

Screening // Sarah Vanhee: 'The Making of Justice' at HAU – Hebbel am Ufer

Article by Kimberly Budd in Berlin // Monday, Oct. 16, 2017

Sarah Vanhee is attuned to the voices that often go unheard in society. She informs the audience in her artist talk, following the screening of her film 'The Making of Justice' at **HAU Hebbel am Ufer**, of her focus in this respect, especially within the contemporary prison system. She quotes **Michel Foucault**: "They tell us that prisons are over-populated. But what if it was the population that was being over-imprisoned? Little information is published on prisons. It is one of the hidden regions of our social system, one of the dark zones of our life."

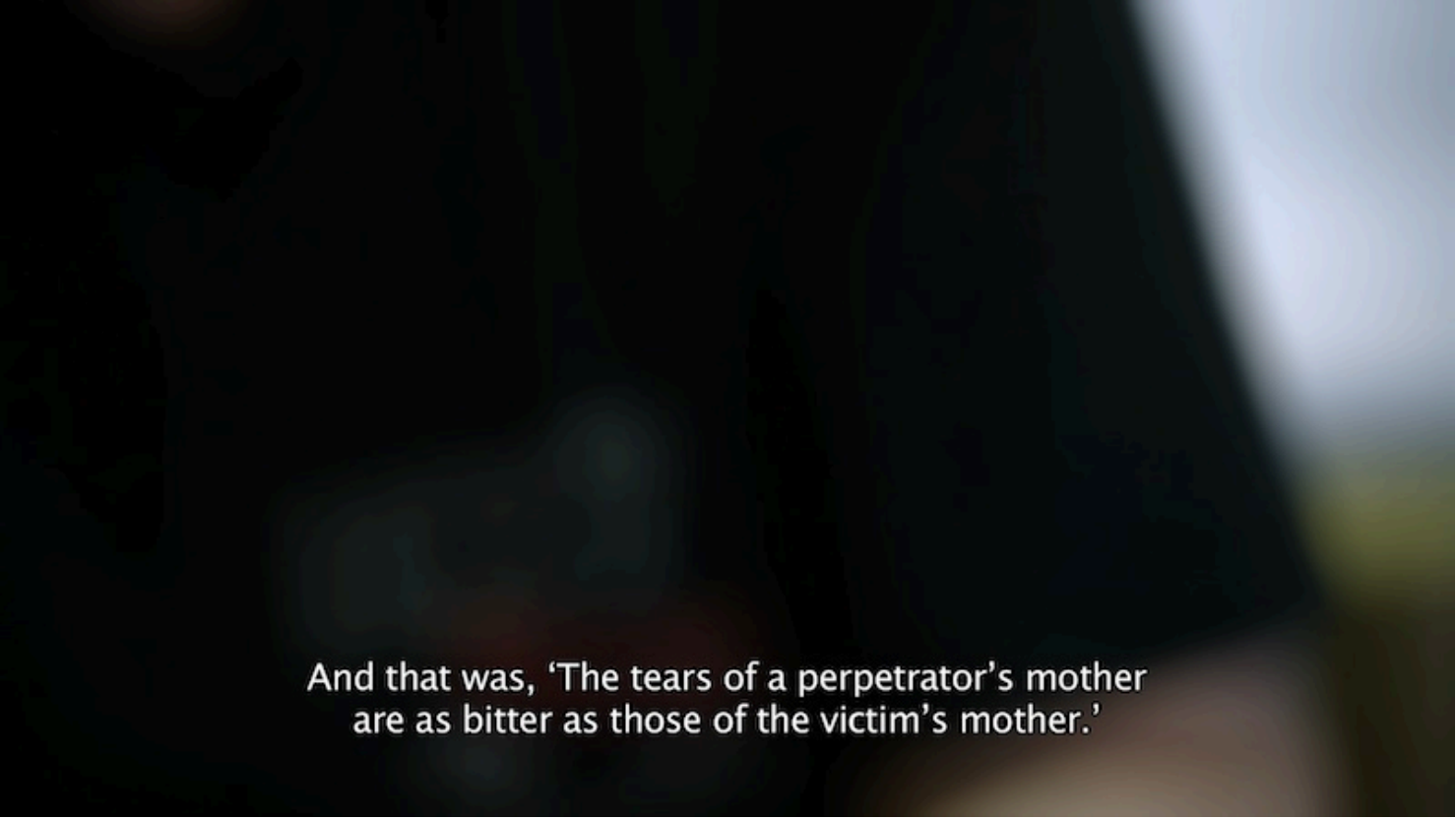
Unlike Foucault's work on prison and punishment theory, Vanhee is involved in the movement around restorative, transformative justice. She believes that outside of the Scandinavian model our current prison system is extremely flawed and representative of societal problems at large: society opting for retaliation rather than restoration. Aligning with the themes of the festival, 'The Mole Keeps Digging', the film centres around the largely unheard voices of seven prisoners convicted of murder.



Well, in my case at least.
Since my crimes I've never felt free.

Sarah Vanhee: 'The Making of Justice', Film Still // Courtesy of the Artist, 2017

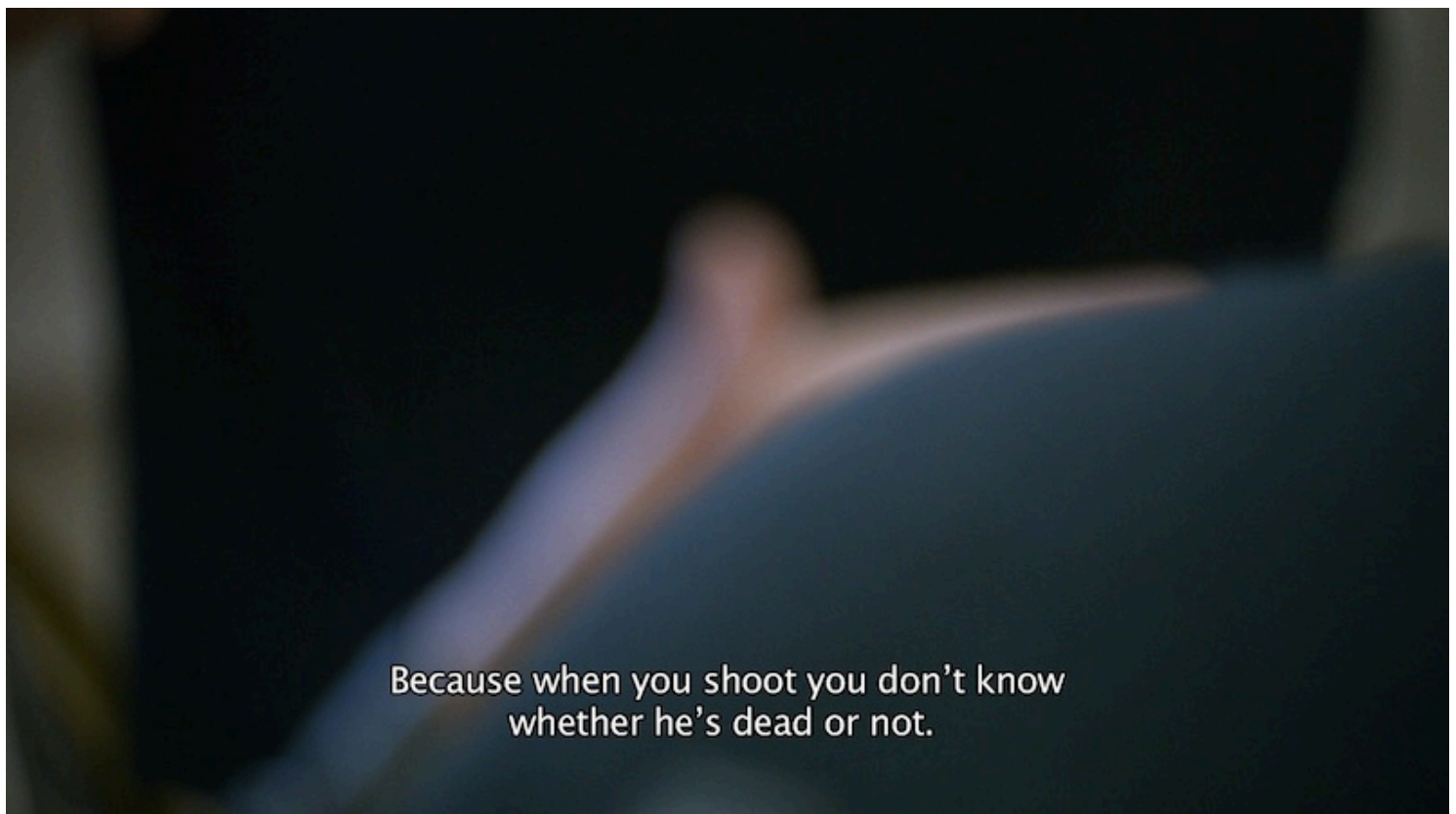
The festival 'The Mole Keeps Digging' investigates the co-habitation of human beings and animals, elaborating on the imaginary concept that human beings have drawn around 'the mole', used through history as a metaphorical figure representing numerous political, literary, and theoretical ideas. Through installation, performance, film, theatre and dialogue the festival instigates a change of perspectives and attempts to uncover a 'tunnel system' to an alternative conception of who 'we' are. In this case the elusive character—the incarcerated individual who has often been ostracized or demonized in our communities—has been given a platform to share with the audience, to potentially transfigure our perception of human being and murderer, us and them.



And that was, 'The tears of a perpetrator's mother
are as bitter as those of the victim's mother.'

Sarah Vanhee: 'The Making of Justice', Film Still, 2017 // Courtesy of the Artist

In the film, the audience is presented with a central scene, entirely out of focus, of seven prisoners who collaboratively work on the scenario of a crime film. Like the protagonist they are envisioning, each of them is also guilty of murder. Sitting in a round circle we witness them adapting the narrative of their characters' murders, his sentence and journey to prison and the mental outcomes, each of them drawing on their own experiences to shape the scenarios. They are meant to be using this method of fiction as a means of accepting and transcending their personal situations. This initiates relevant discourse around criminality, the nature of justice and what a society could possibly look like if it were oriented towards healing rather than retribution. The censored, blurry imagery we are presented with, the constant unfocused lens on their faces and nebulous features, although necessary for privacy and for the sake of the victims, also aesthetically allows us to view the men first as people and only afterwards as offenders, to employ more concentration in hearing their reflections since their conviction, urging us to hear their reflections and break down their 'otherness'.



Because when you shoot you don't know
whether he's dead or not.

Sarah Vanhee: 'The Making of Justice', Film Still, 2017 // Courtesy of the Artist

The artist talk following the screening revealed some engrossing data surrounding the project and a mixed bag of questions from the audience, exposing the fraught nature of the subject matter. One audience member blatantly posed the question: 'I don't understand, why are you interested in all this criminal stuff?' Vanhee eloquently addressed the questions, always returning to her belief in restorative justice: the repairing of harm caused by the crime, where victims, offenders and appropriate community members can come together and decide how to go about this. Fascinatingly, Vanhee spoke of the screenings of her film after its conception, where victims of the perpetrators attended, and the feedback they gave was positive: they reported that they took something away from experiencing it. Vanhee also informed the audience that anyone can write a message, thoughts or reactions and she will pass it on to the detainees, as they would really appreciate feedback on the film and the issues it raises. 'The Making of Justice' followed a lengthy research project exploring the discrepancy between the formal, institutional system of justice versus justice as a lived experience, and was Vanhee's first film. She is touring with it throughout Europe, with several screenings still to come in various European cities.

Artist Info

[sarahvanhee.net](http://sarahvanheecom.webhosting.be/home) (<http://sarahvanheecom.webhosting.be/home>).

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