

INTERVIEW WITH RICKY RIJNEKE



**DIRECTOR OF “THE HUNTER’S SON”,
A FEATURE FILM SUPPORTED BY EURIMAGES**

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WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO DIRECT YOUR UPCOMING FEATURE “THE HUNTER’S SON”?

I wanted to tell a story about a father and son relationship. Their bond is the core of the story and what intrigues me most. It is all about the human psyche. Each film that I make starts with a specific atmosphere, imagery based on a theme, and unique characters who have inner and outer conflicts with themselves and the world. I am interested in their state of mind and how that evolves over time. “The Hunter’s Son” is about strangers and borders. What is a stranger? Who is the stranger in oneself? It refers to how members of a family can become estranged from one another. Indirectly it is also a film about issues nowadays in Europe. It reflects our society’s growing fears of migrants, a rising xenophobia which redefines borders. It’s not a political drama though; it’s really about a human tragedy – humanity.

WHY CHOOSE TO FOCUS ON FATHER AND SON, AND NOT MOTHER AND DAUGHTER, FOR EXAMPLE?

People often ask me this question. I am asked because the story centres around the theme of hunting and focuses on border patrol men, who can be considered hyper-masculine. Society expects women directors to make a certain type of movie, for example films with a female lead about growing up, children, domestic

affairs or teenagers. We are also expected to make smaller budget films – indie films. I want to make films on issues that interest me, full stop. I don’t mind going against gender stereotypes if I have to. It is sad that we have to fit genres into boxes. When I wrote this film, I didn’t think for one second about gender.

I AM CURIOUS ABOUT SOMETHING YOU WROTE: “I AM A FEMALE DIRECTOR AND SO IS MY GAZE.” CAN YOU ELABORATE?

I think the way I approach my subjects, how I tell stories or how I visualise my characters will automatically be different from a male director. I don’t like labelling myself but I have this feminine point of view and I’m also happy to put it out there. We clearly have enough male voices in the film world; we need more diversity in this industry. It is sad that, as my generation grows up, there is still a lack of films to watch by leading female filmmakers. I can only name a handful of female directors – Jane Campion and Sofia Coppola are among a few – which leads to this industry adopting a male gaze. I believe that the upcoming generations need to break this glass ceiling. If you are a woman who wants to make it in the business, you have to work hard to prove your worth – twice as hard. Thankfully there is a slow cultural shift, but times are changing very, very slowly.

HAVE YOU STARTED SHOOTING?

I am now casting and searching for specific locations. We will shoot in Iceland and in the Ardennes mountains in Belgium.

I am looking for an actor for the leading role, Lorenzo, who has this rare combination of power and humility, and can be sensitive and at the same time rough on screen. In "The Hunter's Son" the father faces a whole range of emotions. He has to be fragile, vulnerable, and at the same time aggressive and loving. The film is about his emotional journey as he undergoes a very intense psychological battle with his son, who becomes a stranger to him. It is a very complex role emotionally, but also physically, because we will be shooting in the snow in cold temperatures.

HAVE YOU CAST THE ACTOR WHO WILL PLAY THE SON?

We are still in the casting process. It is a delicate choice. Children often have no acting experience, yet they can give so much in return with their enthusiasm and endless



"The Hunter's Son"

energy. I have already worked with children in my previous films, so I know it is a complex process that demands patience. It has already been a year that we have been searching for the right actor. I am looking for a boy with a brooding type of face; I want him to have an inner wildness that emanates naturally, a certain mystery if you like. It is important because sometimes there will be little dialogue and his onscreen presence needs to speak for itself. I love to play with every cinematic ingredient: sound, design, camera work and editing, for my film to feel like a submerging experience. My goal is to draw my audience into my world and into the actors' psyches.

WHAT THEMES WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXPLORE?

I want to toy with the idea of boundaries. I'm personally very curious about it because it is such a current theme in my life. I always wanted to test the limits, it fascinates me. You can see it in my previous work,

there is always a thin line between fantasy and reality. The difference here is that it literally is a film about borders. Lorenzo is a border patrol guard, yet he may also cross borders internally, on an emotional level. It is about different kinds of borders: right or wrong, guilty or innocent, good or bad. And yet you'll find that there are only grey areas. It all blurs. Extremes fuse together to create something in between.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO WHEN SHOOTING?

I can't wait for the first day to arrive and to be on the set and explore everything around. I can't wait to show it to the audience as well. It is exciting. I think because my first film "Silent Ones" was successful, I now feel able to make this film. I am so grateful for that.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN DIRECTING FILMS?

It is a long story, sort of. My parents are also filmmakers, so I have been evolving in an environment that was all about films, though when I was younger, I wanted to distance myself as far as possible from movies. I didn't want to have anything to do with them. It was only when I was much older that I took an interest in them. I went to the Royal Academy of Art in the Netherlands because I was not sure if I wanted to become a film director, editor or even a writer. I was taught about a whole range of different topics. It was in school that I made my first short film, which I loved. Doing a full length feature film for the first time in 2013 was kind of jumping into the deep end. I enjoyed making "Silent Ones" so much that it encouraged me to make another feature. I love meddling with all cinematic elements: music editing, storytelling, sound design – I just love it. Working in a team is also something I particularly enjoy.

YOU OFTEN TALK OF ADOPTING AN OPEN MIND WHEN APPROACHING YOUR WORK AS A FILM DIRECTOR. CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT YOU MEAN BY THAT?

Throughout my films, I work with many different nationalities, people from all over the world really. For “The Hunter’s Son” it will be the same because it is also a co-production for which funding has come from Poland, Iceland, Belgium and the Netherlands. Working in a multicultural team is inspiring. It teaches you to consider divergent approaches from people whose values differ, based on their culture. I listen to everyone on set, from my cameraman to my actors, with the goal to create a fantastic film. This team almost becomes like a second family to me. That is how I see it.

IT SOUNDS DREAMY. I WONDER, DO YOU OFTEN DREAM?

When I sleep? I have a lot of dreams, vivid dreams. Sometimes I wake in the night from my dreams, which are all so intense. I dream so much and it’s different all the time. Most often I cannot recall them and sometimes they are peaceful but also sometimes very scary. I dream a lot actually. I’ve never been asked this question before. Yet my dreams are all so strange, I don’t think you could make them into films. There’s no specific story line, they are more like fragments of stories pieced together randomly. I do feel the dream’s atmosphere clearly though, so maybe unconsciously I use that in my films.

“The opinions expressed in this interview are those of the director concerned and in no way reflect the official position of the Council of Europe or the Eurimages Film Fund.”