

SEE NL

#Doc Issue



IDFA opener
**Kabul, City
in the Wind**

*Van Brummelen/de Haan
and mint film office in*
IDFA Feature Competition

Honigmann *on canine care*

Eleven docs in
IDFA Dutch Comp

The surrealism of Svankmajer **at EYE**

Issue #33 November 2018 IDFA

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FONDS**



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NL FILM
FONDS



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Ticket to Ride



Aboozar Amini

Filmmaker Aboozar Amini's *Kabul, City in the Wind*, which opens IDFA 2018, plunges spectators into the heart of the Afghan capital through the lives of a bus driver and a young boy who manages to find pleasure amid the debris of conflict.

Amini, who left Afghanistan as a teenager to live in the Netherlands, hit upon the idea of capturing contemporary Kabul via life on its buses when he returned there for the first time in 2009. "The city had changed. I couldn't find the Kabul I once knew. I saw heavy American military vehicles passing in a convoy through the heart of the city. There was the non-stop presence of helicopters in the air and ambulance sirens," he says.

"Tired of all this I took the bus. There I met passengers from all parts of the society: the old, young, men and women, beggars and pickpockets, prostitutes and students. I saw for the first time the true face of the city."

Amini spent a month riding the buses, listening to people talk, picking up snippets of stories and get-

ting to know the drivers. "Everyone was themselves in a true and honest way. I felt a huge difference between what I was seeing in the world media about Afghanistan and what was I seeing inside the bus. That was the moment I knew what my next film would be about."

The filmmaker eventually began shooting in 2015, producing the work under the Amsterdam-based Silk Road Film Salon banner that he runs with Dutch-Chinese producer Jia Zhao, in co-production with Japan's NHK Enterprises and with the support of the Busan International Film Fund, the IDFA Bertha Fund, Germany's EZEF Fund, a South Korean DMZ Grant and the Netherlands Film Fund.

"Violence is against human nature"

Between times, he had chosen a local bus driver called Abbas as the central character and also met a charismatic young boy called Afshin who would also become one of the viewpoints of the work. Amini recounts how he met Afshin while out with his crew looking for an old Soviet tank, which lay abandoned in the hills of Kabul. "We came across a group of children playing in the snow. Suddenly there were hundreds of kids around us and I was filming with my iPhone. Their openness and bright smiles were very touching. It was like they didn't care about the shadow of war on them."

Afshin stood out as the leader of the pack and walked with Amini and his crew for an hour to bring them to the tank. "When I watched my footage back home in Amsterdam I knew Afshin was the one through whose eyes I needed to see the city," says the director.

Amini made 15 trips to Kabul from 2015 on, during a period that saw an escalation in violence and suicide attacks in the Afghan capital. On the advice of Afshin's father, Amini took basic security precautions like not hanging out in crowded places or attending big public events. Nonetheless, he found himself caught up in the July 2016 bombing of a demonstration in the city's Deh Mazang Square, which left at least 86 people dead and another 250 injured.

"It was horrible. This was the moment I decided not to show any form of violence itself in my film. Violence is against human nature," says Amini, who believes that people become desensitized to images and reports of violence and killing over time. "You won't see any blood or bombs or shooting in my film. I'm tired of seeing these images out of Afghanistan. I would like to make the audience relate to the lives there, to feel the pain and violence without seeing it. I try to show life and how precious it can be, in a town which is non-stop under the shadow of war and violence." **Melanie Goodfellow**

IDFA opening film and First Appearance
Kabul, City in the Wind
◊ Aboozar Amini

idfa

14-25 nov 2018
International Documentary
Film Festival Amsterdam



Director & script: Aboozar Amini
Production: Silk Road Film Salon
Co-production: Color of May (DE), NHK Enterprise (JP), KinoKabul (AF)
Sales: Rediance Films



“This film is much more about our profession than self-help”

Growth business



Menna Laura Meijer

mint film office's *Now Something Is Slowly Changing*, selected for IDFA Feature-length and Dutch Competitions, is a minimalist reflection on the business of personal growth and development.

In the film, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, we are shown a plethora of examples of people seeking personal development, whether by choice or corporate requirement. Some engage in pig massage therapy, others learn to be a better (future) dad in an all-male ante-natal class. Security operatives learn to deal with violent intimidation while a group of (mainly) middle-aged people throw themselves free-form around a dance studio. An obvious superstar of motivational speaking gives a TED-type address as an elderly man offers one-on-one sex counselling over the internet.

Each scene is similarly framed, a static camera pointing towards a symmetrical mise-en-scène, and each story is edited into a series of long single takes. But mint film office's Menna Laura Meijer was interested less in those seeking personal development, more in the process itself, and especially its

practitioners. “I was curious about all the doctors, therapists and coaches who were treating them. I wanted to have a look at the industry, the ‘helping people’ instead of focussing on the ‘sufferers’, which would be a more classic approach.”

She further points out that the film reflects as much on the process of documentary filmmaking as the business of facilitating personal development. “This film is much more about our profession than self-help. Documentaries have become more and more character-driven and rely heavily on dramatic developments. We must identify, we must feel, we must be swept away in drama and emotions.”

“We use music and sound design to push and underline these emotions,” she continues. “We film closer and closer, sometimes so close that at the end of the film you realize you haven't seen anything really. You are forced to feel much more than think. This push to capture and translate reality, real life, in a dramatic structure is so dominant that, in my opinion, we have all forgotten how boring real life really is... So, we took away all the elements that are normally used in a film to push emotional and narrative developments. No main characters, no interviews, no sound-design, no music, only wide angles, and no camera movement.”

Were the subjects in any way wary of Meijer or her motives during the filming process? “I have no hidden

agenda. Me and the researchers tell people what our goal is: a film about people looking for improvement in how they live or work. Of course, people are worried about the compilation of scenes, the overall tone of the film. I always say that people should follow their gut feeling when they meet me. If they can't find the trust then they should never do it. I often compared it to therapy and coaching: when you start out you don't know if it's going to work. It is the risk and sometimes the fun and the only way to find out is to do it. Some people have seen the scenes before picture lock and some have had a veto on using it or not. But for me, that is how I always do it.”

The business of facilitating self-help can elicit much by way of cynical response, as well as a fair dose of curiosity and genuine interest. How does Meijer think IDFA audiences will respond to mint's take on the subject? “The same as always, people will like it or not, will understand our ambitions or will doubt our integrity or intentions,” she stresses. “I prefer not to engage with the audience more than that. The audience being viewers, journalists or people from the industry. It blocks my drive, energy, and fun of making. I don't read reviews, I don't know how many people watch it on tv or in the cinema, and I prefer to do as little as possible interviews. I try to focus on what makes filmmaking really important for me and that is working with the people I have been working with for over 20 years and making something new. Next.”

Director: Menna Laura Meijer
Script: mint film office
Production: mint film office
Sales: Some Shorts



Artistic duo Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan’s *Stones Have Laws*, pulls back the curtain on the Maroon communities living in the forests of Suriname, the former Dutch colony which today is South America’s smallest independent country.

Formed by West African slaves who escaped Dutch plantations in the 17th and 18th centuries and fled into the jungle where they learned to survive alongside indigenous people, these Maroon forest communities remain notoriously secretive and wary of outsiders to this day. *Stones Have Laws* is a De Verbeelding project, supported by the Film Production Incentive.

Van Brummelen and de Haan have been working together since 2002 on exhibitions, installations and films, sharing tasks such as research, writing and camerawork, with credits including *Episode of Sea*, which screened in the IDFA’s Framing Reality sidebar in 2014. Their initial desire to explore the history and culture of the Maroon people grew out of learning about the slave trade during research they conducted in Nigeria for their 2007 work *Monument of Sugar*, investigating the subsidised trade of sugar.

As was the case with many of their previous projects, the pair did extensive research in situ, meeting with key members of the Maroon communities, before embarking on the shoot. “We negotiated with

Director: Van Brummelen and De Haan
Script: Van Brummelen & De Haan in dialogue with Saamaka and Okanisi peoples
Production: Van Brummelen and De Haan, SeriousFilm, Ideal Film
Sales: Van Brummelen & De Haan

Secret Society

different members what sort of collaboration could make sense for all involved. Our interest was to inform our fellow countrymen and women about the history [that] the Netherlands shares with Suriname, which we all still know too little about,” they say.

The co-directors also wanted to explore the laws and beliefs shaping Maroon life, created out of a fusion of African and indigenous traditions, and in particular its system which grants rights to non-human entities such as stones and trees in the forest.

“Lengthy debates about proper phrasing and content of the scenes preceded each staging”

Finding members of the Maroon communities who were willing to cooperate on the project took time. “Our Maroon interlocutors were very clear. Their attitude was: ‘First you colonised us, and now we need to inform you? What is in it for us?’,” recount the artists.

“Gradually it became clear that they would be interested in participating in a film that conveyed their ancestors’ escape from slavery, the wars against the Whites, the alliance they made with the rainforest, and how their environment and way of life are nowadays threatened by large-scale extractivism.”

These discussions resulted in a special hybrid approach, combining re-enactments, or staged discussions, based on 40 interviews with members of two branches of the Maroon forest people – the Okanisi and Saamaka – which were then transcribed and re-written into a script. “We presented the script to community members with the proposal to re-enact the conversations and stories before the camera. Lengthy debates about proper phrasing and content of the scenes preceded each staging,” they explain.

The pair highlight the important roles played by Maroon writer, poet and village chief, Dorus Vrede, and lawyer and politician Hugo Jabini, who mediated at the initial interviews, as well as local writer and theatre director Tolin Alexander, who helped direct the staged discussions. “Without Dorus and Hugo, we would not have been able to build trust... while Tolin co-directed the re-enactments with us,” they say.

These discussions are inter-cut with beautiful and meditative shots of the rainforest landscape inhabited by the Maroons, in a visual exploration of what it means for inanimate objects to have rights. “Landscape has been an important character in our previous films too. But in this case, the point of departure was to present a world co-inhabited by stones, waters, animals and plants. They defined the audio-visual vocabulary of the film.”
Melanie Goodfellow



“Loneliness itself is an intriguing subject”

Director & script: Stella van Voorst van Beest
Production: Basalt Film

Love thy neighbour



Stella van Voorst van Beest

The trigger for Stella van Voorst van Beest’s doc about the need to get neighbourly was a horrendous act of social negligence that the citizens of Rotterdam had witnessed a few years previously. Nick Cunningham reports.

In 2013 it was reported that the body of a 74-year-old woman had been discovered in her Rotterdam apartment. What made the case truly shocking was that she had died ten years previously, the exact date showing on the bottom-most item of post lying beneath a mountain of untouched mail.

While neighbours offered up lame excuses as to how this could have happened, much (justifiable) existential navel-gazing was undertaken by the local Rotterdam authority who eventually assembled a group of volunteers tasked with visiting all inhabitants aged 75+ to determine if their social networks were sufficient.

Van Voorst van Beest’s *Good Neighbours*, in Dutch Competition and recipient of Netherlands Film Fund post-production support, follows

two such volunteers as they go on their rounds, and further focusses on two single elderly people whose keen sense of gratitude emerges gradually throughout the course of the film. “Loneliness itself is an intriguing subject, to think about what it actually means in our time,” comments the director. “I live alone so sometimes I have ideas for the future. How do I want to grow old? Loneliness is always dark, it confronts us with our own fears, it is not something people like to watch or see, and I thought the best way for me to confront this is to go to the people and experience it, and hang around.”

Helpers Ada and Wilma employ basic skills and dole out homespun advice as they drive from house to house. Ada is kind and cheerful and prone to tears, while Wilma is altogether more tough, cynical and at times dismissive. She also possesses a rasping voice after years of smoking. Meanwhile former accordionist Mister van Tol, in his 80s and just as lachrimose as Ada when he plays his old records, can barely walk and has to be washed every day by a nurse. Mrs Van der Keij (86) is bright and sprightly but her children haven’t made contact in years, and in the photographs she offers up she never seemed to smile in their presence, even as infants.

Like in all excellent fiction, tension courses through every scene of this documentary. The task of the volunteers is put into initial context by two youthful team leaders (neither

of whom seem to impress Ada or Wilma) who announce that the percentage of single elderly Rotterdam folk who profess to feeling lonely is fixed at an unacceptable 27%. This figure must come down! We hear of past domestic violence and we are witness to powerful emotional reaction following the diagnosis of life-threatening illness. Ada and Mrs van der Keij begin to bicker and Mr van Tol’s lonely status seems to intensify when he attends a jamboree for the elderly in a community centre.

“With every film I try something new, I need a new challenge,” stresses Van Voorst van Beest. “In this case it was to see if I could make a film that was more dramatic. With this subject I could easily have made a film about lonely people and just sit with them, but the volunteer scheme gave me the opportunity to bring in this motor for dramatic development.”

The mathematics of the film are very neat. Two volunteers, two elderly stars and two young and enthusiastic team leaders. There are also two dogs which, aside from providing much needed company for the pensioners, offer much audiovisual value. “They make for good cinema and you can express things through dogs,” the director agrees. “They have a relationship with their owner so I thought I can also use them as a *mirror* of their owner, to reflect their feelings, so in the end it was a present for us that they both had one – and for the story also.”

Power of translation



Marjoleine Boonstra

Marjoleine Boonstra is back at IDFA with her Dutch Competition title *The Miracle of the Little Prince*, about the impact of aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic novel on indigenous communities across the world that are fighting to protect their language and culture. The director talks to Nick Cunningham.

According to Marjoleine Boonstra (and this is a fact attested to by Wikipedia), Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's highly lauded work is the most widely translated book of all time, if one discounts the Bible. But Boonstra's film isn't a hagiographical account of the book's aristocratic sky-bound author, nor a wistful reminiscence about a childhood love for the work. Rather it is an essay on the preservation of culture and language, as well as a discourse on the desire/need to share great art through translation.

"That was all in the film plan but it became richer when we were on the spot," explains director Boonstra. "It also surprised me, because during the process of editing we realised that language is also a very painful

thing, such as what the Chinese are doing in Tibet and what the Arabs have done in Northern Africa."

The film, supported by the Film Fund, starts in the Moroccan Sahara where we encounter a writer and poet who for decades have been trying to preserve the Tamazight language, the second language of Morocco, in the face of wholesale adoption of Arabic. At the same time they find resonance in the Little Prince's practice of talking to animals, which is commonplace in their culture.

Sami speaker Kerttu found much solace in the book after the death of her sister and bullying in her Finnish boarding school, and eventually translated it into her native tongue. Meanwhile El Salvadorian Jorge is creating his own translation into Nahuatl, an indigenous Aztec language, with the aid of three aged native speakers. Today the language is spoken only by some 300 people after the Nahuatl/Pipil population was all but wiped out in 1932.

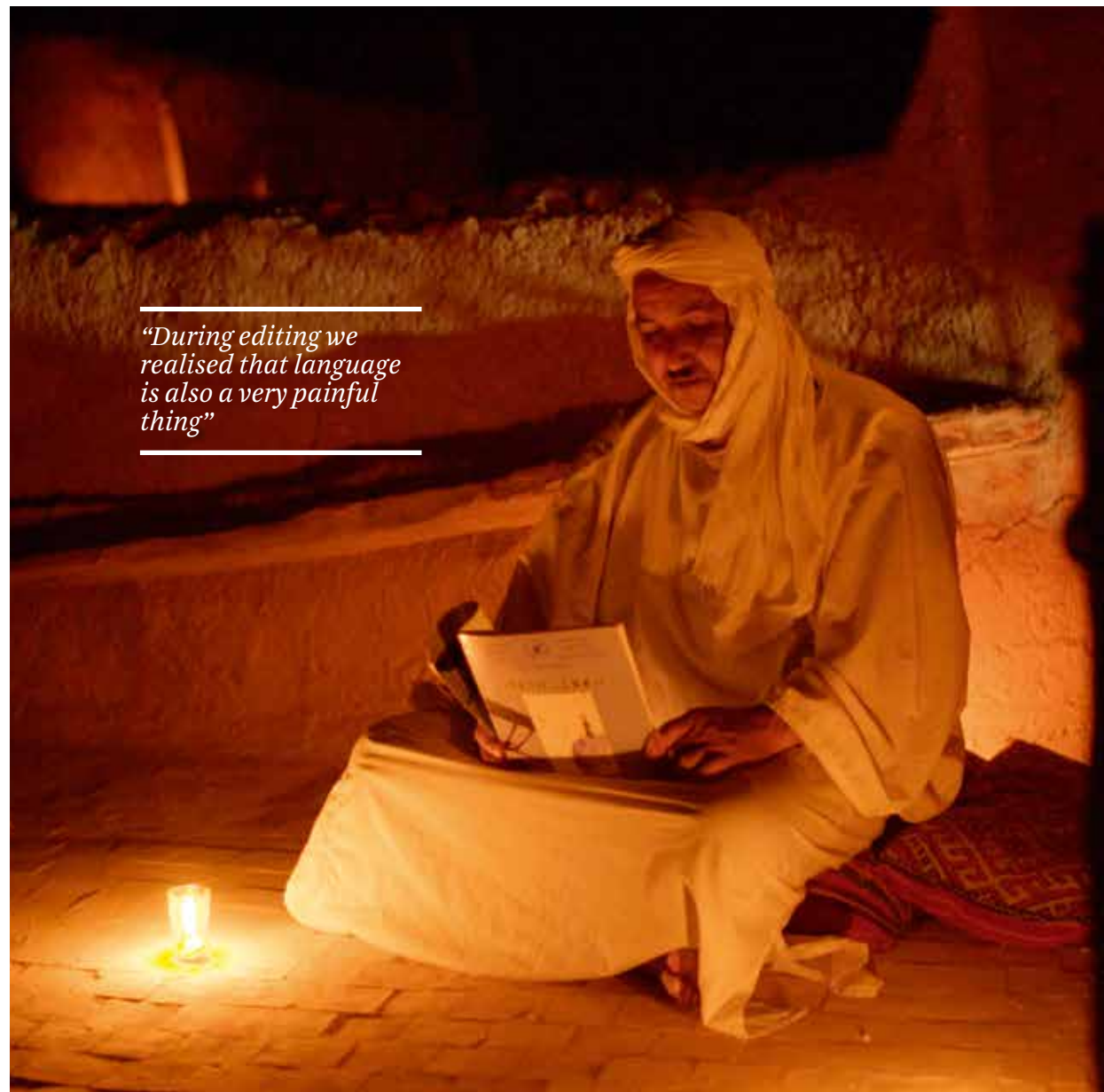
"Lies Janssen (researcher), Pieter van Huystee (producer) and I had the idea to examine what it means to translate from one culture into another, and what makes a book just as *readable* in another culture, and how/why the translator is never in the foreground, always in the background," explains Boonstra of her film. "It was Lies' idea to take a very popular book to compare how it is translated across different times and across different cultures."

The director may have come late to *The Little Prince* herself but was much taken by the purity of an alien child asking questions about the new world he encounters. "Important and emotional questions... What are you doing and why? It's so beautiful because it is so simple and clear."

"And of course, what is so great about the book when you speak to the translators is that it is devoid of politics and religion. When you take these away then you can write about human beliefs, which are on quite another level. It has very strong philosophical overtones, but is not overbearing in terms of a political or religious message."

Boonstra finds parallels between *The Miracle...* and her earlier film *Bela Bela* (2002) about four poets imprisoned for their critical use of language. "They had written poems against the regimes... Language can change people's lives on a very emotional level."

The Miracle of the Little Prince is a feast on the eyes as we zoom over volcanoes, skim across the desert and sledge through drifts of Sami snow, always in the company of animals, such as reindeer, camels and the story's central desert fox. "Documentary filmmaking has to do with observing in silence, and doing the camera myself I was observing the world through the eyes of the Little Prince, looking into the eyes of the animals. Are we making contact, yes or no? A film about the Little Prince is just not possible without animals."



"During editing we realised that language is also a very painful thing"

Canine carers



Heddy Honigmann

Heddy Honigmann's latest feature documentary *Buddy* offers a 'loving portrait of the deep bond' between humans and their guide dogs, reports Geoffrey Macnab.

The Teledoc *Buddy* has its origins in a prize-winning commercial Honigmann saw when she was voting on the best films of the year (in all categories) for the Dutch Directors' Guild. This showed a traumatised soldier having a nightmare about the death of a comrade but then being licked awake (and consoled) by his guide dog. Honigmann began to wonder if it might be worth making a doc exploring the many different ways in which dogs help humans.

"I thought, well, I was very attached to dogs when I was a kid," the Peruvian-born director remembers. Her father, a concentration camp survivor, gave her a pedigree German Shepherd ("a beautiful dog") as a present when she was eight years old. The dog soon had a puppy and young Heddy went walking almost every day in a big local park with her two canine companions. She describes herself

as a sad child, fighting against the "authoritarian attitude" of her father. After his own horrifying wartime experiences, he was very afraid that something bad would happen to his daughter and wanted to protect her at all costs. That meant she had a stifling childhood. "He never hit me – only with words," Honigmann recalls. "It was very hard, a silent battle sometimes, but it taught me forever to fight and not to be down."

The dogs knew when Heddy was sad and stayed nearby for long periods of time to support her. "I would cry with them, even." (She has dedicated the film to her grandmother Stefanie who, she says, taught her to "love and trust dogs.")

"The most important thing for me was to treat the dog as equal to the person in the film," Honigmann explains her approach in *Buddy*. She and her crew used special camera equipment that enabled them to concentrate on the dogs while they were helping their bosses in difficult situations.

Honigmann's human characters include the rebellious Annabel who, in spite of her disabilities, goes with her dog Kay not only to hospitals but to heavy metal concerts. Another is a former soldier, Trevor, with PTSD whose dog Mister helps him during the day and night to cope with his condition. The dog saved their marriage, says his wife: "Otherwise we wouldn't sit anymore on the same bench".

Another subject is 86-year-old Edith who was blinded by the explosion of a German grenade. She loves to run in the park as her dog, Makker, pulls her forward at full speed. Also featured is Erna, who hates nurses and has replaced them with Kaiko, a giant white poodle. We listen to Hans, also blind, telling us in a witty and intelligent way how much he is in love with his labrador, Missy. Then, there is the beautiful, lonely young boy Zeb, whose disability slowly becomes apparent, and his faithful hound Utah.

"The most important thing for me was to treat the dog as equal to the person in the film"

Honigmann describes switching between dog and person as "psychological juggling." The dogs are as effective as any therapists or personal trainers in boosting their owners' health and peace of mind, or in helping them cope with loss and bereavement.

At the end of the film, Honigmann includes stills of all the featured dogs – Kaiko, Kay, Mister, Utah, Makker, and their owners. Tellingly, the dogs are at the front of the image, in very sharp focus, staring at the camera, while their owners lurk behind them in a blur. In every case, the dogs here help the owners cope with what Honigmann calls "the hidden pain" of being human.

IDFA Dutch Doc Competition
Buddy ◊ Heddy Honigmann

idfa
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International Documentary
Film Festival Amsterdam



Director & script: Heddy Honigmann
Production: Appel&Honigmann
Co-production: EO Television
Sales: Cat & Docs



Director & script: Heinrich Dahms
Production: Buzzmedia Network
Co-production: KRO-NCRV

Zen and the art of doc



Sometimes, when life becomes overwhelming and stressful, a bit of Zen is what is needed to restore the proper balance. That is what director Heinrich Dahms has always felt. A few years ago, he read an article in the New Yorker about Buddhist Itetsu Nemoto and was intrigued by the Japanese monk's work in providing comfort to distressed and even suicidal patients.

"I thought this sounds like a really interesting story," the veteran South African-born, Dutch-based filmmaker recalls. In 2015, he and a team visited Japan for the first time to meet the mysterious and inspirational monk. They didn't speak Japanese and Nemoto didn't speak English (nor Dutch) but they developed an immediate rapport.

"I was impressed by his unpretentiousness and his no bullshit approach both to his official position as the priest of the civil temple up in the mountains and the whole Zen experience in general," Dahms recalls. Nemoto didn't wear flowing white robes. He was "a real guy" with a good sense of humour. "He really cares about the people he

deals with and does what he can to help them. My impression was that he was a pretty dedicated person." The director adds that Nemoto also enjoys partying and is quite capable of dancing all night. "Then, he comes home, sleeps and meditates."

Dahms himself has a long-standing interest in meditation. He studied philosophy after, as a youngster, being very taken with Robert M. Pirsig's cult book 'Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance.' "I got into the whole Zen thing then and I have meditated ever since. I still meditate every day...I've been doing Tai Chi for 35 years as well."

The film, supported by the Netherlands Production Incentive, has three main protagonists other than Nemoto - Mocca, Kana and Mizuno, all of whom had come to the monk for help in dealing with feelings of despair about their lives. Dahms has experience making fiction as well as documentary. He has written several screenplays. This helped him when it came to providing the documentary with a narrative structure. The film shows us the dark side of the protagonists' lives but then follows them as things change.

The director and his team shot 150 hours of material. "I work like a madman," the director sighs. "I become a little obsessive-compulsive when I shoot a story." He wasn't shooting randomly but wanted to make sure he was flexible enough to go "where the story takes me."

Editing was protracted. There was a huge amount of material and the director was working in a language he didn't understand. Nonetheless, the film as it finally turned out was (he believes) tightly constructed and with a meditative quality of its own. "I really tried to maintain that Zen-like concept."

Dahms is proud of the title, *My Soul Drifts Light Upon A Sea Of Trees*. The 'sea of trees' is the beautiful forest around Mount Fuji which has become a suicide hot spot. When Dahms was researching the project, they visited the forest ("a pretty interesting place with an interesting atmosphere," he says with evident understatement.)

Nemoto himself is due in Amsterdam for the IDFA premiere which Mocca and Kana will also attend. "We're really looking forward to seeing them again," the director looks forward to the reunion.

Filmmaking clearly runs in the Dahms family. Son Alexander, who lives in Amsterdam, was the cinematographer on *My Soul Drifts*. There have been disappointments along the way. For example, Heinrich tried for many years to make a film based on the life and work of the brilliant Polish reporter, author and poet, Ryszard Kapuściński. He sounds philosophical (and Zen-like) about the setbacks - and doesn't boast too much either about the numerous successes his company has had over the years. **Geoffrey Macnab**

Never follow the flock

IDFA Dutch Doc Competition

Sheep Hero ◊ Ton van Zantvoort

idfa
14-25 nov 2018
International Documentary
Film Festival Amsterdam



Ton van Zantvoort

In Ton van Zantvoort's *Sheep Hero* a traditional shepherd tries to survive within a neo-liberal, highly automated farming industry, writes Nick Cunningham.

Stijn is young and idealistic. He has hippy tendencies, breeds rare sheep and gives work to former drug addicts who find new meaning to their lives within the lush countryside among the livestock. He is married to Anna and is a devoted father to two young boys. What's more, he cuts a dashing, romantic figure in his vest and cowboy hat.

Not surprisingly, Stijn is also a non-conformist, and the powers that be who run the Brabant Estate (where he keeps his livestock) want him off their land as quickly as possible. *Sheep Hero* covers two make-or-break years for Stijn as his future, and that of his family and flock, is decided one way or the other. "For me the film is not about a shepherd, it is about living in a world of conflicting ideals, about a small entrepreneur who is trying to fight the big companies that are taking over," comments director Van Zantvoort.

Sheep Hero, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, offers a plethora of ovine tradecraft, from sheep shearing to butchering to the intricate management of accounts, but all the time we are witness to Stijn's increasing disappointment and frustration as subsidies are withdrawn or as fines are issued for illegal use of the highway in transporting the sheep between pastures. And with Stijn's change in circumstances comes an inevitable change in mood as he becomes incessantly short-tempered, moody and irascible.

"When people saw the first rough cut (with Stijn yelling and stressing most of the time), they were taken aback by that side of him," admits the director. "I love Stijn and understand his behaviour, but the viewers didn't feel for him the way I wanted them to feel, so a struggle during the editing was to create the exact right balance in Stijn's character: loving and passionate shepherd on one hand, burned out and angry entrepreneur on the other."

Stijn nevertheless receives the unwavering support of his wife and co-workers. His mum and dad are always on hand too, and are even prepared to perform the loyal parental task of cleaning up poo, albeit that of a herd of sheep, off the local streets.

The cinematography in *Sheep Hero* is at times stunning, with early establishing shots of the bucolic countryside at dusk shot on a Sony Red camera with a wide lens and

very open aperture, his skies aflame with contrasting blue and orange grading. Van Zantvoort's use of drones is no less impressive as Stijn and his flock diminish in size and importance, reflecting, the director suggests, the perceived perception of the shepherd by his landlord.

One fantastic aerial shot depicts the flock as a storm vortex, with a solitary cow at its eye. Another high 'white on white' shot of the sheep against the snowy terrain could have been designed by Jasper Johns. Van Zantvoort stresses his admiration for the work of esteemed DoP Emanuel Lubezki (*Children of Men*, *The Revenant*) while determining his visual choices. "I am more influenced by the cinematography of features than of documentaries."

The project started out as a regional film but grew in scope, especially when broadcaster KRO-NCRV came on board, resulting in a second picture lock. It had always been Van Zantvoort's intention to make a feature and the broadcaster's major suggestion was to make Stijn more sympathetic at the beginning so his decline seemed more stark. "And they had a point. I think the film is better now...I am very happy and grateful the film now will be broadcast nationally."

Now that the film is finished, surely Van Zantvoort can relax and watch other people's docs throughout the festival. Not at all. "IDFA has programmed my film eight times, so I will be busy handing out flyers!"

"more influenced by the cinematography of features than of docs"



Director & script: Ton van Zantvoort
Production: NEWTON Film
Co-production: SeriousFilm
Sales: Films Transit

A class apart



Petra and Peter Lataster

***You Are My Friend* is a follow-up to *Miss Kiet's Children*, the well-received documentary that husband and wife team Petra and Peter Lataster made two years ago about a Dutch primary school teacher in charge of a class of immigrant children.**

The new film (IDFA Dutch Competition and supported by the Netherlands Film Fund) concentrates on a single child. Six-year-old Macedonian Branche (who featured very briefly in *Miss Kiet's Children*) has recently come to the Netherlands with his family. He has to go to a new school for the first time. You can't blame him for looking nervous. He doesn't speak Dutch and he doesn't know anyone.

"During filming (of *Miss Kiet*), we were already enchanted by this lovely little fellow," Peter recalls of the young boy. The filmmakers weren't able to include him properly in the previous doc – and so decided to make a brand new film about him. Branche is the only Macedonian in the class. He desperately needs a friend – but the other children aren't welcoming. It may seem a small thing but when a group of school

children don't allow him to join their group, he is deeply hurt. "He felt very lonely afterwards and really suffered from it," Petra notes.

Petra suggests the secret of working with children is to treat them with exactly the same respect you would any adult subject. "Then they will help you. They will take you into their world and their way of thinking...in fact, it is very easy, to be honest. People know – and children know – whether you respect and love them or not."

Her partner makes the same point. When a kid tells a story, Peter says, you must take it seriously. "You must follow the logic of their individuality." In their films with youngsters, the Latasters make sure that the children are centre stage. They don't allow parents or teachers to encroach any more than is strictly necessary.

"The refugee parents loved the film because it gave them a chance to show that they and their children are really working hard to become a member of this society," Peter notes. "They are proud of their children's achievements." The film shows Branche learning not just how to make friends but how to keep them as well.

Miss Kiet's Children was made as a film for adults – but the directors quickly discovered that kids loved it too. The film had its premiere in the vast Tuschinski auditorium during IDFA and was given a rapturous

response by all the children in the audience. "You could hear them laughing all the time," Petra says.

The directors hope that *You Are My Friend* will elicit a similar response. "Probably, every age will discover different things in the film," they speculate about how parents and their children might respond. On the one hand, the Latasters are telling the story of a particular boy looking for friendship. On the other, the documentary offers a much broader examination of attitudes toward immigration and the 'other.' "It is much more than a film about children and their friendships," Lataster says. "It is an allegory about our societies and the need for people to get along, not using aggression all the time."

One obvious point of comparison, he suggests, is the US, where President Trump's administration has separated immigrant children from their parents and where the President will ban anyone who doesn't show him complete loyalty from the 'inner circle'. "We are trying to show the opposite – the need that people have to be social, to bond with the people they need to work with or live with or study with, and to have a solidarity with one another," Peter states.

"The film is about a six-year-old boy but I think it is very, very political. This boy shows us that we can solve problems in the long term only through friendship and the ability to work together," Petra agrees.
Geoffrey Macnab



"an allegory about our societies and the need to get along"

Tale of a needless death

IDFA Mid-Length & Dutch Doc Competitions
But Now is Perfect ◊ Carin Goeijers



Carin Goeijers

Carin Goeijers' *But Now is Perfect*, a mid-length film about the European migration crisis selected for IDFA Dutch and Mid-length Competitions, is a superbly crafted tale of tragedy heaped on tragedy. The director talks to Nick Cunningham.

When we first encounter Nigerian Becky, she is fun, single and optimistic. She has a penchant for shoes and believes that her arrival in the Calabrian village of Riace heralds a new beginning. But we also find out very soon in Carin Goeijers' highly moving film that Becky is dead, yet another victim of the global refugee crisis, and her poignant story is told in retrospect.

Riace has been a cause célèbre over the past years. More or less abandoned by its indigenous population, progressive Mayor Lucano opened its doors to the new migrants both to offer much-needed succour and also to breathe new life into the village. Which was more or less the story that Goeijers thought she would be telling during her year and a half in residence. "I had a plan to film this positive story about immigration, but when I got

there with my camera everything started to collapse. There was no money coming into the village anymore... and then the problems started," she stresses.

In the film, tensions develop when regional funding dries up, and inevitable (and unsubstantiated) claims of fraud against the mayor are levelled. The village can no longer sustain its new migrant population and many of the refugees are forced to move on, some to the San Ferdinando refugee camp which, as we see before the film's conclusion, is destroyed by fire. This was the place to which Becky was eventually dispatched – and where she died.

"Becky's story provides a perfect, albeit tragic narrative arc"

"Maybe it sounds like I was making a political story but I wasn't, I never make political stories... the human condition is always my major interest," Goeijers underlines. "But for me it was kind of crazy because I never expected that the person I was filming was going to be dead at the end of the film."

The film inevitably revolves around Becky, but Goeijers offers up a host of secondary characters who greatly enrich the work. The older refugee Djemila tells how she disapproved of Becky, especially the fact that she

was single. "She doesn't have respect or status, it's a chaos," Djemila affirms. Meanwhile, a refugee pastor casts out evil spirits from his migrant flock. Refugee Daniel joins the local marching band as a cymbal player while Mohammed prepares his ramshackle domicile for the unlikely arrival of his family from Africa. The kind Italian shopkeeper Mirella sheds genuine tears at the memory of Becky, and the father of Mayor Lucano loyally confirms his son's probity and generosity.

The tale of Becky provides a perfect, albeit tragic narrative arc for the film, arriving as an ingenue before her eventual interment within the village cemetery.

"But there are two sides of course," adds Goeijers. "She was really one of my favourite people because of her joy. She was so friendly and sweet, and of course I was, and still am very sad, that she has passed away. But at the same time the filmmaker in me stands up and says 'well I have to tell this story for Becky'.

"I have to make my film but it is as important to make a statement for her as well. With her I want to tell a human story about this awful political situation, one that the whole world is experiencing right now, especially here in Europe", Goeijers concludes.



Director & script: Carin Goeijers
Production: Pieter van Huystee Film
Sales: NPO Sales

Love, romance and doc



Geoffrey Macnab talks to emerging talent Marina Meijer whose *O amor é único* is selected for IDFA Dutch Documentary Competition.

Rising young Dutch docmaker Marina Meijer won international recognition for her short graduation film *Cargo*. In it, she dealt with the situation of men at sea, working a long way from home and pining for their loved ones back on shore.

The Rotterdam-based filmmaker's new film *O amor é único* again has a romantic element, but its origins are unusual. After *Cargo*, she had been developing a new project *C'est les autres*, which won the Karen de Bok Talent Award at IDFA. However, she had also experienced upheaval in her private life, ending a relationship after many years. It was summer and she felt a yearning to escape.

"I thought I want to get away. I am confused in love, in life," the younger filmmaker remembers of her state of mind at this time. She decided almost on a whim to head off to Latin America. Meijer flew to Brazil having bought herself a second-hand camera. She headed to

a picturesque village she had visited once before. "I felt in that village, everything reminded me of love, in a good and a bad way. I felt I had to go there and see what I found.."

Meijer is an avowed fan of Gabriel García Márquez's magical realist novels, especially 'One Hundred Years Of Solitude'. The village reminded her of the mysterious and poetic world she encountered in his fiction. No sooner had she arrived, after a long bus journey down muddy roads, that she noticed, carved into one of the seats on the bus, the words: *O amor é único*. That gave her a title - love is unique. That same evening, by chance, she met Dona Alva, a stubborn older woman with a crush on a younger man. Now, she had a protagonist too. As simply and easily as this, the new documentary flickered into life.

Yes, the director says, the film has some thematic overlaps with *Cargo*. "I think what attracts me very much in those two films is that I am always interested in sensitive souls and the importance of love," Meijer reflects. "Of course, *Cargo* is about a macho man. *O amor é único* is about a macho woman!" The director adds that in her films, she always searches for an "emotional landscape."

In *Cargo* she was drawing a poetic contrast between the "soft world of water" and "the very harsh world of steel" on the boat. She was also exploring the yearnings of seafarers who seemed on the outside to be tough and self-reliant. In *O amor é*

único, there is a similar contact between the mountains, with "their free, feminine curves" and the forbidding, man-made house with its strict, geometric lines where the woman goes to live.

Meijer came to documentary in a roundabout way. She studied political science and language & cultural studies in Amsterdam and Utrecht before switching to the Netherlands Film Academy. However, as an 18-year-old, she travelled to South America for the first time - and it had a huge formative influence on her. "I never really felt at home in Holland, in South America I did," she reflects. She also became very interested in photography. She liked to write and to do interviews, good grounding for a future documentary maker. Another key formative experience was working in a left wing student cinema in Amsterdam (Filmtheater Kriterion) where she did everything from working behind the bar to operating the projector.

Although Meijer studied photography, documentary gave her something beyond taking still images. She loved the research and the time she spent with her subjects.

Now, Meijer is looking to complete *C'est Les Autres*, set in a transformation centre for 'at risk' youths in Rotterdam. The subject matter may sound harsh but like all of Meijer's work, the new film (made through Basalt Films) is bound to have a lyrical undertow.



"I thought I want to get away. I am confused in love, in life..."

A new beginning

IDFA artistic director
Orwa Nyrabia

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14-25 nov 2018
International Documentary
Film Festival Amsterdam



Orwa Nyrabia

“To my surprise, it is much less stressful than I expected,” Orwa Nyrabia says of his early experiences as artistic director of International Doc Fest Amsterdam (a position he took up at the end of January).

“It is challenging. The decision-making process is never easy. I do not take our yes’s and no’s lightly. It is a difficult process but it’s not stressful because of our team.”

Nyrabia himself has watched around 400 of the 4000 films submitted this year. The strategy is to be “more selective” and the programme has been winnowed down. (275 films in total will be screening.)

What’s more he is heartened by the strength of the Dutch documentaries at IDFA 2018. “It is a very interesting period (for Dutch documentary) and we have seen quite a few very good films this year.” There are several notable local titles (including new films from such respected figures as Heddy Honigmann and partners Petra Lataster-Czisch and Peter Lataster) in the Dutch competition.

Meanwhile, Dutch movies are also scattered through the other sections of the festival. The opening film, Aboozar Amini’s *Kabul, City in the Wind* (see page 4), is a Dutch minority co-production, made through Jia Zhao’s Amsterdam-based Silk Road Film Salon.

In addition, the artistic director has shaken up the programme structure with a variety of new sections (Luminous, Frontlight and IDFA On Stage) as well as thematic programmes. One of these, the *Me* presentation, showcases personal, autobiographical documentaries. The artistic director is keen to point out that the intention here is not to showcase self-indulgent, narcissistic work in which directors simply point their cameras at themselves. “What matters, in my opinion, is to acknowledge the utter failure of all those who try to be objective in documentary film,” Nyrabia explains of the thinking behind the section. “This is a tribute and an examination of those who are subjective, whether it’s autobiographical, personal or just a film in which the filmmaker’s own self is in the film, as a character.”

IDFA founder Ally Derks always fought to ensure that IDFA had world premieres. Nyrabia shares her philosophy. Nonetheless, he points out times when festivals have been “ridiculously competitive” and this sometimes works against the interests of audiences and filmmakers alike. A balance needs to be struck.

What is clear is that Nyrabia wants IDFA to showcase new work. One of the main goals is “to find new voices and to give them platforms” – and you don’t do that by programming films already shown elsewhere.

IDFA was one of the first documentary festivals to sign the 50/50 gender parity pledge to have equal representation for women and men across the festival. Around a third of the festival’s films have been by female filmmakers but Nyrabia hopes to take that number up to well over 40% this year. He also aims to ensure that every part of the festival, from the industry Forum to the IDFA Bertha Fund, also pays attention to the gender debate. “We are working on all of these fronts at the same time. We are not only working on gender. We are doing our very best to be inclusive in terms of geography – to really go that extra mile to find that African film we would like to show or Latin American film we didn’t know about.”

The new IDFA artistic director already has a very close connection with the IDFA Bertha Fund and the IDFA Academy and is determined the Fund will find yet more ways to develop new talent. “We are doing a lot of new things – talks, think tanks, presentations, discussions. We want to make sure we maximise the value of IDFA as a debate platform and a space for the international documentary community to discuss their affairs,” Nyrabia states. **Geoffrey Macnab**



“IDFA is one of the first documentary festivals to sign the 50/50 gender parity pledge”

**Now Something Is Slowly Changing in
IDFA Feature-Length Competition &
IDFA Dutch Doc Competition**

“The attitude was always ‘cut the crap, you have to tell a story.’”



Director & script: Hans Pool
Production: Submarine

The truth is out there



Hans Pool first became aware of Bellingcat (the website for investigative journalism) after reading an article about a Dutch member of the team.

“The guy was just an ordinary citizen, and he was investigating the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17,” Pool remembers. He was amazed that this ordinary man, not a foreign correspondent, was so heavily involved in research into a story that was causing such enormous political reverberations. “I was thinking, my god, this is a citizen and he is doing a crazy job... he is really close to the truth.”

Pool was immediately intrigued and began planning a film about citizen journalism. The investigator was originally reluctant to meet him. After all, he operated under cloak of secrecy. However, through this Dutch source, Pool was put in touch with Elliot Higgins, the British blogger and founder of Bellingcat.

Higgins was a shy, laid-off office worker who had previously blogged under the pseudonym Brown Moses. He used social media and other openly available web sources to con-

duct meticulous research into his news stories. He and his followers often came up with insights that had somehow eluded the world’s mainstream media. When Pool proposed the film, Higgins responded, “that’s alright with me” and contacted the other main members of the organisation. They also soon agreed to participate.

“They’re a little bit the same. They like to stay hours and hours behind their computers,” Pool describes the personalities of Higgins and all his followers. They’re mainly male (although there is a female member in Armenia). By their own admission, they can seem a little nerdy. They are a long way removed from the world of James Bond and Jason Bourne. Most have normal lives.”

Given that the subjects spend much of their time sitting on their chairs, looking at their computer screens, there was an obvious challenge in making the material visually exciting. However, the stories they are investigating are always fascinating. Pool captures the adrenalin rush the Bellingcat operatives experience when they do manage to connect the dots. So much so that the director believes that the story of Bellingcat could make a fascinating fiction film.

Pool’s initial focus was on the MH17, but as he started making the documentary the film’s remit broadened. Produced through Submarine, the production company run by Femke Wolting and Bruno Felix, Pool has been working on it right up to the

last moment, editing the final cut so he could include material about the poisoning of Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter. Bellingcat’s journalists were able to establish that the poisoning was carried out by GRU operatives. The resulting film *Bellingcat - Truth in a Post-truth World*, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, world premieres at IDFA.

Pool was happy to be working with highly respected British editor, Simon Barker, whose credits include *Pussy Riot* and *Promised Land* and who helped him to find a strong narrative thrust to the film. Dutch documentary makers, Pool suggests, sometimes become distracted by the poetic side of their material. Barker’s attitude was always: “cut the crap, you have to tell a story.”

The film, supported by the Production Incentive, investigates the notion of “truth” in a contemporary world in which President Trump and others are continually railing against what they call fake news and when Russian trolls are busy contaminating the trusted news sources.

“It is very important to have organisations like Bellingcat to find out about the truth,” the director says of the role the organisation. Higgins and his crew can stand up stories that powerful interests would otherwise be able to dismiss as fabrications. “Democracies in the western world are really in danger,” Pool declares of the ongoing battle to establish what is true and what isn’t in the new free-for-all media world. **Geoffrey Macnab**

Rapping under the radar



David Verbeek

David Verbeek's short documentary *Trapped in The City of a Thousand Mountains*, recipient of Netherlands Film Fund post-production support, explores China's surveillance culture through the prism of the smouldering rap scene in the city of Chongqing in the southwest of the country.

A major port on the Yangtze River, Chongqing is one of the country's fastest growing cities, with a rich historical and cultural heritage, especially in the realm of poetry. But its younger inhabitants have little connection with the rural roots and poetic traditions of their ancestors.

Verbeek, who is best known as a fiction feature director with recent credits including *An Impossibly Small Object* and *Full Contact*, says he was drawn to the city on a number of levels. "I had been hearing for years and years about Chongqing. While places like Shanghai, and to some extent Beijing and Guangzhou, have become hubs for expats, Chongqing is still relatively undiscovered. It's known as the Chinese metropolis for the Chinese," explains the

filmmaker, who divides his time between the Netherlands and Asia.

"I'd gotten all sorts of reports that it had been modernising at an incredible pace, with buildings shooting up into the sky. I'm interested in what that means for society, what it does to people and the generational gap. These are themes I've explored in a lot of my films."

Beyond his curiosity about the city, the key draw for Verbeek was the vibrant Hip Hop scene which has flourished there in recent years but has been partially forced underground following a crackdown by the authorities on the popular musical format, which has seen artists pressured out of the business, and 120 popular rap tracks banned.

"Chongqing is one of the hubs for Chinese rap," says Verbeek. "It has a very specific sound to it because the local dialect is very feisty. It sounds very aggressive. People are quite flamboyant in this region. It's a mountainous city and it gets very hot in the summer. Everything in the city is hot. People are hot-tempered and they eat extraordinarily spicy food. They have a local hot-pot which is one of the spiciest in the world."

The film takes the spectator deep into the city's underground Hip Hop scene, through interviews with local artists such as Lil Ya, Master Da and Ghostism alongside footage of impromptu living room rap

meetings, video shoots and secret concerts.

Verbeek explains, however, that he was not interested in the Hip Hop scene in itself but rather as a vehicle to explore state censorship and surveillance in China. It is an interest that grew out of his own experiences while trying to film in the country. "I'm very interested in state control and in cinematically expressing what this kind of state control does and how it functions," he says. "You've got this group of young people, trying to find their identity and then being stopped in a way – that was what drew me to Chongqing."

One of the big issues, the film suggests, is that the authorities blur the lines so that no-one is ever quite sure what is or is not permissible within the law. Many of the interviewees say this results in self-censorship. "It was difficult to get a clear answer. I couldn't just go to government officials and ask them if Hip Hop was legal or not legal so I had to find out from the people on the receiving end of this new policy," says Verbeek.

"Everybody had a different story about what was the deal. It's not like when you walk around with tattoos and sing a bit of Hip Hop you suddenly get arrested. It depends on who you listen to or whether Hip Hop is outlawed or not. For a long time, I wanted to call the documentary *MC, Nobody Knows*." **Melanie Goodfellow**

IDFA Short competition *Trapped in The City of a Thousand Mountains* ◊ David Verbeek

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Film Festival Amsterdam



"I'm interested in cinematically expressing this state control and how it functions"

Director & script: David Verbeek
Production: DeepFocus Web Docs



Scorpio rising



Daniël Krikke

“Niggers are scared of revolution,” civil rights campaigner and celebrated African-American poet Umar Bin Hassan wrote in one of his most famous (and notorious) protest songs.

“It was pretty much a call for self-improvement on behalf of African-American men,” Dutch director Daniël Krikke says of the polemical anthem which has given his debut feature documentary its title.

Scared Of Revolution (a world premiere in IDFA’s competition for Dutch documentary) is partly inspired by a novel that the director’s mother, Christine Otten, wrote about Umar and his role in the so-called Last Poets, a radical 60s musical collective credited as one of the originators of rap and hip hop.

Umar (who will be in Amsterdam for the premiere) later acknowledged that he, too, was scared of change. His song may have been intended as a call to revolution but it also had a surprisingly personal resonance. During the course of the film, Krikke shows him conquering his fear and embracing revolution from the inside out, as the director puts it.

Krikke himself first encountered rap music as a youngster. “When I was 14, I was pretty much intrigued by hip hop music and black culture,” the filmmaker recalls. He became obsessed with Umar when he first met him in the US on a research trip with his mother, and told everyone he knew that his first movie was going to be about the Last Poets.

Over the past 40 years, several attempts have been made by other filmmakers to tell the Last Poets story on film. Umar and the others in the group have been very suspicious about such projects. However, they reacted positively to Krikke’s proposal. “I think they trusted me and had the feeling I could understand them,” the director suggests. It helped, too, that his mother had written the novel about them and that he knew them personally for a long time. He may have been “a white filmmaker from Amsterdam”, dealing with the intimate experiences of African-Americans but his subjects didn’t regard him as an outsider. Umar befriended the director the very first time they met and allowed him unfettered access to his family and friends.

Krikke knew exactly what kind of film he wanted to make. When potential financiers tried to make him sway from his original vision, he simply decided to finance the film as best he could himself.

Scared Of Revolution is clearly a huge passion project. He hugely admires the way The Last Poets have

always stood up for equal rights, even when they’ve put themselves at risk as a result.

“I couldn’t understand as a 14-year-old how evil people could be and go exploit an entire race for 400 years – that still has an impact today,” the director says. “Black people understand but it is so hard to change their self-perspective when, over the course of centuries, white people nourished black people to hate themselves pretty much...if you’re raised in an environment of racism, self-hatred and drugs and violence, that’s not very constructive for the way you look at yourself.”

Krikke has already shown Umar the documentary. Thankfully, the veteran poet’s response was (eventually) overwhelmingly positive. “I waited until I had the rough cut. He (Umar) watched it with his entire family back in Baltimore. He sent me one sentence that he couldn’t speak about it,” the director recalls. At first, Krikke feared the worst and worried that Umar had disliked the film. Then, Umar sent him another, much longer email, saying he had watched it again.

“You are one brilliant, masterful, charismatic, Scorpio motherfucker! I am so honoured and proud that I trusted you with the interpretation of my life,” Umar told the director in this second message, adding, “the world is about to become yours, Daniel.” **Geoffrey Macnab**

Director & script: Daniël Krikke
 Production: Stichting IdeeFix



“A person of flesh and blood, whose personal experiences have fuelled her political ideas”

Sylvana, Demon or Diva
 Director & script: Ingeborg Jansen
 Production: KV Films

21st century women

***Sylvana, Demon or Diva* and *Marceline. A Woman. A Century* are among many films celebrating strong women at IDFA this year. Melanie Goodfellow reports.**

IDFA has always reflected the big political and social issues shaking and shaping the world, either within dedicated sidebars or tangentially in the works it screens. Its 2018 selection is no exception. At a time when female representation, rights and leadership are in the spotlight, this year's line-up includes a number of works about strong and pioneering women.

Among them is Ingeborg Jansen's Teledoc *Sylvana, Demon or Diva*, an up close and personal portrait of outspoken Dutch political activist Sylvana Simons, and Cordelia Dvorák's *Marceline. A Woman. A Century*, about late Holocaust survivor, writer and filmmaker Marceline Loridan-Ivens, who was also the wife and close collaborator of iconic Dutch director Joris Ivens.

Sylvana screens in IDFA's new Frontlight selection. Its subject, controversial former television personality Simons, born in Suriname but growing up in the Netherlands, launched her Bij1 (Together) political party in 2016 to fight racism and discrimination. An advocate of female empowerment, she has been subject to racially-motivated hate campaigns in the past and still receives daily abuse on the social networks.

Director Jansen was brought on board by producer Eric Velthuis at Dutch production house KV Films. "At first I was hesitant. I didn't know that much about her and was slightly sceptical of her as a politician," says Jansen. "Then, as research, I saw her during the last part of the national elections in which she participated, and was impressed and fascinated by her and the very diverse group of people that supported her as a new, up to now lacking, voice in Dutch politics."

The documentary follows Simons as she runs for a seat in the Amsterdam city council in early 2018, at the same time as building her fledgling party from scratch, but the film also goes behind the scenes, delving into her roots, motivations and personal demons. "I hope it gives a comprehensive image of [her] as a person of flesh and blood, whose personal experiences have fuelled her political ideas," says Jansen. "I also hope it makes every viewer think about the reasons and reasonability of all the (strong) reactions that *Sylvana* apparently provokes in people. Why is she a controversial figure? Why are we – a large part of the Dutch – so eager to judge her?"

Marceline. A Woman. A Century, which premieres in IDFA's new Luminous sidebar, revolves around in-depth encounters with Loridan-Ivens and some of her closest collaborators, filmed in her Paris apartment, just before she passed away last September aged 90. It was

lead-produced by Paris-based Elda Productions, with Annemiek van der Hell (Windmill Film) on board as associate producer.

Loridan-Ivens speaks with vigour about surviving the Holocaust and dealing with these experiences throughout her life, her political awakening in the Paris Left Bank of the 1960s and her close working relationship with husband Joris. She also talks of her solo autobiographical projects, such as her third and final book *L'Amour après*, exploring how women can rehabilitate their bodies, sexuality and capacity to love after suffering trauma.

"What made Marceline such an outstanding film protagonist for me is that arc from the long-silenced survivor of the Holocaust [that] she was, when returning after the war, confronted with an oppressive silence everywhere in post-war France, to then one of the politically most uncompromising and frank European filmmakers," says Dvorák.

The filmmaker says she was impressed with Loridan-Ivens's professionalism and determined spirit, right until the end. "It was sometimes really hard for her energy-wise at her age to receive a whole film team in her apartment and to go back to very painful memories," says Dvorák. "I hope her fearlessness, her implacability but also her sense of humour, her hunger and lust for life might inspire and encourage people as it did me."



180cc
Director & script:
René van Zundert
Production: Tangerine Tree
Co-production: EO

Gracious
Director & script: Anneke
De Lind Van Wijngaarden
& Annelies Kruk
Production: EO
Sales: NPO Sales

Skip and the Rhythm Rangers
Director & script: Olivier S. Garcia
Production: Witfilm

**The Man Who Looked
Beyond the Horizon**
Director & script: Martijn
Blekendaal
Production: Cerutti Film

Pushing Boundaries



Meike Statema

IDFA Kids & Docs Head of Education Meike Statema gives an overview of the four Dutch docs in this year's competition.

In the summer of 1975 Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader cast off in a micro sailboat in a bid to become the first person to cross the North Atlantic single-handedly in such a small craft. He never arrived.

Martijn Blekendaal's multi-layered work *The Man Who Looked Beyond The Horizon* explores the man behind this seemingly failed quest, looking at his conceptual artwork, which included several short films built around impossible *Jackass*-style stunts, and his insatiable desire to push boundaries and achieve the impossible.

Blekendaal conceived the work with a youth audience in mind from the start, even though, unusually for a documentary targeted at this demographic, the protagonist is an adult. "I'm particularly pleased to be showing this work at Kids & Docs. It's a project we've been following from early on. I love the way it looks at the act of trying to break down boundaries and pushing beyond the realms

of possibility, to achieve the impossible... I think it has a lot to say to younger audiences, even though the protagonist is an adult," says IDFA Kids & Docs chief Meike Statema.

Produced by Willemijn Cerutti at Dutch production house Cerutti Film, the film won best pitch at the 2017 International Financing Forum for Kids Content in Malmö, Sweden, run in cooperation with the European Documentary Network (EDN) and IDFA, and also participated in the annual Kids & Docs Workshop, organised in cooperation with the Cinekid festival and the NPO Fund.

It is one of four Dutch productions competing in IDFA's Kids & Docs competition alongside *180cc*, *Skip and the Rhythm Rangers* and *Gracious*. "We really tried to diversify and broaden the selection this year so the fact that there are still four Dutch works in there speaks volumes about the strength of the youth doc production scene in the Netherlands," says Statema.

René van Zundert's *180cc* revolves around Jose, a member of one of Rotterdam's tearaway bicycle gangs who rip through the city *en masse*, blocking traffic as they perform extended wheelies and other stunts. It is produced by Kids & Docs regulars Nienke Korthof and Willem Baptist at Rotterdam-based Tangerine Tree, whose previous credits include *Little Fire* and *Skatekeet*. "The boy at the heart of the documentary is an ambiguous character. You sympathise with him, if not the

tough environment around him. I think it will throw up some interesting discussions for the audience."

Anneke de Lind van Wijngaarden and Annelies Kruk's joint work *Gracious* is a portrait of a deaf teenage girl coming to terms with being raped by a cousin while staying at their grandmother's house. It was produced by Kiyomi Molin and Sharon Buijert with the support of Dutch broadcaster EO. Meanwhile, Olivier S Garcia's *Skip and the Rhythm Rangers* concerns a 14-year-old boy called Skip, caught between his dancing aspirations, and fear of being made fun of at school for his involvement in the all-boys group the Rhythm Rangers. It is produced by Iris Lammertsma and Boudewijn Koole at Witfilm.

Some 12,000 children and teenagers will attend the festival this year, either with their families or via school trips, and some of the titles feed into IDFA's Schools Programme, working with teachers across the Netherlands year-round. Statema acknowledges that many of the films in Kids & Docs tackle tough subjects but asserts that child and youth audiences are receptive to such stories on the big screen.

"You have to educate them and build the audiences," says Statema. "Children and teenagers won't necessarily come across works like these while surfing the net on their smartphones or tablets. You need to get them into cinemas but once you do, they're hooked." **Melanie Goodfellow**

Dutch Kitchen

Film Fund DocLab Interactive

The Netherlands is out in force at the 12th edition of IDFA's new media programme DocLab, unfolding under the thematic banner of *Humanoid Cookbook*. Melanie Goodfellow reports.

In the early 1930s, Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published his provocative work *Futurist Cookbook*, extolling his Futurist political beliefs through a collection of simple recipes aimed at revolutionising Italian cooking.

Nearly 90 years later, Dutch interactive artist Klasien van de Zandschulp and US food technologist / multimedia artist Emily Baltz have joined forces to update the work to fit the digital age, in a project called *Eat/Tech/Kitchen*, selected for DocLab Immersive Competition.

It is among seven works with strong Dutch links in IDFA's 10-day new media strand DocLab, showcasing 30 interactive documentaries, live events, sensory experiments and interactive performances at its traditional Amsterdam base of the Brakke Grond. "Klasien and Emily have breathed new life into futuristic cooking. A rudimentary chatbot invites visitors to share their dreams and fears about the future, and uses them as a basis to conceive recipes," explains DocLab creator and curator Caspar Sonnen.

The work fits well with this year's DocLab theme of *Humanoid Cookbook*, which expands on last



year's *Uncharted Rituals* banner, looking at how digital technology is reshaping human behaviour. "This year, we go even further in that direction and ask: how do we remain human in a post-human world disrupted by technology?" says Sonnen.

"To answer that question, in a time when cold intelligent machines are invading our everyday lives, we decided to look for sensory, human experiences using interactive technology, and, moreover, invite various interactive artists to explore the age-old ritual of sitting together at a dinner table."

"The dinner table as a metaphor and platform for exploring new art-forms will therefore be at the heart

of this year's edition of DocLab, which will see the Brakke Grond decked out to look like a virtual restaurant.

Eat/Tech/Kitchen is also one of three recipients in the second round of the €20,000 Film Fund DocLab Interactive Grant, launched last year with the backing of the Netherlands Film Fund. "It has been an exciting experiment and quietly successful," says Sonnen. "Not only did the supported artists go on to create great work, but it also allowed them to experiment with new types of artistic production and expression."

Steye Hallema – creative director at WildVreemd and The Smartphone Orchestra, who was involved in last year's grantee project *W/O/R/K* –



will be back at DocLab with *The Social Sorting Experiment* (DocLab Immersive Comp). The playful interactive audience-based experience explores how Apps construct profiles of their human users through the digital data snail trails they leave behind.

"This year, we focused the grant selection more explicitly to support projects that play with one or more elements that we defined as being 'cinematic': this meant we choose projects that, like traditional cinema, can be a collective experience, create an engaging narrative and/or provide a strikingly audiovisual experience," explains Sonnen. "In the end, we selected three very different experiences, two of which will be ready to be presented at IDFA."

The second grantee at DocLab this year is *The Industry VR* (DocLab Immersive Comp), an immersive re-imagining of a web documentary by interactive storyteller Mirka Duijn about the Dutch drugs industry. It was produced by digital production house Submarine in collaboration with Amsterdam-based new media collective Zesbaans.

The third grant recipient is Nadja van der Weide's *Common Good - Look Inside* (not at IDFA 2018), a hyper-realistic theatrical audio tour that guides the audience around the homes of people they do not know, and denounces issues such as voyeurism and privacy.

Other DocLab projects with strong Netherlands links include *False*

Mirror (DocLab Spotlight) by Iranian artist Ali Eslami, who created the work in Amsterdam while on the 3package Deal residency; Canada-based Dutch artist Dirk van Ginkel's *East of The Rockies*, cinematographer Wendy Gutman's *Ahorse!* (DocLab Immersive Comp), Thijs Biersteker's *Volverium* (DocLab Spotlight) and Yuval Orr's *Earning a Living* (DocLab Comp for Digital Storytelling), which is co-produced by VPRO.

"We see an increasing number of great projects coming out of the Netherlands," says Sonnen. "Artists are demonstrating an increasing level of interest in playing with new and undefined interdisciplinary art-forms."

A surreal EYE

15 Dec 2018 - 3 Mar 2019  **EYE Exhibition**
Jan Švankmajer - The Alchemical Wedding

Legendary Czech surrealist and experimental filmmaker Jan Švankmajer will be the focus of the next EYE exhibition in Amsterdam. Jaap Guldemon explains why to Nick Cunningham.

“Švankmajer is a perfect example of that attitude of daring to do what you want while giving full expression to your imagination,” explains EYE exhibition chief Guldemon of the renowned animator, whose work includes the features *Alice* (1988) and *Faust* (1994), as well as *Insects* (2018) which world-premiered at IFFR. Devotees of the Czech master’s work include Terry Gilliam and the Brothers Quay, the latter themselves a subject of an EYE exhibition in 2013/14.

But the new exhibition won’t be addressing Švankmajer’s feature output. It will concentrate instead on his shorts, collages and 2d works, with a core presentation of three themed *wunderkammers*, or extended cabinets of curiosity, that will exhibit the mad, unique, profane and surreal objects that he created over the past half a century, and which have both informed and populated his works.

Whatever creative ephemera doesn’t fit into the *wunderkammers* will fill the rest of the exhibition space. The vast majority of these objects (masks, dolls, skulls, religious totems, Bosch-inspired hybrid creatures and much more)

will be transported from Švankmajer’s studio in Prague and his castle three hours from the Czech capital. Throughout his career Švankmajer has sought to challenge and disrupt the core tenets of animated filmmaking through the collection, manufacture and animation of such objects in order to, in his own surrealist way, explore the possibilities of non-empirically derived knowledge/information.

“It is amazing as he collects, like a madman, works mainly from the Pacific and Africa, all those fetish objects – and there are thousands of them. He is making his own Rudolf II *wunderkammer* there where he has sessions with the last remnants of the Czech surrealist group,” comments Guldemon.

“Daring to do what he wants while giving full expression to his imagination”

Speaking in 2010 Švankmajer said of his *modus operandi*: “I don’t actually animate objects, I coerce their inner life out of them,” adding, “I like things that have passed through human hands. Things that have been touched. Such things are charged with emotions that are capable of revealing themselves under certain, extremely sensitive circumstances. I collect such objects, surround

myself with them and in the end I cast ‘fetishes’ in my films.”

The EYE exhibitions have proven to be very popular since the museum opened in 2012, but Guldemon finds it impossible to second guess the tastes and intentions of the Dutch and international public.

“I have learned that is difficult to foresee what will attract a large audience. Right now we are having the Ryoji Ikeda exhibition, a Japanese radical electrical composer working with data, and it is our second best visited exhibition ever. We did the Alex van Warmerdam which we expected to be popular, and it was, but it was nothing compared to the current show. So you never know.” The most popular exhibition to date has been William Kentridge’s astounding ‘If We Ever Get to Heaven’ exhibition from 2015.

Guldemon sums up the appeal of the Czech surrealist to EYE audiences. “These days, it seems that everything has to be very rationalised, but I think Švankmajer is doing the exact opposite, and represents a different attitude in a world where technocracy and algorithms are taking over. I am not taking a political standpoint, but it makes sense to do this exhibition now at a time when imagination seems a kind of luxury and is not taken seriously enough.”



More Dutch minority co-pros at IDFA



The Belgian documentary *Sakawa*, directed by Ben Asamoah (Ghana) and co-produced by Dutch doc powerhouse Pieter van Huystee Film & TV, is selected for IDFA's new Luminous section. The film follows Ghanaian online scammers and their targeting of vulnerable, and more affluent, international web consumers.

"*Sakawa* contains a strong story of how the have's and have's not are connected by the digital highway," comments Van Huystee. "How youngsters steal personal identities on social media and use them to seduce men and women in the Western world and ask them to transfer money to them with false stories. On the one hand we see people looking for love and attention. On the other side we see people trying to be connected with money and the

global world.... but it also a story of basic intimate feelings in contrast with machines and distance."

Meanwhile, *Heartbound* by Janus Metz and Sine Plambech (DK), winner of the Golden Eye Award for Best Documentary at the Zurich Film Festival and co-produced by BALDR Film, is selected for Best of Fests. The film concerns Sommai, a former sex worker from Thailand living in windswept Jutland who, 25 years ago, came to Denmark to marry Niels. Ever since, she has helped women from her village in Thailand marry Danish men, and now it is the turn of her niece...

"It has been a great opportunity for BALDR Film to establish its international name as well as an opportunity to promote the involved Dutch

talents, such as a visual artist and post-production facilities," comments BALDR producer Katja Draaijer. "I met Janus Metz in Copenhagen just before the shooting period together with his wife, renowned Danish scientist Sine Plambech, and the subsequent process was remarkable."

"We met again during editing in Berlin for a viewing and he genuinely took our remarks to heart; *Heartbound* is more than just about marriages of convenience between Thai women and Danish men, it reveals the difficult and unjust choices many women must make in order to support their families. For me this is often-times heartbreaking."

Also in Best of Fests is Naziha Arebi's *Freedom Fields* which follows three women and their football team in post-revolution Libya, as the country descends into civil war and the utopian hopes of the Arab Spring begin to fade. Through the eyes of these accidental activists, we see the reality of a country in transition, where the personal stories of love and aspirations collide with history.

Produced by SDI Productions (UK) and HuNa Productions (Libya), the film is supported by (among others) the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the IDFA Bertha Fund (NL).



Dutch documentaries in Student Competition

Two Dutch films will compete in IDFA 2018 Student Competition: Roy Seerden's *At Midnight Plays a Dance Tune* and Miriam Guttmann's *Seeds of Deceit*.

At Midnight Plays a Dance Tune is a fast-cut and experimental collage of intimate images and impressions resulting from the death of Dutch filmmaker Roy Seerden's mother. Turning to sex, drugs and roaming through the night, his life transforms into a bundle of energy, grief and detachment. At the same time, he can't help thinking of non-conformist Antoine, the strange neighbour from his youth, with whom Roy draws an obvious parallel.

Busan Award for Revolver doc

Joost Vandeburg's *Bruce Lee & the Outlaw*, produced by Revolver Amsterdam, won the Busan Cinephile Award in October 2018. The film, which premiered at Sheffield, is about Nicu, a young homeless boy in Bucharest who is adopted by local gangster Bruce Lee, the notorious King of the Underworld, with whom he goes to live in the tunnels beneath the city. As Nicu grows up, he starts to realise

that Lee may not be the perfect father and has to make a choice between staying below ground with him or living a 'normal' life above ground.

The Busan jury citation reads: "It's very impressive that the positive change in the main character is revealed by the director's intervention. Additionally, the problem within Romanian society in the film is not simply portrayed by

"You hear people who are sick sometimes say that they suddenly start to enjoy life more. It was something like that for me too," Seerden explained to Filmkrant in July 2018 (translated). "A colourful world, torn from reality. Expectations from others did not matter anymore. What it involved was spending my money on pizza and drugs. I hardly slept, had sex with men who were twice as old [as me] and whose names I did not even know. I had inherited the car from my mother and if I had the music hard and really pushed the accelerator, only then did I notice that I could come to my senses."

In *Seeds of Deceit* Miriam Guttmann tells the story of Dutch fertility doctor Jan Karbaat who insidiously inseminated dozens of women using his own sperm. Among heart-rending testimonials, and justifiable displays of anger and incomprehension, people seek answers as to how and why a trusted doctor could ride roughshod over all ethical considerations.

"For the film we chose for an explicit, aesthetic, stylized form," comments Guttmann. "A film should pull the viewer into a story. In my opinion the form is always essential, this is not different when one makes a documentary. Our challenge was to find the right method which would put form and content together... I'm currently developing a series which will explore Karbaat's clinic, die Zeitgeist, Karbaat as a person and the further consequences of his actions. Wait for more: my graduation film only covers the tip of the iceberg..."



criticism of the regime but conveyed through the lives of children on the street, which touched audiences with a lot of empathy, resulting in the award."



Menna Laura Meijer, mint film office

Selected for IDFA Feature-length and Dutch Competitions, mint film office's *Now Something Is Slowly Changing* is described as 'a bold and rigidly structured documentary about the modern-day quest for meaning, personal growth and performance improvement.'

Menna Laura Meijer on the film: "When you make a film you always have an opinion. Most filmmakers are excellently trained in hiding this opinion or presenting opinions as facts. When you want to convince people to participate it is extremely stressful when you have a hidden agenda – you always have to be aware of 'the truth' seeping out.

So, I am open about my ambitions and intentions with the film.... I have no problems with people looking for answers. I do have questions about what triggers the pursuit - is it your problem that brings you there or does the industry generate problems because that is how they keep themselves in business."