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Documentary Edge Festival and Forum, New Zealand, March 2010

Report by Julia Overton, Investment Development Manager

The Documentary Edge Forum runs in Auckland at the beginning of March. It is the brainchild of Alex Lee and Dan Shanahan. The Forum is part of a documentary film festival which runs for the entire month of March. The Forum creates a platform for masterclasses, panel discussions and workshops on essential skills and knowledge as well as the latest industry developments, both locally and internationally. This year, the Forum started with two one-day documentary labs; one a pitching masterclass and one to help participants develop digital media ideas attached to their documentaries. The remaining three days were devoted to sessions of an hour or an hour and a half with topics such as Breaking the Colour Bar, Campaigns and Communities, Hybrid Forms, New Forms in Documentary Film, Made for TV, What is Cinematic Documentary? (no doubt on the table because the New Zealand Film Commission decided to assist in the development of theatrical documentaries), What is New Zealand Content?, Recreating Reality, DIY Distribution – or Not. I was a guest of the conference, moderated two of the sessions and spoke on two.

As a general observation it is worth noting that there was very lively discussion and some really interesting participants and panellists from New Zealand and other parts of the world. It is always good to go somewhere and find new faces, new ideas and those who are not necessarily the usual suspects at these events. The panellists were a dynamic mix of practitioners, academics, commissioning editors, new media specialists, festival directors and sales agents.

Local filmmakers **Pietra Brett Kelly, Arani Cuthbert, Annie Goldson, Janette Howes, Roger Horrocks, Kirsty MacDonald, Leanne Pooley** and **Gaylene Preston** were most generous with their time and information. A group with an impressive pedigree in filmmaking.

New media speakers

Laurent Antonzack – an Emerging Technology, Visual Communications and Brand Strategist. He lectures at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) where he manages and leads the Honours and Masters students in the Graphic Design strand whilst at the same time keeping his own company ATZ119 Limited which offers strategies in New Technology, Graphic Design and Communication.

Marc Boothe – Founder and Managing Director of UK-based B3 Media, a digital media arts network that is committed to ensuring that the representation of minorities both off and on the screen is not to be limited to stereotypes. He uses all forms of media to ensure that this philosophy is carried through. His next project FeatureLab, is collaboration between Film4, Binger Filmlab and Skillset and this includes a number of different projects including a slate of six feature films. For a fascinating interview with Marc follow this link. www.the-producers.org/MarcBoothe

Daniel Cermak-Sassenrath – who also lectures at AUT where he teaches courses on computer games, tangible interaction and new media. He too has his own company Dace.

James Franklin – creative director at Pixeco, a digital design studio dedicated to documentary film projects. He explores and champions new forms of distribution, powers digital outreach projects as well as harnessing social media for the documentary cause. Recent projects that he and his company have been involved in include *The End of the Line*, *Burma VJ*, *Vanishing of the Bees*, Britdoc's *Good Film* and *Chosen*. Hugely energetic, based in New Zealand (went there for love) but works mainly with UK companies.

Wendy Levy – who is no stranger to Australia, is Director of Creative Programming at BAVC. She develops and oversees content partnerships for BAVC's productions, exhibition and distribution programs, grants and residences for independent producers and public broadcasters.

Peter Worrall – who has worked as a conceptual designer and storyboard artists who has recently been specialising in the design and creation of 3D interactive virtual environments. He founded GalleryCentric, where you can exhibit your art in a 3D environment; this might be familiar to some of you.

Academic speakers

Dr Peter Zimmerman – a film scholar, author and lecturer who looks at international documentary. He talked about new forms in documentary film as well as looking at the history of documentary. When the forum was engaged in the issues of 'what is New Zealand content' or 'what is cinematic contribution' Peter Zimmerman brought an intellectual rigour to the debate which was appreciated by all.

Geraldene Peters – who teaches at AUT. Her area of teaching and research is media, film and documentary theory and history; research led documentary practice and community media practices. With a focus on documentary her particular interest is how media forms such as domestic, community and arts-based media respond to issues of class, indigeneity and ethnicity

Documentary festivals

Krista English – who is Director of ReFrame Peterborough International Film Festival in Canada, with a population of 75,000. The festival focuses on world documentaries which engage community development, social justice, Indigenous and environmental issues. It has a special focus on multimedia and takes place the last week of January (must be chilly). As if that isn't enough, Krista is also Director of Reel Kids Peterborough Children's Film Festival.

Lei Hong and **Simon Ho** – from the Guangzhou International Documentary Festival. Guangzhou is where the delightful Oscar®-nominated *Please Vote for Me* was first screened. It has become a well-respected documentary festival with many Australian documentary films having screened there over the past few years. Timing for this festival is early December.

Xavier Rashid – works as a consultant with Raindance Film Festival, the UK's largest independent film festival. It was established to extend the normal film school activities of Raindance and to celebrate and support independent filmmaking. The festival runs for two weeks in October.

Broadcasters

TVNZ

Jude Callen – Commissioner of Documentary, Arts and Special Interest Programming. Jude is responsible for commissioning documentary singles and series, arts singles and series, special interest series and national event programming. TVNZ is New Zealand's biggest free to air broadcaster and is also the nation's public broadcaster. The licence fees are small and their interests are particularly New Zealand focused.

Maori Television

Manutai Schuster, Head of Acquisitions and **Carol Hirschfield**, Head of Programming. Maori Television broadcasts programs that make a significant contribution to the revitalisation of Maori culture and language. It is funded by the New Zealand Government and has been broadcasting since 2004. Te Reo is the station's second channel, launched 2008. Te Reo is 100 per cent Maori language with no advertising or subtitles and featuring special tribal programming with a particular focus on new programming. Maori Television has been involved in co-productions with Australian broadcasters and producers including the documentary series *Once Bitten* with SBS. Is very open to more co-productions with Australia.

TV3

Sue Woodfield – Head of Factual. Sue is responsible for the channel's flagship documentary strand inside New Zealand. She is also responsible for the primetime factual output for the network. Sue has recently commissioned work from Annie Goldson and is keen, where possible, to support local filmmakers, but her slots for one-off documentary are limited. TV3 is a commercial free-to-air broadcaster which also plays on Sky Network Television and Freeview's satellite and terrestrial platforms. The first privately owned television network in the country.

Al Jazeera English

Fiona Lawson Baker – works with *Witness* and, amongst other territories, covers Australia and New Zealand. *Witness* is the channel's flagship documentary strand and is looking for character driven stories that provide an insight into the way events impact on the daily lives of ordinary people. They like the stories to be told and made by local filmmakers about the people around them. Half-hour documentaries air during the week with a longer slot

on weekends. Have an established relationship with Australian and New Zealand filmmakers.

ZDF/Arte

Familiar to you all of course is the name of **Hans Robert Eisnehauer**. Hans is Head of Thema where he oversees international co-productions.

Other attendees

Sales agent **Smiley Film Sales** was represented by their Managing Director, **Ewa Biglio**. Smiley represents the work of Australasian documentary filmmakers. Australian films include *Whatever Happened to Brenda Hean?*, *In Search of Shilan*, *In Our Name*, *Just Punishment* and *Silma's School*.

Producers in attendance included **Frederick Marx** (USA), who is part of the Chicago-based Kartemquin collective (*Hoop Dreams*, *The Unspoken*, *Boys to Men*, *Journey to Zanskar*), **Pat Ferns** (Canada), **John Barnett** (New Zealand), **Sue Maslin** and **Georgia Wallace Crabbe** (Australia) to name but a few.

In addition there were a number of representatives from government funding bodies, including from NZFC CEO, **Graeme Mason**, and Head of Development, **Marilyn Milgrom**, and from NZ On Air Television Manager, **Glenn Usmar**.

As an observation, it is to be encouraged that New Zealand and Australian producers and broadcasters find ways of working together more often to enable projects of mutual interest to be produced. There are very few New Zealand/Australian co-productions. The most recent one I am aware of was one between SBS and Maori TV. Perhaps now that John Barnett's South Pacific Pictures has partnered with Michael Cordell and Nick Murray of Cordell Jigsaw that might change? Graeme Mason is considering sending a delegation of producers to AIDC in 2011.

In conclusion

A small event but one which builds relationships in the region and which should lead to a much greater engagement between the two production communities. It was, of course, noted that two of the most successful local participants in the New Zealand filmmaking community had been 'poached' by Australia. They are sorely missed.