



The international voice of



First day of business: pitching at the (soon-to-be) IDFA Forum.

Photo: Bram Belloni

November 27, 2007  
www.idfa.nl

### Greenhouse reception

The Greenhouse (Mediterranean doc development project) reception takes place 18.00 – 19.30 this evening in Studio 80, Rembrandtplein 17 (not the Compagnietheater).

### Guests meet Guests

This evening's Guests Meets Guests networking event at the Compagnietheater will be hosted by ITVS International, whose production fund enables international filmmakers to produce single docs for broadcast on US television. IDFA 2007 titles that have benefited from such funding include Klaartje Quirijns' *The Dictator Hunter*, Arto Halonen's *Shadow of the Holy Book* and Rob Nugent's *End of the Rainbow*.

### Oxfam Novib Lecture/Screening

Oxfam Novib, the Dutch arm of Oxfam International, today hosts a special screening of *Darfur Now*, 16.00 – 19.00 in Tuschinski 1, followed by a talk by Christa Meindersma, Director of Conflict Management at the Centre for Strategic Studies in The Hague. This is the first of three such lectures/screenings, continuing tomorrow with *Jimmy Carter: Man from Plains* and concluding with *Diamond Road* on Thursday.

### NOW MEDIA HOUR @ THE FORUM

17:30 – 18:00 Compagnietheater Grote Zaal  
New Acts of Creation: The Submarine Success Story  
A look at next-media success story Submarine and other producers and funders of innovative short-form digital documentary content for this brave new world.  
Open to all IDFA guests / delegates.

### Paradocs Session

19:30 – 21:30 Tuschinski 5  
Marc Glassman moderates this opportunity for filmmakers and curators of the leading-edge and experimental sections of IDFA to take the spotlight.  
Open to all, free to all.

### Talk of the Day: It's a LoveFest

21:30 – 23:00 Compagnietheater Grote Zaal  
Talkshow about new definitions of love and family, and new rules in relationships whereby documentary filmmakers may offer us a guiding light. With *Living Goddess*' Ishbel Whitaker, Kara Herold of *Bachelorette*, Faramarz K-Rahber (*Donkey in Lahore*), Vittorio Moroni (*Licu's Holidays*) and Harris Fishman (*Cat Dancers*).  
Open to all, free to all.

## Seeing eye to eye

IDFA is looking to boost its budget by € 1 million a year. The festival will be asking the Dutch government to provide around a third of this new money. IDFA's Managing Director, Cees van 't Hullenaar, talks euros and cents to IDFA Daily's Geoffrey Macnab.

At present, the festival runs on a budget of around € 3 million per annum. € 700,000 comes from public sources (€ 350,000 from the Ministry of Culture and € 350,000 from the City of Amsterdam), with the rest of the budget being made up from sponsorship and box-office revenue. During the next four-year funding cycle (2009-2012), the festival's budget is expected to rise to around € 4 million. It is hoped that Amsterdam and the Ministry of Culture will each chip in an additional € 150,000. The festival has already submitted its spending proposals to the City of Amsterdam. It will also be filing its proposals to the Ministry of Culture before February 1, 2008. Extra funding will be required to help IDFA build its planned 'on-line community', for which the festival recently received € 300,000, geared specifically to kick-starting the scheme. According to Van 't Hullenaar, the new, all-year-round digital initiatives should not detract from the festival itself, however. He does not expect industry activity during the actual festival period itself to decrease. "It is important that people see each other and look in each others'

eyes. You have to know each other first before you do business. That will continue to be important", Van 't Hullenaar says. "We think that this online documentary community will strengthen IDFA in Amsterdam. It is a complementary development."

Some other structural changes are in the pipeline. IDFA and The Forum (currently autonomous organizations) are set to formally merge next spring. As things stand, the two events are currently administered separately. The Forum is likely to be rebranded as 'The IDFA Forum'. IDFA staff acknowledge that these changes will not greatly affect festival-goers and industry delegates.

Van 't Hullenaar predicts that IDFA will remain in its new locations at the Munt and Tuschinski next year. Its old flagship cinema, City, is being refurbished as a 700-seat art house venue, but won't have sufficient capacity to cater for the festival's demands. However, it remains a possibility that the City might in future become "a satellite" location. The festival currently has 2,500 cinema seats at its disposal. In future, it would like to increase that number to 4,000 seats. IDFA recently received € 70,000 from the Dioraphte Foundation to build its new content management system. Among its new sponsors this year is TNT. Meanwhile, a new media partner has also climbed aboard in the shape of national Dutch daily newspaper, the Volkskrant.

## The critics' critic

During a two-day seminar, John Anderson, film critic for Variety and The New York Times, among other publications, investigates the ways in which it is possible to look at documentaries as a critic. The first session of the seminar, attended yesterday by some twenty international film critics, revealed that everyone pretty much has his or her own idea of what to look out for when writing a review. A number of specific themes were then examined on the basis of film fragments. For example: How can a badly made film also be an audience favourite? Perhaps the audience falls for a certain character, or a crafty *mise-en-scène*. But as a critic, you should be able to spot these from a mile away. Is Michael Moore (for example) justified in creating such *mises-en-scènes* for 'a good cause'? Is it your duty, as a critic, to blow the whistle if you find out that someone is pulling the wool over audiences' eyes, even at the risk of damaging the worthy message you agree with? Anderson gave a pertinent example of such a dilemma during the

Talkshow on freedom of speech last Sunday: "If there were a documentary that cured cancer, would you as a critic turn round and say, 'Well, it may cure cancer, but I don't like the cinematography, it's too long, and it has no theatrical potential?' Especially if you saying it has no theatrical potential, means it will have no theatrical potential? Are you then doing a good job?"

In addition to scrutinising aspects such as editing, use of music and the filmmaker's relationship with his subject(s), the first of the two critics' seminars raised predominately moral issues. Michael Moore was a frequently cited example, dividing opinion among those present between those who consider him essentially a documentary maker, and those who would describe him as a pamphleteer, who does not make pure documentaries. Further discussion of moral issues took place taking the example of the documentary *The Devil Came on Horseback*, looking at the question of genocide in Darfur. The makers did not shoot the footage themselves, but this was sourced from the BBC. How important is it to know this? Do we need to know – and more importantly, as a critic, do we need to tell? MN/MB

# Coming together to take the pulse

**Business was brisk yesterday at the first day of The Forum, IDFA's celebrated annual co-financing event (soon to be officially merged with the festival). A selection of comments from the shop floor:**

We're looking for opportunities [but] have a very limited amount of funds to spend. We're essentially a movie channel. We buy lots of independent features and a certain number of documentaries, but we are also able in six or seven instances every year to actually get involved in the co-productions of certain films, so I'm here looking for opportunities for the channel to make deals. I think The Forum is a very effective way to raise funds for these projects. I have seen various networks actually jumping in and on the

spot committing to projects. I suspect for the filmmaker it's a wonderful time-saving device, rather than having to go round to all of the different state channels to make these pitches. They can do it [instead] by one-stop shopping. (Sam Paul, Sundance Channel, US)

The virtues of coming together are to take the pulse of the documentary world, to meet old friends. I joked that I would like my funeral to be like this. It's a family. We're the new documentary nomads. We meet in the marketplace and at festivals and we share. I'm not sure whether what we share is form or content, probably a bit of both. Nick Fraser [Storyville] said at a festival I attended recently that one might define documentary as the demo-

cratic art form that crosses the boundaries of politics and geography. We are the people who share that documentary art, and it's good to nourish the shared adventure by coming together periodically, and I can think of few places better than Amsterdam. It's a sort of ritual immersion. (Luke Holland, filmmaker, UK)

Our basic purpose in being at The Forum is to contact commissioning editors and buyers and also to spot any trends, to see what is happening in the world and what people are interested in. One of the basic ideas of The Forum is to meet people in the flesh. I do think deals may be already closed beforehand, but still people like to meet people. (Aad van Ierland, RNTV, The Netherlands)

The Forum is still effective. Because you meet all the people who are around in the business in this little spot, it is easy to get hold of them and talk to them. The initial fire starts here, so that's good, and also to follow up things that you've done already over the months. I am pitching one project and following up on another. All the people who have shown interest over the last three or four months are here now. (Heino Deckert, Deckert Distribution, Germany)

The commissioning editors will straight away – and very honestly – say whether or not it is something for them, and if not then why not. For a producer, it's the best he or she can get. (Claudia Landsberger, Holland Film) NC

## 20,000 results

*26,000 Faces*, the campaigning film-based initiative launched at IDFA in 2004 to challenge the then Dutch Government's controversial asylum laws, will come to an official conclusion next Sunday. A celebratory event is being held at the Mozes en Aäronkerk church, attended by filmmakers and some of the asylum-seekers whose stories were told in the 100 or so short films made as part of the initiative. Five of the *26,000 Faces* films will be screened, and there will be interviews with some of the asylum-seekers, as well as speeches and an update on what has happened to the film's subjects. Earlier this year, Dutch premier Jan Peter Balkenende's government granted an amnesty to most of the asylum-seekers facing deportation. Thousands have now been granted permanent residency in the Netherlands. Joost Bosland, the physiotherapist and filmmaker who launched *26,000 Faces*, believes that the project played a vital role in keeping the plight of the failed asylum-seekers firmly in the public eye. "Because of what we did, the issue was in the news every day for over a year,"

Bosland says. "It would be a bit megalomaniacal to assume it was just us. There was a whole development in (Dutch) society, which was desperately seeking for a more humane approach to these people and this issue." Many of the Netherlands' best-known filmmakers, among them Heddy Honigmann and Paula van der Oest, contributed to the initiative. Bosland cautions that the asylum seekers still face considerable problems, despite now being allowed to stay in the Netherlands. Many have not yet been housed and are still living in hostels. Several hundred who have been accused of (but often never charged with) "the violation of human rights" have not been granted residency. Nor have those with criminal records. Those who left Holland and went to another country in the EC but were sent back under the so-called Dublin/Schengen arrangements have also been excluded. Bosland says that current government estimates suggest up to 20,000 of the asylum-seekers have now been given permits to stay in the Netherlands, with more to come.



Joost Bosland

Photo: Felix Kalkman

Given these developments, there was no further need for *26,000 Faces* to continue. "The prime purpose of the project has been fulfilled," Bosland said. If filmmakers and political campaigners from other European countries want to mount campaigns against draconian asylum policies along the lines of *26,000 Faces*, Bosland is ready to help them. He is also planning a new series of films,

consisting of up to seven documentaries exploring what has happened in South Africa since the end of the Apartheid era. The working title is *Haunted by the Past*. Bosland aims to direct one of the films himself, while helping to bring together a team of filmmakers to work on the others. He has applied to VARA Television, which supported *26,000 Faces*, for backing. GM



Diane Weyermann

## Look back at IDFA

"IDFA has really been instrumental in building a global documentary community", Participant Productions' Diane Weyermann declares. She provides a quick checklist of what she sees as the festival's central achievements over the last two decades: building "a very large public audience" for documentary, supporting new filmmakers from around the world through the Jan Vrijman Fund and bringing together key industry delegates through The Forum. "But mostly, it is Ally Derks and the effort of her team throughout these years to build this community by welcoming us, inspiring us, challenging and engaging us," she says. "IDFA has opened up many, many windows into the world we live in." On opening night, Weyermann (who is serving this year on the Joris Ivens Jury) made a rousing speech. She argued that IDFA had helped transform the landscape for documentary. "It is an honour for me to be part of that," she reflects. Ask her about her personal highlights over the fifteen or so years she has been coming to Amsterdam and she becomes strangely reticent. "Aaargh! No, don't

put me on the spot... there are so many. I would hate to do it." However, Weyermann is willing to share her opinions about two of the key themes being debated in Amsterdam this year: the pros and cons of fake docs and the increasing overlap between animation and documentary. One of Participant's own movies, *Chicago 10*, makes very striking use of animation while using actors to voice certain scenes. "My personal opinion about documentaries that incorporate narrative elements, whether dramatic elements, animation or whatever, is that the documentary form has to continue to evolve," Weyermann states. "I embrace the opening up of the form. I know that there are people who feel differently, who feel that there is a purity to another type of documentary. But with any documentary, what does it really mean to be 'real,' to be 'true'? Even when you are filming, you are deciding what to film, what angle to film from, what to cut – there are so many decisions – altering reality – that take place through the very act of filming and editing." GM

# Fairytale of Kathmandu

Silver Wolf Competition

As every documentary maker knows, your subject can often take you by surprise – and not always in the pleasantest way. Irish director Neasa Ní Chianáin set out several years ago to make a film about a celebrated Irish poet – a man she had long admired. She travelled with him to Nepal, to witness his activities helping young students. “You are a role model and influence to young and old,” the poet was told by TV broadcasters. For Ní Chianáin, he was a heroic figure: a brilliant gay writer who championed Irish culture and was refreshingly open about his sexuality, she tells Geoffrey Macnab.

*Fairytale of Kathmandu* (a world premiere in the Silver Wolf Competition) did not turn out as the director planned. Slowly, she began to notice that the poet (nicknamed ‘the guru of the hills’) had a relationship with Nepalese boys that was not as innocent as it had seemed. To her dismay, she discovered that he had been sexually abusive toward the boys, whom he regards as spiritual sons. As she says toward the end of the documentary, “this was not the journey I wanted to go on, not the story I wanted to tell. I became a witness to a different tale.” What started as a celebration of the life and work a courageous Irish writer turned into a story about power and exploitation.

None of the boys were under the age of consent in Nepal (which is 16). Nonetheless, as the intertitle which ends the film notes: “no counseling or support structure exists in Nepal for boys in these situations.” Speaking in Amsterdam this week, Ní Chianáin frankly acknowledged that this had been a distressing film to make. Completing the documentary was an agonizing process. “I didn’t want to make a story that was just an exposé. If it didn’t deal with bigger issues and wasn’t going to reach an international

platform, I didn’t see the point of making this story.”

Her hope now is that the poet will seek therapy and face up to his own behaviour. Her admiration for his poetry remains intact. “His work hasn’t changed for me. He is a very important figure in the Irish-speaking community. We are proud of his poetry. It has been translated into thirteen different languages.” Ní Chianáin shot 150 hours of footage over a period of three years. She considered the poet to be a friend. “I really, really liked him. When something like that happens, you absolutely do not want to believe it of them,” she reflects. At first, she had difficulty understanding what was happening and how she should react.

“He (the poet) rang and said he felt totally powerless and asked what he could do. We said, look, we can’t tell you, but therapy is the most obvious route,” she says. “I just feel sad – sad about the whole situation, sad for him. I really hope that he can come through this.” Given the poet’s popularity, she is aware that some viewers are likely to be hostile toward her film. “A friend said to me maybe you shouldn’t do this – you have to think of your children, growing up in that village. My answer was that I am



Neasa Ní Chianáin

Photo: Felix Kalman

making it for my children. The choice is to bury it and life continues, or put it out there and tell the truth.”

The aim is to try to broadcast *Fairytale of Kathmandu* in Ireland either before Christmas or early in the New Year. “I showed the cut to counsellors. My big worry was that I would be exploitative of him by continuing to make the film. I showed them different versions. I said: is this film important, should it be made and am I exploiting him. They said, no, I was not exploiting him, and the film was very important – and it should be made.” Ní Chianáin is now hoping to make a documentary about amateur boxing

clubs for young, working-class children in Belfast. Meanwhile, she is busy scouting docs at IDFA for Captive Voice (Guth Gafa), the documentary festival she helps run in Gortahork in Donegal every summer. “It’s a small little village. So once everybody comes, there is no escaping. You immerse yourself for three or four days in documentary.”

**Fairytale of Kathmandu**  
Neasa Ní Chianáin

Munt 11 Tue 27 Nov. 15:00  
Munt 12 Fri 30 Nov. 18:30  
Munt 12 Sat 01 Dec. 13:45



Francine Brücher

Photo: Bram Belloni

## Big screen, big audience

Swiss documentary filmmakers are privileged: the majority of their work is shown in the cinemas, which represents both a challenge and an artistic freedom, Swiss Films’ Francine Brücher tells Jørn Rossing Jensen.

The annual production volume of Swiss documentaries amounts to forty. An unusual incentive to directors and producers is that twenty-five to thirty of these are then released theatrically, according to Swiss Films’ head of international promotion, Francine Brücher.

“A successful film will easily reach 15,000 to 20,000 admissions – less than 5,000 is rare. The reason is that the exhibitors have realised that documentaries also have a commercial potential, developing a growing – and faithful – audience.

“It also affects the filmmakers to know that their work will turn up on the big screen – it represents a challenge, but also an artistic freedom: they are inspired to display their creativity, taking their time to tell their stories to a larger extent than when they are working on a TV film.”

Spearheaded by Swiss director Felix Tissi’s “archaeological science-fiction film”, *Desert – Who Is the Man?*, screening in the Joris Ivens Competition, Swiss Films is this year representing three titles in the IDFA catalogue.

World-premiered in Amsterdam, Tissi’s expeditions into the endless tracts of sand explores why the desert is still able to “fire people’s imaginations, and provoke ideas, dreams and visions.”

Peter Entell’s musical depiction of New Orleans after the hurricane, *Shake the Devil Off*, screens in the Reflecting Images section, and arrives fresh from picking up an award from the documentary film festival in Montreal. Jan Gassmann and Christian Zörjen’s *Chrigu* is an entry in the IDFA Student Competition; launched at the Berlinale Forum, it follows Christian, who is diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, and the progression of his disease.

“IDFA is a very important festival for Swiss film professionals – they will attend in numbers, whether they have a selection in the official programme or not,” Brücher explains. Entell has been an IDFA regular for years, Heidi Specogna (*The Short Life of José Antonio Guttierrez*) is also here to see films, and co-director of the Zürich Film School, Lucie Bader, has brought a group of students.



## Bajo Juárez, the City Devouring its Daughters

Joris Ivens Competition

Alejandra Sánchez and José Antonio Cordero's competition entry is a bold and complex examination of the disappearance of more than 400 women from the Mexican city of Juárez, close to the American border. It also serves as a testament to the extraordinary determination of the relatives who continue their search for the truth behind the disappearances. More controversially, the film forms a damning indictment of a judicial and political system the film's contributors blame for the alleged cover-up of the true identities of the killers.

Divided into four chapters, *Bajo Juárez* moves between harrowing personal testimony from the victims' relatives to the forthright opinions of two journalists who believe that the conspiracy reaches Presidential level. "I believe [former Mexican President] Vicente Fox is not going to get to the bottom of this investigation, for the simple reason that the political and economic powers in Juárez go through people who supported Vicente Fox's candidacy and paid for his campaign," alleges journalist Sergio Rodriguez.

Detracting views are presented by officials within the federal prosecution office. While state prosecutor Sully

Ponce opines that "they have satanised Juárez so that if a woman dies there is an eight-page headline", her colleague downplays the importance of the number of disappearances. "With all due respect, that is not such an outrageous number," she claims.

The final chapters examine the evidence against the prisoners who have been (allegedly) wrongly accused of the crimes, and the continuing protest against the perceived inactivity of the authorities. We are also introduced to two remarkable women whose dedication to their respective causes underpins the story.

While the mother of victim Alejandra leads the protest to the Mexican parliament – and to the door of the President himself – another, whose son David is in prison for the murder of his cousin, vows to clear his name.

"As long as I live, he won't stay there," she proclaims. "I can't afford the luxury of being a coward. I can't afford the luxury of dying right now." NC

***Bajo Juárez, the City Devouring its Daughters***

Alejandra Sánchez, José Antonio Cordero

Tuschinski 2 Tue 27 Nov. 16:00

Munt 13 Thu 29 Nov. 19:45

## Mechanical Love

Joris Ivens Competition

Last year it was pitched at IDFA's Forum – this year it is a contender for the Joris Ivens Award: Danish director Phie Ambo's *Mechanical Love*, the first part of a trilogy exploring "what kind of creatures human beings are." Travelling the world – Japan, Italy, Germany, back to Denmark – Ambo depicts the relationships between robots and humans. Japanese professor Takanori Shibata has developed Paro, a baby seal robot, now a major export article. Ambo is on the spot as the mechanical device is introduced to Frau Körner at an elderly people's home in Braunschweig. (Paro is currently being tested in a Copenhagen project among people suffering from senile dementia, to decide whether he can become a permanent fixture in their treatment.)

Another Japanese researcher, Hiroshi Ishiguro, has succeeded in creating the world's first android, which looks 99.9% like himself, and is ready to take his place as an expert, teacher, husband and father.

Ambo is there as Ishiguro presents his alter ego to his family, examining his daughter's reactions when his double – the robot with her father's physique, face and voice – tries to interact with her.

She highlights the human need to love and craving to be loved, tracking people's emotional relationships with other people, and trying to find out whether robots may eventually be included in these.

"The film asks a very fundamental question: what are feelings," says Ambo. "To find the possible answers to that question, I talked with several neurologists and others who are intrinsically concerned with the nature of thought."

In *Divine Thoughts* – the working title of part 2 of the trilogy – she will focus on physics – what are physics and quantum physics. "It is thrilling to examine such big questions," she explains.

Ambo won the Joris Ivens Award in 2001 for *Family*, co-directed by Sami Saif, following his search for his father in Yemen. In 2005, she portrayed Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn in *Gambler*. JRJ

***Mechanical Love***

Phie Ambo

Munt 11 Tue 27 Nov. 19:30; Tuschinski 2 Wed

28 Nov. 12:00; Tuschinski 3 Thu 29 Nov. 12:45;

Munt 13 Sat 01 Dec. 16:45



## Paradise

Silver Wolf Competition

"Having now made three films with the Stralströms, we have become quite good friends. After all, they were sort of role models for me – it was to 'their' Sweden I immigrated twenty-five years ago. Nowadays, the country is different. The genuineness, honesty, openness and humour they represent are rather thin on the ground," says Polish-born Swedish director Jerzy Sladkowski. Married for 65 years, and both in their early 80s, Hans and Kerstin Stralström from Kiruna appear for the first time in Sladkowski's *Swedish Tango* (*Tango, gräl och ledbesvär/1999*), about their conflicts and discussions during tango lessons which are concluded as they go to Buenos Aires to learn 'the real thing.'

In *Lapp Sickness* (*Lappsjukan/2001*), they are visited by the courteous and slightly aged 'Don Juan' friends, Guillermo and Juan, whom they met in Argentina, and who are now exposed to the wide expanses in the north, the woods, the silence, the saunas and the fermented Baltic herring parties. "According to a Swedish proverb, a marriage that survives wallpapering can survive anything. I thought I owed Hans and Kerstin a little tribute, as a thank-you-very-much for their friendship and their sharing their lives with me during the seven years we have known each other. The 'Paradise' wallpaper

was a gift from heaven," Sladkowski recalls.

In 2005, the Stralströms decided to give away their cottage in Pojkjärvi outside Kiruna to their children and grandchildren. Hans wants to wallpaper the sitting room, but Kerstin is against it. However, the seemingly harmless project leads to a showdown the spouses have been avoiding through their entire marriage.

Hans sees his project through, covering the wall with the 'Paradise' design, including trees, birds, flowers, fishes and berries; but the result is terrible, according to Kerstin. The following day, when he goes to the hairdresser's, she paints over the papered wall, with the help of her friend, Hjärdis.

"I'm usually right until someone proves that I'm wrong, but that's very rare," declares Hans. It is not 'Paradise' that is wrong, but the wall; by the end of the day, it covers another wall in the cottage. Peace is restored, and life is full of love and humour – "should we lose that", they both say, "there would be no point in going on living." JRJ

***Paradise***

Jerzy Sladkowski

Munt 11 Thu 29 Nov. 19:45

Munt 10 Sat 01 Dec. 13:00