

Wendy & Domien Huyghe about SEA SPARKLE

"A camera that feels like the sea"

Lena's life is suddenly turned upside down when her father dies in a ship-ping accident. Together with him, two crew members went down. When Lena feels that her father might be blamed for the drama, she is captivated by a strange thought: perhaps a mysterious sea monster lurking in the North Sea is driving ships into the abyss... While SEA SPARKLE takes us from the shore deeper and deeper into the ocean, the film also digs deeper into the young girl's emotional confrontations with her friends and family.

With their feature debut, director Domien Huyghe and screenwriter Wendy Huyghe bring a very personal story to the big screen. Together they explain how their childhood experiences shaped the characters and setting of the film.

You are children of the coast. What does the sea mean to you?

Wendy: You can't influence the rhythm of the tide, but you can learn how to ride the waves. This is how you learn to accept what life is like.

Domien: You can't control the sea, you can only accept it - go with it instead of struggling against it. One of the last memories I have of my dad was when I was about 5 years old holding his hand as we walked away from the waves. The sea is always linked to that image of my father - it is the opening image of the film.

It is no secret that there is an autobiographical side to the film. There was a period of mourning in your own life, and the movie tells about a brother and sister, like you are.

Wendy: Just like in the movie, a sudden loss turned our carefree childhood upside down. Suddenly our life was completely different from that of our peers. Because no one understands what is happening to you, you feel completely alone. Young people experiencing this feel a need to talk about it.

Domien: Losing a loved one is universal, but there are numerous ways to cope with it; there is no right or wrong way. One starts dreaming about monsters, the other one immediately



writes a song about it, like Lena's brother. A lot of our own experiences oozed into how we describe the way Lena's family handles the situation.

Does Lena resemble her father? Or one of you?

Domien: In her persistence, Lena acts very similar to her father. She is the only one who points out the problems that need to be solved. That is what we ourselves have done too late when our dad passed away. Lena is a combination of how we did it and how we should have done it.

Wendy: I was the eldest child at home, I felt like I had to take care of everyone and therefore I couldn't face my own sadness. When I see Lena screaming, I can't help but think: I never did that. I've always suppressed my anger. I envy her - she isn't like me, but I wish I had been more like her.

In her grief, she is rather egocentric.

Wendy: The story is entirely told from Lena's perspective. She is angry with her mother, angry with the whole world. Yet we understand her. The only message we give is: together you



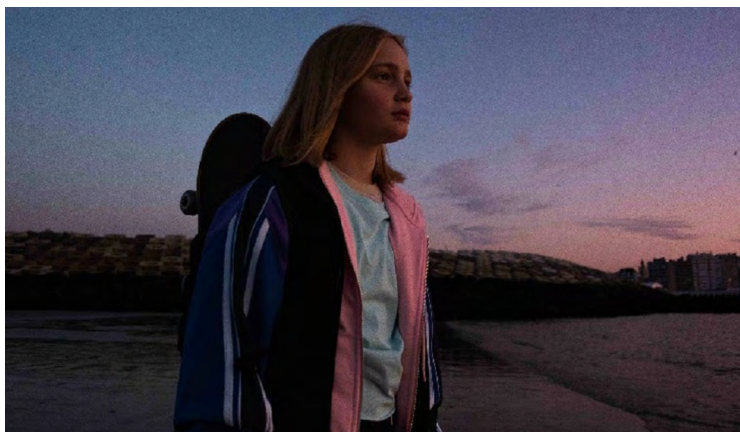
are stronger. Only when the family comes together at the end the grieving can really begin.

SEA SPARKLE is only vaguely set in time. The interiors (the shop, the living room, etc.) could just as easily date from 30 years ago.

Domien: The story is set in the summer of 2021, but many sets make a timeless impression. That is typical for Ostend, the coastal town where the story is set: time standing still and meanwhile moving on, the clash between things that remain and things that change. Surrounded by ultra-modern buildings is an old fisherman's café where fishermen still hang at the bar every day. We didn't have to change anything about that interior, and the people sitting at the bar fit perfectly with the film. Our DoP Anton Mertens knew perfectly how to capture the soul of the city.

What is the secret behind the way you direct your actors?

Wendy: Being an excellent people's manager, you give them plenty of confidence and put them at ease. You speak a lot with them, which helped Saar (Rogiers, playing Lena) and Senne (Rous, playing Vincent) to fully and completely understand their characters.



Domien: Saar chose the other actors together with me. That way we ensured there would be a mutual understanding.

Choosing Saar was maybe your greatest merit. She is an overwhelmingly 'normal' girl. How to pick such an unobtrusive, neutral

profile among all the candidates?

Domien: Protagonists are often profiled as outsiders, but also an ordinary, everyday girl can be confronted with grief and loss. During the casting we mainly asked about the candidates' attitudes to life. Although Saar was only 12 years old, she was very mature in her thinking. She didn't need much to convince me. She learned to sail, skate, dive... It's incredible what Saar has achieved in a few months. We had a stand-in for all the scenes, but she did almost everything herself.

It was Lena who controlled how the camera moved?

Domien: Our priority was: three young actors and a dramatic story. Everything else - lights, camera, costumes, etc. - came second. The technical choices never should curtail the freedom of the actors. We did almost the entire film without *découpage* - we consistently filmed from Lena's point of view. It was incredible how close she allowed the camera to be without being thrown off balance. Thanks to her talent, we were able to maintain our loose style of acting throughout the film, using long shots and then zooming close at the right moment. This allowed the actors a lot of freedom, not only in their dialogues but also in their movements.



In the editing, you could feel the undulating approach of the camera in all takes. Someone told me: *"the camera feels like the sea"*; I thought that was a very nice compliment.

One striking scene is when Lena goes diving in the dark. How did you handle it?

Domine: We went to a water studio where all the lighting was placed in the water. For Saar it was a demanding assignment: while diving, she had to keep up her mimicry, while a crew of divers with a camera swam around

her. There was a team of 40 people in the water to control lighting, safety, etc. Usually when I'm directing I'm right next to my actors, but during those two days I had to shout my directions through a microphone from 30 metres away. That was hell for me; I want to be as close to them as possible.

There is another impressive scene in the ship's wheelhouse.

Domien: That was the most magical moment of the film for me. Such a wheelhouse is tiny; I was huddled in a

corner with my monitor and couldn't move. We would first rehearse the scene but when Saar started acting our DoP noticed that something was happening. He got closer and closer with the camera for four minutes. Shouting 'cut' after such a marvellous moment felt totally cruel.

beautifully wrap up reality. Though Lena is constantly angry or sad, we make it clear that there is always hope.

—
Gert Hermans

You participated in the Cinekid Script Lab. Did that help you?

Wendy: Absolutely! It's super interesting to ask yourself questions about what you want to convey and why. You can solve many doubts in such a lab, together with people struggling with similar problems. In one session actors came to play our scenes; I picked up a lot from that.

Domien: I learned a lot about tools to guide the actors. I think such a Lab would be very useful for any film I will ever make.

Are you happy with the movie you made?

Domien: I grew up watching Spielberg's movies and also E.T. and THE GOONIES have a poignant side. I was 15 when my father died and nowhere did I find stories for my age that showed the gritty side of grief. You could find that in films about falling in love or about divorce, but not about grief. SEA SPARKLE does nothing to