

# FISH TANK

From the director of RED ROAD, Oscar award winning WASP, DOG and MILK

# FISH TANK (15)

Directed by Andrea Arnold

Jury Prize Winner – Cannes Film Festival 2009



Starring

Katie Jarvis, Kierston Wareing, Michael Fassbender,  
Rebecca Griffiths, Harry Treadaway

UK / 2009 / 124 Mins / English / In Colour / Scope

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**An Artificial Eye Release**

Images will be available on [image.net](http://image.net)

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# FISH TANK

## CREW

Directed and written by	Andrea Arnold
Producer	Kees Kasander
	Nick Laws
Director of Photography	Robbie Ryan
Editor	Nicolas Chaudeurge
Production Designer	Helen Scott
Costume Designer	Jane Petrie

**BBC Films and UK Film Council in association with Limelight present  
a Kees Kasander Production**

**- An Artificial Eye Release -**

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## CAST

Katie Jarvis

Kierston Wareing

Michael Fassbender

Rebecca Griffiths

Harry Treadaway

Mia

Joanne

Connor

Tyler

Billy

## **FISH TANK**

### **SYNOPSIS**

FISH TANK is the story of Mia (KATIE JARVIS), a volatile 15-year-old, who is always in trouble and who has become excluded from school and ostracized by her friends. One hot summer's day her mother (KIERSTON WAREING) brings home a mysterious stranger called Connor (MICHAEL FASSBENDER) who promises to change everything and bring love into all their lives.

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## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

BBC Films and the UK Film Council in association with Limelight present a Kees Kasander production. FISH TANK stars Michael Fassbender (HUNGER, INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS), Kierston Wareing (IT'S A FREE WORLD), Katie Jarvis, Rebecca Griffiths and Harry Treadaway (BROTHERS OF THE HEAD), and is written and directed by Andrea Arnold.

Andrea Arnold won the Jury Prize at the 2006 Cannes Festival for her debut feature RED ROAD, for which she also won many other awards including the prestigious Carl Foreman BAFTA Award in 2007.

FISH TANK is the story of 15-year old Mia, whose life is turned on its head when her mother brings home a new boyfriend. Set in the decaying landscape and council estates of Essex, Arnold reinforces her reputation as a British auteur and casts the same unflinching, unprejudiced gaze and touches on the themes of her Oscar-winning short WASP to create an original and unsettling tale for our age.

Filmed over six weeks in the summer of 2008, FISH TANK was produced by Kees Kasander and Nick Laws and was executive produced by Christine Langan of BBC Films and David Thompson. The director of photography was Robbie Ryan (BRICK LANE, RED ROAD), the editor Nicolas Chaudeurge (RED ROAD) and the production designer, Helen Scott (RED ROAD, TOPSY TURVY).

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## PRODUCTION NOTES

Academy-award winning writer/director Andrea Arnold began the process of turning FISH TANK into a film when she was struck by a single image.

“All my films have started with an image,” says Arnold “It’s usually quite a strong image and it seems to come from nowhere. I don’t understand the image at first or what it means, but I want to know more about it so I start exploring it, try and understand it and what it means. This is how I always start writing.”

From the outset of the project Arnold was keen to cast as many non-actors as possible. 17 year old Katie Jarvis who had no previous acting experience was cast as Mia. “I always wanted someone real for Mia,” says Arnold. “I wanted someone who would give me trouble for real. I wanted a girl who would not have to act, could just be herself.” The casting process took some time before Katie was 'discovered' on a station platform. “Originally we went down the more traditional routes as Mia needed to have a passion for dancing,” explains Arnold. “We saw girls from agencies and dance clubs. Then we started looking in Essex, in youth clubs, markets, shopping centres, anywhere teenage girls would hang out. Katie was found on Tilbury Town Station arguing with her boyfriend. When she was approached she didn’t believe it was really for a film and wouldn’t hand over her number. She has a lot of spirit but also a vulnerability and innocence that felt right. She came from where we were going to film and felt very real.”

Katie says “There weren't a lot of people at the first audition so I wasn't nervous, but at the second it was a bit more scary as there were a lot of girls. I'd never done any dancing or anything like that and I didn't think I had a chance. They called me on my birthday and told me I'd got the part. I cried my eyes out, I was well chuffed.”

Even though Katie had no dance experience, which was crucial for the role, Arnold was convinced that she was right for the role.

“She had never done any acting or dancing before,” explains Arnold. “She didn’t dance at all in fact, didn’t even like dancing. The first time I asked her to dance she was too shy and so we left the room and left the camera on so she could dance alone. When I

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watched the tape back I saw that even though she was not a dancer in any way she was totally herself when she was dancing. There was no mask, no show. She was able to be herself totally even though she didn't like doing it. I thought I would take the risk. I wasn't sure if it was going to work, Katie had never done any acting but whatever happened I knew she would be herself and I wanted that the most."

Katie adds "The dancing was hard work as I had to do it over and over again. It wore me out, but it kept me fit."

"She was really brave in so many ways; there was so much for her to get used to. She was in every scene and it was tough for her sometimes," says Arnold. "I think she really grew over the course of the filming, changed in some way. She did beautifully. I think she wants to do more acting. She has an agent now."

"I learnt a lot doing the film," says Katie. "Whereas before I was doing nothing all the time, it made me learn that I could do things if I wanted to do it. It was hard, but it was fun and rewarding. Now I want to make the most of it. It shows you you don't have to go to drama school to get into it, but I think I was one of a kind, I don't think anyone else will get picked off a train station!"

Michael Fassbender was not immediately thought of for Connor. Arnold initially had a very different idea. "I originally wanted real people for everyone in Fish Tank and I had my eye on a man who works in my local park, a man who empties the bins. He was a perfect Connor. I wonder what he made of me watching him so intently every time I saw him.

But then I began to think it would be interesting to have someone with experience, mixed in with Katie's innocence as that would echo the relationship in the film and could work well."

Fassbender had just appeared in HUNGER to great critical acclaim, but Arnold hadn't seen the film. "I saw Michael for the first time in a clip from WEDDING BELLES, an Irvine Welsh film. I hadn't seen HUNGER or even knew about it at that point, though I became aware of it later. I thought he was very charismatic in WEDDING BELLES and

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that was an important quality for Connor. I made a decision without meeting him on the strength of that clip really because he felt right and I trust my instincts in that way. I don't like to question myself when it feels right so just went for it."

Fassbender boarded the film without having read the script as Arnold didn't allow any of the actors to read it beforehand. They were given their scenes only a few days before filming. "Not having a script is kind of worrying and most of the time you wouldn't commit to something under those circumstances, but I'd seen RED ROAD and I really respected Andrea and wanted to work with her. I find her storytelling very interesting because it's in the grey area. She deals with human beings who have flaws and have good qualities and negative qualities and are basically just trying to figure their way through life."

"It was brave of him to do this film really because I didn't show him or anyone in the film the script beforehand so he didn't know what he was letting himself in for. I wanted to shoot in order, so that the story would reveal itself to everyone as we went along," explains Arnold. "I felt this was especially important for Katie, as I wanted her to feel she knew where she was all the time. I also didn't want anyone to add anything significant to what they were doing. Not knowing the future meant that every moment had to be explored for just what it was and nothing more. A bit like life I guess. We never know what will happen to us in the next hour, the next day. I wanted each moment to have that innocence.

Michael very much took this on board and went through the filming taking every day in his stride: "We didn't rehearse, talk much about anything, we just worked on every day as it came."

"It was a very different way of working," comments Fassbender. "I usually like to digest the script and let it rot and then play with it when it comes to the day of filming so in this instance I tried to be as loose and relaxed as possible. That was the main note I gave myself. Andrea is very quick and off the cuff and works with whatever happens that day to organically feed her story and creates a very comfortable space for the actors to work in."

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Fassbender enjoyed working with Katie. “Katie is a very expressive person and very easy to play with as she's not really acting. In Andrea's hand you can get a very powerful performance in that way as it's very raw, it comes from the gut, it hasn't been over-thought, it's very intuitive.” Katie, in turn, found Fassbender easy to work with. “He gave me advice about certain things and was really helpful,” she says. “It felt a bit weird acting some scenes with him, but because I knew what he was like off camera it made it much easier.”

Kierston Wareing was cast as Mia's mother Joanne. “I loved Kierston the minute I set eyes on her and felt I had known her all my life,” says Arnold. “I felt I really knew her. It's very nice to feel like that about someone and I cast her in one second. It turned out she grew up in the area we filmed in so maybe that is what I tapped into. She just felt very genuine, her accent, everything felt authentic.

“I originally was looking for someone real for Joanne too, someone who had lived like Joanne. Someone harder. Kierston does not have that but she had honesty about her, an openness and I guess a kind of innocence that was very attractive. It was different to what I had been looking for but still felt right. I love that about film making, you set out with a particular idea but it changes, evolves, and redefines itself daily. You have to embrace that. If you have the story in your heart, and hold onto it, the thing you care about can still be there even when everything changes, even when you lose the most important things, even when you despair you can often still find a way.”

Kierston embraced the style of working. “I love Andrea's way of shooting, that's how I worked with Ken Loach, so it was great to have the opportunity to do it again.” Katie adds, “In some ways I think it was good, not telling us the story in advance, because you try and put the story together in your head yourself and bit by bit I was slowly working it out.”

“It was great working with Kierston,” says Fassbender. “She's very no nonsense and when I first saw her I thought she looked like Brigitte Bardot. She's got this very interesting quality to her, she's got this sultry, sexy rawness to her and she's very free and easy to work with. I watched IT'S A FREE WORLD while we were working and saw how talented she is, she's also fun”

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“Michael is so down to earth and lovely and normal, there wasn't a barrier in terms of his film experience versus anyone else's,” says Kierston.

FISH TANK was filmed over six weeks in the summer 2008. The locations were all in Essex, to the East of London. Arnold explains her choice to set the story there.

“I originally wrote FISH TANK for Estuary Kent, which I know well, but decided to have a look at Essex because I knew it was similar in landscape. I drove out from east London along the A13 and loved it straight away. The madness of the A13, the steaming factories and the open spaces, the wilderness, the empty car parks where Ford used to be. I love too this part of the Thames, where it widens out to meet the sea. It's where Elizabeth spoke to the troops before they went out to fight the Spanish. It just all felt good.”

Much of the filming took place in one estate, the setting for Joanne and Mia's home. The crew spent several weeks filming on this location.

“I was looking for an estate in the middle of all that that felt like an island and the Mardyke fitted that description,” says Arnold. “I loved too the colours on the blocks there. Colour was important for me. I also loved the wasteland behind the estate. Really overgrown and full of wild flowers and birds and foxes and a really big sky. I wanted to film there but we couldn't get permission which was a massive disappointment.

“We had a very happy time filming on the estate. Film crews are so arrogant, taking over peoples everyday spaces like they own them. I always expect people to get annoyed with us and tell us to fuck off but we had none of that.”

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### **THE FILMMAKERS**

#### **ANDREA ARNOLD**

##### **Biography**

Andrea Arnold just completed 'Fish Tank', her second feature, which won the Jury Prize at the Cannes International Film Festival 2009. 'Red Road', her first feature, was awarded the Jury Prize in Cannes 2006, Five Scottish BAFTAs, the Carl Foreman Award at the British Academy Awards and the Sutherland Trophy at the London International Film Festival 2006. Previously she made 3 shorts. 'Wasp' won 38 international awards including the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short 2005. 'Dog' won the Jameson Award 2003 and 'Milk' was selected for the Critic's Week in Cannes in 1998.

#### **ANDREA ARNOLD**

##### **Filmography**

<b>2009</b>	FISH TANK
<b>2006</b>	RED ROAD
<b>2003</b>	WASP
<b>2001</b>	DOG
<b>1998</b>	MILK

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### **KEES KASANDER**

#### **Biography**

Kees Kasander set up Kasander Film for the purpose of structural European crossover productions. Until the day of the establishment of Kasander Film, Kees Kasander built up an extensive European network with authors and directors like Peter Greenaway.

#### Film production

Kees Kasander entered the film industry in 1978 as Head of Distribution for a Dutch company called Film International, a company which was also deeply involved in the organisation of the Rotterdam Film Festival. From 1982 until 1985, Kasander was the official producer of the Festival program. He has been an independent film producer since 1981 and as such has worked all over the world. Until now he has produced over 50 feature films.

His collaboration with Peter Greenaway has brought him international acclaim. The films *THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER* (1989) and *THE PILLOW BOOK* (1995) have also been great commercial successes. Kees Kasander has won both national and international prizes for his film productions. He won the nationally esteemed prize for best feature film at the Dutch Film Festival in Utrecht four times: *SECRET WEDDING* in 1988, directed by Alejandro Agresti, *PROSPERO'S BOOKS* in 1992, directed by Peter Greenaway, *ABELTJE* in 1999, directed by Ben Sombogaart and *CRUSADE IN JEANS* in 2006, directed by Ben Sombogaart. Kasander received a prize in Berlin for the film *CRUSH PROOF*, directed by Paul Tickell. As a co-producer he has participated in films by Alexander Sokourov (*ELEGY OF A VOYAGE*) and Philippe Garrel (*SAUVAGE INNOCENCE*).

His most recent productions are: *CRUSADE IN JEANS* (directed by Ben Sombogaart, who had an Oscar nomination for *Twin Sisters*), an adaptation of the well-known Dutch Children's book 'Kruistocht in Spijkerbroek' by Thea Beckman, and *NIGHTWATCHING* by Peter Greenaway. *CRUSADE IN JEANS* has been very successful in Dutch and Belgian cinemas in 2006/2007. The film won a golden and a platinum award, a national Dutch prize. The film *NIGHTWATCHING* by Peter Greenaway had its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival in 2007, where it won two Italian art awards. It is a film about

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the creation of the famous painting 'The Nightwatch' by the Dutch painter Rembrandt. The films also received awards at the 2007 Netherlands Film Festival. The festival's top prize, the Golden Calf for Best Film, went to Kees Kasander for CRUSADE IN JEANS and Herman P. Koerts was awarded the Golden Calf for Best Editing. NIGHTWATCHING was also awarded two major prizes, the Golden Calf for Best Script by Peter Greenaway and for Best Production Design by Maarten Piersma.

### New media

As managing director of the Hague Film Foundation, Kasander has programmed a series of Festivals in 1985 and 1986, called "Image and Sound". These festivals featured the integration of new media in the audiovisual industry, a subject that Kees Kasander has always been very interested in. In 1996 he was asked to set up a new program for the International Film Festival Rotterdam concerning new media and feature film, an initiative that resulted in the Exploding Cinema Festival, which is now a substantial part of the International Film Festival Rotterdam.

### Other activities

In 1995 Kasander made 9 cultural programs for the Dutch quality broadcaster, the VPRO. Furthermore, he produced the music albums "Eine Frau für die Liebe" (1990) and "La Baggia D'oro" (1991) by the Dutch singer-performer La Pat. Kees Kasander was involved in the production of "Writing to Vermeer," an opera by Peter Greenaway and Louis Andriessen which had its premiere in the Music Theatre in Amsterdam in December 1999. In 2001 he produced the film images for the theatre play "Gold" by Peter Greenaway and Saskia Boddeke, a production for the Schauspielhaus Frankfurt. Over the years, Kasander produced various exhibitions and installations of Peter Greenaway in co-operation with Reinier van Brummelen, creating constantly changing environments with the help of computer programmed light, sound and projection. He is also co-founder of a Dutch publishing company called Menken Kasander Wigman that specialises in modern Spanish literature, with a speciality in Catalan literature.

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### **NICK LAWS**

#### **Biography**

Nick Laws started his film career as a post boy at 20th Century Fox in London and then worked his way up in the Industry from production runner on STAR WARS – THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK to working as assistant director. He has worked on a range of feature films such as David Lean's A PASSAGE TO INDIA to the BAFTA winning docu-drama TOUCHING THE VOID. He worked as an assistant director on five feature films with Michael Winterbottom including WONDERLAND and THE CLAIM. He also worked with Pan Nalin as assistant director on SAMSARA in Ladakh.

His first move into production management was on YES directed by Sally Potter which was shot in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. He has also worked as the Production Supervisor in Kenya on THE CONSTANT GARDENER and BLOOD DIAMOND in Mozambique.

He first worked with Andrea Arnold when he produced her short film DOG which was shown in the Critics week in Cannes 2002.

### **ROBBIE RYAN**

#### **Biography**

Robbie Ryan served as the DP on Arnold's first feature RED ROAD as well as her Academy Award winning short film WASP. His other film credits include Bille Eltringham's THIS IS NOT A LOVE SONG, Sarah Gavron's BRICK LANE and most recently THE SCOUTING BOOK FOR BOYS, directed by Tom Harper.

He is currently filming PATAGONIA, directed by Marc Evans and starring Matthew Rhysk.

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### **NICOLAS CHAUDEURGE**

#### **Biography**

Trained at the National Film and Television School, Nicolas has been editing drama and documentary for 14 years in both the UK and France. He has edited over twenty award-winning short films, including the Oscar winning WASP, directed by Andrea Arnold.

Nicolas soon moved on to editing television dramas and feature films, collaborating again with Andrea Arnold on RED ROAD (Cannes Jury Prize 2006). Other recent credits include Kevin McDonald's feature documentary MY ENEMY'S ENEMY and THE CRIMSON WING (feature documentary for Disney).

### **HELEN SCOTT**

#### **Biography**

Helen Scott started out as a designer in television working on a variety of series such as "The Bill," "Get Real" and "Dressing for Breakfast". She previously worked with Arnold on RED ROAD, and the shorts: the Oscar-winning WASP and DOG. She designed the Mike Leigh directed TOPSY TURVY as well as CAREER GIRLS.

### **JANE PETRIE**

#### **Biography**

Jane studied costume design at the Wimbledon School of Art. After graduating in 1992, she went on to build up a wealth of experience in the wardrobe department of both theatre and film, her early features credits include NOTTING HILL, ELIZABETH and STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE.

From working as the assistant costume designer on productions including CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN, BUFFALO SOLDIERS and THE CONSTANT GARDENER, Jane went on to designing features such as 28 WEEKS LATER and IS ANYBODY THERE?.

Having completed MOON for Duncan Jones, Jane is currently designing the costumes for HARRY BROWN, a feature being directed by Daniel Barber, starring Sir Michael Caine.

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### **THE CAST**

#### **KATIE JARVIS**

##### **Biography**

Katie makes her acting debut in FISH TANK.

#### **KIERSTON WAREING**

##### **Biography**

Wareing from Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, trained at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute in New York for three years between 1997 and 2000. She made her feature film debut in Ken Loach's IT'S A FREE WORLD in which she starred as Angie. She recently completed filming TASTE OF RAIN in Namibia, directed by Richard Pakleppa. On television she has appeared in a range of series including "Wire in the Blood," "Trial & Retribution," and "Leaving".

#### **MICHAEL FASSBENDER**

##### **Biography**

Michael grew up in Killarney. Having done some theatre and TV, the turning point came when Michael was cast in the epic Steven Spielberg/Tom Hanks production, "Band of Brothers" playing Sgt. Burton 'Pat' Christenson. Following this, Michael was cast in many UK television series. The most notable being "Gunpowder: Treason and Plot" starring as the notorious Guy Fawkes; the teen supernatural drama "Hex" as fallen angel 'Azazel'; "Murphy's Law" where he guest-starred as Caz Miller; Agatha Christie's "Poirot": and "Trial and Retribution X: Sins of the Father." In 2006, at the Edinburgh Festival, Michael starred alongside legendary Mel Smith in "Allegiance," a play about Winston Churchill and Michael Collins.

Following on from the box office success of Zack Snyder's 300, Irish actor Michael Fassbender was the romantic lead in François Ozon's ANGEL. 2007-2008 was an extremely busy time for Michael, with a major part in Joel Schumacher's supernatural thriller TOWN CREEK followed by EDEN LAKE, directed by James Watkins. Michael then starred in "The Devil's Whore," a major four-part serial for Channel 4 set in the English Civil War and directed by Marc Munden. He received critical acclaim for his performance as Bobby Sands in HUNGER, directed by Steve McQueen. He won a

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Critics Circle Award as Best Actor as well as a BIFA for his role. He will next be seen in INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS, directed by Quentin Tartantino. He recently completed filming CENTURION, directed by Neil Marshall, in which he co-stars with Dominic West. He is currently filming JONAH HEX, co-starring with Megan Fox, John Malkovich and Josh Brolin.

## **REBECCA GRIFFTHS**

### **Biography**

Rebecca makes her acting debut in FISH TANK.

## **HARRY TREADAWAY**

### **Biography**

Harry trained at LAMDA graduating in 2006. He took time off in 2004 to film BROTHERS OF THE HEAD for Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe. He won a BIFA Nomination for Most Promising Newcomer in 2006 for BROTHERS OF THE HEAD. He subsequently appeared in CONTROL, the critically acclaimed film about Ian Curtis of Joy Division, directed by Anton Corbijn. He has recently finished filming PELICAN BLOOD, a love story directed by Karl Golden.

On television he featured in the critically acclaimed "The Shooting of Thomas Hurndall", alongside Kerry Fox and Stephen Dillaine. It was directed by Rowan Joffe.

Harry has just finished in Mark Ravenhill's new play "Over There" at the Royal Court Theatre.