

LIMERICK FILMS PRESENTS
A CO-PRODUCTION WITH MAN'S FILMS PRODUCTIONS & HALAL DOCS

MOTHER



In a small village in Thailand, Pomm takes care of Europeans with Alzheimer's. Separated from her children, she helps Elisabeth during the final stages of her life, as a new patient arrives from Switzerland.

Pomm has sacrificed being close to her children in order to earn a better living, meanwhile in Switzerland a family prepares to say goodbye to their mother; a woman who has developed Alzheimer's in her 50s.

Mother is an intimate and moving observation, that allows us to explore the struggles and expectations of motherhood and the frustrations of being unable to care for our loved ones. As two narratives collide in this extraordinary coincidence, the powerful connection between patients and caregivers challenge our preconceptions.

Both Pomm and her patients are trying to recover the pieces of their lives that are gone, but through love and kindness they will learn to care for each other.

a documentary by
KRISTOF BILSEN

'A film full of unforgettable portraits of people navigating the most profound challenges.'

A haunting and gorgeous meditation.'

- Kirsten Johnson -
(executive producer, director CAMERAPERSON)

Long Synopsis

In a small village in Northern Thailand, there is a place where forgetfulness is a state of mind. This place is Baan Kamlangchay, a centre for westerners afflicted by Alzheimer's, where their families leave them in the hands of Thai caregivers. One of them is Pomm, a young woman who tenderly watches over the elderly.

But her favourite patient Elisabeth is also her confidante. To her she can confess the thing that keeps her up at night; how she is afraid she won't get her children back. She cannot afford to live with them: the youngest one is being raised by her ex-partner, hours away. The other two, children from a previous partner, live with her mother in another village.

Meanwhile, in Switzerland, Maya's memory is fading quickly, and her family has made a heartbreaking decision. They will have to leave Maya in the hands of Pomm, who lives at the other side of the world.

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As two narratives collide in this extraordinary coincidence, the powerful connection between patients and caregivers challenge our preconceptions. Both Pomm and her patients are trying to recover the pieces of their lives that are gone, but through love and kindness they will learn to care for each other.

*'I think everyone is afraid sometimes.
Who is going to take care of us ?
We might not have anyone
who takes care of us,
feed us or they might just leave us,
like what we have seen on TV
that someone was left to their fate.'*

- Pomm -
(caregiver, single mother)



Mission statement

Kirsten Johnson (executive producer)

MOTHER is a brilliantly sensitive film which interweaves the impossible choices that two families must make when economic necessities meet the scourge of dementia.

Asking us to look at both the intimate challenges as well as the global ones, MOTHER gently follows Pomm, the young mother who works at a home for foreign patients with dementia in Thailand as her story intersects with an anguished Swiss family, whose mother suffers from early onset dementia and they decide to send her to Thailand for care.

The film opens ways of thinking about what a mother's role is, questions what we owe our children and our mothers, and most profoundly, asks how we can face life's most painful conundrums with dignity.

Filmed in an exquisitely attentive observational approach, MOTHER's exceptional cinematography reveals the devastatingly trickster ways in which dementia transforms a person and emotionally impacts those who care for such people.

A film full of unforgettable portraits of those who are navigating the most profound challenges, MOTHER is a haunting and gorgeous meditation.

Kirsten Johnson has worked as both documentary cinematographer and director committing herself to human rights issues and visual creativity. She is the principal cinematographer on over 40 feature-length documentaries and has been credited on countless others.

She shot a number of highly-acclaimed and award-winning documentaries including "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" "Fahrenheit 9/11" "This Film is Not Yet Rated" and "The Invisible War."

She has a longstanding collaboration with Oscar-winning filmmaker Laura Poitras, credited as cinematographer for "The Oath," "Citizenfour," the upcoming "Asylum."

Her latest film, CAMERAPERSON, premiered at Sundance.



Subjects



POMM:

Pomm is a Thai caregiver in an Alzheimer's centre. She has three children that she can't afford to look after. She works two jobs in order to save up money and reunite with her family. She is a member of the karèn, a Christian ethnic minority. Pomm's hard childhood has sent her life on a long-winding road.

ELISABETH:

She was the oldest patient in the centre. A funny, playful lady who kept her sense of humour intact until a stroke took away her ability to speak. Pomm's patient and her best friend.

MAYA:

Pomm's new patient. Maya is very young for someone in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's, only in her fifties. Maya used to work as a floor manager in the restaurant that she owned jointly with her husband. Both her personal and professional life were wiped away with the diagnosis.

JOYCE:

Maya's oldest daughter. Together with her father and two sisters, Joyce accompanies her mother to Thailand where she will live from now on.



Filmmaker Kristof Bilsen



FILMS

Elephant's Dream, 75' / 2014

The Perfect Belgian, 34' / 2010

Parallel Lives, 34' / 2010

Three Women, 50' / 2005

Kristof did his Masters in Documentary Direction at the National Film and Television School (UK).

In 2014 he released *Elephant's Dream*, a portrait of three state-owned institutions and their workers in DR Congo, a film he directed/filmed and co-produced.

He is an IDFAcademy and EURODOC graduate and is one of the Emerging Producers for Ji.hlava 2019.

He won several awards, such as Grand Prize Nanook-Jean Rouch in Paris, Magic Hour Award at Docs Against Gravity (Warsaw), the TRT 2nd International Documentary Award in Istanbul, Special Mention Bertha Best International Documentary at One World Media Awards (UK), the Buzz Wilson Award at Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival and his work screened at various festivals internationally.

He regularly teaches and gives workshops on documentary research, storytelling and production.

Press World-Premier June 2019



"A radical achievement."

[The Guardian](#)



"A heartbreaking documentary."

[Filmuforia](#)

"Infinitely moving."

[Reel Steel](#)

"Beautiful and sensitive."

[Cineuropa](#)

"Powerful"

[Backseat Mafia](#)

Press & reactions on previous work Elephant's Dream (2014)

"Elephant's Dream" masterfully creates a dreamlike listlessness, sad and funny, that gently hints at great historical tragedy. A beautiful film."

- Joshua Oppenheimer -

"One of the most tender and intense films I've seen in ages – the agony and the scars of colonialism are most artfully captured in a true film d' auteur."

- Hubert Sauper -

Other Press:

Highly poetic, deeply insightful. (Critics Associated)

Sustained atmosphere. (BFI Sight & Sound Magazine)

An extraordinary documentary. (Hollywood Reporter)

Incredibly beautiful. (INDIEWIRE)

Eloquent, enigmatic. (The Globe and Mail)

A striking meditation on finding resilience. (Scenecreek)

Interview with the director

Your second feature doc, MOTHER, started as a film about Alzheimer's, but it quickly turned out to be a film that deals more with motherhood. How did that come about?

Most of the time a film chooses you, not the other way around. I first wanted to make a film about Alzheimer's because it's very close to me. My mother does suffer from dementia. That confronted me with something you take for granted. My mother, who raised four children, and basically owns the collective memory of our childhood, is growing more forgetful. It was quite shocking to realise that this collective memory, the safe haven I could always go back to, is starting to disappear. *

It's easy to say, "We should all care for our loved ones," but when push comes to shove it's really difficult.

I did a lot of research. Partly because I was looking into different ways of caregiving, and partly also as a coping strategy, to try to understand and prepare myself for the future of someone who has dementia. This condition will not get better, so you have to prepare for what is coming. And then I found out about this place in Thailand, Baan Kamlangchay. It's a peculiar place run by a Swiss, who welcomes Westerners who are afflicted by Alzheimer's. It's a safe place, where every patient has three caregivers around the clock and where they can be who they are, this new identity they have now. They're not confronted with the stress of hospitals or retirement

homes, and it's quite a stable environment.

Why did you choose Pomm as the main protagonist?

What we as filmmakers always try to look for is characters, people who intrigue you, who are a bit ambivalent and not too straightforward because you want to go on a journey with them as a filmmaker and then also as an audience. I was struck by her and by the tangible relationship she had with Elisabeth, the Swiss patient. It was like I was watching a mother with her daughter, that's how they behaved around each other. And gradually I found out about Pomm's life, how she couldn't take care of her children, and how much that hurt her. So this story about motherhood started to find its way into my mind.

During the first interview that I did with her, she talked about Elisabeth as if it was her mother or her grandmother. Suddenly, it showed dependency. Pomm was depending on her patient, Elisabeth, because it compensated for the care she couldn't give her own children.

How did you earn her trust?

Pomm needed to get to know us. We were honest about what our purpose was. Most importantly we wanted to tell her story, and of course she was in charge of what she would tell us and what not. Eventually what you will see in the film is that she has been brutally honest with us as well. She didn't shy away from sharing the stories that mattered to her.

In the film, we repeatedly see Pomm filming herself and her daily life, sometimes in very candid situations. Was that a choice you made deliberately and how did you go about it?

It was first a practical choice because of the distance as it allowed us to keep track on the story that Pomm was going through. But then we noticed what she filmed and how she was using the camera. She was taking control of her own story, she was really mastering the process of filmmaking as much as we did. And then we decided it would become a narrative device that we would incorporate in the storytelling, because Pomm is our main protagonist. Because this film is told mainly from her point of view, her video diary became an integral part of it.

How did you as a Western male filmmaker ensure that Pomm's representation wasn't subjected to the 'Western gaze'?

There is always an issue of representation when it comes to filmmaking. I try to be really aware of the power I have as a filmmaker, and how my frame of reference can affect someone's representation.

I think it's important to be open and humble and trust the process of where a story is leading me, and then us as team.

The patients, the caregivers, our fixer... are all female.

We were constantly checking and double-checking, "What are we

doing, which stories are we telling and whose stories are we telling?" That allowed us to give Pomm as much space as she needed. Her video diary also helped, she was in charge of how she would tell the most intimate details of her story.

What do you want people to take away after they've watched this film?

I would like people to watch this film, immerse themselves in the story with an open mind. Ask questions, be confused. But most importantly have empathy to appreciate the tension and conflict in what motherhood, what caregiving actually means, or rather the ambiguity of it all. It's easy to say, "We should all care for our loved ones," but when push comes to shove it's really more complex and difficult. The film invites you to question what care means in this day and age. The world we live in is very demanding yet I want us to think about empathy, kindness, about how you feel having to be a caregiver for your partner, your children, your parents and what the possibilities are in this demanding and complex world we live in.

* Kristofs' own mother passed away on May 1st 2019, some months after this interview was written up.

'A beautiful, touching film. The themes of loss and sacrifice and family are woven through this with real tenderness and poignancy.'

- Simon Kilmurry -
(International Documentary Association)



Limerick Films (producer BE)

Produces universal cinematic and engaging stories. Its work has been screened internationally and pitched at renowned sessions worldwide and co-produced *Elephant's Dream* and managed the outreach. Limerick Films is member of Flanders Doc, the Belgian–Flemish association of documentary producers, EDN and Eurodoc.

WWW.MOTHERTHEDOCUMENTARY.COM

www.limerickfilms.com
www.marionhansel.be
www.halal.amsterdam

Man's Films Productions (co-producer BE)

The company was set up in 1977, by Belgian filmmaker Marion Hänsel, in order to make her first short film *Equilibres*. *The Bed* was her first feature film. Hänsel also produced all of the ten films she directed, e.g. *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, as well as feature films of other directors. She has won many international prizes.

HALAL docs (co-producer NL)

Amsterdam-based documentary film company. The focus of Halal docs, run by Olivia Sophia Van Leeuwen, is to create documentaries of the highest international quality. The personal approach and vast experience in the creative, communicative, financial and organisational aspects of film production, allow their documentary film directors to implement their greatest creative potential while keeping their distinctive personal signature.

MOTHER is a production
by Limerick Films,
an independent
production company
based in Belgium
and is co-produced by
Marion Hänsel
(Man's Films Productions)
and Olivia Sophie van
Leeuwen (HALAL docs).

Release information

Festival Selections

2019

Sheffield Doc/Fest 2019- *World Premiere*
International Award Special Mention
DOKUFEST Prizren, Kosovo - in Competition
EBS International Documentary Festival - South Korea
Athens International Film Festival - in Competition
Film Fest Ghent
Chicago International Film Festival (US premiere) -
in Competition
Hot Springs DFF

Screenings

Bertha DocHouse (UK) theatrical run starting 21 Sept 2019



Technical Fact Sheet

Duration: 82' / 52'

Original language: Thai, Swiss German and English
Available subtitles: English, French, Dutch, Mandarin,
Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Thai, German.

Recording format: HD 4K

Screening format: DCP, Blu-ray, Pro Res 422

Production team

LIMERICK FILMS

Producer: Kristof Bilsen

Executive producer:

Kirsten Johnson

in co-production with
MAN'S FILMS PRODUCTIONS

Marion Hänsel

HALAL docs

Olivia Sophie van Leeuwen

RTBF

VRT-CANVAS

EOdocs

in association with

RADIO-TELEVISION SUISSE (RTS)

Steven Artels & Gaspard Lamunière

Associate producer: Steven Dhoedt

Creative team

Director: Kristof Bilsen

Written and development by Kristof Bilsen
and Xan Márquez Caneda

Camera: Marko Milovanović, Kristof Bilsen,
Chutimon Sonsirichai (Pomm)

Sound recording: Xan Márquez Caneda

Editing: Maarten Janssens

Music: Kyle Bobby Dunn

Sound design & mix: Hugo Dijkstal

Graphic design & poster: Sander Brouwer

Support

Pascal Decroos Fund, SACD/Scam,
Flanders Audiovisual Fund, Creative
Europe Programme - MEDIA of the
European Union, Netherlands Film Fund,
Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel.
With support of the Tax Shelter Initiative of
the Belgian Government.

Developed during EURODOC 2017

International sales

Deckert Distribution
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www.deckert-distribution.com

Belgium/Netherlands sales

Limerick Films
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Trailer QR & link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1jwafBMBPk>

