

TEXT
ON
PRACTICE

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WESTPHAL
LENSBASED 2023/2024

This year my goal was to focus on elaborating my own vision and developing my skills as a director of photography.

This journey began with the kickoff of the EYE research labs which was a major inspiration for me. With no specific guidelines, I was challenged to create a prototype of a final short film of about 3 minutes within 2 weeks. I immediately gravitated towards a topic that I haven't let go of to this day: TIME.

Time is everywhere and nowhere. It's something we're obsessed with or forget entirely. The link with time that I find fascinating is the time we leave behind and store as our memories. Our memories which we often leave untouched and gradually letting them fade into the past and forget. Which I think is a shame, because I see our memories as small puzzle pieces that each of us shapes as humans, thus giving color to our perspectives on things.

Something else that I started to intertwine within my work, which has a lot of overlapping with time and memories, is emotional realism. This is a concept I was introduced to during my final year at HKU, and it's something I will never let go of. It concerns the emotional journey or arc of characters in connection with their psychology and motivations. Emotional realism is what comes closest to the real world in film, yet at the same time, it doesn't. For the viewer, this is the closest they come because, like any individual, they experience things in their own world, through their own lens, creating their own 'truth', shaped by their own memories.

This 'realism' is therefore far removed from 'actual reality', if we can even speak of such a thing.

Time, emotional realism and memories are things that deeply intrigued me, and I quickly had a visual idea in mind for the EYE research labs. This visual idea stemmed from my encounters with 'tangible memories' in recent times, specifically old slide photographs. Not just any old slides, but slides of complete strangers. You see, sometimes bins full of these items can be found in thrift stores or markets.

The idea that people essentially 'discard' their memories from the past and likely no longer attach any value to them lingered in my mind as a perplexing question.

I was personally captivated by these images; I could gaze at

them endlessly, so I decided to take some home with me. Subsequently, I called my parents to inquire whether they still had any of these slides. I was fortunate; they had three boxes full of slide photographs, a slide viewer, and a projector all gathering dust somewhere in the basement.

My father and I began to look through the slides, and just like in the thrift store, I couldn't tear my eyes away from them. Once again, I was almost hypnotised by these small photographs, which I like to call 'frozen memories'. I noticed that something truly special happened to my parents as they looked back at these photos; there was a kind of vitality that I don't see in people when they look back at vacation pictures, if they even bother to look back at them at all (which is another topic I'll address later).

But it wasn't just my parents experiencing this sense of vitality as they looked back at their own memories; I experienced it too. As a complete stranger to both the depicted scene and the people in the old slide photographs, I began to relive this frozen memory. This experience inspired me greatly and only fueled my fascination with 'time', particularly in the past.

I visualised this reliving experience in my short film, Slideshow.



In this film, I visualized my own experience of looking at these frozen memories. My emotional realism is thus evident here. In the film, we see several of the slide photographs that I purchased from a thrift store or received from my parents. I selected a few where I felt as if I was being hypnotized while looking at them.

While observing these 'frozen memories', I felt both confined and remarkably free as a spectator. Watching these 'frozen memories' momentarily halted 'time in the real world' for me, yet allowed 'time' in this 'frozen world' to progress. It felt like hypnosis, as if this small window came to life, and I, as a curious voyeur, peered into the lives of these individuals. Very little seemed to happen, yet simultaneously, a great deal unfolded. A whole story unfolded in my mind. And because I wasn't being directed but rather directing myself as I watched, my imagination ran wild.

I could haunt the frozen memory like a spirit and take a glimpse into a moment from the past at any point in time. I was a free spectator, and it truly felt that way. 'It was okay.'

I experimented with color, light, and camera composition in each slide. In this way, I translated the feeling and the story that unfolded within me into the visuals.



It's in these small details here, but these small things have made me incredibly warm and curious about bigger things. Bigger things that I was also searching for.

Something else I really wanted to achieve this year was to undertake a larger project where I could apply my vision and skill as a D.O.P. And then, the collaboration for: WAIT FOR NOW came about.

When my first documentary, Born to be Alive, premiered in September of last year, I got in touch with Noemi Bär, a Dutch filmmaker with a background of 4 years at the New York Film Academy. We decided to sit down together and discuss our own and each other's work.

We quickly realized that our visions aligned closely, and we decided to further develop the script, which was still nameless at the time and which Noemi had already started, into the script for Wait for Now.

Wait for now

How strong the feeling can return from when you first saw and met someone is when the moment arrives to bid each other goodbye. In the film "Wait for now," you are taken along as you simultaneously go back in time to the conversation between Giulia (Italy) and Reinier (Netherlands), who 'accidentally' met in a nightclub in Elst, Netherlands, and decide to spend the night together, in which they not only get to know each other but also themselves. And as their conversations flow and they grow closer to both themselves and each other, they also increasingly approach the moment when they will part ways.

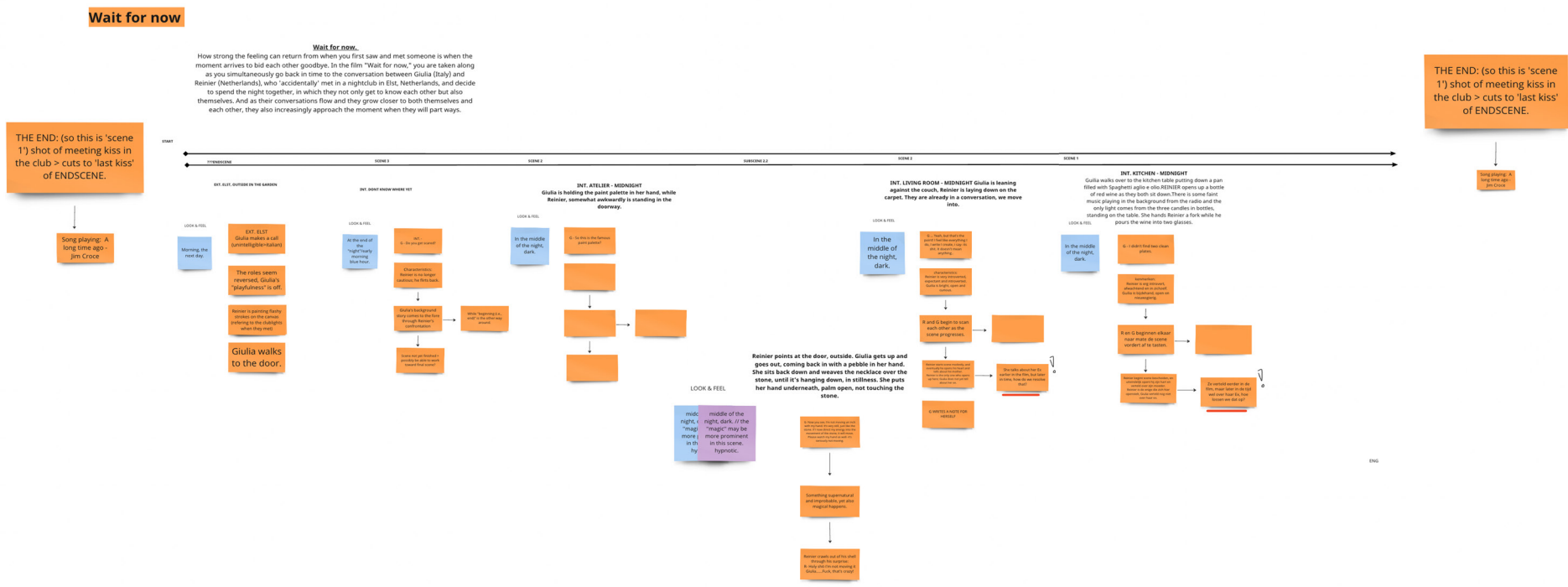
INT. KITCHEN - MIDNIGHT

Elst, Nederland. late 90s. GIULIA walks over to the kitchen table, putting down a pan filled with *Spaghetti aglio e olio*. REINIER opens up a bottle of red wine as they both sit down. There is some faint music playing in the background from the radio and the only light comes from the three candles in bottles, standing on the table. She hands Reinier a fork while he pours the wine into two glasses.

Our visions aligned well because, for instance, the script Noemi had begun writing, which essentially consists solely of a 'dialogue' between two people, provided ample room to build tension between the two characters not only through dialogue but also through all visual aspects, which I, as the Director of Photography (D.O.P), will be tasked with conceptualizing.

This is precisely the space I need and what I was searching for to further develop from the techniques I became familiar with during my previous project, Slideshow for EYE researchlabs.

In addition to creating the visual challenge, I also assist in transcribing the script and devising 'sub-scenes'. One of the most crucial aspects for which I have shared responsibility in the story, and simultaneously the aspect that excites me the most and presents the greatest challenge, is that we are telling the story from end to beginning. As we do so, the viewer remains unaware that they are moving backward in time.



I was and still am very passionate about the subject of 'time' and also searching for a project, or someone with a story, where I could use my visual vision as a translation. When Noemi was not only looking for someone who could visually translate her ideas but also for someone with whom she could give the story an additional twist, both in terms of content and in co-writing, everything fell into place, and the project Wait for Now began to take shape.

The film Wait for Now takes us back in time. Back in time because as the film progresses, we get to know the characters better and better. And you truly get to know someone when you know where they come from. By choosing this narrative approach, the entire film becomes a memory, and a memory is made up of a feeling. In Wait for Now, we convey this feeling not only through dialogue; in fact, the story is told through emotional realism and its visual translation. In this project, what I aim to achieve during this project is to elevate my cinematography to a new level by working meticulously and crafting a comprehensive lighting plan/camera movement plan in advance.

The lighting plan and camera movements will be linked to the message of the dialogue, the character development, and the progression of time in each scene. I can therefore apply the techniques I learned during EYE Research Labs in a large-scale film project, the project I was searching for.

GIULIA (CON'TD)
Do you have a stone?

Reinier points at the door, outside. Giulia gets up and goes out, coming back in with a pebble in her hand. She sits back down and weaves the necklace over the stone, until it's hanging down, in stillness. She puts her hand underneath, palm open, not touching the stone.

GIULIA (CON'TD)
Now you see, I'm not moving an inch with my hand. It's very still, just like the stone. If I now direct my energy into the movement of the stone, it will move. Please watch my hand as well- it's seriously not moving.

Giulia stays still, focusses, and the stone starts to make rounds.

GIULIA (CON'TD)
I can make it go faster

The stone starts swinging in circles, while her hand stays completely still.

GIULIA (CON'TD)
I can also make it stop.

Slowly, the stone comes to a halt.

