

DANISH FILMS IDFA ISSUE 2014

FILM is published by the Danish Film Institute

:/FILM/



SOMETHING BETTER TO COME

Hanna Polak sends the message that you can be a success as a human being even if you are living in a landfill.

THE LOOK OF SILENCE

Joshua Oppenheimer revisits Indonesia's genocide, this time telling the story from the victims' perspective.

DEMOCRATS

Camilla Nielsson follows the bumpy road to Zimbabwe's new constitution.

WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH

Young Somali Danes in holy war. Why?

GOOD THINGS AWAIT

In defense of slow farming.

THE NEWSROOM - OFF THE RECORD

A fly-on-the-wall of a struggling industry.

FILM

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Published by the Danish Film Institute

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FILMS FOR CHANGE

There is no shortage of global crises to confront these days: climate change, epidemics, war, terror threats, poverty, refugees streaming across borders. As citizens of the world we see these things every day, in person or through the ubiquitous media.

But even if we sometimes despair at the disastrous direction the world is headed, there is optimism to be found in the work of smart, visionary documentarians. At least that's my thought looking at the Danish line-up for this year's film festival in Amsterdam. Take "Danish" with a grain of salt. These are international documentaries, in their themes, funding and the creative teams behind them.

Once again, we marvel at the courage and dedication of documentary filmmakers depicting a slice of the world. But for many of them, depicting isn't enough. They deeply want to make the world a better place. Here are just a few examples:

In *The Look of Silence*, the sequel to *The Act of Killing* about the 1965-66 Indonesian genocide, Joshua Oppenheimer wants to show – in human, intimate terms – how necessary truth and reconciliation are in a society built on terror and lies.

Camilla Nielsson spent more than three years making her film *Democrats*, a unique look at the efforts to write a new constitution and establish a modern democracy in Zimbabwe. In *Warriors from the North* Søren Steen Jespersen and Nasib Farah shine a light on what drives young Somali-Danish men to go fight a holy war.

None of these films offer unequivocal answers or easy solutions. That's their strength. They provide nuanced and conscientious cinematic depictions of complex issues, and invite the audience to think for themselves.

Then there are films that put their hope for a better world right up front in the title. Hanna Polak, who worked 14 years on *Something Better to Come*, wants to reflect the human dignity and beauty found among children living on Europe's biggest landfill. Elsewhere, the aging biodynamic farmer in Phie Ambo's *Good Things Await* is convinced that he's the vanguard of a movement towards sustainable agriculture.

The other Danish contributions to IDFA have their own important stories to tell about being human in the year 2014. They all remind us, again, that art, and film, can make us smarter. Not by telling us what to think and do, but by providing sensory experiences that promote reflection and inspire hope for humanity.

Henrik Bo Nielsen, CEO, Danish Film Institute

NEWS & NOTES



Songs from the Soil Photo: Phie Ambo

SONGS FROM THE SOIL

NEW FILM. As she was making her new film *Good Things Await*, about an idealistic farmer working according to biodynamic principles (read page 28), Phie Ambo was inspired to create an experimental piece, *Songs from the Soil*, depicting nature's transformations over the course of a year in images and music only.

"I wanted to see how far I could take a story that exclusively works in an associative way with images and sound. A story that challenges how we experience beautiful and ugly – and perhaps can take us to another place in our consciousness

by lingering on things that don't normally get our attention, for instance the combination of colours on a yellow and black snail shell, an orange reflection in a lake alongside bright green duckweed, a red earthworm pulling out of black soil," says the director, adding: "I wanted to break out of my own concepts of 'real' dramaturgy and get to a more sensual, and perhaps truer, description of nature changing over time."

The renowned vocal group Theatre of Voices, singing Jóhan Jóhannsson's expressive choral work in *Good Things Await*, are also lending their voices to *Songs from the Soil*, performing music by Arvo Pärt. Ambo's "visual poem," as the director calls her film, premieres at CPH:DOX 2014 accompanied by a live performance by Theatre of Voices and will also be released on DVD. The film is produced by Malene Flindt Pedersen for Viola Film, Phie Ambo's own company. AH

The Act of Killing Photo: Anonymous



THE ACT OF KILLING

IDFA 2014. Joshua Oppenheimer takes the concept of staged reality to a new, shocking level in his film from 2012 where killers from Indonesia's mass murder replay their infamous deeds for the camera. *The Act of Killing* is part of IDFA's Framing Reality programme of ten hybrid films, each followed by talks at the EYE Film Museum with Joshua Oppenheimer, Jon Bang Carlsen (see next page) and others. Oppenheimer's *The Look of Silence* is presented in Masters.

NEWS & NOTES

WORKING FOR AFGHAN JUSTICE

NEW FILM. *Afghan Justice* is the story of Kimberley Motley who left her husband and three children in America to work as a defence lawyer in Kabul. She is the only foreign lawyer, not to mention the only woman, who has a license

to work in Afghan courts. What was initially a financially driven personal decision has quickly developed into an obligation towards the underdeveloped Afghan legal system. But time is running out. Nobody knows what will happen in Afghanistan when the last international troops leave. Or when the risk will be too high for Kimberley to stay in the country and continue her work for justice. *Afghan Justice* is directed by Nicole N. Horanyi (*Au Pair, The Devilles*) and is produced by Helle Faber for Made in Copenhagen. The film was pitched at last year's IDFA Forum and is expected to release in spring 2015. NØ

Afghan Justice. Framenrab



MASTER OF HYBRID FILMS

IDFA 2014. While "hybrid" is a term that has been applied to many boundary-bending documentaries in recent years, the notion is hardly new to director Jon Bang Carlsen. A grand old man of Danish documentary filmmaking, Bang Carlsen made his debut in 1973 and has since refined and perfected his method of "staged documentarism". Part of IDFA's Framing Reality programme is the director's classic from 1981, *Hotel of the Stars*. In this documentary comedy, extras and acting hopefuls living in Hollywood's legendary Montecito Hotel play themselves in a

story about big dreams of fame and the reality of crime and poverty that goes with them. Jon Bang Carlsen's cinematic ode to felines, *Cats in Riga*, is showcased in IDFA's Paradoxs, a programme embracing films on the borders between documentary and art. For more information about the two films, see reverse section.



Cats in Riga Photo: Jon Bang Carlsen



Olmo & the Seagull Photo: Zentropa

LIFE WITH A CHILD

NEW FILM. *Olmo & the Seagull* by Lea Glob (Denmark) and Petra Costa (Brazil) is an existential journey into a woman's mind during the nine months of her pregnancy. The collaboration between the two directors began in 2012 with CPH:DOX's international talent programme DOX:LAB.

For the past 10 years Olivia has been an actress with the famous Théâtre du Soleil company, where she met her boyfriend Serge, who is also her acting partner. Part Italian diva, part punk rocker, Olivia has been used to being the centre of attention her whole life. That abruptly changes when she's 34 and finds out she's pregnant.

Translating this emotionally charged time in the couple's life into dramatic

reenactments, *Olmo & the Seagull* is a hybrid film with roots in classical theatre performance. The two actors are themselves but at the same time dramatising their feelings about life with a child. At first, the couple is delighted. But the months of Olivia's pregnancy unfold as a rite of passage for Olivia who has to confront her inner demons and deeply seated fears while slowly trying to put together a new philosophy of life and love.

Lea Glob won a Gold Panda Award for Most Innovative Documentary at the Sichuan TV Festival in China for her graduation film *Meeting My Father Kasper Top Hat*. *Olmo & the Seagull* is her first feature. Petra Costa's first short film, *Undertow Eyes*, screened at MoMA and won awards at several festivals. Her feature *Elena*, which premiered at IDFA, was the most watched documentary in Brazil in 2013. *Olmo & the Seagull* is produced by Charlotte Pedersen for Zentropa. The film world premieres at CPH:DOX 2014. NØ



Hotel of the Stars Photo: Jon Bang Carlsen

THE SOUND OF A REVOLUTION

NEW FILM. Director Inuk Silis Høegh and creative producer Emile Hertling Péronard have made a film about one of Greenland's most popular bands, Sume, whose songs kick-started the first big showdown with Danish colonial rule.

In the 1970s, the young, political rock band Sume gave voice to Greenlanders' longing for freedom and co-determination. After the release of their first album in Greenlandic in 1973, concepts like "revolution" and "oppression" found their way into the Greenlandic

language, and soon the country was engaged in its first big showdown with colonial Denmark – and with its own self-understanding.

Sume's songs instantly captivated the young and provoked the old. After decades of modernisation and Danification, Greenlanders had to stop and take a stand: Where are we? Where are we going? The band's name means "where" in Greenlandic and the title of their first album, "Sumut," means "whereto."

Sume – The Sound of a Revolution is the first Greenlandic film about the country's modern history and the first feature-length documentary produced in Greenland. The film is produced by Anorak Film with Bullitt Film and Jabfilm as co-producers. Premiere at CPH:DOX 2014. *NØ*



Sume – The Sound of a Revolution Photo: Anorak Film



Eskimo Diva Photo: Henrik Bohn Ipsen

THE COURAGE TO BE WHO YOU ARE

NEW FILMS. What's it like to be a young LGBT person in a conservative, tradition-bound society? Two new Danish films take us to Greenland's capital Nuuk and to America's Bible Belt.

Eskimo Diva
Nuka, a young gay man from Nuuk, Greenland, in 2009 found himself on the rooftop of an apartment building

with the intent of committing suicide. Fortunately, he instead ventured – singlehandedly, at the age of 19 – to organise Greenland's first gay pride parade. Now, five years of gay pride later, the incidence of hate crimes and bullying in Nuuk has reportedly gone down.

Director Lene Stæhr's *Eskimo Diva* tracks Nuka and his friend and faithful companion Lu on tour with their shocking-pink drag show to tiny settlements across Greenland in the dead of Arctic winter.

Stæhr calls her film "an odyssey through psychedelic Greenlandic scenery, featuring death, a sexual revolution and a boy who becomes a man." Produced by Lene Børglum for Space Rocket Nation. Expected release in 2015.

Misfits
"The characters in my film have the courage to be themselves in the face of massive resistance, and



Misfits Photo: Hannu Kaki

that's the feeling I want the audience to take away," says director Jannik Splidsboel about *Misfits*, his coming-of-age documentary about three American teenagers from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the consequences of coming out as a young LGBT person in the Bible Belt.

With public opinion about gays in America slowly changing, *Misfits* closely follows Ben, D and Larissa as they struggle to achieve a sense of self within their families and in a community that still widely condemns homosexuality and where exorcisms are not unheard as a "cure" for sexual deviancy.

Splidsboel's previous films include the internationally acclaimed *How Are You*, about the artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset, which was selected for the 2011 Berlinale. *Misfits* is produced by Sara Stockmann for Sonntag Pictures. Expected release in February 2015. *NØ*

// FILM //

DANISH FILMS
IDFA DIGITAL ISSUE
2014

CHECK OUT THE
DANISH LINE-UP
FOR IDFA AT
DFI.DK/FILM



BIG TIME

UPCOMING. Danish architect Bjarke Ingels, the founder of the architectural firm BIG, is known worldwide for his innovative thinking and groundbreaking building designs. For several years, director Kaspar Astrup Schröder has been following Ingels working on an ambitious project in New York, a residential block on West 57th Street in Manhattan. The resulting film, *Big Time*, will also, on a more general level, focus on Ingel's search for new ways to help us design the life we really want to live beyond mere trends and traditions. Ingels was also cast in Astrup Schröder's *My Playground*, a film about parkour and freerunning with much of the action taking place on and around BIG projects in Copenhagen. *Big Time* is expected to release in 2016.



Architect Bjarke Ingels Photo: Kaspar Astrup Schröder/FOST



The Visit Photo: Magic Hour Films

"What I would like to achieve is somewhat parallel to Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. Of course we don't know if an encounter with Alien intelligent life will ever take place. Nevertheless, the mere speculation of the potential existence of Aliens and our reactions to them is, to my mind, extremely stimulating. Without dreams Columbus would never have set sail."

Director Michael Madsen

Photo from Michael Madsen's *The Visit* which explores the hypothetical scenario of an Alien visit to Earth. Produced by Magic Hour Films. Release 2015.

FILMS & PEOPLE

■ Writer Jakob Ejersbo made a splash with his neo-realistic first novel *Angels in Fast Motion*, turned into a film by Ole Christian Madsen in 2005. Before his untimely death at age 40, Ejersbo made a final request: to have his ashes spread over Africa from the top of Kilimanjaro. **Jakob Ejersbo** by Christian Bonke (*Ballroom Dancer*) follows Ejersbo's two best friends as they make a trip to Tanzania with the writer's ashes. Through this expedition we get to know the press-shy novelist

who wrote with death at his heels. Produced by Christianbonke.com. In development.

■ Ahmad Jalali Farahani, an exiled filmmaker and newspaper editor from Iran who was persecuted and tortured by the regime, first came to Denmark to promote *Sofar*, a film about Iranian underground culture. Farahani, who later gained asylum in Denmark, is now bringing out *We Are Journalists*, about the many Iranian journalists who like himself struggled to survive under the Ahmadinejad regime. Produced by Danish Doc Productions with support

from the New Danish Screen talent scheme. Premiere at CPH:DOX 2014.

■ In fall 2007, a student named Amanda Knox arrived in Perugia, Italy, for a year-long study abroad programme. A few weeks later, Knox was arrested for the murder of her flatmate. Since then, Amanda Knox has become the center of one of the most famous murder cases of the past 50 years. Gaining exclusive access for their film *Amanda*, Brian McGinn and Rod Blackhurst interview Knox and key persons in the case, including Amanda's ex-boyfriend and co-convict

Raffaele Sollecito. Produced by Plus Pictures. Expected release in 2015.

■ Charlie Siem is a young "rock star" classical musician trying to balance his career as a successful violinist with lucrative modeling offers from brands like Dior and Armani. Siem is the starting point for Eva Mulvad's *A Modern Man*, a journey into the world of classical music. Mulvad made *Enemies of Happiness* (2006), winner at IDFA and Sundance, and *The Good Life* (2010), awarded at Karlovy Vary. Produced by Danish Documentary Production. Expected release in 2015.

HOLDING A MIRROR TO HORROR

Masters / IDFA 2014



The Look of Silence sees Joshua Oppenheimer back in uncharted territory. While *The Act of Killing* took a surreal look at Indonesia's genocide through the imagination of the killers, his follow-up tells the victims' story through a young optician boldly confronting the men who killed his brother – and who are still in power.

festivals. As promised, this would be a counterpart to *The Act of Killing*, a film about the victimised families of the 1965 massacres to mirror the prior film about the perpetrators. He had conceived of the idea while editing *The Act of Killing*:

“Especially in my longer original cut, almost every disturbing sequence ends in an abrupt cut to an almost silent landscape, usually with a lone figure. I had this feeling that every time we would make these abrupt shifts from Anwar’s dialogue scenes to these tableaux, we were also abruptly shifting the perspective of the film, creating these haunted spaces to honour and commemorate the absent dead.”

“And,” he continues, “I had the feeling there was another film to be made, equally contemporary, in which we enter those silent tableaux and imagine what it would be like to have to build a life here out of the rubble, to have to survive surrounded by these perpetrators who are still in power.”

As for finding a protagonist – someone brave enough to speak truth to Indonesian power; someone not content to suffer in silence with the label of “victim” – Oppenheimer had already met his man.

The Worm Turns

Oppenheimer first came to Indonesia in 2001 to make *The Globalisation Tapes*, whose account of union struggles and free-market militarism introduced him to the fear that still shrouds the country. There was one name that always came up – “as almost synonymous with the genocide, a kind of synecdoche for 1965. I gradually came to understand the reason was that his death had witnesses.”

“I had the feeling there was another film to be made.”

Like tens of thousands of others, Ramli had been abducted at night and taken down to Snake River to be killed and dispatched into the waters. But Ramli managed to escape, wounded; after a commotion in the road, he had crawled all the way back home to his parents, where his killers again found him; claiming that they would take him to hospital (and threatening otherwise to round up the rest of the family), they left him for dead at a nearby creek because it was nearing daybreak, only to be called back again by passersby who’d seen him struggling and calling for help. Finally, we’re told in another boastful confessional scene which Oppenheimer had recorded long back in 2003, his killers cut off his penis and left him for dead in the plantation in which Oppenheimer filmed *The Globalisation Tapes*.

“Ramli,” says Oppenheimer, “was somehow irrefutable proof of the events that had traumatised everybody – that everybody knew about but that the

By Nick Bradshaw

Last year, as *The Act of Killing* swept its way around the world, we were treated to a radical demonstration in the partialities, the pretences and the instabilities of history. Rarely has the word of the winners been shown up on film in such naked ugliness and ongoing mendacity. Finding, in a corner of the fourth most populous country in the world, that the poor were still too terrified and persecuted to speak out against ongoing exploitation, nearly half a century after an estimated minimum of a million suspected leftists had been slaughtered in a military-led purge, Joshua Oppenheimer instead trained his lens on the people who would speak freely: the now-aged perpetrators of those killings, who still rule the roost by boasting about their bloody triumphs, with the implication that they would and could repeat the feats if it were deemed necessary.

When Oppenheimer came across a group of former killers who were also movie mad, with ideas of their own about how to write history on screen, the square was circled. As Anwar and company let their mouths run and the cameras roll, they began to see themselves as we would begin to see them; the more layers of rationalisation, justification, dissimulation and unspeakable truth they wrapped around the film, the more there was to uncover. The resulting movie was traumatically eye-opening for just about everyone involved, including most of us tied to such a country by trade and political alliance. And, of course, as much as the film exposed such a polity, it also challenged it.

Before he left Indonesia for good (he no longer feels safe returning), Oppenheimer filmed a second movie; less than six months after accompanying *The Act of Killing* to the Oscars, he was ready to unveil *The Look of Silence* at the Venice and Toronto film

regime at least officially had threatened everyone into pretending had not occurred. To talk about Ramli was almost to pinch yourself to remind yourself you're awake; to remember the truth."

Ramli's parents, Rohani and Rukun, had one more child after Ramli died; we see Rohani reminding him that he was to be Ramli's replacement, the only thing to save her sanity. Adi, as Oppenheimer tells it, grew up different from the others: surrounded by fear, but not afraid like his remaining elder siblings, who had all witnessed Ramli's abduction and murder; burdened but empowered by his mother's words; angry at the victim-blaming lies taught him in school, and now taught his children; determined to educate himself out of poverty; "questing" in his desire to understand what had really happened in 1965 and why.

"I can't think of another film in which a survivor of political violence, or a relative of a victim, confronts a perpetrator while the perpetrators are still in power."

Adi was one of the original contacts who suggested, in 2003, that Oppenheimer open his camera to the killers – and would help him find them, including the two who owned up to Ramli's killing. And he would watch the resulting footage intently, even when Oppenheimer's investigations took him away from the plantation villages to Medan and the gangsters who would become the focus of *The Act of Killing*. "He'd react with outrage, sadness," says Oppenheimer. "I remember him saying, 'This is

the tiger that's sleeping just under the floor in Indonesia' – an image of repression, of something potent just under the surface."

Come 2012 and Oppenheimer's return to shoot his companion piece, it was Adi who suggested, rather than simply reprise their efforts to gather survivors on camera, that they film Adi meeting Ramli's killers. Amir Hasan, the presiding executioner, had died since confessing for Oppenheimer's camera in 2003, but they identified five who were still alive, able to talk and directly connected to the killings in Ramli's village.

So just as *The Act of Killing* served as its own making-of, recording what happened as Anwar shot its scenes ("the method begets the story", as Oppenheimer summarises), so *The Look of Silence* proceeds from its own making, with Adi watching Oppenheimer's old footage in which killers confess, then paying them a visit. It's a narrative straight out of wish-fulfillment fiction – the return/revenge-of-the-repressed archetypes of *High Plains Drifter*, or *The Bride Wore Black* – and like almost nothing in factual cinema.

As Oppenheimer says, "I had this feeling we were entering totally uncharted waters. I can't think of another film in which a survivor of political violence, or a relative of a victim, confronts a perpetrator while the perpetrators are still in power."

All Asunder

This unbroken ground was disorienting for everyone involved. Oppenheimer describes the precautions Adi, he and his producer Signe Byrge Sørensen took before each set-piece interview – taking no



The Look of Silence Photo: Lars Skree



The Look of Silence Photo: Lars Skree

FAMILY OF SURVIVORS. It was through Joshua Oppenheimer's initial footage of the killers of Indonesia's genocide that Adi (below) and his parents (above and overleaf) discover the identity of the men who murdered their brother and son Ramli.

Indonesian crew and no ID other than mobile phones with only the numbers of their respective embassies stored; readying two getaway cars to mislead any would-be pursuers, and having their bags packed so they could all leave immediately for the airport. "They're the ones who've committed crimes, but we were the ones seen as bandits," he agrees.

As for Adi: "You just felt he was absolutely saying the unsayable, right to their faces," says Oppenheimer. "One way he's able to get away with it of course is his own quiet and calm, his empathy and dignity." At one point in the film he even hazards telling the leader of the Komando Aksi death squads, who is trying to back down from his earlier boasts, "I think you're trying to avoid your moral responsibility." In another confrontation, the head of the local legislature threatens: "If you keep making an issue of the past – it will definitely happen again."

"What can I say – those were frightening moments," says Oppenheimer. "I was often asked by audiences about *The Act of Killing*: wasn't I afraid, shooting it? And really the only times were when the perpetrators themselves would doubt what

they were doing. But in this one, getting to those moments was the crux of the movie. So yes, we were afraid."

"Magical realism is perhaps the only genre for dealing with atrocity in the context of total impunity. Because of the sorcery and magic that becomes inevitable when you have repression and horror."

Yet if they feared for their footing, so too did their hosts. "As with *The Act of Killing*, one of the reasons perpetrators don't want to look honestly at what they've done, and its meaning, is because they wouldn't be able to live with themselves any more," says Oppenheimer. "Also, of course, there's a fear of revenge. And then, they were presumably confused: this man is speaking like a victim accusing us, but he's with Joshua – and they knew me, and knew I'd been working with their commanders and other powerful perpetrators. So what is happening here? I think that gave them second thoughts, if they were

considering reacting violently in the moment. I had this feeling we were entering totally uncharted territory in these meetings, and they were astonished.”

What Lies Beneath

As with *The Act of Killing*, Oppenheimer has not only provoked and exposed a politically and emotionally shattering situation through his work with striking and tragic characters, but found startlingly bold images with which to film it. One are the optical lenses with which Adi fits his interviewees while asking them to tell their stories: Adi trained as, of all things, an optician, and as we see at the start of the film spends many of his working days travelling to old people’s homes and asking them about the past while testing their eyes.

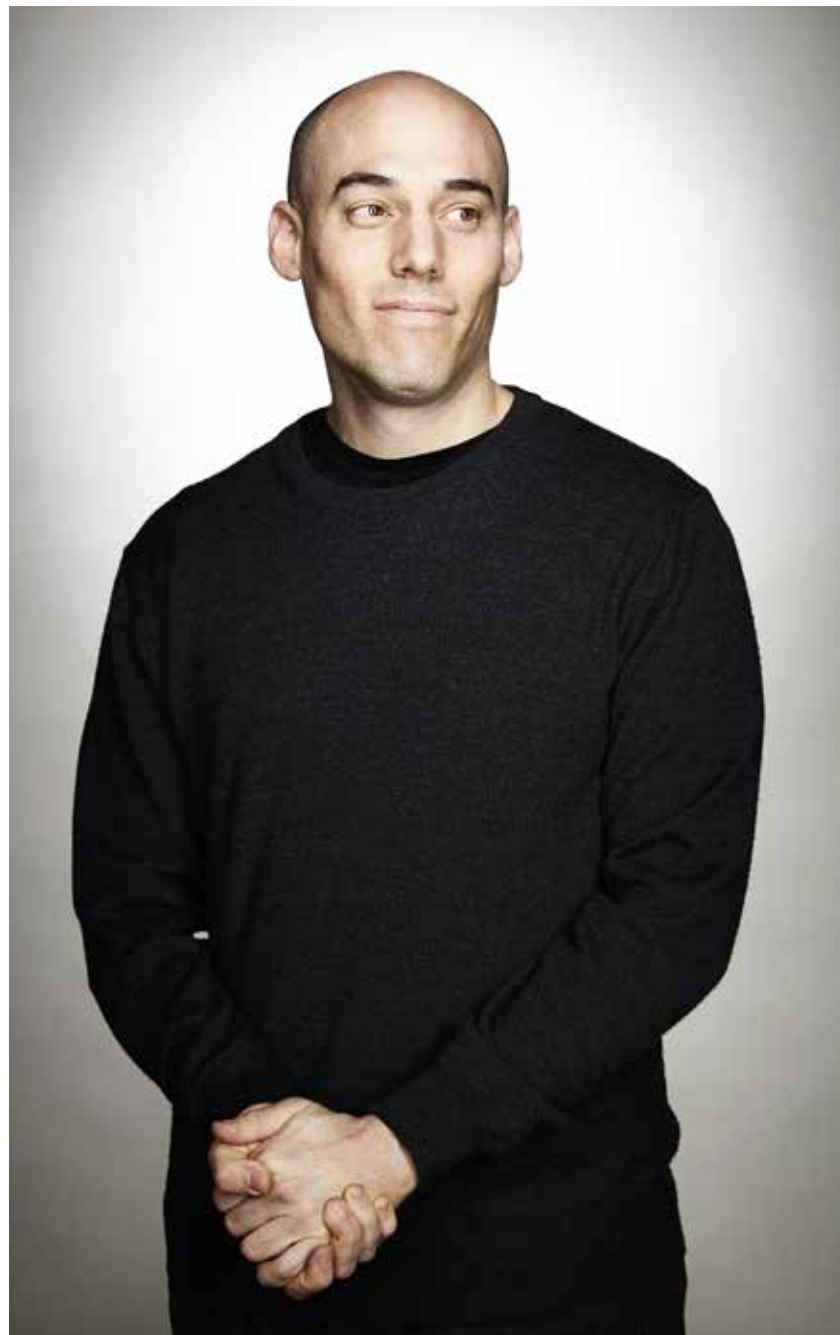
Another visual motif is that of jumping beans, with which Adi’s children play, and which bookend the film. Oppenheimer cites a couple of other favourite shots: light streaming through the clapboards of Adi’s parents’ house at night (“this sense of pressure, this energy inside”), and an overtaking motorbike carrying a burlap sack stuffed with live ducks, their heads hanging out and squawking (“a sense of contained energy, anguish, multitudes”).

“Documentaries dealing with atrocities far too often tell us there’s going to be some truth commission, some campaigning human-rights advocates, and we can trust in them to put things right. I think the point is that nothing will be put right.”

The magic beans had reminded Oppenheimer of earlier thoughts, at the beginning of his Indonesian sojourn, of Macondo in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: “the massacre that just makes sense of everything you’d read up until the point that it’s spoken about; the vortex around which the whole book swirls. Magical realism is perhaps the only genre for dealing with atrocity in the context of total impunity. Because of the sorcery and magic that becomes inevitable when you have repression and horror. Because things haunt. Ghosts are abroad.”

After the Battle

Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of Indonesia’s genocide. Oppenheimer talks about *The Act of Killing* having helped open a space in which Indonesians could speak the truth about their history in public – though not one the government has yet made use of, beyond a cursory acknowledgement, prompted by the film’s Oscar



Joshua Oppenheimer Photo: Daniel Bergeron

Joshua Oppenheimer

Born in 1974, USA. Oppenheimer is based in Copenhagen, where he is a partner at the production company Final Cut for Real. Artistic director of the International Centre for Documentary and Experimental Film, University of Westminster. Recipient of a MacArthur Genius Grant (2015-2019). Has worked for over a decade with militias, death squads and their victims to explore the relationship between political violence and the public imagination.

His debut feature-length film, *The Act of Killing* (2012), was named Film of the Year in the 2013 Sight and Sound Film Poll. It won 72 international awards, including the European Film Award 2013, BAFTA 2014 and Asia Pacific Screen Award 2013, and was Oscar-nominated in 2014 for Best Documentary. *The Look of Silence* (2014) premiered in competition at Venice Film Festival, where it won five awards, including the Grand Prize of the Jury.



The Look of Silence Photo: Lars Skree

nomination, that wrongs were done, though reconciliation will come when the government so chooses.

This film, he hopes, will help people make the most of that space: “to have an easier time making a difference; to make the need for truth, and of reconciling the country to its past, something irrefutable among ordinary Indonesians, just as *The Act of Killing* was an object lesson in the need for justice, of the dangers of impunity and the moral vacuum to which total impunity leads.

“And what we see in Adi’s almost failed and tragic mission,” he adds, “is that that process is not going to come from one individual” – any more than it can be dictated from above. “There was a truth and reconciliation process in South Africa because the apartheid regime fell. There were the Nuremberg trials because the Nazis lost. That’s not going to happen in Indonesia until there’s real social change.”

At the same time, the film’s aims are deeper than either advocacy or therapy: it is art before it is a tool.

“Documentaries dealing with atrocities far too often tell us there’s going to be some truth commission, some campaigning human-rights advocates, and we can trust in them, or in justice, or in the outrage of the audience, to put things right,” says Oppenheimer.

“I think the point is that nothing will be put right. You have to move on, but you can’t fix everything that’s been destroyed, all the opportunities, the hope and the lives lost. I hope this film leaves an indelible sense that the damage done to the survivors’ families, to their lives, is irreversible, that nothing will wake the dead” ■

The article was first published in FILM Digital Fall Issue 2014.

The Look of Silence, selected for Masters at IDFA, is produced by Signe Byrge Sørensen for Final Cut for Real. For more information, see reverse section.

“ESSENTIAL COMPANION PIECE”

The Look of Silence drew high praise from critics across the board after the film’s world premiere at Venice Film Festival in August. Here is a run-down of the first international reviews:

“This film is just as piercingly and authentically horrifying as before. It is filmed with exactly the same superb visual sense, the same passionate love of the Indonesian landscape, and dialogue exchanges are captured with the same chilling crispness.”

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*

“This is an essential companion piece to Oppenheimer’s earlier film; another astonishing heart-of-darkness voyage into the jungle of human nature.”

Robbie Collin, *The Telegraph*

“The film reveals Oppenheimer to be a documentary stylist of evolving grace and sophistication. [Danish cinematographer] Lars Skree’s luminescent lensing provides an invaluable assist to the range and depth of testimony on show here.”

Guy Lodge, *Variety*

“It’s a gripping but also often tense and uncomfortable viewing experience as Adi confronts men who were all in varying degrees responsible for his brother’s death and that of thousands of others.”

Lee Marshall, *Screen International*

“[The Look of Silence is] the story of a remarkable effort of will: to stare straight into the dark heart of a mass murder that everyone else (even other victims) wants forgotten. And Oppenheimer’s skill as a storyteller seems boundless, especially enhanced by having such an extraordinarily sympathetic on-camera interviewer as Adi.”

Jessica Kiang, *Indiewire*

“The Look of Silence is perhaps even more riveting for focusing on one man’s personal search for answers as he bravely confronts his brother’s killers.”

Deborah Young, *The Hollywood Reporter*



BUILDING A TRUE CREATIVE SPACE

Signe Byrge Sørensen has produced both of Joshua Oppenheimer's films bringing to light the human consequences of the Indonesian genocide. Her collaboration with the American-born director has proven long-lasting and fertile.

It all began in 2007, when Signe Byrge Sørensen was attending a seminar in Copenhagen and watched a sequence from a documentary project that made her sit up straight. In the sequence, two perpetrators from the Indonesian genocide are re-enacting a scene by a river in a rural area outside Medan.

"The scene provoked me violently, and I got extremely curious to hear the whole story," Byrge Sørensen says. She went straight home and called up the film's director, Joshua Oppenheimer, who was filming in Indonesia, and asked if he needed a producer.

He did. Although he had a clear vision for his film, which was later to become *The Act of Killing*, he could use professional assistance to structure and fund it.

Initially, Byrge Sørensen's role was to find a form for the film that would allow it to reach a wide audience. Her role has grown, however, into something so much more. As Oppenheimer says, his collaboration, and friendship, with his producer helped make him the director he is today.

"Directors who wish to make artistically challenging films may long for a producer who just leaves them alone. This is a mistake. You need a producer curious enough to fully understand your vision, so that she can challenge you and work with you to create the best creative process to realise that vision. You need somebody who cares enough to explain that process to others, and to defend it. And you need somebody humble enough to admit mistakes and change the process, when necessary. In short, you need a fully engaged creative partner. Somebody like Signe. That's how a true creative space is built."

The Act of Killing (2012) was nominated for an Oscar in 2014. *The Look of Silence* (2014) world premiered at Venice Film Festival, where it won five awards, including the Grand Prize of the Jury.

MEETING THE AUDIENCE

How would you describe the audience's reaction to *The Look of Silence* at Venice Film Festival and later in Telluride and Toronto?

People seem deeply affected coming out of the film – moved and shaken. Of course, the audience was also moved by *The Act of Killing*, but this is a different feeling. The film is so intimate. *The Act of Killing* is intimate as well, but it's an intimacy that makes the viewer uncomfortable, and is intended to. Here it's an intimacy we can embrace.

I think the most important part of the reactions in Venice, Telluride and Toronto was having Adi, the main character of the film, present in the audience. He wanted to sit through every screening. And afterwards, when the audience would clap, Adi would feel like finally his family's story and the story of the survivors in Indonesia – which had been buried in layers of silence and fear for 50 years – was being heard. I think it was both healing and overwhelming for Adi. And quite devastating.

In Venice, for instance, after the film's first public screening, Adi stood there in the spotlight by our chairs and simply broke down. The audience, I think, was moved to witness that, and gave Adi a standing ovation. Adi stood there crying and hugged me for the longest time, until he was finally able to leave the theatre. It lasted something like 10 minutes, with the audience standing and applauding him and his courage. It was the most powerful experience that I have ever had in a movie theatre.

Why do you think these screenings were so extremely powerful?

One of the reasons, I think, is that although Adi fails in his mission in the film, the audience's presence, witnessing the film, means he succeeds in the end. He fails in the film, in the sense that he goes to meet these killers, hoping they will acknowledge what they have done is wrong, so that he can forgive them, and none of them can.

But the audience knows they are witnessing something unprecedented, namely a survivor confronting the perpetrators, while the perpetrators are still in power and where there is no possibility of justice, at least not for the moment. The viewers know that they are helping to deliver what the survivors are asking for. So the audience, I think, feels very active somehow in this film. They feel involved. They feel they are making history with Adi.

I think this is possible because Adi gives a space to the viewer, a character as quiet as he is. And

"The reception has been far beyond what I could have hoped for." Talking to FILM about the reactions to *The Look of Silence*, Joshua Oppenheimer recalls the powerful experience of watching his film for the first time with its main character Adi and reflects on the consequences the film is having for Adi and his family.



mysterious. There is something mysterious about Adi, even to me, and I've known him for a long time. You have to imagine and put yourself in his shoes in order to feel him, to grab hold of him. I think that gives room for the viewers to make the film *their* film.

What happens to Adi and his family now that the film is out?

Well, one of the terrible ironies of the film is that a man who goes to forgive people actually should be treated like a fugitive as a result and find himself forced to move far from home to escape danger. In the film, Adi goes to meet people, hoping that when they meet the brother of their victim, they will recognise the fact that they killed a human being and realise that they've done something wrong and apologise. If they could do that, Adi felt he would be able to separate the crime, as it were, from the human being, as the criminal is no longer justifying his crime. And Adi would be able to forgive them. As he says to his mother in the film: he hopes to be able to live side by side with them as human beings instead of as perpetrator and victim divided by fear.

We have worked with Adi and his family intensively for six months before the film came out to try and make the best of this bad situation and help them build a life that is better in many ways than what they had in North Sumatra. They have had to move thousands of miles from home, to another part of Indonesia. Now they are in a community of filmmakers, journalists and human rights activists, people who are very supportive of what Adi has done through this film. His children are in much better schools than before. There are new opportunities

opening up for the family. But it's also really sad that he should have to move away from home. Until there is truth, reconciliation, and genuine rule of law, the film cannot really have a happy ending.

Opening in Indonesia 10 November, what impact do you expect the film will have there?

The Indonesian premiere, open to the public, is taking place in Indonesia's largest theatre. It's being held by the National Human Rights Commission, a state organisation, and by the Jakarta Arts Council, a part of the city government. The fact that the film is being presented by the government, in public, makes this the single most important screening of either *The Look of Silence* or *The Act of Killing*. I feel as though our love letter to Indonesia has not only reached its destination, but is finally being read aloud, by the state, the people.

A new president came to power in October, and he is far more progressive than the last (Joko Widodo is the first president not to have come from the military or political elite, *ed.*). So there's a chance he will embrace the film. Younger Indonesian, people who are not accomplices of the military dictatorship, nor survivors traumatised by what happened, but young people raising their children in a society that they would like to be a democracy, I think they will embrace the film and say, 'Look, we need to deal with our past.'

To me, Adi provides such a luminous example of how truth, justice and reconciliation are attainable, and what that might look like. He teaches us so much about why truth and reconciliation matter and the issues and traumas that invariably go with it ■

VENICE RED CARPET. Producer Signe Byrge Sørensen, director Joshua Oppenheimer and Adi, the protagonist of *The Look of Silence*, talking to Venice festival director Alberto Barbera.

Feature-Length & DOC U Competitions / IDFA 2014

For 14 years Hanna Polak has been tracking homeless children in Moscow. Now the Polish director is presenting the fruit of her labour, *Something Better to Come*, a Danish-produced documentary sending the message that you can be a success as a human being even if you are living in a landfill.

By Per Juul Carlsen

There's a simple way to gauge a filmmaker's enthusiasm for their project. Ask a question like "How did you come up with the idea for the film?" and time the length of their answer. A typical reply from an engaged director lasts 3-4 minutes, while a highly dedicated filmmaker might take 7-10 minutes. At least, that's my experience. When I asked the Polish filmmaker Hanna Polak how she came up with the idea for *Something Better to Come*, her answer maxed out at 17 minutes.

"In 1999 I got involved in aid work in Russia. We were a group of friends who donated toys to orphanages and organised dinners for elderly poor people. One day, when I was walking through an underground station in Moscow, I ran into some homeless kids sniffing glue. I hung out and talked with them and realised that homeless children are a common sight in Russia. They did drugs and smoked and sniffed glue and had a hard life, but they were still kids. I thought, 'It's impossible to live like this.'

"I couldn't sleep for days and was really upset emotionally. We're talking about many, many children. So I went back with some of my friends who had also been touched and we tried to help the kids."

Hope amidst Garbage

That's how Polak's documentary *Something Better to Come* got its start. For Polak, it was initially about aid work, not filmmaking – until the day in 2001 when she decided to photograph and then film the children. By 2004, she had enough footage to make *The Children of Leningradsky*, a 35-minute documentary about homeless children at Moscow's Leningradsky station. The film was nominated for an Oscar and made Polak's name as a director.

The homeless children living in train stations led Polak to even more shocking locations. At a Moscow landfill she came across a community of homeless people living among mountains of garbage, wild dogs and huge bulldozers. Among them was a girl, Yula, who was 11 when Polak first met her. Yula had come to the dump with her father and mother, as they lived in poverty and had no food. Her father later died at the dump. Now, Yula was dreaming of starting a family and living a normal life.

Polak traces this dream in her feature-length documentary, an incredible story of hope amidst garbage. The film shows people living under nightmarish conditions, with vodka practically taking the place of running water.

The Children Are Family

"This is a highly unusual project, especially because the shooting conditions were extremely difficult. It's illegal to be in the landfill and filming is absolutely prohibited. No one wants the conditions at the dump to be made public. Everything is illegal. And it's a dangerous place. You could get killed by wild dogs or run over by heavy machinery. There's a lot of crime. It's a nation within the nation. It was dangerous for me, but it's even more dangerous for the people who live there. If they are hurt, they can't call an ambulance. Officially, the inhabitants of the garbage dump don't exist."

"It's illegal to be in the landfill and filming is absolutely prohibited. No one wants the conditions at the dump to be made public."

Something Better to Come is the fruit of 14 years among the homeless kids in Moscow. The film and Polak's work to help the homeless are so closely connected that it's hard to tell whether she's an aid worker or a filmmaker.

"I'd say I'm a filmmaker, but if I can help out, I do. The film comes out of a desire to do something for these children," Polak says. Over time, she formed such close bonds with some of the children that she acquired a third role, as mother.

"These children are my family. They still are. I'm no longer in contact with many of the children in the film. I don't know if they're doing well or not. Maybe they're alive, maybe not. Sadly, I don't have the time to visit them all. I don't know of the whereabouts of many of them. But I worry about them, so in a way they have become my children. I think they feel the same way. I took care of them. In many cases I didn't know how great their tragedies were. Several of them were victims of sexual abuse, but I had no idea. Their suffering is unfathomable."

SURREAL Hanna Polak captures the lunar atmosphere at the landfill, *svalka* in Russian. Although it lies close to the centre of Moscow, it is secluded, difficult to get into and heavily guarded.

HUMAN BEAUTY IN A RUSSIAN GARBAGE DUMP

Hard to Let Go

While it's not uncommon for documentary filmmakers to bond with the subjects of their films, maybe even fall in love with them, Polak's relationship to the homeless kids in Moscow is unique. Sigrød Dyekjær, who produced *Something Better to Come* for Danish Documentary Production, describes Polak as "one with her material and her film."

"For Hanna, this film is so close to her, so much a part of her life, that letting go of it and finishing it is a journey in itself. It's many years of her life she has to let go of," Dyekjær says.

Polak says she tried to finish the film back in 2005, but somehow that didn't work out.

"I was looking for a producer, but I also wanted to make sure that the film would be in the best hands. It really is my baby. I wanted to be absolutely certain. It had to be in the hands of someone who was as concerned with the project as I was."

According to Dyekjær, who ended up finishing the film with Polak, very few people believed in the filmmaker's vision.

"Hanna is a very singular filmmaker who is willing to go all the way and continually let the material dictate the story. The story wouldn't end until now, and that made it hard for Hanna to get funding for the film."

A Film about Humanity

Polak, who is 47, has such a special relationship to *Something Better to Come* that she almost becomes as much a story as the homeless people she filmed. But that makes no sense to Polak, who for years has been consumed with the importance of getting her story out to the world. The film isn't just about people living in a landfill.



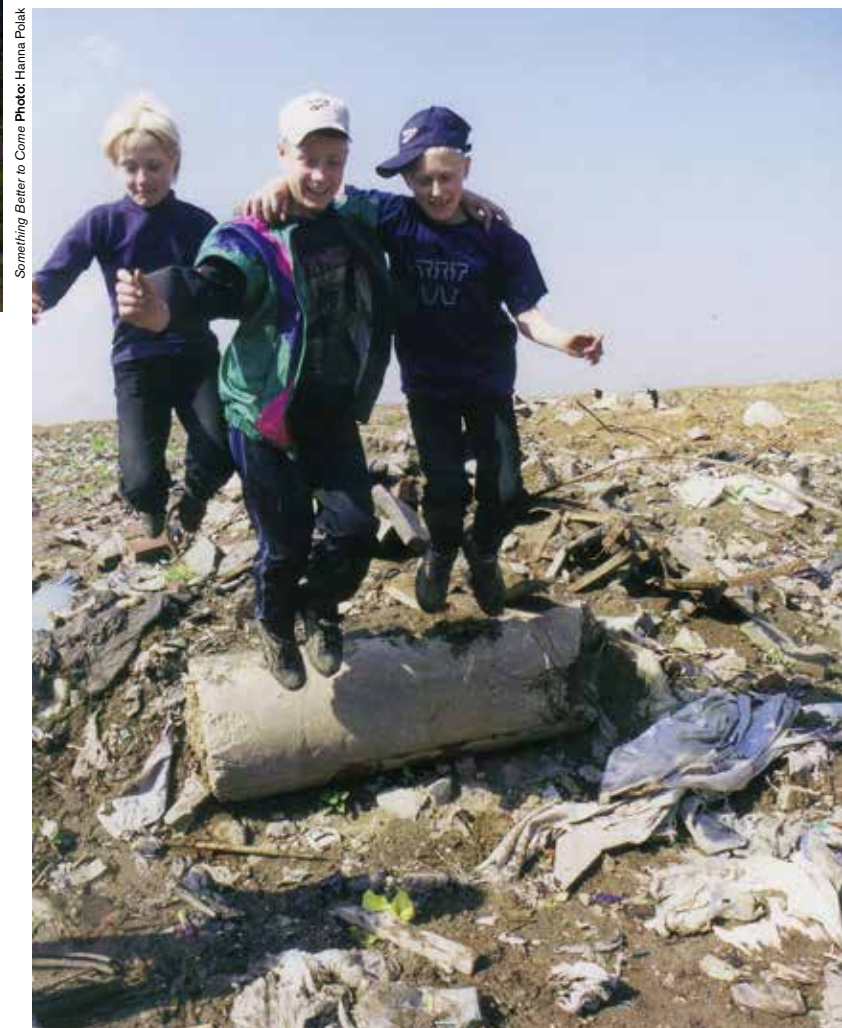
Something Better to Come Photo: Mariusz Miegas



Hanna Polak Photo: Sine Heilmann

Hanna Polak

Director, producer and cinematographer Hanna Polak, born 1967 in Poland, graduated from the Cinematography Institute of the Russian Federation, VGIK, in Moscow in 2007. Polak's *The Children of Leningradsky* (2004), the precursor of *Something Better to Come*, was nominated for an Oscar and two Emmys and won an IDA Award. *Love and Rubbish* (2012), made for the international *Why Poverty?* cross-media initiative, also came out of her time with the children at the garbage dump. Other titles include *AI – Tribute to Albert Maysles* (2004), *Battle of Warsaw 1920 in 3D* (2010), and *Faces of Homelessness* (2010). *Something Better to Come* (2014) is selected for IDFA's Feature-Length Competition.



Something Better to Come Photo: Hanna Polak

POETRY. Hanna Polak wants her film to reflect human dignity and beauty, above all. Despite its sombre story, it is full of warm, uplifting moments.

the inhabitants of the garbage dump need to vent. But, Hanna Polak stresses, she has not made a political film.

"It's a universal story. There's homelessness everywhere in the world. Some homeless children came to my office in Warsaw one day looking for food and they looked exactly like the Russian children. I didn't want to make a clichéd film about Russia and its social problems. I wanted to make a film about human dignity, about the beauty in people. In that sense my film is a modern fairytale."

"Yula had the tenacity to make her dream come true. As a filmmaker, it was an incredible privilege to follow her for so many years. I don't think my camera mattered to her. I think she personally had the strength to do what it takes to get a normal life" ■

Something Better to Come, selected for IDFA's Feature-Length Competition, is produced by Sigrød Dyekjær for Danish Documentary Production and co-produced by Hanna Polak for Hanna Polak Films. For more information, see reverse section.

14 YEARS. When Hanna Polak first started filming, Yula was 11. We follow Yula until she is 25 and finally leaves the garbage dump, pregnant for the second time. She was forced to give her first baby up for adoption, but she hopes to keep this one.

"What's a successful life? These people were not successful materially, but for me they were very successful as human beings. They can feel, they can love, they can share."

"*Something Better to Come* is a film about humanity, about beauty," she says. "Even though they were homeless and living under these conditions, they would do anything for the people they cared about. Often, they would give everything they had to help someone else. They gave their hearts. For me, that raises a question of where humanity begins and ends. What's a successful life? These people were not successful materially, but for me they were very successful as human beings. They can feel, they can love, they can share. That doesn't mean they weren't flawed, but it's incredible to come to such a place and be made to feel welcome."

Russian President Vladimir Putin is evoked several times in the film as a welcome target when



Sigrød Dyekjær Photo: Sine Heilmann

Sigrød Dyekjær

Producer at Danish Documentary Production. Films include *Something Better to Come* (Hanna Polak, 2014), *The Newsroom – Off the Record* (Mikala Krogh, 2014, see page 30), *Ai Weiwei The Fake Case* (Andreas Johnsen, 2013), *A Normal Life* (Mikala Krogh, 2012), *Free the Mind* (Phie Ambo, 2012), *The Good Life* (Eva Mulvad, 2010), *The Monastery* (Pernille Rose Grønkjær, 2006).



WARMTH. *Democrats* is also a story about a friendship emerging across political persuasions, here with the two protagonists and former opponents relishing each other's company.



"I was met with enormous trust by the two negotiators. I told them that I was coming as an anthropologist to collect material. They were glad I didn't come as a journalist with predictable questions about Mugabe."

ON THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

A unique chemistry emerged between filmmaker Camilla Nielsson and the protagonists of *Democrats*, Paul Mangwana and Douglas Mwonzora, former political opponents united by their efforts to write a new constitution for Zimbabwe.

Feature-Length Competition / IDFA 2014

By Tue Steen Müller

"It was such a beautiful night that I cried. They did it!" Camilla Nielsson is referring to the evening scene in *Democrats*, when the Draft Constitution of Zimbabwe is being printed out in a humble printer room at the resort where the final negotiations took place. It was a very emotional moment for the film's two protagonists, Douglas Mwonzora and Paul Mangwana, and for Nielsson and her crew who had been tracking the process over three years starting

in 2010. Now, a new constitution was ready to be put to a national referendum.

After tons of problems and ups and downs, an accord had finally been reached. Following the events leading up to the finished document, outside and behind closed doors, Camilla Nielsson's film provides a unique look at a democratic process that included more than 5,800 public hearings. The idea was to bring proponents of both parties together to discuss the future organisation of the country. While the hearings didn't go by the book, they were held and scores of people travelled great distances to take part in them.

Observing and Collecting

"I arrived in Zimbabwe a month and a half before the work leading to the new constitution was set to begin," Nielsson says. "The Danish journalist Peter Tygesen had got the idea for the film and contacted Henrik Veileborg, producer at Upfront Films, who asked me if I wanted to direct it. Tygesen, who used to live in Zimbabwe, got the necessary permits and I flew down there to talk with Mugabe's chief negotiator Mangwana, of the governing party ZANU-PF, and Mwonzora, of the opposition party MDC-T.

"We talked off the record and I instantly fell in love with them both. Mwonzora was elegant and charming, in touch with the poor people. I believed in him, and in Mangwana, an emotional man – I bonded with him in 20 minutes. He was the one who could open the doors for me, giving me access to track the process. And he did. All three of us thought it was an important story to tell.

"I was met with enormous trust by the two negotiators. I told them that I was coming as an anthropologist to collect material. They were glad I didn't come as a journalist with predictable questions about Mugabe and the dictatorship. They saw me as a neutral presence," she says.

Four years later, after 12 bouts of filming of one to three weeks and 400 hours of footage, the film is ready to be seen around the world. "I record everything," Nielsson says. "I observe."

Nielsson's background shows through. She has a master's in visual anthropology from New York University and learned documentary filmmaking at the Tisch School of the Arts. "Albert Maysles was my mentor. He inspired me so much, while my later work in UNICEF's film department taught me to work in other cultures," she says.



Democrats Photos: Henrik Bohn Ipsen



“The two negotiators built a bridge across the political polarisation. It was a Sisyphean task, but they pulled it off.”

Reverse Stockholm Syndrome

Democrats is a film that at every turn is respectful to the process and the people involved in it. It has a basic tone of optimism, even if it is torpedoed along the way by Mugabe and his people. Mwonzora is arrested at one point when it's opportune to keep him away from the negotiating table, and Mangwana is accused of trying to instigate a coup against the dictator when a paragraph about presidential term limits is reworded.

These and other crucial moments in the negotiating process are caught on film. “The biggest problem, of course, was that we didn't know when something important was going to happen that should be filmed. When to book tickets? What often happened was that Mwonzora or Mangwana would call me up and say, ‘Get down here, something important is going to happen.’ Mangwana also got us access to parliament, even though he was the one who said, ‘No white people get in there.’”

Unfolding chronologically, the film works with its two protagonists' feelings and expectations about the outcome of their efforts. “I want to be friends with my enemies,” Mangwana says at one point in the film. Nielsson first thought of him as a hardcore nationalist, but he changes over time, expressing his wish that “change must come.” Mwonzora, who has been jailed 25 times, is more cool. He is the one who hopes the constitutional process will lead to a new Zimbabwe.

“He referred to our relationship as reverse Stockholm syndrome. Initially, they didn't really know how much access to give me. At the end, they thought of my camera as an important witness to the process and asked us to be present when talks on crucial issues were taking place.

“I tried to put aside all my baggage of preconceptions about Mugabe and his regime and make my film on a blank canvas. As a result they asked me inside. Viewing the ZANU people as the usual villains would only be repeating stories that have already been told.”

Coming Together through Dialogue

It seems obvious to ask the filmmaker if she believed in the constitutional process from the outset.

“At first, no. But I soon got the feeling that the two negotiators would be able to do something together. They built a bridge across the political polarisation. It was a Sisyphean task, but they pulled it off.

“The beautiful thing about the story is that they came together through political dialogue. An autocratic guerrilla party like ZANU-PF, which has been in power since the country gained independence from England, is not used to engaging in democratic dialogue with the opposition. But the negotiating process forced them to speak together and make compromises, creating a political culture that in itself is a huge step forward for the country.

Now a democratic constitution has been produced that's better than the one before it. It just needs to be implemented.”

Democrats documents the ups and downs of the sprawling discussion about democracy in Zimbabwe. As the film shows, a lot of the early meetings were staged by ZANU supporters, who one after the other got up and praised the idea of the president as being in charge of everything. At one meeting a young man died from injuries sustained in violent clashes.

At the end of the day, Nielsson says, the process was worth it. “Even though the constitution has not been implemented, the country has gained valuable experiences from the ‘democratic bubble’ that emerged with the establishment of the coalition government in 2008.”

Blending In with the Wallpaper

Nielsson had never been to Zimbabwe before. She agreed to “parachute in there,” as she puts it, hoping to show a different kind of Africa, despite the regime of Robert Mugabe, a “master of the situation” who has an almost Machiavellian ability to read and navigate the political game, as the director puts it.

“Once again, I learned that you've got to have love for your characters and do everything you can to give them confidence in the job you've been assigned.

“At the end, we became an integral part of the process. We were pretty conspicuous at first because Zimbabwe has no tradition of observational documentaries. But eventually we almost blended in with the wallpaper – Henrik Bohn Ipsen behind the camera and I with my boom mic,” Nielsson laughs ■

Democrats, selected for IDFA's Feature-Length Competition, is produced by Henrik Veileborg for Upfront Films. For more information, see reverse section.



Photo: Steen Meier Rasmussen

Camilla Nielsson

Director, born 1973. Has a BA in anthropology from Copenhagen and an MA in visual anthropology from New York University. Nielsson contributed *Mumbai Disconnected* (with Frederik Jacobi, 2009) to a series of films about megacities. *Democrats* (2014), selected for IDFA, is Nielsson's first feature documentary.

Henrik Veileborg

Producer at Upfront Films, Veileborg's own company. Films include *Democrats* (Camilla Nielsson, 2014), *Stealing Africa* (Christoffer Guldbrandsen, 2012), *Mumbai Disconnected* (Camilla Nielsson, Frederik Jakobi, 2009), *Love on Delivery* (Janus Metz, 2008). In production with *Between Two Worlds*, (Janus Metz, page 51).

ZIMBABWE'S “DEMOCRATIC BUBBLE”

The fate of Zimbabwe has for more than three decades been linked to Robert Mugabe, its president since 1980. During the past 15 years he has been challenged by the increasingly popular opposition MDC-T party which he has met with persecution, violence and disputed elections. Mugabe's ZANU-PF finally lost its parliamentary majority in 2008, but neighbouring countries forced the two parties into a unity government. *Democrats* delves into the ensuing years when the two parties are formally sharing power but ZANU-PF is maintaining its control and abuse of police authority and prisons. In this tense atmosphere, two hardworking politicians, one from each party, are united in their struggle to write a new constitution for a more democratic Zimbabwe.



WE HAVE TO LEARN FROM THE WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH

Mid-Length Competition / IDFA 2014

Søren Steen Jespersen and Nasib Farah's *Warriors from the North* provides a unique window into a world where young Somali Danes go off to fight a holy war and are willing to die for the terrorist organisation al-Shabaab. We need stories like this to understand how things could go so wrong, says the journalist Jakob Sheikh, who writes about radicalisation and terrorism for the Danish newspaper Politiken.

A FATHER. *Warriors from the North* is also the story of Abukar whose son is a warrior in al-Shabaab. All Abukar wants is to have his boy come home to Denmark, back to safety.

By Jakob Sheikh

Something is just about to happen. We can tell from his eyes. They are distant, detached. Almost dreaming.

Abdi has taken a seat in one of the front rows and is now pointing a silver-coloured pocket camera at the stage, pretending to be a journalist.

But the big white costume he is wearing tells another story. Under it, Abdi, presumably, is concealing the object that will seal his fate in a few short seconds.

We are in a hotel in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, where a group of graduating doctors in ties are being honoured by their university. In many ways the embodiment of Somalia's future, they are being applauded one after another by their families and loved ones. It's a moment to remember.

And then ...

Boom.

A massive explosion. Sounds of screaming, broken windows and a room collapsing in on itself. Feelings of chaos, fear, utter panic.

When the smoke clears: the sight of pools of blood on the floor, mangled corpses and soldiers lifting rubble, looking for body parts.

It's incomprehensible how someone would so destructively take the lives of the country's best and brightest. It seems even more incomprehensible that the person who triggered the suicide bomb that December day is Abdi, a young man who grew up in a Copenhagen suburb, played football and lived a relatively normal life as a young person in Denmark.

Abdi is far from the only tragic case of a young man who has been shaped by the Danish welfare society but still seeks the extreme and ultimately pushes the detonator button, taking a crowd of innocent people with him into death. The following year, his Somali-Danish friend Hassan blows himself up in a crowd of civilians in Mogadishu's airport.

How on earth could this happen?

This tumultuous and highly dramatic scene opens *Warriors from the North*, a documentary that takes us close to a secret Somali-Danish cell in Copenhagen, whose members swear allegiance to the militant terrorist organisation al-Shabaab.

Copenhagen's Somali community is notoriously difficult to penetrate, and militant Islamists obviously don't share their insurrectionary plans. So it's even more remarkable that an outsider managed to get access to the world of a small group of young men declaring their willingness to kill in the name of God. A world we way too often see splashed across front pages but way too rarely get a window into that might provide some kind of understanding. A world that shows us that hardened Jihadists rarely begin their radicalisation process as hardened Jihadists but as socially marginalised young people

groping for something to stand on, a community to believe in and a burning cause to ignite them.

Abdi, Hassan and their friend Mohammed seem to have been lifted straight out of that narrative. While the first two men today are dead, Mohammed remains in Somalia. The story of the three young men and the brotherhood that prepared them to pay the ultimate price for their faith is laid out by "The Shadow," an anonymous fourth member of the cell, who got out of the radical Islamist scene in time and now, for the first time ever, tells the story of al-Shabaab's recruitment in Denmark.

This human development is what's so important for us to understand. As a journalist who writes about radicalisation and terrorism on a daily basis, it's my experience that the nuances are often lost in a fog of salacious headlines, limited column space and dramaturgical devices. I, too, have been guilty of generalising when complex issues have to be broken down and mass-communicated in a split second.

"It's important to remember that these people are a product of our own world."

We far too often forget that these people aren't pariahs but a part of us. They grew up in our backyards, were shaped by our social institutions, they speak perfect Danish, seamlessly navigate our community and don't always come from deeply religious families at the bottom of society. Far too often we find that the feeling of self-worth and brotherhood that militant communities provide is something that the established society in many cases could have given them.

Where does that leave us? In a place where we have to acknowledge that relieving these people of their brutal mindset takes understanding and acknowledging what value a community like the Somali-Danish cell in Copenhagen has.

That's why "The Shadow," who today has turned his back on his fundamentalist past, still talks about his time with the cell as the best time of his life. That's why Mohammed in Somalia doesn't return to his frustrated father, Abukar, in Denmark, who has dedicated his life to getting his son back alive. And, essentially, that's why Abdi and Hassan ended up becoming suicide bombers.

We need stories like Hassan's, Abdi's and Mohammed's to be able to comprehend the big picture – that we are currently seeing a flood of holy warriors leaving Denmark to fight in armed conflicts, in numbers that haven't been seen since World War II.

That's the perspective. It's in this context that we can learn from the warriors from the north and their stories. While politicians in Denmark and

the rest of Europe are desperately trying to stem the tide of emigrating Jihadists, it's important to remember that these people are a product of our own world, which is how they must be met. They are an expression of enormous social challenges that must be solved by society, not by people who get cold feet at the prospect of restrictions like revoking passports and residency permits.

As a 27-year-old Pakistani-Danish warrior in Syria told me recently, "Listen, I'm not afraid of being hated in Denmark. Why would I try to gain respect in Danish society when Danish society never gave me any respect until now?"

Which takes us back to Abdi and his silver-coloured pocket camera. To the question of how this could ever happen.

We ask ourselves if this young Somali Dane had an alternative to blowing himself up? Could the tragedy have been stopped in time?

Warriors from the North doesn't shove answers down our throats. We have to think for ourselves. And maybe that's what we really need the most. To think ■

Warriors from the North, selected for the Mid-Length Competition at IDFA, is produced by Helle Faber for Made in Copenhagen. For more information, see reverse section.



Warriors from the North, Framgrab

Nasib Farah

Journalist and director Nasib Farah, born 1981 in Somalia, came to Denmark on his own as a child fleeing the civil war in his homeland. Farah has spent his adult life in Denmark working with young Somalis and doing media projects targeting the Somali community. Making *My Cousin the Pirate* (2010), with Christian Sønderby Jepsen, he went back to Somalia for the first time in years to stop his cousin from becoming a pirate. *Warriors from the North* (2014), selected for IDFA's Mid-Length Competition, is Farah's first director credit.

Søren Steen Jespersen

Director Søren Steen Jespersen, born 1962, is a 1993 graduate of the Danish School of Media and Journalism. Jespersen has years of experience in journalistic documentaries for TV. He has also produced several documentaries, including *Carbon Crooks* (Tom Heinemann, 2013), *Blekingegadebanden – The Invisible Cell* (Anders Riis-Hansen, 2009), *69* (Nikolaj Viborg, 2008) and *Punk Royal* (Robin Schmidt, Niels David Rønsholdt, 2006). *Warriors from the North* (2014), screening in IDFA's Mid-Length Competition, is Jespersen's first documentary as a director.

FACELESS. Working with Nasib Farah's contacts in Mogadishu the crew found young al-Shabaab warriors from Norway, Finland, Holland and England whom they interview in the film.

THE HUMAN ASPECT OF VIOLENCE

Warriors from the North is the product of a close collaboration between Somali-Danish journalist Nasib Farah and journalist and documentary filmmaker Søren Steen Jespersen.

Nasib Farah, who came to Europe on his own at age 11 fleeing the civil war in Somalia, knows the Somali community in Denmark inside and out. Thanks to his personal network, over a four-year period he and his co-director Søren Steen Jespersen were able to infiltrate a cell of young Somali men meeting in a Copenhagen apartment in 2008-2009 with one common goal: to go to Somalia and join the Islamist terrorist organisation al-Shabaab.

In the following, the two directors discuss the background for *Warriors from the North* and what they hope their film can bring to the table in the highly topical debate about rootless young people leaving to fight a holy war:

Nasib Farah: "It's important to break the isolation and give Somalis a voice"

"I have been close to these young Somali ever since I came to Denmark – in school and at the youth club. I know several of the warriors personally. I went to the same club as Abdi who blew up himself and the young doctors. I always thought of him as a younger brother. My background and my life are a lot like his and the other al-Shabaab warriors'. We are Danes of Somali descent. We came here in the early nineties.



Nasib Farah Photo: Henrik Böhm Ipsen

We're the same age. We were young, had fun, went out and lived life. We travelled in the same circles, we were there for each other. We were friends.

"Abdi and the others were as far from extremism as can be, but like many other dark-skinned young people with strange names they felt unwanted and out of place in Danish society. Having people cross to the other side of the street when they see you, being repeatedly turned away at job interviews, for internships, even at clubs, reinforced their feeling of not belonging. That's probably a key factor in my former friends' vulnerability to al-Shabaab's manipulation. Who doesn't want to be appreciated and feel like you're doing something with your life for a greater cause?"

"It's important for me to break the isolation that a lot of Somalis in Denmark experience and give Somalis a voice, also when it comes to angry young men who choose to be recruited for al-Shabaab."

Søren Steen Jespersen: "The world is interconnected"

"We can't separate the world into different pieces. What happens in the sand-coloured, bloody heat of Somalia impacts me on a random rainy day in Copenhagen. The conflict between haves and have-nots knows no boundaries and respects no arbitrary passport controls or EU constructions. We already live side by side, including in Copenhagen, where I live. There are almost 20,000 Somalis living in Denmark and their world is part of mine for good or ill.

"For me, this film is an opportunity to tell an important story about how everything in the world is interconnected. And an opportunity for me personally to understand how a seemingly meaningless suicide attack in Somalia for a certain individual can be a valid alternative to life as a young Somali in a Copenhagen suburb.

"It's so easy to write off militant fundamentalists as psychopaths who should be locked up for life. You're either with us or with them has been the rhetoric. But in this film I get to discuss the processes that lead up to a young man pushing the trigger and taking 24 people with him in death. I get to discuss the human aspect of violence and the human consequences of his action."



Søren Steen Jespersen Photo: Anita M. Hopland



Helle Faber

Producer at Made in Copenhagen, Helle Faber's own company. Films include *Warriors from the North* (Nasib Farah, Søren Steen Jespersen, 2014), *Putin's Kiss* (Lise Birk Pedersen, 2012), *The Dark Side of Chocolate* (Miki Mistrati, U. Roberto Romano 2010), *Enemies of Happiness* (Eva Mulvad, 2006). Soon up for release is *Afghan Justice* (Nicole N. Horanyi, see page 5).

Helle Faber Photo: Joachim Ladefoged

In her new film, Phie Ambo goes to bat for sustainable agriculture. *Good Things Await* is about Niels Stokholm, a farmer fighting with the authorities to run his farm – supplier to Copenhagen’s acclaimed Noma restaurant – his way, biodynamically.

The Female Gaze / IDFA 2014

By Marianne Lentz

When Phie Ambo was a tot she went to a Marxist kindergarten. Not that her parents were particularly leftist, but this was the 1970s, and since there were very few kindergarten spots open in their area, they took the first one they were assigned.

“I remember they had these Marxist structures in my kindergarten that were impossible to live in. There was a sandbox patrol of kids who would make the rounds and make sure the other kids behaved the way they should – that the sandbox stuff was kept inside the sandbox, that kind of thing. I did not do well with that at all,” Ambo says.

Ever since, the award-winning director of documentaries like *Free the Mind* and *Mechanical Love* has had a hard time with authority. In general, Ambo is not very comfortable in surroundings that value efficiency and structure over contemplation and reflection.

Ambo puts these principles up for debate in *Good Things Await* through her protagonist Niels Stokholm and his unique biodynamic farm Thorshøjgaard, located an hour’s drive north of Copenhagen.

It all began with a farm field trip that Ambo’s daughter was going on with her Rudolf Steiner kindergarten. The filmmaker went along with her camera to photograph the kids and the farm animals. Ambo had heard that Stokholm’s produce was praised by gourmet restaurants like Noma, that his produce was top grade. But she didn’t know anything about the farm or how it was operated.

“As soon as we pulled into the driveway, I could tell this was where I needed to be,” Ambo says. “And I could tell there was a film in Niels.”

Contemplating a Snail

To understand life at Thorshøjgaard and its appeal to Ambo, you have to understand what kind of



A GOOD PLACE TO BE

farmer Stokholm is. He runs the farm according to the principles of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner that are the basis for biodynamics. Instead of considering weeds an evil, Stokholm thinks of them as part of the farm’s circulatory system, where everything has a function.

There is no soy feed here, no pesticides or industrial production. The animals are on pasture all year round, including when the ground is covered in thick snow. Stokholm’s cattle, an old dairy breed known as Danish Red, are so nimble they look like deer more than the heavy, industrial swollen-uddered cows you usually see in the Danish countryside. This resonates with chefs like Noma’s René Redzepi, who regularly buys beef from Thorshøjgaard, because, as Ambo puts it, “It simply tastes exceptionally well.”

“I needed to get out of the whole efficiency mindset that we’re quickly lulled into in our modern lives,” the filmmaker says.

“I needed a chance to be somewhere where you can spend an hour contemplating a snail moving along a leaf, the kind of thing that I think is good and important to spend time on but that we usually don’t have time for in the day to day,” she says.

“Niels is an extreme contrast to the rest of society, which is all about efficiency and quantity instead of quality. He is 100 percent uncompromising. If he can sense that his cows need milking in the middle of the night, that’s what he does. He follows the rhythm he finds in the farm. He is an organism on the farm interacting with all the other elements. Nothing is subjected to his rhythm – he slips into the animals’ rhythm.”

Positive Alternatives Do Exist

Still, it was more than her personal need to spend time at Thorshøjgaard that compelled Ambo to make the film. Looking at the 40-year-old documentarian’s back catalogue, her anti-authoritarian worldview shows through everywhere. *Free the Mind* looks at how meditation can help soldiers with PTSD and children with ADHD-symptoms. *The Bailiff* is a glimpse into a system that puts debt-ridden people out on the street, while *Mechanical Love* is about robots being used as substitutes for human relationships.

The impression is of a filmmaker looking for the good life, who wants us all to stop and ask ourselves if the world really is organised in the best possible way. No exception, *Good Things Await* demonstrates that alternatives do exist to how farming is done today and to how society is organised overall.

“I’m always looking to push a positive development in society,” Ambo says. “When I arrived at the farm, I saw a real alternative. For me, it’s incredibly inspiring to see someone actually doing something instead of just talking about it. We live in an age where the industrial and capitalist

worldview is collapsing left and right in some pretty hardcore ways. I think the way Niels and his wife, Rita, live presents a positive alternative, even if it is extreme simple living.”

Ambo is surprised to hear trend researchers dismiss the whole issue of sustainability as a passing trend.

“What are they talking about? We have a global account that doesn’t add up. That we use more resources than we have is above discussion. The planetary store is all sold out! For the first time in human history we face these climate and resource changes caused by our excessive consumption. I can’t see how anyone could call the solution to that a passing trend” ■

Good Things Await, selected for *The Female Gaze* programme at IDFA, is produced by Malene Flindt Pedersen for Danish Documentary Production. For more information, see reverse section.



Phie Ambo

Director Phie Ambo, born 1973, graduated as a documentary film director from the National Film School of Denmark in 2003. Ambo’s debut feature *Family* (with Sami Saif, 2001) won her the Joris Ivens Award, IDFA’s top honour. *Mechanical Love* (2007), on the relationship between humans and robots, and *Free the Mind* (2012), on how thoughts influence the mind and the body, were both selected for IDFA. *Ripples at the Shore* (expected release 2015) examines the topic of consciousness. *Good Things Await* (2014) is having its international premiere in The Female Gaze programme at IDFA.

Malene Flindt Pedersen

Producer for Hansen & Pedersen Film og Fjernsyn, run by Malene Flindt Pedersen and Anders Riis-Hansen. Films include *Good Things Await* (Phie Ambo, 2014), *The Circus Dynasty* (Anders Riis-Hansen, 2014, see page 34), *A Family at War* (Jørgen Flindt Pedersen, 2004).



THE FUTURE OF (TABLOID) NEWSPAPERS

At a time when the newspaper industry is struggling with changing habits of news consumption, Mikala Krogh got access to the Danish tabloid Ekstra Bladet. Documenting the daily work of reporters and editors, *The Newsroom – Off the Record* also suggests that the decline in tabloid readership is about more than competition from new media, says film critic and former newspaper reporter Demetrios Matheou. Read interview with the director on page 32.

By Demetrios Matheou

This November two “newsrooms” are presented on screen, with two very different perspectives on today’s journalistic profession. One is a fiction, the other a documentary; one clings to a nostalgic notion that traditional news media still matter, the other signals their death knell.

On HBO, the third season of *The Newsroom* is underway. Written by Aaron Sorkin, with that writer’s customary mixture of idealism and hyperbole, the show follows a Cable television news team, led by its crusading anchorman. For those of us who still believe in the role of trained and conscientious journalists in reporting the news, Sorkin’s romanticized newsroom feels like a guilty pleasure.

But for a more realistic idea of the state of play for today’s media, in particular newspapers, audiences should look to Mikala Krogh’s documentary *The Newsroom – Off the Record*.

Reflecting a Greater Crisis

Krogh’s film offers a fly-on-the-wall of the Danish tabloid Ekstra Bladet, as chief editor Poul Madsen tries to save a paper whose circulation is plummeting – from 130,000 in 2000, to 60,000 in 2012 and still falling – with a corresponding drop in advertising revenue.

At the same time as addressing the newspaper, Poul Madsen seeks to make its more popular website generate revenue – to persuade online users

to pay for something that they’re already enjoying for free.

Ekstra Bladet’s problems reflect the crisis faced by the newspaper industry everywhere in the world, with the exception of Asia, as editors combat both the budgetary effects of the economic slump and the growing competition from new media.

The industry is experiencing declining sales on a catastrophic scale. July figures suggested that the UK newspaper market was falling at a rate of 8% a year; in the past decade, the country’s Sunday newspapers have lost half of their sales – six million copies. In the same period, the total circulation of Danish newspapers has declined by more than 29%, some 470,000. In the United States, newspapers have actually been closing for years; since 2001, one fifth of American journalists have lost their jobs.

Media executives have been immersed in the details of adapting to the new environment – pay walls remain a hit-and-miss phenomenon – without particularly understanding the ethos they are up against.

Krogh reveals the crisis at the coalface. Nothing Poul Madsen does makes any difference to his paper’s circulation or finances, whether he’s cutting pages, making redundancies, breaking good news stories or pursuing stories that other papers won’t touch. At one point he ruefully reports his own teenage son’s insistence that he can’t wait for dad to print the news, when it is updated constantly online. And the further Madsen moves into the online world – at one point he travels to the US to get tips from the management of the Huffington Post – the more disillusioned his journalists become, as they see their role becoming marginalized.

The Ethos of the Tabloid Newspaper

Andrew Rossi’s 2011 documentary *Page One* considered the same challenges and questions at The New York Times. But there are key differences between the two newspapers, the chief one, perhaps, being that of reputation.

The New York Times has won dozens of Pulitzer Prizes and is regarded as a national “newspaper of record”. It’s had its crises of content, including a reporter found to be plagiarising and fabricating stories, and controversy over its coverage of the WMD programme. Yet it remains a potent news organisation, both off and online. In contrast, Ekstra Bladet’s Citizen Kane-like claim to be “a defender of the ordinary man” is undermined by its often sensationalist and salacious content; one of its senior staff laments the perception that “it’s all death and boobs with us”. Early subscribers to its paid-for pages admit to doing so for the porn.

It can’t be a coincidence that Krogh’s film spends so much time with Poul’s failed attempt at “crusading” journalism. The high-profile campaign for stronger efforts to free the hijacked Danish



seamen is met with widespread criticism – the paper is accused of actually prolonging the crisis in a bid to sell papers – and censure by the Press Complaints Commission.

Although Krogh scrupulously avoids commentary, it’s impossible not to feel sympathy with Madsen and his team at this point. One of the paradoxes of tabloid newspapers is that their staff are amongst the most practically gifted and dogged in the business; the problem is the ethos in which they work. So here we see a talented young trainee’s excitement at her first front page story ruined by the cynicism of her sub-editors, whose headline distorts the facts for effect, and the heroically hard-working investigative journalists on the hostage story doubted because of their paper’s notoriety.

Has the Public Had Enough?

While old-school journalists rightly highlight the absence of training or regulation of their online counterparts, the shenanigans of the tabloid press in recent years make that argument redundant. The best example is the phone-hacking scandal in the UK that led to the closure of The News of the World and jailing of its former editor; it’s interesting that the UK newspapers losing the most readers are the tabloids.

New media and social media have heralded a fundamental change in the way that people think of “information” – its creation, access and dissemination; there is now a democratization of news that flies in the face of its traditional delivery.

There are signs, in papers like The New York Times and The Guardian, that the quality press can face the challenges posed by the internet and successfully adapt; the same might be said for television news organizations. But *The Newsroom – Off the Record* suggests the gloomy possibility that the internet is not the chief reason for the struggles of the tabloids – that, in fact, the public has simply had enough of them.

And if that’s the case, perhaps the only place for their content is, ironically, online ■

“One of the paradoxes of tabloid newspapers is that their staff are amongst the most practically gifted and dogged in the business.”

“INSIGHT INTO THE JOURNALISTIC PROCESS IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND OUR DEMOCRACY”

As the daughter of a journalist and editor-in-chief, Mikala Krogh’s childhood was defined by newspapers, debate and a critical attitude towards those in power. To make *The Newsroom – Off the Record*, the filmmaker spent the entire year of 2013 as a fly on the wall at the Copenhagen tabloid Ekstra Bladet.

As told to Lasse Jensen

My father was editor-in-chief of a socialist paper called Socialistisk Dagblad, which was in danger of closing, and he put up the family’s row house as collateral to save the paper. The prospect of having to move was a pretty big deal. But it says something about how important print newspapers were in our family. We didn’t lose the house, but the paper closed – and I remember that as painful.

I absorbed journalism with my mother’s milk and always wanted to do a film about a newsroom. No one ever really has, in a way that gives you insight into the journalistic process. And that’s important – to understand our democracy and to understand the role of journalism. We have seen portraits of politicians and coverage of all sorts of other aspects of our society. Journalists are way down on the credibility scale, and I think people until now have had a grossly wrong image of journalism.

There were two papers I thought it would be interesting to make a film about. One was Information, which I knew (Krogh’s father was

Mikala Krogh

Director Mikala Krogh, born 1973, graduated in documentary direction from the National Film School of Denmark in 2001. Krogh worked for several years in radio before turning to filmmaking in 1992. She won CPH:DOX’s Audience Award for *A Normal Life* (2012), about a family with a daughter who has cancer, also selected for IDFA. Other films include *Cairo Garbage* (2009), *Beth’s Diary* (with Kent Klich, 2006), *My Grandad’s Murderer* (with Søren Fauli, 2004) and *My Father’s Choice* (2002). *The Newsroom – Off the Record* (2014) is selected for Of Media and Men at IDFA.

Sigrid Dyekjær

Producer of *The Newsroom – Off the Record*. See more page 19.



Mikala Krogh Photo: Sine Heilmann



The Newsroom – Off the Record. Framgrab

editor-in-chief, *ed.*), and the other was Ekstra Bladet, because it’s so controversial and because I love to hate it. On one hand, I think Ekstra Bladet has the most amazing scoops and I love that politicians are afraid of ending up on the front page of the paper. On the other hand, some of their front pages just make me wonder what the hell they’re doing. ‘What was the editorial process that led to this, and is anyone using their brains?’

I always try to stick to investigating and not bring in any preconceptions I’m looking to **confirm**. Perhaps that’s where documentaries and journalism diverge. I often find that the work of journalists is about wanting to confirm a thesis, and that’s not how I work at all. I investigate and when I sit down to edit, I pick certain threads.

I think it’s more interesting simply to observe and report. That’s my method. If I only just ask questions, they (editors and journalists, *ed.*) are really good at talking their way out of it and feeding you a line – that’s part of the reason why so many media programmes and newsmagazines look the same.

Editor-in-chief Poul Madsen is putting his ass on the line with this film. He showed me enormous confidence by opening his doors to me.

He has a pretty unique job, because he’s both the editorial leader and a businessman. That’s a pretty unique combination, having to both set the daily editorial line and turn the sinking ship around. The way I see it, he’s a highly likeable person in a megacynical position ■

This is an abridged version of an interview first published in the newspaper Information on 26 September 2014.

The Newsroom – Off the Record, selected for Of Media and Men at IDFA 2014, is produced by Sigrid Dyekjær for Danish Documentary Production. For more information, see reverse section.

“I think it’s more interesting simply to observe and report. That’s my method.”

A CIRCUS LOVE STORY

Panorama / IDFA 2014

The Circus Dynasty Photo: Søren Søtker



The Circus Dynasty is a love drama set in a circus. Over a whole season, director Anders Riis-Hansen travelled in a caravan with Denmark's Cirkus Arena, plumbing his fascination with the circus world and following the budding romance between the youngest heirs to two of Europe's most illustrious circus dynasties.

THE CIRCUS HEIRS. Merryly and Patrick, the romantically involved protagonists of *The Circus Dynasty*, are, respectively, seventh- and fourth-generation circus performers.

By Nynne Østergaard

Ever since he was a boy and got to meet the strongman Abdullah and his trained coati, Anders Riis-Hansen has been deeply fascinated by the singular world of the circus. In 2012, like every year, the filmmaker was in the audience for the season opener of Cirkus Arena, the biggest circus in Scandinavia.

"I had long wanted to make a film about the things that fascinate me about the circus world, a subculture that in so many ways has its own norms and rules," he says. "So I thought, Now is the time."

For the next two weeks, he took his camera and bicycled out to the circus grounds in Bellahøj, just outside of Copenhagen, where Cirkus Arena stays when it's in town, to get a taste of circus life and see if there was a film in it.

Drama beneath the Surface

As Riis-Hansen quickly learned, a potential drama was brewing between two of Europe's most prominent circus family. The Casselly family, the world's most award-winning circus family and faithful companions of circus manager Benny Berdino for more than 20 years, had recently won the coveted Golden Clown award – the circus equivalent of an Oscar – and now the billionaire owner of Ringling Brothers, the world's biggest travelling circus, was making the Casselys an offer of a multi-year contract.

Meanwhile, Benny Berdino's grandson and future heir, Patrick, had started seeing the youngest member of the Casselly family, Merryly. A union of the two families, securing the circus dynasty long dreamed of by both sides, was tantalisingly close.



The Circus Dynasty Photos: Anders Riis-Hansen

"I suddenly saw the contours of something really interesting," the filmmaker says. "A love drama between two young people who are under enormous pressure from their families. How do you handle that pressure? And can love between two people who are so young even last?"

Getting His Own Caravan

Early on in the process, Riis-Hansen got a licence to drive large trailers and bought his own caravan, allowing him to follow the circus on tour around Denmark. In the beginning, he felt that his presence was just barely being tolerated. It wasn't until the Casselly family asked him to join them on a trip to the US to visit Ringling Brothers that he knew he had won them over.

"The circus world reminds me of what it was like in the 1950s. The children are expected to follow in their parents' footsteps and marriage isn't just a question of love."

"They call people outside the circus 'Privatmench' (private people, *ed.*), because we live behind fences and hedges, while they live in very close quarters and travel together in their caravans. In truth, of course, they are just as private as we are. The circus is a very close-knit community. They welcome us into their world when it comes to performing and selling chips. As far as letting a stranger into their caravans to peek behind the facade – getting to that point was a major challenge," Riis-Hansen says.

"If I wasn't around with my camera for a few days, they put their guard back up. Then, I had to slowly penetrate the layers of makeup all over again."

The product of the filmmaker's efforts is a love story set in a circus. We watch the frantic last moments before a performance as well as a dinner of local junk food being scarfed down in front of

CIRKUS ARENA

Arne Berdino Olsen founded Cirkus Arena in 1955 and travelled from town to town with a small tent, a portable gramophone and a single household caravan. Over the course of the 1960s, the tent and the staff grew, and today Cirkus Arena is the biggest circus in Scandinavia with several circus outfits touring Europe. When Arne Berdino died in 1976, Cirkus Arena fell to his son, Benny. Now, Benny's grandson Patrick, who performs an act with African elephants, is next in line to continue the family heritage.



Anders Riis-Hansen Photo: Maggie Olluska

Anders Riis-Hansen

A director, journalist and TV producer, born 1963, Anders Riis-Hansen has worked several years at the Danish broadcaster DR. In 2010, Riis-Hansen won a Bodil, the Danish film critics' award, for best documentary for *Blekingegadebanden – The Invisible Cell* (2009), the story of a group of leftist activists who committed political crimes in the 1970s and '80s. With Malene Flindt Pedersen, he is co-owner of the production company Hansen & Pedersen Film og Fjernsyn. *The Circus Dynasty* (2014) has been selected for IDFA's Panorama.

Malene Flindt Pedersen

Producer of *The Circus Dynasty*. See more page 29.

the TV. We experience the frustration when an act, even after hours of practice, still hasn't been nailed down. And we feel the pain of a performer who has collided with a horse but still has to go in the ring, tearful and with a pained smile. The show must go on.

Hard-working Family

The Circus Dynasty is also the story about handling your family's expectations and heritage, something that is familiar to most of us but is much more pronounced in a circus family with proud traditions going back generations.

"In many ways, the circus world reminds me of what it was like in the 1950s. The children are expected to follow in their parents' footsteps and marriage isn't just a question of love but is also seen as a strategic move to strengthen ties between families," Riis-Hansen says.

During his time at Cirkus Arena, the filmmaker got especially close to the Casselly family. He was with them when the horses and elephants were fed and the stables cleaned, when the animals and performers were readied for a show and, later, after the curtain came down, when the tents and stables were packed up, to be put up again in a new town a few hours later.

"I have never seen a family work that hard. Each and every one of them. In that way, *The Circus Dynasty* is also a story of how everyone is needed. A feeling of belonging. I think we need to hear that at a time when our lives are increasingly fragmented and we need community and fellowship," Riis-Hansen says ■

The Circus Dynasty, selected for Panorama at IDFA, is produced by Malene Flindt Pedersen for Hansen & Pedersen Film og Fjernsyn. For more information, see reverse section.

A TRANS BOY BECOMES A MAN



Songs for Alexis: Framinglab

Panorama & DOC U Competition / IDFA 2014

A love story between a transsexual teen and his girlfriend, Elvira Lind's musical portrait documentary *Songs for Alexis* acts as a magnifying glass on youthful vulnerability and dawning maturity.

By Katrine Hornstrup Yde

When documentary filmmaker Elvira Lind was 11, she was incensed that she didn't have breasts yet. There was nothing she wanted more in the world. When she was 15 and finally had breasts, she'd prefer people didn't know if she was a boy or a girl. Today, Elvira Lind tells me, in a café in New York's TriBeCa, where she lives, those despondent hours in front of the bedroom mirror show just how difficult it can be for anyone to have to fit into a gender box. It's about the quivering sensitivity of the teen years, the ups and downs of the body and all the troubles of accepting yourself and growing up.

Lind's debut documentary *Songs for Alexis* invites us into a similar teenage headspace. The film is an intimate, musical portrait of Ryan Cassata, an 18-year-old transsexual from Long Island, and a heartfelt story of young love. We meet Ryan, a sensitive but fearless singer-songwriter with brown dreadlocks,

INSPIRATIONS

Three titles were highly inspirational for Elvira Lind in her work with the theme and setting of *Songs for Alexis*:

Fucking Åmål (Lukas Moodysson, 1998)

“This is one of my absolute all-time favourites. I love how simply, but also incredibly effectively, the story is told. It’s a touching teen film that reminds you how love at that age can feel like the most repulsive and painful and humiliating thing, and then two days later the feelings can change completely to euphoria and joy – for maybe a week. I was very inspired by how the film lets you just hang with the kids in long, intimate scenes. Transferring that to a documentary is a challenge, if you don’t want to fiddle with reality too much. You might have to wait a long time for significant moments, with your arms numb and your camera glowing. But when they happen, they’re worth the wait.”

Bombay Beach (Almar Harriel, 2011)

“I was very inspired by Harriel’s portrayal of an isolated suburban environment. *Bombay Beach* is a lot more extreme than *Long Island*, where I ended up filming, but I’m fascinated by how these communities create their own norms. I think Harriel has made a really touching portrait of a mother and son who are able to set up a sanctuary for themselves in their corner of the world. And I was very inspired by how we get to spend time with them in the film.”

FTM videos on YouTube

“The inspiration to make *Songs for Alexis* first came when I stumbled on these videos of young trans guys documenting their physical transformation from female to male (FTM) on YouTube. I was deeply fascinated by these ‘confessions in teen bedrooms,’ where kids live their own, often secret, lives with others online. The parents in some cases have no idea about the issues their kids are struggling with or where they are headed, but the Internet does.”

Songs for Alexis. Framgrab



a flat chest with surgery scars and a Jim Morrison poster on his wall. Ryan isn’t on testosterone, though he does work out. He finds an outlet for his many emotions in his music, singing his songs and playing his guitar, which has made him a bit of an icon in the LGBT community. We watch as he respectfully kisses, says goodbye to and skypes with his 16-year-old girlfriend Alexis, who lives on the West Coast. Tracking the couple with her handheld camera, Lind provides intimate glimpses of big and small events over the course of these dramatic teenage years.

Love Magnifies

Coming out as transgender at age 14 was a key event in Ryan’s life, and for his career and message as an LGBT icon. Even so, *Songs for Alexis*’s transsexual theme is simply a backdrop for a love story about a girl and a boy journeying into adulthood. While stories about trans people might seem strange or exotic to some, the filmmaker says, a love story draws everyone in.

“I don’t know if I’m the right person to make a film about being a trans person, but actually I’m more trying to describe what it’s like to be Ryan and what it’s like to be in love. The last part I know a little bit about,” Lind says. “When you fall in love at that age, it’s all-consuming. And your love generally enhances all other circumstances of your life.”

While films about transgender kids tend to focus on their physical transformation or the inhuman treatment that a lot of trans people, tragically, are subjected to, *Songs for Alexis* is like a cinematic trampoline of positive energy buoyed by its protagonist’s indomitable spirit and a strong,

Elvira Lind

Director, born 1981. Graduated from the CityVarsity School of Media and Creative Arts in Cape Town in 2005, with a major in documentary film directing. Has worked in all aspects of production, mainly in documentary, in the UK, US, Africa and Denmark. *Songs for Alexis* (2014) is Lind’s first long documentary, selected for IDFA. Is preparing her next film, *Bobbi Jene*.

Julie Leerskov

Producer at Sonntag Pictures. Films at IDFA include *Songs for Alexis* and *The Will* (Christian Sønderby Jepsen, 2011). In production with Elvira Lind’s second feature *Bobbi Jene*.

Anne Sofie Hansen-Skovmoes

Producer at Copenhagen Bombay. Films include *Songs for Alexis*, *Little Tot* (Mette Skov, 2014, animated series and game). In development with *Get Santa!* (Jacob Ley), *Doxwise Global* (platform for online storytelling).



Director Elvira Lind Photo: Miriam Kilde

supportive mother fuelling his self-esteem. If the film has a before and after, it’s not about Ryan’s body but about his emotional growth and greater maturity over a year of filming. “The film is about the transition from being a boy to being a man,” Lind says.

Gender Trouble

Songs for Alexis is also about bodies and gender on a more general level. In one scene, we see Ryan and Alexis’s legs intertwined. One pair of legs is smooth, the other hairy. To pass as the gender she was born into, Alexis has to shave her legs. To pass as a man, all Ryan has to do is let his leg hair grow. Ryan’s mother is a hairdresser and wigmaker. We watch her glue a tuft of hair onto a man’s shiny bald spot.

“There is so much secretiveness on Long Island. What goes on with wigs and toupees in that hair salon is totally hush-hush,” Lind says. “Meanwhile, the ladies in the waiting room talk about who had her breasts done last.”

In that way, they are all performing their gender. Which also makes Ryan a role model for anyone who looks in the mirror and is confused.

“You think, what’s so strange about having your breasts removed if having something stuffed into them is normal? Why not have a beard and body hair done, like Ryan wants, now that everyone has hair extensions?” ■

Songs for Alexis, selected for IDFA’s *Panorama*, is produced by Julie Leerskov and Anne Sofie Hansen-Skovmoes for Copenhagen Bombay with support from the New Danish Screen talent scheme. For more information, see reverse section.



Songs for Alexis. Framgrab

“I don’t know if I’m the right person to make a film about being a trans person, but actually I’m more trying to describe what it’s like to be Ryan and what it’s like to be in love.”

DOUBLE ARMS DEALING

In 1995 a secret weapons drop was set to take place in India. The principals were a Danish idealist and a British arms dealer. But nothing went according to plan. Andreas Koefoed's real-life thriller *The Arms Drop* documents the affair that continues to impact the lives of everyone involved.

Masters / IDFA 2014



By Dorte Hygum Sørensen

Niels Holck, a Dane, is on a plane over India's West Bengal in 1995 on a mission to drop four tons of weapons to a movement fighting the local communist regime. With him is Peter Bleach, an Englishman, who has an entirely different agenda.

After a career in the British army, Bleach has set up shop as a legitimate arms dealer. When he receives an order from Holck to supply a large amount of weapons, he knows right away it isn't legal and notifies the British authorities.

London asks Bleach to move forward with the deal. They also assure him that the British authorities will get him out of the case and hold Holck accountable. That's what Bleach expects, the documentary filmmaker Andreas Koefoed says, but London never comes through for him.

"During the drop, the arms fall into the hands of the Indian authorities, Holck gets away and Bleach is left in Bombay, explaining that he was working for England. But England refuses to acknowledge him. Bleach takes the fall and spends eight years in an Indian prison, while the real culprit, Niels Holck, goes free and lives in hiding in Denmark for years."

The Two Men Meet Again

Andreas Koefoed's *The Arms Drop* tells the story of the dodgy arms deal that had far-reaching consequences for its two partners.

The first dramatic highlight comes in 1995, when Holck and Bleach meet on the plane to carry out a mission that goes completely awry. But the story also has a more recent dramatic highlight that has received far less attention than the actual arms drop.

In fall 2010 and spring 2011, the Danish government files suit against Holck in response to India's demands for extradition. When the case is tried in Denmark, Bleach shows up to testify. Koefoed tracked both Holck and Bleach with his camera prior to their court appearances.

"Had the story been done as pure fiction, you would lose the gifts that lie in the real Peter Bleach and the real Niels Holck."

"Bleach testified how he had been treated during the eight years he spent in prison despite the British government's original promise not to leave him in the lurch," the filmmaker says. "Bleach's testimony was a major reason why Holck got off in 2011, when the judges of Denmark's Eastern High Court ruled that he couldn't be extradited because of the risk



SCAPEGOAT. After the arms drop in 1995, Peter Bleach, pictured, is arrested along with the plane's crew. Bleach served eight years in an Indian prison under horrid conditions.

of torture in India." The film shows the two men meeting again after so many years. We sense no craving for revenge from Bleach or remorse from Holck:

"We see the victim return and decide, in an apparent act of forgiveness, to help the man who should probably have received the punishment he got. Bleach does not want another human being to suffer what he suffered," Koefoed says.

Touching the Audience

While *The Arms Drop* describes an action-packed historical event, for Koefoed it is also a portrait of someone who was an uncompromising idealist in his youth.

"Niels Holck fascinates me because he has a clear faith in certain things, which he converts into action without any particular regard for laws or authorities," Koefoed says. "Through him and Peter Bleach the film also charts the course of a life – from reckless, ambitious youth to a certain level of maturity. The story is an example of how things you do come back later in life and force you to deal with them."

With his editor, Adam Nielsen, Koefoed strove to shape the material to move and touch the audience. More than anything, perhaps, *The Arms Drop* brings to mind an adaptation of a John le Carré thriller culminating in a human drama.

"It's a real-life thriller. Had the story been done as pure fiction, you would lose the gifts that lie in the real Peter Bleach and the real Niels Holck," Koefoed says. "It's a major point of fascination for me in documentaries in general that people are themselves. My job is to capture them with my camera in the most powerful way possible" ■

The Arms Drop, selected for Masters at IDFA, is produced by Miriam Nørgaard for Fridthjof Film. For more information, see reverse section.

THE ARMS DROP'S REENACTMENTS

How do you tell such an intricate story in a film? A story that, to boot, has not just one, but two quite complex protagonists in Niels Holck and Peter Bleach?

The Arms Drop alternates between reenactments of the 1995 arms drop and present-day documentary footage of Niels Holck's court battle to avoid extradition and Peter Bleach's search for answers to why the British government left him hanging.

During the lengthy process of developing *The Arms Drop*, Andreas Koefoed got support from the writer and journalist Øjvind Kyrø, who co-wrote the 2008 book *They Call Me a Terrorist* with Niels Holck.

To make the many reenactments, Koefoed worked with the director James Marsh, a Copenhagen resident, who won an Oscar for his documentary *Man on Wire*, a film that also includes reenactments. Also, Koefoed worked with the DP Manuel Alberto Claro (*Nymphomaniac*), who had a big hand in breathing documentary life into the reenactments.

Writer-director Tobias Lindholm (*The Hunt*, *A Hijacking*), working from Koefoed's interviews with Holck and Bleach, wrote the script for the reenactments of the 1995 events, including the dialogue for the two actors playing Holck and Bleach.

For Koefoed and the film's producer Miriam Nørgaard, it was important to bring the reenactments on a par with fiction films.

"Reenactments often illustrate something that's being said in a voiceover or an interview," says the director. "Instead, I tried to have the reenactments play out to give you a feeling of being fully present in the here and now of the events as they actually happened."



Andreas Koefoed

Director, born 1979. Graduated in documentary direction from the National Film School of Denmark in 2009 and in sociology from Copenhagen University in 2004. Koefoed has a unique IDFA track record, with *The Arms Drop* (2014), screening in Masters, being his seventh film in seven years to be selected for the festival: his short films *A Day in the Smoke*, *12 Notes Down*, *Albert's Winter*, and *Pig Country* were all at IDFA. *Ballroom Dancer* (with Christian Bonke, 2011), Koefoed's first feature-length documentary, and *The Ghost of Piramida* (2012) were selected for IDFA competition.

Miriam Nørgaard

Producer at Fridthjof Film. Films include *The Arms Drop*, *Pixadores* (Amir Escandari, 2014, as co-producer, see page 50), *Mercy Mercy* (Katrine Kjær, 2012). In production with *Shadows of a Hero* (Laurits Munch-Petersen, 2015).



WAR-RAPED WOMEN BREAK THE TABOO

In *Mission Rape – A Tool of War*, Annette Mari Olsen and Katia Forbert Petersen shine a light on the thousands of women who were raped during the Bosnian War but failed to get adequate redress for the crimes committed against them in the post-war judicial reckoning.

Panorama / IDFA 2014

By Dorte Hygum Sørensen

In a humble office in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo a mother and her grown daughter work tirelessly every day with the consequences of the Bosnian War from 1992 to 1995.

Both the mother and the daughter, who was a child at the time, were raped during the war, when rape was used systematically as a weapon of war to carry out ethnic cleansing. Both women take part in Katia Forbert Petersen and Annette Mari Olsen's documentary *Mission Rape – A Tool of War*.

The two directors spent several years making the film in collaboration with producer Karen Hjort. Focusing on the women from Sarajevo, they clearly and powerfully shine a light on the consequences of the mass raping that was carried out during the Bosnian War and the lack of legal redress for the women in the international tribunal after the war.

The Hidden War Crime

"Rape is recognised as a war crime. But rape is lumped together with all the other crimes. It's not a crime that's mentioned and singled out in court. The women who were raped never hear it stated in court that a criminal raped 20 specific women," Katia Forbert Petersen says.

Rape as a war crime continues to be perpetrated around the world. It's happening right now in Syria, Africa, South America and elsewhere, but it's not spoken of, Annette Mari Olsen says.

"We talk of fatalities and casualties and wounded soldiers and estimated civilian deaths. But rape and the consequences to the victims are not brought to light, unless it's an extremely high number of crimes," Olsen says.

"Rape is a taboo, a shame-ridden crime. It's amazing that the women in our film are willing to stand up and talk about it, both to us and to a court of law."

Rape statistics from the Bosnian War range from 25,000 to 50,000 instances. The film includes scenes from the post-war tribunal, where war criminals are sentenced to death for homicide.

Hoping to Raise Awareness

Obviously, no criminal can get a sentence longer than life, and the women in Bosnia and other countries aren't asking for more jail time for the criminals. They are asking for justice. As the two Danish directors say, this is necessary for the rape victims to get their lives back.

"A lot of these women are living like zombies. They are dead inside. Many of them say it would have been better if they had been shot," Forbert Petersen says.

Olsen mentions the Norwegian trial against the mass killer Anders Breivik as an example of a case where judicially a big deal was made out of

mentioning the name of every single individual Breivik killed.

"Each victim is given the feeling of having achieved judicial justice. Whereas during post-war court trials rape is being dealt with as the least significant of war crime acts. It is as though the courts haven't understood how central the position of woman is in society – she is the 'mother-daughter-sister.' It's the pillar of society that has been violated and unless justice is done the aftermath will be felt for generations to come," Olsen says.

"After the Bosnian War, some women courageously testified in court about what happened. There have been no consequences," Olsen says. "We hope the film will raise awareness about that and let the women know that they don't have to hide. The victims shouldn't be ashamed that they were raped."

Long-Term Consequences

The last rapes of the Bosnian War took place almost 20 years ago. As the Danish documentary's footage from Sarajevo shows, the consequences of the assaults are still being felt. Rape is a common crime in peacetime, as well. But, as Forbert Petersen says, rape is much more widespread during a war. "All the bad things that happen to women in peacetime grow to monstrous proportions in wartime."

"The still unresolved political conflicts in Bosnia are closely tied to the lack of justice for the rape victims," Olsen says. "When you impact the woman, you also impact the husband, the children – the whole family." Forbert Petersen adds, "It reverberates through the generations. It lingers" ■

Mission Rape – A Tool of War, selected for Panorama at IDFA, is produced by Annette Mari Olsen, Katia Forbert Petersen and Karen Hjort for Sfinx Film/TV. For more information, see reverse section.

Photo: Katia Forbert Petersen



Annette Mari Olsen

Director and producer Annette Mari Olsen, was born 1947 in Denmark, but grew up in Iran and England. She holds an MA from the Polish Film School in Lodz from 1973. Before returning to Denmark in 1977, she worked as a director in Poland. Her stints as an interpreter of Farsi/Persian, among other languages, have led to several films about minorities living in Denmark.

Photo: Wojtek Kloczko



Katia Forbert Petersen

Cinematographer and director Katia Forbert Petersen, born 1949 in Poland, graduated in cinematography from the Polish Film School in Lodz. She has shot around 150 films and worked widely as a cinematographer, including for ZDF and the Canadian Film Board.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Annette Mari Olsen and Katia Forbert Petersen, the filmmakers behind *Mission Rape – A Tale of War*, have been running their company Sfinx Film/TV since 1988, making films that appeal to the heart and the mind.

It's no coincidence that the integration of people from different cultures features as a prominent issue in the list of films Annette Mari Olsen and Katia Forbert Petersen have made in their long-standing professional partnership at their joint company Sfinx Film/TV.

Katia Forbert Petersen came to Denmark from Poland as a refugee in 1969 with a degree in cinematography from the National Film School in Lodz. Annette Mari Olsen was born in Denmark and grew up in Iran and England. She has a degree in directing, also from the Lodz Film School, and has lived in Denmark for the last many years.

Their multicultural backgrounds form the foundation for their interest in, and understanding of, meetings between people of different origins across the world. Their films never fail to penetrate to the human core of the subject or event they are describing.

Mission Rape – A Tool of War is the latest film from the two documentarians. The film's message has priority over the aesthetics. In other films, including *The Bird That Could Tell Fortunes* (2007) and *My Iranian Paradise* (2008), they have crafted highly personal and atmospheric documentaries.

Sfinx Film/TV has existed since 1988, making it one of Denmark's oldest documentary production companies. Forbert Petersen is cinematographer and co-director, while Olsen is director, producer and general manager.

MISSION RAPE – AS PART OF AN APPEAL FOR CHANGE

Mission Rape – A Tool of War is one of six films nominated for the Oxfam Global Justice Award. The Award recognizes the efforts of filmmakers telling stories about people who make a difference. The winner is announced during IDFA.

In June, Annette Mari Olsen and Katia Forbert Petersen's film was screened in London during the global summit End Sexual Violence in Conflict. The object of the summit was to do something about the fact that mass rape as a military strategy is still seen in many conflicts. The summit is reportedly the biggest meeting ever held on the subject.

The film received a nomination for the Iris Best European Intercultural Programme at Prix Europa and is selected for Vienna Human Rights Film Festival, taking place in December. See more at nomoremisionrape.com.

YOUNG LIVES IN MOTION

Fencing is not all they have in common. Two films, Simon Lereng Wilmont's *The Fencing Champion* and Lea Hjort Mathiesen's *Malek Means Angel*, record with great sensitivity the intimate world of two children on the cusp of adolescence.

Kids & Docs / IDFA 2014



The Fencing Champion, Framnegrab

Malek Means Angel, Framnegrab



"The moment my camera found Malek, I started filming."
Lea Hjort Mathiesen

By Nanna Frank Rasmussen

As often happens in documentaries, it was circumstance that brought Malek, a Tunisian girl, to Lea Hjort Mathiesen's attention. A partnership between the National Film School of Denmark and the non-profit organisation IMS had dispatched the Danish director to Tunisia with nothing but a camera and a return ticket. All she knew in advance was that she wanted to film a young girl in motion.

One day, she stopped by a big white, rundown basement where a group of children were fencing and she knew that she had found what she was looking for. Their dance-like movements across the floor transformed the room. It was like a mash-up of the Renaissance and something very futuristic, the filmmaker recalls.

Two Stories Take Shape

"I was observing the children's movements, as they tried out power stands and internal dynamics. Suddenly, Malek showed up. There was something about her face. She's a really pretty girl, of course, but she's also incredibly expressive. It was like she instantly invited me into her world. The moment my camera found her, I started filming. We had no common language, but there was a mutual understanding between us, a natural connection," Hjort Mathiesen says about the protagonist of *Malek Means Angel*, a girl who dreams of becoming a fencer.

Nor was there any doubt in Simon Lereng Wilmont's mind when he found his protagonist, Ruben, a master of the épée who lives and breathes

his sport with every ounce of his 11-year-old body and soul.

"The first time I saw Ruben compete, there was frustration and tears of joy. I wanted to examine what makes a winner, what it takes to win tough competitions and how to move on if you lose. But then another story emerged that became at least as important. That was the story of Ruben's growing infatuation with Marie," Wilmont says.

Malek and Ruben are on the cusp of adolescence. It's a vulnerable age that fascinates both directors, and they both capture it with poetic sensitivity.

Love Songs in the Dressing Room

As a filmmaker, Hjort Mathiesen is drawn to the study of girls before they become teenagers – when the world is at their feet, energy levels are high, and presumptions about what it means to be a certain gender haven't started to cause restrictions.

"The most important thing for me," Hjort Mathiesen says, "was to tell a story about this particular stage of life. This phase where you still have access to the carefree and playful world of children and where girls like Malek haven't started to limit themselves by expectations as to what they should or should not do. A phase where female and male roles are played out, even if it's just among girls. It's like playing house when you are little, only now as the rehearsal before the actual play."

Malek also showed a side of herself that took the director by surprise. "When Malek burst into these beautiful love songs in the dressing room, she invited me to see a whole new side of herself. Here is a girl



Photo: Final Cut for Real

Simon Lereng Wilmont

Director, born 1975. A 2009 graduate of the National Film School of Denmark. His first feature doc, *Travelling with Mr. T* (2012), was selected for CPH:DOX. *Chikara – The Sumo Wrestler's Son* (2013) was selected for IDFA, as is *The Fencing Champion* (2014).

Monica Hellström

Producer at Final Cut for Real. Films include *The Fencing Champion*, *Concerning Violence* (Göran Hugo Olsson, 2014, as co-producer, see page 50), *Chikara – The Sumo Wrestler's Son* (Simon Lereng Wilmont, 2013).



The Fencing Champion, Framnagrab

who may not know love between a man and a woman yet, but who certainly showed extraordinary emotional depth. Her songs became the key to the intimate space I wanted to create," the filmmaker says.

"What I didn't know was that it's not considered proper behaviour for a young girl to sing such heartfelt love songs. When there was a loud knocking at the dressing-room door, I thought the parents were just impatient because they wanted to take their children home. Later, I learned that she was being reprimanded through the door."

No Voiceover to Explain

Simon Lereng Wilmont's *The Fencing Champion* also trusts that you don't have to take the audience by the hand and explain everything to them. Neither director uses a voiceover or long, explanatory captions. The films are windows into a transitional phase in life and the audience tag along with the directors, who observe without interfering.

"You get more nuances when you stay away from explaining." Simon Lereng Wilmont

"You get more nuances when you stay away from explaining," Wilmont says. As he learned, it's no use trying to direct the children. "If I tried to set up certain guidelines for their behaviour, the whole thing fell apart. Then when I left them alone, real things started happening. The freer they were, the more I got out of them. I learned to look for that."

He spent time just hanging out with Ruben and Marie, goofing around and playing. "You have to know when to put away the camera," he says.

"Children generally don't have the same kind of filters as adults, which makes working with them so hard but also so much fun. When I film kids, they're definitely being real."

A Need for Something Less Simplistic

Both filmmakers literally got on their character's

eye level by holding the camera to show us the world from the children's point of view. This had the effect that they were accepted into the group of children.

"I was interested in the intimate moments that occur between Malek and her friend Yasmine," Mathiesen says. "To do that, you have to be on their level. Emotionally but also technically. I constantly shot with my knees bent," says Hjort Mathiesen.

While Hjort Mathiesen didn't make her film with a target audience of children in mind, Wilmont's *The Fencing Champion* is intended for a young audience. As a filmmaker and a parent, Wilmont thinks all children would benefit from having something less simplistic to look at than the standard children's channel fare.

"It will teach them to see the world through other lenses than the American one, which is so dominant on TV," Wilmont says. "People have a tendency to think children need to have everything served on a silver platter" ■

The Fencing Champion is produced by Monica Hellström for *Final Cut for Real*. *Malek Means Angel* is a student film produced at the National Film School of Denmark. Both are premiering in *Kids & Docs* at IDFA. For more information, see reverse section.

THE FENCING CHAMPION

Ruben's face isn't hard to read. If he does well in a fencing match, he beams. If he does poorly, he gets upset and cries. Pulling in close, Simon Lereng Wilmont shows us the turbulent emotions cursing through Ruben's body as he is preparing for the big annual championship. Winning means everything to him. However, as he has moved up a level, the opponents are older, bigger and better. He has to give everything he's got to succeed. Plus, Ruben has his budding friendship with Marie to think about and the confusing feelings that go with it.

MALEK MEANS ANGEL

Malek takes fencing lessons, but she values her time with her friend Yasmine just as much. During practice they concentrate, training intensively for an upcoming tournament. In between lessons, Malek sings to her friend and they talk about the future as they sit outside the fencing hall, giggling and daring each other to pull pranks. They are thoughtful, playful girls with a newly developed curiosity about the opposite sex. Lea Hjort Mathiesen's documentary is a musical study of a young girl's movements, both physically and metaphorically.



Photo: Frans Mathiesen

Lea Hjort Mathiesen

Director, born 1983. A student at the National Film School of Denmark, graduating in 2015. In early 2014 she travelled to Tunisia under the project *One Month, One (Wo)man, One Camera*, a partnership between the Film School and the non-profit organisation IMS (International Media Support). She returned with the footage for *Malek Means Angel*. Selected for *Kids & Docs* at IDFA.

BRINGING OUT PERSONAL AND TRANSMEDIA STORIES

Several Danish filmmakers have pooled their creative resources in 2014 to found two new production companies, Good Company Pictures and House of Real. FILM looks at what we can expect from the two new outfits.

GOOD COMPANY PICTURES

Three award-winning directors, Kaspar Astrup Schröder, Katrine Philp and Boris Benjamin Bertram, together with producer Katrine A. Sahlstrøm, established Good Company Pictures in spring 2014.

"We wanted a creative partnership where we could use each other and our various skills to make the films we want to see. And we wanted to be our own bosses," producer Katrine A. Sahlstrøm says.

Previous films by the three directors include *Rent a Family Inc.* and *The Invention of Dr. Nakamats* by Kaspar Astrup Schröder, *Dance for Me* and *Suitable* by Katrine Philp, and *The War Campaign*, *Tank City* and *Diplomacy* by Boris Benjamin Bertram. Producer Katrine A. Sahlstrøm has worked with directors like Lars von Trier, Nikolaj Arcel and Thomas Vinterberg. Her first film as a documentary producer, *Ai Weiwei The Fake Case*, was shortlisted at IDFA and won the Danish critics' award in 2014.

UPCOMING FILMS

Learning to Forget

The film centres on an orphanage in China, home to 100 children whose parents are either on death row or serving long prison sentences. Stigmatised by their parents' deeds, they must prepare for life outside in a society where misconceptions about them flourish. **Director** Kaspar Astrup Schröder.

The War Photographer

Jan Grarup is a world-famous war photographer who becomes torn between his career and his family when his ex-wife falls seriously ill and he has to take care of their three children all by himself. **Director** Boris Benjamin Bertram.

Salimah

Salimah, 10, is from Malaysia, where she has been living as an illegal refugee since she was born. Her mother is unable to take care of her, and so she is going to Denmark where her father and older sister live. Sadly, she has no memory of them. **Director** Katrine Philp.



Flux, Framnagrab

HOUSE OF REAL

House of Real, founded by the two producers Jesper Jack and Anna J. Ljungmark, works in factual cross-platform storytelling focusing on creative development processes and a sustainable approach to documentary filmmaking.

"As a producer, I often experience being left with a lot of research and knowledge that doesn't fit into a 90-minute format. At House of Real we want to make better use of our knowledge and rights by creating a cohesive work that will continue to have a life on a multitude of platforms in the form of web series, articles, news reports or theatre," Jesper Jack says.

Jack has worked as a director, editor, format developer and film editor of a long line of series and documentaries and has produced Janus Metz's *Ticket to Paradise* and *Love on Delivery*. Anna J. Ljungmark has worked in film since 1994 and is a pioneer in the field of transmedia in Scandinavia. She is the founder of BoostHbg, an innovative arena for talent development working in transmedia and film, and also developed and was head of SWIM, a media innovation platform launched by CPH:DOX.

UPCOMING FILMS

Flux

Inspired by Ursula K. Le Guin's science-fiction classic *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Flux* is a playful journey into a world where gender is negotiated instead of being categorised by sex. Embarking on the journey, your mission is to explore this world and report back. The director is currently an artist in residence at the MIT Open Documentary Lab, focusing on emerging documentary forms. **Director** Suvi Helminen.

Venus

It's springtime in Copenhagen. Two female filmmakers set out to investigate female desire, driven by questions raised by their own experiences growing up. They invite 100 young women to reveal to the camera the complexity between what reason allows and passion demands. The directors want to make an erotic film based on the women's own memories and thoughts. **Directors** Mette Carla Albrechtsen, Lea Glob.

Foreigners for Sale

A story about the Chinese housing bubble. See more on page 49. **Director** David Borenstein.



Learning to Forget, Photo: Kaspar Astrup Schröder

HOME-MADE SPACE TRAVEL

UPCOMING. Director Max Kestner follows two Danish space amateurs as they pursue their dream to build their own rocket and travel into space.

Amateurs in Space is the story of one of the greatest dreams of humankind and how to make it come true in your own way.

Founders of the Danish rocket association Copenhagen Suborbitals, Peter and Kristian are struggling to build their own rocket and venture beyond Earth's atmosphere. Peter is a self-taught submarine builder specialising in making the impossible happen. He's in charge of the booster that's going to push the rocket into

orbit. Kristian, who used to work for NASA, is in charge of the spacecraft that's going to take Peter into orbit – and back again. Everything in the rocket is homemade. Most of it is built from materials that are available at any home improvement store.

The first attempted launch took place in 2010 under the eyes of the assembled world media, including reporters from as far away as the US, Russia and China. But the rocket just stood there on the launch pad – nothing happened. The next year, it flew – but horizontally!

Then, in 2013, the project had its big breakthrough. The rocket lifted off and soared upwards, actively controlled by a homemade computer program. Straight up – and straight for the stars.

The film monitors the two space pioneers' efforts to arrive at the sublime despite such everyday stumbling blocks as losing your screwdriver or fighting over whose turn it is to take out the trash. *Amateurs in Space* is produced by Sigrid Dyekjær for Danish Documentary Production. Expected release in 2015. *NØ*



Amateurs in Space Photo: Danish Documentary Production



The Allins Photo: Anders Løfstedt

AN EXTRA-ORDINARY FAMILY

UPCOMING. The late American, extreme punk-rock musician GG Allin is best remembered for his notorious live performances, which featured transgressive acts like self-mutilation, eating his own feces and attacking the audience. Allin died of a heroin

overdose in 1993. In director Sami Saif's (*Family*) upcoming film *The Allins*, we meet Allin's two remaining family members, his mother Arleta and his brother Merle, who is still active in Allin's backing band The Murder Junkies. The film tells the story of an extraordinary, loving family, whose departed son and brother left a trail of unanswered questions behind. It explores our need to feed our own version of the past to overcome the present and the future. Signe Leick Jensen and Stine Boe Jensen are producing for Toolbox Film. *The Allins* is expected to release in 2015. *NØ*

WAR STORIES

UPCOMING. Based on two dramatic historical events, Claus Bohm's *The Plunge* explores the nature of war and humanity, drawing connections to today's young combatants.

March 1918. A young man is on a train to Stockholm. Peter de Hemmer Gudme, a Danish poet and theology student, is going to Finland to fight in the Finnish Civil War. Gudme becomes a legendary war hero and later an intrepid war correspondent during the Russian-Finnish Winter War of 1939-40.

November 1944. Gudme fights in the resistance during the

German occupation of Denmark. Captured, he is due for his second interrogation at the Gestapo headquarters in Copenhagen. Upon his arrival, Gudme breaks away and jumps down a stairwell. He plunges five storeys, hits the hard stone floor and dies. Gudme, 47, is recently married and leaves behind a two-month-old son. His charismatic personality, Christian background and the fact that the war is nearly over make his suicide even more inscrutable.

The script for *The Plunge* is co-written by director Claus Bohm and the Norwegian-Danish writer Kim Leine, who in 2013 received the Nordic Council Literary Prize for *The Prophets of Eternal Fjord*, his epic novel about a Danish pastor in Greenland. The film is produced by Ulla Hjorth Nielsen for Filmforysningen. In development. *NØ*



The Plunge Photo: Filmforysningen

THE NATURAL DISORDER

UPCOMING. What does it mean to live with cerebral palsy? How does society in general regard people with brain damage? These questions are explored in *The Natural Disorder*.

The Natural Disorder is a new project merging documentary filmmaking and scientific research by director Christian Sønderby Jepsen and philosopher and neuroscientist Dr Kristian Moltke Martiny, PhD.

The main character in the film is journalist and comedian Jacob Nossell (*The Red Chapel*), who has cerebral palsy. Following

Nossell in his everyday life and capturing people's reactions to his condition, the film also features a live performance at the Royal Danish Theatre in September by Nossell, who was encouraged to write and star in a play in response to the painful, heartrending question that has been haunting him all his life: Do I have the right to live?

Documentary filmmakers' interest in scientific subjects is evident in several current films, such as *The Natural Disorder*. The Danish Film Institute has recently launched an initiative focusing on creative and financial partnerships between documentary film and science.

The Natural Disorder is produced by Malene Flindt Pedersen, Sidsel Lønig Siersted and Katrine Salhstrøm for Moving Documentary. Expected premiere in late 2015. *AH*

Photo montage showing Jacob Nossell as the central figure of *The Natural Disorder*.



The Natural Disorder Photo: Anders Ladegaard



Transformation Photo: Final Cut for Real

STAYING OUT

UPCOMING. Tracking three people from Los Angeles who have made a conscious decision to stay out of crime, Camilla Magid's *Transformation* is a universal tale of survival through the will to change.

Brian, 42, has just been released after 24 years in prison. He has no job, no place to live and doesn't know a soul. He has never used a cell phone or the Internet. He dreams about finding love, but he has never been with a girl.

Juan is a teenager in juvenile prison. When he was a child, his mother had him smuggled from El Salvador to Los Angeles to give him a better life. Instead, he ended up in

a gang and got arrested. Now he is determined to change his ways and be the father he never had for his baby girl.

Brian and Juan are two of the three characters in Camilla Magid's *Transformation*. In sessions with Dr. Richard, a psychologist for the L.A. Sheriff's Department, we learn about their hopes and darkest fears. He offers them a rare helping hand to realise their dream – transforming to a life without crime.

Camilla Magid's previous documentary *White Black Boy* (2012) was awarded at CPH:DOX. A graduate from the alternative film school Super16, Magid debuted as a filmmaker with the award-winning short film *The Black Lines* (2006).

Transformation is produced by Signe Byrge Sørensen (*The Act of Killing*, *The Look of Silence*) and Heidi Elise Christensen for Final Cut for Real. Currently in development. *NØ*

CHINESE HOUSING BUBBLE

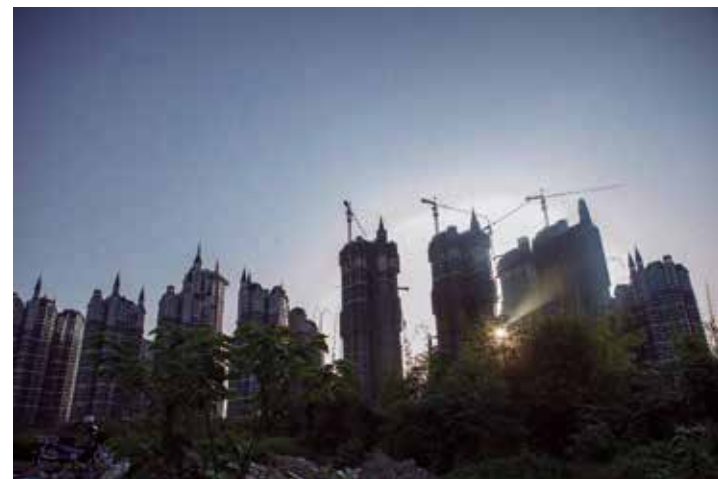
UPCOMING. In China where real estate prices are ballooning, Suky is selling the illusion of a never-ending boom to Chinese home-buyers.

In *Foreigners for Sale* director David Borenstein tracks Suky, his assistant Yana and a Dutch employee named Dirk organising deceptive spectacles to help Chinese developers and government officials sell overpriced property. For a few hours, their scheme turns remote ghost towns



into surreal globalised cities with fake foreign celebrities and pop stars, diplomats, athletes and businessmen. But like the people Suky is helping to dupe, he too makes painful sacrifices to buy into the "Chinese Dream."

Produced by Jesper Jack for House of Real (see more page 47), the feature version of *Foreigners for Sale* opens in 2015, while short current-affairs versions open in late 2014. *NØ*



Foreigners for Sale Photos: House of Real

DANISH CO-PRODUCTIONS

Creative exchange and financing across borders makes good sense in filmmaking. Four documentary titles show the fruit of Danish producers working with their peers in Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Drone

Technology is expanding at an unprecedented rate changing our wars and possibly our world. Through voices on both sides of this new technology, *Drone* gives crucial context and new perspectives to the covert CIA drone wars. Over 3000 people have been killed by drones in Waziristan since 2004. The film gives new insights on the future of warfare. Should robots decide who, when and where to kill? Does the new technology make it too easy to kill or is it saving lives by making war more humane?

Director Tonje Hessen Schei
Production Lars Løge for Flimmer Film (Norway)
Danish co-producers Stefan Frost, Henrik Underbjerg for Radiator Film

Concerning Violence

The film is based on newly discovered archive material covering the most daring moments in the struggle for liberation from colonial rule in Africa. This powerful footage is combined with citations from Frantz Fanon's landmark book *The Wretched of the Earth* written in 1960 and still a major tool for understanding and illuminating

the neocolonialism happening today, as well as the unrest and the reactions against it.

Director Göran Hugo Olsson
Production Annika Rogell and Tobias Janson for Story (Sweden)
Danish co-producers Monica Hellström and Anne Köhncke for Final Cut for Real



Best of Fests / IDFA 2014



First Appearance / IDFA 2014

Pixadores

A group of young men from the favelas of São Paulo risk their lives to make their mark on the world, going out at night to spray-paint high-rises with slogans. Are they artists, criminals or anarchists? The art world flirts with them and the authorities hate them. The pixadores have to choose between staying on the

fringes of society with their protest or becoming more mainstream risking being kissed to death in a world unknown to them until now.

Director Amir Escandari
Production Miia Haavisto for Helsinkifilmi (Finland)
Danish co-producer Miriam Nørgaard for Fridthjof Film

Gulabi Gang

Enter the badlands of Bundelkhand in central India and you have entered a place of desolation, dust and despair. And yet it is hope that we discover as we follow the pink sari-clad women of the Gulabi Gang. These women travel long distances by cart and tractor, bus and train, to wrest justice for women and Dalits, undeterred by sneering policemen and

condescending bureaucrats. As the film pulls us into the centre of these blazing conflicts, it uncovers a complex story, disturbing yet heartening.

Director Nishtha Jain
Production Torstein Grude for Piraya Film (Norway)
Danish co-producers Anne Köhncke and Signe Byrge Sørensen for Final Cut For Real



The Female Gaze / IDFA 2014

PRODUCING WITH DANISH PARTNERS

The Danish Film Institute (DFI) can fund international co-productions of documentaries of any length plus short fiction and trans-media projects that have a non-Danish

delegate producer. If you have a project you would like to co-produce with Denmark, the first step is to find a Danish co-producer. The Danish co-producer can then apply to the DFI. Find more at dfi.dk/English under Funding.

MARRIAGE MIGRATION – AND HOW TO EAT INSECTS

Introducing two titles pitching at IDFA Forum 2014.

ALMOST LIKE FOIE GRAS

IDFA FORUM / CENTRAL PITCH
 Andreas Johnsen's *Ai Weiwei The Fake Case* screened in IDFA's main competition last year. The Danish filmmaker's next documentary, *Bugs*, digs into the phenomenon of entomophagy, or "insect eating."

In the company of two talented chefs from Noma's non-profit Nordic Food Lab, director Andreas Johnsen travels the world to sample a variety of insects and investigate whether bugs are the solution to global malnutrition and food shortages.

Why is it important to study how insects can become part of our diet in the Western world?
 Basically, it's a question of feeding the world's growing population while still looking out for the planet. Insects are predicted to be the next big food trend because of their nutritional potential, low environmental cost and, some would say, good taste. But to have a real impact, it has to advance from an interesting idea to a greater trend.

What are the biggest obstacles to that?
 Clearly the cultural barriers against eating insects ... We have no tradition for it. So most people think it's disgusting. I try to examine how to break down the cultural barriers. If you had never seen a shellfish or a chicken before, you would think that was disgusting, too. How do you change that attitude? But it's also a matter of how the food is going to be produced. If we successfully persuade people to eat insects, we have to start mass-producing them, and how do we ensure that industrially produced bugs taste as good as what we find in nature?

What's your most extreme experience so far?
 I have always been a very curious person and I'm never afraid to try all sorts of weird things, seen from a Western perspective. So it wasn't really that much of a leap for me to start eating insects. The chefs and I even ate them alive sometimes just to see how that tasted. There's a reason why people all over the world eat insects. It usually has to do with the fact that they taste good.

Is there any specific insect you would recommend?
 Yes, take something like a termite queen, a termite roughly eight centimetres long and full of eggs. It's really delicious, almost like foie gras.



Bugs Photo: Andreas Johnsen

Ben Reade and Josh Evans are two chefs working on a three-year grant to study the practice of eating insects in different cultures around the world. Andreas Johnsen tags along to record and document their

fieldwork. To date, they have visited Australia, Mexico, Peru and parts of Africa. Their next stop is Japan. *Bugs* is produced by Sigrid Dyekjær for Rosforth Film and Danish Documentary Production.



Between Two Worlds Photo: Lars Shree

CAUGHT BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

IDFA FORUM / ROUND TABLE
 It's been nearly a decade since we first met Sommai, Kae and Basit, three Thai women arriving in a small, windswept village in Denmark to find husbands.

Now, in *Between Two Worlds*, director Janus Metz is back to record their lives and the effect their decision to leave their home in Thailand has had on them and their loved ones.

Sommai lives by the North Sea in Denmark and heads a wide network of mail-order brides from Thailand who are married to Danish men. She was the first Thai to arrive in the area and ever since she has been helping her "sisters" make the same journey.

Set in Thailand and Denmark, and centring on Sommai, *Between Two Worlds* follows four married couples over 10 years in a drama about globalisation seen from the perspective of marriage migration.

The unique time frame of the filming has made it possible to portray the changes in the characters'

lives as well as the changes happening in Thailand and Denmark. We witness dreams meeting reality and actions having consequences.

Between Two Worlds is a documentary project embracing four individual films and a feature-length documentary. Back in 2008, Janus Metz released *Love on Delivery* and *Ticket to Paradise*, about Sommai and her endeavour to help Thai women. Returning to the same characters, he is now making *Seven Years Later* and *A World Apart* from all new material. Finally, *Between Two Worlds* is based on the material of all four individual films.

Like its predecessors, the new films are made in close collaboration with anthropologist Sine Plambech, whose internationally recognised fieldwork among marriage migrants and sex workers is the backbone of the project.

Between Two Worlds is produced by Henrik Veileborg for Upfront Films and Metz Film.



1989 / ANDERS ØSTERGAARD

When the 40-year-old economist Miklós Németh was made prime minister of Hungary in 1988, no one expected him to be anything but a puppet of the Party. Instead, he went his own way, tearing a hole in the Iron Curtain.

Photo from 1989 shows the Hungarian Parliament on 24 November 1988 when Németh was inaugurated as prime minister.

Marking the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, Anders Østergaard's film about this little known Cold War hero had its world premiere at CPH:DOX on 5 November. As a true pan-European event, the film was transmitted simultaneously to Danish cinemas and more than 20 venues across Europe. 1989 is produced by Magic Hour Films.