

# SETTING HIGH STANDARDS

A PORTRAIT OF PRODUCTION COMPANY GROWN UP FILMS



Ingelore König | © Kinderfilm/ Steffen Junghans

“The film PAULA was the reason that I decided to set up the new label of Grown Up Films in 2012,” recalls producer Ingelore König who had already been heading up Erfurt-based Kinderfilm since 2000. “I had been developing a biopic about the feminist artist Paula Modersohn-Becker since 2008 and we had reached the stage where we had a convincing screenplay by Stefan Kolditz and Stephan Suschke that was being dramaturgically supervised by Cooky Ziesche, and we were now beginning to look for a director and partners for the financing. It made sense to have a separate label because when you have been running a company with a name like Kinderfilm, everyone assumes that you only produce children’s films,” König explains.

“We had a whole list of names for the label, but we felt most comfortable with Grown Up Films,” she continues. “I liked the fact that the name was open to several interpretations: Kinderfilm has come of age, the stories that it will now tell are more grown up, and it will grow beyond itself.”

König, who was born in the former GDR and studied Philosophy at Berlin’s Humboldt University, first learned about Paula Modersohn-Becker after reading a biography. “I was fascinated that she was so radical and courageous, that she was always testing and transcending her limits, and that she had this resolution never ever wanting to be mediocre.”

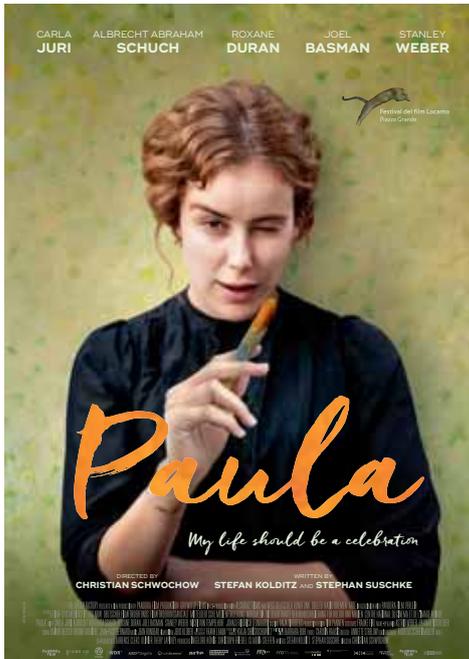
“She wanted to achieve something in her life and set herself very high standards. She once said that she would like to have painted at least three good paintings in her life and she wanted to become a mother. That sentence has everything that motivates modern young women: they want love, happiness, a family and self-realization – Paula was so modern in the way she went through life and even though she is a historical figure, she is very much of the here and now.”

“Stefan Kolditz and his co-author Stephan Suschke knew so much about Paula and her husband Otto [Modersohn] because they had been studying the lives of the artist couple and conducting intensive research ever since

1988,” she continues. “However, this screenplay was never made into a film. After a series of unsuccessful attempts at arriving at a script, I was very fortunate in finding both of them through the dramaturge and screenwriter Laila Stieler and developing a new interpretation with them.”

“Christian Schwochow proved to be exactly the right person to direct the film,” König recalls. “He told me on the phone that he could exactly empathize with what Paula’s story is all about. Christian had himself wanted to become a painter, but felt at some point that he would never achieve anything more than mediocrity. That personal connection immediately won me over to him. I was equally impressed by the way he saw all of the characters in the screenplay with a very modern approach and from a contemporary perspective, and the resulting film with the remarkable Carla Juri in the title role only confirms this.”

“It was also thanks to Christian that our co-production with Claudia Steffen and Christoph Friedel of Pandora came about.



Their standing meant that the film could be financed and realized in this quality." PAULA had its premiere on the Piazza Grande of the 2016 edition of the Locarno Film Festival and went on to win the Bavarian Film Award in the category of Best Cinematography as well as Lolos for Best Production Design and Best Costume Design at the 2017 German Film Awards.

Strong women have also been at the center of Grown Up Films' second feature project ENDZEIT – EVER AFTER by Swedish-born Carolina Hellsgård, which celebrated its world premiere in Toronto's Discovery sidebar. Based on the successful graphic novel by Olivia Vieweg who also wrote the screenplay, the action in ENDZEIT – EVER AFTER is set two years after zombies have overrun the Earth, when the German towns of Weimar and Jena are probably the only remaining places of human civilization thanks to a protective fence.

The film follows two very different young women, who for better or for worse have to join forces in the fight against the undead when they find themselves out in the open countryside without any kind of protection. Their journey leads them to the apocalypse where a stunningly beautiful nature has started gaining the upper hand in the absence of any humans.

As König points out, "our producer Claudia Schröter brought the screenplay which had been awarded the Tankred Dorst Prize in 2015 from the Münchner Filmwerkstatt. She knew that I am a big genre fan. Olivia's debut was an exhilarating display of visual fireworks in the middle of the Thuringian countryside. And then it turned out that the talented young artist lives just 25 kilometers away from us in Weimar. And so ENDZEIT – EVER AFTER is a perfect fit for our company.

Our location is our USP," König explains mischievously, "and this also includes supporting the up-and-coming generation from Central Germany." One of these young professionals is Claudia Schröter, who grew up in the Erzgebirge Mountains and studied at the University of Television and Film in Munich.

"ENDZEIT – EVER AFTER is, in many respects, an experiment. It is extremely difficult for German genre in the market. For the most part, the narrative style is dominated by men. And that's something we wanted to do differently because Olivia's screenplay made it possible: showing three magnificent female lead characters whose conversations were, for once, not about men. And we wanted to give a chance to an up-and-coming director. I have been involved in the ProQuote campaign for more gender equality in the film industry and looking to give more weight to women in the various crafts as far as the stories being told are concerned," she explains. "The market tends to want to compartmentalize people, but I am for diversity, so why should a female director like Carolina Hellsgård not make a zombie film?" And so all of the key creative positions are taken by women: the three lead actresses Gro Swantje Kohlhof, Maja Lehrer and Trine Dyrholm, the director, screenwriter, cinematographer, casting director, production designer, make-up, costume designer, score composer, editor and producer.

"We didn't really know what to expect when the film premiered in Toronto," König continues. "We were fascinated by the giant queues outside of the cinema which was always full. The audiences reacted in different ways, but I was pleased that people understood the film's philosophical content. That was really important for us because I didn't want to have us presenting a dystopia without a philosophical basis." Following the world premiere in Toronto, ENDZEIT – EVER AFTER had its German premiere at the Film-festival Max Ophüls Preis in Saarbrücken and an invitation to the Göteborg International Film Festival in Sweden in January.

Looking to its future projects now in development, the company appears to be holding true to its focus on strong women as protagonists, which began with PAULA and continued this year with ENDZEIT – EVER AFTER. One project that König has been pursuing since 2008 will introduce cinemagoers to the eventful life of one of Germany's best-known modern dancers and teachers, Gret Palucca, (1902-1993) who was a pupil of the famous choreographer Mary Wigman in the early 1920s before founding her own dance school in Dresden in 1925.

"There is hardly anything about her private life available," König says. "That's quite different from Paula Modersohn-Becker who wrote lots of letters." Scarlett Kleint – who



is also working for Kinderfilm on an adaptation of Antje Babendererde's bestselling youth novel *Libellensommer* as a co-production with Canada's Red Cedar Films – is now onboard to write the screenplay.

At the same time, König doesn't want to restrict herself to working on particular film genres. That may have something to do with her personal background growing up in the former GDR. "Once my parents gave me the present of a book club membership and I was an avid reader," she recalls. "I was a big fan of science fiction and also read stories taken from real life. Perhaps that influenced me to the point where I now don't want to tie myself down to specific genres."

Similarly, Grown Up Films won't be working exclusively for the theatrical market: "We already tried our hand at a web series," König notes, "and, of course, we have a lot of experience of working with television on TV movies based on classic fairytales which we have made at Kinderfilm."

"The label of Grown Up Films also sees us showing a commitment to the young audiences that are no longer children, but haven't yet arrived in the world of adults. EINE SAUBLÖDE IDEE is a story for young people that the writing team of Anja Kömmerling and Thomas Brinx have developed with us based on a true event of three A-level students from Munich who walk from Munich to Berlin after a stupid drunken night through the Bavarian and Saxon countryside." Brinx and Kömmerling have collaborated with König on more than a dozen films and series for children: "We have grown along with each other, we trust each other and try out more and more new things – just what it means becoming grown up..."

Martin Blaney