

Document Citation

Title	Johan van der Keuken's global vision
Author(s)	James Quandt Chris Gehman
Source	<i>Cinematheque Ontario/a division of Toronto International Film Festival Group</i>
Date	2000 Mar 09
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	2-4
No. of Pages	3
Subjects	van der Keuken, Johan (1938-2001), Amsterdam, Netherlands
Film Subjects	Big Ben/Ben Webster in Europe, van der Keuken, Johan, 1967 Bewogen koper (Brass unbound), van der Keuken, Johan, 1993 I [heart] \$ (I love money), van der Keuken, Johan, 1986 Het oog boven de put (The eye above the well), van der Keuken, Johan, 1988 Het witte kasteel (Triptych north-south, part two: the white castle), van der Keuken, Johan, 1973 Beppie, van der Keuken, Johan, 1965 Herman Slobbe/Blind kind 2 (Herman Slobbe/Blind child 2), van der Keuken, Johan, 1966 Amsterdam global village, van der Keuken, Johan, 1996

Even stilte (A moment's silence), van der Keuken, Johan, 1963



THE WHITE CASTLE

JOHAN

GLOBAL



1958



AMSTERDAM GLOBAL VILLAGE



THE EYE ABOVE THE WELL

"Few filmmakers working today can match the absolute commitment, intelligence, perfectionism, and humility that Johan van der Keuken brings to his work. . . . for the Dutch filmmaker and photographer affectionately known to his fans as JVDK, filmmaking is not only a profession but also a calling, a way of seeing and a way of life." – **Marcy Goldberg, DOX**

"It can't be said too often that the tradition of the great documentaries, from Joris Ivens to Chris Marker, from Flaherty to van der Keuken, has less to do with objective reportage on faraway realities than with the invention of the aesthetic of diversity."

– **Cahiers du cinéma**

Johan van der Keuken is among the greatest documentary filmmakers of the postwar period. Born in Amsterdam in 1938, van der Keuken began making photographs at an early age, publishing *We Are 17*, the first of several books of his photographs, in 1955. His attention turned to filmmaking around the same time, and he studied at the IDHEC film school in Paris from 1956-58. While continuing to work as a photographer and prolific filmmaker, responsible for more than 50 films made over the course of four decades, van der Keuken has also produced a large body of insightful and unconventional film criticism since the early sixties. In 1999, van der Keuken was awarded the Golden Gate Persistence of Vision Award by the San Francisco International Film Festival, and was chosen as one of two artists given retrospectives at the reopening of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris - the other was Michael Snow.

From the start, van der Keuken's films were characterized by the precision and thoughtfulness of their images and arguments. He describes his work as inhabiting a "no man's land between documentary and fiction," and will direct or rehearse his subjects, or film multiple takes of a particular action, if it will help him to get the images he wants, an approach that would be anathema to a purist of the direct cinema school. Van der Keuken often mentions narrative filmmakers when speaking of influences on his work – Straub/Huillet, Hitchcock, Lang – but in many ways his simple and flexible methods are quite opposed to those of the fiction film: he is his own cinematographer, and generally works alone or with his sound recordist and wife Noshka van der Lely as his only crew member, allowing him to film scenes from everyday life in a way that would be totally impossible for a large crew with trucks full of equipment. As Marcy Goldberg writes, "Over the years he has trained himself to make split-second, on-the-spot decisions about framing and composition to correspond with the idea of the finished film that he carries around in his head. The result is an immediacy which is also crafted through and through."

If van der Keuken's films are often works of great visual beauty, they are also much more. The films' rich, complex montage structures address the essential issues of our times: the divide between rich and poor; the global circulation of capital; the interpenetration of traditional and commercial cultures; racial divisions and religious and factional warfare. This series offers a rare opportunity to see several of van der Keuken's greatest works, and we are very pleased that he will be present March 9 - 12 for three screenings at Cinematheque Ontario and a guest lecture at Ryerson. – **Chris Gehman**

This retrospective has been made possible through the generous assistance of Susanna Scott, Ideale Audience, Paris; Mary Fessenden, Cornell Cinema, Ithaca; Kathy Geritz, Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley; Lesley Sparks and Bob Burley, Kodak Lecture Series, The School of Image Arts, Ryerson, Toronto. Film descriptions by James Quandt and Chris Gehman.

Cinematheque Ontario
Spring 2000 Programme Guide March 9 - May 6
p2-4

VAN DER KEUKEN's VISION



AMSTERDAM GLOBAL VILLAGE

10TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EVENTS MARCH 9-12! JOHAN VAN DER KEUKEN IN PERSON! JvdK's EARLY SHORT FILMS

Johan van der Keuken's refined visual sense, critical intelligence, and diversity of subject matter are already fully apparent in this programme of early shorts, each film a kind of portrait. A MOMENT'S SILENCE gives us city scenes that converge on a shared moment of silence before business as usual begins again. The captivating BEPIE creates one of the fullest, most complex portraits of a child ever seen on film. As van der Keuken's camera follows the irrepressible Beppie, a girl of nine, from home to school and through the streets, the film elicits an increasing sense of intimacy, and of the delights and difficulties of a fascinating person. The subject of HERMAN SLOBBE – BLIND CHILD II is no less remarkable: the teenaged Herman is opinionated, dynamic, and funny, an aspiring musician and disc jockey who carries a microphone with him everywhere and whose love of sound and music clearly guided the making of the film. (The cutting of sound and image during a scene at a racetrack is both hilarious and a tribute to Herman's mastery of noisemaking.) BIG BEN – BEN WEBSTER IN EUROPE follows the great American jazz saxophonist through a period spent in Holland recovering his health, at home, in rehearsal, on tour, and at his favourite spot, the zoo. (CG)

A MOMENT'S SILENCE

Director: Johan van der Keuken • The Netherlands 1963 10 minutes

BEPIE

Director: Johan van der Keuken • The Netherlands 1965 38 minutes

HERMAN SLOBBE – BLIND CHILD II

Director: Johan van der Keuken • The Netherlands 1966 29 minutes

BIG BEN – BEN WEBSTER IN EUROPE

Director: Johan van der Keuken • The Netherlands 1967 31 minutes

Thursday, March 9 7:00 p.m.

(Patrons please note: this event will be held as part of The Independents series, so admission is free. See pages 16-17.)

JOHAN VAN DER KEUKEN KODAK SERIES LECTURE

Johan van der Keuken will give a special illustrated artist's talk on his approach to film and photography. Off-site event presented by The School of Image Arts, Ryerson Polytechnic University, 350 Victoria Street (at Gould), Lecture Theatre L-72.

Friday, March 10 at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free.

Call (416) 979-5167 for information or visit: imagearts.ryerson.ca

THE EYE ABOVE THE WELL (HET OOG BOVEN DE PUT)

Director: Johan van der Keuken • The Netherlands 1988 94 minutes

"THE EYE ABOVE THE WELL may have future classic status, but it's difficult to describe. Reportage? Film essay? Cinematic poem? It's all three at once" (*Variety*). This is perhaps van der Keuken's most beautiful work. Shot in Kerala, India, THE EYE ABOVE THE WELL takes us from the teeming city to the countryside, taking in the performance of a mythological play by an elderly actor; young girls at singing lessons rewarded by a spontaneous burst of song from their teacher; a money-lender on his rounds collecting his payments; and a man bicycling several very heavy metal containers from one village to the next. With this film, van der Keuken witnesses and mirrors "a non-western world view, where the creation of the universe simultaneously implies its disintegration. Van der Keuken's film combines a clarity and precision of observation with a vibrant visual style" (Dimitri Eipides). (CG)

Johan van der Keuken will present the film.

Saturday, March 11 6:30 p.m.

TORONTO PREMIERE! AMSTERDAM GLOBAL VILLAGE

Director: Johan van der Keuken
The Netherlands 1996 228 minutes

"A film of – let's risk the word here – genius. The genie of the cinema inhabits it, released from his lamp by the friction between political impulse and an exceptionally generous manner of seeing. . . . Magnificent" (Jean-Michel Frodon). AMSTERDAM GLOBAL VILLAGE seems less like one long film than like several different films contained within one work, all united by the filmmaker's constancy of vision. How better to examine the tendency towards globalization than by staying at home in Amsterdam? Here we find Khalid, a Moroccan moped courier; Borz-Ali, a Chechen businessman; Roberto, a Bolivian immigrant; DJ 100% Isis, a Dutch dance-club DJ; and others. Each of these figures takes the film in a new direction, sometimes away from Amsterdam, but always returning to it. The film follows Borz-Ali back to a Chechnya devastated by war, shows the reunion of Roberto with his mother in Bolivia, who had thought him dead, and includes scenes from an Ashanti funeral ceremony. "A multifaceted, shattered time scheme ties and unties, loops, circles back on itself . . . a fantastic global film" (Serge Toubiana, *Cahiers du cinéma*). (CG)

Johan van der Keuken will present the film.

Sunday, March 12 1:00 p.m.

BRASS UNBOUND (BEWOGEN KOPER)

Director: Johan van der Keuken
The Netherlands 1993 106 minutes

"From its opening shot of a man descending a Nepalese mountainside with a sewing machine on his back, BRASS UNBOUND never ceases to surprise. The film – a polyphonic journey exploring the transformation of brass bands across four cultures – is a fusion of van der Keuken's passion for music with his search for links between seemingly disparate parts of the world. Although they originally accompanied colonizing European armies and proselytizing Christian churches, brass bands were ultimately appropriated by those they came to conquer. In weddings, funerals, military exercises, and spirit ceremonies, BRASS UNBOUND resounds with the melodies and rhythms that have evolved in Nepal, Surinam, the Minahassa Peninsula in Indonesia, and finally Ghana. Yet van der Keuken's film is much more than just a music documentary: He improvises with his camera as though riffing on an instrument" (Irina Leimbacher, San Francisco International Film Festival).

Tuesday, March 14 8:45 p.m.

THE EYE ABOVE THE WELL





I♥\$

I♥\$ (a.k.a. I LOVE MONEY)

Director: Johan van der Keuken

The Netherlands/France/Switzerland 1986 147 minutes

Imperative, and perhaps more relevant now than when it was made, **I♥\$** goes to the heart of the dilemma that grips our money-mad world: the connection between capital and individual being, between economic forces and existential issues. Never theoretical or ponderous, the film explores with stunning wit, tenderness, and consoling insight the effect of high finance on our everyday lives. "Van der Keuken wanted to make a film about money: the people who trade in it, the specialists who create it, and the ordinary guys who need it and have to scramble for it. Shooting in Amsterdam, New York, Hong Kong, and Geneva, van der Keuken interviewed brokers, jobbers, investment counselors, electronics manufacturers, slum dwellers, and others while letting his handheld camera nose around the streets and betting shops of the financial centres" (Vancouver International Film Festival). Winner of numerous international prizes, including the Josef von Sternberg award for the most original film at the Mannheim festival, **I♥\$** is one of van der Keuken's major achievements. (JQ)

Wednesday, March 15 8:45 p.m.

THE WHITE CASTLE (HET WITTE KASTEEL)

Director: Johan van der Keuken

The Netherlands 1973 76 minutes

A masterpiece of montage, **THE WHITE CASTLE** is both blunt in its political critique and poetically complex in its structure and form. It reminds one of the angry, polemical Godard of the early Seventies (**TOUT VA BIEN**, especially), and of William Klein in his pop agit-prop period, and elsewhere of Buñuel's **LAS HURDES** and **UN CHIEN ANDALOU**, of Edward Hopper and Diane Arbus. The film interweaves three settings – the island of Formentara with its peasants and invading tourists; the highways, supermarkets, and ghettos of Columbus, Ohio; and two factories in The Netherlands – to illustrate the fragmented, isolated lives that capitalism produces. (The "White Castle" of the title refers to the restaurant chain, but also connotes the film's fixation on race relations. America is, literally, a "white castle.") The repetition and rhyming of images – curtains; a pristine room of white beds that suggests prison, hospital, summer camp, and dormitory; sheep (sheared, shackled, and butchered); abattoirs and factory production lines; meshes, bars, and grates that bespeak imprisonment, ironically contrasted with the "Open 24 Hours" sign of an all-night diner; children and parents; eating rituals and the making of bread; singing and work – endow the film with a rhythmic beauty that belies the heart-smiting pronouncement of a black teenager: "Life is pain and darkness to most people, I believe." (JQ)

Friday, March 17 8:45 p.m.

THE WHITE CASTLE

