

Interview with Mischa Kamp



By Tara Karajica
December 2017

Upon graduating from the Dutch Film and Television Academy in 1996, director Mischa Kamp became involved in the VPRO production "Waskracht!" After a number of documentaries and shorts, her breakthrough came in 2005 with the children's film "Winky's Horse". Based on the film's screenwriter Tamara Bos' book of the same name (in turn based on a screenplay), it received multiple award nominations and wins, including a Golden Calf Award for Best Screenplay of a Feature Film for Bos. Since then, Kamp has become a prolific and successful family film director with titles such as "Tony 10", "Boys" or "Sing Song". She is currently shooting her new film, "Coupe Confused", also based on a screenplay by Tamara Bos, and backed by Eurimages, the Dutch Film Fund, Creative Europe and Filmfonderung Hamburg Schleswig Holstein, among others. Tara Karajica quizzed her on "Coupe Confused", her body of work, children's films and the situation of women in film today.

How did *Coupe Confused* come about? What attracted you to it?

Mischa Kamp: The script is written by Tamara Bos. She also wrote the film we did in 2005, *Winky's Horse*, and she told me a story about when she was a teenager and her own grandmother had Alzheimer's. So, in a way, it's based on her own experience and relationship with her grandma. In the beginning, the grandma was a very upscale and neat person and then, with Alzheimer's, she became nicer and more connected to her granddaughter. It also tells the story about the mother of the girl (the grandmother's daughter) who didn't really want to get involved in her mother's illness.

***Coupe Confused* is actually a film that is very much in line with your body of work, thematically speaking, and in the sense that it is a youth film. And yet, it is different from your previous films as it explores the relationship between a grandmother and her granddaughter, the brutal discovery and facing of Alzheimer's and, therefore, a brutal coming of age. Can you comment on that? What do you think its message is?**



Still from "Coupe Confused"

M.K.: Actually, I don't know yet if it's a coming-of-age film in that sense, but it is a film extremely focused on this relationship between the girl and the grandma. And, I don't know if we could really speak of a message. But, the subject in itself – that the old lady is confronted with Alzheimer's as well as her grandchild – I think is something that a lot of people face, so I think in that case it's a very important message: sometimes changes in life are hard but you learn how to deal with them, how to stay connected...

As previously mentioned, so far, your opus has focused on family films or coming-of-age stories. How have you found yourself in this particular genre? Do you plan on moving on from it in the future to try something different?

M.K.: I have also made films that weren't really for young people or family films, but most of the time there is a child or a teenager in them. I also always make films for children and their parents and grandparents. It should be interesting for them too. I think it might come just from the fact that when you're young or a teenager so many new things appear in your life. They have a big impact on your life.

I do try different things all the time because the last film I did was also with a younger person – it was a sixteen-year old girl – and it was more like a musical and before that, I made a film about two boys who fall in love. My next project is not about children; it's a thriller with two women in the lead roles. So, it just depends on the story and the more different it is, the more interesting I think it is.

How important are, in your opinion, (good) family film and coming-of-age stories for children? How much do they shape their minds on cultural and social levels?

M.K.: I really do hope that children get to see more live action films about serious subjects and not only animation, or only films that are based on books that they already know or on characters they know from television. So, most things I do are not based on books; they are just original stories. I think it's also important to show them a different kind of approach to film. In school, the same way you have literature, it would be nice to educate children in the way(s) you can make films, how to watch them, and look at them in a different way. And, in that sense, they would get a film education on different levels.

How do you see the situation of family films in Europe? How difficult is it to get them funded?

M.K.: I think that in Europe – I would say especially in the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden – there's quite a number of family films that are being produced. In Holland, I don't know the percentage of the money that is subsidized for film that goes to children films, but I think it is quite substantial. We have money for children's films but the hardest thing is – and, that's I think also the same for films for grown-ups – is to have the money go to quality projects and not so much to films that are based on well-known books or characters, which they know will have an audience anyway. So, in the case of *Coupe Confused*, it's really important to find an audience at a later stage. I think children's films are of lesser interest in many cases. On the other hand, they are watched quite a lot. But, I still think they should be taken more seriously, especially on a professional or festival level. Conversely, there are a lot of children's film festivals, but only a limited number of them have an A-list status like the Berlinale and Toronto. Ideally, a children film could qualify for an Oscar.



Still from "Coupe Confused"

The protagonists of your films are mostly girls. Why is that? In today's social climate, how important is it, according to you, to show both young boys and girls, a strong girl?

M.K.: There are a lot of girls, yes, but there are boys as well. In the case of *Coupe Confused*, it's really important because it's three women who play the main parts. It's important because these three women are really on their own and it means that the grandmother is on her own because the husband died a long time ago. Her daughter has just divorced and is living her new life on her own. And then, you have the girl, of course, who in a way isn't really connected to her grandmother at first but becomes so more and more. I don't know if I look at it that way; I just want to see interesting characters – be it boys, men, girls or women. There is no real specificity in my scripts; sometimes it's a man, sometimes it's a woman. So, I can't really say. It just depends on what the story is about. But, I guess that it's also because I am a woman myself; I can identify better with girls, that's for sure one of the reasons...

What do you think of the situation of women in film in Europe today? What about the Netherlands?

M.K.: I think that in Holland, the situation is quite good – to make a film, that is. Especially in family films, female directors are in the lead. In terms of opportunities, I think that it's not that bad in Holland. We have good female directors. If I look back, for example, when I was in film school, it was 50-50 men and women in class. So, compared to the rest of Europe, it's not a bad situation.

Do you think it is more difficult for women to get their films made than it is for men? Do you have any particular anecdotes?

M.K.: It is always hard work for a director – male or female – to get their money organized with a producer or a funding body and to get enough shooting days. I can't really prove that men get more done.

As for anecdotes or discriminations, the funny thing is, my name is Mischa, and Mischa is most of the time a male name in Holland. So, people always think I'm a man before they meet me. But, it's only because they think directors are men. That's true, in a way, often people still think that film directors are men, but that probably also has to do with the whole American situation...