



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

interviews

**Even Mice Belong in
Heaven**

My Uncle Tudor

ECFA Award Winners

The Quiet Girl

MAUR Film



Journal

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Delight & Dismay

It has been such a delight to meet more than 30 members on site at our AGM and even more at the ECFA Award Ceremony! Delightful too, how more than 60 joined online. Like director Giorgio Bosisio says in an interview in this edition: *"ECFA felt like a house gathering of friends"*.

As good hosts, we are planning more opportunities to meet in person, share experiences, and try things out. It feels like we're reclaiming the outside world after spending so much time in front of our small screens... In cooperation with doxs! Ruhr, Bochum will become the meeting point for the European youth documentary scene on 9-10 November 2022 during the REALITIES event. The conference will initiate an exchange of expertise on presenting and communicating documentary works for young audiences.

Furthermore, we are about to build the Workshop Warehouse: a place where media education field workers can participate in each other's workshops, where ideas for active media education can be exchanged and can be stimulated to travel internationally. Planning is going well and we are optimistic that the Warehouse will open its doors for the first time next year.

This fuels optimism. Though there is also reason to worry: ECFA as an ambassador of children's needs is dismayed and shocked by what is happening on the

international political terrain. We condemn the fact that the Russian government considers war to be a legitimate means to enforce its interests against Ukraine, a sovereign country. War was and is never a legitimate means – it will serve nobody; there are only losers. Especially the children. We are committed to quality children's films. In these times they can mean comfort, relief, and hope.

ECFA's call for inclusion at the latest AGM is reflected in several articles in this Journal. The interviews with the directors of MY UNCLE TUDOR and DANS LA SILENCE D'UNE MER ABYSSALE speak about claiming justice. The Short Cut section reports promoting inclusion in its purest sense and SEAHORSE and A YOUTH provide insights into the fate of young refugees. The current situation in Ukraine will only add more faces to the flow of nameless individuals crossing the planet in search for a home. We ask our members to search for ways to also include them in your activities. They need our support.

–
Margret Albers

Jan Bubeníček & Denisa Grimmova about EVEN MICE BELONG IN HEAVEN

Fun with a frog

After a sudden accident, the short-tempered young mouse Wizzy and the shy fox Whitebelly end up together in animal heaven. As naturally mortal enemies, they have to gain control over their instincts and work together to meet the challenges of this new environment. There's plenty of magic to this story, but there's even more magic in the way it is made: In top-notch stop-motion with hand-made puppets, delicate textures and a warm lighting design.

What's so special about Wizzy's nose? What do animals fear most in a haunted house? What are woodworms doing on a film set? Czech directors Denisa Grimmova & Jan Bubeníček brought the answers to the JEF festival in Antwerp, where EVEN MICE BELONG IN HEAVEN was screened as the opening film. But first we asked them an even more crucial question...

Is it really so important to wash our ears?

Jan Bubeníček: It's not the most important thing in the world, although

our mothers always told us so. More importantly it is not to be scared of water, or even not to be scared at all.

There are certain aspects we might not appreciate too much about Wizzy's character.

Bubeníček: She is annoying! Even the tone of her voice is.

Denisa Grimmova: She has her reasons to fight. Her anger comes from sadness; she is sad because this evil world took her father away from her, the father whom she loved so much and who told her in his last moment to *"be brave"*. Compared to her dad's epic story, Wizzy's life looks rather shallow, which is frustrating. She is a little girl, not yet able to handle such big emotions.

That ambiguity, was it a conscious decision?

Grimmova: What is good for mice isn't necessarily good for foxes and vice versa. We break with the paradigm that the world is divided into innocent prey and evil predators.

Bubeníček: We all carry the best and



the worst within ourselves. It is important to decide which part of your personality you decide to foster.

Since the film was made in stop-motion, all locations must have been built, like the forest in the opening scene.

Bubeníček: The abandoned forest playground was one of the largest sets, scaled 50% of the real size. It was eight metres long, constructed on separate segments, with little holes for the camera to peek through.

The only sets fully constructed in CGI are the ocean and the underground railroad.

The Indiana Jones tribute?

Grimmova: Based on the estimated speed of the cart, we would have needed a 30 metre long railway, so we decided to do it in CGI.

The "heavenly fairground" is another ambitious set.

Bubeníček: That was fun! We both studied traditional animation. While





I started working as a digital effects supervisor, Denisa kept on using real materials and textures. We didn't want to re-model nature, we wanted the real thing! All the stones and tree-trunks are real, and we bought tons of artificial flowers.

Grimmova: The "Forest of Forests" was made from grapevines; we collected the cut-off branches. Actually the set got invaded by bugs. Every day we found piles of sawdust, and little pieces of the trunks had disappeared. Whatever we were building on the upside, they were destroying on the inside.

You even succeed in making an amusement park look particularly

inviting.

Bubeníček: Because we contrasted a warm light in the foreground with darkness in the background, and had classical music on the score. We kept our visual concept deliberately conservative or traditional.

There are charming details, like Wizzy's school bag being made from a matchbox, or the interiors of a mouse hole. How much passion was invested in these details?

Grimmova: Constructing the mouse hole was like a childhood dream coming true. I've always been fantasising about it and even tried to think from a mouse's perspective. We uploaded a drawn concept in a computer to calcu-

late scales and proportions. Then puppets, sets and props were built. That is when I came in to do the set-dressing. I love collecting and sorting objects - our house is full of them. I added all the details, planted every flower and invited pupils from our kids' school to the studio to help me design the wrapped candy for the fair.

Animators in general invest their energy in the eyes and fur of the characters. You invested in noses! I never knew they were so important.

Bubeníček: They are for rodents. Being so small, rodents are rather limited in their mimics; Wizzy was only 14 centimetres tall. While the foxes' faces contained 20 mobile elements, the mice had only six: jaws, nose, eyes, and eyebrows.

The number of animal specimens in heaven is almost unlimited.

Bubeníček: There were around 105 puppets, representing 85 different species.

Which one was the most challenging or the most fun?

Bubeníček: The birds! The parrot and the raven have real feathers; 18 per wing. Instead of animating them feather by feather, we started with a CGI design, which was then replaced

by real feathers. With every movement, all feathers folding and unfolding correspond to the bones.

Grimmova: I had fun with the frog, which was made of silicon, a material that resembles the human flesh and skin, which adds extra liveliness to the character.

Do kids still know what heaven is?

Grimmova: If there would be some kind of heaven, I hope it will be different for every individual, according to our needs and desires. We can't tell what heaven looks like; this is simply our version. In our story heaven is not only about fun; it is a place where you have to work on who you are.

Still... even in heaven you need to pay for a cinema ticket!

Bubeníček: Indeed, but you pay with your own experiences, based on the way you overcome your fears, anger and worries.

Although we were in heaven, God never was in the movie.

Grimmova: The concept of God is too big for us. I can't tell whether that God should be christian, jewish, muslim or anything else.

Bubeníček: Children's films often mislead their audience by refusing the answers to the questions they might





raise among children. We want to give children a fair answer to all their possible questions. Some of those answers come from the crayfish, who advise us to *“follow our nose and not our tail”*. Always move forward, something is awaiting you there, and the choices we make will have their consequences on our lives.

That scene explains about the circle of life and the mysteries of life and death.

Bubeníček: The crayfish is a sensei; he has the wisdom to tell about the rhythm of the universe, and about eternity.

Still the biggest threat for animals

is the human being. Do we meet them in the film?

Grimmova: Somehow, while hunting in the forest or driving a car. When humans enter a haunted house, they are frightened by gruesome animal creatures. But the animals visiting the haunted house in the amusement park are mainly frightened by human figures.

How was it to make a film with two directors?

Grimmova: It helped the film a lot. As man and wife we are complementary in our filmmaking, me being the illustrator working with the art department and Jan being focussed on

technical aspects (animatic, storyboarding). With Wizzy being a girl and Whitebelly being a boy, the gender balance was always there throughout the script writing and directing process. We were working half days together in the studio, the rest of the day we took turns taking care of the kids. Script author Syd Field once wrote that you should never make a film together with your significant other, but with a huge project like this, it was our only option. Otherwise the film would have crushed our relationship.

The film explains how every ending marks a new beginning. Now that the project is finished, does this mark a new beginning for you?

Bubeníček: A new beginning for Czech animation! After the political and economic changes in the nineties, the situation got extremely difficult and the Czech animation industry almost went bankrupt. For most of us, animation became a hobby and no longer an occupation. Student films did very well, as film schools were the only animation producers left. After more than 20 years, finally a new generation of producers, that don't care much about what once was, stood up. They revitalised the market for Czech feature animations. Denisa is current-



Denisa Grimmova & Jan Bubeníček

ly working on a short film, I'm working on a TV-series, and together we're preparing our next feature.

–
Gert Hermans

MY UNCLE TUDOR

“The film continues after the credits”

The documentary selection process for children’s film festivals is a tricky task, with programmers debating about what is a documentary “for children” and which documentaries about childhood experiences are suitable for young audiences. These questions all faded when Dimitris Spyrou and the Olympia Festival selection team watched Olga Luconvicova’s short documentary MY UNCLE TUDOR (Golden Bear @ the Berlinale, EFA Award for Best Short).

A young woman is revisiting her family home in a rural setting in Moldova and confronts her uncle who had sexually abused her as a child. That child, now a young woman, is the filmmaker herself. Olga Luconvicova describes MY UNCLE TUDOR as “a Moldovan poetic film which helped me disclose my trauma and gain international recognition” – and she’s right! But how could the Festival bring this marvellous but harsh film to its audience without further harm being done?

It was decided to accompany the

screening with other activities, that would use the film itself to launch and extend a social discussion on the issues of sexual abuse, sexual harassment and rape culture, internationally codified as “#MeToo”. The Greek society recently has had its own version of public debate on the issue, in which former sailing champion, two-time Olympic winner and now psychologist Sofia Bekatorou played a leading role, after revealing a rape she suffered at the age of 21, back in 1998, where a senior Hellenic Sailing Federation official was the culprit.

The Festival collaborated with Mrs Bekatorou and filmmaker Vania Turner, who is currently making a documentary on this subject. A roundtable discussion was prepared on the issues of abuse of children by adults, which – as we realised during the process – should not be thought as limited to sexual abuse.

The Festival, promoting the art of cinema, made Luconvicova’s film the starting point for the discussion. Va-



nia Turner, who as a filmmaker has had the chilling experience of documenting sexual violence in African countries, made an in-depth discussion with Olga Luconvicova on the emancipatory possibilities of filmmaking. This led to an online debate with a selection of specialists who have consistently worked on the issue: investigative journalist Mariniki Alevizopoulou, psychiatrist Yorgos Nikolaidis, with an extensive activist record on the protection of children from sexual exploitation, Alexandra Koronaïou, Professor of Sociology of Panteion Social & Political Sciences University, filmmaker Vania Turner, Elena Rapti, member of the Hellenic Parliament and Dr. Margarita Gerouki, researcher at the Finnish Jyväskylä

University. Highlighting different aspects of the issue, the participants presented an alarming reality in a very constructive way.

Furthermore there was a workshop for teachers, based on Dr. Gerouki’s research and expertise. Overall, this has been a successful case of using the art of cinema to raise social awareness.

Here you’ll find a transcription of the talk that Vania Turner had with director Olga Luconvicova, offering insights into an exceptional piece of cinematic art that stands out not only for its topical focus but also for its delicate and well-thought narrative framework and approach.



Olga Lucovnicova about MY UNCLE TUDOR

After 20 years of silence, the filmmaker travels back to the house of her great-grandparents, where she passed through harmful events that left a deep imprint on her memory forever. The long-awaited family gathering runs counter to her attempts to overcome the past. MY UNCLE TUDOR is a personal story that highlights all those personal stories that were never resolved.

Olga Lucovnicova: The film is a poetic journey into my childhood, taking me back to the house of my great-grandparents in Moldova. Many beautiful memories are related to that house, but it's also the place where something bad happened which had a lasting impact on me. After twenty years of silence, I decided to go back to confront my childhood fears and the person who caused them. I hope the film encourages people to speak up, as I realised that remaining silent only empowers evil. In the film, I used spiders as a symbol of the family's reluctance to acknowledge the truth. All family members know that spiders are there but choose to ignore them.

What kind of cinematic language was required to transcend these feelings?

Lucovnicova: Moldovan cinema was quite known in the 1960s for its poetic cinema, speaking to us through symbols and metaphors rather than strictly depicting reality. The house it-



self has a lot to tell about my feelings as a child. At first, it looks like a beautiful summer house bathing in warm sunlight, before transforming into an old house in which cold colours and shabby furniture abound. One

important element are the white curtains through which I filmed many of the scenes. I always knew I would use them in the film, as they were deeply imprinted on my memory. During the shooting process, I went through an inner journey, discovering myself as a filmmaker.

Throughout the film, we witness the confrontation with your uncle.

Lucovnicova: During the 10 days of filming I noticed my uncle sitting alone in one of the many chairs in the garden for hours. I thought may-

be he was analysing his past and had something important to tell me at this stage of his life. So I approached him; having my recorder and camera with me helped me to hide my emotions and remain patient. Without that, I wouldn't have had the courage.

Did the conversation strengthen you to carry on?

Lucovnicova: I realised that even though I couldn't go back in time to change the past, I could help others by sharing my story. During these two hours of conversation I took the chance to ask him the questions that have been haunting me for decades.

How did you feel at that moment? Like the girl who once went through all this, or like a filmmaker on the job?

Lucovnicova: The questions I asked came from Olga, looking back upon that bad experience from the past. However, I could never have been that patient and calm if I hadn't assumed the identity of Olga the filmmaker, preventing me from getting carried away by my emotions.

You seem to have strong bonds with your family members. Did you face any ethical dilemmas throughout the process?

Lucovnicova: Shooting the film was indeed a tough decision. Those people are still around – for them the film continues after the credits. But as soon as I realised that I wasn't the only in the family who had suffered from my uncle, I made up my mind. What if we saw even more children suffering due to my silence? By sharing my story, I could at least protect them from potential harm. This was my way of dealing with this reality. However, I decided not to have the film being screened in Moldova to protect the identity of the family members.

Do you think there can be healing and reconciliation through the film?

Lucovnicova: For me, family is an environment where you can talk honestly. It was very toxic for me not to be able to tell the truth about what I had experienced. Although in the film I said that I wouldn't forgive my uncle, I think by now I managed to forgive him in real life.

What does this concept of forgiveness mean to you?

Lucovnicova: All in all, this film has been like an act of forgiveness. I put the blame not only on my uncle, but also on my family and myself; I can't hold just one person accountable for what happened, as all the time



nobody confronted him with his bad deeds. My uncle was a great father and husband, but he had a dual personality which went unnoticed for many years. Family is supposed to be the safest possible place for children, but it is not always like that. I've always discussed everything with my parents – they truly are my best friends – but I never told them about what had happened when I was nine years old as back then I didn't understand something wrong was going on. I believe it is extremely important for parents to explain to their children what abuse is and to teach them to confront even their closest relatives.

For which your film could be helpful.

Lucovnicova: I believe in the power of cinema; my conversations with family

members didn't help me as much as making the film did. What I intend to do in the future is write a methodology of how to use films as a therapeutic tool to get over your negative experiences.

You think the general approach has changed since your days of childhood?

Lucovnicova: Definitely. Back then, my uncle wouldn't have been arrested even if my case had been reported. Nowadays, making a child get undressed might already be classified as an act of abuse. On the other hand, we are witnessing an increase in the rates of abuse, while nobody is speaking up due to the fear of being labelled by others. Conducting my research for the film, I found out

that the cases of boys being abused are disclosed even less than those of girls. Boys are scared of being labeled not only as victims but also as gay. It is of crucial importance to change this false perception in our society.

So all is in the hands of the young generation of today?

Lucovnicova: I admire this new generation that is more fearless compared to our grandparents. I'd advise everyone to speak up and be courageous, knowing that your story matters.

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Transcription by Pelin Su Özdoğan
Intro by Pantelis Panteloglou

February is ECFA Award season! It's our members who voted for the best European films in three categories, and for each of the three winners we had a representative in the well-attended Award Ceremony, which felt very much like a reconciliation with public life. Congratulations to all the winners – we give them the floor!

ECFA AWARD FOR BEST FEATURE: CALAMITY

Florenzia Di Concilio: "Banjo's are known as annoying instruments"

Representing the award winning Best Feature was Florenzia Di Concilio, composer of the French animation CALAMITY by Remi Chayé.

As a composer, is animation your natural habitat?

Florenzia Di Concilio: No, this is my first animation film, but I already know it's not going to be my last, as Remy Chayé already asked me for his next one.

Congratulations! You're the only one in the room who knows Remi's plans for the future.

Di Concilio: I am, and I'm not sure if I should tell you. Remi's films always revolve around girls with very special stories and personalities. This is going to be another one like that.

The first word that comes to mind when listening to CALAMITY's soundtrack is 'bluegrass'.

Di Concilio: That is what I like about

my job as a composer, which was very different in my previous occupation as a classical piano player. Now under all circumstances, I can be true to my style, keep my own voice, and adapt it to whatever a story needs. We casted a bunch of amazing musicians that could translate our musical intentions into a bluegrass style; which went rather easily. Even if I never practised that style, I've been living for a long time in the US, so I kind of knew about it. I'm not a big fan of country music, but bluegrass is acoustic so it has a more authentic, rural flavour. By no means you could call me a bluegrass musician, but it wasn't completely strange to me either.

When they told me about interviewing the composer, I was expecting some kind of bearded banjo player.

Di Concilio: Actually I am. I had a shave!

How do you feel about banjo's?

Di Concilio: Banjo's are known as generally annoying instruments, but we had an amazing banjo player; he was very skinny and had no beard at all. Unexpectedly I became a fan of the instrument, and especially of the guy playing it.

The other tonality that stands out is the one of the wide landscapes.

Di Concilio: There are indeed two tones. One is the bluegrass, the other one is the symphonic larger scale orchestration that goes along with the wideness of the landscape and the rhythm of the action. And there is yet a third element, which is my own style; a kind of acoustic phrases electronically modified into the sound design.

The most striking element of the film is the unique, hard-headed main character Calamity. How do you feel about her?

Di Concilio: It takes a long time to create an animation film. I started working on CALAMITY when the animatic was finished and post-production began, so I had plenty of time to get to know the character and see her evolve. Simultaneously I saw my own daughter evolving; she was still a baby when I took on the project. In some respects I could see my daughter in her, at least in the way I would like her to be. Meanwhile I sang the main film theme as a lullaby for my son. To me deep emotions are attached to both the film and the character; it's like a very dear part of my life.



ECFA AWARD FOR BEST SHORT: SHOWER BOYS

Christian Zetterberg: “How would you measure masculinity?”



After ice hockey training, two friends are heading home to have a sauna. The friends start to compete on who is more manly, a tough competition where no-one really wants to be tough. Their game is interrupted when father knocks on the door...

SHOWER BOYS winning the ECFA Short Award was not a big surprise, but there were other surprises. Like director Christian Zetterberg showing up with three more crew members, happy and proud, to collect their award. But the questions about the ECFA Award, he had to answer all by himself.

There was a method to make the young actors feel comfortable with you and with the camera.

Christian Zetterberg: I've been a child actor myself, and I've found myself often in situations on a set where you were put next to another actor, and then the director came and said: "You two... you'll play best friends" and you never even met that boy, you even didn't know his name. We casted the boys 6 months before shooting

and on weekends we went on trips together. Because in the film they mostly had to be in swimming clothes, we met in swimming pools, bath houses, on water slides... They got so comfortable with me and with one another, and now they are like my little brothers. That is what might have lent their performance this almost documentary feel, as if they're not even acting.

SHOWER BOYS deals with male stereotypes, especially in a sportive environment where you have to act



tough not be accused easily for being a “pussy”.

Zetterberg: This is a story about toxic masculinity and how it affects boys, especially in sports. Like the quote we're using: "are you a man or are you a mouse?" I experienced it myself as a boy, doing lots of sports but always being the weak one, the one who was afraid, the mouse. Not fitting the stereotype, does it make you less manly? How would you measure masculinity? By muscles? By how tall you are? Or is it something else? I wanted this film

to be a social experiment, somehow provoking people.

Provoking was among the main intentions?

Zetterberg: That is what you do when questioning the boundaries of a male friendship. As soon as you put a label on it, it's over, it's decided. By not putting a label, I challenge the audience to fill in the blind spots for themselves. It was interesting to see the reactions from the young audiences we met.

As a festival programmer, I would be so interested to follow this film's Q&A film in my festival. I guess you were in many?

Zetterberg: I wish there would have been a lot more! The ones with the kids are so much funnier than the ones with adult audiences, who might often question you about the process. Kids just honestly ask what comes to their minds. I got very happy reactions, also some rather inappropriate ones, but I have the habit of always re-



turning them with another question.

You finished the film in March 2021. How many sports games have you been watching ever since that made you think: this is exactly what my film is all about?

Zetterberg: A lot! When we were talking with all the actors and extras, all of them could recognise that “man or mouse” part. More than ever we need to talk about toxic masculinity in the sports industry; the topic is very much up to date.

Another element is the reaction of the father, which is quite an extreme one.

Zetterberg: We wanted to show the difference between what the boys see and do, which is just fun and games, and how adults react according to their standards and labels, imposing them on kids even at an early age. If your father is a racist, you’ll probably grow up becoming a racist too. That is why we have two different types of dads in the film. One who is more supportive, and one who thinks he knows best, simply because he is a father.

Since I’m an adult, I can ask at least one question about the process. Shooting films in a shower, how does it work?

Zetterberg: We were under a huge time pressure. We only had two shooting days, that was all we could afford. For the shower scene a script was written, but we realised we couldn’t make it in time. So we were like: toss it! You guys, go play and have fun. And we just did it, completely improvised, in one shot! We had no idea what the boys were going to do, the entire team was alert, all of them holding towels to prevent our equipment from eventual splashes. We just let them play and gave our photographer Jakub a hard time. It was the funniest scene that I’ve ever been recording. We were just running around with a camera in this tiny bathroom, trying to collect as much material as possible.

The act of physical nakedness for them might have been a thin line to walk.

Zetterberg: We always kept the focus on their faces, as we didn’t want to have it sexualised in any way. *SHOW-ER BOYS* is not about sexuality, it is about identity. We had a superb relationship with the actors and their parents, and since we worked with them so long in advance, they would have had the courage to tell us if something wouldn’t have felt okay. I thought I would never have them



Shower Boys crew @ ECFA Award ceremony

feeling comfortable enough to do the kissing scene, and we were ready at any time to call it off. But we ended up doing 35 retakes, which in a way made it even more funny.

The boys still felt comfortable when seeing themselves on screen?

Zetterberg: The first time they were a bit afraid about reactions from classmates. One of the boys is an ice hockey player who never stood in front of a camera before. Actually he might be a man, not even a mouse.

But they had grown so much with this film. They were awarded a prestigious Swedish “Rising Star” award, which helped them understand that what they did was really acting. “It was a role I played, and now this is me, and both are completely different.” All those prizes and all the festival fuzz must have meant a lot to them. And now there is this ECFA Award, which proves this is an important film about a subject that needs to be talked about.



ECFA AWARD FOR BEST DOC: RAISE THE BAR

Producer Margret Jonasdottir: "Gender Heaven doesn't include sports"



The ECFA Journal talk with director Gudjon Ragnarsson (RAISE THE BAR) in the Film'on Festival was an extremely enjoyable experience – what a pleasure to hear one director speak with such spirit and passion. I wondered what producer Margret Jonasdottir could add to that! But at the same time Gudjon (from now on – and according to Margret – simply

'Jon') described his producer as the absolute Leading Lady of the Icelandic documentary scene. ECFA was extremely proud to have her picking up the award in Berlin.

In 2015 a basketball team for girls was formed in Iceland. Coach Brynjar Sigurdsson taught the girls to behave like leaders off the field, and like pro-

fessional athletes on the court. His training sessions provoke controversy among the audience: as much as you like what he is doing, at the same time you might hate him for the methods he uses. Constantly raising the bar, the girls' team enrolls in boys' tournaments, which the Icelandic Federation forbids them. RAISE THE BAR tells about girls who once and for all wanted to change the paradigm in women's basketball.

Margret Jonasdottir: I've been in this business for over 20 years, but this is something I've never seen before. At first I thought this was going to be a small Icelandic project, but gender and sports are currently a big thing, as coaches are treating boys and girls differently. Girls are supposed to be more quiet and obedient and not be as fierce fighters as the boys. A lot of young women don't know how to speak up for themselves, they don't know how to take space. Our basketball girls are stimulated to push boundaries and find their own inner voice.

This convinced you to raise your level of ambition?

Jonasdottir: I decided to try to push this one internationally, which was quite challenging. Luckily we found this Finnish co-producer Pystymetsä with whom we established a wonderful cooperation. The film was big in Finland, where they claim to have the best education system in the world. It ran in the cinemas for weeks and made it to all the newspapers.

Jon said: If you want to do a documentary in Iceland, there is only one person to talk to... Was he right?

Jonasdottir: It's not up to me to answer this! I did my first film in 2000, so I have some experience in finding co-production partners and I can recognise potential weaknesses in a project. Jon had never done a film before. He was overwhelmed at times with the story. Having amazing access to the girls and their families, he filmed and filmed; we had about 600 hours of footage. So I gathered my best people around him, including for-



mer commissioning editor Iikka Vehkalahti, who is like ‘the king of Icelandic documentaries’. He helped Jon to streamline the story. I always wanted to push the girls into the frontline; we needed to give them a voice. What I see in Jon is similar to how I felt when I started in this business: the will to give everything that I had, not caring how to get it through, and a deep respect for his subject.

How was the reaction on the national market?

Jonasdóttir: I’ve never seen anything like this. For four weeks we had all the major broadcasters, newspapers, podcasts... endlessly discussing the film. Everybody was going after Brynjar for breaking down the girls, like an old-style East European coach. But you don’t see broken girls in the film! Today these girls are 15 years old, playing in the women’s league, and they’re still fighting the fight, asking the Federation to apologise for how they treated them. Some of these girls have been offered to play for the national team, but they have all declined, saying “we don’t want that logo on our chest”. They will not let go, they continue the fight for their younger sisters, for the next generations. Iceland is supposed to be “Gender Heaven” but that doesn’t include



Margrét Jónasdóttir @ ECFA Award ceremony

sports. We’re very traditional at this point. Boys play against boys, girls play against girls, and they’ll get the worst coaches. I am proud of this film and of Jon, who fought so hard for it.

Given the fact that you were introduced as the Leading Lady of Icelandic documentary, you never did a documentary for children before!

Jonasdóttir: This was also my first sports film. But if ever another project would pop up with a children’s topic in focus, I would definitely be interested. I’ve learned quite a lot from this one.

You could consider this ECFA Award

as a motivating tap on your shoulder.

Jonasdóttir: We were very pleased. Children were of course our target audience, but also parents, teachers, coaches, sports people... In Iceland it all got very personal; everyone had an opinion about Brynjar, which made me sad. People didn’t understand the themes like foreigners do. Even today the Federation has not yet said a single word; they have not been willing to meet with the girls. They simply believe the coach has brainwashed them. How awful – the girls take up the fight and then they’re told “Kids do not have opinions like that. You must have been brainwashed.” That shocked me. After so many grown-ups have offended them, now their opinions were ignored and swept off the table. We’re starting to circulate the film in the US - a big basketball nation. We had young basketball players bursting out in tears watching the film.

I can’t help thinking: what would happen if you would take Brynjar on one of your festival trips?

Jonasdóttir: He has been to a couple of festivals. He has experience as a “leadership coach” in big companies, so he knows how to play the crowd to get his message across. He treats



the kids exactly the same and addresses them like adults. In the light of the #MeToo movement, this is exactly what girls need. When I saw the first clip, I remember thinking: I wish I would have had this training. I wish my daughter would have been in this basketball programme. These girls are never going to be bullied by a male or female in their workplace; they will take it in and answer for themselves. It was a shame it all ended the way it did with his programme being broken up and the girls being sent to different teams. But he is still coaching and he is still fighting for equality.

—
Gert Hermans

Creating an inclusive short film programme

It can't be as hard as everyone always says, was the slightly, or let's say extremely arrogant thought we had at Mo&Friese when deciding three years ago to provide our annual short film programme for German cinemas with audio description and subtitles for the deaf. Why hadn't we done this all along? Why wasn't everyone doing it? Wasn't short film the perfect medium for this?

Ambitiously we planned not to simply "have the films translated", but to get children themselves involved. Hearing and non-hearing children would work as duos on subtitles; sighted and non-sighted children would cooperate on an audio description. Covid pushed the workshops back and when, two years later, we were finally ready for take-off, we looked at our plans with different, far more realistic eyes.

Fortunately, we found great allies who gently but firmly explained to us how much more work this concept would include... Audio film author Marit Bechtloff and sign language

coach Susanne Held both never led a workshop with kids before but their great sensibility, creativity, organisation and improvisation skills have saved us.

Audio description

Since blind children are usually not among the target group of a film festival we had no network to find them. We ended up with a team of kids ranging from sighted to completely blind, willing to dedicate three days of their autumn holidays to learning about the art of audio description, transmitting all the information from a visual medium into spoken language and synchronising texts with dialogues. Under the guidance of a blind and a sighted author, superb texts were created for five short films, which the children then recorded themselves. Both the writing and recording were impressive, seeing them break into collective laughing cramps about mispronounced words while recording.



Sign Language

One of our naive mistakes was that we never considered how deaf children (like any other child) can't necessarily read subtitles at the age of six. So we changed plans and prepared for a recorded sign language translation. But then we were confronted with the question of how deaf children should communicate with hearing kids if not sharing a language?

With the help of an inclusive school, the sign language workshop was fully booked. And through the EiS-App (a pocket lexicon for German sign language) we found two hearing children able to sign and thus form a bridge between both groups. The joint search for signs that would render the spoken content as comprehensively as possible was great fun. The

children signing in front of the camera were integrated into the film as a video window. There are two very skilled video and audio technicians to whom we are forever in their debt!

At the end of April we celebrated the premiere of our programme with some very proud workshop kids facing a large, heterogeneous audience.

The programme MO&FRIESE UNTERWEGS IN DER NATUR is now available with or without German audio description or translation into sign language.

The Short Cut column is published with the help of the [Mo&Friese KinderKurzFilmFestival](#) dedicated to short films, as a part of the [Hamburg Short Film Agency](#).

Colm Bairéad about THE QUIET GIRL

“Compassion, attention and love, ultimately”

Cáit, a 9 year old girl from an overcrowded, dysfunctional family in rural Ireland, is sent for the summer to live with distant relatives when her pregnant mother’s due date approaches. Cáit has learnt to hide in plain sight from those around her, but in the care of her foster parents, she blossoms... until she discovers a painful truth.

One of the best films at this year’s Berlinale was Colm Bairéad’s debut THE QUIET GIRL, which won the Grand Prize of the Generation Kplus Int’l Jury and an Honourable Mention of the Children’s Jury. One month later this touching coming-of-age drama was awarded a total of 8 prizes at the Irish Film & Television Festival.

Colm Bairéad: The film is quite a faithful adaptation of Claire Keegan’s much beloved short story FOSTER (2009) in which she is constantly showing how beauty and ugliness coexist in very close proximity. I immediately fell in love with it. Two years prior to having read the book I became a father myself for the first time and I got a

kind of new understanding of what it is that a child needs and deserves in life: compassion, attention and love, ultimately. The most attractive thing to me as a filmmaker was the strong sense of point of view. The story is written in the present tense with a first person narrator – all is seen through the eyes of the girl – and I longed to bring her to life as it were. I was immediately drawn to Cáit’s sensual character and wanted to see if I could translate her particular point of view into the language of film. For me, the old question ‘Whose story is this?’ is the starting point for all filmmaking. I was particularly drawn to the smallness of the story; the lack of plot felt like an intriguing challenge to me.

Up from the beginning till the bittersweet end, when Cáit is shouting “Dad” – meaning not her own father – every one of your wonderful visuals seems to contain a little secret. Like in the opening shot, when we finally discover the small figure of a girl who’s not responding



to the loud calls. She might as well be dead... Until she rises and starts moving.

Bairéad: The opening shot is an estimation of the theme of the film, which is the story of a young girl coming to life when discovering a new way of living. We decided the camera should never leave Cáit, always be with her. For instance when father drives her to her aunt’s place we don’t see anything outside the backseat of the car.

How did you come to your profession?

Bairéad: With my father being a German language teacher, I grew up with German television. We used to watch lots of early classics, like silent films by Fritz Lang, Chaplin’s CITY LIGHTS or John Huston’s THE MALTESE FALCON. As a teenager I made some short films

myself, or with a friend. Later I studied Film & Broadcasting at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Dublin was the place to be?

Bairéad: That is where I was born and raised bilingually in both Irish and English. The Irish language, spoken by a minority in rural parts of the country, is close to my heart. My wife and I also raised our children bilingually. In 2012 we both founded the Irish production company Inscéal. For us, the success of THE QUIET GIRL, with Irish as the main spoken language, is truly a gift.

–
Uta Beth

SEAHORSE

“It stands upright in the water and can’t sink,” the swimming instructor encourages the children as they are training for their first swimming badge - the Seahorse. However, the sea creature in the title not only refers to the badge named after it, but also to the area of our brain, the hippocampus, where memories are stored. It serves as our body’s archive, consolidates new memories and weighs possible outcomes.

In SEAHORSE we meet Hanan and her younger brother Sidar. Hanan, a swimming instructor at the local swimming pool, takes her brother to swimming lessons so that he can earn his first badge. - the seahorse. Amid the splashing water, Hanan remembers her family’s arduous journey to Germany. When crossing the Mediterranean Sea with her family in a small rubber dinghy in 2015, she could not swim. After the boat capsized, the fear of drowning got irrevocably burned into her memory. She is determined to have her younger brother learn how to swim before his painful memories to the water surface.

SEAHORSE poetically explores the contradictory and unpredictable nature of memory. Hanan tells her story with a determined, yet fragile voice; her account echoing over sometimes abstract images of the water, or images of Sidar and the swimming class. Her voice itself is like the current, silky but rough, shaky, yet a force to be reckoned with. As she bares the strength to face her trauma, the ordinary swimming pool becomes a place of reappraisal.

Director Nele Dehnenkamp created a sensitive portrait of a girl who found new strength by facing her fear and ultimately overcoming it. The director neither puts any particular emphasis on the dreadful backstory, nor does she resort to loaded imagery. Instead, she provides her protagonist with a safe space to tell her story in her own way. The camera merely skims the outer walls of this protective bubble, making palpable the extraordinary trust between the director and her protagonist needed for such a portrayal.



Just as hippocampal neurons string together past and future, Nele Dehnenkamp manages to connect Hanan’s account of her traumatic past with the hopes for her brother’s future. The result is a sensitive short film that deals with the traumatic consequences of flight in its own way and brings images back into our heads that are unfortunately all too quickly forgotten.

SEAHORSE received the Special Mention from the GROSSE KLAPPE Youth Jury at the 20th doxs! festival. Endowed by the Federal Agency for Civic Education the award is given since 2011 to productions with an outstanding aesthetical and political approach.

Production & Distribution: Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg, Christine Duttlinger: christine.duttlinger@filmakademie.de
 Director: Nele Dehnenkamp
 Producer: Christine Duttlinger, Nele Dehnenkamp

The Doxspot column is published with the help of the doxs! festival for children & youth documentaries in Duisburg and other cities in the Ruhr Area. www.doxs.de.



MAUR FILM

Alena Vandasova: “Why should this movie be made in animation?”

The Czech production company MAUR Film has more than one trump card to play. With versatility as a keyword, they combine multiple assets, such as a permanent production of mainly short films, a diversity of animation styles, a strong reputation as co-production partner... And two inspiring people at the wheel: Martin Vandas and his partner in work and life Alena Vandasova. Together with her, we go over the recent production of MAUR Film in their offices in a Prague suburb.

Alena Vandasova: Martin and I come from different artistic backgrounds. I was working in a photo gallery in Prague when he introduced me to the world of cinema. After the births of our children – we have three daughters – I started working with him on film projects. Next year, MAUR Film will celebrate its 20th anniversary.

For the whole world 2021 has been a terrible year, but maybe not for animators?

Vandasova: Animation is about spend-

ing endless hours alone in a dark studio. So maybe this wasn't a big change after all. Many of us worked on projects from home. If that wasn't possible for technical reasons, animators could come here to work in perfect isolation. Lucie Sunková made her wonderful SUZIE IN THE GARDEN here during the pandemic. Every day she came and made these beautiful paintings, and nobody was looking over her shoulder. We were so happy for her to be selected for the Berlinale; she deserves it.

What about animation being a group process?

Vandasova: For creative teams it was indeed impossible to have their in-depth discussions online; you simply need a pencil and paper in your hand, instead of a keyboard and a mouse path. That is why several projects in the development phase - a crucial phase for animation - were postponed.

There is some special feeling about SUZIE IN THE GARDEN, bringing us



SUZIE IN THE GARDEN

so close to nature; seeing Suzie's hands digging into the ground, you can almost feel the dirt under your fingernails.

Vandasova: Lucie Sunková established that connection with nature in her previous film THE TREE, and now she elaborates on it with a colourful garden full of surprises. Her animation suits this kind of poetic story; she found the perfect technique for transmitting her ideas. This technique has its consequences for the character design.

Different from when using other 2D tools, you can't elaborate too much on the details when using a brush, although you can see the wind blowing through Suzie's hair.

How exactly does it work?

Vandasova: A multi-layered glass table enables you to combine several lay-outs and backgrounds, connected through the lighting. Then the oil drawings are made on the upper glass plate. For each shot you have to erase



everything and start from scratch. The final result is a combination of all layers. Lucie did everything by herself.

Every story requires its own choice in terms of technique?

Vandasova: Choosing the right technique is at the cradle of every story. Often when reading a script, you might wonder: why should this movie be made in animation? We should be asking this question all the time in our talks with creators and animators. When preparing the feature THE ELEVEN with director David Sukup we had a script, we had a director, but it took us years to point out the right technique. Now it's decided - we'll be combining stop motion sets with 3D characters – but we've walked a long path before getting there and we've spent several months on testing.

Let's test your theory with some of your recent shorts, and see whether the technique fits the story... What about MOTHER IS ALWAYS RIGHT? Paper animation is yet another challenging technique. However, all characters have a delicate facial expression, often defined by the eyebrows.

Vandasova: Marie Urbankova is very talented. She just finished her studies - this is only her second short - and she



THE PIT

has a special gift for paper animation; her art design is brilliant and what she does with paper and scissors is simply amazing. She is a skilled book illustrator, for which she has already won several awards.

Do you agree with the title?

Vandasova: I have to say I do! For Czech audiences, there is an extra layer to the story, compiling these typical sayings that sound all too familiar to us. Like our parents telling us not to drink too fast or we'd get frogs in our bellies.

DON'T BLOW IT UP is another recent production.

Vandasova: For this short student

film, Alzbeta Macakova Misejkova used a traditional 2D technique, with soft colours creating a calm atmosphere. It makes the story look much more simple than it actually is...

What about this remarkable THE PIT?

Vandasova: THE PIT tells a funny story about teeth, like a quirky small joke. Now director Marketa Smolikova Kubatova wants to make a similar film about... the stomach. The process started with 2D art designs, then we spent a lot of time modelling and finally everything was made completely in 3D. THE PIT was not only a technical pilot study, but also a test for our cooperation patterns, as we're think-

ing about more ambitious long term projects with Marketa.

At MAUR Film it seems like all techniques and formats can be combined. You never thought about specialising in one aspect that would define your professional profile?

Vandasova: A specialised studio might fit a director who knows exactly what they want. But sometimes a search process is needed, discussing how to link a director's intentions to the technical options. A time-consuming, but equally exciting process. For instance, for ROSENTAAL, a feature in development, we've already made four tests on how to optimise the animation, and we're still not completely there.

But then, is there something that all MAUR titles have in common?

Vandasova: There is one thing: the continuity of people. Several animators who came here to work on FRITZI, the film we co-produced with Germany, came back to work on their own shorts. One of the animators whom we met for THE CROSSING is currently developing a film here. A profound relationship with our partners, that is the secret that connects all MAUR titles.



FRITZI – A REVOLUTIONARY TALE was a surprisingly successful feature.

Vandasova: It didn't surprise me at all. FRITZI was the re-telling of Czech history. There were so many parallels and similarities between the situation in East-Germany and Czechoslovakia. Can you believe that Czech Television said no to co-producing? They called it a German history – "It's not ours" – while this is exactly the story of so many Czech parents and grandparents. Even Czech teachers were delighted to have found a tool for teaching about the Velvet Revolution, using a source that was created in Germany. Also here the personal connection with German producer Grit Wisskirch-en was crucial.

Was THE CROSSING an equally rewarding experience?

Vandasova: In terms of people, yes. It was French producer Dora Benousilio who came to find us when searching for people mastering this 'animation on glass' technique. We worked together on THE CROSSING for many years and really got to appreciate each other. But for director Florence Miailhe it must have been so frustrating...

Because?

Vandasova: Bad timing! We finished the film in 2020 and all cinemas were empty. Moreover, with THE FLEA, MY SUNNY MAAD and THE CROSSING there were suddenly three animated movies dealing with a similar topic. This proves even more that we should offer our films a life outside the festival circuit. VOD is going strong, which is great for the animation scene; even short films gain extra visibility through different VOD formats.

Years ago in the CEE Animation Forum in Trebon, there was a project being pitched called OF UNWANTED THINGS AND PEOPLE...

Vandasova: ... And now we're making progress! This episode film with four co-production partners tells a poetic story in the line of MY LIFE AS A ZUCCHINI, based on a book by Arnost Goldflam. The art design and puppets look marvellous. The Czech part is finished, the Slovenian part (ZVVIKS) is currently in production, our Slovak partner (Artichoke) is finishing the animatic, while the French (Vivement Lundi) are working on the art design. The project took shape during the CEE meetings.



THE CROSSING

What is the importance of an organisation like CEE?

Vandasova: CEE is like a miracle! Nowadays companies from Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, etc. can co-produce with Germany and France, simply because we joined forces in this association. When granting FRITZI, Eurimage seemed very pleased with the way a diverse group of co-producers was brought together. What I appreciate about CEE is how they keep going, with events organised year round. Even under pandemic circumstances, they continued their mission.

For many years, every time when speaking with Czech filmmakers, there was a big nostalgia for the heydays of Czech animation.

Vandasova: We worked with Bretislav Pojar on FIMFARUM, his last work,

which was at the same time the start of a new era. We were not clinging onto the wonderful works of Hermína Týrlova, Jiri Trnka and Vlasta Popisilova, but decided to find our own way. There wasn't yet much of an industry, but we felt like rediscovering the language of animation. The Czech Republic is such a small market; not big enough to produce four features per year, and financial sources are limited. But over the last 10 years a generation of young producers stood up, launching a new tradition.

Are there any other players that might have stimulated this transition?

Vandasova: I'd like to mention two festival events, Anifest and the Zlin Film Festival! The town of Zlin is far away and people don't seem to be willing to make that long ride, but their programme always looks fantastic and the staff are super qualified. They do a wonderful job advocating for children's cinema and animation in the Czech Republic.

– Gert Hermans

Find the [showreel](#) on the [MAUR Film website](#)

Giorgio Bosisio about A YOUTH

“The almost existential state of waiting”

Together with his group of young Afghan friends, Peyman finds himself stuck in Athens. Their hope is to reach mainland Europe and reunite with their loved ones, but that could take years; and it might never happen. Living in limbo, but armed with a new-found freedom, they kill time by aimlessly strolling around the city, sharing jokes, rap battles, stories from the past and dreams for the future. As Peyman is waiting for news that could shake his false state of harmony, he tries to make sense of the world around him through music and poetry.

Based between Milan and London, director Giorgio Bosisio comes from a fiction background. Ever since 2015 - the moment marking the start of the European refugee crisis - he began to feel a growing sense of being deceived and manipulated by the media. He decided then to make a documentary, developing an unconditional and direct relationship with the subjects of his film. A YOUTH (spoken in Dari & Farsi) describes the emptiness caused

by the almost existential state of waiting in which Peyman, his mother and friends are immersed. The film made a successful festival career (Shortfest Aspen, Olympia Pyrgos, Hot Docs, Guanajuato, Helsinki...) and a re-edit was distributed by Aljazeera English.

Giorgio Bosisio: I first travelled to Greece as a volunteer in 2016 but it was only in 2017 that I first met Peyman during a stop-motion animation workshop that I facilitated for Greek and Afghan teenagers. Back then, he was living with his mother at Hotel City Plaza, one of Athens' "refugee squats". City Plaza was a project launched by migrant communities, in cooperation with the Greek and international solidarity movement, offering people a dignified alternative to the overcrowded camps. It was here, in this safe haven, that Peyman performed some of his rap songs for me. A few days later we recorded them and shot his first music video.

How did you proceed from rap to



film?

Bosisio: After working on his video clips, I decided to shoot a short portrait with the aim of attracting media attention and promoting his music to a European audience. The trailer I edited convinced my old friends and colleagues Afolabi Kuti and Charlotte Carroll to come on board as producers, who were able to raise finances from Executive Producer Emma Bealand and the Lush Film Fund. Finding the budget is what ultimately helped turn this short portrait into the cinematic journey that became A YOUTH.

How did this affect your consciousness as a filmmaker?

Bosisio: I never felt comfortable with the idea of making documentaries, probably because I was afraid to take responsibilities. I remember the long chats I had with Peyman and how finally it was him who insisted on making this film. We took the decision together, trusting one another and sharing a substantial part of our lives. The film profoundly changed us both as individuals. This is what I see when looking at A YOUTH: a relationship between two people taking shape as they are growing closer. What began as a personal need to relate more directly with what was happening at the borders of our European fortress and consciousness, soon grew into an





urge to reflect on my own borders, approach and motivations as a storyteller.

What was the most important accomplishment for you in your live-action documentary debut?

Bosio: One of the biggest challenges was allowing myself to understand what was really going on, rather than setting my mind on what I was going to get; trying not to impose myself on the situation and avoid tailoring my point of view onto the structure of the story.

This year you participated, as an observer, in the ECFA General Assembly in Berlin. I would appreciate

your feedback, as a director.

Bosio: It was great; I felt like discovering a world of new possibilities. The film industry can be a cold place to wander in, but ECFA felt like a house gathering of friends, understanding that one of the most important audiences is also one of the most commonly ignored: young people.

Have you ever considered making films – fiction or documentary – especially for a young, let's say 8-14 years old audience?

Bosio: Before getting in touch with ECFA I actually never even considered youngsters as a possible audience for my films. Only after winning the award at the Olympia Festival I began to realise that probably A YOUTH's primary audience would be exactly that age. We brought the film to several high schools in Athens; it was amazing to find out how engaged students were during the Q&A's. We'll continue bringing this film to schools and young people and we're looking for partners to help us in doing so, as the topic of adolescence seems to be reoccurring all the time in my work. I usually don't start a film process considering who could be the receiver, but after discovering what ECFA is all about, this could become my new challenge.



What is your new project all about?

Bosio: I am developing my first feature documentary. THE POSSIBILITY OF A LANDSCAPE is a sci-fi journey through the past, present and future of the river Po's delta, a world shaped by entanglements and contradictions. Until recently, this bio-reserve protected by UNESCO hosted one of Europe's biggest power plants, which now will be turned into a gigantic tourist resort. As the sea rises and threatens to flood the delta, we find ourselves questioning what landscapes can tell us about ourselves and our future, and what is left of us if we reduce all nature into a postcard or a resource to leech. Landscapes are stories too, mirrors of an open dialogue

between nature and culture. This film wants to be a starting point to conjure new possible narratives.

–
Eva Schwarzwald

Along the Way

Feature Film, the Netherlands, Greece, 2022

directed by Mijke de Jong
 Prod.: Baldr Film, Heretic, VPRO
 World Sales: Baldr Film
 Phone: ++31-20-303-26-70
info@baldrfilm.nl
www.baldrfilm.nl



Beanie

Feature Film, Slovenia, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Croatia, 2021

directed by Slobodan Maksimović
 Prod.: Senca Studio, Wady Films, Objeftif,...
 World Sales: Senca Studio
 Phone: ++38-61-330-72-03
info@senca-studio.si
www.senca-studio.si/en

Boney Piles

Documentary, Ukraine, 2022

directed by Taras Tomenko
 Prod. & World Sales: Insightmedia Producing Center
 Phone: ++38-05-03-27-49-06

info@insightmedia.com.ua
www.insightmedia.com.ua

Chickenhare and the Hamster of Darkness

Animation, Belgium, France, 2022

directed by Ben Stassen & Benjamin Mousquet
 Prod. & World Sales: nWave
 Phone: ++32-23-40-79-80
info@nwave.com
www.nwave.com

Gabi: Between Ages 8 and 13

Documentary, Sweden, Norway, 2021

directed by Engeli Broberg
 Prod.: House of Real, Fuglene, SVT,...
 World Sales: Cargo Entertainment
 Phone: ++12-1-29-95-81-39
contact@cargofilm-releasing.com
www.cargofilm-releasing.com

How I learned to Fly

Feature Film, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, 2022

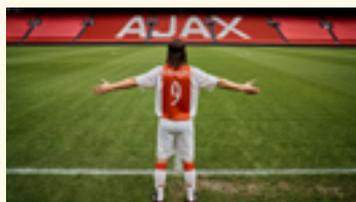
directed by Radivoje Andrić
 Prod.: Sense Prod., Kinorama, Art Fest,...
 World Sales: Pluto Film Distribution Network
 Phone: ++49-30-21-91-82-20
info@plutofilm.de
www.plutofilm.de



I Am Zlatan

Feature Film, Sweden, 2021

directed by Jens Sjögren
 Prod.: B-Reel Films, Nordisk Film
 World Sales: TrustNordisk Film Int'l Sales
 Phone: ++45-29-74-62-06
info@trustnordisk.com
www.trustnordisk.com



Icarus and the Minotaur

Animation, Luxembourg, France, Belgium, 2022

directed by Carlo Voegelé
 Prod.: Iris Prod., Rezo Prod.
 World Sales: Bac Films
 Phone: ++33-1-1-80-49-10-00
sales@bacfilms.fr
www.bacfilms.com/international

The Island

Animation, Romania, France, Belgium, 2021

directed by Anca Damian
 Prod.: Aparte Film
 World Sales: Best Friends Forever
sales@bffsales.eu
www.bestfriendforever.be

Kidnapped!

Feature Film, the Netherlands, 2022

directed by Bob Wilbers
 Prod.: Messercola Drama & Soap
 World Sales: Incredible Film
 Phone: ++31-6-53-94-89-86
danielle@incrediblefilm.nl
www.incrediblefilm.nl



Little Nicolas' Treasure

Feature Film, France, 2021

directed by Julien Rappeneau
 Prod.: Curiosa Films, Umedia, M6 Films,...
 World Sales: Charades Int'l Sales
 Phone: ++33-6-29-87-45-04
sales@charades.eu



Mini-Zlatan and Uncle Darling

Feature Film, Norway, 2021

directed by Christian Lo
 Prod.: Snowcloud Films
 World Sales: Dutch Features
 Phone: ++31-23-8-88-01-68
sales@dutchfeatures.com
www.dutchfeatures.com



The Path

Feature Film, Germany, 2022

directed by Tobias Wiemann
 Prod.: Lemming Film, Warner Bros. Film Prod.
 World Sales: Global Screen
 Phone: ++49-89-24-41-29-55-00
info@globalscreen.de
www.globalscreen.de

Scheme

Feature Film, Kazakhstan, 2022

directed by Farkhat Sharipov
 Prod. & World Sales: Kazakh Cinema
 Phone: ++ 7-72-73-39-28-93
info@kazakhcinema.kz
www.kazakhcinema.kz

Seekers, The: Thrill Night

Feature Film, Denmark, 2021

directed by Philip Th. Pedersen
 Prod. & World Sales: Copenhagen Bombay
 Phone: ++ 45-72-42-08-00
info@copenhagenbombay.com
www.copenhagenbombay.com



Shabu

Documentary, the Netherlands, 2021

directed by Shamira Raphaëla
 Prod.: Tangerine Tree
 World Sales: Reservoir Docs
 phone: ++33-1-84-16-36-15
doc@reservoirdocs.net
www.reservoirdocs.net

The Sleeping City

Feature Film, Czech & Slovak Republic, 2021

directed by Dan Svátek
 Prod.: Holiday Films, IS Produkce, MM,...
 World Sales: Holiday Films
 Phone: ++420-736-663-343
dan.svatek@holiday-films.cz

www.holiday-films.cz

The Summit of the Gods

Animation, France, 2021

directed by Patrick Imbert
 Prod.: Folivari, Julianne Films, Mélusine Prod.,...
 World Sales: Wild Bunch
 Phone: ++33-1-43-13-22-40
fbeauville@wildbunch.eu
www.wildbunch.biz

Tales of Franz

Feature Film, Austria, Germany, 2022

directed by Johannes Schmid
 Prod.: IF Prod., Nikolaus Geyrhalter Filmprod.
 World Sales: Atlas Int'l Film
 Phone: ++49-89-21-09-75-0
mail@atlasfilm.com
www.atlasfilm.com



Waters of Pastaza

Documentary, Portugal, 2022

directed by Inês T. Alves
 Prod.: Oublaum Films
 World Sales: Syndicado Film Sales

Phone: ++1-72-52-22-93-83

greg@syndicado.com
www.syndicadofs.com

What Makes Us Boys

Documentary, Belgium, 2021

directed by Janet van den Brand & Timothy Wennekes
 Prod.: Diplodokus
 World Sales: Taskovski Films
 Phone: ++44-387-65-92-08-57
sales@taskovskifilms.com
www.taskovskifilms.com



More information on all these films you will find on our website:

www.ecfaweb.org/european-childrens-film-network/feature-films

Du, Xiao'ou



Personal impression by Xiaojuan Zhou

About two years ago, encouraged by a few friends, I started this series of Meet the Mentors interviews, or - in my own words - a sort of "around the world in 80 interviews" in children's cinema. I intentionally sent out very similar questions to my interviewees in various countries and, not to my surprise, received very different answers which were candid, thought provoking or instructive. It's a humble effort to preserve the precious heritage in an area that we all cherish, for ourselves and many others to come. As the list of mentors goes on, I started to look at China where I was born and grew up. What films impacted me when I was young? What

kind of Chinese filmmakers were/are still there who care about movies for the 300 million children in this populous nation? I would have loved to speak to Wu, Tianming about his mesmerising *THE KING OF MASKS* but unfortunately this reform-minded filmmaker passed away years ago. Another accomplished director that came to mind was Mme Wang Junzheng whose *LETTER FROM HEAVEN*, a gentle inter-generational story set in Beijing, moved millions to tears, myself included. After so many years, my emotions for her film were still so overwhelming that it felt more appropriate to keep her for an in person chat, one day. Recommended

by a Chinese friend, I was put in touch with Mme Du. I happened to have seen *THE SEPTEMBER OF MINE*, one of the films she co-wrote, and I remember it particularly because in that film, a school teacher acted like an innocent kid. He was awkward and playful, unlike other adults portrayed then on the Chinese screens, who were perfect and uptight from the same mould. Did that represent a turning point in terms of realistic character description for Chinese children in the new era? The scriptwriter answered my questions diligently. Thanks to my UK educated friend Henry Luo, her replies were adeptly translated from Chinese to English.!

THE 'MEET THE MENTORS' Q&A

Mme Du, Xiao'ou, Chinese screenwriter

Please describe your childhood and its relationship with cinema.

Du, Xiao'ou: Your question made me seriously reconsider my childhood days. Back then, I watched a lot of stage plays, which may have led me to studying at the



THE SEPTEMBER OF MINE





Central Academy of Drama later on. It was there that I discovered the magic of cinema and decided to dedicate myself to movie making.

Which person (real or fictional) had the greatest influence on your growth?

Xiao'ou: It was Anton Chekhov and his writings that influenced and enlightened me mostly during my early years. Continuously broadening my personal spectrum, I came across other beloved artists that I simply can't rank in order of preference, but I applaud them for their profound description of characters, unique story angles or abundant imagination. Through their writings I could see their own humanity and humility.

How were the protagonist and story

of THE SEPTEMBER OF MINE conceived?

Xiao'ou: The Beijing Asian Games was the first large-scale sports event hosted in China; a significant event that the entire society was concerned about. When I heard about some primary school students rehearsing gymnastics for the opening ceremony, I visited that school to research. During my visit I noticed a particular student; no matter how the others humiliated him or laughed at him, he didn't get angry and even laughed together with them. That boy became a vague prototype of my protagonist. I added



my own life experiences to the script, which could be expressed more easily through the children. Much to my surprise, many adults and children told me that they identified with the main character, which made me realise that what I felt or observed did not belong to me alone. The story resonated with many people.

Do you have any different considerations when writing for children?

Xiao'ou: I'm more cautious to write for children, because childhood memories will last for a long time. Actually, it's not easy to understand children;

lots of elements deep within them are ignored. At a very young age, they realise what adults prefer and how to hide their true selves. About these aspects I'm concerned; I want to be their friend and confidant. When writing for adults, I may consider more the expectations of the investors and the film's commercial potential. That's why I didn't write good scripts for adults. Although some were awarded, I'm not satisfied with them. I'm not a mainstream film professional, I pay more attention to a script's humanistic values.

There's an interesting character in THE SEPTEMBER OF MINE: the new class teacher is a bit "silly", and thus the young protagonist finds resonance with him. Such an endearing and convincing adult character is rarely seen in Chinese children's films.

Xiao'ou: The problem lies in the traditional Chinese culture: "a teacher must behave like a teacher and hold the dignity of a respected master". As a result, good teachers are portrayed as strict fathers, loving mothers or "candles" that burn themselves to give light to others. Like unreal saints. Another reason might be that our film professionals have lost touch with the real world.





Many screenwriters or author-directors, Chinese and foreign, like to write stories based upon their own childhood memories.

Xiao'ou: You can write about your own or other people's childhood, as long as the story has artistic values and is beneficial to young audiences. I have observed how some people score a hit with their debut film, based upon their life story (either young or older), but then run out of steam quickly and fail to follow up with more good films. Are they limited by their own experience and imagination? It takes

a lot more than your own experience to keep on creating quality content. **There is a saying that what is national is also international. Do you agree?**

Xiao'ou: In my opinion, no matter which national style or colours you see on the outside, the inner soul of humankind remains essentially the same. The diversity of our cultural expressions doesn't rub out the fact that people all over the world are the same in the core.

Are there still children's stories that excite you and strongly encourage you to adapt them?

Xiao'ou: Oh yes, there are many. The lives of today's children are getting harder and harder, so I want to give them joy - not that kind of unreal and short-term joy felt by LITTLE MATCH GIRL. In other words, I hope to provide them with spiritual food that may nourish them for their entire lives.

What are your expectations about the exchange of children's films between China and foreign countries?

Xiao'ou: Childhood is short and precious. It's so important to open children's eyes and minds to outside worlds. Movies can help them meet other cultures and children else-



where. If we say that children are our future, to encourage cultural exchange through good movies will ensure a better future for them and us all.

Is there anything more you'd like to share with us about children's films?

Xiao'ou: We are not short of people who can make good films for children. We also advocate various types of storytelling for our kids. However, we have a problem with the distribution of children's films. Good films made for children might not reach them. We need to improve not only our storytelling skills, but also the whole value chain of our industry.



ENIMATION

The Youth Cinema Network (YCN) proudly introduces one of its members, dedicating their work to developing animation techniques while working with young people.

For 15 years the ENIMATION school in Maribor, Slovenia, has been engaged in inspiring children, young people, adults and teachers to breathe life into the inanimate, creating animated films in classic cartoon or stop motion techniques. Regardless of age, there is something they all have in common - when they see their cartoon characters come to life on screen for the first time, they smile from ear to ear.

In addition to the enthusiasm for film, ENIMATION workshops encourage research and analysis of AV media and their communicative powers. Creating short animated messages and handling various materials strengthens the authors' motor skills. Longer animation workshops train creativity and interdisciplinarity, organisation and planning of individual phases of work, patience and perseverance, which is a difficult challenge in today's "fast food" society. The ENIMATION school



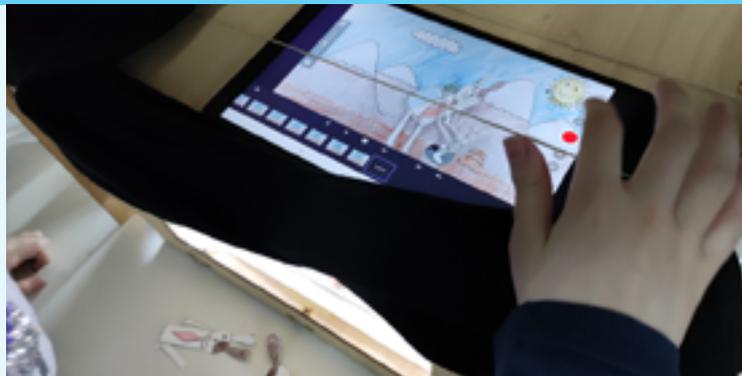
emphasises the importance of the process of filmmaking. Connecting the analogue and digital strengthens the skills and knowledge of the individual.

Enimation box

The workshops with the youngest students led us to develop the ENIMATION box - an adaptable wooden stand for recording in class, that allows a stable installation of a tablet or smartphone for recording. Students come up with a short message, joke or saying, create characters and a scene, and capture moving images and sounds. The animation box was designed in cooperation with the Institute MARS Maribor and the Association for the Development of Film Culture. In addition to the recording stand, the package includes five optical toys. The set is suitable for both school groups and home use.

Enimation festival

The ENIMATION Festival is an international festival for children's & youth



film that has been developing since 2011. Starting as an animation festival, nowadays it also flirts with documentary, feature and experimental film. The ENIMATION Festival allows young people to have their films presented to the general audience, both on the big screen and online. In the competition programme, we show the best films made by children and young adults from all over the world in three age categories. In 2022, we are adding the thematic set Diversity/Tolerance, to which also professional productions intended for young people can apply. The festival takes place in Maribor in November, so don't miss the opportunity to submit your films by August 5, 2022 at www.filmfreeway.com/ENIMATION-festival.

More on www.enimation.si. Do you want an animation workshop at school, cinema or other cultural space? Write to hana@enimation.si.

-
Hana Repse

The Youngsters Making Film column is curated by YCN (Youth Cinema Network), a worldwide network of youth film festivals, organisations and film & media educators. YCN focusses on films made by young people, using their right to express themselves through moving images. For more info about Youth Cinema Network, check www.youthcinemanetwork.org.

Juliette Klinke about DANS LA SILENCE D'UNE MER ABYSALLE

“Film history presents cinema as an all-male industry”

“Who decides what is worth remembering?” Although women have been shaping cinema since its very beginning, they’re often completely overlooked in official film historiography. In her documentary essay *DANS LA SILENCE D'UNE MER ABYSALLE* Juliette Klinke compiles film clips that were made by women between 1896 and 1940 and brings back a buried legacy to the present cultural memory. In their statement at the *doxs!* festival – where the film was awarded the Grosse Klappe – the Youth Jury praised *DANS LA SILENCE...* for “finally giving justice to courageous and innovative women that had deserved recognition a long time ago.”

Juliette Klinke grew up in Switzerland and later joined the Belgian female filmmakers collective [Elles Font des Films](#). Together with six members, they created a series of short films about “women & cinema”. Juliette Klinke: I made a film about “the pioneers”, the many female filmmakers during the early days of cinema. My biggest effort was in the research – I

found more information than I ever could include in one film.

What exactly did you find?

Klinke: I discovered so many films and was really impressed by their cinematographic qualities. I used these images to make a new film, honouring their work and legacy. Maybe this will trigger people’s curiosity to explore more of it. Those films are out there, you can find them on YouTube, but yet they are not being seen. Why do we keep on watching the same movies, while so many other titles seem to be forgotten. Including every film made by women back in the day.

I might have thought there were no female directors in the early days of cinema, which would have been shocking. Now we find out there were plenty; we simply don’t know about them. That might be even more shocking!

Klinke: I knew about some personalities like the French director Alice Guy-Blaché, being the first person ever



to make a fiction film, and I’ve seen *ET LA FEMME CREA HOLLYWOOD* by Julia & Clara Kuperberg, about the days of Hollywood before it became an industry. Still I was afraid to end up rather empty handed, until I found out there were so many of them, everywhere in the world.

But your focus remains on the Western world.

Klinke: Throughout my studies the focus has always been on the Western

world. Now I discovered female filmmakers in India, Turkey, Tunisia... but I decided to stick to my own field of expertise. I have included some names in a personal list rolling with the credits; maybe these references can open a few doors. The [Women Film Pioneers Project](#) dedicates a webpage to the work and relevance of every woman making films; that was my goldmine and at the same time an additional challenge... Making movies is making choices.



Some of the filmmakers mentioned were making clear social statements.

Klinke: Like Maria P. Williams, who participated in a better representation of the African-American community in cinema, or Drusilla Dunjee Houston, who wrote a screenplay protesting against BIRTH OF A NATION and its displayed racism, but couldn't get it produced.

History in general is written by men, but your film shows a different narrative than generally accepted. Are you a historian who wants to rewrite history, or do you consider yourself more as actively making a change?

Klinke: Why is history simply defined by white Western males? Even when learning in school about the second World War, we got the European version of the story. Film history presents cinema as an all-male industry; seldom is it brought up that financing is more problematic for female directors. When it's about women being involved, money is always an indicator.

This film gives us your personal point of view, with your own voice doing the narration.

Klinke: I came across so much information, but didn't know how to process it into one story. I ended up researching,

writing, directing and editing simultaneously. When evaluating the first draft, my editor told me: we need to hear your point of view; we need your story to guide us. Moreover, this project made me rethink my own history. Who could have been my role model as a teenager? Even if I adore Jane Campion, with her long white hair she was not exactly the kind of woman that made me wish to "become like her" at the age of 16.

At some point all female directors seem to disappear out of the picture. Was it when cinema became "a respected form of art" or when it became "a profitable business"?

Juliette: In my opinion it is all about the industry. When, in 1929, the first union was founded in Hollywood, women couldn't sign up for it. Moreover, taking a man's job in those days of economic crisis was considered as unpatriotic. Women were then relegated to other positions and no longer had access to decision-making positions. Moreover the cinema evolves and changes with the arrival of the sound. Lois Weber, who's films about important social issues were extremely successful, was one of the best paid filmmakers in Hollywood. But being in her forties, both the change towards sound film and big entertainment



was too drastic for her. When cinema turned into a profitable business, all of them disappeared.

Did you recently see a change?

Juliette: 2021 has been an important year. After 90 years, Julia Ducournau was only the second woman winning the Palme d'Or in Cannes, and Chloé Zhao was only the second female director to receive a Golden Globe and an Oscar. I hope things are changing, and I want to be part of it, because there is still work to do.

Certain scenes in your film are in some way far ahead of their time. Which one did you find most striking?

Juliette: There are two. One is the extract of Alice Guy-Blaché's film playing with reversed gender roles. Realising she made this film more than 100 years ago, already questioning the topics that puzzle us today, was a revelation. The other one comes from a film by Dorothy Arzner, who invented the boompole microphone, although the licence was claimed by a man. In the only spoken scene in DANS LA SILENCE D'UNE MER ABYSSALLE, a girl who dreams of becoming a dancer ends up in a cabaret and addresses the indignant audience with an impressive speech.

Who are you quoting with that bizarre title?

Juliette: Michelle Perrot, the French author who wrote MON HISTOIRE DES FEMMES about the place of women in history. In one excerpt she mentions how she had to dive deep into the ocean to find what she was looking for.

—
Gert Hermans

Remixing Documentary in Rio

Cezar Migliorin's new approaches to community film education

Sharing an interest in facilitating learning with and about film I interviewed Brazilian lecturer and community film educator, Cezar Migliorin, and asked him to elaborate on his approach to documentary film education. His weekly participant-led workshops, based in Rio de Janeiro, capture and mobilise the agency, curiosity and imagination of learners of all ages and from all backgrounds. One of his observations was about the capacity of film to generate 'presentness' in the participants - not only in the attention viewers give to a screen, but another level of attentiveness that emerges amid the chat, the imagination and the creative participation of everyone involved.

What follows is a summary of our conversation, about the ways in which film can be mobilised to produce intense learning experiences based on sustained open-ended practices with no particular objective.

Inventing with Difference

In 2013-2015, Cezar Migliorin co-ordinated a cinema/documentary education project called [Inventar com a Diferença](#) - sponsored by the Brazilian Ministry of Human Rights - which evolved into a national network of universities and hundreds of schools throughout Brazil (English version here). The initiative was developed by a group of film educators at Kumã Lab, based at the Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), Niteroi, Rio de Janeiro. What defined this programme was a commitment to image, sound and experimental storytelling.

There was a strong belief in film as a playful art form, an empowering political instrument, and as a medium with the capacity to build strong communities of practice among non-professionals. Forget about traditional approaches to documentary pedagogy; here the focus is on a script-less, democratic, almost anarchic environment: genres and roles are blurred, ends are emergent and films may or may not be made. In a process known as 'group cinema', learners watch a variety of



Cezar Migliorin, lecturer and community film educator

films together, construct low-stakes short movie clips and montages made on phones, and then share them anonymously in weekly gatherings, sometimes in the street. At a pace determined by the learners and using the language of film, students' aesthetic and critical sensitivities towards the world are developed, and it is the joint-ownership of work that stamps

this idiosyncratic pedagogic practice.

In Cezar's current work in a clinic for wellbeing called [Casa Jangada](#) (Botafogo, Rio), learners discover and develop their interests in improvisatory ways through still & moving images, and sound. It's a strategy that allows non-judgemental practice to flourish, one where 'mistakes' are experiments

and amateurs are embraced. Indeed, in a 2016 interview it was proposed by Cezar that his approach to educational documentary film-making de-emphasises intellectual debate, and rather, privileges the intense feeling of being in the present. This in turn fosters a powerful sense of impromptu world-making. In other words, by giving learners opportunities to create cultural 'mash-ups' informed by watching clips and by the unique and entangled perspectives of the makers themselves, ways of seeing and interpreting the world are multiplied.



Street Screening of participants' film work

Feeding the soil for transformative practice

Cezar and colleagues have been facilitating the Casa Jangada project for 2 and a half years, honing a practice that negotiates the tension between insecurity and risk-taking, alongside a growing sense of creative freedom, all the while providing a place of safe return. What about the approach to film education at Casa Jangada? How it delivers on so many human levels? And why group members keep on coming back for more? Cezar feels it's about the way film generates a common space for connection, listening and reciprocal understanding. Any sense of hierarchy is levelled: *"the ex-*

perience doesn't belong to anyone, neither the maker nor those being filmed - a common experience is co-created, on site and in the moment".

One of the ways in which this climate of cooperation is made is by borrowing the ideas of established film icons, such as Brazilian documentarist Eduardo Coutinho, who would start with rich discussions around an image, rather than an issue, so that narratives of social, aesthetic and ethical importance would flow directly from the concrete and the pictorial. Dialogic energy and creative activity around an image is not necessarily new, but when practised sensitively is an en-

during stimulus for learning. I must add here that 'stimulus' is a crude translation of the more philosophically-rooted and action-oriented notion of the *'dispositivo'* - a key word in the pedagogy at Casa Jangada, that describes an inspiring pedagogic tool, a device, a motif, a game, a challenge, or some playful activity that forms around a particular ideology within the arts.

Political dimension

There's a strong political dimension to Cezar's work that explains the importance of designing *'dispositivos'* that nurture an impulse - and the right - to

create and thus to transform: *"Creative energy has a transversal trajectory cutting across life experience - it doesn't just manifest itself in the manufacture of great imagery and artefacts, but it's also put to work in the everyday, in our life choices. Taking part in collective, creative activity means receiving and interpreting the world, in readiness for it to be changed."* This said, there is no sense of didactic purpose to this group film work - these are folkloric and organic approaches to film-making that refute elitism and individualistic 'auteur' principles. Neither are participants encouraged to engage with the acute social problems of Rio inhabitants, meaning that social issues are not necessarily front and central, making way for the 'everyday artistry' of its citizens (Cannon 2018). What's more, there is no sense in which makers are called upon to publicly defend their work, indeed, much of it is anonymised at the point of display. Anyone can use anyone's material to create collages, montages and mash-ups. The programme at Casa Jangada is taking its place as a forerunner in the egalitarian grassroots remixing of image and sound, throwing away the genre rule-book and replacing it with *'The Inventing with Difference Notebook'*.





Participants at Casa Jingada

The Notebook gathers together a series of imaginative film education ‘dispositivos’ resulting from several years of human rights activism and research in film and education based at the Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) in Niteroi. Nurturing the right conditions of creative possibility is a delicate negotiation dependent on everyone’s commitment to the process and the repeated practices. With just a framework to work within and no particular objective, facilitators have faith in “deferring that state of expectancy in relation to their students” and are ready to respond to chance and serendipity. “With the intensity of being in a creative process, sometimes it’s not easy, because creative work can cause anxiety.... One of

our responsibilities is to create a territory with particular soil, to create a base that people can keep coming back to, and feel supported. It’s much easier not to do it!”

Street cinema: towards collective endeavour

To some the practices that Cezar and colleagues espouse may seem unfocussed, especially as a final film is never conceived as a project: “if a film is made it’s because it’s stumbled upon by chance” - but here lies the value of their non-instrumental approach. Ideas that flow from the manipulation of film as a medium, that is, from still and moving images, sound, music and spoken word, support collaborative

meaning-making and human flourishing through democratic cultural production. There are no more excuses, as Cezar pragmatically points out, it’s time for the moving image to move into the mainstream of visual arts practice for the wellbeing of the citizenry: “We spent a long, long time saying that film was hard to do, expensive to do, and had to be done with lots of people, and this is turning out to be a cliché... cinema is no different from drawing”, and in a sense this is an initiative that is literally reclaiming the cinematic streets.

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Joya Thome about LAURA'S STAR

"It was pure brain jogging"

Up-and-coming director Joya Thome, who scored a festival hit in 2017 with the award-winning *QUEEN OF NIEN-DORF* has been entrusted the remake of Klaus Baumgart's classic children's book *LAURA'S STAR* for Warner Bros. Translating the animation by Maya Gräfin Rothkirch & Thilo Graf Rothkirch (2005) into a live-action film (that premiered in December 2021) was not only quite a contrast with her feature debut, but also a challenge that the young filmmaker mastered surprisingly well.

Joya Thome: The framework was clear and fixed; that couldn't be touched. The animated film was the basis of it all, and should still be recognisable in terms of its design and visuals. I went along with that, but furthermore I worked with a surprising creative freedom. Whatever I was pushing for, the producers tried to make it possible within the budgetary limitations; they trusted me completely. For instance, I was allowed to delete quite a substantial part of the dialogue from the original screenplay, that I tried to

translate into images and emotions recalling the plot of the animated film.

LAURA'S STAR tells about a little girl, missing her old home after her family had moved. One night when she sees a star falling from the sky, she goes searching for it and finds it in the city park. The star has lost a branch in its fall and Laura nurses it lovingly. Without further ado, she takes it home and finds in him a friend with whom she can have the most amazing adventures. When the star decides to return to her spot in outer space, Laura bids farewell with a heavy heart.

What did you like about the story and what turned out to be the hardest part of it?

Thome: People might think that smaller children are way too young to understand an inner conflict such as letting go of something so dear, but that is simply not true. Which is depicted beautifully in this story. The biggest challenge was certainly working on the visual effects, a challenge that I



took on with great pleasure.

For example?

Thome: When capturing "outer space" all we actually had on set were the kids in a blue studio and nothing more. They were hanging on ropes from various devices, and we had the flying mobile there, which had to move through the room but actually couldn't move at all... Everything needed to be calculated in advance on a spatial level – who would fly where in which shot and how can we visualise it optimally? You always needed to preview how stars and objects would move later on. The camera needed to travel extensively on a crane over the children. And all these things

needed to be communicated with the children, like in which direction they should look and what would be added to the picture later. Sometimes at least five people were moving around the room with sticks and lights, and then there were planets coming out of the screen... All of us had to know our stakes; it was pure brain jogging! Looking back upon it, I wonder how I actually managed to do it.

How did you communicate everything to the kids?

Thome: We tried to keep things as playful as possible. For example, when 5 year old Michel (playing Tommy) wakes up at night, hearing the star raging in Laura's room, not know-



ing what these sounds could be, the set designer in the next room moved around various objects and asked Michael to guess which one he had moved. Meanwhile the camera was capturing Michael's concentrated face. Until a sudden loud noise frightened him. At that age you can read almost every emotion on a child's face! Of course, this doesn't work for dialogue scenes, for which you have to practice, practice, practice! We had an entire week for rehearsals, so that on the set we could concentrate on the acting and not on the dialogues. At the age of 8, Emilia (playing Laura) was so matured, super concentrated and motivated. She had these bright ideas; when it came to playing with the star, she simply imagined it was her newborn sister.

You also had a voice in the casting.

Thome: I love casting children in general, and I guess I might have an eye for talented kids. I have always admired this set atmosphere, this cohesion, ever since I was in front of the camera as a child actress in the films made by my father Rudolf Thome. Ever since I was in the Children's Jury at the Berlinale in 2003, where I saw all those great films and was subsequently invited to the Children's Jury in Giffoni, I wanted to become a director. At the



age of 19 I made several short films and did internships. Looking for more structure, I started studying pedagogical and social sciences. After my bachelor's degree, I shot QUEEN OF NIENDORF, which – contrary to the expectations – became a festival success. Then producer Christian Becker brought me in for LAURA'S STAR, even though QUEEN OF NIENDORF had only been just a finger exercise, by no means perfect. I'm incredibly grateful to him. Afterwards I got offered other projects so now I know that I can make a living from being a director. I found it extremely important to prove that filmmaking to me is more than just a dream or a hobby.

So you must have new plans already...

Thome: I just finished a documentary on which I've been working for 4 years with the crew from NIENDORF. ONE IN A MILLION is a coming of age story about an American YouTuber and one of her biggest fans, a girl from Neumünster in Germany. Now I'm in a phase of upheaval in my life again, not knowing exactly what will come next. I have a new idea for a film but don't want to start shooting right away. In January I started training as a volunteer at the Helpline for Kids, which is super exciting. Someday I would like to work as a children and youth psychotherapist, but I first need to finish my master's thesis. I cherish

those other passions and interests, as they make me feel inspired to write new stories. But right now I'm mainly looking forward to LAURA'S STAR's festival tour – due to the pandemic we didn't even have a proper cinema premiere. Children's film festivals are such fun; they're really special. And so are the conversations afterwards, with kids asking me smart and interesting questions. The things they notice, it's often crazy. And I appreciate the way cinema is celebrated there as a true event.

–
Uta Beth

ANIMOK

Young filmmakers crossing borders

About 5 years ago, the ANIMOK Animation Festival in Denmark met with the French animation festival Image Par Image - Écrans VO and quickly found common ground for becoming 'friendship festivals'. We visited each other's events and shared film programmes and visions on film education. But we wanted more. With a common desire for children to meet through art and culture, we launched a joint film project.

We were aiming for a creative space for pupils from France and Denmark to explore and create one animation together. Of course, the final film was important, but the process and understanding among pupils was ultimately crucial. This was the beginning of a journey, an experiment in how to jointly make a joint film with more than 1,200km between us.

With 'everyday life' as our common theme, we formed a framework for the children to explore, enabling them to discover new forms of expression, new ways of drawing and

storytelling. Through online meetings we swiftly involved teachers and animators and discussed possible methods and outcomes.

What is on the menu?

If film can achieve one thing brilliantly, it is speaking to our senses, to our memories and imagination. How do other cultures smell, taste and sound? And how to express it? These were elements we wanted to explore?

The first online meeting with pupils was great fun, introducing themselves, trying to recognise each other's names and faces. Could kids in Denmark and France share the same name? They questioned each other about their daily lives: What is on the menu? What time do you get up? What are your hobbies? They sang each other songs in their own language, which was an exciting way to learn through speaking and listening.

Teachers and animators guided the children in how to work in a creative



process, how to create ways of expressing themselves. Children are born curious and have an immediate desire to participate, an urge for creating with others. We held on to this energy that arose in the classroom as soon as they came up with stories and started to work on the animation together.

Candy learning

The Danish class took on the first part of the story. Meanwhile, they wrote each other letters and sent traditional sweets as presents – what a way to learn through taste and smell! All this gave them a feeling of connecting and understanding. When the project ended with an online joint film screening, you could feel the pride and ownership burning through the screen.

This small project has meant an incredible amount to us and we are absolutely sure that there is great value in having a friendship festival, instigating children's encounters with the world through films and pictures.

–
Ditte Lundsgaard Nielsen

Festival partners:
[Image Par Image](#)
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In France: Children aged 7-8, from Jean Jacques Rousseau's school, Argenteuil

In Denmark: Children aged 10-11, from Brattingsborg School, Klejtrup

Michael & Andrew Van Ostade about THE GHASTLY BROTHERS

“Our fights are based upon 30 years of training”

Suffering from ghosts, poltergeists or paranormal plague? The Ghastly Brothers will help you out. Where monsters lurk - in the closet, basement or under the bed - these professional ghost hunters will catch them and lock them up for good. But when Lilith and her friends in boarding school track down a supernatural phenomenon, the Ghastly Brothers take on the most dangerous task of their career; catching the monster hiding inside all of us.

The Belgian brothers Michael and Andrew Van Ostade had many things to prove. That you can make a thrilling film on a small budget and that children like to shiver. That horror for children can be outrageously funny and the charm of artisanal crafts in general exceeds the perfection of clean CGI. That belief in old-fashioned craftsmanship and crazy stories dates back to their childhood.

Michael Van Ostade: Our passion for film was born in the video store. Roaming around the shop as a child,

my attention was always drawn by the GREMLINS video. That was clearly an adult film, I wasn't allowed to see it yet. Until I secretly grabbed that box again, and saw the magic words on the cover: 'for all ages'. That was simply unthinkable; this had to be a mistake! That's how my brother and I came to watch our first "horror movie", which turned out to be very funny. Andrew Van Ostade: And there was Aunt Sylvie's VHS collection! In her garage, we discovered STAR WARS, INDIANA JONES, ET, THE GOONIES, THE WITCHES, POLTERGEIST and many more great titles.

In the video store the choice for a certain movie was often based upon its cover. So you know how important that poster is!

Andrew: The poster that Michael designed for THE GHASTLY BROTHERS refers to Drew Struzan, who designed all those great iconic eighties posters; INDIANA JONES, THE GOONIES, STAR WARS, BLADE RUNNER, BACK TO THE FUTURE...



What kind of girl is Lilith?

Andrew: With Lilith we especially wanted to avoid the Alice in Wonderland syndrome; with all those crazy characters circling around her, she couldn't be dull and grey.

Eva Luna, how do you – as the main actress – remember the shooting?

Eva Luna Van Hyfte: It mainly meant: getting up extremely early! Earlier than on a school day. Luckily I didn't have to waste any time on make-up; just putting two dots in my hair and I was done.

Did covid make things more difficult

For you?

Michael: The very first word of the script was put on paper seven years ago. We started shooting in March 2020, and everyone knows what happened then...

Andrew: After 16 days of shooting, the first lockdown came. Only in the summer were we allowed to go back to work. When the "career choice day" scenes were shot, a maximum of 15 people were allowed in one room. We had a large crew, so the extras simulated that there were plenty of people, but in fact they had to walk from left to right through an empty room.

Besides a spectacular collection of ghosts and spirits, we also come across a special kind of demon living inside of us. Those are the worst?

Andrew: A little monster gnaws inside each of us, and the longer you ignore them, the more powerful they grow. Talking about it with others might make it easier to handle and control them.

Michael: The fear I felt as a child whenever I forgot about a test or



about my school diary was at least as big as the stress I feel as an adult when I fill out my tax return. "Oh no, I didn't study for my maths test, so I'm going to fail, so my entire life will go down the drain..." That stress was uncontrollable.

How were these demons to be captured in front of the camera?

Michael: The small ones were constructed in a studio with puppets, controlled by three fantastic craftsmen. They're animatronics, like the Muppets. But the couch that comes to life and the White Spirit were visibly present on set. That couch is my favourite – the idea of a sofa that eats chips and pocket money, that's where it all started for me.

Eva Luna: I saw my demon on the screen for the first time; he has long arms because he always wants to keep Lilith close. During the shooting I could feel him pulling my sweater but I never actually got to see him. The White Spirit was huge, at least four metres high, and even its eyes and eyebrows could move. Utterly weird: you know someone is controlling that colossus, but you forget it when you are face to face with it.

Nowadays everything can be made with computers, but for you it is



important to keep things real and tangible?

Michael: Things created with computers often feel weightless. We love that craft, the magic behind the mechanics.

The most disorienting scene in the film is a bad dream in black and white.

Andrew: In that scene we wanted to take things one step further, turning a crazy dream into a nightmare. We painted the kitchen set from the opening scene black and covered it with white lines to create an alienating feeling. We stood around with 12 people, moving panels and throwing balloons. Ever since the success of STRANGER THINGS, we know that kids genuinely want to get spooked, they want to dive deeper into that

dark world.

You guys really filmed at IKEA?

Michael: We begged them on our knees: we want to catch a monster at night in IKEA! They thought it was a great idea. That was a childhood dream come true.

Have you been playing in the ball pool?

Andrew: Unfortunately that was impossible due to covid. But we had a lot of fun there for three nights. When the last customers left, we were allowed to fill IKEA with slime. By daybreak everything was quickly cleaned up before customers returned.

You are brothers. What did that implicate for the project?

Eva Luna: Brothers argue; that's how

it goes. During rehearsals I already understood: I'll step aside while they fight it out, and then come get me once the decision is made.

Michael: If we squabble, it must be worth the effort. We are often on the same wavelength, but we sometimes had discussions about crucial choices. Since we are brothers, our on-screen arguments come across very naturally; they are based upon 30 years of training and exercise.

What is your favourite horror movie?

Michael: Can you spare us one hour...?

Eva Luna: An impossible question! Every time I asked, I got showered with titles.

Andrew: EVIL DEAD 2 is my absolute favourite, but in case of watching with the entire family, I would go for GREMLINS.

Michael: HEREDITARY is the scariest movie I've ever seen; for a family audience I would recommend Steven Spielberg's original POLTERGEIST.

Eva Luna: I really liked A QUIET PLACE. But compared to these two guys, I haven't seen anything yet.

–

[Gert Hermans.](#)



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ECFA's goal is to support cinema for children and youth in its cultural, economic, 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 (€ 250 per year):

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Databases on children's film festivals, sales agents, distributors and TV-programmers interested in European films for children.

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