

Thursday, 28th October - Sarah Vanagt

19.00

Boulevard d'Ypres

Sarah Vanagt, Belgium 2010, DV, English subtitles, 65'
and excerpts from other works

21.30

Carte Blanche

Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania

Jonas Mekas, UK/Ger 1972, 16 mm, English version, 82'
Beforehand: excerpts from **Donkey Room** (work in progress)
Sarah Vanagt, Belgium 2010, DV, English

Sarah Vanagt

Sarah Vanagt (*1976) studied history in Antwerpen, Groningen and Brighton as well as film at the National Film and Television School in London. Her artistic work includes documentary films, video installations, and photography. She lives in Brussels.

Micro history

Her interest in history but also in story-telling is eminent in Sarah Vanagt's work. Important themes are the Belgian colonial past and World Wars I and II, with Vanagt's main concern being on how these collective experiences are handed down to later generations for further interpretation. What is remembered, what has been forgotten, by whom and how? Vanagt explicitly relates her empathy for the small gestures of reminiscence to Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg's concept of a "micro history".

From 2003 to 2005 Sarah Vanagt has traveled several times to the war-struck border region between Congo and Rwanda. The videos she produced during these visits all deal with questions of memory and historiography on the backdrop of the region's political past: the heritage of German and Belgian colonial rule and the long period of civil war and genocide. A group of works made in the border city of Goma focusses on the games and symbolic language of children.

The in-between state, in which the region is suspended, has triggered the interest of both the film-maker and the historian Sarah Vanagt: *"I went there because historiography is at a similar point in those countries. Something is past, and something has yet to emerge, and we don't yet know what that is. But how can one already tell something with the fragments that are available?"*

Boulevard d'Ypres

This is where Vanagt finds a connection to her latest work, *Boulevard d'Ypres*, in which she continues her search for fragments in her immediate local environment. On Boulevard d'Ypres, a traditional merchant street in Brussels, many transformation processes have left their traces, from colonial trade via labour migration to nowadays gentrification. The video reflects upon this history through the residents' and shop-keepers' personal stories. Many of these are about flight and exile; they become a mirror for a century of wars that is already commemorated in the street-name: Ypres, a WWI battleground.

The associative and playful use which Sarah Vanagt makes of archive images as well as her own footage creates a counter-balance to the heaviness of the stories; as if to not smother

the memory. "The best historians often seem to be those with the most vibrant imagination", says Sarah Vanagt in an interview. For her, the empty or partially cleared warehouses are just so many gaps on the threshold between end and beginning.

Sarah Vanagt is currently working on a film with the working title *Donkey Room*: in a South England residence for the elderly a donkey comes visiting the patrons once a week in their rooms. The animal's physical presence facilitates memory and reminiscing. For Sarah Vanagt, documenting these visits is part of her ongoing research on practical forms to access memories and make them communicable.

Carte Blanche: *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* by Jonas Mekas

...not only because Mekas is among Sarah Vanagt's favourite film-makers, but also because his trip to the past and his interest for small gestures represent practices of historiography (and film) which inspire and inform her own work. Mekas is a witness to the century we are heirs to, and his film, too, is about the "in-between", the haunting aspects of home and exile.

Further information on Sarah Vanagt and her work: www.balthasar.be