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# At Elske Pia

## Loving Pia

### Daniel Borgman

**Producer** Katja Adomeit. **Production company** Adomeit Film (Kopenhagen, Denmark). **Written and directed by** Daniel Borgman. **Director of photography** Daniel Borgman. **Editor** Sofie Marie Kristensen. **Music** Kristian Paulsen. **Sound design** Anne Gry Friis Kristensen, Philip Nicolai Flindt. **Sound** Sigrid DPA Jensen, Dan Isager, Mark Vesterkov.

**With** Pia Skovgaard (Pia), Céline Skovgaard (Pia's Mother), Jens Jensen (The Man), Putte Jensen (The Sister).

Colour. 100 min. Danish.

**Premiere** February 10, 2017, Berlinale Forum

Sixty-year-old Pia is intellectually disabled and lives with her aging mother Guittou in a farmhouse on the Danish island of Langeland. She dreams of meeting a man. She dreams of a Frenchman named José from Larzac, who she knows from television and with whom she could make pizza and rosehip juice. The days come and go. Pia does exercises and strolls along the beach; she reads books, visits a day centre in the city and looks after her goose Lola with tenderness. Her conversations with her mother focus on the future – how and where will Pia live once Guittou dies? One day Pia meets Jens at the harbour. The two of them get talking and start spending time together. They go to Copenhagen for a weekend and visit the Den Blå Planet aquarium.

*At Elske Pia* spins a fictional tale that is based on Pia's real life and is embedded in her everyday routines. With gentleness and lyricism, Daniel Borgman allows his protagonist's thoughts, dreams and wishes to inform the story. An impressive hybrid film shot on 16 mm, a declaration of love to Pia.

*Caroline Pitzen*

## A dream

I dream about a visit.  
I dream that I should visit him who travels round. His name is José, and he lives in Larzac.  
I thought he... we... I...  
I dreamt that... he... we made pizza and rosehip juice together, and we thought that it tasted good.  
I thought he would take care of me, but he couldn't.  
Because he has another wife.  
That's why.  
He said he would take care of me, but it was just a dream.  
It wasn't meant to be.

*Pia Skovgaard*

## Before we got to know Pia

With *At Elske Pia* I wanted to explore intellectual disability, focusing on love and isolation, by developing a project together with my subject, Pia Skovgaard, a sixty-year-old intellectually disabled woman who lives with her elderly mother in the countryside.

Pia doesn't have a concrete diagnosis, and I've found that the more I get to know her, the more complex her condition seems to be. This is something that I wanted to include in the story, the complex sweeping in and out of my understanding of her, as if it were a wave.

The project is development-oriented. This means that we have a process that is open to change, based on what is discovered through an extended development period. The process was really important to me; at every step in the journey I always returned to the process. I wanted to make a film that used a process in which any challenge or obstacle or problem is actually a positive thing. So the idea was to work with this real person Pia, and to document sometimes and to sometimes construct moments that are inspired or taken from her life, then to examine her responses and to use this material to further the screenplay.

*At Elske Pia* is an exploration of a person, and of a disability, and of a life situation. Pia is a woman who lives with her mother, and depends upon her, who hasn't known love, real romantic love, who has a very romantic and simple understanding of love, but who has connected very strongly with the idea of romantic love. She is also a woman who has grown used to having just a few ideas, which she repeats because these ideas seem to satisfy people.

I asked Pia about love and she gave me a response; a beautiful heartfelt story about a man she couldn't have. Now every time I talk to her she gives the same response. I can't tell if she is saying these things over and over to please me, or if she says them to please herself. At first I was so happy to have cracked through, at least to have the feeling of cracking through, into her core thoughts and feelings that seem so inaccessible. I felt that I had discovered something about her, about this love for this man, José Bové, but when I came to talk to her more about love, I found I got the same answers, the conversation didn't advance, she would say, 'There was a man, the one in France, the one I love, but I can't have him because he has a wife, so who can I have? No one wants me, and when my mother dies I'll be alone because no one will have me and then I'll die alone...'

I thought this is an amazing revelation about how she understands the world, her world, but over time as she repeated these assertions, I wondered if this was a story she was stuck on, more of a conditioned recall rather than something that she engages with in a deeper way.

When Pia's mother speaks of Pia she says that Pia does not have a clear sense of herself, she does not see herself when she looks in the mirror, as if she is stuck in some kind of pre-mirror phase, an infant in the body of an adult.

Two questions that came to concern me a great deal were: 'What is this love that Pia is so concerned about?' and 'Is it really real?' When I ask her about sex she giggles and says that it is something that happens on TV sometimes. And then now and again a story will slip out. For instance, there's one about a boy who held her down and kissed her when she was young, something along those lines, something funny and silly and removed from all things sexually adult, and yet something that was violent, and dangerous and complicated. I would ask her, 'Did you like this guy?' and she would say, 'No, he was too fat.' Where did she get that idea from?

## An attempt at reconciliation

I think Pia is a person who travels through the world picking up fragments of ideas about things, some things stick and some do not, and what stays remains, but removed somewhat, if not completely, from the context of and relation to all the other things that didn't stick. Our film's original title was 'Across the Fields'. Across the fields was love, across the fields were all the things Pia should have access to but could not because of her condition, across the fields was any kind of true understanding of Pia, and it was a place we could not go to, a place that perhaps even Pia could not arrive at. Across the fields there was a man waiting, but what would he want? And why would he want her? And what would that mean? Who could want Pia? And how could she find love, when no one is actually allowed to love her, and when her mistakes and past experiences are quickly forgotten, because it's too complicated to get into?

The title 'Across the Fields' was an attempt at reconciliation with the fact that Pia would always be alone, that she would never truly understand herself or the world around her, and that we, the able world, would never understand her either.

Across the fields was the place where we, 'the able viewer', lose all our hopes of ever really understanding anything when it comes to Pia, where all our ideas about life and meaning and love and death and connection fall away.

'Across the Fields' was the title of the film before we got to know Pia. By the end of our process the title had changed to *At Elske Pia*, which translates in English to 'Loving Pia', and it makes sense, because in the end something simpler happened from out of the process. We cared about Pia, and she cared about us, and we enjoyed our time together. That was what got the film made, and hopefully it is there in the material. In the end we arrived at a simple film about Pia being in love, Pia loving, and about a man loving her... and we loved her too.

*Daniel Borgman*



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Daniel (Joseph) Borgman was born in Dunedin, New Zealand in 1981. He studied Film at Otago University in New Zealand before moving to Europe, where he worked in post-production, first as an assistant and later as a colourist and VFX artist. In 2009 he started studying at the Danish film school Super 16, his graduation project being an experimental live film/theatre/happening, entitled *How to Say Goodbye*. *At Elske Pia* is his second full-length film.

### Films

2008: *Manden og Mågen/The Man and the Albatross* (24 min.).  
2009: *Lars and Peter* (15 min.). 2011: *Berik* (15 min.). 2012: *Brainy* (30 min.). 2013: *The Weight of Elephants* (83 min., Berlinale Forum 2013). 2017: *At Elske Pia / Loving Pia*.