

## In Memoriam Theo van Haren Noman (April 29, 1917 - February 6, 2021)

**Theodorus Josephus van Haren Noman belonged to the distinguished group of early Dutch documentary makers who from 1945 onwards captured both extraordinary events and everyday life on film, leaving an irreplaceable image of an era. Last Saturday, on February 6, 2021, the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Haren Noman passed away. He was 103 years old.**

"Genuine interest", "enthusiasm", "charming", "proud", "witty", "precise and knowledgeable" are some of the qualifications that come up when mentioning Theo van Haren Noman's name. Fellow filmmakers speak with melancholy about "the good old days" in which videographers had to master the art and the technique of capturing images through the impact of light on a light-sensitive layer on a film strip. Filmmaking was still like making a tailor-made suit by the hand of a master. Filmmakers were highly regarded at the time. Due to the exceptionally beautiful look of the black and white material and their documentary value, these films are being well preserved and viewed. The death of Theo van Haren Noman marks the end of a century that was first captured on celluloid and hence lives on. Historians, writers and documentary makers will undoubtedly continue to draw on the rich cinematographic work left behind by Theo van Haren Noman.

### **Creative and engineering ingenuity**

At the age of ten, Theo van Haren Noman saw how his father Dirk (1888-1966) built the first Dutch caravan, the wooden Hano camper van on two wheels with small windows on the side. Theo's grandfather Dirk (1854-1896) was also extremely creative and technical. At a young age, in the second half of the 19th century, he assembled a camera with which he recorded various forms of skin diseases during his career as a leading professor of dermatology.

Perhaps not very surprising in the light of these talents of both father and grandfather, the hidden passion of the young Theo van Haren Noman became apparent: photography and film. The career choice test at a Psychotechnical Bureau proved this as well and a training at the prestigious *l'École Technique de Photographie et de Cinéma* in Paris was on the horizon. It was 1939. The outbreak of the Second World War brought a brutal end to this plan. Van Haren Noman was forced to return to the Netherlands where he married Albertina Bruins (1918-2011). Their first son Dirk Jan was born in 1941, followed by (future filmmaker) Alfred Eric in 1943. The hard practical lessons during the war by photographers such as Jacob Merkelbach (1877-1942) and Menno Huizinga (1907-1947) ensured that Van Haren Noman was able enough to start working as a reportage photographer at the *Algemeen Nederlandsch Fotobureau* (ANEFO) in the summer of 1945.

At the beginning of 1947, Van Haren Noman started his film training as an apprentice cameraman at the film factory *Polygoon Profilti Productions* (PPP), which provided the news in the cinema under the title *Neerlands Nieuws* (Dutch News) and *World News*. The topics were characteristic of those years: reconstruction after the war, the royal family, football, traditions, folk festivals and other national matters to be proud of, such as the subject of Van Haren Noman's first own news item: icebreakers that 'liberate the frozen Noord-Hollands Kanaal (channel) from ice'. The choice of words and the characteristic voice of Philip Bloemendal (1918-1999) underlined the intention to enhance national enthusiasm and pride. After the Second World War there was a need for optimism and the visitor had to leave the cinema in good spirits. Commissioned films followed on subjects such as the Dutch Railways and the Navy. In 1948 Van Haren Noman together with (script) writer Anton Koolhaas

(1912-1992) made *Mother of Lands* in honor of the 50th anniversary of Queen Wilhelmina. The opening scene showed Philip Bloemendal and Jeanne Roos (1916-2001) in bed together. Jeanne Roos was the first Dutch announcer of the NTS and journalist of newspaper *Het Parool*. The by then divorced Van Haren Noman married her in 1952. In 1955 their son Philippe was born.

The first major drama production after the war was *De dijk is dicht* (The dike is closed off) written and directed in 1950 by Anton Koolhaas. For Van Haren Noman it was his first experience as a cameraman for a full-length feature film with actors such as Kees Brusse (1925-2013) and Kitty Knappert (1929).

*Bruin Goud*, commissioned by the famous chocolate company Van Houten, was Van Haren Noman's first film made as an independent filmmaker in 1952 together with producer Louis van Gasteren (1922-2016). The exciting journey to Africa made by the film crew for this assignment, resulted in two shorter films: *Dwars door de Sahara* (Right through the Sahara) and *Accra, harbor without cranes*. A tough ordeal for cameramen: plodding through the endless hot African sand for weeks with dozens of film cans, vulnerable cameras and lenses in a draughty jeep. The filmmakers were enthusiastically welcomed on their return home by the management of the Van Houten company.

### **Cannes Film Festival**

In 1957 Van Haren Noman filmed his first not commissioned film, *Een leger van gehouwen steen* (An army of cut stone). The film was selected and screened at the Cannes Film Festival. In addition to many other prizes, the very successful film received the State Prize for Dutch Film. This film about war and resistance memorials, laced with poems, was shown on television during the annual May 4 commemoration of World War II well into the 1960s. The film is a moving ode to depicting suffering and resistance.

His second free film, *Gisteren komt nooit weerom...* (Yesterday never comes again), followed in 1959, was based on the stories of the literary chronicler of the pre-war Jewish Amsterdam, Meyer Sluysen (1901-1973). Van Haren Noman directed and produced the film, the camerawork was by Gait Berk (1926-2006). The film is a documentary story about the Jewish quarter in Amsterdam just before World War II, with many old newsreels and scenes of hundreds of Jewish citizens of Amsterdam as extras filmed on location. A striking free film from 1962 was *'t Was een vreemdeling zeker* (It was a stranger for sure), a narrative about Santa Claus. Van Haren Noman opted for an original approach by exclusively using children's drawings to depict the story of the saint who travels annually from Spain to the Netherlands. The film has received several international awards.

Van Haren Noman alternated his free films with commissioned films for, among others, Shell, the Coöperatieve Handelsvereniging, the government (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ministry of C.R.M.), universities and institutions. These films were also shown in the cinemas.

In the late 1960s, Van Haren Noman focused on making informative films such as a thirteen-part series about the Middle Ages. These films were broadcast on television prior to the immensely popular youth series *Floris* by Paul Verhoeven (1938). In 1970, Van Haren Noman filmed the deplorable condition of Borobudur, the famous Buddhist temple in Java in dire need of restoration. Van Haren Noman spent the 1970s making *Titan* spots, the precursor of the *Postbus 51* films and educational films. After ending his directing career and finally putting down his camera in the 80s, Van Haren Noman took up the brush until his very old age and made new images, but now in watercolor and oil paint.