

# Rotterdam



## The long-running Dutch festival takes in Mickey Mouse snuff and spam email live reads for its 48th edition.

**F**or an operation of such scale and seriousness, the International Film Festival Rotterdam is good at mixing things up. This year's edition included a thematic programme titled 'Rabbit Hole', focused entirely on web cultures, which offered a slew of internet-inspired film programming.

The highest profile film in the programme was Gabriel Abrantes and Daniel Schmidt's *Diamantino*, which, while being one of the most entertaining features on offer, was also the least relevant to the broader theme. Besides its subject – a much suffering character who resembles a certain international footballing icon who finds himself on the receiving end of the meme treatment – the film's attachment to the digital world is mostly aesthetic only. Much more deeply embedded in online communities is Dan Schoenbrun's *A Self-Induced Hallucination*, a dense and ultimately disquieting found-footage feature about YouTube myth-making that unravels the phenomenon of the 'slenderman', a fictitious boogeyman whose online legend had real life consequences. How many people believing in something, Schoenbrun asks, does it take for that thing to become real?

Also rooted in the internet shock stories known as 'creepypasta' is Christopher Radcliff's chaotic *Lost Episode*, a three-channel short about a fabled Mickey Mouse cartoon known as *suicidemouse.avi* supposedly so disturbing it drives viewers to take their own lives. The film features

remixed, distorted sections of the original 'lost episode' spliced alongside reaction videos and warped fan-art. Equally uncanny is Marnie Ellen Hertzler's *Hi, I Need to be Loved* which has actors hired via Craigslist performing readings of spam emails, first in an 'audition-tape' style then in fantastically realised filmed scenarios, lending unexpected emotional heft to the absurd narratives.

Two other short highlights were Tulapop Saenjaroen's *A Room with a Coconut View* and Ross Meckfessel's *The Air of the Earth In Your Lungs*, both of which reflect the transportive potential of internet aesthetics. An analogue object with a digital sensibility, Meckfessel's film teleports us through a pixel world of videogames, drones, Go-Pros and robot suits, dousing the new-age technological scenarios in an old-world grainy glaze. Tulapop's fantastic film also journeys through virtual spaces, screen-switching seductively as its various AI characters indulge each other in convoluted, increasingly metatextual conversations.

Contrasting the strength of the films playing in cinemas was the weakness of the Meme Café exhibition, described as the strand's "centrepiece". Situated unceremoniously in a corner of the Het Nieuwe Instituut's own cafe, much to the bemusement of any non meme-seeking visitors, the setup was shoddy and the content similarly so. Installed awkwardly on computer-cubicles was proprietary meme creation software; a Minecraft style 'virtual gallery'; and a three-monitor vertical-video piece made from "digital garbage"; among other hodgepodge.

Fittingly, the most interesting piece in the space was from a 15-year-old. Tobias Kers' *Meme Rewind 2018* is a mash-up of 2018's most noteworthy memes, a fan's dissection offered to counter YouTube's own corporate year-recap videos. Created by a creator, its view on the "memeverse" comes direct from within the machine, not from an artist looking in ☹️