

KINO LORBER

SKIN DEEP

Directed by Alex Schaad

Written by Alex Schaad and Dimitrij Schaad

WINNER

Queen Lion – Venice Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION

Fantasia International Film Festival



Germany | 2022 | 1:1.85 | 5.1 digital | 103 min | In German with English subtitles

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LOGLINE



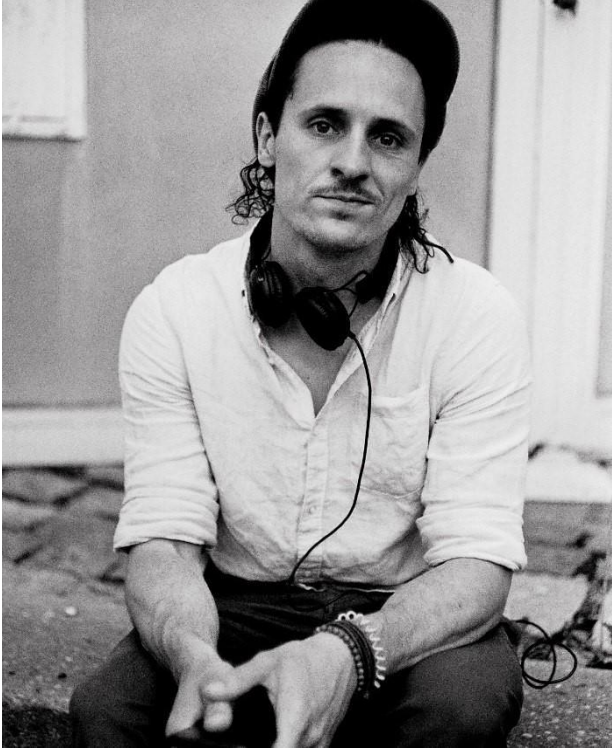
On first glance, Leyla and Tristan seem like a happy young couple. But when they travel to a mysterious, remote island, a game of identities begins, which changes everything – their perception, their sexuality, their whole “self”. Not only is their relationship in jeopardy, they may never be who they once were again...

SYNOPSIS

Seeking a retreat where they can salvage their struggling relationship, young couple Leyla (Mala Emde) and Tristan (Jonas Dassler) travel to a remote island at the invitation of Leyla's childhood friend Stella, where it soon becomes clear that what the island offers is more mysterious than a simple vacation. Leyla and Tristan join another couple in a ritual to exchange bodies and see the world through the eyes of someone else – a chance to find themselves or, for some of them, a chance at escape. Free from the constraints of her former body, Leyla quickly finds she has never been happier, with a fresh outlook on life and a new sense of release and fulfillment. But when she refuses to return to her old self, the situation threatens to spiral out of control. Subverting genre and gender as it toggles from body swap thriller to intimate relationship drama, *Skin Deep* tells a story that transcends bodies, embracing the endless fluid possibilities in the question of what it means to truly love someone.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



"You are the person you are because of the body you have," says one of the characters in SKIN DEEP. But what does this sentence mean in times of fluid identities?

To what extent can our body adapt to the development of our personality? Or is it an unchangeable, insurmountable limit to which we must adapt throughout our lives? What happens when body and mind are out of harmony? And how do we define "mental health" in this context?

Our body, our subconscious, impenetrable biochemical system plays a much greater role in mental illness than we "self-determined" beings would like to acknowledge. What tremendous, invisible forces are actually at work within this indissoluble duality of mind and body?

And since the composition of our so-called 'I' already holds such great conflicts, how wonderfully complex does it become once one two-divided being meets another two-divided being, resulting in them forming a pair?

At the beginning of SKIN DEEP was my intimate need to find a cinematic translation for what happens when a relationship undergoes a major change. From this situation, which most of us have experienced, evolved the vision of a cinematic world that allows our characters to magically leave the confines of their bodies and encounter each other and, above all, themselves in a new way. In a dramatic relay race, one and the same character was embodied by actors of different age, gender and biological makeup. This in turn meant that each of these actors played several sharply-contoured characters. This process alone produced a rarely-seen ensemble performance. The script and the different departments, from costume and make-up to music and camera, all had to work together in delicate coordination in order to guide the audience through a unique narrative world.

I hope that all these fantastic individual parts have come together in SKIN DEEP to form one big cinematic body.

– Alex Schaad

ALEX SCHAAD – WRITER & DIRECTOR

Alex Schaad was born in Kaskelen, Kazakhstan in 1990, and moved to Germany with his family in 1993. After graduating from high school in Baden-Württemberg and doing his civil service in Munich, he worked in various positions in film, TV and theater productions, before enrolling to study film directing at Munich film school HFF 2013. His second student film INVENTION OF TRUST won the Max Ophüls Prize as best mid-length film 2016 and the Student Oscar in Gold in Los Angeles the same year. SKIN DEEP is his debut feature.

FILMOGRAPHY

In development: **THE HUT**

2022: SKIN DEEP

Director & Screenwriter (in collaboration with Dimitrij Schaad)

2018: THE LOVE EUROPE PROJECT (SHORT)

Director & Screenwriter

WINNER – Best Fiction – Adolf-Grimme-Award

2017: ENDLING (SHORT)

Director & Screenwriter

WINNER – Best Medium-Length Film – Filmfestival Max Ophüls Preis

2016: INVENTION OF TRUST (SHORT)

Director & Screenwriter

WINNER – Best Foreign Film – Student Academy Awards

WINNER – Best Medium-Length Film – Filmfestival Max Ophüls Preis

2015: MARIE (SHORT)

Director & Screenwriter

2014: THOMAS BALDER UND DER FORTGANG (SHORT)

Director & Screenwriter

2012: MISSISSIPPI VARIATIONEN (SHORT)

Director

2009: PROJEKT LIBERATIO (SHORT)

Director

PRODUCERS' NOTE

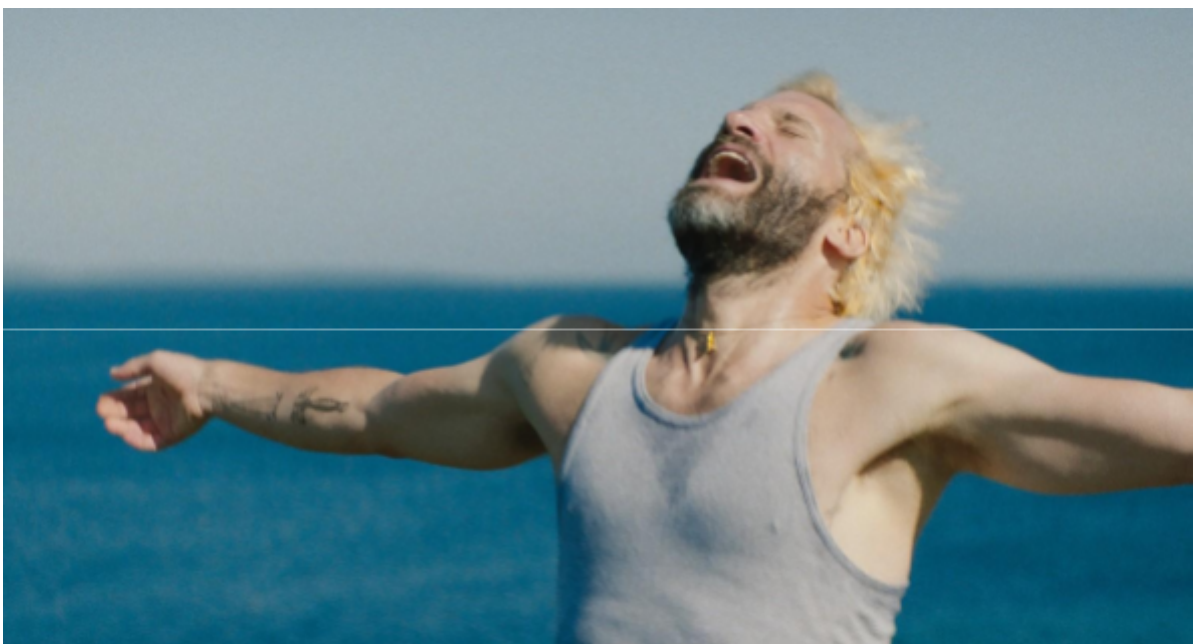
Producing a film like SKIN DEEP is equal parts joyous and risky. It all started with a fantastic idea for a project that is really quite difficult to pigeonhole to a specific theme or genre. Inasmuch it presents a great risk for its makers and the actors.

Brothers Dimitrij and Alex Schaad – as close as they are – are blessed with very distinct but different talents. Each of them manages to shine in their chosen careers, but only when working in combination, in symbiosis, can a work like SKIN DEEP emerge – at least from our point of view. They've really moved beyond anything that's been tried before. Using a science-fiction love story, in an experiment on a remote island, theirs is a story of existential fears and longing. Who or how do I wish to love? Or can I even love at all? Do I first have to love myself, and how do I do that? Current or even future questions of identity and how to imagine life together are skillfully woven together with such freshness that a definition of gender or love for a certain sex seems like a thing of the past.

The ensemble's performance is extraordinary. Mala Emde, Jonas Dassler, Maryam Zaree and Dimitrij Schaad are the shooting stars of their generation, not to mention Thomas Wodianka, a stage great and new discovery for cinema, and Edgar Selge, the great master of his craft. Leyla, the main character, is played by four actors, and could only be realized by way of intensive rehearsals and the great skill of all the actors involved.

We were able to work on SKIN DEEP with our dream partners Bayerischer Rundfunk/ARTE, X Verleih and Beta Cinema. Their daring to support this project at such an early phase cannot be overestimated. It's made us that much happier to celebrate its world premiere on the Lido in Venice, a reward for everyone's hard work. Our enormously dedicated team includes Co-Producer Richard Lamprecht (Donndorffilm), Cinematographer Ahmed El Nagar, Production Designer Bartholomäus Kleppek, Editor Franziska Köppel, and Composer Richard Ruzicka. We're pleased to be at the start of a longer term creative collaboration with Director Alex Schaad and Screenwriter Dimitrij Schaad.

– Tobias Walker & Philipp Worm



CAST

MALA EMDE / LEYLA

She first appeared in front of a camera as a schoolgirl, gaining initial film experiences early on. She attracted a great deal of attention for her role as Anne Frank in Raymond Ley's *My Daughter, Anne Frank*, which received multiple award nominations, including the German Grimme Prize, and won the Television Film Prize from the German Academy of the Performing Arts. Emde received the Young Talent Award at the Bavarian Film Awards for her touching performance. That same year, she made her feature film debut in Florian Schnell's *Offline: Are You Ready for the Next Level*.



Emde played a wide variety of roles right after high school, including in the TV drama *Neben der Spur* (director: Thomas Berger), in the children's TV film *Nussknacker und Mausekönig*, and played the leading roles in *Tatort – Borowski und das verlorene Mädchen* (director: Raymond Ley) and in *Katharina Luther*. The feature film *303* (from 2015) attracted a great deal of attention for Emde; she worked with Hans Weingartner on the project and received the award for Best Young Female Actor at the Filmkunstfest Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In summer 2020, Emde successfully graduated from the renowned Ernst Busch Acting College in Berlin.

One of her first international projects was the elaborately produced thriller series *Shadowplay* (director: Måns Mårland and Björn Stein). *And Tomorrow the Entire World*, in which Emde plays the main role, was released in German cinemas almost simultaneously; the film, directed by Julia von Heinz (with whom Emde first worked together on the TV film *Katharina Luther*), celebrated its world premiere at the 77th Venice International Film Festival and received high praise in the media. Emde

was honored for her performance in the film with the Bisato d'Oro prize, awarded by the independent film critics. Emde has been a member of the company of the Theater Basel since 2021. Two films, in which she has taken on leading roles, are currently in production. Emde lives in Paris and Berlin.

JONAS DASSLER / TRISTAN

Jonas Dassler was cast for his first feature film, WE ARE FINE (2014), right before starting his studies at Berlin's Ernst Busch Academy. Next up was Julia Langhoff's LOMO. The LANGUAGE OF MANY OTHERS (2015), for which he received the Götz-George Nachwuchspreis and Bavarian Film Award as Best Young Actor, an award he took home again for his work in Lars Kraume's THE SILENT REVOLUTION (2017). His performance in Fatih Akin's THE GOLDEN GLOVE earned him a nomination for the German Film Award in 2019. The same year this movie premiered in the Competition of the BERLINALE Film Festival. In 2019 Jonas Dassler played the male lead in Lena Stahl's debut, MY SON. Jonas is a member of the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin.



DIMITRIJ SCHAAD / MO, SCREENPLAY



Dimitrij Schaad, born in Kazakhstan in 1985, trained at the Theater Academy August Everding in Bavaria and at the Theater Academy in St. Petersburg. After initial success at the Schauspielhaus Bochum, he became an influential member of the company at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin from 2013 to 2019, which was voted Theater of the Year two times during his time there. Schaad himself was voted Young Actor of the Year.

He's written several plays that have won awards, including the Mühlheim Theater Prize, during the Berlin Theatertreffen and the best German-language Play of the Year, and that have been reprised in several countries. He also writes screenplays with his brother, Alex. Their film *Invention of Trust* was honored as the Best Medium-Length Film at the Max Ophüls Film Festival, received numerous awards both in Germany and abroad, and was awarded the prestigious Gold Student Oscar®. Their second medium-length film also received the Max Ophüls Prize in 2018. *SKIN DEEP* is their feature debut.

Since his starring role in the best-selling film adaptation of *The Kangaroo Chronicles* (2020), Schaad has taken on leading roles in high-end streaming productions including *Beat*, *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (both on Amazon), and *Das Boot* (Sky), and also played the male lead in *Kleo* (Netflix). He played the love interest in the romantic feature *JGA*, the protagonist in the film adaptation of the successful novel *Sophia, Death and Me* (slated for release in spring 2023), and has appeared in international shows including *Killing Eve* (BBC America) and the world war drama *Wil* (Netflix). The *Kangaroo Conspiracy*, the second installment of the series, opens in German cinemas this August.

MARYAM ZAREE / FABIENNE

Maryam Zaree is an actress, writer and director. She was born in Evin Prison in Tehran in 1983, where her mother was being held as a political prisoner. Her mother managed to escape to Frankfurt, Germany, when Zaree was two years old. She studied acting at the University for Film in Potsdam-Babelsberg and has played numerous roles in cinematic and television productions, including *Shahada*, directed by Burhan Qurbani (Competition at the Berlinale 2010); *I'm Not Him*, directed by Tayfun Pirselimoglu (Best Film, Istanbul Film Festival 2012); *System Crasher*, directed by Nora Fingscheidt (Silver Bear, Berlinale 2019); and *Undine* (Competition, Berlinale 2020). Zaree received the Grimme Prize as Best Actress in 2018 for her work in the series *4 Blocks* (TNT).

As an author, she writes for theater, film and television. Her first documentary, *Born in Evin*, premiered at the 2019 Berlinale and screened in more than forty countries, winning numerous awards – including the Compass Perspective Award at the Berlinale and the German Film Prize/Lola for Best Documentary in 2020.



THOMAS WODIANKA / ROMAN

Thomas Wodianka, born in Schrobenhausen, Germany, in 1974, studied acting at the College for Music and Theater in Hamburg and with Eric Morris in Los Angeles. He's worked at various theaters in German-speaking countries and with directors including Christoph Marthaler, Susanne Kennedy, Sebastian Baumgarten, Yael Ronen, Alexander Giesche and Wu Tsang.

He's also been involved with international dance productions by Meg Stuart and Trajal Harrall. Wodianka has also appeared in films by Tomasz Thomson (*Snowman's Land*, 2010) and Ziska Riemann (*Lollipop Monster*, 2011), not to mention a wide variety of TV and film productions.

SKIN DEEP is his first collaboration with Alex Schaad.

EDGAR SELGE / STELLA

Edgar Selge is one of the most celebrated character actors in Germany. Born in 1948, he grew up in Herford, eastern Westphalia. He completed his acting training at the Otto Falckenberg School in Munich in 1975. He had previously studied philosophy and German language and literature in Munich and Dublin, and classical piano in Vienna. He became known to a wider audience as Inspector Jürgen Tauber in the crime drama *Polizeiruf 110*. This was followed by films for cinema and television including Helmut Dietel's *Rossini* (1997), *The Experiment* (2001) by Oliver Hirschbiegel, *The Poll Diaries* (2010, by Chris Kraus), *Das Zeugenhaus* (2014, by Matti Geschonneck), *The Barschel Case* (2015, by Kilian Riedhof), and Jan Josef Liefers' directorial debut from 2022, *Honecker/Holmer*.

He has received numerous awards and prizes for his work in the theater and in front of the camera, most recently the Faust Theater Prize and Actor of the Year for his monologue as François in Michel Houellebecq's *Submission* – the novel was also made into a film with Selge in the starring role, directed by Titus Selge. Selge lives with actor Franziska Walser, and they have two children. He made his highly acclaimed literary debut with *Hast du uns endlich gefunden*, which has remained on the SPIEGEL bestseller list since its release in October 2021.

CREW

AHMED EL NAGAR

/ DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Ahmed El Nagar was born in 1988 in Kairo, Egypt. 2010-2013 Ahmed trained as a media designer for image and sound at Bavaria Film. Subsequently, he went on to study Cinematography at the Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film in Munich (HFF) and graduated in 2019. His 2nd year project was Alex Schaad's short-film *Invention of Trust* (2016), winner of the Student Oscar for best foreign film. In 2019 Ahmed was nominated for the German Cinematography Award for New Talents with *Naiwan*. Among others Ahmed El Nagar has directed the photography of two episodes of the German TV show *SOKO Hamburg* (2022) and the feature films *Rogue Trader* (2021) and *Skin Deep* (2022). He lives and works in Munich.

BARTHOLOMÄUS MARTIN KLEPPEK

/ PRODUCTION DESIGN

Bartholomäus Martin Kleppek, born in 1980 in Schwientochlowitz, Poland, studied acting at the Hanover University of Music and Drama from 2002 to 2006. He is a co-founder of the Würfelbühne - Junges Theater Hagen and has participated in several productions there as a set designer as well as an actor. Since 2000 he has been working as a director, stage and costume designer for theater and film productions. He has worked as set designer on productions such as *Endling* (2017), *Running against the Wind* (2019) and the more recent *Under Water* (2021) and *Skin Deep* (2022).

FRANZISKA KÖPPEL bfs

/ EDITOR

Franziska Köppel was born in Augsburg in 1990 and grew up in Kitzingen. After graduating from high school, she studied philosophy and film and television with a focus on editing in Munich. Since 2017 she has studied in the master's program in Editing at the Film University Konrad Wolf. Particularly formative for her career is the collaboration that connects her with Alex Schaad: *Invention of Trust*

(2016) and *Endling* (2017). Her first work as an editor of a feature-length film (television) was *Irgendwas bleibt immer* (2019). *Skin Deep* (2022) is her first theatrical film.

NOËMI LARA STREBER

/ COSTUME DESIGN

Born 1991 and raised in Munich, Noemi first studied painting at the Academy of Art in Munich. Parallel to these studies, she worked as an assistant at the Kammerspiele in Munich, where she discovered her enthusiasm and curiosity for costume. After graduating from the academy, she went to Hamburg to study costume design. During her studies she was already working as a costume designer in film, advertising, ballet and theater, which seamlessly translated into her career post university. She assisted to costume design for *Wolken unterm Dach* (2020) and has led costume design for *Blei* (2018) and *Skin Deep* (2022).

RICHARD RUZICKA

/ MUSIC

Richard Ruzicka (born in 1994) started taking piano lessons at the early age of five. He studied composition at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Munich, broadening his horizon to the field of Avantgarde music. In 2013 Richard Ruzicka started studying film scoring at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Munich. He was nominated for the Golden Eye „Best International Film Music 2014“ at the 10th Film Music Competition of the Zurich Film Festival. His first film scores were for *Lenalove* (2016). Since then, he has worked on many other projects, including the score for four episodes of Germany's most popular TV crime series *Tatort*. In 2018 he won the Rolf-Hans Müller Film Music Award for his music for the episode *Nachtdienst* from the popular TV series *Polizeiruf 110*. His most recent work was on *Laufen* (2022) and *Skin Deep* (2022).

WALKER + WORM FILM

/ PRODUCTION COMPANY

Walker+Worm Film was founded by Tobias Walker und Philipp Worm in 2008 after working, collaborating and studying together at Munich's University of Television and Film. The company has produced more than thirty feature films, documentaries and commercials in recent years. Every production focuses on the individual's style, striving for authenticity and the desire for realizing the director's personal vision.

Some of their best-known productions include *Picco* (directed by Philip Koch), *The Royal Game* (directed by Philipp Stölzl), *The Garden* (directed by Sonja Maria Kröner), and *Finsterworld* (directed by Frauke Finsterwalder).

Walker+Worm Film productions have been well received by critics around the world and have been screened at the most prestigious film festivals and awarded numerous prizes in recent years.

RICHARD LAMPRECHT

/ CO-PRODUCER

Richard Lamprecht (Donndorffilm) has been producing feature films, commercials and music videos since 2006. One of his first major successes was the film *Kids in Black*, which won the German Young Talent Film Award in 2007. Many very different cinematic works have been created over the past years, but all under a common premise: the greatest dedication to the project. Donndorffilm was able to win some of the most important international prizes with its most recent releases, including the Gold Student Oscar for *Invention of Trust* and the Audience Prize at the Max Ophüls Festival for *Endling*.

SKIN DEEP will now be Donndorffilm's first feature film production under the shingle of Walker+Worm Film.

CREDITS

CAST

Mala Emde	Leyla
Jonas Dassler	Tristan
Dimitrij Schaad	Mo
Maryam Zaree	Fabienne
Thomas Wodianka	Roman
Edgar Selge	Stella

CREW

Directed by	Alex Schaad
Screenplay	Dimitrij and Alex Schaad
Director of Photography	Ahmed El Nagar
Editor	Franziska Köppel
Music by	Richard Ruzicka
Sound	Michael Manzke, Alex Oberrader, Marco Hanelt, Jakob Weber
Production Design	Bartholomäus M. Kleppek
Costume Design	Noemi Streber
VFX	Lukas Väth
Casting	Ulrike Müller
Producers	Tobias Walker, Philipp Worm
Co-Producer	Richard Lamprecht
Production Companies	Walker + Worm Film in co-production with Bayerischer Rundfunk and Donndorffilm
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