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Foreign Exchange



**Dutch filmmaker meets
expat pornographer**

**Dutch producer/writer/director
Stephan Brenninkmeijer talks erotic
filmmaking with American expat
and feminist pornographer Jennifer
Lyon Bell – and lets Amsterdam
Magazine eavesdrop...**

Sex On Film

Stephan Brenninkmeijer (known for his movies *Swingers* (2003) and *Caged* (2010)) loves to make films. 'Basically any film with a good storyline will do,' he says. 'Drama intrigues me. Observing human behaviour, enlarging it and drawing lessons from it is my focus. At the moment I'm concentrating on interesting stories that are erotic – in the mainstream landscape I'm the only one in the Netherlands who is doing that.'

By Lauren Wissot



J: Do your films share a similar moral about sex?

S: I like to think I am a man who tries to tell a story through the eyes of a woman. All my main films have female lead characters. I'm a bit of a feminist in a man's body. Is that weird? Stepping into these sexual stories was a real eye opener for me. I discovered that a lot of women think like me, but sometimes the same thoughts are judged completely different; that I find fascinating. Do you yourself feel that as an erotic filmmaker who's also a feminist you have to educate people with your films?

In part. I do feel a responsibility to be, well, responsible about the way I show sex in general and female sexuality in particular. But I think it's more that the things I'm interested in happen to be educational. I wove a condom into the story of my film *Matinée* because, as a viewer, I was weary of being distracted by the lack of a condom during sex scenes between strangers because I was worried about the female character's wellbeing. I just want to enjoy myself, and seeing a condom helps me do that.

I know you're a curator/programmer and the founder of Blue Artichoke Films, but besides your mini-feature *Matinée* what else have you directed? **I've made a short film called *Headshot* and a collaborative feature film that's coming out in April called *Des Jours Plus Belles Que La Nuit*. Right now I'm in the middle of shooting an erotic documentary about a beautiful, young Dutch feminist coming out of the closet as a BDSM submissive. I also shot a series in London about young London**

guys telling me their sexual histories and fantasies and then masturbating on camera, and that will be out soon too. They're all what I call explicit erotic films, except for *Headshot*, which is very sexual but technically non-explicit. Do you wish your own films had more explicit sex in them?

The main reason all my scenes are still simulated is because the actors won't cross that line. It is up to me to make it look real and I really succeed sometimes. I think it's a lot of fun to walk that thin line. It pushes your creativity to make it look real and the (positive) tension on the set is more tangible. I mean, if actors did those scenes more often it would be just another day at work. But I shot an orgy scene in *Swingers* with real swingers and they performed real sex on set. I didn't show that explicitly in the end, because it was out of sync with the other erotic (simulated) scenes.

So what's the most awkward moment you've experienced while working as a filmmaker in the sexual realm?

I once had an actor who came during simulated sex. Luckily the actress was not too shocked and handled it well. But the most bizarre moment was with the orgy scene in *Swingers* where I called 'Action!' and 20 people started humping away. I couldn't stop laughing for minutes.

Do you watch porn? Would you want to make porn?

Of course I watch porn. Who doesn't? But professionally I'm not eager to make porn at all. There is so much crappy porn it hurts. Porn has nothing to do with storytelling. It is just a tool for masturbation or serves as appetiser or background. Pornographic



Too hot?

Holland's biggest theatre chain Pathé refused to show Stephan Brenninkmeijer's *Swingers*, branding it pornography.

The Australian Film Commission banned Jennifer Lyon Bell's award-winning *Matinée* from the Melbourne Underground Film Festival the week before it was due to be screened.

imagery in films, however, could work and is not done well often. Therein lies a challenge and I would be willing to experiment with that. What drives you to make pornographic films?

I'm just making the films I'd personally want to see. And as a feminist I want to make films that turn women on.

Would or did you ever consider starring in your own film?

In theory I'd love it, because I love acting and I love sex. But there are two reasons that I don't. One – not only am I not an exhibitionist, I would definitely be too shy to be able to enjoy having sex in front of the camera. The other reason is that performing doesn't fit into the current romantic relationship that I have, which I do cherish. Oh, well. So if you heard that someone masturbated to a film you made, what would your reaction be?

Actually I talked to someone lately who confessed she did. It made her blush and me proud, because it was meant to be erotic.

Have you ever gotten physically aroused on set?

in films. Your films adhere to that?

I'm afraid Paul Verhoeven traumatised Dutch audiences in the 70s and they still have to overcome that. In that period nudity was badly lit and in your face. For the last couple of decades nudity in Dutch films has been rare. There is a comeback now but people still associate these new films with the hairy, bouncy nude scenes that didn't necessarily add to the storyline. So in part I agree that we have a bad reputation, but Dutch films have evolved into a more prudish showing of nudity than mainstream American films. It looks like Dutch filmmakers don't dare to reinvent erotic scenes. My scenes are different of course. In both my films sexuality IS the story. So is there any subject matter you really want to show, and what (legal) subject matter do you not, even if someone offered you a lot of money?

I was once offered a possible job directing a BDSM script in which the final situation turned bad. Because I feel I'm kink-positive

I refused the opportunity (even though I loved the production

company) because I felt the film sent a message that BDSM ruins lives. In my experience that's practically the opposite of true. And there are a heck of a lot of kink-negative scripts out there. In terms of what I'd love to show, I'd like to show sexual relationships that aren't romantic, but are still intimate – really excellent one-night-stand situations, for example.

Do you consider your films realistic? **They're always emotionally realistic, but not necessary literally realistic. The art-house, erotic fiction feature I just started making follows the lonely – and eventually joyful – story of a young woman who finds that she has an unusual erotic fixation. Though she doesn't want to be seen, and isn't an exhibitionist, she craves being naked while other people are clothed. So she has to find a way to feel satisfied both sexually and emotionally because she's chosen an unusual path. And eventually she finds a friend who may share the same feelings and sense of adventure. That's not realistic, in that I've never met anyone with this fixation, but it feels very true to me.**

'Twenty people started humping away. I couldn't stop laughing'

I myself am never aroused on the set. It is hard work and it takes a lot of concentration to shoot those scenes. Technically they're just like any other scene, be it action or emotional scenes. They need planning and you have to get those images in your head onto the screen. In editing, however, things can be different. That's when I know a scene works. Is there personal sexual tension for you during any part of the filmmaking process?

Just like you said, I don't feel it on the set but I do feel something in the editing, and that's how I know I'm on the right track. I do feel sort of a buzz during shooting when everything is clicking, but it's not the same feeling at all as being turned on in my private life. Maybe it's some kind of unique film-directors-only arousal? For the first time last week I got a little turned on describing to someone the plot of my new art-house fiction film, so I took that as a good sign that the film is going to be exciting – at least to me anyway. The Dutch, though, have a reputation for including unnecessary sexual scenes

