

Panel B2

Sala delle Colonne 1

Researching the History of Women in Animation

Pascal Lefevre & Roel Vande Winkel

A Belgian Tragedy? Rediscovering Nicole Van Goethem (1941-2000)



Today, Belgian animation director Nicole Van Goethem (1941-2000) is barely remembered. If her name is mentioned, it is usually done so in reference to “A Greek Tragedy” (1985), her directorial debut, which was distributed in the USA in 1986 and received the 1987 Academy Award for best animated short. (The actual award, however, was, as was customary, given to the producers of the film.) Interestingly, the members of the Academy chose “A Greek Tragedy”, which was a rather traditionally hand drawn animation, over Pixar’s completely CG film “Luxo Jr.” (1986), which is now considered a milestone in recent animation film history.

Van Goethem, a highly talented visual artist, had worked on some other projects before, but was taken by surprise by winning the “Oscar” and receiving the media attention that followed. After her next animated short (“Full of Grace”, 1987) it would take more than a decade before she made a third film. This long hiatus, which she filled with accepting other assignments (posters, promotion films), was among other reasons caused by a fallout between her and her producer. Her third, “L.A.T.” (2002), had to be finished and released posthumously, as Van Goethem died unexpectedly from a heart attack in 2000.

Van Goethem’s friends and her producer (with whom Van Goethem had reconciled) tried to keep her legacy alive by organising an exhibition (in 2003) and releasing a DVD with her three shorts and some commercials she made (in 2006). Nevertheless, Van Goethem has fallen into oblivion, in particular from an international viewpoint.

This paper brings a critical reassessment of the works of Van Goethem. The paper is based on extensive research into the hitherto un(der)valorised personal archives of Nicole Van Goethem, which were donated to the City of Antwerp shortly after her death. Containing her private and business correspondence, numerous press clippings and an innumerable amount of drawings and film cells, this archive allows us to paint a detailed portrait of Van Goethem’s work and life.

Biography

PASCAL LEFEVRE is special guest professor in the arts at LUCA School of Arts (campus Sint-Lukas Brussels). Since the late 1980s he has been researching graphic narratives. Most of his research (over 90 publications in 9 different languages) deal with graphic narratives, like the book he wrote with Jan Baetens, *Pour une lecture moderne de la bande dessinée* (1993). Sometimes also cinema, animation film, television, poster art or interactions of media were considered: for instance the contribution “Incompatible Visual Ontologies? The Problematic Adaptation of Drawn Images” (in *Film and Comic Books*, 2007) has been often referred to. Among his recent publications figures a study of graphic style in *The Visual Narrative Reader* (Cohn ed. 2016). Forthcoming in 2017 is his

contribution to a collection of essays on the animated documentary, *Drawn from Life* (Edinburgh University Press).

ROEL VANDE WINKEL is assistant professor of film & television studies at the University of Leuven. He teaches at the LUCA School of Arts and is associate editor of the "Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television". His research is usually media-historical and focuses among other things on Belgian and European cinema (production, distribution, and exhibition), historical films and media propaganda during the interwar period and during World War II. He undertook extensive research in international archives on European cinema under the German occupation, on which he is preparing several publications. He contributed articles to many international journals and published books such as "Cinema and the Swastika. The International Expansion of Third Reich Cinema" (with David Welch, 2011 revised) and "Silencing Cinema. Film Censorship around the World" (with Daniel Biltereyst, 2013).