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Fien Troch's
HAPPINESS

S.O.I.L. MAN
Geert Van Goethem

REALITY Playground

Very **Veerly**

Veerle Baetens: ready for her big screen breakthrough

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sales: e.wirix@tvskyline.com



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[CREDITS]

Editor:

Christian De Schutter

Sub Editor:

John Adair

Contributors:

Nathalie Capiou

Kris Dewitte

Melanie Goodfellow

Ines Van de Velde

Henry Womersley

Simon Wullens

Design:

www.graph-x.be

Concept:

Hype Park Publishing

Advertising:

flandersimage@vaf.be

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Flanders Image

Handelskaai 18 B3

B-1000 Brussels

Belgium/EU

T: +32-2 226 0630

F: +32-2 219 1936

E: flandersimage@vaf.be

www.flanders-image.com

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Veerle Baetens (p6)
cover photo: Kris De Witte

presents one of the first stills of the prestigious VTM television series **King of the World** (10); unveils director **Fien Troch's** all-star feature film debut, **Someone Else's Happiness** (12); meets up with an animated **Geert Van Goethem** (16); takes a look at **Beast Animation's** new **stop-motion studio** (19); meets up with the **Workspace Unlimited** crew (20); talks with Flemish helmer **Stijn Coninx** about his first made-for-TV epic drama series, **The Kavijaks** (24); gets familiar with young documentary-maker **Fabio Wuytack** (28); analyses how accommodating **Ghent** is towards film crews (30); shows some recent audiovisual **highlights** (32); and looks at how Flemish singer-composer **Daan** is spreading his wings (34). Everything you always wanted to know, but were never able to find out.

Flemish cinema is omni-present at the key international film festivals around the world this summer and fall: Nicolas Provost's **Exoticore** competes in Locarno, Frank Van Mechelen's **The Intruder** competes in Montreal and screens in Munich, Venice presents Marcell Ivanyi's **Ballada**, Fien Troch's **Someone Else's Happiness** premières in Toronto and San Sebastian, Thessaloniki screens Wim Vandekeybus' **Blush**, Hans Herbots' **The Long Weekend** and Dominique Deruddere's **The Wedding Party** screen at the Flanders International Film Festival in Ghent, etc. This while a growing number of titles find their way to commercial theatres abroad.

This third issue of **Flanders iMAGe** looks at young, **emerging documentary talents** (p4); talks with upcoming actress and this magazine's cover girl **Veerle Baetens** (6);



IN EVERY ISSUE, FLANDERSIMAGE LOOKS AT EMERGING FILMMAKING TALENT FROM FLANDERS. THIS TIME, WE PUT THE SPOTLIGHT ON FOUR YOUNG DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKERS WHO WERE SELECTED FOR THE FLEMISH AUDIOVISUAL FUND'S (VAF) INAUGURAL WORKSHOP SESSION. UNDER GUIDANCE FROM AWARD-WINNING

KRISTOF BILSEN

- Born in: **1979**
- Film studies: **Narafi Brussels**
- Graduated in: **2002**
- Graduation film: ***Van de brug af, a short documentary on the daily life of a Flemish theatre company***
- Workshop film: ***Three Women (Drie vrouwen)***



Who or what made you decide to become a documentary filmmaker?
Documentary gives me the opportunity to watch and listen to people. It's a chance to discover daily life in a new, focused way. Thanks to the workshop, I was able to make my first documentary.

What's your workshop film about?

Three women imprisoned in the Ghent city jail tell their stories. But far more than just being confronted with detainees, we get to know these women as true human beings who have the time to hook up with others. It's straight to the point.

What's your next project?

At the moment, I'm focusing on reactions to this first film. My next project will probably come about by accident. I have a few ideas: maybe something about children at school and their social lives. Anyway, this is still work in progress.

What's the wildest dream you hope to be able to achieve one day?
If I tell you, the dream probably won't come true!

Where do you want to be in 10 years' time?

I hope I can continue working as I please, without having to fit into one 'school' or way of working. I hope that I can maintain this interest and curiosity, to make the films I want to, whether they be fact or fiction.

What would you like to be remembered for at the end of your career?
Do I want to be remembered? That's the real question! Whatever the answer, I think I'd like to keep the conversation going after I retire...

Is there anything you'd like to change about yourself?

There are a lot of things I would like to change. I will only mention this one though: I think there is too much to decide. That is, if there were fewer decisions to make, there would be more opportunities...



↑ *Three Women*

TONE DE COOMAN

- Born in: **1979**
- Film studies: **none, I studied philosophy and journalism (Ghent University)**
- Graduated in: **2002**
- Graduation film: **none, see above**
- Most recent work: ***I Don't Travel, I Dream (Je ne voyage pas, je rêve)***



Who or what made you decide to become a documentary filmmaker?
I always had a keen interest in stories, images and people. Not only that, but I was also interested in film, theatre and journalism. I was taken aback by the enthralling stories of the residents of the institute where we were filming. Some people who have few opportunities deserve to be heard. A documentary offers the chance of portraying these kinds of non-fictional events.

What's your workshop film about?

It's about the vulnerability and the strength of people I met in a psychiatric institution, who were preoccupied with rehearsing a stage performance. The documentary takes a closer look at the emotions of these people, with whom we shared a special relationship. We show their desires, their dreams and their ways of dealing with these emotions within the institute.

What's your next project?

I am working on several ideas. I'm also interested in exploring the border between fiction and non-fiction. At the moment I am organising smaller projects and events with vzw Marcel asbl, a collective of socially engaged artists. I would like to elaborate on this initiative in the future in order to start a production company. Apart from that, I want to travel and explore new horizons.

What is the wildest dream you hope to be able to achieve one day?
Well, I do not travel, I dream. I connect my dreams to reality. One should be happy if each small step takes you closer to the realisation of a dream.

Where do you want to be in 10 years' time?

I hope to have found an experienced producer by then to support my projects and who has faith in what I do. I have not made my mind up whether I want to make creative documentaries or not. It would do me no harm to have some interaction with other disciplines.

What would you like to be remembered for at the end of your career?
That's a tough one. That I should be remembered as the man I am today. Eventually we all leave precious things behind.

Is there anything you'd like to change about yourself?

I would like to change my introverted nature and find an easier way of expressing difficult emotions. The challenge is to figure out whether I ever will be able to formulate clear answers to some of the previous questions, but I doubt that.



↑ *I Don't Travel, I Dream*

DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER ROGER BEECKMANS, THEY DELIVERED THREE EXTRAORDINARY DOCUMENTARIES THAT PREMIERED AT THIS YEAR'S EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL IN BRUSSELS. WATCH THIS SPACE, BECAUSE IN SUBSEQUENT ISSUES WE WILL BE LOOKING AT YOUNG EXPERIMENTAL MEDIA AND TELEVISION TALENTS.

MICHA PLETINCKX

- Born in: 1978
- Film Studies: Kask, Ghent
- Graduated in: 2002
- Graduation film: *Twilight (Schemering)*
- Most recent work: *I Don't Travel, I Dream (Je ne voyage pas, je rêve)*



Who or what made you decide to become a documentary filmmaker?

Actually I'm not really a typical documentary filmmaker – I do fiction as well!

What's your workshop film about?

A group of psychiatric patients who create a stage performance about their lives in an institute.

What's your next project?

Alice, a short fiction film about a little girl who's lost in her own imaginary world. The film will combine both live-action footage and stop-motion animation.

What is the wildest dream you hope to be able to achieve one day?

To be blessed with the same energy as filmmakers like Kim Ki-duk and Takashi Miike and to be able to make more than two films a year.

Where do you want to be in 10 years' time?

Don't know, but I'd very much like to be able to continue making films.

What would you like to be remembered for at the end of your career?

I would like to be remembered for some of my good films, hopefully. And maybe the magic trick with the two gold coins!

Is there anything you like to change about yourself?

I'd like to develop more of a producer's brain, so I can fight my way through all the paperwork with greater ease.



↑ *I Don't Travel, I Dream*



↑ *I Don't Travel, I Dream*

STEVEN SCHOUKENS

- Born in: 1976
- Film studies: Narafi (technical training) and Sint-Lukas (artistic direction)
- Graduated in: 2002
- Graduation film: *La vie privée des autres*, a documentary about a hairdresser for homeless people
- Most recent work: *One-way Ticket (1 rit-voyage)*



Who or what made you decide to become a documentary filmmaker?

I grew up in an independent, but left-leaning family. At home, we talked a lot about politics, peace, injustice, love, all while sitting at the kitchen table... As a student, my teachers thought that I was too socially engaged. When I was 15, I felt a bit of an outcast – I always felt that I had a kind of vision of society, a vision I wanted to share with everybody else. It's very clichéd, but I guess I wanted to change the world into a better place back then, although I was well aware that it was far beyond my power.

What's your workshop film about?

My film shows an ordinary day on tram 18 in the centre of Brussels. Brussels is a very multicultural city and the trams are very crowded. Number 18 crosses many districts, each of them with different nationalities, religions and languages. The mix of all those people creates an interesting story of faces, glimpses, dialogues and even habits. For some people it's frightening, for me it's a treasure, a treasure of cultural diversity. If I wanted to I could meet the whole world in Brussels.

What's your next project?

I would like to complete my project *La vie privée des autres*. I'm working on a documentary about the human fascination and need for energy. It starts at the beginning of mankind and runs up to the present.

What is the wildest dream you hope to be able to achieve one day?

To make a very beautiful movie. It's also my dream to make films for a long time...

Where do you want to be in 10 years' time?

By then I hope to be more settled in the movie industry. Today I'm still trying to find my way in this industry. Maybe one day I'll be really part of it and earn the respect of others.

What would you like to be remembered for at the end of your career?

That's not really my concern. I want to be remembered as a good person and maybe also as a good filmmaker.

Is there anything you like to change about yourself?

I'm pretty shy. I would like to be more persuasive in order to get people to believe in my projects. Living, working, traveling, experiences... it all changes us and our views permanently...



↑ *One-way Ticket*

Baetens breaks through

AFTER EIGHT MONTHS TREADING THE BOARDS IN THE GUISE OF THE CLASSIC CHILDREN'S CHARACTER *PIPPi LONGSTOCKING*, COVER GIRL VEERLE BAETENS IS ABOUT TO HIT THE BIG SCREEN THIS AUTUMN. SHE TALKED TO MELANIE GOODFELLOW ABOUT HER CAREER THUS FAR.

You may not recognize the actress on the front cover but chances are you will in a few months time. She is 27-year-old Veerle Baetens. She is about to hit big and small screens in two majors roles -- in *The Long Weekend* and *Caught* -- this autumn and has just clinched her first leading role in *Storm Force*, a remake of the popular Flemish television series.

'For me, Veerle Baetens is our next Shooting Star. She made me think of Hilary Swank, sometimes Natalie Portman, sometimes Asia Argento and even Julia Roberts but real stars don't like to be compared to others,' commented cover photographer Kris Dewitte, whose past subjects include Morgan Freeman, Chloe Sevigny and Maggie Cheung.

FLASHDANCE

The fact that Baetens got this far, however, is something of a mini-

In the meantime, her agent secured a part in *Wittekerke*, a sitcom set against the backdrop of a seaside town. Prior to that she also had a supporting role in *Misstakes*, a film adaptation of the popular Belgian comic strip *Kiekeboe* and small parts in the hit thriller *Alias* and television series *Cops* while still a student.

'*Wittekerke* was my first real part. I played this tough Israeli girl who came to Belgium to avenge herself against her sister who left her behind in Israel. It was very soapy and completely unlikely as a plot,' comments Baetens.

After that she went on to play a small part as a teacher in Dirk Belien's *The Kriegel Sisters*, about a set of terrible triplet sisters, as well as a nurse in Douglas Boswell's *Romance* -- a short about the loves and hopes of three elderly ladies as they come to the ends of their lives.

people going for it and somehow I got through to the second round,' Baetens recalls.

'We were asked to prepare the scene in which *Pippi Longstocking* first meets her friends Tommy and Annika. I prepared something accompanied by a piece of Mozart. I think that is why I got it. I'd prepared so well that I was very certain of myself. Also, this time round the audition panel was a bit more responsive.'

She has been resting over the summer after a grueling eight-month run of the show which toured back and forth between Belgium and the Netherlands.

'It was quite tough. I'm recovering right now. We weren't always touring but in general we would do two shows a day, three times a week during term-time and then perform as many as five, six days a week during the school holidays,' she explains.



miracle. On graduating from the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Brussels in 2002, where she specialized in musicals, Baetens nearly abandoned acting altogether because she could not stand auditions.

'I wasn't very certain of myself and I hated auditions. I was going for parts in musicals but their auditions are more demanding than TV or film ones. They're like that scene in *Flashdance* -- it's "okay show what you've got to show" -- and I didn't like it,' recalls the actress.

'I went for a couple of things but I felt like I wasn't good enough and I started thinking about exploring other fields. I'm pretty good at drawing so I started looking into graphic art.'

'I've been friends with Doug since we met on *Kiekeboe*. I really went on the set of *Romance* just to help out but ended up playing the nurse after he couldn't find anyone else to take on the role.'

TOP PRIZE

Her first big break was not in film, however, but rather in musicals when she managed to secure the lead role in a musical adaptation of Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren's children's classic *Pippi Longstocking*.

'It involved doing an audition again. At that point I hadn't done an audition for four years but I mustered all my strength and told myself "You can do it". I thought the role would be fun. There were a lot of

It was worth the hard work -- the production picked up five top prizes at the prestigious Kaaijkamp Musical Awards last June including Best Actress for Baetens.

'On the awards night, the show won the first of its four nominations but the Best Actress had yet to be announced. I tried to tell myself that it was enough that I had been nominated but knew I would be really disappointed if I didn't win while all the other categories had,' she recalls.

She is set to perform in another three-month run this autumn and then plans to retire from the show although she remains passionate about the musical genre.



**'PEOPLE SAY ACTING HAS TO COME FROM THE INSIDE
BUT I THINK THE OUTSIDE IS IMPORTANT TOO..'**

The Long Weekend ↑

HILDE VAN MIEGHEM

'I've always been into musical films – I love the combination of acting, singing and dancing. For me Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* is mind-blowing. The scene featuring the Roxanne number gives me goose bumps. I prefer the modern stuff like *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*,' she says. 'Douglas and I are brainstorming all the time about musicals. We'd love to make a modern one. The only trouble is that there's not much support for the musical in Flanders. It doesn't get any arts funding, which is crazy – just because it's commercial doesn't mean it isn't art,' she says. Prior to performing in *Pippi Longstocking*, Baetens also landed a role in Hilde Van Mieghem's *The Kiss* starring the director's daughter Marie Vinck as teenager who falls for a small-time crook. 'I played the half sister of the bad guy. I was also a prostitute but in the end I

also help Marie's character, Sarah, so I'm not so bad,' she says. 'I love working with Hilde. She always makes me believe in myself – she is capable of pulling things out of me. She's a very strong woman. Sometimes I feel totally comfortable with that and at others she scares me.' Baetens has remained good friends with Vinck. The pair recently ended up auditioning opposite one another for the same part. 'We had to learn the same text and play opposite one another – it was strange but fun. Afterwards, we bumped into Hilde and she asked us if we thought either of us had got it. Marie said, "She's got it." I said, "No, I think Marie's got it." In the end, Hilde said she had to write a script about the two of us – about two friends who are like two sisters.'

THE LONG WEEKEND

Baetens has since worked with Van Mieghem again in the upcoming

social drama *Caught*, which was originally made for television but might get a theatrical release early next year. The harrowing story revolves around convicted paedophile Dennis who on his release from prison, returns to live with his mom and dad in the neighbourhood where he previously offended. Baetens plays Barbara, the sister of one of his victims who is bitterly opposed to his return. When Dennis re-offends, Barbara strangely sees his offence in another light. Almost immediately after *Caught*, the actress transferred over to the set of Hans Herbots' *The Long Weekend* (*Verlengd weekend*) – a farcical tragic-comedy about two embittered ex-factory workers who kidnap their former manager. They want to force him to pay damages to the loyal workers who were unceremoniously sacked when the company went bankrupt. When the manager's mistress

turns-up their plans go awry. Jan Declair and Wouter Hendrickx play the masked kidnappers and Koen De Bouw the manager. Baetens is the mistress.

'I'm Jan's daughter, Koen's mistress and falling in love with the other one,' she says with a laugh. 'Jan's character doesn't know I am the manager's mistress. He's scared I'll work out who he is so he doesn't speak to me.'

'When I read the script, I thought it was quite comic but the finished film is actually quite tragic. Jan's character has been sacked after 40 years of loyal service and is being eaten-up by what has happened to him.'

Asked what it was like to play opposite local heartthrob De Bouw, Baetens responds: 'Actually I was far more excited about working with Jan Declair, he's my real hero. He was in *The Kiss* but I didn't have much to do with him on that set.'

PICTURE PERFECT

The Long Weekend director Herbots had previously worked with Baetens in *Wittekerke* but when producer Jean-Claude Van Rijckeghem originally suggested her as a

candidate for the mistress role, he did not think she would fit the bill.

'We'd worked together for four weeks but it wasn't until he saw me on the test video that he could picture me in the role. He was like, "Oh she looks like that". That's one of the frustrating things about directors and producers – they can't see that people can change. They don't have any fantasy.' 'When I get a role in a movie, the first thing I do is start searching in books and magazines for pictures of people, even actresses, I can compare the character with. Then I start modelling the character. People say acting has to come from the inside but I think the outside is important too... I'm not just talking going from 'fat' to 'skinny', but you can change your hair, age, voice, the way you stand. I love playing with appearances, trying out different hairstyles, makeup, dressing up as a starlet from the 1940s or 1950s, for example.' Flanders Image can attest to her ability for transformation. The day she comes in for her interview, she's dressed in a jeans and a t-shirt. Her hair is pulled back and face devoid of make-up. She would go unnoticed on the street. The day she

turns up for her photo shoot with Dewitte, she looks like a full-blown vamp.

STORM FORCE

Looking to the future, Baetens has just secured her first lead role in *Storm Force*, the feature-length adaptation of a popular Flemish television series about a search and rescue helicopter crew, being developed by production powerhouse MMG which also made hits such as *The Alzheimer Case*.

But as her cinema career takes off she doesn't plan to abandon musicals entirely. 'I love the fact, I can do both. You get a lot of people who do theatre and television but not so many who do theatre and cinema. They require such different techniques. Anyone can act in movies as long as they look good on camera. Theatre requires a bit of technique and training. Projecting your voice to 2,000 people requires technique – you need to make everything bigger.'

Whichever genre Baetens works in, one thing is for sure: we'll be hearing a lot more about her in the future.



The Long Weekend ↑



Caught ↑

VEERLE BAETENS

VEERLE BAETENS' (1978) FILM CREDITS INCLUDE:

- 2006 - *Storm Force* (Windkracht 10)
- 2006 - *Caught* (Gevangen)
- 2005 - *Long Weekend* (Verlengd Weekend)
- 2004 - *Romance* (short)
- 2004 - *The Kiss* (De Kus)
- 2004 - *The Kriegel Sisters* (De Zusjes Kriegel)
- 2002 - *Up* (short)
- 2001 - *Alias* (De alias)
- 1999 - *Mistakes* (Misstoestanden)



Photo: Sofie Silbermann

KING OF THE

Director Guido Henderickx (*Burnt Bridge; S; Mother, What's the Meaning of Life?*) was in Cuba this summer to shoot *King of the World* (*Koning van de wereld*).

Based on an original screenplay by Marc Didden (*Brussels By Night, A Man Needs A Plan*), and described as an 'emotional rollercoaster', *King of the World* is a prestigious five-part

television series about a young boxer who, in the last days of WW2, fights his way to become the European champion. Torn between his love for two



THE WORLD

women, he finds it hard to deal with success.

Starring Kevin Janssens, the series' impressive cast also includes Jan Decleir, Koen De Bouw,

Josse De Pauw, Carry Goossens, Katelijne Damen, Ellen Schoenaerts, Frank Vercruyssen and Natali Broods. Production company is Roses Are Blue for broadcaster VTM, with

support from the Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF).



A VILLAGE AFFAIR

FIEN TROCH'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WHODUNIT *SOMEONE ELSE'S HAPPINESS*, WHICH IS TO GET ITS WORLD PREMIÈRE IN TORONTO MIGHT BE THE DIRECTOR'S DEBUT FEATURE BUT THAT HASN'T STOPPED HER FROM RECRUITING A STELLAR CAST. MELANIE GOODFELLOW CAUGHT UP WITH THE DIRECTOR MID-WAY THROUGH THE SHOOT THIS SPRING.

Photo: Kris Dewitte

The day director Fien Troch comes into offices of Flanders Image she is still in the throes of shooting her debut feature *Someone Else's Happiness* (*Een ander zijn geluk*). It is the middle of March and unseasonable snowfalls across Belgium have set the shooting schedule back by a week. 'It never snows in Belgium, only when I shoot,' she says with a note of anguish. 'We had to stop – suddenly the landscape was totally white. There was no continuity. At first we tried to clear the snow – we cleared a whole street and the surrounding gardens but then it started snowing again – we gave up.' Shot on location south of Brussels, *Someone Else's Happiness* revolves around a small village sent into a tailspin after the hit-and-run killing

of a local child. As suspicions mount over the possible culprit, hidden tensions and emotions come to the surface in the tight-knit community. 'The search for the killer is an excuse to tell the story of the whole village,' explains Troch. 'Everybody is a bit suspicious. It's more of a psychological tale than a detective story. I wanted to tell a story exploring how people connected with each other – I was looking for an event or something that would act as catalyst for this.'

INA GEERTS

'I grew up in a village but the story doesn't come from there. It's pure fantasy – I've always been intrigued by how people are connected with one another and interact with one another. I hope spectators will ask

themselves who did it but the more important thing is that they get to know the characters involved and their problems.'

This debut feature is a low budget affair of some € 1.2 million but this has not prevented Troch from recruiting some of the biggest names in Flemish cinema for the cast including Josse de Pauw (*Everybody Famous!*), Johan Leysen (*Miss Montigny*), Natali Broods (*Anyway the Wind Blows*). Even Jan Decleir (*The Alzheimer Case*) has a small part.

'The budget isn't huge. The only way we could make this film is because those involved are working for less money and some have deferred their fees,' explains producer Antonino Lombardo of Brussels-based Prime Time. The female lead Ina Geerts,

however, is a theatre actress who is relatively unknown in cinema. She plays Chris, an unstable, neurotic woman, on the verge of a nervous breakdown, who discovers the child's body. She finds herself at the heart of the investigation.

'Part of her attraction for me was that she is not well-known in cinema – I like the fact the audience won't associate her with other roles,' says Troch. 'She's very natural. She's beautiful but not in a classic sense. She's got a very distinctive face.'

COMING HOME

The 28-years-old director admits to being slightly intimidated by the combined clout of the ensemble cast in the early days of the shoot.

'I was scared at the beginning because many of them were professionals with a lot of experience. I was worried they would say: "But

story is quite traumatic there is an element of humour in the script,' admits Troch. 'In a period in which bad things are happening there are always moment of absurdity and humour is one of the best ways of dealing with unhappiness – I tried to put this into the script.'

NATURAL THING

Troch is the daughter of respected editor Ludo Troch, who has worked with the cream of the Flemish film industry over the years including Dominique Deruddere and Stijn Coninx. Last year, he won the prestigious French César award for his editing of *An Amazing Couple* – part of Lucas Belvaux' award-winning trilogy.

'Because of my father's work film is a very natural thing for me. I didn't think of it as something exotic,' she says. 'I never managed to figure out

recounts Troch. 'In the end, he said he really didn't need to edit it as long as he could come over and watch the work as it progressed and give his opinion. Maybe he thought he was too close or that he would get nervous.'

The film has remained in good hands: Leunen has edited a slew of innovative works by Flanders' hottest upcoming directing talent over the last five years including Felix van Groeningen's *Steve + Sky* and Nicolas Provost's *Exoticore*. Previous works by Troch, who graduated from Sint Lukas Academy in Brussels in 2000, include her graduation short *Maria* and a children's short *Cool Sam en Sweet Suzy*.

NEW SCRIPT

Maria revolves around a young woman's battle to get her children back after she returns home from an

'I GREW UP IN A VILLAGE BUT THE STORY DOESN'T COME FROM THERE. IT'S PURE FANTASY – I'VE ALWAYS BEEN INTRIGUED BY HOW PEOPLE ARE CONNECTED WITH ONE ANOTHER AND INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER. I HOPE SPECTATORS WILL ASK THEMSELVES WHO DID IT BUT THE MORE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THEY GET TO KNOW THE CHARACTERS INVOLVED AND THEIR PROBLEMS' – FIEN TROCH



↑ *Someone Else's Happiness*

you don't do it like that, you do it like this". But this didn't happen. It might seem a bit strange but going onto set was a bit like coming home,' she recalls. 'The actors were respectful - they just said 'Tell us what we need to do because you're the director.' Geerts says that despite the film's tragic subject matter the film is imbued with a strange humour. Others involved suggest it has a David Lynch feel about it.

'I think people get a bit confused about this because although the

if it was because of him that I went into cinema or whether I would have gone into it anyway. It seemed a natural progression, it has been part of my daily life since I was small. But my brother who had the same experience hasn't ended up in cinema.' Interestingly, Troch Sr. has not edited his daughter's film. The task fell instead to her boyfriend Nico Leunen. 'Nico and my father discussed who was going to do it for nearly a year. They were like "You do it", "No, no, I insist you do it",'

unspecified institution. Rejected by her former friends and faced with a seemingly hopeless situation, she keeps up her spirits by fantasizing about a future life with her children. 'I wanted to tell a story about a very strong woman but I was looking for something that made her different,' explains Troch. 'Despite her problems she has a strong spirit and she can handle it.' Although post-production had yet to begin when Troch spoke to Flanders Image, she already had another script on the boil. 'I had to

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wait for two years for the funding to come together for *Someone Else's Happiness*. I was getting really nervous and driving everyone crazy. Everybody told me to get started on a new script,' she says. 'It's

still at a very, very basic stage. It's about a father who is looking for his missing daughter. It might sound a bit like *The Intruder* but it's not at all the same,' she adds, referring to the recent Flemish hit starring Koen De

Bouw. 'I'll dust it off and see if I still like it.' *Someone Else's Happiness* is to receive its world premiere at this year's Toronto International Film Festival. Its European première is set for San Sebastian.

FIEN TROCH

FIEN TROCH'S CREDITS INCLUDE:

2005 - *Someone Else's happiness (Een ander zijn geluk)*

2001 - *Cool Sam & Sweet Suzy*

2000 - *Maria*



↑ Antonino Lombardo



↑ *Someone Else's Happiness*

ANTONINO'S LINE

***Someone Else's Happiness* producer Antonino Lombardo set up his Brussels-based production company Prime Time straight out of film school to produce the films he wanted to direct.**

'I originally wanted to be a director. I started making movies with Super 8s when I was 14-years-old. I did a degree in directing at the Sint Lukas film academy,' he recounts. 'I set-up the production company to raise finance and produce my own films.' Instead, he ended up producing writer/director Marc Didden's 1988 tragicomedy *Sailors Don't Cry* along side another budding producer, Dutch Kees Kasander. 'I ended up producing more than I was directing,' he explains. 'In the end I got just as much satisfaction. It can be an equally creative process.' His production credits to date include Didden's *A Man Needs A Plan*, Dutch Marleen Gorris' Oscar-winning *Antonia's Line*, the *Blinker*

hit children's films and the popular kids adventure *The Dark Diamond*. 'For me there are two key sorts of film project,' he says. 'There are projects like *Blinker* and *The Dark Diamond* where you buy the rights to the book, pick the director and have the final say on the final cut and then there are the auteur projects where you have to take a slightly more hands-off approach. 'Of course, Fien and I discuss the film's progress and I give her my opinion. For example, we recently had a discussion over a couple of scenes that I think are too long. But at the end of the day the final cut belongs to her.' Lombardo says he is constantly on the look out for new talent. Alongside producing, he runs a production course at Sint Lukas which, he says, enables him to scope out new talent. 'For me new auteurs are the life-blood of the film industry. I'm always on the lookout for directors with vision. I don't believe in Flemish cinema, Walloon cinema or German

cinema – I believe in directors who create their own universe and then tell it in a way that appeals to people all over the world, like Marleen Gorris.' Financing the films of relative unknowns such as Troch is not getting any easier, he says. Thus far, he has managed to stay afloat by alternating auteur projects such as *Someone Else's Happiness* with more commercial ventures such as *Blinker* and *The Dark Diamond*. Finance for *Someone's Else's Happiness* came from the Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF), the tax shelter and broadcasters Prime (the former Canal + Vlaanderen) and VRT. Netherlands co-producers Motel Films also brought on board Netherlands Film Fund money. Upcoming projects on Lombardo's slate include an adaptation of late Flemish playwright Michel de Ghelderode's farcical work *Escorial* and a television series based on a novel by the best-selling Flemish author Tom Lanoye. **MG**

S.O.I.L SURVIVOR

AFTER A BRIEF HIATUS, S.O.I.L PRODUCER GEERT VAN GOETHEM IS BACK ON THE ANIMATION SCENE WITH A SLEW OF PROJECTS – SO MANY IN FACT IT'S A WONDER HE KEEPS UP WITH THEM.



↑ *Lost Cargo*

Animation producer Geert Van Goethem of Brussels production house S.O.I.L turns up with a stack of project treatments and DVDs under his arm and immediately starts mustering people for an impromptu screening of rough-cuts of two upcoming releases. The first, Luxembourg director Daniel Wiroth's *Elegant*, is an endearing fantasy starring French actor Denis Lavant (*Les amants du Pont Neuf*) as a man who forms a close relationship with a collection of magical gloves he finds in an apartment he inherits. It cleverly combines stop motion animation with live action. S.O.I.L

co-produced the film with Luxembourg company Samsa Film putting up just under 50 percent of the € 500,000 budget.

'I met Daniel at the Espinho Animation Festival in Portugal and he contacted me a couple of years ago about this crazy idea that he had about a man who is in contact with a community of living gloves,' recounts Van Goethem. The second title is an amusing short called *Lost Cargo* about an intergalactic trucker whose spaceship malfunctions, which S.O.I.L co-produced with Netherlands animation company illuster. This too, is shot using

the stop-motion technique.

ANIMATION POTENTIAL

Van Goethem first got into animation in the mid 1990s. S.O.I.L (*Sight Of an Ignored Landscape*) was already in existence by then but its remit was wider. It had been originally set up as a platform to support adventurous projects across the arts. 'We did a couple of animation shorts,' recounts Van Goethem. 'I immediately liked it as a medium. I see animation as a sort of crossroads where visual art, film art, cinema, music, even dance all meet together. I discovered there was an enormous pool of talent in

Belgium but also that there was a lack of production structures. There were hardly any animation producers. It was impossible to ignore this potential.' In between producing a number of critically acclaimed but financially disastrous contemporary open-air operas, S.O.I.L continued to work on animated shorts, getting its first big break in 2000 with Benoît Ferroument's *Bzz*. The amusing tale of man with a thing about bees, the 10-minute work screened at Cannes and was immensely popular on the festival circuit where it picked up a slew of prizes. 'That sort of opened things up for us,' says Van Goethem.

SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Around about that time Viviane Vanfleteren of Vivi Film contacted Van Goethem. She had gotten involved in the financial side of French Sylvain Chomet's *The Triplets of Belleville* and was looking for someone to help her out on the executive side. 'She didn't know the animation world that well at that time and contacted me. I agreed to get involved on the proviso the Belgian animators could do their work in Belgium. I felt, and still feel, strongly that it's the only way we will build an infrastructure here.' He put together a small team for a standalone 2D sequence at the beginning of the film and contacted Eric Goossens of *Walking the Dog* for some of the 3D work. It was a hugely successful collaboration – which helped draw attention to the potential of Belgium's animation sector – but all three companies went their separate ways for a time immediately after *Triplets*. 'It was a bit of a strange period - I even thought of stopping,' admits Van Goethem. 'I think everybody needed space to work out "Who am I? What do I want to do?" We needed to find our independence. I'm convinced we'll work together again in the future. The challenge is to work out



a way of retaining our individuality but stimulating collaboration at the same time.'

PAIN-STAKING

Two years down the line, Van Goethem has dispelled his post-*Triplets* doubts and is working on a slew of projects, many of them using the stop-motion animation. He got his first taste of this pain-staking technique - in which a sequence is built up of single frames of an object moved a little bit in each take - with French director Virginie Bourdin's 2002 *La Femme Papillon*, which he co-produced with Arnaud Demuynck of Les Films du Nord.

'It was very difficult but a very beautiful design. Arnaud had never done stop-motion but I knew a lot of the new generation of stop-motion animators coming out of the schools. It was a bit like *Triplets* as an operation - I found a studio and created a team of local talent including Efim Perlis and Steven de Beul,' he recounts.

Van Goethem continues to work with both Flemish animators. Perlis, for example, co-directed *Lost Cargo* alongside compatriot Pieter Engels. Aside from his financial participation, the producer also brought in Pieter Van Houte, who was Chomet's assistant on *Triplets*, for the special effects. 'Because the shoot was a lot more complicated than expected, I also called on Steven,' he adds.

FANTASTICAL INSECTS

He and de Beul, who now operates under the Beast Animations banner, are

also collaborating on *Elegant* and the ongoing *The Cid* (see page 19). The latter is a quirky adaptation of 17th Century playwright Pierre Corneille's classic play inspired by the legendary Spanish hero Rodriguez Diaz. The characters are represented by a cast of fantastical insects. Written and directed by French director Emanuelle Gorgiard, it is a co-production with French Vivement Lundi based in the Breton city of Rennes. S.O.I.L raised just under 50 percent of the € 600,000 budget. '*La Femme Papillon* got a lot of attention and that's how Vivement Lundi! heard about us,' says Van Goethem. 'At first we weren't sure about it because we were very busy with *Lost Cargo*. They kept calling and I thought I had found a way of putting them off by saying they would have to shoot part of the production in Belgium but instead they just said "That's okay, we'll take the train". 'The production spent three months from June at Beast Animations' studio in Brussels and has now re-located to Rennes for another three-and-a-half months.

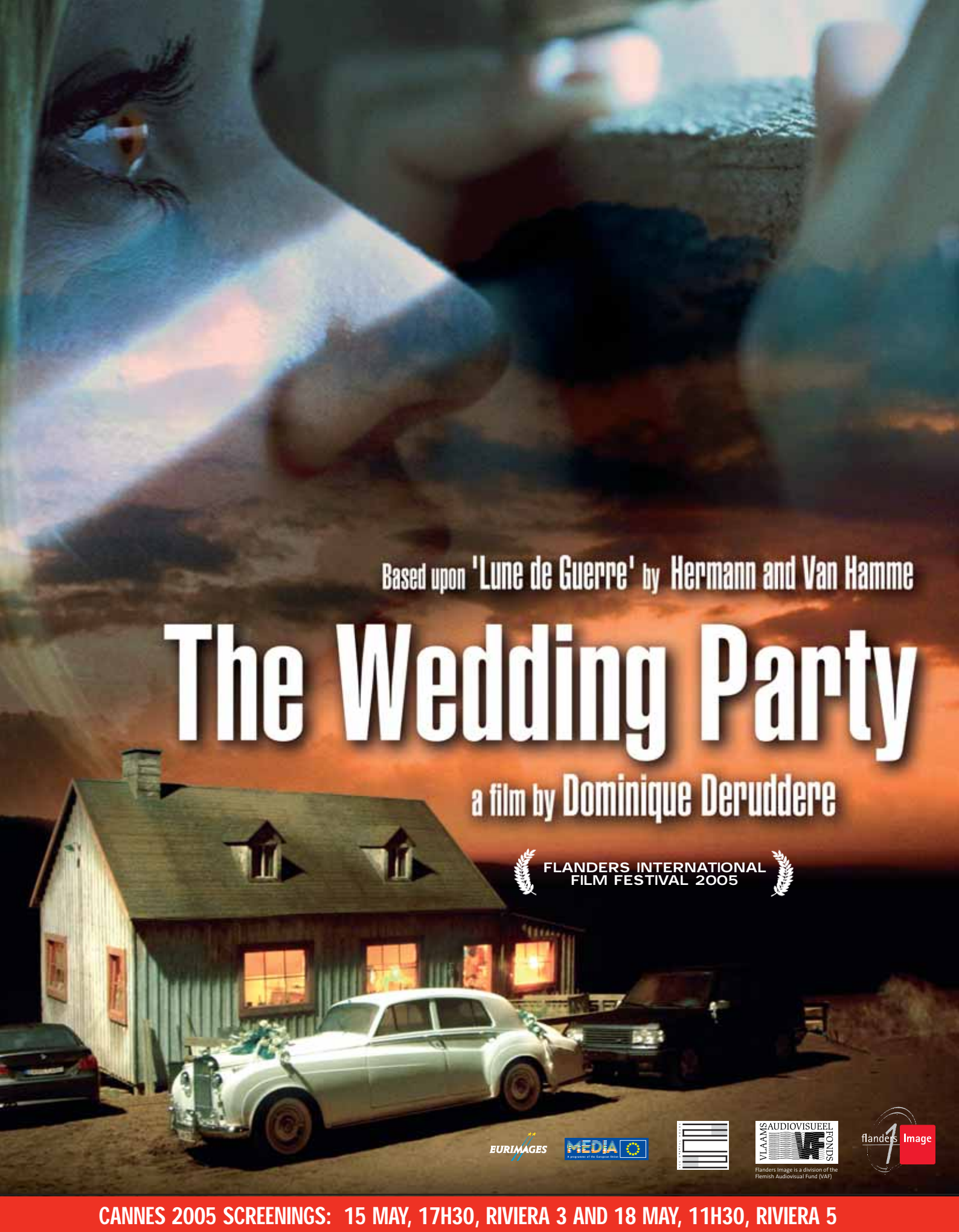
Aside from the stop-motion animation projects, Van Goethem is also involved in French director Jerome Boulbes' 3D, CGI futuristic fantasy *Nuages*, alongside French Lardux Films and Belgian La Parti Production. 'Half of the film will be done in Brussels. The idea is that Pieter Van Houte will set up a team of some 18 to 20 people here,' he says.

Beyond this, he is also working on an ambitious project in which 15 young animators will direct a series of shorts inspired by contemporary poetry. 'It's based on an idea from the Netherlands. The point is not to illustrate the poem but rather to feel the poem, interpret it in a personal way,' he explains. 'We're going to have to help the animators pull the dialogue out of themselves. These will be their first films.'

Melanie Goodfellow



↑ Geert Van Goethem



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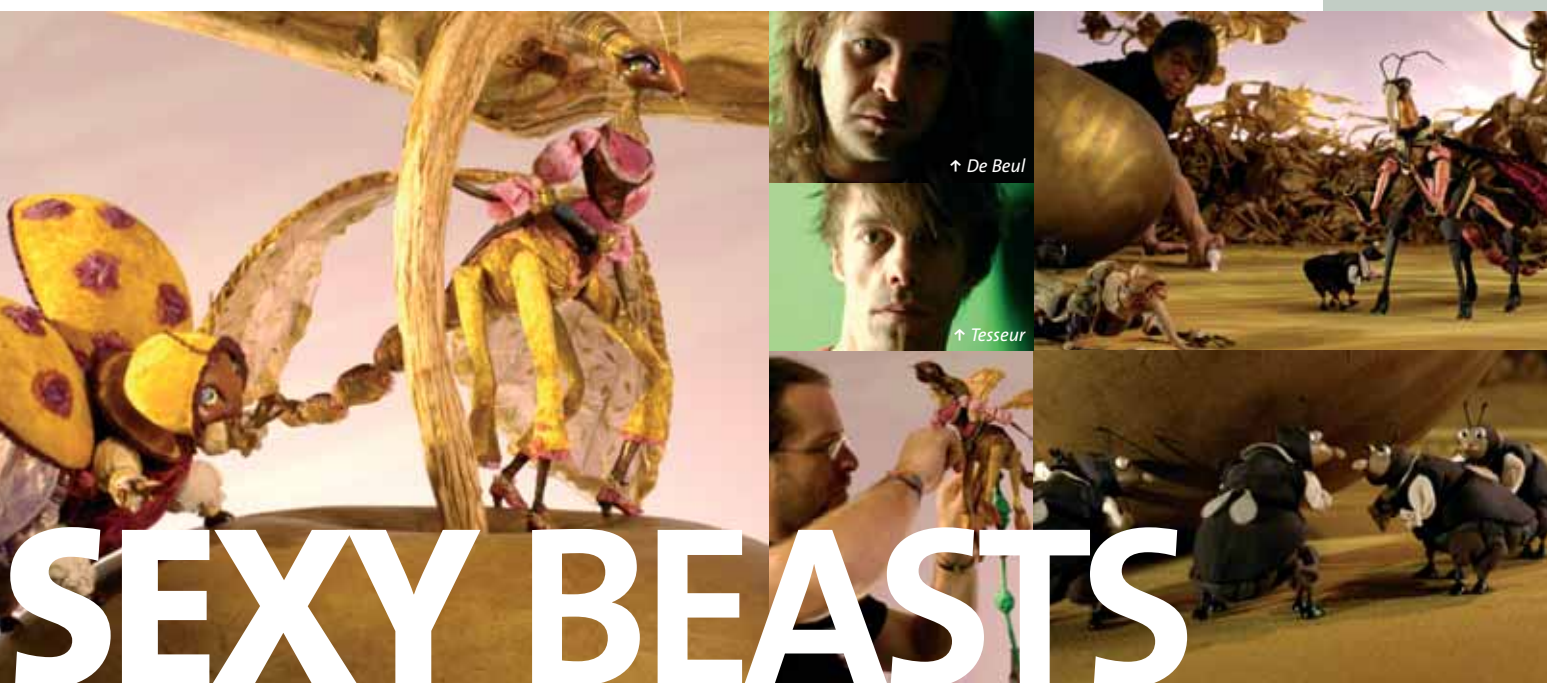
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SEXY BEASTS

AT THE STUDIOS OF BEAST ANIMATION IN BRUSSELS, ANIMATOR STEVEN DE BEUL IS CREATING A SEQUENCE FOR FRENCH DIRECTOR EMANUELLE GORGIARD'S *THE CID*, A QUIRKY RETELLING OF THE MEDIEVAL SPANISH EPIC STARRING A CAST OF FANTASTICAL INSECTS, USING THE STOP-MOTION ANIMATION TECHNIQUE.

De Beul is working on a scene featuring the female protagonist Jimena. She is represented, like all the characters, by a model of a fantastical insect. Beautifully ornate, Jimena boasts flashing dark eyes and long undulating wings that she moves around like a cloak. Ben Tesseur painstakingly moves her wings by almost imperceptible amounts in between shots to gradually create the movement.

Stop-motion is one of the oldest techniques in animation, past classics include *The Magic Roundabout* and *Chicken Run*, but in a world of CGI technology does such artisan-style animation really have a place?

De Beul and his partner at Beast Animation, Tesseur, certainly think so. 'Stop-motion is magic. We call it sexy-motion,' says Tesseur.

'There's something about stop-motion - a feeling, an atmosphere, call it

what you will - that can't be created through CGI.'

'I like to work with material. I want to touch things. I want to move them but physically not just on a computer,' says de Beul.

The pair studied together at respected RITS arts and media academy in Brussels, going their separate ways on graduation.

Their paths crossed again on Virginie Bourdin's *La Femme Papillon*. After collaborating on a number of other stop-motion projects including the hit French series *Panique au Village* and *Lost Cargo*, a humorous short set on a spaceship, they came to the conclusion that there was enough stop-motion work about to set up a studio.

They launched Beast Animation in 2004. As well as offering their own creative services, they also operate a well-equipped stop-motion studio - a

rarity in the sector. De Beul focuses on animation, Tesseur also builds sets and sorts out studio logistics.

Their first project, under the Beast Animation banner, was Daniel Wiroth's *Elegant* - about a man who befriends a set of living gloves. Bringing to life, this cast of real gloves, featuring an elegant red silk arm-length glove as the leading lady Gilda, was no easy task.

'We had some gloves especially made and modified other ordinary gloves ourselves,' says Tesseur. 'Each glove had a different character and we had to find ways of conveying this. The live action parts were shot during the day we would work overnight.'

After *The Cid*, other possible projects include a feature version of *Panique au Village* and *JC*, a short co-written by Tesseur and De Beul about a social misfit obsessed with building a cathedral. **MG**

playing with reality



MULTI-MEDIA ARTIST THOMAS SOETENS AND ARCHITECT KORA VAN DEN BULCKE HAVE TURNED GAMES TECHNOLOGY ON ITS HEAD BY CREATING A SERIES OF DAZZLING VIRTUAL WORLDS. MELANIE GOODFELLOW SPOKE TO THE PAIR WHO OPERATE UNDER THE WORKSPACE UNLIMITED BANNER.

In 2003 the Society of Arts and Technology (SAT) in the Canadian city of Montreal opened a state-of-the-art, Zeppelin-shaped wing devoted to digital art. Since then, more than 20,000 visitors have taken the high-speed elevator to this upper-floor extension to explore its galleries. There's nothing extraordinary in this but for the fact this futuristic space doesn't, in physical terms at least, really exist: it is a virtual wing accessed through computer workstations in SAT's real-life ground floor lobby. It is the creation of Flemish multi-media artist Thomas Soetens and architect Kora Van den Bulcke, founders of Workspace Unlimited, an itinerant collective of artists and computer programmers, which create virtual worlds with game technology. The specific aim of the SAT project, says Soetens, was to explore the potential of 'hybrid and augmented reality' and to redefine and transform

the way people experience digital art and digital space. On first accessing *Extension*, visitors enter an exact replica of SAT's real-life ground floor lobby from where they take the lift up to the added virtual building. 'Because the believability of the ground floor is so convincing visitors pretty much accept that the upper floor is also there and that the extension has a connection with the

project first and then physically visit the SAT look for the elevator up to the Zeppelin part of the building. They start comparing realities. In their minds the virtual part of the building exists,' comments Van den Bulcke.

RADICAL OVERHAUL

Extension is just one node of Workspace Unlimited's expanding Virtual World of Art network – a series

of interconnected projects linked to a specific public space, a city, an arts centre or, even, a temporary event such as a digital art festival.

All the projects of the Virtual World of Art

network were built using the software of a popular computer game called *Quake III* – a multiplayer, first-person shooter game in which the players move through different environments killing their opponents. One of the game's main attractions to its millions of fans is the shareware made available by its Texas-based

'IT'S HARD TO PREDICT THE EVOLUTION OF VIRTUAL WORLDS WITHOUT BEING UTOPIAN, BUT WHAT IS CERTAIN IS THAT VIRTUAL WORLDS, AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FORM OF DIGITAL MEDIA, HAVE A SIMILAR IMPACT ON ART AS PHOTOGRAPHY AND MOVIES HAVE HAD IN THE PAST'

real building. The *Extension* project questions, in many ways, ideas of space and location. For example, the SAT is situated in downtown Montreal but the extension is situated in the old port and looks out on the downtown area in the distance...' 'A lot of people who see the SAT



makers id Software. It enables players to modify just about every aspect of the game from the environment in which the game unfolds to the outcome.

'Quake III comes with a set of free tools (GTK Radiant) supported and used by a large community. Fans can develop their own game modifications,' explains Thomas Soetens. In what must be one of the game's most radical overhauls to date, Soetens and Van den Bulcke turned the players into visitors of interconnected game-engine-based art projects accessible from different parts in the world.

ARTISTICALLY CHALLENGING

In *Extension*, visitors can walk through a series of portals giving them access

to digital art installations – all of which have also been created using games software. 'Games generally revolve around a mission. The players are directed toward a set outcome,' says Van den Bulcke. 'Here we try to engage visitors in clusters of ideas rather than in a linear experience. We confront them and engage them in artistically challenging situations.' Some of the installations, like *Diplomatic Arena*, bear obvious testimony to their computer game roots. Created in the run-up to the Gulf War, it is a three-part piece commenting on the failure of diplomacy to prevent the conflict. In Part One, computer-generated characters controlled by artificial intelligence representing international political figures such as US President

George Bush, his vice-president Dick Cheney and terrorists such as Osama Bin Laden are programmed to use pre-emptive killing as a survival strategy. The characters consider each other as targets. They battle it out with sub-machine guns, somersaulting perpetually in a blood-splattered cube, shooting manically at anyone who gets in their way. A rock guitar riff mixed with CBS news reports blares out over the racket of gunfire. Dialogue boxes pop up at the top of the screen showing the kill tally... 'US Vice-President Dick Cheney shot Osama Bin Laden, US President George Bush...' 'It is inspired by the unavoidable outcome of the war in Iraq,' explains Soetens. 'The concept of pre-emptive strike is put into a cycle of violence similar to what is going on right now.'

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LABYRINTHINE WORK

Other works are more abstract. *Infinite 60 Seconds*, for example, is a soundscape based on a recording of a watch during exactly 60 seconds. The source material has been sampled and filtered to create several tracks that each travel through space on an orbital (looping) path. Once inside the installation, a jumble of circles permanently rotating to the sound of several ticking watches, the visitor changes the way the tracks combine to create an experience, always unique, of an infinitely looping 60 seconds composition. 'Time and space are both questioned and refracted in the perspective of repetition and uniqueness.'

Storyscape, meanwhile, is a labyrinthine work revolving around a non-linear story. The user navigates around the fragments of text, moving them about in the process – distorting and changing their meaning. 'We tried to create a story within a 3-D space - it's a sort of 3-D poem, story if you like,' comments Van den Bulcke. Workspace Unlimited created all the installations and environments. The collective plans to open *Virtual World of Art* to other artists through a workshop starting this fall. 'There are several artists out there making artistic game modifications,' says Soetens. 'It is rare to find an environment specifically dealing with these experiences. It would be great to create a coherent network for these projects.'

THEATRE OF SUBJECTIVITY

After completing the SAT project, Thomas and Kora were commissioned by V2_, Institute for the Unstable Media, an interdisciplinary center for art and media technology in Rotterdam (The Netherlands), to create a unique work for the Dutch Electronic Art Festival (DEAF). '*Devmap* is a radically different approach from the

SAT project in many ways,' comments Soetens. 'The main theme of the festival was Open Systems. It challenged us to conceive a continuous experience out of a temporary event.' In *Devmap*, each visitor shapes his own environment, through the choice of his paths, observations and interactions with elements captured from the festival (works of art, interviews, presentations, etc.), and with other interlopers (potentially at other locations) simultaneously exploring and visiting the *Devmap* space. Visitors are also shaped by their environment, as information adheres to their character's skin, letting others see where they have been. '*Devmap* is a theatre of subjectivity, exploring how people simultaneously experiencing multiple realities share the same public space. Two visitors in the same virtual space can see each other, even speak with each other, yet what they perceive around themselves may be entirely different, depending on the paths they have taken and the information they have absorbed. Only by observing each other's skins or through direct communication can each form an idea of what the other is experiencing. If two visitors happen to be side by side in the real exhibition space, they may sneak glimpses of each other's screens to fully understand how different their virtual worlds really are,' explains Van den Bulcke.

'We wanted to create an unpredictable virtual world. The resulting experience forms a poetic memory of the event; like real memories, the representation shifts, mutates, and takes on its own identity, detached from the original reality,' comments Soetens.

IMPACT ON ART

Workspace Unlimited is currently also developing a third project called *Implant* in conjunction with the Vooruit arts centre in the Flemish city

of Ghent. This node will reflect on how virtual networks and virtual spaces can become part of the evolution and cultural significance of a city. This project as well as *Extension* and *Devmap* will go online in 2006, a move that will expand the scope and possibilities of the Virtual World of Art network even further.

'It's hard to predict the evolution of virtual worlds without being utopian, but what is certain is that virtual worlds, as an interdisciplinary form of digital media, have a similar impact on art as photography and movies have had in the past. At the moment it's not generally understood as art as was the case for photography and cinema in their early days. But this is changing and more and more people are accepting this as an artistic experience and this in turn is influencing existing media.'

WWW.WORKSPACE-UNLIMITED.ORG



↑ Thomas Soetens and Kora Van den Bulcke ↑





CONINX'

small screen saga

AFTER A LIFE-TIME DEVOTED TO FEATURE-LENGTH FILM, DIRECTOR STIJN CONINX IS ABOUT TO UNVEIL HIS FIRST MADE-FOR-TELEVISION DRAMA SERIES, *THE KAVIJAKS (DE KAVIJAKS)*, A FAMILY EPIC SET AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF WORLD WAR 2 STARRING AN ENSEMBLE FLEMISH CAST INCLUDING JAN DECLEIR, HILDE VAN MIEGHEM AND MARIE VINCK.

Photo: Kris Dewitte

It is a little known fact outside of Belgium but director Stijn Coninx' correct title is Baron Stijn Coninx. He rarely uses it, however, and looks surprised when it is brought up in conversation.

'I hardly ever think about it,' he says. 'I was given it a long time ago – back in 1993. The then king (King Baudouin I of Belgium) saw my film *Daens* and was very moved by it,' recounts Coninx, referring to his Oscar-nominated film tackling the terrible conditions in a Belgian textile town in the 1890s.

'It was very strange. He invited me for an audience and we talked for a long time – it was very special. He had a few ideas of his own for films and said let's keep in touch. He would send me newspaper articles, stories about society, how to survive in today's world, the relationship between men and women... His palace contacted me a short while

after to say he wanted to grant me a baronetcy.'

The king's ideas would never be developed further for he died a few months later. Many of Coninx' films, however, have explored society and the struggle of individuals to find a place in society in a way that would have very probably appealed to the king.

**'I DO THINK A GOOD WAY OF
LOOKING AT CONTEMPORARY FEELINGS IS
TO REFER TO STORIES IN THE PAST'**

JAN DECLEIR

His latest production *The Kavijaks* is a five-part television series based on Jozef Vantorre's Flemish bestseller following the fortunes of a large, impoverished but close-knit family living in the port of Ostend during World War Two.

'The script is by Marc Didden. He

spoke to me about this project about two years ago. I read his script and was immediately enthusiastic,' says Coninx. 'Jozef Vantorre is essentially the main character Piften. He is one of 13 children. The story follows his search for love – at first, he tries to find it in his family but because his mother is so busy she has little time to lavish attention on one son.

'The five parts of the series are named after five important woman in his life: his mother, his sister Jetje and three other female characters who enter his life: Marcella, Esther and Belinda.'

Aside from Piften's quest to work out if true love is possible, the series also follows the lives of the other children as well as their relationship with their tough-talking, no-nonsense father who believes his children should learn to stand on their own two feet as early as possible.

'He doesn't think it is his duty to put food on his family's table. He has another view of love,' explains Coninx.

Popular Jan Decleir, who previously starred in *Daens* and appeared in Coninx' early comedy *Koko Flanel*, plays the father. Decleir's son Jenne and daughter Sophie are also in the cast. Jenne Decleir has a major role as the grown-up Piften. Sophie plays the oldest sister.

'It's the third time we've worked together. Jan is unbelievable,' comments Coninx.

CHILD CAST

The Kavijaks is Coninx' first major television drama although he has directed comedy for television in the past. He treated the shoot like that of a film. 'It's shot on Super-16 and not on video and most crew members

Competition at this year's Montreal World Film Fest.

As in many of his previous films such as *Daens* and *Sea of Silence*, about a young girl growing up in the shadow of an alcoholic father in a farming community in the 1960s, there are a number of child protagonists in the film.

'Somebody joked that I had dealt with a family of five in *Sea of Silence* so dealing with a family of 13 should not be too hard – in fact the child cast is slightly larger than that because many of the character are played by two actors due to the time span from just before the war to 1946... This also raised problems of creating continuity in the characters,' comments Coninx.

'Of course working with children is different from working with adults. I've worked with children a lot – ever

living in straitened circumstances.

Coninx says this is more of a coincidence rather than a conscious move.

'It wasn't a deliberate move but it's true I'm more attracted to this sort of social drama than detective stories or thrillers revolving around a murder. I thought *The Alzheimer Case* was interesting but it's not my cup of tea,' he comments.

'And not all my films are set in the past – other films like *When the Light Comes* and *Koko Flanel* had nothing to do with the past. That said, I do think a good way of looking at contemporary feelings is to refer to stories in the past.

'The trouble with working with contemporary stories is that sometimes events catch up with you. I once tried to write a script about what was happening in Romania



↑ *The Kavijaks* →

'I'VE WORKED WITH CHILDREN A LOT – EVER SINCE DAENS. YOU HAVE TO COMMUNICATE WITH CHILDREN DIFFERENTLY FROM PROFESSIONAL ADULT ACTORS. YOU CAN'T JUST TELL A SMALL CHILD TO RESPOND TO SOMETHING WITH "CYNICISM", FOR EXAMPLE, BECAUSE HE OR SHE WON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN. THEY HAVE A DIFFERENT SET OF REFERENCES'

come from the film world. We handled it like a film. Although we had to work very fast, in our minds it was a film,' says the director.

Cinematographer Renaat Lambeets previously worked on Tom Barman's *Anyway the Wind Blows* and the acclaimed documentary *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death*. Editor Joris Brouwers cut the local box office hit *The Intruder*, which is to receive its international première in Official

since *Daens*. You have to communicate with children differently from professional adult actors. You can't just tell a small child to respond to something with "cynicism", for example, because he or she won't understand what you mean. They have a different set of references.'

SISTER SMILE

Like *Sea of Silence*, *The Kavijaks* is a period piece revolving around family

under the Ceausescu regime but events overtook me – before I knew it the story had moved on.'

His next project is in a very different vein. Entitled *The Extraordinary Life of Sister Smile* it is a biopic about Belgian's notorious singing nun *Soeur Sourire* (*Sister Smile*). It is based in a script by Chris Vander Stappen, who also wrote Alain Berliner's *Ma Vie en Rose* (*My Life in Pink*). Belgian actress Cécile de France is attached to play

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Sister Smile.

'Everybody in Belgium has heard of Soeur Sourire. She had a hit song in the 1960s that went like "Dominique-nique-nique...". But her tale is quite tragic – she ended up killing herself,' says Coninx. 'We're due to start shooting in the autumn.'

Born Jeanine Deckers in 1933, Sister Smile shot to fame in the 1960s for a series of songs she had originally written for the other nuns in her convent. She was the only Belgian to top the charts in the United States. Fame proved too much. She left the convent and moved in with a close female friend, Annie Pescher. They set up a school for autistic children but when this was threatened with closure by the authorities, she and Pescher killed themselves in a suicide pact.

In 1966, director Henry Koster cast Debbie Reynolds in *The Singing Nun*, the MGM production that was loosely based on the first part of her life. Even that film presents her as someone completely unprepared for her new found fame (like appearing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*) and the unwanted side-effects that come with it.

JESTER TILL

Aside from this, Coninx is also in the throes of developing a number of dream projects of his own. These include a documentary examining the rise of the far right in Belgium and across the rest of Europe. 'It's something that worries me a lot. It's a difficult subject to tackle here in Belgium. I'm not just interested in what is going on here but also beyond. But it's early days so it's difficult to say too much about it,' he comments.

Beyond this, Coninx also hopes to get a long-gestated live action film about the European folk hero *Jester Till* (*Till Eulenspiegel*) off the ground. He is



developing the project with Dutch production house Shooting Star, which made the children's hit *Peter Bell*.

'I've wanted to do this for years. I've talked about it many times. There are so many versions of the legend out there – I've done a lot of research. I think that I'm ready to pull it off now – before I was too young. I know what I want to do but I just need to find the time to sit down and write it,' says the director.

Coninx's version will draw heavily on Belgian novelist Charles de Coster's 1869 retelling of the legend as well as his own research.

'The Germans say he is German.

The Belgians say he is Belgian. There are even Dutch influences in there.

You can find traces of Jester Till dating back to the 12th Century but De Coster, who wrote his version of the story in the 18th Century, placed it in the 16th Century. It's very complex. On one level, it's also telling the story of Belgium – how it started and the characteristics of its people.

'It interests me not so much for the legend but more for its parallels with what is going on today. The conflicts that arise in Jester Till are not unlike those of Bosnia, Rwanda – where violence suddenly flares-up without warning.' Coninx just can't help bringing the past into the present.

Melanie Goodfellow



STIJN CONINX

STIJN CONINX' (1957) WORK AS A DIRECTOR INCLUDES:

- 2005 - *The Kavijaks (de kavijaks)* – television series
- 2004 - *Visions of Europe* ('Self Portrait' segment)
- 2003 - *Sea of Silence*
- 1998 - *When The Light Comes (Licht)*
- 1993 - *Daens*
- 1990 - *Koko Flanel*
- 1987 - *Hector*



↑ Fabio and his dad

MY DAD

the revolutionary priest

FRESH FROM THE SUCCESS OF HIS AWARD-WINNING GRADUATION DOCUMENTARY *MADE IN ITALY*, A HIGHLY PERSONAL PORTRAIT OF THE ITALIAN MARBLE-QUARRYING TOWN CARRARA THAT TOUCHES ON HIS FATHER'S BEGINNINGS AS A SCULPTOR, PROMISING YOUNG FILMMAKER FABIO WUYTACK IS SET TO DELVE DEEPER INTO HIS FATHER'S PAST IN *PADRE FRANCISCO*.

Documentary filmmaker Fabio Wuytack's dad Frans isn't quite like other dads – prior to meeting and marrying Fabio's mother, he was a priest with a revolutionary bent who stirred up disquiet among the poor and oppressed just about everywhere he went.

'After becoming a priest, he was sent to South America on an evangelic mission but instead of doing what was expected of him – blessing the upper classes and providing them with non-stop confirmation that they were doing a great job – he moved into the slums of Caracas,' explains Wuytack.

Frans, or Padre Francisco as he was known then, arrived in the Venezuelan capital in the 1960s just as Liberation Theology, which advocated the church should be involved in the struggle for economic and political justice, was beginning to take off across Latin America. Wuytack is now set to explore his father's adventures in Venezuela in a documentary entitled *Padre Francisco*.

DOUGLAS BRAVO

'He started working in the slums without a well-defined plan but with conviction and lots of dedication.

People spontaneously started collaborating with him and in no time it became a movement, organizing mass-demonstrations with strong demands for clean water and work,' recounts Wuytack.

It was not long before he fell foul of the authorities and was expelled. Back home, he applied the ideals of Liberation Theology in Antwerp, becoming one of the leaders of wild-cat strikes that brought its port to a standstill in 1973. In trouble with the authorities back home, he returned to Venezuela, entering the country clandestinely to join legendary communist guerilla leader Douglas Bravo and his men in the jungle, where they had decamped to escape the army. 'He got bored of hiding out in the jungle and went back to the city against the guerillas' wishes. They said they could no longer be responsible for his safety. A few months later he was arrested,' continues Wuytack. He was tortured and sentenced to 17 years prison for his activities but was expelled rather than made to serve out his time in a Venezuelan jail.

BLACKLIST

In the meantime, conservative Belgian Bishop Van Peetegem had

evoked a medieval law dating back to inquisition times to eject Wuytack's father from the priesthood. Frans has since directed his energies into poetry and art but still remains politically engaged. 'He went out to Iraq to act as a human shield during the first Gulf War. I was about eight-years-old. During the Yugoslav War he got so upset by what he saw on television that he piled up our van with medical supplies and set off for the Bosnian border,' recalls the director. Wuytack's *Padre Francisco* will focus on his father's return to Venezuela some 30 years after he was kicked out. He and his father were due to set off for the country as this article went to press.

'My dad was on a blacklist for more than 30 years but in 1999 he made enquiries about whether he could return and was told he could,' he says. 'I'd like to look into the history of the country as well as its present and future.' Wuytack hopes they will be able to visit the jungle where his father hid out, the slums where he worked and also meet some of the key figures in his life at that period.

MOHAMMED TAMIN

Amnesty International is partly



↑ Fabio Wuytack

financing the project. The body premiered Wuytack's first film, a short about Palestinian surgeon Mohammed Tamin entitled *Two Hands*, at the Amnesty International Film Festival in Amsterdam last year. The director met Ramallah-based Tamin while the surgeon was on a course in Ghent. 'We struck up a conversation in a bar somewhere. He told me about life back in Ramallah. By the end of the conversation, I felt like exploding, I started to feel his tension, his sense of claustrophobia,' explains Wuytack. Despite his emotional reaction to

Academy in Brussels. It was inspired by a piece of Lumière Brothers footage showing a steam engine emerging from a tunnel. It is just one of a thousands such images captured by the cinema pioneers at the turn of the 20th century.

'We were doing research into the early days of film and ended up watching some Lumière stuff,' recounts Wuytack. 'The minute I saw the train coming out of the tunnel I knew I had been there. I knew it was Carrara.' He had spent time there training to be a sculptor before deciding to go into film. Beyond that, it

Wuytack and a small crew set-off for Carrara where they interviewed quarry workers and owners, a local priest, old friends of his parents, a railway enthusiast, who keeps a scale model of the old railway that used to cut through the mountains around Carrara in his garage, and even the local cinema-owner.

Wuytack ended up with an endearing portrait of Carrara, past and present. At the same time, he delves into his own roots returning to the now abandoned house where his parents once lived. 'In some ways *Made in Italy* is a portrait of an Italy which is now disappearing. It's so Italian. You see the guys on their scooters with their mobiles – that is the Italy of today but that's not the Italy I'm in love with.' Wuytack plays with the documentary format, inter-cutting interviews and shots of Carrara's majestic mountains with speeded up Keystone Cops-style sequences featuring himself and his tiny crew on their quest. He even tampers with the original archive material, inserting himself into the scene. 'I was making an associative reconstruction. It's not like reconstructing reality as it is. It's more like reconstructing something that's not there. It's not objective – it's a creative way of dialoguing with reality,' he comments. It will be interesting to see what sort of approach the young director uses in *Padre Francisco*.

Melanie Goodfellow

Tamin's tale, the resulting work is remarkably restrained. It features Tamin walking around a Belgian park talking about the chaos in his overstretched hospital following a clash between Palestinians and the Israeli army. These accounts are inter-cut with images of the palms of his hands pressed against a windowpane.

'Two young guys are brought in on stretchers. You treat one. The other carries on screaming for help but you only have two hands,' recounts Tamin.

LUMIÈRE BROTHERS

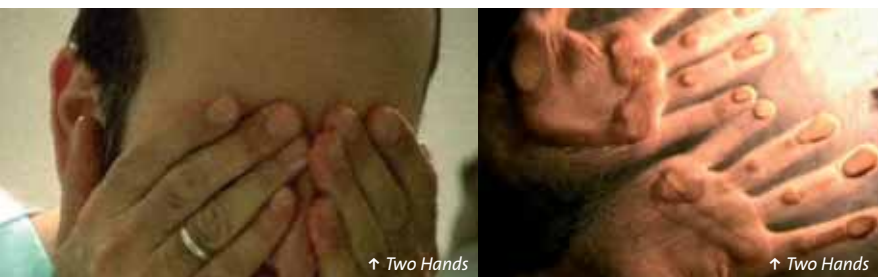
Wuytack's first medium-length documentary *Made in Italy* is a far more light-hearted affair – a whimsical portrait of the Italian marble-quarrying town of Carrara that also delves into his parents' past and his own roots. He made the film as part of his studies at the Audiovisual Art Department (Documentary Film) at the Sint-Lukas

was also where his parents had spent the early years of the marriage and where he had been conceived.

'Carrara is, of course, famous for its marble and it also has a history of political radicalism – it hosted an important anarchist conference in the 1960s – but the fact the Lumière Brothers had passed through Carrara wasn't really known,' says Wuytack. The young director had a mission – to take the footage back to Carrara to work out exactly where it had been shot. Amazingly, the Lumière Brothers Association gave him permission to use the footage. 'Everybody told me it would be impossible to get permission but I wrote to them about the project and they agreed,' says Wuytack. 'I think they liked the originality of my proposal, the joyful and playful way I dealt with the archive material.'

ASSOCIATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

In the summers of 2003 and 2004,



↑ *Two Hands*

↑ *Two Hands*



↑ Fabio Wuytack

The Ghent THERAPY

GHENT AND THE MOVING IMAGE FOUND EACH OTHER WAY BEFORE THE LUMIÈRE BROTHERS SHOT THEIR FIRST FILM. IN 1830, LOCAL SCIENTIST JOSEPH PLATEAU DISCOVERED THE PERSISTENCE OF VISION PHENOMENON THAT FORMS THE BASIS OF CINEMATOGRAPHY. THE CITY ALSO HOUSES THE KASK FILM ACADEMY, THE FIRST IN EUROPE TO OPEN AN ANIMATION DEPARTMENT, AS WELL AS THE RESPECTED FLANDERS INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL AND THE FIRST MODERN MULTIPLEX IN EUROPE, KINEPOLIS GENT. IT THEREFORE SHOULDN'T COME AS A SURPRISE THAT GHENT WAS ALSO THE FIRST IN THE FLANDERS REGION TO DEVELOP ITS 'MELDPUNT FILM', A FILM OFFICE WHICH IS DESIGNED TO BETTER ACCOMMODATE FILM AND TELEVISION CREWS.



↑ Jan Schiettekatte



↑ Erwin Provoost



↑ Paul Teerlinck



↑ Wim Van Driessche

It was Ghent Mayor Frank Beke who in 1999 set in motion the creation of a one-stop city film office, the 'Meldpunt Film'. One year earlier, production house MMG had launched the television series *Cops (Flikken)*, which follows the adventures of a number of policemen and police-women in Ghent. Still, as *Cops* producer Erwin Provoost points out, Ghent city administrators had already warmly welcomed filmmakers back in the 70s. 'Such a tradition will not be given up easily,' notes Provoost. But pre-production on *Cops* started long before Meldpunt Film was launched. In a way, the series was the ideal

testing ground for how the film office should operate later on. Back then, the production received a grant from City Marketing. 'For me personally, one of the biggest advantages of Ghent is that no streets in the city centre are perfectly straight, which improves the photography of the scenery,' the producer continues. 'And no cars are allowed in the centre so you're not causing huge traffic jams when scenes are shot in the centre. Ghent is popular these days.' Provoost says the fact that other cities such as Antwerp, Bruges and Ostend have launched similar offices proves that Meldpunt Film works. He's now even planning to move his own offices to Ghent.

LARGE NETWORK

Initially part of the City Marketing Fund, Meldpunt Film eventually became the responsibility of the city's events department. Jan Schiettekatte, who runs the department, further developed the idea of a central desk

types of practical problems. 'Our unit has contacts at numerous levels within the large network of city services,' explains Schiettekatte. 'We also very often hear from people who are keen to offer access to their own private properties as locations.'

The city can boast an ever increasing list of productions it has accommodated. Wim Van Driessche, in charge of City Promotion and Sports, names just a few of the productions that have recently chosen to shoot in Ghent: *Peter Bell* by Maria Peters, *Alias* by Jan Verheyen, Lieven Debrauwer's award-winning *Pauline & Paulette*, Dany Deprez's *Science Fiction* and Geoffrey Enthoven's *Vidange perdue*. And in Frank Van Passel's *Villa des Roses*, most of the early 20th Century Paris exteriors were actually shot in Ghent. 'We also hope that more and more foreign filmmakers will come to Flanders thanks to the Belgian tax shelter system. Furthermore, we intend to bring together the city's key cultural institutions in Ghent to outline a final strategy.'

These institutions include Arts Centre Vooruit, which is something of a magnet to young people with a

'FILM OFFERS A UNIQUE ONE-TIME CONTRIBUTION TO THE GENERAL IMAGE OF A CITY' - WIM VAN DRIESSCHE, GHENT CITY MARKETING

aimed at facilitating and supporting production companies that wish to shoot on location in Ghent. Today, Meldpunt Film offers logistical support, gives assistance in finding suitable locations and helps solve all

strong interest in theatre, dance, concerts, video and exhibitions; the SMAK Museum for Contemporary Art; the Flanders International Film Festival and the internationally respected KASK film academy.

LOCATION DATABASE

As City Council Secretary Paul Teerlinck points out, although the city is happy to offer assistance to any productions which approach it for help, Ghent has not yet really been actively marketed as a shooting location. For instance, Ghent currently lacks the funds to invite production companies from overseas to come and see the city and what it has to offer. However, he notes that, 'The Flanders International Film Festival has already suggested improving communication and promotion of Meldpunt Film by attending the Cannes Film Festival.'

Van Driessche hopes that additional promotional efforts such as an international flyer and a booth at this year's Flanders International Film Festival will also help.

Dirk Impens, the Ghent-based producer of the Academy Award-nominated film *Daens* and *Steve + Sky*, suggests that to facilitate location hunting, a website should be created with photo galleries of places labelled with useful information for filmmakers who are interested in shooting in Ghent. Van Driessche promises that such a database will be up and running 'within the next year'.

SECOND GEAR

'Perhaps we should now be aiming to create more detailed levels of support,' says Provoost, who calls for an 'interim evaluation' of the system to find out whether it meets its goals and to find out whether adjustments are needed. 'This should be done before going any further.'

'We must ask ourselves whether we really want it and determine whether it is not one of the city's recent cultural whims,' adds Impens. 'Such a service needs to be backed 100% by

the City Council. Ghent is a wonderful place with lots of opportunities, but perhaps the city should get in touch with the New York film office about the support it offers to filmmakers. We all want it to be well organised. Ghent deserves this, but we should give it a lot of thought.' However, he notes, 'Ghent has changed dramatically and improved enormously over the past 10 years.' City Hall decision makers are aware that, in order to have a real impact, the debate will have to consider whether or not the city should offer financial incentives to productions which undertake a major part of their shoot in Ghent.

Schiettekatte believes that there are several possible scenarios for financial incentives. 'We are faced with talented young filmmakers or students to whom we could grant financial support with no payback obligations later on. But there could also be a system of interest-free loans aimed at Ghent-based production companies making commercial productions. A third possibility is a loan at a commercial rate, for instance when international production companies wish to shoot in Ghent.' He believes that it will be something for the new Ghent City Council to decide after the fall 2006 local elections.

Van Driessche says that local politicians should not forget that although 'film offers a unique one-time contribution to the general image of a city, a television series does this repeatedly, week after week. It should therefore be considered a powerful tool in city marketing.' TV show *Cops*, for example, has had a similar effect on tourism in Ghent as a film like *Amélie* had for Paris.

Simon Wullens



↑ Steve + Sky

GHEENT IN A NUTSHELL

Known as the City of Flowers, and with more listed historical buildings than any other Belgian city, Ghent, with its cobbled streets, canals, gabled houses, two castles and five abbeys is fast becoming a popular film location.

Alongside the beautifully preserved architecture, Ghent also boasts 19 museums. As a university city, Ghent has a young and lively nightlife with nearly 300 pubs and cafes in the centre alone, whilst the Patershol district is renowned for its many excellent restaurants tucked away down cobbled lanes.

KEY FEATURE FILM PRODUCTION PARTNERS IN GHEENT*

Fobic Films

Mariano Van Hoof
Nieuwe vaart 118 box 48
B-9000 Ghent/Belgium
T: +32-9 329 00 52
E: info@fobicfilms.com

Lumière Productie

Jan De Clercq
Handelsdokcenter - Stapelplein 70 box 302
B-9000 Ghent/Belgium
T: +32-9 235 40 20
E: distribution@lumiere.be

Menuet

Dirk Impens
Ferdinand Lousbergkaai 105
B-9000 Ghent/Belgium
T: +32-9 235 73 70
E: info@favouritefilms.be

A Private View

Jean-Claude Van Rijckeghem, Mieke De Wulf
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(*incomplete list)

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↓ **HUESCA, 18 JUNE** - FLEMISH HELMER DOUGLAS BOSWELL RECEIVES THE JOSÉ MANUEL PORQUET CRITICS AWARD AT THE HUESCA FILM FESTIVAL FOR HIS SHORT ROMANCE



↑ **ANNECY, 9 JUNE** - THEY ALL CAME TO CELEBRATE THE PRESENCE OF FLEMISH ANIMATION IN ANNECY, AND TO SALUTE THE CREATIVE TEAM BEHIND THIS YEAR'S 'LE LAPIN' FESTIVAL REEL



↓ **CANNES, 15 MAY** - BELGIAN FINANCE MINISTER DIDIER REYNDSERS VISITED THE BELGIAN BOOTH AT THE CANNES MARKET TO DISCUSS THE BELGIAN TAX SHELTER SYSTEM TO BOTH REGULARS AND FIRST-TIMERS. THIS WHILE PETER GHESQUIERE'S SHORT *MOONGLOW* GOT SELECTED FOR OFFICIAL COMPETITION.



↑ **BRUSSELS, 7 JUNE** - JAN VERHEYEN PRESENTS THE CAST OF *GILLES (BUITENSPEL)*, HIS NEW FAMILY MOVIE WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR A DECEMBER 2005 OPENING



...NNECY, BRUSSELS AND CANNES, TO NAME JUST A FEW, TO CELEBRATE THE
...TIONS, AND THEIR CREATORS, AROUND THE GLOBE.



↑ **BRUSSELS, 6 JULY** - THE EUROPEAN FILM FESTIVAL IN BRUSSELS PRESENTED THE THREE DOCUMENTARIES MADE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE VAF DOCUMENTARY WORKSHOP (SEE ALSO PAGES 4 AND 5 OF THIS ISSUE). HERE WE SEE STEVEN, MICHA AND TONE OVERWHELMED BY COMPLIMENTS AT THE AFTER-SHOW RECEPTION;



↓ **BRUSSELS, 3 MAY** - WHILE SHOOTING STAR MARIE VINCK WON THE JOSEPH PLATEAU AWARD FOR BEST ACTRESS (FOR HER PERFORMANCE IN HILDE VAN MIEGHEM'S *THE KISS*), IT WAS FELIX VAN GROENINGEN'S *STEVE + SKY* THAT GRABBED BELGIUM'S OSCAR-EQUIVALENT FOR BEST FILM. BEST SOUNDTRACK WENT TO SOULWAX, ALSO FOR *STEVE + SKY*

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↑ **CANNES, 11 APRIL** - THEY WERE ALL THERE AT THE FLANDERS IMAGE MIPTV BOOTH: BELGIUM'S KEY PLAYERS AND TOP TELEVISION-MAKERS NETWORKING WITH COLLEAGUES FROM AROUND THE WORLD. TOP SELLERS INCLUDED THE

GOLDEN ROSE OF LUCERNE NOMINATED *FATA MORGANA* FORMAT, *THE INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES OF KIKI & BOB* ANIMATED TV SERIES, AS WELL AS THE HIGHLY ENTERTAINING *MAN BITES DOG* DAILY SHOW.



← **MARSEILLE, 30 JUNE** - PRODUCER PAUL PAUWELS RECEIVES THE EBU GOLDEN LINK AWARD FOR MOST PRESTIGIOUS EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY CO-PRODUCTION AT THIS YEAR'S SUNNY SIDE OF THE DOCS FOR LODE DESMET'S *REQUIEM OF A CUP FINAL*



→ **COLOGNE, 21 APRIL** - THE STARS WERE OUT AT THE GERMAN PREMIÈRE OF DOMINIQUE DERUDDERE'S *THE WEDDING PARTY*





DAAN SPREADS HIS WINGS

As well as writing some of the music for Ivan Boeckmans and Guy Lee Thys' new film *Suspect*, Belgian pop idol Daan Stuyven also makes his feature film acting debut in it, the new feature from the makers of *Kassablanka*. (Our photographer Kris Dewitte was on the set when Stuyven literally threw himself into this new adventure.) According to Thys, the film is about a '15-year-old Lolita who unleashes a witch-hunt against her stepfather. And you don't need to know any more than that.' Knowing the filmmakers, and with sexual abuse as its subject matter, it's a fair bet that *Suspect* will stir up some controversy among cinemagoers. Starring newcomer Zoë de Roovere as 15-year-old Sandy, the cast also includes Gene Bervoets as the stepfather, Karlijn Sileghem, Ellen ten Damme, Elias Mentzel and Joke Devynck.

Originally a graphic designer, Stuyven always had a keen interest in music and together with Rudy Trouvé set up the

band Dead Man Ray. Their first encounter with film was when they composed the score for animated film *Transatlantic*, and soundscapes for Hanzel & Gretzel's video installation *The Hamlet Machine*. In 1999, the band put together a new score for an old Flemish film, the campy *At the Drop of a Head (Café zonder bier, 1962)*, starring Belgium's only real cowboy, Bobbejaan Schoepen. The new score combines Dead Man Ray's compositions with fragments of the original soundtrack. After releasing his first solo album, *Profools*, in 1999, Stuyven wrote the soundtracks for Alex Stockman's *I Know I'll See Your Face Again (Verboden te zuchten, 2001)*, Dorothée Vandenberghe's *Girl (Meisje, 2001)* and for Philippe Blasband's *Step By Step* (2002). The influence of his work for film on his music was particularly evident on his album *Bridge Burner*.

In 2004, he released his third album, *Victory*.



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