



European Children's
Film Association

Association Européenne du Cinéma
pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse

interviews

**Yuku and the Flower
of the Himalayas**

Bigman

The Fledglings

My Small Land

Tales of Franz



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Photo: Yuku and the Flower of the Himalayas

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TALKING AT/ABOUT FESTIVALS ON THE ECFA BEAT

The festival calendar has been jumbled like a pair of dice at the poker table, and many familiar milestones in the festival-goers' routine have been disrupted. Festivals such as Lucas (Frankfurt), AleKino! (Poznan), Smile (Delhi), Cinemira (Budapest) etc. are suddenly listed with a different date. Did this cast also result in a full house? The question certainly raises some concerns...

1. Festivals primarily address the local audience. Some festivals state that their audience hasn't found their way back to the cinemas yet. Does the public still need to wake up from its pandemic slumber, or has it lost interest in festivals for good? After all, they are the first to benefit from the events, more than the professionals flying in from abroad as privileged guests... which might be another element subject to change from now on, considering a growing environmental concern.

2. Perhaps the greatest pleasure of festivals lies not so much in seeing films on the silver screen, but in talking about films with colleagues. I remember very well when that realisation hit me: last year in Zlin after the screening of A BRIXTON TALE, a film about which there was a lot to say, and the intensity with which it happened was testament to how much we had collectively missed it. The same thing struck me during the recent AleKino! Festival. Movies such as CLOSE, LIBERTAD, SWING RIDE, etc. led to lively conversations about the role of (young audience)

cinema in our society today. Feeling the need for this exchange of thoughts, ECFA will launch a new initiative at the Olympia Festival: under the name "ECFA Beat" festivals will facilitate loosely moderated round tables for professionals to further elaborate on industry-related topics.

3. The ECFA Awards are booming! Never before have so many awards been presented in festivals. At the end of the day ECFA can proudly put 36 titles on the list of nominations! Many thanks to the festivals that graciously link their name to ECFA, giving new (and old) members the opportunity to get to know each other in the framework of festival juries.

4. Festivals do not simply renounce the achievements they have claimed during the pandemic years. New opportunities were discovered, new online paths were explored and new audiences were found in unexpected places. As long as the pandemic held us in a stranglehold, ECFA chose to ignore the inconveniences. But now that the grip is loosening, it is our job to list the conclusions with you and share with each other how we have learned to turn disadvantages into advantages.

—
Gert Hermans

Arnaud Demuyne about YUKU AND THE FLOWER OF THE HIMALAYAS

"The most beautiful feeling when saying goodbye"

Yuku, the eldest child in a large mouse family, has to guard the food supplies. But she prefers playing her ukulele and listening to her grandmother, a master storyteller. As the end of Grandma's life approaches, Yuku embarks on a musical quest to find the luminous Flower of the Himalayas for Grandma to take on her "last journey."

In fact it is a miracle that Belgian director Arnaud Demuyne was able to finish this musical adventure, *"I love music - especially jazz - and I love dancing, but I can't play music. Not even the ukulele. But I thought it was the right instrument for a little mouse."*

Besides your love for music, a great love for stories, riddles and fairy tales speaks from the film.

Demuyne: I do indeed have a preference for 'all things literary'. I used to play theatre and wanted to become an actor, but my parents didn't agree. In my screenplays I often play with words. Just like YUKU AND THE FLOWER OF THE HIMALAYAS, my short film THE SCENT OF CARROTS

was a musical comedy with a rich vocabulary, full of word games. Children adore riddles. A riddle always seems complicated at first, but the answer is usually simple. Such is life: it seems

in the film are always right under your nose; the answers are there for the taking. Even the solution to the riddle of the Himalayan flower seems unattainable, far away but actually it is



complex, but for those who know the recipe for happiness, it is quite simple; peace, health, love... not much more than that. The solutions to the riddles

close at hand... in your heart.

The scene in which the little mice listen to the fairy tale is one of the

highlights for me.

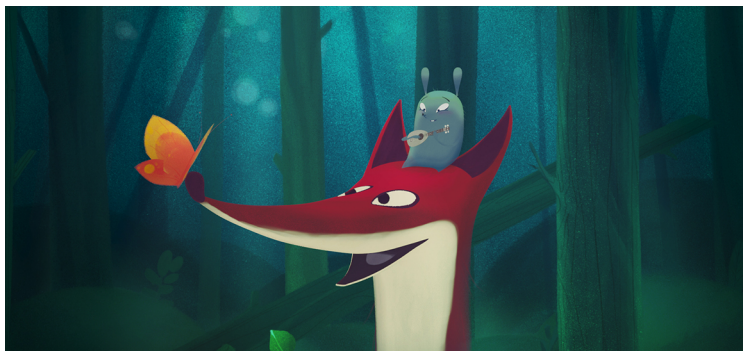
Demuyne: I have a passion for the oral tradition, the direct relationship between a storyteller and his audience. What brings us together are the stories we share; they form the basis of our humanity. Telling fairy tales to children and adults used to be a common thing; nowadays cinema has kind of taken over that role. Anyone who makes films or tells fairy tales seeks contact with an audience and creates togetherness.

Is that why your film sounds so cosy?

Demuyne: Due to the voices in the dubbing. Think of the scene in which all little mice go to sleep in the curtain. All you hear is children talking in their own typical way. In the French version, my daughter Lily, who was 11 years old at the time, did Yuku's voice. The other mice got authentic children's voices, which made the result particularly catchy.

What kind of place is it where they live?

Demuyne: Under the kitchen in a



castle inhabited by people whom we never get to see. Once we hear their voices, when the rabbit is under fire. Only in one song, their presence is mentioned explicitly, when all possible recipes for preparing rabbit are listed.

It was your choice to use so many songs?

Demuynck: Those songs allow me to tell things that are difficult to put into a dialogue. They add poetry, humour and symbolism to the story.

Is that why each character has its own musical style and tonality?

Demuynck: Every character has its problems. The rat has the blues because he is old and lonesome and afraid of death. I found rap music

more appropriate for the rebellious rabbit. For the wolf, I intuitively had a boogie woogie in mind; the result sounds fantastic. The songs are full of references. During the cat's ska song, you'll see some mice doing the Madness move from *One Step Beyond*, Yuku singing while sailing on the belly of the rat is a reference to Mowgli and Baloo in *JUNGLE BOOK*, the swing pays tribute to King Louie's song from the same film.

There is a substantive coherence in the songs.

Demuynck: The central theme is the transition between Grandma and Yuku. Grandma was the great storyteller and now on her farewell, Yuku will take over her role. Therefore she has to go out into the world and ex-



perience her own adventures. This is how Yuku discovers her independence, learning from every encounter. With the rat she speaks of the finiteness of life and the choice is ours to mourn or sing. The squirrel's message is: relax! That philosophy is further explored by the fox: enjoy life, here and now... *carpe diem*. That sums up the message perfectly.

All those songs reduce your chance of international distribution, because they make dubbing extra expensive.

Demuynck: For now, my artistic choice doesn't seem to harm the film's career; it was already sold to many countries.

The soundtrack is indeed full of

ukulele music!

Demuynck: I worked with three composers. I wrote the songs with Alexandre Brouillard. Then Yan Volsy composed the music for the animatic, so that the animators could edit to the rhythm. And David Rémy added the atmospheric passages on the ukulele, for example in the scene around the campfire. When image and sound come together organically, that's pure magic.

What about the little blind mole?

Demuynck: We discussed a lot whether or not we should show that little mole on screen, because it only exists in the imagination. But a child's imagination is different from an adult's. Children know this twilight zone between 'real' and 'unreal'. Even if a



child knows that Santa doesn't exist, his presence remains tangible. A teddy bear as an object can seem to be really alive for kids. When Yuku and Grandma say farewell, the screen goes black, we hear Yuku say 'I love you' and flowers begin to bloom. Parents recognise that moment as death, but what children see is a symbolic imagination. It's the only 'fade to black' in the movie, and it's a very subtle, important moment.

This bears witness to a serene vision on death.

Demuynck: When Grandma realises that Yuku has taken her place, she smiles. The transition was successful. The most beautiful feeling we can

have when saying goodbye, is knowing that we're leaving something behind for others.

How was the design of the animation?

Demuynck: I'm not an animator; I'm making a musical and I can't play music, I'm making an animation film and I can't draw! The 3D animation was done with Blender open source software, which artistic director Paul Jadoul thoroughly adapted to his artistic goals. The character design took a lot of time, but once it was done, we could easily share it with the animators in Switzerland and France. This made it possible for the film to get made at a fast pace. We started

in March 2021 and the animation was finished in March 2022.

The style of the animation is consistently maintained in the shapes and colours and in the cohesion between sets and characters.

Demuynck: We made a long animation film in a style that you would rather associate with short films. Paul Jadoul's work looks very personal, but also familiar and simple. We explored this style in *THE SCENT OF CARROTS* and have now further expanded it with the same artistic team. It felt like a real family; we had so much trust in each other.

The dream in which a rock takes the shape of Grandma is a visually striking scene.

Demuynck: Fog and lighting create a special atmosphere. Children apparently find such a metamorphosis - in which we float between two worlds - much scarier than an angry wolf or a hungry cat.

You didn't make it easy on yourself with the eyes and tails.

Demuynck: In Paul's geometric style, noses are just triangles moving across a face. Mouths in 3D turned out to be very difficult, so we converted them to 2D. The tails are in 3D, but they al-

ways have to be in motion, and therefore be animated.

Which animal was the most difficult to animate?

Demuynck: The fox, because of that long nose.

At the premiere you told a story to the children in the cinema...

Demuynck: On the beach, the eternal storyteller tells his stories to the waves of the ocean. The waves listen to his voice and break at his feet with joy. No one knows how the waves would react if the narrator disappeared one day and they start missing his stories. When I asked the children, one of them said, *"I know what the ocean would do. It would flood the world!"* Could the ocean really be so evil? *"No, not to destroy us. Out of pure grief, the ocean would go searching for the narrator and the eternal treasure of his stories."*

—
Gert Hermans

Camiel Schouwenaar about BIGMAN

“The harder he tries, the harder he falls”

Dylan and Youssef are best friends, and football is all they dream about. When Dylan ends up in a wheelchair due to an accident, he must come to terms with his new life. His dad – and former coach – wants him to accept his situation and tries to keep football from his life, but Dylan is determined to play again. Will Youssef choose to ditch or support him?

A festival edition without a new football film would be unthinkable. More than any other sport, football seems to be the ultimate backdrop for telling stories about brave young people. But...

Camiel Schouwenaar: ... BIGMAN is not a typical sports film with fixed formula scenes about winning or losing. The story is inspired by Job Tichelman's youth, our scriptwriter who has a disability. He comes from a football crazy family, his two brothers were fanatic players. As a child he loved the game so much and wanted to join them. Determined as he was, he taught himself to play football with

his hands, upside down in his wheelchair. He is the only person I know who can do this; it is so exhausting to practise.

The energy of the football scenes on the square and in the streets is overwhelming. These boys can't live without football!

Schouwenaar: We wanted to open the film with a dynamic vibe, as a proof of Dylan's carefree life. He enjoys playing football with friends, and discussing football with dad. The joy that football brings is the motor behind our story. When ending up in a wheelchair, the only thing Dylan wants is to play football with Youssef again. Our story is set in the streets of Rotterdam, a harbour city. People have a typical saying there: *“Act, don't talk”*. That's also Dylan's spirit.

What was the biggest challenge for actor Maik Cillekes? Doing the football scenes or riding the wheelchair?

Maik Cillekes: Playing football in a wheelchair was hard. I had to use muscles that I didn't know I had. My whole



body was aching.

Schouwenaar: The football scenes for sure. Maik is not exactly a superb football talent. I knew that with the right shots, choreography and editing, we could make the audience believe in his talent. But Maik's real talent is in his passion for wheels. He is a cyclist; he knows a million tricks on his bike. In our very first wheelchair rehearsal he immediately did a wheelie! He had such fun learning how to master all the skills and tricks. It is a tough physical role to play, with stunts, football, fighting... so we needed a sportive actor. Job taught him how to control the vehicle, going fast, climbing in and

out...

Job Tichelman: We practised all summer long, every week I took him to a gym. Maik appeared to be a natural talent: he is very skillful at handling the wheels and playing football upside down in his wheelchair. As a kid it took me years to get there.

Dylan's reactions of frustration and anger are not exactly charming, but deeply human.

Schouwenaar: Job and I created a universal story; both children and adults can relate to loss and failure, and how it leads to anger and frustration. And everybody wishes for Dylan to walk



again. When things turn out differently, he doesn't give up. His tenacious nature is what everybody envies him for. In the first drafts of the script Dylan was more frustrated, in a way that you could easily dislike him. We changed some scenes and made him the stubborn, tempered character that you still can identify with. The moment I casted Maik, I knew this was no longer an issue; Maik is a strong individual, but a sweet guy as well.

What's the role of the "dream character" appearing in Dylan's daydreams?

Schouwenaar: One of my inspirations was the film *LOOKING FOR ERIC*, in

which footballer Eric Cantona simply appears in the life of a troubled postman. We did the same with the famous YouTube street footballer Touzani. His solidarity is unconditional. When Dylan is down, the famous Touzani is encouraging him to fight back. He feels true and real, as if he was a close friend. We didn't want to make him a mythical figure, just someone helping a boy in need. Until this imaginary friend at some point shows up as a real person.

After every ray of hope comes another disappointment for Dylan, time after time again. Is that the story of this film, or simply the sto-

ry of life?

Schouwenaar: The story of our film. Some people have to face a lot of misfortune, others don't. We made a film about a boy who has a hard time accepting his disability. The harder he tries, the harder he falls. Thus we are telling a story of strong will, independence and empowerment. If you want something, go for it. Every attempt brings Dylan closer to embracing his new life.

Parents getting over involved with the sports careers of their kids is a well known phenomenon. I guess you didn't have to look far for inspiration.

Schouwenaar: Youth football culture is immensely popular in the Netherlands. Every village has its team and on Saturdays all parents encourage their children on the pitch, like a family tradition. For many years I did the same for my sons. This was a huge inspiration for the film indeed.

The helplessness of Dylan's parents is painful to watch. There simply isn't a ready-made codebook on how to deal with such situations.

Schouwenaar: Everybody might respond to it differently. When your child gets disabled, the natural response is to protect and nurse it. But

some parents don't know how. We show both sides of the coin through Dylan's caring mother and his clumsy father. Despite being in a wheelchair, Job's parents let him play outside like all other boys. If parents want to see their children growing up as happy self-confident individuals, stop over protecting them.

Tichelman: I sometimes came home with bleeding knees after falling from my wheelchair. My mother stuck a band aid on the wound and I went out on the street again. My parents knew I wanted to be treated like a normal kid, and that is how they raised me. They gave me the space to experiment and get hurt; I even broke my legs three times. I was all the time doing crazy stuff.

—
Gert Hermans

Emma Kawawada about MY SMALL LAND

“Not a single Kurdish refugee has been accepted to Japan so far”

Sarya and her younger siblings were born in Japan to a Kurdish immigrant family. They are torn between their desire to integrate and the attachment to their Kurdish origin that their father tries to implant in them. For *MY SMALL LAND* director Emma Kawawada says to be inspired by the Dardenne brothers, Ken Loach's *KES* and of course Hirokazu Kore-eda (*SHOPLIFTERS*), who serves as executive producer, alongside Hidetoshi Shinomiya, who as a DoP recently provided the picture composition for *DRIVE MY CAR*.



Emma Kawawada's prominently supported film had its world premiere in the Generation Kplus section at the Berlinale 2022 and was given a special mention in the Amnesty International Film Award. As the jury justified: *"This told film could take place almost anywhere in the world. It has the universal concern to denounce the inhumane treatment of refugees. The focus is on a Kurdish family, suffering from the authorities' inhumane treatment, while their residence status in Japan is being*

revoked."

Emma Kawawada: I became interested in Kurdish people in 2015 when I was shocked by the images of women soldiers fighting with the Kurdish militia against ISIS militants. That is when I first heard about this country and this ethnic group. I found out that a community of approx. 2.000 Kurds were living in Japan, and many of them were in the process of applying for refugee status. They had come all

the way from Turkey and still fought for the place where they wanted to live. In 2018 I started interviewing them; those visits have inspired me for my story.

What do you mean by this "Small Land"? Is it the prefecture where the protagonist is allowed to live or is the title referring to Kurdistan?

Kawawada: Both. If you are rejected as a refugee in Japan, there is an option that allows you to stay under very

strict conditions. For example, you are not allowed to leave your own region – in this case the Seitama Prefecture – this place is what Sarya defines as her homeland. But it also refers to Kurdistan, which can't be called a nation, simply because it doesn't exist. When I was looking for a word that could include both, I thought of 'lando' (land). In Japanese the word denotes "what can be my own" - in opposite to 'country' which is more a political label.

Born to an English father and a Japanese mother, Emma Kawawada directed the short *CIRCLE* as a student. She joined the Bun-Buku production company in 2014 and has served as assistant director to Hirokazu Kore-eda on *THE THIRD MURDER* (2017) and to Nanako Hirose on *HIS LOST NAME* (2018). *MY SMALL LAND* is her feature film debut.

What is the general situation on migration in Japan?

Kawawada: There are many immigrants from Asia, for example Rohingyas from Myanmar. But only 1% of the

candidates is granted refugee status and not a single Kurdish refugee has been accepted so far. Nevertheless it has become part of everyday life in Japan to have people from various countries standing at the checkout in the supermarket or working in convenient stores. But I have the feeling that the understanding is far from sufficient. For example, people meeting me will often praise me for speaking Japanese so well, though I was born here and master the language perfectly. I notice how my own identity, which is not at all different from other Japanese people, is questioned. As a teenager, this was a big issue for me and I struggled a lot with it. Now I can deal with it, even if I'm confronted with it on a daily basis.

This must have helped you to understand your Kurdish contacts.

Kawawada: These Kurdish youngsters grew up in Japan and don't speak their parents' language very well. The identity gap that has grown between the first and second generation was a level on which we could connect very empathetically. My father came to Japan as an English teacher, he met my mother here and has been living in Japan for over 30 years. He speaks Japanese, although his mother tongue is English and he feels English too. He

has absolutely no intention of becoming Japanese. That's completely okay with me, although there will always be something that I don't understand completely about my dad and that I can't fully empathise with. Since I was little, I have always had this feeling.

Why did you choose a feature film instead of a documentary?

Kawawada: I wanted to make a film that was not just about a distant problem, by telling a story that the audience can embrace as if it was their own. I wanted people to identify with the characters and tap into their own emotions. That is why I'm telling a story about a 17 year old girl struggling with her identity.

Are the actors in MY SMALL LAND all Kurds?

Kawawada: Initially that was the intention, but I decided against it. I was worried that appearing in a dramatic film with a social message may work against them in their rather delicate position of applying for refugee status. I held auditions for people with varied overseas backgrounds. That's how Lina Arashi, who started her career as a magazine model, signed up. She's a high school student and her roots go back to five different countries in the Middle East. Sarya's fam-



ily is played by Lina's real-life father, sister and brother. We never intended it to be like this, but we made the decision after seeing how well they all performed together. Lina's most natural expressions and emotions came through with her father; she then was completely different than with other actors.

What are your wishes in regards to your film?

Kawawada: In a story that is mainly about youth and coming-of-age, the issue of Kurdish refugees in Japan always plays in the background. It is something that, like the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine, spurs people on to question the meaning of borders. National borders will likely

never vanish, but I think those borders of the heart we carry inside us can be redrawn. I hope that by watching through the eyes of a young girl, we'll realise that these immigrant people are not so far from ourselves; they think about friends, love, family... These are issues that concern them and therefore we are all the same people with exactly the same feelings, exactly the same thoughts.

—
Uta Beth

Lidia Duda about THE FLEDGLINGS

“Their fingers are their life”

In an institute for the blind, we meet three original characters: imaginative Zosia, sensitive Oskar and self-reliant Kinga. With endless respect, the renowned Polish documentary maker Lidia Duda delves into their lives. Until an unforeseen storyline bubbles up, telling of an overwhelming tenderness, a deep affection, and of a world in black and white where a small touch says all there is to say. AleKino! bravely put THE FLEDGLINGS on their programme, in a screening that will not lightly be forgotten.

Can you tell us about the location, the Laski Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Children?

Lidia Duda: It's a catholic school, led by nuns, with a kindergarten, an elementary and secondary school, a music school... In this vast area, there is a swimming pool, a park, stables with horses for hippotherapy... When starting in kindergarten, you might stay there until the moment you finish your college career.

In this school they don't teach you

how to see but how to listen, how to hear the environment around you, as if every person and every room has its own sound.

Duda: These children have a form of echolocation, like bats. Oskar always looks down, listening to the sound of his feet; that is how he hears eventual obstacles on his path. They sense the smell of every person, they hear the shuffling on the floor when someone sneakily comes near. There is no person as sensitive as a blind child.

It makes this movie a confrontation with the mysteries of the human senses.

Duda: The lack of eyesight raises a need for an imaginary world, created in their minds by using all other senses. They connect music with smells, they have the ability to sense people's emotions, they feel sadness in the sound of one's voice. Different from us, they truly listen to what people are telling and how they tell it. Inspired by them, I also started noticing hidden emotions when listening to people's voices. It was interesting to



discover this ability in me.

Lying to them won't be easy!

Duda: It never works. They are like a litmus test; the chemical reaction is always correct. Things are good or bad, true or false. Only black and white makes them feel safe; they don't mess around with shades of grey.

Is it their senses that cause the uncontrollable movements they are making constantly?

Duda: They are little kids who should run, jump, play football, ride bicycles... what they are not capable of. They have tons of energy and no way to use it so they need to transmit it, especial-

ly in a new environment where they can't move freely. It changes when growing up. By the time they are in third grade they might have outgrown this habit; no longer feeling insecure, they'll know how to get from one classroom to the other. I didn't find a single scene in which this behaviour could be explained. This film is more about raising interest than about explaining anyway.

Often documentary makers want to be like a fly on the wall, remaining unnoticed. The paradox is that even if these protagonists couldn't see you, they might have been even more aware of your presence.

Duda: I made a pact with them that they would always know when we came and went, as to make them feel safe. The kids allowed us in their private conversations because they trusted us. They knew we were curious about their world. We spoke a lot outside of shooting, so that they got to know me as a person. I am curious about people in general, and apparently they often like talking to me, maybe because I'm not judgemental by nature.

Today I fell in love with fingers! They are so beautiful.

Duda: Their fingers are their life. Like when playing the piano, or when Zosia falls asleep and Oskar puts his hand on her back. That is such a massive thing! Those hands also define the frame we use, which is exactly the frame that these kids can control. The audience experiences the world only within that frame, both in visuals and in sound.

Is that why you made the film in black and white?

Duda: Honestly... I didn't plan it like this. I could say this was the result of my artistic vision but I'll give you the real reason. This school looks extremely colourful, with neon colours that were all the time on the first



plan, where I wanted the faces of the children to be. The emotions on those faces are the first thing that should catch your attention. That is why I took off the colour.

In a school run by nuns, religion seems to be an important issue in their lives.

Duda: Poland is a very religious country, but the number of churches might be bigger than the true faith with people. This dogmatic faith is more an idea than a practical immersion. No one questions what this faith really is about, but Zosia does. We recorded scenes with Zosia asking beautiful questions - which were rather confusing for the nuns - and expressing

her religious doubts, but we decided not to include them; I had to make a choice whether to make a movie about the love for God or about the first love between two kids. I chose the world of children's feelings and emotions.

I was curious if religion somehow gives them comfort.

Duda: Zosia comes from a non-religious family, while Oskar knew all the prayers by heart but didn't understand the words. These are two sides of faith you'll meet in our society. More than in religion, they find comfort in each other. They understand each other so well because they're in the same situation, experiencing the

same challenges, depending on each other.

Which becomes clear in the love story between Zosia and Oskar.

Duda: At first Zosia, being raised in a very caring family, was like a mother to Oskar. It was obvious that she wouldn't leave him helpless. When it turned out that both of them liked this fantasy world in which they can make up stories, they became friends.

My thoughts often were with Kinga, the third character who is more in the background. Who is she?

Duda: Kinga is raised only by her father as a practical little woman. She knows how to get things done and has a different kind of imagination than the other two. She likes hanging out with the older girls but she was always helping out when needed, like a good spirit, always around but never in the spotlight.

What is happening in the closing scene?

Duda: In this party the boys and girls from the dormitory are invited together, like a group date. Every girl has her dream boy, but none of them wanted to be with Oskar, except Zosia. That was the moment when Zosia and Oskar "saw" each other's faces,



touching them with their fingers

Did the kids already watch the film?

Duda: After the world premiere in Poland (with audio-description) Zosia

ure out which age group would fit the best as a target audience for THE FLEDGLINGS.

Duda: I made the film without any age limitations in my mind. The surprising



turned towards me and asked 'why is this film so short?', then pointed out all the scenes that she felt were missing. She remembered all the takes we did and the final film turned out to be too short for her. This movie was so important for them; it is their "film diary". Zosia, Kinga and Oskar are now in second grade. Zosia goes to singing lessons, Oskar is making huge progress in playing the piano and Kinga still helps them out.

In the AleKino! Festival discussions with psychologists were held to fig-

thing is that I thought it would mainly be appreciated by a female audience; now it turns out that especially men seem to like this film a lot. One thing is for sure: it is a movie about our need for closeness with another person. This is a fundamental truth, no matter our age. THE FLEDGLINGS got a 7+ qualification and I'm very happy about that.

—
Gert Hermans

Thomas Hailer (Nordic Film Days) "Bordeaux wines, Sicilian almonds and good films"

There is life before and after the Berlinale! Thomas Hailer might be known as the former face of the Berlinale's "Kinderfilmfest" (since 2002), that he renamed Generation and to which he added a youth competition. Later he became curator of the festival's international competition. Nowadays, since 2020, he is the artistic director of the Nordic Film Days in Lübeck, a festival that has – by nature – a strong connection with quality films for children.

Can you explain why so many good films for children are coming from the North?

Hailer: I can't explain it, but one indicator is that these are countries with a very intelligent approach to film funding. As relatively small countries they know that they alone are responsible for their offspring, and that they have to make sure that children get enough incentives so that their enthusiasm for cinema carries into adulthood. Denmark for example is



the only country where Tarrantino's DJANGO UNCHAINED was not box office number 1 because the film was released at the same time as JAGTEN by Thomas Vinterberg. I assume that these societies might have a different idea of childhood in general. But most of all they are not afraid of individual voices in the film industry.

Maybe they also have less bureaucracy?

Hailer: I'm not so sure, bureaucracy is part of the funding business anyway - there are good reasons why



ONE IN A MILLION

our constitutional fathers gave the individual federal states control over education. After the experiences of the Third Reich, they wanted to prevent a *"Gleichschaltung"* (uniformity). Of course, a tiny country that is governed centrally from the capital has an easier time with everything that concerns film funding. But a lot has happened here in Germany in recent years too, the Förderverein Deutscher Kinderfilm has been very active and has cleared a lot of hurdles, especially for independent production of children's films.

Born in the small town of Öhringen, Thomas Hailer studied theatre sci-

ence. Once moved to Berlin, he joined the artistic staff of an independent music-theatre ensemble. When the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded the end of the "fat years" for the independent theatre scene, he carried on as director, production dramaturge (for a dance company) and script doctor for cinema and television. He is also a member of the Head of Studies of the Academy for Children's Media.

How did you actually get from theatre to children and youth film?

Hailer: It was an unexpectedly successful lateral move. I had noticed that the field of dramaturgy, consulting and participation in creative pro-

cesses suited me better than directing or entrepreneurial management. When Uwe Rosenbaum, then a member of the board of directors, offered me the position as project consultant at "Kuratorium junger deutscher Film" it soon became clear to me that it's worth investing energy in making sure that children get to see good films. The foundation had decided in 1998 to also invest in children's film and additionally offered dramaturgical support on top of the financial support.

Then Berlinale director Dieter Kosslick was looking for a new Section Head for his children's film festival...

Hailer: Which really appealed to me. I thought I'd do it for two or three years - I wouldn't have thought it would turn into 17 years at the Berlinale. Yet it was a great time: implanting 14plus and transforming the 'Kinderfilmfest' into 'Generation' was great fun and one of the things I look back on with pride and gratitude. Of course the section was already in good shape when I arrived, through the flawless selection of films and this unconditional commitment that children can and must also be exposed to so called serious films.

What do you remember as a particu-

lar highlight of those years?

Hailer: 'My' first Crystal Bear for ELINA by Klaus Harö. And I will never forget that moment when the headmaster in Nils Arden Oplev's film WE SHALL OVERCOME comes telling the children that their hated teacher has died, and all the children go standing on their chairs cheering - at the premiere in the Zoo-Palast, 1000 children were also standing on their chairs cheering. That was a very, very wild and energetic experience! You saw how films can evoke physical energy when an audience gets the right stimuli.

Then you became an advisor to Dieter Kosslick.

Hailer: In a few steps I was appointed curator of the entire Berlinale, supporting Kosslick in the selection of the programmes, and in strategic questions about the Berlinale. What I enjoyed was being in contact with all the sections, holding the threads together.

One year after leaving the Berlinale in 2019, you joined the Nordic Film Days as artistic director.

Hailer: When I left the Berlinale, I really didn't think about working for a festival again. But when Lübeck asked me it immediately felt differ-

ent. There are definitely parallels to the Berlinale, because the Nordic Filmdays belong first and foremost to the audience. It was a Lübeck film club that came up with this idea in 1956: why don't we bring these modern films from the Nordic Countries to Germany? Why don't we bring that different image of women, family, childhood... here through films and see them as a means to shape society and promote modernity? Five years later, the festival was taken over by the city and meanwhile it attracts almost 500 accredited industry guests and grants a total of €63,000 in prize money. But from the heart it still belongs to the people of Lübeck, the fans of Nordic cinema. With this special focus on the eight Nordic countries and on regional production from Schleswig Holstein and Hamburg, we are indeed a unique festival.

2021 was your first festival as artistic director of the "Nordic Film Days". Now we're at the eve of your second edition (2-6 November). Tell us what to expect?

Hailer: First of all, we're completely back in our cinemas. Additionally we offer 70% of the films as streaming for all those who still want to avoid crowded rooms. The festival is in good shape; Hanna Reifgerst is our



WE SHALL OVERCOME

new programmer in the children's and youth area, we have a new programmer for the series area with Wendy Mitchell, a renowned journalist and expert on Nordic cinema and series. We'll see the comeback of our Infinity Dome, a 360 degree cinema where we present immersive Nordic content: Danish artist Thomas Wilfred's light-painting compositions, adapted for this venue, or the German premiere of ARRAN 360°, seven immersive works by indigenous artists commissioned by the International Sami Film Institute. Their stories, traditionally told in round tents, fit perfectly to the Dome because of their circular narrative form. The variety of

indigenous films also extends into our documentary section, where we show HISTORJÁ - STICHES FROM SAPMI, which on the one hand is a portrait of the artist and activist Britta Marakatt-Labba, who herself comes from a reindeer-herding family and whose 23 metre long embroidered frieze caused a sensation at the 2017 Dokumenta. She gives us a deep insight into the history and ongoing struggle of these indigenous people in Europe, about whom we generally know far too little.

Speaking of documentaries - what role do they play in your festival?

Hailer: Documentary film has a long

tradition in Lübeck. This year our Young Audience Section offers ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS, a documentary series about the phenomenon EFTERSKOLEN, a huge success in Denmark, probably because it was developed with the participation of the target group. At our industry platform we offer a workshop on documentaries for young audiences which is also held in a participatory way. Based on Joya Thomé's first feature documentary ONE IN A MILLION and the Danish documentary TSUMU, young experts from FBW Jugendjury and EFA's European Film Club will discuss with industry participants how documentaries should be made in order to be interesting for them. Children and young people don't just want to watch anymore, they want to participate - and that's why we like to take up these impulses from the Nordic countries, keeping up with the tradition of our festival. I also find it remarkable that the route that Bordeaux wines and Sicilian almonds used to travel through the Hanseatic League to the North is now being used hundreds of years later in the opposite direction to transport good films. It's a great statement for Europe.

–
Uta Beth

Happy birthday Youth Cinema Network

10 years in one book

9 September 2022 was a big day for the Youth Cinema Network family! The book 10 YEARS OF YCN, 2012-2022 was presented during the Four River Film Festival in Karlovac, Croatia, telling the story of the Network's development since its very first days.

Presenting the book were Helena Enright (editor), Hermann Greuel (one of the YCN's founding members), Marija Ratković Vidaković (YCN co-ordinator) and Sanja Zanki Pejić (long-term member and representing one of the publishers, the Croatian Film Association - Other publishers were Fresh Film Festival and Cinema Club Karlovac).

YCN is a worldwide network of youth film festivals, organisations and film & media educators which started as an informal gathering at the Nordic Youth Film Festival in Tromsø. The book, the crown of 10 years work, consists of six chapters:

- In the Beginning – Connections and Possibilities;
- The YCN Award – Recognition;
- Collaboration & Exchange: An Infor-



- mal Education;
- Give & Take;
- Festivals in Pandemic – What a Challenge;
- The Future of YCN – The New Generation.

These chapters summarise the YCN's activities, mission and goals through a series of interviews with YCN members, combined with short quiz-questions, giving an insight into the world of films made by children and youth. As Helena Enright points out: *"I have enjoyed working on this book as I had the opportunity to talk with a variety of people from the network and hear*

how important it has been to them. How it has been a source of friendship and a space where they can collaborate, exchange ideas and learn from one another without agenda. It was clear that the young people are at the heart of what they do and that their passion and enthusiasm for creating informal spaces of learning is not only inspiring but also much needed as young people are faced with growing up in an increasingly challenging world."

In its 10 years, the YCN's greatest contribution is primarily found in the distribution of films made by children and youth around the world. Addition-



ally, YCN is the primary source of implementation of many collaborative youth film projects for many of its member organisations. Such exchanges are enabling new experiences to numerous young people.

Beside the printed version, the book is to be found on the following [link](#). So what else is there to say than... enjoy your reading!

– Marija Ratković Vidaković

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.

Johannes Schmid about TALES OF FRANZ

"Exploring the neighbourhood on their own"

9 year old Franz is the smallest kid in his class. On top of that, his voice often lets him down in stressful situations, leaving him with nothing more than a squeaky sound. In Franz's life there is a need for creative solutions to the everyday problems of growing up, which he finds with the help of his best friends, the self confident and opinionated Gabi and the fiercely loyal Eberhard. Until one day Franz falls under the spell of Hank Haberer, an influencer with reprehensible advice on how toxic masculinity can boost your success in life.



The film stays true to a kind of children's logic. How was this consequently maintained throughout the script?

Johannes Schmid: In almost every scene the focus is on Franz; there is not a single scene without him or at least one of the three main young characters. Our DoP Matthias Grunsky adopted Franz's perspective and the camera constantly stayed physically close to him, searching for the right angle. With the help of children's acting coach Eli Wasserscheid we managed to get the kids in the right emotional space.

TALES OF FRANZ targets a younger age group than your earlier titles.

Schmid: The main actors in both *BLÖDE MÜTZE* (aka *SILLY'S SWEET SUMMER*) and *WINTERTOCHTER* were 12 years old, which is almost like working with grown-ups. But to work with a bunch of 9 year olds, you need a lot of energy to keep them focused. Nevertheless it was great fun having these boys and girls around.

Who came up with those 20 rules for becoming a real man?

Schmid: The book series by Christine Nöstlinger compiles short stories and anecdotes about a young boy's life, addressing the target group of kids that just start to read. Screenwriter Sara Wassermair had to develop a story based on many episodes and details from the books, but with the dramaturgy and storyline of a feature film. She came up with the idea of the influencer Hank Haberer and his 20 rules. Haberer's character and tone are inspired by loads of male influencers that you find all over the internet.

These days gender related topics are often addressed in movies, but seldom for such a young audience. This was the right moment?

Schmid: On the internet, kids might easily get confronted with this wave of right-wing populists, spreading messages about toxic masculinity. It's important to address these issues with them at the moment when they start thinking about it, probably at the age of nine. Up till then every-



body plays with everybody and it just doesn't matter, but at this age your perception starts to change.

Film and media could be the right channels to open this debate with kids?

Schmid: I am a German, living in Scandinavia, and I notice great differences in media content. In Sweden you'll come across a lot of different role models for family structures in children's media. Already in pre-school children learn to use a gender-neutral pronoun. All this creates a different



mindset. In German speaking countries I sometimes have the impression that society is already more advanced than the way it is reflected on screen. Through Franz we aim to raise the topic with children, and with Gabi we introduce a strong female character. Katharina Posch (producer): Gabi, who is helping Franz whenever he is too shy or clumsy, has a surprising fan base. The impact of her character is amazing. My daughter told me she wanted the same trousers as Gabi!

Your film has a thing in common with GODZILLA: the tagline that “size matters”.

Schmid: On the contrary, this film

tells that “size doesn’t matter”. Franz is learning on his journey that he can have self confidence because of who he really is, and that the best version of Franz is the real Franz.

You have an interesting way of portraying grown ups. Not as 100% caricatures (as often is the case in children’s films) but just a little bit awkward.

Schmid: Looking at adults through children’s eyes, all of them sometimes seem a bit strange; adults do weird things. But they are never ridiculed. Together with the actors, I wanted to create real life characters. The comic relief is never within the acting or the



costumes; it is within the situation and the behaviour of adults. None of the grown up actors are playing ‘funny’.

Your version of Vienna looks like a village, so peaceful and friendly.

Schmid: Vienna is a big and modern city, which has at the same time a strong small town vibe in some districts. 20 years after my last visit, it was interesting to rediscover the city through the eyes of Franz. At the age of 9, children start to carefully explore their neighbourhood on their own, going to school alone, hanging out with friends and thus discovering the urban space. They start having a

life of their own, without parents. This journey enlarges the radius of their lives and encourages them to become more independent.

–
Gert Hermans

As recommended by Alessandra Gariboldi

The "Audience Centred Experience Design (ACED) blueprint" as selected by Alessandra Gariboldi, Head of Transnational Projects of Fondazione Fitzcarraldo and collaborating with the Cultural Observatory of Piedmont, Italy.



Within the ECFA Academic Committee researchers, academics, and experts are gathering with one mission: to provide better access to inspiring data and research reports for youth film professionals on the workflow. In every edition of the ECFA Journal, you'll get to know one of the Committee members and the research projects they recently curated for the ECFA website's [Knowledge section](#).

I. Catch up with Alessandra Gariboldi

Why are you the right person to be a member of the ECFA Academic Committee?

I'm a researcher and expert in cultural participation. In the last 20 years I've been investigating, designing and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of policies and projects aimed at widening, deepening and diversifying cultural audiences. I'm an outsider in the film domain; my background is in Art History and my career has developed working with diverse cultural and creative domains: performing arts, museums, festivals, libraries, independent cultural centres, publishers, digital start-ups... But an "outsider look" is essential to meet new perspectives.

"Research is something for books and reports." Not true! Research can also be implemented on a practical level in our work. Do you have suggestions on how this could be done? Research exists (or should do so) to help and support citizens and organisations in developing their practices.



The kind of research I'm interested in is always an applied one: it learns from and for the field. We live in a complex world, and research helps us understand the ever-changing context, the trends and the solutions that others are applying.

Name one person, alive or dead, famous or obscure, that you would consider a valuable member of this committee, and why?

Pierre Bourdieu; as a sociologist he investigated how culture and society interact; his reflections on "cultural capital" really help us understand our responsibility as cultural professionals – *why, for whom and how* we make

art is the hardest and more challenging question that we should keep asking ourselves.

There is this theory that everybody working with media education has a strong film related memory from their childhood. Do you have one that still influences your professional approach?

My first cinema experience (at least in my memory) at 5 years old was STAR WARS. I don't believe it still influences my professional approach, but I still remember how I felt in front of the big screen!

II. For the ECFA Academic Committee Alessandra Gariboldi curated...

The Audience Centred Experience Design (ACED) blueprint, a tool to help cultural organisations create experiences with and for their audiences, visitors or participants. It helps cultural organisations to become more sustainable, relevant and inclusive, using a step-by-step process co-designed by the Adeste+ partnership. Alongside explanations of each stage, there are examples, templates and case studies as well as links to other resources which explain how the blueprint works.



About the ACED blueprint

The ACED model can be helpful for organisations that programme for an audience such as cinemas, festivals etc... I believe it can help in a very practical way to gain a fresh look into our present and wannabe audiences by questioning the way we design (and by helping us to do it differently). If you think that there is something more you could do to make people fall in love with cinema but don't know how, you should have a look at the [ACED blueprint, available 7 languages](#)

(Croatian, Danish, English, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish).

This resource is something for you if...

- Your work is about connecting audience with content;
- You work in an organisation programming for audiences;
- You believe that if people are not attending, it's up to you to change something;
- You believe that reaching an audience is not just (but also) about

marketing;

- You feel your organisation needs new approaches for collaborative working.

—
Alessandra Gariboldi

Angry Young Men

Feature Film, UK, 2022

Directed by Paul Morris

Prod. & World Sales: Marlo Films

marlofilmsltd@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/marlofilmsltd



The Black Pharaoh, the Savage and the Princess

Animation, France, 2022

Directed by Michel Ocelot

Prod.: Nord-Ouest Films, Studio O, Artémis Prod.,...

World Sales: Playtime

phone: ++33-1-53-10-33-99

info@playtime.group

www.playtime.group

Erik Stoneheart

Feature Film, Estonia, Luxembourg, Finland, Latvia, 2022

Directed by Ilmar Raag

Prod.: Amrion, Paul Thiltges, Helsinki Filmi,...

World Sales: Pink Parrot Media

Phone: ++1-51-42-70-25-22 ext.268

info@pinkparrotmedia.ca

www.pinkparrotmedia.ca



The Fledglings

Documentary, Poland, 2022

Directed by Lidia Duda

Prod.: Aura Films, TVP, The Mazovia Institute of Culture,...

World Sales: Aura Films

Phone: ++48-660-74-69-96

contact@aurafilms.pl

www.aurafilms.pl/en

Gaja's World 2 – This is my Planet

Feature Film, Slovenia, 2022

Directed by Peter Bratuša

Prod.: Felina Films, RTV Slovenija, Studio Ritem

World Sales: Felina Films

Phone: ++386-41-68-80-28

nives@felinafilms.si

www.felinafilms.si

A Girl Returned

Feature Film, Italy, Switzerland, 2022

Directed by Giuseppe Bonito

Prod.: Maro Film, Baires Produzioni,

Kafilms,...

World Sales: True Colours - Glorious Films

Phone: ++39-06-37-35-23-34

catia@truecolours.it

www.truecolours.it

Go With the Floh, aka: The Mucklas ... and how They Came to Pettson and Findus

Animation, Germany, Luxembourg, 2022

Directed by Ali Samadi Ahadi & Markus Dietrich

Prod.: Tradewind Pictures, Amour Fou

Luxembourg, Senator Film Prod.,...

World Sales: Wild Bunch Germany

Phone: ++49-89-444-55-66-44

office@wildbunch.eu

www.wildbunch-germany.de

Hug Me – The Movie

Animation, Poland, 2022

Directed by Anna Blaszczyk

Prod.: Animoon, Animex, Fixafilm

World Sales: Urban Distribution Int'l

Phone: ++33-1-48-70-46-56

contact@urbandistrib.com

www.urbandistrib.com

I Am Chance

Documentary, Belgium, France, 2022

Directed by Marc-Henri Wajnberg

Prod.: Wajnbrose, RG & Créatifs As-

sociés, Eva Prod.

World Sales: Wajnbrose

Phone: ++32-23-81-28-31

wajnbrose.com

www.en.wajnbrose.com/iamchance



Just Super

Animation, Norway, 2022

Directed by Rasmus A. Sivertsen

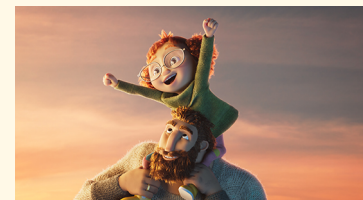
Prod.: Qvisten Animation

World Sales: TrustNordisk Film

Phone: ++45-29-74-62-06

info@trustnordisk.com

www.trustnordisk.com



Motherhood

Feature Film, Spain, 2022

Directed by Pilar Palomero

Prod.: Inicia Films, Bteam Pictures

World Sales: Elle Driver
Phone: ++33-1-56-43-48-70
sales@elledriver.eu
www.elledriver.fr



My Father's Dragon

Animation, Ireland, 2022

Directed by Nora Twomey
Prod.: Netflix Animation, Cartoon Saloon, Mockingbird,...
World Sales: Cartoon Saloon
Phone: ++35-35-67-76-44-81
info@cartoonsaloon.ie
www.cartoonsaloon.ie



No Dogs or Italians Allowed

Animation, France, Italy, Switzerland, 2022

Directed by Alain Ughetto
Prod.: Les Films du Tambour de Soie, Vivement Lundi
World Sales: Indie Sales
Phone: ++33-1-44-83-02-27
info@indiesales.eu
www.indiesales.eu



Oliver's Universe

Feature Film, Spain, 2022

Directed by Alexis Morante
Prod.: Pecado Films, La Claqueta, Sinehan Capital,...
World Sales: Filmax
Phone: ++34-933-36-85-55
filmaxint@filmax.com
www.filmaxinternationalsales.com

The Space Among Us

Feature Film, Slovenia, 2022

Directed by Rahela Jagric Pirc
Prod.: Arsmedia, RTV Slovenija, MB Grip,...
World Sales: Coccinelle Film Sales
info@coccinellefilm.com
www.coccinellefilm.com

The Tiger's Nest

Feature Film, Italy, 2022

Directed by Brando Quilici
Prod.: HD Prod., Medusa Film
World Sales: TFI Int'l
Phone: ++33-1-41-41-17-63
sales@tf1.fr
www.tf1international.com

The Time of Secrets

Feature Film, France, 2022

Directed by Christophe Barratier
Prod.: Lionceau Films, Pathé Films, France 3 Cinéma
World Sales: Pathé Films
Phone: ++44-20-74-62-44-29
internationalsales@pathe.co.uk
www.patheinternational.com



Vesper

Feature Film, Belgium, France, Lithuania, 2022

Directed by Kristina Buozyte & Bruno Samper
Prod.: Natrix, 10.80 Films, Rumble Fish Prod.
World Sales: Anton Corp

info@antoncorp.com
www.antoncorp.com

White Berry

Feature Film, the Netherlands, 2022

Directed by Sia Hermanides
Prod. & World Sales: Family Affair
Phone: ++31-20-70-71-713
info@familyaffairfilms.nl
www.familyaffairfilms.nl

Yuku and the Himalayan Flower

Animation, Belgium, France, 2022

Directed by Rémi Durin & Arnaud Demuyck
Prod.: Artémis Prod., La Boîte Prod., Les Films du Nord,...
World Sales: New Europe Film Sales
Phone: ++48-5-03-03-51-63
kat@neweuropefilmsales.com
www.neweuropefilmsales.com

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

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

Rose-Marie Strand

Personal impression by Xiaojuan Zhou

Rose-Marie Strand is a veteran in our industry. She has been involved for many years in the children's department at one of Sweden's biggest national distribution companies. She is a bit different from other film distributors I have encountered, having her business acumen wrapped under a soft and gentle appearance. Through her glasses she conveys a kind of a school master impression. She champions the films she has curated. She studies the best marketing approach to bring them to the target audience, either 'toddlers' as she termed, or graders or t(w)eens. She knows that IP-driven films are

easier to get out, but does not shy away from original arthouse titles. She does not look like a Pipi Longstocking to me, but she is definitely inquisitive and open minded. She is not only a children's film distributor, she is also a media literacy educator in quality children's cinema. Her experience shows how a dedicated distributor works with cinemas, schools, media and parents to reach children in the most optimal screening environments. From the double roles that she has been playing for decades as a distributor and film educator, many children in Sweden must have benefited. .

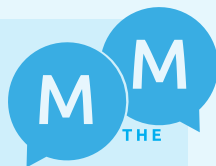
THE 'MEET THE MENTORS' Q&A

Rose-Marie Strand, Swedish distributor (Folkets Bio)

You have dedicated a large

part of your life to quality children's cinema. How did it all start?

Rose-Marie Strand: During my



university years in the northern part of Sweden, I combined my studies with voluntary work for an independent cinema. I started with an interest in arthouse movies and grew to become more interested in programming for children. I thought (and still think) that programming for children is both about the film and about how you welcome children and their families. The recipe should always consist of playing tools, crayons and paper, lemonade and cookies, and of course the film.

Instead of becoming an antiquarian in museums after my graduation, I became a school screening organiser for the community of Umeå, and from there all the way to the Head of Children Film Department at Folkets Bio in Stockholm. At this job I handle film acquisitions, marketing and media literacy.

Who, fictional or real, inspired you the most?

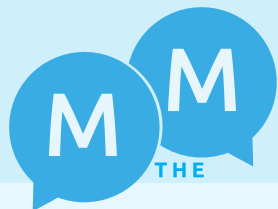
Strand: I absolutely believe that the Pipi Longstocking books and films had an impact on me, like on many other Swedish kids. But when I was about 15 years old, our school offered film screenings; the love for film and for seeing films together with others started there, I guess. For me, SCARECROW by Jerry Schatzberg was an

eye-opener; it really described what a film could be. We also saw THE GRADUATE by Mike Nichols, ROMEO AND JULIET by Franco Zeffirelli and one Agatha Christie murder mystery. This experience has trained me, I presume, as a future programmer, buyer and media literacy person.

What are your guiding principles in selecting, acquiring and distributing children's films? How did you come to establish them?

Strand: My guiding principles are that the film 1) should be made from a child's perspective, 2) should have high production and artistic values and 3) should be relevant and unique. Finding the film is one thing, promoting it is something else. You need to convince cinemas and audiences and present it to the press. Our films rely on being present on all windows, cinema, school cinema, VOD and institutional VOD. And my job is to be actively engaged in all these windows. When releasing a film, we make sure that children are in the centre of the plan. We work with cinemas to create an environment where they feel welcome to play, eat, listen to our (short) presentation and watch a movie.

Scandinavia used to be a pioneer in quality children's cinema.



Strand: Nowadays the Swedish children's films depend on IPs (Intellectual Property). There are still some films made from original scripts but they have a hard time reaching the audience. Norway has the leading position in Scandinavia nowadays. There, both big commercial films based on renowned IPs as well as original stories are produced, they all find a domestic audience.

Can you share with us your digital distribution experience with children's films?

Strand: Transactional VOD reflects how a film has performed in theatres. For the arthouse children's films, school screenings and institutional VOD are of vital importance. CHOUM'S ODYSSEY by Julien Bisaro performed very well even though it



was released during the worst Covid period in 2020. It is still screened in theatres and day-care centres, being visible on all windows. Such a simultaneous presence on various windows is probably only possible when it comes to films for small children.

You have theatrically distributed short or medium length films for very young children – how did you make that work?

Strand: In Sweden all cinemas, even the multiplexes screen and demand films for toddlers (3-6 year old) up to 45 minutes. These films can sell any-

where between 3,000 and 150,000 tickets. We screen short film packages for small children. Our children's film catalogue consists of approx. 60 titles with 5 or 6 titles added each year. This year we will release three new ALFIE ATKINS films (by Tomas Alfredson, 3 x 36').

What makes a good distributor for children audiences?

Strand: As specialised distributors for children we look for films that are for - not about children. Quality is essential, but we seek a deeper meaning as well. We do not look for moralistic

films nor do we seek films that help to raise "good" children.

Is there a market for arthouse films for children?

Strand: There has to be! If we do not offer them arthouse films now, how will they demand arthouse films as adults? On top of my all time favourite children's film list are titles like WHO WILL COMFORT TOFFLE, KIRIKOU AND THE SORCERESS and ONLY CLOUDS MOVE THE STARS. It is so important to see children from other countries on screen and understand that we are all alike. We need films that talk about representation, films to identify with and films to open up the world. As adult gatekeepers, we need to offer a broad variety.

Could you share with us a few items on your bucket list?

Strand: For me personally it is about finding places to hike. I am hoping to go trekking in the Alps, several small islands with lighthouses are on my 'to visit' list, and I hope to become a better skier one day.

Yfendo van Praag about I DON'T WANNA DANCE

"I never thought I had so much focus in me"

"I am Yfendo van Praag, 17 years old and I DON'T WANNA DANCE is like a snapshot of my life. You discover who I am and what I do. My character Joey is taken from his family. He would prefer to live with his mother, but encounters obstacles: should he choose for himself or invest in their relationship?"

In the Dutch film I DON'T WANNA DANCE by Flynn Von Kleist a true story is told by the boy who lived it. After living with his aunt and uncle for two years, Joey returns home to his mother. Everything is going well: mum has a job, the fridge is full and Joey has a great time with his dance crew. Until mother relapses in her old habits and youth care knocks on the door again. How long can Joey keep up this destructive dance with his mum at the cost of his own happiness?

Yfendo van Praag: I am not Joey, but 80% of Joey's story is taken from my life, although some details were dramatised or fictionalised.

How did Flynn Von Kleist find you?

van Praag: When I was 12, Flynn was working on a music documentary. I played the clarinet and my teacher told him I was good. When I told Flynn my story, he wanted to make a movie out of it. He chose elements from my life that we scripted over a 6 month long process. First we made a short film and from then on worked on a fiction film that was shot in 2019.

Your name is among the credits as "executive producer".

van Praag: Because I contributed ideas to the film on every level. I got to read every version of the script and was allowed to fill in my role and improvise. The many Surinamese words that I used add some extra flavour. I had a say in the musical choices and I included some artists from Amsterdam North, where I come from. I want to thank Flynn for that. Getting the chance to adapt your own story in this way feels very exceptional.

You also chose the dance crew?

van Praag: When looking for dancers, I immediately thought of my



best friends, two guys I consider my brothers. Amsterdam North represent! They are not actors; they have nothing to do with dialogue and cameras, but everything with dancing. We made one choreo, which recurs in a few scenes. It was hard labour before we finally mastered it.

If dancing means so much to you, then why is the film called I don't wanna dance?

van Praag: Because I don't want to dance anymore with this pain that holds me back. Dancing should be my outlet and that is only possible if my

emotions don't slow me down. It was my first passion and I still do it from time to time - nothing makes me happier than a few smooth dance moves.

And what about acting?

van Praag: I had to bring out all kinds of emotions: pain, sadness, love... But I'm not an actor; I don't know what tools to use. Fortunately, I got advice from experienced people on set. I learned to keep a distance between Yfendo and Joey. That was therapeutic. I've been much better at life ever since.





Could an experienced actress like Romana Vrede help you

van Praag: In the Netherlands Romana is a well known top actress. I could read her mind on the set: "oh no, another one of those non-actors..." Once we understood where we both come from, a bond grew but we kept our distance. She was very straight forward and demanded a lot of focus; I never thought I had so much focus in me. The intense, dark scenes that we did together were often situated on the thin line between love and hate. Romana taught me to release those feelings right away so I could prepare for the next scene. She is pretty feisty. As you can see at the end of the film, she resembles my mother like two

drops of water; they are like sisters.

All this happened with a camera pointed at your face. How did that feel?

van Praag: Awkward! The crew kept saying: "pretend that we're not there" but then I looked into the lens and we had to redo the scene... The first few weeks they kept their distance. Only afterwards they got very close with the camera for those close shots. That was frightening.

You've spent quite some days and nights on the set.

van Praag: We had 26 shooting days. The first three days on set were summery with wonderful temperatures



and late evening daylight. But when we shot those intense scenes, it was 40 degrees inside the house, there was no air conditioning and a crew of 50 people walked in and out. Some of the most demanding scenes were shot in the middle of the night.

What is the essence that I DON'T WANNA DANCE found in the story of your life?

van Praag: Actually it's all about self-esteem. You get to know the other side of a person; we cannot always immediately assess what is going on in someone's life. But I DON'T WANNA DANCE also tells about having fun in the things you do. When I first saw the movie, I thought mostly about the

scenes that were missing. But now I'm satisfied. The story still grabs me and touches other people too.

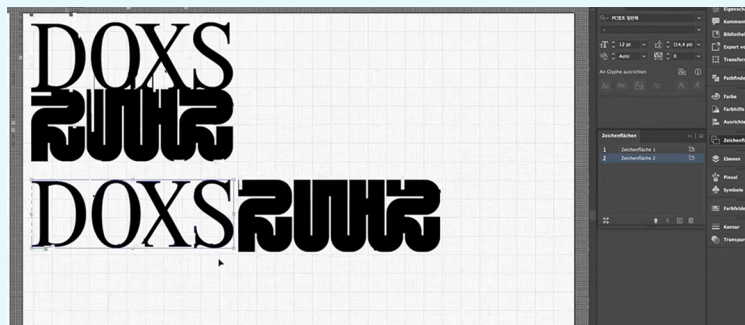
Do you see your mum regularly?

van Praag: Not so often, because I am mainly concerned with myself. Despite the distance, our family bond is very close, also with my brothers and sister. You won't hear me complain!

—
Lukas De Block

Doxs! / DOXS RUHR

The knot untied in a double interview



Gudrun Sommer – director of DOXS RUHR since 2013

People seem to have a strong belief in the power of and the necessity for documentaries for young audiences.

Gudrun Sommer: When we started the *doxs!* festival in Duisburg 20 years ago, in Germany there was nearly no reference. In the Netherlands there was, with a steady production and a training model called Kids & Docs. All this didn't exist anymore in Germany since the East German production in the DEFA studios came to an end in 1989 and left us with a vacuum. The

only way to successfully relaunch this tradition was to be very convinced and very loud. Nowadays, from time to time I still pick up glimpses of that strong belief in other people. Apparently young audience documentaries still require an extra emphasis, and people being loud.

Meanwhile the *doxs!* festival in Duisburg is celebrating its 21st anniversary! Looking back can you give me two moments that were really defining for you what *doxs!* was

Doxs! and DOXS RUHR are both looking back upon a successful recent edition. One celebrated its 21st birthday, the other for the first time sailed under its own flag. Two festivals in the same period, in the same region, with a focus on the same genre... the knot is difficult for the outside world to untie. We provide clarification through an interview with both festival directors. Although Gudrun Sommer and Tanja Tlatlik each have a fascinating story to tell, we moulded them together, asking them the same questions. An interview with royal proportions: the two queens of the young audience documentary in the Ruhr area, in Germany and probably across the European continent.

doxs! DOKUMENTARFILME
FÜR KINDER
UND JUGENDLICHE

Tanja Tlatlik – nowadays director of *doxs!*

People seem to have a strong belief in the power of, and the necessity for, documentaries for young audiences.

Tanja Tlatlik: When asking them what they understand as documentaries, the answers often greatly differ. People might have the perception that a documentary is what you see on TV around midnight when nobody is watching. The documentary field is very big; it can mean so many things. I appreciate it when people tell me that young audience documentaries

are needed, but in a way it proves our position as outsiders; it's not yet a given fact. For many people it is still an abstract concept.

You're well integrated in the cultural life in this region, meanwhile keeping up an international profile.

Tlatlik: Our position within the ECFA network is a good example of our international profile; we can travel and get the message around. But on a local level we are in a structure with the Duisburger Filmwoche, a documenta-



all about.

Sommer: One highlight was the co-operation with the Steirischer Herbst avantgarde festival in Graz. That was a perfect example of stepping out of the children's film scene and into the context of a high class art festival. For me it was all the time interesting to develop a project with street workers in Duisburg and at the same time curate an ambitious and aesthetically demanding programme for a festival like the Steirischer Herbst.

With DOK YOU we wanted to convince German film funds and TV broadcasters about the value of creative documentaries for young audiences. Against all odds, we managed to convince a few partners to invest in the project. It was presented to the

press on a ship in the presence of the WDR Head of Programming, the mayor of Duisburg and the head of the North Rhine-Westphalian Film Fund. Overhearing their conversation, I heard the words "children's documentaries" popping up. It was a term they probably never used before, and there would never be another occasion in their lives to use it again, but at that very same moment they were discussing it!

My memories of the *doxs!* festival often have more to do with the audience participation and debates than with the films itself.

Sommer: We had a product that was hard to sell, because nobody knew exactly what it was. When you're offering something that nobody is



ry festival for an adult audience that is having its 46th edition this year and taking place at the same time. Other than the Duisburger Filmwoche we have two international competitions which allow us to welcome filmmakers from all of Europe to Duisburg.

My memories to the *doxs!* festival often have more to do with the audience participation and debates than with the films itself.

Tlatlik: This is certainly something that evolved from the Duisburger Filmwoche. When *doxs!* was established, the thought of considering children and youth as serious partners in discussions was adapted to that tradition. When programming a film, we're already thinking about the debate it can launch. What is really

special is when a kind of bond is created; often the conversation between audience and director or protagonist becomes a personal thing. This year it happened again with *BORN IN DAMASCUS*, when a girl in the audience said 'what I saw on screen I consider my life story'. Afterwards the director stayed to talk with her and they exchanged contacts.

When seeing those kids entering the cinema, you might often think "no, they'll never manage getting this audience to talk", but then in the end it always happens.

Tlatlik: They come with expectations, and already after the trailer they realise it might be something else than what they expected, and you feel the tension rising, and then the silence.

waiting for, you can't just sit and wait for people to come. We developed several formats that involved the audiences, like a project with 7-9 year old kids helping us with the selection process. Another participative format is DOKU. Klasse, in cooperation with public broadcaster 3sat, in which filmmakers come to discuss their projects with a 16+ audience before they start shooting. And when refugees arrived in our region and we didn't know how to serve them, we invited young refugees to curate and present programmes in our festival.

How do you address this particular audience?

Sommer: On three DOXS RUHR locations we have a programme targeting international pupils who are having difficulties with the German language. We selected films without or with very simple dialogues and prepared educational files that can be used in inclusive ways. While keeping the language barriers minimal, the visuals might encourage refugee children to communicate.

Let's go for the million dollar question: How does DOXS RUHR relate to *doxs!*?

Sommer: DOXS RUHR was founded in 2013 by some members of the *doxs!*

team. We had this idea that more than a city, the Ruhr Area could be addressed as a region. In the Berlinale you can travel an hour from one cinema to another and still you are in Berlin; I saw the same potential in this region, where all cities are so closely located to one another. The public transport network enables us to cover the region as such, which makes the festival's effect more sustainable. Since DOXS RUHR was from the beginning a regional event, it was clear that the project should be hosted by a different association. We founded the association Freunde der Realität, hosting the festival in close cooperation with the *doxs!* mothership.

Now both initiatives will run their own course?

Sommer: The process of growth made clear that both events required a different approach. After all, every cinema in all of the six DOXS RUHR cities has its own policy. *Doxs!* is a section of the Duisburger Filmwoche, a traditional grown-up documentary festival. *Doxs!* has all the time been pushing the boundaries of the Filmwoche's profile, while DOXS RUHR can now sail its own course. In the future both events will develop their own profile in different directions, but with a common interest. The aim for young

After the screening we need to create these moments for them to talk in a trustworthy environment. What we consider to be a "successful" debate is not only these intensive moments. It can be the discussion that still goes on back in the classroom with their friends.

How much does this have to do with the specific demographics of the Ruhr area?

Tatlik: Duisburg is generally considered a poor city with a lot of migration; our crowd is very diverse. Presenting a range of documentaries from different countries with diverse protagonists really means something here; it sometimes leads to very personal stories.

Looking back today, can you give me two moments that were really defining for you what *doxs!* was all about.

Tatlik: In general I remember the conversations more strongly than the films, because they touch me on a different level. Once we screened ALIENATION, a film about puberty. We were a bit nervous about how 14 year old teenagers would take a film with monstrous alien creatures talking with young people's voices about their bodies. After the film, there was

an uncomfortable silence, until the toughest guy in class – the one you wouldn't expect to talk – raised his hand and said how he identified with the story. Suddenly all hands were raised. That is when I realised that it is not just an audience coming to the cinema, it's a group of people with their own dynamics. What they say and the way they say it has an effect on how they will see each other the next day.

The other moment was in a primary school screening. There was this kid sitting close to me, he kept asking me about glasses and I didn't understand what he was talking about. The fact that he didn't have glasses obviously made him nervous. Then other kids started saying the same. Until I understood they were obviously referring to 3D glasses, which is what they knew from cinema. These kids come to us with a set of expectations about cinema behaviour. For them it must have been crazy to realise that when going to the cinema, glasses are not always needed.

Let's go for the million dollar question: How does DOXS RUHR relate to *doxs!*?

Tatlik: 10 years ago DOXS RUHR branched out, presenting the film

audience documentaries is 'more variety'; we're not looking for 'more of the same everywhere'.

It makes it complicated for outsiders to understand the documentary landscape in this region.

Sommer: Those 20 years in Duisburg are still running in my system, but my focus has changed. I want to explore how to work with documentaries in an informal learning environment. How can we develop a youth documentary festival as a part of youth culture? By including young people and letting them decide, show, present, communicate... We will keep on cooperating with schools, but our new projects should rather launch a young community that is interested in experimental and documentary films outside school time. This requires a completely different approach that starts with creating your social media account - you can't address youngsters and teachers in the same way. This year's 'kino.for you' project involves young people between 17 and 24 in curating

cinema programmes, for their own pleasure and profit.

Are you, as festival organiser, in direct contact with your audience?

Sommer: Of course. We are facilitators, making things possible, but everything is up to them to decide. I'm creating a space that allows young people to make choices. Together with them, we are trying to answer the question "how will young audiences deal with the future of cinema", offering them as much support as possible.

programme in other cities in the region, which gave us the opportunity to gather new funds and reach more pupils. We worked in tight cooperation. We had two flyers with the same corporate identity, and with complementary programming, fishing from the same pool of films. Now both festivals are in different structures, do their own programming, and have their own corporate identity – *doxs!* even has a new one! *doxs!* still has the Grosse Klappe and the ECFA Doc Award competition. We check films and guests that we have in common, and we still share the same mission, that will now be spread even more widely.

It makes it complicated for outsiders to understand the documentary landscape in this region.

Tlatlik: After DOXS RUHR left the mothership this year it was important for us to establish new projects with local partners within the city again. The Duisburger Filmwoche was developed within the structure of the

Folk High School, its roots are in adult education, connected to a workers environment. I still believe in that idea, from which this debate culture is a concrete result. This year the new director of the Duisburger Filmwoche and I wanted to rediscover the new relationship as partner festivals and created joint programmes for both audiences and a conference about intergenerational film education together. We used the synergies that seemed fruitful and important – and even somehow obvious.

Does this new approach bring you in closer contact with your local audience?

Tlatlik: It does. The focus of *doxs!* has shifted towards local partners; cinemas, socio-cultural centres, new venues and spaces... It is a multiplier effect: new people are coming with new groups that we didn't know how to reach in the past. Through local institutions we also connect to a non-school related audience.

–
Gert Hermans

DOXSPOT

THE COMMUNION OF MY COUSIN ANDREA

Andrea celebrated her First Communion. When looking back at it now, she doesn't think it was glamorous enough. The ceremony took place in a small country church in Galicia which clearly lacked swag. As she herself puts it, *"something that doesn't sparkle isn't anything."*

Together with her cousin and filmmaker Brandán Cerviño, Andrea looks at the video and photos of the event again. They talk about what could have made this special day even more beautiful. Glamour instead of a profession of faith, reggaeton instead of a rosary. *"Why did you actually go to communion?" - "Because I don't know if God exists or not. If there is a God, I already have communion in my pocket."* In their meaningful conversations questions come up about faith and life in general.

Playful special effects and editing recreate Andrea's First Communion into a new version of reality in this documentary. THE COMMUNION OF MY COUSIN ANDREA is an original

portrait of a young girl growing up and having her own thoughts. She no longer necessarily believes everything she is told. It is a personal story that deals with managing traditions, the clash of generations and growing up, all while remaining childish at heart.

In addition to the school screenings, the film was also shown in the *doxs!* family programme, where it was exceptionally well received and led to an exchange on the topics of religion, tradition, and fantasy.

MY COUSIN ANDREA'S COMMUNION

Director: Brandán Cerviño
Spain, 2021, 12'30"

Producer: Sabrina Zimmermann,
Brandán Cerviño

Production company: Filmes de Pedra

Sales: Marvin&Wayne

Contact: fest@marvinwayne.com



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Alexander Isert about META

"Improvising is not very economical"

How to do an interview about a 3.5 minute short film consisting only of transforming objects, seemingly without logic or structure? Well... by finding someone who can tell fascinating things about a 3.5 minute short film consisting only of transforming objects. Like Alexander Isert. At the Film'on Festival I had only one crucial question on my mind...

Is there a logic in what I saw, or is it all random?

Alexander Isert: The film is about change; nothing stays the same, everything evolves all the time. META stands for metamorphosis; characters and settings are changing into one another. There is a second version of this film with a Buddhist-inspired voice-over about the constant changing of things and how you don't have to be afraid of it but accept it. Everything is connected and will finally go back into one.

Basically it's just objects transforming, 3.5 minutes long.

Isert: At times we improvised, we tried

things out to see what happened. Improvising is not something you'll often hear about in animation; it's not very economical. Animation, as we've learnt, is all about planning, but we made a film like this also for the joy of animation. The questions we asked ourselves in the process were very practical; about form, about lines and about which object could morph into another.

What we see is the combination of animals, fantasy creatures, geometrical forms... Everything can be animated...

Isert: ... and everything can be integrated. The transformation I am most satisfied with is the one from a whale into a swimmer which happens quite organically.

There is also a technical side to the element of transformation. I heard you saying: everything is digital.

Isert: Morphing is a very drawn-animation thing to do. We translate old school drawn animation into the digital realm, frame by frame, while

applying all the classic rules of animation. This film could have been done on paper, but it would have been much more of an effort.

Even if it looks like not much more than an exercise, the ending has kind of an emotion to it.

Isert: If there is a narrative to it, it is that: you go through all these stages, some of them might seem a bit fearsome, but you just have to accept what is happening and in the end it all goes back to the origin. There is an emotional quality to it, as it ends full circle.

You were the animator, not the director. What's the difference, in this case?

Isert: Protoplanet Studio consists of three people at its core, developing projects as a team. Designer Johanna Hochholzer creates the characters and gives our films their particular look. Then there is me as an animator and Antje Heyn as director. The story development is shared between the three of us.



Endless variations are possible in morphing. Could you make 10 more films like this?

Isert: For us and for now, this is our ultimate morphing film. It is very much about rhythm: setting certain accents at the right moment. For me animation is about knowing when what should happen and with which formal qualities. It is like making music, finding the right accents in your improvisations.

So what you've made is a jazz masterpiece!

Isert: Storyboarding is about reducing the efforts. But sometimes results look very much planned, repeating the same recipes, lacking a certain spontaneity. There is another approach to animating which maybe is explored too seldom, but we definitely strove for that and it was a good thing to do!

Silja Saarepuu about THE TURNIP

"We were cool in our underground hideout"

Root vegetables may not be the most elegant of all, but the title character in *THE TURNIP* looks beautiful. While the roots are teeming with hungry insects, a farming family tries with all their might to harvest the crop. Silja Saarepuu (Estonia), one of the two directors of this animated folktale, is a guest at the Film'on Festival.

You succeeded in turning an ordinary turnip into a majestic vegetable!

Silja Saarepuu: That was quite easy, as the turnip didn't need much animation. But there was a whole world of creatures around it, making the turnip come to life. When planning this film, I went to the countryside and planted a row of turnips, but they didn't grow very big; they looked more like potatoes.

Why a turnip?

Saarepuu: During lockdown, when everybody was about to go crazy, co-director Piret Sigus invited me to her house and told me a story she was planning to film with her kids. I

thought the material was so strong that we should send the kids out to play and make the film ourselves.

The film depicts both a world above the ground and one underground.

Saarepuu: Underground is the real world, for which we used vivid, colourful visuals. The world above is like 'the other side', animated in not much more than contours. Our story focuses on what happens underground where vegetables are growing.

Therefore you had to imagine how life underground would look like, how creatures move and behave.

Saarepuu: That was easy, as our small studio is located underground. When we wanted to find out about certain aspects, we just lifted our heads and looked through the ground window at what was going on there. That was so comfortable. Last summer it was hot as hell, but underground it was fresh; we had to wear woollen socks. Sometimes we quickly warmed ourselves up in the sun before going back to work. While everybody was complain-



ing about the heat, we were cool in our underground hideout.

This turnip causes a rivalry between both worlds.

Saarepuu: The film is based on a folktale, in which the mouse joins the crowd above and helps them pull out the turnip. In our story his role is less outspoken – he is kind of a trickster between two worlds, feeling at home on both sides. In any case you see that all unity falls apart when one element in the group turns its back towards the others.

You stay true to the folktale uni-

verse.

Saarepuu: Our independent cut-out animation studio Animailm has already made two films based on folktales, for which we stayed true to specific locations and traditions. We know this story as a Slavic tale, so we went to a region in East Estonia near Lake Peipsi where lives a community of old 'believers' from Russian origin, who fled their country in the 18th century during the Church reformation. They have kept many of their traditions alive and we used the embroidered patterns of their clothing in all our decorations, both in the world above as in the insect world.

Ekaterina Ogorodnikova about KUUMBA UMBO

"A bridge between African and European art"

But in the background there is a car, to prove that the story is contemporary?

Saarepuu: What you think is a car, is actually a *"karakatitsa"*, also typical for that region. It is something which is constructed from a car, but when putting big tractor wheels underneath, this vehicle allows the local fishermen to drive over the ice on the frozen lake. It's a detail that might be recognised by an Estonian audience as typical for the Lake Peipsi region.

The film was made by two directors, you and Piret Sigus.

Saarepuu: Piret wrote the first story; from there we worked together on the script and the design. While I focussed more on the characters, Piret designed the vegetables and the patterns in the soil. Together we made hundreds of drawings, Piret did the sewing, and Marili Sokk joined the team as animator, but the studio was so small that only one person could work there at a time. For the embroi-

deries we got help from friends, and we found a group of retired ladies who embroidered the grass and some flowers above the ground.

How do you fit in the Estonian animation tradition?

Saarepuu: Estonian animation is flourishing, with studios both big and small. We are kind of outsiders but we do well in festivals; there were many selections and even awards, like the ECFA Award we won in Riga.

A child, a buffalo and a beautiful mask are the ingredients of the animated short KUUMBA UMBO. At the Film'ón Festival, Belgian-Russian director Ekaterina Ogorodnikova explained how these elements together form a story about an African boy growing up to be a man.

KUUMBA UMBO means 'The birth of shape' in Swahili and seems to be situated in a timeless world.

Ekaterina Ogorodnikova: The birth of shape is the birth of the world. From our childhood till the moment we take our last breath, we learn about the world around us and try to find our place in it.

Through the story of an African mask, KUUMBA UMBO tells about a child growing up.

Ogorodnikova: The child grows up together with his friend the buffalo. We follow him during his teenage initiation rite. He becomes a mask maker, the most important job in the village.

In the opening scene, we see him wandering through the forest looking for wood to make a mask that the villagers will use in their ceremonies, and for which the shape is inspired by the buffalo from his childhood.

Only in the last minute, the story changes tone, when this mask turns up in a Western gallery or exhibition.

Ogorodnikova: When I started the film, the ending was not quite decided yet. Until one day I saw an African family standing in front of the window of an art gallery in Brussels. It was raining and the father, mother and three children looked inside at the African masks and sculptures. They were subdued, as if in prayer. I understood: these people aren't looking at the price or the beauty of these objects; they are interested in something beyond, something meaningful. It was then that the story took on its final form.



What is the story behind that mask?

Ogorodnikova: The Goli Glin mask comes from the Ivory Coast. Goli Glin, son of the god Nyama, is a mythical hero of the Baule people. He has elements of a buffalo and an antelope. The mask forms a bridge between African and European art. It inspired numerous Cubists and Fauvists, such as Pablo Picasso, who used it in his famous Guernica. By wearing this mask, the villagers make contact with another reality - in many cultures, people transform into other beings through the masks they wear.

Actually the mask is your main character?

Ogorodnikova: The film pays tribute to the creation process of such masks. African artists work from an image in their mind. It may be a form from their memory, something they saw as a child which now is materialised by the adult artist. That is why I show the artist in all his life phases. African sculptors are extremely skilled artisans. They know the features of each type of wood and carve their ideas directly into the material, without any preliminary sketches. As a sculptor, I know how difficult it is to create a shape directly from an image in your mind.

How did you give shape to the Afri-**can landscape?**

Ogorodnikova: I've never been to Africa; I have never seen this landscape with my own eyes. But I've been watching plenty of documentaries and reading books about African art. Maybe I might have dreamed that landscape...

At times, objects in your film are reduced to pure geometric shapes, e.g. spears flying through the air during the hunt.

Ogorodnikova: Ornaments and motifs are extremely important in African art. Geometric shapes can have many symbolic meanings. I rhythm those shapes to the music, which adds extra

dynamism to the image.

The colour pallet in your film is limited – brown, grey, beige – but so rich in hues and shades!

Ogorodnikova: I painted countless backgrounds on watercolour paper; thousands of sketches with only colour patterns; no computer colours but simply the result of endless experiments.

Your initial background is not in animation film.

Ogorodnikova: I studied in St. Petersburg at the Art Academy in Monumental and Fine Arts. There I created monumental works, such as frescoes and

mosaics. Later I graduated from St. Petersburg University in Film & Television, Animation Department. I made my debut film LOVE PRAY FIGHT for an exhibition of Indian art in Brussels. For an exhibition of African art in the Hermitage Palace in St. Petersburg, the curator contacted me with the request to make a short animation film. The Hermitage has a rich collection from which I was allowed to choose one object. I found this Goli Glin mask an interesting choice. Animation gave me a new language to talk about different worlds. This was my first big animation project.

More will follow?

Ogorodnikova: I would like to make a series of films about the birth of shape in other cultures. I have already prepared a story and an animation sketch about the Buddhist sculptures of Avalokiteshvara. Film is like a child clinging to me. When you have finished a sculpture, you are done with it. But KUUMBA UMBO has been on my mind for a long time; I still travel in the footsteps of that movie.

–
Gert Hermans.

Involving the local community in the Olympia Festival

The Olympia Film Festival for Children & Young People in Pyrgos, Greece is at a pivotal point in its development. With the building of a European Centre for Audio-Visual Creation, the festival aspires to a crucial place in the international chain of festivals. But this project only has a *raison d'être* if it is anchored in the local community, says Deputy artistic director Pantelis Panteloglou.

Pantelis Panteloglou: With the festival we want to contribute to the European children's film community by creating a favourable environment for quality children films in Greece. Five years ago we launched a pitching lab as a way to promote children's film production in the country. This year there will be the presence of film critic Alain Bergala, author of *The Cinema Hypothesis* that we admire and that we are publishing in Greek to celebrate the 25th edition of the Festival.

All your ambitions for the future find each other in one place: the Raisin Factory.

Panteloglou: In 2018 we convinced the central government of the need to

create 'a European Centre for Youth Audiovisual Creation' in an abandoned raisin factory, an empty space in the heart of the city of Pyrgos. The regional government has outlined the project according to our proposal and now is very close to a public tender for the actual construction. When this plan becomes reality - which according to the current timeline should be in approx. three years - we want to be ready from day one.

For which the involvement of the local industry is needed?

Panteloglou: One essential part of the plan is the building of a permanent film set, approx. 600 square metres big, for film or TV productions. There's plenty of international film production in Greece lately, also lots of international co-productions, making use of the tax-rebate incentives set by the Greek government, and we want to welcome them. One of the partners in this discussion is EKOME, the institution operating the cash-rebate scheme on a national level (and member of ECFA).

Your ambition is to have an impact

on the region?

Panteloglou: We want to involve the entire local ecosystem: restaurants, hotels, local companies... We know from experiences in other Greek regions that there is a lack of specialised technical staff. Our education for film technicians is simply insufficient. A related discussion on how to prepare students for a job in the film industry is going on in the Greek Ministry of Education. We want the crew working on this platform to be local and the factory to be active around the year as a film education and a film production facility. This should be a long term discussion, not a sprint but a marathon. When talking about public money and investments, we need to act responsibly.

Why does this region need it so desperately?

Panteloglou: Cities like Pyrgos and even Patras in Western Greece have among the lowest welfare scores in the country. When people turn 18 years old, they leave such places to study and never return. We need to create a reason for them to come back. Our infrastructure - even for the



festival - has always been insufficient, but now we're talking about a different level of infrastructure, designed for different types of activity.

—
Gert Hermans

Anis Lassoued about A SECOND LIFE

“How social hatred was born in modern Tunisia”

When 12 year old Gadeha has a traffic accident, his mother can't afford the medical treatment and is relying on the help of a random family she meets at the hospital. After Gadeha's recovery, he and his family move into the home of their benefactors, where he befriends his 'new brother' Oussama. However, the secret that Gadeha's mother is keeping might disturb the fragile balance.

The sea and water are there in every key moment of the story.

Anis Lassoued: The film starts with the boys' playing in the water, being a place of joy, fun and freedom. It is, however, the water that took Gadeha's father away when he left the country in an attempt of illegal immigration. His destiny remains unclear, although Gadeha hopes that he has reached overseas and might come back as a wealthy man. That's why the sea for him is as dreamy as it is scary. The movie ends with Gadeha interacting with the water. Running water is a metaphor for life, it signifies that life goes on, no matter what. Like Gadeha,

who has learned that life is made of losses.

How should we understand his mother Borkena?

Lassoued: We never condemn Borkena. We discover her true self through her struggle to save her children and the things she did to grant them a better life. Throughout the movie we discover how broken she is: this woman was abandoned by the post-revolution Tunisian society and left by her husband in a precarious situation. Gadeha, nor the audience, know Borkena's truth. Only as the film goes on, we will figure out if she's really a monster or just a woman impeded by the hardships of life.

This is only one of the many questions that the film raises...

Lassoued: How much can we consider Borkena's acts as criminal if they are shielded by love? After all, every act in the film could be considered an act of love from parents to their children. Do these acts ever cease to be crimes? No. A man who rapes a woman, then



pampers her and takes care of her for years, will always be a rapist.

Gadeha masters his tranquillity, his face always pretending to be in control of things. Only when befriend-ing Oussama, we see Gadeha getting more relaxed.

Lassoued: Gadeha switched to a new and better life. However, he knew there was a secret, and the film is based on Gadeha finding out. Oussama and Gadeha are two sides of the same story; both were used and deceived. Both of them are victims

of adults who wanted to save them but ended up sacrificing them. What connects them is their friendship and love for each other. Gadeha found the brother he needed in Oussama, while Oussama found the friendship he needed in Gadeha.

His little sister Salma is like an innocent angel.

Lassoued: She presents a new generation, embodying the hope for a better childhood. She is an amputated child, deprived of her father, her identity and her balance. In A SECOND LIFE,



children are embodied by the arrows, the parents by the arches. When the arches are broken, arrows can only be left behind.

When Gadeha meets with his old friends, the clash between both cultures seems unavoidable.

Lassoued: The gap between social classes is growing. In the post-revolution era children from different classes do not meet each other in common spaces anymore; rich and poor do not live in the same neighbourhoods, do not go to the same schools, they don't attend the same youth or sports clubs. For the poor class, all basic facilities are ruined, especially on the level of

education – we have 100,000 students dropping out of school annually in Tunisia – as for the rich class, they have the privilege of privately owned facilities for literally everything. These two categories only directly come across each other on rare occasions, like at a crossroad, where one is wiping the windscreen of the other's car. On a larger scale, they meet due to the exploitation of domestic workers, factory workers, field workers etc. with the rich enslaving their workers while sugarcoating it.

We can't expect social classes to merge in the Tunisian society today?

Lassoued: We witness rising crime

and rape rate, aggression, religious extremism, terrorism and child prostitution. Envy is spread amongst people towards others living their best lives, laying on beaches. That is how social hatred was born in modern Tunisia. This mechanism is the reason why youngsters want to leave the country. Even dreams are ruined here, so the only dream they have left is to take off before celebrating their 18th birthday in order to benefit from Child Protection programmes in Europe. This has also become the dream of their parents as they struggle to send their kids away illegally to Europe, hoping for a better life.

Even the grown-ups in your film seldom show joy on their faces, as if life has marked them deeply.

Lassoued: Tunisians have to pay a price to survive. There are two opposite worlds in Tunisia: people being deprived of everything, versus others who have everything. Remember the scene in which Gadeha asks Oussama's mother *"Did you have a revolution too?"*

Your hope is on the children's shoulders?

Lassoued: I will always believe in the power of childhood and the capacity of children to change the world

through their innocence, even if they mature early in life due to painful experiences. The power of childhood resides in their refusal of their parents' decisions. My work is solely dedicated to children; A SECOND LIFE was an emotional experience for me, and for the children who played in it. They were the real directors of this film.

–
Gert Hermans

Thessaloniki Film Festival building European bridges

The Thessaloniki International Film Festival (TIFF) teams up with prestigious partners to build bridges between European cinema and young audiences. The Nextus platform and 'We are filmmakers' are two internationally oriented initiatives that recently boosted the festival's educational programme.

Nextus/Learning by documentaries

TIFF participated in the design and implementation of the educational platform "Nextus", carried out within the framework of the Creative Europe Media programme ('Support to Education' Sub-programme), in collaboration with Plan Slu (Spain) and DOK.Fest Munich (Germany). Nextus promotes new forms of learning by fostering a critical spirit. As part of the educational community, we suggest new, more challenging and active methods that promote innovative learning experiences.

The main goal of the programme is to contribute the tuition of 20th Century History in the classroom, and to bring young audiences in touch with Euro-

pean documentaries by promoting their transnational circulation. The online platform contains 31 documentaries and is addressed to students aged 12-18. [You can access the platform](#) with different types of permission depending on whether you are a teacher or a student and the user will be able to watch either an individual clip or a collection of clips related to a specific topic or even an entire movie. Nextus is available in five languages (Greek, English, German, Spanish, Catalan).

Erasmus project 'We Are Filmmakers'

The We Are Filmmakers educational programme is implemented by three cultural institutions, the Marseille Documentary Film Festival, the Thessaloniki International Film Festival, the Madrid Film Archive and three different schools in the respective cities.

We Are Filmmakers aims to support film education through actions both at a national and European level.



During the programme, students and teachers from each country follow an identical model, aimed at familiarising students with film critique and film production.

Within this context, students aged 15-18 participated in the three festivals, not only as spectators but also as jury members under the guidance of renowned critics. First they enjoyed the films in the youth programmes of the three festivals, then – thanks to real and virtual mobility – students joined forces in transnational teams to car-

ry out projects supervised by cultural trainers and to create a joint film team aiming to film a documentary on the urban landscape.

[Check the We Are Filmmakers programme.](#)

–
Maria Papasotiri

Amitabh Reza Chowdhury about RICKSHAW GIRL

"A beautiful noise all over Bangladesh"

In the most wonderful colours, Amitabh Reza Chowdhury's *RICKSHAW GIRL* depicts all kinds of injustice in the villages and towns of Bangladesh. Naima, a young girl who wants to help her ailing father, encounters abuse of power, discrimination and social inequality while cycling the streets of Dhaka with her rickshaw. But with all those things going wrong on a structural level, one hopeful message of *RICKSHAW GIRL* is that with the right, honest people in the right position, many problems can be solved on an individual level.

What is this rickshaw culture all about?

Amitabh Reza Chowdhury: Cycle rickshaws were first introduced in Calcutta around 1930. European jute exporters imported them in Bangladesh for their personal use. The new vehicle roused great curiosity among the people of Dhaka, who were used to horse carriages, palanquins and city-canal boats. These rickshaws didn't receive a very enthusiastic response, until rickshaw culture grew big in the eight-

ies. Initially rickshaws were painted with cinema posters, not as a part of a marketing campaign; it simply could be any kind of poster that painters found interesting. When for religious reasons, the depiction of the human face on rickshaws was banned, they started painting animals. Do you remember Naima got involved in a quarrel with a guy and then painted him as a rat? This is a typical motive used for such decorations.

You frame them in a wonderful way.

Chowdhury: This is the art direction of the streets in Dhaka. It didn't need framing, it was all there. Whatever you see in the streets in this film is natural; only for the interiors we did some art direction.

To pull a rickshaw, you need to be a man.

Chowdhury: In Bangladesh, there are no more than two or three female rickshaw pullers. It simply never happens. Women can do daily labour in brick factories or shipyards, but the rickshaw business still isn't ready for



it.

This is not as much a film about the unfair position of women in society as I thought it was?

Chowdhury: This is not a feminist film; this is a humanist film about any person, struggling to make a living in Dhaka city.

Still we hear a woman saying that 'there is no pride in being a man'.

Chowdhury: I wrote this character named Marium into the film. After the death of her husband she is now running a rickshaw business as an empowered woman who knows that regardless of being a man or woman,



you can achieve anything you want in this life.

Nevertheless I saw a big tragedy in the scene in which Naima turns herself into a boy. When she cuts her hair, that is falling on the floor, it's like by losing her femininity, she loses her greatest good.

Chowdhury: She is passionate about rickshaw riding, and if that is the only job she will accept, becoming a boy is the price she pays. Even if that includes cutting off her hair. For a Bengali girl, long hair is the ultimate significance of beauty. Still she cuts it because she wants to earn a living by doing the thing that she enjoys most... Like me, I graduated in eco-

nomics, I could make a living on economic development studies and many people wonder why I don't do it, as life on a film set is hard. But I want this job, and I will do whatever is required for it. In the whole narrative structure of the film, that scene is one of the emotional climax points.

What about the scene with the bird?

Chowdhury: In Bangladesh, there is a situation I strongly want to criticise. Girls and boys are coming to the city to work in housekeeping, but when being hired, their employers lock them inside the house. They turn them into prisoners. Like a bird locked in a cage. When Naima sees this bird outside and wants to help it, she can't

because she is caged. In the morning when the door opens, she runs out like a bird flying out of its cage.

Both in the city and in the village, there is a lot of shouting going on. Bangladesh seems to be a noisy country.

Chowdhury: Extremely noisy! With very different kinds of noises, like the honking, going on all day long. Most people initially come from a riverside area, from the delta. When you're on one bank of the river, and you see a family on the other bank, you will go like "hey, how are you?!" When moving to the city, people still act the same. "Hey boy!!" That is the normal amount of decibels they produce. It creates a beautiful noise all over Bangladesh that I found very enjoyable; it is the purest beauty of Bangladesh.

I thought there was often also a kind of aggression involved, based on power positions.

Chowdhury: Shouting is considered a power indeed. In the village this powerful guy – the second man of the city commissioner – holds a dominant position, which allows him to shout, beat others and use bad language. The disrespect from rich people towards the poor, or from the authorities towards citizens is highly prevalent in our so-

ciety. I wanted this film to launch a dialogue with society and ask: "Do you see what is happening? If you don't like what is going on, do something about it."

By telling about the struggle of one girl, you open the spectrum for telling about the struggle of women in general and the struggle of the poor...

Chowdhury: In Dhaka, you have to fight for every basic right; there is nothing like the right to food or health or education. So everyone claims their own rights. Bengalese people are strugglers; we are fighters by default. We fought for 9 months to get our freedom in 1971, we fought against the British, against Pakistan... and still we are living the post-colonial era in a typical capitalist country where everyone fights for his own class. The middle class is very limited; 70% of the people belong to the poor class. Most slums and houses are illegal; people made them their home and now that they live there, they claim their rights. The film actually had two endings. I shot another ending with the police tearing down the entire slum. But after seeing the film, I felt it was lacking hope, it was too negative. So I reshot the scene and added the animation.

What about the animation in that closing scene?

Chowdhury: The rickshaw paintings are one of the film's vibrant main characters that we could bring to life through movement. I asked the SICO animation team from Bangladesh to create the concept. Starting from a live action shot with Naima on a roof, we aimed for a smooth transition to animation. The roof that she stands on was painted, which took us 10 days. Then we created some very subtle movement when the moon starts rising; that is the first animated element. I didn't want to go beyond reality, which is why only in the last part the full animation happens.

Naima's paintings are so elegant and beautiful!

Chowdhury: All the rickshaw paintings were made by a young, underestimated artist named Sulehman. He makes these brilliant paintings as if they were in 3D. Our production designer explained to him the concept and the stages, and he painted them brilliantly. When Sulehman was working on the peacock, I told him this was a wide shot *"so we don't need the eyes in detail". He looked at me and sighed "You don't understand about art!"*

I've seldom seen a film in which col-

ours had the same intensity.

Chowdhury: I wanted this film to look like rickshaw paintings, that are full of specific colours. The paintings always have balance and symmetry and often use the same motives. The peacock is a commonly used motif, because peacocks have colour.

Even the industrial scenes are of splendid beauty.

Chowdhury: They were shot at a sugar cane factory in Pabna. Because of the rhythm of sugar cultivation, the factory is operational for six months, and the next six months it is closed. That is when we did the shooting.

"For those who found their purpose, even the ugly is beautiful," one says in the film.

Chowdhury: That is my personal belief. Bangladesh is going through troubled times, but if you would offer me citizenship in a well-developed country, why would I accept? In Bangladesh I have a purpose; I was born there, together with many other struggling people and I want to tell their story. How would you define ugliness? In his book *ON UGLINESS* Umberto Eco explains how ugliness is defined from a western cultural perspective. It is my understanding of reality that ugliness has a beauty in it, you just need to find



it. Art is not to be found in museums. In North Bangladesh women paint the doors and walls of their houses in the most beautiful ways. I don't consider art only to be manifested on an institutional basis. Art can come from real people with no background in art history. Art grows inside you and it will find a way to manifest itself, and people will notice you.

The magic of cinema is a recurring theme in films from the Indian sub-continent.

Chowdhury: The song-and-dance scene in my film refers to the dreams that these films offer. It is not the kind of cinema that I am making but these lovely films make us happy and bring a smile to people's faces. I celebrate the magic of song-and-dance-cinema!

How does the film industry in Bang-

ladesh relate to the big brother in India?

Chowdhury: The same way European cinema relates to Hollywood. Every day a new generation of filmmakers fights against the Bollywood hegemony. In some parts of India, like in Calcutta, Bengali films already gained a certain dominance through several box office hits. But we haven't had children's films over the last 20 years. Even the big films don't sell, so why would a children's film sell? My film did well in the festivals - I got an award in Schlingel! - but still it doesn't sell anywhere.

—
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.

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