

Ruëll, Niels. "Cinemathek casts a spotlight on filmmaker Johan Grimonprez," *Bruzz*, October 16, 2017.

BRUZZ

Cinemathek casts a spotlight on filmmaker Johan Grimonprez



Cinemathek's Âge d'Or Festival casts a spotlight on artists and filmmakers who explore uncharted territory. So it was written in the stars that sooner or later, they would find the Vismet resident Johan Grimonprez, who is internationally renowned for intriguing films like *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* and *Shadow World*.

CNN

Listing all of Johan Grimonprez's inspirations in a newspaper or magazine would be simply impossible. You would need a whole book. A very big book. "There is always an immense archive of things that I combine and bring together in my work. 'Being in the world' is probably my biggest source of inspiration. I studied in New York and saw the Iraq War take over the school."

"We were allowed to visit the operations room of an aircraft carrier. Everyone was deeply impressed by the technology. Nobody seemed to care that the ship had been built to invade Iraq. CNN was a big inspiration then too. The language used on television was so different from what I was accustomed to hearing in Belgium. CNN discussed the Iraq War, but interrupted their coverage for shopping and advertising. I thought that was so absurd and surreal."

Borges vs Borges

In *Double Take* (2009), the great Alfred Hitchcock is confronted with a doppelganger. "If you meet your double, you should kill him," is the tagline of Grimonprez's film about the global rise of fear as a market and political capital. "I was deeply inspired by the Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges. Do you know the story in which Borges meets himself? He cross-examines himself when he walks into the hotel where he will commit suicide."

"The other Borges answers evasively and lies. But Borges knows that he would have lied too. And because he is lying, he knows that he is talking to the real Borges. The truth comes to light because of the lie. I am fascinated by reversals like that. My co-author, the English writer Tom McCarthy, translated 'Borges meets Borges' as 'Hitchcock meets Hitchcock'."

Commons

In the astonishing documentary *Shadow World* (2016), Grimonprez narrates how world leaders dance to the drum of the corrupt and immoral arms industry. "The documentary was partly inspired by the book of the same name by the South African politician Andrew Feinstein. But I wanted to add something. Film can also touch viewers emotionally."

"So I started investigating what the arms trade does to the world. I started studying everything related to Syria, and the future of war and the technologies of war. But I also studied the alternatives. Three books by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri come to mind: *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*. David Bollier also says incredibly interesting things about the commons."

Science Fiction

In *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997), Grimonprez focuses on airplane hijacking, the mediatisation of terrorism and the explosion of the culture of fear. It was a visionary piece because in 1997, 9/11 was not a date that sent shivers down New Yorkers' spines. "Among many other things, I was inspired by two books by Don DeLillo: *Mao II* and *White Noise*."

The artist is fascinated by science fiction more generally. He names *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Blade Runner* as examples. "I still enjoy watching *Battlestar Galactica*. I'm astounded by its imaginative power. The situation has become so dire that the Americans start using suicide vests and try to take out their enemies in suicide missions. President Laura Roslin is pro-abortion, but has to make it illegal because there are only 50,000 humans left."

Time, A Hesitant Smile

Johan Grimonprez has put together "Time, a Hesitant Smile" for the Âge d'Or Festival. It is an exhibition, masterclass, and retrospective of his short and long films. One highlight will be the première of *Blue Orchids*, a film that builds on *Shadow World* and makes even more shocking revelations about the war industry.

"*Shadow World* relied on the arms dealer Riccardo Privitera, but halfway through I realised that he was totally unreliable as a source. I had to cut most of that out. But it was precisely as an unreliable source that he was a template of what was happening in the shadow world. And exposure is bewildering and revealing. So I explored his story more deeply. As a counterpoint to Privitera, I interviewed Chris Hedges. As a war correspondent at *The New York Times*, he watched humanity's worst shit unfold before his very eyes. It completely traumatised him."

Raymond Tallis | *On Tickling* is an example of a short film in "Time, a Hesitant Smile". "Raymond Tallis is a British neurologist. I asked him about various things, such as why we cannot tickle ourselves. Only schizophrenics can do that. Tallis thinks that consciousness is not an interior construction but a relational reality. I exist because you can tickle me."

"Tallis often refers to language. He thinks that Descartes was wrong with his 'I think therefore I am'. Descartes can only express this thought with words that he has learned because he is part of a community. 'We dialogue and therefore we are', Tallis says."