

DIE STROPERERS

CINÉMA DEFACTO PRESENTS



SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

"THE HARVESTERS"
'N FILM DEUR ETIENNE KALLOS

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ETIENNE KALLOS STARRING BRENT VERMEULEN, ALEX VAN DYK, JULIANA VENTER, MORNE VISSER. PRODUCED BY SOPHIE ERBS PRODUCERS TOM DERCOURT, THEMBISA COCHRANE, MICHAEL AURET, MARIUSZ WŁODARSKI, KONSTANTINOS KONTOVRAKIS, GIORGOS KARNAVAS, ETIENNE KALLOS ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS JAMAL ZEINAL ZADE, DAN WECHSLER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS LWAZI MANZI, ANNETTE FAUSBØLL, JULIEN FAVRE, JEAN-ALEXANDRE LUCIANI PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL ENGLERT EDITING MURIEL BRETON ORIGINAL MUSIC EVGUENI & SACHA GALPERINE SOUND LEANDROS NTOUNIS, THOMAS ROBERT, JEAN-GUY VERAN IN COPRODUCTION WITH SPIER FILMS, LAVA FILMS, HERETIG, KALLOS FILMS, BORD CADRE FILMS, MERCURIAL PICTURES, ERT PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH MOONDUCKLING FILMS INTERNATIONAL SALES AND FRENCH DISTRIBUTION PYRAMIDE



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a film by
ETIENNE KALLOS

The Harvesters

Starring

BRENT VERMEULEN
ALEX VAN DYK
JULIANA VENTER
MORNE VISSER

Director

ETIENNE KALLOS

Screenplay

ETIENNE KALLOS

Producers

SOPHIE ERBS
TOM DERCOURT
THEMBISA COCHRANE
MICHAEL AURET
ETIENNE KALLOS
GIORGOS KARNAVAS
KONSTANTINOS KONTOVRAKIS
MARIUSZ WLODARSKI

Associate Producers

DAN WECHSLER
JAMAL ZEINAL ZADE

Executive Producers

LWAZI MANZI

ANNETTE FAUSBØLL
JULIEN FAVRE
JEAN-ALEXANDRE LUCIANI

Photography
MICHAL ENGLERT

Editing
MURIEL BRETON

Music
EVGUENI ET SACHA GALPERIN

Sound
LEANDROS NTOUNIS
THOMAS ROBERT
JEAN-GUY VERAN

Script Supervisor
EVDOKIA KALAMITSI

Art Director
BARRI PARVESS

Synopsis

'The Harvesters' is an internationally co-produced feature film set within the rural Free State region of contemporary South Africa, an isolated stronghold of the Afrikaans ethnic minority.

It is a psychological drama exploring the coming-of-age of a new generation of Afrikaans youth. It tells the story of obedient Afrikaans teenager, Janno, who witnesses his childhood come to an abrupt end on the day his fiercely religious mother, Marie, brings home a mysterious street orphan, Pieter, to foster on the family's remote cattle farm.

Pieter (Alex van Dyk), a hardened yet sickly teenager with a precocious history of street crime and drug addiction, is an Afrikaner devoid of culture and roots. Wracked by the symptoms of drug withdrawal, refusing to pray with the family or believe in God, the newcomer turns the devout household upside-down. Despite a growing sense of alarm, the gentle and sexually confused Janno does what he is told and opens his heart to the stranger, turning Pieter into his brother.

As the brotherhood between the two boys deepens, Pieter's wellbeing improves and the two partake in the annual maize harvest together. But as Pieter's strength returns, so do his appetites for sex with girls and drugs.

Janno, already insecure within his conservative farming community, obsessed as it is with strength and masculinity, soon finds himself jealous of the manipulative Pieter, who wins over the family with his show of strength and red-blooded heterosexuality.

Soon the brothers are locked in a dangerous struggle for power, each using the other's hidden pain and transgressions as weapons. Despite being opposites, Pieter is swift to identify the one thing that binds them: Neither boy will ever fully belong in this church-dominated world of alpha males and nuclear families.

Ultimately, Janno is faced with the question: How far he is willing to go to protect his identity as beloved Afrikaans son? Does he belong in the conservative Free State or is he destined to forge a new path in the Africa that lies beyond?

Awards and Recognition for 'The Harvesters'

DEVELOPED at the:

Sundance Institute 'Screenwriters Lab'
 the Cannes Cinefondation 'Residence' program
 the Berlinale Talents 'Script Station'
 Venice Biennale 'Final Cut' program

FESTIVALS (selected):

Cannes Film Festival, 'Un Certain Regard'
 Miami International Film Festival
 San Francisco International Film Festival
 Thessaloniki International Film Festival
 Goteborg International Film Festival

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El Gouna International Film Festival
Filmfest Hamburg
Rome International Film Festival
Melbourne International Film Festival
Istanbul International Film Festival

AWARDS:

Sundance/Mahindra 'Global Filmmaker Award'
Gan Foundation, 'Prix Opening Shot Award'
Rome International Film Festival 'Alice Nella Citta Jury Award for Best First Feature'
Cheries-Cheris Film Festival, 'Grand Prix' Award
African Film Festival of Khouribga, 'Best Director' Award

Q&A – Etienne Kallos

What is so special about the Free State that you set your first feature film there?

It's a fascinating region, the "bible belt" of South Africa, the heart of Afrikaner culture, all maize fields, farmhouses and church steeples. From a distance it looks like time stands still in the Free State but of course, up close, that's not the case.

The eastern part of the region is especially intriguing; it is wilder than the western region, and there is something mysterious and powerful in that landscape, something that captures you and won't let go. I come from Cape Town myself so the first time I even heard of the eastern Free State was through the late Reza de Wet, a wonderful Afrikaans playwright and teacher who was my mentor when I studied theatre at Rhodes University.

When I first visited the eastern Free State, I was struck by how these beautiful Free State farms could be a paradise, yet there are bars on windows, and fear in the air. A loneliness too. Hearing about farmers being murdered is not uncommon. With the South African government continuing to threaten 're-appropriation of (Afrikaner) land without compensation', it brings up fascinating notions of what it means to 'belong'.

What is your perception of the rural farming population?

I respect the way the Afrikaners work the land – they are devoted to it. And I like the new generation. I wanted to explore adolescence and tell a story about the first generation to be born completely outside of the Apartheid system. The issue of this legacy is never addressed directly in the film, yet it is pervasive and expressed by the feeling of alienation of the young protagonist, Janno, through his loneliness, his fear of being judged, and how lost he feels. How do you live with the weight of post-colonialism on your shoulders? Do we have to literally and figuratively burn the structures of our ancestors to become African?

This is my experience too – the fracture and conflict inherent in being an African of European descent. The experience of fracture is important to me as a storyteller, to love and hate in the same breath, to belong and be a stranger at the same time: You grow up oblivious and then, suddenly, as a teenager, you realise that you don't really belong in your family, in your community, in your culture.

It is a universal experience, this loss of childhood, but I wanted to give it a rural setting. When you live in a city you dominate space, whereas in the countryside, it's the other way around: The land and the elements control you. The silence of the countryside exaggerates every decision you make, every action you take, and throws it back at you.

Describe the writing process.

I used the award money from my short film 'Firstborn', which had won the Golden Lion for 'best short film' at Venice in 2009, among other awards, to fund research trips to the Free State.

At the time I was pursuing many different leads over the country, trying to figure out what my first feature project would be about. I was immediately struck with how willing and eager the Afrikaans community was to share with me. The door opened wide and I walked through it.

In 2010 I flew to Johannesburg, rented a car and drove around the Free State and KwaZulu Natal meeting people – farmers, orphans, high school students, social workers. My first draft of the script was a compilation of research materials. It was just too broad, not a story yet. Eventually, I had to throw out most of my research and find a single thread, a single point of view. I started a second draft after I had returned to the USA and was teaching my first semester at NYU.

Where does the story about two adversarial brothers come from?

I feel fractured somehow and wanted to explore this experience through Janno and Pieter and their complicated dynamic. This kind of 'brotherhood' cannot be described sufficiently in words, but it is exciting to dramatize. Despite the socio-political context, this is not a story that occurs in the exterior world of reality. It's more of an inner journey and the tension between interior and exterior worlds is very exciting to work with cinematically.

How did you move onto production?

I completed a second draft in 2012 and applied to the Cannes Cinéfondation Residence program and to the Sundance Screenwriting Lab. Both programs selected my script, so I was working between Paris and Utah. The script won two awards. It received the Fondation Gan's 'Prix Opening Shot' for best screenplay at Cannes and the Mahindra 'Global Filmmaker Award' at Sundance.

With these two prizes and a Golden Lion for 'best short film', I thought my first feature film would be easy to finance. But it wasn't the case. I kept on travelling and researching, establishing connections with generous farmers – the harvest sequence, for instance, was literally a gift from a farmer who gave us his maize crops, trucks and threshers for a day. This film was only made possible through the generosity of the Afrikaans people. I would drive around at random and knock on farmers' doors. Sometimes I would literally dream of a farmhouse and then I would wake up and drive around trying to find it.

In the end, a South African producer brought a Canadian producer on board, who in turn brought on board Sophie Erbs, from the French company Cinéma Defacto, to co-produce the film. The first two partners dropped the project, but the good relations I had built with Sophie allowed us to make the film together. She hasn't stopped fighting for the film since I met her six years ago.

How did you find the two boys who play Janno and Pieter?

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I wanted the actors to be 14 or 15, an age when emotions still shape bodies. I knew having older boys play younger wouldn't work. Kids at that age grow up fast, so I postponed the casting for as long as I could. Afrikaner society is quite conservative, so it wasn't easy to gain access as the script explores sexuality in part. Half the schools refused to allow me to hold auditions, parents too.

But I also met youths and their parents who believed in me and the project. Just ten days before the shoot I finally cast the two young actors, it was pretty stressful. I knew there had to be chemistry between them, and that such chemistry would come, in part, from their contrasting personalities.

The character of Janno was written as physically fragile; he gives the impression of not being able to cope with the demands of farm life. But Brent, who plays the part, is quite the opposite – he is a high school wrestler and rugby player. Nevertheless, from the first audition in a Paarl high school, I knew that it would be him. I could sense under his reserved demeanour a unique, frenetic emotional quality, something unspoken and inspiring. More importantly, I could sense that it would not scare him to explore his inner life. He had the underlying emotional strength required for the part.

When I found Alex, who plays Pieter, he had just turned 14 and had no acting experience whatsoever. In contrast to Brent, who is more urban with his love of hip-hop and Kanye West, Alex comes from a family of farmers in the Durbanville area. He has a natural charisma that the camera loves and whereas Brent's freneticism feels emotional and subterranean, with Alex it's all extroverted and physical. They were a great match.

Was Pieter adopted by the family to replace Janno?

That's what Janno thinks. My job was to bring to light his fears, his own perspective, to explore the limits of a single point of view. What his parents actually think or do isn't what the film is about. Janno's point of view is unstable, unreliable. He overhears whispers, insinuations, conversations and then forms an opinion based on those snippets of information. He craves unconditional love. His parents have difficulty expressing their feelings. But that doesn't mean they don't love him.

The storytelling had to remain ambiguous, especially as it's about a young person who does not know good from evil yet. The music, for instance, does not convey joy or sadness – it strikes a balance so that the audience can participate in the story, have a full experience and form their own conclusions. Pieter isn't some lost city child who finds redemption through his contact with nature. Speaking of redemption would imply a judgement of the characters – you must sin in order to be redeemed – and I don't judge them like that.

Why does Janno contemplate the family photo gallery so often?

All farmhouses in the region have a family portrait gallery on the walls, to protect them from loneliness and provide comfort. Every farmer wants to look up and feel that his family has been there for three centuries. It is a way of saying, “we belong to this land, look at all those who came before us.”

Which community do I belong to? Which land do I belong to? These questions form part of the main themes in the film. Today, not to belong to a place or community is a common experience, as we hear and read every day stories of immigrants, refugees and exiles around the world. In South Africa, the very idea of belonging is evolving and that is part of the story.

As for Janno, the pictures on the wall are not a comfort, they are a weight against which he pushes. He is moving towards a new Africa, a new sense of place that has not been discovered by the older generations.

Describe the cinematography.

Michal Englert is a fantastic Polish cinematographer. I think it was my photographs of the Free State, which I had taken over a few years driving around the region, that convinced him to come on board. At that point I already had most of the shooting locations mapped out. He came early so that we could travel the area together and brainstorm. I also watched a bunch of classic Polish films, some of them with religious motifs, like Jerzy Kawalerowicz’s ‘Mother Joan of the Angels’, so that I could understand his cultural point of view.

Together we made a shot list and storyboarded some scenes. It was a tricky balance as I wanted to capture the landscape with fresh eyes and yet I didn’t want the image to transform the landscapes – they are already unique and beautiful. For instance, it was always a dream of mine to shoot at Sterkfontein Dam, the unbelievably beautiful lake where we staged the rugby and fishing scenes.

Michal is also great at hand-held camera work, so we explored the tension between static wide shots that create such a strong sense of place and then hand-held shots that explore Janno’s point of view.

I see the ‘nightclub scene’ as part of South Africa’s future: On my travels I was surprised to find that every farming town on the border between Free State and KwaZulu Natal had a small Chinatown area, immigrants coming in through neighbouring Lesotho. They don’t care to speak English or try to be white, instead they speak Zulu or Sotho. I thought how great it would be to create a ‘Chinese shebeen’; they don’t exist yet but they will one day. Yes, the scene has a dreamlike feel, but to me the whole film is dreamlike, like a chamber play.

Are there elements of Greek tragedy?

Well yes, I am ethnically Greek after all! A few years ago I visited the island of Rhodes with my mother and attended a live performance of a Greek tragedy for the first time. It was ‘Iphigenia in Tauris’. I was struck by the intensity of the acting, Iphigenia came onto stage crying and was hysterical from start to finish. That Greek

style of sustained intensity, controlled madness, is exciting to me. It had an impact on how I chose to tell the story of 'The Harvesters'.

Biographies – Crew

Etienne Kallos – Director/Writer

Etienne Kallos is a Greek-South African film director who studied theatre and then worked in non-fiction before doing his M.F.A. in Film Directing at New York University. His short non-fiction film 'Jane's Birthday Trip' screened at the Berlin International Film Festival and was a national finalist for the Student Academy Awards. His fiction short, 'No Exit' screened at 2006 Slamdance Film Festival and another short, 'doorman', was presented at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival (Cinéfondation section) and at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. His thesis film, 'Firstborn', was the first Afrikaans-language film to win the Corto Cortissimo Lion d'Or for Best Short Film at the Venice Film Festival in 2009. 'The Harvesters' is his first feature film.

Michael Auret – Producer

Michael Auret has been the head of Spier Films, the Cape originated film finance and production house, for just over a decade. Under his stewardship, Spier has made 20 films that have helped re-shape the South African film landscape, proving that local stories can travel and hold their own at international film festivals and marketplaces. Spier's very first foray into film production 'U- Carmen Ekhayelitsha' won a Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 2005. This was followed by 'Son of Man' which was in competition at the Sundance Film Festival in 2006. The company returned to Berlin in 2013 with 'Layla Fourie' which garnered a Jury Special Mention in competition, and to Sundance with the 2014 premiere of 'Young Ones', which was shot in the Northern Cape. Also in 2013, Spier produced one of South Africa's most controversial films, Jahmil X T Qubeka's look at child abuse 'Of Good Report', which was initially banned in South Africa, and premiered at Toronto Film Festival to acclaim, becoming an international festival hit. After it was eventually unbanned, it went on to win five SAFTAs including Best Film and Best Director in 2014. Festival attention continued when Spier hit the red carpet in the Official Selection at Cannes twice with a gala midnight screening of Kristian Levering's Danish western 'The Salvation' (2014), and 'Die Stropers', which premiered in Un Certain Regard and was in competition at Silwerskerm in 2018.

Michał Englert – Cinematographer

Michał Englert is a sought-after Polish cinematographer. He attended Łódź Film School, where his teachers included Polish cinematographer, academic teacher and former jazz musician professor Witold Sobociński, and legendary filmmaker and visual philosopher Jerzy Wójcik. Englert won the Best Cinematography award for 'Lasting' at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, and for '33 Scenes from Life' at the Golden Lion Festival in Gdynia. He was also the cinematographer for 'The Congress' (2013) by Ari Folman.

Barry Parvess – Production Designer

Born in Zimbabwe, Barry learned an early appreciation of aesthetics from his father, and a love for the natural world from his mother who encouraged his artistic endeavours and lent him her camera so that he could teach

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himself the magic of photography. In 1983 his family moved to Mooi River, now Mpofana, in KwaZulu Natal. There, his high school art teacher taught him the skills to build on his future as an artist, while his English and drama teacher enabled him to express himself as a creative being. In the 1990s, he worked in print media, as a press photographer, reporter, editor and publisher. He also designed billboards and art directed photo shoots. He was business manager of Advantage Magazine in 1999. In 2001 he made the transition into the world of film, and his first feature was 'Stander' (2003) where he was the assistant property master. In 2010 he received his first credit as art director on 'Spud: The Movie'. This was followed by 31 Million Reasons (2011). 'Die Stropers' gave him his first production design opportunity, and took him back to the hinterland, his first love.

Biographies – Cast

Brent Vermeulen – ‘Janno’

Brent Vermeulen is currently a Gr 12 learner at Paarl Gimnasium. He has always had an interest in drama and it is one of his chosen subjects at school. In 2016, he played one of the lead roles in his school’s production of the musical Fame.

In the same year he was chosen for the lead role of Janno in ‘Die Stropers’. He has appeared in two feature magazine articles (Huisgenoot, 28 June 2018, Wêreld, hier kom Brent!) and (Vrouekeur, 28 December 2018, Jong Talent). He has received excellent reviews for his performance from The Hollywood Reporter and Rotten Tomatoes. He will appear in the

KykNet drama series ‘Alles Malan’, which is shot in and around Paarl and will be broadcast in 2019.

Alex van Dyk – ‘Pieter’

Alex van Dyk lives on a farm outside Cape Town and attends Hoërskool Durbanville. He plays tennis for the school and Durbanville Club. He was a rugby player until he suffered a serious concussion which forced him to stop. He has since developed a keen interest in acting. His role as Pieter earned him a nomination for best supporting actor at the 2018 Silwerskerm Film Festival in Cape Town. He also took home, in front of 6000 spectators, the award for “Best School Achiever of the year” at Bokradio station’s yearly Bokkies awards ceremony.

Juliana Venter – ‘Maria’

Actress, composer and singer Juliana Venter grew up in Pretoria and has lived in Johannesburg, London, Cologne, Munich and Berlin and is currently living in Oslo. She is known for her role as the older Genevieve Scott-Thomas in the M-Net mini-series ‘Innocent Times’, in 2008. She also appeared in the films ‘Hooded Angels’ (2002) and ‘Paradys’ (1994). An operatically trained vocalist, she has been called the Queen of South African Avant Garde. She was front woman of the 1990s cult performance group “The Mud ensemble” from Johannesburg, a group known for its ground-breaking work in creating a new language for film, theatre and music. As an actress she trained extensively in the Meisner technique with Mike Bernardin from the Actors Space in Berlin. She is also a student of world acclaimed coach Susan Batson. In 2018 she appeared in three productions of the world renowned Norwegian Theatre group Det Utvalgte, as actress, and singer. They appeared this year at the Ultima contemporary music festival in Oslo. Her role as Maria in ‘Die Stropers’ earned her a nomination for best actress at the 2018 Silwerskerm Film Festival in Cape Town.

Morné Visser – Jan

Morné Visser has been working in film, television and theatre for more than 20 years. He is known to take on challenging and often controversial roles. He recently won the Best Actor Award in a Lead Role at the Silwerskermfees 2015 for his portrayal in ‘Dis ek, Anna’. He appeared in ‘The Forgiven’ (2017) by two-time The Harvesters Production Notes

Academy Award nominated director, Roland Joffe. He also appeared in South African feature film, 'Skoonheid' which won the Queer Palm Award at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival.