

## ROBBY MÜLLER AWARD 2024

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the Robby Müller Award that pays homage to the craft of artists working behind the lens, in the spirit of the late, celebrated cinematographer Robby Müller. It's been near-impossible not to notice the spectrum of Müller's legacy: it spans across generations, finding itself in the films of both young and emerging artists. In that regard we have been particularly delighted to discover the works of Grimm Vandekerckhove and to honour him as a recipient of the fifth Robby Müller Award.

When talking about his works that range from shorts to music videos to features, Vandekerckhove prefers not to describe them in terms of style, for this is secondary to the defining nature of his images. Vandekerckhove's work is driven by his intuition, his personal, intimate relations with the world that he carefully observes and listens to without interference. We can even argue that it is reality itself, a physical, living substance that forms the style of his films. Thus, it's no surprise that his approach is affected even by the smallest changes of light, weather, movement and sound. These are transitory qualities of nature and without imposition, his sensitive camera aims to become part of this nature too.

In Bas Devos' *Here* (2023), he takes a close look at moss, a microcosmos invisible to the human eye, and depicts it in the same way he depicts an urban landscape. Two worlds of opposite scales and origins become one and equal in their fragile significance. Unnoticeable nature we are unaware of, and concrete jungles of highways, highrises and construction sites that have an overwhelming presence.

In the same subtle manner, he challenges the distinctions between light and darkness. Bas Devos' *Ghost Tropic* (2019) is a journey through a sleeping city at night. Here, light is fragmented and comes only from the lonely standing street lamps, some nightshop windows and signboards. The camera of Vandekerckhove becomes a torch too, inflaming the night and disappearing once it is over. In that sense his camera follows the natural cycle of life, creating images that can fade and reappear once again. In *Nocturnus* (2022), it is mostly the white snow that provides light to a secluded northern place devoured by darkness and sleep. Shot in black-and-white, this film directed by Harm Dens and Meltse Van Coillie is an example of chiaroscuro cinematography reminiscent of the works of old masters of painting and photography.

Vandekerckhove shows reality as a network of particles: they belong to different objects but also harmoniously coexist with each other. He looks at them as if through a microscope so powerful it can see the grains of an object. And this microscopic approach is mirrored in the grainy texture of his images often shot on 16mm. His signature combines artistic finesse with a documentary-like sensitivity and is characterised by an unwavering, deeply humane point of view on the world and those who inhabit it. With profound commitment and a wondrous tranquillity, he captures details and hidden shades of everyday existence in his own singular way, mirroring the emotionally moving images of Robby Müller.

Rotterdam, 27 January 2024

The jury members:

Evgeny Gusyatskiy, IFFR

Mercedes Martínez-Abarca, IFFR

Andrea Müller-Schirmer

Jay Rabinowitz, ACE

Josje van Erkel, NSC

Richard van Oosterhout, NSC