

Evelin van Rei gets Angénieux Special Encouragement Award at Cannes



L-R on the red carpet at Cannes: Evelin van Rei, Séverine Serrano, Liv Corfixen, Nicolas Winding Refn, Amira Casar, Darius Kondji AFC ASC, Philippe Parreno, Emmanuel Sprauel. Photo © Olivier Vigerie.

Evelin van Rei was honored at Cannes with the Angénieux Special Encouragement Award, which recognizes next generation cinematographic talent. She was nominated for the BSC Short Film Cinematography Award in 2018 and 2019, hailed by British Cinematographer Magazine part of the 'New Wave' in 2019, and invited to join BAFTA as a full voting member in 2021. Her latest credit includes Apple's Bad Sisters.

Jon Fauer: Where did you grow up and where are you now?

Evelin van Rei: I grew up in a small village in The Netherlands, where escapism into cinema became my lifeline. Image creation, both still and moving, became a tool to explore my life experiences, to express and communicate complex feelings and emotions. It empowered me, and it has become the way I see and experience life, and through which I am trying to make sense of it all. I studied fine art and art history in high school, left The Netherlands at 19, and graduated from the Cambridge School of Art in England with a first-class BA (Hons) in film in 2012. It was here where my interest and fascination in experimental film, Super16mm installation and image-making took off. I am currently based in London, and shoot worldwide in commercials and narrative.

Jon: How did you get your start in the film business?

Coming from a low socio-economic background and without any privilege, or connections in the film industry, for a year-and-a-half after university, I worked a full-time office job on minimum wage, while figuring out how I could financially sustain myself in film. I moved to London in 2013, got my first job as video assistant on a feature film, quit my office job, and continued as a camera trainee and clapper loader for a few years, before transitioning into lighting in late 2014 on short films, music videos and commercials. Then, around 2016/2017, I thought, "Okay, I need to stop assisting, and solely light, as nobody's going to hire a cinematographer who also still assists..." I jumped in the deep, and hoped for the best!

Where do you see your career going?

I would love to move away from TV and position myself in feature films in Europe and the US, as well as commercials globally. I dearly miss cinema as an art form and projects that have substantial meaning, as well as travelling Planet Earth. When I was very young, I dreamed of being an architect, or a politician to fight for the protection of our environment and humanity. Then I thought, "But art can be a political medium too. I can

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Evelin van Rei receiving the Angénieux Special Encouragement Award from Séverine Serrano, with Agnès Godard, AFC, at rear. Photo: Pauline Maillet. Cannes May 27, 2022

make films and change the world.” That desire has never left me. Progression within a career can be slow, tedious even, and you may have to take a path you’re not too keen on taking, but it’s all part of the journey that takes you to your destination, or to the part of life’s journey you’re excited about. It’s about the little victories, little steps, and growth and insights along the way.

Darius Khondji, who works in both commercials and features, said that he prefers features because of the ability to tell a story rather than focus mainly on visuals. What do you think?

I’d agree with Darius mostly, as one of my “nightmares” would be to become an image creator of just “pretty pictures.” For me, it’s so important that images carry substantial weight and carry meaning. Though I do love shooting commercials abroad, as new places, different light, and countries inspire me, it gives me insight into my own life, and creates gratitude for what I have. Cinema is an art form that should allow, or at least try, us to dig into our psyche, examine our biggest questions in life, share stories, examine ideas, change laws, move entire civilizations, and improve our governments. It can and should be so much more.

Is your visual style informed by the script or something else?

I’ll respond to the needs of the script and story, and will always follow my intuition when visualizing. It’s an instinctive process. I have developed a distinct taste and will always seek to imprint my signature on the images I create—for them to be recognizably mine. Authored.

That’s why I adore shooting fine art still photography, as the control I have is freeing. It’s authored, expressive, instinctual and incredibly collaborative with each subject I photograph. It’s a dance between the two of us, which fuels the creation of the images; the relationship is visible “on screen.” I picked up still photography during university, where another teacher said the

best thing I could do to develop my eye was to “look at things, look at light, look at people, photograph,” and I did.

Light is life. Light, and life, are key motifs in my life: architecture, nature, interior and landscape design, fine art. Everything in our environment is about light, and the colors within—how it moves you physically, emotionally, how it makes you feel, whether you feel safe, comfortable, what it does.

I am technical, but that part of the job doesn’t really excite me. For me, it’s all about story, emotion, how things feel. I’m intuitive, though I’m a meticulous planner, well organized in pre-production, which allows me to go with the flow during principal photography. People have asked me, “Why do you frame this way?” I reply, “That’s just how it’s supposed to be framed.” You just know. You can’t explain some things rationally.

I am fascinated by the complexities and fragility of human existence and the human mind. I am intuitively drawn to the conscious, unconscious, subconscious, and behavior. Image creation lifts the veil on the human experience. It explores the nature of our existence and emphasizes the experience of the feeling, living, human individual, and the fundamental nature of reality.

Cinema is an art form that allows us to transcend into something far bigger, to explore philosophical questions about life, death, our deepest values and the meaning by which we live. It is visual poetry, as emotionally resounding as paintings, often created from the broken. You can’t always create from something that isn’t broken or imperfect. Imagery has the capacity to move us into unknown emotional depths. They contain energy. I strive for my imagery to have a sensitive and distinct point of view on the world, to carry a personality and a distinct style, to capturing life in an eternal, intriguing way. I would like to leave behind a legacy as an artist that is remembered by others.