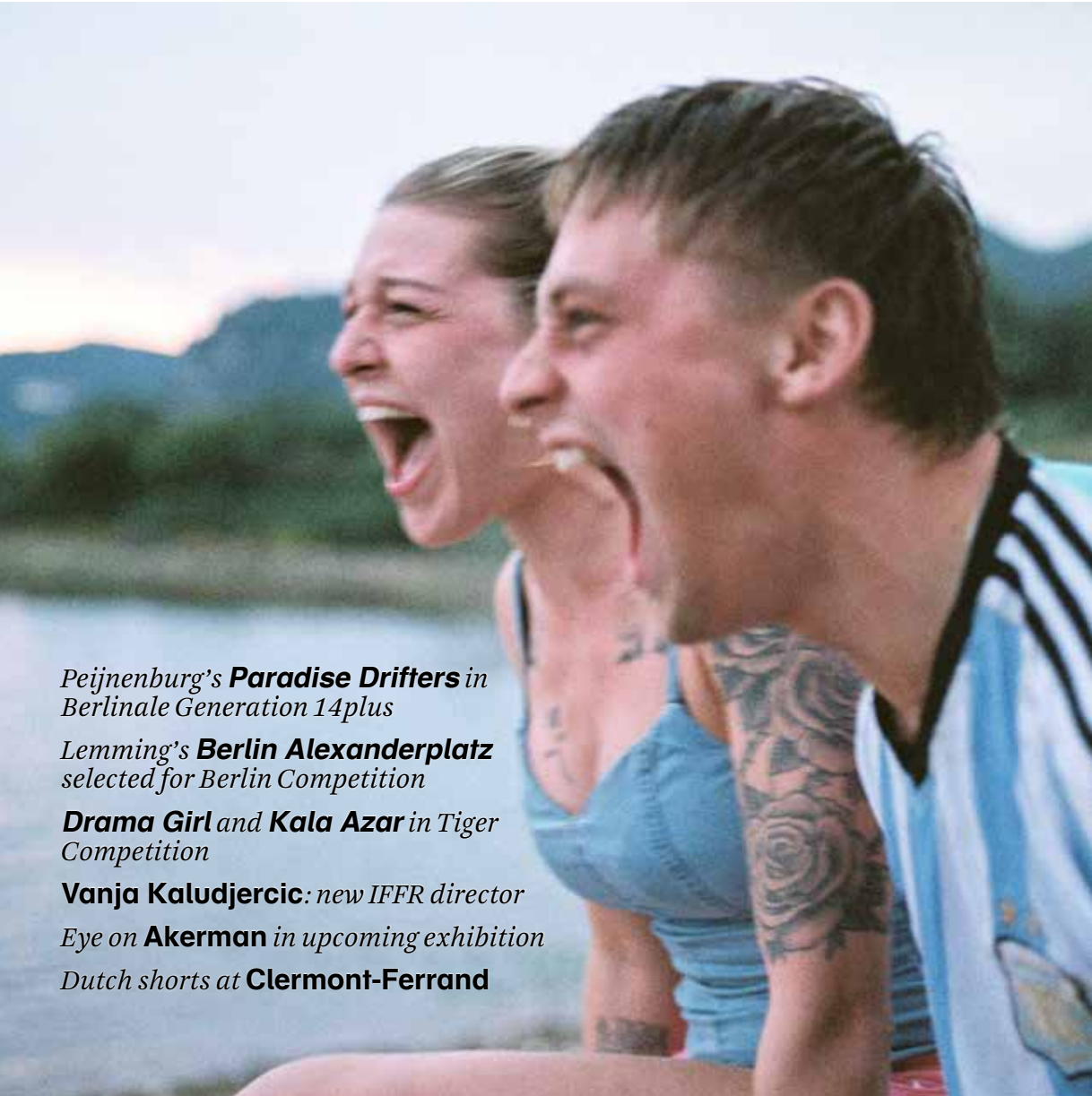


SEE NL



*Peijnenburg's **Paradise Drifters** in
Berlinale Generation 14plus*

*Lemming's **Berlin Alexanderplatz**
selected for Berlin Competition*

***Drama Girl** and **Kala Azar** in Tiger
Competition*

***Vanja Kaludjercic**: new IFFR director*

*Eye on **Akerman** in upcoming exhibition*

*Dutch shorts at **Clermont-Ferrand***

Issue #38 February 2020 IFFR,
Berlin and Clermont-Ferrand issue



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COLOPHON

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Road to Paradise



Paradise Drifters is writer-director Mees Peijnenburg's debut feature, writes Geoffrey Macnab, following on from the young Dutch director's acclaimed shorts *Even Cowboys Get To Cry* (2013), *A Hole In My Heart* (2015) and *We Will Never Be Royals* (2015).

In *Paradise Drifters*, supported by De Oversteek scheme and Production Incentive, three young people from different but equally tough backgrounds are thrown together. Lorenzo (Jonas Smulders), Yousef (Bilal Wahib) and Chloe (Tamar van Waning) are outsiders on the margins of society, all "searching for connections, searching for love," but are continually confronted with violence and rejection.

Peijnenburg chose his actors very carefully. "I think the casting of each film is almost the most crucial part of the process. I like to take time to find the right people."

Jonas Smulders had appeared in Peijnenburg's graduation short and is described by the director as "a natural fit" for his role as the charismatic Lorenzo. Tamar van

Waning was discovered in less straightforward circumstances. Peijnenburg hadn't been able to find anyone to play Chloe when his girlfriend tipped him off about an actress she had seen on a Dutch NTR TV programme, *Dream School*, about youngsters from troubled backgrounds who are given the chance to go back to school.

"She was super pure, honest, open, fragile," Peijnenburg says of the audition that Van Waning gave him. "She was a powerhouse of interest for me." The fact that she didn't look anything like the Chloe he had originally envisaged didn't put him off in the slightest. "The energy she gave was spot on."

Bilal Wahib had had a minor part in one of the director's shorts. "In real life, he has an extraordinary energy," Peijnenburg says of the actor whose role calls for him to be withdrawn and introspective. "In our film, he has to play an introverted, suicidal character which I was really interested to see... all the energy went into his eyes, his mind, and he was really good."

The director gave the three leads time to get to know each other and to develop their characters. "I let them write letters to me with their thoughts."

Peijnenburg did extensive research for *Paradise Drifters*. "I've been working on this film for several years," he says. He visited numerous child protection homes

and Salvation Army hostels where young adults between 18 and 25 "can still find a bed at night when they don't have some other place to fall back on."

The film (due to be released in The Netherlands in April by Gusto) develops into a road movie. It was shot all over Europe, in Marseilles and Barcelona as well as in The Netherlands. Peijnenburg sees it as following on from his Golden Calf winning short film *We Will Never Be Royals*, about a brother and sister living in youth care, moving from foster homes to youth prison and looking desperately for a place in society.

"Even though all the ingredients for a horrible life were present, these kids had a glance in their eyes, had a fighting spirit in their way of talking and behaving," the director says of the defiance he saw continually during his extensive research into alienated youth. "Whereas my previous film was still set in institutions and under the flag of society, this film starts off where that stops, when you are 18 and being dropped on the streets literally."

As an adolescent himself, Peijnenburg came from a more comfortable background. "I was a skateboarder, I did a lot of filmmaking already back then, I did pictures. I was very much on the creative spectrum." No, he wasn't a rebel himself but he has always been drawn to characters like Chloe in his film who have the energy to fight back, even when everything seems pitched against them.

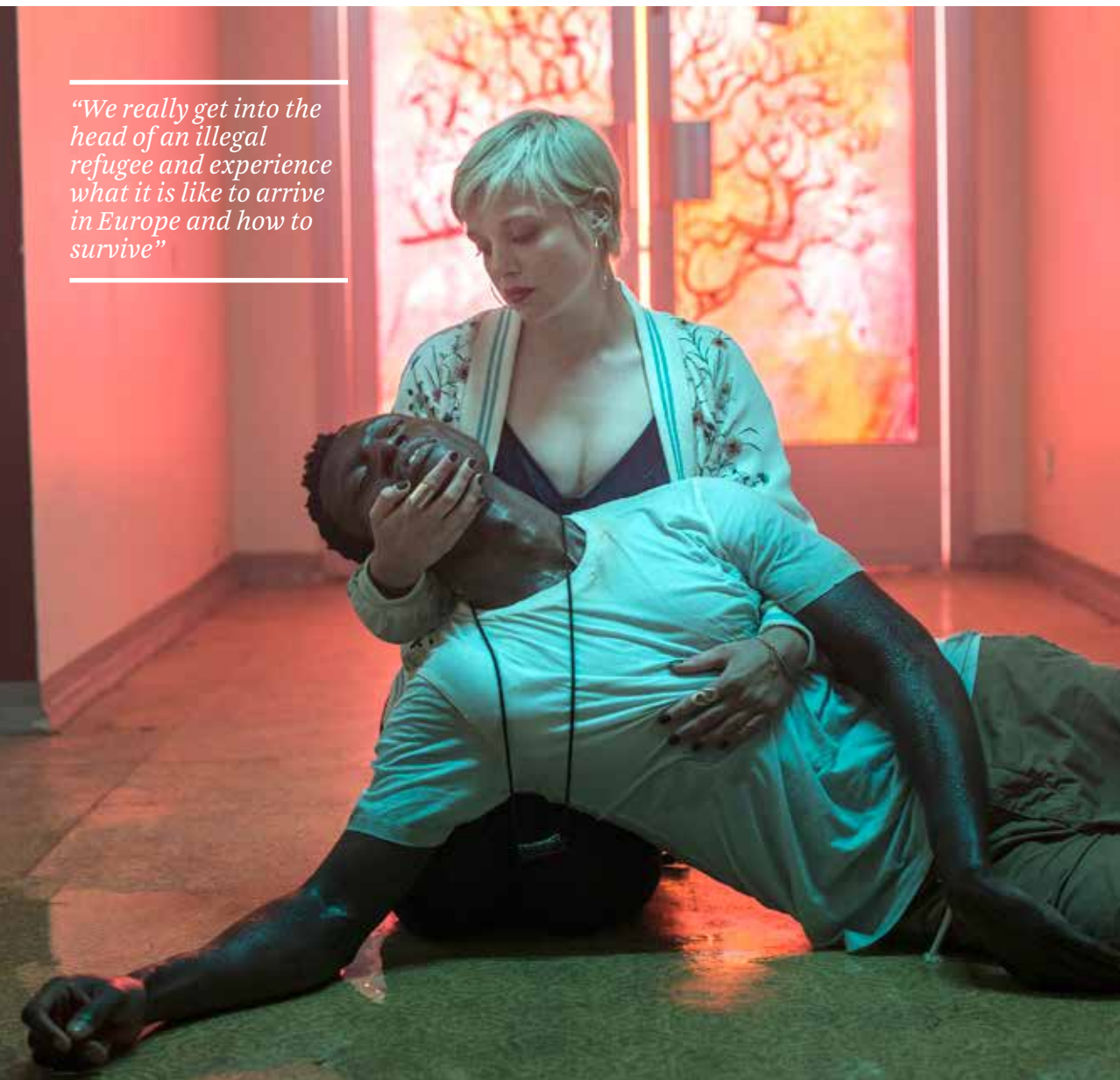
Berlin Generation 14plus and IFFR Limelight
Paradise Drifters ◊ Mees Peijnenburg



"I think the casting of each film is almost the most crucial part of the process"

Paradise Drifters ◊ Director & script: Mees Peijnenburg
Production: Pupkin Film Sales: Orange Studio

“We really get into the head of an illegal refugee and experience what it is like to arrive in Europe and how to survive”



Berlin Alexanderplatz ◊ **Director:** Burhan Qurbani
Script: Burhan Qurbani, Martin Behnke **Production:** Sommerhaus
 (DE) **Co-production:** Lemming Film (NL) **Sales:** Beta Cinema

Repurposing a classic



Geoffrey Macnab talks to Leontine Petit, Dutch co-producer of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

Alfred Döblin’s ‘Berlin Alexanderplatz’ (1929) is a classic modernist novel from the Weimar era, telling the story of an ordinary man, Franz Biberkopf, trying to stay afloat in a society riven by corruption, violence and political prejudice. The hero, Francis, wants to be a good man and to live honestly but circumstances keep on getting in the way.

It was made into a mini-series by Rainer Werner Fassbinder in 1980. Now, a contemporary version, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, directed by Afghan-German auteur Burhan Qurbani, produced by Sommerhaus Filmproduktion and Lemming Film, and sold by Beta Cinema, is screening in Berlinale competition. It is supported by the Film Fund and Production Incentive.

“It’s a different approach on Alfred Döblin’s novel, told in the present day from the perspective of a refugee,” Leontine Petit (Lemming Film) says of Qurbani’s 3-hour re-imagining of the story, which she

boarded after its pitch at CineMart 2016. “We really get into the head of an illegal refugee and experience what it is like to arrive in Europe and how to survive.”

Lemming had been following the project from the outset. The film had a relatively high budget, around €5 million. Although considerable support was available in Germany itself, Sommerhaus eventually decided to make it as a co-pro and to use support from Eurimages, with Lemming as a minority co-producer.

“I agreed that this is definitely a Eurimages kind of project, both from the type of director and the subject matter. It is about Europe

“Honoured that we can be part of such projects”

and about the way we deal with migrants.”

Petit and her team weren’t just aboard as financial partners. They made a strong creative contribution too. One of the main actors, Nils Verkooijen, is Dutch. “I think he did an amazing job in a very important part,” Petit says of Verkooijen, who plays a transgender character. Dutch technicians were involved in everything from the sound on set to the grading, sound design and the mix.

“They’re always different,” is how Petit (who won the European Co-production Award – Prix

Eurimages award in 2016) reflects on her huge range of different projects over the last two decades. “But if we can co-produce with these really outstanding directors (like Burhan Qurbani), I feel almost honoured that we can be part of such projects.”

The Lemming boss adds that it is rare for projects on the scale of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* to be made in The Netherlands. The advantages of being involved are self-evident: Dutch technicians get to show their talent and work on bigger European films while Petit and her team get to extend their network.

“For us to be part of these projects also means to be on the radar of the sales agents,” Petit highlights one obvious benefit for Lemming when it comes to selling their own projects in the international marketplace. Because of the high profile films which the company has co-produced, she has excellent relations with leading companies like Beta Cinema and Match Factory, who can advise Lemming and even handle their films in the marketplace.

Thanks to the Production Incentive, Lemming can offer serious financial and creative support and will provide between 10 and 20% of the overall budgets. That is why top international filmmakers like Yorgos Lanthimos, Burhan Qurbani, Franka Potente and Lucrecia Martel are so keen to work with them.

“It is incredibly important that we have the Incentive,” Petit says of the soft money scheme which has helped put the Dutch at the heart of European and international filmmaking.

For co-pro, see Holland

Days of Cannibalism ◊ Teboho Edkins *Pari* ◊ Siamak Etemadi
Window Boy Would Also Like to Have a Submarine ◊ Alex Piperno
Apiyemiyekî? ◊ Ana Vaz



© Samuel Lohu

Days Of Cannibalism

Geoffrey Macnab checks out the Dutch angle of some of Berlin 2020's notable titles.

Underlining The Netherlands' rising status as a co-production partner, the Berlinale this year has a number of films in its programme which were made with Dutch backing.

Berlin-bound titles with an orange tint include Afghan-German director Burhan Qurbani's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in main competition (see page 6), Teboho Edkins' Lesotho-set *Days of Cannibalism* and Iranian-born Siamak Etemadi's *Pari*, both in Panorama; Uruguyan director Alex Piperno's magical realist story *Window Boy Would Also Like To Have A Submarine* in Berlinale Forum and Brazilian director Ana Vaz's *Apiyemiyekî?* in Forum Expanded.

In some cases, the Dutch producers have been involved in these projects for many years.

Days of Cannibalism ◊ **Director & script:** Teboho Edkins **Production:** Kinoelektron (FR) **Co-production:** Keplerfilm (NL), Day Zero Films (SA)

shadow of a new global economic reality." Its director "takes us deep into the lives and souls of these Chinese and African characters."

The Post-production Award, given by The Netherlands Film Fund, the Hubert Bals Fund, and The Netherlands Post Production Alliance, enabled Keplerfilm to come on board. Sound and colour grading were completed in The Netherlands.

Dutch outfit Topkapi was introduced to Siamak Etemadi's *Pari* by its Greek producer, Konstantinos Kontovrakis, who together with Giorgos Karnavas runs leading Greek production and sales outfit Heretic (behind such films as *Wasted Youth* and *The Harvesters*).



Pari

The film is supported by the Film Fund and Production Incentive.

"I was intrigued by the fact that the origin of the story is Iranian," Topkapi's Frans van Gestel remembers of what drew him to the subject. In the film, an Iranian student in Greece goes missing. The student's parents, devout Muslims, search for their son but they are

Pari ◊ **Director & script:** Siamak Etemadi **Production:** Heretic (GR) **Co-production:** Topkapi Films (NL), Le Bureau (FR), The Chouchkov Brothers (BU) **Sales:** Heretic Outreach



Window Boy Would Also Like to Have a Submarine

adrift in a western culture entirely alien to them. "That's a good idea for a film," the Topkapi boss says of the premise. The fact that there was an established producer like Kontovrakis behind it persuaded the Dutch company to board the project, which had a strong script and an obviously talented director.

As on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the Dutch provided much of the sound expertise (this is a field in which the country currently excels) while also working extensively on the post-production. "We really built a strong relation with Siamak, the director. We spoke about the sound, we spoke about the music and also about the editing. It is more than just a service or helping with the financial part. It is a sincere co-production," Van Gestel says.

Writer-director Piperno's *Window Boy Would Also Like To Have A Submarine* has one of the most distinctive (and longest) titles of any film in Berlin this year. It also has one of the more intriguing storylines: on board a cruise ship, a sailor discovers a hallway that leads into an apartment far away in Montevideo. New Dutch

Window Boy Would Also Like to Have a Submarine (Chico ventana también quisiera tener un submarino) ◊ **Director & script:** Alex Piperno **Production:** La Pobladora Cine (UY) **Co-production:** BALDR Film (NL), Pelicano (AR), Desvia (BR), Cinematográfica (PH) **Sales:** Square Eyes

sales company Square Eyes picked up the film just before Berlin.

"Director Alex Piperno and I were actually introduced by Laurette Schillings from Topkapi Films," says Baldr's Frank Hoeve of the film which had Netherlands Film Fund and Hubert Bals Fund Co-production Scheme (NFF+HBF) support. "She was not able to co-produce the film and suggested to him to contact me. I immediately saw the original approach by Alex. It is a very unique film about human movement and solitude, moving through distinct physical and geographical spaces as seen through the eyes of a young sailor." Piperno was writing, directing, producing and editing. Hoeve praises the filmmaker as "very professional and very open to his various co-producers."

On *Window Boy*, the VFX was done in The Netherlands while the mix was handled by Vincent Sinceretti at Posta Amsterdam. Hoeve describes features like *Window Boy* as "a great opportunity for us as producers and Dutch talent to work on unique projects." Brazilian director Ana Vaz's

Apiyemiyekî? is screening in Berlin fresh from its appearance in the Tiger Short Film Competition at International Film Festival Rotterdam. For Dutch producers De Productie, this is a chance to work with a highly regarded artist and filmmaker on a short film that looks bound to get wide festival exposure.

Vaz makes use of an archive of drawings from the Waimiri-Atroari, an indigenous people from the Brazilian Amazon who use their pictures to make sense of their own devastation and suffering during the time of the military dictatorship "We didn't know anything about the genocide and napalm situation in Brazil. was really touched by this



Apiyemiyekî?

subject," says De Productie's Annemiek van Gorp. She came on board as co-producer late on, in the post-production phase, and talks about the "beautiful and cinematic way" in which Vaz tackled the delicate subject matter. Now, De Productie hope to work with their Brazilian partners again, on one of their own films which they hope to shoot in Brazil.

Apiyemiyekî? ◊ **Director & script:** Ana Vaz **Production:** Spectre Productions (FR), Stenar Projects (PT), Ana Vaz **Co-production:** De Productie (NL) **Sales:** La Fabrique Phantom

Dutch shorts to Berlin

Two Dutch shorts are selected for Berlin Generation Kplus, and a Dutch minority co-production for Berlinale Shorts section.



Marit Weerheijm's *En Route* is a film made from a child's perspective dealing with a major social problem. Without giving away any of the plot, poverty and hunger lie at the root of this very moving tale of a family's journey through a city. The film is supported by KORT! (Film Fund, CoBO fund, NTR and NPO Fund).

"When you approach such difficult subjects and themes from the point of view of a young child, we might see things differently. It definitely adds some lightness to the stories," comments director Weerheijm. "I think it's beautiful that children don't know everything about this world, but they do want to know everything about it. That is the same curiosity that makes a filmmaker.

"For me, this makes children the best main characters because they can translate all these questions that I have about the world into a storyline, into a film. Plus, I love working with children on set. You



never know what you're going to get, but when it happens, when they deliver, it can be the truest thing you've seen in a long time."

Weerheijm came to prominence in 2016 with her brilliant short *When Grey is a Colour*, produced by partners Loes Koomen and Eva Verweij for their joint company Room for Film, which won a Student Oscar in 2017. Has her style evolved since then? "I don't know if it has changed much [but] I do think it evolved because of more experience. *En route* has a few similarities with *When Grey is a Colour*. They both tell the story of a young girl, a child's perspective, and they both tell stories about difficult subjects, taboos even. What was new for me was writing the script all by myself. The result was that I had complete flexibility on set, especially with dialogue. I had written dialogue, but I also did improvisations and that worked

really well with the kids." And what next for Weerheim? "After writing *En Route* I realized that I had written that script from my gut feeling. I really loved writing it, but I also felt like I didn't have all the knowledge and the tools to yet write a feature film," she comments.

"These past six months I've been thinking a lot about how I want to keep learning as a director. I did an internship at the International Theatre Amsterdam to see how directors in theatre have weeks to work through a script with the actors. That is something that I sometimes miss in making films, time to rehearse, time to get to know the actors and for them to get to know their characters. Right now, I am planning to learn more about writing. Meanwhile, I'm working on a few ideas for feature films and I'm working on a very short film with an experimental twist."

En Route ◊ Director & script: Marit Weerheijm Production: Room for Film

En Route ◊ Marit Weerheijm Under the Skin ◊ Emma Branderhorst A Demonstration ◊ Sasha Litvintseva & Beny Wagner



Emma Branderhorst's *Under the Skin* is her graduation film from University of the Arts in Utrecht, and tells the story of Keesje, a 15-year old introvert. She and her friends, Lize and Dunja, swim together in a synchronized swimming team. From the outside it all looks like the perfect friendship, but beneath the surface hide continuous tensions between the girls...

"I am fascinated by youth problems," comments Branderhorst. "When I was younger in high school I was in a group of ten girls and there was always a lot of tension between us. We were friends but everyone was

pushing each other down, there was a lot of competition. I always thought I was being bullied, I always thought these are my friends. What is this? Is it normal? Where does it come from?"

Branderhorst later revisited her friends to interview them about that period in their lives. "All the girls agreed that was a very tough time for them, instead of looking back with nice memories I thought I was the only one... We were all having a laugh but on the other side we were really sad and we couldn't be ourselves in the group. It's called girl venom."

The director believes that synchronised swimming is the perfect metaphor to express this notion of girl venom. "The thing is, above the water it is beautiful but when you look under the surface you see all the ugly mistakes they make."

Branderhorst has recently been

awarded a €50,000 Wild Card grant from the Netherlands Film Fund that she can use to make a film about anything she chooses. She will therefore partner up with Family Affair Films to make another youth-oriented short, this time about "teenage lying, creating a different version of reality and seeing how far they can go with it."

The UK/Dutch/German co-production documentary short *A Demonstration*, world-premiering in Berlinale Shorts is described as a "monster film with no monsters" and inspired by "the existence of taxonomies of monsters at the heart of Early Modern European science, exploring and reinterpreting our way of seeing the natural world that is almost impossible to imagine from today's vantage point."

The film is directed by Sasha Litvintseva and Beny Wagner, and is co-produced by Daan Milieus of Dutch production outfit Video Power.

"Rather than narrate a distant history, we have tried to create a journey for our viewers to feel with their entire sensory apparatus," comments Wagner. "We designed the film as a series of rhythmic intensities, to be experienced through the whole body. We hope that our viewers approach the film without too many preconceived ideas of what a film should be and allow themselves to be guided by their intuition in a way that allows for new connections to be made between images, sounds and movement."

Under the Skin ◊ Director & script: Emma Branderhorst Production: HKU-Eva Schaaf, Patou ten Cate

D for dazzling (and Dutch)

New talent from Holland in Berlin



Five new and diverse talents from The Netherlands talk about their selection for the prestigious Berlinale Talents programme 2020.

Director Noël Loozen is certain about what he wants to get out of Berlinale Talents, a clear perspective on the transition from shorts to features.

“I’m exploring how to stay true to my visual style and artistic DNA, whilst experimenting to see how they translate best into the longer format,” he underlines. “A feature film presents a different context than a short film. Ultimately, I hope to investigate my established visual language and form in relation to storytelling and drama. This symbiosis is what currently fascinates me the most, and I’m really excited to utilise the Berlinale Talents platform to dive deeper into this.”

He comments how working within the mediums of film and photography helps elevate his craft to higher levels of proficiency, “and it challenges me as a storyteller”. He adds: “Moving into my first feature film (entitled *Crapule* for Amsterdam-based Halal), after having worked on short films, music videos, commercials and photography, forces me to tie all this experience together. I think my hybrid approach has given me a strong sense of my own visual and aesthetic language, and a confidence in crafting my own little worlds.”

Editor Christine Houbiers has a head start on her fellow Dutch Talents in



Noël Loozen

2020, having attended many of the programmed events in Berlin last year, following the Generation selection of *My Extraordinary Summer with Tess*, which she edited.

“It was the first time I edited an international co-production and I really enjoyed working with the German co-producers, sound designer and composer. I hope to meet new people from different countries that inspire me and maybe I can work with them in the future,” she comments. “This year’s topic is about Collectives. At the moment I’m thinking of starting a collective together with two female friends, a screenwriter and a director. I hope to learn what’s the best way to do this.”

“I’m proud of the fact that I have been able to edit documentaries as well as fiction films... When I edit documentaries, I use techniques of



Christine Houbiers

fiction storytelling and vice versa. I’m not scared of changing the storytelling, like in a documentary. By doing both, I feel I can get more out of the material.”

Netherlands-based Turkish actress Ece Yüksel studied at HKU in Utrecht where she “realized the importance and fun of diversity in approaches to acting. Therefore [in Berlin], I’m mostly looking forward to meet, collaborate with and learn from the great diversity of colleagues worldwide. With these experiences I hope to broaden my skillset and take further steps in my career internationally.”

Yüksel notes how her experience on Emin Alper’s *A Tale of Three Sisters*, which was shot in Eastern Turkey in 2017, was “life-changing” for her, and for which she was awarded Best Actress prizes at the International Istanbul Film Festival and the



Ece Yüksel

Batumi International Art-House Film Festival.

“During the rehearsal period and the shooting process, I had the chance to experience an inspiring and deep character which gave me the space to create, guided by our great director. We were all very proud that our movie achieved many successes starting with premiering at the 69th Berlinale competition, followed by many festivals all over the world.”

Sales agent Wouter Jansen of Square Eyes (launched at IFFR 2020 out of his previous company Some Shorts) is eyeing up the long-term transition into features sales, and believes Berlinale Talents, located adjacent to arguably the calendar’s most important film market, will help facilitate that. “I’m still relatively new to the world of feature sales, and with my focus on more non-



Wouter Jansen

mainstream films I hope to find out more about the best strategies to put these in the market and get them in front of audiences,” he stresses. “Hopefully I can exchange ideas and experiences with the other sales agents in Talents as well as people attending the festival. And of course I just want to meet more new people, extend my network and hopefully discover some great new films.”

“I have been able to work with a lot of young talented directors and introduce them to the international market with their short films where they were also really well received; directors like Guido Hendriks, Ena Sendjarevic and Mees Peijnenburg, to name a few, that have all gone on to make strong debuts,” he adds. “Hopefully with Square Eyes I will be able to continue this success and also build a strong slate of feature films.”



Rogier Kramer

Producer Rogier Kramer of Dutch Mountain Film fully expects a very full week of intense meetings in Berlin with the great and the good of the international film community. “I hope to learn more about the international market and different co-production structures, strategies and methods from experts and other Berlinale Talents.”

In 2019 Kramer became co-owner of his company. “That’s a really big achievement for me because I’ve always wanted to have my own production company. As owner I’m in full control over my own goals and choices about what I want to produce and who I want to work with. This gives me the opportunity to develop myself as a producer even faster.

“Therefore I would also love to learn more about entrepreneurship.”



“She is clever and just as curious about the life/art dichotomy that she is experiencing”

Drama Girl ◊ Director: Vincent Boy Kars Script: Jolein Laarman Production: Halal Docs

Drama out of a crisis



In IFFR Tiger Competition selection *Drama Girl*, Dutch director Vincent Boy Kars rewrites the life story of a young woman, and then asks the same woman to play herself in its retelling on screen.

It all started with a 16-hour interview in the summer of 2018 when Leyla de Muynck told director Kars everything about her life, and that of her parents even before she was born. This text formed the basis of the story that the director set out to retell, but on his terms and with little by way of further input from Leyla.

The film, which received Film Fund selective support and a KNF Award Special Mention at IFFR, concentrates on the past five years of Leyla’s life, when she has to deal with the death of her father, falling in and out of love, and arguments with her mother.

Leyla is not an actress (rather, a skilled freeform dancer) but her onscreen parents are powerhouse Dutch thespians Pierre Bokma and Elsie de Brauw, whom we see introduced to Leyla on set for the first time, to her rising consternation and bemusement. Likewise, her

onscreen boyfriend is played by established Dutch talent Jonas Mulders.

Initially Leyla is given latitude to advise on how her parents/boyfriend should be portrayed, but once we get into the action, she must react to (and act within) the severe constraints that the script imposes, and the emotional grenades that Kars continually lobbs her way.

As a viewing experience, this is in equal part fascinating, moving, psychologically challenging and emotionally wrenching as she is forced to apply her performance skills to a fictionalised, and therefore at times unrecognisable, version of her own life story.

And of course, all this is cinematic gold dust for director Kars. “The moments when she is struggling, those are the moments for me that are the most exciting. She is in the construct of a fiction scene, but she is not acting, she *is*. You have a fiction scene with an actor but the main character *is her*, and pulling real emotions out of herself. And she was also in real life struggling with her memory [of events]. The struggle was real... The last thing I wanted was a polished performance.”

Not that Leyla is any way unaware that she is part of an experiment. She is clever and just as curious about the life/art dichotomy that she is experiencing. “That is the reason why I chose to work with her. She is a dancer and a performer, but as an

artist she is also interested in the differences between her as a performer and her as herself, and what is real and what is fake in her performance. She is interested as a maker in the same questions that I am.”

There is a core scene in the film where Leyla and Mulders, looking like a pair of beautiful aliens with matching cropped hair and dressed in garish colours, contemplate their lives while sitting on the bonnet of a car. For Kars, the gods were smiling at that moment as the weather performs a complete *volte face*, pouring down one moment to bright sunshine the next (as if directed), and the actors don’t miss a beat. “That scene by the car, you cannot do that again. I always wanted to see Leyla’s first reaction on everything, so 80% of the film was one-takes. They knew to continue acting through the scene.”

The film, to be released in The Netherlands by Periscoop Film, is located in Rotterdam which enabled Kars to find fascinating interiors and exteriors (he scouted on his bike), and the electronic music score by Beau Zwart is mesmerising.

Leyla performs her own transformation when she asks Mulders to crop her long curly hair on camera, a process that always seems the ultimate sacrifice for an actor. “But that was real,” comments Kars. “She cut her hair in real life two days after her father passed away, so it was part of her story. A lot of things in the film you think are fictionalised, but a lot more things are not.” Nick Cunningham

Creature comforts

Janis Rafa



© Michael Aulst

Janis Rafa's debut feature ***Kala Azar*** (which screened in IFFR Tiger Competition and is sold internationally by Heretic Outreach) was shot on the outskirts of Athens, "in the grey zones of the city," as the director puts it.

The film, supported by *De Verbeelding* scheme (Film Fund and Mondriaan Fund), is set in an in-between world, neither industrial nor rural. Roaming around the area in a car is a couple (played by Penelope Tsilika and Dimitris Lalos) with a very strange job. They collect deceased pets, taking their carcasses to the crematorium where they are burned. Penelope and Dimitris also gather up roadkill.

Rafa deliberately withholds information both about the couple and the world they live in. There are no specific references to the period in which the film is taking place or its location. We're told little about where the couple come from or how they met. Dialogue is kept to a minimum.

The tone here is similar to that in the "Requiem Series," the director's video

art projects exploring decay and death. The film has its surrealistic moments, for example a scene showing a brass band playing their instruments in the middle of a huge chicken factory or of an elderly woman, naked in the bath with a big, shaggy dog which she takes care to wash thoroughly.

The title *Kala Azar* refers to a real disease, also known as *Canine Leishmaniasis*, which killed many animals in Mediterranean countries in the 1990s. Rafa, born in 1984, grew up during this period. She has vivid memories of when the disease hit Greece. The locals didn't have a sentimental attitude toward pets. Medicine to counter the disease was expensive and many animals were simply left to rot and die.

Her father (who appears in the film) is a geologist and her mother is an artist. Both are animal lovers. "I came from a family that had many dogs which came as strays from the streets."

There may be hints of her childhood experience in the film but the storytelling is oblique. Rafa was determined to avoid direct biographical details. She places heavy demands on her two leads, a couple with a relationship so intense it risks becoming oppressive. They behave in as instinctive a way as the animals they tend. The actors had never met before. "I cast them separately and they prepared separately. Only a few days before shooting, they got together. We even started shooting with the intimate

scenes but they were very open in allowing me to play with their bodies, with their presence."

Animals, both dead and alive, feature prominently in the film. Rafa worked closely with a taxidermist and artist who helped her collect and preserve the carcasses of the dead animals. The dogs who appear are "semi-trained" but she generally allowed them to run free.

Sound design is crucial to *Kala Azar*. "We knew from the start that this was a film with very little dialogue. We tried to approach it with Marc [Lizier, the sound designer] in a minimal way that respected natural sounds, but gives another story to the one the camera gives." There is a creative tension between sound and cinematography. We hear dogs that we don't see. The sounds adds "elements which have escaped the image."

Rafa may have shot the film in Athens but she has very strong Dutch connections. Her producers were Digna Sinke's SNG Film. She studied at the Rijksakademie and her gallery is in Amsterdam. Her first major solo exhibition was in Utrecht. The artist/director splits her time between Greece, where her family is based, and The Netherlands, where most of her work originates. What's more, Gusto came on board early as the Dutch distributor.

Having finished *Kala Azar*, Rafa is weighing up options as to what she will do next. "I am preparing some video pieces. I don't have a confirmed exhibition yet... and, of course, in the back of my mind is the possibility of another feature!" **Geoffrey Macnab**



They behave in as instinctive a way as the animals they tend

Piece of the Tiger

Dutch minority co-productions in IFFR Tiger Competition

Nasir ◊ Arun Karthick

La Fortaleza ◊ Jorge Thielen Armand



Two of the films in IFFR Tiger Competition had Dutch minority support, self-taught Arun Karthick's award-winning *Nasir* (Rinkel Film) and *La Fortaleza* (Jorge Thielen Armand, co-produced by Viking Film).



Arun Karthick

Described by the jury as “a moving letter to and from the oppressed Muslim minority in Mother India,” Tiger competitor *Nasir* picked up the NETPAC Award for best Asian film premiering at IFFR.

In the film, *Nasir* is a gentle man who suffers a hard life but remains optimistic in the face of terrible difficulties, all the time writing love letters to his wife. Eventually, however, he wonders whether he would be better off as a migrant labourer in Abu Dhabi.

Rinkel Film CEO Reinier Selen credits his colleague Ibo Karatay with discovering the project (as well as Karthick's undoubted talent) at CineMart in 2017, and monitoring it closely all the way through the production process.

“Ibo realised that Karthick's is a very distinctive and specific voice that



Nasir

needs to be heard and what made me decide to say ‘yes’ was that, first of all, it is a very important story but told in an original and fresh way,” points out Selen. “As much as it is a story about how the society in the South of India suppresses parts of the community it is told in a different manner to, for example, our previous film about refugees (*Rafael*, Ben Sombogaart) or Paula van der Oest's film about a terrible miscarriage of justice (*Accused*).”

The project received €50,000 from the NFF+HBF Co-production Scheme. Sound post, grading and deliveries were completed in The Netherlands.

“The NFF+HBF support can be spent in the majority country (up to 50%) as the euro goes a lot further in India than it does in Holland. The film's budget was 160,000 euros, which meant the HBF support was around 33% of that, so we used half

to do post and the other half was sent to India to help with production support,” Selen points out.

“This kind of HBF support enables you to make daring choices, for example the script for the 90-min film was just 35 pages,” he continues, “whereas a regular minority co-production is restricted to many conditions. The director has to have a proven track record with previous A-fest selections, and reciprocity is kind of demanded. These conditions tend to rule out projects that I really believe need to be supported.”

“And from the start Ibo was very much involved with the script development of the project. He did a lot of script sessions and I think the film turned out so well because of that involvement. It is very uncommon that from a minority position you are able time-wise to be involved at that level.”



La Fortaleza



Jorge Thielen Armand

In Jorge Thielen Armand's *La Fortaleza*, Roque, who is just old enough for a midlife crisis, has wrecked his mother's car. He blames the chaos in Venezuela, but his parents don't share this view, and throw him out of their house. To battle his demons, and the drink, he travels into the southern jungle to renovate a cabin he built there in happier times. He meets old friends, now captivated by the gold rush. But his desire for redemption conflates with an increasingly violent environment...

Dutch co-producer Marleen Slot explains her co-pro rationale. “I do it all based on guts and on taste, and I value the previous work of the director a lot.”

When she saw Armand's previous *La Soledad* she was deeply impressed, and was further excited by the director's desire to cast his own father in the lead of *La Fortaleza*. “That was immediately something I found so interesting and also such a risk. I really felt like it could go both ways. It could be really good or a big mistake, but I like it when directors take those types of risk.”

The project was rejected for Hubert Bals support but was given the nod by the World Cinema Fund Europe after Slot submitted her application. There was no requirement for any Dutch spend.

“But despite that it was not just a financial co-operation but also a true co-production,” she underlines. “They really involved me in the entire process and I acted like a sparring partner for producers Manon Ardisson and Rodrigo Michelangeli.”

“Always when I am a minority co-production partner I try to interfere as little as possible because I think it is very important that the main producer can really take the lead, and I only give my opinion when it is really requested or when I think ‘oh this is really going in the wrong direction’, but that was definitely not the case with this film. It was a really nice collaboration and I think the Tiger Competition was the best place to go with this film,” Slot concludes.

Nick Cunningham

Nasir ◊ **Director & script:** Arun Karthick **Production:** Stray Factory (IN) **Co-production:** Rinkel Film (NL), Magic Hours Films (IN), Harman Ventures (IN), Uncombed Buddha (IN), Cent Percent Films (IN)

La Fortaleza ◊ **Director:** Jorge Thielen Armand **Script:** Jorge Thielen Armand, Rodrigo Michelangeli **Production:** La Faena Films (VE) **Co-production:** Viking Film (NL), Mutokino (CO), In Vivo Films (FR) **Sales:** Reel Suspects

Journey into the past

Sonja Wyss



Sonja Wyss' *Farewell Paradise* is a tale half a century in the telling, of a woman's decision to remove herself and four daughters from a warm paradise island to a cold and, initially at least, hostile Switzerland.

In *Farewell Paradise*, supported by the Film Fund and Production Incentive, nobody dies and the world doesn't come to a shuddering halt. The documentary tells a small story that affects few others than the family members featured in it. And in cinematic terms it comprises little other than a series of talking heads reacting to an off-screen director/questioner, who then turns the camera on herself.

Despite these seeming limitations, the film is riveting in its dissection of a family feud, its slow revelation of detail and in the disparity evident within each family member's recollection of events.

Back in the 1960s father Ueli and mother Dorine lived the dream life on the Bahamas with their four young daughters. The problem was that Ueli had an eye for the ladies, and given that he was dashing,

successful and cool, they liked him as well. This was the source of adoring Dorine's ire, and ultimately the reason she hot-footed it to Switzerland, where both originally came from.

But all is not well when they arrive in Europe, and Dorine is forced to farm out the children to other families as she does not have the means to upkeep the household. It is a trauma (not always recognised as such at the time) which informs the future development of the girls, and of Dorine herself...

The starting point in this cathartic analysis – for that is what the film becomes for all concerned – is a fantastic 1960s photograph of Dorine and the girls walking towards the plane that will take them away.

Sitting in a blank studio, Ueli, Dorine and then each daughter take turns over many days to tell their sides of the story, to laugh, to complain or to remonstrate, surprised by the new information they are taking in but also unburdening themselves of years of hurt and miscomprehension, all the time inexorably drawn towards a point of acceptance and maybe even reconciliation.

"We are a very open family, we talk about everything, but we had never spoken about this... these were secrets that we never spoke of," comments director Wyss. "There were things that I never heard and my sisters had opinions and

viewpoints very different from mine."

Older sister Kathy is a tour de force, a firebrand in her youth, pregnant at 13 (or maybe 14 or 15, opinions differ), her father's favourite and a girl who, for many years, could not abide her mother. Christine is contemplative, sometimes playful, but she is hurt that her father suddenly disappeared out of her life. Bettina, often tearful in the film, was overcome by the experience having had to confront her past.

Meanwhile, the father is blunt, although the reasons for his behaviour are expressed clearly. He didn't find his wife sexy. After they had sex for the first time, he felt compelled to get married – the 1960s were different times. His heart wasn't in the marriage, although he wanted it to be, he says.

Mother Dorine is ultimately a survivor who, in later life, discovers sexual liberation, forges a career in journalism, and rediscovers her innate sense of musicality.

And Wyss? How does she assess the experience? "I am the analytical one in the family. My interest was to learn and understand the motivations my parents decisions were based on. Decisions that were so drastic to us, their children. The next step was to elaborate on how the consequences of the divorce of our parents had influenced and formed me and my sisters and how it effects the next generation, our own children. Our past is working through the generations like radioactivity does."



"We are a very open family, we talk about everything, but we had never spoken about this"

Going for Gold



Rogier Hesp

Rogier Hesp's *Gold* (which world-premiered in IFFR Limelight) may be set in the world of competitive gymnastics but its writer-director says the same story could be told against the backcloth of any sport in which children are pushed too hard toward success by their parents, writes Geoffrey Macnab.

When Hesp conceived the film, supported by *De Oversteek* scheme and Production Incentive, he wanted an actor to play the young gymnast hero, Timo, who is getting ready to compete in the world championships. He thought he would give the actor six months to prepare.

However, the director was quickly advised that this wouldn't work at all. Gymnasts spend a decade or more trying to reach the top of their sport. They have skills which no actor, however dedicated, can pick up in a few weeks or even after months of practice. "I knew then I had to go and search for a real gymnast."

Hesp and his casting director therefore approached all the leading gymnast schools in The Netherlands.

They were looking for someone who would not only be able to look credible, vaulting and performing somersaults, but who could carry off the dramatic scenes too. In the film, Timo has a fraught relationship with his father, a former gymnast now wheelchair-bound. He also has strong and complicated feelings towards the female physiotherapist.

Hesp stresses how he was "immediately sold" when he found his lead actor, David Wristers, a former Dutch junior champion with a boyish face but a very muscular body. "He looks like a man but he's really still just an adolescent boy – he's like a little kid in a grown-up's body," the director notes of the qualities which made Wristers the perfect fit. It helped, too, that the gymnast turned actor was such an enigmatic presence on camera. When you looked at him, you could never tell exactly what he was thinking, Hesp notes.

The director kept on telling Wristers not to play the part but to be the part. The script was adapted to fit his personality and technique as a gymnast, "just so it felt more natural for him."

Unlike the character he plays, Wristers has "nice parents." However, during his time on the circuit, he had seen plenty of pushy and ruthless mums and dads, driving their kids far too hard. "You can see them (these parents) sitting on the sidelines," Wristers told him. These were the parents who yelled at

their kids and made them cry whenever they didn't win.

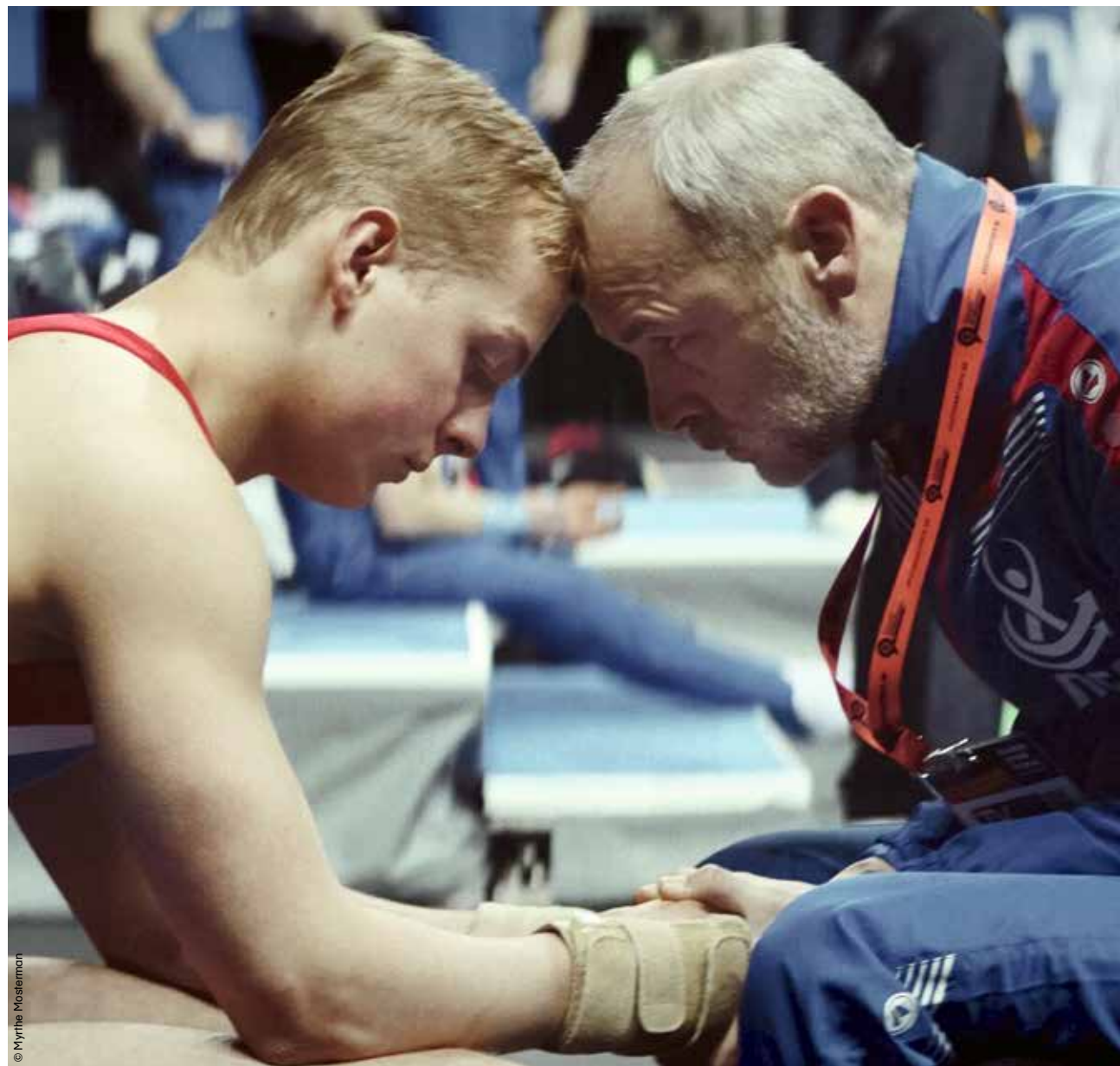
Gold was inspired by an article the writer-director read about an athlete who was eventually murdered by his father. "That really triggered my vision on the way we look at retrieving success," he says.

"I haven't seen any sports movie where you see the downside. It's always the same story of the guy who wins and wins, then he loses, then he starts training more and he wins – and he is happy about it," Hesp sums up the trajectory of the typical upbeat story of triumph told on screen.

What about his own background? Hesp says that his surgeon father, unlike the one depicted in the film, always encouraged him and told him to choose his own path.

Gold (which will be released in The Netherlands in March by September Films) may be Hesp's debut feature but he is an experienced director of commercials. "The advantage of working in advertising is that you spend a lot of time on set. Even if it is 30 seconds or 40 seconds, you still have to bring that emotion on screen," he says.

Shooting on *Gold* went very smoothly. "The only thing we were scared of was what if David falls?" the director remembers. He pushed Wristers hard, but thankfully the gymnast actor was always able to land on both feet.



© Myrthe Mosterman

Dual perspectives

Their subjects may be radically different but two Dutch films selected for IFFR Perspectives tell the lives of two extraordinary characters, the French cover Michel Siffre and the actress-turned-spy Leonie Brandt.

Just over a decade ago, video artist/filmmaker Melvin Moti read an article in Cabinet magazine about a French “speleologist” (a cave expert) called Michel Siffre who had spent two months living in a cave. The experience/ordeal allowed Siffre to chart the physical and psychological changes that you experience when you are exposed to such subterranean hardships.

“At the time, I was making a film about visual deprivation and I was also researching self-experimentation,” Moti, whose debut narrative feature *Dreamlife*, supported by *De Verbeelding* scheme (Film Fund and Mondriaan Fund), premiered in IFFR Perspectives. He was fascinated by the article. He began to read Siffre’s books and to look at his photographs. He found something innately cinematic in Siffre’s work. It also helped that the French scientist was so photogenic.

In Moti’s description, venturing into a cave sounds akin to being buried alive. No, your mobile phone doesn’t work. Time unfolds at a different rhythm to the outer world. “You feel alien... if something falls on you, it is over. You are a guest as a human being in that completely non-biological environment.”



© Melvin Moti

Dreamlife

“The main story is definitely based on his expeditions but I took it into my own hands. It is hugely fictionalised,” the director says of the version of Siffre’s tale.

Moti’s research was thoroughgoing. He spent a lot of time in caves. Ask him what it is like spending prolonged periods underground and he acknowledges that it is “very intense” and can be disturbing. “You have to fight all kinds of anxieties. It’s a non-human world. Your brain tells you not to do things all the time. The access is very challenging. You have to walk uphill for a long time and then crawl into very narrow spaces which are sometimes just the width of your hip. You sometimes need to push yourself through that.”

The film was made through KeyFilm, the company run by Hanneke Niens

and Hans de Wolf. Windmill Films in Amsterdam will be handling the Benelux distribution. Alongside the cinema screenings, the film will also be seen in art galleries. The cast is headlined by the famously intense Belgian actor, Sam Louwyck, known for his work in Flemish classics like *Ex Drummer* and *Bullhead*.

Louwyck has a background in dance as well as acting, one reason why Moti was keen to cast him. “Since the film is based on isolation, it means the main character is by himself, without any dialogue. That means you have to act physically – to interest the audience just with your body and the way you do things,” Moti reflects. “He (Louwyck) could physically communicate emotions without any other actors to play (alongside)... it was a beautiful experiment to transfer the act of acting into a location like the cave.”

Dreamlife ◊ Director & script: Melvin Moti Production: KeyFilm



photo features Francesca Bertini/Asumita Spina

Leonie, Actress and Spy



Annette Apon

Born in Germany in 1901, Leonie Brandt came to The Netherlands in her teens where she became both an actress and a double agent, working for the Dutch and German secret services. A woman who could obviously live off her wits, the glamorous Leonie survived imprisonment in Ravenbrück (where she was at one point sentenced to death) before working for the Dutch National Security Bureau after 1945. She was arrested again in 1950, accused of being a collaborator, but released for lack of evidence.

Leonie may not be so well known as an actress in The Netherlands (she

was oriented more towards the stage than the screen) but as in all great spy stories, she is clever, elusive and mysterious. What’s more, very few photographs of her exist.

Filmmaker Annette Apon had previously packaged the life story of Leonie as a fiction series for TV, before hitting upon an ingenious way to tell the story in documentary form. *Leonie, Actress and Spy*, made with Film Fund selective support, uses archive from the Eye Filmmuseum that features contemporaneous sirens and divas of the silver screen. We see the great Dutch and European actresses from the early days of cinema, and each of their scenes is used to illustrate a passage, an adventure or an impression of Leonie’s life.

Apon was no stranger to working with archive, having made *Ik wil gelukkig zijn* 2016, about the

legendary Dutch actress Fien de la Mar (footage of whom is used in *Leonie, Actress and Spy*). Apon further ramps up the dramatic story of Leonie by including other huge stars of the age, such as Asta Nielsen and Pola Negri.

She enthuses about Eye Filmmuseum’s archive department, which she refers to as “marvellous, marvellous,” as it was very well organised in terms of subjects and themes, thus enabling her to piece together her film like a jigsaw puzzle. She was even able to source very rare female prison footage (from the German film *Die weissen Rosen von Ravensberg*, 1919) to illustrate Leonie’s incarceration.

“To write the script I had to know what material I could find, so for months I was in the archive,” Apon stresses. “That was the first part, writing the script, and then it took a long, long time to get people interested and make them believe it is possible to become involved with Leonie while seeing all these screen stars, all these different women. It was a big deal to convince people that it was possible.”

“What also drove this idea to use film fragments was that I knew Leonie was a cinema lover from the 1920s on,” continues Apon. “The films that I saw in the Eye archive, maybe they were the films that she had seen as well... and was psychologically influenced by as she turned more and more to espionage.”

Leonie, Actress and Spy (Leonie, Actrice en Spionne)
◊ Director & script: Annette Apon Production: SNG
Film (NL) Co-production: NTR (NL)



IFFR RTM

Porcelain ◊ Jenneke Boeijink



The director was determined to find someone young enough to act without self-consciousness

Porcelain (Porcelain) ◊ Director: Jenneke Boeijink Script: Jenneke Boeijink, Thibaud Delpout Production: New Amsterdam Film Company (NL) Co-production: Wrong Men (BE), Verdeoro (IT)

Decaying from within



Writer-director Jenneke Boeijink's *Porcelain* starts in spectacular fashion with a shot (filmed by a drone) of the Rotterdam skyline, writes Geoffrey Macnab.

We draw closer and closer to a high rise apartment in which wealthy property developer Paul, his wife Anna, an expert in ceramics, and their son Thomas live, seemingly in prosperity and domestic harmony.

The film's title comes from the idea that porcelain may look perfect but that it is decaying from within. Anna explains this in the course of her job but the metaphor is obvious. Cracks in the facade of the perfect family life soon begin to appear. The little boy has behavioural problems. He is prey to fits of unexplained aggression.

"I have this feeling about modern western society that we are all sometimes aiming at the wrong thing," Boeijink explains the underlying themes of her film. "We are trying to have a great career, friends, a big house. We dress properly. Everything is picture perfect. It's maybe an illness of modern society that it is more about surface than it is about the inside."

In *Porcelain*, supported by the Production Incentive, there is a stark contrast between the family's experiences in their apartment "in the sky in Rotterdam" and the much more idyllic, natural world they later encounter in the Italian countryside. Boeijink describes *Porcelain* as "a modern dark fairy tale."

Boeijink set out to cast actors who weren't immediately familiar to Dutch audiences. Laura De Boer, who plays Anna, is Dutch but based in Berlin and works more in Germany than in The Netherlands. Tom Vermeir, who plays the arrogant patriarch, is Belgian.

Finding the boy proved a struggle. Boeijink had chosen a young actor but then production was postponed. "Two years later, we couldn't make the movie with that boy. He was too old and so we had to start the whole process again."

The director was determined to find someone young enough to act without self-consciousness, who would forget that the cameras were there. "He had to be old enough to take into account things that I wanted to direct but also young enough to be spontaneous." Eventually, she found Neathan van der Gronden, a kid from the Utrecht region who had never acted before and was able to play Thomas without worrying about his motivation and what drove his destructive behaviour.

Throughout the course of the film, its

visual style changes. The opening is set in the sterile, affluent world of the family when they seem to be on top of the world. "The picture perfect world is cracking in part 2 and, in part 3, we are in this rough kind of nature." The sound editing also changes, shifting from urban and industrial noise in the early scenes to natural sounds in the rural Italian scenes.

The film screened in IFFR's RTM section after making its premiere in Cairo late 2019. Boeijink wondered if the story and images would be universal enough to appeal to an international audience, but those concerns proved unnecessary as the viewers in Egypt responded warmly to the film, picking up on what its director believes are universal themes about family, work, wealth and the illusion of the perfect life.

Porcelain was in selection for CineMart (IFFR's co-production market) in 2014 but took several years to finance. The director had started the project with her then-husband, Thibaud Delpout, a well known theatre director.

"In the beginning, it went really smoothly," Boeijink remembers of the lengthy financing process. However, potential backers would always ask whether this was a horror film, a fantasy or a drama. Some were uncomfortable that they couldn't pigeonhole the genre. She pays tribute to producer Sander Verdonk at New Amsterdam Film Company who stayed with the project from the start and guided it towards completion.



Beer at IFFR

In the 36-minute experimental film *Beer*, iconoclastic filmmaker Erik van Lieshout pulls off an improbable, if not impossible feat, writes Nick Cunningham.

He accepts an extremely well-endowed art prize (€100,000) without being in any way complicit in the questionable dealings of the mega-brand that bears its name.

Just after Erik van Lieshout won the coveted Heineken prize, details of the beer company's alleged nefarious activities in Africa were published, involving sexual abuse of promotion hostesses.

So what did Van Lieshout do? He did what any self-respecting iconoclast and neo-Surrealist would do, and mounted a full frontal assault on the company, and seemed to have a great time in the process. In his subsequent film, not only does he bite the hand that feeds him, he also unleashes his most confrontational and disruptive inner self.

Van Lieshout is very funny and is great on camera, and does nothing by half measures. In the film he is mainly housebound, due to a knee injury and so, in the great procrastinatory tradition of the creative artist, discovers the house chores that must be done before he really gets down to business. But luckily, each chore, whether fixing the bathroom cabinet or levelling a floor, are recorded, documented and used in the film.

When he really gets into the swing of



Beer

things he goes beer mad, unveiling a Heineken green sofa (same pantone colour), rebrands the Yellow Canary pub across as the Green Canary, and has himself rolled through the streets of Wiesbaden in a human-size beer can.

Which is all great fun, but he is by nature confrontational, and in the film is delighted to say of Heineken to camera, "they're a terrible company, they're raping all over Africa," before labeling them "colonist exploiters."

What's more, he spent a sizeable portion of the prize money on helping to construct a pharmacy in central Africa to help some of the communities that Heineken's marketing practices have allegedly harmed.

Other topics Van Lieshout explores in the film are sex with his wife and masturbation (twice a week and every day respectively), the creative urge and the fear of aging. He also spends a lot of time pulling human shapes on his floor to resemble what seem to be numerous photographs of turds.

"We tried to edit the film really strongly on the Heineken problem, but then it became a very boring film," Van Lieshout says. "So I had to put in the other stuff which was important for me and the film... But conflict is always the most important thing for me."

Elsewhere at IFFR, projects by two of The Netherlands' most vibrant film talents were presented at CineMart 2020.

Beer ◊ Director: Erik van Lieshout **Script:** Erik van Lieshout, Suzanne Weenink **Production:** Suzanne Weenink

CineMart goes NL



Garden of Earthly Delights

In Morgan Knibbe's €1.5m project *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 12-year-old drug addict Kenji fights for attention, respect and freedom in the drug-infused slums of Manila.

Meanwhile, he struggles with his sexuality and crosses paths with Dutch sex tourist Michael, who is being torn apart by his dark desires.

Knibbe blazed like a comet onto the Dutch production scene in 2014 with his audacious doc debut *Those Who Feel the Fire Burning*. Following this, his *The Atomic Soldiers* won the Golden Calf (Dutch Academy Award) for Best Short Documentary in 2018 and the Dutch Director's Guild Grand Prize in 2019.

The Garden of Earthly Delights will

become an explosively colourful, eclectic and grim fairytale in which grotesque images of hellish horror are set against moments of surreal beauty," Knibbe comments. "The images will have a layered meaning. In the first place, the cinematic form will serve the emotional journey of the main characters, which will become intensely tangible and sensory, mixing gritty social realism with magical escapades.

Co-written with Roelof Jan Minneboo, the Filipino and English-language film is produced by BALDR Film and has €72,500 in place, courtesy of the Netherlands Film Fund (€22,500) and Creative Europe (€50,000).

David Verbeek's *The Wolf, the Fox & the Leopard* is a dystopian story about Isa (23) who has been found living amongst wolves. She is brought back to a medical centre only to be kidnapped by an idealistic couple in order to help them build a new, purer world.

Produced by Lemming Film, the 100-minute €2,700,000 project has €127,500 in place from the Netherlands Film Fund (€102,500) and Creative Europe (€25,000). The screenplay is also written by Verbeek.

"In order to start any attempt to describe the core of this film, we must look at the animal kingdom and ask ourselves what it is exactly that separates us from them," says the director. "What we do all day with our oversized part of the brain called the frontal lobe is run simulations, structure the past and project possible future outcomes or even entirely alternative variations on things we have perceived before. What I mean to say here is: we're storytellers."

"I see the art of cinema as a spiritual exercise," he continues. "Something that cuts beneath rational narration. And perhaps, at its core, to begin with, the effort to prevent the destruction of the world is similar to this; a spiritual exercise more than anything else."

Right now, Verbeek is in post-production on his feature film *Dead & Beautiful*, also produced by Lemming Film.

Garden of Earthly Delights ◊ Director: Morgan Knibbe **Script:** Morgan Knibbe, Roelof Jan Minneboo **Production:** BALDR Film **Co-production:** Cinematografica (PH)



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At the end of IFFR 2020 Vanja Kaludjeric took over as Festival Director from Bero Beyer, who will now be heading up the Netherlands Film Fund.

Vanja Kaludjeric tells an interesting story about her first visit to IFFR. It was back in 2002, in the days before cheap flights, when she and five of her friends piled into a car and drove all the way non-stop from Zagreb, dozed off for a couple of hours overnight by Rotterdam Centraal, and then grabbed her accreditation just in time for a Miike Takashi 9 am screening.

Back then (and little has changed since) the goal was to see 5 or 6 films a day, meet up later with her friends and colleagues and then lock horns over beers with the producers and directors of the films she had just seen.

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Since then, Kaludjeric has continued to champion ground-breaking independent cinema from around the world, programming for the likes of Sarajevo, Cinéma du Réel and CPH:DOX, heading up Holland Film Meeting and most recently working as Head of Acquisitions for streaming outlet MUBI. And yes, for two years she was head of Talks and Masterclasses for IFFR.

Vanja at the vanguard

She returns to a Rotterdam festival that has regained its reputation as a core player in the discovery of new and vibrant cinema from all corners of the globe, and as an essential tool in its finance, realisation and release.

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At IFFR 2020 Kaludjeric shadowed the redoubtable and outgoing Beyer. "I had, for the first time, a bird's eye view over the ensemble of events, and I can still say it is one of the most amazing festivals in the world. It has so many activities that cater to different demographics, and to see the different ways that film and art blend together through audience and maker engagement is really fantastic."

"I really enjoyed seeing the number of youngsters at the festival visiting *en masse*, that was really fantastic to see," she adds. "It is an ambition to increase as much as possible younger audiences, and to include them even more in the festival programme. We are about to reach half a century and this should be one of our pillars for the future."

In terms of announcing wider policy

change or future priorities, Kaludjeric recognises the sterling work performed by the experienced team and is holding fire until Cannes following a period of careful appraisal both of the festival they have just hosted, and the 50th birthday celebrations to come.

What is very clear is that she will continue to be at the vanguard in demanding equal representation for women both at her festival and across the wider industry, and across all sectors, both creative and business.

She also underlines the uniqueness of the festival's host city, Rotterdam. "It's such a diverse and exciting place, which is exactly what the festival is designed to reflect. Every area and interest is catered for. From events for filmmakers, artists and musicians to educational opportunities, there is a whole range of activities that extend across the cityscape.

"Rotterdam is a place that celebrates unconventional cinema, champions filmmakers and brings audiences from both worlds together in an informal way, creating a thrilling atmosphere," Kaludjeric says.

"With the festival's 50th year fast approaching I will continue to celebrate everything that Rotterdam is, and can become, as we look towards another 10 years of diverse, ground breaking and inspiring film."

Clermont-Ferrand

Retrospective ◊ Rosto *Spring* ◊ Andy Goralczyk
School's Out ◊ Jamille Van Wijngaarden *Flow* ◊ Adriaan Lokman
Playing Men – Homo Ludens ◊ Sanne Rovers



Jona/Tomberry ◊ Rosto

Dutch filmmakers were once again in the frame at Clermont-Ferrand, the world's leading short film festival. Nick Cunningham reports.

In Jamille van Wijngaarden's very funny short *Tienminutengesprek* (*School's Out*), selected for International Competition and supported by KORT! (Film Fund, CoBO fund, NTR and NPO Fund), an old-style primary school teacher exacts violent revenge on a very pushy parent who demands the very best in modern education for her child.

Despite playing for laughs, the film, produced by Dutch production house The Rogues and shot over 2.5 days, has a serious undertow, the director points out.

"In recent years we are seeing a more open-minded approach towards gender neutrality, but at the

same time there's a belief that we should be mindful of the fact that boys and girls are anatomically different. So here we have two camps and in our film this is represented by the mom on the left side of the table and the teacher on the right," stresses van Wijngaarden.

"At the same time there are many problems in our education system, a lack of teachers resulting in overpopulated classrooms and concerned parents venting their concerns with already stressed teachers. This really puts a lot of pressure on our educators and is something that needs to be addressed. So with this film I hopefully allow educators, who are really undervalued, to be heard."

The film has an in-built universal appeal, the director adds. "To be honest I made this film from a Dutch perspective with issues that

are very current in my country at the moment. But when my film screened at the International Filmfestival Emden-Norderney in Germany, I received a lot of praise from especially teachers in the audience. So I came to realize these matters really transcend borders."

Andy Goralczyk's animation *Spring*, made at Blender Animation Studio and selected for Clermont-Ferrand Young Audience section, is the story of a shepherd and her dog who must face ancient spirits in order to continue the cycle of life. It is a proto-mythological tale of the coming of spring, a ritual as old as the world, and is frightening, enormous and exquisite in equal measure.

"I grew up close to the Swiss Alps," points out director Goralczyk. "While I was growing up, our family did many hiking trips through the



Spring

mountains. There are places that feel very ancient and much bigger than our small existence. But sometimes there are small traces, carved stones, runes that give us a hint of the tiny impact us humans have had."

"The films of Hayao Miyazaki were certainly the biggest influence when it comes to the visual style," he adds. "Very naturalistic with a strong connection to reality. We wanted to create a world that feels rich and tangible, which is very challenging to do in computer graphics. Again, it's the connection between us and nature that was the leading element. The works of Caspar David Friedrich, a 19th century romantic painter were very influential when it came to the juxtaposition of human versus nature."

"The mission of our studio is to develop Open Source software for computer animation and film-making," Goralczyk continues. "Our developers work alongside us artists to improve the tools of our trade, namely Blender."

Adriaan Lokman's beautiful and extraordinary short animation *Flow* (Special Program: 3D), made for Valk Productions and supported by The Netherlands Film Fund, looks to present in dramatic and physical form the shape and power of the air that surrounds us. He does so by linear-tracking the movement of wind around solid objects (humans, buildings, a turbulent sea, even a lazy hand languidly extended from the window of a sports car) and then removing those objects from the frame.

"Everything that is invisible I turn visible. Everything that is visible I turn invisible," Lokman points out. "I like to look in another way at things that are kind of ordinary, in this case the wind that is around us all the time. We can't see it but it has a huge influence on our lives... It is a beautiful and fascinating thing but you don't see it, you only see the effects of what it does."

The eccentric, visionary and wildly talented filmmaker Rosto, who died tragically early in 2019, will be

honoured at Clermont-Ferrand, a festival that followed his every move with deep interest and fascination. Lauded by cineastes across the world, Rosto made the masterly *Wreckers Tetralogy* which consisted of *No Place like Home*, *Lonely Bones*, *Splintertime* and *Reruns*, all of which were satellites around what he called the mothership 'Mind My Gap': an online graphic novel of 26 episodes that illustrated his bizarre, unique, stylish and highly idiosyncratic universe.

The Clermont-Ferrand retrospective includes 6 films: *The Rise and Fall of the Legendary Anglobilly Feverson* (2002), *Jona/Tomberry* (2005), *No Place Like Home* (2009), *Lonely Bones* (2013), *The Monster of Nix* (2011) and *Big White Big Black* (2016).

Finally, Sanne Rovers' 2017 Dutch/Belgian short doc *Playing Men – Homo Ludens* plays in the European Short Film Award section. Dressing up as a Viking for the weekend or racing through mud pools, some people lose themselves in games while others find it a curious way of passing time.

In the film we meet a selection of dare devils and free spirits; grown-ups who completely immerse themselves in games. At times, their complete devotion to the game will have the viewer wondering: what is it that drives humans to play human?

Eye on Akerman

21 March-31 May 2020  Eye Exhibition
Chantal Akerman: Passages

For Jaap Guldemond, Director of Exhibitions/Chief Curator at the Eye Filmmuseum, the staging of the Chantal Akerman exhibition, Passages (21 March-31 May 2020), is the fulfilment of a very long standing personal ambition, writes Geoffrey Macnab.

“We started this project before she died. This is exactly the field we are trying to focus on in our exhibition programme,” Guldemond says of the show celebrating the pioneering avant-garde feminist filmmaker who committed suicide in 2015.

Akerman made both features for theatres and installations for galleries. “That made her very special. Finally (with this exhibition), we are able to really start at the beginning of this transformation of film into exhibition and vice versa. Chantal Akerman was one of the first filmmakers who discovered the exhibition space.”

“She very precisely represents what I am trying to establish in the Eye Filmmuseum with the exhibition programme. Right from the beginning, she was one of the key figures I knew I would love to work with,” he underlines.

Guldemond had been aware of Akerman’s filmmaking as long ago as the late 1970s. However, in the mid 1990s, at a museum in Wolfsburg, he stumbled on one of her installations for the first time. “I remember that I was really struck by

its quality,” he says of the installation which features 24 monitors in a darkened space. It was a non-narrative piece but he immediately responded to “the sensitivity of the images.” The work showed him how fruitfully filmmakers with ability and vision could make use of the exhibition space to amplify their movie work.

Akerman was a troubled figure, a manic-depressive with a close and sometimes stifling relationship with her mother, an Auschwitz survivor.

‘She was one of the key figures I knew I would love to work with’

In her films, for example her early feature *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (1975), about a single mother who is also a prostitute, she dealt with the oppressive monotony of women’s lives.

Guldemond had been hoping to stage an Akerman exhibition for many years. He met her several times in Paris to discuss such a project. Occasionally, their meetings were disrupted when she would have manic episodes but there were also periods when she was calm and lucid. “Just when I was trying to formulate what I was trying to do (in the exhibition), she died,” he says.

Now, the Eye curator is delighted to

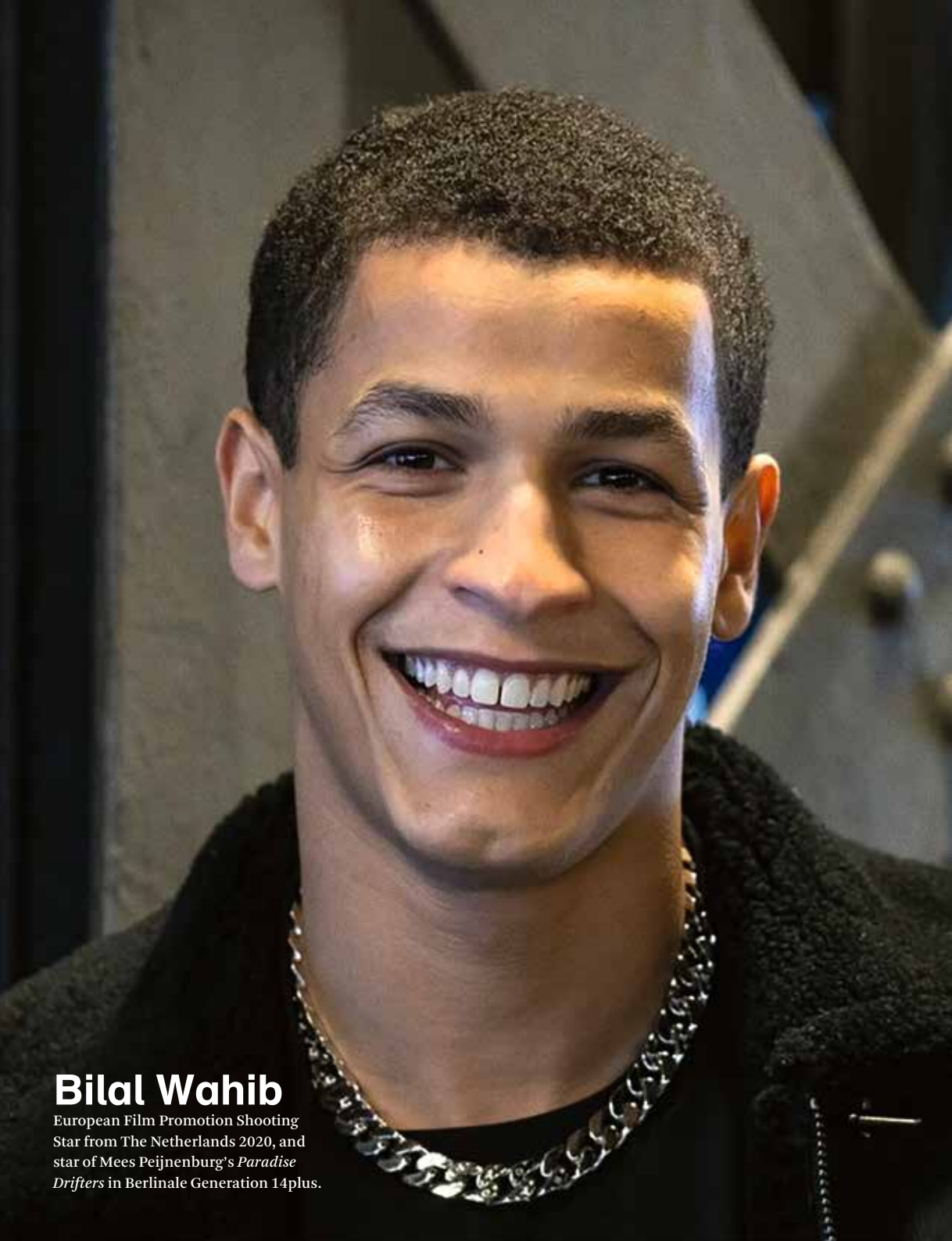
stage an exhibition close to his heart. Editor Claire Atherton, who worked with Akerman for over 30 years, is one of the artist’s key collaborators, and has been in close contact with Eye about the show. Guldemond has also been in close touch with Akerman’s gallery, the Marian Goodman Gallery, and with the artist’s sister.

A lavish catalogue has been prepared for the exhibition. “Firstly, Akerman is an amazing filmmaker. Secondly, she is an important feminist, already from the mid-70s onward. In the context of our museum, she is one of the first filmmakers who deliberately took the step of developing film installations based on works she had first meant to be shown in cinemas. There was no catalogue talking about this subject,” Guldemond explains why he and his colleagues went to such efforts to produce their book. It not only features writing by the artist herself but several essays focusing on her installation work and the general themes in her work.

Akerman has influential admirers, among them filmmakers like Joanna Hogg and Mark Cousins. Guldemond suggests her work is now also being rediscovered by a broader audience because of its attention to feminist issues. She is a towering figure whose influence is felt in sometimes mysterious and indirect ways. The exhibition, which includes both her earliest work and the installation *Now* she presented just before her death, is bound to boost her reputation yet further.



Chantal Akerman in the mirror 1971-2007



Bilal Wahib

European Film Promotion Shooting
Star from The Netherlands 2020, and
star of Mees Peijnenburg's *Paradise
Drifters* in Berlinale Generation 14plus.