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#Doc Issue



Fassaert's *A Family Affair*
IDFA opener

A Strange Love Affair with Ego
in IDFA comp

Van Huystee debuts
with *Bosch* doc

Appel back with
Eritrea Stars

Oscar® submissions
An insider's guide

Issue #21 November 2015 IDFA



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Index

3 View from the Edge Claire Aguilar, Director of Programming and Industry Engagement, Sheffield Doc/Fest

4-5 Family values Tom Fassaert opens IDFA with *A Family Affair*, a portrait of a mysterious and disagreeable grandmother

6-7 Altered ego *A Strange Love Affair with Ego*, Ester Gould's study of egotism and narcissism, plays in IDFA competition

8-9 Players in exile John Appel is back at IDFA with his doc about the Eritrean football team that absconded to Holland

10-11 On the shop floor How does a medium-sized family-run car dealership survive the crisis, asks Catherine van Campen in *Garage 2.0*

12-13 Inside view Sophia Luvàrà's *Inside The Chinese Closet* explores what it means to be a young gay adult in China

14-15 Bosch debut Producer Pieter van Huystee kickstarts his directing career with a study of Jheronimus Bosch, the most cinematic of all Dutch masters

16-17 Dutch idol Suzanne Raes profiles Dutch pop star and national treasure Boudewijn de Groot

18-19 Beauty of the beast Walther Grotenhuis and co-director wife Cinta Forger capture the work of Dutch artist Theo Jansen

21-22 Patient perspective Meral Uslu's first-person account of her therapy following diagnosis of breast cancer

22-23 Statement of intent New Film Fund documentary consultant Suzanne van Voorst explains her rationale

24-25 Evolving lab IDFA Doclab chief Caspar Sonnen on this year's smorgasboard of cutting-edge digital story-telling

26-27 Transit to Berlin Top doc seller Jan Rofekamp takes over as head of studies at Berlin's Documentary Campus Masterschool

28-31 Talent spotting The wave of new Dutch doc talent that will soon break on international shores

32-33 It's all Academic®
The Academy's Tom Oyer explains how to submit your doc for an Oscar

34-35 Short Cuts News from the Dutch film industry

36 Star profile Morgan Knibbe, whose *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning* will compete in the 88th Academy Awards® - Documentary Feature Category

Cover still: *A Family Affair* > Tom Fassaert
Production: Conijn Film, www.conijnfilm.nl
See page 4

Still: *I'll Fly Higher* See page 32

View from the edge



Claire Aguilar: Director of Programming and Industry Engagement, Sheffield Doc/Fest

In many ways the Dutch are the envy of other documentary industries. The Netherlands is a small country but its doc support is substantial both from the funds and broadcasters, also in terms of the distribution options – there are many robust distributors in Holland. Dutch documentary is really up there in terms of what can be achieved.

When I was at ITVS I worked with half a dozen diverse and highly talented directors and producers who were either Dutch or based in the Netherlands. We commissioned, for example, two films by Klaartje Quirijns, *The Dictator Hunter*, about a man trying to find a war criminal in Chad, and *Peace vs Justice* that was based in Uganda, and which she produced with another very strong Dutch producer, Bruno Felix from Submarine. They weren't Dutch subject matter but they were incredible human rights films. Another really notable film was the co-production *This is my Picture*

When I was Dead by Mahmoud Al Massad. It was a hybrid fictional doc about Palestine and the right to exist but it had a very strong Dutch production team attached. Releasing that film in the US was a challenge because of its content, but the Dutch were very supportive of us, both the funders and broadcaster VPRO.

Dutch documentary filmmakers are renowned the world over. Leonard Retel Helmrich is a master – his films are absolutely unique. Heddy Honigmann also makes very distinctive and amazing films on numerous different subjects, and many from her native Peru. And then there are the masters of Dutch cinema, such as Joris Ivens and Johan van der Keuken, whose films were so beautifully stylized, so personal and aesthetically amazing.

From a Sheffield perspective, there is a real personal link with the whole IDFA team. We are colleagues and we share information and resources. Also IDFA has a big tradition in programming human rights and social documentaries, so we have that affinity as well. But we are also complementary timing-wise – we don't have to compete for films. Which means that when I go to IDFA I can really focus on the titles that I want in Sheffield, even if they won't be European premieres, because they will be really high calibre and have that IDFA imprimatur – and that's fine with us!

COLOPHON

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Family values



Dutch filmmaker Tom Fassaert opens IDFA 2015 with his highly personal *A Family Affair*. He speaks to Geoffrey Macnab.

When he was a young child growing up in the Netherlands, Tom Fassaert believed that his father “didn’t have any parents.” They were never talked about. Fassaert was therefore surprised when his father started making tape recordings and videos to send to an old lady living far away in South Africa. This was Tom’s grandmother, the woman who had put Tom’s father into an orphanage and now the subject of Fassaert’s new film *A Family Affair*.

Tom’s father felt deeply ambivalent about the way he had been abandoned but still yearned to bring the family back together. That was why he decided to visit his mother in South Africa and eventually to go and live there. “We said goodbye to all our family in Holland and we tried to build a new life there,” Fassaert recalls of events when he was 10 years old. Almost immediately, his father and grandmother argued again. The dream of the family reunion was

quickly shattered. “The fact was that she was gone again and we were there (in South Africa) by ourselves.” What’s more, Fassaert’s mother was deeply homesick and yearned to go back to Holland. “This put a huge stress on my parents’ relationship which eventually led them to break up.”

In his documentary, Fassaert sets out to explore the strange dynamics of his own family and behaviour by his grandmother that, at least to outside eyes, was very hard to understand. She was a complicated and glamorous woman - a kind of *femme fatale*. When Fassaert met her as a child, he had an immediate impression of “this grand lady who had control of everything and everyone.” He didn’t feel the “warmth or cosiness” that you would expect from a grandmother. She was a former model who had had many lovers and several husbands, now living a grand lifestyle.

While making his documentary, Fassaert was able to discover more and more about his mysterious relative who caused so much discord in his family. And yes, Fassaert acknowledges, his film underlines the truth in that famous opening sentence of Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*: Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

Throughout the course of the film, the director began to understand his grandmother’s behaviour. Her

seeming cruelty to her own children was partly prompted by what she had endured as a child at the hands of her own father. Fassaert’s intention in the film wasn’t to “judge” her, rather to try and understand how and why she suppressed her maternal feelings for so long.

“Of course, she wasn’t a perfect mother,” the director declares. The grandmother always made decisions in her own interests, not those of her kids. Even so, as he spent time with her, Fassaert felt sympathy for her. He began to see her as someone with her own problems, not as a Cruella De Ville-like archetype.

In the doc, whose post-production was supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, the director makes use of the recordings, videos, old 16mm films and photographs that his family made over several generations. This includes material shot by his great-grandfather in the 1920s.

Fassaert can’t hide his delight that his second feature has been chosen to open arguably the most prestigious documentary festival in the world. “It is nerve-wracking,” he admits. “I am pretty nervous because I am still working on it right now. It is not just sound mixing. I’m still editing it...I am very proud but also extremely nervous because the film is so very close to myself.”

A Family Affair ◊ Tom Fassaert



Production: Conijn Film, www.conijnfilm.nl

Altered ego



Ester Gould

Filmmaker Ester Gould talks to Melanie Goodfellow about her IDFA competition title *A Strange Love Affair with Ego*.

From childhood to her twenties, filmmaker Ester Gould was in awe of her older sister Rowan, a larger-than-life figure with a huge ego and belief in her central position in the universe. While Gould remained at home, Rowan set off around the world, touching down in various cities from London to Los Angeles, in an endless quest for success, fame and recognition.

But when these failed to materialise and mental health issues kicked in, Rowan's self-confident persona and peripatetic, bohemian existence unravelled and Gould's awe turned to concern. Inspired by these experiences, her *A Strange Love Affair with Ego*, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, explores the human affair with ego, the fragility of self-esteem and the darker side of narcissism as it manifested itself in her sister.

It is an intricate essayistic, partly biographical, multi-layered work

that is difficult to define. "I call it an ego fairy tale which goes bad," says Gould. "It's a struggle to pin down because it's an odd construction. You end up asking, is it a documentary, or is it a fiction film?"

The trajectory of Rowan's life is captured through a running commentary of one-line title cards based on thoughts about ego, exchanges between the sisters and Gould's memories. A series of portraits of real-life female characters – from a self-confident school girl in Scotland to a party event organiser in Los Angeles, whose glitzy public persona is tragically at odds with her humdrum, debt-ridden reality – evoke the stages of Rowan's life and explore the subject of ego at the same time.

"I never wanted to make a direct portrait of my sister... not least because I don't have enough home video. I thought it would be interesting instead to look for female characters who reminded me of Rowan in specific locations and who would also say something about ego in that phase of life." A haunting score by Marc Lizier at Amsterdam-based sound company Klink, envelopes the words and images, evoking a sense of expectation and disappointment.

There is not a single photo or frame of Rowan anywhere in the main body of the film and yet it is imbued with her presence, while at the same

time exploring the topic of narcissism. Beyond being an exploration of ego, it is also a touching portrait of sisterly bonds. Gould says she did not intend to make such a personal work when she first submitted her proposal to the Netherlands Film Fund some five years ago. "Because of my sister, I have a soft spot for people with big egos. It started out with a different slightly tongue-in-cheek title, *How To Become a Narcissist*. I thought it would be funnier," says Gould.

"Our personal story was simply a paragraph in the section marked motivation," she continues. "I wanted to make a film about narcissism linked to what I had experienced with Rowan but as I developed the project it became clearer and clearer to me that the personal story was not just the motivation but also the backbone."

Produced by Zuidenwind Filmproductions, *A Strange Love Affair with Ego* is Gould's first solo feature documentary after the 2010 *Shout*, co-directed with Sabine Lubbe Bakker, and a number of shorts and TV productions.

Alongside *Ego*, Gould has also been working with Reijer Zwaan on former IDFA Forum project *Strike a Pose* about the seven young male dancers who joined Madonna on her controversial Truth or Dare tour in 1990. The work is expected to be ready in time for Berlin 2016.

***A Strange Love Affair with Ego* ◊ Ester Gould**



Production: Zuidenwind Filmproductions, www.zuidenwind.nl

Players in exile



John Appel

John Appel is back at IDFA but with a film in a very different register. He explains everything to Geoffrey Macnab.

Three years ago, John Appel's *Wrong Time, Wrong Place* opened IDFA. This was a film about the aftermath of the massacre on the small Norwegian island of Utoya. His new film *Eritrea Stars*, which received OASE development support and screens in IDFA Competition for Dutch Doc, is about the national football team of Eritrea in exile. "I wanted to make a more light-hearted film this time," Appel stresses.

Midway through a football tournament in Uganda in 2012, the team members decided to flee their homeland. They left their hotel, ostensibly to go on a shopping trip, but never returned. The Eritrean football players embarked on an epic adventure which (a year and a half later) took them to the Netherlands, where they were granted asylum. They ended up in a small town called Gorinchem.

On camera, the players are reluctant to criticise conditions in Eritrea.

They fear reprisals against their family members back home. After all, Eritrea is a dictatorship, caught in a well-nigh permanent war with Ethiopia. Its citizens are drafted against their will into the army, for which they are paid a pittance and their rights are taken away.

"You can't flee a dictatorship without the help of a people smuggler," journalist Habtom Yohannes observes at the very start of the film. Appel uses Yohannes to give viewers a sense of the problems the team members faced back at home and in leaving Eritrea - problems they themselves steadfastly refuse to discuss on camera. Yohannes, himself a former refugee, is one of the few Eritreans living in the Netherlands prepared to talk openly about the political situation in his homeland. In the documentary, the journalist's explicit, outspoken and often disturbing observations about Eritrean politics and society are contrasted with the extreme reticence of the players themselves, who are only able to hint at what they have endured.

"For me, the complexity of the story was striking. When I started making the film, they (the players) were hesitating in co-operating with me or with anybody. They didn't want to talk about politics. They didn't want to talk about the whole trip they made from Uganda to the Netherlands," the director observes.

What's more, adjusting to Dutch life took time for the players. There was the cold and the rain. The Netherlands was far more permissive than Eritrea. This was a place where men could marry men and women could marry women.

Appel films the team members as they resume their lives as sportsmen. The footballers dream of joining big clubs like Ajax or Feyenoord. They want to build new lives and possibly get married. In the short-term, at least, they are deeply frustrated. They are prey to boredom and are suspicious of one another. The municipality treats them as if they are children. They don't fully understand the new culture in which they are trying to integrate and this puts them under stress. The players need to stick together. Unless the coaches have at least 11 players, enough to put a team on the pitch, they won't be able to secure funding. At the same time, the players all want to find professional clubs and to go their own ways.

This is a doc in which the politics and the suffering are hinted at but rarely referred to explicitly. "Many things are untold in this film," Appel observes. "That was one of my challenges in making it... I had to do it implicitly. I knew it wasn't going to be about killings and about human rights. They wouldn't talk about it. I was just curious if the team could manage to be a team after one year in exile in the Netherlands."

Eritrea Stars ◇ John Appel



*'I wanted to make a more
light-hearted film this time'*

Production: VPRO/Appel&Honigmann

On the shop floor



Catherine van Campen

In the funny and warm-hearted Teledoc film *Garage 2.0* the head of a family car business looks to survive the economic downturn by demanding the very best from his employees. Director Catherine van Campen goes into overdrive with Nick Cunningham.

1.0 is obsolete. 2.0 is the new industry standard. If this model can apply to the worldwide web then it is just as applicable to the car sales industry - in this case to the moderately sized Kooijman dealership, located in the Dutch provinces. Because of the recession, Kooijman is just about keeping its head above water, so boss Gert is determined to rally the troops, get them motivated and drive sales once more into the 2.0 stratosphere.

But there will always be hurdles for Gert to overcome if his company is to perform to optimum standard. Ad, the company's chief salesman, who has clogged arteries, is suffering a slump in confidence and resents the slick (and considerably younger) trainer who comes in to pep up his performance. Gerda in accounts has just been promoted

but cannot bear the stress of white collar work patterns following the death of her father. Ton the repairman goes about his business speaking in an impenetrable Dutch dialect while Gert's retired dad Arie comes in everyday, as if to remind everybody who kick-started the whole enterprise in the first place.

What's more, every customer wants to haggle over price, even Cor whose previous seventeen cars were purchased from Gert or his father. So Gert is forced to walk a managerial tightrope. At times he is harsh and critical of his workers, at others he is very much prepared to extend a comforting arm.

Throughout the film it is obvious that van Campen's sympathies lie with the blue collar personnel on the shop floor. "Oh yeah, I wanted to focus on ordinary working class people in the crisis," she agrees. And so her gaze lingers on them as they try to close sales, call family members after less than satisfactory meetings with boss Gert or when they gather in the smoking room (complete with girlie Pirelli calendar) for unabashed flirting, banter and gossip.

"Those scenes in the smoking room are like a play, they were completely natural in their conversations, as if the camera wasn't there," she says.


Despite van Campen's emphasis on the worker contingent, boss Gert is

nevertheless the real star of the show, always at ease, avuncular and articulate, and with enough business nous to inspire our confidence in Kooijman's future. "But I told him a million times, if you want me to make a commercial about your company then it isn't going to work, so let's not waste our time," van Campen points out. "If I was to make a successful film then he had to be honest in all his conversations. And I think he was. I think maybe he was a bit harsher when we were not around but he was pretty tough during many scenes."

In many senses *Garage 2.0* is "typically Dutch", as van Campen puts it, given its small scale and its regional accents (although these are less evident in a sub-titled version), but she also underlines the film's universality. This is a scenario that could as easily be played out in Detroit, Dublin or Delhi.

"When it was finished we realized that it is not just a Dutch story because people everywhere will recognise themselves, and that makes it very universal," van Campen affirms. "It's all about retaining family values, but at the same time the 2.0 world has turned up in every company, and every manager these days wants to run a 2.0 system. That is what makes my film something more than a local flavour story."

Garage 2.0 ◇ Catherine van Campen



*'It is not just a Dutch
story, people
everywhere will
recognise
themselves'*

Production: Zuidenwind Filmproductions **Sales:** NPO sales, www.nposales.nl

Inside view



Director Sophia Luvarà and producer Iris Lammertsma talk to Melanie Goodfellow about delving into China's gay scene for IDFA Dutch Documentary Competition contender *Inside the Chinese Closet*.

Sophia Luvarà's *Inside The Chinese Closet*, supported by the Netherlands Film Fund, explores what it means to be a young gay adult in China through a touching portrait of two Shanghai residents juggling personal desires with parental expectations.

Homosexuality was legalised in China in 1997 but it is still very much taboo, especially in the provinces. "It's legal but gay people still have a tough time linked to society's views," says Luvarà. It took the Italian filmmaker three years to find people who were willing to talk on camera about their experiences as a gay person. "I met many, many people with great stories but they all backed out at the last minute," she recounts. "This went on for years. I was going back and forth, staying a month at a time."

She credits Dutch producers Boudewijn Koole and Iris Lammertsma at Amsterdam-based Witfilm with keeping the project on track. "I was upfront with them from the start that it would be difficult to convince people to take part, but Boudewijn and Iris trusted me and believed that I could make the film, although sometimes I didn't believe it myself," says Luvarà. "I would sometimes think what am I doing here? Am I crazy? Knowing they were there was a huge help."

In the end, Luvarà managed to convince two young Shanghai residents – Andy and Cherry – to participate in the film on the proviso it was never broadcast in China. "I also wanted to get people's families involved too but that was nearly impossible – very often people didn't even want me to meet them – but I did manage to meet Cherry's family and interview her mother."

At first, Luvarà had planned to revolve the documentary around the phenomenon of fake marriages between gay youngsters as a ruse to keep families happy. But then, another, very Chinese, angle came to the fore: the pressure on the only children of China's 30-year 'one child' policy to give their parents a grandchild. The documentary touches on the subject of fake partnerships but homes in more closely on the issue of bearing a child as Andy and Cherry explore options such as surrogacy.

Producer Lammertsma first connected with Luvarà while attending the Sheffield Doc/Fest some four years ago. "I'd just started working with Witfilm, having moved into documentary from theatre," she says. "I'd put the word out that I was looking for new talents and Sophia sought me out. She had a simple trailer and we thought it had the makings of an attractive story."

"Then she found Andy, who is one of the main characters," continues Lammertsma. "He is this very nice, loveable guy who is under huge pressure from his father to get married and have a child. It gives a particular insight into Chinese society through a specific community."

Other upcoming Witfilm films include *Transit Havana*, about Cuban President Raul Castro's gay rights campaigner daughter Mariela Castro and the country's progressive transgender stance, and *The Three Lives of My Father*, exploring Chinese mass migration through the family of a second-generation Chinese-Dutch director.

"We've really grown a lot recently. We used to have two or three documentaries a year and now we have nine in production," says Lammertsma. "We focus on author-driven works. We're really looking for a different way to tell a story, which is more artistic or experimental."

Inside the Chinese Closet ◊ Sophia Luvarà

*'Gay people still
have a tough time
linked to society's
views'*

Production: Witfilm **Sales:** Films Transit, www.filmstransit.com

Bosch debut



Pieter van Huystee

Pieter van Huystee has long been one of the best connected producers in the Dutch doc scene. What he has never done before is direct a film of his own. That is why financiers and festival directors alike were so surprised when the veteran doc guru decided that he would be the one calling the shots on the ambitious new film, *Jheronimus Bosch, Touched by the Devil*.

Van Huystee's original plan was simple. He intended to follow the team of art historians and researchers analysing the paintings by the visionary and apocalyptic medieval painter, ahead of a Dutch exhibition to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Bosch's death.

"I would join the research team at the museums, and together with them take a good look at the paintings," van Huystee explains. "Their research was going to take a long time, nearly five years. So every time I came back from a visit to the museums, I would edit a short clip of the visit. In this way it became clear what the story was, which was growing under my eyes. In that

sense it was more that the story was looking for me than the other way around. My main idea was to have a good look at the experts looking at the paintings. And at the same time I could have a good look at the paintings too. And because very little is known about the life of Jheronimus Bosch I was liberated from the task of making a mere biography of the painter."

This film may mark van Huystee's directorial debut but his creative/editorial input to the documentaries he has produced over the past twenty years has been significant. "I started off behind a stills camera, working for more than 5 years as a reportage photographer for illustrated magazines," he points out. "After that I worked for ten years for IDTV as creative director. And for the past 20 years I had the privilege to work with outstanding directors like Johan van der Keuken, Heddy Honigmann and many others. During these years I spent most of my time helping them develop, research and shape their films. Sometimes I would bring them the *ideas* for their films. So the idea came very naturally to make a documentary myself."

No, Bosch was not one of his childhood obsessions. As someone growing up in the Netherlands, he was aware of the artist's work but didn't have specialist knowledge. Early in his research for the doc, the filmmaker spent a weekend in

Madrid with his wife so he could study Bosch's most famous works The Garden of Earthly Delights and The Seven Deadly sins at first hand in the Prado Museum. It struck him immediately that these immensely detailed paintings, with their imagery of heaven and hell, were perfect for filmmaking. The camera and editing could reveal aspects of the work that the native eye would miss.

Van Huystee's own attitude toward Bosch isn't that of the typical art historian. He looked at the works, in all their darkness and raw honesty, in a very moral way and saw them as a primer for better living. Bosch, he felt, was prepared to confront his demons head-on in works such as The Seven Deadly Sins (itself the subject of keen speculation as to its authenticity), and the filmmaker wanted to do something similar himself. While his film aims to remind contemporary cinemagoers that Bosch did astonishing work - 'he is a medieval painter, who cares?' is an attitude the film aims to overcome - van Huystee suggests that Bosch is confronting viewers with the evil in themselves.

"But for me the biggest thrill of this film was to see the small details of his paintings (sometimes not bigger than a view centimeters) projected on a 6 x 10 metre screen. To enjoy the paintings as you never did before. Its a big adventure in a detailed world," van Huystee concludes.

Jheronimus Bosch, *Touched by the Devil* ◊

Pieter van Huystee

'The biggest thrill of this film was to see the small details of his paintings'



Production: Pieter van Huystee Film & TV **Sales:** Films Transit, www.filmstransit.com

Dutch idol



Suzanne Raes

Dutch documentarian Suzanne Raes is gearing up for IDFA 2015 with her feature-length *Boudewijn de Groot - Come Closer* in Dutch Doc competition. The director talks to Nick Cunningham.

Boudewijn de Groot may be largely unknown to international audiences, but he enjoys an iconic status within Dutch popular culture. Starting out as a crooner in the early 1960s, he moved through the phases of protest singer, hippie and drug-influenced psychodelio, assuming the characteristics and looks of international pop counterparts such as Jacques Brel, George Harrison and Jim Morrison, before immersing himself into more introspective self-penned works.

De Groot's upbringing was traumatic. His mother died in a Japanese camp in 1944 when he was just a year old. Even though the family moved back to the Netherlands soon after, his father felt compelled to return to the Dutch East Indies to "top up his pension", which meant that Boudewijn and his two siblings were separated into different foster

families. He suffered a further separation from his "second mother", his Aunt Alie, at the age of seven when his father re-married, removing Boudewijn from a life of domestic harmony.

As Raes shows in her film, while Boudewijn elicits much devotion from an army of fans, friends, family members and colleagues, he finds it difficult to return these affections in equal measure, possibly because of the psychological trauma he suffered in early life. As his son Marcel reflects: "Emotionally speaking, he is completely unfathomable."

"I was really enthusiastic to make this film because he is really one of the heroes from my youth," says director Raes of her reaction to broadcaster NTR's commission. "But of course I then had to meet him, and I thought after two hours that I cannot make a film about this man as he is so inside himself. This is not going to work. I met his wife, and that was very enjoyable, but he was just sitting there being on another planet. I was on the verge of saying 'nice to meet you, but I cannot make a film about someone who cannot look me in the eye'."

So Raes had to find a way of countering de Groot's resistance, and so she asked to see the place where he wrote and played his music, at which point he began to open up. Then she decided to let the

people from his past tell his story through their memories and reflections, and at the same time allow the audience to become better acquainted with him as he collaborates with colleagues on new songs. The film was shot after a 'farewell to the past concert' in which he played his popular material for the final time.

But the film isn't all moody introspection, far from it. Actor Jeroen Krabbé describes the delicious sense of (literally) naked freedom that the swinging 1960s allowed him to explore with his friend Boudewijn. (The pair had a bet as to who would be famous first. Boudewijn won.) The black and white footage from experimental films and photos of increasingly Bacchanalian 72-hour parties remind us of the revolutionary culture from which de Groot's artistry sprung. And his musical output encourages numerous epithets from his collaborators. He is referred to as a "born story-teller" with a voice that was "special, warm and mysterious, unadorned, straight to the heart". Another contributor concludes he is "the ultimate exponent of the 60s".

Also selected for IDFA 2015 is *Need for Meat* (Panorama) by Marijn Frank whom Raes mentored during the production. The film documents Frank's attempts to come to terms with her meat addiction by taking an internship at a slaughterhouse.

Boudewijn de Groot - Come Closer ◇

Suzanne Raes



Dir/Script: Suzanne Raes **Production:** Fabie Hulsebos for Docmakers

Beauty of the Beast



Walter Grotenhuis talks to Melanie Goodfellow about capturing the work of Dutch artist Theo Jansen alongside co-director wife Cinta Forger.

Husband and wife team Walther Grotenhuis and Cinta Forger's *A Boy's Dream* captures the life and work of Dutch artist and "kinetic sculptor" Theo Jansen, the renowned creator of a series of wind-powered machines called Strandbeests, or beach animals.

Jansen has spent a quarter of a century building these vast, intricate structures, mainly out of PVC pipes, tie wraps and canvas, on a beach near the Dutch capital of The Hague as well as in a workshop in his home city of Delft.

Combining art and engineering, the former physics degree dropout says his aim is to create "a new form of artificial life", fuelled only by wind-power. "We liked his structures but what also attracted us to Theo Jansen was the fact that he has spent more than 25 years working on these creatures, either going to the beach every day during

the summer, or at his atelier in Delft in the winter, and always with the same enthusiasm," says Grotenhuis.

He and Forger connected with Jansen through friends, sending him their previous works on artists, which include *Tajiri's Labyrinth* (2000), about reclusive Netherlands-based US/Japanese artist Shinkichi Tajiri who died in 2009, and a film on satirical Dutch cartoonist Bernard Willem Holtrop, best-known for his work for Charlie Hebdo and France Libération. "We said we'd like to follow you and make a movie about your life and how your personal and artistic life coincide - and that's how it started," recounts Grotenhuis.

The directors spent three years observing Jansen at work in The Netherlands and also when he took his creatures on the road to Japan and the US. "We'd film a few days at a time. It's not hard to be around him. He's a fairy-tale teller and a very charming fellow," says Grotenhuis.

The resulting work follows Jansen's journey from inventive young boy with dreams of becoming a pilot, which were dashed due to poor eyesight, through to his early experiments with self-propelled flight and his embrace of art and technology to create the beach animals. The hardest aspect of making the film, says Grotenhuis, was capturing the animals on the move. "We'd turn up with our

cameras to capture shots of them moving but very often they do not work - they break a leg or the wind is too strong. A lot of things have to come together for them to work. We'd spend all day on the beach and come back with nothing," recounts Grotenhuis.

Grotenhuis and Forger are now developing a work about a man suffering from mysophobia, an obsessive-compulsive disorder revolving around a fear of germs and dirt, which manifests itself in acts such as repeated hand washing. "We like to make documentaries about worlds we do not understand. This can take us anywhere."

The pair's *It Might Be Dark Tomorrow* (2011), for example, followed the quest for happiness and identity of a young deaf and blind woman, while other films have explored mixed marriages, a classic motorbike club and the stigma of having AIDS in Kenya, Thailand and Brazil.

"It doesn't matter whether it's the moon, a forest in Brazil or plastic tubes. We always want to go deeper. Capturing Jansen's work was an adventure because it took us into a completely new world which is all of his making. There are no other creatures like this in the world. It's a completely original idea and that's what makes it quite so amazing."

A Boy's Dream ◊

Walther Grotenhuis and Cinta Forger

*'He has spent more than 25 years
working on these creatures'*



Script: Sarah Vos **Production:** Olympic Films

Patient perspective



Meral Uslu's latest film, about her diagnosis with breast cancer, premieres in IDFA mid-length competition. She talks to Geoffrey Macnab.

It is two years now since Meral Uslu was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her left breast had grown bigger than the right one. At the time, she was 51 and her first thoughts were that this swelling was a result of the menopause. "I thought maybe the other breasts would grow bigger too and I ignored it," the filmmaker recalls of the first signs of her illness.

At first, Uslu had no desire at all to make a film about her condition. Then, she decided, she was a filmmaker and this was just about the only subject available to her for the time being. Ironically, completely by chance, Uslu had just finished working as the cinematographer on Sacha Polak's doc *New Boobs* in which the young director, who learns she carries a cancer gene, decided to have her breast removed. (Uslu is Polak's stepmother.) No sooner had she completed this film than she learned about her own cancer.

What makes *My Cancer* unique is that the director gives viewers the impression that they are in the patient's chair. Everything is filmed from her perspective. The film is almost entirely focused on her therapy. One or two other patients ("my breast buddies" as Uslu calls them) also feature. "I have been a filmmaker for 30 years but I have never made a film like this. Nor have I seen a film like this," the director states. "It is a film in which the camera is the patient and the doctors are talking in the camera. You don't see me. You see all the time my therapists and they are all talking to me."

The doc was started as a digital diary. The doctors were open to the idea. Her editor Floor Rodenberg was also encouraging, and told her to work on a proper script and to secure funding.

Uslu's treatment took place at two hospitals and was shot over a period of around 18 months. She agreed to show the doctors and therapists *My Cancer* at a very early stage. "I said to them you will see the film before it is picture locked." To her relief, at this pre-premiere, the doctors all gave the film their blessing - even if it took them by surprise. They had never before seen a record of the effect their treatment had on patients. "They thought the film was wonderful and they had no comments!" The doctors now plan to show the film to their patients.

How did Uslu decide to end the film? She ponders the question. "I decided to end it about half a year ago when I had my new breast and there was no nipple," she finally volunteers. "My therapists were showing me what kind they could make." As they fussed around her with an artificial plastic nipple, asking if it was the right size and if she was happy with it, she decided that would make a good end point.

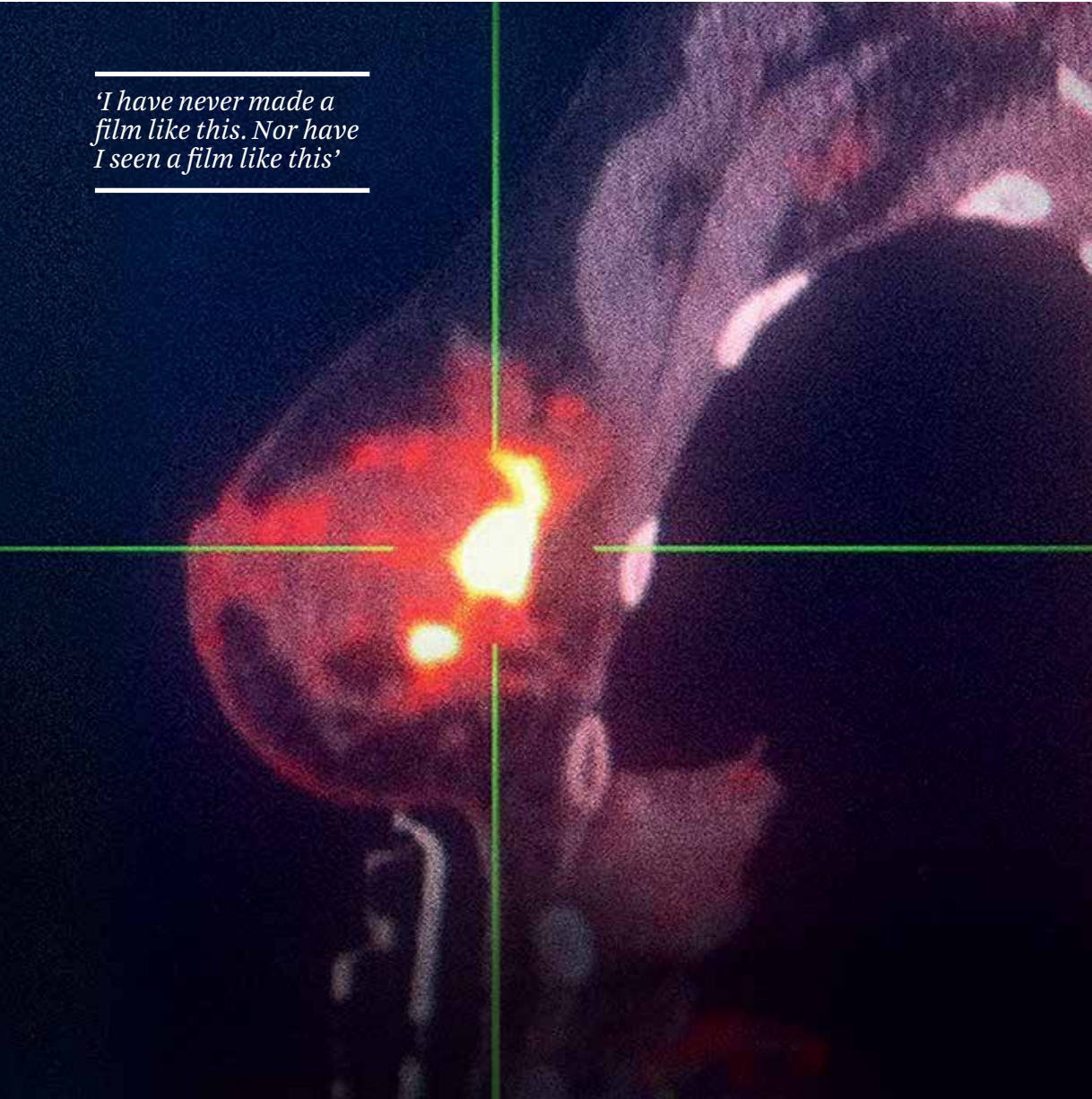
This may be a film about breast cancer but, as Uslu's remarks about the documentary underline, it comes with plenty of humour too. "I always make films that have heavy stories with humour in them," she explains of her approach.

Uslu, who makes fiction as well as docs, already has two new projects in the pipeline. One is a documentary about the Dutch embassy in Beirut, a tiny establishment but one with responsibilities that stretch right across the Middle East. The other, also a documentary, is about two brothers adopted from Brazil when very young who went on to kill three people. The film looks at the court case and the anguished debates it has provoked.

In the meantime, straight after IDFA, *My Cancer* will be shown on Dutch TV at prime time - a sure sign that this is one cancer film with a populist touch.

My Cancer ◇ Meral Uslu

*'I have never made a
film like this. Nor have
I seen a film like this'*



Script: Lies Janssen **Production:** CEM Media

A portrait of Suzanne van Voorst, a woman with short brown hair, wearing glasses and a dark blue cardigan. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a solid light blue.

*'The role of the
Fund in Dutch
documentary is
very much as the
enhancer of the art'*

Film Fund documentary consultant Suzanne van Voorst

Statement of intent

Earlier this year documentary producer Suzanne van Voorst took over as the Film Fund's documentary consultant. She talks about her approach to the role with Nick Cunningham.

The Netherlands Film Fund's new documentary consultant Suzanne van Voorst sets out her stall early in our interview. In many ways there has been little need for change, she concedes. Her predecessors Pieter Fleury and Niek Koppen, both directors, were keen advocates of co-pro, as she is, and she is as proud of her country's doc tradition as most of her professional counterparts, citing its considerable output and the laudable funding mechanisms in place that maintain documentary excellence.

What van Voorst really advocates for though is a re-definition of the Fund's investment in the genre, not just financially but in pure aesthetic terms too. "The role of the Fund in Dutch documentary is very much as the enhancer of the art. Our films should have the ambition to explore film language, and not just to look at the world in an interesting way – obviously *all* documentaries should do that. They should have filmic ambition and make no compromises in how the story is told. The creative documentary is a place to go for genuine artistic freedom and to explore new ways of telling or visualizing the story."

Nor should there be any restrictions placed upon the form, she argues. Complacency must be rooted out. Quality content must be delivered in the most ambitious, vital and visually stimulating way.

"I wouldn't aim for higher standards but I would certainly aim for *different* standards. The Dutch tradition is in observational documentary. I don't think that this has run its course exactly but it has become stale over the past years and we really need to explore the many new ways to tell a story. There is the risk of it becoming formulaic – you just observe some people and your subject and, hey presto, a documentary will ensue. No, the way of looking at documentaries must be given more life. Maybe the filmmaker should be more opinionated when telling his or her story. Or maybe they should find another radical way to approach their subject. These are things that I would really like to stimulate."

Van Voorst concedes that advising on who does and who doesn't receive funding is an invidious part of the job, but once these decisions are taken the business of creative support can begin.

"I have always liked the content part of documentary producing the most – I was never much of a financing fiend. I see it as an engagement with the filmmakers. You think about how you can help them make the

optimal film that is somewhere within them waiting to be found, and that is the same in my role at the Fund," she stresses. "Obviously you are less engaged than the actual producer and more on the sidelines, but I really like being able to discuss the project at development stage and at the start of its realization, and then again in the edit. That is a really interesting and challenging and stimulating process."

The controversial axing of the Dutch Cultural Media Fund in 2017 will make the role of the Film Fund more vital in upholding artistic values, van Voorst points out. The Media Fund currently invests over €16 million in programmes for national and regional broadcast, of which approximately €8 million is earmarked for documentary.

"I think the current role of the Media Fund will more or less be incorporated by the broadcasters themselves," she stresses. "Obviously if the money comes from within television, then the pressure on the project is even greater than it is now. We should very much engage with the broadcasters and collaborate with them on projects, but they have different objectives than we do, and therefore I think that will make the role of the Film Fund as the standard bearer for artistic freedom and ambition that much more important."

Evolving lab

IDFA DocLab founder and curator Caspar Sonnen talks to Melanie Goodfellow about this year's edition of the cutting-edge digital storytelling showcase.

An immersive experience combining the sounds and smells surrounding US President John F. Kennedy's assassination, in which the participant lies enclosed in a morgue drawer, might seem like an installation more suited to an avant-garde gallery than a documentary festival.

But Dutch Marcel van Brakel and Frederik Duerinck's macabre *Famous Deaths* will be just one of the many experimental works on display at IDFA's DocLab, based at De Brakke Grond Flemish Arts Centre in central Amsterdam during IDFA 2015. "It explores the sense of smell as a narrative device," says DocLab founder and curator Caspar Sonnen, adding wryly. "It's perhaps the most daunting project we have this year."

Sonnen created DocLab in 2007 in response to the way in which the internet and the digital revolution were impacting upon documentary storytelling. Today, it is one of the most important digital storytelling showcases in the world alongside events like the New Frontier exhibition at the Sundance Film Festival and Tribeca Storyscapes. "The internet is amongst one of the impactful inventions of mankind.

It's impossible to think about the documentary art form and not include the digital revolution," says Sonnen.

From the beginning, Sonnen was keen to keep the selection criteria open rather than tying the event to one particular form of digital storytelling. "We look at the treatment of factual reality in any digital medium other than linear film. That is a very open and complicated definition to work with and yet it gave us the creative freedom to work with the projects that we love," he says.

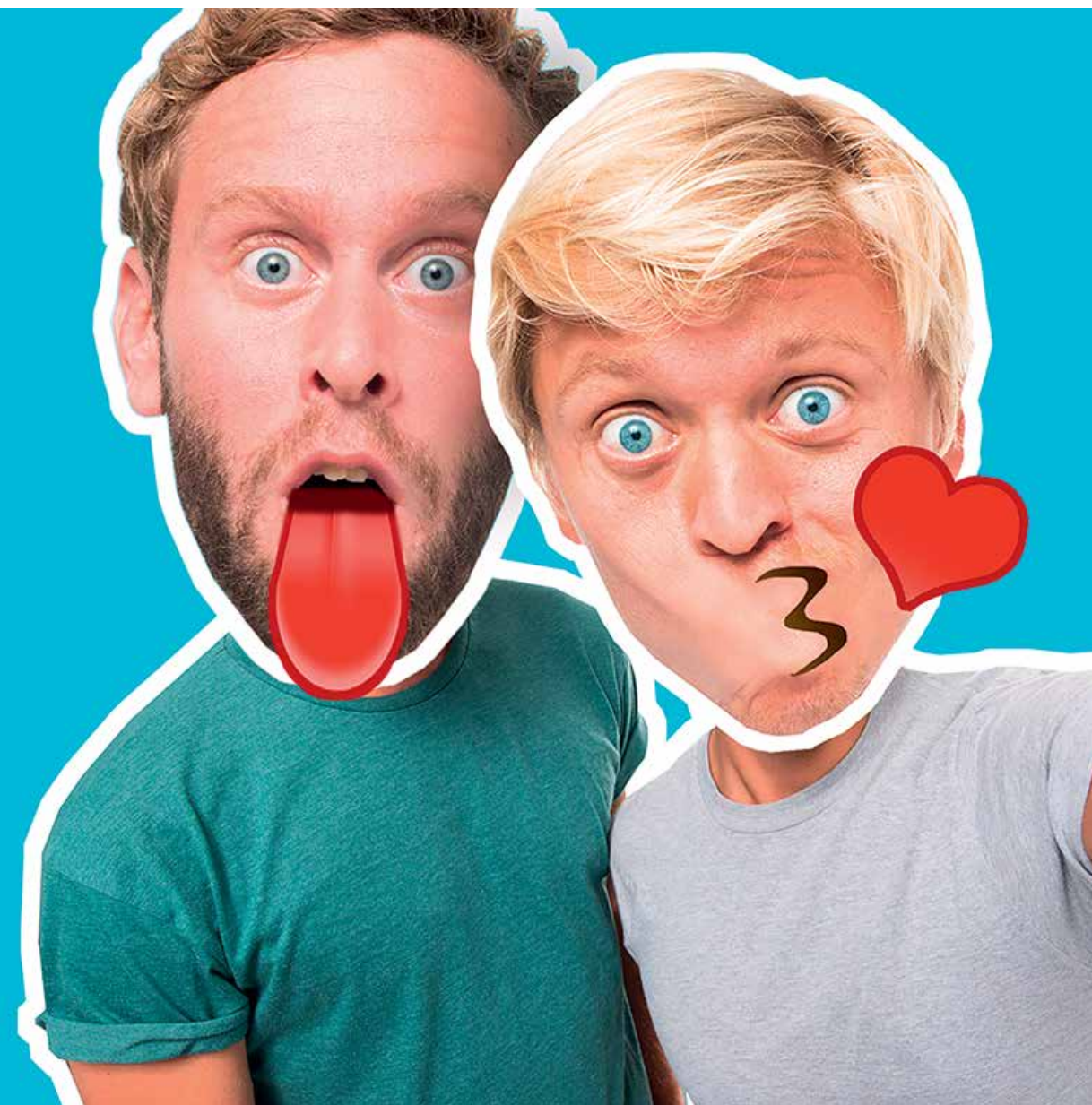
For this reason, DocLab's selection and focus is constantly evolving. If, three or four years ago, docs playing with the touch-based functionality of the iPad were all the rage, this year's "big thing" is virtual reality, Sonnen stresses. "We already looked at VR last year but since then the scene has exploded. What's interesting is that it's a very distinct new medium, unlike a lot of interactive story-telling projects which are harder to pinpoint."

Virtual reality works showing in the IDFA DocLab Competition for Digital Storytelling include Dutch Jan Rothuizen's *Drawing Room*, British Aaron Bradbury's *LoVR* and Gabo Arora's *Waves of Grace*, about an Ebola survivor in Liberia who uses her immunity to care for orphaned children.

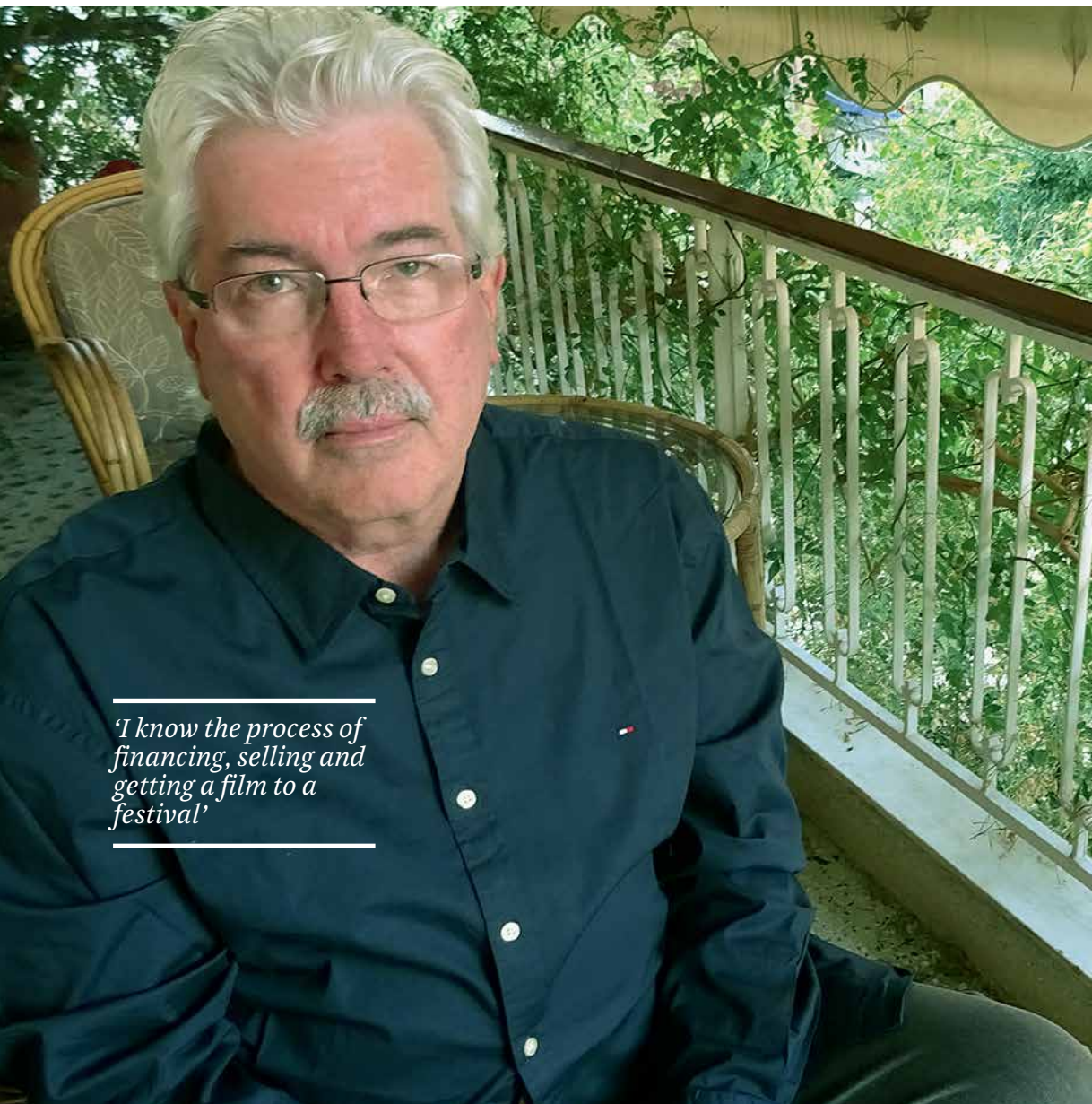
Sonnen is particularly proud of illustrator Rothuizen's presence in the competition line-up. "Jan did the DocLab Academy two years ago and got inspired to actually go into interactive," says Sonnen, referring to DocLab's training event for Dutch and Flemish filmmakers, artists and media professionals taking place during IDFA. "He went on to make *Refugee Republic*, which we premiered last year and is now winning loads of awards all over the world, and is now back with a VR piece."

Developed during the Room On the Roof artist residency in a small room above Amsterdam's famous De Bijenkorf department store, the *Drawing Room* offers the viewer a 360° experience from the centre of Rothuizen's detailed illustrations.

Other Dutch projects on display at DocLab this year include Eefje Blankevoort and Dana Lixenberg's *Imperial Courts*, Bruno Felix and Koert van Mensvoort's *Bistro in Vitro*, about a virtual restaurant, Bert Hana's *Rebuild Fukushima*, which gets participants to construct paper replicas of buildings destroyed in the nuclear disaster, and Tim den Besten and Nicolaas Veul's *Super Stream Me*, probing internet privacy and how our lives are captured on the web. These four projects are showing in DocLab's Seamless Reality programme, that looks at the ever-blurring lines between digital and physical reality.



Super Stream Me by Tim den Besten and Nicolaas Veul



*'I know the process of
financing, selling and
getting a film to a
festival'*

Jan Rofekamp, new head of studies at the Documentary Campus Masterschool

Transit to Berlin

Documentary sales expert Jan Rofekamp talks about his new role as the head of studies at the Doc Campus Masterschool.

Netherlands native Jan Rofekamp is best known as the founding head of Films Transit International, one of the oldest sales companies in the world specialising in quality theatrical documentaries.

In addition to his sales activities, Rofekamp will be at IDFA this year with a new string to his bow as the newly appointed head of studies at the Documentary Campus Masterschool. "I think one of the reasons they picked me is because of my long experience in sales. I know the process of financing, selling and getting a film to a festival and what to do once it's selected inside-out," says Rofekamp.

Organised by the Berlin-based training and development agency Documentary Campus, the Masterschool selects 16 director-producer teams per year and helps them develop their projects over the course of four 5-day workshops running over a 10-month period. Recent alumni include Polish Hanna Polak, who developed IDFA Special Jury Award winner *Something Better to Come* with the support of the programme.

With the staff, Rofekamp will be responsible for project selection as well as appointing tutors and

shaping the content of the workshops. "It's an absolute necessity, for example, that we talk about the online world and the disruption caused by the rise of VOD and SVOD. The issue of rights is incredibly complicated these days and producers need to have a grasp of the issues before signing deals," he says.

The veteran salesman says he did not think twice about accepting the role when Documentary Campus director Donata von Perfall approached him at MIPTV this year to see if he would be interested in replacing Elizabeth McIntyre, who is taking over the reins of the Sheffield Doc/Fest as of 2016. "I didn't even ask the salary because I think it's a wonderful job," he says.

The timing was also perfect, notes Rofekamp, coming just as he was in the throes of restructuring 30-year-old Films Transit. "The company is doing well but I've decided to rein in our activities a bit and handle less films a year, with the focus on high-profile titles and maybe a bit more from the art sector," he explains.

Over the summer, he also took the decision to stop handling library sales, brokering his 200-title back catalogue to Israel-based educational rights Filmplatform.net and Ellen Windemuth's Amsterdam-based Off The Fence. Rofekamp will be busy at IDFA with four festival titles: *Guantanamo's*

Child: Omar Khadr (Masters); *Requiem for the American Dream* (Best of Fests) and two IDFA Competition for Dutch Documentary contenders, *Inside the Chinese Closet* and *Jheronimus Bosch, Touched by the Devil*. "There's a strong tradition of Dutch documentary making going back to the 50s and the 60s. I think there's something in their genes," he says.

Jheronimus Bosch, Touched by the Devil, which will be released to coincide with 500th anniversary of the 16th century master's death, is the directorial debut of Dutch producer Pieter van Huystee. "It's a wonderful documentary analysing and capturing Bosch's works in all their magnificent detail in a way you just can't see when you're in a gallery or museum, standing at two metres distance," says Rofekamp. *Inside the Chinese Closet* – exploring the challenge of being homosexual in China – is a first-time work by Italian director Sophia Luvara produced by Boudewijn Koole and Iris Lammertsma's Amsterdam-based Witfilm.

"One of the strengths of the Dutch documentary scene is the openness of the funding. *Inside the Chinese Closet*, for example, has an Italian director, Dutch producers and is shot in China. This openness makes for a very broad production and means the country produces films that travel all over the world." **Melanie Goodfellow**

New talent at IDFA

Marijn Frank Need for Meat

*World premiere IDFA Panorama.
Feature debut*



Logline Are we addicted to meat? A film that explores the dilemma between love for meat and rational arguments against the products of the meat industry.

Director's statement Eating meat has been an issue for a long time for me. I grew up in one of those macrobiotic, vegetarian families. Eating meat is for people who don't think, my Mum used to say. But when I was five I wanted to start eating meat and I've never been able to stop since. I've been wanting to be a vegetarian since I was in my twenties but somehow I didn't manage.

Working for a TV consumer program as I do I've been visiting slaughterhouses and meat factories for years. Knowing what I know and what I've seen, I should never touch another piece of meat. I eat meat against my better judgement.

But after my daughter Sally was born, three and half years ago, I thought, if I'm ever going to make

this documentary about meat, this is the moment. Because it wasn't all about me anymore, I had to decide for her too...

Next project I don't know yet! *Need for Meat* was so hardcore to make on any level that I haven't had the space to think about a next project. Some ideas are popping up, but none of them are good enough yet.

Marta Jurkiewicz Opposites

*World premiere, IDFA Competition
for Kids & Docs, 14 mins*



Logline 11-year old Myra's experience of meeting Silas (38), somebody totally different from herself, challenges her initial prejudice and encourages children to think about who they are and who they see as opposites.

Director's statement I made *Opposites* out of curiosity for what two totally different people would tell each other if they met. What do you ask somebody who you think has nothing in common with you? How do you make first contact? What stories do you tell? That was

one point of departure. The other was my fascination with the children's ideas about the people they saw as their opposites: the criminals, the drunks, the lonely. From their descriptions a whole dark world emerged, a world the kids had not much understanding of, but were nevertheless curious to explore. I hear them thinking: how do you (not) end up like this?

Next project I am working on another "encounter", this time between parents and their children. I am looking to see what ideas migrants find vital to pass onto their offspring growing up in a different country. And how much these ideas get lost in translation.

Isabel Murazal Lamberti I'll Fly Higher

*IDFA Competition for Kids & Docs,
22 mins*



Logline A Spanish road movie about two young brothers walking through the fringes of society.

Director's statement Being half-Spanish and therefore visiting Madrid every year I was shocked to learn of a very big slum not too far

from downtown Madrid. I read an article about this group of youngsters who had to walk everyday from school back to the slum because of lack of transportation or good infrastructure. There was a dangerous walk through highways, deserts, mountains etc. The image of two boys walking and walking in an endless world did not leave my head.

I decided I wanted to make a road movie where the different landscapes and the little stops they made along the way would tell us something about their excluded situation. *I'll Fly Higher* had to be a movie about exclusion as seen through the eyes of children. Symbolizing finally, the walk as a metaphor for our path in life.

Next project After *I'll Fly Higher* won the Torino Award we suddenly had the opportunity to change the script and rewrite it for a longer film. It's going to be a crossover film with a small fiction line but a lot of documentary scenes. It focuses on a young girl who is struggling with her individual longing in a collective gypsy culture.

Investing in doc talent

In 2013 the Netherlands Film Fund, CoBO Fund and broadcaster NPO launched the Teledoc Campus project in order to offer six emerging producer/director teams the opportunity to produce six 25-minute documentary films. The latest results were screened at the 2015 Netherlands Film Festival (NFF, September) ahead of their Dutch broadcast in early 2016. A further six projects have been selected for realization in 2016 ahead of next year's NFF and subsequent broadcast in 2017.

"We are very surprised and delighted with all the new documentary talent presented at Teledoc Campus," comments the Film Fund Head of Screen NL Frank Peijnenburg. "We are absolutely determined to continue with this talent initiative, to help young filmmakers at the start of their career and to introduce them early to the documentary system, institutions and community within the Netherlands. The other important thing for the Film Fund is that it underlines the cinematic importance of documentary filmmaking through visual storytelling which marks a different approach from that of the broadcasters."

Peijnenburg cites the Oscar® entry of *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning** by Morgan Knibbe as proof of the quality of emerging doc talent from the Netherlands. He also references Tom Fassaert whose *A Family Affair* opens IDFA 2015 (see page 4). "He is another great film talent. What I really appreciate is the way he is devoted to the subject, as was broadcaster KRO-NCRV who gave Tom and the film's producer Wout Conijn the opportunity to develop and work on it for a long time.

"It is a personal film, a lovely film, beautiful and moving, and it is great that it is opening an important festival like IDFA. It really underlines the position of Dutch documentary within the international film world."



*This doc was realized through a Film Fund Wildcard.

... and the talent goes on

Sjors Swierstra **The World According to Mr Khiar**

World premiere, IDFA Comp for Dutch Documentary



Logline Traumatized by his work as a war photographer for The New York Times and Vanity Fair, Dutchman Jeroen Robert Kramer decides to start a new life as an artist in Lebanon where he meets Monsieur Khiar, an elderly gentleman in whom he recognizes a better version of himself...

Director's statement I met Jeroen Robert Kramer in 2009 around the time he decided to quit his war photography. I was immediately struck by the power of his stories and intrigued by this funny, crazy and intelligent man. Years later when he first mentioned Monsieur Khiar, and told me about the importance of this old gentleman for his life and work, I connected the dots and figured this could be a beautiful story for a documentary.

In the end even I don't know for sure who Monsieur Khiar is or what he represents. And for me that's the beauty of it: the mystery keeps the

fantasy alive. When I visit Beirut I see Monsieur Khiar everywhere. In the plane from Paris to Beirut, at the airport, in a bar, when a gentleman walks along the street.

Next project I am currently working on the plan for a new film within the framework of the IDFA Media Fund workshop 2015. This documentary will be about the magical powers of the Oud, the Arabic lute.

Marinka de Jongh **Full of Dreams**

IDFA Competition for Kids & Docs / IDFA Junior, 20 mins



Logline Anne Fee (10) forms a band with Bob (24) and Olivier (25) and they all dream of becoming famous. But Bob and Olivier have learning difficulties. After they write a song about their future dreams, they start thinking: will our own future be very different from Anne Fee's?

Director's statement When I was fourteen my parents opened one of the first 'Thomas houses' in the Netherlands. Since that moment I lived together with eight mentally

disabled adults. Of course this was a life-defining experience. Twelve years later I wanted to make a film about a child that grows up in such a special house. Anne Fee shows a world which most children don't know, or even find a bit scary. Furthermore, with this film I want to show that Anne Fee, Bob and Olivier don't differ that much. But their future prospects are very different. As a child I felt guilty about that. But Bob and Olivier have shown me that, even with disorders, you can gain a lot of strength from your dreams.

Next project The warm and sometimes confrontational documentary *This is my Summer* about a group of young people with learning disabilities going on a supervised trip for the first time in their life without their parents.

Yan Ting Yuen **Mr Hu and the Temple**

World premiere, IDFA Comp for Dutch Documentary



Logline A documentary about the Chinese community in the Netherlands with the ambition to

found a Buddhist temple in the suburbs of Utrecht.

Director's statement I am fascinated by the idea of two worlds trying to come together, the earthly and the heavenly. The earthly world of the overseas Chinese community is not unknown to me, as I am a daughter of a Chinese restaurant owner in the Netherlands. And I was, just like them, very curious about that other heavenly world of Putuoshan, one of the most famous buddhist monasteries of China. Even though my mother is a Buddhist, she sent me, in a typically Chinese logical way, to a Catholic school in the west. 'Who knows, maybe that's the right faith'. Despite the repeated attempts of my religious tutors during high school, they were not able to convert me to Catholicism. Although I have a healthy suspicion of religions, I am still someone who is open to faith and divine philosophy. I can feel the beauty in a ritual, the evolution of myths and stories. Would it not be perfect, to really have something to believe in?

Next project I am in the middle of shooting *The Three Lives of my Father*, a feature-length documentary about the small personal migration story of my family, from a small Chinese village via Hong Kong to the west, reflecting the turmoils of the larger history of China.

Sophie Dros My Silicone Love

World premiere, IDFA Comp for Student Documentary, 27 mins



Logline Everard has 13 lifelike dolls. He talks with them, dresses them, has sex with them. Is he happy with this way of living or does he actually long for a real woman?

Director's statement I wanted to make a documentary about a guy who lived with his dolls for years. I once read an article about it and was extremely fascinated by this phenomenon. But it was very important for me that this film was respectful and therefore I needed a strong main character. When I met Everard I immediately knew that I could make the film with him. He told me about his love for the dolls. He also told me he understood perfectly that he was living in his own fantasy. Then I knew that that was something I wanted to portray in this film. Reality vs fantasy.

Next project A documentary about a very interesting and intelligent woman I met who also happens to be one of the most famous female bodybuilders in the world.

The fire burns brighter

Following the worldwide success of his debut doc *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning*, Morgan Knibbe is developing his fiction feature debut, based on the 'atomic soldiers' who were forced to operate within the nuclear testing zones of the Nevada Desert during the 1950s. "It is going to be based on true events, but the people who can tell me about their experiences are all dying," says Knibbe. "They have been struggling to tell their story to the world, but it has been kept secret and now many have already passed away due to illnesses caused by the ionizing radiation that was spread by the bombs they were exposed to. Only a few of the 'atomic veterans' are still alive and my research needs to be done now, before it is too late."

Knibbe is yet to settle on a Dutch producer for this film, a factor that will kickstart script development funding, he hopes. In the meantime, he is determined to tell stories in fiction form. "I just want to do this. There are definitely risks but that's what makes it exciting," he stresses. "I want to go into fictional filmmaking because I want to take a step forward in controlling the images and sounds I want to share with people."



It's all Academic®

If anyone has questions about how documentaries qualify for Oscar® consideration, Tom Oyer from the Academy of Motion Picture, Arts And Sciences (AMPAS) is the man to ask.

Following his successful visit to IDFA in 2014 the Academy's Tom Oyer will be back again this year. "It's a wonderful festival that brings together so many members of the documentary community from all over the world," he enthuses.

During his time in Amsterdam, Oyer will be explaining to filmmakers just what they need to do to have a stab at Oscar® glory. "Over the last two years, we have certainly been making more of a concerted effort to be available and to explain the process. We do understand that it is a lot to wade into if they haven't done it before."

On his visits to festivals, Oyer has realised that, as he puts it, "there is a lot of confusion out there." He hopes to be able to correct some of the myths and fallacies surrounding the Oscar® selection process as it applies to docs. "A documentary feature does require a theatrical release in the US, in both New York and Los Angeles," he explains of a key requirement for feature docs. "For the documentary short subject category, there are a couple of different ways films can qualify. They can qualify through a theatrical release in either New York

or Los Angeles but we also have a qualifying festival list. There are a number of juried awards at those festivals - films can qualify through that process."

Oscars® have been awarded to documentaries since the early 1940s. What has changed in recent years is the number of feature docs that are being submitted (there are 124 in contention this year) from all over the world. And no, not every member of the Academy watches each and every one of them in the one or two months leading up to the awards. "We provide films to our doc branch members throughout the year," Oyer clarifies. "We have a rolling submission. What we require is that when films open, they submit within 30 days of opening." The thinking here is that it is best for members to see films at their maximum point of visibility - and that is at the time of their release, when they are being marketed, reviewed and talked about.

The documentary branch at AMPAS includes directors, producers, editors and cinematographers from the doc world - "a whole community" as Oyer puts it. Some prominent Dutch doc filmmakers are now members of the Academy, Heddy Honigmann and Leonard Retel Helmrich among them. "The key thing is that they all have a background and experience in the documentary community." While

the nominees are determined by the documentary branch, the ultimate Oscar® winner is voted by the entire Academy.

The documentary form is fluid. Docs can be animated. They can have reconstructions and even dramatic elements. How does the Academy define where docs begin and fiction ends? "It is becoming more and more of a grey area," Oyer acknowledges. "I think it is very exciting to see how documentary filmmaking is evolving. We often refer filmmakers to the definition in our rules to help guide them."

Over the last 10 to 15 years, Oyer has noticed a dramatic increase in the number of docs given theatrical releases. This means there are always very rich pickings when it comes to Oscar® contenders. "There is such excitement over which films will get nominated and shortlisted and that just continues to increase."

The voters aren't afraid of polemics or controversy. There is no cosy consensus. Last year's winner was Laura Poitras' politically charged Edward Snowden doc *Citizenfour* - but a few years ago, the winner was crowd pleaser *March Of The Penguins*.

As for his mission at IDFA, Oyer wants to make it clear to filmmakers at the festival that AMPAS is "a global organisation and we definitely want filmmakers from all over to be included." **Geoffrey Macnab.**

*'Theres a lot
of confusion
out there'*



Tom Oyer, Academy of Motion Picture, Arts And Sciences

Short Cuts

Making an Impact

The Impact Academy, which will launch at IDFA 2015, is a program dedicated to documentaries that strive towards social and cultural goals, and whose success can be measured in the impact they make. The program will enable five film teams, consisting of a director, producer, impact producer and broadcaster, to develop their own impact productions.

Dutch examples of impact production, suggest program founders Hasse van Nunen and Bernadette Kuiper, include the polemical campaigns of Ireen van Ditschuyzen and Femke & Ilse van Velzen, and the initiative follows in the footsteps of, among others, the BRITDOC Foundation and the US Center for Social & Media Impact who are strong exponents of impact production. The program has the support of key stakeholders within the field: IDFA, the Netherlands Film Festival, Movies That Matter, DPN (Documentary Producers Netherlands), DDG (Documentary Directors Guild), Stichting Democratie & Media, many public broadcasters, CoBO Fund, the Media Fund and the Netherlands Film Fund.

Comments founder van Nunen: "Why give years of your life making a film when the only result is a single television broadcast or theatre release? That is no longer enough. Not for me as a producer and not for the directors I work with either. All of us want to make a difference with our films. The Impact Academy can help us do that."



Paradocs

Dutch involvement at IDFA Paradocs is high once again in 2015. Paradocs is billed as the programme where 'the periphery takes centre stage'. In the main section Ben van Lieshout's *Sketches of Siberia* follows the trail taken by 19th Century Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen into the Siberian interior to reveal how little has changed, citing the ongoing influence of the Orthodox Church and the deterioration of the road network system during the rainy season.

A core element of Paradocs 2015 is the Amsterdam Art Weekend during which 14 recent video art-works are presented at the De Rijksakademie and De Ateliers galleries. Dutch films in the section range from Florian and Michael Quistrebert's 6-minute parody

of op-art (*Stripe 3*) to Sander Breure and Witte van Hulzen's up close and personal (sometimes disconcertingly so) portrait of two lovers, *Phi and Laurine*.

The other nine Dutch works in Amsterdam Art Week selection include Feiko Beckers' *A Conversation is a Risk to Lose Your Own Opinion*, about how conversations about trivia can enter the realms of the absurd, and IDFA regular Barbara Visser's *Manual/2* in which she plays with her personal history by revisiting four of her iconic past works.

New Treaties

Two new major co-production treaties have been signed by the Netherlands, both designed to enhance and facilitate co-operation between Dutch filmmakers and their international counterparts. On October 26 a treaty was signed with China and another will shortly be signed with South Africa. The two treaties are intended to boost the film industries of the signature parties as well help develop greater cultural and economic exchange.

Films that are co-produced within each established framework are considered by both countries as 'national films' and the treaties allow qualifying co-productions to access financing possibilities in both countries.

Doreen Boonekamp, CEO of the Netherlands Film Fund comments on the China agreement: "The treaty offers thorough opportunities for inspiring new collaborations between the Dutch and Chinese film industry. It creates the conditions to increase artistic and technical collaboration leading to a true cultural exchange between both countries and to explore each other's markets and audiences."

On the South Africa accord Boonekamp adds: "The agreement between The Netherlands and South Africa has been eagerly awaited by professionals in both countries in order to create a comprehensive structure for creative bilateral co-operation. Our experience in the



exchange of talent and expertise between the Netherlands and South Africa through international co-productions such as *Black Butterflies* by Paula van der Oest and *The Price of Sugar* by Jean van de Velde reveals a promising potential of opportunities for closer co-operation."

The Netherlands has co-production treaties with France, Canada and Germany and will sign a treaty with the French-speaking Community of Belgium in the near future.

Dutch turn to Natural Disorder



Dutch doc houses Zuidenwind Film-productions and docLander are co-producers on the "black-humoured" IDFA 2015 competition selection

Natural Disorder (Denmark), directed by Christian Sønderby Jepsen. In the film, comedian and "self-proclaimed spastic" Jacob Nossell is too disabled to be normal and too normal to accept himself as disabled. So in a quest to understand his own destiny, the cerebral palsy sufferer sets out to challenge the concept of normality and his own inabilities.

"I saw the project pitch at Nordic Panorama in 2013 and I was very impressed by the trailer, and the topic made me want to be involved. I believed in the story that director Christian wanted to tell," comments docLander's Estelle Boveland.

"The pitch proved how we, as normal-bodied people, would judge somebody who is disabled. That gave me the feeling that Christian was making a very strong case in telling the story from the perspective of Jacob, this person who is disabled and with a speech handicap, and who people do not treat as seriously as a normal person. He is ignored by everybody when he falls over in a square for example. That was shocking to see."

The film received €50,000 production support from the Netherlands Film Fund.

Those Who Feel the Fire Burning

Academy Award 2016 entry
Best Feature Documentary



Morgan Knibbe hit the international documentary world like a thunderbolt with his feature debut *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning* at IDFA 2014. Intensely lyrical, deeply moving and driven by an urgent polemicism, the film addresses the terrible plight of refugees in today's Europe.

The film has been selected for 40 international film festivals and has received numerous international awards.

US distributor FilmBuff will, together with EYE International, release the film theatrically in the US in December 2015 to kick off the 2016 Academy Award campaign.

See page 31

