

### JORIS IVENS COMPETITION

A desire to explore the possibility of love between people and robots took Phie Ambo around the globe. *Mechanical Love* resulted in a touching, thought provoking film – running in competition at IDFA.

PAGE 3

### SILVER WOLF COMPETITION

Jon Bang Carlsen's *Purity Beats Everything* delves deep into the layers underlying Nazism's purity ideals, traces of which, the filmmaker contends, still exist today.

PAGE 8

### SHEFFIELD DOCS/FEST

Danish focus at Sheffield Doc/Fest 2007: films by Grønkjær, Mulvad, Krogh, Leth, Bang Carlsen, and Kestner. See 'A Poetics of Cinema' by the latter three.

PAGE 10

# ./|FILM|./

# #60

FILM IS PUBLISHED BY THE DANISH FILM INSTITUTE / NOVEMBER 2007



# ./FILM./

FILM#60/ IDFA ISSUE

**JORIS IVENS COMPETITION**  
A desire to explore the possibility of love between people and robots took Phie Ambo around the globe. *Mechanical Love* resulted in a touching, thought-provoking film. *Mechanical Love* is running in competition at IDFA.  
PAGE 3

**SHEFFIELD DOCS/FEST**  
Danish focus at Sheffield Doc/Fest 2007: films by GrønkJær, Mulvad, Krogh, Leth, Bang Carlsen, and Kestner. See "A Poetics of Cinema" by the latter three.  
PAGE 10

**SILVER WOLF COMPETITION**  
His documentaries are often visually and symbolically powerful, staged portraits of marginal figures and milieus that involve compelling stories. Jon Bang Carlsen is running for the Silver Wolf Award with *Purity Beats Everything*.  
PAGE 8



*Mechanical Love* Photo: Phie Ambo



*Purity Beats Everything* Photo: Jon Bang Carlsen



*Lakshmi and Me* Photo: Tju-Bang Film



Signe Byrge Sørensen, Janus Billeskov Jansen Photo: P. Wessel



*Bloody Cartoons* Photo: Framegrab



Tine Fischer, Tine Moesgaard Photo: P. Wessel

# INSIDE

## JORIS IVENS COMPETITION

A desire to explore the possibility of love between people and robots took Phie Ambo around the globe. *Mechanical Love* resulted in a touching, thought-provoking film. *Mechanical Love* is running in competition at IDFA.

PAGE 3

## REFLECTING IMAGES

The historic trials of Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein, ending in worst-case scenarios, presented daunting cutting-room challenges for Team Productions, who documented both.

PAGE 6

## SILVER WOLF COMPETITION

His documentaries are often visually and symbolically powerful, staged portraits of marginal figures and milieus that involve compelling stories. Jon Bang Carlsen is running for the Silver Wolf Award with *Purity Beats Everything*.

PAGE 8

## POETICS OF CINEMA

Danish focus at Sheffield Doc/Fest 2007: films by GrønkJær, Mulvad, Krogh, Leth, Bang Carlsen, and Kestner. See "A Poetics of Cinema" by the latter three.

PAGE 10

## SILVER WOLF COMPETITION

Nishtha Jain, a talented and poetic Indian woman, has made a deeply personal film, *Lakshmi and Me*, about modern India for a Western audience.

PAGE 16

## IS DEMOCRACY FOR EVERYONE?

*Why Democracy?* is one of the widest ranging and most ambitious international projects ever undertaken. The project stimulates a global discussion: What is democracy? How does democracy work? And is democracy, by definition, right for everybody?

PAGE 17

## LANGUAGE IS THE HOUSE OF BEING

Somewhere between six and seven thousand languages are spoken in the world - half of these will disappear within the next 100 years. Janus Billeskov Jansen and Signe Byrge Sørensen about their *Voices of the World* project.

PAGE 20

## DANISHDOCUMENTARY.COM

Three documentary filmmakers have teamed up to market their films on DVD. Their long-term dream is to create a label for Danish quality documentaries with international appeal.

PAGE 23

## CPH:DOX

CPH:DOX is the largest documentary film festival in Scandinavia. Each year the festival fills the cinemas with more than 130 documentary films from around the world.

PAGE 24

## KIDS & DOCS / STUDENT COMPETITION / NEWS

*Christopher Wants to Fly* (Kids & Docs) is about eleven year old Christopher. He is obsessed with airplanes and spends most of his time spotting airplanes. *One Day* (Student Competition) tells the story of a 36 year-old West African woman who works as a prostitute in Copenhagen, sending money home to her family.

PAGE 26

### FILM #60 / IDFA ISSUE

November 2007

**PUBLISHED BY** Danish Film Institute  
**EDITORS** Agnete Dorph Stjernfelt, Susanna Neimann  
**EDITORIAL TEAM** Vicki Marie Synnott  
**TRANSLATIONS** Glen Garner  
**DESIGN** Rasmus Koch Studio  
**AD** Pernille Volder Lund, Anne Hemp  
**TYPE** Cendia, Millton, Underton  
**PAPER** Munken Lynx 100 gr.  
**PRINTED BY** Schultz Grafisk A/S  
**CIRCULATION** 11,500  
**ISSN** 1399-2813  
**COVER** *Mechanical Love*  
Photo: Phie Ambo

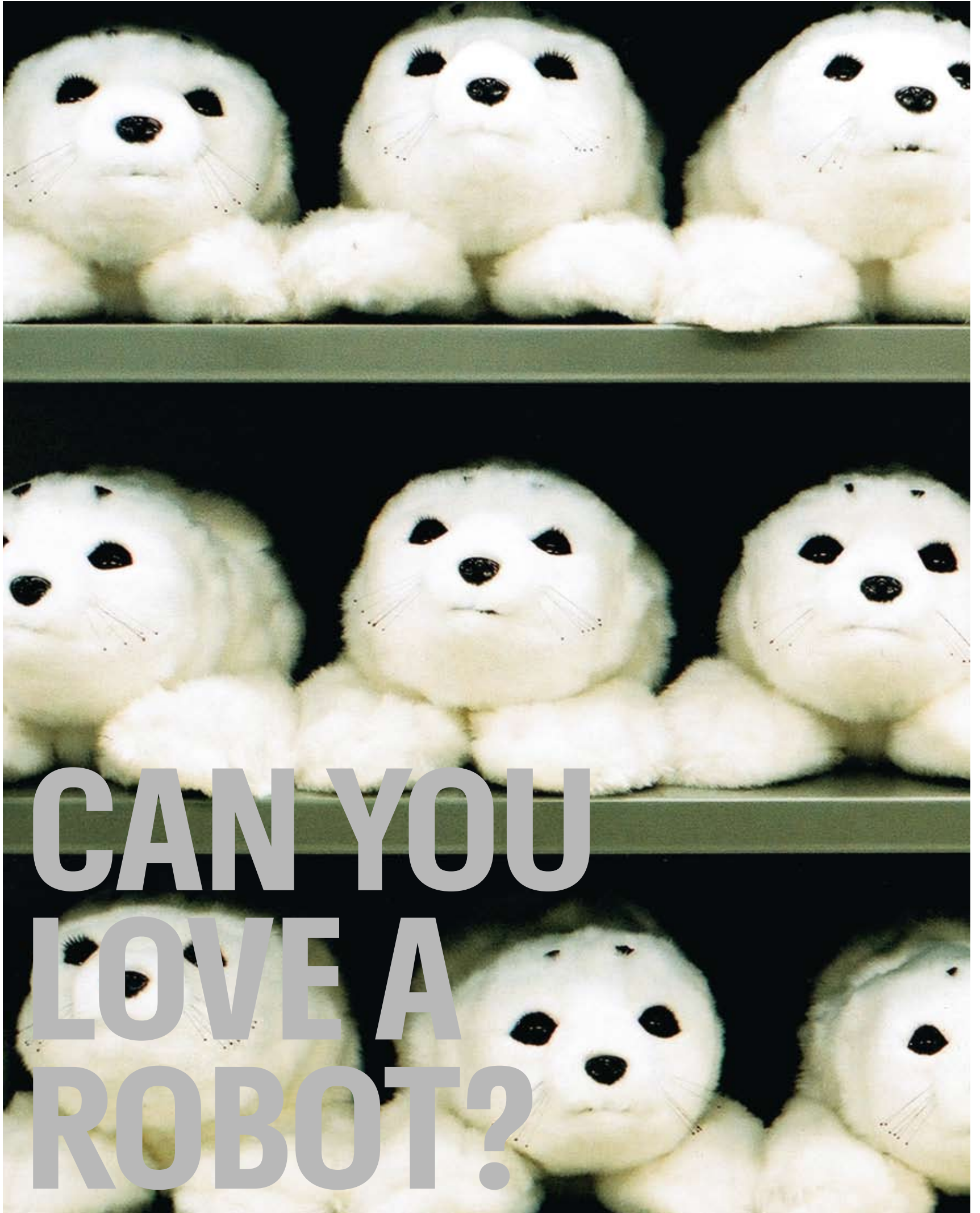
FILM is published by the Danish Film Institute (DFI). 8 issues annually; 3 are in English and published prior to the festivals at Cannes, Amsterdam and Berlin.

All articles are written by freelance film critics and journalists.

The Danish Film Institute is the national agency responsible for supporting and encouraging film and cinema culture. The Institute's 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. The total budget of the DFI 2007 is DKK 395.8 m / EURO 53 m.

Subscriptions: ninac@dfi.dk

**DANISH FILM INSTITUTE**  
GOTHERSGADE 55  
DK-1123 COPENHAGEN K, DENMARK  
T +45 3374 3400  
susannan@dfi.dk / agnetes@dfi.dk



**A desire to explore the possibility of love between people and robots took Phie Ambo around the globe. *Mechanical Love* resulted in a touching, thought-provoking film running in competition at IDFA.**

BY EVA NOVRUP REDVALL

What is the difference between humans and machines? What does it mean to have a soul? Can a person love a robot? And, if so, is it the same as loving another person?

These and other big questions quickly arose when Phie Ambo, who made the 2001 IDFA winner *Family* and in 2006 *Gambler*, got the idea to explore the emotional relationships between humans and robots in *Mechanical Love*. With producer Sigrid Dyekjær of Tju-Bang Film, she threw herself into making an ambitious film for the international market that took her to Switzerland, Italy, Finland, Germany and, most memorably, Japan, as she looked in on people and machines that could make us all smarter about ourselves and our feelings for therapeutic robots.

Characters in the film include Frau Körner, a nursing home resident who receives a Paro, mechanical baby seal. Though rationally she knows the baby seal isn't alive, of course, she quickly develops an emotional relationship with the cuddly, contact-seeking pet and has soon talked herself hoarse about it.

*Mechanical Love* does not lecture on its subject or overload us with facts. In meetings with people and their actions, the film shows us different aspects of the underlying issues. To Ambo, the ability to emotionally approach even quite complex subjects is the amazing thing about working as a documentary filmmaker. Though she spent a long time researching and acquainting herself with the latest developments in robotics, she made sure not to drown the film in scientific issues propped up by endless facts.

"As a filmmaker, you get to ask the same questions science does, but from a more emotional angle," Ambo says. "You can show moments and situations and then let people decide for themselves what they are seeing and what to think about it. Images and moods let you explore emotional aspects of some of the things factual science is struggling to prove with facts."

### **SOCIAL CONCERNS, NOT NUTS AND BOLTS**

Ambo's original concept was to create a filmic progression, tracking people's emotional relationships with other people, from cradle to grave, and how robots may eventually be included in them. The first few sequences she shot was of kids playing with the Amazing Amanda robot doll, but gradually she switched focus from describing a life cycle to highlighting specific stories about human relationships with therapeutic robots.

A central character is Hiroshi Ishiguro, a Japanese professor who is trying to build a robot that looks just like him. His daughter is recruited as a test subject to examine how she reacts when a robot with her father's physique, face and voice tries to interact with her. Ambo got exclusive access to film these unique family experiments.

"My method is to do meticulous research before I contact people," Ambo says. This opens doors to



*Mechanical Love* Photo: Phie Ambo

**Though rationally she knows the baby seal isn't alive, of course, she quickly develops an emotional relationship with the cuddly, contact-seeking pet and has soon talked herself hoarse about it.**

fruitful discussions, which at times go beyond the scope of the film. The balancing point is always that, of course, I'm not a robotics researcher. I can find out a lot by researching, but it's not like I really know how you get two lights to blink. So I have to focus on what I know or what is exciting to watch. The exciting thing in this case was to see people and robots together in a social setting, rather than something about turning a bolt."

As Ambo sees it, Western research is focused more on rational function in robots, whereas, in Japanese robotics, she found a tremendous interest in social and human concerns, as emotions are always incorporated into the work.

"There is a reason why the best therapeutic robots come from Japan," Ambo says. "Scientists in Japan are always figuring emotions into the process. What do you expect when you are with another person? What emotions are in play? Working with androids is incredibly exciting, precisely because they are something unto themselves: neither human nor robot. What are they then? They're not alive, but they're not exactly dead either. When you look into their eyes, you feel something, because humans have a need to personify things. That's the subject of a lot of discussion in Japanese research, and getting a glimpse of all the thinking that goes into the research was a tremendous experience."

### **NATURE AND CULTURE**

Ambo operated the camera herself for this film, which made it easier to get close to people and situations.



Phie Ambo, Director Photo: Anders Morgenthaler

**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 the Joris Ivens Award, IDFA Amsterdam.

But more than anything, doing her own camerawork is the only way Ambo feels she can continually work towards the film's visual expression.

"For me, the film is in the camera. To find a film's visual expression, I have to sense it and see it and frame it. I can't think it up. I can only find the film when I see it through the viewfinder, and that's why I photograph my own films. I would never have found out how physical it is, if I hadn't shot it myself," Ambo says.

The film's juxtaposition of nature and culture was another thing that popped up in the process. "When it comes to robots, there's a lot of talk about what's 'natural.' I find it interesting to compare mechanics and nature. Which is better made, a blade of grass or an example of a good mechanical structure? What's natural and what's not? It's exciting to deal with our perceptions of nature and culture, both content-wise and visually," Ambo says.

**ROOM FOR AMBITION**

Going to Japan and filming for an extended period is not usually an option for Danish documentary filmmakers. It's expensive to do extended research and shoot abroad, and Ambo was delighted that the process allowed her more than the usual elbowroom, both in the development phase and during the shooting.

"My producer, Sigrid Dyekjær, and I hooked up on *Gambler*. That film had a lot of budget problems, which was incredibly exhausting," Ambo says. "From the outset, we decided that *Mechanical Love* would be a bigger-budget film for the international market, and we did a lot of pitching. Right away, there was interest in the film. It meant a lot to me to have a dedicated producer on the project and it saved me worrying about the finances.

"There were a lot of practical matters I didn't have to think about in terms of how far I could go," Ambo says. "The message from Sigrid was always to go ahead and do what was right for the film, and that was a tremendous privilege. As a filmmaker, that

allows you to be much more relaxed and take more risks. In many ways, I actually feel the whole process of making a film never really fell into place for me until making my third feature-length documentary."

**FIRST INSTALMENT OF A TRILOGY**

Ambo is currently developing a new film with Dyekjær, the follow-up to *Mechanical Love* and the second part of a trilogy that looks at what kind of creatures human beings are. For Ambo, it was productive to work from what is really a quite fundamental, banal question with a number of major implications.

"*Mechanical Love*, in effect, asks a very fundamental question: What are feelings?" Ambo says. "Exploring the possible answers to that, I talked with several neurologists and others who are intrinsically concerned with the nature of thought. I want to explore that in my next film, which has the working title of *Divine Thoughts*. The idea is for the third film to focus on physics. What are physics and quantum physics? It's thrilling to examine such big questions.

Not least because the times we live in are open to taking up such big discussions.

"In Japan, I talked with a number of scientists who think we are living in a kind of neo-Renaissance distinguished by a readiness to discuss things that we used to think were settled. There is a willingness to turn things upside down, and for a filmmaker it's exciting to sit in on that process and ask questions like: How does our way of thinking affect the things we are actually observing? There are a lot of things we don't even see or pay attention to, because we think in one way rather than another," Ambo says. "I look forward to investigating that in my next film ■

*For further information on Mechanical Love, see reverse section.*



**A central character is Hiroshi Ishiguro, a Japanese professor who is trying to build a robot that looks just like him. His daughter is recruited as a test subject to examine how she reacts when a robot with her father's physique, face and voice tries to interact with her.**

# CUTTING WORLD HISTORY

**Raw, unprocessed reality is unpredictable. That's a basic condition of documentary filmmaking. The historic trials of Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein, ending in worst-case scenarios, presented daunting cutting-room challenges for Team Productions: The *Milosevic*-film was inundated with footage material, and the *Saddam* film had to put together in just three and a half weeks.**

BY ANETTE OLSEN

Former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic died in March 2006, during his trial at the Hague war crimes tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide, robbing us of the conclusion to one of the most important trials of the century. The verdict, which could have been a historical touchstone and turning point, never came. Having followed and documented the trial for the four years that it ran, Team Productions now had to find a new central thread in thousands of hours of footage.

Michael Christoffersen, the director, chose to see artistic potential in not having a predetermined outcome: dramaturgically, the material was more open to interpretation now.

"Had the trial continued on course and a verdict been reached, the conclusion would have been generally known and that would have been like knowing the score in advance," he says. "The dramaturgy would have been expected to lead to that conclusion, which would have confined the story a lot.

"That line was broken, of course, when Milosevic died and there was no conclusion," Christoffersen says. "No one was willing to wager one, so I had to sit down and interpret the material. There were both advantages and disadvantages to that. One advantage was that it allowed me to relate more freely to the material." He followed the trial daily online or in the courtroom for the four years that it ran.

The director was dealing with an enormous amount of material: thousands of hours of courtroom footage from fixed cameras operated by producers affiliated with the tribunal, plus his own crew's shots of the defence attorneys, prosecutors and other participants in the trial.

Christoffersen continually took notes during the trial and kept a log of interesting situations, which included the witnesses and the defendant himself, Milosevic, who acted as his own attorney assisted by a team of Serbian lawyers. Those notes turned out to be a huge help in the editing process.

## COURTROOM DRAMA

"I felt that the story really got good at the point when Milosevic took up his own defence," Christoffersen says. "Relating less all the time to the actual charges against him, he blustered and speechified about politics and conspiracy theories instead. In this self-revelation, he showed how little he was really able to deal with the trial. So we cut it down and selected the witnesses that I thought best illustrated the proceedings. As we cut it down from eight hours to four hours, we more clearly began to see the bones of a story. I had other sets of eyes on it too, because there were times when the editors

**"I didn't play down the basic notion that the one person who really brought down Milosevic, had he ever been convicted, was Milosevic himself. Once I reached that conclusion, everything became much clearer."** *Michael Christoffersen*

**MICHAEL CHRISTOFFERSEN** Born 1954, Denmark. Has been working as a documentary director since the 1980s. He has directed and produced several international documentaries. His work includes *Genocide: The Judgement* (1999) for BBC and SVT, about a trial at the Rwanda court, and the feature-length behind-the-scenes documentary *Saddam on Trial* (2007).



Michael Christoffersen, Director. Photo: Bente Jæger

and I became swamped in footage. “At one point, we decided to write the whole thing out, as we would have done for a film with a voiceover – which turned out to be a good idea because it gave us a much more precise narrative structure,” he says.

To Christoffersen and producer Mette Heide of Team Productions the driving idea with both the Milosevic and the Saddam projects was to explain and analyze a historical event, offering behind-the-scenes glimpses at what went on in the courtroom. The crew wanted to get close to the key participants, their strategies and schemes, and reveal the human drama, while describing the personal victories and defeats that played out.

“I picked the witnesses and situations that were both crucial and dramatic – there were a lot of very tiresome witnesses,” Christoffersen says. “Meanwhile, I didn’t play down the basic notion that the one person who really brought down Milosevic, had he ever been convicted, was Milosevic himself. Once I reached that conclusion, everything became much clearer.”

“We broke the chronology in certain places, but only to simplify the story. The main idea was to produce a historical and dramatic document,” the director says.

### CONDENSE, CONDENSE, CONDENSE

The volume and complexity of the material necessitated a monstrous task of pruning, and gleaning essential footage that also had dramatic potential.

“After all, this isn’t bicycle theft we’re dealing with but three and a half wars with nation-founding and political showdowns – a historically very complex sequence of events, with one party, Milosevic, trying to turn the whole thing into a political process, and the other party, the prosecution, seeking to make it a criminal case with Milosevic on trial for killing people,” Christoffersen says.

“We decided to pin down Milosevic’s responsibility. And we went for the duel aspect of the criminal case, even as Milosevic was constantly trying to make it a struggle to tell the Serbian version of the story. Ultimately, Milosevic himself gives the game away, essentially crafting his own defeat,” the director says.

“There’s a good story in that, basically: the prosecution is unable to come up with the evidence, and it’s only when Milosevic takes up his own defence that he slips up, letting the prosecutor in on important information,” Heide says. “The criminal exposes himself.”

“It was condense, condense, condense,” Christoffersen says. “The more we cut, the easier it got. Gradually, the details became apparent. Still, there’s a lot of amazing material we would have liked to use. It was a reductive process a good deal of the way, until everything began to get clearer.”

### THE STRUGGLE OVER SADDAM

Whereas the Milosevic trial dragged on for years, the trial of Saddam Hussein at a Baghdad court ended altogether more abruptly at year-end. Team Productions had promised its main financing partners – TV 2/ Denmark, BBC, ZDF/ARTE of Germany and SVT of Sweden – that they would have a film for them immediately after the hanging. The broadcasters had scheduled the film for the third week of January.

That gave Christoffersen and Team productions only three and a half weeks to finish the film. Moreover, footage of the American lawyers advising the Iraqi court could not be used for security reasons, since they were still in Iraq after Saddam was hanged on 30 December.

Team Productions and the Spanish filmmaker Esteban Uyarra decided to produce 50 minutes about the trial, focusing on the Iraqi prosecution and Saddam’s defence team.

“Because of the time pressure, we had to find a satisfactory structure for the material as fast as possible,” Heide says. “We divided the film into 10 five-minute sections. Esteban wrote a script and I started writing the voiceover of four lines tops for each five-minute interval.”

“That’s how we worked to advance the story, in order to make it in such a short time,” Heide says. “Of course, the whole thing was re-evaluated and rewritten in the process. After two weeks, when we had a 50-minute cut, we wrote out all the dialogue and sent it to the network editors. We used this transcript as a tool in the continued editing, and every

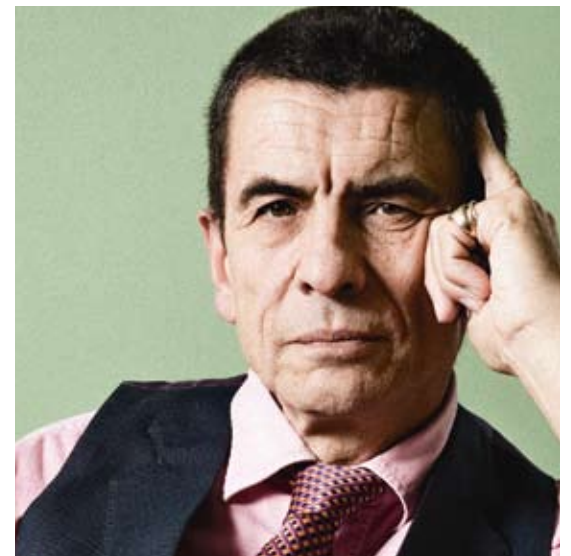
worst-case scenario will happen – and it did, for both films!” Heide says. “For the Milosevic film, the worst thing that could happen was that he died before a verdict was reached, and he did. For the Saddam film, we feared that he would be hanged before we completed editing, and he was.”

“In both cases, we ended up making an entirely different film than we had thought we would. But that’s a challenge you have to face when you make films that document trials, and I really think both films turned out the better for it. The long version of the Saddam film, now completed, in particular, is a much more universal film about a group of young American lawyers who go out to fight for certain ideals and get disillusioned in the process,” Heide says. “The film has a lot more universal recognition and identification now” ■

*Further information on Milosevic on Trial, see reverse section.*



Dragoslav Ongjanovic, Milosevic's legal adviser **Photo:** Aleksandar Andjic



Geoffrey Nice, chief prosecutor in the Milosevic case **Photo:** Thomas Marott

**“After all, this isn’t bicycle theft we’re dealing with but three and a half wars with nation-founding and political showdowns – a historically very complex sequence of events, with one party, Milosevic, trying to turn the whole thing into a political process, and the other party, the prosecution, seeking to make it a criminal case with Milosevic on trial for killing people.”** *Michael Christoffersen*

night our assistant would write out that day’s cut.”

The editing process ran round the clock, with Uyarra, a trained editor, cutting at night and Brian Tagg, a British editor, cutting during the day. The actual process of shooting the film in Baghdad under such difficult conditions had already presented so many obstacles – endlessly changing contacts, no-show participants, months of waiting for various permits – that the crew was starting to feel like victims of Murphy’s Law.

“We had a lot of unknown factors to work with. Producing a film of this kind, you always fear the

# NOTHING EVER ENDS



*Purity beats everything* Photo: Jon Bang Carlsen

**From 1997 to 2005, Jon Bang Carlsen shot a trilogy of films in South Africa dealing with his relationship to religious issues. Now he is back with a new film, *Purity Beats Everything*, also set in South Africa, but this time adding a contemplative, auto-biographical layer shot at his country home in Denmark. Around the testimonials of two Holocaust survivors, the film delves deep into the layers underlying Nazism's purity ideals, traces of which, the filmmaker contends, still exist today.**

BY LARS MOVIN

"My mother was always an optimist. It didn't save her."

These words are Miriam Lichterman's, one of the two witnesses in Jon Bang Carlsen's new film, *Purity Beats Everything*. Lichterman was the only member of her family to survive Auschwitz. After the war, she moved to South Africa, far from the Europe that had made a wreckage of her life. But, even having escaped

European concepts of purity, Lichterman soon realised she had ended up in another political hot spot with anything but trouble-free relationships between races, religions and cultures.

"The Jews had been through incredible evil as the result of the Nazis' Northern European variant of a perverted notion of purity," Bang Carlsen says. "It seems somehow tragicomic that, when they finally succeeded in escaping the smell of cremated family

members and making it to South Africa, they are met first by protesters on the pier and, once they are admitted into the country, they become part of a white upper class founded on some of the same ideologies behind the persecution of their own people in Europe."

That's not a popular observation among the 75,000 Jews living in South Africa today, Bang Carlsen says. In the film, Lichterman, in a controlled but very firm manner, admonishes him for suggesting that it must have been problematic for her to meet some of the same Germanic types in South Africa she had escaped from in Europe. "You must never, ever compare racial segregation in South Africa with the Holocaust," she tells him. No matter how bad the situation was for black South Africans, South Africa never had a plan to systematically eradicate an entire race.

That's a crucial point for Lichterman. In the film, her reaction becomes a jumping-off point for Bang Carlsen to hear his other main character, Pinchas Gutter. Gutter's experience tells him to remain on guard. What happened in Germany in the 1930's can happen again, anywhere and at any time. The subtext being that the Nazis were not an especially primitive race of human animals. Their leaders tended to be well-educated people. Music lovers.

## PAIN TRANSFORMED INTO ART

Bang Carlsen's fascination with South Africa goes back to 1994, when he visited the country for a film festival. He was captivated by the sweeping landscapes and the fact that the African culture was so close to the culture he grew up with in Denmark. He felt at home, even though he was in a foreign context. He returned in 1997 and settled in Cape Town, where he started working on what would eventually become a trilogy of films about religion. *Addicted to Solitude* (1999), *Portrait of God* (2001) and *Blinded Angels* (2005) are three very different works exploring the intersection between documentary, personal essay and fiction.

The idea for his new film grew out of an episode he witnessed in a coffee shop in Sea Point, a former



affluent neighbourhood in Cape Town that is home to many Jews. As he was sitting there nursing a cup of coffee, a tiny, ancient Jewish woman was rolled in in a wheelchair by a black maid, a big, strong Xhosa woman. The image lingered in his mind and out of it emerged the outlines of a film story.

“I imagined the old Jewish woman sitting in isolation in her big, old apartment with all her memories. Of course, she would have survived the camps in World War II and like so many other Jews had come to South Africa in 1947-48, that is, around the time the apartheid regime was instituted. Now, her children would have left the country and were probably working in London or New York, while fate had brought to her a black aide, who might even be living in the same apartment, because it was too dangerous for her to go home to her township at night. I wanted to tell their story. I started looking for a suitable couple but didn’t initially find anyone whose mutual relationship was strong enough to carry a film.”

Instead, Bang Carlsen met Miriam Lichterman and Pinchas Gutter, the two main characters in *Purity Beats Everything*. Having filmed their stories and reflections on living as Holocaust survivors in South Africa, he returned to Denmark and began to document his own attempt to relate to their horrendous experiences in terms of his own life and his own history. The film geographically alternates between South African reality and Danish village idyll, while temporally switching from World War II to the present day. This is at once the film’s artistic stratagem and its point: the past always exists in the present, nothing ever ends, everything is connected.

“Spending time with Miriam Lichterman, it struck me how, in a sense, she had transformed her experiences into art, simply to be able to talk about them,” Bang Carlsen says. “I recognised a little bit of that in myself. In 1995, I had just finished a feature, *Carmen and Babyface*, which dealt with some big wounds in my own life, some of those infernal, salty wounds that never heal and we all carry around with us. At first, I couldn’t approach the material without breaking into tears, but I finally managed to give it artistic shape. Then when I heard Miriam tell her story, I realised that perhaps the most beautiful function of art is its ability to give shape to even the most painful experiences, so you can stand looking into a darkness that is otherwise too sinister for humans to contemplate. Miriam had simply turned her experiences into a work of art, allowing her to recount the same experiences over and over again in almost exactly the same words and phrases.”

#### CONFRONTING YOUR OWN HIDEOUS PROFILE

Jon Bang Carlsen was born in 1950 and grew up in peaceful Denmark – as he puts it, an astoundingly short distance from places in Germany where Nazi atrocities had taken place just a few years before. Why didn’t anyone talk about this when I was growing up, he asks in the film. Why this silence about something that was so near and took up so much room?

“When I was growing up, my mother introduced me to Beethoven and Bach and all the other things belonging to her culture, the whole notion of ultimate beauty and romance – what was, in a way,

simply the positive side of the perversion that created Auschwitz,” Bang Carlsen says. “Later, in the 1960s, when most of my generation was absorbed by the Beatles and Anglo-Saxon culture, it struck me as odd how everyone could turn their backs on Central-European culture so completely, perhaps because my temperament and disposition was mainly oriented in the other direction. I have always had a hard time with Danish humour, the little irreverences that take the wind out of any loftiness. I have at times found Danes lacking a willingness to strive upwards where the air is a bit chillier and the view a bit bigger. On the other hand, I certainly see that a leavening joke can be a wonderful thing, because it prevents people from becoming extremists. But, especially when I was young, I experienced a big cultural vacuum southward, toward Germany, and considered it a serious problem that we, as a nation, never confronted our own mental connection to the perversion that happened in Germany back then. After all, even today, a tinge of it remains in how we relate to the challenges of globalisation and the multiracial society. I think it’s important that a nation is able to stare down its own fear and confront its own hideous profile.”

*Is the film a generational showdown?*

“No, it’s more of a showdown with my country and the denial that marked the 1950s,” Bang Carlsen

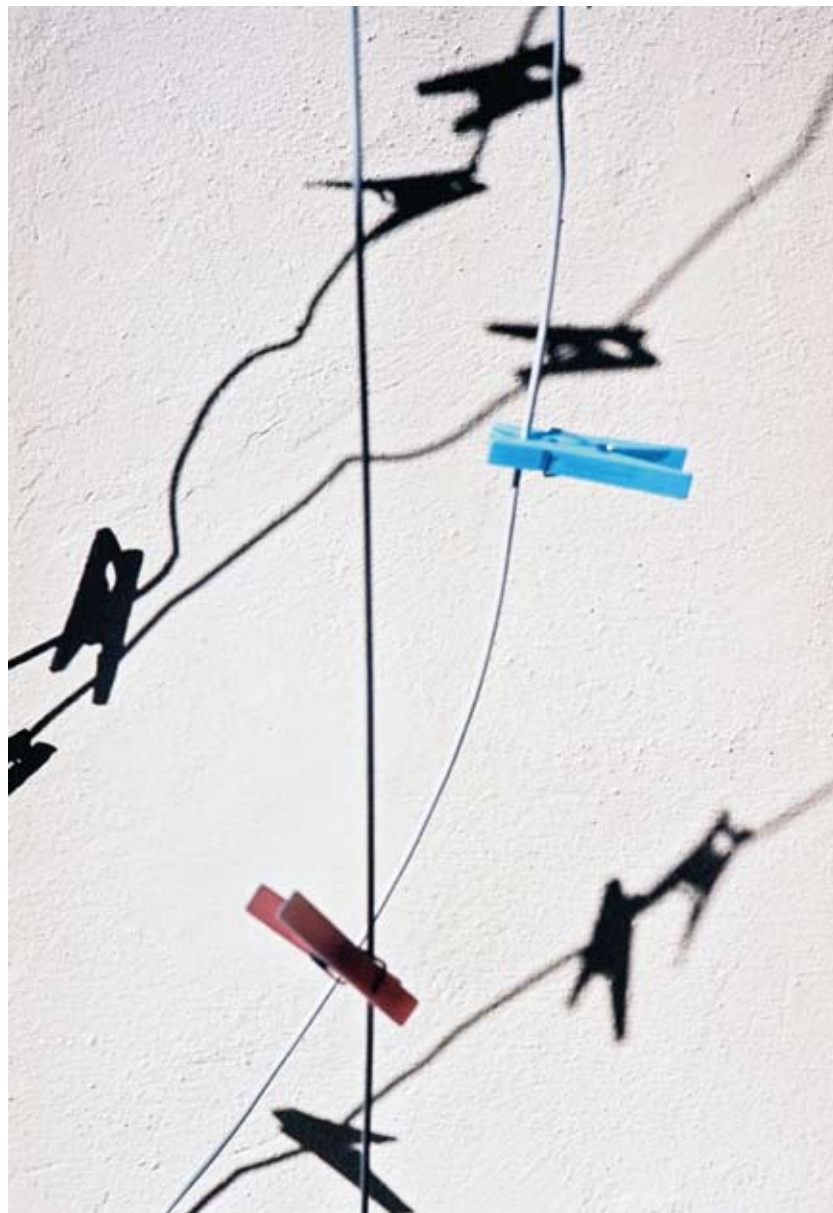
**“... perhaps the most beautiful function of art is its ability to give shape to even the most painful experiences, so you can stand looking into a darkness that is otherwise too sinister for humans to contemplate.”**

says. “I always felt somehow culturally co-responsible for what had happened. And I have had a need to ask of my own culture whether we were afraid to look our German neighbour in the eye back then for fear of seeing our own face. This is something that has been gnawing at me, and for a long time I have known that I would make a film about it someday. But obviously, the Holocaust is a brutal subject to approach and, of course, it intimidated me at first.”

*Says you who is known for films dealing with big existential questions, including a portrait of God!*

“True. Then again, God never had a number tattooed on his arm, did He?” ■

*Further information on Purity Beats Everything, see reverse section.*



*Purity Beats Everything* Photo: Jon Bang Carlsen



# INVENTING REALITY

Danish docs are coming out in force at the SHEFFIELD DOC/FEST, including films by Jon Bang Carlsen, Jørgen Leth and Max Kestner.

FILM took the opportunity to explore the cinematic poetics underlying the three Danish filmmakers' work.



How to Invent Reality Photo: Jon Bang Carlsen

**“To describe a world that is infinite and unstoppable in its wealth of expression, you have to make ultimate, manipulative choices that, in a few happy moments, may succeed in capturing the unstoppable in a solid form in which we can mirror ourselves and be enriched.”**

# A POETICS OF CINEMA

BY JON BANG CARLSEN / DIRECTOR

Documentary film, to me, is an art form. Art has always offered me unexpected angles on existence, allowing me to act in opposition to a certain kind of one-dimensional journalism that turns people into over-informed, intellectual fossils, who never will digest whatever fragment of reality they happen to experience on the screen, because they don't feel the sender's thumbprint. That's why it's important to build our documentary stories on a sequence of deliberate artistic choices, so we don't, like a voyeur or a fly on the wall, spy on life but take part in it.

In making artistic choices, we let ourselves be vulnerable and visible. It is then that the dialogue between us and the world we seek to describe can become fruitful. By investing ourselves and our experiences in a filmic story, we gain the moral right to tell stories that are never really ours alone but part of a common emotional landscape. Only by fabulating about the world do we bring order into our impression of it, capturing unfathomable complexity in a form that makes the unfathomable readable.

“Inventing reality” is a simple necessity. If we merely have the camera reflect reality, we see only the body and not the soul that moves the body. But

**“... it's important to build our documentary stories on a sequence of deliberate artistic choices, so we don't, like a voyeur or a fly on the wall, spy on life but take part in it.”**

staged documentarism is a demanding discipline, in that we are working in the over-crowded no man's land between fiction and documentary, where even the cock-surest dramaturgy has to stay humble in the face of life's unpredictability and insist on the authenticity that gives documentaries their peerless storytelling power.

Without filmic authenticity, the piano will only play false notes, no matter how well you play. You can only stay on fabulating terms with reality by having both feet solidly grounded in it. For reality wears a mask, too, of course. The filmmaker's job is to go behind the mask in the simplest way, which can be a very complicated thing to do. The mask is so thick that sometimes we falter, mistaking the mask for the face.

To me, documentaries are no more 'real' than fiction films and fiction films are no more fabulating than documentaries. There is no “reality” that cannot be seen from a different angle and be revealed as a dream. To describe the world, you have to define the truth in a way that does not exclude lies.

I refuse to be held hostage to circumstance, even though I dip my brush in reality.

To my mind, the filmmaker should not settle for documenting the world as it happens to unfold in front of his lens and later cut the footage into suitable lengths. Films should digest what is seen, just as we do, and then dress reality in new images. Otherwise, it all becomes meaningless, like food passing through the body without giving nourishment.

Any artistic formulation has to be torn away from its source material and create its 'own' universe, with its own ethical and aesthetic laws. Hence, the usual identification between documentary and truth will always be false. Likewise, the usual identification between fiction and fantasy.

To describe a world that is infinite and unstoppable in its wealth of expression, you have to make ultimate, manipulative choices that, in a few happy moments, may succeed in capturing the unstoppable in a solid form in which we can mirror ourselves and be enriched ■

**JON BANG CARLSEN** Born 1950. Film director. Graduate of the Danish Film School, 1976. Written and directed more than thirty films, both documentaries and feature films. His documentaries are often visually and symbolically powerful staged portraits of marginal figures and milieus that involve compelling stories, best exemplified in *A Rich Man* (1978) and in *Before the Guests Arrive* (1986). His feature films include *Ophelia Comes to Town* (1985), *Time Out* (1988) and *Baby Doll* (1988) and *Carmen & Babyface* (1995).

From 1980 Bang Carlsen sought out international milieus and stories. Examples are films from Ireland, all from 1996: *It's Now or Never, My Irish Diary* and *How to Invent Reality*, and films from South Africa: *Addicted to Solitude* (1999), *Portrait of God* (2001) and *Blinded Angels* (2007).

# ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NOTHING

**Sometimes I think I have a method. That is, a way of working I return to that has its strengths and weaknesses. It has grown out of who I am. Out of my likes and dislikes. My method consists in letting a lot of control meet a lot of chaos.**

**“I have made an image that I think belongs to the film and I try to hold onto it. I know that, if I change the image, the story disappears. The image is the story. And the story is the image.”**

BY MAX KESTNER / DIRECTOR

## CHAOS IS LIFE

I have a desire to control, but I have no desire to control the characters. I don't stage actions. I stage situations that give birth to actions. If the characters have no motives of their own to be present - and, naturally, it's preferable that they do - I have to provide them with motives. I never give them actions to perform. I know that the film's life comes from the characters' ability to be alive, and controlling them too severely drains the life out of the film. The life-giving element is connected to the actions and the way they are performed. The way the actions are performed precisely has to come from a character's subconscious, innermost core. Perhaps that's what's known as personality. For that reason, I like to work with a very high degree of chaos concerning the characters.

Often, I haven't even met the characters before I start shooting. I might want to know how many they are. What kind of clothes they might be wearing. And I like to know their motives for being where I will be filming. But I don't interfere in how they act. It's not that I don't care about what they do. I know that's crucial, of course. But I don't interfere in it. I feel I need to have unknown conditions. Some things have to be unpredictable.

I try to regard the characters as part of reality - which, strictly speaking, they are - on a par with chairs, guitars, bicycles or hand grenades. I try to reduce them to lines or shirts or other physical attributes. I don't look at them as stories. I actually don't think there are stories to be found in the characters that are just waiting to be told. I think that's a misconception that thrives in documentary environments, like a misguided respect for reality.

Reality does not carry stories. Not a one. Reality is a mess. That's the most important thing for a documentary filmmaker to realise. Our big problem is that we're easily fooled by reality being indistinguishable from a set with characters and props. After all, we do not, like fictional storytellers, start

with an empty space without words, light and movement. We start from everything. They add in, we leave out. It makes us especially susceptible to working unconsciously, according to a bias of how a film should look, when there is no empty space demanding answers of us.

## CONTROL IS LANGUAGE

Selecting from reality is part of my personal gaze. If I succeed in casting off all biases, my honest interest will remain. Then, sensing what's in and what's out is no problem. This is where control comes in. The control is in my gaze. Maintaining my way of seeing, I create order in chaos. My gaze creates stories, so others can look into chaos with my eyes and perceive meaning.

Control of the cinematic language makes reality's indifferent events stand out like scenes in a film. I must not stray from my language. I have made an image that I think belongs to the film and I try to hold onto it. I know that, if I change the image, the story disappears. The image is the story. And the story is the image. That's all there is. Well, there's sound, of course. But that's it. Image and sound.

I never successfully invented a language to suit a subject. Although I've tried. On the other hand, I might start with a language and later discover what the film is about. Ideally, form and content should be one and the same. The image itself should be the story. It shouldn't be an image of the story. It shouldn't communicate the story. It should be the story. It seems to be against the innermost laws of the film to separate form and content. It's as if the film, in its earliest conception, should be both. Born as images and sound, as form. Not as content and form.

I can feel if the film is going to be healthy. The pieces fall into place. Everything is just so. There should be a hierarchy of rules. Some things controlling other things. And that which is controlled naturally conforms. At the top sits the most important image in the film that contains the germ of everything else. These rules are invariable, because they are the film's cohesive force. They

**MAX KESTNER** Born 1969. Graduated in documentary and television from the National Film School of Denmark, 1997. Lecturer at the National Film School of Denmark. Worked for DR TV, where he made *The Party* (2000) and *Supergeil* (1997-1998). Documentaries: *Blue Collar White Christmas* (2004), *Max by Chance* (2004), and *Verden i Danmark* (2007), chosen for First Appearance at IDFA Amsterdam and received a GulDok for Best Short Documentary at CPH:DOX, 2004.



Max Kestner, Director Photo: Erik Molberg Hansen

# AND SOMETHING

## A POETICS OF CINEMA

are what turns reality into a story. Magically, the rules allow reality to change in front of my eyes and become moments of a special kind: narrative moments.

In this way, I feel, I can provoke situations that cannot fail, that will always beget a scene. If the rules that form the basis of the film's language are boring, the scenes may be boring. If they are challenging, the scenes may be challenging. But scenes will result under any circumstances, if I stay faithful to the film's language and trust chaos to do its job.

### NOT EVERYTHING CAN BE PERCEIVED

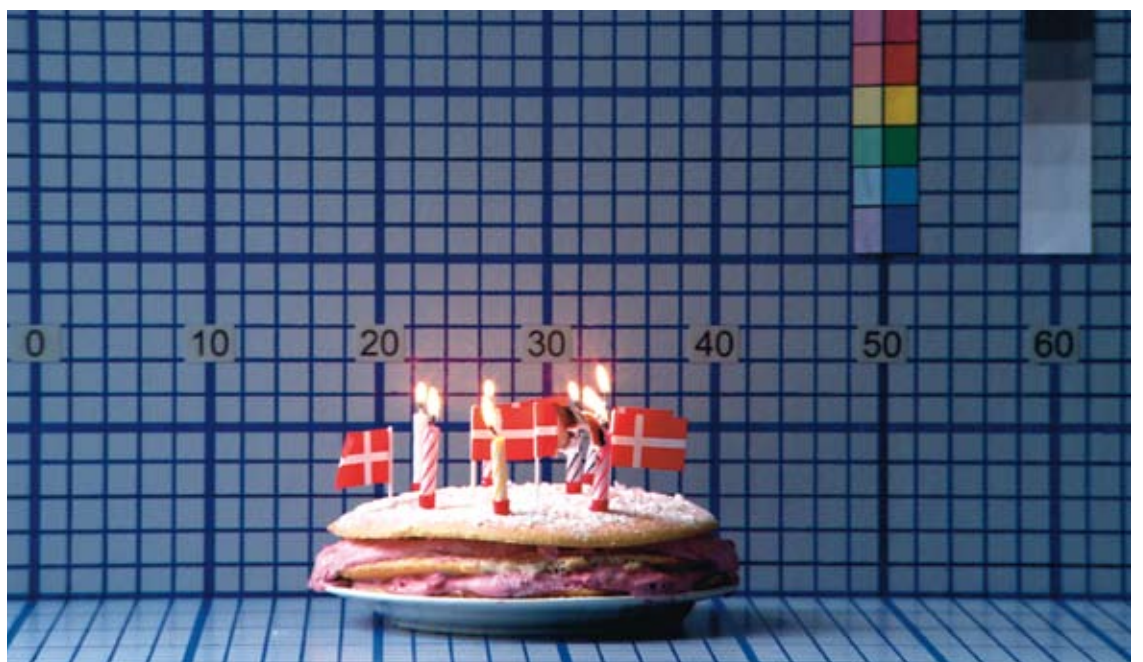
What the cinematic language allows me to experience, I think, is small shifts in relation to my expectations. After all, I know the world, reality. I have been in it for a long time and I know what it usually does, which is rarely anything surprising, whereas the way it does it can catch you unawares. But reality's way of behaving can only be revealed by a gaze.

I experience reality's chaotic material as consisting of icons. The icons seem meaningless, because they don't rouse any feelings in me. I recognise them without experiencing them. They simply are what they are, without characteristics. Just a guitar. Something has to make me experience the familiar anew. And that is what the language can do.

I believe that the only thing we, as storytellers, can bring to the world, is a language. Reality is simply our material. Like a painter's pigments and canvas. Or a guitarist's guitar. The guitarist and the painter, they are what's interesting, not the canvas or the guitar. What matters is how they paint and play. A guitar, after all, is just a guitar. An insignificant part of reality.

I'm not talking about the difference between good films and bad films. I'm only talking about the difference between narrative and nothing. The difference between nothing and something ■

*For further information on Kestner's latest film, The World in Denmark, see reverse section.*



# GIFTS OF CHANCE A POETICS OF CINEMA

BY JØRGEN LETH / DIRECTOR

Chance is a good friend of mine. I am on intimate terms with it. Chance often comes to my aid at crucial junctures. It moves things forward in small or big leaps. I sometimes get the sense of having a contract with fate. What invites chance in is my keeping a door open, allowing it in. Keeping the door of an ongoing work open is like a spell.

There are times when chance knows what I need better than I do. It is like a Vodou priest, a Houngan, in a long, insistent ceremony, invoking the presence of the Iwas, or spirits. They reveal themselves abruptly and with unknown force. Usually, it's not a scary but a happy thing.

Granted, all this may sound both hysterical and mystical. But hysterical it's not. On the contrary, the actual receiving situation is a sober, rational arrangement. There is nothing clandestine or ceremonial about it. There I am. I'm ready. Chance does not bring its gifts by accident. There has to be room for it and the humility to receive it. Openness is the key. On the other hand, there is something irrational about the creative process in itself.



**“I put a priority on nonsensibility, the not-right, the narrow angle of approach. Those are the conditions I want for telling my stories.”**

But I go too far. That was unintended. Mainly, what I'm trying to describe is a work situation. How do you initiate a piece of work, where do you begin?

From the beginning: That was in 1963, when we made our first film, *Stop for Bud*, a portrait of the jazz pianist Bud Powell. At the time, my buddy, cameraman Ole John, and I were prepared to blow up the whole film establishment. What was happening around us, for instance in the famed field of Danish documentaries, we found completely boring. Middle-class values were firmly embedded in the film environment. It was all so sensible and right. Danish filmmakers were quite skilled and that's all they were striving to be. Their professionalism was suffocating. As a starting point, we wanted to dismantle sense and calculation – all the things we considered small-mindedness – exploding cinematic conventions and reinventing the language of cinema from the ground up. Nothing less. No rules applied. Ole John and I were conspiring to turn everything upside down. Image and sound had nothing legitimately to do with each other. Image was image, sound was sound. They were independent elements.

And the whole thing about editing was a paper tiger. All that was about, after all, was putting the scenes in some kind of order, preferably determined by chance.

#### EMPTY WHITE SPACE, PERFECT HUMAN

Today, I can say this approach has been an always-valid premise for me. I have stayed faithful to my original desire to experiment and try out new things. Not out of stubbornness but out of desire. Mainly, it's about not getting bored.

I have always wanted filmmaking to resemble poetry-writing as much as possible – to be as simple and as unpredictable. When I write a poem, I never know where it's going to end up. It starts in the upper left-hand corner and grows along unknown paths across the page. I see where it's going and I accept that. That's why I never wanted to write regular scripts for my films. For me, that would have made shooting the film a reproduction of something that had already been thought out and planned. Screenplays always look so boring with their schematic layout. One of the first films we made was *The Perfect Human*. In many ways, it is a piece of writing in an empty white room. We put two people into it, with a few props and elegant clothes and a handful of very simple tasks, like a catalogue of everyday routines. Their movements and actions are studied as under a magnifying glass. The operating model is the wish to be skilled at living, to be a perfect human. We observe the surface, the skin, simple actions and discover the cracks and the small flaws in the surface, the humanity in these pseudo-anthropological situations.

The story has no conclusion. It's a (fictitious) study. That's the story. This short film is open in the beginning and it's open when it ends. In it, we are introduced to a new storytelling form that consisted of placing one scene after the other, without dramaturgy, and seeing where it went.

Salmon and potatoes with hollandaise sauce. A glass of Chablis. The perfect human in a limitless space. That was enough. Objects of microscopy.

We continued this project over the years in films cultivating the clarity of tableaux. It was about creating order in chaos. In a series of films, we looked at life under a magnifying glass.

In *Life in Denmark*, we stripped things down further. We didn't want any rainy weather or a social-realist mess. We simply wanted Danish life to stand out plainly and clearly, like a relief. An enamel-like surface. Emblematic.

We rendered details. We refined a style.

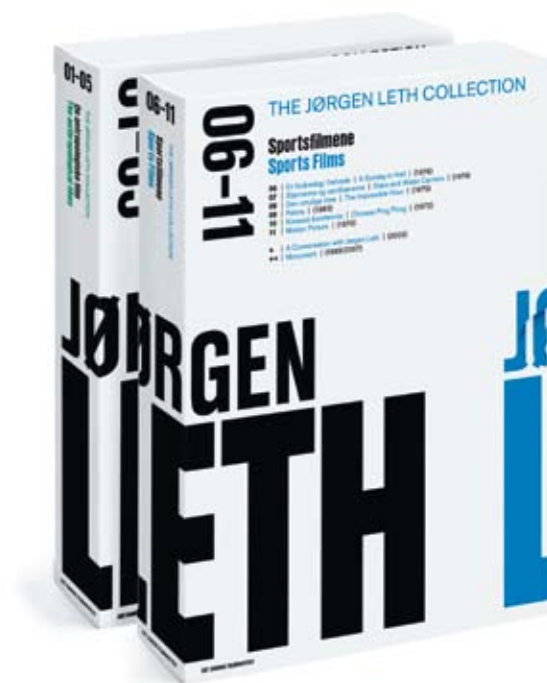
#### DON'T KNOW, WOULD LIKE TO KNOW

Curiosity matters in the kind of films I make. My basic idea is: I know nothing, but I would like to know something. That's my approach. My premise. Curiosity is an engine. Searching, fascination, framing. Discovering, seeking to understand. Not knowing in advance, not proving, not illustrating, certainly not arguing, but showing. That's the narrative model I set out. In it, a valid momentum is found. I put a priority on nonsensibility, the not-right, the narrow angle of approach. Those are the conditions I want for telling my stories.

From this I get my faith in the freshness of notes. My notepad is my most important tool. I want to preserve this sense of note-taking far into the film (or the poem), preferably making the film look like a collection of notes. That's the ideal. It's about shrinking the distance between impulse and execution. A poem can do that. I want to preserve this approach, also in the more complicated process of filmmaking. Making sure the handwriting is clearly seen despite all the technique (...) ■

(excerpts from *Tilfældets gaver – en filmisk poetik*, printed in *Kritik*, no. 179, Gyldendal, 2006)

**“My notepad is my most important tool. I want to preserve this sense of note-taking far into the film (or the poem), preferably making the film look like a collection of notes. That's the ideal. It's about shrinking the distance between impulse and execution. A poem can do that. I want to preserve this approach, also in the more complicated process of filmmaking.”**



**JØRGEN LETH** Born 1937, Aarhus, Denmark. Film director, journalist, poet. Guest lecturer at the National Film School of Denmark. Leth's writing includes poetry, essays, radio and television dramas. Directed over forty films since the early 1960s. Owns the company Sunse Productions. A key figure in the 1960's milieu of experimental documentary filmmakers.

**THE JØRGEN LETH COLLECTION** The Danish Film Institute (DFI) is publisher of six DVD box sets of Jørgen Leth's films. Each box set includes three DVDs, extra information and a booklet.

#### THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL FILM, ISSUED JUNE 2007

*Livet i Danmark / Life in Denmark (1972)*, *Det gode og det onde / Good and Evil (1975)*, *Det perfekte menneske / The Perfect Human (1968)*, *De fem benspænd / The Five Obstructions (2003)*, *ales se (1989)*.

#### SPORTS FILMS, ISSUED NOVEMBER 2007

*En forårsdag i helvede / A Sunday in Hell (1976)*, *Stjernerne og vandbærerne / Stars and Watercarriers (1974)*, *Den umulige time / The Impossible Hour (1975)*, *Pelota (1983)*, *Kinesisk bordtennis / Chinese Ping Pong (1972)*. Motion Picture (1970).

The remainder of Jørgen Leth's work will be published in 2008-2009 under the following titles: Travel Portraits, Biographical Portraits, Fiction and Early Experiments.

The Jørgen Leth Collection is financed by Møllehegnet Holding A/S.

The DVD box sets can be purchased at [www.dfi.dk/boghandel](http://www.dfi.dk/boghandel).



Jørgen Leth, Director Photo: Søren Kirkegaard

# MEETING THE OTHERS

BY KAROLINE LETH / MANAGING DIRECTOR & PRODUCER / TJU-BANG FILM

It's a widespread phenomenon for Western documentary filmmakers to journey into the world and return home with images and stories from foreign lands. *Lakshmi and Me* stands apart from the crowd because it was made by a local filmmaker. Nishtha Jain, a talented and poetic Indian woman, has made a deeply personal film about modern India for a Western audience.

## STEPS INDIA / CHANGING INDIA

It was a magical experience, travelling to the other side of the globe, being confronted with a stirring country brimming with colours, noise and unfamiliar smells – while taking in a full range of India's manifold human, social and political problems at the pitching session for some 25 documentaries for the *Steps India* project. Naturally, I came prepared, having read the many project descriptions. Before leaving, I had singled out Nishtha's film, which in a peculiar way spoke to me directly across cultures.

When my assistant Nynne Selin and I met Nishtha and her producer Smriti Nevatia, it was like seeing someone we had always known. Professionally as well as personally. Our ways of discussing and describing the process of filmmaking were in complete sync. We understood each other's methods and felt a deep connection. This surprised us so much that within a few hours we were rolling on the floor

laughing, talking about our personal and professional experiences higgledy-piggledy. We spent nearly three days together. Four women filmmakers on a stone floor in India. We looked through many hours of raw footage and talked about which direction to take the film in and how to do it. They were fruitful and inspiring days that, apart from moving the film along, gave us friends for life.

## THE PROCESS

This process continued into the actual work with the film, first in translating all the material and, particularly, during the whole editing process. We brought in a Danish editor, Rikke Selin Lorentzen, to work on the film. On her own initiative, and her own dime, she went to IDFA last year to meet Nishtha before they would team up at the editing table in Goa a few months later. Nishtha and Rikke collaborated intensely on editing, mainly in India, where Nynne and I made sure to join them for the final phase. After a break, we had a brief editing bout in Copenhagen, where Nishtha joined us and had the opportunity to familiarize herself with the workings of a Danish production company.

In the editing process, quite literally, two very different and very strong film cultures came together in a contemporary and global cinematic language. Pacing and transitions were things we discussed a lot. Claustrophobia in terms of storytelling was another big issue. Having a natural, equilibristic visual language was crucial.



*Lakshmi and Me* Photo: Tju-Bang Film

**LAKSHMI AND ME** depicts the relationship between the filmmaker and her maid Lakshmi, as the filmmaker films her own attempts to get closer to Lakshmi. The question is, can they even be friends? Is there an unbridgeable gulf between employer and employee? Are they only 'friends,' because Lakshmi thinks she is serving her employer by pretending to be friends?

We see how Lakshmi acts when she is filmed on the job, working for her employer. And we see how she acts when she is in her own home. Is there a difference? Does it help to illuminate their relationship? In a voiceover, the filmmaker discusses her reflections on forming a relationship across social boundaries.

Nishtha Jain and Lakshmi talk about how Lakshmi eloped to marry a man from a lower caste. We see her get very ill during her pregnancy and follow her when all of a sudden she runs away from her husband's family and seeks refuge with Nishtha.

The film also shows Lakshmi discussing her own daughter's possible future. *Lakshmi and Me* is a film about modern India – with all its ties back to a centuries-old caste system and the upper and lower classes of India's colonial days.

*Lakshmi and Me* is a universal story of a woman and her maid, an issue that many women the world over can relate to. Watching *Lakshmi and Me*, Western audiences will experience that we may have more in common with people on the other side of the world than we tend to think. The film gives viewers a contemporary impression of India – as seen through Indian eyes.

## LAKSHMI AND ME

DIRECTOR Nishtha Jain / EDITOR Rikke Selin Lorentzen / PRODUCER Smriti Nevatia, Raintree Film / COPRODUCER Karoline Leth, Tju-Bang Film / COPRODUCER Kristiina Pervilä, Millennium Film Ltd. / EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Steps India, Iikka Vehkalahti / FINANCE International ITVS, YLE, Finish Foreign Ministry, et al. Domestic TV2 Denmark, Danida, CKU, DFI.

**STEPS INDIA / CHANGING INDIA** is a project related to Steps International, which is a non-profit organisation based in Denmark. Steps International was founded on the backdrop of Steps For The Future in South Africa. Steps India is lead by commissioning editor at YLE, Iikka Vehkalahti. The purpose of Steps India is to produce a series of documentaries on India by Indian filmmakers in coproduction with Western producers. The goal is to make 5-10 documentaries, of which *Lakshmi and Me* is one.

Our collaboration was always challenging, rewarding and deeply inspiring. We are richer in experiences now, smarter about our own abilities and our own work has been inspired by meeting the others. At the same time, I am happy and proud to be a part of presenting *Lakshmi and Me* to the

Western world, both via TV transmissions and at major festivals. We are extremely excited that the film has been nominated for the Silver Wolf at IDFA.

*Lakshmi and Me* is intimate and lovely, a universal film about modern womanhood ■



# IS DEMOCRACY FOR EVERYONE?

***Why Democracy?* is surely one of the widest ranging and most ambitious international projects in documentary filmmaking ever undertaken. Embracing 10 films by local filmmakers, in such far-flung countries as China, Liberia, Pakistan, Egypt, Bolivia, the United States and Denmark, shown by broadcasters in 42 countries and supported by numerous websites, the project by its mid-October kick-off was expected to reach at least 300 million viewers and stimulate a global discussion: What is democracy? How does democracy work? And is democracy, by definition, right for everybody? Here, one of the three commissioning editors behind the project, Mette Hoffmann Meyer of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), talks about her thoughts and experiences from three years on the project.**

BY LARS MOVIN

At the Evergreen Primary School in Wuhan, central China, kids are still taught to march in lockstep, subordinate the individual to the community and shout out slogans about the state and the future. That's the China we know. But years of one-child policy and economic liberalisation have put traditional values under constantly growing pressure.

If kids in the new China don't figure out for themselves that they need to be ambitious to make it in what is increasingly looking like a competitive society, their parents are sure to set them straight. The question, then, might be what would happen if Chinese society cut the last ties to its past and unleashed the forces of democracy. What if a school class was allowed to elect a student leader following the same principles that adults in the West use to elect their political leaders – nominating candidates, running campaigns and having open voting?

That's what the Chinese documentary filmmaker Weijun Chen set out to explore when he was encouraged to submit a proposal to the *Why Democracy?* project, a series of 10 documentaries by local filmmakers around the world describing different views of democracy. *Please Vote for Me* is both touching and frightening as it documents Chen's experiment, following three eight-year-old candidates during

their election campaign leading up to the final student vote, a process that evolves like a miniature version of the adult world with all its dirty tricks and spin doctors, pork-barrel politics and horse trading, cynicism and corruption.

## LOCAL AND GLOBAL

*Please Vote for Me* eloquently represents the spirit of the *Why Democracy?* project. Since it's made by a Chinese director, it combines a local point of view with a globally relevant theme. Moreover, the film isn't tied to any one current event but has a crafty premise that cuts to the core of the democracy discussion. Finally, it takes up a theme that is truly significant to how the world will develop in coming years but does not generally get much international press attention.

"We deliberately tried to avoid the proverbial hotspots," Mette Hoffmann Meyer, one of the project's three initiators, told us a few weeks before the project's October 8 premiere. "Films about Afghanistan or the Israel-Palestine conflict are likely to get off the ground regardless. When we started the project three years ago, we knew that it would stretch over a long period, so we would never be able to meet a criterion of 'current interest'. We decided to wager on films that go into more fundamental themes and could be expected to have a long life."

## WEIJUN CHEN / DIRECTOR OF PLEASE VOTE FOR ME

"There is a misunderstanding in the outside world that we don't have elections in China. In actuality, different kinds of elections take place every day in China. But obviously, within the Communist Party, there's no such thing as democracy elections. If there is one thing this film has taught me, it's that a democratic system and a democratic nation are two very different things. In the film, we conduct an experiment where we give kids in a school class a democratic tool, but their use of it turns out not to be very democratic. It's my hope that the film will make people all over the world think about how democracy is far from the same thing as being handed a democratic system as a tool. If you take a nation that was never based on democratic values and, from one day to the next, give it a democratic tool and tell it what democracy is, that will not make it a democratic nation. In the Chinese mindset, the winner is emperor and the loser is slave. Creating a system in which the winner, upon his victory, shows tolerance for his opponent is a long process."



*Please Vote for Me* Photo: Why Democracy?

**GLOBAL DIALOGUE**

Hoffmann Meyer headed the international sales department at the commercial Danish broadcaster TV2 for 18 years, including the last few as editor of documentaries. On 1 August, she started her new job as editor of documentaries and head of co-productions at the public broadcaster DR. Not surprisingly, she brings a wide network of contacts to *Why Democracy?*, a project she developed and conducted in partnership with two other experienced commissioning editors, Nick Fraser of the BBC and Iikka Vehkalahti of YLE, Finland. In past years, the three of them have co-launched a number of big projects, including *Interesting Times*, a handful of documentaries from China, and, notably, a series of no less than 38 films from Africa under the banner of *Actually Life Is A Beautiful Thing*, in both cases working with local filmmakers.

“Doing the African project, it really became clear to me how much it means to have local filmmakers direct the films, rather than simply dispatch a Western reporter to do the usual story about how depressing everything is. Of course, the African directors’ films had their problems, as well, but they had humour and a joy about small everyday things that made it so much easier for African viewers to identify with the images presented of them. I have used that principle in many contexts since,” Hoffmann Meyer says.

**DEMOCRACY AS A BUZZWORD**

Hoffmann Meyer was having a meeting with Fraser and Vehkalahti to evaluate a project, when they started talking about what they would like to do next.

“We put various proposals on the table – the Arab nations and other obvious choices – but then we started talking about democracy, this buzzword we go to war for these days and try to export to other parts of the world,” Hoffmann Meyer says. “Democracy means something different to everyone. In Japan, there is a different perception of democracy than in the West. In Russia, they probably would not even want the kind of democracy we, in Scandinavia, think of as the only right kind. And so on.”

An initial meeting was held in December 2004 and ever since the snowball has been rolling and growing – up to the point where it no longer sounds like hot air when the project initiators say they hope the project will start a global dialogue about democracy.

“It’s grown huge,” Hoffmann Meyer says. “Once we had signed on five or six broadcasters, we started applying to the Danish Film Institute, the Finnish Foreign Ministry and various funds around the world, and ultimately we signed on 42 broadcasters. They will all be airing several of the films over 14 days in October, when we launch the project worldwide. Not every TV station involved has acquired all

10 films, but all have agreed to air at least two of the films and most will be airing several or all of them.”

*How did you locate the 10 filmmakers?*

“We organised pitching sessions and did worldwide outreach. We sent out e-mails to mailing lists from different festivals and eventually received 480 proposals,” Hoffmann Meyer says. “At first, the proposals were not distributed geographically as broadly as we would have liked, so in some places we had to make an extra effort. That had also been my experience from our last project in Africa. When you work in countries that don’t have a documentary tradition and a corresponding environment or network, you have to find other ways of doing things. In China, we held a secret meeting, inviting all the documentary filmmakers we knew, and asked them to submit proposals. In India we held a couple of workshops in Mumbai and Kolkata, formerly Calcutta, and located a project that way.”

**VIRAL MARKETING**

The initiative group has tried to think outside the box in terms of distribution and marketing. When *Why Democracy?* kicked off in October, the Chinese film, *Please Vote for Me*, was posted in its entirety on MySpace. Moreover, they have an alliance with Joost.com, the new Internet TV website launched by Janus Friis and Niklas Zennström, the founders of Skype. In print media, they have a partnership with the MetroXpress free daily, which has branches in 23 countries and 25 million daily readers by their own count, including a lot of young people. And, of course, the project has its own homepage designed and run by a group of eight to ten young students from around the world, working out of a house in South Africa for the occasion, while trying to kick-start bilateral dialogue about democracy among different universities worldwide.

“We also got into viral marketing, making little 30-second commercials that we hope are funny or rude or grotesque enough that people will want to share them with their friends, which we put out there via mobile phones or Facebook and the like and hope get a life of their own,” Hoffmann Meyer says.

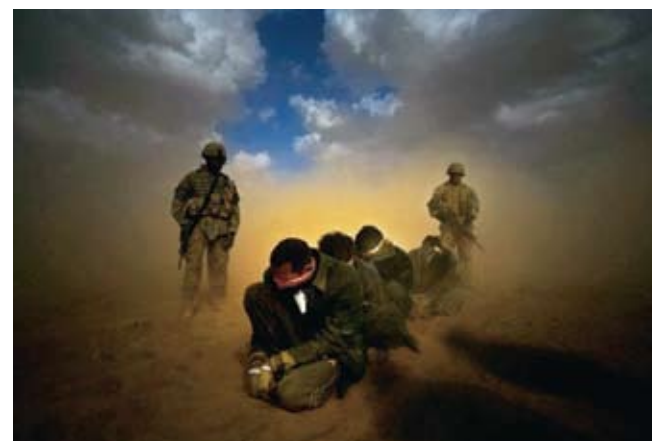
**NOT JUST BBC**

The most satisfying thing about the project to Hoffmann Meyer was that the films, precisely because they were made by local directors, also to varying degrees reflect the respective film cultures.

“As a for instance, the Russian film, *For God, Tsar and Fatherland*, by Nino Kirtacze, though he is actually from Georgia, is very Russian in its cinematic language. For its part, Egypt: *We are Watching You* by Leila Menjou and Sherief Fahmy, clearly has a much stronger “

**ALEX GIBNEY / DIRECTOR OF TAXI TO THE DARK SIDE**

“Fear is the ultimate test of democracy. Having made this film, it’s my opinion that American democracy is in a very fragile state right now. It’s my impression that some of the institutions have been markedly weakened, not least Congress. In a time marked by fear, Congress does not wish to appear to be weakened, but nonetheless that’s the way it has been heading. That’s pretty scary. But at the same time, I think the vast majority of the population is starting to realize that the direction in which the Bush administration has been leading the country has not led to anything possible. They set out to spread democracy, first in Afghanistan, then in Iraq, but instead they have ended up undermining some of the central principles of American democracy. Sadly, the population has been very slow to realise this, and it makes you wonder that the protests weren’t a lot louder. So, if there is any conclusion to be drawn, it has to be that fear has not strengthened us as a nation but, rather, has weakened our democracy. Not that democracy is about to disappear, but the question is whether we will be able to turn the development around and re-strengthen democracy.”



Taxi to the Dark Side Photo: Why Democracy?



Bloody Cartoons Photo: Framegrab

chaotic nerve than the films we usually see in Europe,” Hoffmann Meyer says. “One of the challenges about the project is trying to keep a balance. On the one hand, we didn’t go out and tell the directors to do things like a BBC film. On the other hand, we realised the films would be seen, and had to be understandable, all over the world. I remember when we pitched the project to the Arab countries – in Qatar I think it was – it took us days to convince the filmmakers that we really didn’t want them to just do what they thought we wanted them to.

“There were instances, too, of course, where we started things that for various reasons didn’t pan out. I think we are fortunate to be bringing out 10 such strong and moving films. At one point, I showed the Liberian film, *Iron Ladies of Liberia*, by Daniel Junge and Siatta Scott-Johnson, to a colleague at DR. The film follows Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically elected president in Liberia after 14 years of civil war and the first female head of state in Africa, from her inauguration in January 2006. My colleague was very touched by the film and told me this was the first time she had ever cried over a political documentary from Africa. This is what documentaries do. When the documentary tools are used correctly, viewers are able much better to identify with the subjects, while gaining a better understanding of the processes involved,” Hoffmann Meyer says ■

Further information on *Bloody Cartoons*: see reverse section, and [www.whymocracy.net](http://www.whymocracy.net)

**WHY DEMOCRACY?** Is the brainchild of three commissioning editors – Mette Hoffmann Meyer of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), Nick Fraser of the BBC and Iikka Vehkalahti of YLE, Finland. The project embraces 10 feature-length films, a large number of short films, a website and various other elements. It is produced by Steps, a non-profit organisation, on a total budget of around three million euros.

The 10 films are: *Campaign! The Kawasaki Candidate* (Kazuhiro Soda, Japan), *Bloody Cartoons* (Karsten Kjær, Denmark), *Egypt: We are Watching You* (Leila Menjou & Sherief Fahmy, Egypt), *Iron Ladies of Liberia* (Daniel Junge & Siatta Scott-Johnson, Liberia), *For God, Tsar and Fatherland* (Nino Kirtacze, Russia), *Dinner with the President* (Sabiha Sumar & Sachitanandam Sathananthan, Pakistan), *In Search of Ghandi* (Lalit Vachani, India), *Taxi to the Dark Side* (Alex Gibney, USA), *Looking for the Revolution* (Rodrigo Vazquez, Bolivia) and *Please Vote for Me* (Weijun Chen, China).

#### TEN QUESTIONS

For the project, 10 questions were phrased that were then sent to some 150 prominent personalities worldwide, from heavy-metal drummer Lars Ulrich, to Jesse Jackson, to football legend Pelé and Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Their answers were incorporated into the presentation of the films in various ways. The 10 questions posed:

- Who would you vote for as President of the World?
- What would make you start a revolution?
- Can terrorism destroy democracy?
- Is democracy good for everyone?
- Are dictators ever good?
- Who rules the World?
- Are women more democratic than men?
- Why bother to vote?
- Is God democratic?
- Can politicians solve climate change?

#### KARSTEN KJÆR / DIRECTOR OF BLOODY CARTOONS

“In a world of omnipresent global images, how could 12 newspaper cartoons of an historical prophet throw Denmark into a violent conflict with Muslims all over the world? I am still trying to fully understand this clash of cultures after finishing my film *Bloody Cartoons*.

How do believers of Islam and its iconoclasts protect themselves against all the imagery of our modern world? They all use Nokia, Microsoft and all sorts of photo, film and cable visions, very secular and democratic devices for practicing freedom of expression. I respect that some people prefer to keep in their hearts and minds one perfect ‘image’ of their ancient Prophet and God not to be polluted by the media and distorted by infidels. But it’s their religion – not mine. In a picture-perfect world everybody ought to nurse their own religious dogmas in private without obstructing my freedom to imagine, see and portray everything living and dead in the universe. That’s the credo of *Bloody Cartoons*.”



Bloody Cartoons Photo: Framegrab

# LANGUAGE IS THE HOUSE OF BEING



*Voices of the World* Photo: Jørgen Schytte

**Somewhere between six and seven thousand languages are spoken in the world. But half of the world's languages will disappear within the next 100 years. In average a language vanishes every two weeks, Janus Billeskov Jansen and Signe Byrge Sørensen stress. They co-directed *In Languages We Live* and *The Importance of Being - MLABRI* as part of the *Voices of the World* project.**

BY LARS MOVIN

A new language has emerged among young people in Nairobi's Kibera ghetto - Sheng, a portmanteau of Swahili, English and other local languages. Young people speak Sheng, they sing and rap in Sheng and they use it when they don't want their parents to know what they are saying. Sheng is a rapidly evolving language, with new words being added every day.

A language is a living organism, it is consciousness and identity. Languages come and go, but Sheng is an exception. Most of the world's languages are vanishing. Very few new ones

emerge. Take Australia. When Europeans arrived, Australia had 250 languages - 700 counting dialects. Today, just 70 remain.

These examples are taken from the film *In Languages We Live* (2005), an homage to linguistic diversity and a warning of how much we stand to lose if the current trend continues. A linguistics researcher who appears in the film has studied 12 different indigenous Australian languages over the last 30 years. Today, they are all gone. A big chunk of the world's cultural heritage has been lost. Forever.

Co-directed by Janus Billeskov Jansen and Signe Byrge Sørensen, *In Languages We Live* and its sequel, *The Importance of Being - MLABRI* (2007), make up the *Voices of the World* anthology. The two films were conceived together, the first presenting a global perspective on the world's language diversity, the second taking a local focus on a people whose language is dying out.

## RICHNESS IN DIVERSITY

Janus Billeskov Jansen (b. 1951) is a familiar name in Danish cinema. For three decades, he has ranked among the country's most prominent editors, not

least by virtue of his long-running partnership with internationally recognized director Bille August.

The idea for *Voices of the World* goes back to 1990 when Billeskov Jansen was making a short film recording different reactions of persons at the moment a baby was put into their arms.

"When someone gets to hold a baby, a very fundamental thing happens, no matter if that person is a pregnant woman or a big tattooed guy," Billeskov Jansen says. "The film recorded all these glowing faces - young, old, men and women, from different cultures. The point was that the film could be seen all over the world, because the reactions of people in that situation are so universal. At the end, there was a sign reading, *My future is in your hands*. The line had to be translated into all the world's languages, so the film could be seen the world over. It was then that I realised how many languages are in the world. More than 6,000."

Discovering how many languages the world's peoples had developed was so fascinating he couldn't let it go. Reading up on the subject, he realised how grave the situation was for so many of the world's languages. "The world's language diversity is kept alive by the most exposed population groups," Billeskov Jansen says.

"So, our two films are both about languages and integration - how to survive when you don't belong to one of the major population groups, when you don't speak the language of power," he says.

*Couldn't it be argued that the fewer languages there are in the world, the easier it will be for people to understand each other?*

"It's good to have a common language for mutual understanding. In Europe, that language used to be Latin. Elsewhere, Arabic united people. In China, it was Mandarin. People have always used certain languages to communicate in for practical reasons, in trade, science and religion. That's how it is with English today. That's all well and good. But people need their own individual language, their mother tongue. This is where the cultural richness lies. Every language contains a unique way of perceiving and interpreting the existence of mankind. Every language contributes to our common knowledge and survival. If there were just one language, it would be like trying to understand the Earth's biological diversity by studying, say, a beech tree," Billeskov Jansen says.

## A STUDY IN CREATIVE PRODUCTION

Signe Byrge Sørensen came aboard *Voices*

of the World in 2003. Her background is in developing Internet projects and documentaries in an international context, including working as a producer at Spor Media and now at Final Cut Productions. In addition to co-directing, she also produced the two films.

In *Languages We Live* was shot in 42 countries. Among Byrge Sørensen's tasks was keeping all the different threads sorted and coordinating the extensive logistical effort.

"It was a study in creative production," she says. "We issued a call for proposals to filmmakers and linguists around the world, asking for different kinds of stories. For instance, we were looking for a story about the last person in the world who spoke a certain language. The nearest place for that was in Latvia, where an old man was one of the last surviving speakers of Livonian. At that point, Janus took over and did the story with a Latvian crew.

"Another example was Australia, where we found stories reflecting that country's history of oppression," Byrge Sørensen says. "We located the Indigenous Australian TV station, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association CAAMA Productions that had documentaries in the original languages. We got permission from them to use their clips and also got them to shoot supplementary interviews. A third way was used for the Mexican sequence. We located a visual anthropologist in Mexico City who studied the Totonac language. She was stuck and needed money. So we financed equipment for her in return for permission to use her footage. Plus, we generously received clips from people across the Danish film community from films they have made across the world."

"This really is a non-commercial project," she says. "It was only possible because everyone recognised how important it is to call attention to this issue."

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MLABRI

A segment of *In Languages We Live* deals with the Mlabris, a people of hunters and gatherers who until recently roamed in small groups through the jungle bordering Thailand and Laos. Today, most of the jungle is gone. Only 320 Mlabris remain. Their children now go to school to be able, in a better way, to handle the transition from nomadic life to a settled existence. A Danish linguist, Professor Jørgen Rischel, recently deceased, spent years with the Mlabris and recorded their language in print at the last possible moment. In a generation or two, there will likely not be any remaining speakers of Mlabri at all.

We meet the Mlabris again in *The Importance of Being - MLABRI* (2007). The film follows two young men who set out in search of Mlabri girls to marry and the very first group of Mlabri children who leave their parents to attend a big-city boarding school. Alongside these parallel paths, the film describes how Mlabri culture and their way of life is threatened by a development that seems to have no room left over for such peoples to retain their distinctiveness – including their soft, sing-song language.

"When Professor Rischel first sought out the Mlabris 25 years ago, they were still roaming the jungle," Byrge Sørensen says. "Today, most of

## "We do humanist propaganda."

Janus Billeskov Jansen

them have settled in two villages in northeastern Thailand. A few of them still roam, but in reality they are itinerant labourers. Adjusting to life in villages of up to 100 people has been rough and part of the problem comes from the clash between their hunter-gatherer culture and their new neighbours, who are peasants."

*How did the Mlabris react to the film project?*

"They feel that they are, and always will be, Mlabri," Byrge Sørensen says. "But you sense how it provokes them when their kids come home from school on holiday and start inserting Thai words into their Mlabri sentences. Not, perhaps, that they directly experience their language as threatened, but they are not blind to the changes that threaten them. They just don't have the preconditions for seeing themselves in a global perspective."

"It's important to mention that this isn't about nostalgia," Billeskov Jansen adds. "We didn't detect a hint of romanticism about nature among the Mlabris. The jungle was cold and wet. It was buzzing with mosquitoes. It's not our task to save these 'noble savages' from progress but to offer them an opportunity to appear as the dignified people they are. It's all about knowing your past and preserving your language and, in turn, your identity – having respect for your own language and an awareness that all languages are unique and worth protecting and being proud of."

*What do the Mlabris say about the film?*

"When they saw it, they said it painted a faithful picture of what it's like to be Mlabri," Byrge Sørensen says. "They noted that one of the young men in the film, IDang, still isn't married. And, they commented that it was a nice well fed pig we see at the start of the film."

#### DEMONISING THE 'OTHER'

The two Danish filmmakers wrote down a set of ethical rules for *Voices of the World*. One rule goes: "Since all oppression presupposes dehumanisation of the Other, *Voices of the World* aims to counteract the mutual demonising of cultures, and to achieve this by means of humanising the unfamiliar and the different."

"We do humanist propaganda," Billeskov Jansen says with a hint of irony. "Many of the conflicts we see today are partly rooted in our lack of knowledge about each other. So it is extremely important to know more about each other and thereby come to see things in a bigger perspective. That's why *In Languages We Live* closes with a view of the Earth from space."

As *In Languages We Live* makes clear, languages aren't just vanishing, new ones are also emerging, such as Nairobi's new Sheng patois. How much cause for concern is there?

"People stop speaking their language, because they have no choice! If they see that their children don't stand a chance because they don't speak the main language in the area where they live, they have no motivation for passing their mother tongue on to the next generation. The language issue is

part of a bigger picture, and we should not just be concerned about language without being concerned about the fact that people are poor and have no political rights. It's all connected," Byrge Sørensen says.

"We can't just tell ethnic minorities to preserve their language according to an abstract notion that it's important that their perspective on the world exists," she says. "But we can work for the world community – to support minority groups with more resources, allowing them to preserve their culture while they are also part of a bigger context. After all, it's not a problem that people are multilingual. Quite the opposite.

Byrge Sørensen quotes David Crystal, a linguistics professor in *In Languages We Live*: "We need to draw attention to the values of multilingualism as a universal human good, and as a personal opportunity to become culturally mature. A language acts in a sense as a straightjacket, allowing you to think in one way only. Then, unless you have exposure to other languages and therefore other experiences and other visions, that is not a very healthy situation."

*For further information, see reverse section.*

**JANUS BILLESKOV JANSEN** Born 1951. Editor and director. Has edited a large number of internationally acknowledged feature films and documentaries. Has taught editing and narratology at the National Film School of Denmark since 1979. Billeskov Jansen has collaborated with most of the influential Danish directors during the past 30 years, notably a lifelong creative relationship with Academy Award winning director Bille August. Billeskov Jansen won Danish Film Academy Awards in 1984, 1988 and 1995, plus an Honorary Bodil in 2005.

**SIGNE BYRGE SØRENSEN** Born 1970. Producer and director. MA in International Development Studies and Communication Studies, 1998. EURODOC graduate, 2003. Prior to her current position at Final Cut Productions, Sørensen worked as director-producer at SPOR Media, 1998 to 2004.



Signe Byrge Sørensen, Janus Billeskov Jansen. Directors Photo: P. Wessel



WWW.

Three of Denmark's leading documentary filmmakers have teamed up to market their films on DVD. Their longterm dream is to create a label for Danish quality documentaries with international appeal.

# DANISHDOCUMENTARY.COM

BY EVA NOVRUP REDVALL

*Enemies of Happiness, The Monastery, Mechanical Love* – three strong titles from today’s documentary scene in Denmark, and the first three titles from the new, aptly named DVD label: Danish Documentary. Why these titles? The reason is simple: they were all directed by the company’s founders, Eva Mulvad, Pernille Rose Grønkjær and Phie Ambo. As their track records show, these are three talented women filmmakers that are catching the world’s attention. Mulvad’s *Enemies of Happiness* – about the dramatic campaign of Malalai Joia, a woman who ran in the first free parliamentary elections in Afghanistan – won the Silver Wolf Award at IDFA last year and the prestigious Best Documentary prize at this year’s Sundance festival. Grønkjær won the Joris Ivens Award at IDFA 2006 for *The Monastery*, the story of an old man who, over the course of five years, slowly realises his dream of turning his ramshackle manor house into a nunnery. Ambo, who won that award in 2001 for *Family* (with Sami Saif), is competing this year with her new film, *Mechanical Love*.

Danish documentaries have reaped many distinguished awards and attracted substantial international interest in recent years, but until now such award-winning films were not available on the international market. Now, the trio of filmmakers behind Danish Documentary is looking to change all that. Noting international demand, they of course want to put their films out there. “People want to know what’s going on in Denmark: Why we are producing some of the best documentaries in the world?” Mulvad says. “People want to purchase copies of the films and we want to make that possible.”

Naturally, filmmakers want their films to be available, especially when deliberately making films they hope will find a big audience. “We try to make engaging, entertaining films,” Ambo says. “We aren’t social workers out to save the world. We’re filmmakers and we want people to see our films. That’s why we formed Danish Documentary. Just as writers want their books published, we want our films to be available.”

## MASTER CLASSES ON METHODS

Concerning a previous film, *Gambler* (about Nicolas Winding Refn’s struggle to make *Pusher 2* and *Pusher 3*), Ambo was frustrated that people who wanted to see the film couldn’t get a copy.

“*Gambler* was sold via the Danish Film Institute’s website and kortogdok.dk, a site under the Danish Producers Association, which very few people outside Denmark know about. If someone wanted the film, they had to buy the whole box set of *Pusher* films, which included *Gambler* as bonus material, and that’s obviously not a very direct way to get my film,” Ambo says. “So the three of us decided to take charge. We

produce the DVDs ourselves, with English subtitles, and sell them on our website. What’s more, we personally take the DVDs around the world with us. We sell copies at master classes and when we meet our audiences. My new film *Mechanical Love* is more an international than a Danish film, and it wouldn’t make any sense not to have the film available internationally.”

To start out, Danish Documentaries will only be selling the three directors’ own films, although they plan to expand into films with international potential by other Danish directors. As an added feature, lectures and workshops can be booked on

the website. All three partners are experiencing major domestic and international interest in having them out to discuss their films and working methods.

“We do things in a unique way in Denmark,” Grønkjær says. “We know how to tell real-life stories that move an audience. Now, we’re organising our sales and lectures, so anyone who is interested will be able to see our films and learn about our production methods. This won’t make us rich, but it’s gratifying to us that our films are available. Eventually, we would like to create a whole catalogue of Danish quality documentaries for sale at [www.danishdocumentary.com](http://www.danishdocumentary.com).” ■



Pernille Rose Grønkjær won the Joris Ivens Award at IDFA 2006 for *The Monastery* Photo: Frej Pries Schmedes



Eva Mulvad won the Silver Wolf Award at IDFA 2006 and the prestigious Best Documentary prize at Sundance 2007 for *Enemies of Happiness* Photo: Zillah Bowes

# FOCUS ON DISTRIBUTION

**CPH:DOX is running for the fifth time, now with a distinctive industry profile focusing on distribution. For the festival's organisers, it was always essential to take documentaries off the reservation and bring them into the same space as fiction films and other forms of artistic expression, such as visual art and music.**

**FILM talked with festival director Tine Fischer and Tine Moesgaard, who heads the new Industry Platform initiative.**

BY TUE STEEN MÜLLER

CPH:DOX was a success from day one. Not their words, but Tine Fischer and Tine Moesgaard are bursting with the combination of expectation, enthusiasm, energy and professional skills it takes to make this year's CPH:DOX documentary film festival another successful one.

*What's the biggest change from 2006 to 2007? What's new?*

Tine Moesgaard (TM): "We are formalising a platform for the industry, gathering all our offerings for professionals under the banner of the Industry Platform. Since the first festival, we have had a large seminar program and last year we introduced a marketplace. Both are continuing this year – and both are evolving. Our market is digital now and we are creating it in collaboration with a line of international partners. Plus, we're introducing a brand new initiative, Distribution Forum."

## INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION POTENTIAL

Tine Fischer (TF): "We have reached a point where the festival has the surplus to evolve naturally in an industry direction. We have consulted our own advisory board and talked with the industry, and their response is clear: There are plenty of opportunities for pitching documentary projects but far too little focus on distribution. We want to do something about that. Because there is a need for it, but also because we fundamentally believe documentary film is alive in ways easily comparable to good art cinema."

TM: "Following an extended selection process, we are inviting 12 projects with international distribution potential to come to Copenhagen and be introduced to a string of key players in the international market.

Each of these projects will be ready for market during 2008, so our Distribution Forum is a sneak preview at what's coming up.

As we are mainly sponsored by Nordic funds – from the DFI, Nordisk Film & TV Fond and the Nordic Culture Fund – our ambition this year is creating a Distribution Forum on Nordic soil, extending what Filmkontakt Nord is doing with its financing forum (Nordisk Forum, *ed.*) That's why 11 of the 12 selected projects are Nordic. Down the road, we would like to present other European, North and South American and Asian projects, as well."

*Who will the projects be presented to?*

TM: "We have invited a throng of distributors, sales agents and representatives of alternative distribution platforms, including NomadsLand, an American online network, and Submarine, a Dutch production company successfully dealing in so-called MiniMovies for financing online, along with alternative distribution and new works, on their online channel [www.submarinechannel.com](http://www.submarinechannel.com).

Moreover, from Eastern Europe we have Doc-Air, which is affiliated with the festival in Jihlava, Czech Republic, alongside more established distributors, such as Magnolia Pictures of the US. Magnolia does a lot of work in multi-platforms and simultaneous release – theatrically, online, on DVD and TV. Also from the US, we have THINKFilm and Picturehouse, a new, exciting distributor emerging out of a partnership between HBO and New Line Cinema. In addition, there is Against Gravity of Poland, which bought films from us last year; Salzgeber of Berlin, which comes with experience from the digital Docuzone project; and Wide Management, a French company with a catalogue focused on art cinema, both fictional and documentary. Most of these companies are relatively unknown to Danish and Nordic producers, and we are looking forward to bringing everyone together.

We also invited the major festivals that are an important early step in films making their way to the

international market. Moreover, we will be visited by the Toronto International Film Festival, Hot Docs, likewise of Toronto, Tribeca of New York, Docpoint of Finland, Yamagata of Japan, the Berlin Film Festival and several others.

Distribution Forum runs over three days, with one day set aside for presenting projects, one for introducing distributors and festivals, and one for one-on-one meetings between participants. As organisers, we aim to create a space for creative dialogue and artistic discussion, and we firmly believe that distributors, too, are content oriented and interested in cinema and art. Accordingly, we deliberately chose to avoid the proverbial, public pitching form in favour of arranging a series of talks, introducing the selected projects, while centring on thematic discussions about distribution."

## DOCUMENTARY FILM AS ART CINEMA

*Immediately prior to CPH:DOX, festivals are held in Jihlava, Lisbon and Leipzig. While your festival is running, Sheffield holds screenings. And right afterward, there is the 'world cup,' IDFA in Amsterdam. What do you want to do that the others can't? Are there enough good documentaries to go around?*

TF: "We have good relations with the other festivals. A few titles we can't get because IDFA is sitting on them, but I think we have a pretty unique profile. We approach documentary film as art cinema."

*And the others don't?*

TF: "Sure they do. But we have New Vision, for instance, a separate international competition for what, for lack of better, could be called art documentaries, where 80% of the films come from another world than traditional documentaries, for instance, from the art world.

At CPH:DOX, we always considered it essential not to regard documentary film as an isolated genre. We want to bring documentaries into the same space as fiction films and other artistic platforms. We have a visual art platform, a music platform (specifically,

**"We reached a point where the festival had the surplus to evolve naturally in an industry direction. We consulted our own advisory board and talked with the industry, and their response was clear: there are plenty of opportunities for pitching documentary projects but far too little focus on distribution."**



music meeting visuals), and this year we are organising a exhibition and seminar in partnership with a major Danish contemporary art institution: Overgaden, Institute for Contemporary Art. Exclusively showing documentary works, the exhibition is a brilliant example that the genre's evolution, both today and historically, to a great extent is found outside the documentary mainstream."

*Even so, you also have the Amnesty sidebar, where the films' subjects would seem to be what matters?*

TF: "We have always tried to stay away from films of the 'people-in-the-Third-World-sure-have-it-bad'-genre. We wager on works that have a cinematic project. It's very rare to see films of the classic TV-reporting variety in this sidebar. Basically, the films should be carried by some form of cinematic interpretation. This year, we are introducing a new series that we would like to develop in coming years, *FICTIONONFICTION*, exploring the borderland between fiction and documentary - an area we will continue to deal with in our Industry Platform and in honing the festival's profile. We established this sidebar, basically, because we see major documentaries coming out of this more open, undefined field."

#### IDEOLOGICAL PROJECT

*Tell me about your Danish distribution initiatives.*

TF: "Psychologically, it doesn't feel ambitious enough to work for a whole year and then run a festival in 10 days! There should be more to it. So we were glad when the Danish Producers Association contacted us and asked if we wanted to come up with a proposal for an alternative form of documentary film distribution. The outcome was DOX-ON-WHEELS, a nation-wide documentary film distribution project that runs year round. To date, we have distributed 12 films, Danish as well as international. We have also launched UNG:DOX (YOUNG:DOX), an effort to reach eight- and ninth-grade students and high schoolers. Filmmakers are invited to high schools to speak, and we show the films followed by a discussion. Plus, we tell them about CPH:DOX. This year, we invited high-school classes from all over the country to Copenhagen for an all-day event with Danish and international guests. UNG:DOX is an ideological project to prep a generation on documentary film."

*How many people do you reach with DOX-ON-WHEELS and what is your biggest hit to date?*

TM: "The *Monastery* made the Top 20 after it opened, and it's out in just two prints. To date, around 3000 people have seen the film in Danish cinemas."

TF: "To begin with, it was hard to get provincial cinemas to become interested in the programme. Now there is a whole network of cinemas that are all crazy about it. Perhaps they have had a successful event and now they are looking to repeat it. Local cinemas are starting to realise that they have to function as 'houses of culture' or they won't survive."

*You talk about yourselves as curators more than selectors?*

TF & TM: "Not that we think documentaries shouldn't be shown in cinemas, but showing films in museums, say, or a music venue, like Vega in Copenhagen, or other alternative contexts, challenges filmmakers and their works. We believe the screening

context will also have an effect on the kind of works that are produced in the long term. Clearly, in an art institution, there is far greater tolerance for slowness than in the commercial cinema market. Drawing in these new screening options, we believe, will create opportunities for slow art to grow in the long term at the expense of the fast and super narrative" ■

CPH:DOX has seen ticket sales rise from 14,000 in 2003 to more than 24,000 tickets in 2006.

CPH:DOX 2007 runs from 9 to 18 November 2007. The festival presents four international competitions with cash awards: the CPH:DOX Award, the New Vision Award, the Amnesty Award and the Sound & Vision Award.

2CPH:DOX curates a series of thematic sidebars. This year, in the wide-ranging FICTIONONFICTION sidebar, the focus is on films that cross the traditional boundaries between documentary and fiction.

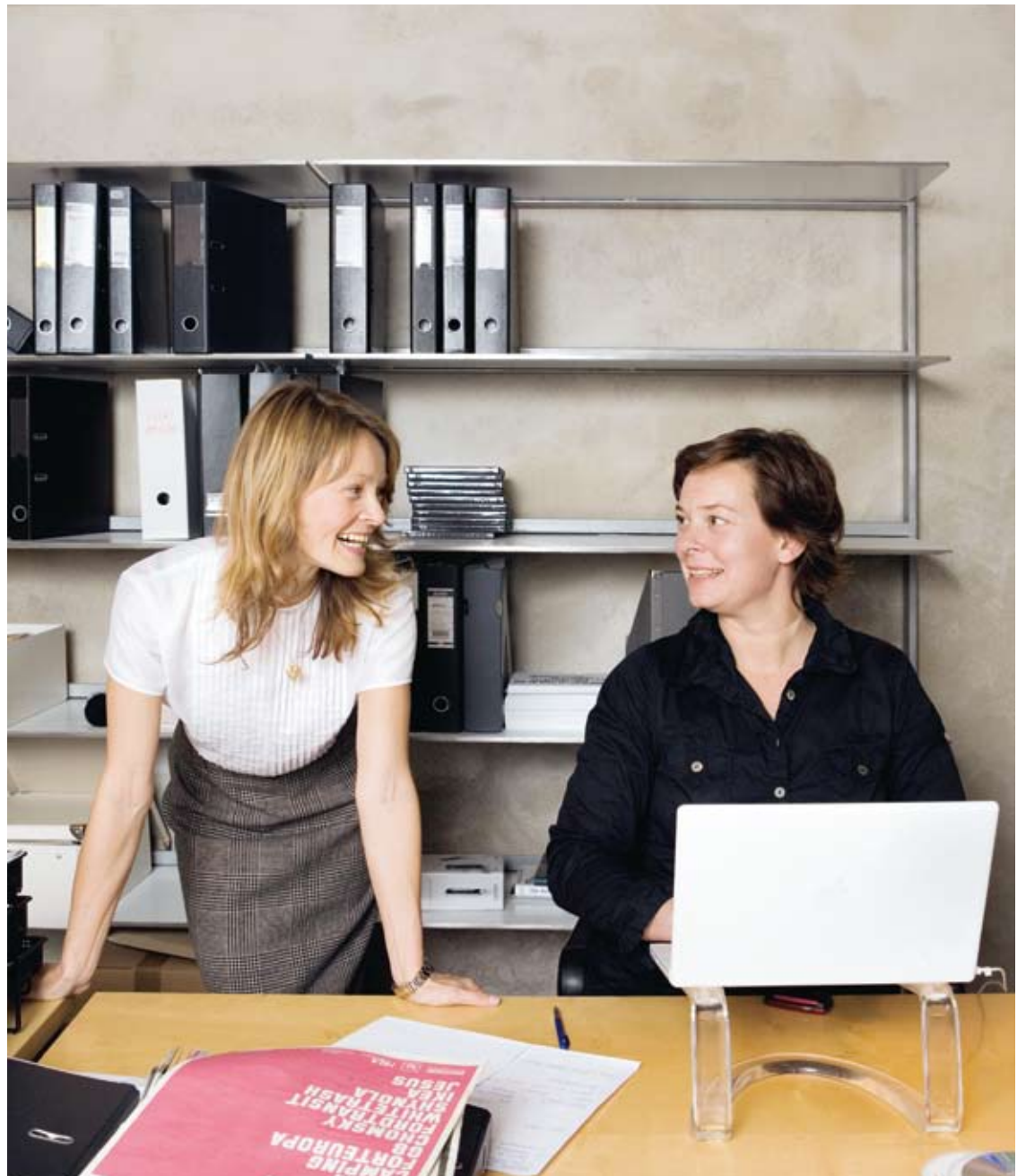
Apart from the film programme, CPH:DOX embraces an art exhibition, plus a number of debates, concerts and VJ/DJ events.

**PROFESSIONAL PLATFORM** The professional platform under CPH:DOX, running 12-16 November, features an extensive seminar programme, a digital film market and a distribution forum for new documentaries. Taking up current aesthetics issues, the

discussions will focus on the grey zone between documentary and fiction, and on the potent relationship between the art scene and the film world. An all-day seminar, under the new distribution forum, on the subject of distribution well into the 21st century, will introduce the current festival landscape, new successful distribution strategies and alternative distribution platforms.

The festival's film market, DOX:MARKET, is a digital on-demand market featuring 18 screening stations and more than 250 titles. DOX:MARKET presents the official festival programme along with a special market selection, while showcasing a line of titles in partnership with the five Nordic film institutes and the East Silver Market.

**DISTRIBUTION FORUM** Under the headlines of Political Thrillers, Arthouse, Local/Global and Music in Motion, the new distribution forum, running 14-16 November, will present 12 new documentary film projects to select sales agents and distributors. The presentations will take place as creative dialogues moderated by high-profile personalities from the documentary film world. Among the filmmakers coming to Copenhagen to present their projects to key people in the international art-house market are Jacob Boeskov, Mikala Krogh, Ulrik Wivel, Göran Olsson, Mika Ronkainen and Jukka Kärkkäinen. Participating distributors, sales agents and festivals include THINKFilm, Picturehouse, Magnolia Pictures, Wide Management, First Hand Films, the Toronto International Film Festival, the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, the Tribeca Film Festival and the International Forum of New Cinema.



Tine Fischer, Tine Moesgaard Photo: P. Wessel



Framegrab

## SMILING IN A WAR ZONE NOMINATED FOR AN EMMY

In October, the internationally award-winning Danish documentary *Smiling in a War Zone* was nominated for an International Emmy.

The film, which has won several

international awards, including the prestigious Women in Leadership Award (sponsored by the American White House Project), has been shown at leading international film festivals and sold to major TV stations worldwide.

*Smiling in a War Zone* is a film from the heart. It speaks to an international audience. Fast-paced and entertaining, the film chronicles the real-life adventure of Simone, an intrepid artist and aviator, who sets out with her boyfriend Magnus on an impossible, intercontinental journey of freedom in single-engine propeller plane. In

true kamikaze fashion, Simone goes up against generals, Arab airport gendarmes and the American armed forces – all to take one young girl in Kabul flying.

### SMILING IN A WAR ZONE

Directed by Simone Aaberg Kærn and Magnus Bejmar. Produced by Helle Ulsteen and Cosmo Film in coproduction with Helena Danielsson/Hepp Film, Lars Säfström/SVT, Peter Nadermann/Network Movie, Kimmo Paananen/Klaffi Film and Film i Skåne. Additional funding was provided by the Danish, Swedish and Finnish Film Institutes – DFI, SFI, SES – Nordisk Film og TV-Fond and AVEK. The film was produced in joint by DR, YLE, ZDF/ARTE, BBC and CBC. Read more at [www.cosmo.dk](http://www.cosmo.dk)



Framegrab

## CHRISTOPHER WANTS TO FLY COMPETING IN KIDS & DOCS

*Christopher Wants to Fly* is a film about dreams and longing. About a boy who lives in a different world than his friends.

Christopher is eleven years old and obsessed with airplanes. He lives only five minutes from Copenhagen Airport where he spends most of his time, spotting airplanes.

Christopher can't really find a friend who understands him. Fortunately, his

cousin, Sofie, comes with him to the airport, and finally Christopher can use his knowledge to impress somebody who, kind of, listens. *For further information, see reverse section.*

### MARIA BÄCK

After graduation from the European Film College in 2002, Maria Bäck has freelanced on various productions in Sweden and Denmark. Director: *Även om pappa inte ser dig* (2006). *Christopher Wants to Fly* (2007).

## ONE DAY IN IDFA STUDENT COMPETITION

Ditte Haarløv Johnsen's documentary film *One Day* is selected for IDFA's Student Competition. Produced at the National Film School of Denmark, the film tells the story of a 36 year-old West African woman who lives in the suburbs of Copenhagen and works as a prostitute, sending money home to her family. *For further information, see reverse section.*



Framegrab

## DFI KEY CONTACTS IDFA 2007



**ANDERS GEERTSEN**  
Head of Department  
Distribution & Marketing

[andersg@dfi.dk](mailto:andersg@dfi.dk)  
Cell: +45 2097 3400



**CLAUS LAEGAARD**  
Head of Department  
Production & Development

[clausl@dfi.dk](mailto:clausl@dfi.dk)  
Cell: +45 4032 6212



**MALENE FLINDT PEDERSEN**  
Head of Unit  
Shorts & Documentaries /  
Production & Development

[malenefp@dfi.dk](mailto:malenefp@dfi.dk)  
Cell: +45 2744 2567



**PERNILLE MUNK SKYDSGAARD**  
Head of Unit  
Distribution & Marketing

[pernillem@dfi.dk](mailto:pernillem@dfi.dk)  
Cell: +45 4114 5390



**ANNE MARIE KÜRSTEIN**  
Festival Manager  
Shorts & Documentaries /  
Distribution & Marketing

[kurstein@dfi.dk](mailto:kurstein@dfi.dk)  
Cell: +45 4041 4697

**VISIT US AT  
DFI.DK/ENGLISH**

**DANISH FILM INSTITUTE CONTRATULATES**

**IDFA**

**ON THEIR 20TH ANNIVERSARY**

**AND PROUDLY PRESENTS**

**GHOSTS**

**OF CITÉ SOLEIL**

**& THE MONASTERY**

**SELECTED FOR THE AUDIENCE TOP 20**