



**EMPIRE: THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES
OF DUTCH COLONIALISM**

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EMPIRE: THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF DUTCH COLONIALISM

Mon Nov 11 | 8:30 pml

Jack H. Skirball Series

West Coast Premiere

Official Selection: New York Film Festival 2013

Having travelled 140,000 kilometers through Asia, Africa, Oceania and the Americas to film this award-winning documentary, and fresh from the New York Film Festival, transatlantic artist duo Eline Jongsma and Kel O'Neill invite audiences into the sensory overload of *Empire's* interactive digital adaptations, consisting of a series of overlapping vignettes designed for an immersive experience. Focusing on minute details and underrepresented populations, *Empire* reveals the gaps, lapses and contradictions of a sprawling colonial history which lasted from the 17th to the 20th century, and stretched from the Cape of Good Hope to the Indonesian archipelago, from New York City to South America's Wild Coast.

In person: Eline Jongsma and Kel O'Neill

Empire is an immersive documentary project that explores how the conditions of the past define our lives in the present. The Dutch East and West India Companies once controlled vast trading networks that stretched from the Cape of Good Hope to the Indonesian archipelago, and from New York City to South America's Wild Coast. Although they came in pursuit of short-term profits, the companies left behind a legacy that can still be seen today in the cultures, and in the bloodlines, of people and communities around the world.

Shot in ten countries over the course of four years, *Empire* invites you to discover the human-scaled impact of the first global capitalist endeavour.

Directed and produced by Eline Jongsma and Kel O'Neill Design and development by Clint Beharry and Sam Bailey.

This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the Netherlands Cultural Services and generous support from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud.



"Hovering over 10 minute apiece, the uninflected loops don't need to press the point of the complex human narratives they unearth, each of which short-circuits conventional conceptions of a history long laid to rest. These deceptively calm sketches are micro-portraits of hate, hope, and everything in-between." – *Film Comment*

"Culture is never a pure thing' – notes a musician in Cape Town. *Empire* reminds us of this, bringing to many screens not just the damaging consequences of global capitalism

and colonialism, but the unintended blossoming of cultures melding together, language hybridizing, traditional songs being passed around. Loneliness, death, guilt and dancing – it really is all here.” – *Grolsch Film Works*

“As practiced by a new class of digital frontier types, [these experiments] often blend the image-as-object ethos of museum installations, the interactivity of video games and the narrative and character features of traditional cinema. Immersive documentary shares some similarities with its cousin, journalism’s multimedia presentation, though is far more rooted in a cinematic tradition. Shown at the New York Film Festival, one of the most ambitious examples [of this new trend] *The Empire Project*, is the creation of a young Dutch American husband-and-wife team named Kel O’Neill and Eline Jongsma. About four years ago, O’Neill and Jongsma decided to sell most of their possessions, give up their Brooklyn apartment and, armed with just their own money and a meager amount of European film funding, hit the road—to places like Holland, Southern California, Australia and even Indonesia, where Jongsma traces some of her ancestry.

The filmmakers were interested in the legacy of colonialism and migration in these places. Initially their thought was to make traditional films about the subjects that illuminated these topics, either a series of shorts or a longer omnibus piece.

But they soon realized that there was a more compelling way to tell their story. Instead of simply compiling the interviews and footage, they decided to fragment and then recombine them in unusual ways. After all, many of these voices were interesting precisely because they aren’t traditionally heard. So why use traditional means to give them a voice? Technique, essentially, became part of the process of telling their story. ‘Rather than *transmedia*,’ says O’Neill, ‘we prefer to call it *exploding cinema*.’”
– *The Los Angeles Times*

Empire: Periphery **8 minutes, USA**

In Southern California, a Dutch-Indonesian actor named Norman poses as a Mexican in order to get the attention of casting directors. Meanwhile, another story lurks beneath the surface.

Empire: Periphery **8 minutes, Australia**

In Western Australia, outlaw biker Yeti explores his Dutch-Aboriginal heritage in an effort to prove his family’s rightful claim to their ancestral lands. Meanwhile, another story lurks beneath the surface.

Empire: Legacy **12 minutes, South Africa**

Orania, South Africa is a private, whites-only community in the Northern Cape. It is a village built on Dutch Calvinist values where all residents are expected to be fluent in Afrikaans—a language derived from 17th and 18th century Dutch. In Cape Town, a different part of South Africa’s past survives in the form of the “Nederlandsliedje” or “Dutch song.” Originally performed in Dutch, Nederlandsliedjes have stayed alive in Cape Town’s Cape Malay community for generations through an oral tradition, with young singers learning the lyrics from old masters. Over time, the songs’ words have transformed into a hybrid language that is neither Dutch nor Afrikaans.

The South African installation presented at REDCAT is one of four videos that make up the *Empire: Legacy* project, which also includes videos from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India. Find the others at empireproject.eu/legacy

Empire: Migrants

21 minutes, Ghana, Suriname, Brazil

Empire: Migrants explores the contemporary reverberations of the transatlantic slave trade in three locations that were once of key importance to the Dutch West India Company: Ghana, Suriname and Brazil. In each country, a local narrator speaks for his or her own community and highlights the current-day impact of economic decisions made by 17th and 18th century Dutch traders. Together, these voices create a single monologue that transports viewers from the luxurious mansions of a group of aging Freemasons to the gritty depths of an artisanal gold mine.

Empire: Cradle (live-screening)

5 minutes, The Netherlands

Outside Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, plane spotters wait for a glimpse of their favorite aircraft. Inside the airport's mortuary, undertaker Theo prepares the recently deceased for their final flights home. *Empire: Cradle* presents two films with a shared soundtrack. As the seconds tick by, you decide which you will watch and which you will ignore.

Try *Empire: Cradle* yourself at empireproject.eu/cradle

Eline Jongsma & Kel O'Neill are a married Dutch-American filmmaking team who focus on cross-platform storytelling. Their videos and installations have been presented by museums, galleries and festivals throughout the world, including: the New York Film Festival (NYFF); the Los Angeles Film Festival (LAFF); the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA); the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR); Apex Art, New York; Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town; Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta; Khoj, New Delhi; and CBK Zuidoost/Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam (SMBA). They work primarily as a two-person crew handling all aspects of production, from research to filming and editing. In addition, their journalism work has appeared on VPRO Television and *De Correspondent* in The Netherlands, and in *Vice*, *The Creators Project* and *Huffington Post* in the US.

<http://empireproject.eu/>

<http://vimeo.com/57141520>

<http://www.vice.com/read/meet-the-filmmakers-who-are-excavating-the-former-dutch-colonial-empire>

<http://indienyc.com/2013-nyff-filmmaker-profile-eline-jongsma-kel-oneill-creators-empire/>

UPCOMING FILM/VIDEO PROGRAMS AT REDCAT FALL 2013

Mon Nov 18

Rakhshan Banietemad: The Hidden Cost of Violence

Mon Nov 25

The Real and the Hyper-Real: Films and Videos by Scott Stark

Mon Dec 9

autrement, la Molussie by Nicolas Rey