

PROJECT PROPOSAL

Nobody Knows Many Things About Me

MFAD2: Graduate Research Seminar [GRS]

Piet Zwart Institute
Lens-based Media
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I missed you.

Nobody Knows Many Things About Me is a graduation project which will result in a film or film installation in which we'll enter the lives of two friends who devote their lives to art. Each in their own way they struggle with mortality and the meaning of legacy. Just as their lives run, the two storylines intersect and sometimes run simultaneously (on multiple screens).

At the heart of the film is a place where we often come back to: Henk's dilapidated house full of belongings and paintings. Daily he waits for his dear friend Rinke who brings his groceries and joins for small talk, or sometimes a heart-to-heart. On the other hand Rinke struggles with a burn-out and is challenged in his role as caregiver. The garden seems to give him some redemption, but winter is coming and the question arises: what needs to be cared for?

The protagonists: Henk van der Ploeg (73) lives close to my parents and I have known from many brief encounters over the last 15 years. Rinke Nijburg (58) is my father. During the past years their relationship evolved as Henk's health has declined and my father sometimes struggles with his mental health. It made me wonder: what drives my father to go there every day to bring the groceries? Their situation makes me reflect on how my own life is organised, as well as my position as an artist. How do we meet the Other? The other human-being, the animal, the planet? I have touched these themes before in previous films but they were never so close to home as this piece. The challenge for me as a filmmaker is how to translate this everlasting struggle: *the attempt to care* in an audio-visual piece - this time on a hyper personal level.

Previous work

Another project close to home. Almost two years ago I made a documentary about the two Dutch sisters: Froukje and Jetske Visser, daughters of a dear friend of my father (also called Henk!). In the documentary '*Alles wat gezegd moet worden*' (ENG: *Everything That Needs to be Said*) they organise a solo exhibition for their father: artist Henk Visser (1953 – 2019) who recently passed away. This is the first time Henk will get his long cherished but dreaded stage. This is a project quite close to home since I know the girls from way back and their story relates to my own - my parents are both artist and made a lot, (a lot!) of paintings and drawings in their lives, still stored in their studio's.

"The question about the legacy of an artist often becomes the responsibility of their children."

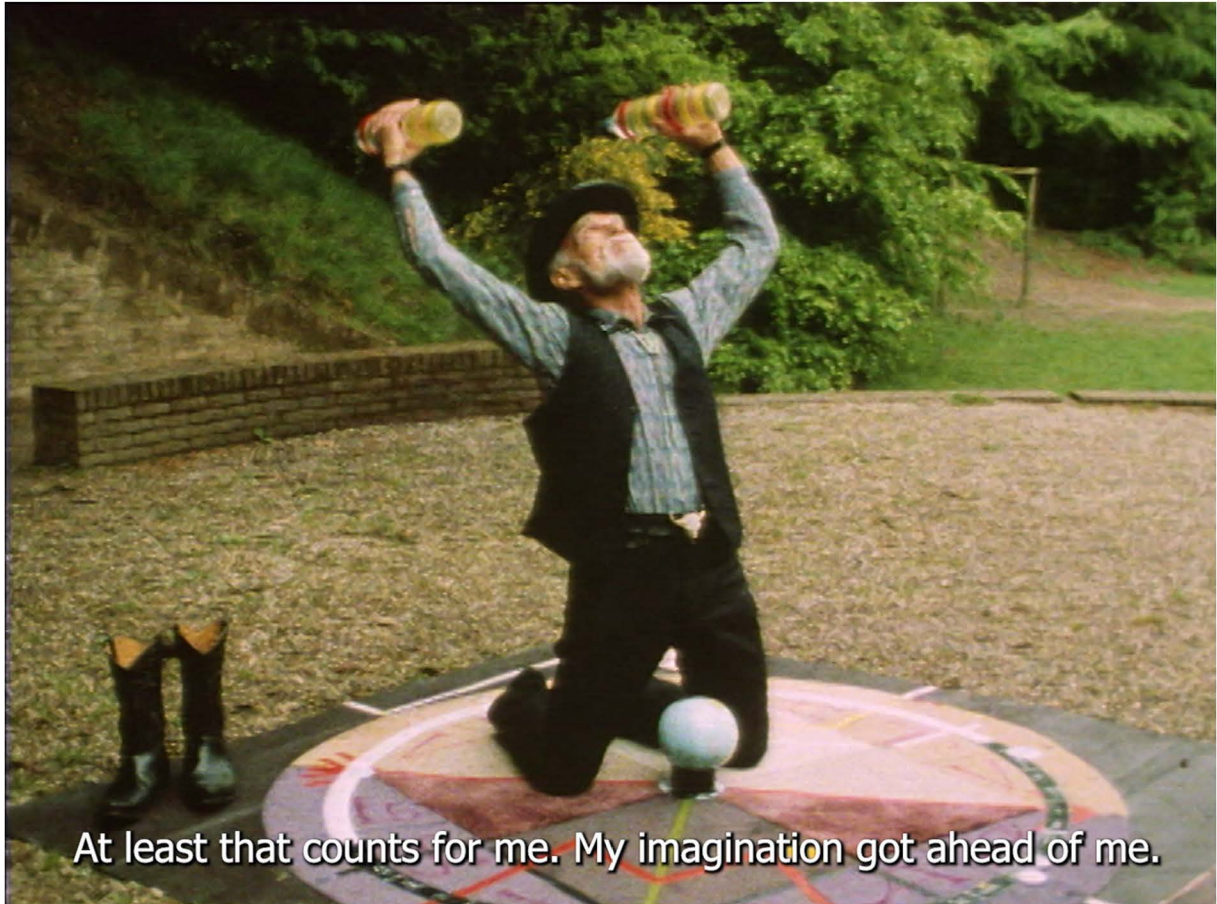
Last year I made a documentary for the Eye Research Lab program, a initiative from Eye Film museum Amsterdam & Master degree: Lens-based Media. The documentary is about retired filmmaker Sacha Barraud whom is looking back on his so called 'failed' feature film from 1989, which was never finished. In *My Sweet Faillure* (2022) he's looking back at the rushes of his feature *Sweetly Continental*, in cinema setting. Despite he's very contagious view – he's not shy with self-critic and likes to make fun of his own ego – he still seems to have hope the film will be finished.

In 2019 I graduated from the University of the Arts in Utrecht with a short film called *Anemoia* which is a hybrid, essayistic film about the phenomenon of nostalgia. The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows from John Koenig introduced me to the term 'Anemoia' means something like: nostalgia for a time or place one has never known. Anna, the main character is only at the beginning when we see some photo's through a view-finder. She visits several places that seems nostalgic to her and make her reflect on her thoughts. In the meantime daydreams keep occurring and a life in the 'here and now' seems unreachable.



One should record everything because in a blink of an eye it could be gone.





At least that counts for me. My imagination got ahead of me.



If we sum up these subjects we can draw a clear red line, it's about human legacy and taking a look in the past to try to make sense of the present.

Doubts and certainties

The common threat is exactly the point at which the doubt pops up. Do I really want to continue this theme of looking back, looking into the past? Is there a way to stay close to the present, and look in the future? Or are these concerns mostly my own projection?

"I feel like this film about Henk and my father is telling me to "slow down" in a sense."

Henk is physically very slow for one of the reasons his lifestyle always included a lot of red milk: alcohol, cocaine and tabaco. Also, time seems to stand still in his house. Paintings, objects, furniture seem to have been there forever. For these reasons you could draw the conclusion that the perfect "shape" for this film project heads towards slow cinema. But is this really the right move for this project? I feel like this specific shape could set the 'wrong' tone. I'm much more eager to catch the madness and complexity of life in a decoupage/montage that translates that feeling.

Is there a way out of the slow cinema for *Nobody Knows Many Things About Me*? Is there a way to search for a shape that will make it a film about today's modern life? Is there a way to stay true to Henk's story but not make a film about a man in decline that seems to live in the past rather than the future? Though I want to be true to the story of the real human beings in my films. I'd rather not paste something on it, which maybe does not fit. It's going to be a challenge but I'd like to figure it out!

New directions

And now something completely different? Previous films I made together with other creatives were always intended for the big screen. I've always enjoyed thinking about scenes and playfully ordering them into stories and I've had a little experience with audio-visuals as installations in an exhibition space. They tend to stay away from a storyline. Funny enough, through the input of this Master degree at Piet Zwart and also because of the characteristics of this project, I feel like I want to challenge myself by thinking of this project in another setting than cinema. Part of the answer lies in the fact that this is a very personal story set in my own family. It could be that I feel the complexity of the reality happening around me more than ever. Working with several screens can be interesting for the perception of time and place in this project. Events happening at the same time in a different place or room can be seen side by side in an installation setting. Luckily for me there are enough people connected to the Master degree Lensed-based Media, with experience in installation films who can give advice such as filmmaker Stefanos Tsivopoulos from whom we had and have a Thematic Seminar called: *Video Installations*. So I'll not hesitate to dive into some great, or failed, examples to learn from. Though I'm not sure yet if this is the correct medium, this way of thinking can definitely bring me new ideas.

Methodologies

My thesis will result in an essay called *An Attempt to Care* in which I will reflect on the process of making: all the things influencing along the way, the everyday observations I make, including the doubts and uncertainties that come along with filmmaking.

Then there's the theory. I'm gathering books, essays, films and lectures that talk about a lot of different themes. Dutch writer Roxanne van Iperen wrote 'Own well-being first' an essay in which she explains how the Dutch midclass lost her liberal values. It's a critic and explanation about why and how this could have happened. This kind of essay could help me see Henk's story in a bigger context while a book like 'Anders Zichtbaar' and a film like 'Ne Me Quitte Pas' could help me think and reflect of the potential shape of the film: about how to and how not to (audio)visualize this specific story. Filmmaker, writer and tutor Steve Rushton will guide me through this process of writing.

The practical approach towards this project will not be so different from other projects. Shooting and editing will alternate constantly which will make it easier to get a little distance now and then which will help me get back to the core of things. I'm making this project as a one-man crew for the second time in my life, therefore it will be good to get a lot of input and feedback from classmates and teachers during the process. Feedback on camerawork but also on the decoupage. My mentors, filmmakers Sabine Groenewegen and Laura Huertas Millan will play a big part in the feedback. Furthermore I'd like to follow the advice of guest tutor and filmmaker Etienne Kallos and not forget Henk & Rinke themselves - I'm very curious what *they* think the film should be like.

The Common Thread

It's a fact that I come from a family of artist. I can't deny where I come from. My own love for making has brought me to several different places, but my background and probably my gut feeling, often brought me back to the subject that concerns the struggles that come with (and from) making art.

The film (installation) and the essay will be seen through the question: what does 'caring' look like? I'll not be shy to approach this subject in a broader view: I'm interested in how we meet the 'Other' - and like mentioned before - the 'Other' can also be something other than a human-being. Although my collection of readings and observations will not be literally in the final film, they will nevertheless influence the outcome and probably change my view on the project *Nobody Knows Many Things About Me*.



I missed you.



Red milk.
- Nice.

Bibliography (work in progress)

[Book] *Anders Zichtbaar* (ENG: Visible Differently) (2010) – Johan Swinnen (red.)

[Book] *Vogels* (ENG: Birds) (2022) – Ton Lemaire

[Essay] *De herontdekking van Iris Murdoch* (2022) – Arthur Eaton

[Essay] *Eigen welzijn eerst* (ENG: Own well-being first) (2022) - Roxanne van Iperen

[Lecture] Food, Self & "The Natural History of the Chicken (2011) – Kirby Farrel

[Film] *Truffel Hunters* (2021) – Michael Dweck & Gregory Kershaw

[Film] *A Family Affair* (2015) – Tom Fassaert

[Film] *Ne Me Quitte Pas* (2013) – Sabine Lubber Bakker & Niels van Koevorden

[Film] *Er even helemaal tussenuit* (ENG: Getting away from it all) (2012) – Inge Meijer

[Film] *Engel van Doel* (ENG: Angle of Doel) (2011) – Tom Fassaert

[Film] *Bloody Mondays & Strawberry Pies* (2008) – Coco Schrijber

[Film] *Fiona Tann* (1997) – My You Life In Interesting Times

[Film] *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) – Chantal Akkerman

