

TEN OUT OF TEN

This year, the IDFA Kids & Docs workshop celebrates its tenth edition, and once again ten Dutch filmmakers have been selected to develop a 15-minute child-themed documentary. At the end of the workshop, an award valued at €35,000 and donated by the Dutch Cultural Media Fund, will be presented by an independent jury. Six films from the 2009 workshop feature in the 2010 IDFA Kids & Docs international programme.

“The workshop has stimulated the genre for the broadcasters,” Kids & Docs chief Meike Statema comments. “Without this, not so many broadcasters would commit to producing children’s documentaries. We have had over fifty projects come out of the workshops already, so that is a huge push in terms of volume, and for the industry as well. I think the broadcasters think it’s important to broadcast real and important stories.” During the workshop each filmmaker receives support from one of ten participating broadcasters, and the completed projects are subsequently screened both at IDFA and the Cinekid festival, before broadcast on children’s channel Z@pp. Forty-six films have been made and broadcast since the first Kids & Docs workshop. This year’s offerings, to be broadcast post-IDFA, will bring this number up to fifty-two. In addition to the workshop projects, four other Dutch projects will screen in the Kids & Docs

film programme. International highlights of the programme include the Greek doc *The Game Must Go On*, about children exerting their right to play football despite the complaints of neighbours, and the Iranian *It’s Confirmed*, in which pupils campaign during the annual election for the school council.

“Every year, the response to the Kids & Docs programme is really good; it’s really fun and very exciting”, Statema points out. “The way the documentaries are made – especially over the last few years – is based on visualisation, so in style they are very poetic and very different from what kids are used to seeing on television. They are expecting to see something like the news, and when they see something that feels more like a fiction film they ask if it is real. Most of the time, these films really touch them. They have a lot of questions and really identify with the subject. They can recognise themselves and a new world is opened up to them.” NC



LAB REPORT

“The term DocLab is not to be used in its most rigid, literal form – although we do have a project in the programme called *The Test Tube*,” jokes IDFA DocLab czar Caspar Sonnen.

The programme, now in its third year, is a showcase for new forms of documentary filmmaking and storytelling. The twenty projects this year include *One Day on Earth*, Kyle Ruddick’s film garnered from thousands of hours of material filmed by members of the general public on 10 October 2010, and *Les communes de Paris*, in which 23 inhabitants take a digital stroll through their city.

“At IDFA, we have always had the infrastructure to present regular, linear films,” Sonnen explains. “On the other hand, we had beautiful, interactive documentaries, webdocs – presented both offline and online – and all these weird things made on mobile phones and using data visualisation and interactive websites and what have you, but we didn’t have a place for them at the festival. So we created a place, and that place was DocLab.”

This year, IDFA DocLab and the Forum will host a panel discussion to try and determine which types of new media projects work, and which are worth investing in. Panelists will include Joel Ronez of Arte France and Rob McLaughlin of the National Film Board of

Canada. “It’s important to have a few people who have a proven track record over the past few years doing creative artistic storytelling online and using new media in a way that has reached audiences and has received critical acclaim,” Sonnen stresses. “We will ask them how they spend their money, why do they choose this project and not that one. This is something we all need to learn.”

Other DocLab guests include Webby Award winner Katerina Cizek, whose 360° installation *HIGHRISE/Out My Window* features in the 2010 programme, and live storyteller and host of *The Moth*, Ophira Eisenberg, who with Zach Wise (multimedia producer from the New York Times) will be a keynote speaker at the IDFA DocLab – Back to the Future presentation, shedding light on the new methods of doc story-telling. This year also sees the inaugural IDFA DocLab Award for Digital Story-telling, the winner of which will receive a state-of-the-art Canon 5D camera. NC

DocLab Presentation – Back to the Future
Tue 23/11 14:00 Escape Club admission free



Kids & Docs 2008

photo: Felix Kalkman

EXIT THE DRAGON

Mid-length competitor *The Chinese are Coming to Town* is director and photographer Ronja Yu’s second film at IDFA, following *Goodnight Beijing* (2006), in which she followed preparations for the Summer Olympic Games held in that city in 2008. Yu was born in Beijing and moved to Sweden in 1989, where she went on to study documentary at Stockholm’s Dramatiska Institute.

In *The Chinese are Coming to Town*, she again deals with the preparations for a huge event with potentially massive economic and social ramifications. In this case, rather than a sporting event, Yu focuses on a massive commercial development, to be realised in the sleepy town of Klamar in Sweden by mysterious Chinese businessman Luo Jingxing (aka ‘Mister Luo’). “I read about the project in the news,” the director says. “It sounded interesting – and huge – so I made contact with Luo, and met him in China. He was happy with my interest in the project, and for me to follow the first construction workers’ trip from Shanghai to Sweden. He also took me along to meetings with local government officials in Sweden.” The access granted to the filmmaker is evident from the ease with which she films these discussions, as well as negotiations and – increas-

ingly – arguments and misunderstandings that take place between the Swedish ‘hosts’ of the project and their Chinese ‘guests’. The initial enthusiasm for the project – launched with beautiful scale models, posters, flags and fireworks – gradually dampens, as differences in culture and above all working practices slow the work down, before bringing it to a grinding halt.

“They were quite proud of the project back then,” Yu says of the Swedes involved. “Four years later, some of them came to a screening of the film in Kalmar, and talked about how they still think they did things right. Johan, the local council official involved, said ‘We couldn’t have done things any differently’. And the locals must have agreed with him, because he was re-elected to the local council this year.”



The Chinese are Coming to Town

“I too believe the centre could have worked”, Yu says. “Similar marketplaces have worked in Europe before. And it could have brought benefits to both the Swedes and the Chinese. It was a surprise that it didn’t come to anything.” One unresolved factor in the whole story is the role of the mysterious Mister Lou, who eventually vanished completely from the radar, leaving some very large unpaid bills behind. “I have no idea what happened to Lou,” the director, who also followed attempts to track him down in China, says. “He is still in China, operating somehow, underground. Many of the investors in the project are from his hometown, so it won’t be easy for him to

build up business there again.” Financing her film was also not easy, Yu says. “In fact, at one point Mister Luo even offered finance!”, she reveals. Fortunately, she didn’t take up his offer – here at IDFA, however, she is open to “good advice on film finance”. MB

IDFA COMPETITION FOR MID-LENGTH DOCUMENTARY
The Chinese are Coming to Town – Ronja Yu
Thur 18/11 13:15 Tuschinski 2
Sat 20/11 18:30 Tuschinski 6
Sun 21/11 12:00 Munt 12 Press & Industry Screening
Tue 23/11 22:15 Tuschinski 2
Thu 25/11 16:30 Tuschinski 8
Fri 26/11 16:15 Tuschinski 3 Press & Industry Screening