VL: I see the simpleness, the easiness of how we came to speak about very important things, which are also very important today, but are not said. And I feel this easiness gives the people something which they lack, and they don't see in mainstream projects today.

*BW: Why did this easiness get lost?*

VL: In the 1970s, we really had an opportunity to feel important. You know, we felt important that we had something we should do, and that our voice was important. And when we came to the 1980s, we had to strive a lot. Then we were disappointed. We were kind of outcast again. We couldn't be ourselves. And more and more, it accelerated like up until today.

*GB: Could you say a few words about the evolution of your career after you made the film ÅPENBARINGEN (1977)?*

VL: That film was successful. After that, in 1981, I made LØPERJENTEN (THE ERRAND GIRL) or, the US distribution title, CAMILA. It takes place in 1948, just after the Second World War, and is about how people longed to go to America and give up Norway. That was a big success in the US, too, it was one of the ten best films that year. And then I made the movie HUD (SKIN) in 1988. Both those movies were in Cannes. HUD was about the incest and rape of women, it's set in the 1890s. A very powerful movie, very expensive, and it deals with those subjects. And in Norway, where people are more interested in football than movies, it was a scandal. We had some fantastic reviews, but very contrasted because I took up this subject which is so dangerous to take up. And then I made a movie called MÅKER (THE SEAGULLS, 1991), which was about children from a family who went bankrupt, and they didn't know from whom they came. And then I had one more movie, DER GUDENE ER DØDE (WHERE GODS ARE DEAD, 1993). When the war broke out in Yugoslavia, I went there and made this movie in Vukovar, a documentary fiction. And in Norway, again, hell broke out when it came out. In the US it was in the Los Angeles Film Festival, it got a big review, everything was fine – but not in Norway, as always, because in the end, I was called a Norwegian witch. It was very difficult for my whole family, my children. The conservative media here depicted me as a kind of aggressive, angry person, and insinuated I was not entitled to be a director. I was always defined by my sex, by being a woman, and I was not like I should be. They felt I made movies that were critical to the guys. So, they had me stop everything. They stopped me from making movies with my children, with my husband. There is a letter stating we should never make movies with our children, or with your husband as a producer, that I should never act in my own movies. I was cut out completely, I didn't ever get money to make a movie again. It went on like that for the next 20 years. They even said I'd need a writer to make my script, because I couldn't write a script. 'You're not a writer', they said, whilst I had written all my scripts to all my movies myself. I am capable of writing my own movies. I am an author, and that is useful. And then I wrote a book to convince them that I could write, and that book became a big success in many countries. And it was my debut as an author. So, in those 20 years, I didn't make any movies, but I wrote six beautiful novels. And I also wrote a book called "Purple", it came out in Germany and was translated into six languages, including Greek, Italian, and Russian. I was awarded the title of Cavaliere by then president of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. It was about

Renaissance Italy. A very special book which I wish people could read again today because it's about Pope Pius II from the 1400s who wanted the papacy to conquer Turkey. Now, with all these wars, this book is very relevant. Anyway, and then the war came out in Gaza, and I saw some pictures, I lifted myself from the chair. I called an institution that was called Free World, and I said: 'Please give me some money. I want to go to Gaza and film the war. What is happening there?' No journalist could enter. I went down there with my husband, and they didn't let us in, but I had connections inside Gaza. I wrote a script in my bed in Norway. We decided what to do and whom to go to ask questions of the children because it's about children. That film premiered at Toronto Film Festival as the most important movie in 2010. And since then, I haven't made any other movies.

*BW: But now you made one!*

VL: Yes. And I wrote a book, a new novel in 2018 about my husband and myself living and waiting for him to die of cancer.

*GB: Thus, THE LONG ROAD TO THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR is your comeback as a film director?*

VL: Isn't that fantastic?

*BW: It's not the end of the journey. It's the beginning of the next journey.*

VL: Oh, yes. I feel very competent now. I turn 80 in January. Imagine!

*BW & GB: Happy birthday, and thank you very much, Vibeke.*

VL: Thank you so much. Very nice to speak to you.