

SEE NL

Nanouk Leopold *back
in Berlin with Cobain*

*Dutch filmmakers
target IFFR*

Rosto *honoured at
Clermont Ferrand*

My Giraffe *in Berlin
Generation*

Barbara Visser *on
Barnett Newman*

Issue #30 January 2018 Sundance, IFFR,
Berlin and Clermont Ferrand issue

NL FILM
FONDS



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NL FILM
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Sundance exposure



Sebastián Hofmann

Two Dutch minority co-productions, *Time Share* by Mexican filmmaker Sebastián Hofmann and the Danish feature *Holiday* (Isabella Eklöf) are selected for the prestigious World Cinema Dramatic Competition of the 2018 Sundance Film Festival. Nick Cunningham reports.

In *Time Share* the sinister meets the magical as two patriarchs find themselves in a holiday nightmare after becoming convinced that an American timeshare conglomerate

has a sinister plan to take their loved ones away. The film is co-produced by Circe Films, whose *Cobain* (see page 24) is selected for Berlin Generation 14Plus. The film will have its European premiere at IFFR.

Circe's Lisette Kelder was determined to co-produce the latest Hofmann film after the impression his *Halley* (2012) left on her – and the Dutch industry as a whole. "That was a film we loved very much," she underlines. "And why we were very eager to be involved in *Time Share*, but it was difficult as there is no formal relationship for funding between Mexico and The Netherlands. But we were really excited when we found out that the Film Fund was prepared to support it, based on their expectation that it would be selected for an A-festival. It was great to know that everybody was such a big fan of Sebastián."

Fund involvement translated into approximately €100,000 of minority co-production support and €60,000 from the Production Incentive. All of the editing (editor: Natalie Alonso Casale) and the entire sound and image post-production were completed in The Netherlands. In addition, visual effects (such as flamingos) were applied in post- after the establishing plates were created in Mexico. "We were very much involved, more than we are used to as a minority producer," stresses Kelder.

"Sebastián is very original and *Time Share* is just as bizarre and funny and beautiful as *Halley*. The actors are brilliant and the film looks disturbingly stylish, almost grotesque. We really hope that we can follow him onto his next project as well."



Time Share ◊
 Director: Sebastián Hofmann
 Script: Sebastián Hofmann & Julio Chavezmontes
 Production: Piano (MX)
 Co-Production: Circe Films (NL)

World Cinema Dramatic Competition *Time Share & Holiday* sundance film festival 18



Isabella Eklöf

Dutch producer Trent knew very little about the director and producer of *Holiday* (Isabella Eklöf and David B. Sørensen) before he met them at CineMart 2015. But he was intrigued by the feature debutante's notes about a "female Godfather, trapped within a criminal environment" and quickly watched three of Eklöf's short films to prepare for the meeting.

"All of them were very interesting, visually and stylistically, and Isabella had worked with a lot of non-actors, which I found very interesting. She is not afraid to make drastic choices – I especially liked that. I knew it would be a risk as it is not often that the Fund gives minority support to a first feature, but I thought if we could make a nice package and a great director's statement then it might be possible."

What made the project relatively easy to co-produce was the flexibility of the Danish team. They were prepared to switch nationalities of key characters to facilitate Dutch co-pro terms. Dutch technicians oversaw the sound on set, the focus pulling and make-up. All the camera



Holiday ◊
 Director: Isabella Eklöf
 Script: Johanne Algren, Isabella Eklöf
 Production: Dharma Film (DK)
 Co-Production: OAK Motion Pictures (NL), Common Ground Pictures (SE)

equipment was Dutch and, in post-production, all the sound design and sound editing was overseen by Dutch professionals. The Danish team were amenable to suggestions at script level as well. "This was a director who was very open to working with six or seven different opinions, but then she was able to take her own decisions, which was very special," stresses Trent, adding that there was a mutual and palpable "click" between the Dutch

and Danish production entities. Talking in early January, Trent was yet to see the final version. While he felt the first cut was too long, coming in at over two hours, the second and third versions indicated that the Danes were making all the correct choices, as evidenced by the Sundance selection. "It really is a film that can work at the cinema as it is slow and intense, and I am really looking forward to seeing the finished result."



Phantom Thread ◊ Paul Thomas Anderson

Tailor made



Bero Beyer

IFFR director Bero Beyer indulges in a little pillow talk with Geoffrey Macnab.

The great Thai director, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, a Palme D'Or winner and regular visitor to IFFR, has said on several occasions that he doesn't really mind if audience members fall asleep during his films. This is almost bound to happen to some of those visiting his new project, SLEEPINEMAHOTEL, at this year's festival.

"We asked him to come up with something that could be a new work at the festival," IFFR artistic director Bero Beyer explains of Apichatpong's idea for an installation that involves audiences, awake or asleep, in a very intimate way. They can book into the hotel, which is being established at the World Trade Centre Rotterdam as part of the festival's Art Directions programme. There aren't many beds, but non-guests can also visit during the day.

Beyer will be spending at least one night in Apichatpong's cinematic hotel. He hails the idea as representing the adventurous spirit that makes IFFR "so much fun."

In the same spirit, the festival is hosting a screening of Paul Thomas Anderson's awards contender *Phantom Thread*, in which Daniel Day-Lewis stars in what he says will be his final role, as a British fashion couturier. The screening is accompanied by the Rotterdam Philharmonic. "These things are crazy, especially if they're for a new film, but they always have a real cinematic power," Beyer reflects on showing a movie with live music. Anderson is expected to attend the screening and Beyer hopes he will stick around at the festival to sample its esoteric pleasures.

Meanwhile, IFFR titles are going to be shown further afield than ever before. Half a dozen of the festival films (all of them directed by women) will be shown during the 4th edition of IFFR Live across more than 50 participating cinemas across the world – one of them this year is in Harare. Rotterdam is thus reaching audiences in post-Mugabe Zimbabwe.

The 2018 festival opens with the international premiere of *Jimmie*, a road movie about a father and his four year-old-son on the run across Europe, by Swedish director Jesper Ganslandt. "What I think is incredibly powerful about the film is that it takes a very concrete and very easily understandable concept and real takes it to the extreme," Beyer says.

Rotterdam has always been known as "a discovery festival," where you come to find new names and new talent. This year, though, there are

plenty of well-established and illustrious guests, among them Paul Schrader, who will be introducing his Bergmanesque new feature *First Reformed*, in which Ethan Hawke plays a priest struggling with his faith. Schrader will also be giving a masterclass. Meanwhile, the celebrated British actress Charlotte Rampling (star of *The Night Porter*, *Stardust Memories* and Oscar-nominated for *45 Years*), will talk about her role in Andrea Palloro's *Hannah*. British satirist Armando Iannucci is also Rotterdam bound, to accompany his film *The Death Of Stalin*, which closes the festival.

IFFR boasts the oldest and most respected co-pro market, CineMart, celebrating its 35th edition. This year, that event is being given a radical re-think with 16 chosen projects as opposed to more than 30 in previous years. "The concept of co-production markets is well established. There are plenty of them. CineMart is always going to be a key part of what we do whether it's 16 projects or 25 or 40 but the way of dealing with those projects is going to be radically different."

"The aim now is to choose fewer projects but to give them more attention and exposure. (This process had already started through the Boost NL programme on which it collaborates with the Netherlands Film Festival in Utrecht.) Sales agents have responded warmly to the change, which makes CineMart less of "a rat race" and allows for a more painstaking and selective approach.

Cross border affair



Muayad Alayan

The much anticipated second feature of Palestinian filmmaker Muayad Alayan has been drumming up interest at co-pro markets over the last two years and is now competing for the Rotterdam Tiger awards. Geoffrey Macnab reports.

The story of an affair between a married Palestinian man and a married Israeli woman, *The Reports on Sarah and Saleem* received both HBF+NFF co-pro support and funding from the Berlinale World Cinema Fund.

In May 2016, Muayad Alayan and his brother (and scriptwriter) Rami approached Hanneke Niens of KeyFilm to see if she would come on board the project as the Dutch co-producer. Niens had already worked on a Palestinian film, Hany Abu-Assad's Oscar contender *The Idol*, and was keen to help the brothers if she could.

"What triggered me in the script is that you really feel that this is just a human story, a private one, of a man and a woman having a secret affair," Niens reflects. The difference is that the story is located between

Palestine and Israel. This means that politics can't help but intrude into the couple's illicit interaction. As Niens puts it, "the consequences of their behaviour are so immense."

The veteran Dutch producer (who was Oscar-nominated for *Twin Sisters* in 2004) realised that this was just the kind of project the Netherlands Film Fund was likely to get behind. It had artistic pedigree (the Alayan brothers' debut feature, *Love, Theft and Other Entanglements* had premiered at the Berlinale) and a political edge.

The film was shot in Jerusalem, both on the Palestinian East side and the Israeli West side, and in Bethlehem. During the summer, clashes erupted in Jerusalem and the production team had to overcome more and more obstacles. Several locations in East Jerusalem were not accessible due to military checkpoints and several members of the team were not allowed by the Israeli army to cross into Jerusalem to be on set. "There were days when they really had to stop shooting. It was just too dangerous," Niens underlines.

The producer wasn't on set during the shoot but was being sent rushes regularly. "We had said let's spend every penny on the film and not in transporting producers just because they love to shake hands with the main actors," she says of her absence.

Sarah And Saleem didn't qualify for Netherlands Production Incentive

support – at just under €1 million the budget was too small and very little of the money was spent in Holland. Nonetheless, Niens, like many other leading Dutch producers, points to the transformative effect the rebate has had in recent years on the Dutch industry.

"It is really, really important," she declares, "and has really put a spotlight on Holland, making it much easier to co-produce." In the past, Dutch producers always had to "reach out" (quite often in vain) to foreign partners to ask them to come on board their films but could offer little in return. Now, foreign producers are reaching out to them – and the Dutch have the means to help.

KeyFilm already has several other projects in the pipeline, among them the Henry James adaptation, *The Beast In the Jungle*, directed by Clara van Gool. The company is also presenting *Craving*, the new feature from Saskia Diesing, at IFFR (see page 24) and is close to production on *Tench*, the latest feature from Belgian director, Patrice Toye.

"I've been co-producing now for more than 20 years. The more you co-produce, the more co-producers, international financiers, funds and sales agents you know," Niens says of the formidable range of contacts she has built up – one reason why so many filmmakers from The Netherlands and abroad remain keen to work with her and KeyFilm.



"This is just a human story, a private one, of a man and a woman having a secret affair"

Director: Muayad Alayan **Script:** Rami Alayan **Production:** PalCine Productions (PS) **Co-Production:** Manderley Films (DE), Monofilms (MX), KeyFilm (NL)



Director & script: David Verbeek
Production: Flash Forward Entertainment
 (TW) **Co-Production:** Nukleus film (HR),
 JDP Croatia (HR), Lemming Film (NL)

Camera Obscura



David Verbeek

Photo: Bojan Mredjenovic

Dutch director David Verbeek has long had a love affair with Taiwan, the setting for his new feature *An Impossibly Small Object*, selected for IFFR Voices. Geoffrey Macnab reports.

Around a decade ago, David Verbeek was working on the soundtrack of his film *Shanghai Trance*, which had been shot in China. He had a strong admiration for Taiwanese composer, Lim Giong, who had worked with directors such as Jia Zhangke and Hou Hsiao-hsien. When Verbeek went to Taiwan to collaborate with him he was immediately entranced.

“That’s really how I discovered Taiwan for the very first time. I remember being on the streets of Taipei and just realising how different it was from Shanghai, where I had been living for two years before that. I remember being very intrigued by the atmosphere in Taiwan.”

An Impossibly Small Object is the third film he has made in Taiwan (after *R U There* and *How To Describe A Cloud*). The starting point for the story was a street restaurant in the

centre of Taipei famous for its pepper shrimps which he used to visit regularly.

“I always loved eating there late at night. This was a roadside restaurant that was open until around 4am... I would see all kinds of people. There were gangsters and party people who had just come out of the clubs. The food they were selling was extremely good, some of the most delicious food that I know... I began to think what it would be like to be the son or the daughter of the guy who has this roadside restaurant.”

In the story a foreign photographer (played by Verbeek himself) is fascinated by an eight-year old girl he photographs from afar, but never communicates with.

The director knew exactly what he wanted. This wasn’t a film that was shot on the hoof. “We were working with very small children. It had to be very tightly scripted. You can’t ask children that young to improvise or use their own sensibility to take it wherever it goes. Every line was there... but I asked everybody around the girl to improvise as much as possible – the father of the girl, the mother, the customers in the restaurant.”

The film, which was shot over a period of three years, has three different strands. There is the little girl losing her best friend because he is moving away; there is the photographer who takes pictures by

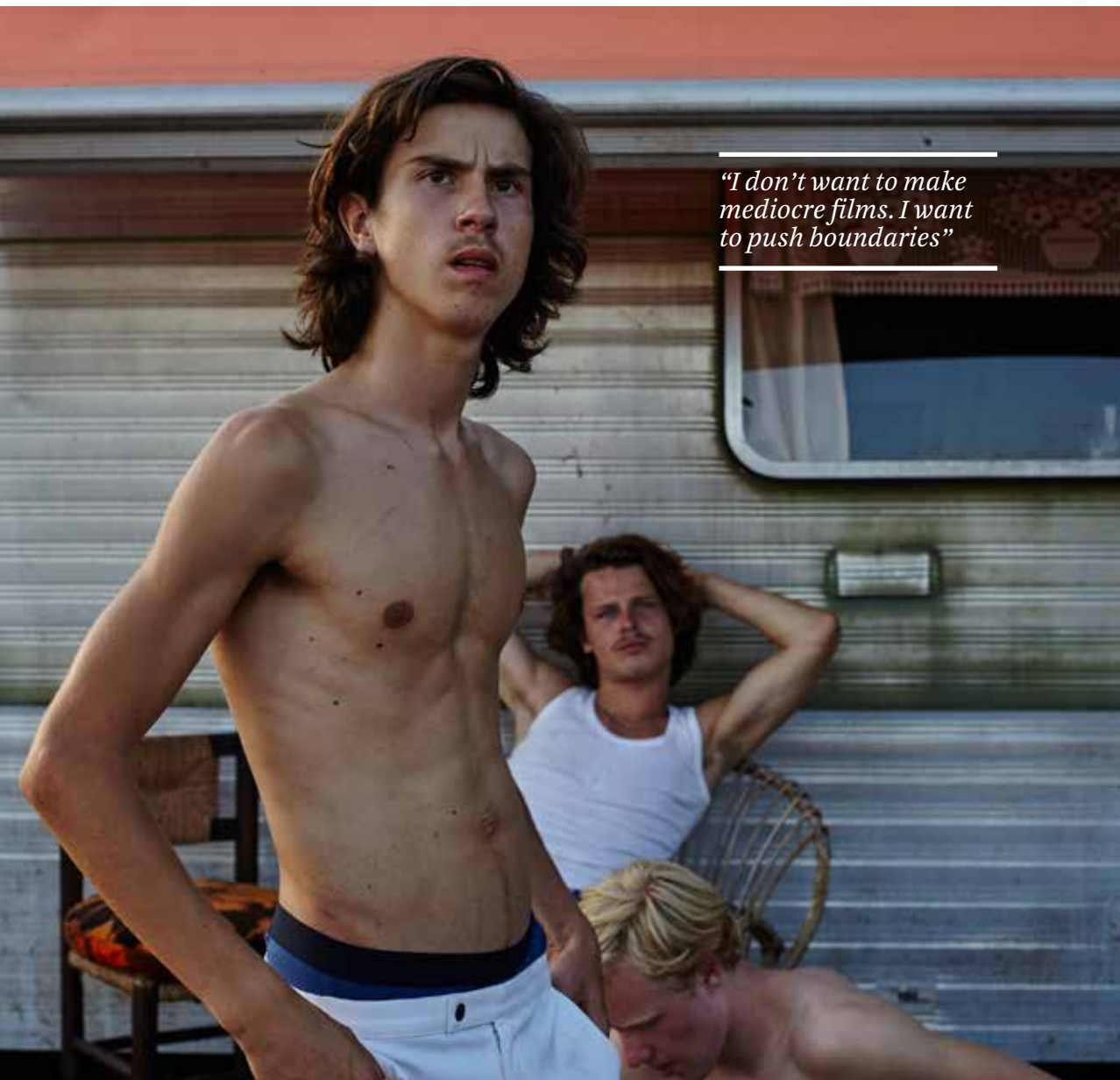
night; there is a sequence showing the photographer flying home to Amsterdam and meeting an old woman on the plane who tells him about her life.

“Somehow, magically, it appears to us as an audience that this old lady’s life is the life of the little girl,” Verbeek explains. The old lady tells the photographer that she too is obsessed with light. She is a physicist who has been researching black holes in outer space. These black holes attract and

“Fascinated by a girl he photographs from afar, but can never communicate with”

consume light, which can’t escape. The particle at the centre of these holes is called ‘an impossibly small object.’ This is where the title comes from. In the film, people are attracted to one another without being able to explain why.

Why did Verbeek cast himself as the photographer? “We were looking for a way to make this film within the small budget we had... it became apparent to me that the best way to have the one character who has to turn up in the Taiwan part, the airplane part and the Amsterdam part was just to do it myself. I was the one constant person who was definitely going to be there all the time. It kind of had to be me!”



“I don’t want to make mediocre films. I want to push boundaries”

Nihilism rules ok



René Eller

We [Wij] may be a summer movie, but don’t expect one of those evocative stories about youngsters spending long, lazy days together, learning lessons about life and love as they prepare for adult life.

René Eller’s debut feature, selected for IFFR Maximum Overdrive and supported by the Netherlands Film Fund and Production Incentive, is altogether more disturbing than that. Based on the novel by Elvis Peeters and his collaborator Nicole Van Bael, it follows a group of teenagers enjoying the sunshine and freedom. They want to discover the world and they have nothing to lose. So they start by playing sex games and end up starting a porn site and venturing into prostitution.

Eller is the founder of Czar Films and a very experienced multi award-winning director of commercials and music videos who has made films for everybody from Coca Cola and Polaroid to Boy George. He had been in Brazil, working on another feature project, when he first read the novel. “It’s really important to find a script you really believe in because it’s such a complicated thing to make a film

– it feels like 10 marathons,” Eller reflects. He had heard the book being discussed on a TV programme on the VPRO one Sunday morning and was immediately intrigued.

“It was a very puzzling book. It took me half a year to read and I actually threw it away a few times. It was a reality story that was a bit too much for me,” Eller says. The nihilism startled him as much as the novel’s very frank treatment of teenage sexuality. The director describes himself as “a very positive person” who sees the future as “bright” and who looks for the “good in people.” The book, though, gave him a very empty feeling.

The teenage protagonists are from a generation in which “everything seems negative.” The big causes, whether socialism, campaigning for nuclear disarmament or fighting to save the environment, don’t carry much weight with them. They’re not hippies, they’re not yuppies. “When I talk to that generation, they’re a bit lost. They don’t really know what they are going for. They become more and more cynical and hedonistic... they see life from day to day.”

Casting the film well was crucial. Eller needed to find young actors who could capture their generation’s sense of ennui and anxiety on screen. He started following the conventional route, using established casting agents. He realised, though, that “kids of 16, 17 and 18-years old” weren’t so easy to find. “When you’re casting, you’re casting in

theatres or from previous films that they have made or from academies where they are learning. They’re not there yet! They’re all behind their computers or their playstations.” In the end, the filmmakers took over casting themselves, visiting music festivals and other events at which they could track down teenagers with the strength of personality and the looks to play the roles.

Once the actors were chosen, the next step was to make them into a closely knit group. They were taken on expeditions, paintballing outings and spent a lot of time together before shooting began. Even so, filming was really harsh, Eller stresses. It didn’t help that they were shooting in small Catholic villages in Belgium where the locals were deeply suspicious of them. “We were constantly being stopped by police and attacked by people,” the director recalls of the sometimes fraught atmosphere during production. As the director ruefully reflects, that’s what can happen when “you have eight youngsters running naked over streets and fields in an area that is very conservative.”

“I am a little shocked by how emotional, difficult and complicated it is to make something really good. I don’t want to make mediocre films. I want to push boundaries,” the director reflects. He says he was “completely empty” at the end of shooting and so exhausted that he felt he had shell shock. He’ll direct again – but needs to recharge fully first. **Geoffrey Macnab**

Director: René Eller **Script:** René Eller, Sanne Nuyens, Bert van Dael **Production:** New Amsterdam Film Company (NL) **Co-Production:** Miauw (NL), A Team Productions (BE)



“The smartphone in this film stands for constant dread, terror and isolation”



Director & script: Metahaven (Vinca Kruk and Daniël van der Velde) and Rob Schröder
Production: Dutch Mountain Film (NL)

Bad connection

IFFR Tiger selection *Possessed* takes a swipe at our obsession with the smartphone. Geoffrey Macnab reports.

Possessed is the latest feature from Metahaven, the award-winning studio of Amsterdam-based filmmakers and designers Vinca Kruk and Daniël van der Velden. The film, co-directed by fellow filmmaker (and designer) Rob Schröder, is described by the Metahaven team as “a complaint” against the tyranny of modern mobile communications. “The smartphone in this film stands for constant dread. It doesn’t stand for opportunity and connection but for terror and isolation,” Van der Velden elaborates.

The film offers a meditation on communication and connectedness in the digital era. It is a “mash-up” of found footage culled from YouTube, archive material of bombed out cities at the end of the Second world War, newsreel footage from the Balkan wars of the 1990s, surrealist imagery shot by the filmmakers themselves and fictional scenes involving a young woman, played by Olivia Lonsdale. There are voice-overs from London-based leftist academics Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, co-authors of ‘Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work’.

“On the one hand, there are influences that are political. On the other hand, there are influences that are much more lyrical,” Van der

Velden says of the film. “I would not call it a straight-up essay film but it definitely uses elements of that.”

Van der Velden and Kruk originally formed Metahaven as a graphic design studio dedicated to design and speculative projects with a political and philosophical edge. Their first major work was inspired by Sealand, an abandoned rig/fortress in the North Sea that was reclaimed as a tiny independent state. It has been put to use as a “data haven,” outside the control of any state, and as the site for a casino.

Over the years, the Metahaven founders have become increasingly drawn to film. “If you work on your own projects in design and research then you start to tell stories. At least, we did,” Van der Velden stresses. The Metahaven principals saw film as the perfect medium for bringing together their visual obsessions with their desire to create narratives.

One early film was *The Sprawl (Propaganda About Propaganda)*, exploring the use of the internet and social media for propaganda purposes. They also recently made an experimental short called *Information Skies*, a hybrid film involving live action, graphics and animation that was nominated for a European Film Award.

Possessed, their first feature-length work, was conceived in 2014 when producer René Huybrechtse of Dutch Mountain Film called Kruk and Van der Velden out of the blue

with the question, “do you guys want to make a film?” At first, they were wary but they quickly discovered that Huybrechtse was sincere in his offer – and that he had the contacts and expertise to get the project going. As graphic designers, Kruk and Van der Velden tended to do everything themselves. Working with Dutch Mountain Film taught them to accept the division of labour within feature filmmaking. They brought on board Rob Schröder, a close friend who already had considerable filmmaking experience, as their co-director. “The really interesting point about the collaboration is that is confrontational and that it has moments of friction in it,” Van der Velden says of the working relationship between the filmmakers.

The film features plenty of designs from Metahaven, among them the beautifully patterned scarves used to veil the faces of the women in front of camera. These women evoke memories of classical sculptures and of old De Chirico paintings but the women are also intended to be militant and aggressive – an “internet tribe.”

Possessed, which will be released in The Netherlands by Cinema Delicatessen, may take a dark view of smart phone culture but Van der Velden believes it could as easily be watched on a digital device as on the big screen. “We are not from a traditional film background and we are not bound to the cinema as the only place to experience... cinema.”

Visseral response



Barbara Visser

The End of Fear, world-premiering in IFFR Limelight, may tell the story of the mutilation and infamous restoration of Barnett Newman's "Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III" but Barbara Visser's art-doc morphs seamlessly into an examination of aesthetics, painterly processes and artistic ownership. Nick Cunningham reports.

For many Dutch people the attack by disaffected artist G.J. van B. on Barnett Newman's masterwork in 1986 was a pivotal moment. It certainly was for filmmaker Barbara Visser.

As a girl, Visser was frightened by the vast red canvas, measuring 2.5m x 5.5m. She couldn't understand the mysterious work and fled Amsterdam's iconic Stedelijk museum in a state of apoplexy. It was many years later, when Visser was in her first year of art school, that the attack took place. Van B. made a series of violent horizontal slashes across the width of the work using a tradesman's knife.

The painting was sent to New York for restoration by Daniel Goldreyer.

According to many, including Visser, the restoration was a travesty, and consisted of little other than a shoddily applied coat of household paint. All the subtlety and depth of the original was lost forever. Many articulate experts in the film attest to this (although the eerie, disembodied voice of an unapologetic Van B. on Visser's cellphone provides textual counterpoint to their opinions). Newman is quoted at the beginning of the film: "aesthetics is to the artists what ornithology must be to the birds." This pithy aphorism could be applied to the painting's restorers too.

"By making this film [supported by the Netherlands Film Fund] I learned that Goldreyer had bluffed himself into a corner, and had no choice but to cover the whole canvas, even if it is against all the rules of the trade: retouching 15 metres of slashes on a monochrome surface of oil paint would *always* be visible."

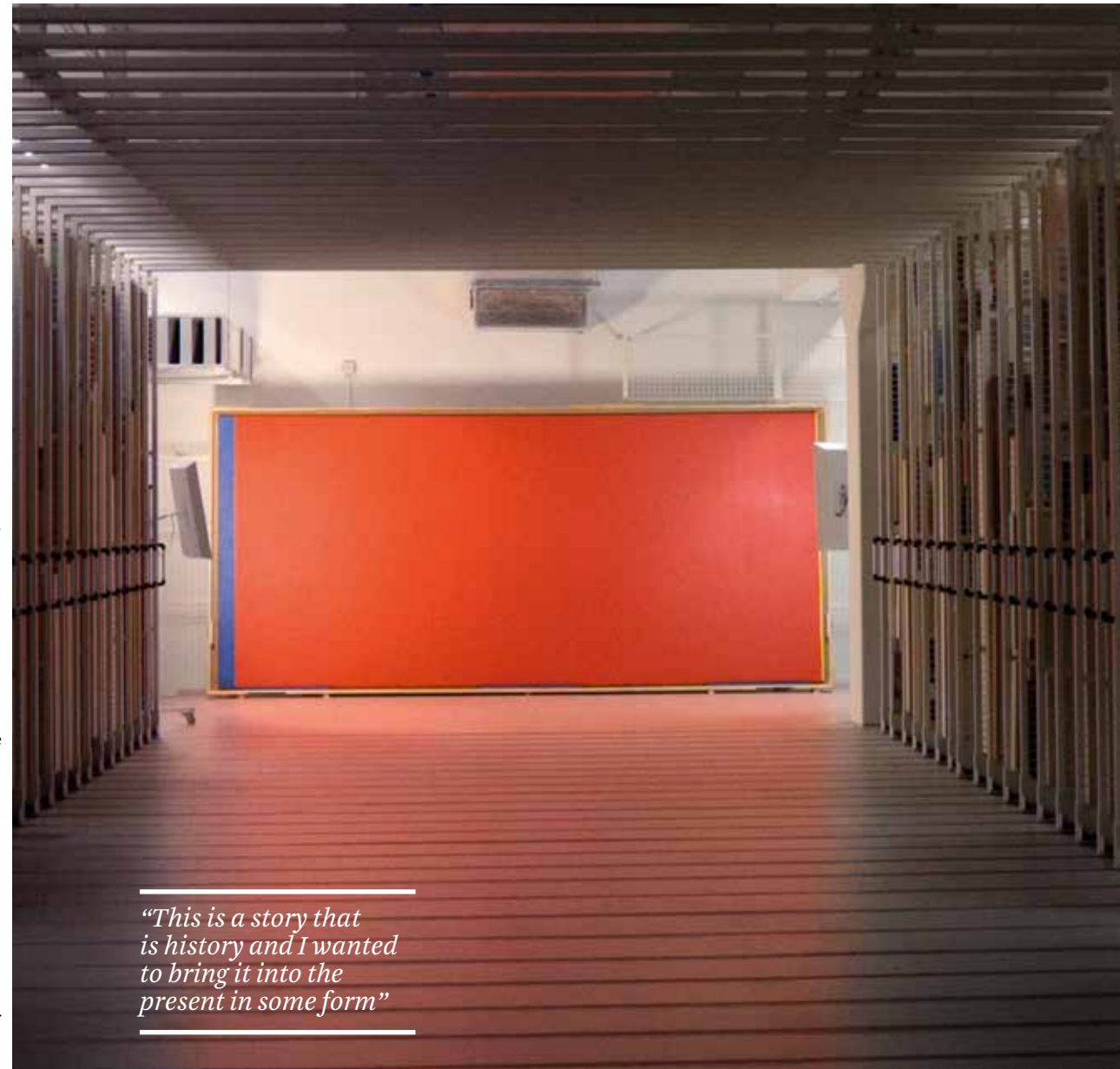
Visser may be a fine documentary filmmaker but she is also an accomplished artist. For her, a simple linear telling of the tale was never going to be so interesting, despite the profound effect Newman's work had on her. "This is a story that is history. It happened in the past, and I wanted to bring it into the present in some form."

So the director commissioned a full scale recreation of the painting, as much to answer the detractors (and there are letters from many in

the film) who believe that this was the work of a charlatan with little technical skill, something that could have been done by a child. "I wanted to know if it is really that simple. I assumed that it wasn't [she is proved right], even though the painting is almost monochrome. In the film you see that even trying to get such an enormous canvas straight on its frame takes a few weeks for one person to do, and this is even before the painting process begins."

What Visser didn't reckon on was the emotional attachment that the commissioned artist Renske van Enckevort would develop with her work. She had worked on it for many months, painstakingly mixing and applying layer upon layer of paint to create a rich and melodious veneer. It may have been a copy, a piece of artifice, but her love for it is palpable, and when the time comes for her to hand it over she is distraught.

The director underlines that, despite this part of the film being an artificial construct, it wasn't devised merely to create an added layer of conflict. "Renske's grief stemmed from the fact that even if we [Visser and her colleagues] understand intellectually that she made the painting, we still have this distance. But she, over the course of these many months, had lost all sense of distance to see it as a prop for the film or a piece of decoration. For her it was part of her life, whereas for us it was just an instrument."



"This is a story that is history and I wanted to bring it into the present in some form"

Director: Barbara Visser **Script:** Barbara Visser, Bart Haensel **Production:** De Familie Film & TV (NL) **Distributor:** Amstelfilm (NL)



Director: Saskia Diesing **Script:** Saskia Diesing, Esther Gerritsen **Production:** KeyFilm (NL) **Sales:** Media Luna New Films (DE)

The parent trap



Saskia Diesing's second feature *Craving*, produced by KeyFilm and selected for IFFR Limelight, concerns the complex and uneasy relationship between a fiery young woman and her terminally ill mother. The director talks to Nick Cunningham.

When estranged daughter Coco hears of her mother's cancer, she decides to move in to look after her. The problem is, her mother Elisabeth just wants to be left alone.

Theirs has always been a fractured relationship. We know that when Coco was 18 months old she was continually locked inside her bedroom and left to fend for herself. When her parents separated soon after, it was her father that Coco went to. Since then she has been a wild child. In an unsatisfying relationship with an academic (Hans) in his fifties, alcohol-fuelled periods of moroseness drive Coco to kiss strangers or, in one scene, to publically fellate a barman.

Meanwhile, the mother speaks very little, although her breaking of the fourth wall indicates that she maintains an inner dialogue. What we

know about her we invariably hear through other characters, such as Coco's father Wilbert, his new wife Miriam (whom Elisabeth detests) or her boss in a framing factory.

Little by little Elisabeth becomes weaker and more bed-ridden while Coco's behaviour becomes more erratic, but mother and daughter reach an understanding of sorts before the film's dramatic, and satisfying, conclusion as both characters determine their own exit strategies.

Craving, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund and the Production Incentive, is an adaptation of the novel *Dorst* by Esther Gerritsen, who takes a co-writer credit on the film. The pair also co-wrote Diesing's highly acclaimed feature debut *Nena*, which won Golden Calves for best director and actress in 2014. Both films share the theme of a vibrant young woman having to deal with an irascible and vulnerable parent.

"I think this whole dysfunctional thing, which is always fascinating and which was also in *Nena*, stems from this eternal paradox of wanting to break free from our families – but we can't," comments Diesing. "A question that Esther is asked a lot is if she relates more to the daughter or to the mother, and her answer is always both. But I guess my answer is to relate a lot more to the mother, as I recognise this quasi-autistic part that means she seems to rationalise everything

internally, whereas Coco is more impulsive. In a way the film is very much about growing up and maturing for Coco. In that sense it is a coming of age film."

Coco has no friends her own age despite attending university. All her relationships are with people more than twice her age, no matter how fractious those relationships may be. "This theme of a big age difference

"A craving for solidarity and sympathy"

is very interesting for me, but I am not entirely sure why. At the end of the day age doesn't seem to matter that much – but of course it does. Coco is a character who relates to older people because she is an only child and doesn't really know how to relate to people her own age. She needs the recognition of older people, I guess, as she didn't receive it when she needed it most as a child."

The Dutch title *Dorst* literally means 'thirst' which has resonance, given Coco's increasing reliance upon alcohol as the film progresses. But Diesing is happier with the English title *Craving*. "The film is about an eternal craving for love and recognition and being part of other people's lives – a craving for solidarity and sympathy may be the best way to describe it. But at the end of the day you find out that in reality we are lonely and by ourselves."

Final testimony



Morgan Knibbe

Morgan Knibbe burst onto the Dutch and international documentary scene in 2014 with his audacious feature *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning*. At IFFR he presents the short doc *The Atomic Soldiers*.

In *The Atomic Soldiers* selected for IFFR Voices Shorts, after more than four decades of forced silence, some of the last surviving servicemen share their unfathomable experiences of the atomic bomb tests in the US in the 1950s.

Director Morgan Knibbe has long held a fascination for these nuclear tests, carried out by both the US and the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War. The numbers are astonishing, with 900 bombs alone detonated within 60 miles of Las Vegas, most of which dwarfed the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Equally shocking is the number of servicemen who subsequently died from radiation exposure. Of the 400,000 soldiers who observed the tests, an estimated 800 are still alive, Knibbe points out. With the assistance of NAAV (National

Association of Atomic Veterans) Knibbe tracked down some of these survivors to record their testimonies. This is done to camera. Knibbe eschews use of the official stock footage we have come to expect, because is it not representative of the veterans' testimonies. The voices of the men and their pained faces are sufficient to drive home the horror of their experiences.

The soldiers were sworn to secrecy about their experiences until the Clinton administration lifted the oath of silence, in the late 1990s. "Until that time nobody was allowed to talk about any of this stuff. Any mention of the tests was considered treasonous, which was a serious threat to anybody with a military background. But at the same time these men were very naive, and frightened," says Knibbe. "And then there is the question of cancer, with all of these bombs detonated so close to Las Vegas. Many people didn't have a clue that this was happening. A lot of radiation was spread out across the area, and there were a lot of official cover-ups."

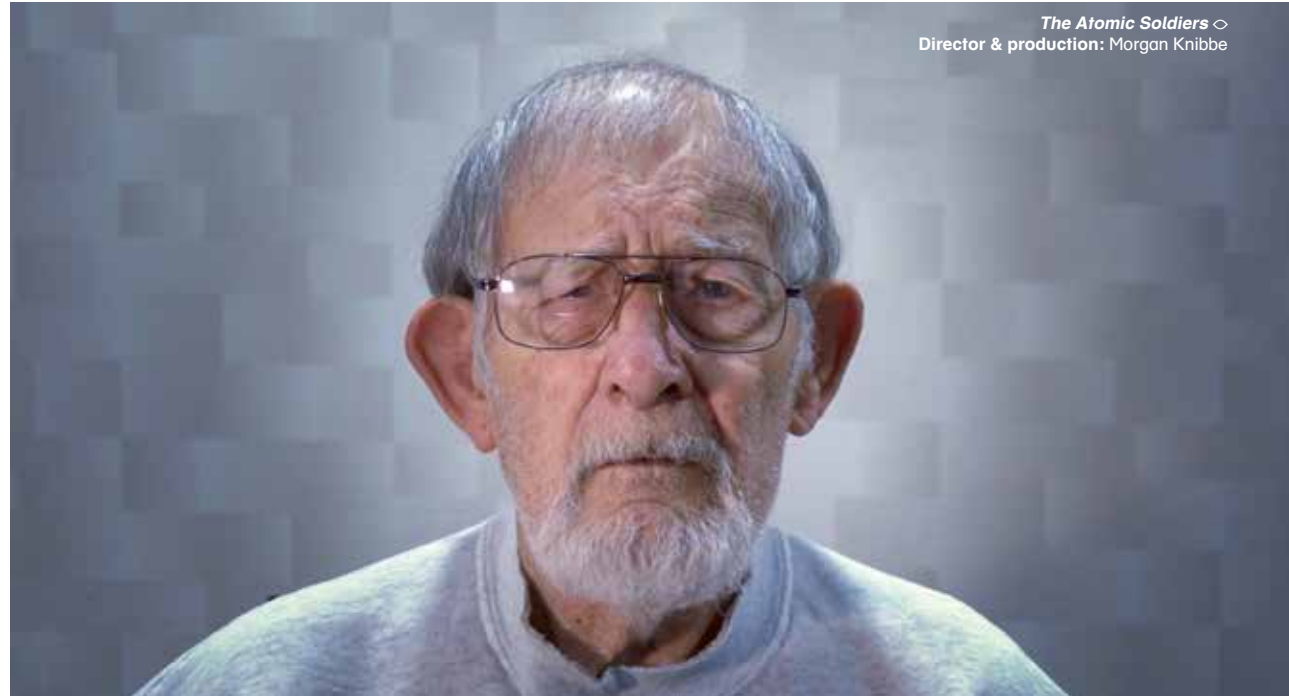
The short film serves as a prelude to (and a calling card for investment in) a fictionalised feature that Knibbe hopes to make about the subject. "I have been working on this for quite some time now. But it is huge. I had to do all this research now because these men are dying. So it is now or never in terms of collecting their stories..." The feature idea is proving more difficult than one may assume, despite Knibbe having his

cinematic and filmmaking skills affirmed by a slew of major awards for his debut doc. "It is not that easy. The industry is quite conservative. Investors see a young Dutch documentary filmmaker, and ask 'why not a documentary using archive?'. But I see a powerful story there... I will therefore focus on making features until I can win their trust."

Also In Voices Short is *Elastic Recurrence* by Johan Rijpma. Without dialogue this experimental film details, in precise and analytical slow motion, how the fragments of a broken plate move off into space to form a decomposed structure before they seek to regain their original shape.

In IFFR's *Curtain Call* section, Michiel van Bakel will present *Forest Paths*, in which animated still photographs are used to reveal movement and light on forest paths that are otherwise invisible to the human eye. The director developed a 'scanner-camera' that extends the capabilities of our vision to allow for near-infrared light, therefore revealing hitherto unobservable activity.

Pim Zwier's 13-minute short *3rd Builders' Street*, selected for *Bright Future*, tells the story of the Khrushchovka, the first Soviet concrete panel houses which meant a real improvement for residents. For younger generations, however, these houses represent a failed utopia. The story is told without dialogue. **Nick Cunningham**



The Atomic Soldiers ◊
Director & production: Morgan Knibbe



Forest Paths ◊
Director & production:
Michiel van Bakel



3rd Builders' Street ◊
Director & production: Pim Zwier



Elastic Recurrence ◊
Director & production:
Johan Rijpma

Analogue memories



“The most extreme are the digital nomads and remote workers, who have as little as possible”

Director & script: Digna Sinke
Production: De Familie Film & TV (NL)



Digna Sinke

Photo: Friso Kevrijns

Digna Sinke is not the type to throw things away. Nor is her 92-year-old mother, who features prominently in *Keeping and Saving (Bewaren)*, selected for IFFR Limelight. The director talks to Geoffrey Macnab.

From her earliest childhood, Digna Sinke has collected and catalogued possessions – “all the items I love.” She won’t throw anything away without thinking about it carefully first. “I’ve been saving things for as long as I can remember,” she says, but adds that she has always drawn a distinction between “collecting” and keeping things for their own sake.

Her mother used to collect cigar bands. “She was not from a rich family,” Sinke says. In an era when material wealth was hard to come by, people would take a pride in owning “a nice pot or a tablecloth.” Even the most banal objects would assume a totemic significance. There was the added thought, too, that some piece of bric a brac might turn out to be useful or that the mouldy newspaper from years ago could hold some vital secret about the past. Possessions helped give you an identity and a sense of security. Sinke’s mother

still has bean slicers, bread knives and forks that her relatives once used. They link her to them.

Of course, no-one will keep an object if it reminds them of unhappy times. Sinke talks of one interviewee who was married several times and is estranged from his children. This man doesn’t want reminders of what went wrong in his life. “It’s easier to get attached to something, a toy for example, if you only have 10 toys. Nowadays, my nieces and nephews have maybe 500 toys,” the director notes of the amount of “stuff” that every child owns.

Sinke noticed that younger people have a different attitude towards possessions. They see little point in keeping material objects when they can store a lot in in the Cloud. “The most extreme are the digital nomads and remote workers, who have as little as possible: a passport, a bank card, a laptop and a telephone. I wonder if people finally will forget how to touch material things to recall memories.”

The director began her career in the movie business over 40 years ago, as an assistant to the editor on Paul Verhoeven’s *Turkish Delight* (1973). She used to shoot her films on celluloid and yes, she has kept the old reels. However, *Keeping and Saving* was made on digital. This enabled Sinke to shoot it partly herself. She is not an expert cinematographer but if something was bungled or out of focus, she could simply shoot it again. “I am

not living in the past or thinking that the analogue world is the only world that has value,” she says.

Sinke isn’t just a director. She runs her own production company SNG Film, long renowned for its personal, idiosyncratic and artistic films. On *Keeping and Saving* she was working with De Familie, the outfit run by Michiel Van Erp and Monique Busman. Premiering at IFFR, the film is supported by the Netherlands Film Fund and will be distributed in The Netherlands by Mokum Filmdistributie.

The director points out that it wasn’t a difficult film to finance. “The film plan was so well-written

“I am not thinking that analogue is the only world with value”

that it convinces everyone,” the director boasts tongue in cheek. And the subject certainly hit a chord. It’s an essay film that is both deeply personal and that has a social and political resonance. It is revealing not just about Sinke and her family but about changing attitudes in society as a whole.

No, Sinke’s mother has not yet seen the film. “I showed the trailer to her last weekend. I think she liked it. My mother is a very practical and straightforward woman. She saw I wanted to make a sincere film about this subject.”

Teen spirit



Nanouk Leopold

Photo: Klaas Zwijnenburg

Nanouk Leopold is back in Berlin with the masterly *Cobain*, selected for Generation 14plus. She talks to Nick Cunningham.

The premise of *Cobain* may be simple, how to safeguard the future of an unborn child within the body of a junkie mother, but its telling is complex, lyrical and immensely satisfying.

Cobain is a 15-year old boy saddled with a name he never wanted. He no longer lives with his mother, a former prostitute, but he cares for her immensely, even though her behaviour and dependency upon him can be unbearable at times. He is kind and practical, and very sweet natured, but the cards he has been dealt place have placed severe restrictions on the life he has hitherto led. He is not comfortable with foster parents and the surrogate family he turns to is comprised of his mother's former pimp and the prostitutes that he controls, one of whom offers Cobain affectionate sex, albeit for cash.

Cobain is determined therefore that his future half-sibling will not be similarly blighted from birth.

In saving the unborn child, he is also saving himself.

The film, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund and the Production Incentive, is written and produced by Stienette Bosklopper of Circe Films, her first feature screenplay, and is Nanouk Leopold's sixth feature. Her last film, *It's All So Quiet*, opened Berlinale Panorama in 2013.

"I was looking for something beyond what I write myself," comments Leopold. "I wanted to go in another direction, and I think it was the speed and structure of the story that I liked, and the fact that the main character is a boy of fifteen. I had never done anything like that before. Also, I wanted to make something colourful and lyrical, and I think I have succeeded in that."

Debutant Bas Keizer was chosen from over five hundred boys who were screen-tested for the role. Leopold points out how the character that he subsequently developed was gentler on screen than on the written page, and that the casting of a different actor would have sent the film on a different trajectory. "With him we did a lot of rehearsals, which I normally do not do," she says. "He had to learn many things, like how to fight. He is such a sweet boy and was not used to screaming at anybody."

Leopold also points out how she "just hung out" with Bas and actress

Naomi Velissariou, who plays his mother Mia, as they prepared for their roles. The familiarity obviously worked as the pair form a flawless entity, and Leopold was confident enough to employ her technique of 'dancing and catching' to capture moments of delicious intimacy and spontaneity on screen.

"In the beginning I was a bit anxious that Stienette was ok with what I was doing to her script," the director reveals. "But she always watches the dailies and we always phone afterwards to talk about them. I found out very quickly that she really liked all the things I was doing. She gave me a lot of freedom."

Leopold created a mood board of music to complement the visuals she had devised. This was a departure for a director who has generally eschewed musical assistance in upping the emotional ante. The film opens with a resonant acoustic soundtrack to accompany an abstract opening scene, bathed in blood red, the significance of which become clear towards the film's conclusion.

"I would avoid music in the past for illustration. But this time I really wanted to do it. This library of moods enabled me to make the edit I wanted." But there is no Nirvana in the soundtrack. Costs aside, the band's music just wasn't appropriate. "Too literal, too obvious," concludes Leopold.



"I wanted to make something colourful and lyrical!"

Director: Nanouk Leopold **Script:** Stienette Bosklopper **Production:** Circe Films (NL) **Co-Production:** A Private View (BE), Coin Film (DE), The Film Kitchen (NL), VPRO (NL) **Sales:** Beta Cinema



Director: Barbara Bredero **Script:** Mirjam Oomkes, Laura Weeda
Production: Lemming Film (NL) **Co-Production:** Hamster Film (DE),
 A Private View (BE), KRO-NCRV (NL) **Sales:** Attraction Distribution

A tall tale



The children's film *My Giraffe* was a phenomenon at the Dutch box office in 2017, one of the most popular local films of the year. Now it is selected for Berlin Generation Kplus. Geoffrey Macnab talks to director Barbara Bredero.

My Giraffe, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund and the Production Incentive, is a family story about a young boy, Patterson Pepps, whose best friend Raf happens to be, as the title suggests, a giraffe.

Director Barbara Bredero, whose previous kids' films include the *Mister Twister* series and *Morrison Gets a Baby*, was intrigued by the project. The challenge was in depicting the friendship between the boy and the animal. She decided early on that she didn't want to rely on special effects and blue screen. Instead, she had an animatronic giraffe constructed. "If you're directing children, it's very hard for them to make believe that a tennis ball in the distance is a giraffe and is smiling at you. I thought I really needed a big puppet, something the kids

could touch," Bredero remembers of the decision.

If the giraffe was crucial to the success of the film, so was the young actor who would play Patterson Pepps – and who would be on screen in almost every scene. "That was the most important thing for me," Bredero says of the casting process. "I really had to fall in love with this person because it was going to be hard work. You are going to have to spend a lot of time together and you are going to have to put all your faith into this little boy. It is always a really big risk," she continues. The young actor was going to have to carry the movie. The director had to know that he was not going to get bored or distracted or upset over the period of production.

In the end, Bredero chose Liam de Vries, who was seven when shooting began. This was his first film. Not only did Liam show the energy levels that the director was looking for. He also had a vulnerability and innocence. Sweet-natured, very natural in front of camera and photogenic, he gave her goosebumps, she says. When she looked in his eyes, she felt she could see "the whole world. I could see his soul a little bit."

"If I, as the director, fall for somebody, I think the audience will also fall for this person," Bredero explains of the reasoning behind her decision. One advantage that inexperienced child actors tends to have over older professionals is their openness and natural quality.

They don't hide behind technique or professional tricks. The film was shot over a few weeks during the summer holidays. Bredero tried to create a party or a holiday atmosphere so that it didn't feel too much like hard work for the young star.

My Giraffe was based on a story by Annie M. G. Schmidt, a legendary figure generally acknowledged as the queen of Dutch children's

"Liam had a vulnerability and innocence, sweet-natured and very natural in front of camera"

literature. Bredero had grown up with Schmidt's stories and had always admired their humour and invention.

Having directed films and TV dramas for children, Bredero has just completed a grown-up movie, *Taal is zeg maar echt mijn ding* (due out in Dutch cinemas in early 2018.) She believes her experiences on kids' movies have made her a better director. "When you work with children, they have no background. They are clueless. You have to figure out which way works," she reflects. Working with adults was less stressful. The responsibility for the success or failure of the film wasn't just on her shoulders. "It was a big relief for me! I really had a lot of fun, but in a different way."



Sebastián Schjaer

Denis Vaslin of Rotterdam-based Volya Films is co-producer of Argentinian *The Omission*, selected for Berlin Panorama. He discusses the art of co-pro with Nick Cunningham.

In Sebastián Schjaer's debut feature, a young woman moves to an inhospitable city at the southern tip of Argentina with her boyfriend and her daughter with the sole purpose of saving money. But the plan is put in jeopardy when she meets Manuel, a young photographer, at which point she becomes emotionally overwhelmed and is unable to react to her own pain.

Co-producer Denis Vaslin first heard about the project in San Sebastian in 2015 and was impressed by director Schjaer's body of short films to date. "They were very nuanced in terms of psychology and character and direction. He has a very subtle gaze on people. He is very realistic, and his work really corresponds to real life," he underlines. The screenplay that Schjaer was developing was ambitious and Vaslin was interested, despite the difficulties that first features always entail.

He points out how they are never easy to produce and place in the market.

"But when I read the first version of the screenplay I thought he was really getting there," Vaslin continues. "The subject was interesting, about a woman who is collecting money to do something – but we don't know what that is. And she is at the end of the road, both literally and metaphorically. And then there is a big change in her life, so will she make it or not?"

The film received development support from the Hubert Bals Fund before director Schjaer took up residency in Paris, courtesy of the Cannes Cinefondation. Such was the quality of the resulting effort, Vaslin was able to apply successfully for Netherlands Film Fund + HBF minority co-production support.

One of the conditions of such funding is to spend 50% in The Netherlands. As it happened, it was more convenient for much of the technical post-production, such as colour grading, to be done in Argentina, so Volya oversaw the marketing, trailer, poster design and press representation via Herrie Film and TV in Amsterdam.

"Co-productions are never easy because of cultural differences, the physical distance in general and sometimes in terms of artistic content, but if you can overcome all these differences then you will get better films that can travel further and are not just restricted to their country of origin."

"At the same time, *The Omission* is a very local film and very typical of the new wave of Argentinian cinema. It is a very good first movie and I think it is one that deserves to be discovered in Europe and The Netherlands. The Berlin selection is a fantastic thing and the Panorama is a wonderful section to be selected for."

Also on the Volya slate is the documentary *Mrs F*, currently in production. Directed by Chris van der Vorm, the film follows activist Ifeoma Fafunwa as she takes up the challenge to stage her play HEAR WORD! about the abuse of women in the male-dominated slum of Makoko, in the lagoon of Lagos. Besides assembling an original cast of Nigeria's most acclaimed actresses, Ifeoma has cast the young women of Makoko who are subject to such daily abuse.

Volya is also financing the family movie *Totem* by Sander Burger and is developing *Black Salt*, their second feature with Marjoleine Boonstra. Docs on their roster include *About Men and Love* by Tatjana Bozic and *Earth and Freedom* by Marco de Stefanis. "The films we make must appeal on local, national and international levels," Vaslin points out. "We like societal and political subjects but ones which tell human stories. And they must be told visually. It can be a chaotic visual style – why not? – as long it corresponds to the film. And we are never repetitive."

Due South



"Very nuanced in terms of psychology, character and direction"

Director & script: Sebastian Schjaer
Production: Trapecio Cine (AR)
Co-Production: Volya Films (NL), unafilm (DE), Tareafina (AR)

Native bedfellows



Topkapi Films is co-producer on two Berlinale titles, *The Bed* (Argentina), selected for Forum and *Land*, directed by Baba Jalali, in Panorama. Geoffrey Macnab reports.

Amsterdam-based Topkapi Films has been used to working with Latin American partners on several projects, among them Adrián Biniez's *Gigante* and Ana Guevara Pose & Leticia Jorge Romero's *Tanta Agua*. "I don't know. We share the same kind of humour maybe," Topkapi's Laurette Schillings speculates, when asked just why the Dutch and Argentinians seem to get into bed together so often. "They are quite passionate about everything, which I absolutely adore. That is why I love working with them."

Schillings came across *The Bed* when she was on an EAVE workshop for producers, and met Gema Juarez Allen from Buenos Aires-based Gema Films.

"We used to bump into each other all the time at festivals and had lots of good times together," Schillings recalls of a friendship that eventually led the two women



Land ◊ Director: Babak Jalali
Production: Asmara Films (IT)
Co-production: The Cup of Tea (FR), KNM (CH), Piano (MX), Topkapi Films (NL) Sales: BAC Films

working together. At the Mar del Plata Festival, she met writer-director Mónica Lairana, with whom Gema Films was working on the film. Schillings was able to secure Dutch funding for the project from The Hubert Bals Fund. *The Bed* then went on to win the work-in-progress prize at the 2017 Holland Film Meeting Co-Pro Platform.

The Bed tells the story of a break-up. What's different here is that the man and woman are a couple in their 50s who've been together for many years. George (58) and Mabel (56) have one last day before they split up for good. The removal truck is already on the way and the family

home has been sold. They're not quite sure how to spend their last moments together...

Described as a 'modern western about Indians, Whites, distance, longing, roadwork and abuse', Babak Jalali's *Land* explores the issue of alcoholism within a Native American community, through the story of a family awaiting the return of the body of their dead G.I. son from Iraq. "We followed Babak's work for a long time," comments Schillings. "We finally met in Rotterdam when he presented *Radio Dreams*, winning a Tiger award. We were very impressed by him and decided that we would love to work with him, and therefore got

involved in his new project *Land*. It also helped that there were some very solid producers attached such as Ginevra Elkann (Asmara Films, Italy) and Christophe Audeguis from The Cup of Tea (France)." The film is handled for world sales by Bac Films in Paris.

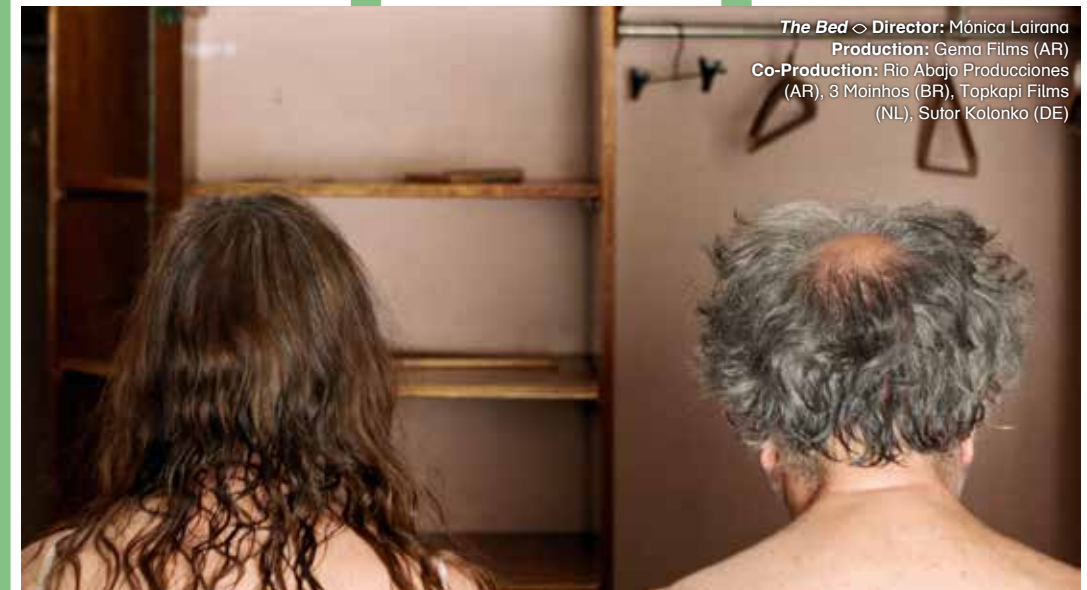
This are just two of several provocative art house movies on which Schillings has worked. She was the co-producer on Belgian director Felix Van Groeningen's Oscar-nominated film *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, about a very intense relationship between a Flemish country singer and a tattoo artist. She also co-produced Danish director Thomas Vinterberg's *The Commune*. The Topkapi

executive suggests that the starting point for any co-production is the relationship with the other producer. "Co-production is so much based on trust and trust is very personal," she says.

Schillings works alongside company founders Frans van Gestel and Arnold Heslenfeld at Topkapi. "We work on our own projects... but we share our problems." Schillings' focus tends to be on new talent (although she has worked with some very established figures.) Heslenfeld oversees the legal and financial side of the business. At any given time, Schillings will have up to 10 different projects on the boil. Some may be in development; others may be at the finals stages of

post-production. "At Topkapi, we do TV series, single productions, television films and recently started to work on non-fiction projects as well," she explains, lest anyone thinks that the company is devoted only to movies.

True to form, the prolific producer has several new films likely to shoot in 2018, among them thriller *Tour De Force* from Lodewijk Crijns, which is about tailgating – "a fight in traffic that gets totally out of hand." Soon to start shooting is *Shit Happens* (working title), from Anna van der Heide, in which illness forces a family to come together. Mijke de Jong's new feature *God Only Knows* is also likely to go before the cameras this year.



The Bed ◊ Director: Mónica Lairana
Production: Gema Films (AR)
Co-Production: Rio Abajo Producciones (AR), 3 Moínhos (BR), Topkapi Films (NL), Sutor Kolonko (DE)



“I consider the impeachment a parliamentary coup d’état”



Maria Ramos’ *The Trial*, about the impeachment of Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff, is selected for Berlin Panorama.

Maria Ramos describes her latest feature-length documentary as a “political thriller: a tale of betrayal and corruption.” It focusses on the trial and removal from office in 2016 of left-wing Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff, a politician both popular (among the working classes) and reviled (by the establishment) in equal measure.

Ramos argues that fourteen uninterrupted years of left wing or Workers’ Party (PT) rule proved too much for the right-wing opposition. The difficulties brought about following the global financial crisis of 2008 were all the excuse they needed to bring what the director regards as trumped up proceedings against the president. The principal architect of the impeachment was Vice-President Michel Temer of the centre-right PMDB party and one of her former allies.

Eschewing commentary and interviews, the film offers a unique insight into the political judicial

Photo: Lula Marques

Kafka in Brazil

process via behind-the-scenes meetings between the defence team and the senators, as well as conversations with President Rousseff at the Presidential Palace as she awaits trial. “The film is about what I personally find to be a Kafkaesque process – there was no crime of responsibility. The charges were basically fiscal, namely the issuing of six budgetary decrees that might have surpassed the annual budget, and the delayed repayment of the agricultural subsidies spent by state banks. Rousseff’s accusers suggested that this was an illegal loan. There was no stolen money.”

“I consider the impeachment a parliamentary coup d’état, and the role that the media played was huge,” Ramos continues. “And then there was sabotage by the opposition, whereby everything that the government was trying to do, all the decisions and policies that had to be passed in order to avert the crisis, were not allowed through Congress. As soon as Rousseff was suspended from office, it became clear that those who impeached her had no interest in clean government but only in seizing power that they could never obtain democratically.”

The interim president Michel Temer immediately imposed a right wing, radically neo-liberal agenda that the Brazilian population would never have voted for, Ramos argues. Nine months after the impeachment, Temer was himself formally accused of corruption by the attorney general, becoming Brazil’s first

head of state to be formally charged with a crime. However, Congress voted not to put him on trial for corruption.

“The film witnesses how the impeachment triggers a political earthquake in Brazil. It proposes a reflection on the dangers and challenges facing Latin-American democracy.” A coda sequence offers a damning political and economic assessment of the country a year after Rousseff’s dismissal.

In *The Trial*, it is obvious where Ramos’ loyalties lie and she is unrepentant at having made another defiantly political film. In the past, she has held the judiciary and the political executive to account in films like *Justice* (Grand Prix at ‘Visions du Reel’, Best Film at Taiwan Int. Doc Fest, Amnesty Award at CPH: Dox), *Behave* (Grand Prix at One World, Fipresci Award at Dok-Leipzig) and *Hill of Pleasures* (Best Director – Brasilia Film Fest).

“Every film is political but this one is especially so given its subject matter. The film is an attempt to understand the complexity of this historical moment. It brings to light a different narrative than the wide-ranging media narrative that was propagated during the impeachment. The coups d’état of the 21st century are conducted without guns and without the military. Nevertheless it reveals a collapse of the democratic institutions which is echoed in many democracies throughout the world.” NC

Director: Maria Augusta Ramos
Production: Nofoco Filmes (BR)
Co-Production: Conijn Film (NL)

Then we take Berlin

Dutch talent in Berlin *Mascot* & *Kiem Holijanda*



Remy van Heugten

Two significant Dutch talents will be getting down to business at Berlinale 2018. Remy van Heugten is pitching his *Mascot* at the festival's Talent Co-Production Project Market while self-taught Sarah Veltmeyer's short film *Kiem Holijanda* is selected for Berlinale Generation. Nick Cunningham reports.

Remy Van Heugten's new project is politically and socially charged,

dealing with the proto-fascist attitudes that a young man develops as a result of his being forced to feel like an outsider. All of his life Jerry has borne a facial disfigurement which has limited his social standing and ability to make friends, and his chosen refuge becomes the football terraces where violence and racism are common currencies. Yet he is clever and as his confidence grows, so do his levels of articulacy, and he slowly assumes a firebrand populist status.

But all the time he is desperate to impress and gain the love of a mother whom he adores but for whom his new politics are anathema.

The film is produced by Joram Willink of Dutch production company BIND. In a Holland where the spectre of Geert Wilders and the politics of the right looms large, Willink articulates the urgency of the message the film drives home. "*Mascot* is a warning, an incisive film that mirrors our changing times."

Van Heugten, whose debut feature *Gluckauf* (also produced by BIND) won Golden Calves for best film, best direction, best script and best camera, concurs: "I see right-wing populist leaders like Wilders and Baudet as clever but dangerous politicians who feed the masses with anger. My fear is that the masses will become an unstoppable force. As a filmmaker I feel a responsibility to make my call to connect and not to isolate. Using my privilege as a filmmaker, straight from my underbelly, without holding back."

Adds producer Joram Willink: "Like myself, Remy is bound to tell socially engaged stories which open eyes. *Mascot* goes even further on that path with a powerful message in a very distinctive style. I admire his guts to do so. And combined with his co-operative and passionate way of working, I am grateful to work with him on the project and to present it at Berlinale market."



Sarah Veltmeyer

The career trajectory of Sarah Veltmeyer is far from regulation. Turned down from film school at the age of 23 she channelled her frustrations into a campaign of autodidacticism, working in a post-production studio by day, filming her own material by night. She eventually made a short film (*Gotta*) for €5000, which caused enough of a stir for her to raise the cash for her

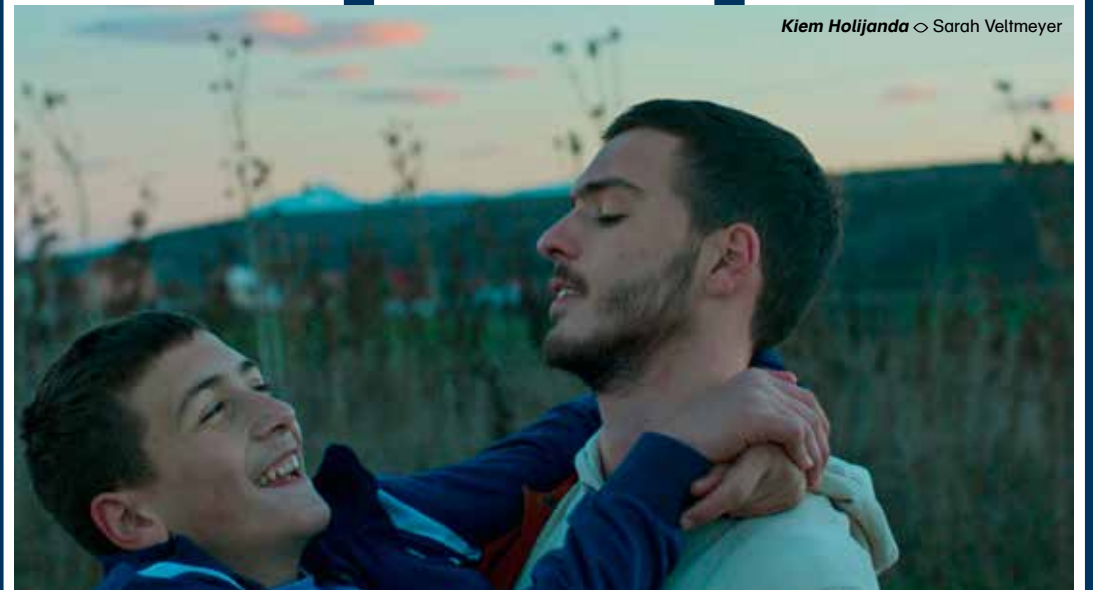
second short *Kiem Holijanda*, which was selected for 2017 Golden Calf Competition (Netherlands Film Festival) and now for Berlinale Generation Shorts Competition.

In the film, co-written with Tom Bakker and set in Kosovo, Andi (13) becomes obsessed both by the phone of his brother Florist (20) and the free access to a Dutch porn star that an accompanying phone card offers. So much so that he is oblivious to his older sibling's decision to leave the family home.

"I was in Kosovo for a month doing research and finding locations, and I found my actors, and we went back a month later to shoot the whole thing in five days," explains

Veltmeyer. "I think my films are very personal and small. Even though I am almost 30 I am interested in telling coming of age stories – this is still one of the themes that I understand best."

In early January the director received backing from the Film Fund to develop the 10-minute short *Never Forget*, which she describes as two girls on a balcony, one of them contemplating her first kiss with a boy waiting downstairs. "I always look to introduce something strange or funny, so it's not just serious drama – I like to introduce a light touch. I like using colour and everything is very quiet in my films. I try to create a world that can be understood everywhere."



Kiem Holijanda © Sarah Veltmeyer

Rebel with a cause

Young Dutch actor Jonas Smulders is selected as The Netherlands' Shooting Star at Berlin 2018. He talks to Geoffrey Macnab.

Jonas Smulders will be taking time out from his studies to attend the Berlinale. The Golden Calf-winning actor, chosen as the Dutch representative at Berlin's Shooting Stars event for Europe's brightest young acting talent, recently started at The Netherlands Film School on a directing course. Not that moving behind the camera means he is giving up the day job. "For me, directing and acting are quite different but in some ways they're quite quite similar," Smulders says of the challenge of telling stories through images, text and movement.

As for being a Shooting Star, he is looking forward to it, given that his predecessors include Carice van Houten, Marwan Kenzari and Sylvia Hoeks, all with international careers in full swing. "I hope to talk with international casting directors, meet a lot of actors my own age and to get a sense of the film climate in Europe. I really want to try acting in different languages."

Smulders, born in 1994, comes from an artistic background. His father is a well-known painter and his mother was a dancer. Both have encouraged him in his career. When he was 16, one of his mother's friends, an Italian director, cast him in a tiny role in a film, thereby

helping to kickstart his career. Many other roles in film and TV soon followed and he won a Golden Calf for his performance in Mees Peijnenburg's TV drama *We Will Never Be Royals*, about a troubled teenage brother and sister growing up on their own in child protection. The young actor already had close links with Peijnenburg, having appeared in the fast rising director's award-winning graduation short *Even Cowboys Get to Cry*, which also screened at the Berlinale.

The first big screen role Smulders landed was in Menno Meyjes' adaptation of Herman Koch's vicious, satirical novel, *The Dinner*. He played one of the privileged middle-class kids who commit an act of random violence – and whose wealthy parents try very hard to help them escape the consequences of their actions.

"That was the first big part I got in a film. I auditioned three times," Smulders remembers of his role. "The film says a lot about how you raise your kids. A lot of spoilt kids act without responsibility and don't think over what they do." It helped that being a "rebel teenager" himself, he could identify with this aspect of his character easily enough.

On *The Dinner*, Smulders was delighted to have the chance to work with Jacob Derwig, one of the most respected contemporary stage and screen actors in The Netherlands, and to have the chance

to meet writer Koch. However, ask the actor about his inspiration and he doesn't cite well known movie actors or directors. Instead, he mentions the great Dutch mime artist René van 't Hof. "He tries to tell stories with movement and not just with text. In film, it is really important to be aware of how you move." Smulders talks with admiration of how the Van 't Hof can use facial expressions and tiny gestures to make audiences understand a character.

Smulders is fast gaining international recognition. In 2015, he won the Spotlight European Breakthrough Award at Kilkenny's Subtitle fest and is represented by Janey van Ierland of leading talent agency Number 9 Management.

"A Golden Calf for his performance in Mees Peijnenburg's We Will Never Be Royals"

However, his experience on sets has also whetted his appetite to write and direct. He already has one directorial credit to his name, *TEX*, which he made last year, just before he started at the Film Academy. Now, he is busy studying direction. No, the other students don't cut him extra slack or treat him with added respect because he is already a successful actor. If anything, the reverse is the case. "I think I have to work twice as hard – but I think that is a good thing!"



Photo: Janey van Ierland

Just daring



EYE's Head of Exhibitions Jaap Guldemond talks to Geoffrey Macnab about the current event, dedicated to the work of Jesper Just.

Danish artist Jesper Just's new exhibition has been specifically tailored to the angular and modernist building. Those looking at the EYE Museum from Central Station across the river have likened it to both a slingback shoe and, predictably, to a spaceship. Those inside it can't help but notice the sloping ceilings and tilted walls – some of which veer inwards, some which veer outwards.

"We are actually focusing our exhibition programme on the interface between visual art and cinema," is how Jaap Guldemond explains the thinking behind the

"One of Just's fascinations is the impact of architecture on human behaviour"

show. Cinema, he adds, should be about more than just feature films projected on regular screens.

One of Jesper Just's fascinations is the impact of architecture on human behaviour. That's the reason why Guldemond thought it a very good idea to let him loose on the EYE building. "From an architectural point of view, the exhibition spaces within the building are unconv-

entional and pose challenges, and I thought it could be interesting to ask Jesper to react to this with his work," Guldemond says. "He is the first artist who dares to project directly onto these tilted walls."

For other exhibitions, Guldemond and his colleagues have been inventing many different ways to cope with the difficult, but challenging, space. They have installed free hanging screens, put in fake walls and changed the routing within the space in such a way that the building's idiosyncrasies are hidden from visitors' eyes. Just, though, "used the architecture as it is. He is definitely the first one who dared to do this."

In preparation for the exhibition, Just took his time to study the building. He worked out how best to display the work in the space. The exhibition consists of three major installations. Images are projected in ingenious and unconventional fashion across corners, which make them bend and seem to fracture, on floors and on huge walls. He doesn't provide any benches. Spectators therefore have to stand as they engage with the work. Just wants them on the move and wants to disorientate the viewer.

The artist is never the type to exhibit this work in a predictable way. When he had a show at the Palais De Tokyo in Paris, he chose to set his installations up in the basement rather than in the usual galleries. At EYE, too, he wanted to startle the

public. "Many people are astounded by the way he uses architecture," says Guldemond. "Regular visitors have

"We are focusing our programme on the interface between visual art and cinema"

never seen the building used in such a way. It's not an easy exhibition but it is a very radical one."

For his film installations Just uses cinematographic tools – professional actors, sophisticated lighting etc – but has always made it clear he has no interest in making feature films. As he frequently declares, he is not against mainstream films ("I watch them myself") but he has no desire to make them.

Jesper Just has been a major figure in the international art world for around 15 years. Guldemond first had the chance to look at his work in depth when the Dane held a solo exhibition at the Witte de With in Rotterdam in 2007. "It was the first time that I really saw a couple of works that were beautifully connected to each other."

The exhibition has certainly convinced Guldemond that the "weird spaces" of EYE are as much an advantage as a hindrance. "It is not easy to work with the given space, but if you manage to use the specifics of it then the exhibition will benefit significantly."

Short and to the point



Shady El-Hamus

Clermont Ferrand has selected two Dutch shorts for its 30th International Competition, Zara Dwinger's *Sirene* and Shady El-Hamus' *Nightshade*. Nick Cunningham talks to the filmmakers.

Shady El-Hamus' *Nightshade*, made with Film Fund Support, has already received a number of plaudits, not least as Dutch submission to the Academy in the Live Action Short category. The director describes the film as a 'dark coming-of-age' tale, about an 11-year old boy helping his father to transport refugees across Europe in a van.

"What kicked it off was CCTV footage of a minivan on a highway in Europe – suddenly it flips 180 degrees and then comes to a halt," explains El-Hamus. "Then you see the driver get out and run away into the woods and from the back of the van about thirty people come out. There seemed no end to them, kids as well. That sparked something in me and I realised there was a story. With the whole refugee crisis going there are so many stories, but we wanted to focus on the driver. What is going on there?"



Nightshade ◊
Director: Shady El-Hamus
Script: Jeroen Scholten van Aschat
Production: The Rogues (NL)

"Specifically we have a boy who wants his father's recognition and love – he wants to be seen by him, as we all do," continues the director. "So there is this tragedy in him trying to gain something without realising what road he is going down. His loss of innocence is something that really stands out at the end."

El-Hamus is currently in Berlin co-writing his feature debut with Jeroen Scholten van Aschat. The film is set in Amsterdam over a

24-hour period and is "a much more light-hearted whirlwind film, one that leaves you energised," he says. Indicating that he has as much a head for business as for creative filmmaking, he adds: "I am looking for the middle ground between art and commerce. I want to tell honest stories about people, but at the same time I want people to see the film, so I am constantly thinking about how to build a relationship with an audience, how to get them into the theatre and how to keep them engaged."



Zara Dwinger

Zara Dwinger's *Sirene* may be a graduation film (2017) but it is an audacious one, and suggests that hers is a talent which will transfer well to long-form filmmaking. What sets her film apart is how it elevates the quotidian lives of two adolescents by asking one to undergo radical physical change (no spoilers here).

It is a directorial choice that is both clear and effective, and as daring for

the actor as it was for the director herself. The film could have been be a love story but Dwinger decided to take a more nuanced path.

That said, throughout all phases of the production (from pre- through to post- and editing) Dwinger was so immersed in managing logistics and fighting fires that she was barely aware of how well the film was turning out. She got an idea, however, after it was selected for Student Competition at Utrecht 2017, and was made fully aware after it won three prizes at the Keep An Eye Graduation Film Festival (best script as well as audience and press awards).

"I really like to let people have an insight into the worlds of others, and I like beautiful images," says

Dwinger. "I love how form can sweep you away on this dream journey. I like a bit of realism but I think it is really nice when a film is larger than life, not really of this world but dreamier and more exaggerated."

Dwinger has just received funding for her next short, *Julia and Juliet*, a tragic love story set in a youth detention centre. She will shoot the film in early Summer 2018 before its premiere at the Netherlands Film Festival in September. "I like stories about young people. It was the most formative, weird and beautiful period of my life. I was depressed a lot, and so it made a mark on whom I am, but I also experienced some lovely things too – those first experiences when you are still new to the world."



Sirene ◊
Director: Zara Dwinger
Script: Randy Oost
Production: The Netherlands Film Academy



Director & script: Rosto **Production:**
Studio Rosto A.D **Co-Production:**
Autour de Minuit (FR), A Private View (BE)
Sales: Autour de Minuit

Gospel of Rosto



Clermont Ferrand is rolling out the red carpet for Dutch artist/filmmaker/musician Rosto who is world-premiering *Reruns*, the final part of his *Thee Wreckers Tetralogy*. He talks to Nick Cunningham about his films, his music, his upcoming feature – and his late birth.

According to Rosto he was born at the age of 17, not when he left his mother's womb. This was, he says, the point at which his mind had developed into the recognisable entity it has remained ever since. "At that age the clay is not soft anymore and you are not so susceptible to what is happening around you. The only thing that subsequently happens is some chipping of the clay, but it is beyond remodelling. I have more or less remained the same person since then, except for more cracks – and losing bits and pieces here and there."

Rosto's observation on age is poignant given how his dynamic and fantastical hybrid short *Reruns* presents numerous versions of his fabricated self, from 5-year-old boy through to his performance as a headless singer with his band *Thee*

Wreckers (themselves fabricated versions of the band *The Wreckers* that Rosto led years before). The wildly beautiful graphic film is also a study both of wish fulfilment (as we descend beneath the waves towards Rosto's dream subterranean city) and the skewed nature of dreams and memories that we often try to make sense of by applying false narratives.

"As soon as we wake up we start cheating and turn our dream into some kind of linear thing that makes a little bit of sense, and then we start modifying and revising it even further. And memories work in exactly the same way. Memories are not what happened, but they *become* what happened."

In the city, various age iterations of Rosto visit his old school, ruled over by a teacher who multiplies in form as he mocks his former pupil. He visits his grandmother's parlour where the motion trail created by his younger blond self [the images are culled from old Super 8 home footage] creates dramatic comet-tail patterns in the frame. "We rebuilt my grandmother's room using the footage and modern technology and by mapping the textures of the Super 8 onto it. The little blond boy is really me. Then we see my character growing up until he is so old that he is dead. So the film is not just about my past, it is also about my future. I hope not my near future."

The previous parts of the *Thee Wreckers Tetralogy* are *No Place like*

Home, *Lonely Bones* and *Splintertime*, which are all satellites around what Rosto calls the mothership 'Mind My Gap', an online graphic novel of 26 episodes that illustrate his unique and idiosyncratic universe. That series itself was inspired by the songs that Rosto wrote when the band were together.

Now the mothership is set to take flight in the form of a feature, also named *Mind My Gap*. "For the past two years I have been developing the script with the Film Fund. Themes and certain characters will return

"The film is not just about my past, it is also about my future"

and like in the New Testament, where there are four gospels, the story is basically the same but told from different perspectives. This feature version is another gospel version of the same story I have always been working with."

Rosto is thrilled to be guest of honour at Clermont Ferrand, a festival that has supported him throughout his career. "Being a special guest and a having special programme for the entire tetralogy as well as an accompanying documentary about the films and the music and the band – that feels fantastic because Clermont is so important and so cool. It is a huge honour that they always keep a special spot for me."

When Harry met Johan



Harry Bos

Geoffrey Macnab talks to Harry Bos, newly appointed doc programmer for the Pompidou Centre in Paris, who is staging a retrospective of the works of legendary Dutch filmmaker Johan van der Keuken.

If there is one Dutch filmmaker revered in France, it is Johan van der Keuken (1938-2001). The documentary director and photographer tackled many different subjects in his work. He made political films, essay movies and also told deeply personal family stories. He loved Paris and it is fitting that his work is being celebrated in an extensive retrospective organised through the Public Information Library (BPI) of the Pompidou Centre.

“He is the most French of Dutch documentary filmmakers. He has always been very widely acclaimed at the BPI, the documentary festival Cinéma Du Réel and at other cinemas in France,” says Harry Bos, the Dutch cinephile programming the retrospective, and who knew Van der Keuken well.

The critical reaction from the French press has been close to euphoric.

“All the French newspapers have been very enthusiastic about the whole thing,” Bos says.

Although extensive, the Pompidou Centre event won't cover every part of its subject's career. The director's fiction films from the early 1960s have been left out, the focus being mainly documentary. However, Bos promises that the retrospective, which runs until the middle of March, will screen some unknown short films as well as the director's best-known works. Treats in store include such rarities as *Young Pretty Girls* (1959), which was recently re-discovered in the television archives in Holland, and titles such as the landmark *Amsterdam Global Village* (1996) and *The Flat Jungle* (1978). There are also films about him made by other directors, for example Ramon Gieling's *Living With Your Eyes* (1997).

Prominent French directors have been queuing up to introduce Van der Keuken's films. (Serge Daney refers to him as “the hovering Dutchman”). What they relish about him isn't just his filmmaking but his intellectualism – his ability to formulate ideas about his political and aesthetic approach.

Bos himself has been based in Paris for 26 years now. When he first arrived in the city and started working for the Dutch Cultural Centre, he made immediate contact with Van der Keuken. As a film programmer, he always screened the filmmaker's works. “I met him

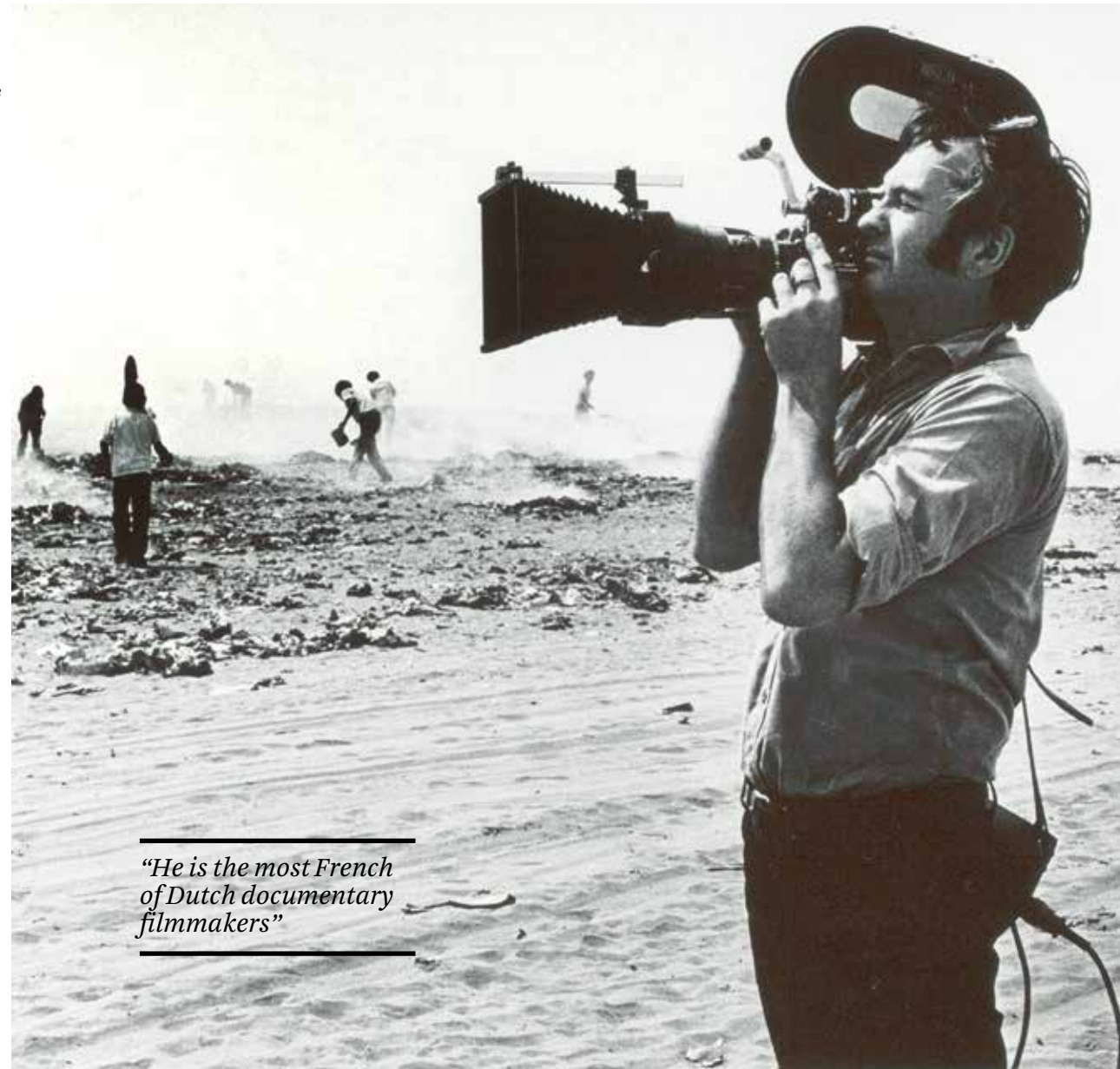
frequently,” Bos recalls. “He has always been for me a very impressive personality. He was the kind of man who always sees through you. He was very kind but at the same time extremely sharp.” As a young programmer, Bos was one of the first viewers allowed to see *Amsterdam Global Village*, the director's four-hour homage to his native city and its very colourful inhabitants.

Ask Bos about his favourite among the master's films and he pauses. That is not the type of question a film curator likes to answer. He has seen all the documentaries many times. Nonetheless, he can't disguise his awe at the sheer originality of films like *Blind Kid I* and *II* (1964 and 1966) which gives us a sense of the world as it is experienced by a boy who can't see but has an uncanny sense of sound. “It's a unique experience of how to visualise reality for blind children.”

Bos also enthuses about one of the director's final films, *The Long Holiday* (2000), which Van der Keuken made after he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. “It's a wonderful, wonderful and very human film, so honest. It is about how to end your life... about what is important when you know you are not going to live for long.”

As for the many other documentaries, Bos struggles to choose between them. “It's difficult. That's one of the reasons why I invited other people to speak about the films!”

Centre Pompidou Retrospective Johan van der Keuken



“He is the most French of Dutch documentary filmmakers”

Director Johan van der Keuken

Dutch industry news

Short Cuts

Messi and Maud Live

The Dutch drama *Messi and Maud*, directed by Marleen Jonkman, is one of six selections for the 2018 IFFR Live extravaganza that streams simultaneously to dozens of cinemas across Europe. The film world-premiered at Toronto in 2017 and IFFR marks its European premiere.

In the film, a chance encounter between a Dutch woman and a Chilean trucker's young son turns into an epic adventure across Chile's breathtaking landscapes, and down a road of discovery.



Messi and Maud ◊ Marleen Jonkman

The screenplay was written by Daan Gielis. "The journey of *Messi and Maud* started at CineMart in 2013, so it's a great honour to be back at IFFR and to show the film on such an extraordinary platform as IFFR Live," she comments. "It will not only be shown in 50 theatres simultaneously, but we can also present the all-woman team that has delivered it to an international audience."

These are filmmaker Marleen Jonkman, actress Rifka Lodeizen, screen writer Daan Gielis and producer Danielle Guirguis of Smarthouse Films.



The Tale ◊ Jennifer Fox

Binger to Sundance

Ground-breaking US director Jennifer Fox reflects on the role that the Binger FilmLab played in helping her to develop *The Tale*, selected for Sundance US Dramatic Comp 2018. Starring Laura Dern, the film follows a successful journalist as she unravels the disturbing and coded truth within a story she wrote as a child 40 years before.

"I absolutely loved my time at the Binger Director Lab [in 2012]," she says. "My script was in a very early phase when I went there and I felt so fortunate to be chosen. Coming from documentary, it gave me a chance to grow new fiction storytelling skills and learn to work with actors, not just on set, but also as a tool of script development."

"As part of the Lab, I ended up shooting a sample scene that I had rewritten during the course with fantastic Dutch actors. The sample was so good, it helped me to build the project and bring on producers in the states. The Binger Directing Lab was a priceless experience that completely contributed to me developing and finally realizing *The Tale*."

Methusalem at Script Station

Dutch filmmaker Floor van der Meulen will present the first Dutch project ever selected for Berlinale Talents Script Station. In the tragic-comic Dutch/Slovenian/German co-pro, produced by Derk-Jan Warrink of Kepler Film, just as a woman is preparing to break the happy news of her pregnancy to her family, she is trumped by her father who announces that he is done with life and intends to end it all on his next birthday. How is one supposed to react to such news?

"For me, the quality of the script is in the combination of a bold, somewhat absurdist and urgent story set against the backdrop of our observation of a contemporary society that is drifting," comments director Van der Meulen. "We live in a 24/7 designed hyper-reality without realizing how surreal and erratic life has become. It's a story about death, love, fathers and daughters... that might sound heavy, but rather than it being melodramatic we created down to earth characters with a light tone, that makes room for humour. Cinema as mirror."



Floor van der Meulen



Frühlings Erwachen ◊ Richard Oswald

EYE on Weimar

EYE Film Museum will deliver the restored version of German classic *Frühlings Erwachen* (1929, Richard Oswald) to Berlin in February for the festival's 'Weimar Cinema Revisited' retrospective. The tragedy concerns two young adults growing up in

oppressive middle-class society, finding ways to fight back and discovering as individuals who they truly are. The film was distributed in The Netherlands by the Filmliga between 1929 and 1933. The EYE restoration was undertaken in 2008.

The retrospective of the 68th Berlin International Film Festival will focus on the great variety of cinema in the Weimar era. A hundred years ago, at the end of World War I, one of the most productive and influential phases in German filmmaking began, a creative era that went on to shape the international perception of the country's film culture, even to the present day. For the event, the festival will present a total of 28 programmes of narrative, documentary, and short films made between 1918 and 1933.

Slamdance goes Polaroid

The Slamdance Film Festival has selected Dutch Willem Baptist's debut *Instant Dreams* for its Documentary Feature Competition. The film, shot on cinemascope, investigates the strange and continuing allure of the Polaroid. "For me, this movie is a quest on the grand scale," Baptist says of the decision to shoot in the wide format. "I wanted to do a great epic movie... but, of course, on a very modest budget."

The film, produced by veteran (and prolific) documentary producer Pieter van Huystee, isn't intended as a conventional history of the Polaroid camera. Baptist's real fascination is with "our strange relationship with photographic images, and how we try



Instant Dreams ◊ Willem Baptist

to capture our dreams", as well as with his subjects – the artists, scientists and authors who were even more obsessed by Polaroid than he was, such as German artist Stefanie Schneider, who uses her last remaining Polaroid stock to stage a shoot in the California desert, and New York Magazine editor Christopher Bonanos.

IFFR Live for Binger alumnus



Pin Cushion ◊ Deborah Haywood

IFFR Live has selected Deborah Haywood's *Pin Cushion* for simultaneous pan-Euro streaming treatment. Reflecting the all-female vibe among the directors chosen for the programme, *Pin Cushion* is an all-girl, gothic fairy tale set in the British working-class suburbs. Single mother Lyn and her teenage daughter Iona are excited about their new life in a new town, but the transition doesn't go as smoothly as planned. Both keep up a pretence to protect each other from the dangerous outside world...

The screenplay was developed during the 2011-12 Writer's Lab at the Binger in Amsterdam. Director Haywood had previously honed her talent at Judith Weston's *Directing Actors* Lab (Binger FilmLab, 2008). "Binger was a protective bubble where I got to explore my characters and my world, and then some really smart experts and collaborators took a look and helped diagnose what my subconscious wanted to write about," she comments.



Berlinale Generation
Kplus

Ceres by Janet van den Brand

In her feature-length documentary debut, world-premiering in Berlinale Generation Kplus, Dutch director Janet van den Brand accompanies her four young protagonists as they go about their daily agricultural business. Piglets are born, as well as calves,

lambs and chicks. Sowing, planting and harvesting and butchering. No matter what, the camera is close by, alongside Koen, Daan, Sven and Jeanine. They help with the farm work from a young age, learning to take responsibility – and how to say farewell. Will they

run their parents' farms one day? Van den Brand presents a realistic picture of life and work in agriculture – one without idealism, and yet full of poetry. **The film is produced by Diplodokus (Belgium) and co-produced with Rotterdam-based Tangerine Tree.**