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The Visionary

9'05"excerpt – 2013

Could you say something about *The visionary*, the work you will present at *Helicotrema 2014*?

Originally I made *The Visionary* as an installation as part of the *Workspace13* competition, organized annually by Filmhuis Den Haag (NL) and BNG Bank. Workspace is dedicated to exploring the boundaries of film and focusses on works which investigate the nature and operation of film.

The installation *The Visionary* was based on the fact that blind and visually impaired people miss the visual element when watching a film. Other elements, such as sound, become more important.

When listening instead of watching a film, the viewer has to use its own imagination to create the visuals.

I decided to create an installation which looks like a film set, a small living room or a private cinema. In the installation the visitor could experience an audio film which came from eight speakers surrounding four cinema chairs. Other objects, such as vans and lights, were part of the installation. When the location in the story changes, the atmosphere and light in the installation changed as well. By using special glasses the observer could take the position of a visually impaired visitor.

The audio in the film installation is based on the comic book *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905–1914) by Winsor McCay, in which a boy 'Little Nemo' experiences magical and bizarre events in his dreams. Together with composers / artists Kim David Bots and Matthijs Tuijn I made an adaption of four episodes of the series in the book, into an audio work in which all acts, actions, emotions and landscapes of the images are expressed in sound, voice-over and music.

After having the installation exhibited on several locations, I realized that a audio version of the work would allow me to understand how the work functions in different settings. For example I am curious how a visitor would experience the work while it is presented in a cinema room. Also I think that this version will allow a visitor to completely focus on the audio instead of also paying attention to the other aspects present in the installation.

In your work, narrative seems to be a constant, central interest. When and how did it all start?

Indeed the narrative is very important. This has several reasons. First of all I consider myself a filmmaker who is particularly interested in telling stories. My films are very visual and I focus on the aesthetics, but always with the narrative in mind. I find it interesting when different layers of a story in a work are expressed or revealed in diverse ways, visually, textually, orally or by sound.

With this background and my film-work in mind I can't imagine that I would make an audio piece in which the narrative plays a subordinate role. I myself love to read books and watch films, which allow me to become completely part of the story and absorb me.

The second reason for this focus on the narrative is the fact that the work is based on the comic series *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. The stories in these series are one-page narratives. Every page starts and ends almost in the same setting, with 'Little Nemo' in his bedroom falling asleep and waking up again. Already in an early stage I decided that I wanted to make an adaption of the book, which would follow this structure and the original narrative because I see this as one of the qualities of the work. Of course I changed many things in the stories such as characters, descriptions of places and parts in the storyline. But this emphasis of 'telling a story with a clear beginning and end' stayed.

In *The visionary's* narrative line, a sort of hallucinatory trip seem to take place in a child's mind. How did you get interested in this book?

I know the series *Little Nemo in Slumberland* since my childhood. It is strongly related to my father who had an English version of the book as well as a Dutch translation. I have these memories of reading these books on the attic of my parents. The images in the books impressed me as a child, they are drawn in such a fantastic way, full of imagination and visually so rich and bizarre!

These images always stucked in my head and popped up now and then.

As a preparation for creating the installation, I had several meetings with people who have visual impairment. One of the women explained the absence of sight as a possibility to experience every new situation as an adventure. For example, she transformed a staircase in a new room into a ravine and the sound of the cups in the kitchen made her imagining herself being in an American Dinner. I realized that there is a connection between the way she made adventures of ordinary rooms and situations and the way 'Little Nemo' transforms his bedroom in a place for adventures. The fact that the series *Little Nemo in Slumberland* shows such a visual approach to story telling, made it really a pleasure to turn the stories into audio adaptations.