



Australian Government

SCREEN
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International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA)

November 2010

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The annual Amsterdam Documentary Festival celebrated its 13th year in 2010. IDFA is certainly the largest and arguably most important documentaries-only film festival in the world. It is unique for its international film program showcasing a variety of genres and the many European and world premieres featured each year.

This year over 3000 entries from 100 different countries were hoping to make selection. Finally selected were 300 films to screen over 10 days.

The festival is highly visible across the cities media and 2010's audience figures exceeded 180,000 – at least 15,000 more than 2009. The number of Dutch and international guests also increased, with a record 2500. And a staggering 5,300 primary and secondary school students made it to screenings in the *Kids and Docs* section.

Australian films at IDFA and the FORUM

In 2009 there was a record number of 13 Australian films screening at IDFA. 2010 returned to a very modest three in the festival but as some compensation Australia was represented in the FORUM selection with *Cocaine Prison* (dir Violetta Ayala & prod Daniel Fallshaw) a commendable achievement giving the team considerable profile and unique networking opportunities.

The three films screening in the festival were:

- *Imoja: No Men Allowed* (dir Liz Tadic, prod Selene Alcock). *Umoja* won the inaugural AIDC First Factual Award in 2010. This was a world premiere and the film screened four times to sold-out houses with the producer in attendance for Q&As. The contacts with distributors and sales agents proved invaluable for the director, and a deal with *Women Make Movies* is currently being negotiated.
- *Memoirs of a Plague* (dir Robert Nugent, prod Mitzi Goldmann). IDFA World Premiere. Sold out screenings for the feature length festival version. The producer, director and editor attended much of *Docs for Sale* and *Forum* as observers as well as connecting with NGTI (National Geographic Television International) as distributor for the television version.
- *Cane Toads: The Conquest* (prod/dir Mark Lewis). Sold out screenings but unfortunately the director was unable to attend.

Screen Australia provided market material support as well as travel grants for the filmmakers behind *Umoja*, *Memoirs of a Plague* and *Cocaine Prison*.

Other Australians attending

Several Australians attended as buyers: Jenny Neighbour (Sydney Film Festival), from SBS, Ben Nyguen (Documentary and Factual Acquisition SBS), and John MacFarlane (Commissioning Editor SBS Online), distributors: Gil Scrine, *Antidote International* and producer/directors Mick Angus (dir *Salt*) was supported by Screen Queensland. Mick reconnected with contacts from the previous year and was raising finance for his next project. Karina Astrup the Producer of *Six Foot Hicks*, a JTV doc with SA and ABC and now resident in Scandinavia. Karina used the opportunity to network with potential European co-production partners; others included *Docorama*, Gina Twyble and *Film Projects* producer Gregory Miller; Joost Den Hartog, AIDC Director, who was previously a FORUM organizer, and remains very well connected was also there to entice guests and create synergies with AIDC.

Screen Australia Marketing produced an online profile of the films and their teams for IDFA. See <http://www.australiaatidfa.com/default.htm>

Screen Australia also hosted an invitation only drinks event for Australian and international guests. Guests included financiers who regularly partnered with Australian producers, as well as targeting new commissioners and distributors, festival directors and producers with whom Australian producers could take full advantage of networking in a convivial atmosphere. It was well-attended – around 60 people - with overwhelmingly strong feedback for the event.

The Festival

IDFA's founding Director, Ally Derks, delivered an impassioned speech that summed up the importance and current state of documentary filmmaking in the Netherlands, and around the world. You can read her opening address here:

http://www.idfa.nl/industry/Festival/news/latest_news/director-ally-derks-opens-idfa.aspx.

The opening film was *Position Among The Stars*, the concluding part of the Indonesian trilogy directed by Leonard Retel Helmrich – who's particularly well-known in Australia for his inspiring workshops as well as his films. Aside from the festival, IDFA consists of three other components - all established in order to improve the international climate for creative documentaries.

- *The Jan Vrijman Fund* offers support to documentary projects and festivals in developing countries, with many of the projects developed eventually finding their way to the Forum for co-financing.
- *The FORUM* is Europe's biggest co-financing market for international documentary productions,
- *Docs for Sale* is an international documentary market where buyers, sales agents and distributors can see a selection from the best creative documentaries of the past year.
- Together, these activities have propelled IDFA to its current, top-ranked status within the world of creative documentary cinema.

The FORUM

IDFA's annual pitchfest, the FORUM, is the integral, non-public part of the festival – and is the highlight. The FORUM serves as a valuable opportunity for selected filmmakers to seek financing for their projects via co-production deals or pre-sales; and for commissioning editors and funders to learn more about promising new projects in the pipeline.

Canada's Hot Docs Festival became a partner with IDFA and stages the same model in the first half of the calendar year. These forums are an important alternative to markets like MIPTV or the World Congress of Science and Factual Producers where specialist factual projects are marketed and pitched. With Sheffield Documentary Festival moving to mid-year, these events now occur evenly throughout the calendar year. For Australian producers they have become essential financing and networking opportunities.



TRAVEL REPORT

The majority of Commissioning Editors (CEs) turn up for the three days of the Forum and bypass the festival. So having a project within the Forum pitching structure gives significant prestige and profile to the team, company and project and remains the best way to organize meetings. Clearly the CEs' priority is to finance the films they are representing with producers and connect with those others where there's a fit.

Beyond that, for the many observers (often filmmakers who haven't won pitching slots) the FORUM is a chance to see how to pitch a project, what broadcasters and other financiers are looking for - and, just as importantly, what they're not looking for. It's a unique opportunity to watch and listen as industry experts share their critical observations, insights and assess viability in an over-crowded marketplace.

This year there was further diversification of pitching models with the FORUM now distinctly divided into two types of pitch sessions - the first half of the day focuses on pitches to the entire assembly; the second on separate, more intimate roundtables - and one-on-one meetings between participating filmmakers and industry representatives. The different pitch sessions differ primarily in the setting and time limit - otherwise, they run in the same manner: Filmmakers (director and producer teams) introduce their projects, often joined by an attached commissioning editor, explain what they're looking for (ie money), and show a brief trailer to give the broadcasters and funders a sense of their visual approach, the story structure, and characters.

For the first time, the number of round table pitches outnumbered the central pitches. Also for the first time giving genre-specific projects a clear presence, there were two round-table sessions devoted exclusively to art and culture themed projects that proved extremely popular, and the increasingly influential cross-media projects were also clustered in round tables sessions.

This is a universal pattern of the way pitching markets are headed and its indicative of how the FORUM adapts and responds to preferences of Commissioners "The model of the small table allows commissioners to be more precise about the pitches they want to attend. Originally, the round tables were for projects with less than 25 percent of the budget in place, but this year some projects with finance in place will be pitched in this way because we think it suits them better," said Forum organizer, Adriek Van Nieuwenhuyzen. "We see that producing is getting harder and harder. We had a huge number of submissions this year, and the increase was mainly for what we call the round table pitches: pitches without 25 percent of the budget in place."

In addition to the 46 projects covering the central and round-table pitches, there were six 'off-catalogue' projects, which are pitched in private (as AIDC's MeetMarket). These tend to be strong projects that have either been around for a while, or that come from a country that has already exceeded its Forum quota

"It's an understatement to say it's tough out there. Filling the gaps in finance plans becomes an ever more complex mosaic. It's a huge paradox. The festival gets bigger. There's a huge interest in documentaries, but the broadcasters are getting less and less money. We need the broadcasters. Their money is vital for this whole industry. If they do commission, they

commission less with less money, they have fewer and fewer slots and if they buy films, it's for less money," she adds.

The calibre of projects and pitches remains extremely high

- 485 submissions in 2010 (340 in 2009)
- 52 projects pitched from 27 countries.
- Around 85% of all pitches are from Europeans - a requirement which stems from the Forum being financially backed by the EU Media Fund.
- The expectation is that the projects accepted into the FORUM will eventually premiere at IDFA
- 17 of the top and most prestigious projects in the festival originated from previous FORUM pitches

Regardless, the cry of 'I'll see it at rough cut' has become even more common around the table. Commissioners who perhaps five years ago controlled their own slots and budgets no longer have the same buying capacity. Several of the projects have been pitched elsewhere across the European financing circuit with commissioners usually commenting on 'improvement' since hearing the last pitch. There's much caution and penetrating questioning as they strive to determine a 'fit' for particular slots. Even so, if selected, the opportunity is considerable for newer teams and production companies eager to make an impact – so long as they are prepared to come under rigorous scrutiny. And the scrutiny doesn't end with the pitch – public or not. More than 700 individual meetings were organized to follow-up on interest garnered around the table.

Cocaine Prison (also with development funds from the *Jan Vrijman Fund*), and listed as a co-pro between Australia, Germany and Norway) chose to be within this category and took advantage of the privacy afforded by being part of the "off-catalogue" approach.

Another interesting perspective on a couple of the FORUM pitches can be found here:

http://www.indiewire.com/article/toolkit_pitch_perfect_at_idfas_forum/P1/

And if you didn't catch Mitzi Goldman's terrific blog during IDFA it's here:

<http://www.sbs.com.au/documentary/bloggers/view/id/417/n/Mitzi-Goldman>

With reference to commissioning editors there were representatives from SBS Australia, Arte, ITVS, CBC, ZDF, ORF, Knowledge Network, TV Ontario, DR TV Denmark, TV2 Denmark, YLE, Canal +, Planete, France 5, France 3, SWR Germany, WDR Germany, NDR, Germany, DR Germany, ERT SA Greece, TG4 Ireland, RAI Italy, AVRO, Ikon, VPRO and NPS all from the Netherlands, EBS Korea, Television TV3 Catalunya Spain, SVT Sweden, TSR and SF TV Switzerland, Taiwan Public TV, TRT Turkey, Channel 4, BBC Storyville and Al Jazeera English all from the UK. WNET 13, POV American Documentary, Sundance Channel USA, Tribeca.

DEBATES & WORKSHOPS

Doc Next - a well-attended talk-show about the impact of young do-it-yourself documentary makers. Five documentary makers took centre stage to discuss the challenges and possibilities of user-generated media content with festival organisers, media broadcasters and documentary experts and media

professionals and whether they can help mainstream media attract new audiences. Not surprisingly there was no agreement. There were three debates within the festival program: *Green Screen climate debate*, *Who is there left to trust?* and *Witnessing suffering in the 21st century*. As well as sessions:

Introducing Different Markets – Asia, North America and the Arab-speaking world; Navigating the Muddy Waters of New Media Opportunities What's up-and-coming, and what's passé ranged from how to generate audience interest to how to finance cross-media works, to the lack of international cooperation to date. Panellists Frank Boyd, of UK-based digital consultancy Unexpected Media and Rob McLaughlin, digital chief at the National Film Board of Canada, concurred that web documentary finance would remain tight as long as state funds are mainly in the hands of TV commissioners at broadcasters.

DocLab - showcased a selection of surprising documentary projects including five live cinema events, as installations and on the web. Key guests including Zach Wise, multimedia producer at the New York Times where he “can cherry-pick from the best of both worlds, combining the best of ‘old media’ journalism with the latest in multimedia storytelling and technology”. For a thorough account of the program check out:

<http://www.doclab.org/category/news-articles/>. Zack Wise will be a guest at AIDC 2011.

Kids and Docs - The very successful *Kids and Docs* section has screenings as well as an innovative workshop spanning many months and culminating in productions. Many Dutch documentaries from the *Kids & Docs* section are selected and awarded at International festivals.

<http://www.idfa.nl/industry/Festival/program/non-competitive-programs/kids-docs.aspx> Like *Drona & I* at the Berlinale 2010 and *We are Boys* at the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen which then screen in a special 15-minute slot at children's TV network Zapp - a slot reserved for broadcasting the documentaries.

<http://www.idfa.nl/industry/training-education/kids-docs.aspx>

Why Poverty? - Steps International's Don Edkins held a round table session during the Forum to reveal the latest elements of the ambitious project *Why Poverty?* – a global cross-media initiative looking at why one billion people still live in abject poverty.

- Will consist of 8 x 1hour films and 30 shorts which will be distributed via broadcasters, the internet and mobile platforms.
- 33 broadcasters have signed up for the *Why Poverty?* Project
- Other backers include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the European Broadcasting Union.
- Aims to connect with 500 million people worldwide when it launches in 2012.
- The project follows on from the 2007 *Why Democracy?* which was backed by 48 broadcasters – including SBS - and a plethora of NGOs and institutions.
- It has since connected with an estimated 250 million people in 180 countries.

Neither SBS nor ABC are taking part at this stage.

Docs For Sale

Docs For Sale is the meeting place for sales agents and festival directors as well as facilitating introductions for filmmakers. Buyers, festival programmers and directors are able to preview films from the festival on line allowing filmmakers to track viewers and schedule meetings.

There are a number of familiar and influential companies with long-term connections with Australian producers. Documentary sales doyenne Catherine Le Clef, of *Cat & Docs*, has a strong focus on the Asia/Pacific region and continues to strengthen her relationship with South Korean filmmakers. At IDFA the company represented feature-length competition entry *My Barefoot Friend* by Seong-Gyou Lee.

Asked about the state of the market, Le Clef noted that broadcasters are buying less freely than in previous years. "It's slower, much slower than it used to be." Nonetheless, the *Cat & Docs* boss was still striking a positive note, citing "the huge success" the company has enjoyed with Ali Codina's *Monica and David* (which it picked up at IDFA last year.) The film, about two Down's Syndrome adults who marry, has sold to broadcasters worldwide, among them France (France Television), and Germany (Bayreischer Rundfunk).

The London-based company Dogwoof acquired theatrical and DVD rights to Laura Poitras' *The Oath* the film about Osama Bin Laden's former bodyguard Abu Jandal from *Cat & Docs*, which has been screening in Reflecting Images: Best of Fests. The UK TV rights have already gone to Channel 4. Dogwoof is likely to give *The Oath* a limited theatrical release early in 2011. Dogwoof also snapped up competition title *Blood In the Mobile* (Frank Piasecki Poulsen). This film explores the way minerals from the war-torn Congo are used in the making of mobile phones. "It *Blood in the Mobile* is very much in line with a lot of the other campaigning docs that we've released. We'll look to give that a good theatrical release and create a lot of media attention around the issue, probably in the spring of 2011," said Dogwoof's Oli Harbottle. World Sales were handled by DR International Sales. The third Dogwoof acquisition in Amsterdam is Alex Gibney's *Client 9: The Rise and Fall of Elliot Spitzer* sold by Ro'Co Films International. The film tells the story of the political career of Spitzer, former Governor of New York State, which collapsed in spectacular fashion after he was caught out as a client of a high-class escort agency. Dogwoof has all rights except TV which have already gone to the BBC. The film will be given a theatrical release in Britain in the spring/summer of next year.

IDFA veteran Jan Rofekamp of Films Transit celebrated a record number of award nominations from his sales slate this year, among them *Holy Wars* and *Position Among the Stars* both Nominated for Best Feature Length documentary (with *Position Among the Stars* winning). "We had eleven titles in the festival and have ended up with five nominations," said Rofekamp though it was still too early to report any sales deals. "The thing about these festivals is that the films begin their career here. The sales business is sometimes not that fast. We're already generating interest, but it's too early to report anything. *Holy Wars*, for example, makes a very good feature, but also fits nicely into a one-hour slot and I'd rather sell an hour-long version into a primetime selection than a feature into a night-time slot."

It's worth checking out a couple of links to follow recent arguments I suspect will have reverberations across and within docs/factual.

[Will the Liberal "Establishment" Kill the Documentary Resurgence?](http://edendale.typepad.com/weblog/bbc/)
<http://edendale.typepad.com/weblog/bbc/>

Looking to next year, Van Nieuwenhuyzen welcomed news that Sheffield Doc/Fest is moving its dates to June from early November, saying this will stop the doubling-up of projects at the Forum and the British festival's MeetMarket. "I think it's positive for everyone. There were too many things happening in the autumn, so people in the industry are pleased with the change. From the Forum's point of view, it is also good because up until now we've had to compete for projects. For the industry, people don't have to choose between the two festivals and pitching events anymore."

IDFA AWARDS

Competition for Feature-Length Documentary

HOLYWARS (US/Canada) Directed by Stephen Marshall

MARATHON BOY (England) Directed by Gemma Atwal

POSITION AMONG THE STARS (Netherlands) Directed by Leonard Retel Helmrich

Competition for Mid-Length and Short Documentary

FAMILY INSTINCT (Latvia) Directed by Andris Gauja

THE HANGMAN (Israel) Directed by Netalie Braun and Avigail Sperber

PEOPLE I COULD HAVE BEEN AND MAYBE AM (Netherlands) Dir Boris Gerrets

Competition for First Appearance

ABUELOS (Ecuador/Chile) Directed by Carla Valencia Dávila

FEATHERED COCAINE (Iceland) Dirs Thorkell S. Hardarson and Örn Marí Arnarson

KANO: AN AMERICAN AND HIS HAREM (Philippines) Directed by Monster Jimenez

Competition for Student Documentary

ALL MY FATHERS (Germany) Directed by Jan Raiber

A SCREENING AT THE TATRY CINEMA (Poland) Directed by Igor Chojna

WHAT'S IN A NAME (Belgium) Directed by Eva Küpper

Competition for Dutch Documentary

PARRADOX Directed by In-Soo Radstake

STAND BY ME Directed by Monique Lesterhuis and Suzanne Raes

POSITION AMONG THE STARS Directed by Leonard Retel Helmrich

DOC U Award

ARMADILLO (Denmark) Directed by Janus Metz

AUTUMN GOLD (Germany/Austria) Directed by Jan Tenhaven

REVOLUTION (Cuba) Directed by Mayckell Pedrero Mariol

Competition for Green Screen Documentary

No Nominees were named

DocLab Award for Digital Storytelling

CALIFORNIA IS A PLACE (US) Directed by Zackary Canepari and Drea Cooper

HIGHRISE/OUT MY WINDOW (Canada) Directed by Katerina Cizek

SOUL PATRON (Germany/Japan) Directed by Frederik Rieckher