















THESSALONIKI
INTERNATIONAL
DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL
NEWCOMERS
COMPETITION 2026
TIDF28



A film by
SYLVELIN MÅKESTAD

the smuggler

Ballad Film presents **THE SMUGGLER** a film by **Sylvelin Måkestad** Produced by **Ina Holmqvist** A co-production between **Ballad Film, SVT & Film Stockholm** with **Ballad Films** co-producers **Aideles & Mouka Filmi** with support from **Swedish Film Institute, Amos Andersons Fund, Swedish Cultural Foundation, Nordisk film & tv fond, Finnish Film Foundation, The Norwegian Film Institute, Western Norwegian Film Centre, Fritt Ord Foundation, AVEK, The Swedish Arts Grants Committee, DR, NRK & YLE** Film editing **JUSSI RAUTANIEMI** f.c.e. Cinematography **Pia Lehto, Marita Hällfors f.s.c., Love Oijens, Ita Zbroniec Zajt, Erik Åhman, Karl Gustafsson, Gustav Ågerstrand & Malin Nicander** Composer **Salla Luhtala** Sound design **Jorunn Børve Eriksen** Color grading **Christian Wieberg-Nielsen** Graphic design **Eivind Stoud Platou**



A film by
SYLVELIN MÅKESTAD

SWEDEN, FINLAND, NORWAY | 2026 | 80 MIN

LOGLINE

Newly retired Lisbeth joins a “therapy bus” in Finland to hunt down her father’s long-lost revolver. The journey turns into a quiet rebellion against the silence of war.

SYNOPSIS

Newly retired Lisbeth sets out on the most important mission of her life: to find the gun her father turned on himself in 1940, but with which he failed to take his own life. The weapon vanished, becoming a haunting family legend. Determined to bring the gun home to Sweden, she joins a “therapy bus” of fellow children of war veterans. What follows is an emotional journey through Finland, where Lisbeth encounters an arms dealer, sings karaoke, learns to shoot, and receives cryptic guidance from a witch. As the bus nears the Russian border, she edges closer not only to the lost pistol, but to reconciliation with her father, her past, and a country scarred by old wounds.

BALLAD ^{FILM}

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When my friend Lisbeth told me about her mission to join a therapy-bus, and go look for the long-lost revolver that once belonged to her father, my curiosity was awakened. What at first seemed like an absurd adventure on a bus trip through Finland quickly revealed something deeply human, a daughter's lifelong yearning for reconciliation with a father who carried his trauma in silence.

I wanted to explore how war trauma can echo through generations, carried quietly within families, often unspoken yet deeply present. *The Smuggler* is also a film about companionship and the healing power of shared stories, showing how unexpected encounters and strange paths can open doors to understanding. Lisbeth's journey reminded me that it is never too late to ask difficult questions, to confront the past, or to follow a dream.







Q&A WITH SYLVELIN MÅKESTAD

What drew you to Lisbeth's story?

I had known Lisbeth for some time, and when she told me about her plan to travel across Finland to find her father's pistol and smuggle it back home to Sweden, my curiosity was awakened. There was something deeply life-affirming and inspiring about an older woman setting off on a secret mission like this. And I really could connect to her motives behind it. Because it was not actually about the pistol itself, the revolver had become a symbol of Lisbeth's relationship with her father; a symbol of his life, his history, and everything that had been left unresolved. For her, retrieving the gun was a way of "bringing her father back home." That resonated strongly with me. My own father passed away when I was 19, and I recognize that urge to search for traces of life in the things that remain, to hold on to objects as a way of staying connected. Through Lisbeth's journey, I could see myself, a daughter's love for a parent, and how sometimes we are willing to go very far to feel close to them again.

The film balances humor and grief. Why was that important?

Because that is how life often feels. Even in the middle of pain, there is absurdity and laughter. I believe humor can be a form of survival. It allows us to look at difficult things without turning away. In *The Smuggler*, the comedy is never there to mock. It is there to create closeness. Sometimes lightness is the only way we can stay with the heavy questions long enough to truly face them.

Why did you choose the road movie format?

The bus journey is the skeleton of the film. Lisbeth's return to her motherland and each place she visits, each person she meets, opens another door into her father's history, but also into her own unanswered questions. A road movie allows movement, surprise, and new encounters along the way. And Lisbeth's story needed that sense of adventure. Because even though the film deals with trauma, it is also about the desire to enjoy life in a playful way, to understand your roots and finally come to peace with questions you carried your whole life.

What larger themes does the film explore?

For me *The Smuggler* is a film about how war does not end when the fighting stops. Trauma can echo through generations. It lives in families, in bodies, in silence ... especially when it is never spoken about. Lisbeth grew up with a father who survived the war but was unable to heal his memories and open up to his family. And that silence shaped Lisbeth's entire childhood. Through her journey, I wanted to explore what it means to carry something you never experienced yourself, but still inherit.

What do you hope the audience takes away from the film?

That's not something I want to dictate, I hope the film feels like an invitation rather than a conclusion, an invitation to reflect on your own unresolved carry-on. And sometimes it can be easier to open up to a stranger. The feeling of connection among strangers is an important and beautiful thing, it gives me hope. We have the possibility to heal through sharing, even late in life.

For me, meeting Lisbeth and the people on the therapy bus was a reminder that it is never too late to set out on a journey, to confront what has been left unresolved, or to follow a dream, no matter how unexpected or unconventional it may be, and perhaps also an encouragement to simply go for it, and to keep a sense of playfulness along the way.



DIRECTOR BIO

Sylvelin Måkestad is a Norwegian filmmaker based in Sweden. She graduated from the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts in 2013 and has directed numerous short-form works across both fiction and documentary, released in cinemas and broadcast by SVT and NRK.

Her first feature documentary *I SEE YOU* won Best Documentary (“The Golden Fly”) at the Norwegian Documentary Film Festival, and her films have screened internationally at festivals including Oberhausen, One World, Seoul Film Festival, and Bergen International Film Festival.

THE SMUGGLER is Måkestad’s second feature film, continuing her distinct cinematic approach to intimate human stories, told with warmth, humor, and emotional depth.



PRODUCER BIO

Ina Holmqvist is a Swedish producer and director and the founder of Ballad Film, an independent production company based in Stockholm. She has produced award-winning documentaries screened at major festivals such as IDFA, Hot Docs, Visions du Réel, and Berlinale.

Her internationally acclaimed feature documentary *THE GULLSPÅNG MIRACLE* premiered at Tribeca Film Festival and went on to reach wide audiences across festivals, cinemas, and television, receiving multiple major awards including Sweden’s Guldbagge and Kristallen prizes.

Holmqvist’s work focuses on locally rooted stories with universal resonance, often centered around strong voices both in front of and behind the camera.

TEAM

Original Title: Smugglaren
International Title: The Smuggler

Director / Writer
Sylvelin Måkestad

Producer
Ina Holmqvist

Main Participant
Lisbeth Grägg

Cinematography
Pia Lehto
Marita Hällfors
Karl Gustafsson
Love Oijens
Ita Zbronic-Zajt

Editor
Jussi Rautaniemi

Sound Recordist
Lou Strömberg

Sound Designer
Jorunn Børve Eriksen

Composer
Salla Luhtala

Production Company (Sweden)
Ballad Film AB

Co-Producer (Finland)
Mouka Filmi Oy, Juha Löppönen

Co-Producer (Norway)
Aldeles AS, Turid Rogne



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