

SEE NL



Honigmann opens *IDFA*

Georgica : **Schrama's ode to the soil**

Debutant Knibbe in **IDFA feature-length competition**

Gieling brings new doc **Home to IDFA**

Ineke Smits on **Georgia's former (and Dutch) First Lady**

Issue #17 November 2014 IDFA issue



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NL FILM FONDS



3 View from the Edge Peter Jager, CEO of Outlook Film Sales

6-7 Baptism of fire Morgan Knibbe's lyrical and visually arresting debut doc is selected for IDFA main competition

8-9 Georgia on my mind Ineke Smits is back at IDFA with a profile of Sandra Roelofs, the former First Lady of Georgia

10-11 A mother's battle Gülsah Dogan's *Naziha's Story* probes behind the headlines about a troublemaking Moroccan-Dutch family

12-13 Where the heart is Ramon Gieling profiles a highly charismatic, very musical refugee who has settled in Amsterdam

14-15 A link to Sluizer A documentary about the late George Sluizer is selected for IDFA Dutch competition

16-19 A taste of Honigmann The illustrious Heddy Honigmann is in demand at IDFA 2014, and what's more her *Around The World In 50 Concerts* opens the festival

20-21 Solo again Dutch master Jos de Putter once more profiles Brazilian footballer Leonardo Santiago, now an international star

22-23 Ode to the Soil Katelijne Schrama's feature debut *Georgica* introduces Virgil's ancient treatise on farming to contemporary Dutch farmers

24-27 Big Business See NL profiles IDFA, the most important doc fest in the yearly calendar

28-29 Kids in the Frame See NL looks at why The Netherlands is so hot on docs for kids

30-31 Reaching Out Director Daan Veldhuizen's talks about his upcoming doc *Banana Pancakes and the Children of Sticky Rice*, and explains the need for outreach campaigns

32-33 Paradocs Joost Daamen, curator of IDFA's experimental Paradocs programme runs through the Dutch highlights with Melanie Goodfellow

34-35 Arab Dreaming François Verster's *The Dream of Shahrazad*, co-produced by Volya Films, counterpoints the mythological tales with events surrounding the Arab Spring

36-37 Reaching the summit Geertjan Lassche's documentary *Killer Slope* investigates the appeal of climbing one of the world's highest peaks

38-39 Paying the price Kasper Verkaik's *Plaza Man* profiles celebrated JFK conspiracy theorist Robert Groden

40-41 Trying to make sense... Alexander Oey investigates the life of mass killer Pekka-Eric Auvinen to work out what drove him to do what he did

42-43 Short Cuts News from the Dutch industry

44 Profile Heddy Honigmann



Still: *Solo - Out of a Dream* by Jos de Putter
See page 20

Cover still: *Banana Pancakes and the Children of Sticky Rice*
Director: Daan Veldhuizen Script: Daan Veldhuizen Production: Viewpoint Productions See page 30 Photo: @Philip Bais Viewpoint productions

Peter Jager – CEO of Outlook Film Sales



Outlook distributes an unusually high number of Dutch docs: *Meet The Fokkens*, *Matthew's Laws*, *Mussels In Love*, *New Boobs* and new films *The New Rijksmuseum - The Film* (IDFA 14) and *The Chimpanzee Complex* (CPH:DOX 14) and many more. So for us, Dutch docs have a great reach across continents. Why? Here are the most important reasons:

Firstly, there is a long tradition of documentary filmmaking in the Netherlands with brilliant directors like Joris Ivens and Bert Haanstra. Secondly, Amsterdam has a thriving Film Academy that nurtures young doc talent. Thirdly, The Netherlands has a solid funding infrastructure, willing to take risks on creative docs. Fourthly, Dutch broadcasters support their documentary filmmakers, and experienced commissioning editors like Barbara Truyen and Nathalie Windhorst not only travel the world but also bring home amazing international know-how about the documentary landscape.

In addition the local theatrical market for documentaries is flourishing. Outlook docs like *Our Daily Bread* (our first IDFA winner)

and *Meet The Fokkens* did exceptionally well at the Dutch box-office. Recently Cinemien picked up our feature *Yalom's Cure* for a Dutch theatrical release.

Dutch filmmaking is close to Anglo-Saxon and Nordic filmmaking in terms of its approach to story-telling, and they often have a continental visual aesthetic too. So we see strong, subject-driven docs that sell well to broadcasters, and creative arthouse gems that travel globally to festivals and sometimes find theatrical distributors.

The country is rather small, so filmmakers look abroad and take on subjects of international importance. With documentary, subject is everything and Dutch filmmakers are prepared to ask the important questions of our time.

The team at EYE International play a crucial role in promoting Dutch documentaries not only at the important international festivals and markets but also as a liaison to distributors and sales agents. We will really miss you dear Claudia!

The cherry on top of the pie is IDFA, the world's leading documentary festival, they not only take over the entire city during the festival (which is very rare for any festival to achieve) but also fondly embrace Dutch documentaries within several program sections. IDFA is a unique brand for the global recognition of Dutch documentaries.

COLOPHON

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NL FILM
FONDS



Killer slope

“Lassche was fascinated by what drove the climbers toward the summit in the face of so much danger and difficulty. Was it egotism? Was it stubbornness?”

See page 36



Director: Geertjan Lassche **Production:** NPO / EO **Sales:** NPO Sales



Banana Pancakes and the Children of Sticky Rice

“The film touches on the conflicting desires of the tourists who are searching for an authentic, traditional village, and the villagers who are fascinated by the West”

See page 30

Director: Daan Veldhuizen **Script:** Daan Veldhuizen **Production:** Viewpoint Productions

Baptism of fire



Morgan Knibbe

Morgan Knibbe's extraordinary debut doc feature *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning* is selected for IDFA competition. He talks to Nick Cunningham.

In his debut feature Dutch director Morgan Knibbe rejects conventional tools - talking heads, interviews to camera, factual narration - to present a lyrical essay that describes the plight of refugees seeking access to the European mainland. Instead he tells their story through the eyes and mouth of a ghost, whose human host drowns during the film's dramatic opening scene.

"When this person falls off the boat at the beginning of the film his reality slips into another dimension, which is a metaphor for the situation in which the refugees are situated," he explains. "As is the perspective of this ghostlike being, like a spirit flying through a space somewhere between paradise and hell. That is the core concept of the film."

As a new sense of reality begins to emerge, Knibbe's camera flies and floats, continually curious, rarely intrusive. Fixed upon a drone it

reveals to us an unnamed Mediterranean cityscape before swooping down onto its streets, recording dance parties and mini riots, continuing its journey through windows and along corridors to introduce a panoply of characters seeking refuge, newly settled within Europe's borders. And when the ghostly narrator isn't speaking, some of the film's other subjects take over to explain their plight, always in poetic and whispered tones.

"I am a bird... I want to fly to places I haven't seen yet," a very young sleeping girl intones, while a male refugee recalls the tragedy of Lampedusa in 2013, when more than 350 Eritrean refugees were killed off the coast of Sicily. "When the boat sank we swam towards the light," he contemplates. "It was very far and one of us got tired. He said, 'Not all of us have to die. You go ahead.' He said farewell and so we parted."

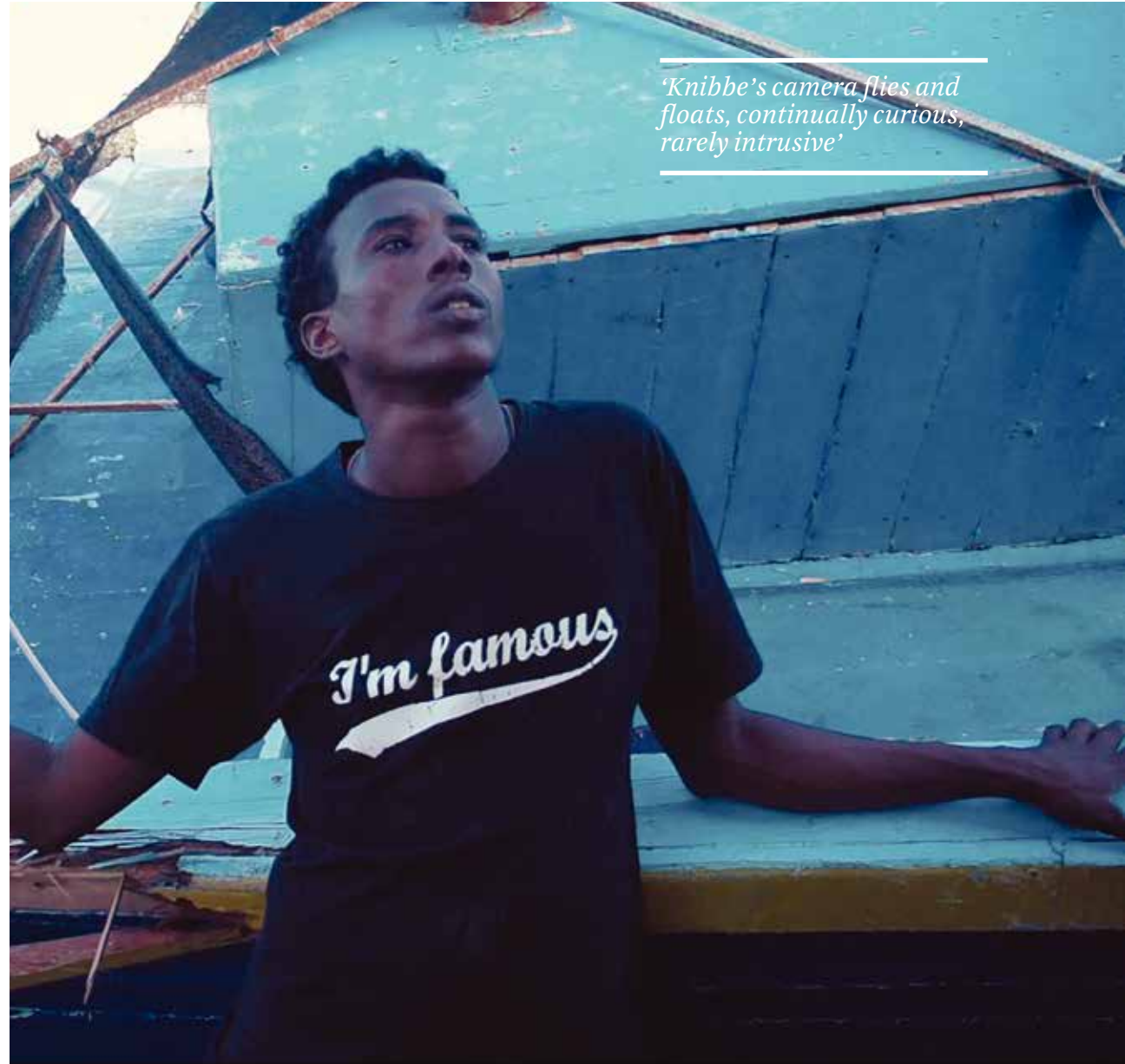
"It was important to bond with the people and to make a film not only about them, but together with them, explains," explains Knibbe. "The only way for the audience to get very intimate with the people in the film was for me to get intimate with them myself."

The intensely warm tones of the film resulted not from use of filters but from dedicated application during the colour grading process.

And the smooth camerawork (using a consumer steadicam and a Sony FS100) was achieved not as a result of years of practice, more through trusting to intuition. "I hadn't done any camerawork before this film," Knibbe points out. "The Film Academy didn't allow me to shoot anything because the concept of the education there is that you really work inside your own discipline. So I actually learned camerawork during the shooting."

Those Who Feel the Fire Burning was made by Amsterdam-based Baldr Film with a Wildcard grant awarded by the Netherlands Film Fund. The Wildcard initiative enables the most talented and promising Dutch film graduates to go out into the world and shoot an ambitious feature on any subject that takes their fancy.

"Cinema is a very powerful medium and I am always thinking about ways to touch the audience emotionally with cinematic tools but also to make them think about what they are seeing on a meta level, and that is always a difficult balance," Knibbe underlines. "On the one hand you always want to take your audience on a journey and to tell a story that really sucks them up, but on the other hand you want to make them think about what they are seeing and what their own individual role in the story might be, and I try to do that by creating an audiovisual style that tickles their imagination."



'Knibbe's camera flies and floats, continually curious, rarely intrusive'

Georgia on my mind



Ineke Smits

Ineke Smits makes a welcome return to IDFA with *Stand by Your President*, a profile of Sandra Roelofs, the former (and Dutch) First Lady of Georgia.

In many ways Ineke Smits was always the person best qualified to make a documentary about Sandra Roelofs, the Dutch wife of former President Saakashvili of Georgia. The women's relationship pre-dates Saakashvili's presidency (2004-13) when both were living in Georgia after the turn of the millennium.

"We were the only two Dutch girls in Georgia living in a family set-up, not working for NGOs. We were not ex-pats, we were family members," she explains. "We were in touch twice a year and would meet up and drink coffee, and over time she became the First Lady and I became a widow of my Georgian man, but I kept on coming back to Georgia and she kept on coming back to Holland. So we share a history in Georgia, which created a bond."

Back in 2012, as Saakashvili's fixed term of office was drawing to a close, Smits realised the time was

ripe to shoot her documentary, that was supported by the Netherlands Film Fund. "I knew that the era was coming to an end - and that is always a very good moment, both to look back and to look to the future to see what might happen, so I proposed to Sandra that we make this film. I wanted to make a personal film, not an official film, about a public figure."

'She was saying some radical things...'

Stand by Your President offers an intimate portrayal of Roelofs, but this in itself was a difficult task given the constant attention paid by her bodyguards, something she had to put up with ever since her husband rose to power. "Another problem was that she has been living for 10 years under the eye of official cameras, which made it hard for her to open up for *my* camera. Because I was aware of that, it was my choice to work with an independent, Dutch team," comments Smits.

Later in the film Roelofs is filmed back in The Netherlands where she can speak more openly of her dissatisfaction with the political machinations within Georgia. A noteworthy revelation is of her husband's request that she stand for presidency at the end of his term, the inference being that he would continue to rule from behind

the throne. "She was saying some radical things, things that are also very personal," opines Smits. "And she is still a public figure so it is very brave of her to say 'this is how I am, this is how I want to show who I am, and I am very happy with that'. Yes, she has been so brave and honest."

In the film's lyrical mid-section Smits' camera follows Roelofs as she sings with her close Georgian friends and talks lovingly of the spiritual heart of her country, all the time fearful of its potential capitulation to Western values and mores. 'I sometimes wonder if the westernization of Georgia is really right for the essential soul of Georgia,' she says.

"All the things that she says about this sense of community is absolutely true," agrees Smits. "But I am not so pessimistic about this disappearing. It is a Mediterranean country in a way. People stick together and take care of each other and keep in touch. My friends are the ones I have known for 25 years and I know that if something happens to me they will take care of me - and the other way around."

So, given the political sensitivity of the project, how did Roelofs react to her portrayal in the documentary? "She gave me the biggest compliment that a filmmaker can get," responds the director. "She said 'I recognize myself in this. This is how I am.'" **Nick Cunningham**



Stand By Your President Director:
Smits Production: IDTV Docs Sales
Docs

A mother's battle



Gülsah Dogan

Gülsah Dogan's *Naziha's Story* probes behind the headlines about a troublemaking Moroccan-Dutch family, writes Melanie Goodfellow.

The first time filmmaker Gülsah Dogan heard about Naziha Aouled, the subject of her *Naziha's Spring*, it was as a news item. The Moroccan-Dutch mother of 10 children, nine of them boys, hit the headlines in the Netherlands in 2007 because of the criminal behaviour of some of her sons who spent more time in the police station than at home.

Aouled's inability to control her chaotic brood, coupled with the fact that she and her children were being assisted by several different social workers, prompted multiple media reports, few sympathetic. "The Dutch media tends to talk about rather than *with* these troubled families. You get a lot of reports suggesting that parents don't care, that they aren't present," says Dogan.

The filmmaker came into contact with Aouled through a 26-minute work she made for state broadcaster NTR in 2008. In the process, Dogan

discovered a compelling backstory she felt was worthy of a feature-length documentary.

"I met a woman who, with a lot of humour and strength, was fighting against prejudice, a history marred by a bad childhood and a horrific marriage, as well as against some of her sons who wanted her to be more like other Moroccan mothers and also against social pressure," explains Dogan. "I ended up spending three years with the family, really getting to know them. The story behind the news is so different. The children sometimes make mistakes, but most of them are very sweet and have a strong connection to each other."

What emerges is the tale of a tough and articulate woman determined to build a better life for herself and her children, and in particular her young daughter. Speaking in fluent Dutch, the Moroccan-born Aouled explains how she was married off to a violent man, some 30 years her senior, as a young woman. In 2005, she decided to take her life in her hands and kicked her husband out of the family home.

"That's when she started her fight to get her children on the right path and also establish a life for herself as a free woman," explains Dogan. "The film doesn't only show her in a good light. She's very intelligent and strong and has a lot of humour and that is what keeps her going but she

is also very dominant and can be hard on the kids. The film really shows how she is... always running, fighting and laughing and never standing still because if she does she has to cope with her own pain... but she needs to stay strong for her kids now."

As part of the development process, Dogan had to negotiate access with social services which were heavily involved in the lives of the family. "Naziha always wanted to share her story in the film... but we battled for nearly three years to get permission to make it," says Dogan. "Some of the social workers involved in the case felt the children had already had enough media exposure and were nervous about the film."

Naziha's Spring, which was produced by Volya Films with the support of the Netherlands Film Fund, will premiere in IDFA Competition for Dutch Documentary, with Aouled and some of her children in attendance. It is also set to broadcast in a primetime slot on broadcaster NTR next year.

Prior to that Dogan is planning a series of outreach-style screenings across the Netherlands. "I'd like to show it to Moroccan mothers and youngsters as well as social workers. It's Naziha's story but it's also a universal story and will help people both in and outside the community understand their issues better."

'A resilient woman determined to build a better life for herself and her children'

Where the Heart is



Ramon Gieling

Ramon Gieling's feature-length doc *Home*, about a charismatic refugee living in Amsterdam, plays in Dutch Competition at IDFA 2014. The director talks to Nick Cunningham.

In *Home*, the Ivorian refugee Cyriaque resembles a 21st century prophet, one that has landed in the middle of Amsterdam. He is kind and he is wise, and not at all bitter. He speaks in metaphor and accompanies his guitar playing with lyrics of love, longing and memory. He is also a great lead man and, as evidenced by his performance at Amsterdam's Paradiso club, could rival Bob Marley in his pomp.

Back in 2012, director Gieling read about an encampment that had sprung up spontaneously in the centre of Amsterdam, housing 120 immigrants. At the time he was researching a film about what the concept of 'home' means to different people, and so he immediately journeyed to the urban campsite along with a cameraman.

"I started making some interviews with people who were staying there,

and then I saw a man playing a guitar and I asked him if he didn't mind if I made some shots. Bit by bit we came to talk to each other, and suddenly I felt like a painter who had found his model," Gieling explains. "I had my main character. It was as simple as that, and when I made the first dialogue scene with him and heard his profound way of expressing himself – almost like a prophet – I was sure of it. And so I continued with him for two years."

The film is, in essence, a quasi-surreal study of a man dislocated from his Ivory Coast homeland. After Cyriaque sang a song critical of the government on local radio back home, the authorities tortured and murdered his father. Cyriaque then became estranged from his family and suffered another terrible bereavement before he began his nomadic voyage towards Europe. But throughout the odyssey he remained irrepressible, considering hardships, homelessness and poverty to be essential building blocks in the business of existence. "A life without obstacles is like a river without fish," he claims in the film.

"He never complained... he has no reason to be optimistic about anything, but nevertheless he is an optimist," Gieling adds. "And there is not a glimpse of vanity in him. He is still very humble in the way he reacts to what I did. We had a screening recently to check the VCT

and he was there - he came with another character who was in the film. And it is very interesting because he reacts very coldly, in the best sense of the word. No vanity at all. The only thing he hopes is that this film might help him get him a visa."

The relationship developed after Gielings offered Cyriaque a room in his house, but he nevertheless knew that his involvement with his subject was always going to be limited to the duration of the project. That said, the director points out that the main character of his 1986 documentary *Duende*, about flamenco and gypsy life in Anadalucia, subsequently became his best friend and godfather to his son.

"But of course every filmmaker is also a user. I used Cyriaque for my film. It is like in the theatre you have the glass between the audience and the stage. You can do two things, you can leave the glass intact or you can hit it with your fist and break it. So at the end I have to say 'Okay, we have seen a film with you but now I will break this glass and I have to move on - I have to make another film and you have to care of yourself now.'

"Which is a bit cruel, but it confronts us with the limits of what we can do for our 'model' in a film, and I was convinced that the film needed it," Gieling concludes.



*'Nevertheless
Cyriaque is an
optimist'*

Home Director: Ramon Gieling
Production: Pieter van Huystee Film

Alink to Sluizer

Geoffrey Macnab reports on *Sluizer Speaks*, a new feature doc about the acclaimed filmmaker and polemicist George Sluizer, who died in 2014.

Earlier this autumn, when Dutch director George Sluizer died, many found it hard to accept that he had finally gone. After all, the famously combative filmmaker had been living under a sentence of death since he suffered an aneurysm at Christmas 2007. As he liked to tell journalists, he had been in the mortuary before the doctors somehow brought him back to life. His health may have been faltering but he remained as hard working and prolific as ever during his final years.

Now, a new documentary *Sluizer Speaks*, is about to be unveiled. It was made by young director Dennis Alink, who interviewed his subject at length.

It was eight years ago that Alink first saw Sluizer's masterpiece *The Vanishing (Sporloos, 1988)* "I was very much intrigued by his way of storytelling and I was amazed that I couldn't find any information about him on the internet. There were no books about him. Nothing much was available," the director recalls.

In 2010, Alink saw Sluizer's controversial documentary *Homeland* at IDFA and tried to sort out an interview with the great man.

"He agreed to let me interview him but out of health reasons, he had to leave the festival a couple of hours before the interview." Alink thought his chance had gone. Then, in 2012, Sluizer returned to the public eye, presenting a version of *Dark Blood*, the film he had had to abandon 20 years before following the death of its star River Phoenix during shooting. The young director approached him again and Sluizer agreed to participate in the documentary.

"At first, he (Sluizer) didn't really care. He said 'alright, go ahead,'" Alink recalls of his subject's reaction to the idea of the film. "But during the process (of filming), he started to care more and more - and became more involved." Sluizer was collaborating with Alink on the documentary until days before his death.

"I am very fascinated by two aspects," Alink says of Sluizer's life and work. "First is his films - they tell stories of extreme people and all of his films really go into the extremes of the human mind... also, he himself was into extremes. Everything in his life, from producing *Fitzcarraldo* (for Werner Herzog) in the jungle to his family life, was about extremes. I thought that made a good combination."

The documentary follows Sluizer to the Rotterdam and Berlin Festivals and shows him in Nice, where he

lived. Yes, Alink acknowledges, controversy did seem to dog Sluizer. He told very colourful stories about events he had witnessed, getting himself into trouble as he did so. "I think everything he said was rooted in truth but he had admitted that his stories are 90% true and 10% fantasy," Alink says.

Did Alink like Sluizer? "Yes, I liked him a lot but he doesn't want to be liked," says the director, parrying the question. "There are a lot of people who didn't like him. He himself said there were two kinds of directors - the ones people like and the ones people don't like."

True to his reputation, Sluizer was difficult from time to time during the shooting of the documentary. Alink took this in his stride. "I am pretty much used to extreme people," he says. "I don't find it hard to communicate with people as long as they are truthful and passionate." Sluizer, he adds, was one of the "most truthful and passionate" men he had ever met.

He has one final story which sums up Sluizer's personality perfectly. When Alink was filming him in Nice, he was struggling to walk. "He stood there with two sticks. He said 'walking is very hard but I do know how to handle these sticks.' He pointed to the mountains and said 'Skiing might be a bit easier than walking!'"

'Sluizer didn't want to be liked'

A taste of Honigmann



Hedy Honigmann

Hedy Honigmann is everywhere at IDFA 2014. Her latest film opens the festival. She will present her Top 10 films, is part of the Female Gaze programme and will oversee a retrospective of her works. Yet she still finds the time to talk with Geoffrey Macnab.

Hedy Honigmann's latest documentary begins with a bang. The first images of *Around The World In 50 Concerts* (which opens IDFA 2014 and is supported by the Netherlands Film Fund) are of a percussionist on his own in the concert hall, describing his job - and giving a demonstration. If the orchestra happens to be performing Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, which lasts for an hour and a half, he will be called on to hit the cymbals precisely...once!

Ask Honigmann why she began the film with the percussionist and she replies: "intuition." It helped that the percussionist was such a good storyteller - Honigmann always likes the characters in her documentaries to be able to spin a yarn. "If they are not good storytellers, it is difficult.

You have to pull words out of their mouths. It's a kind of torture for them and for you." Her technique is to put subjects at ease in front of the camera by giving them something to do. "You can never ask someone in a documentary to do something he has never done but you can help the person to do it as well as they can." And it is some noise the musician makes with his cymbals.

Around The World In 50 Concerts was commissioned to mark the 125th anniversary (in 2013) of the Amsterdam-based Royal Concertgebouw and its orchestra, one of the best in the world. Don't expect a dry, historical documentary. Like all of Honigmann's work this is a deeply personal affair, a film - as she puts it - made with "a little tenderness." ("Try a little tenderness" is the name she has given her masterclass on documentary at IDFA.)

The invitation to make the film came to her through production company Cobos Films, who in turn had been commissioned by Avro TV - but it was necessary that Honigmann could convince the orchestra management with a good idea for the film. "I had to speak with the boss of the orchestra to pitch," she recalls. "Never in my life have I pitched anything!"

When the director turned up at the meeting, she made it clear that she could only take on the project if she

was allowed to do it in her own way. "I came there five minutes too late. I had a half hour with them. I said what I see is a lot of black children (because I knew they would visit Soweto) waiting in a row and then in a theatre, listening to the music the orchestra will make." Maybe, she added, she would include one or two of the children in the film. It turned out that the director of the orchestra had only been able to see one film of her oeuvre in advance, Honigmann's classic 1996 documentary *O Amor Natural*, in which she invited elderly Brazilians to read the poetry of Carlos Drummond de Andrade. "He said, well, you should do the film."

The film's producer Carmen Cobos comments of the commission: "Although this was the first time Hedy worked on a film project that she did not initiate, she embraced the whole idea and really made it into a 'Hedy' film. We are very pleased about that." (Interestingly, Cobos chose the same subject - the 125th anniversary of the concert hall - as the subject for her own directorial debut, *Imperfect Harmony*, which premiered in April 2014. The film focuses on the clash of egos when modernist *enfant terrible* Louis Andriessen returns to the hallowed space with a commissioned work to be conducted by the world-renowned conductor Mariss Janssons.)

In Around The World In 50 Concerts,



'Never in my life have I pitched anything'

Around the World in 50 Concerts
Director: Hedy Honigmann
Production: Cobos Films Sales:
NPO Sales



*'A world without music
would be a frozen planet'*

Still: Mariss Jansons in *Around The World in 50 Concerts*

Honigmann follows the musicians to Buenos Aires, Soweto and St Petersburg. Wherever she goes, Honigmann is looking for the tell-tale details about the way music affects lives. In the St Petersburg section, for example, there is an immensely moving interview with an old Russian man called Sergei who loves classical music but who has endured a long and troubled existence. His father was killed by Stalin's police in the late 1930s. He himself spent the war years in a Nazi concentration camp. His beloved mother and his wife of 50 years are now dead and he is on his own in a small apartment. Honigmann shows the absolute rapture he feels when he attends a concert.

"Sometimes, I imagine characters and then I go on a search to look for them," Honigmann (who won a "Living Legend" award at last year's IDFA) reflects on how she chooses subjects for her films. She cites her 1997 feature doc *The Underground Orchestra*, about immigrant musicians making a living playing in the Parisian subway. "I dreamed about a cellist who was coming from East Germany..." "I never found him. I found a Romanian cellist playing in the street."

Her IDFA opener hints at the stresses within the musicians' lives - their long absences from their families and their worries about such matters as keeping their instruments at the correct

temperature. Nonetheless, this is a joyful and optimistic film in which both the musicians and the interviewees (the taxi driver in Buenos Aires, the twin sisters in Soweto, Sergei in St Petersburg) express their pleasure in the music.

The doc is structured in four parts. In each part, there is a musician leading. We see the orchestra playing in different environments. With the kids in Soweto, they are at their most playful, delighting their audience with their high jinks. We also see violinists playing astonishing solos and the orchestra tackling Mahler in an invigorating and passionate fashion.

At one stage, in Buenos Aires, two musicians pay a visit to their favourite chocolate shop. The woman who works there was unable to go to the performance because she had to work long hours. They explain that they are therefore bringing the concert to her and play for her in front of the cakes and eclairs.

Like the characters in her film, Honigmann loves music and fully appreciates its transformative powers. "It (music) is a lot of things. It's what everybody says. It depends on your mood what you feel. If you are very sad, it is a great consolation. If you're happy, it makes you even more happy. If you are searching for memories, you can trigger them pretty quickly with music." She adds that she can't imagine a world

without music. "It would be like a frozen planet." Making the documentary was exhausting but exhilarating, "very tiring but glorious." She adds: "I was a kind of cadaver," at how she felt after finishing it. "The joy exhausts you."

Not only is *Around The World in 50 Concerts* opening this year's IDFA. Honigmann has also been invited to programme a 'top 10' of her favourite documentaries. Yes, it was a struggle to come up with a list. The 10 films she has chosen for the festival aren't exactly the same as those she named in film magazine Sight and Sound's recent list of the "Greatest Documentaries Of All Time." (Such well known titles as *Shoah* and *Sans Soleil* aren't on her IDFA list.) She shows no embarrassment at having picked a couple of fictional features alongside the docs: Abbas Kiarostami's *And Life Goes On* (1992) and Victor Erice's *The Quince Tree Sun* (1992.) Her justification is that she thought they were docs when she first saw them.

This year's IDFA features a sidebar on the "female gaze" in the documentary genre. Honigmann is one of the 15 directors invited to put together the films. "I asked if I could speak not just about a female gaze but also about a feminine gaze," she says, mentioning male filmmakers like Chris Marker and Cristian Mungiu. "If you speak of a feminine gaze and then you give examples, people will understand you exactly."

Solo again



Jos de Putter

In 1994, Jos de Putter won the Joris Ivens Award at IDFA with *Solo, the Law of the Favela*, his film about two 11-year-old favela kids from Rio who dream of making it big as professional football players. Twenty years on, de Putter has made a follow up. Geoffrey Macnab reports.

Largely because of his original film, one of the boys, Leonardo Santiago, was brought to Europe and has enjoyed a successful career as a professional footballer, first with the Rotterdam team Feyenoord, later with NAC Breda, then Ajax and now with 1860 Munich. "The strange thing is that you end up with a life that is somehow destined by something I did," de Putter expresses of his surprise at how events panned out. "I don't make films to change anything. I just make films to tell stories."

In the new film *Solo - Out Of A Dream*, de Putter takes Leonardo back to Rio and they reflect on his experiences, good and bad, over the last 20 years. "I am not really a sequel man," de Putter reflects. "When you make documentaries,

some of them resonate a bit and people, especially producers, advise you to do something similar. I've tried to avoid that for the past 20 years but in Leonardo's case the story behind the first film - or after the film - was quite extraordinary."

The director acknowledges that he felt wary about re-visiting the story. He had kept in touch with the player, seeing him on and off. De Putter himself is an ardent Feyenoord fan (even if he lives in Amsterdam rather than Rotterdam). He couldn't help but take a certain pride in Leonardo's performances for his favourite team - or feel a slight dismay when the player later joined Feyenoord's arch-rivals Ajax.

Earlier this year, a book was published about Leonardo. De Putter went to the launch. "Every time I meet him, I have a strong feeling... I identify with him, maybe. He identifies with me, maybe. It was like that 20 years ago. It is like looking through a magnifying glass. I recognise a lot of myself in him although with him everything is very much more intense."

From the very beginning de Putter felt a kinship with the emotional and maladjusted Leonardo. "When I saw him the first time, I knew he was going to fight himself up. I never thought it could have happened in such a crazy way." The director couldn't help but become a kind of father figure to the younger

player who had never known his own father. A deep feeling remains between them.

Leonardo is now 31 and coming toward the end of his career as a professional football player. He has suffered injuries and upheavals in his private life. De Putter sees himself as being at a similar stage of his filmmaking career. "It's a very cannibalist kind of industry; we both experienced that when you achieve something people try to steal you blind. But the most important question is what a film can do to a life."

Yes, Leonardo has been invited to the IDFA premiere and the director hopes he will attend. However, de Putter accepts that the film may be just a little too intimate for the player. As he reflects on his experiences in Europe, his old friends, his difficult relationship with his mother and the extraordinary transformations in his life, the player can't help but become emotional - and professional sports people don't always like seeing themselves weep on screen. "You know, the guy's a famous soccer player - they don't cry."

Ode to the Soil



Katelijne Schrama

There aren't many recent documentaries inspired by classical Roman poetry. That is why Katelijne Schrama's new film *Georgica* is so unusual, writes Geoffrey Macnab.

The film's starting point is *The Georgics*, the ancient odes to farming ('on working the earth') that Virgil wrote in 37 BC. Virgil's opus wasn't just a piece of lyric poetry. It also contained practical advice for farmers.

Sicco Mansholt, the celebrated post-war Dutch politician who oversaw the creation of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy, was an admirer of *The Georgics*. Mansholt was famous for his advocacy of 'big farming'. Late in his life, he recanted his views and acknowledged the importance of more local and community-based approaches to agriculture. "I was struck that he (Mansholt) read the Virgil poem because it is really about small-scale farming. At that time, technology wasn't as far as advanced as it is now," the director recalls.

Although she is now based in Amsterdam, Schrama is from an agricultural background. (Her parents ran a fruit farm in Flevopolder on land reclaimed from the sea.) She had the idea of taking Virgil's poem to contemporary farmers in the region and asking them to read it and respond to it in the light of their own experiences. Predictably, the farmers were wary when a filmmaker came knocking at their door, but it helped that Schrama was from farming stock and many of her potential interviewees recognised her surname and were willing at least to have her in for a coffee.

"When I came first with the poem, they were like 'what is this?' Some were more open than others but everybody was also immediately interested," the director recalls. "They immediately understood that it was about their lives." Farming is a solitary profession. Once they realised that Schrama didn't have an agenda and was ready to listen to them, they opened up to her.

Georgica was shot over a year, as the seasons changed. "When I had to instruct my crew, the most difficult thing was to let them understand when farmers harvest. You don't know exactly when they are going to do it - they have an idea but it depends on the weather. If they have to do it, they have to do it right away because it's their whole income. They can't wait for a camera crew."

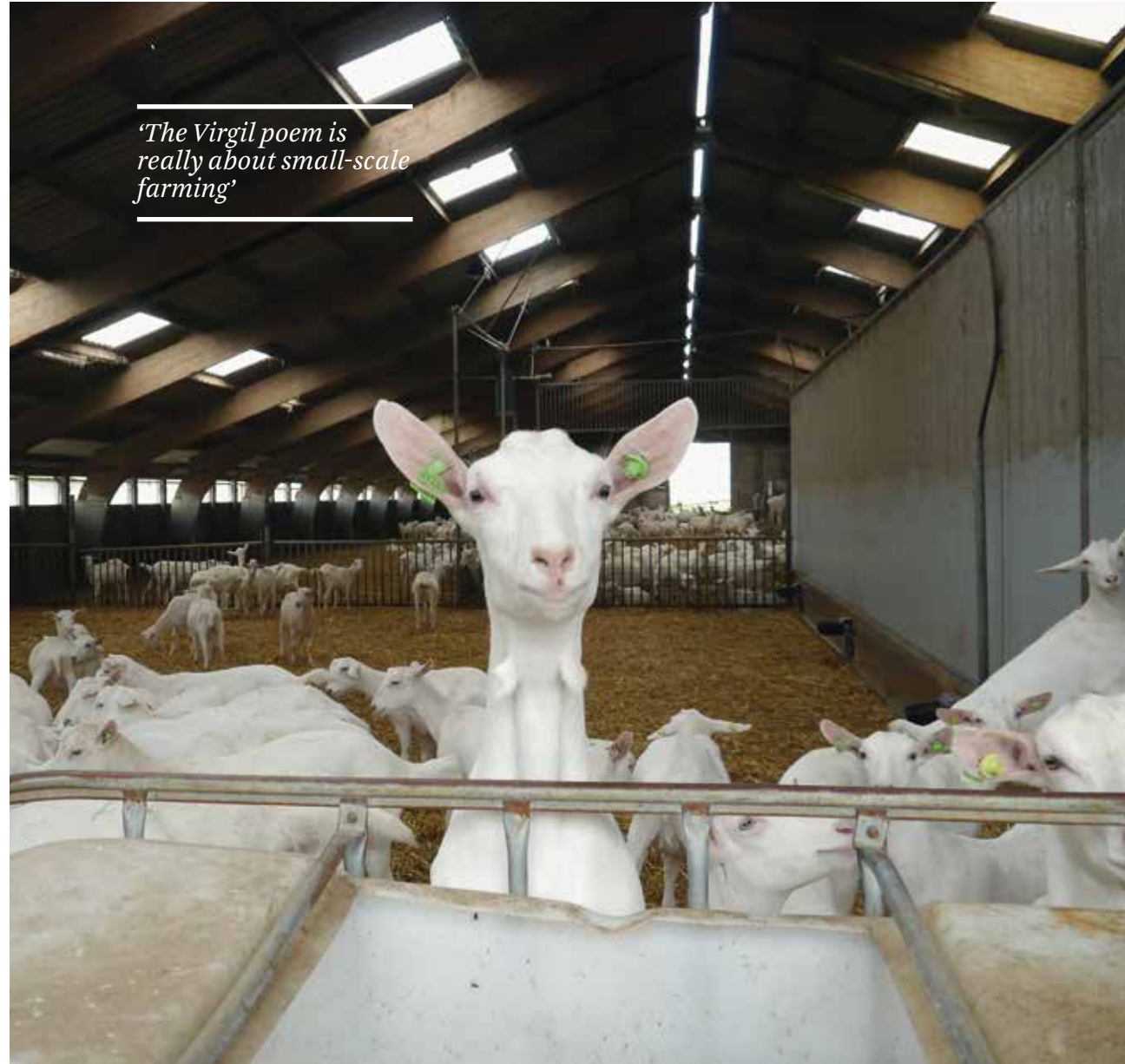
The film was shot with a digital HD camera. She and her cameraman took their inspiration from old photographs of farming. When it came to shooting a milking machine, she instructed him to 'film it with love!' At first, he looked at her as if she was crazy but he then began to follow her advice, bringing an unlikely tenderness to his work.

Whatever her own misgivings about mass factory-style farming, Schrama feels no nostalgia for older, simpler days. "Farming by hand is very hard work," she says. By the end of their lives, farmers' "bodies are over and out and done - it is hard labour."

Schrama hopes that her film will provoke viewers to think a little more deeply about the part that agriculture still plays in all our lives. "People should be part of it," the director says of the debate about farming methods. "It should not be decided by banks and corporations."

Georgica is Schrama's first long doc. (She has made several well received shorts, among *Sangius Vergus* and *1974*.) To the director's relief, the producer Digna Sinke of SNG was knowledgeable about agriculture. "It was a relief I didn't have to explain everything! She understood - and it was a very good match."

And, yes, the farmers involved in the doc will be given their own preview. "You can have a more quiet moment and also talk with them afterwards."



'The Virgil poem is really about small-scale farming'

Big Business

If there is one date documentary professionals keep each year, it is the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA). Melanie Goodfellow investigates why.

IDFA old-timers love to recount how, back in the early days, deals were sealed over a beer at the bar of the documentary festival's first home of the De Balie, the Amsterdam hub for political and cultural debate.

A quarter of a century later, a lot of networking still goes on over a beer and the odd bitterbal, but the festival has since grown into one of the most important business global events within the documentary industry calendar.

Some 2,500 professionals flock annually to the festival, drawn by its cutting edge film selection, the Forum co-production meeting, the Docs for Sales market, the myriad networking opportunities and a large and enthusiastic public audience. "If Hot Docs in Canada is the world championships, IDFA is the documentary equivalent of the Olympic Games," says prolific Dutch producer Pieter van Huystee.

"It is the mother of all festivals for the documentary world," concurs industry veteran Esther van Messel, CEO of Zurich-based sales company First Hand Films. "We go to all the festivals and love them all for their

different strengths and attendees but IDFA is the one everyone has to attend... none of the others have quite the energy, dynamic or diversity of IDFA."

As well as selling festival titles that include August B Hanssen *Ida's Diary* screening IDFA Mid-Length Competition, First Hand Films will also be at the Forum with Israeli director Ido Haar's *Through You Princess*, produced by Liran Atzmor, whose previous credits include Ra'anana Alexandrowicz's Sundance-winning *The Law In These Parts*. It is among 50 projects due to be pitched at the three-day event alongside new projects by Heddy Honigmann, Maryam Ebrahimi and Janus Metz.

"The top commissioning editors for TV are there and this is key because they are the ones who go out to bat for our films inside the broadcasters, which remain key funders for documentaries," explains van Messel. "The level of discussion is extremely intelligent. I love presenting projects there."

Pioneering Spirit

When IDFA launched the Forum in 1993, in co-operation with the EC-funded agency Documentary (which later became EDN), it was the first event of its kind for documentaries and even pre-dated most of the fiction-focused meetings that have since sprung up at film festivals around the world.

"It was really quite groundbreaking," says IDFA industry chief Adriek van Nieuwenhuyzen. "Nowadays, it's common practice for broadcasters to seek partners in Europe and increasingly further afield but at the time it was almost taboo. There was a sense that broadcasters should remain loyal to local productions and a fear of producing so-called 'euro-puddings'."

Alongside the Forum, IDFA's Docs

'IDFA is the documentary equivalent of the Olympic Games'

for Sale market and the related internet viewing library, DfS Online, have also grown in size and stature. Attended by some 270 buyers and festival programmers each year, the selective event annually showcases some 500 new titles. The online platform is regularly updated with new films throughout the year rather than only at the time of the festival, making it in an invaluable tool for sellers, buyers and programmers alike.

Around the Forum and Docs For Sale, the festival also lays on a packed programme of industry talks and networking events. "We'll be focusing on outreach, distribution and VOD this year because we think these are really relevant topics for



IDFA Forum



Outside IDFA Forum

Dutch Influence at Forum

Two of the projects due to be presented at the Forum this year hail from the Netherlands. In addition the Chinese project *China's van Gogh*, which will shoot briefly in the Netherlands, involves minority Dutch co-producer Trueworks.

Heddy Honigmann will present her latest project *100UP* about people who are a hundred years or older but continue to have an irresistible zest for life. It is being produced by Iris Lammertsma of Wiifilms, the company of Boudewijn Koole, specialising mainly in documentary but also occasional fiction titles such as the award-winning *Kauwboy*.

Rosan Boersma and Sander Verdonk of CTM Docs will present Ester Gould and Reiger Zwaan's *Strike a Pose* about the reality of the gay men proudly voguing in Madonna's iconic pop song.

Reinette van der Stadt, co-founder and producer at Amsterdam-based Trueworks whose credits include the award-winning *Mussels in Love*, is minority producing Haibo Yu and Taingyi Yu's *China's van Gogh* about a peasant-turned-painter making the transition from reproducing European old masters to creating his own work.

the industry," says van Nieuwenhuyzen.

Speakers will include producer Brian Newman, on how he won sponsorship from a major outdoor clothing chain to finance his film *DamNation*, and Callum Gray, sales manager at UK production and distribution company Independent Films, on rights management in the digital age.

Former Sheffield International Documentary Festival deputy director Charlie Phillips, who has just filled a newly created documentary post at The Guardian newspaper, will join Jason Spingarn-Koff of The New York Times and Vice Netherlands' Sjoerd Raaijmakers in a discussion on new platforms which are emerging for documentary.

Local Impact

The existence of IDFA on its doorstep has also had a trickle down effect for the local film industry. Initiatives such as the IDFA-Mediafonds workshop, aimed at fostering new talent and offering a €125,000 prize to one project each year, and the Kids & Docs workshop, focused on the development of works suitable for younger audiences (see *Kid in the Frame* on page 28), have been key in nurturing local documentary-making talent.

Van Huystee, long-time producer of renowned local documentary makers Heddy Honigmann and the

late Johan van der Keuken, suggests that the very presence of IDFA on Dutch soil has helped bolster an already existing love of documentary in the Netherlands. "What came first, the chicken or the egg question? Do we have a relatively big and healthy industry because of IDFA, or does IDFA exist and thrive because of the traditional Dutch love of documentary... I think, it's a virtuous circle," says van Huystee, whose recent credits include *Ne Me Quitte Pas* and *The Yes Men Are Revolting*.

He describes the festival as a

'The festival is there to serve the documentary community'

must-attend event for any budding documentary filmmaker or producer. "If someone comes to me asking for advice on how to break into the documentary industry, I say spend a week at the festival... it's the best possible introduction," he says.

Van Huystee feels that the festival's appeal to the documentary industry, at home and at large, is intricately linked to the attitude of its founding chief Ally Derks, van Nieuwenhuyzen and the rest of the team. "There's this sense that the festival is there to serve the documentary community. If you're at a festival with Ally and she sees someone she thinks might be a good contact for you, she'll cut

through the crowd and introduce you. It's an attitude she instilled right through the organisation," he says.

Amazingly, despite its continual expansion, the festival somehow retains the friendly and spontaneous atmosphere of its early days. "Unlike a market like MIPCOM, where your days are planned and neatly divided into scheduled 30-minute meetings, IDFA means a lot of late nights and never quite knowing who you're going to bump into as move you move from A to B but it is *the* place to network and catch up with people because everyone is there," says van Messel.

Van Nieuwenhuyzen says the festival puts considerable effort into retaining its friendly feel. "The intimate atmosphere is one of the things people love about the festival. We work hard to keep it intact," she says. "It's important that people come to the festival and feel at home."

Kids in the frame

The Netherlands is one of the leading suppliers of docs for younger audiences in Europe. Melanie Goodfellow explores what is behind this trend.

Nine out of the 50 documentaries screening in IDFA's Kids & Docs section, aimed at child and youth friendly fare, hail from the Netherlands this year. This strong showing is not due to favouritism for local films, says curator Meike Statema, but rather a sign of the flourishing scene for the genre in the Netherlands. Like their feature film counterparts, Dutch producers of docs for kids know there is a vibrant market for their films both at home and internationally.

"We don't make a special case for Dutch documentaries, it's just that there is a strong scene here for works aimed at younger audiences," she explains. "I'm not boasting if I say the Dutch lead the way in Europe in this genre and that our work stands out on the international stage. Our documentaries are regularly invited to festivals worldwide, although it's harder for them to travel to foreign tv stations because of the language issue."

Dutch works set to play in the Kids & Docs programme include Anneloor van Heemstra's *Under The Stars I Felt At Home*, about an Afghan refugee, and Astrid Bussink's *Giovanni and the Waterballet*, about a young boy's quest to enter the

normally all-girl, Dutch synchro swimming championship.

Statema suggests that the strength of local documentaries for younger audiences is partly due to the fact that culturally the Dutch are not scared to broach difficult subjects with children, a characteristic that then spills over into the country's fiction and non-fiction filmmaking for younger audiences. Dutch producers take young audiences seriously, and the strength of their output derives from their ability to make their films from that audience's point of view.

As importantly, Statema also believes that the success within the sector is in part a consequence of the development workshop run jointly by IDFA, the Cinekid Festival and the Dutch Cultural Media Fund. Launched in 1999, the initiative has supported around 80 docs to date. "When you sow continuously and structurally, the harvest eventually is a high quality product," says producer Willemijn Cerutti, who produced workshop participant Sjoerd Niekamp's *Johan*, about a newcomer at a scouting club.

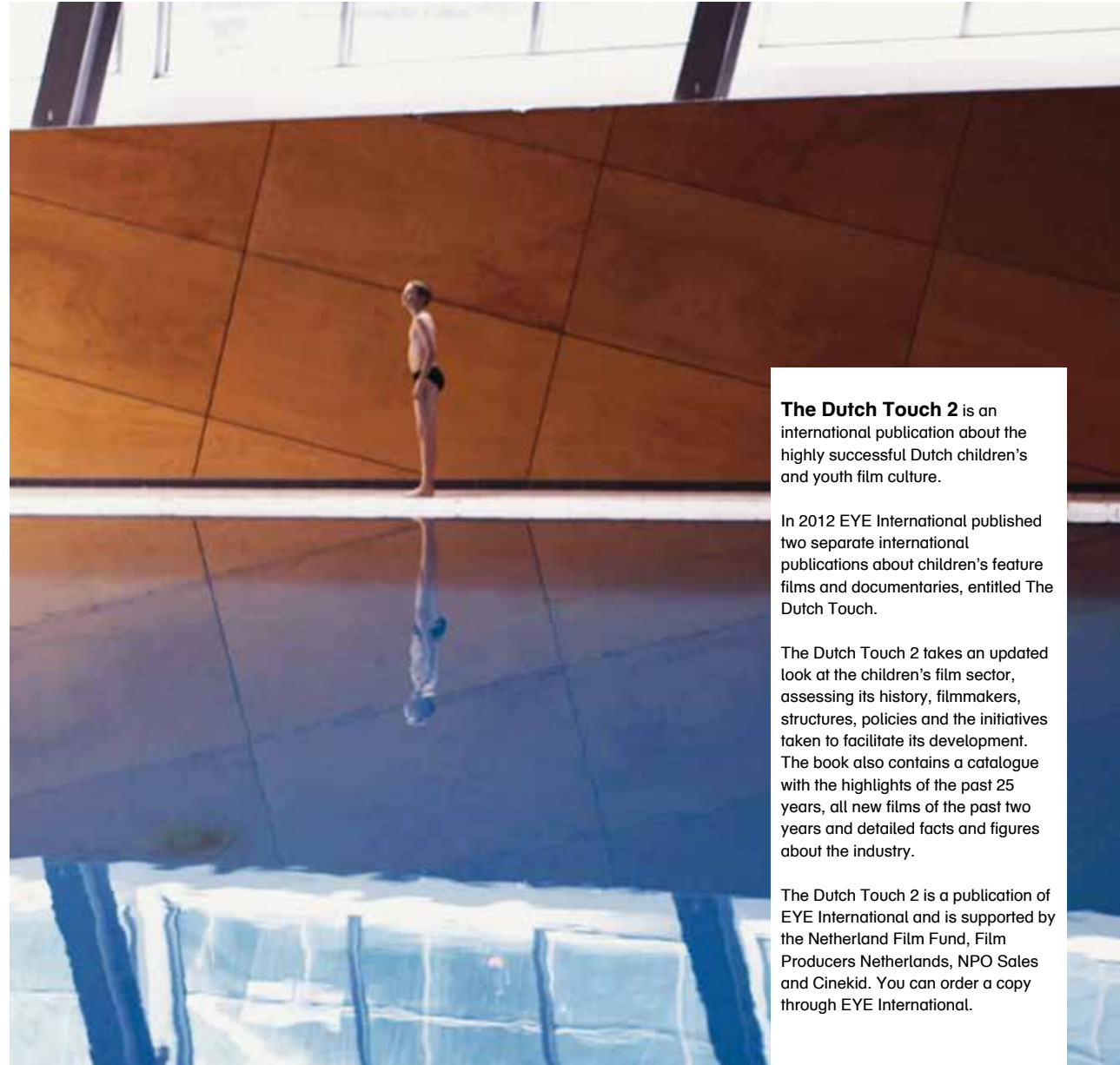
As in previous years, Kids & Docs will showcase the latest batch of completed documentaries to come through the workshop. Alongside *Johan*, other films due to screen include Eef Hilgers' *My Dearest F#cking Phone*, following a teenager's love/hate relationship

with her smart phone, Reber Dosky's *4 Ever* and Margot Schaap's *School Full of Fish*, following 13-year-old Hugo whose fascination for deep-sea fish and talent for diving help him find his footing in his new high school.

Beyond the workshop, Statema notes local broadcasters are also very supportive of the genre, programming targeted strands and also showcasing some 300 youth-friendly titles on its online platform. Cerutti cites NCRV's Dokument Junior, for example, as a key broadcaster initiative for filmmakers wanting to make a creative docs for young audiences.

At IDFA, Dutch producers within the genre will be sharing some of their know-how and experiences in a new co-production initiative and conference, entitled RealYoung, which is set to be unveiled during IDFA Forum on 26 November. A joint initiative between Kids & Docs, EDN and Sweden's Financing Forum for Kids Content, held in Malmo every March, RealYoung is aimed at fostering more European co-productions in the genre.

"I couldn't be more excited about this initiative. I've wanted to investigate how we can stimulate cross-border cooperation in the genre, especially with Scandinavia and Germany which are also increasingly active in the field, for some time," says Statema.



Still: *School Full of Fish* by Margot Schaap

The Dutch Touch 2 is an international publication about the highly successful Dutch children's and youth film culture.

In 2012 EYE International published two separate international publications about children's feature films and documentaries, entitled *The Dutch Touch*.

The Dutch Touch 2 takes an updated look at the children's film sector, assessing its history, filmmakers, structures, policies and the initiatives taken to facilitate its development. The book also contains a catalogue with the highlights of the past 25 years, all new films of the past two years and detailed facts and figures about the industry.

The Dutch Touch 2 is a publication of EYE International and is supported by the Netherland Film Fund, Film Producers Netherlands, NPO Sales and Cinekid. You can order a copy through EYE International.

Reaching Out



Daan Veldhuizen

Daan Veldhuizen talks to Melanie Goodfellow about his plans for an outreach campaign to engage audiences with his latest documentary.

Director Daan Veldhuizen's upcoming documentary *Banana Pancakes and the Children of Sticky Rice* examines the impact that backpacker tourism has had on the remote mountain village of Muang Ngoi in northern Laos.

"When I first visited, I remember thinking how perfect it was. I caught myself nostalgically hoping it would never change," says Veldhuizen. "Years later I heard that Muang Ngoi had become part of the Banana Pancake trail, a figurative trail of villages and regions in Southeast Asia that are said to have lost their authenticity and have become mainstream tourist destinations. Here banana pancakes are being served instead of the local cuisine," he continues.

The film touches on the conflicting desires of the tourists who are searching for an authentic, traditional village, and the villagers

who are fascinated by the West. Veldhuizen and his crew spent three-and-a-half months filming in the village, with the shoot divided into two periods: the 2013 rainy season and the dry season of 2014.

Alongside making the documentary, which is in the final stages of post-production, Veldhuizen and producer Valérie Schuit are also planning an ambitious outreach campaign focused on the backpacking community. "We feel that the theme of our film can potentially resonate throughout the entire backpacker scene and doesn't need to be limited to Southeast Asia," explains Veldhuizen.

"There are many online platforms for our audience that we're trying to tap into but we also hope to be visible in the off-line world. For example, for our cinema release in the Netherlands we're planning events at popular hostels in order to get international visitors to Dutch cinemas," he continues.

They also have plans for a Banana Pancake trail aimed at backpackers visiting Amsterdam, in which participants would explore "the authenticity and inauthenticity" of the city, watch the film in a local cinema and be offered banana pancakes. Other plans include a pop-up photography exhibition and an App, enabling backpackers to watch the film while on the road. Producer Schuit attended an

outreach workshop at IDFA last year and Veldhuizen was an observer at an event led by BRITDOC for the Netherlands Film Fund in September.

Pieter Fleury, film consultant of documentary at the Film Fund who invited BRITDOC for the seminar, says he believes outreach techniques could be a good way to counter the dwindling theatrical audiences for documentaries. "We're keen at the Fund to get filmmakers and producers to look at other ways of engaging audiences and different ways of distributing their works, especially with few documentaries making it into cinemas," says Fleury.

Veldhuizen reveals he had mixed feelings about the power of outreach campaigns after the workshop. "It showed me how extensive and successful outreach campaigns can be, how they can add many years to a film's life and how campaign budgets can easily overshadow production budgets," says the filmmaker. "An outreach campaign is a project in its own right, requiring funding, resources and specialised professionals."

"That said, I think outreach is undoubtedly a part of filmmaking," he adds. "As a director I'm excited about my story and it seems no more than logical to explore how other media can be employed to support it."



'Outreach is undoubtedly a part of filmmaking'

For documentary professionals: IDFAcademy Plenary Session: Outreach Campaigns - An Impact Field Guide 10.00 Saturday 22 November 2014, Compagnie Theatre Amsterdam

Banana Pancakes and the Children of Sticky Rice
Director: Daan Veldhuizen **Script:** Daan Veldhuizen
Production: Viewpoint Productions Expected release: early 2015

On the edge of reality

Joost Daamen, curator of IDFA's experimental Paradocs programme runs through the Dutch highlights with Melanie Goodfellow.

Dutch director Sjoerd Oostrik's experimental work *Kookaburra Love*, which screens in IDFA's Paradocs selection this year, captures the trajectory of a relationship through exchanges on WhatsApp. The inclusion of the short film (produced by Amsterdam-based 100% Halal that also made Tara Fallaux's doc *Louis the Ferriswheel Kid* as well as co-produce the highly successful *New Kids* films) makes perfect sense for a sidebar that explores the fringes of documentary filmmaking.

"It's an interesting comment on contemporary life and how modern couples communicate, and an interesting starting point for a documentary," says Paradocs curator Joost Daamen of the work, a Wildcard winner supported by the Netherlands Film Fund and which premiered at the Locarno Film Festival earlier this year. "The WhatsApp conversation is sort of an abridged version of the relationship. The imagery is poetic but also linked to the mood of the exchange. In one scene where they fight, for example, there's imagery of riot police."

Beyond the main programme, the Netherlands involvement in Paradocs 2014 is underlined by the

choice of contemporary Dutch artist Aernout Mik as guest of honour. Mik's complex video installations, combining staged and found footage, have been shown in the world's top modern art galleries including the Jeu de Paume in Paris, MoMA in New York and most recently the Stegelyk Museum in Amsterdam. The focus on Mik follows a similar initiative last year in which Dutch artist Barbara Visser was invited to contribute to collaborate with the section.

As part of the 2014 initiative, Mik's 2006 installation *Raw Footage* that assembles television footage shot during the Yugoslav War will be on display at the De Brakke Grond arts centre throughout the festival. "*Raw Footage* is a montage of news agency footage showing images we don't normally see in the mainstream media's coverage of war. You see soldiers eating and sleeping and ordinary civilians trying to go about their everyday lives. There's even an incongruous shot of a kangaroo in a zoo," says Daamen.

"It challenges our pre-set idea of war and what it looks like, showing it's not all armed combat and people riding tanks," he continues. "In the installation it's completely unclear who's who and who's on what side. This unclarity allows the viewer to look at other things in the image. It makes other things interesting to look at. It's also an exceptional work for Mik in a way

because it is drawn from raw found footage rather than staged footage which is more common in his work."

Daamen has also asked the Dutch artist to curate a selection of documentaries dealing with the media's representation of reality as part of IDFA's larger festival theme Of Media and Men. The artist's selection includes Johan Grimonprez' *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, Sergei Loznitsa's *Maidan*, Hubert Sauper's *Kisangani Diary* and Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin's *A Letter to Jane*. "Rather than an arty programme, Aernout was really keen to pull together a selection of films exploring the media's representation of reality," comments Daamen. "The subject of these films is important but they're also interesting in that they open up a conversation about how they were made and how they show reality."

Aside from *Kookaburra Love* and Mik's involvement, the sidebar will also showcase the video work of Netherlands artists through the collaboration with the Amsterdam Art Weekend (for the second consecutive year) at the end of the festival. Through this initiative, Paradocs is presenting a programme of 13 recent works of video art from Amsterdam galleries. The Dutch works include Erik van Lieshout's *The Basement* (loop version), Paulien Oltheten's *Chairman*, Rebecca Digne's *Climats* and Emma van der Put's *Room*.



'It challenges our pre-set ideas of war...'

Still: *Kookaburra Love* by Sjoerd Oostrik

Arab Dreaming

Dutch production house Volya Films is co-producer on François Verster's IDFA 2014 Masters selection *The Dream of Shahrazad*. The company's Fleur Knopperts explains why she boarded the project.

Given both its complexity and the scale of its ambition, *The Dream of Shahrazad* is a story that could only be told in the edit. At its heart is the famous tale of the sultan's wife who, in order to thwart her husband's desire to murder her every morning, weaves and interlinks a series of stories so mesmerizing that he is left continually enthralled, his sadistic ambitions kept at bay.

This highly potent mythology resonates deeply even into the 21st Century and, for director François Verster, the recent Arab Spring provides the perfect political/cultural counterpoint to explore the ongoing and vital tradition of story-telling within the region.

It is a multi-layered work, using delicate silhouettes to depict Shahrazad and the sultan, which are accompanied by Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic poem on the subject. The music is played by members of an Istanbul youth orchestra whose conductor attempts to raise its members to a heightened level of political consciousness. Meanwhile a story-telling acting troupe in Cairo tells the tragic story of a mother grieving after her teenage son is

killed in the troubles. A celebrated actress in Lebanon becomes politically conscious during the uprising and her social media communications go viral. All the time these examples of the ongoing story-telling tradition in the Middle East offer both solace and respite from the violence we see in the found footage from Cairo's Tahrir Square and Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park.

'The film goes way beyond the topicality of the Arab Spring'

The project was many years in gestation, Volya Films' Knopperts points out, and the Arab Spring served as a catalyst for its final realization. "But on the other hand the film goes way beyond the topicality of that. It's not a film about what is happening right now, it is really a reflection on how this political turmoil is dealt with in the Middle East, and François' point of view on that via storytelling and art."

"Without the Arab Spring it would have been a very different film for sure - this I do think," she adds. "But there was already a lot of turmoil before the Arab Spring took off so yes, maybe you would have missed that sense of urgency in a way, but on the other hand there has been so much going on in the

region that I am not sure that the film wouldn't have been relevant anyway."

The film is supported by, among other institutions, the Netherlands Film Fund, the IDFA Bertha Fund and the Sundance Documentary Fund. For Knopperts, the timing of her application to the Netherlands Film Fund was of paramount importance. "It was crucial that we had something really convincing to show, and that has been a tough process to convince people. It is such a super complex project with so many layers that had to finally come together. It was very ambitious and so it was really a matter of trying to find the focus."

To help in this, Knopperts brought in the highly respected and prolific Dutch editor Menno Boerma. "We needed somebody with fresh eyes who would come in and work with François and make it work with all the different storylines in the film and to get the tempo right, as well as the structure which was very complicated.

"In the end I saw so many versions, but the first time I saw the film on a big screen during post-production, what I really liked about it - and was impressed by - was that it has a lot of hope in it, hope for a young generation. The film has a very positive message in that sense."



The Dream of Shahrazad Director: François Verster **Script:** François Verster
Sales: Spier Films **Production:** Volya Films, Melia Films, Hakaya

Reaching the summit



Geertjan Lassche

In April 2014, renowned filmmaker and investigative journalist Geertjan Lassche was part of a Dutch expedition to climb the Cho Oyu.

Located below Mount Everest, this is the sixth highest mountain in the world. Lassche wasn't there as a bystander, filming the climbers from a distance. He was at the heart of the trip, facing the same danger and enjoying the same transcendent experiences as the other climbers, who accepted him as an equal.

The resulting film *Killer Slope* premieres at IDFA only a few weeks after a disaster in Nepal in which dozens died. When Lassche was shooting his film there last spring, the sherpas were on strike following an avalanche on Everest.

"2014 is the year of accidents in the Himalayas," he notes. "This is what the film makes really, really actual and urgent... we can see how these people think about these crazy foreign people who pay lots and lots of money to reach the summit." As the director notes, there are few really authentic journalistic

accounts of mountain expeditions for the simple reason that very few journalists have ever gone 7000 metres above sea level without oxygen. "That is why mass media often relies on the mountaineers' own version of events," he underlines. "Of course, in the past some expedition members were journalists by profession but they were already experienced mountaineers. My wish was to give a fresh and first impression of this phenomenon."

Lassche was fascinated by what drove the climbers toward the summit in the face of so much danger and difficulty. Was it egotism? Was it stubbornness? The only way he could really find out was by joining them. That is why he trained for half a year to get fit for the trip.

"The truth is not so romantic as you think," the director suggests. The high altitude makes you sick. This is risky and exhausting work. You're never sure quite how nature will behave. There is anger and frustration alongside the exhilaration at being so high. "What I am doing is enclosing myself in an interesting hidden subculture," Lassche says of his aims as a documentary maker. "My focus is always a psychological point of view."

As an investigative journalist, he is often looking for information of wrongdoing or corruption. In his films, there is not necessarily a new

fact that will blow a case open. The emphasis instead is on behaviour - on what his subjects are thinking and feeling at the most extreme moments. In his 2011 documentary *Nobody Knows Me*, he explored how someone as talented as cyclist Thomas Dekker risked destroying his life and reputation by taking banned drugs.

In *Killer Slope*, Lassche offers an extraordinarily intimate and immediate view of an expedition that didn't go as planned. The documentary was largely shot by Lassche himself but only during the editing was Lassche able to distance himself from his experiences on the mountains.

Ask Lassche about his documentary influences and it isn't a surprise that he cites Werner Herzog as a favourite. He admires the visual style contemporary Dutch director Leonard Retel Helmrich (with his "single shot camera") and sees himself as following in a tradition of Direct Cinema.

"For me, Direct Cinema is to be there when it happens - not trying to find the best angle or get the best light. You turn on that camera and you let the public be a witness of what happens...in the heat of the moment, when it happens, ask the most crucial question! Don't be afraid to ask that really annoying, or really bad, or really heavy question." **Geoffrey Macnab**



Killer Slope Director: Geertjan Lassche
Production: NPO / **EO Sales:** NPO Sales

A tale of obsession



Kasper Verkaik

Kasper Verkaik's *Plaza Man* gets up close and personal with one of America's most famous JFK conspiracy theorists.

American writer Robert Groden was celebrating his 18th birthday the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dealey Plaza in Dallas on 22nd November 1963. Like many of his generation, Groden was profoundly affected by the killing, but little did he know that the event would shape his destiny.

In the late 1960s, Groden was working at a film-processing laboratory in New York which had been commissioned by Life Magazine to do some work on the Zapruder Film capturing the assassination. He secretly made a copy and studied it in minute detail back home. This research would become the basis for his 1975 book *JFK: The Case for Conspiracy*, suggesting that Lee Harvey Oswald had not killed the president and the identity of the true killer had been covered up.

The film, which premieres in IDFA Dutch Competition on the 51st

anniversary of Kennedy's death, is a deeply personal character documentary focusing not on Groden's conspiracy theory but rather his backstory and the sacrifices he and his family made in order that he could pursue his work.

"What really interested me was how so many people had become obsessed with the JFK case and made it their life's work," says Verkaik, whose previous documentaries include *Daddy Doll* about a boy growing up on a US army base.

'The JFK obsession is a sort of endless tunnel'

"A former FBI agent I'd once interviewed, described the obsession as a sort of endless tunnel. Once you entered it, there was no way back," he adds.

Initially, Verkaik had not considered Groden as a suitable subject. "He is one of the most famous conspiracy theorists but I wasn't sure he would make for an interesting film. But then I read that he had been living in Dallas by himself for 20 years, leaving his wife and his children behind in Pennsylvania. That was the moment for me when I thought I really have to meet with him."

Verkaik tracked down Groden at Dealey Plaza in Dallas where he can

be found most days of the week, selling his conspiracy theory books and talking to tourists. "He was sceptical about the whole thing. He was wary of being portrayed as this crazy guy," says the filmmaker, who first made contact in May 2013. Verkaik spent some six months gaining Groden's trust and researching his story through a series of long conversations. "We'd meet in diners, at conventions, sometimes at his home, and spend time going back through his life and history and putting things into perspective. He's always been so obsessed with the case that he's never really thought about himself," says Verkaik.

A key period in Groden's personal life was when his late wife developed cancer some 21 years ago, from which she would eventually die 18 years later. "Robert wanted to be there for her and the kids but his JFK obsession had led to so much fear and paranoia that she decided Robert should no longer be living with them. She wanted to create a sense of peace and security for her and the kids," explains Verkaik.

With Groden's blessing and help, Verkaik also got access to his sons. "The sons are immensely proud of their father but at the same time very upset about how he left. The younger son, was just 12 when his dad went and they'd never had a dialogue about it," Verkaik concludes. **Melanie Goodfellow**



Plaza Man Director: Kasper Verkaik
Production: Zeppers **Sales:** Films Transit International and NPO Sales

Trying to make sense...



Alexander Oey

In 2007, in a small commuter town near Helsinki, an 18-year-old called Pekka-Eric Auvinen went on the rampage, shooting dead eight people at his high school. He then shot himself in the head and later died from his wounds in hospital.

In the aftermath of the killings, there was widespread bafflement. No-one seemed to know just why Pekka resorted to such extreme violence. In his new film *Pekka* (premiering at IDFA in Dutch Competition), Alexander Oey tries to make sense of the killer's actions.

As the director points out, there are plenty of stories (and films) about high school killings in the US. He wanted to find a European example. But when Oey approached family and classmates of the killer, they were extremely reluctant to take part in the documentary. "A lot less people were willing to talk about it than I thought," he says.

The hostility of the locals was understandable. In the immediate aftermath of the killings, journalists had posed as social workers and

had used trickery and aggression to try to get a story. Pekka's parents refused to help (although the film does include archive material of an interview they gave to Finnish television in 2008). They were suspicious about Oey's motives and scared that he was looking to sensationalise the case. That wasn't his intention at all. His film was designed more as a psychological case study of a boy who was clearly very troubled.

Eventually, the director tracked down a girl from the high school who was willing to speak on camera about Pekka. It turned out that he had been bullied. Even so, classmates didn't think they were treating him that badly and the teachers didn't see a problem. One way for Oey to try to analyse Pekka's state of mind was to study his writings and the material he had posted on YouTube. These revealed a troubled and depressed soul. There is a tragic undertow to the story that Oey tells. To call Pekka misunderstood is to understate it. The problem, the director suggests, is that those around him only ever saw part of his personality.

"What surprised me most was that everybody who was involved with him only saw a part of him. In the end, no-one saw all of him and so no-one could have known that he was out of order and had problems," Oey reflects. "His friends saw only a part, his parents saw only a part, the

teachers (the same) but no-one saw the whole of him. If they had, maybe they would have thought this man needs some help." In the film, Oey's goal is to try to understand Pekka's personality in full.

Look at the director's filmography and you'll discover a man who has tackled all sorts of different subjects. *Off The Grid* (2011) looked at how Americans were coping with the new Depression. *The Terrorist Hans-Joachim Klein* (2005) was a portrait of a former associate of Carlos The Jackal who now lives quietly in the Normandy countryside. Does he see thematic links between his films?

"Yes, there are connections," Oey suggests. "Maybe it all boils down to people or individuals who have to face the system that they live in - how you survive or deal with the system...you have to abide by laws and live in the system."

The director hopes that Pekka will be seen in Dutch schools. "Especially kids of this age, they are not that conscious about people who are different and (how to) be tolerant toward them. They don't have this empathy, to be sympathetic to somebody who is really strange or weird. I hope this film can change their mind a little bit. If someone is weird, just leave them alone and don't bully them and they might be ok." **Geoffrey Macnab**

Short Cuts

Fund-backed Transmedia projects at IDFA



The IDFA focus on transmedia continues in 2014 with the programme entitled DocLab Immersive Reality

that will embrace digital immersion, virtual reality and the interactive doc. The Netherlands Film Fund, together with the Media Fund and the Creative Industries Fund, invests €750,000 annually to develop and support non-fiction transmedia productions that look to explore the limits of the linear documentary genre while focusing on a socially relevant subject. The intention is to develop and expand the interdisciplinary media landscape and promote both cross-over and innovation in productions which fuse cinematic aesthetics, design and e-culture.

Two such recent projects that have received Fund support include *Mosque*

in the City, in which story-makers Godfried Hartkamp and Sara Kolster chronicle the construction of a large mosque in Amsterdam. The surprising online story structure shows the opposing perspectives of local residents and stakeholders both in words and pictures.

Additionally, *Behind the Blue Screen* by Ruben Pater and Jaap van Heusden is a video app in which the masked face of a narrator (who wishes to remain anonymous) is presented. In a series of sixteen video episodes published on De Correspondent online platform, personal stories from countries where free speech is denied are offered up using this raw-styled interface.

Landsberger to fly solo

After twenty years as Head of EYE International (formerly Holland Film) Claudia Landsberger will leave EYE early 2015 to establish herself as an international film consultant for her new company BaseWorx For Film. She will focus on international festival and marketing strategies, festival programming and script development.

Landsberger professionalised the international marketing and promotion agency Holland Film and was instrumental in the Academy Award campaigns for Dutch Foreign Language Oscar winners *Antonia's Line* and *Character* as well as nominees *Twin Sisters* and *Zus en Zo*.

She was the co-founder of European Film Promotion, serving as its President for many years. For the past twelve years she has sat on the Berlinale Competition Programme Selection Committee, and continues to serve on the selection committee of the Hamburg Schleswig Holstein Film Fund. She has, in addition, sat on numerous festival advisory boards and is a member of the European Film Academy.

Said Landsberger about her imminent departure: "There comes the day when you know you have to take the next step in life. I can look back with a great sense of fulfillment and pride because



we achieved a lot during these years at Holland Film/EYE International. Because the international film festival world and market are continuously moving you have to invent all the time new ways to get these films and filmmakers on the radar of the industry to be able to launch them in the right way."



Teledoc Campus

Back in 2013, the Netherlands Film Fund, CoBO Fund and broadcaster NPO together launched the Teledoc Campus project to offer fledgling producer/director teams the opportunity to produce a series of six 25-minute films annually. The project is intended to enable these filmmakers to develop their talent and gain experience before tackling bigger productions further down the line. Six production awards of up to €60,000 and 12 development awards of maximum €5000 are offered each year.

This year, four Teledoc Campus films were premiered at the Netherlands Film Festival in September. These were Anna van't Hek en Alette van Zwieten's story of the gender-bender party-enhancing troupe *The Amazing Agency* and Jef Monté's essay on epilepsy *Falling (Vallend)*. Judith de

Leeuw's *Bademeesters* follows a group of Utrecht students en route to the island of Texel to learn to be life-guards while *Tell me I'm Wrong (Geef me's ongelijk)*, by Laura Hermanides, follows a provocative 15-year old who wonders why he must conform to the idiocy of being normal.

A further three projects are hopeful of completion for IFFR 2015: *The Chinese are Coming (De Chinezen komen)* by Olaf Oudheusden, Ingrid Kamerling's *After Summer... (Na de zomer...)* and *It's all about Jennis (Alles draait om Jennis)* by Aisha Roberson.

"The Teledoc Campus project was created to deliver high quality documentaries by very promising new film makers," comments Netherlands Film Fund documentary film consultant Pieter Fleury.

Going green

On January 1 2015 Els Rientjes will take on the new role of Sustainability Manager for the Dutch film industry. Rientjes' appointment, facilitated by The Netherlands Film Fund, will stimulate the sustainable production of projects that receive production support from the Fund. She will also share relevant knowledge on sustainable innovation from the (international) film industry with Dutch filmmakers. Additionally she will co-ordinate with sustainable facility companies and suppliers in order to benefit numerous projects.

For a number of years the Fund has worked closely with the Green Filmmaking Project (GFMP), an initiative of Strawberry Earth. Doreen Boonekamp, Netherlands Film Fund CEO comments: "We see sustainability as an obvious and important development within the Dutch film industry. The work of the GFMP over recent years has proven that sustainable filmmaking is here to stay, and that the industry understands both its benefits and its central importance. With Els Rientjes' appointment we can offer Dutch producers the advice and practical support they need to produce to their films as sustainably as possible."

Rientjes has many years' experience working in the Dutch TV and Film Industry; as Creative Producer at IDTV, as TV Productions Manager for Niehe/Stokvis and in recent years as Creative Producer/Producer at Fu Works.



Profile: Hedy Honigmann

Hedy Honigmann, the doyenne of Dutch documentary, was born in Lima in 1951. A passionate cinephile, she relocated to Europe in 1973, eventually settling in The Netherlands in 1978 where she assumed Dutch citizenship.

Her films have won myriad international awards and her body of work has been honoured with retrospectives at numerous international film festivals. Among her films are the award-winning *Metal and Melancholy* (1993), *Crazy*

(1999), *Forever* (2006) and *Oblivion* (2008). At IDFA 2013 she was accorded Living Legend status.

This year Honigmann will curate the IDFA Top 10 program as well as show a selection of past films. She will also be one of many renowned female documentary filmmakers featured in The Female Gaze programme.

Perhaps most importantly, her latest documentary *Around the World in 50 Concerts* has been selected as IDFA

2014 opening film (see page 16).

“Can I lose myself in music? Absolutely. I can sit down and listen. I just go and sit down specially to listen to something, or I put it on in the background, but I know the passage I love the most is coming and I stop with my work and I sit and listen to it...if you are searching for memories, you can trigger them pretty quickly with music,” she told See NL.