

# Director Johan Timmers about EFA Award winner FIGHT GIRL

## The smell of sweat and bruises

While her parents are caught up in a divorce, the introverted Bo moves with her mother to an Amsterdam suburb. A girl next door introduces her to a kickboxing club and Bo turns out to be a natural talent. But Bo must learn to control herself, because you should only fight when you're in the ring.

For FIGHT GIRL, it seems like director Johan Timmers knew exactly how he wanted to tell this story. With a lot of passion and inspiration, but also with a lot of anger. FIGHT GIRL shows anger in all forms and variations, among young people and adults, because everyone is angry in their own way.

Johan Timmers: Bo's anger should not repel the audience. That is why several softer moments, such as the sweet scenes with her brother, show us how vulnerable she is. The film starts with the image of Bo talking to her stick insects... This girl is still a child!

**By the way, how did those stick in-**

### sects end up in the story?

Timmers: We had ordered them long in advance. They needed time to grow, otherwise you wouldn't even notice them on the screen. They are just a minor element of the story, but I like them better than yet another dog or cat.

### In that way we get a better understanding of Bo's anger.

Timmers: The scene in which we see Bo in the ridge of the gym hall is a key moment. When we hear her 'monologue interieur', we come closer to her, we sympathise and we understand why she is angry. When she is practicing kickboxing and she doesn't get the hang of it immediately, that makes her furious - "*I must succeed!*". When kickboxing, that inner struggle must be in balance, otherwise you get smacked in the head. The better she can control her anger, the better her boxing is.

**You don't spur the audience to hit each other's faces, but in the film**



### that is what they do all the time.

Timmers: Bo's story is very simple: a girl suffers from her parents' divorce and fights her way through it. That's all. If she wins the competition, she has conquered herself and she masters the situation. She has grown up to become strong and autonomous. Kickboxing is such a beautiful sport!

### Is it really?

Timmers: I started kickboxing myself now and it is a very difficult and technical sport. In this film, 14-year-old girls are fighting at top level. Noa Farinum (in the role of Joy) is unbelieva-

ble, she would knock us both out in the blink of an eye. Main actress Aiko Beemsterboer trained three times a week for four months. The immense power of kickboxing radiates throughout the entire film and adds an extra dimension. It is a youth film, but the tone is tough, raw and energetic.

### There is a lot of bruises involved

Timmers: No, it all looks spectacular, but the boxers are well protected. Competitions are fought with head-caps on, but then you couldn't recognise the characters, so we dropped those. Aiko had a bruise here and





there, but every fight was strictly choreographed by a coach, punch by punch and kick by kick. And all credits to our editor Philippe Ravoet, who contributed substantially to this film, especially to the final fight, that he entirely puzzled together.

**The atmosphere in the boxing club feels authentic. You can almost smell the odour of sweat.**

Timmers: We built that set from scratch in an old factory. Kickboxing sometimes has an aggressive connotation, but I wanted a location that was clear and bright. Despite that smell of sweat, it is a magical place where it is nice to box. Of course all details in colour and lighting were decided in advance.

**The scenes in and outside the box-**

**ing club seem to take place in two different worlds.**

Timmers: You can depict suburban life in a gloomy way, as Ken Loach does so well. But I didn't want cliché images of poor, gray flats. We opted for stylised places, such as the geometric high-risers and the intimidating courtroom. Outside the boxing school it is always cold and dark, inside it is warm. There we shot with a handheld camera, moving closer to the characters.

**The parents usually stay out of sight.**

Timmers: I chose to maintain Bo's perspective. That's why I literally kept the parents at a distance. This is not their story. You realise Bo is the most mature character, while her parents fight out their childish arguments in the background. Quarrelling in front of

your children is totally unacceptable. The only adult who manages to play a meaningful role in the children's lives is the trainer.

**What about the language? Is that stylised too or is it real street talk?**

Timmers: The actresses have adjusted the dialogues to their own liking. But scriptwriter Barbara Jurgens has two teenage daughters, she knows the jargon of youth in and out.

**You make a statement by choosing female protagonists in a boxing film. In the ring boys and girls are on an equal terms.**

Timmers: We rehearsed the boxing scenes with a lot of extras, members of various boxing clubs, and I immediately noticed how physically they acted with each other. They already came

to hug me after the first rehearsal. I wanted to hold on to the feeling that everyone was very easy with his body and with each other. In reality, boys and girls rarely fight each other, but I enjoyed showing how some girls just knock down the boys. This is a film about girl power.

**Thanks to actress Aiko Beemsterboer.**

Timmers: She is a phenomenal talent. We had 25 shooting days and Aiko is in just about every shot. She is a fantastic fun and smart girl. She came up with suggestions and we discussed everything together... It was a very true and special collaboration.

—  
Gert Hermans

