

SEE NL



*How to Meet a Mermaid
and Miss Kiet's Children*
in **IDFA Competition**

IDFA opener: *Stranger
in Paradise*

Lieshout gets a lust for
life with Iggy Pop and
Houellebecq

The new wave of Dutch
doc talent

Issue #25 November 2016 IDFA issue



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**NL FILM
FONDS**



Index

6-7 North-South divide Guido Hendrikx opens IDFA with his audacious *Stranger in Paradise*, about the European migrant crisis

8-9 Song of the sea Coco Schrijber's *How to Meet a Mermaid* in IDFA Competition is both an ode to the sea and an essay on the perception of reality

10-11 The kids are alright Petra and Peter Lataster take a refreshingly positive look at the European migrant crisis in their *Miss Kiet's Children*, in IDFA competition

12-13 Lust for life Erik Lieshout takes on French novelist Michel Houellebecq in *To Stay Alive – A Method* and gets a little help from Iggy Pop along the way

14-15 Camp lives Catherine van Campen profiles four young residents of a refugee camp in Jordan

16-17 Framing dad Daan's *Inheritance*, a film about the emotional trauma endured by a boy growing up with a famous, and terrifying, father

18-19 From Brexit to Bruce Two years in the life of EC second-in-command, the distinctly pro-cycling Frans Timmermans

20-21 The art of restitution Ditteke Mensink's *The Claim* addresses the thorny issue of the ownership of artworks stolen by the Nazis during WW2

22-23 Water wonderland *Passage – A Boat Movie* explores the hidden world of Europe's inland waterways

24-25 Zoo of dreams *Waiting for Giraffes*, a film about running a zoo in the Occupied Territories, plays in IDFA Dutch competition

26-27 Unbinding feet Laetitia Schoofs' *Fallen Flowers Thick Leaves* is a fascinating portrait of female sexuality in contemporary China

28-29 Kids 4 Docs 4 Kids IDFA's Meike Statema talks kids and docs with SEE NL

30-31 Replicated in China Copying the works of Dutch Impressionists is big business in China, as explained in the IDFA Panorama doc *China's Van Goghs*

32-35 Doc relief The Film Fund's Suzanne van Voorst talks about the ever-popular Oasis funding scheme, aimed at Dutch documentary directors

36-39 Doc talent on display Presenting the new wave of Dutch documentary film talent

40 Installing Tarr The next EYE exhibition will feature the work of the remarkable Hungarian director Bela Tarr

42-43 Short Cuts News from the Dutch film industry

44 Director profile Guido Hendrikx, director of IDFA opening film *Stranger in Paradise*



Cover still: *How to Meet a Mermaid* ◊ Coco Schrijber See pages 8 - 9
Photo: Jason de Caires

Miss Kiet's Children ◊ Petra and Peter Lataster See pages 10 - 11

COLOPHON

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NL FILM
FONDS





Zaatar Djinn ∞ Catherine Van Campen See pages 14 - 15



To Stay Alive – A Method ∞ Erik Lieshout See pages 12 - 13

North-South divide



Guido Hendriks

Guido Hendriks's IDFA opening film *Stranger in Paradise* promises to be one of the most talked about films on the European migrant crisis of the year.

The arrival of some 1.2 million conflict refugees and economic migrants in Europe in 2015, followed by another 350,000 people this year, has divided opinion across the region on how it should respond to this mass influx of people.

In his feature documentary debut *Stranger in Paradise*, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, Guido Hendriks audaciously tackles the subject by presenting a series of anti and pro-immigration arguments followed by a bureaucrat's dispassionate approach to a group of newly arrived, real-life refugees on the Italian island of Sicily. "For me, the bureaucrat represents current public debate which is bogged down in issues of law and regulation," says Hendriks.

Mixing fact and fiction, Belgian actor Valentijn Dhaenens plays a tutor brought in to talk to the young migrants who have all survived a perilous trip across the

Mediterranean in search of a new life, and now hope to head north to countries like the Netherlands.

Hendriks started developing the film during a trip to the Italian island of Lampedusa in May 2013. "I became intrigued with a few different mechanisms I experienced and/or noticed. The power relationship between Europeans and those from the other side of the sea: how the lucky ones dealt with the desire for luck of the other. And the stark contrast between optimistic dreams and an often harsh reality," he says.

The idea of the fake tutor grew out Hendriks's desire to explore the power-play he had witnessed on Lampedusa. "I was looking for a metaphor or instrument to make the existing power relationships tangible. It was an idea that just popped into my head once and never went away, and developed to the form you see in the film," explains the director.

The detailed arguments are set forth by Dhaenens in three quite distinct acts – which can be categorised as 'anti-immigration', 'pro-immigration' and 'dispassionate bureaucrat' – and were the fruit of long research by Hendriks. Dhaenens rehearsed the scenes at length to get into character and also re-wrote sections of the text to make it more convincing for himself.

"All the facts were filtered from public debates and most of them

I checked. Of course there is always a kind of bias in it I think, for example, the figure of 26,000 euros that 'each migrant costs (is) only in the first year'. This was a famous argument by Dutch populist politician Geert Wilders, but it's easy to get another figure with another calculation method," says Hendriks.

The participants were selected from a nearby refugee centre by Hendriks's assistant director Viktor van den Valk. "I would explain to the assembled group what the film was about, that they would be confronted by an actor who would represent a certain European voice, for or against migration. For the bureaucrat scene, we selected migrants who wanted to obtain travel documents to travel to North-Western Europe and explained we would run a simulation of the procedure to do this. I wanted to be transparent, though I had the feeling when the lesson was running for a few minutes some forgot about it as well," says Hendriks.

The shoot took place in the small Sicilian town of Siculiana. "I wanted to shoot in a location where newly arrived migrants entered Europe," says Hendriks. "For me this was the most distinct location to represent the clash between Europe and the refugees, and their most unadulterated power relationship. Like the place where they just set foot in the new world."

Melanie Goodfellow

IDFA Opening film **Stranger in Paradise**  Guido Hendriks 

'The bureaucrat represents public debate bogged down in law and regulation'



Director & script: Guido Hendriks
Production: Zeppers Film & TV
www.zeppers.nl

Song of the sea



Dutch filmmaker Coco Schrijber is back in IDFA competition with a film that is both an ode to the sea and an investigation into two maritime deaths, one of them that of her brother. Nick Cunningham reports.

How to Meet a Mermaid may be a lyrical evocation of the sea in all its forms and guises, but director Coco Schrijber's original intention was to make a film about something entirely different, the perception of reality and how our state of mind can be turned in an instant depending on our mood. The film is supported by the Netherlands Film Fund.

Schrijber had come up with the story of Rebecca, who seemed to have thrown herself off an ocean liner after what may have been a violent sexual encounter at sea, and Miguel, a Mexican surfer who decides to surf north to the sanctuary of the US. But then a colleague asked why she wasn't making a film about her own brother, who drowned off the coast of Egypt, presumably a suicide. At which point, things began to make sense for Schrijber. "Of course the

sea was the whole arena for this film, and I thought, 'oh yeah, this is how it always goes, the most logical thing in front of you we failed to see'. It was then obvious that my brother should be involved."

"But I didn't want to make a personal ego document because then I am selling myself short. It had to be universal and with a bigger scope than only my brother," she adds.

The film is a beautiful, poetic and complex essay in which Schrijber gives voice to the sea, which describes itself (with lilting female intonation) as "a friend, a playmate, beauty, strength... a psychopath. I could kill you and it wouldn't mean anything to me." We see interviews with the relatives of the deceased. We hear readings by novelist William Faulkner and the dead speak to us too, most notably Rebecca whose last moments onboard are caught by CCTV cameras.

How easy was it for Schrijber to give words to the dead Rebecca, especially as her parents (who feature in the film) will be present at the world premiere at IDFA? "You talk to them and you try to win their trust, but I tell them that it is really my film. They give me the freedom to do whatever I think is acceptable or tasteful or the right way to go. I could never tell them in detail what I was going to do because it is hard for non-filmmakers to imagine what it will look like in the end," stresses the director.

Towards the end of the film circumstances present Schrijber with the opportunity to take to the water herself both to experience the thrill of the depths and to undergo a catharsis, as these were the waters where her brother killed himself.

Schrijber is an avowed filmmaker, and dedicated to the business of cinematic documentation, using her own personal and idiosyncratic methods within an essayistic form. But this doesn't mean she has to enjoy the process. "I had a note on the wall saying 'Don't Make This Film'. It is going to be too difficult

'I didn't want to make a personal ego document because then I am selling myself short'

and too impossible to grab. The note meant 'don't make the film at all, period'. Don't be lured into doing it. You can live your life in many easier ways than making this film."

"I mean, filmmaking is hell, it really is and anybody who says differently, I don't buy it," she continues. "I love to be a filmmaker. It is in your blood, it is your passion, but you are always trying to warn yourself – don't go there! You are going to hate your life for the next three years, and I really did."

IDFA Feature-length Competition  16/27 NOV 2016
How to Meet a Mermaid  Coco Schrijber



Director & script: Coco Schrijber
Production: Zeppers Film & TV
Co-production: Off World (BE)
www.zeppers.nl

The kids are alright



Petra and Peter Lataster

Petra and Peter Lataster's *Miss Kiet's Children* explores a refreshingly positive angle of the European migrant crisis. Melanie Goodfellow reports.

Film-making duo Petra and Peter Lataster have achieved a rare feat with their joint work *Miss Kiet's Children*: they have made a documentary touching on the European migrant crisis with a feel-good edge.

The film follows Kiet Engels, a primary school teacher specialised in integrating newly arrived refugee children into the Dutch state education system, and her young pupils – many hailing from Syria – as they struggle to learn Dutch and re-adjust to life in the classroom. These children have been uprooted from their native countries and have sometimes been out of school for extended periods of time.

The result is a heart-warming work showing the power of education and good teaching. The film, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, plays in IDFA Competition for Feature-Length Documentary as well as in the festival's Assembling Reality

programme focusing on editing in the documentary field.

The directors initially came across Engels while looking for subjects for a film tackling the importance of education in society and how the teaching profession is being undermined. On visiting her classroom, they rapidly decided to shift the angle of the documentary.

"We had put out feelers for potential subjects and received a letter from a headmaster talking about Kiet's wonderful work with the refugee children in his school. It was almost a sort of love letter praising her work. We hadn't been thinking about refugees at all but decided to take a look," says Lataster. "Within 10 minutes of entering Kiet's classroom, we decided we wanted to make a film about her and her class."

Petra Lataster says she fell in love with the positive energy in class: "It was so lovely to be part of the class for the whole year. There was a lot of laughter – and a lot of fighting as well – but it was often so much fun. The children were so original and full of energy and joy. These children feel the necessity to learn. It's not a luxury but they need it in order to forget what happened before and to start a new life."

The directors went on to spend an entire academic year with the class, visiting on alternate weeks. Their regular presence meant the children ended-up paying little attention to the filming process.

Among the core characters is a Syrian refugee called Haya. Her progress in the film is emblematic of what Engels manages to achieve with her young pupils. "She was the first child we decided to focus on. She was very scared and because of that she was quite aggressive in the classroom, even hitting other children," explains Petra. "Kiet told us that she was an extremely insecure child and hit the other children to handle the situation. We don't explain this in the film but she probably learned this behaviour in the refugee camps. It's interesting to see the changes in her as the film progresses thanks to the methods employed by Kiet."

Like their last film *Awake In A Bad Dream*, about women coming to terms with breast cancer, the filmmakers are building an outreach programme around *Miss Kiet's Children* to encourage debate around the topic of integrating young refugees and also lobby for more resources.

"This school is a positive example of what can be done but there are a lot of school heads who are reluctant to take in these children because they think they might cause problems. But rather than seeing them as problems, the school sees them as children who have a right like any child to a decent education – and a chance for the future."



'Within 10 minutes we wanted to make a film about Kiet and her class'

Directors & script: Petra and Peter Lataster **Production:** Lataster & Films
www.latasterfilms.nl

To Stay Alive – A Method

◊ Erik Lieshout,
Arno Hagers and Reinier van Brummelen



"Is this Erik? This is Iggy," said a gruff voice at the other end of the line

Photo: Reinier van Brummelen

Director & script: Erik Lieshout,
Arno Hagers, Reinier van Brummelen
Production: SeriousFilm
Co-production: AT Productions (BE)
www.seriousfilm.nl

Lust for life



Erik Lieshout

Geoffrey Macnab talks to Dutch filmmaker Erik Lieshout about *To Stay Alive – A Method*, his cinematic study of French provocateur Michel Houellebecq. It is a film that just happens to feature a certain Iggy Pop.

It was back in 2007 that Erik Lieshout first met and interviewed Michel Houellebecq. The novelist was already a hugely controversial figure, France's "most provocative nihilist" as he was called, and had just made his debut film, *The Possibility Of An Island*, an adaptation of his own novel, which received very mixed reviews. Lieshout (a big fan of the novelist's work) admits to having been nervous about talking to him that first time. Rather than ask the standard movie junket questions, the Dutch journalist/director (who was making a piece for Dutch broadcaster VPRO) decided to give Houellebecq time to think. "I said to him 'why don't I give you the questions beforehand?' You can think the night about them."

The next day, when the interview finally took place, Houellebecq was well prepared. "He came with

10-minute long answers which were really brilliant." This marked the beginning of a friendship – and helped spawn the extraordinary new film *To Stay Alive – A Method* (premiering in IDFA Mid-length Competition) which features Houellebecq and one of his most famous fans, rock star Iggy Pop.

The director knew in advance that Houellebecq was a big Iggy Pop enthusiast. The French writer had bought his first Iggy and The Stooges record when he was an unhappy teenager growing up in Beaux and living with his grandmother. He identified immediately with Iggy's punk sensibility – that mix of defiance and sensitivity that runs through his music.

Not long after his meeting with Houellebecq, Lieshout contacted Iggy Pop's manager. A few weeks later, he was out sailing with his four year old son. "Is this Erik? This is Iggy," a gruff voice at the other end of the line intoned as Lieshout tried to keep the boat stable in the wind. They talked for an hour or more. By complete coincidence, Iggy Pop had just read Houellebecq's *The Possibility Of An Island*. "He was really, really enthusiastic – so then you had two big stars who are fans of each other. From that moment on, things got easier. You had big people who respected each other."

The director brokered the first ever meeting between Iggy Pop and Houellebecq. This took place in

2009 at Radio France after Iggy gave a concert of the songs he had written for Lieshout's documentary *Last Words*, about the making of *The Possibility Of An Island*. After the concert, they all went to a brasserie in Paris to eat oysters and drink late into the night. There they bonded very firmly.

For Lieshout, Houellebecq's genius as a writer is that readers can always see aspects on their own life in his work. "On every page, there is wisdom or an observation that counts for me. Also, he knows how to combine the horror of life with the beauty."

The director suggested to Houellebecq that they make a film about his book *To Stay Alive*. The writer was enthusiastic – and so was the rock star. "Iggy read it and said right away, 'This is my story. I've been in and out of mental institutions. I had a hard time. I exactly know what he is talking about.'" The other way round, Michel at 16 recognised himself in the records of Iggy. "There is some kind of magic there."

In the film, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, Houellebecq has some advice for his fellow artists: "put your finger on the wound in society and press down real hard." That is what Houellebecq does in his own work and is one of the things Lieshout most admires about him. It's also why Iggy Pop sees the French novelist as such a soul mate.

Camp lives



Catherine van Campen

Catherine van Campen's *Zaatari Djinn* captures the lives of four young residents of the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. Melanie Goodfellow reports.

In an early scene of Catherine van Campen's *Zaatari Djinn* three young children snuggle under the covers listening to a traditional Syrian folktale involving a djinn, a supernatural figure in Arabic mythology that can do good or evil. It is a bedtime story scene that plays out in households around the world.

But these children are not tucked up at home but rather bedding down for the night in a prefab shelter in the Zaatari refugee camp in the middle of the desert in Jordan. Zaatari was one of the first refugee camps to spring up at the beginning of the Syrian civil war and today the sprawling desert settlement is home to some 80,000 people – an estimated 58% of whom are minors.

Zaatari Djinn, which world premieres in IDFA Competition for Dutch Documentary and is supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, homes in on the lives of four

of the camp's young residents. They range from the rebellious teenager Fatma, who is driving her mother crazy with her back-talk and a penchant for lipstick, to Mariam, an obedient young girl from a remote farming community who seizes the opportunity to explore the activities, such as soccer and drama, offered by NGOs operating in the camp. The baby-faced Hammoudi is living with a loving but vulnerable young mother who pines for her husband back in Syria. Ferras has a tough home life and ekes out a living running errands.

"I first started researching the camp shortly after it opened in July 2012," says film-maker Van Campen, a regular at IDFA, who was at the festival last year with *Garage 2.0*, her portrait of a struggling car dealership. "What interested me at first was the way that it very rapidly started to look like a real city. Within months of being set up, it already had a shopping area called the Champs Elysees. I thought it would be interesting to capture this evolution."

As her research progressed Van Campen decided to change the focus of the film. "What struck me amid all the sad stories was how the children seemed more able to adjust to life in the camp than their parents who were stilling longing for their past lives."

Van Campen and her crew – cinematographers Jean Counet and Jefriim Rothuizen and soundman

Mark Wessner – visited the camp nine times from the start of 2013 to the summer of 2016. In the beginning, they stayed in the homes of local families in the remote area surrounding the camp, but Van Campen had to change strategy with the rise of the Islamic State in the region during 2014, as well as harassment of the crew by an imam and a group of his men on one occasion.

"We were advised it wasn't wise to stay overnight in the area, especially with families we didn't know that well," recounts Van Campen.

"It became a struggle to get the crew back to the camp." They ended up staying in the Jordanian capital of Amman and driving to the camp each day with the United Nations.

One of the striking aspects of the film is how the adults try to maintain some sort of normalcy in their lives and those of their children. In difficult conditions, homes are erected, improved and cleaned daily, gardens tended, clothes washed and children are sent to school. But the hardship and ennui of camp life is ever-present.

Van Campen hopes to continue following the destinies of the children and is already mulling a film about Hammoudi, who has since returned to Syria to live with his father who wants to take the family to Turkey. "I'd love to follow what happens to these children in the future," she says.

Dutch Documentary Competition
***Zaatari Djinn* ◊ Catherine Van Campen**



'What struck me was how the children seemed more able to adjust to life in the camp than their parents'



Director & script: Catherine van Campen
Production: Witfilm (NL) www.witfilm.nl

Framing dad



Joris Postema

Musician Daan van der Elsen is son of one of the Netherlands' most celebrated photographers, Ed van der Elsen, Dutch photography's 'enfant terrible'. It's not easy growing up with a famous dad, Geoffrey Macnab discovers.

Daan's close friend Joris Postema (director of *Daan's Inheritance* which premieres in IDFA Dutch Competition) has long been aware of just how much Daan struggled to make sense of his relationship with his father.

Postema and Daan know each other through the music business. Fifteen years ago, Daan was the drummer in Postema's band. Back then, Postema didn't realise that Daan had such a well-known father. "Daan was so angry about him that he really didn't want to talk about him," Postema remembers. "It wasn't a subject really."

The reason for this anger was Daan's deep-seated resentment about his father's neglect of him. Ed van der Elsen was so devoted to his photography and filmmaking that it sometimes appeared he had

little time for his family. Another source of tension was Daan's failure to live up to his father's success – something his father wasn't slow to remind him about.

How did Daan react when Postema proposed making a film about him and his father? The director explains that Daan himself had started to write a book on the subject. Postema read some early chapters and was deeply impressed. He thought that there must be potential for a film. After all, one of the advantages of Ed being a photographer and filmmaker is that there was plenty of archive material of Daan growing up, and of his family.

Writing the book had seemed therapeutic for Daan, who had been prey to bouts of depression. There was the sense that he had finally confronted his past and would now be able to put it behind him. Postema felt he could make a "beautiful film" about the process. That wasn't quite how it turned out. Daan had agreed to take part in the film but with one condition – he wanted it to be completely honest and open, not to hold back anything. In the course of making the documentary, Daan did indeed achieve a catharsis. He was able to overcome his fury toward his father and to accept that his father did indeed love him... but there were plenty of bumps along the road.

This was a complicated family. At the same time Daan was angry with

his father, his sister blamed their mother Gerda for the tensions in the household. Gerda herself had a colourful backstory. Her father was Gerrit Van der Veen, one of the most famous Dutch resistance heroes from WW2 who was executed by the Nazis in 1944. As a child, Gerda had spent many months living in hiding. She too suffered from depression in later years.

Postema describes Daan as someone with a ferocious work ethic. Once his mind is set on something, he will devote himself entirely to it. Like his father, he will "work, work, work till he drops." At the same time, he is a very sensitive and troubled soul, much of his hearing now gone due to his drumming in his earlier life.

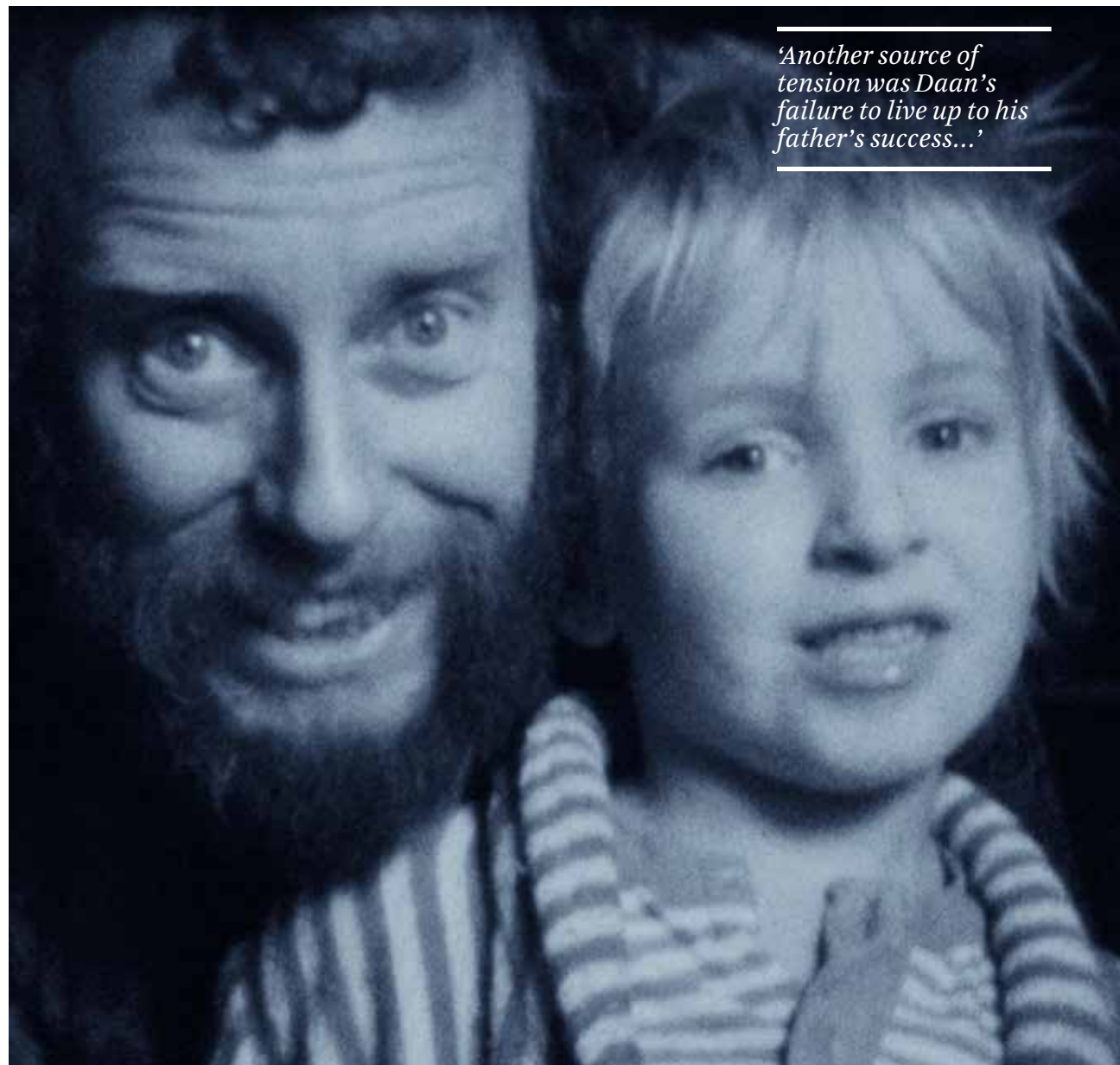
Daan is expected to attend IDFA with Postema and has agreed to give interviews – as long as the director is by his side. Making *Daan's Inheritance* has clearly been a gruelling experience for both of them and Postema hasn't given much thought to what he will do next. "This film has been so intense... for the last few months, I couldn't do anything but this film. I need to come up for air. The difficult part was that Daan was my friend... I wanted to help him but I also wanted to make this film."

Daan's Inheritance is supported by the Netherlands Film Fund.

Dutch Documentary Competition
Daan's Inheritance ◊ Joris Postema



'Another source of tension was Daan's failure to live up to his father's success...'



Director: Director & script: Joris Postema
Production: Keydocs www.keydocs.nl

From Brexit to Bruce



Nick Cunningham talks to Dirk Jan Roeleven about his up close and personal portrait of Frans Timmermans, a very public European.

When Dutch politician Frans Timmermans took over as second in command at the EC in 2014, little did he know that his brief was soon to include mass migration and the small matter of Brexit, all set against a backdrop of rising IS terrorism in Europe. In *The European*, Dirk Jan Roeleven follows Timmermans every step of the way, chronicling the politician's growing disillusionment with the member states whose dedication to the European ideal, little by little, fails to match his own.

It all began with the Tour de France in 2014. Roeleven had made a full-on documentary about a Dutch professional cycling team out to prove that it is possible to compete drugs-free. That year *le grand depart* was from Utrecht and so it seemed natural to screen the film there. It just so happened that the then Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Timmermans, himself a real cycling nut, was in attendance to give a keynote speech. Barbara Truyen,

commissioning editor at VPRO, was there too and when news broke later of Timmermans' EC appointment she thought that a similar warts-and-all film might be interesting, and so she turned to Roeleven.

"So I sent him a text about making a documentary where I would 'start the camera when the other cameras had to be turned off,'" explains Roeleven. "He said 'usually I don't want this kind of thing, but I trust you, so let's do it.'" It was a snap decision that sent Timmermans' Eurocrat mandarins into a tizzy. "The bureaucrats were given a three minute warning about this film instead of the usual 6-month lead period, but my objective was to show the EC from the inside and how this person who is the life and soul of Europe reacts within a radically changing Europe."

Timmermans was true to his word and allowed Roeleven carte blanche access, even when the chips were really down. "One of the core scenes of the film is when he speaks to representatives of the member states," says the director. "You want us to do our job properly, but you fail to deliver what you agreed upon," he says. That is the frustration of his life, that the member states just do what they want. They say they will take refugees and then they don't honour their pledge. That is the point in the film when he feels so insecure about Europe and the European project. He is also fearful that after 70 years of peace Europe may not continue this way. These

are expressions which are heavy and chilling, especially from somebody of his importance."

On the eve of the Brexit referendum Europe went to bed confident of the of the union's continuation. Next morning it woke to the shock news of the UK's intention to sever it. But when all else fails there is always Bruce Springsteen to help pick up the pieces, at least from Timmermans' point of view.

"I texted Frans the morning after Brexit to say I was coming to his house as soon as possible," tells Roeleven. "He came out in his cycling kit and was not amused at all, either at Brexit or at me for

'Timmermans allowed Roeleven carte blanche access, even when the chips were really down'

being there." The director explains how they cycled to the office and then, in front of his personnel, how Timmermans turned on his computer and found much needed solace in the lyrical optimism of The Boss, whom he adores.

"He was sitting there whistling this song. *'I'm waitin', waitin' on a sunny day, gonna chase the clouds away'*. It was very sad but very cinematic," Roeleven reflects.

This Teledoc film is supported by the Netherlands Film Fund.

Dutch Documentary Competition
The European ◊ Dirk Jan Roeleven



He is fearful that after 70 years of peace Europe may not continue this way

Director & script: Dirk Jan Roeleven
Production: De Familie www.defamilie.net



'The family stories linked to the claims change everything'

Director & script: Ditteke Mensink
Production: Pieter van Huystee Film & TV
www.pvhfilm.nl

The art of restitution



Photo: Nina Kopp

Ditteke Mensink

The Netherlands' quest to return art looted during WW2 to its rightful owners is at the heart of Ditteke Mensink's IDFA Dutch Documentary Competition entry *The Claim*. Melanie Goodfellow reports.

Ditteke Mensink's *The Claim*, a Teledoc film supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, explores the work of Netherlands' Restitutions Committee which was set up in 2002 to tackle the issue of artworks stolen by the Nazis during World War Two. Her interest in the restitution process was, she points out, multi-layered.

"It is an historical subject but at the same time it is very much in the present. You have to judge something in the present which happened in the past. I liked this conflict. Beyond that, it was a very emotional story. If it were just about the archives that would be pretty dry but when you bring in the family stories linked to the claims that changes everything," she says.

Mensink follows two Jewish claimants – Lion Tokkie and Clare Hamburger – who believe that

paintings hanging in Dutch museums once belonged to their families. Tokkie, the grandson of a tailor who was murdered in Auschwitz with his wife, is trying to get back a painting by the respected Dutch artist Isaac Israel. The work, which is currently housed in the collection of Museum Arnhem, shows children riding donkeys on a beach.

"His father had a reproduction of the work and always told him that the real one had hung in the family home before the war. You get a sense that he is trying to repair a trauma from the past," explains Mensink. "We follow him as he tries to prove the painting was once in the possession of his grandfather, but it's difficult because there is no documentation. The inventory made up when the house was cleared states there was a painting by Isaac Israel but it doesn't give any details."

Hamburger's backstory is very different. She is the daughter and sole heir of wealthy banker Gustaaf Hamburger who had the means to get his family to safety in the United States at the beginning of the war. Their ownership of artworks seized by the Nazis is well documented.

Her claim in the film revolves around two portraits by 17th century painter Ferdinand Bol which had ended up in the Tongerlohuys Museum in Roosendaal after the war. They are among a number of artworks reclaimed by the heiress

and then donated or sold off for charity in recent years.

Mensink recounts that Roosendaal's museum was surprised by the claim. Although the painting had been donated by a Dutch citizen with Nazi connections, no-one had ever delved too deeply into its origins. "I had the feeling that the museum was overwhelmed by the fact that the painting had once belonged to a Jewish family and that there was something wrong with it," she says.

Mensink first started researching the work of the Restitutions Committee some four years ago as it approached its 10th anniversary. Her aim was to show the restitution process from start to finish but it took time to find interesting stories and claimants who were willing to participate in the documentary. "Together with researcher Hans Dortmans, I spent about one and a half years researching. And then we spent another two and a half years filming. The actual process itself can take some time as the commission assesses the claim," says the filmmaker.

Having wrapped post-production on the eve of IDFA, Mensink is now gearing up for a character driven documentary – entitled *I Started Writing At The Age of Three* – about the writer Thomas Verbogt and his belief that a childhood brain infection at the age of three sparked his creativity.

Water wonderland



Filmmakers Jascha de Wilde and Ben Hendriks uncover the hidden world of Europe's inland waterways in their *Passage – A Boat Movie*. The pair drift along with Melanie Goodfellow.

Jascha de Wilde and Ben Hendriks' documentary installation *Passage – A Boat Movie* captures the disappearing world of the Spits riverboat, a type of smaller-than-average European freight barge plying its trade across the inter-connected inland waterways of the Netherlands, Belgium and France.

The project grew out of a chance meeting with the captain of a Spits at a friend's wedding who told the filmmakers about the barges and the tight-knit community that exists around the dwindling number of vessels still in commercial service. "The Spits are a bit special. The canals in France are very small and tight and the Spits are among the only vessels that can make it through, sometimes by a matter of centimetres," says Hendriks.

He and de Wilde researched the world of the Spits captains in-depth before embarking on the shoot. "We

became fascinated by their way of life. They live separately from society, in their own small communities, often in couples," says de Wilde.

Due to the size of the vessels, the pair worked as a stripped down two-person crew using 4K and HD cameras. "There's not a lot of space on board so we didn't take a sound engineer. It was pretty straightforward apart from getting back to the car after we'd got off. We'd often end-up hitch-hiking, carrying all our stuff on small trolleys," recounts de Wilde.

The filmmakers originally planned to make a traditional, linear documentary but as shooting progressed they decided to opt for an interview-less, installation-style format. "When we travelled on the Spits we discovered a completely other world, a lot of hidden places which, if you don't know are there, you don't see," says Hendriks. "And the visuals aspects were so interesting, we thought it would be nice to put people inside the scenery by surrounding them with screens. So we opted instead for a documentary installation on three separate screens."



The resulting 54-minute work plays out as a sort of moving triptych that immerses the viewer in the slow-moving world of a Spits as it travels along the so-called "North-South" inland water network running from the Netherlands, through Belgium and on to the South of France.

Original music by Austrian composer and pianist Marion von Tilzer and Scottish percussionist Alan 'Gunga' Purves – inspired by the sounds of ships engines and water – accompanies the piece as the Spits glide slowly southwards.

World premiering in IDFA Comp for Dutch Documentary, the work will play on one screen, with the three parts playing out side-by-side. The filmmakers have also organised a fringe screening during the festival at the nearby Perdu Theatre so that viewers can also watch it as an immersive experience, with one screen in front and the other two on either side. "It's not an official part of IDFA but we thought it would be good idea to show it to people in the form it was intended. The theatre is just round the corner from the festival," says Hendriks.

Beyond its artistic merits the film, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, also documents a rapidly disappearing world. "These ships are too small to compete in today's world where everything is scaled up. This means there's not much incentive to keep the canals in good shape and open. Most captains are getting on in age and when they retire their ships are decommissioned and often end up being sold off to be used as houseboats," says Hendriks.

"It's a shame because one ship can carry the equivalent of 12 trucks. It could be a sustainable alternative."

Dutch Documentary Competition
Passage – A Boat Movie 
Jascha de Wilde and Ben Hendriks 



'A moving triptych that immerses the viewer in the slow-moving world'

Director & script: Jascha de Wilde, Ben Hendriks **Production:** Molenwiek Film
www.molenwiek.nl

Zoo of dreams



Marco De Stefanis

Director Marco De Stefanis talks to Nick Cunningham about his IDFA competition doc that follows an inspirational animal doctor trying to re-establish a zoo in the West Bank.

He may not be the director of Qalqilya Zoo in Palestine but Dr Sami, the institution's chief veterinary doctor, is its heartbeat. Dedicated to the animals in his care, his primary aim is to improve zoo conditions and to affiliate with EAZA, the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums, which will guarantee him both support and a supply of animals. It may even mean that the people of the Occupied Territories will once again see giraffes, after the last were killed during the second Intifada.

Marco De Stefanis came across the story of Sami when he read Amelia Thomas' *The Zoo on the Road to Nablus* in which she chronicled a three-year period in the zoo's recent history. De Stefanis' first intention was to make a documentary about a 'protest happening' during which the animals were going to be transported from city to city to represent the people's desire for

freedom of movement. This didn't happen as the strain on the animals would be too great, but the kernel of an idea had formed when Marco met Sami.

"For me it was extremely fascinating," stresses De Stefanis. "I wouldn't say I was prejudiced but I was in possession of a lot of information that I got from mainstream media, about how Palestinians were dedicated solely to fighting the Occupation, except that this doctor was actually caring about the animals first. So I was determined to meet this guy because I saw his passion and his capability to find a common language with the Israelis on the subject of wildlife. They share a passion for animals that goes above the political problems."

So together with the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo Sami starts the process of EAZA membership. The sense of mutual respect and desire for co-operation is palpable between the two institutions, although the pristine Jerusalem establishment is presented in marked contrast to the heavily under-funded Qalqilya Zoo. "I wanted to tell the story of a man who, despite all the odds and obstacles, was able to find the energy and the enthusiasm to go ahead and pursue his dream (of membership). It was an international and universal story that can be applied anywhere."

De Stefanis and his team had to overcome considerable hurdles as well every time they came through

the Wall into the Occupied Territories. On one occasion they accidentally used the gate reserved for Palestinians and were body-searched and scanned for bombs, having to proceed slowly through several ceiling-less rooms, all the time observed by armed militia from cat-walks overhead. "I felt like a cow," says De Stefanis.

Viewers will have to wait to see if the giraffes eventually return to Qalqilya, but their importance is continually emphasized throughout the film. Vox pop interviews indicate that giraffes are what the residents of the region want to see the most. We also see brutal images of giraffes at Copenhagen Zoo who are 'euthanised' to prevent inbreeding. Sami weeps as he views footage of them chopped up and fed to the zoo's big cats.

"Yes, even in civilized Denmark, they butcher giraffes. They were really upset about that. If you really care about the health of the giraffe that you are going to kill anyway, why don't you give it to us who will treat it well and which will be the main attraction of the zoo. For them it was really difficult to understand," comments De Stefanis.

"But the giraffes are also a kind of metaphor for the peace process," he adds. "It is a dream. Sometimes it seems close, but at other times it seems very distant."

The film is supported by the Netherlands Film Fund.

Waiting for Giraffes ◯ Marco De Stefanis

Dutch Documentary Competition



'They share a passion for animals that goes above the political problems'

Director & script: Marco De Stefanis
Production: Volya Films (NL)
Co-production: Cassette for Timescapes (BE), EO (NL) **Sales:** Cat&Docs
www.volyafilms.com

Unbinding feet



Laetitia Schoofs

Laetitia Schoofs' *Fallen Flowers Thick Leaves* explores how China's rapid modernisation has impacted upon the sexuality of Chinese women.

The plight of China's 'leftover' unmarried women, the complexities of being a lesbian in a country where homosexuality remains taboo and the challenge of finding a partner in middle age are just some of the topics covered in Laetitia Schoofs' *Fallen Flowers Thick Leaves*, a fascinating portrait of female sexuality in modern China.

Schoofs is best known in the Netherlands as the former head of the Buddhist Broadcasting Foundation (BOS), the first western broadcaster exploring the contemporary world through the prism of Buddhism.

Alongside her work as commissioning editor, Schoofs was able to make her first feature-length documentary *Fallen Flowers Thick Leaves*. The title refers to a Chinese poem: once all the flowers of a tree have fallen off, leaves can prosper. "It represents the discarding of the showy stuff," says the filmmaker.

Schoofs explains that the feature initially grew out of a desire to capture how China was re-embracing Buddhism amid the country's rapid economic expansion and modernization. "As the head of Buddhist television, I was always looking for topics which touch on Buddhism but have a broader appeal. China came to my attention because alongside the economic reform of recent years you also see a religious reform happening," she explains.

"Under Communism, religion was forbidden but capitalism has led to a sort of moral vacuum. Egoism is on the rise and the collective is no longer a priority for younger generations. Faced with this scenario, the authorities have started encouraging Buddhism, which in China is heavily influenced by Taoism and Confucianism, as a way of getting morals back into society."

It was while exploring this angle that Schoofs became aware of the way in which China's rapid modernisation was also impacting female sexuality in very different ways as new life-styles collided with the traditional, patriarchal nature of Chinese society. The idea of exploring the topic in more depth also grew out of conversations with Bettine Vriesekoop, the former Dutch table-tennis champion turned China expert and journalist who collaborated with BOS. "We were discussing ideas, and the topic of female sexuality fascinated both of us," says Schoofs. "A lot of

my past films have been about women [who] have this power and this vulnerability at the same time which enables them to deal with any kind of situation."

The documentary's many subjects range from a female Buddhist nun, who turned to religion after a relationship turned sour with tragic personal implications, to a so-called "left-over woman" – an attractive thirty-something who is deemed a failure by society because she has failed to marry before the age of 27. Meanwhile, a middle-aged woman, emotionally and sexually numbed by an abusive marriage, blossoms after attending group therapy.

The filmmaker and her Amsterdam-based Chinese producer Jia Zhao of Muyi Film visited China several times over a two-year period to research and shoot the film, culminating with a final trip this summer.

Schoofs admits she was often surprised by the candour and humour with which the women talked about their relationships and sexuality. Attending the group therapy meeting featured in the film was a particular eye opener, she says. "I was almost shocked by the way in which they shared their experiences so openly with near strangers. I thought I was the one coming from an open, emancipated society and in the end I was like 'wow' there's a lot I can learn here."

Melanie Goodfellow



'China is heavily influenced by Taoism and Confucianism, as a way of getting morals back into society'

Director & script: Laetitia Schoofs
Production: Silk Road Film Salon (NL)
www.silkroadfilmsalon.com

Kids 4 Docs 4 Kids

Underlining the strength of Dutch docs for children, there will be half a dozen new Dutch titles in this year's IDFA Competition for Kids & Docs, writes Geoffrey Macnab.

These range from the playful, one minute long natural history doc *1Minute Nature* by Stefanie Visjager to Saskia Gubbels' emotionally gruelling *Naomi's Secret*, about a girl whose mother has mental health and drugs problems.

"You can talk about any topic in children's documentary," underlines Meike Statema, Head of Education (Youth programs and IDFAcademy). She oversees the selection and points out that there is never any shortage of titles to select. Statema describes *Naomi's Secret* as a "really well made film" with a tough and attractive central character. "You can relate to her even if you're not in her situation at all... this is how some kids are growing up. Life is not always easy."

All of the films screening in the Kids & Docs section will have the chance of an afterlife through IDFA's Docschool Online section. What's more, ten thousand school kids are expected at IDFA screenings this year. These kids can also access IDFA docs in the classroom – and there are further screenings of selected films after the festival is over.

At the same time as encouraging children to watch the films, IDFA

works hard to promote them with distributors, sales agents and other festivals.

Alongside the Dutch titles, Kids & Docs is showcasing half a dozen other films from around the world, among them two features; Otto Bell's *The Eagle Huntress* (executive produced by Daisy Ridley of Star Wars fame) and *Win By Fall* by German director Anna Koch, about five 12 year-old girls who leave home to study wrestling at the celebrated Eliteschule des Sports in Frankfurt. The film was originally entered for IDFA's Student programme but Statema fell in love with it and nabbed it for her section instead.

Films of all running times feature in the Kids & Docs competition, from one minute to long-form. Through such programming, Statema hopes, young audiences will discover just how flexible documentary can be. "The idea about documentary (among children) is that it is very informative and quite boring. This is a way of showing it can be all kinds of different things, and fun!"

Accompanying the screenings, there will be two days of Kids & Docs industry events during IDFA. NPO Sales and several producers and broadcasters from the Netherlands, will present a selection of children documentaries in the Docs for Sale viewing room. Meanwhile, during the IDFA pitching and co-production event, four projects aimed at kids will be presented, among them the groundbreaking

transmedia project *If You Are Not There, Where Are You?*. Another key event is the RealYoung Thinktank at which leading industry practitioners will come together to brainstorm on the development of kids' docs. "Overall I think IDFA is taking the genre to the next level, with a range of industry events growing every year and new formats in the selection," Statema underlines.

The Dutch already have a strong tradition of home-grown docs for kids. The aim now is to explore opportunities for co-producing. However, the news that the Dutch

'IDFA is taking the kids' doc genre to the next level'

Cultural Media Fund's activities will shortly be taken over by broadcaster NPO is causing some wariness. (The Fund has traditionally been one of the key backers of docs for kids.) "I am quite worried but need to hope for the best now that NPO is taking over. The genre deserves it so they can't let us down," says Statema.

One small regret Statema has about this year's selection is that she had to reject some very decent Dutch docs. There simply wasn't space for them. The consolation is that these films can still be shown as part of the Dutch Children's Docs For Sale event. "It gives them the chance to be watched... and to be bought!"



***Naomi's Secret* ◊ Director & script:** Saskia Gubbels **Production:** Selfmade Films (NL) www.selfmadefilms.nl

Replicated in China



'The ersatz Van Goghs sell for hundreds of euros...'

Director & script: Yu Haibo & Kiki Tianqi Yu
Production: Century Image Media (China)
Co-production: Trueworks (NL) **Sales:**
 Cat&Docs www.true-works.nl



Reinette van de Stadt is the Dutch producer of one of the most unusual documentaries of this year's IDFA, reports Geoffrey Macnab.

China's Van Goghs is a film about the self-taught Chinese artists from the small community of Dafen, many of them peasants, who have become virtuoso copiers, painting incredibly detailed imitations of works by Van Gogh and other artists.

This wasn't a project that producer Van de Stadt discovered herself. Pieter Fleury, former Documentary Consultant at the Netherlands Film Fund, had attended a pitch for it and immediately thought that this was a film that should have Fund involvement. After all, the story had a very Dutch flavour. Through Fleury, Van de Stadt was introduced to the Chinese producer Kiki Tianqi Yu, who also co-directed the film with her father, Haibo Yu.

In its own way, the film reflects the changes going on in Chinese society as a whole. This is a country that no longer wants to copy and mass manufacture cheap goods for

consumption in the west. There is, Van de Stadt suggests, a move away from "made in China" and a move towards "created in China."

In the film, one of the artists travels to the Netherlands. He wants to see Van Gogh's work for real. When he finally encounters it, he is very startled. Paintings he thought were very small turn out to be huge – and vice versa. The colours were also very different from what he knew in the reproductions he used as source material.

This Chinese artist may be a forger but his ersatz Van Goghs sell for hundreds of euros. He wants more money and recognition for his work. He also wants to express himself. The filmmakers were convinced he would eventually follow "his own path" and try to establish himself as an artist in his own right, not an imitator. Instead, a little bizarrely, the artist announced plans to open his own Van Gogh museum in China – at which his replicas will be hung. "He didn't do what we thought he would do."

"I think it is a really strange idea but maybe it will work. People go to Madame Tussauds to see fake stars," the Dutch producer reflects on the attractions that a museum of fake Van Goghs might hold. She adds that she has "huge respect" for the skills and speed of the artist although their ideas about what constitutes artistic integrity and originality aren't at all what is accepted in the West.

The Chinese filmmakers have been working on the project for almost a decade. The Shenzhen-based Haibo Yu is an award winning photographer whose pictures of the Chinese replica workshops have been shown all over the world and anthologised in books. Kiki teaches film in Shanghai University. This was their first film.

The Chinese filmmakers and their Dutch co-producers encountered some culture clashes along the way. "There were different styles of telling stories. When we had viewings in the Netherlands, we felt completely differently about the structure of the film than they did in China. In many ways we think... differently!"

China's Van Goghs may have had its challenges but Van de Stadt is clearly happy with how the film turned out. Cinema Delicatessen has already come on board to release the film in the Netherlands in December and broadcaster NTR will show it on TV in the summer of 2017. The hope now is that the film will be distributed in Hong Kong and China. As for Van de Stadt, who has been running production company Trueworks since 2003, she is very open to the idea of co-producing further documentaries – from China or beyond.

Relief for docmakers



Geoffrey Macnab talks to Netherlands Film Fund doc consultant Suzanne van Voorst about the popular director-oriented Oasis funding scheme, administered with the Prins Bernhard Cultural Fund.

Imagine you're a documentary maker with an idea for a new film. Maybe it's a movie about the players from Eritrea's football team who are looking for political asylum in the Netherlands, or perhaps you want to tell the story of Burma's most famous dissident poet. The question is: how do you start? You'll need to travel, to research your subject, search for finance and attach a producer – and to test out whether the project really is viable. In the past, you would probably have been left entirely on your own to try to spark your film into life. Since 2013, however, the Netherlands Film Fund has offered what it calls Oasis (OASE) funding to filmmakers looking to turn an idea into reality.

The scheme was put in place by Pieter Fleury, the former doc consultant at the Fund, and is now overseen by his successor Suzanne van Voorst.

Documentaries take a long time in gestation. Nonetheless, three years on, there is already ample evidence that the scheme has given a major boost to local filmmakers. In the past, these filmmakers would have had to develop new projects on their own, in their spare time and without financial support.

"Normally at the Film Fund, only the producers can apply. This (Oasis) is the one place where the directors can apply," Van Voorst explains. Oasis is targeted at the very first stage of development, when a project is in its earliest, most delicate state. Filmmakers are given an initial € 8,000 to kick their films into life.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the scheme is the level of trust placed in the filmmaker. A director presents a three or four page proposal. If this is accepted, the money will be invested, with no strings attached. The directors are given time to think in depth about a project, not to have to rush. They can use the money to go abroad for research if necessary.

It is accepted that a certain percentage of the projects won't come to fruition. "We have had several instances where at the end of the (development) period the director has said the project is not coming to anything, either because of practical problems, for example the situation that they were investigating has ceased to exist or, for creative reasons, that the project doesn't take wings," van Voorst

acknowledges. In these situations, the Fund doesn't try to claw back its investment.

"You want to give them (the directors) the space to fail," the documentary consultant explains. The thinking is that the documentary makers need to have the opportunity to explore new ideas and to take risks, even if they do sometimes run into dead ends.

In order to be eligible for Oasis funding, directors must have a track record. They're expected to have already made at least three medium length documentaries and preferably a feature length doc as well. In other words, they need to be able to prove that they have completed projects. Their experience acts as a guarantee and

'We want to give the director the opportunity for artistic freedom'

the funders know that they are serious and responsible practitioners of their craft.

"The other reason to start Oasis funding is that documentary in Holland, as almost everywhere, is very much dependent on television," adds Van Voorst. "We explicitly brought money to (fund) ideas for theatrical documentaries, and feature-length as well. Those are sometimes very difficult to develop through the conventional routes." ▶



'Filmmakers are given € 8,000 to kick their films into life'

Burma Storybook by Petr Lom and Corinne van Egeraat received Oasis funding



Eritrea Stars by John Appel, recipient of Oasis funding

Continued from page 32

Broadcasters looking for 30 to 60 minute films to fill specific slots in their schedules are unlikely to give directors the liberty to go away and develop a feature-length idea. They don't necessarily want essay-style documentaries or anything too unusual. They also have very firm timetables. When they back a documentary, they're likely to want it to be delivered for broadcast as soon as possible. By contrast, Oasis encourages a more patient approach. Even at the very earliest stage, the commissioners can generally tell whether an idea has potential to work as a feature film.

Three of the success stories form the first three years of Oasis are John Appel's *Eritrea Stars* (the film about Eritrean football refugees), *Burma Storybook* (Petr Lom's doc about dissident Burmese poets) and Catherine van Campen's *Zaatari Djinn*, about a refugee city in the desert in which 80% of the population are children. These films are all completed and have screened – or are about to screen – at prestigious festivals. *Zaatari Djinn* screens in 2016 IDFA Dutch Competition (see pages 14 - 15). "To our mind, these are very good examples," Van Voorst says of this initial crop of Oasis docs. Ten further projects are in development or in production.

"If you have an idea and it's not yet sorted out, you can apply to Oasis. You don't need any producer," confirms an enthusiastic John Appel. "The money is given to the

director, not to the producer. In the end, you have to deliver a script. Then, based on the script, you can look for a producer... but for the first part of the film, the developing and writing, you don't need anybody else but you. You don't need a broadcaster." Directors, he adds, can be very experimental in their ideas and can even apply when they're not entirely sure about how a project will work. "It's a lot of freedom. It's very beneficial for the filmmakers. They can apply themselves and so don't have to wait for anybody else to make the application."

"It's funding you can get right at the start, even before you apply for research funding," notes Petr Lom, who worked on *Burma Storybook* with his partner Corinne van Egeraat. "We were going to Burma to teach... we got this funding as well which enabled us to do the proper research." He describes the process as completely "straightforward."

The Fund's documentary supremo is at pains to point out that Oasis is not about 'freeing' directors from their dependence on producers. Generally, documentary makers work very closely with their producer partners and there is nothing to stop them from applying to the scheme even if they already have a producer in tow. Further down the line, when their films are ready to be financed, they will certainly need to have a producer. The point about Oasis is that, at the very outset, it is a director-led scheme.

"It's more about artistic space," clarifies Van Voorst, a former documentary producer herself. "It is not so much that Oasis wants the director not to link themselves to producer. It is more that we want to give (the director) the opportunity for artistic freedom."

The Oasis funding scheme is run in partnership with the Prins Bernhard Cultural Fund (PBCF – former filmmaker Mady Saks bequeathed money to the fund which is now used for the scheme.) The Film Fund and PBCF each invests €40,000 per year. There are 10 awards of €8,000 made per annum. The selection process tends to be harmonious and swift. Once an application is received and assessed, a decision will be made within six weeks or so. For obvious reasons, the scheme is confined to Dutch-based filmmakers only. "But if it's a foreign filmmaker living in Holland and working with Dutch producers, that would be no problem," says Van Voorst. "We have a number of applicants who fit that description."

What do these filmmakers make of the scheme? It's no surprise that they "love" it and want it to continue, Van Voorst underlines. Nor is anyone startled at the boost it has already given to creative, theatrical documentary making in the Netherlands.

New Dutch doc talent

Every year the Netherlands boasts an enviable array of new and emerging documentary talent, with IDFA providing the platform for its promotion to the international doc community. On these pages we present four more filmmakers presenting their debut feature documentaries.

Reber Dosky

Reber Dosky's *Radio Kobani*, screening in IDFA Dutch Competition, is the politically charged and highly emotive story of how the women of the Syrian town of Kobani helped lead the fight against IS occupiers, hoping to lay down the foundations for a more stable and happier life.

"In September 2014 IS attacked Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) and I saw on the TV images of people who wanted to flee, but Turkey stopped them. Those images hurt me but I also saw an opposing force, especially of women who picked up arms and went to fight IS," explains Dosky, who traveled to the city to record events. "I remained a month and built a relationship with the remaining inhabitants of Kobani and the fighters."

Dosky explains how he was nearly killed three times while shooting the film and, after completing such a dangerous project, how proud he is of the result. "I knew it would be a mosaic narration. Everyone in Kobani is interesting and has a story to tell but Dilovan, the presenter on



Radio Kobani ◊ Director & script: Reber Dosky Production: Dieptescherpte (NL)

Radio Kabani, is the person who carries the film. She was our guide and she connects all people in the city together. My biggest obstacle was that we had a lot of material and perhaps too many beautiful scenes which I could not say goodbye to. But fortunately the editor Xander Nijsten is an experienced professional. He has remained at the core of the story and he has helped me well."

Kurdish Dosky has been living in The Netherlands for 18 years. He graduated from the Amsterdam Academy in 2013. "The subjects of



my films are placed in an international context, so I consider myself as a internationalist. The Netherlands is a small country but the (documentary) competition is fierce. Film is a desired profession and many people I meet want to make films. Until now the funding of my films went well and I am very grateful for that. At the moment I am working on my second film project that I'm going to submit to the Film Fund. I want to shoot in northern Iraq, Istanbul and Amsterdam. We need a big budget so we will definitely be looking for co-producers."



Rocknrollers ◊ Director & script: Daan Bol Production: BALDR Film (NL) Sales: NPO Sales

Daan Bol

The feature-length *Rocknrollers*, by Daan Bol is described as "a moving coming-of-age story about depression and the beneficial, healing effects of music and friendship." It focuses on three teenage member of a blues band, one of whom (Sia) becomes very ill. The film screens in IDFA's Kids and Docs and Music competitions.

"The film became something completely different from my original plan, but at heart it had the same core," explains Bol. "My original plan had nothing to do with depression: Sia (the main subject) got into a heavy depression just when we were supposed to start filming.

This obviously changed everything. But real life is what happens and when you're making a documentary and when things all of a sudden change you have to be aware of that."

"So the difficult part of putting the film together for me was mainly dealing with the *consequences* of Sia getting ill," Bol adds. "Originally the shooting period was supposed to be a month or three, but we decided to film over a longer period of time. I was very lucky with producers (BALDR Film and VPRO) who were behind me and believed that it wasn't right to rush things."

Bol stresses that another major hurdle had to be overcome in the

editing. Originally he had a more implicit narrative in mind, with more fantastic/dreamy elements to it. But in the end it worked better with a more explicit narrative because the director felt the story needed it.

"In my experience the Dutch funding scene is a fruitful place, there are many opportunities for starting directors and I hope this will carry on being the case (after the Dutch Cultural Media Fund ceases to exist in 2017). I am not an internationalist yet, but am in pre-production stages of a documentary with an international subject, so that's an exciting new thing for me to try," he concludes.



Che! ◊ Director & script: Elsbeth Fraanje Production: Tangerine Tree (NL)

Elsbeth Fraanje

Che!, Elisabeth Franje's study of a 12-year old boy with a dark imagination that borders on the *grand guignol*, screens in Kids and Docs competition.

"Is this a potentially dangerous kid, a lone wolf, a psychopath in the making?" asks Franje. "Or is he a cool dude with a fascination for creepy things? Che is a child of divorced parents which is less amusing than some pretend. So, making friendships – especially with a girl! – is not that easy when you're not convinced that relations are meant to last. But if you dare to look monsters like these in the eye, maybe it is not as bad as it seems."

After many visits to community centres, Franje first met Che in October 2014, just two years before the eventual completion of the film. Raising finance was not easy as the subject, that of a vulnerable child, was deemed very risky. "It's great to work with children, and especially with this kid – Che's mother said of the film, 'It's really my child, this is Che from head to toe!' – but it was also different from what I knew. We had shot great material, but the editing was far less straightforward than we first thought. In the film, everything falls into place in a natural way, and you wouldn't think it had been so hard putting it together. It's always a difficult path to simplicity..."



Sjoerd Oostrik

Sjoerd Oostrik's *A Quiet Place*, screening in IDFA Dutch Competition and made in part thanks to the Dutch Cultural Media Fund Documentary Award presented to him at IDFA 2014, is a rigorous account of three boys in a juvenile detention centre trying to keep their heads above water.

"I have always been fascinated by prisons," stresses Oostrik. "The whole concept of a prison is something that strikes a deep and genuine fear in me. And I think that being afraid of a subject is always a very good starting point for a work of art. And as long as I can remember I've had trouble with authority. Not because I am such a rebel, but because I am always so acutely aware of its presence. And I deeply admire those people who can live their lives as if there is no such thing as authority."

Oostrik was determined to allow his subjects to play a role in the filmmaking process and therefore handed over the cameras to them to film themselves "without too much guidance from me."

"Now their own material is so wonderfully different from ours, it has a certain intimacy that we as a crew could never have achieved," Oostrik concedes. "And I think in that intimacy little drops of freedom start to appear, and in these drops the surrounding universe of imprisonment becomes visible."



A Quiet Place ◊ Director & script: Sjoerd Oostrik Production: Halal docs (NL)



"I like to surprise myself during the making of a film," he continues. "It is tempting to see directors as these geniuses with bold creative visions, but in my experience that is not how it works. For me it is a lot more about creating the conditions for

beautiful poetic things to happen. If the work you made looks like the thing you envisioned during its development it's probably something you and others have already seen before."

Nick Cunningham

Installing Tarr

The great Hungarian director Bela Tarr 'retired' from filmmaking after completing his 2011 feature *The Turin Horse* but he has gone back behind the camera to support a new exhibition of his work being held at EYE Museum in Amsterdam in January 2017.

Jaap Guldemon, director of exhibitions at EYE, is clearly delighted to have enlisted Tarr for what promises to be much more than a simple retrospective of the Hungarian master's work.

"He is one of those rare exceptions among filmmakers who really dares to believe in the quality and power of the image," Guldemon suggests. "Of course, in Bela Tarr's films, there is no story. There are only the images. The situation endures... and it is the same at the beginning as at the end."

For Tarr, Guldemon suggests, filmmaking is a necessity, not a profession. He embarks on new work only when he feels he has something to say. After *The Turin Horse*, he felt that he had arrived at an end point. He had reduced the film to the barest essence of filmmaking, paring down his style as far as he believed he could. "Tarr said, 'I am finished, I am done. I am never going to touch the camera any more,'" he reflects.

After withdrawing from filmmaking, Tarr was installed as artistic director at a production 'factory' at the

Sarajevo Film Academy. Typically, he did so entirely on his own terms. "It's not like a normal school, more like a workshop," Guldemon says.

Guldemon is excited to be working with a living director on "a new form of exhibition." The event will be something between theatre, film and film-set. Tarr is using his collaboration with EYE to make a statement about the treatment of migrants in contemporary Europe. He will be referring to the 'NATO fence' that the Hungarians have erected on their own borders, using barbed wire with razor blades to keep outsiders away. "It is a completely new form and it is also very daring," Guldemon points out.

In the late autumn, Tarr and his regular cinematographer Fred Kelemen spent a few days in Sarajevo shooting some new material to include in the exhibition. The scenes will include footage of a young Bosnian kid among the ruins in Sarajevo and of impoverished people at a bottle drop. The material will be included in the five main rooms that make up the EYE exhibition space and will include barbed wire, props, photos of migrants and fragments from the director's films, such as *Damnation* and *The Wreckmeister Harmonies*. Visitors will briefly be given the feeling that (like refugees on western European borders) they are trespassing and unwelcome.

If the exhibition works well, it is likely that other museums and

galleries may also want to stage it. After all, Tarr is one of the towering figures in recent European cinema. "It's a daring project for Bela Tarr as well as for us," Guldemon points out. He adds that this isn't just an installation. As in conventional retrospectives, all of Tarr's films will be shown. The Hungarian director is also being given "carte blanche" to choose and curate some of the movies that have inspired and influenced him. At the time of writing, he hasn't come up with a final list but Guldemon predicts there will be work from fellow countryman Miklós Jancsó. Speakers, writers and musicians who have worked with Tarr or been inspired by him are also likely to feature in the exhibition and public program.

One challenge for EYE is to make Tarr relevant to a young audience not familiar with his work. The Hungarian's films can make very forbidding viewing. Shot in black and white, they feature enormously long takes and are filled with a bleak surrealism that recalls the universe of Samuel Beckett. Nonetheless, early signs show that the eager cineaste public conversant with Tarr's work are very curious as to how to his intelligence and high cinematic aesthetic will be replicated within this ambitious new EYE exhibition.

Geoffrey Macnab

January 2017
EYE exhibition: Bela Tarr



'For Tarr, filmmaking is a necessity, not a profession'

The Turin Horse ◊ Bela Tarr

Dutch industry news

Short Cuts

DPN at IDFA

The Documentary Producers Netherlands, which represents the majority of Dutch documentary producers and serves to promote their common interests, is upping the ante at IDFA 2016 with a three-pronged campaign of activities, says DPN chairwoman Katja Draaijer of BALDR Film.

DPN has prepared a booklet entitled *Presenting Documentary Producers: The Netherlands 2017* which it will distribute at IDFA Forum. The booklet comprises a comprehensive listing of member films and projects in development that need further financing, co-production, distribution or sales. The diversity of the projects gives a good impression of the variety and vivacity of the Dutch documentary film landscape.

The organization will host Producers Breakfast tables during the Forum to enhance the perception and visibility of the Dutch documentary producers and to inform international producers on current activities within the Dutch documentary scene. DPN will also organize one-on-one meetings between Dutch and German producers with a view to potential co-productions.

“We hope to stimulate international co-production and distribution between Dutch documentary producers and international partners and at the same time promote their common interests by lobbying to government and the industry at a national and international level,” stresses Draaijer. “The Dutch film industry has a strong tradition in documentaries and is known for its open attitude towards international co-production.”



A Family Affair ◊ Director & script: Tom Fassaert Production: Conijn Film

Academy submission for A Family Affair

The documentary *A Family Affair* by Tom Fassaert has been submitted to the Academy for consideration within the Best Feature Documentary category.

The film profiles Fassaert's enigmatic and glamorous, but essentially cruel, grandmother who created a schism within the family when she abandoned them for a life in South Africa. It was the most attended film in IDFA history (5000 visitors) after it opened the festival in 2015, and was selected for scores of international festivals during 2006, picking up a raft of awards including Best Dutch doc at IDFA, best film at Biografilm, the Golden Calf for Best Film (Netherlands Film Festival)

and a Special Mention at the Zurich Film Festival. The film also secured a Netflix sale. Earlier this year Fassaert was listed by Variety as one of 10 documentary filmmakers to watch.

Fassaert told SeeNL, “I was making something very delicate, very intimate, almost on my own. I was shooting and editing it solo. It was small and it felt like a personal project, and then it [went] into the world.”

“It managed to reach a broader audience, bigger than just documentary lovers, people who wouldn't normally go to the cinema to watch this kind of film.”

China-bound

IDFA, EYE International and the Netherlands Film Fund are looking to send a select delegation of Dutch filmmakers and producers to Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival in December 2016 to be part of a focus on the Netherlands doc industry. This will include a prime selection of recent Dutch films, a number of ambitious projects to be pitched at the market and five workshops (3 filmmaker, 2 industry) that will be run in conjunction with IDFA. Renowned filmmaker Leonard Retel Helmrich

will both sit on the festival jury and host one of the workshops.

“With GZDOC being China's sole state-level documentary film festival, it has become one of the most important platforms in Asia for documentary industry exchange,” comments Fund head Doreen Boonekamp. “Aside from showing what the Dutch doc industry has to offer, it is an important market and a great opportunity to seek Chinese co-pro partners.”

A Decade of DocLab

Not exactly an event that looks to the past, IDFA DocLab will nevertheless be celebrating its 10th edition with Elastic Reality, a themed program of interactive documentaries, virtual reality experiments and live performances, which promises to explore the boundaries of the internet today and submerge audiences within “undefined new realities”. The ten project program includes world premieres of two Dutch projects, Bregtje van der Haak's *White Spots*, a *Journey to the Edge of the Internet* (pitched at Forum 2015) and *The Island of the Colorblind* by Sanne De Wilde.

Since 2007, IDFA DocLab has been at the vanguard of the digital revolution and has chronicled how artistic documentary (or documentary art) has morphed over this period. This year is no different with a Competition for Digital Storytelling that presents 20 new works, live events and eleven dynamic and eclectic DocLab commissions, such as Bert Hana's



I Am Not Home Video, a virtual translation of a selection of answering machine messages and one very special videotape that Hana found in a second-hand store.

On the occasion of its 10th edition IDFA DocLab is also unveiling the *Canon of*

Interactive Documentary, an anniversary publication with 100 of the most important interactive documentary projects created over the last decade and, together with the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, DocLab is also presenting a session on the preservation of the interactive documentary.



Director profile **Guido Hendrikx**

Amsterdam based film director and screenwriter Guido Hendrikx (1987, Eindhoven) graduated from Utrecht University (Liberal Arts & Sciences) and the Netherlands Film Academy (Directing Documentary). His admission film (*Day is Done* 2010) premiered at IDFA. At the Film Academy he directed the international critically acclaimed shorts *Escort* (2013) and *Among Us* (2014) and co-wrote the short film *Fernweh* (dir. by Ena Sendijarevic).

Stranger in Paradise, which opens IDFA 2016, is his feature documentary debut, shot on the troubled island of Lampedusa. "For me this was the most distinct location to represent the clash between Europe and the refugees, and their most unadulterated power relationship. Like the place where they just set foot in the new world," he muses. **See pages 6 - 7**