



**European Children's  
Film Association**  
Association Européenne du Cinéma  
pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse

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*interviews*

**Owls & Mice**

**Cloudboy**

**Oskar's America**

**At Eye Level**

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# Journal

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*September*

*Photo: Cloudboy*

[www.ecfaweb.org](http://www.ecfaweb.org)

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## Strengthening ties, joining forces

The way ECFA has developed over the years is impressive: the number of members skyrocketed from 35 in 2004 to 115 (plus 6 honorary members) in 2017, a new communication strategy has been developed and so much useful information about various working fields in the children's film landscape is easily accessible and constantly updated.

Of course this development should continue. Growth comes with new challenges, especially in terms of structures and priorities. ECFA's true treasure is the knowledge and experience of its members. Further means have to be developed to share and exchange these assets. As important as a good circulation of information are the opportunities to meet and get to know each other. Children's Film First and this year's more modestly scaled ECFA Conference 'Screening for Children - Expanding Experiences through Film' in Stockholm are steps in the right direction. More initiatives should follow, as a basis for strengthening ties and joining forces. After all, it is crucial ECFA's mission is heard, acknowledged, taken seriously and needed in order to make change. In this edition you can read how the Visegrad Animation Forum set a remarkable example for organisations facing fast growth (see interview on page 18).

ECFA's aim is to promote quality cinema for children and youth. Achieving this hasn't become an easier

matter in the digital(ised) world, of which in many countries and even on the European level, quality cinema for young audiences doesn't have the status of importance it should have.

Therefore it is only logical and crucial that the ECFA board is currently working on a strategic development plan, to figure out what ECFA can set in motion with the resources available. We are very happy to have an expert in this process like Edita Bilaver Galinec on board with us, as well as all of you, with your knowledge, experience and most important: your passion for children's film.

–  
Margret Albers  
ECFA President

### Have you already registered for the ECFA 'Screening for Children' Conference?

On 20th September ECFA is looking forward to welcoming you in Stockholm for a conference on how to screen and discuss films for and with children, in order to engage the young audience. With speakers from many countries (from Slovenia to the UK, from The Netherlands to Finland), parallel lectures and active sessions mixing theory with practice, this conference will address film festivals, education professionals at cinemas, schools and other venues, distributors and producers etc.

For a complete [programme & registration](#).

## Simone Van Dusseldorp about 'Owls & Mice'

"Running naked belongs very much to the world of children"



Meral's best friend is small, grey, four-legged and named Peepeep. When taking her pet-mouse with her on the school camp, out in the wild, Peepeep is caught by an owl. Meral blames her classmates for this tragedy, but when she sets out into the woods, searching for the owl's nest, unexpected forces come to the rescue.

**Just like FROGS & TOADS, OWLS & MICE is a musical film for a very young audience. But despite the joyful songs, the story essentially tackles important dilemmas and key-moments in the lives of children.**

Simone van Dusseldorp: Children's movies do not all have to be 'happy-go-lucky'. In LIFE ACCORDING TO NINO, there's a mother dying. People asked me: Can you show it when she's lying dead? Of course! That's a part to the mourning process. Suddenly you see parents getting scared: "Oh no, what kind of a movie will that be?" Parents want to build a glass bell around their child to protect it. In OWLS & MICE Vito scares everyone by running naked through the hall. That scene was also under question. But running naked belongs very much to the world of children.

**In OWLS & MICE there's hordes of children rushing over the screen.**

Van Dusseldorp: With no more than two main actors, FROGS & TOADS was a rather simple job. OWLS & MICE has four of them! I always pick children who are a bit perky: they have more perseverance. I prefer sponta-



neous, noisy children above the neat and obedient ones. But the four of them had so much fun together that adults had a hard time interfering. Sometimes it was difficult to keep our focus. Luckily they were very ambitious; the only thing that could silence them was: 'action!'

**The movie looks so easily done, as if every scene was a 'first take'. Usually this implicates that everything actually was prepared extra meticulously.**

Van Dusseldorp: We never used long shots. Young actors have a maximum 10 second attention span. Then you see their eyes fading away, becoming somewhat absent. If you force them

to do long takes, they'll just gabble their dialogue lines.

**The singing scenes seem to prove: these are no future opera stars.**

Van Dusseldorp: That's what I particularly appreciate. With all those shows on television you only hear children with perfectly trained singing voices. While I prefer those who can't but do dare to sing out loud. Matheu Hinzen (Jason) sings beautifully, he kept the others together. Composer Kees van de Voren had a hard time struggling with all the off-key singing: "please try once more!" But I didn't see it as a problem, just sing! We didn't have a singing coach, because they'll make a voice lose its personality. And it



works... several people came to tell me how The Pancake Song (from FROGS & TOADS) was a vital part of their family's singing routine, and the biggest compliment was a YouTube clip in which drunken teenagers were performing The Caterpillar Dance. As a filmmaker, there is not much more you can dream about!

**One of the songs explains the ways of nature: everybody gets eaten. A realistic, unromantic perspective.**

Van Dusseldorp: Animals eat animals. I find it strange that children do not know where a chicken fillet comes from. For them it's kept a secret. Growing up in the countryside, you know such things. But for children in the city, nutrition is just something that comes from the supermarket.

**What I particularly appreciated: when losing her pet, Meral is more angry than sad. Angry with the entire world! That kind of rage is rarely to be seen in children's movies.**

Van Dusseldorp: In movies, mourning children always start to cry immediately, which terribly annoys me. Children usually aren't familiar yet with the sizes of their sadness, they cling to a dream, or get angry, but in a funeral they'll seldom cry straight away. Hiba

Ghafry (Meral) could also play 'angry' very well, because of her temper.

**Your 'bad girl' Desi isn't that bad after all, and above all she's unbelievably cool.**

Van Dusseldorp: I noticed already in the casting. Jashayra Oehlers came in with her gold necklace and bling bling and asked: "Can I quickly do a rap?" I liked her immediately. In the film she isn't just annoying, she's also honest and sassy. A typical girl at the top, getting bored. Always being the leader of the pack is a tough task. As Desi steals the show so easily, I kept her profile a bit low in the editing, not to make Meral look too pale or dull. Of course they're both top dogs, actors always want to be in the foreground. With four lead actors, that was a pretty tough battle.

**In a subtle way you also tackle the topic 'autism' in the film.**

Van Dusseldorp: Felix van de Weerd's role (Vito) stands pretty close to his own identity. He is a cool boy, he breakdances, he wanted to join the film and he kept himself well. But I didn't have to explain about his character. Something like The Contract Song (in which Vito captures a friendship in rules and regulations) he understood immediately.



**Apparently there was a lot of outdoors filming.**

Van Dusseldorp: Recent Dutch children's films were mainly raw and edgy, but I wanted a more happy look: bright upgraded colours in natural settings. I prefer shooting outdoors, even if this includes seeking shelter for the rain or chasing runaway mice. Jaap-The-Miceman came on the set with a box of mice, who regularly escaped. A whole day long Hiba rehearsed the mice-scenes: they're unpredictable, they're wild animals after all, who can even bite (as happened once on the set). Only for the wide shots we used an 'animated mouse'.

**Your producer Lemming after FROGS & TOADS (summer) and**

**OWLS & MICE (autumn) promised us two more episodes, for two more seasons.**

Van Dusseldorp: That is indeed the intention. But every film should be better than the previous one, and that takes time. Looking back at FROGS & TOADS, you'll notice that times have changed. In those days there were no feature films for pre-schoolers yet: loose stories, anecdotes intertwined with songs. The perfect audience for OWLS & MICE is probably two years older: the scenes are a little bit longer, but still with short narrative spans. These are details to take into account.

—  
Gert Hermans

# Meikeminne Clinckspoor about 'Cloudboy'

## "The eyes glued to the North"

CLOUDBOY is a multi-levelled adventure, told with maturity and introspection, though still an adventure. Through her training already, Meikeminne Clinckspoor showed a great passion for children's films, that now comes to fruition in CLOUDBOY, a story about a child discovering his roots and identity. Niilas (Daan Roofthoof) keeps his father too close and his mother at distance. In order to find harmony he has to break up with one, and get recognition from the other. Even if this forces him to travel (against his will) to Lapland, where his mother lives with her new family among the reindeer hordes. A movie like a geyser, seemingly quiet on the outside, but steam bubbles and bursts on the inside. CLOUDBOY, winner of the ECFA Award at the Kristiansand Festival, keeps the eyes glued to the North. Take that as a compliment, Meikeminne.

Clinckspoor: That is a vital part of who I am. Those are the films that have always inspired me in my thinking and my visual language. The new wave of children's cinema, launched in the early seventies by Astrid Lindgren and Olle Hellbom, still touches me, up till today. Those films communicate directly with who I am: deep inside I'm still Pippi Longstocking or Ronja The Robber's Daughter, telling my story.

**CLOUDBOY excels in its depiction of a relationship between 'child and nature' between 'mankind and environment'.**

Clinckspoor: Nature forces you onto self-awareness. You can call it my mission, to care about the relationship children have today with nature. Children are at their best when they have their way in nature: getting dirty in the mud, climbing up the highest trees, making huts in the reed. It stimulates their physical capacity, their self-confidence and their imagination.



**Were you a city girl or a rural rascal?**

Clinckspoor: What do you think? I grew up in the city, but the house was surrounded by a huge garden and behind it was a nature reserve. I was a rascal climbing trees to make a treehouse and spending hours daydreaming about wandering off with my knapsack, into the wild...

**How was it for your actors to spend so much time outdoors?**

Clinckspoor: For Daan it was a challenge. By the end of the shooting in Norway, he was physically exhausted. But all the time he came to tell me how amazing the location was. Sometimes I had to pinch my arm and tear myself away

from all that beauty to concentrate on my job.

**You also filmed the reindeer migration.**

Clinckspoor: A few times per year, the reindeer are gathered for marking and counting the calves, or for selecting the best fur. The shepherds listen to the needs of the horde: if animals are too tired or stressed, they'll be released immediately. We were on the spot only one day. We were flown in by a helicopter that could carry only four passengers at the time. Shipping in a 20-member crew was an adventure. The shooting was delayed up to two times due to the weather conditions. But when we finally





arrived at the mountain top, that was really something. The whole crew was stunned: "Wow, where did we end up?"

### Did you spend a lot of time with the shepherds?

Clinckspoor: The shooting only lasted one day, but I went through an intense 5-years trial process. I immersed myself in that culture and developed a deep connection with those people. On a movie set, you can't suddenly create such a relationship with shepherds that a producer rounded up. With them, my approach was different.

### The moose... what role does he have in the story?

Clinckspoor: A moose symbolises many different things: it can be the omen of a positive turn in life, through the start of a journey. It stands for strength and endurance. The moose is the ultimate king of the Scandinavian forests.

### In **CLOUDBOY** a mother discovers her child, and a child discovers his mother.

Clinckspoor: Niilas discovers his roots. As if he was only half a child, and suddenly - literally - a new world opens up for him. His mother is the way how, but not the reason why... Children can understand the multi-levelness and depth of that story. The current trend of simple, unambiguous stories gives me heartache. And that's why I do what I do.

### An absent mother will unavoidably be judged by the audience.

Clinckspoor: I wondered how to paint her picture more positively, but it just doesn't work. A mother that leaves her child will always be convicted, and you can only pardon her by knowing her background. There is such a background for all my characters, and I know exactly why she did it. But I chose to just show her the way she is. I don't ask for pity, I don't blame her anything - I simply love her and treat her with respect, hoping the audience will do the same. Luckily we could get rid of some emotional ballast by focusing on the crazy, outrageous aspects of Sara Sommerfeld's character.

### You always believed in cinema as a multi-sensory experience. How much of that still stands in **CLOUDBOY**?



Director Meikeminne Clinckspoor on the set: "Children are at their best when have their way in nature"

Clinckspoor: Over the past few years I have been writing for and filming with children, and I found out that I want to tell beautiful, exciting stories. I used to be very idealistic, and I still am, but I've also grown more realistic. I want my movies to find an audience. **CLOUDBOY** once was purely poetic, but has become more adventurous throughout the writing process. Sometimes I was almost fed up with all that poetry. Once you're on the set with children, magic comes naturally. That's what I've learned: poetry is a part of who I am. You can find it in children's acting, in colours, in nature. But without a good story, it doesn't stand. So: keep the poetry for the set!

### Meanwhile you started working on something new.

Clinckspoor: My next feature, indeed. In 2012 I got script development support

for **CHILDWOOD**. But since **CLOUDBOY** took longer than expected, that project was put 'on hold'. Meanwhile I'm also writing a pre-schooler TV-series. Guess what both projects are about? ... Children in nature, obviously!

Gert Hermans

→ watch trailer



Meikeminne Clinckspoor

## Wolfe



After the Crystal Bear for Best Short Film at the Berlinale, *WOLFE* by young Australian director Claire Randall also won this year's Youth Jury Award at the Mo&Frieze Children Short Film Festival. This 16' documentary is an intimate portrait of Nick, a young man with a mental health illness. Very strict interview scenes with the protagonist facing the camera, are intertwined with animated white on black drawings, visualizing Nick's inner life, particularly his imaginary friend/nemesis Wolfe. "Experiencing this film," the jury stated "feels like having a face to face conversation."

Randall: I've been studying at the Griffith Film School in Brisbane for 3.5 years, and *WOLFE* was the first film I made that wasn't a 'practice' piece.

My very first idea was to create an entirely talking heads docu about three young people's mental health experiences, but that appeared to be too difficult for a first-timer, so Plan B was to make it only about Nick.

### How did you come across Nick?

Randall: I met Nick at a party in my first year at university. The next year we moved into a share-house, and as he opened up more about his experiences, I suggested making a documentary about him. Surprisingly, he was committed to the idea. During filming, we set up curtains around him so the only person he could see was the interviewer. I showed him rough cuts, which I know many people are opposed to. Lachlan, the animator, and I worked with him on the drawing concepts, and the illustrator Jacob would message him the concept art for feedback (mainly "does this look like Wolfe?").

### At what point did you decide to mix the interview sections with animation?

Randall: Embarrassingly, we decided very late into the post-production process. I initially wanted to mix the interview with footage of Nick's real life, but there was a major style dif-

ference, and it just wasn't immersive to watch Nick in the present when he was talking about the past. During a screening to our supervisors, one of them mumbled: "if only you had enough time to animate it..." The hardest part was finding an illustrator and animator. After that, although it was 100+ hours of work, it went smoothly. What really linked the interview to the animation was the animated journal entries – all the time Nick only showed me his journal to drive me away from him, now letting it go public is the most selfless thing I've ever known someone to do.

### Are you working on a new project already?

Randall: There's so much happening with festivals, and I honestly don't know when I'll meet someone whose life I'm drawn to in the same way. *WOLFE*'s cinematographer and animator Lachlan James Morton is currently directing a compelling, personal documentary about domestic violence though, which will definitely be amazing.

*WOLFE*  
Australia, 2016, 16'  
Director: Claire Randall  
DoP: Lachlan James Morton



Producers: Shannen Tunnicliffe, Claire Randall

The Short Cut column is published with the help of the [Mo&Frieze KinderKurzFilmFestival](#), dedicated to short films. As a part of the Hamburg Short Film Agency, the festival aims to present documentaries and experimental films in addition to animation and short films as well as to arouse the curiosity of children and to stimulate their imagination.



## Tongue Cutters (aka TUNGESKJÆRERNE)

Cod tongue is a delicacy around the world, but in Norway it is mainly considered a simple everyday dish. The job of cutting cod tongues from fish heads has always been reserved for children. Each of them has at least one ancestor who was a tongue cutter and they are proud to continue the family tradition.

*"In Oslo, where I live, there are no jobs for kids."* Like her mother and aunt before, and her grandfather before them, nine-year-old Ylva wants to spend her holidays in Northern Norway, cutting cod tongues. Apart from her eagerness to have that experience, she deems it a hobby with the benefit of being paid for. Highly motivated she travels to the fishing village where her grandparents live.

But what appeared so simple in her mother's stories, is unexpectedly hard for Ylva when she finally gets there. Grabbing the fish head, putting it on a spike, pushing it back, and then cutting off the tongue turns out to be an obstacle she is not sure she is able to

overcome. However, she quickly finds a friend in 10-year-old Tobias, who has been cutting cod tongues since he was just six years old. He takes her under his wing and shows her the art. With slickers on and knives sharpened, they ambitiously dive into their work. As Tobias claims: *"Fish does not smell like shit. It smells like money."* While he wants to buy himself a boat, Ylva has decided to spend her money on a rabbit. Soon they discover that they have more in common than a job and their bond tightens: a new friendship is formed knee-deep in fish heads. When Ylva has to leave, they promise to meet again when the next season begins.

Director Solveig Melkeraaen follows her niece's journey from the big city to the small fishing village. From Ylva's first careful view of the fish heads and her initial repulsion, to her eventual participation in a tongue cutting championship, this is a charming coming of age story about overcoming obstacles, friendship, and family traditions.

### doxs!-festival 2017

This year, the doxs! festival will take place from 6-12 November 2017 in



Duisburg and six other cities in the Ruhr area: Bochum, Dinslaken, Dortmund, Essen, Gelsenkirchen and Moers. TONGUE CUTTERS has been chosen as this year's opening film for doxs!.

In the context of an award ceremony, the two prizes GROSSE KLAPPE and the ECFA Doc Award will be presented. The ECFA Doc Award launched during the doxs! 2016 edition which aims to support and promote European documentaries for a young audience. The complete festival programme will be available from early September on the doxs!-homepage: [www.doxs.de](http://www.doxs.de).

The Doxspot column is published with the help of the doxs! festival for children & youth documentaries (Duisburg, Germany), [www.doxs.de](http://www.doxs.de).



TONGUE CUTTERS, Norway, 2017, 85'.  
Director & Screenplay: Solveig Melkeraaen; Producer: Ingvil Giske for Medieoperatørene AS.  
World Sales: CAT&Docs.  
Contact: [info@catndocs.com](mailto:info@catndocs.com).

## Work in progress from Zlin Following - a Youtubers' documentary



Every day one billion hours of film is watched on YouTube, every minute 400 hours of new content is posted – which equals 65 years of moving images per day – and watching all videos available on YouTube would take you one million years. No wonder this platform has caused the rise of a new type of star: the so-called YouTubers. In their feature-length documentary FOLLOWING, director Jiří Sádek and producer Jindřich Trčka (COFilm) followed six of them, for 62 days.

- Nicol, a shopaholic who quit her job to make “girl videos” and now has her own life(style) vlog.
- Gabrielle’s classmates are in doubt whether to hate her hobby or to be just jealous.
- As one of the oldest YouTubers, Pedro nowadays already has a family.
- Kovy is one of the few YouTubers writing scripts

for videos that deal with topics like internet content, digital media, and politics.

- Nicole and Lucie demonstrate how ‘ordinary girls’ can make the world a better place.

Jiří Sádek & Jindřich Trčka: “Each one of them has at least half a million subscribers. They are famous, but at the same time they are not. Parents have no idea who they are, but out on the streets, they’re stormed by hordes of youngsters begging for autographs. Every photo they share makes 50,000 likes. They are anchors and marketing tools at the same time, and in a blink of an eye, they can switch from personal issues to plain marketing. But this is not what makes them happy. It’s not the numbers nor the money. They are normal people with their own worries, fears and depressions, which they can never show, as it wouldn’t fit in the concept of their videos. We wanted to capture their everyday lives, and the moment they admit: it’s not about likes, it’s not about being liked, it’s about being happy with who you are.”

“All of them refused to team up for a personal film like this if we would collaborate with any official channel. They are the new media and they don’t want to be associated with any sort of traditional media. And they’re used to being in control. Whenever they felt like losing control, they kicked back

– every time. If we came too close, they stopped answering our emails for two weeks. If we urgently needed something from them, they were not there. Getting on a personal level with them, took us a long time. The crucial element was trust. Sometimes I simply knew: you’re lying. You’re giving me just the same as what you give to your audience, and that’s not what I want. We needed to build up a relationship of trust. That’s why the tone of our first interviews is completely different from the last ones, when we finally reached that different level of trust.”

“Our main characters all live ordinary lives, kids see them as older friends or siblings. They’re not like those extreme examples often showcased, the arrogant ones who constantly swear and shout. We wanted to avoid those extreme cases, and show the real heart of creation.” (GH)

FOLLOWING will go into distribution this autumn.

FOLLOWING (Original title: Nejsledovanější)  
Czech Republic, 2017, 90’.

Director: Jiří Sádek

Contact: Jindřich Trčka, COFilm,  
[produkce@cofilm.cz](mailto:produkce@cofilm.cz) or [trcka@cofilm.cz](mailto:trcka@cofilm.cz)

→ [watch the teaser here](#)

## Torfinn Iversen about 'Oskar's America'

“Running around in the woods talking to a pony”

In 2009, the year that Norwegian director and screenwriter Torfinn Iversen (b.1985) graduated at the Nordland Kunst- & Filmfagskole, he participated in the Berlinale Talents. His short film *LEVI'S HORSE* was screened in the Generation section in 2012 and was transformed into his feature debut *OSKAR'S AMERICA*. “The difference between both films is that the feature version has more characters and you get to know them in another way. The short film was shot in winter, *OSKAR'S AMERICA* in full summer. And both endings are a bit different, although they share the same basic message: *Good things win when you want them to.*”

Ten-year-old Oskar has a dream. Together with his mum, he wants to ride the prairies on the back of a horse. But that dream collides with the sad reality of being dropped off for the summer holidays with his grumpy grandfather, living in a village in

Northern Norway. While mum ‘goes to America to find a job’ (which is far from the truth) Oskar teams up with Levi, a social outcast who has a short-sighted pet pony. Together they set up a nutty plan to leave for America, crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a rowboat. This tale of an extraordinary friendship against the backdrop of a broken family has been playing for a long time in Torfinn Iversen’s mind. “I started writing in October 2011, but I found notes to different scenes from long before that.” The film was shot in 27 days on Andøya and in the Målselv Filmcamp – a military camp that is turned into a film studio. The master version was ready in January 2017, right in time for the Berlinale.

### How did you become a director?

Iversen: I started drawing when I was 7-8 years old. I made a lot of cartoons, and when I got my first camera, I started to make short films with my friends and family. I got an award at the



Amandus Film Festival in Lillehammer when I was 15, handed out by producer Kathleen Kennedy, known for *E.T.* That was motivating.

**In Berlin you said in some way *OSKAR'S AMERICA* tells your own story. Is Oskar - the kind-hearted and responsible Lonesome Cowboy - your alter ego?**

Iversen: In many ways I took experiences from my own childhood into the story. Especially the relation Oskar has with his mother and with the cognitively challenged Levi are well known to me. The scene with Oskar ‘cleaning up’ Levi’s horse is the most personal one. In many ways it’s a film about lies, hope and being brave.

**Which reminds me of a quote from you in the Berlinale Talents Programme: “My eyes are my windows towards the reality of light and darkness. When I close them I can still see the light that passed through them many years ago.”**

Iversen: When you direct your own story, you deal with characters you’ve known for years. They become a part of your life and you want to fight for them.

**At the bases of your film is a complex puzzle of family relationships: Levi turning out to be Oskar's uncle. With grandpa, who hasn't exactly been the kindest of fathers, denying the existence of one of his child-**



## ren... Can you help us to lay that puzzle?

Iversen: Levi was an unwanted child. His father was very young, and went away with another girl, with whom he had another child, Isabel, Oskar's mother. After his wife passed away years ago and Isabel moved out, he stayed behind alone on the farm, isolated from the world and carrying a great sorrow. In his basement he's building a matchstick-house as an attempt to flee back to happier times. That's his project, and he wants to be left alone with it. Until Oskar arrives and turns his life upside down. His behaviour might be not so unusual in the district where he lives. There's a lot of lonesome older men out there, working on a basement project.



## Still grandfather doesn't want Oskar to befriend his uncle.

Iversen: He doesn't want his grandson to have anything to do with him. This is his belief about Levi: "You should be

*remembered for something, not for just running around in the woods talking to a pony."*

## As an apotheosis, your main characters plan to sail a small boat from Norway to America?!

Iversen: Based upon a true story! In 1896 the two Norwegians George Harbo and Frank Samuelsen crossed the Atlantic Ocean in opposite direction, from New York to Europe, in an 18 feet rowboat named Fox. They were rowing for 55 days. An incredible story.

**In those closing scenes the film closes the narrative circle, referring to Oskar's dream from the opening scenes. You could feel it in the audience: the children want that dream to come true, and everybody has faith that those three sailors will not drown.**

Iversen: Reaching that balance was one of the hardest parts when writing the screenplay. In many ways, Oskar is reaching his aim. He is reunited with his mother and got to know his uncle. Now that all of them are together, this is probably the happiest moment in the film.



## How did you film that scene, trying to get a horse into a boat?

Iversen: It was mostly done with greenscreen. We understood immediately that it wasn't going to be easy to get a horse on board. We've put up a green screen in a field, with the boat up front, but still the horse didn't want to go in, even if there was no water involved. It was the same horse we used for the short film, and it's already 19 years old. Thanks to the post-production company, creating the images of ocean and sky, it all looks very nice and realistic. Another challenge was the continuously changing weather: rain, sun, wind, horizontal rain etc.

## And what about the cast?

Iversen: We searched a long time for a boy to play Oskar. Over 300 boys were casted – which is quite a lot on Norwegian scale – and finally I was lucky to find Odin Eikre. Jørgen Langhelle, as Levi, I had in mind ever since he played that role in my short film. And I was very happy with Bjørn Sundquist

saying yes to be the grandfather. I have seen him in films as long as I can remember. Marie Blokhus as the mother connected very well with Odin. There have been some ups and downs throughout the production, but in the end all turned out in a good way, thanks to a very nice team.



## Is your mother still alive so she could see the film?

Iversen: Unfortunately she passed away two years ago, and I think about her every day. She inspired me a lot. We've spread her ashes out at the open ocean close to where we shot the film, the day after we finished the shooting.

–

Uta Beth

*New European films for children or young people which are ready to be discovered for your programmes. More information and more films can be found at [www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films](http://www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films). Producers, distributors and sales agents are kindly invited to inform us of their new releases.*

## Bamse and the Witch's Daughter

Animation, Sweden, 2016

Director: Maria Blom & Christian Ryltenius

Prod.: SF Studios, Bamse Förlage

World Sales: Svensk Filmindustri AB

Phone: ++46-8-68 03 500

[international@sf.se](mailto:international@sf.se)

[www.sfindernational.se](http://www.sfindernational.se)

## The Big, Bad Fox and Other Tales



Animation, France / Belgium, 2017

Director: B. Renner & P. Imbert

Prod.: Folivari, StudioCanal

World Sales: StudioCanal

Phone: ++33-1-71 35 35 35

[anna.marsh@studiocanal.com](mailto:anna.marsh@studiocanal.com)

[www.studiocanal.com](http://www.studiocanal.com)

Festival contact:

[www.thefestivalagency.com](http://www.thefestivalagency.com)

## Birds Like Us



Animation, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2017

Director: Faruk Sabanovic & Amela Cuhara

Prod.: Prime Time, Turkish Radio & TV

World Sales: Prime Time

Phone: ++ 387-33-718 035

[adnan@primetime.co.ba](mailto:adnan@primetime.co.ba)

[www.primetime.co.ba](http://www.primetime.co.ba)

## Boy on the Bridge



Feature Film, Cyprus, 2016

Director: Petros Charalambous

Prod. & World Sales: AMP Filmworks

Phone: ++357-22-875187

[info@filmworks.com.cy](mailto:info@filmworks.com.cy)

[www.filmworks.com.cy/work/](http://www.filmworks.com.cy/work/)

[boy-bridge-2016](http://www.filmworks.com.cy/work/boy-bridge-2016)

## The Breadwinner



Animation, Canada / Ireland / Luxembourg, 2017

Director: Nora Twomey

Prod.: Aircraft Pictures, Cartoon Saloon, Mélusine Prod., etc.

World Sales: West End Films

Phone: ++44-207-494 8300

[info@westendfilms.com](mailto:info@westendfilms.com)

[www.westendfilms.com](http://www.westendfilms.com)

[www.thebreadwinner.com](http://www.thebreadwinner.com)

## Casper and Emma: Go Hiking

Feature Film, Norway, 2017

Director: Arne Lindtner Næss

Prod.: Cinenord Kidstory AS

World Sales: Attraction Distribution

Phone: ++1-514-846 1222

[info@attractiondistribution.ca](mailto:info@attractiondistribution.ca)

[www.attractiondistribution.ca](http://www.attractiondistribution.ca)

## The Dragon Spell



Animation, Ukraine, 2016

Director: Manuk Depoyan

Prod.: Karandash LC, Panama Grand Prix

World Sales: Sola Media

Phone: ++49-711-47 93 666

[post@sola-media.net](mailto:post@sola-media.net)

[www.sola-media.com](http://www.sola-media.com)

[www.pgprix.com/NT/](http://www.pgprix.com/NT/)

## Just Charlie

Feature Film, UK, 2017

Director: Rebecca Fortune

Prod.: Seahorse Films, Just Charlie Film

World Sales: Media Luna

Phone: ++49-221-51 09 18 91

[info@medialuna.biz](mailto:info@medialuna.biz)

[www.medialuna.biz](http://www.medialuna.biz)

[www.justcharliefilm.com](http://www.justcharliefilm.com)



## Let Him Be a Basketball Player

Feature Film, Slovenia, 2017

Director: Boris Petkovic  
 Prod. & World Sales: Gustav Film  
 Phone: ++386-1-590 31 995  
[petra@gustavfilm.si](mailto:petra@gustavfilm.si)  
[www.gustavfilm.si](http://www.gustavfilm.si)



World Sales: Attraction Distribution  
 (see address above)

## Loving Lorna

Documentary Film, Sweden, 2017

Director: Annika Karlsson & Jessica Karlsson  
 Prod.: Systerskaparna  
 World Sales: Swedish Film Institute  
 Phone: ++46-8-6651100  
[sara.ruster@filminstitutet.se](mailto:sara.ruster@filminstitutet.se)  
[www.sfi.se](http://www.sfi.se)

## Only a Day



Feature Film, Germany, 2017  
 Director: Martin Baltscheit  
 Prod. & World Sales: Heimatfilm  
 Phone: ++49-221-977799-0  
[post@heimatfilm.biz](mailto:post@heimatfilm.biz)  
[www.heimatfilm.biz](http://www.heimatfilm.biz)  
[www.wfilm.de/nur-ein-tag](http://www.wfilm.de/nur-ein-tag)

## Marcus & Martinus – Together

Documentary, Norway, 2017

Director: Daniel Fahre  
 Prod. & World Sales: Fenomen TV Film & Scene  
 Phone: ++47-98-88 66 49  
[post@fenomen.no](mailto:post@fenomen.no)  
[www.fenomen.no](http://www.fenomen.no)

## My Giraffe

Feature Film, The Netherlands, 2017

Director: Barbara Bredero  
 Prod.: Lemming Film, Hamster Film, A Private View

## Tongue Cutters

Documentary, Norway, 2017

Director: Solveig Melkeraaen  
 Prod.: Medieoperatørene AS  
 World Sales: Cat&Docs  
 Phone: ++33-1-44617748  
[info@catndocs.com](mailto:info@catndocs.com)  
[www.catndocs.com](http://www.catndocs.com)

## We Can Be Heroes



Feature Film, UK, 2017  
 Director: Claire Downes  
 Prod.: Heroes Productions  
 World Sales: Starline Entertainment  
 Phone: ++44-20 7998 6270  
[info@starlineentertainment.co.uk](mailto:info@starlineentertainment.co.uk)  
[www.starlinecontent.com](http://www.starlinecontent.com)

## Wendy

Feature Film, Germany, 2017

Director: Dagmar Seume  
 Prod.: Bantry Bay Productions  
 World Sales: Beta Cinema  
 Phone: ++49-89-67 34 69 80  
[beta@betacinema.com](mailto:beta@betacinema.com)  
[www.betacinema.com](http://www.betacinema.com)

## Windstorm and the Wild Horses

Feature Film, Germany, 2017

Director: Katja von Garnier  
 Prod.: SamFilm  
 World Sales: Attraction Distribution  
 (see address above)

## Zombillénium



Animation, Belgium / France, 2017

Director: Arthur de Pins & Alexis Ducord  
 Prod.: Maybe Movies, Belvision, Gebe-ka Films  
 World Sales: Urban Distribution Int.  
 Phone: ++33-1-48 70 46 56  
[contact@urbandistrib.com](mailto:contact@urbandistrib.com)  
[www.urbandistrib.com](http://www.urbandistrib.com)

More information on all these films you will find on our website:  
[www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films](http://www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films)

# Evi Goldbrunner & Joachim Dollhopf about 'At Eye Level'

## "Please grab a beer on your way"

"Short people have grubby little fingers and dirty little minds." Randy Newman didn't exactly paint a flattering picture in his notorious song 'Short People', but at least he used the correct wording. "Short people do not appreciate to be called 'midget'," says director Evi Goldbrunner. "However there is one scene in the film in which Tom uses the word himself, when sitting in a bar, drunken, frustrated and full of self-despise." AT EYE LEVEL (original title: AUF AUGENHÖHE ) has already screened at 80 festivals worldwide and received many awards, including the Lola Award For Best German Children's Film of the Year. It is the first children's film that ever made it to the German shortlist for the Oscars.

Michi lives in a foster home, but when he happens to find the address of his unknown father, there is hope for a better future. Until Michi discovers his father Tom is not a 'big and strong hero', but a short guy, not taller than



'Children know how it feels to be small'

himself. The boy can't cope with the idea of his father being a dwarf, but when running away from the foster home, he has no other option than looking for shelter with Tom. With Michi trying to hide his embarrassment and Tom getting confronted with the concept of 'fatherhood', their relationship is constantly put to the test.

**The kids in the children's home are acting extremely rude towards Tom, when he comes to visit Michi for the first time.**

Joachim Dollhopf: That's a part of the conflict we establish between Michi

and the other children. Short people are often confronted with such rudeness, up to an extent that is hard to believe. One of the many short persons that we interviewed told us about once going inside a dixi toilet, and then people started to pull over the cabin and jumped upon it. Where short people show up, unforeseen things might happen.

**And there's the omnipresent staring gazes, which you see in the film: on the bus, in the bar... everywhere.**

Goldbrunner: The guy said: "Every time I leave the house, it is another coming out for me. There is no way I can disguise my appearance." On the other hand: for other people it's difficult to know how to behave correctly. If we look i.e. at short people, they feel like being stared at, but by not looking at them, we ignore them. The situation is uncomfortable both ways.

**And there is the temptation to tell silly jokes, as you probably could even feel on the set.**

Dollhopf: Jokes were allowed. Because our main actor Jordan Prentice is so strong, a successful actor (e.g. IN BRUGES and with Julia Roberts in MIRROR MIRROR) with enough self-confidence.



'Always dirt under his fingernails'

Goldbrunner: At first the crew felt insecure about their attitude towards Jordan. Should we 'spoil' him, or do the opposite? Until Jordan told us that the best compliment he gets, is when he visits friends at home, and they tell him to "please grab a beer when you pass the fridge". As the beer is always on the top shelf, it means they've forgotten about him being small.

**How were both main actors together on the set?**

Goldbrunner: Jordan is Canadian, he doesn't speak German. He did his acting in English, and then was dubbed in German. Luis Vorbach (Michi) didn't speak English at all, so they had to develop other ways to communicate. They both had to study the other one's key-words to react to. It was a risk we took but they both did a superb job.



Dollhopf: Before the shooting we had two weeks of improvisation sessions to have the actors well-prepared. It helped Luis and Jordan to feel secured.

Goldbrunner: On the set, Luis was a ray of sunshine, getting everybody's attention. While Jordan was much more focussed, playing a role that stood so close to his own reality. Sometimes it was a difficult process for him to go through.

**As a child paralysed by doubt, Luis' tone of acting is rather suspended and introvert.**

Dollhopf: It was surely no method acting, because in real life Luis is energetic and wild. The kind of boy that always has dirt under his fingernails from playing outside. But he understood perfectly what was expected from him.

Goldbrunner: He has a great acting intelligence. The script says Michi is 11 years old, so it was to our great surprise that we ended up with a 9 year old actor – usually it's the other way around. His talent is outstanding.

**Then in one scene there is a sudden eruption of anger, with Michi trashing Tom's apartment, shifting from extremely suspended towards ext-**

**remely violent.**

Goldbrunner: That door was really smashed. Luis had been looking forward to that scene for a long time.

Dollhopf: That scene stood closer to the real impulsivity that Luis carries within, so we simply said: go ahead and smash it all.

**Michi's emotional process can be relatively easily understood by the audience. But for Tom, you sometimes need dialogue with his grown-up friends to express his point of view.**

Goldbrunner: We wanted Tom to have his own story-line and, to our surprise, that story is easily understood by children. They know how it feels to be small and helpless in certain situations. The film evolves from one towards two - equally interesting - protagonists.

**More than about 'short people' the film is about acceptance in general.**

Goldbrunner: All our movies have outsiders as protagonists. Witnessing the international refugee crisis and knowing about President Trump's attitude towards the weaker, we show what humiliation does to people. Searching for a balance between compassion and truth, with AT EYE LEVEL we've made a film that is both empathetic



*'Where short people show up, unforeseen things might happen'*

and truthful, both autobiographical (in terms of family related issues) and original.

**Tom is in a rowing team. Is it a common thing to have a short guy on board?**

Goldbrunner: It makes sense to have a lightweight person as *coxswain* (the team member sitting faced towards the bow, determining the rhythm of the rowers). Short persons often don't have that many options in sports, but it all depends upon the type of dwarfism. In Germany there is a short weight lifter, and in the US

there is this basketball player with a reputation for dribbling past his opponents, as he is so small they can't catch him.

**You've made this film together, as a couple.**

Dollhopf: The most important is to be sure that you're making the same film! Developing the story together is a good way to make sure that you both share the same vision.

–  
Gert Hermans

## Work in progress from Kristiansand - part 1

### Kidbusters

Bjarne Reuters, who became one of the most famous Danish authors for children, was a 25 year old school teacher when he made his writer's debut with 'Kidnapping'. It became an instant hit – 5 more books were written about these characters.

Director Frederik Nørgaard: "The book was a huge success in the mid-seventies because of its social set up. It's about a kind of 'gangster' family struggling to make a living. Having a hard time finding a job, they might as well hustle their way through life. Now the book is adapted into a movie, produced by Danish production company Regner Grasten Film, who realised it was crucial to keep the authenticity and the social critique alive."

Life isn't easy for a family with 4 children between 8 and 14 years old. Surely not when the father indulges in criminal activities. He can't deny a single favour to his young brother George, a first class hustler who always gets into trouble. When caught, dad ends up in prison, while mother has to work for two to pay the bills and ends up with a nervous breakdown. The family now moves in with George, who unfolds a diabolical plan: kidnapping a rich kid and demanding one million Kroner in ransom. A plan not as goofy as it sounds... Until the kidnapped kid appears to be totally happy with the situation: being bored and lonesome, he's relieved to finally experience 'real life in a real family'.

Nørgaard: "We invested in drama and tension, but also in social criticism and satire. Regner Grasten has a mainly commercial appeal, but we all understood the audience is longing for authentic stories, with strong characters they can identify with. Of course KIDBUSTERS is a heist movie, but it's also an honest depiction of a social problem - the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. You'll see kids struggling with poverty, there is unemployment, a family losing all hope, and the relevant issue of parents having depression."

"The young actors were not totally inexperienced – with some of them I already worked in VILLADS FROM VALBY. I wanted them to be relaxed, and to listen and be alert for the dynamics between all actors. My biggest challenge with young and adult actors is to shift the attention away from themselves, and have them focussed on the others. Then I take a step back and let go – keeping them in frame and helping them to feel safe is my biggest mission as a director."

"Even if kidnapping a child is no petty crime, the audience should still wish the best for this family. I was well aware of that while writing the script. Normally in a plot movie like this, you'll have the first plot point after 20 minutes. But I needed at least 40 minutes to convince the audience about the neces-



sity of the plan, so that they would really care for these kids and forgive them."

"KIDBUSTERS was released in Denmark on 13 July. During the Christmas and winter period, all family films are competing each other to death, while American blockbusters are doing very well in summertime. Our mission was to win that market back. With a summer release, we're having the market more or less for ourselves. We'll see how that works out." (GH)

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World Sales: Attraction Distribution, Xiaojuan Zhou, [xiao88@attraction.ca](mailto:xiao88@attraction.ca).

## Work in progress from Kristiansand - part 2

### Twigson The Explorer

Twigson, born in the radio plays and books by Anne Cath. Vestly from the sixties, is a widely known character in Norway. But through 3 feature films, the whole world got acquainted with little boy Junior and his 'know-it-all' twig, who now make their return in a new feature: TWIGSON THE EXPLORER.

Jan Petter Dickman (Paradox Film): "With over a million tickets sold in Norway, the first films were such a tremendous successes that we needed a break. The first two premiered in Berlin's Generation competition and were sold worldwide. TWIGSON was really something, but we didn't want people to finally get bored with him. Now, six years later, we're ready to attract a new generation. But meanwhile the market has changed. We don't know how it's going to turn out this time."



"We've always been ambitious to make every TWIGSON film better than the previous one, and to add something new or different to every film. Thus our strategy is to choose a new director for every episode, and have all of them adding a bit of their individual personality. TWIGSON THE EXPLORER is directed by Andreas J. Riiser. 8 years ago, coming relatively fresh out of the Norwegian Film School, we thought he was the right man for the job. But then it turned out he was also very talented in making commercials and TV projects, so the timing wasn't right. But this time my colleague called him at the right moment. He agreed, and we were happy to get him on board for his feature debut."

"Children grow fast. Adrian Grønnevik, playing Junior in the previous films, now turned 16 and is probably 180 centimeters tall. And needing a new Junior, we wondered what to do with the rest of the cast. Why not start with a whole new family? That's exactly what we did. We started looking out for a new actor, but as Spielberg said: "when you see the kid, you'll know it's the one". Like when we met Filip Mathias Eide. All those weeks living in a remote hotel, spending demanding days on the set, Filip slowly turned into Junior. He didn't mind walking in the footsteps of Adrian Grønnevik, impersonating one of Norway's most beloved cinema icons."



Always moving around with his family, Junior hardly has any friends. Until he finds a wooden twig, that becomes his fantasy friend. Junior and Twigson are inseparable, but the twig only comes to life when he's alone with Junior. Now the family is moving to the coast, where Junior further indulges in his new passion: famous explorers, like Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen. Dreaming of becoming a great explorer himself, Junior is looking forward to a blanket of deep snow. But arriving at the new home, there appears to be hardly any snow at all. As father gets rather annoyed by Twigson's omnipresence, he takes the twig and hides it, saying that "Twigson has gone to the mountains". Maybe finally all the skiing practice might prove itself useful for Junior...

"We just started the post-production, with the animated parts done by Qvisten Animation. Adding the animation feels like making the film all over again, once more. TWIGSON THE EXPLORER was made on a €2,5 million budget and will premier in November. (GH)

Contact info: Paradox Film AS, Jan Petter Dickman, [janpetter@paradox.no](mailto:janpetter@paradox.no), +47 911 00 031 or Finn Gjerdrum, [finn@paradox.no](mailto:finn@paradox.no), +47 915 15 463.

# Visegrad Animation Forum

## A new era for Central & Eastern European animation

The Czech town of Trebon isn't much more than a main square, surrounded by a few bars and hotels. But once a year the circus comes to town! During Anifilm (International Festival of Animated Films) the small town becomes a stage for those who have sold their soul to the art of animation. On that occasion, VAF (Visegrad Animation Forum) is gathering like-minded spirits from the animation industry around the table and in pitching events. Their enthusiasm gives you the impression that a new era has come for Central and Eastern European animation. How could an organisation cause such a new impetus in... well, how many countries are we exactly talking about?

On Marta Obršálová (VAF Public Relations): Visegrad was originally a political and cultural alliance between four Central European states: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. In the Visegrad Animation Forum (that is having its 5th edition this year) we also included Slovenia. In these five countries we found specialised associations or institutions to represent the work of the national animation industry. We integrate the other CEE countries like Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and the Baltic States in VAF to share our know-how. Producers from those countries are welcomed to report about what is going on in each country and we bring companies and projects together.

Anna Vášová (VAF TV Programme): We're trying to build up a Central and Eastern European market, which has never been done before. Even if our languages are different, there are similarities in culture and history, in rules and regulations, and in the character of the people in general.

### How do you connect them?

Obršálová: VAF has got 3 projects: the pitching competition in Trebon, the VAF New Talents, which is all about promoting young talent from this region, and the most essential part of our work is combined in VAF Red Bricks, which is all about facilitating co-productions and lobbying.

Vášová: We started with pitching sessions, in which producers tried to get other CEE broadcasters on board. Soon we realised that the way to open the gate to the TV-stations is through the producers. So the pitching sessions became a way to build up a producers' network. Red Bricks took it one step further: it's an attempt to re-shape the animation landscape. It includes networking and lobbying on a national level with broadcasters, film funds and other supporting bodies and Media Desks, and on an international level with the European Union, based on a mutual strategy (that we're currently developing). We find inspiration in other territories – in this year's VAF we're having South Korea as a guest nation, and next year we'll hopefully work to-



gether with Canada. We're trying to act as a unified territory, developing models and standards for setting up projects and defining budgets.

### What are the strengths and weaknesses of this market?

Vášová: The problem is that our markets are divided and non-transparent. Nobody seems to understand what is happening in our region. We are a closed box and nobody knows what's inside. To get the situation more clear, VAF should act as a contact point. This year we've installed in VAF the 'minority coproduction pool': we've invited 24 producers from the entire CEE to introduce their companies in 2 minute presentations. Trebon should become the shopping window for everybody who wants to work with the Central and Eastern European animation industry. Even the EU doesn't seem to be aware of the different circumstances under which we work. We're literally working in a different rhythm – making an animated series for TV in Eastern Europe takes much more time, as well in the financing as in the production phase. This is what the EU should realise and implement in its support system.

Obršálová: It works both ways. As little as Western Europe knows about animation in our region, we don't know much about the western situation ne-



ither. Agnes Bizzaro from Cartoon Network gave this advice to producers from both territories: *do your homework!* Go on the internet to find out what broadcasters are interested in. Especially young producers should learn about the market. That's why we invite French, German, Irish and Canadian experts in our panels; they could be a big help in connecting East and West.

**All the VAF countries have a tradition in animation that goes more than 3 decades back in time. But then came 'the age that animation forgot'...**

Obršálová: Because of the revolution in 1989. Until then, the animation industry was state-funded. After 1989 the state support ceased, many studios went bankrupt and production stopped. The worldwide reputation of the Czech animation was established by animators from the eighties or before: Svankmajer, Trnka or Zeman. But even if the gap with the past is huge, we have new, promising talents coming up. The quality of the projects is getting better all the time, as we hear from regular visitors to Trebon. They all notice an impressive progress, which makes us very happy.

Vášová: This year's pitching award went to Joseph Wallace, a young animator from the UK. His project SALVATION HAS NO NAME was rooted in the Eastern animation tradition, as was clearly proven in his presentation. I'm delighted that British animators want to come pitching here and have an interest in how our audiences respond. It's not about running after broadcasters or funders, it's about getting to know the other market and meet your peers in the other part of Europe.



*Pitching Award winner Joseph Wallace*

### **Up to what extent are National Film Institutes involved in VAF?**

Obršálová: Last year's VAF was historically the first meeting that brought together all the Visegrad Film Funds. Discussions were started to launch a common call for co-production. All follow up meetings in Karlovy Vary and Berlin were instigated by VAF. Later this year, a minority co-production call should be announced. Now we're doing the same with all Visegrad TV broadcasters. All this proves that VAF is eager to grow. In our meetings sometimes the room feels like it's exploding from all that energy – people are so ambitious!

**Chairman of VAF Michal Podhradský is running the 'Animation People' production company and is chief of the Czech Association of Animated Films. With him are working five national coordinators. What is their role?**

Obršálová: They're extremely important. On a national level they know which producers are wor-

king on which projects, they promote our calls and spread the news from the institutions. They inspire, motivate and build bridges.

### **Under the best possible circumstances, how do you see VAF in five years?**

Obršálová: The vision is to help building a solid, interconnected animation industry across the CEE. In many western countries culture is understood as a business, while Central and Eastern Europe often cling on to an artistic ideal, which is a different mind-set. This is what we are seeking to achieve: preserve and deepen the artistic / creative part, while making people - filmmakers, national institutions and all sorts of potential investors - realise how art can also be a valuable product.

–  
Gert Hermans



## Maria Novaro about 'Tesoros'

"I made the camera work for them"

Six year old Dylan is moving from Mexico City to Guerrero, where his parents start working in an animal sanctuary in Barra del Potosi. His new school is located directly at the beach of South-Mexico's wonderful Pacific coast. In this green paradise starts a treasure hunt on the trails of the great sea captain Sir Francis Drake. Dylan motivates his classmates, his siblings and all his new friends to find the treasure Drake has hidden 400 years ago, as he once told Dylan on a stormy night. In fact they discover a treasure more precious than the gold of a buccaneer... TESOROS is a wonderful treasure hunt in a tropical idyll filmed in a documentary style by Maria Novaro (° 1950), one of Mexico's most strongly profiled directors, whose second film DANZÓN in 1991 was one of the revelations at the Cannes Film Festival.

Director, screenwriter and editor Maria Novaro collected numerous festival selections and awards, for instance with SIN DEJAR HUELLA (2000), LA MORENA (2004) and LAS BUENAS HUELLAS (2010). TESOROS, her first film for children, was selected for Berlin's Generation in 2017.

Maria Novaro: I studied Sociology at the Autonomous University of Mexico and from 1979-1981 was a part of the first Mexican Women's Film Collective 'Cine-Mujer'. Then I studied Film, Directing, Screenwriting and Project Development (in the US and in Cuba). I have written all of my films, I have edited them and produced some of them, I had fellowships (with Guggenheim, Gateways, Rockefeller-MacArthur and SNCA/México) and retrospectives, and I'm a member of three Academies of Motion Picture Arts. But maybe most important: I have three children, Mara, Santiago (playing the man who introduces the children to Google Earth as a better alternative to pirate maps) and Lucero, and three grandchildren, Andrea, Dylan, and Jacinta.



*'I wanted to share the process of filmmaking with my grandchildren'*

### TESOROS was your first film for and with children.

Novaro: I wanted my grandchildren to know first-hand what has been my profession and my joy throughout my entire life: making films. The main storyline was developed from great ideas of both Dylan and Jacinta who were six-year-olds at the time. Because especially Dylan was so interested in pirates and pirate maps, I began to research about Sir Francis Drake, the famous buccaneer in the time of Queen Elizabeth I, who in fact has been sailing off the coasts of Mexico and California. When I decided to make this film not only for them, but with them, I wanted

to share the process of filmmaking with my grandchildren too. They are being raised in Mexico City, a huge cosmopolitan city. They lived a different experience for the film, it enriched them and they enjoyed it.

### Is that why the young actors look so very natural?

Novaro: They were not actors working for the camera, I made the camera work for them. We had lots of improvisation, joyful experiences and a very good mutual relationship built on trust, love and patience.



**While Guerrero is known for drugs, violence, poverty and abuse of human rights, you show a paradise... Is it real?**

Novaro: It is. Mexico is both things, paradoxically. TESOROS was meant to tell Mexican children something about our own country. Mexico is hurt, bleeding from violence, corruption and impunity, with a profound social inequality. Children know that because they live it. But our country is rich in biodiversity, in cultures, and in people. Kind, hard-working and compassionate people who share an unbreakable determination to be happy. Filming in Guerrero was exemplary: security was definitely an issue, but we were supported at all times by the people living in Barra de Potosí. I wanted Mexican children to remember this, as proof that another world is possible.

**In the end we get the information that this paradise is currently in danger.**

Novaro: Although efforts are made to save it. An initiative to make Barra de Potosí a protected natural area has been taken to the Mexican congress. But there are strong interests against it, mainly from enterprises in tourism.

**Does the hatchery for turtles and the breeding ground in Barra de Potosí really exist?**

Novaro: Both projects exist as you see them in the film. Both are privately funded and operated. And there are similar initiatives from a very lively plural society (Mexicans, Americans and Canadians) in the area.

**Can you tell about the budget and production planning?**

Novaro: It took me one year for screenwriting and pre-production, 5 weeks for shooting and 18 months of editing and post-production. The total budget was one million dollars - a little less in Mexican pesos. The film has been screened in many festivals in the USA, Brazil and other Latin-American countries, in Germany, Italy, France, Israel, Poland, Slovenia, Taiwan, Spain and others, and counting...

**After the premiere in Berlin you said that you wanted to offer an alternative to the usual children's films. Can you be a bit more precise?**

Novaro: I like good cinema, films that open our minds to different worlds, films that make us more understanding. Not just entertainment. This I want to offer to children.



*'Making this film not only for them, but with them'*

**For me TESOROS tells about solidarity, friendship, freedom, imagination and intercommunication in a wonderful nature.**

Novaro: I love that interpretation. That's it: the real treasures of our lives are our children and our planet.

**What project are you currently working on?**

Novaro: For some time now I have been writing for a film, or maybe a series, that has to do with the fall of the Aztec empire and the city of Tenochtitlan. LA LISTA will be told from a contemporary situation in my hometown Mexico City, with glimpses from the past. It will be

a quite expensive production - we'll see how that goes. Furthermore I'm writing on another children's film that I would like to shoot in Southeast Mexico, in the fortified city of Campeche, that has a strong history with pirates, again! And I am writing what would be my first novel: LAS RELACIONES OCULTAS ENTRE LAS COSAS. It has to do with what it was like to grow up as a woman in Mexico during the 50's and 60's. I don't know which project will come out first, if I am lucky enough to continue them all.

-  
Uta Beth

## Beyond Boundaries



In the German-Belgian exchange project **BEYOND BOUNDARIES**, young filmmakers tried out creative ways to combine documentaries with animation.

Beyond Boundaries is both geographically and artistically a project that crosses borders. In this cooperation between the Youth Academy for Documentary Young Dogs (Dortmund, Germany) and the Belgian animation studio (and ECFA member) KidsCam, youngsters were guided through a trajectory of four workshops in which they tried their hands at different techniques and produced three short 'anidoc' films.

In terms of content, all the produced films deal with boundaries that youngsters are facing in their lives. Like Friday, a young boy who escaped from Northern Nigeria, and now takes us along on his life's journey

in his film *A GOOD CHRISTIAN. I CLOSE MY EYES* deals with the boundary between dream and reality from the perspective of a narcoleptic girl. And *CRAZY LYING PEOPLE* tells the story of a confused old lady and how she was treated by the people in the village where she used to live. All these stories seemed rather difficult to tell through a normal documentaries storyline. But when combined with the wide variety of techniques in the animation toolbox (like pixilation, puppets, green-screen) this was exactly what could give those films the right look.

Beyond Boundaries brought together young people from different social backgrounds and with different skills, talents and interests (storytelling, animation, camera etc.) who could now experience the power of teamwork. Moreover, as participants came from various countries (besides Germany and Belgium several youngsters brought along an immigrant background from other native countries), they took along a personal approach to the life of others, getting to know more about themes and issues that are not often reported about in newspapers or on television. Thus a glance of another reality oozed into their work, broadening the horizon of everyone watching these films. An interesting way to correct prejudices and to get a deeper understanding, based on knowledge.

Beyond Boundaries, a cooperation between KidsCam and Young Dogs, was funded by the ERASMUS+ programme of the European Commission.

→ watch the films here



More info about the project-holders [Young Dogs](#) and [KidsCam](#).

[Young Dogs](#) are experts in the use of film and digital media as tools for creative involvement of youngsters. They bring teenagers together in common projects and provide access to different European actualities through working with film. In ECFA Journal they report about creative projects and initiatives for young people making films.



# Young European Cinephiles at LUCAS

## A new generation of film enthusiasts

**What is the actual work of a film jury at a festival? Which categories do they apply and how do they distinguish subjective opinions from objective assessments? Is that even possible when looking at film as a form of art? Is the situation different if it's films for young audiences that are to judge? Are there other categories that are (subconsciously) applied? And to add yet another sphere: What about a jury that is not made up exclusively of adult professionals but of children and youngsters too? How do they come to a decision? What is their focus and does it differ from the one of the professionals?**

This year LUCAS, Int. Festival for Young Film Lovers, takes its 40th anniversary edition as an impulse to discuss these questions with young film lovers/jury members from Germany and Slovenia. Olja (18), Simon (17) and Mark (18), all three associated with the EYE ON FILM festival from Ljubljana will team up with the 2016 LUCAS-alumni Halima (15), Luana (17) and Lilith (16). As this year's "Young European Cinephiles" (YEC) and experts in either subject matters – being jury members and young people – they will share their experiences as members of a youth film jury and discuss differences and similarities they recognise.

The project was initiated in 2016 as part of the ABCinema cooperation between the EYE Institute Amsterdam, the Cineteca di Bologna, Les Enfants de Cinema Paris and the Deutsches Filminstitut. Two youngsters from each country visited Frankfurt, bringing along two films for a double feature.

This year's YECs were also involved in the festival programming: As curators they exchanged ideas on films that reflect the question "what is fake and what is true?" either formal-or content-wise. Given the assumption that art reflects today's inability to differentiate between truth and non-truth (or even doubting the existence of both), the YECs focused on hybrid forms of cinema. Mingling styles, genres and forms, such hybrid films raise the question of how/whether we, as viewers, can be 100% sure of our own perceptions.

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM (Žiga Virč, 2016), THE CONGRESS (Ari Folman, 2013) and SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK (Charlie Kaufman, 2008) will be part of this year's LUCAS programme. The young experts themselves will introduce the films and talk about their choices.

With the YECs, young film lovers get the opportunity to express their taste and expertise. LUCAS is



*This year's Young European Cinephiles*

thus planning to continue the project, altering its focus every year in order to represent the young film experts' involvement in different festivals or institutions as well as the variety of tasks they fulfil.

More [info](#)

– [Marie Wolters](#)

The Deutsches Filminstitut in Frankfurt, hosting the LUCAS Film Festival, simultaneously has a project running on how to adapt electronic exhibition guides to the needs of the Filmmuseum's young visitors. About 60 children and youngsters were consulted in determining the content of the guide and the choice of objects displayed. [Read more about it.](#)

# Chris Walley & Alex Murphy are ‘The Young Offenders’ “Tracksuits will always be there”



Best friends Conor and Jock dress the same (tracksuits, sneakers, gold chain), talk the same, act the same and go pretty much everywhere together. When news breaks that 61 bales of cocaine worth €7 million each have gone missing off the Irish coast, the boys pedal across the countryside on stolen bicycles (with the police in close pursuit) on a quirky treasure hunt, that should help them escape from their troubled home lives. Similar stories have been told before, but seldom with as much dynamics and self-irony. For every young audience, THE YOUNG OFFENDERS is a highly entertaining blast of energy.

The Q&A with Chris Walley (Jock) and Alex Murphy (Conor) is one of this year's Zlin Festival highlights. Ping-ponging jokes back and forth and flaring up

the chaos, the young actors have plenty of anecdotes to tell. *"They're so cute,"* the audience sighs, hardly recognising the on-screen ordinary straits in the charming boys on stage.

## Irish road movies on bicycles... It could be a genre in itself.

Chris Walley: Director Peter Foott mainly worked for television, but had plenty of ideas for a feature film. Finally he took it upon himself to make it happen. *"I'm gonna write it, I'm gonna direct it and I'm gonna co-fund it myself."* It was a pure passion project. He got the team together (including his wife Hilary Rose playing Alex's mum) and shot THE YOUNG OFFENDERS for an initial budget around €60,000. And half of that was spent on food. Every time the catering van arrived, it was a feast!

Alex Murphy: Peter had this idea, as long as you keep your actors well fed, they'll be happy... which is true! This was our first film. Both having a background in theatre, we heard about open auditions for a film, looking for two young male actors from Cork...

Walley: Let's not box us in – I can do female, I can do anything.



*"Two kicks back, one kick forward, spin around and then do it again!"*

## As Blackadder said: "Animal, vegetable or mineral..."

Walley: I can play a mineral!

## The story is set in 2007 – how much 2007 is there in you?

Walley: In 2007 Alex would have been 9 and I would have been 11. During rehearsals, Peter played some music from that era, and those songs worked like a time capsule. Walking around the city in those track suits and with that haircut, brought us straight back.

Murphy: Back then there were no smartphones. Which is great for the film. If you would set the story in the smartphone era, Google Maps would ruin everything, there would be no mystery left. We had little Nokia's. The moment we throw them away, is the moment the story really begins.

Walley: In August we start filming a series commissioned by the BBC, based upon THE YOUNG OFFENDERS. It will still be set in 2007, before technology took over. It's about the same characters, the same world, but it won't be clear whether the story is set before or after the film.





'Google Maps would ruin everything'

### Are tracksuits still around out there?

Walley: That's never going to change. Tracksuits will always be there! Which makes our characters almost look timeless.

Murphy: We were walking through Cork city in our costumes, and saw people literally wearing the same suits as ours. The only difference was: we couldn't afford a deal with Adidas. We bought Adidas suits but covered up the logo with stripes. I don't think Adidas would have supported a film about two lads and loads of cocaine. If you'd make a film about two lads running to Dublin for a marathon, they might let you.

### In 2007 there actually was a cocaine seizure at the Irish coast!

Murphy: People still talk about it, until this day everyone knows some story related to it. In the script that event was combined with Peter's memories about a cycling trip to West Cork. When I put a chocolate ice cream in my pants for cooling off,

the original story is that Peter poured a can of Fanta over his head. He was all sticky, it was awful. But ice cream looked funnier.

### Apparently there was room for improvisation?

Walley: For every scene, we did a few takes following the script, and then Peter gave us two takes to improvise, hitting the narrative beat. Which feels so liberating when working with an actor like Alex. We have a similar sense of humour, in those takes we bounced jokes back and forth and came up with the most random and obscure things. Peter said: *"I wrote the characters, but you know them better than I do, as you inhabit them."* Not many directors will give you that opportunity. It's a cliché, but acting is reacting and those improvised takes were all about reacting.

### No further harm was done in the improvisation sessions?

Walley: Accept maybe the gravel incident... There is this scene in which I slip with my bike and after the tenth take, we were sure about having the right one. But I wanted to do one more, for fun, and when hitting the brakes, I flipped over and landed head first in the gravel. Alex, staying in his character, kept improvising around it while I was lying on the ground in pain, trying to peel the gravel from under my skin.

### What about my favourite moment in the film: a dance scene in the city streets?

Walley: Alex always had a lot of good ideas. This dance scene was completely from the beginning his idea.

Murphy: Peter asked us: *"Lads, what did you do 10 years ago?"* When thinking back, I remembered in primary school on the playground, there were always lads doing this weird dance called 'jump style'. A very structured dance, like two kicks back, one kick forward, spin around and then do it again. We learnt it and Peter then shot the scene in an alleyway, and more or less forgot about it. Until it turned up being in the film's final cut!

### Would you call THE YOUNG OFFENDERS an Irish film?

Walley: It's a 100% Irish film but it's definitely a 110% Cork film. And it's great to see a Cork film doing so well in Ireland, where usually it's all about Dublin. Cork is so small that everyone knows exactly where every scene was shot. That might explain why people have reacted so well to the film... besides the fact that we're brilliant actors of course!

Murphy: Cillian Murphy, an actor from Cork who has been in so many films (he played The Scarecrow in BATMAN BEGINS), was interviewed about his performance in DUNKIRK, and said to be so proud about this Cork film. It's something that I can never get my head around: this man that I admired all along and that is one of the reasons why we both wanted to become actors, has watched a film that I'm in.

—  
Gert Hermans

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ECFA's goal is to support cinema for children and youth in its cultural, economical, aesthetic, social, political and educational aspects. Since 1988 ECFA brings together a wide range of European film professionals and associations, producers, directors, distributors. ECFA aims to set up a working structure in every European country for films for children and young people, a structure adapted to Europe's multicultural interests.

For more information and memberships (€ 200 per year):

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The European Children's Film Distribution Network:

[www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/network](http://www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/network)

Databases on children's film festivals, sales agents, distributors and

TV-programmers interested in European films for children.

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