



# BLISS GLÜCK

a film by Henrika Kull  
Germany 2021, 90 min., German-English-Italian

# BLISS

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## SHORT SYNOPSIS

Sascha has been working in the Berlin brothel “Queens” for many years. Maria is the new girl, she is independent, maverick and queer. Sascha is immediately drawn to this otherness, Maria in turn is fascinated by Sascha’s supreme ease. The attraction becomes a love that works differently than anything either has experienced before. A promise of great bliss. But then their connection starts to tremble - because of their fear of showing each other their true selves and facing up to their own abysses.

## PRESS NOTE

In BLISS (GLÜCK), director Henrika Kull tells the story of two women who meet in a world where the female body is a commodity. In authentic, powerful images, she follows her two protagonists who at first tiptoe around each other, then secretly flirt, get closer and closer and soon can’t be without one another - but yet don’t manage to simply be together. A rousing love film that knows no boundaries.



## LONG SYNOPSIS

Sascha is 42, lives in Berlin and has been working in the brothel “Queens” for many years. She is popular with her colleagues and clients, but feels an increasingly elusive emptiness inside. Despite her best efforts, Sascha cannot feel any emotional attachment to her current lover, Stefan. She has also never been able to develop a maternal relationship with her eleven-year-old son Max, who lives with his father out in the countryside. She tries to keep her visits there as short as possible.

One day, 25-year-old Italian Maria starts working at “Queens”. She wants to earn a lot of money as a sex worker in Berlin, so that she can lead a free and independent life. Maria is different: strangely self-sufficient, non-conformist, and queer. Sascha immediately feels attracted to the new girl, admires Maria for her determination and quality of otherness – and at the same time is challenged by her. In turn, Maria is fascinated by Sascha’s special position at the brothel and by her charisma. She wants to conquer Sascha’s heart.

The two women tiptoe around each other, secretly flirt, get closer and closer. The mutual attraction turns into love – a love that works differently from anything

either has experienced before. It could be the promise of great happiness.

Soon Sascha and Maria are inseparable, and Sascha takes her friend back to her village in Brandenburg so that she doesn’t have to go through the annual village-festival with her son Max alone. And there it is again: The pathetic masculine posturing that Sascha once fled from. Maria doesn’t seem to mind, she actually thinks it’s all rather funny.

Maria wants to please Max, above all she wants to please Sascha, wants to do everything right. In the process, she stops being Sascha’s ally and unwittingly becomes her betrayer. Cracks begin to form in their happiness. Sascha is angry – at herself, but also with Maria, who she believes serves everyone but herself.

Sascha starts to lose her grip and repeatedly oversteps the boundaries – with Maria and also at the brothel. She has lost touch with who she is. To regain control, she ends the relationship with Maria. The abyss that Sascha is staring into begins to look threatening. And yet she feels more alive with her pain than in a life without love. Now she has an idea of what happiness might be.



## HENRIKA KULL ON HER FILM / DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I have always been intrigued by the topics of longing and physicality, and by places of social boundaries and stigmatization. In 2010, a research led me to a brothel for the first time. I wanted to find out how this place works: How did the women there deal with femininity? How did they treat each other? How did they treat their clients?

Over the years I continued my research at various brothels, working behind the bar in some or assisting the madam. I had conversations with the sex workers but also with their clients. Although the places I went to were different, the women I saw there usually appeared very self-determined in their profession. I realized that they saw this job primarily as an opportunity to make better money than in other career choices. Since they had learned ways to anticipate, avoid or handle attacks, I always experienced these women as active agents who set their own boundaries. I have seldom heard women say "No" so clearly as in these brothels.

In my second feature film, I wanted to tell a fictional love story that is set in a place where love becomes a commodity in a very physical way. I didn't just want to integrate my experiences into the story as "real" as

possible, but also wanted to be open to new insights during the shoot. So I looked for a brothel in which the sex workers were keen to engage in the joint experiment of making a film together.

I returned to a brothel that I already knew from my research. I had assisted the madam and knew many of the women who worked there. The big challenge with my idea was that the women should play themselves in their own familiar work place, but with the story's protagonists, played by actors, integrated into that environment. We spent a lot of time on site, with and without a camera – which was sometimes problematic, as our presence naturally disrupted the processes and not all the women wanted to appear in the film. Nevertheless, as a result of this approach, the actors became more and more a natural part of the location, and the sex workers no longer perceived us as foreign entities.

Since sex work is heavily stigmatized, and many of the women lead a double life, it was particularly important during the shoot to show that our film wishes to engage with the women on an equal footing and does not want to devalue them or show them off. Rather, it wants to present the brothel as an everyday workplace.



It was important to me to portray sex work as a profession – as a service, as a performance, as an opportunity to earn money.

I kept asking myself whether self-determined sex work is possible.\* More interesting, however, is the question of whether any self-determined work is actually possible under capitalism.

In the course of my research and during the film shoot, I increasingly got the feeling that through their work sex workers are regaining sovereignty over their own bodies and turning them into a commodity from which they can draw capital themselves, instead of leaving that exploitation up to the patriarchy. In the context of the systematic oppression and abuse of the female body by the patriarchy over the centuries, sex work takes on a subversive connotation for me. Getting paid for a sexual performance seems to me like a logical and honest reaction to the world that we are living in.

However, BLISS/GLÜCK is primarily supposed to be a love story of two women who do not – or no longer – actually believe in love. I'm interested in how power asymmetries – especially within the context of capitalism – can affect relationships. Sascha has learned to protect herself: She'd rather hurt herself than let

anyone else do so. She doesn't think she even has the capacity for happiness. Meanwhile, Maria has an almost compulsive need to maintain her independence. The two women's struggle for a chance at a deeper connection is, for me, the core of the story.

\*Prostitution as an independent service is the much more common form of sex work. In this context it must be clearly differentiated from forced prostitution and human trafficking.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Henrika Kull**, born in 1984 in southern Germany, studied social sciences in Cologne. After completing her diploma thesis on German film funding (2012), she studied film production at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (dffb). While she had the opportunity to direct a short film there, she suffered the worst agony, felt the greatest happiness, and finally realized where her true passion lies. From 2014 on she studied film directing at the Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf, in the class of Barbara Albert, to whom she also assisted for her film "Mademoiselle Paradies" (2017). Henrika Kull's graduation film "Jibril" premiered in the Panorama section of the Berlin International Film Festival in 2018 and won several prizes, including the Studio Hamburg Young Talent Award for the best feature film. In 2019 it was released in cinemas across Germany. Her debut film BLISS/GLÜCK is produced by Flare Film in co production with ZDF - Das kleine Fernsehspiel. Her third feature film project "Central Station" is currently in the script development phase and is supported by the Medienboard Berlin Brandenburg with the artist-in-residence program..

### Director Filmography

- 2015**     **Absently Present** (short documentary film)  
Production: Filmuniversität Babelsberg Konrad Wolf
- 2018**     **Jibril**  
Production: Filmuniversität Babelsberg Konrad Wolf
- 2021**     **Glück/Bliss**  
Production: Flare Film GmbH, Martin Heisler · Commissioning Editor: Burkhard Althoff, ZDF - Das kleine Fernsehspiel

**Katharina Behrens**, born in Meiningen in 1981. Studied acting at the "Max Reinhardt Seminar" in Vienna, Austria until 2007. Afterwards she played at various theatres, including the Thalia Theater Hamburg, Theater Osnabrück and Schauspiel Stuttgart. For her role in the short film "Where We Are" ("Wo wir sind", 2015) by Ilker Çatak, she was awarded Best Actress at the Festival International du Film d'Aubagne. In addition to appearances on television, she also played in Çatak's "Once Upon a Time ... Indianerland" ("Es war einmal Indianerland", 2017) and in 2021 can be seen in "Sтамbul Garden" ("Räuberhände") the new film by Ilker Çatak. The role of Sascha in BLISS/GLÜCK is her first leading role in a feature film.

**Adam Hoya**, is an Italian artist based in Athens, Greece. You might know him as Eva Collé, the name and character that he went by from 2012 to 2019, years that he spent in Berlin, part of which performing for the film "Searching Eva" (2018). Adam has gone by at least half a dozen names since 1992 and has spent most of his working life as a sex worker.

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### Cast

Katharina Behrens ..... Sascha  
Adam Hoya ..... Maria  
Nele Kayenberg ..... Scarlett  
Jean-Luc Bubert ..... Mike  
Petra Kauner ..... Petra

### Crew

Writer & Director ..... Henrika Kull  
Cinematography ..... Carolina Steinbrecher  
Editing ..... Henrika Kull, Anna-Lena Engelhardt, Hannah Schwegel  
Music ..... Dascha Dauenhauer  
Art Design ..... Theresa Bischof, Theresa Reiwer  
Costume & Make-Up ..... Wiebke Christin Lebus  
Sound ..... Manja Ebert  
Sound Design ..... Thomas Neumann  
Mix ..... Dominik Rätz  
Line Producers ..... Jule Terrey, Maxim Juretzka  
Production Manager ..... Simon B. Stein  
Commissioning Editor ..... Burkhard Althoff  
(ZDF - Das kleine Fernsehspiel)  
Producer ..... Martin Heisler

a Flare Film Production  
in Coproduction with ZDF - Das kleine Fernsehspiel  
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