

BLOOD

Frank Piasecki Poulsen's daring *Blood in the Mobile* and Silver Wolf winner Eva Mulvad's chamber play *The Good Life* are two stories that reflect the wide span of Danish documentaries.

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COMEDY

IDFA veteran Phie Ambo returns to the festival with *The Home Front*, a doc comedy about communication breakdown over a fence. New at the festival are Morten Vest and Robin Schmidt, showing *Masai on the Move*.

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EROTIC

Can you measure the erotic? Jørgen Leth, experimental filmmaker for nearly 50 years, searches the world and his inner self for answers in *Erotic Man*, a film Leth describes as perhaps his most important work.

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#70

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THE GOOD LIFE
BLOOD IN THE MOBILE
THE HOME FRONT / MASAI ON THE MOVE
ARMADILLO / MY PLAYGROUND
EROTIC MAN / PIG COUNTRY / INTO ETERNITY
MY AVATAR AND ME

./FILM./

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COVER *Blood in the Mobile*. Photo by Frederik Jacobi

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The catalogue in the reverse section gives a full view of all current Danish documentary and short films – either in release or in the pipeline. See more at dfi.dk/English/FILM-Magazine

The Danish Film Institute is the national agency responsible for supporting and encouraging film and cinema culture. Operations extend from participation in the development and production of feature films, shorts and documentaries, over distribution and marketing, to managing the national film archive and the Cinematheque.

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The Good Life Photo: Pedro Cláudio



Danish Documentary Photo: Per Morten Abrahamsen



Masai on the Move Photo: Robin Schmidt



My Playground. Framegrab



Erotic Man Photo: Jakob Langvad



Into Eternity. Framegrab

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YOU'VE GOT BLOOD IN YOUR MOBILE

Blood in the Mobile Photo: Frederik Jacobi (above and below)

When Frank Piasecki Poulsen went to Congo in 2008 to research a film about child workers, he was plunged into a real-life hell of human exploitation at militia-run mines extracting precious minerals for our mobile phones. The director, who never balked at a risky political project, talks about a horrifying reality and the difficult art of getting to see real decision-makers. *Blood in the Mobile* is selected for IDFA's Feature-length Competition.

BY NYNNE MARIE SELIN

Frank Piasecki Poulsen had been to Africa many times before, but he was still taken aback when he first landed in Kinshasa to do the research for *Blood in the Mobile*.

"This was really Africa the hard way. There was trash everywhere and it stank. It was a big city teeming with life and desperation at the same time," he says.

"Before you can even turn on your camera, you need permits from the civilian authorities, the military authorities, the secret police, the immigration police and the regular police. Every time you run into the authorities, you have to show your permits, and they all have the right to delay you. I made the mistake of saying I was in a hurry and suddenly it took them 20 minutes just to flip through

my passport. That's something I had to learn. If I got upset, the process just took longer."

Poulsen can understand why no one ever made a film like this before, which sets out to defy obstacles and potential dangers in a volatile corner of the world.

"It's Africa, that's one thing, but on top of everything else there's a two-day hike through the jungle without UN protection, should something go wrong. Very few reporters are willing to make that trip."

HELL ON EARTH

After visiting the Bisie mine and getting a sense of how inflamed the situation there was, he knew he had found the premise for his film: to describe conditions at one of the illegal mines that supply minerals to mobile phone manufacturers and finance a drawn-out, bloody civil war.

"The first time I made it to the top of the mountain pass into the mining area and looked down over the 800-by-500-metre crater, it was like looking down on hell on earth. It's impossible to describe this nightmare scenario with all its suffering. All ties to human morality have been abandoned there," Poulsen says.

"Somewhere from 15,000 to 25,000 people, mainly children and teenagers, work in the Bisie mine. No one grows old there. Inside the area, everything is expensive. You have to pay money for protection, lodging, a hammer and chisel and,

"Before you can even turn on your camera, you need permits from the civilian authorities, the military authorities, the secret police, the immigration police and the regular police."





Blood in the Mobile Photo: Frederik Jacobi

“The first time I made it to the top of the mountain pass into the mining area and looked down over the 800-by-500-metre crater, it was like looking down on hell on earth.”



“Against my expectations, I ended up with a case study of how a big corporation should not react when someone like me comes knocking.”

of ethnic minorities or for a political agenda. They are fighting for control of the mining areas, because they are a regular money-making machine. And every time we in the West get out our wallets to buy a mobile phone, we are financing it.”

Using yourself to propel the story and putting the issue ahead of personal aesthetics comes at a price. “I had to approach the material in a way that would best explain the issue,” he says. “So I had to use all my research footage, even if the camera is whirling around. No doubt, people who see the film, who know about eastern Congo and the things that go on there, will find a lot of information missing. However, we tried to make a film that takes up a serious, heavy issue in a way so people don’t mind spending 82 minutes watching it.”

NOKIA IN A BAD LIGHT

Ever since he started doing films and television – way before he had heard about Nick Broomfield or Michael Moore – Poulsen instinctively put himself in his films.

“I realised there was almost nothing I couldn’t do when I was in front of the camera. I wasn’t afraid of kicking in doors of ministries or asking pointed questions of high and mighty editors-in-chief. Nothing was sacred and there was nothing I couldn’t get access to.”

Visiting Bisie was so overwhelming that Poulsen considered it his duty not only to reveal conditions there but also to use *Blood in the Mobile* to get some

possible solutions to the problems. So he tries to get the ear of mobile phone manufacturing giant Nokia.

“I never for a minute doubted that Nokia was already working to find a responsible solution,” he says. “I intended to show the drawn-out, difficult process I know it takes to solve this kind of problem. Tracking them in their work, I would spotlight the stumbling blocks. I always had the attitude that I wanted to give Nokia every possible chance to shine as a company that’s doing something to solve these problems.”

But, even though Poulsen called up Nokia every week for more than a year, he never managed to get a single appointment for an interview. He talked with an army of receptionists, but the communications officers they transferred him to never picked up the phone and never called back. Finally, Poulsen travelled to Nokia’s headquarters in Helsinki, where, after much wrangling, he was pooh-poohed with a half-hour interview.

“I feel bad for the people at Nokia who may be taken to task now for giving bad answers or turning up in a movie that doesn’t put Nokia in a very good light. But that’s Nokia’s own business. I just show what happened. Against my expectations, I ended up with a case study of how a big corporation should *not* react when someone like me comes knocking.”

TAKING THE FIRST STEP AFTER 10 YEARS

The solution is right at hand, the director says: “If you can get big corporations like Nokia and

of course, food and drink. A beer costs 12 dollars, a soda costs 7. Children and young people go there looking for a fast buck, but they are hornswoggled into a system where the cost of living is so high that they can’t afford to leave again. They are trapped. Not by a fence but by jungle.

“The trade in minerals at Bisie is self-operating, because of the constant external demand,” Poulsen says. “Armed groups make their money by setting up roadblocks and collecting a tax from everyone entering or leaving the mining area. You could try to make a run for it through the jungle, but it would amount to suicide.”

Eight days before the film crew arrived in Bisie, more than 50 people were killed in a massacre after trying to seize control of the mine. To Frank, it was a stark reminder of what the conflict is about. “The militias are not fighting for the rights

Apple to decide to stop using conflict minerals in their products, the fuel being poured on the civil war in Congo will dry up and the conflict will more than likely come to an end. Of course, that won't solve every problem in Congo, but cleaning up mining conditions would be a start. The big companies seem unwilling to take on social responsibility. They have to be pressured to do so, either by legislation or consumer pressure."

Five days before the Danish premiere of *Blood in the Mobile* Nokia sent a press release to a Danish newspaper stating that the company would start declaring the origin of the minerals used in their mobile phones. The statement was a result of a bill signed by the US Congress.

Naturally, that pleases the director, though he remains sceptical. "Sadly, a close reading of the statement indicates that they are trying to lay the blame on their supply chain, which is not all that

different from what they had been saying all along. For a company that claims to be socially responsible, that's simply not good enough."

Poulsen hopes *Blood in the Mobile* will help create the needed pressure. "The situation in Congo is so extreme, and will continue to be so, as long as there is money flowing in. Stopping it takes legislation and the big companies taking responsibility. Let's hope Nokia is ready to at least take the first step – after 10 years of knowing about the problem" ■



"I realised there was almost nothing I couldn't do when I was in front of the camera. I wasn't afraid of kicking in doors of ministries or asking pointed questions of high and mighty editors-in-chief. Nothing was sacred."

For further information on Blood in the Mobile, see reverse section.

FRANK PIASECKI POULSEN

Born 1975, Denmark. Poulsen began his film career at a Copenhagen TV network. Graduated from the National Film School of Denmark, 2001. Worked as director, photographer and scriptwriter, primarily for the national broadcaster DR. Poulsen is well travelled, especially in Africa. In the making of *Guerrilla Girl* (2005), Poulsen lived in a FARC training camp for three months. The film attracted worldwide interest, was showcased at IDFA's First Appearance programme, at CPH:DOX, AFI's Silver Docs, Havana and Sheffield, as well as at One World Human Rights Festival, Prague. *Blood in the Mobile* (2010) is selected for IDFA's Feature-length Competition.

KONCERN TV & FILMPRODUKTION

Founded 1995 by producer Thomas Heurlin. Has since developed into a co-ownership between Thomas Heurlin, Jens Ulrik Pedersen and Lars Seidelin. A major player within the field of TV productions and documentaries, entertainment series and fiction – in the latter field signing in 2009 Martin Pieter Zandvliet's highly successful debut feature *Applause*. *Blood in the Mobile* is selected for IDFA's Feature-length Competition. See bloodinthemobile.org and facebook.com/bloodinthemobile. koncern.dk

COMPELLING DOWNFALL



Encountering the extraordinary often feeds thoughts about the ordinary. When she first heard about her two characters' financial downfall and individual confrontations, director Eva Mulvad knew she had to make a film about them. *The Good Life*, selected for IDFA's Feature-length Competition, is Mulvad's first film since her 2006 Silver Wolf winner *Enemies of Happiness* about the female Afghan politician Malalai Joya.

BY EVA NOVRUP REDVALL

A mother and daughter share a small flat in Portugal. The mother is 83, her daughter is 56. Both have been used to living in luxury on inherited wealth, but when Eva Mulvad's *The Good Life* opens that's all in the past. The money is gone and all they have to live on now is the mother's minimal pension.

As the film unfolds, we get an inkling that their past holds a lot of good stories. What happened to the money? Why couldn't the mother's husband see to their future? As in Mulvad's *Enemies of Happiness*, about Malalai Joya, an Afghan woman running for parliament, which won the Silver Wolf at IDFA in 2006, the scene-driven present is what counts. We look in on mother and daughter as they cope with situations in the here and now, we listen to their mutual recriminations and hear how they intend to move on.

Little by little, we get to piece together a few of the historical elements and the story comes to be about a lot more than financial calamity. After all, as parents, don't you have a duty to teach your children to take responsibility for their own lives, even though they happen to be wealthy? Conversely, do children have a duty to take responsibility for their own lives, no matter how they are raised? And what does "taking responsibility" even mean?

As Mulvad sees it, a lot of the attraction of the film's story was having the questions emerge from the material as it unfolds. Her premise was to make a chamber play about two people who immediately fascinated her three years ago when she happened to listen to a radio montage entitled *Downfall on First Class*.

"When I heard the two women on the radio I was totally sucked in," she says. "I just had to stay in my car and listen until the show was over, because these two compelling and unusual characters prompted so many thoughts about big questions like, What makes us happy? Or, What are the important things in life? I was convinced it would be interesting to meet them on film. I was always fascinated by people who live in a kind of time warp, people whose lives are a bit out of whack with everyone

"I was always fascinated by people who live in a kind of time warp, people whose lives are a bit out of whack with everyone else's. Such people can challenge our perception of normality."

else's. Such people can challenge our perception of normality. There was a concrete drama here about the relationship between a mother and daughter, but also an even bigger drama between the life they had before and the life they are living now."

POETIC FAMILY SAGA

Mulvad got in touch with the journalist who did the montage and together they left for Portugal to present the idea of making a film. One source of inspiration for Mulvad was the Maysles brothers' 1975 classic *Grey Gardens*, a poetic film about a formerly wealthy mother and daughter stranded together in a ramshackle beach-front mansion in posh East Hampton, New York. Mulvad was attracted by the idea of doing a lyrical chamber play, where the filmmaker could never be sure what twists and turns the story would take and with no dramaturgical deadline.

"The film was shot over three years, on numerous visits to Portugal, and it was allowed to evolve a lot in the process. I was always fascinated by family sagas, Thomas Mann stories like *Buddenbrooks*, and the things that novels can do. I wanted the film to have a kind of poetic, novelistic level, but I only gradually figured out how to do that and what the core of these two women's story was," Mulvad says.

"The main challenge, as the film progressed, was how to turn everyday life into scenes. I always work in scenes, and in the present, so it was important to me to communicate interesting things about the past through the chamber play that is unfolding before our eyes," Mulvad says. She points out that her colleagues at Danish Documentary - the directors Phie Ambo, Pernille Rose Grønkvær and Mikala Krogh, plus her producer Sigrid Dyekjær - were important sparring partners in the process of cutting to the core of the film. Moreover, Adam Nielsen, the editor who has cut several of Mulvad's films with her, was an important collaborator in picking the cream of the footage.

A QUESTION OF STATUS

Focusing on two women from an upper-class background, *The Good Life* paints a portrait of decadence rarely seen in documentary film, where directors often look to the lower social strata.

"I'm from a middle-class background and a lot of the fascination for me definitely was the element of grandeur and pride, which is fun to explore. There is almost a fairytale-feel to their fate - down to the way they talk or their unconditional belief that getting a job is out of the question - that made me reflect on certain things in my own life and my own culture," the director says.

In general, there aren't a lot of film portraits of the upper classes, probably because they insist on

more control and stand on ceremony rather than airing their dirty laundry. But I was met with a lot of trust throughout. Also, things like the daughter not really caring what anyone thinks made it a lot easier for me. This mother and daughter are not like most people, which is one reason why it's so interesting to use their story to make us think about our own more ordinary lives."

As she went along, Mulvad kept discovering new aspects of the story. Meanwhile, part of the challenge was staying confident that a small story about two women would hold big themes and big drama.

"Of course it's challenging to take such an open approach to the story you're telling, as compared with doing a story like *Enemies of Happiness* about an obvious heroine working towards a deadline in the form of an election. But that's one of the fun things about working in documentary film: the incomputability of real life. You can apply your skills to orchestrating real life, but it still ends up in surprising and unpredictable places," Mulvad adds with a satisfied smile ■

For further information on The Good Life, see reverse section. Read more about the production company Danish Documentary on page 10.



Photo: Erik Molberg Hansen

EVA MULVAD

Born 1972, Denmark. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 2001. Winner of the 2006 WIFT (Women in Film and TV) award for young film talents. *Enemies of Happiness* (2006) won the IDFA Silver Wolf and the World Cinema Jury Prize at Sundance. *The Good Life* (2010) is selected for IDFA's Feature-length Competition.



The Home Front Photo: Phie Ambo

SHUT UP

MOUNTAIN GOAT!

Phie Ambo's *The Home Front* is a breezy documentary comedy made for Danish prime-time TV, but the title's reference to war is no fluke. The film is about conflict, how they arise and grow, in this case between neighbouring homeowners. The director marvels at the Danes' awkward inability to deal with conflict and the passions unleashed when the facade cracks. Phie Ambo's *Family* won the Joris Ivens Award, and also competing at IDFA were *Growing Up in a Day* and *Mechanical Love*. *The Home Front* is in the running for Best Mid-length Documentary.

BY SUSANNA NEIMANN

Denmark has roughly six million hedges and fences. Placed end to end, they would circle the globe two and a half times. That's a lot of hedge to argue about. And neighbours do. About a hedge that is too high or suddenly gone, a fence that is too ugly. Over kids who play raucous football from dawn to

dusk or a behaviourally challenged dog. Or, perhaps they don't argue enough. Grievances are allowed to accumulate for years, while both parties grow increasingly bitter and the rage builds up, until municipal property line inspectors are called in to try and resolve a frequently impenetrable dispute.

DENMARK'S NATIONAL SOUL?

Phie Ambo followed property line inspectors on their rounds over two seasons, as they tried to bring neighbours around for a dialogue on one side of the hedge.

The director views neighbour disputes as a microcosm of sorts for examining how conflicts arise, escalate, culminate and, maybe, are resolved. She wanted to examine how the Danish way of dealing – or not dealing – with disputes between neighbours can become a litmus test of a nation's soul.

"I find an interesting duality between our self-image as a quaint, peace-loving nation and the awkward and overblown way we have of handling conflicts," Ambo says. "It is an experience shared by most of the neighbours in this film that they have

been nice for a very long time in order to maintain good neighbourly relations. They haven't addressed the conflict before it blows up. This image people have of themselves as nice and friendly comes back like a boomerang. Tension is allowed to build up until people become bitter and are boiling over with pent-up rage.

"What interests me about these seemingly harmless neighbour quarrels is that they've all come to the last straw. And that's something that I can easily identify with – the point where everything becomes a matter of principle."

"Perhaps the Scandinavian coolness is to blame, which prevents people from going straight to their neighbour and yelling. What you're doing is incredibly annoying! A conflict easily gets very abstract when you don't deal with it right away. It can become a symptom of so many other things," she says.

A DOCUMENTARY COMEDY FOR PRIME TIME

Apart from the thematic aspect, the director was driven by the challenge of making a film that could be shown in prime time on a national Danish TV channel, because she was tired of seeing her films

relegated to slots after midnight. She wanted to do a quality mainstream production.

“My previous films – *Mechanical Love*, for one – are niche films, and I wanted to develop my narrative moves,” she says. “I felt like opening up and being less art-housey. And it seemed to me that neighbour disputes and micro-democracy were things most people could identify with.”

Moreover, it was important for Ambo to make the film “light.”

“I thought it was super important that the film not be too serious, because this *isn't* a serious issue. A conflict like this might *seem* serious when you're right in the middle of it, but if you take a broader view, a hedge really isn't that critical,” she says.

“Then, it was about finding some characters who were capable of seeing themselves from the outside, who could look at the situation from both sides and say, All right, in this situation I thought I was doing the right thing, bu-ut ...

“The same thing prevents the audience from feeling like witnesses to something they shouldn't be seeing. I make sure to talk with the people in my films and tell them what kind of film they are getting themselves into, so no one will be blindsided. Thankfully, everyone could recognise themselves and signed off on the film,” the director says.

The film has a distinctive, circus-like score by the composer Sanna Salmenkallio, who also scored *Mechanical Love* and *Three Rooms of Melancholia*.

“It was fun to play around with the music as a narrative element,” Ambo says. “The music does so much to indicate when it's okay to laugh.”

THE WEALTHIER A SOCIETY IS ...

... the more weird things like this happen, sighs one character, who is not blind to the tragicomedy of her conflict with her neighbour.

The societal backdrop for the film is a steady increase in the number of neighbour disputes in Denmark over the last 50 years. People don't have close relations with their neighbours like they used to, because no one basically needs to see anyone else. Families function as little self-sufficient units, independent of favours from friends and neighbours, and so there are really no good reasons

“I find an interesting duality between our self-image as a quaint, peace-loving nation and the awkward and overblown way we have of handling conflicts.”

anymore for tolerating individual differences, big and small. This tendency fascinates Ambo:

“I wanted to take a closer look at the Danes' tolerance in general. Considering what's going on in the rest of the world, it's pretty absurd: Here we are, picking on each other, though these aren't real problems. I could have shown more extreme neighbour conflicts, but I consciously chose conflicts we can identify with to make us realize it's ourselves we're laughing at, not some people in a film. It would be great if the film could make us reconsider whether we really are as tolerant and permissive as we like to imagine.”

OUR BRAIN IS PLASTIC

Phie Ambo is currently working on a film about the human brain. *Free the Mind* follows the American brain-scientist professor Richard Davidson and his staff in their research on the human brain's ability to change and produce new cells through the practice of meditation. For Professor Davidson this has far-reaching implications. He believes that meditation can transform humankind itself into a more peaceful species.

Ambo draws on her experiences from *The Home Front* in telling a story for a broad audience. “After all, we all have a brain and it's my sincere hope that a lot of people will get to see this film,” the director says ■



Photo: Per Morten Abrahamsen

PHIE AMBO

Born 1973, Denmark. Graduated in documentary film directing at the National Film School of Denmark, 1999. Co-directed with Sami Saif the documentary *Family* (2001), winner of IDFA's Joris Ivens Award. Directed *Gambler* (2006) about film director Nicolas Winding Refn and *Mechanical Love* (2007) about man's relationship with robots. *The Home Front* (2010) is selected for IDFA's Mid-length Competition.

For further information on *The Home Front*, see reverse section. Read more about the production company Danish Documentary on page 10.



The Home Front Photo: Phie Ambo

BIG



“These are widely different directors who make films in their own individual way, but they help each other out creatively.” *Producer Sigrid Dyekjær*

AMBITIONS, TIGHT SETUP

The directors at the helm of the rapidly advancing production company Danish Documentary strive to put the money on screen. Eva Mulvad's *The Good Life* and Phie Ambo's *The Home Front* are in competition at IDFA.

BY EVA NOVRUP REDVALL

A taste of the real thing. That's the motto of Danish Documentary, a company founded in 2007 by three of the most prominent Danish documentary filmmakers. Their initial ambition was to get out their awardwinning films on DVD to international audiences – films like *Enemies of Happiness* (Eva Mulvad), *The Monastery* (Pernille Rose Grønkjær) and *Mechanical Love* (Phie Ambo).

Soon, Danish Documentary became home to their new productions as well, and the company has quietly been adding new, critically acclaimed films to its catalogue. This year, Eva Mulvad's *The Good Life* and Phie Ambo's *The Home Front* are competing in Amsterdam, and a new film by Pernille Rose Grønkjær is on the way.

NO EMPLOYEES

Shortly after it was founded, Danish Documentary was expanded to embrace the three directors' regular producer, Sigrid Dyekjær, and their fellow filmmaker Mikala Krogh (*Everything is Relative*). Still, the company has no staff. Danish Documentary is simply a framework for the directors' productions: they want to put the money on screen and keep overhead low. Which was always part of the concept of banding together as directors, Phie Ambo says.

“To a director, it can be pretty opaque how the money in a budget is spent. Part of the motivation behind Danish Documentary was to get more control, because we want to put the money into our films, not into administration. In that respect, having our own company has given us focus and peace in our work,” Ambo says. She underscores the importance to all

four directors of having as skilled a producer as Sigrid Dyekjær working on their projects.

“Obviously, it's essential to have a high-energy producer on your film,” she says. “It's my impression that a lot of directors outside Denmark produce their own films. That's absolutely not the concept here. If you have ambitious projects and want production flow in your work, it's crucial to have a skilled producer, so you can focus on the essential things as a director,” she says.

USING THE FINANCING PHASE CREATIVELY

As Danish Documentary's producer, Dyekjær considers the corporate construction an advantage, both for the films and the company itself, in a time when many other companies have grown too big.

“We do films with big, international ambitions, but that doesn't mean you have to have a big outfit,” she says. Moreover, she sees it as a huge strength for the company that all four directors came out of the National Film School.

“These are widely different directors who make films in their own individual way, but they help each other out creatively, and it's productive to be able to draw on long-standing collaborations during processes that very often are both drawn-out and difficult. All four have in common that they approach the world cinematically and develop their highly personal films in a dialogue with a film crew from the outset,” Dyekjær says. “Also, we are working a lot to use the financing phase creatively, gauging people's reactions in order for the director to explore which parts of the story are the most important.”

As Ambo frankly observes, the financing phase is an aspect of filmmaking that a director has to find ways of turning into an advantage. “We know that we have to raise funds for our films ourselves and we approach financing as a part of the project development,” she says. “Often, when we first bring our project to someone, we have already done some shooting and present pilots with footage that will make it into the finished film. Financing is part of the film” ■

Read about *The Good Life* and *The Home Front* on pages 6 and 8 and in reverse section.

DANISH DOCUMENTARY

Founded 2007 by Eva Mulvad, Pernille Rose Grønkjær and Phie Ambo, initially as a distribution platform for the directors' awardwinning films *Enemies of Happiness*, *The Monastery* and *Mechanical Love*. Were later joined by producer Sigrid Dyekjær and director Mikala Krogh. Produced Mikala Krogh's *Cities on Speed – Cairo Garbage* in 2009. Both Eva Mulvad's *The Good Life* and Phie Ambo's *The Home Front* are selected for competition at IDFA. In production are Phie Ambo's *Free the Mind* and Pernille Rose Grønkjær's *Love Addiction* as well as Christian Bonke and Andreas Koefoed's *Ballroom Dancing*, pitching at IDFA Forum (see page 36). danishdocumentary.com



Pernille Rose Grønkjær Photo: Erik Molberg Hansen

WHEN LOVE TAKES CONTROL

Completed in January 2011 is Pernille Rose Grønkjær's *Love Addict*, the director's first film since *The Monastery*. *Love Addict* is a film about love taking control over your life. We meet various addicts and hear their stories as the director seeks to grasp the nature of this all-consuming obsession for being loved. Pernille Rose Grønkjær received IDFA's Joris Ivens Award in 2006 for *The Monastery*, a story about old headstrong Mr. Vig and a young Russian nun, Sister Amvrosija, whose paths cross in their common endeavour to turn an ancient, worn-out castle into a monastery.

MODERN COWBOYS OF THE NGORONGORO PLAINS

“You people up there, what kind of work do you do?”, Simon asks curiously to the camera in *Masai on the Move*. Steering away from the usual cliché Robin Schmidt and Morten Vest’s documentary about the three Masai Simon, Elisabeth and Samuel is a thoughtful and poetic portrait of a modern indigenous culture flush with paradoxes. The film is running in IDFA’s Mid-length Competition.

BY ANNEMARIE HØRSMAN

Simon, Elisabeth and Samuel are among the one million Masai in Kenya and Tanzania. Living in one of the world’s most beautiful nature preserves, the Ngorongoro Safari Park in Tanzania, the three Masai are the main characters in Robin Schmidt and Morten Vest’s *Masai on the Move*. We follow them over the course of a year, listening to their thoughts and witnessing their struggle to adjust to life in a modern, globalised world.

The Masai are pastoralists. They are dependent on land for herding their cattle. But drought and increasingly restricted access to pastures are putting their traditional way of life under pressure. They, too, are feeling the impact of global warming and recession.

AVOIDING THE CLICHE

Schmidt and Vest supplied the film with a kind of tagline, *Indigenous Peoples with Modern Problems*, reflecting an important ambition for the two filmmakers.

“That was a mantra for our work. We wanted to be at eye level with our characters. We wanted them



Masai on the Move Photo: Robin Schmidt

to communicate directly to us. And we consciously steered away from didactic narration and avoided focusing on traditions and rituals,” Schmidt says.

“We also steered away from showing the cliché of starving and suffering people asking for more help. Instead, we tried to depict what the impact on daily life is, say, when the rainy season doesn’t arrive.”

To enhance the intimacy of their characters’ stories, the directors chose to pull in tight. “Though we are in the middle of one of the most beautiful regions in the world, we chose to avoid nature

“Though we are in the middle of one of the most beautiful regions in the world, we chose to avoid nature scenery and wild animals. That’s what all the tourists come for. We wanted to stay focused on the human stories.”



Masai on the Move Photo: Robin Schmidt

scenery and wild animals. That's what all the tourists come for. Of course there are beautiful landscapes in the film – you can't miss it, it's all around you – but we wanted to stay focused on the human stories.

"We regard the Masai as cowboys of a sort. They drive the livestock across desolate plains of breathtaking beauty, not on horseback but on foot. So we were more in the mood for a Western than a film filled with traditional drum music," Robin Schmidt says.

To suggest this kinship Schmidt and Vest had western-type music composed for the film. "We hope this will help take people's understanding to another level and make the issues more global," Schmidt says.

'YOU PEOPLE UP THERE'

Masai on the Move was made in conjunction with a development project with support from Danida, the Danish International Development Agency.

"The standard procedure at the end of a major project is to write an assessment report, but very few people read those," Schmidt says. "So the project managers – the Danish Embassy in Dar Es Salaam and affiliated consultancies – got the idea that they also wanted a film about the people that had helped by the project. They didn't want a conventional film about a developing country, and probably there's not much of an audience for such films anyway. Also, they didn't want any experts or local employees from the development project to appear in the film."

The directors made a research trip, then wrote an outline and suggested possible characters for the film. Plus, the DR 2 channel of the Danish national broadcaster was game.

"We were more in the mood for a Western than a film filled with traditional drum music."

"We decided to follow our characters over the course of a year to get a sense of the rhythm of their lives. Following the same people over time, the seasonal fluctuations will provide a broader picture of how vulnerable pastoralists are. How little it takes to go from having a good life to being unable to make ends meet," Schmidt says.

Spending so much time in the area enabled the two filmmakers to create a bond with their characters, and this intimacy made it possible for Schmidt and Vest to introduce a poignant narrative element in the film when the characters look directly into the camera and ask questions back, sometimes playfully, sometimes inquisitively, like "You people up there, what kind of work do you do?" or "When you see the changes going on here, do you see them as a good thing or a bad thing?". These are questions about marriage, divorce, work, love, economy, rites of passage and weather-related problems, and they are peppered throughout the film.

"Our asking about personal matters invited the counter-questions that ended up being such a critical element of the film. Their questions, I think, have a big effect on the audience. In fact, their questions speak louder than a lot of the answers and really put our own life and culture in perspective," Robin Schmidt says ■



ROBIN SCHMIDT

Born 1959, Denmark. Producer. Graduated from the University of Copenhagen, the National Film School of Denmark and the European training programme for producers EAVE. Has produced and directed documentaries and documentary series for the national Danish broadcasters, the Danish Film Institute and the development agency Danida. Is experienced in working in developing countries. Directed *Punk Royale – A Brand on the Arse* with Niels David Rønsholdt in 2006. *Masai on the Move*, selected for IDFA's Mid-length Competition, is Schmidt's sixth documentary. Producer and director on *The Development Amateur*, currently in postproduction.

MORTEN VEST

Born 1956, Denmark. Photographer, holds a MA in architecture specialising in visual communications. Has worked as still photographer, graphic designer and art director of exhibitions and campaigns. Has lived and worked in New Zealand, Greece and Africa. Shot and directed two documentaries in Africa: *Masai on the Move*, selected for IDFA's Mid-length Competition, and *The Development Amateur*, currently in postproduction.

FILMSELKABET

The company has, since 2009, served as an umbrella organisation for a group of independent professionals in documentary and corporate filmmaking. Productions include documentaries and TV productions for the national broadcasters DR and TV 2 and the Danish Film Institute. filmselskabet.dk

For further information on *Masai on the Move*, see reverse section.



RENDERING ARCHITECTURE WITH BODIES

Kaspar Astrup Schröder captivated audiences last year at IDFA with his stylish portrait of Dr. Nakamats, a famous inventor and cult figure in Japan. This year, the young Danish director is back with a playful and poetic documentary about people and architecture, *My Playground*, chronicling the urban phenomenon of parkour.

The four tiny, nimble figures jumping and rolling down the Danish architect Bjarke Ingels' pioneering building, The Mountain, in the Orestad district just outside of Copenhagen, make an audacious and breathtaking picture.

For Kaspar Astrup Schröder, a multi-talented, self-taught filmmaker, musician and graphic artist, *My Playground* began as an out-of-pocket labour of love. Later, the Municipality of Copenhagen stepped in with funds.

Schröder spent a year tracking Copenhagen's Team JiYo, Denmark's leading parkour practitioners, who make the city their stage, leaping from high rooftops, somersaulting down Metro staircases or seeming to defy gravity as they soar between multi-storey carparks.

The film also features appearances by urban planners, local politicians, philosophers and, notably, Bjarke Ingels, founder of BIG Architects, who enthusiastically lets the young parkour artists loose on his buildings. Collaborating on the film was

a real eye-opener for the successful Danish architect. Witnessing the acrobatic freerunners' impressive physical feats in urban spaces revealed new ways of animating and communicating architecture.

Set mainly in Copenhagen, the film also travels around the world, visiting urban acrobats in Japan, the United States, even China, where Team JiYo conquers the raw, still unfinished skeleton of BIG's expo-pavilion in Shanghai.



Parkour acrobats on Danish architect Bjarke Ingels' pioneering building The Mountain

ON PARKOUR, URBAN SPACE AND FILM



Kaspar Astrup Schröder: When I began doing these test shoots with the parkour teams, I started composing my pictures according to the buildings and the space, but with these guys moving in the space it became a totally

different experience. This was an eye-opener to me, and it made the space much more alive and dynamic.

I filmed the top parkour team in Denmark, Team JiYo, jumping from rooftop to rooftop on The Mountain and did a short film. That's how Bjarke came on board. I gave him the film and he was like, "This is amazing, we have never seen our buildings in that perspective. I want to be more a part of what you're doing."

We began a discussion about perceiving space, exploiting space and how to show architecture in a film. It was a journey for everyone to make a film, not only about parkour but also about architecture, that didn't feel like a traditional film about architecture. So, for some people it's an architectural film, while others see it as a parkour film. I feel it's a good mix of both.

The film's opening sequence of The Mountain took half a day. I had one camera and I would make Team JiYo do things over and over again from all different angles. There are 78 apartments and I had to go around to each apartment to get permission for my performers to jump down on every platform.

I shot everything myself, so I was doing six takes from different angles, and by the last take the guys' and girls' knees were hurting, but they were really great. Creatively composing the images and visually thinking about how to compose scenes with the buildings was a lot of fun for me.



Bjarke Ingels, BIG Architects: When Kaspar took those few hours of footage and put together a little teaser, it instantly became a classic and I started using it in all my lectures.

The film's main resonance comes from communicating on such a physical, intuitive level just by showing two guys climb up through The Mountain and jump back down again in a real, physical space.

We started a dialogue with Kaspar about trying to engage with the architecture at all stages of its realisation – in the office, looking at the architectural models, going to the construction site and moving around the unfinished building and afterwards inhabiting the buildings once they are completed.

Whenever you create a building or an urban space, you contribute to the future life of the city. In doing so, you also contribute to the future of the culture and lifestyle of the people who live there. *My Playground* is, of course, a film about parkour, but it is also very much about the intricate link between public life and architecture. Showing architecture, not as some static art form, with the typical architectural photography focusing only on how light falls on a wall, but architecture as observing human life and attempting to accommodate it ...

The beauty of parkour is that it's a form of urban ballet, it has a graceful quality in its own right. Therefore it becomes a very dynamic way to experience architecture, teaching you about urban space and urban life. Architecture is an ongoing global dialogue. Using film, you can communicate ideas to people who do not have the luxury of travelling to Copenhagen or Shanghai and seeing the structures in person. In a way we learned from Kaspar, and we were able to capture some of the essence of the structure ■

Excerpts from presentation on objectivecinema.net by Tara Farrell. For more information on My Playground, see reverse section.

"The beauty of parkour is that it's a form of urban ballet, it has a graceful quality in its own right. Therefore it becomes a very dynamic way to experience architecture, teaching you about urban space and urban life."

Bjarke Ingels



BIG's unfinished expo-pavilion in Shanghai



Parkour acrobats at the Copenhagen harbour

PARKOUR

Parkour started in France in the 90s and has spread to the whole world. Freerunning is the term for the British approach to the sport. In parkour/freerunning, you go from one point of the city to another as efficiently and quickly as possible, overcoming any obstacle in your way: walls, fences, trees, etc. This has made parkour *the* urban sport, featured in recent music videos, advertisements and feature films. Team JiYo dreams of making the biggest dedicated parkour park in the world.

KASPAR ASTRUP SCHRÖDER

Born 1979, Denmark. Self-taught visual artist and designer. Though based in Copenhagen, he often works in Asia. Has exhibited visual work and released music in Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Bruxelles, New York, Shenzhen and Tokyo. Schröder's documentary *City Surfers* (2007) won Best Danish Film and Filmic Award at the D.A.F.F. Festival. *The Invention of Dr. Nakamats* (2009) enjoyed its world premiere in IDFA's Mid-Length Competition in 2009 and has travelled to more than 20 festivals since. *My Playground* (2010), exploring parkour and freerunning around the world, is selected for the DOC U! Competition and Panorama at IDFA. *My Playground* is produced by Kaspar Astrup Schröder's production company KSPR. kasparworks.com

Read about Kaspar Astrup Schröder's I Want to Cheer Up Ltd. pitching at IDFA Forum on page 36.



Pig Country. Framegrab

THE LAST FARMER

“What attracted me was the story of a young, visionary farmer trying to develop his family’s farm and suddenly finding himself in a situation where he has put his family’s future at risk.”

A farming country for the last 6,000 years, Denmark is undergoing radical changes, as industrialisation and streamlining has structured everything down to the smallest detail. In his portrait of a beleaguered pig farmer, Andreas Koefoed has crafted a document that could end up as a closing chapter in Danish farming history. *Pig Country* runs in IDFA’s Reflecting Images.

BY ANDERS BUDTZ-JØRGENSEN

Pig Country introduces us to Jacob, 29. A pig farmer like his father and grandfather before him, Jacob runs three farms and owns vast tracts of land. He sends large numbers of pigs to the slaughterhouse every week – and he owes the bank 6.5 million euros, far more than his assets are worth.

Danish agriculture is changing. Medium-sized farms are disappearing and soon all that will be left are huge industrial farms and gourmet niche

operations. Farms like Jacob’s, stuck in the middle, will either be shut down or acquired by bigger outfits.

“What attracted me was the story of a young, visionary farmer trying to develop his family’s farm and suddenly finding himself in a situation where he has put his family’s future at risk,” director Andreas Koefoed says. So much is on the line for Jacob. He has been responsible not only for his own destiny but also for that of the 20 or so close family members who farm his lands. If he goes bankrupt, they stand to lose their livelihoods, too.

“Jacob has been innovative and visionary, but he also had the bad luck of investing in new land and new farms at the wrong time. The recession, with falling land and property prices, has left him with a huge debt that he will never be able to pay back. There is really not much he can do, because the matter is out of his hands now. All he can do is hope the bank will give him a little more time, while he tries to reassure his family hoping that the prices on pigs will rise,” the director says.

CAPTURING SUBTLE NUANCES

Pig Country depicts a life that will be familiar to many Danish farmers in the year 2010. But to create a whole, well-rounded cinematic narrative, Koefoed employed devices from narrative film.

“I tried to imagine how a natural story would play out and constructed certain scenes in advance,” Koefoed says. “How do you convey that Jacob is in crisis? What scenes will show that he is working to solve his problems? What scenes can be used to show whether he will succeed? We needed scenes with bankers, with his accountant, with his family, as well as scenes from the barn. And of course, there are powerful scenes that happen simply because you’re around – like the one where Jacob has to put down a pig.”

Jacob’s waiting for an answer and his inability to control his own destiny are the core of *Pig Country*. But for the same reason, it was a huge challenge for Koefoed to push Jacob’s story forward.

“Jacob is under extreme pressure, but he is the kind of person who doesn’t talk about it when he is going through a tough time. You have to read everything out of the tiniest facial expressions. Country people are not wont to make a fuss. That was a definite challenge. You want them to blow up, but there’s almost nothing like that and I was concerned that the whole thing would be too underplayed,” he says.

Moreover, the story has no external engine or natural momentum. Jacob can’t just work harder and sell more pigs. He has a problem, but he can’t solve it himself.

“We worked a lot with mental images, scenes where Jacob’s inner turmoil bubbles up to surface, as in the film’s nightmare scene or the scenes of Jacob just staring out across his fields and barns. That is where we get a chance to move up close and

capture the nuances of Jacob’s character and create intimacy,” Koefoed says.

THE END OF FARM LIFE

“I saw Jacob’s story as a kind of modern tragedy of Danish farm life. Behind it looms the end of an era in Danish history, as bucolic living, ancestral farms, close family ties and so on are being uprooted because of the general development, increased competition, heightened environmental standards and recession. It’s the story of a young man’s possible fall and the story of a society in change. That’s what spins my crank,” Andreas Koefoed says.

Koefoed has been a regular contributor to IDFA in recent years. This is the fourth film he takes to the festival. His past films have looked at everything from boys’ choirs, hookah culture and serious illness. This year, Koefoed is coming to Amsterdam with a portrait of a nation’s agriculture that’s under threat and at risk of total collapse without political intervention or a sudden upturn in the economy.

“That’s what I find truly amazing: Jacob has set everything up as efficiently as possible. He almost single-handedly produces hundreds of pigs a week, but he still can’t turn a profit, because conditions in farming are so tough. It’s a huge taboo, though pretty much every farmer is in the same predicament,” Koefoed says ■

Andreas Koefoed is serving as a jury member in the IDFA Competition for Student Documentary 2010.

For further information on Pig Country, see reverse section. Read about Andreas Koefoed and Christian Bonke’s Ballroom Dancing pitching at IDFA Forum on page 36.



Photo: Mads Emil Hilmer

ANDREAS KOEFOED

Born 1979, Denmark. Graduate in documentary direction from the National Film School of Denmark, 2009, and in sociology from Copenhagen University, 2004. Has since 2001 produced documentary films in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. His films *12 Notes Down* (2008) and *Albert’s Winter* (2009) have won awards and honours at festivals worldwide, among them IDFA, Full Frame Durham, Silverdocs AFI, CPH:DOX and Sheffield DocFest. Was awarded the Swedish documentary award *Silverfjäril* in 2009. Other films selected for IDFA’s Reflecting Images are *A Day in the Smoke* (2008) and this year’s *Pig Country*.

BAROK FILM

Founded 2000 by director Anne Regitze Wivel. Originally a documentary company, having since expanded into the field of feature films. Was formerly a sister company to Skandinavisk Film Kompagni. Became independent in 2002. Among a substantial body of documentaries are *Max by Chance* (Max Kestner, 2004), *The Land of Human Beings* (Anne Regitze Wivel, 2006), *The Arab Initiative* (Lotte Mik-Meyer, 2008), and *Tankograd* (Boris Bertram, 2009). The company’s first feature film was *Silk Road* (Jytte Rex, 2004), followed by *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (Zacharias Kunuk, Norman Cohn, 2006).



Pig Country. Framegrab

THE BEAST IN CIVILISATION

How little do you have to scratch a civilisation's veneer before the dark, primeval forces appear? That's a fundamental question for the Danish director Janus Metz, whose documentary *Armadillo* spurred heated debate in the Danish media. The film is selected for IDFA's Reflecting Images.

BY PER JUUL CARLSEN

What did we learn from *Armadillo*? Janus Metz scratches his reddish-blond beard a bit and stares thoughtfully into space. "Well, there has to be a lesson in there somewhere," he chuckles and thinks some more.

There is, for sure. As it turns out, Metz himself learned more than a little from *Armadillo*. When the 36-year-old director laughs at the question and has to think about it, it may be because he's not quite sure how precisely to sum up the uproar his film caused when it was presented at this year's Cannes Film Festival. The advance word was that this film would change the Danish view of the war in Afghanistan that, now in its eighth year, had become a distant and sluggish fixture on the news just before the weather.

The Danish writer Carsten Jensen got to see an early version of the film and predicted, "After *Armadillo* it will no longer be possible to look at ourselves as Danes in the same way as before. The film is an earthquake in the nation's self-image."

Tough words. Possibly too tough, but his prediction did get politicians and pundits out of their seats. Even before it opened, the film had already been subjected to the curious, but not unusual, discipline of politicians discussing a film they haven't even seen a single still from.

LIQUIDATION?

One scene in particular from *Armadillo* was destined to cause a stir. After spending more than six months keeping a lookout for the Taliban militia, which operates in secret, hiding behind the civilian population, a handful of young Danish soldiers finally get to engage the enemy in open combat and kill five Taliban fighters. The Danish soldiers pitch a hand grenade and fire hundreds of rounds to make sure the enemy is no longer a threat, then they drag



Armadillo Photo: Lars Skree

a pair of the bullet-riddled bodies out of a ditch. Their reaction is of a kind rarely seen before – shock spiked with the thrill of the kill. Back at the base, spirits are high, ecstatic even. Words are said, like "fucking cool", and during a debriefing a jubilant soldier mentions the "liquidation."

"Maybe the troops crossed a line, maybe they didn't. Maybe they don't even know what they were doing," Metz says. "To me this is a grey area that testifies to the darkness that comes with war. We don't know if the soldier is actually describing what happened or if he made a gaffe because he was excited."

While Metz contemplates what lessons he wants to draw from *Armadillo*, we can proffer a quick conclusion. In today's media reality, the old axiom that "what is seen depends on who is doing the seeing" is hopelessly imprecise. As soon as a camera appears to immortalize an event and presents it in a public medium, things very quickly get very complicated, especially in the case of a potentially controversial event. What were the circumstances? What's the context of the event? What's the background? What's the camera operator's agenda? On the one hand, we have a soldier who was trained to fight an enemy, not to express himself verbally, and in his giddiness is searching for the right word

– without finding it. On the other hand, we have some politicians who hear that a soldier has been caught on film saying he has liquidated a wounded enemy in a war that reaches far beyond the small, impoverished nation where it's being fought. An abyss of meaning separates the two perspectives on the same situation.

This word, "liquidation", made opponents of the war smell blood. Were young Danes really running around in Afghanistan ignoring the sacred commandments of the Geneva Convention?

Armadillo was all over the Danish media in the days after its world premiere in Cannes on 16 May, and again at the Danish premiere on 8 July. Defence-policy spokespeople from every party had prepared comments, from left-wing horror at seeing young Danes "sent into another meaningless situation" to the politician on the extreme right who thought the film stood as "a monument to the heroic effort of the Danish troops in Afghanistan".

Metz contends that *Armadillo* made more headlines in Denmark than any other film ever. The film was also exhaustively debated in Norway and Finland. When a Norwegian soldier recently was quoted as saying that "war is better than sex", the Norwegian defence minister commented, "Now Norway has its *Armadillo*."



“The Danish attitude to the war in Afghanistan has changed after Armadillo. There might be other reasons for that, too, but I still like to think the film left a wound.”

“The screening I had with the soldiers before the film came out is one of the worst experiences I’ve had in my life. They had an extremely violent reaction.”

NOT AN OVERT POLITICAL FILM

It can seem a bit ironic, then, that *Armadillo* was never conceived as a film that would take a political position for or against the war.

“The premise was open curiosity about what’s happening in Afghanistan,” Metz says. “Investigating how little we have to scratch our civilisation’s veneer before we get to the dark, primeval forces that so clearly come into play in war when you come face to face with death.”

This may be a good time to point out that Metz is both a very reflective and a very talkative person. The director Kasper Torsting, who got the original idea to do five documentaries about Afghanistan, one being *Armadillo*, has described Metz like so: “He’s not the one who speaks loudest in a group of people, but he’s definitely the one who speaks longest.” In fact, that’s a pretty accurate description not only of Metz but also of *Armadillo* – not because the film is longwinded, but because it’s not very loud. It documents, reflectively and deliberately. It’s not Metz, but everyone else who has been raising their voices.

The director scratches his beard with satisfaction, noting that the film didn’t end up in a big fight with Danish Defence or the Danish government but, in fact, elicited a broad range of reactions.

“We were extremely concerned that Defence would do all they could to take the film apart. We’ve seen that before in Denmark with Christoffer Guldbrandsen’s documentary *The Secret War*. We were arming for an onslaught from politicians and Defence, but once they dropped cutting our footage while we were shooting in Afghanistan, nothing happened, probably because *Armadillo* isn’t a film that aims to bring down the defence minister or the prime minister. It’s not a film that takes an unambiguous political stand. Nor is it a documentary that tries to catch someone with their pants down because they did something they shouldn’t have. It’s an analytical film on another level, and so people have been able to find a lot of different things to grab onto in it. It delves into paradoxes and dilemmas, presenting them to us and asking questions. *Armadillo* tried to rattle Denmark’s smug self-image, the idea that we can go out and save the world with our welfare society and our cooperative movement and our people-helping-people democracy.”

NO EMOTIONS

But then, did Danes learn that they can’t save the world? Metz, who, as we have seen, shuns hyperbole, will venture the claim that “the film shook things up.”

“Before *Armadillo*, it was almost like a law of nature that, if we were going to hear anything about



Armadillo Photo: Lars Skree

Afghanistan, we would have to ask the returning soldiers – or the army’s advisors. *Armadillo* opened up a space for new viewpoints in the Afghanistan debate, and the Danish attitude to the war in Afghanistan has changed after *Armadillo*. There might be other reasons for that, too, but I still like to think the film left a wound.”

Carsten Jensen predicted that the film would be an earthquake. Now Metz is talking about a wound?

“Well, of course there’s a difference between an earthquake and a wound, but if you think of an earthquake as something that shakes everything up, and everything then having to be rebuilt in a new order, I truly really think this was a tremor. It might not have been an earthquake, but it was a tremor.”

Metz had to think about what he and the Danes learned from *Armadillo*. But now that he has had some time to think, there is no end to the lessons that can be drawn. He concludes with a couple of important points about his role as a documentary filmmaker. One is that the story is always right there in front of your nose.

“I thought the soldiers would be much more affected by the war. I thought that’s where the film would be, and that we would be mirroring ourselves in the experience of intense combat or dead buddies and think, ‘It could have been me’. That’s not what happened. The soldiers seemed to have no real emotional reactions at all to the things they were experiencing. It was ‘work’, a job that had to be done. They joked around. Violence was largely played down, made taboo, handled with black humour or ritualised in the form of heroic, theatre-like speeches and ceremonies. For the longest time, it frustrated me that no one was showing any feelings. After all, it’s feelings we need when we’re making a film.

“But after a while, it hit me that this was precisely what was interesting. There was a far more profound, dangerous, terrifying, far-reaching and interesting story about “human nature” here. A counter-image to the hero, the Whole Human who fights for good. This is a fall-from-grace story, and so it’s also a story about the violence we apply to maintain our notion that our form of civilisation is the right one. That’s a big, basic story that challenges our whole cultural foundation.”

UPSET SOLDIERS

The final lesson Metz can think of – for now – may be the one that will stay with him longest. “Sometimes you run into a story that comes with such a big responsibility and such a heavy obligation to the theme and the material that you have to set aside your desire to protect the people in your film. *Armadillo* would become a significant historical document and a hefty political contribution to a debate that was not only of great national but also international importance. Major political interests are involved in the attempt to control the image of the war in Afghanistan. We are treated to a polished heroic image where soldiers’ lives are sacrificed for a greater cause, and maybe we need that heroic image so we don’t feel like accomplices in dark, unbearable barbarism. The foundation for the war is continually being justified, and *Armadillo* challenges that identity tale,” the director says.

“Insisting on an unvarnished image also means challenging the self-image of the people in the film so much it hurts. The screening I had with the soldiers before the film came out is one of the worst experiences I’ve had in my life. They had an extremely violent reaction. They were angry, upset



Janus Metz Photo: Robin Skjoldborg

and nervous about being court-martialled, losing their jobs or being spit at in the street. They thought I had betrayed their confidence. In that sense, the film rocked the soldiers' own heroic image, but the film had to show how chaotic, tough and violent it is to deal with war, how primitivising war is in so many ways. An important lesson for me, in the aftermath of *Armadillo*, has been how important it was that I held my ground regarding my experience of the things we witnessed in Afghanistan. The soldiers, too, have acquired a much more nuanced view of the matter and a greater understanding of why the film is the way it is. A lot of them are proud of it today."

These are a few of the experiences Metz is taking with him from *Armadillo*. He is currently considering his next film project. Perhaps it will be fiction. Meanwhile, his country is still at war ■

For further information on *Armadillo*, see reverse section.

JANUS METZ

Born 1974, Denmark. MA in Communication and International Development Studies with a thesis on anthropological film. Metz made his debut, *Township Boys* in 2006, about a group of small-time gangsters in Johannesburg. The same year he directed *Clandestine* about a group of illegal African migrants heading for Europe. *Love on Delivery* (2008), awardwinner at CPH:DOX, nominated for IDFA's Silver Wolf, and bringing in Metz the HBO emerging filmmaker award at Full Frame, is Metz' first of two films about Thai women and their pursuit of a Danish husband, the second being *Ticket to Paradise* (2008), selected for IDFA's Panorama. *Armadillo* (2010) was, as the first documentary ever, awarded the Grand Prix at Semaine de la Critique in Cannes. The film also took home London Film Festival's Grierson Award. Selected for IDFA's Reflecting Images.

FRIDTHJOF FILM DOC

A newly launched documentary division of Fridthjof Film focused on high-end, director-driven documentaries for a broad international audience. Fridthjof Film founded 2000 by producer Ronnie Fridthjof. Projects ranging from TV documentary series and corporate films to commercials and single documentaries – and from 2008 feature films. Widely successful was the feature documentary *Solo* (2007) about Danish ex Popstar Jon. *Take the Trash* (2008) is the company's first venture into feature films, followed by *The Christmas Party* (2009). f-film.com



CINEMATOGRAPHER LARS SKREE TOUGH GUY AND A POET

Lars Skree put his life on the line while filming *Armadillo*, and he is also credited on IDFA competitor *Blood in the Mobile*. Winning several awards, director of photography Lars Skree has a keen eye for both detail and the broader picture.

"Lars Skree has a unique ability to live in the moment – listening and observing intensely," said the committee behind the Roos Award 2010, an award that honours outstanding achievements in Danish documentary filmmaking.

"He masters effortlessly the 'staged' and 'real' setting within documentary, as well as poetic reflection and raw drama," the committee continued in its motivation. "He is willing to go to great lengths to bring back his images. He has a 7th sense when it comes to what is about to happen, and he knows when to let the camera roll."

Lars Skree graduated as director of photography from the National Film School of Denmark in 1997. He has received awards for his work on films such as *The Swenkas* (by Jeppe Rønede), *Love on Delivery*, *Ticket to Paradise* and *Armadillo* (all by Janus Metz). Lars Skree is also credited on *Blood in the Mobile* (by Frank Piasecki Poulsen), selected for IDFA's Feature-length Competition (see page 3).

Skree spent six months on the front lines in Afghanistan's Helmand province shooting *Armadillo*. The project took him through all the dilemmas and choices of working in a war zone. For instance in a scene depicting dead Taleban soldiers.

"Of course I had mixed feelings as I stood there filming the dead bodies. 'Is it really necessary to film this?' But I had to stay professional and say 'We'll make that decision later.' You can't decide something like that when you're under pressure from all sides (...) To see this person who was breathing only 30 seconds ago, lying there in a pool of blood, off course that was tough. When I see that image today, I turn my head away."

"For me *Armadillo* is a very poetic and philosophical film. I was determined to be open and avoid too many prejudices and try to get a poetic quality into something that is so horrifying."

Lars Skree is quoted from an interview by Louise Kidde Sauntved in the Danish daily *Urban*, May 2010.



OBJECTIVELY AND IN DETAIL

Can the erotic be measured? Can it be framed? Or defined? In his new film, *Erotic Man*, more than 10 years in the making, Jørgen Leth touches on these simple yet wide-embracing questions.

In his artistic production over the past five decades, documentarist and poet Jørgen Leth has been propelled by the desire to capture sensuality, often taking an anthropologist's

investigative and experimentally objective view of the world.

In *Erotic Man*, the 73-year-old European artist travels the world and his inner self to document the erotic, to search for its form and meaning. The film is perhaps Jørgen Leth's most personal and idiosyncratic film to date. A film about growing older, about loss, about the moments you remember.

Three women played crucial roles in the creation of *Erotic Man*: producer Marianne Christensen, editor Camilla Skousen and film commissioner Molly Malene Stensgaard. FILM asked them for their personal comments on *Erotic Man*.



Jørgen Leth and producer Marianne Christensen in Senegal Photo: Adam Philp

A LONG JOURNEY

Producer Marianne Christensen is a key person in Jørgen Leth's film life. On *Erotic Man*, she performed numerous other functions besides producing, mainly continuity and memory. Over the many years of the film's gestation, she also did sound, makeup, operated the camera, found costumes and stage-managed, scripted, coordinated and served as a runner.

It all begins at a birthday party in 1997, with a treatment in 1998, pilot shooting in Haiti in 1999, followed by development support, research trips and numerous reports on the state and forms of eroticism in different countries. In between, we are interrupted by other projects, but the erotic film is always with us, the subject is discussed and notes are taken.

In fall 2005, the project is put on ice after the publication of Jørgen Leth's controversial autobiography *Det uperfekte menneske* (*The Imperfect Human*). The financing falls apart and

things are quiet for a while. In 2006, Lars von Trier and others encourage Jørgen Leth to take the project back up, and he does.

The concept of mapping eroticism globally is replaced by a much more personal and artistic interpretation of the subject based on Jørgen Leth's poetry, personal memories and experiences.

Over the years of production, five film commissioners at the DFI are replaced, countless LOCs renewed, more than 30 budgets set up, one TV station replaced, thousands of e-mails written, footage shot by five different photographers in six different formats, and texts written, which today fill four fat ring binders.

The pleasure of doing a film with Jørgen Leth and his "working family" is that everyone has a voice, the director has confidence in everyone - and every penny is turned over twice to make sure it ends up on screen.

In 2009, the 40th anniversary of Denmark's legalisation of pornography is celebrated, while neo-puritanism continues to rage and the subject of eroticism remains controversial.

In August 2010, Jørgen Leth tells an interviewer, "It's not a film I could have made earlier in my life, it could only have been made now." Over time, the film's long journey becomes an advantage.

In light of the earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010, while the editors Camilla Skousen and Morten Højbjerg and I were all in Haiti with Jørgen, which could have cost us our lives as well as the film, it seems like the film *wanted* to be made, in spite of it all.

'IT SHOULDN'T BE A SMART FILM'

Camilla Skousen and Jørgen Leth have been friends for 40 years. She has stood in front of the camera for a couple of his films and she has been his trusted editor on 12 films – the last two, *The Five Obstructions* and *Erotic Man*, co-edited with Morten Højbjerg.

Jørgen Leth is a faithful man. If you win a place in his heart, you remain there forever. That goes for both working and personal relationships. I'm one of the lucky ones.

Jørgen Leth is a generous man. He first and foremost recognises the virtues in people. Vices

"Jørgen Leth is a generous man. He first and foremost recognises the virtues in people."

merely express the fact that we are all human. Jørgen is not in advance interested in a film's structure or dramaturgy, so we don't discuss that during the editing process. The footage just has to be ordered. The sequence of the scenes, what scenes go first or last, is dictated by the process. Individual cuts just have to be surprising and bring the material to life. That's the requirement.

Jørgen Leth has a lot of respect for his co-workers and he has kept the same people around him for years. When Jørgen makes a film, the photographer photographs, the editor edits, the sound engineer engineers the sound and the composer composes. He supervises every work process on and off – often at long distance – but he never dictates. Still, all his films are undeniably "Jørgen Leth films." That's the mystique.

"It shouldn't be a smart film," Jørgen says, when the editing process begins. Is he being coquettish? I don't think so, but I don't know so. "Go into the world and use your eyes," Jørgen's father told him when he was young. And that's what he does. Uses his curiosity and his openness to the world to see and experience people, places, things and situations. Then he shows it to us in a film, opens our eyes –

and maybe it's not a smart film we see, but it does make us smarter.

He probably gets smarter, too. I think that's one of the reasons why he can watch his own films and enjoy them over and over again a long time, sometimes years, after they were finished. When Jørgen talks or writes about his films publicly, he always – unlike other directors – credits his co-workers by name. And once the final cut of the film has been made, we quote Jørgen's dad and all go, "Everything in place, a place for everything."



Erotic Man Photo: Jakob Langvad



Erotic Man Photo: Jakob Langvad

NUDGING MY PERSPECTIVE

Molly Malene Stensgaard, who is currently working as a film editor on Lars von Trier's upcoming film *Melancholia*, was the DFI film commissioner who supported *Erotic Man*.

Films about the erotic tend to spell trouble. However, *Erotic Man* was never intended to be an issue film but rather a sensual, poetic and also objective investigation of human eroticism. That seemed simple and doable enough? Perhaps now

we have finally established what the erotic is! I find today's erotic reality to be oddly ambivalent. On the one hand, there is the puritanism that Jørgen Leth personally experienced in its worst form. On the other hand, there is the commercialised erotic – at erotic conventions we can prove our liberal-mindedness by waving pink dildos in the air, while silicone boobs sell anything from ice cream to car washes, and rare is the music video that does not have babes rubbing kittenishly against the singer.

I view *Erotic Man* as a film that insists on the erotic being poetic, sensual, pleasurable, universal – and human!

Jørgen Leth takes a stab at documenting and curiously investigating something essentially human and important – with minimalist means and loving care for details. He proceeds alphabetically, an anthropologist-like figure taking a tangible, physical approach.

He pursues his leads to places where eroticism finds unique expressions, to examine whether a universal erotic message exists that can be read with the senses anywhere in the world. The erotic is universal, but it takes singular national forms.

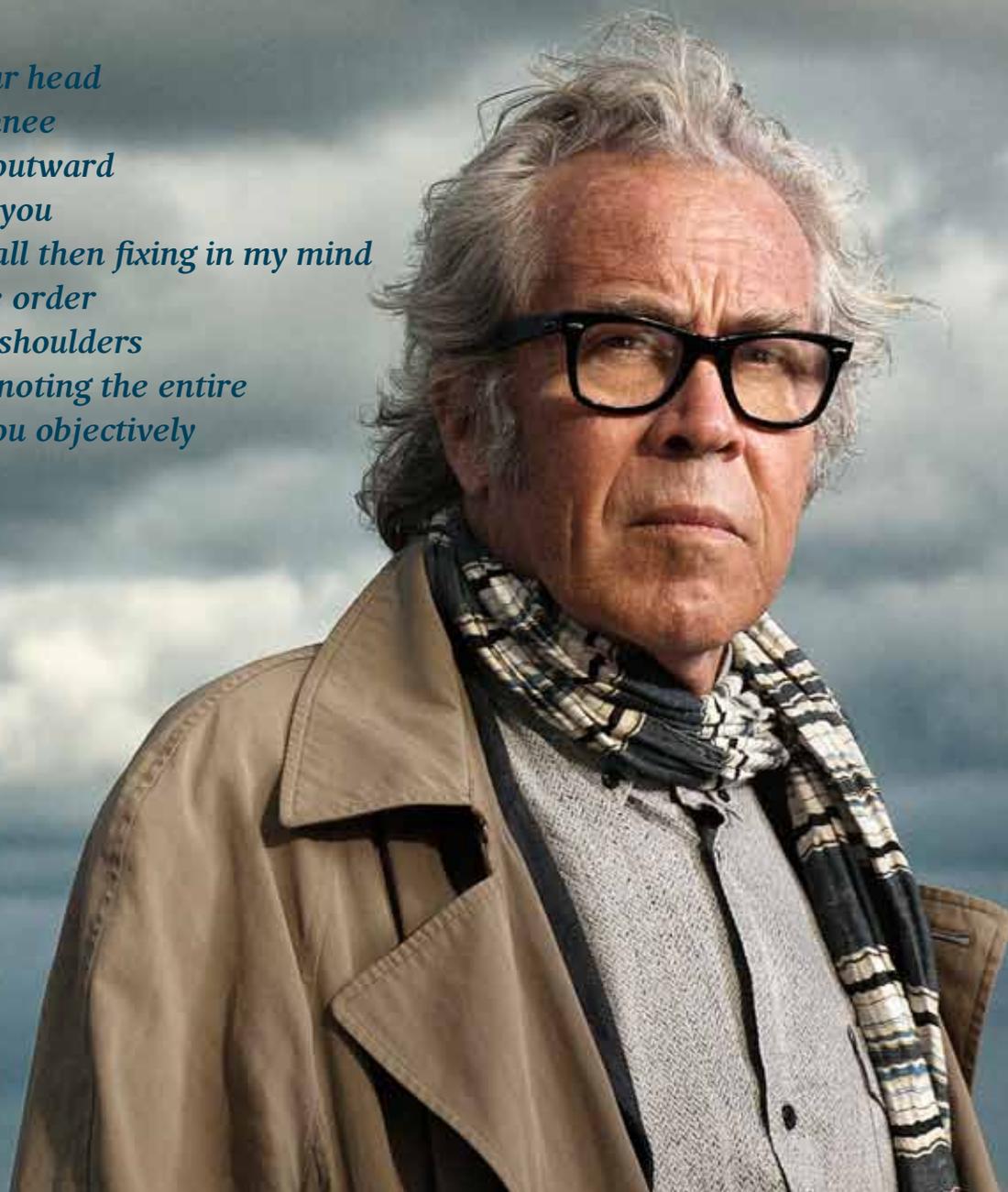
The anthropologist searches the tracks of his own memories of erotic encounters. On his way, he loses his detachment from his subject. He gets lost in sensual memories, in looks, a woman's beautiful gait or the name of a city ringing with the distant sound of a special meeting, all too humanly losing his grip and his overview. The hope of a rational conclusion recedes, both for him and for me as a viewer.

A man with a long, lived (erotic) life presents his picture to me. The film includes scenes that approach my personal limits and push my view of men, women and eroticism – and bully for that! That's what a film should do – as long as it is an honest and forthright expression of another person's view, in this case that of a gifted filmmaker.



Erotic Man Photo: Jakob Langvad

*Holding your hands tight above your head
with my left hand taking your left knee
with my right hand and bending it outward
thereby spreading your legs seeing you
seeing you holding your eyes in thrall then fixing in my mind
in one seamless passage this whole order
as it presents itself your neck your shoulders
your breasts your belly your thighs noting the entire
arrangement and making love to you objectively
and in detail*



Fragment of Leth's poem *Holde dine hænder fast / Holding Your Hands Tight* from the collection *Hvordan de ser ud* (1987). The lines are a recurring motif in the monologue of *Erotic Man* **Photo:** Søren Solkær Starbird

JØRGEN LETH

"All of a sudden I've become a rock star in my old age," Leth said recently, full of surprise but pleased nonetheless with this unexpected honour. Indeed, Jørgen Leth has for nearly 50 years been a significant figure on the cultural scene as director of forceful, personal and poetic short and documentary films, as poet, sports commentator and much more. But he has never been as popular as he is today, even attracting young audiences with his laidback croon and freestyle poetry in the musical trio *Vi Sidder Bare Her* (which translates as *We're Just Sitting Here*), sided by two young musicians.

It was only five years ago that Jørgen Leth found himself vilified as a sexist by the Danish tabloid press because of his autobiographical *The Imperfect Human*. A shocked Leth went underground, but emerged stronger from the media storm some time after. Encouraged by his old playmate and admirer Lars von Trier, Leth resumed work on *Erotic Man*, a film the 73-year-old director describes as perhaps his most important.

Jørgen Leth, born 1937 in Aarhus, is considered a leading figure in experimental

documentary filmmaking. He has directed over 40 films since the early 1960s, and his writings include poetry, essays, non-fiction books, and radio and television drama.

Leth as the anthropologist looking upon the world with curious wonder is characteristic even of the director's early films, notably *The Perfect Human* (1967), *Life in Denmark* (1971), and *66 Scenes from America* (1981). He developed a unique epic approach to the genre of sports documentaries, best exemplified by *Stars and Watercarriers* (1973) and *A Sunday in Hell* (1976), both films a result of his passion for bicycle race.

Acclaimed films from the 80s and 90s are *Notebook from China* (1986), *Notes on Love* (1989), *Haiti. Untitled* (1996), and *New Scenes from America* (2002). In 2000 Lars von Trier challenged Leth to do five remakes of his signature work *The Perfect Human*, resulting in the mischievous and playful game of *The Five Obstructions* (2003).

Leth has directed two fiction features, *Interference* (1983) and *Traberg* (1992), both set in Haiti and both revolving around a searching male character.

Leth is recipient of a lifelong grant from the Danish Art Foundation for his achievements in filmmaking.

"Still nothing he's done in the past will quite prepare you for the idiosyncratic and unique pleasures of Erotic Man, in some ways his most radical and personal work, a powerful and sometimes shockingly honest essay about eros, aging and loss (...) What emerges is an elegy for lost possibilities and a paean to sensuality and the female form – and possibly the most upfront and searing look at sexuality you will see in a long while."

Festival programmer Steve Gravestock writing about *Erotic Man* at the film's world premiere during the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2010.

THE CHAMBER YOU MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER TO FORGET



Into Eternity. Magic Hour Films

Michael Madsen's *Into Eternity* is a mesmerizing reflection on the construction of the world's first permanent storage facility for nuclear waste. A reflection that Madsen, who comes from the art world, expresses in images, sound and music rather than logical statements.

BY ANNEMARIE HØRSMAN

When he first heard of Onkalo, Michael Madsen had a hard time believing the time scale. 100,000 years – that's how long this gigantic network of underground tunnels that is being blasted into solid Finnish bedrock is intended to last.

"I got started on the film because I was curious to find out how one can relate to that perspective," Madsen says. "100,000 years, that's well beyond my own comprehension. So, I thought it would be interesting to talk to some of the experts who actually have to deal with it."

"I seriously doubt that we will still be here in 100,000 years. That there will be people around who think like us. It may well be that they have

two arms and two legs and still look like us, but they will most likely perceive the world differently. How, then, should we understand what we're building today that is to last so long, and how do we communicate it to the future? This was what I wanted to explore," the director says. "Next question is how to create a film that gives an idea of what such a time scale entails."

THE EFFECT OF ALIENATION

Madsen uses a high degree of stylisation in *Into Eternity* to convey this mind-boggling theme.

"I wanted to create an element of distance in relation to the present by stylising the images and sound effects. In that way I try to draw the audience out of our own time and catapult them into the future so that they can *see* better and experience new aspects of themselves," says Madsen, who appears in the film as a myth teller of sorts, modeling the history of nuclear power on the myth of Prometheus who stole the fire from the gods. Madsen directs his fable to future generations as a warning about Onkalo, which means "hiding place".

"This time scale of 100,000 years is a fantastic vantage points for a documentary. To me, documentary filmmaking means precisely to see new sides of reality. And the key to that, I believe, is to work with some kind of alienation effect. I can't just put up a camera, I have to find a way to make the camera see, so I can catch sight of the meanings that are actually there."

EMPTY UNIVERSES

"I talked to the photographers and sound people about how we could give the impression that we're visiting this facility at Onkalo as a traveler from the future, from a point where everything about the present has been forgotten. The key design component in Onkalo is precisely oblivion. When the facility is finished and sealed off in 120 years, it will be able to operate without human intervention, in silent mode so to speak, because the scientists expect that our civilisation will end at some point within the 100,000-year time scale."

"To capture this state of oblivion we saw the camera as a being of sorts, an entity. Except for the scenes where experts sit and talk, we worked with

the camera that way. When it comes into a room or is filming outside it won't necessarily seek out the things we normally find important, for example a group of people in a room. It would rather point to whatever comes its way."

The visual inspiration Madsen found in specific films: *Le Samourai* by Melville, *L'Eclisse* by Antonioni, and *Elephant* by Gus Van Sant.

"What characterizes these directors is their enormous visual precision. The universes they create are extremely empty, and that's something I really appreciate, because it allows a level of abstraction. There's room to say something else. Van Sant's *Elephant* has very long takes, and it's really unclear what's happening. The time is just passing for these teenage kids. The stedicam-movements and the long takes in *Into Eternity* are very much inspired by this – and also by the opening scene from *Alien*, which is another film I admire. We give the audience time to look at people and experience the situations."

"I wasn't trained as a documentarian. I come from the art world and take my inspiration mostly from fiction, art and the history of ideas. This provides a cross-fertilization of expressions that really gives me something to work with."

Another example of this cross-fertilization is the film's soundtrack. Kraftwerk's *Radioactivity*, for instance, accompanies the scenes with men and women in white coats filmed in slow motion in the science fiction-like storage rooms where radioactive waste is submerged in water tanks. "I wondered if it would be too much of a cliché. But no, I thought, it's kind of cool that the reference between the music and nuclear power is so obvious."

Madsen also makes use of classic works by Arvo Pärt, our time's most prominent composer of sacred music, and Finland's own Sibelius, and *Into Eternity* fades out to a piece by the father of modern electronic music, Edgar Varese, whose aria *A Vast Black Sleep* creates an impressively solemn finale in the ink-black depths of the Onkalo cave.

VANTAGE POINTS

"When I started writing the screenplay, I worked very associatively, because I had a strong feeling that this place at Onkalo and the people working there already were in a sort of afterworld. There was something unreal, something uncanny that had already crept into this place due to the time frame.

"I saw the film as a kind of requiem. The people are portrayed very fleetingly and small in scale compared to the machines and the cave and rocks. The film also takes place in winter, like we're on the verge of a new ice age. Nature is like a separate world. At one point in the film, you see a reindeer looking up, indifferently. The animals may well feel that something is going on, but they are in a different form of reality, one that probably will last much longer than the one we humans inhabit. Maybe because nature as such doesn't want anything? Nature has another kind of momentum, another kind of movement within. Compared to that, we humans will necessarily fail."

If you really expect to be able to relate to 100,000 years, such as the construction of Onkalo is the outward expression of, you're juggling with concepts that are heavier than we humans can

manage, says Madsen. And here the director voices his scepticism about our belief that we master the world because we have mastered the technology.

"The reason for the many shots that depict vanishing points down long corridors, and outside as well, is to mimic the classical linear perspective that emerges in the Renaissance. That is, the idea of man looking out on the world and mastering it by subjecting it to his vantage point," says the director. "This place is an fitting expression of that ideology."

HOW DO YOU CREATE OBLIVION

Madsen was surprised that the experts in Finland hadn't been working on some scenarios for the future, should anything go wrong with Onkalo.

"In relation to the long term perspective, the safest solution for them would be that the place were forgotten – as opposed to having some kind of marker, a rune stone which could warn about the dangers buried on the site. The real threat to the facility is not so much the forces of nature unleashed

during a coming ice age, but human curiosity. And here lies a paradox: how do you create oblivion?

"What is so fascinating to me is that even though the Finnish engineers would choose not to put a skull at the entrance or whatever, this facility will inadvertently be a sign of some sort. If someone finds it 50,000 years from now, they wouldn't know what it is, but they would certainly be able to say to themselves that it is manmade because it has a symmetry and regularity that you don't find in nature. It will communicate something. And once you suspect that, you start looking for intentions.

"I like to imagine how they will understand our time. They might think: That's strange. There are only technical references, numbers on the walls, but what kind of worldview did these people actually adhere to? They'll find all these high-tech welded copper canisters with radioactive waste, and they'll see it as a legacy handed over from a long-gone society. But they'll wonder at how technical it all is. This says something about our times ■



Into Eternity. Framegrabs

"I wanted to create an element of distance in relation to the present by stylising the images and sound effects."



Michael Madsen Photo: Søren Solkær Starbird

For further information on *Into Eternity*, see reverse section.

MICHAEL MADSEN

Born 1971, Denmark. Director and conceptual artist. Works in the field of music, art and sound production. Director of *To Damascus – a Film on Interpretation* (2005) and the highly successful *Into Eternity* (2009), winner of the Nordic Documentary Award at Nordisk Panorama and the Grand Prix in Nyon. *Into Eternity* is selected for Reflecting Images and Green Screen Competition at IDFA.

MAGIC HOUR FILMS

Set up in 1984, Magic Hour Films has produced a wealth of short films and documentaries as well as feature films. Documentary films include *Can You Die in Heaven?* (Erlend E. Mo, 2005), *In a Soldier's Footsteps* (Mette Zeruneith, 2005), *My Eyes* (Erlend E. Mo, 2006), *On the Way to Paradise* (Suvi Helminen, 2007). *BURMA VJ – Reporting from a Closed Country* (Anders Østergaard, 2008) is recipient of more than 40 awards, among these IDFA's Joris Ivens Pris, and *Into Eternity* (Michael Madsen, 2009) winner of the Grand Prix in Nyon and Best Nordic Documentary at Nordisk Panorama, is selected for Reflecting Images and Green Screen Competition at IDFA.



My Avatar and Me Photo: Henrik Bohn Ipsen

Bente Milton and Mikkel Stolt set out to do a personal investigation of the online phenomenon *Second Life*. *My Avatar and Me*, selected for IDFA's Reflecting Images, goes with co-director Stolt on a journey into a virtual world, as the lines between fiction and reality gradually blur until the protagonist can no longer distinguish between himself and his computer-generated alter ego Mike Proud.

BY KATRINE SOMMER BOYSEN

Defining where reality ends and fiction takes over is a perpetual cinematic conundrum, even more so in the new Danish documentary *My Avatar and Me*. This blurring of lines was a challenge for co-directors Bente Milton and Mikkel Stolt when they started shooting their documentary – in cyberspace!

Bente Milton, who is head director, first heard of *Second Life* on a TV show back when the online phenomenon was still relatively unknown in Denmark.

"I found it weird and compelling at the same time," Milton says. "We decided to do a kind of anthropological study, where we dispatch a filmmaker to travel in *Second Life* and investigate the phenomenon – from within.

"So I had to find a suitable person. It wouldn't hurt, either, if that person was somewhat gawky. In *Second Life*, he would then be living out some of the dreams that had eluded him in real life. In a fantastic world limited only by your own imagination."

"That's when I came into the picture!" Stolt cuts in. Milton guffaws, "I met Mikkel at a film course, where he came barging in way too late and almost fell over a chair."

"It's funny, because as I remember it, you were the one who arrived late after a run-in with a car park attendant and with a

bowling baby in tow," Stolt says, before Milton takes the word again.

"Suffice it to say, we impressed one another and I instantly knew he was the one! Mikkel has the ability to comport himself with a delightful, ironic detachment from his own awkwardness."

A VIRTUAL KISS

Dividing the roles, Milton became head director, in charge of the structure and the content, while Stolt directed the shooting in *Second Life* and had a say in other matters as well, according to their contract, which called for reaching the greatest possible agreement. That way they avoided the worst conflicts.

They made a trailer, indicating the direction of the film and introducing Mikkel as well as Rob Gould, their photographer friend, and gorgeous, mysterious Helena. But how do you even film in *Second Life*?

"We had no clue," Stolt says. "Via *Second Life*, we got in touch with Rob, who is a photographer, both in real life and *Second Life*. He took us into this world and, together with him and our technical producer Jeppe Raasthøj, we figured out how to shoot in full HD in cyberspace. Through Rob, who was always walking around with a camera on his shoulder, we met Helena and soon we had the basis for exploring *Second Life* and for a good story. We all agreed to start filming and see where the story would take us."

When you say "meet," you mean in cyberspace?

"Yes!" Stolt says proudly. "It was a new way of working, but wildly fascinating."

"It was a lot like real life," Milton adds. "Rob knew Helena, and I guess he was a bit in love with her, too. He knew the bar she used to frequent and he took us there to meet her. Mikkel wasn't entirely unmoved by this blond bombshell, either ..." Helena helps Mike become a cool avatar with the skills to

"Second Life is still huge, though you don't hear about it so much anymore. The point we wanted to make is that there is a tangible, real-life dimension to it."
Bente Milton

IN CYBERSPACE

“There is a scene of Helena and me kissing, and when we shot it I could feel it physically. I was amazed how powerful it felt.”

Mikkel Stolt



My Avatar and Me

mingle with the cyber jet set and make a successful career for himself as a filmmaker in the virtual world – a career he has dreamed about, and vainly struggled for, in real life.

“We didn’t expect Mikkel to become so absorbed and even outright attracted to Helena. It just happened. A lot of people who have seen the film ask us if Helena is a construction. But no, she isn’t. We still don’t know who she really is. We don’t even know if she is a man or a woman,” Milton says.

Stolt himself is convinced Helena is a woman.

“I was surprised at how many real feelings Second Life engendered,” he says. “There is a scene of Helena and me kissing, and when we shot it I could feel it physically. It was weird for Rob, too, who had to film it. I was amazed how powerful it felt.”

NEW WAYS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

My Avatar and Me follows both virtual Mike and real-life Mikkel, whose relationship to his flesh-and-blood is put to the test. But how much is real and how much is fiction?

“After the first few visits to Second Life, it became clear to me that it’s impossible to distinguish between fiction and reality in Second Life,” Milton says. “If you ask me, it makes no sense to talk about that distinction in Second Life and I found it interesting to explore that perspective. Second Life is still huge, though you don’t hear about it so much anymore. The point we wanted to make is that there is a tangible, real-life dimension to the lives that are lived there.”

Allowing the story to develop at its own pace had some unforeseen consequences.

“The story started getting a life of its own for us and taking some unplanned twists and turns. The whole structure of the story had to be developed when we found out what was happening to Mikkel in Second Life. This fictionalising actually takes place on the film’s real-life level, while almost everything that happens in Second Life is documentary,” Milton says.

“Though in real life I wasn’t actually kicked out in the street because of my Second Life relationship to Helena,” Stolt says. “For me, it was important to do a film that breaks down certain boundaries. Running a professional risk as a director by making a film that is self-reflecting, satirical and documentary all at one time,” he adds. “Also, the film thematises what it means to be human in a modern world where technology creates new

living conditions and forms of interaction that feel no less real for being virtual.”

Milton concludes, “Our ambition with this film is to explore the grey area between fantasy and reality and – to be fancy about it – to expand our perception of time and space. I think it’s important to redefine our concepts now, at this point in time, when humanity is facing such huge challenges. All indications point to technological developments continuing to accelerate. Science tells us we’re approaching a dramatic point where evolution will make a quantum leap ahead, and where we risk coming up short with respect to the technology we have created. It’s a scary thought, unless humanity turns out to hold a huge untapped potential just waiting to be unleashed.

“The question is whether we will let egotism and the pursuit of material wealth win out over love and the life of the mind,” Milton says ■

The title of the film is inspired by the double meaning of the word “avatar”. In Hindu mythology, an avatar is a higher spiritual being who descends to earth to guide us, while an online avatar denotes a graphical representation of yourself.

For further information on My Avatar and Me, see reverse section.



Photo: Peter Engberg

BENTE MILTON

Born 1960, Denmark. Milton’s most prominent film, the acclaimed *The Children of Gaia* (1998), received numerous awards including Pärnu’s Grand Prix and honours from Golden Gate Awards, Nordic Panorama and Prix Europa. *Alison’s Baby* (2001), a portrait of the armless single mother Alison Lapper, brought her the prestigious Prix Italia. *My Avatar and Me* (2010), made with Mikkel Stolt, is Milton’s first film in feature-length and selected for IDFA’s Reflecting Images.

MIKKEL STOLT

Born 1965, Denmark. Director-producer, MA in film studies, co-founder and co-owner of Fenris Film & Multimedia. Has directed and produced documentaries and short films as well as TV documentaries, educational films, and exhibition and museum videos. *My Avatar and Me* is Stolt’s first feature-length film and is selected for IDFA’s Reflecting Images.

MILTON MEDIA

Founded 1992 by director-producer Bente Milton. Film and television production company specialised in documentaries and educational programming. *My Avatar and Me* is a feature debut.

FENRIS FILM & MULTIMEDIA

Founded 1993 by Jeppe Raasthøj and Mikkel Stolt. Produces documentaries, educational material and multimedia equipment. Produced the children’s documentary *We Rule Because!* (Mikkel Stolt, 2002) about a Danish team of young basketballers. Screened at several Danish festivals. The musical documentary *Fado* (Anders Leifer, 2003) was chosen for the Vancouver International Film Festival. fenrisfilm.dk

CROSS- CULTURAL DOC DATING

In 2009, the CPH:DOX festival added a new initiative to its already wide scope of projects. DOX:LAB is an experimental filmmaking laboratory bringing together a handpicked group of talented young filmmakers from all corners of the world. DOX:LAB has already resulted in 12 new documentaries, and the experiment continued at this year's CPH:DOX with a fresh group of talents.

BY MATHILDE ROSENDAHL PHILIPSEN

DOX:LAB is a creative lab focusing on artistic exploration and on developing the film genres. The idea is to bring together filmmakers from different cultures and storytelling traditions, film histories and production methods to create a space for innovative and visually original films.

Concretely, DOX:LAB combines a talent workshop with subsequent film production. During the CPH:DOX festival, the selected filmmakers participate in a workshop with seminars, master classes and input from Nordic film commissioners.

Taking off from the workshop, participants are partnered up to develop specific film projects. The cultural meeting of filmmakers is an important aspect. In 2009, 12 directors from the Nordic nations were partnered up with 12 directors from Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The outcome was 12 films that in various ways investigated the boundaries of the documentary genre.

"At the heart of the project is the artistic challenge and the aesthetic meeting with someone who thinks differently about art," CPH:DOX festival director

Tine Fischer says. "The idea of asking two directors of different backgrounds to make a film together challenges the production process and genre definitions and encourages the making of different and innovative films. We deliberately picked directors from widely different production cultures and with widely different artistic methods to expand the space in which films emerge and develop."

FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS

Producing their films, the participants have to deal with five obstructions: 1. CPH:DOX picks a co-director for each participant. 2. Participants have eight months in which to finish the film together. 3. Participants must execute the entire production themselves, including editing and sound. 4. Participants will receive limited funding. 5. Participants must shoot in the non-Nordic participant's country.

In terms of the style and genre of the finished films, CPH:DOX has elected to give the participants an essentially free hand.

"The invitation is very open in terms of how the finished film will look. There are no requirements on running time, content or form," Fischer says. "As it turns out, that openness has been the attraction of the project. If we had dictated that the film *had* to run 10 minutes, that it *had* to be shown on a specific media platform or stick to certain genre conventions, etc., a lot of the participating directors would probably have bowed out. I think the combination of something that's very open and something that's very defined - an arranged marriage, if you will - makes the project interesting to the participating filmmakers."

PRODUCTIVE CULTURE CLASH

One of the 12 teams from 2009 consists of Michael Noer of Denmark and Khavn de la Cruz of the Philippines. Their collaboration, *Son of God*, is about a Philippine midget worshipped as the Son of God. As a documentary, it inhabits the borderland between fiction and reality.

Noer and de la Cruz' collaboration was not without friction and it resulted in two versions of *Son of God*, a short and a feature.

"Why not two versions? There could be three or four or even five versions, because film is like music - it's highly malleable," de la Cruz says. "I've always seen the film as a feature, and Michael saw it as a short. Given this difference in perspective, why choose? It's a free world, so we made two cuts, or versions. Aside from the length, the major difference is that the short has a voiceover, while the feature has none."

Ending up with two versions of *Son of God* also reflects culturally different ways of viewing a film as a work, Noer says.

"Khavn has a tradition of making several versions of his films, and we intend to make even more versions of this film, too. It's the kind of thing that's not done in this country. Here we are more prideful of the film, of *the work*. I think it's fine to look at your film in a different way and I find it enormously refreshing to do several versions of one film," he says.

EXPLORE NEW STRATEGIES

Collaborating so closely with another director made an impression on de la Cruz in several ways.

"The collaboration was not without its challenges. We're two filmmakers with different perspectives. We both had to adjust to accommodate

“We deliberately picked directors from widely different production cultures and with widely different artistic methods to expand the space in which films emerge.”

*Festival director
Tine Fischer*



Son of God by Michael Noer and Khavn de la Cruz

the other's creative worldview, processes and quirks – and I must say we were able to do so without spilling too much blood. I'm kidding! We had a lot of fun, Michael and I. Admittedly, collaborating is not something that I'm used to. I've always been alone at the helm. Working with Michael made me feel like one of the twin heads on a monster. It's different. It's interesting. The more I came to know the otherness of the other filmmaker, the more I understood my own creative self, my aesthetics," he says.

"As for the rewards, I got to know another filmmaker quite intimately. We made new friends, we learned new things. Of course, the biggest reward of all is ultimately coming up with a film that we are both very proud of."

De la Cruz sees a lot of potential in DOX:LAB, now and in the future. "It's a good platform for collaboration. I recommend that all filmmakers, young and old, collaborate on one project at least once in their lives. It opens your eyes to new things and helps you grow as a creative mind and as a human being. I also see DOX:LAB as a place where new strategies in filmmaking can be explored in depth, where we can hopefully come up with new cinemas unthought of and unheard of before. It's a lot like crossbreeding. DOX:LAB is where we can crossbreed and create cinemutants."

DOX:LAB 2010

In selecting the participants for this year, CPH:DOX drew on its experiences from DOX:LAB 2009.

"We learned a lot from last year, of course," Fischer says. "A crucial factor to the success of the project has no doubt been the matchmaking process. We took pains to ensure that everyone in the new

“Working with Michael made me feel like one of the twin heads on a monster. It's different. It's interesting.”

Khavn de la Cruz

group has a similar level of experience. The team consists mainly of filmmakers and visual artists who all have established, international careers. Most are familiar with the international market and have advanced so far in their artistic development that methods and projects are second nature. They know what they're doing and what interests them, which makes them open to dialogue.

"We also took pains to ensure that the combination of filmmakers brings something to the collective understanding of what 'the documentary project' is. A lot of these filmmakers aren't exclusively documentary filmmakers but hybrid filmmakers working in both fiction and nonfiction. We included a number of visual artists this time, so I expect the aesthetic discussion of the documentary framework to expand, which includes challenging the classic narrative form, since so many of these filmmakers work in conceptual practices," Fischer says ■

DOX:LAB is funded by the Danish Film Institute, Obelfonden, Århus Festuge, the Danish Centre for Culture and Development, and realized in close collaboration with the DFI Film Workshop. The film productions are additionally funded by the Swedish Film Institute and the Finnish Film Foundation, International Media Support and Screen Institute Beirut. / www.cphdox.dk.



Michael Noer and Khavn de la Cruz

DOX:LAB 2010 / PARTICIPANTS

Caroline Sascha Cogez (Denmark) & Dechen Roder (Bhutan)
Lilabeth Cuenca (Denmark) & Nidal Hassan (Syria)
Jesper Just (Denmark) & Uraphong Raksasad (Thailand)
Kasper Bisgaard (Denmark) & Donald Mugisha (Uganda)
Jeppe Rønde (Denmark) & Woo Ming Jin (Malaysia)
Marcus Lindeen (Sweden) & Mauro Andrizzi, (Argentina)
Måns Månsson (Sweden) & Li Hongqi (China)
Reetta Aalto (Finland) & Vipin Vijay (India)
Salla Sorri (Finland) & Renate Costa (Paraguay)

DOX:LAB 2009 / THE 12 FILMS

Michael Noer (DK) & Khavn de la Cruz (PH): *Son of God*
Frosti Runolfsson (IS) & John Torres (PH): *Hudas Hudus*
Robin Färdig (SE) & Sherad Anthony Sanchez (PH): *Balangay*
Thu Thu Shein (BU) & Katrine Philips (DK): *5 Beats Before Death*
Halim Sabbagh (LB) & Camilla Nielsson (DK): *Shot in Beirut*
Caroline Kamyra (UG) & Boris Bertram (DK): *Chips and Liver Girls*
Zero Lin (CN) & Ada Bligaard Søby (DK): *Master Chen lives on 88 Lucky Street*
Aada Niilola (FI) & Wai Mar Nyunt (BU): *Dragon Beach*
Gan Chao (CN) & Anna Maria Helgadóttir (DK): *One is the Loneliest Number*
Mahasen Nasser-Eldin (Palestine) & Camilla Magid (DK): *From Palestine With Love*
Corine Shawi (LB) & Nikolaj Larsen (DK): *Je t'aime infiniment*
Yves Montand (RW) & Iris Olsson (FI): *Memory*

GIVE KIDS A BREAK!

It comes as a surprise to Dorte Høeg Brask that one out of three Danish children go through a divorce. That 3,000 children lose a parent every year. That children at Danish asylum centres don't have their own teddy bear but have to borrow one from a communal teddy bear box. In Høeg Brask's office at the DFI sits a giant bag of stuffed animals that the commissioner for children's short and documentary films has collected for the asylum children ...

AF SUSANNA NEIMANN

Discussing conditions for children and children's films, Dorte Høeg Brask is serious and insistent, interrupting herself at one point to muse, "Does that sound 'politically correct'?" She decides it doesn't matter: As grownups, we have to guard the preciously short time kids have to be kids these days. Which does not mean sheltering them from harsh images of reality. Because reality *can* be harsh, and one of the most important things a documentary for children can do is foster identification: Somebody out there is going through what I'm going through!

CHILDREN ARE BUSY

What's it like to be a kid today?

"I think children are busy," Høeg Brask says. "Busy with school, after-school programmes, homework, sports, TV, the Internet and computer games - and always having to

perform. I think being a child in our part of the world is stressful.

"Childhood isn't harder today, but it is shorter. Way too many children spend their lives commuting between parents and all the things they have to do. The time available for carefree play without the demand to perform has shrunk, as I see it.

"Children become tweens before we have time to blink. The Internet and media, with commercials and talent shows on all channels, make them self-conscious at a way too early age about how they look, what they can or cannot do - and about their sex. They are confronted with images of assault, sex and violence. And we can't protect them against it, but we can put the images into context, so they can understand them. Children have seen almost everything and they can handle more than we think.

"There's no getting rid of these images, either - or the norms of behaviour and appearance - but we

can give kids some *other* images of conflict material in their lives. Images that are about more than just the importance of being attractive, images about things like being scared of the dark or how to say goodbye to a friend."

CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT

As a commissioner, Høeg Brask can, and does, support any genre, but this graduate of the National Film School's documentary programme is particularly dedicated to developing stories for children and young people.

"Documentaries can mirror real life on a one-to-one scale. They can create identification and make kids feel they are not alone. Through these stories they can see how other kids live.

"Children are so different, and so are their lives. Because most people working in the film industry live in Copenhagen, we are seeing a lot

"Documentaries can mirror real life on a one-to-one scale. They can create identification and make kids feel they are not alone."

of films that mirror their lives and environment.

"But there are children out there whom we do not reach and who do not feel recognised. The kind of kids we rarely see. Kids living on the fringes. Kids who look different. Kids who don't fit in. I'd like to see some films about them."

Overall, Høeg Brask would like to see more quality documentary projects for children and teens. "Documentaries for kids are the lowest level of the hierarchy no one wants to be associated with," she says. But she can't see why, and she won't accept it. So what is she going to do about it?

"I'm working on several levels. Talking with filmmakers: How are they doing? Where are they headed? I try to send them out to meet kids, in the schoolyard or out in the country. It makes a difference where you live and what view you wake up to in the morning. I'm in close dialogue with TV stations about specific projects - and I'm trying to raise more private sponsorship funds for the area."

REACHING YOUR AUDIENCE

Høeg Brask has no plans to directly encourage filmmakers to work on different media platforms. She hopes filmmakers will come up with ideas on their own, stories that naturally outgrow individual films and spread to other platforms. Because that's where the kids are: on the mobile and online. Her main criterion for success, when her time as children's short and documentary film commissioner ends in a few years, is, Have the films reached their audience? Have they been seen and used?

"Also, we mustn't forget that childhood, however brief it may be, is a pocket of time whose driving forces are play, desire and fantasy - and children's films should always reflect that, too" ■

DORTE HØEG BRASK

Graduate of the documentary programme at the National Film School of Denmark, 2001. Former chair of the Danish Film Directors association, one-time production company owner and director of such documentaries as *Scattering Clouds - When Mom and Dad Have Wronged* (2007), *Duften af Beirut* (2006), *Radiofolket* (2001) and *Notes on Silence* (2001).



Dorte Høeg Brask Photo: Robin Skjoldborg



Klara Grunning-Harris Photo: Robin Skjoldborg

PASSION FOR DIALOGUE

Klara Grunning-Harris wasn't sure she would ever return to her Scandinavian roots, but the post of DFI film commissioner was too much of a temptation. After 17 years in California, the 39-year-old Swedish-Korean-American producer is ready to use her skills and connections in international co-production to strengthen Danish film's global position.

BY ANNEMARIE HØRSMAN

Klara Grunning-Harris has only just started in her new job as film commissioner for short and documentary films, and on the surface of things it looks like a big step. She has acted as an independent producer, consultant and filmmaker since 1997 and lived in San Francisco since 1993. She has travelled the world, exercising her expertise in international co-production, served on heaps of industry panels, and her first language is not Danish but Swedish and English.

SHARING STORIES

A theme that has fuelled Grunning-Harris throughout the years is film's unique ability to create a dialogue. For even though talent, strong artistic vision and a solid teamwork encouraging experiment are the fundamentals of filmmaking, sharing your story and really getting it out there is its *raison d'être*, she says.

"I'm passionate about stories where people from different parts of the

world start communicating all of a sudden about an issue. Where, say, different generations are exchanging perspectives, or developing countries and western countries engage in a dialogue. I've seen this happen very successfully in my previous work.

"If you can get people connecting around something they are passionate about, it can create a very positive energy and if you are lucky – change."

The Internet has, of course, been extremely beneficial to the diffusion of documentaries to global audiences, Grunning-Harris points out. "Platforms like YouTube provide a great opportunity to expose your project. I think documentarians should include these early in the process in order to get a better picture of the distribution possibilities later on and to build a support network that will create the right buzz." And of course, says Grunning-Harris, this exposure is important in opening the project up to financing possibilities.

"But then again, using the Internet can create a lot of confusion, because there are so many possibilities. That's why I want filmmakers to make a very detailed outreach and distribution plan, and then stick to it. I don't want the creators to get too distracted by all these marketing issues."

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Grunning-Harris has a keen eye for new creative partnerships through her many years of production experience. When asked which opportunities she

sees for Danish films, she points to the southern hemisphere, among other places.

"I see a lot of interest from Danish filmmakers in stories from Africa – Congo, Angola, Zimbabwe. And as Scandinavia has a high level of technology, projects like these could represent a great exchange with underdeveloped regions. People there don't watch television, they don't watch movies in theatres. What they have is basically a mobile phone. It would be great to be able to create content in these areas, but on the platforms that are available to them.

"I think it's important for people in these regions to be offered a different perspective on themselves – to help broaden their sense of self. This kind of feedback is exactly what documentarians can give, because they often come in with great knowledge and sympathy, and they stay on for some time.

"In my previous work I've seen crews who collaborate with a local television station and talk about, say, technical aspects of how to have community screenings in villages. It could also be engaging kids and teenagers in schools in what you're doing. Of course, all this can be really challenging in places where there is a war going on ...

"I have a hard time with cultures that 'steal stories' – coming in, using the local subject and then disappearing without sharing your work and without knowing what you leave behind."

KLARA GRUNNING-HARRIS

Born 1971, Sweden. Studied art in Paris and moved to San Francisco in 1993, where she completed her film studies at the Academy of Art University in 1997. Since then she has worked as producer, writer, director, consultant and cinematographer – since 1999 for ITVS in San Francisco, where she headed the start up of a new division for international co-production. Started the production consulting company Hell in a Handbasket in 2000. Grunning-Harris was instrumental in the launch of Kudos Family in 2008, a company focusing on multiplatform media distribution and based in San Francisco and Stavanger. Grunning-Harris' track record as producer includes the Emmy Award winner *Gumby Dharma, What Do You Believe?*, music videos, shorts and commercials.

BREATHING ROOM

Grunning-Harris' new job at the Danish Film Institute fits perfectly with her work during the past five years, where she has created strong bonds with Nordic filmmakers.

Part of what attracted Grunning-Harris to the teamwork at the Film Institute was the opportunity to help Danish films break into new markets. They take creative risks and are visually strong – qualities that she finds very inspiring.

"I've been seeing more Danish films at festivals and markets for the last six-seven years. What stands out for me is the courage to tell stories that aren't important just because of an issue that is exposed, but because the filmmaker wants to share a situation of some sort – a human situation, without pushing a political agenda. It's a very radical way of telling stories, I think – inconspicuous but at the same time very direct and very real.

"I also noticed an incredible skill in the editing, which is such a huge part of documentary filmmaking. There is an enormous sense of timing and, again, the courage to leave breathing room. As a filmmaker, you really have to believe in your vision to be able to do that.

"I think in Denmark there is an enormous amount of support for being courageous in your filmmaking which is also part of why I wanted to try it out – to see what it's like to actually be in an environment that supports original voices" ■



Jesper Jack Photo: Miriam Dalsgaard

DEVICES FOR CAPTURING HAPPY ACCIDENTS

A thorough discussion of development and methods in documentary films is called for to clear up the prevailing confusion of terminology, Jesper Jack says. The Danish Film Institute's short and documentary film commissioner considers the availability of risk-ready development funds to be an important framework for such discussion – and the route to the best films.

BY EVA NOVRUP REDVALL

The boxes and papers piled high in Jesper Jack's office provide a vivid snapshot of a day in the life of the DFI's short and documentary film commissioner. The room speaks volumes about the man and his jam-packed workday.

In fact, as Jack notes shortly into our talk about project development in Danish documentaries, rooms are one of the things he likes to discuss with Danish filmmakers. What rooms will a film be set in? What does a room say? What difference does it make if a dialogue takes place in one room rather than another? Since all aspects

of reality add to the storytelling, the DFI supports the examining of such issues in the development process, before shooting starts.

DEVELOPMENT KEY TO SUCCESS

The DFI puts a considerable amount of its subsidy funds for documentaries into the development phase, based on a desire to specify projects before they go into production. The development phase is absolutely central, Jack contends, because it involves important considerations about how to take responsibility for reality. Clarifying what you want the future film to examine, you develop “a device for capturing happy accidents,” as he puts it.

“The DFI puts proportionally more funds into development than other film institutes do. Films are not sent into production until they are truly ready. For example, we allow urgent shots to be made during the film's development – before a letter of commitment has been written – so that projects can mature, creatively and financially, better than before. We try to think outside the box in terms of original development processes, according to the thesis that creative projects produce creative

“As a documentarian, you might find that the couple you'll be filming are head over heels in love every day you're with them. Then on the day you start shooting, they suddenly have a big fight. What's the truth then?”

results,” Jack says. In his view, access to development funds is the key to understanding the relative success of Danish documentaries at the moment.

SPECIFYING PROCESSES

In Jack's opinion, the development of documentaries suffers from a confusion of terminology. An absence of standards, in scriptwriting, say, can make it difficult to have a dialogue.

“A development process can involve many different things. A diversity of opinion is fine, but some processes can get a little murky because there is so much confusion about nomenclature. Are we talking about the same thing when we say ‘treatment’ or ‘genre’? Do we mean the same thing when we use the term ‘dramaturgy’?”

Fortunately, Jack is finding that Danish directors today are more interested than before in discussing

methods and working creatively in development.

“I don't think someone has to work out a complete roadmap before they start shooting, but a project is strengthened when you have systematic discussions about the script and methods as well as aesthetics. It's my experience that we, in the documentary film world, tend to be too diffuse, so having more agreement about what we are really talking about helps. There is progress on that front of Danish film these days. People are working to consciously put words to certain devices and genre considerations, and I think several recent films have benefited from this specifying of processes.”

RESPONSIBILITY FOR REALITY

For Jack, the development phase is about honing your eye. While there

“Danish film spends a relatively large amount of money on development, and that’s essential if we want innovation and artistically powerful films.”

JESPER JACK

Born 1969, Denmark. Having been a world traveller, journalist and political activist, Jack graduated from the National Film School of Denmark in 1997. Was appointed DFI Film Commissioner in 2009. Jack has directed, edited, developed and produced numerous documentaries. Together with Henrik Veileborg, he produced the duology *Love on Delivery*, IDFA Silver Wolf nominee, and *Ticket to Paradise*, winning a Special Mention at CPH:DOX. Produced the festival hit *Side by Side* (2008), a Toronto Hot Docs Spectrum nominee and winner of a Special Mention at Nordic Panorama. Together with Henrik Veileborg and Anna-Maria Kantarius he produced two films from the Cities on Speed-series: *Mumbai Disconnected* and *Bogotá Change*, both selected for IDFA’s Reflecting Images.

used to be a tendency to turn the camera on the world and then react to the footage afterwards, Jack sees today’s Danish filmmakers putting a lot of thought into what they want to tell before they turn their eye on the world.

In his opinion, the National Film School of Denmark has been central in making it more legitimate to discuss methods, and those discussions are making for better films. This process is not about finding all the answers but getting to what you want to depict and becoming aware of how best to capture it cinematically. You have to take responsibility for the fact that what you want to tell becomes part of the film – in Jack’s own experience as a documentarian, you can’t leave it up to reality to take responsibility for itself.

“As a documentarian, you might find that the couple you’ll be filming are head over heels in love every day you’re with them. Then on the day you start shooting, they suddenly have a big fight. What’s the truth then?”

“I have had the experience of editing together a film that almost became a total pack of lies because I

took a strictly truth-seeking approach to filmmaking and didn’t want to influence the shoot. So I ended up with whatever footage I happened to get. A moment of truth can tell a lie if it’s taken in isolation and not contextualised, which can require manipulation,” he says.

“A lot of excellent Danish directors employ narrative devices in their films and they’re not afraid to stage things in one form or another. The result is compelling films like *Armadillo* or *Into Eternity*. But this approach to reality takes thorough initial deliberation. That’s one reason why it’s so important to have funds for development and why it’s important that subsidy schemes are willing to take risks, since it’s often so hard to see what direction a project will be going in.

“Danish film spends a relatively large amount of money on development, and that’s essential if we want innovation and artistically powerful films,” Jack says, enthusiastically pulling out an original presentation for a potential film from one of the stacks in his office.

How that project will end up nobody knows, but the discussions about it are in full swing ■

DFI KEY CONTACTS / AMSTERDAM 2010



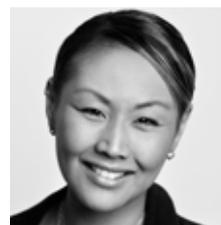
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JUGGLING SECRETS

“No one understands me”, says Mr. Ryuichi, father, husband and keeper of secrets. Mr. Ryuichi, the protagonist of Kaspar Astrup Schröder’s *I Want to Cheer Up Ltd.*, is head of a clandestine business of professional stand-ins.

With his portrait of the iconic Dr. Nakamats last year, Kaspar Astrup Schröder moves to the other end of the scale in his choice of a protagonist in his new film *I Want to Cheer Up Ltd.* Here we have a man who conducts his second life after hours, unobserved by even his immediate family.

Mr. Ryuichi and his 32 employees are professional stand-ins, part of a growing service sector catering for clients who are in need of a companion – a spouse, relative, friend, colleague, boy or girlfriend – to accompany them to social functions such as weddings and funerals.

The film explores how Mr. Ryuichi juggles with so many secrets and why his clients cannot bear public scrutiny of their personal lives. Not able to be the ubiquitous dad or face up to his own shortcomings, Mr. Ryuichi finds satisfaction in being a stand-in for other families. But, is this giving him a better life?

Producer Mette Heide previously signed the two behind-the-scenes documentaries *Milosevic on Trial* (2007) and *Saving Saddam* (2008) ■

I WANT TO CHEER UP LTD.

IDFA Forum – Round Table Pitch
 Director: Kaspar Astrup Schröder
 Producer: Mette Heide for Plus Pictures / www.pluspictures.dk
 Mette Heide is also pitching Brian McGinn’s *300 Reasons ...* (opposite page)

Read about Kaspar Astrup Schröder’s *My Playground*, selected for *Panorama* and *DOC U!*, on page 14.

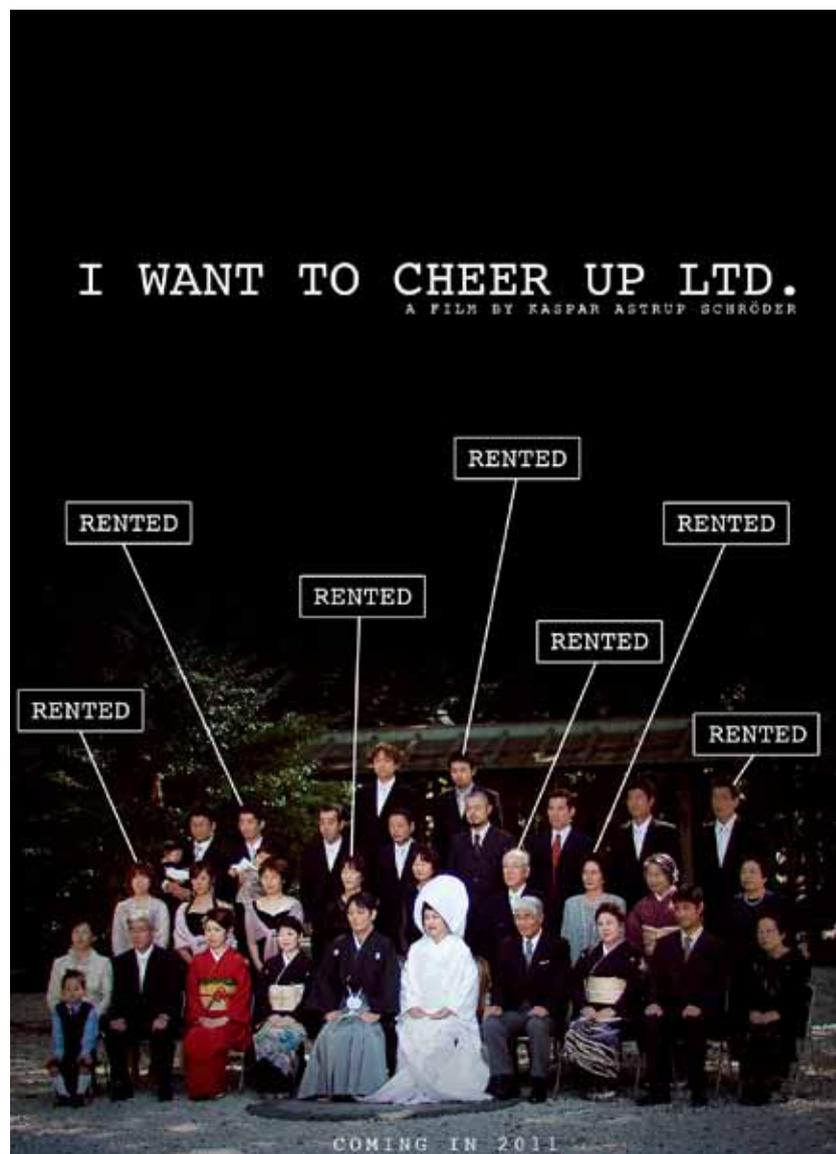


Photo: Plus Pictures



Photo: Danish Documentary

HARROWING COMEBACK

Striving to reach success for a second time can be a painful journey. This is the case for ballroom dancer Slavik in Andreas Koefoed and Christian Bonke’s *Ballroom Dancing*, who once held the world championship in Latin American dance. He is now making a final comeback attempt – this time with Anna, his partner and lover.

Born into a poor Ukrainian family with Gypsy blood Slavik set his sights on becoming the world’s best Latin American dancer. But as good as he was at his climb, as difficult it was for him to sustain his fame.

A decisive flaw in his character – his uncontrollable temper – led to his downfall. He turned his partnerships

into emotional roller coasters, which eventually cost him his title. Now with his new partner Anna, he has his mind set, but the journey is a bumpy one. His maturing physique presents its ailments, all while Anna suffers from his outbursts.

Moreover to win the title, Slavik and Anna will compete with the very same girl who discovered him and with whom he broke through to stardom, status and wealth. But Slavik is confident. On the dance floor he is in a place serene where he is oblivious to emotional interference ■

BALLROOM DANCING

IDFA Forum – Round Table Pitch
 Directors: Christian Bonke and Andreas Koefoed
 Producers: Jakob Nordenhof Jønck and Sigrid Dyekjær for Danish Documentary / www.danishdocumentary.com

Read about Andreas Koefoed’s *Pig Country*, selected for *Reflecting Images*, on page 16.

CARVING A DEMOCRACY

Democrats by Camilla Nielsson offers a unique insight into the inner workings of the Zimbabwean government at the highest level. Nielsson was co-director on *Cities on Speed – Mumbai Disconnected*, selected for last year's Reflecting Images.

A historic project is underway in Zimbabwe. Committed people, once bitter political rivals, are now part of Government.

Two top politicians – and former political enemies – have been appointed to lead the country through the process of forming a

new constitution that should bring the country a decisive step closer to democracy.

The film goes behind the scenes of the constitutional process and is being made at a critical and, possibly, history-changing juncture as the political elite struggles to find a new post-colonial identity – a struggle that may herald a new epoch in the development of modern African states ■

DEMOCRATS

IDFA Forum – Central Pitch

Director: Camilla Nielsson

Producer: Henrik Veileborg for

Upfront Films / www.upfrontfilms.dk



Photo: Upfront Films



Photo: Plus Pictures

NERDISH RECORDBREAKER

The Peter Pan of Queens, New York, Ashrita Furman is a determined man. He has broken over 300 Guinness records in the past 30 years. In this human interest story Brian McGinn portrays a man who has decided never to grow up.

Ashrita started out as a super-nerd, immersing himself in the works of authors like Henry David Thoreau and Herman Hesse. Normality was

anathema to him, so at 15 he decided to devote his life to attaining the extraordinary. This meant putting aside family, sex, and material

possessions in return for pushing the limits of human potential to the breaking point.

Besides pursuing his record-breaking, Ashrita manages his neighborhood health food store. His colleagues from the store and the community have become his record-breaking assistants, and, in many ways, his closest family.

Why has Ashrita become dependent on record-breaking for joy

in his life? Can he keep raising the bar for humanity as he approaches the age of 60? ■

300 REASONS TO SMILE AND MAYBE MORE BEFORE THIS FILM IS DONE

IDFA Forum – Round Table Pitch

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