

# ***MONKONDEE***

*vriza presents a film by*

**Tolin Alexander, Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan**

**in collaboration with  
the Kalina and Wayana Indigenous Peoples  
and the Pamaka, Ndyuka and Aluku Maroon Peoples**

**the Netherlands, Suriname, 2025**



# MONIKONDEE

*length* 103 min.  
*format* 4k DCP  
*aspect ratio* 1:2.39  
*premiere* Cinéma du Réel, France, 2025  
*countries of production* Suriname, Netherlands  
*genre* hybrid, participatory documentary  
*languages* miscellaneous: Haitian-Creole, Ndyuka, Dutch, Kalina, Sranan, French, Chinese, Pamaka, Aluku, Wayana  
*subtitles* Dutch, English, French

*direction* Tolin Alexander, Lonnie van Brummelen, Siebren de Haan  
*main protagonist* Boggi Josef Adijontoe aka “Boogie”  
*casting* Tolin Alexander  
*director of photography* Sander Coumou  
*additional cinematography* Siebren de Haan  
*set sound* Idi Lemmers

*editing* Bobbie Roelofs, Lonnie van Brummelen  
*sound design and mix* Jaim Sahuleka, Karakter Sound  
*post-production image* Barend Onneweer, Raamw3rk  
*title design* Janna Meeus

*producer* Lonnie van Brummelen  
*line-producer Suriname* Ann Hermelijn

*funders* Netherlands Film Fund, Mondriaan Fund, Fonds 21, Amsterdams Fund for the Arts, Cultuurfonds, Dutch Culture

*production company* vriza productions  
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[www.vriza.org](http://www.vriza.org)



## *synopsis*

For centuries, the Maroons in Suriname's rainforest have kept capitalist society at bay. Descendants of enslaved Africans who escaped Dutch plantations, they have thrived by preserving their ancestral traditions. In recent years, however, economic interests have encroached upon their land.

*Monikondee* (Money Land) follows Boogie, a boatman who delivers essential cargo to remote Maroon and Indigenous communities along the border river separating Suriname and French Guiana. While the communities continue to grow their own food, they are becoming increasingly dependent on boatmen like Boogie to bring in vital supplies, as floods and droughts destroy their crops and gold mining poisons their water.

When Boogie is summoned by his clan leaders to attend his nephew's trial, the demands of his money-driven work begin to conflict with his traditional duties. During a winding journey deep upstream, the currents become increasingly unpredictable.

## *director's statement*

The story of Boogie—a Ndyuka Maroon boatman struggling to juggle his traditional responsibilities with the pressures of a money-driven world—unfolds in a forested landscape ravaged by climate upheaval and pollution from gold mining. Boogie is our guide along the winding rivers, inviting us to drift through the rivers of his thoughts. He shares his role as narrator with those he meets along the way, singing and speaking in their own tongues about the struggles of their communities.

In crafting the narrative, we employed a travelling camera that follows Boogie and the people he encounters, creating an atmosphere where this remote world feels close, drawing the viewer into its reality.

We complemented these travelling shots with wide-angle perspectives to situate the actions within the vastness of the rainforest, making tangible the delicate balance between the people and the forces of nature.

The film blends an immersive, sensory style with a collaborative, multi-voiced approach, incorporating techniques from participatory cinema (Brechtian, Rouchian) as well as from the Maroon storytelling tradition of *mato*, where spectators interrupt the narrator with new storylines and songs—practices breaking the invisible fourth wall. These techniques are realised in the film through multi-voiced storytelling, people re-enacting their own lives, and actors becoming spectators, reflecting on the story we co-created.





## *Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan*

### *biography*

Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan are collaborating artists and filmmakers. Their works explore geopolitical landscapes, such as international borders and sites of global trade, as well as the material impacts of resource extraction on local communities and ecosystems. Since 2014, they have created three feature-length participatory documentaries: *Episode of the Sea* (2014), *Stones Have Laws* (2018), and *Monikondee* (2025), the latter two co-directed with the Surinamese theatre maker Tolin Alexander. Their films have screened at film festivals worldwide including IDFA, TIFF, CPH:DOX, Mar del Plata, MoMA's Documentary Fortnight, ICA's Frames of Representation.

### *filmography*

*Monikondee* (103', DCP, 2025)

*Stones Have Laws* (100', DCP, 2018)

*Episode of the Sea* (63', 35mm film transferred to DCP, b/w, sound, 2014)

*View from the Acropolis* (16', 35mm film, b/w, sound, 2009)

*Monument of Sugar – how to use artistic means to elude trade barriers*  
(63', 16mm film, color, silent, 2007)

*Grossraum (Borders of Europe)*, (35', 35mm film, color, silent, 2005)

## *Tolin Alexander*

### *biography*

Tolin Alexander is a Surinamese writer, theater maker, and performer specializing in cross-cultural theatre and community projects. His work is influenced by Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. In collaboration with Van Brummelen and De Haan, he directed the participatory documentaries *Stones Have Laws* (2018) and *Monikondee* (2025). His recent plays include *Lofzang der Vrijheid* (2018), performed on a boat in the harbor of Paramaribo in collaboration with the theatre group Ship of Fools. In 2025, he will curate the exhibition *De Bezielde Natuur* (Spirited Nature) at the museum and biodiversity research centre Naturalis in Leiden.

### *filmography*

*Monikondee* (103', DCP, 2025)

*Stones Have Laws* (100', DCP, 2018)



screening *Monikondee* to the participants  
Moengo, Suriname, December 2024

### ***line producer Ann Hermelijn***

Ann Hermelijn is a versatile and creative professional from Suriname with over 25 years of experience in the creative industries and event management arenas. She has led countless projects related to the arts, culture, education and tourism industries, locally and internationally. Hermelijn has played a key role in the organization of a number of initiatives that have become popular Hallmark events, including Su-rifesta and the Suriname Jazz Festival. She is also co-creator of socially engaged and educational theater, music and film productions, often in cooperation with international partners. Ann is especially committed to productions and artistic initiatives that aim to contribute to social change and sustainable community development.

[www.annhermelijn.com](http://www.annhermelijn.com)

### ***director of photography Sander Coumou***

Sander Coumou is a Dutch filmmaker who has been living in Paramaribo, Suriname, since 2009. He developed his skills as a cinematographer and director through creating commercials and music videos. In 2018, he worked as the director of photography and co-screenwriter for *Wiren*, a Surinamese drama that became the country's first submission to the Academy Awards. He has served as a cinematographer on several documentaries. In 2025, he made his directorial debut with the documentary *De Surinaamse Voetbaldroom* (The Surinamese Football Dream). Coumou's work is defined by a focus on authenticity and a deep interest in capturing people who are chasing their dreams. He aims to bring the viewer as close as possible to his subjects, no matter the challenges that arise.

[www.wavesfilms.org](http://www.wavesfilms.org)

### ***sound recordist Idi Lemmers***

Idi Roy Lemmers studied at the Surinamese Film Academy of Pim de La Parra (2005-2006) and gained practical experience at AT5 in Amsterdam (2007). His early career involved working as a self-directing cameraman, editor, and presenter at *10 Minuten Jeugdjournaal* (2006-2010), a children's news program. For his work at *10 Minuten Jeugdjournaal* he won multiple awards, including a UNICEF Media Award for best story in Children's Rights (team effort). In recent years, Lemmers has worked as a cameraman, editor, and sound recorder for international news and media outlets, and documentaries. He has also made a mark as an actor, acting in theatre plays like *Kettingreactie* and *Bryan X* (2011) by Sharda Ganga, and in the film *Wiren* (2019), selected by the Dutch Film Festival and Suriname's first entry for the Academy Awards.

### ***production company vriza***

Vriza is a production house for artist films, founded by artist-filmmakers Siebren de Haan and Lonnie van Brummelen. Vriza develops, produces, and distributes films by artist-filmmakers with an engaged practice, who use cinematic means to explore postcolonial and ecological dilemmas, often highlighting the hidden struggles of underrepresented communities and challenging prevailing perspectives. We support filmmakers throughout the research and production process, offering feedback, project financing, and logistical assistance. Recent productions include the feature *East of Noon* by Hala Elkoussy, the experimental documentary *Aasivissuit* by Jasper Coppes, and the participatory documentaries *Stones Have Laws* and *Monikondee* by Alexander, Van Brummelen, and De Haan. Currently in production is the hybrid feature *Lyrical Vengeance* by Wendelien van Oldenborgh.

[www.vriza.org](http://www.vriza.org)





# MONIKONDEE

*interview with directors*

**Jason Fox:** *Monikondee* is the second film that the three of you made together in Suriname. How did your previous films lead to this collaboration?

**Lonnie van Brummelen:** When Dutch politics shifted drastically to the right around 2011, Siebren and I decided to make a film in Urk, a Dutch fishing village with a strong far-right populist presence. In this context, we opted to experiment with a participatory approach. We interviewed fishermen and used excerpts of verbatim transcripts to create the dialogue for a film script. These interviews were then re-enacted on camera by the fishermen themselves along with members of a local theatre group. In the film *Episode of the Sea* (2014), we combined these staged scenes with documentary footage of work at sea and scrolling titles, in which we reflect on our encounters with the fishermen. After editing, we organised a screening so we could show the participants the fruits of our collaboration. Working within the Urk community was a transformative experience, and the film found both a local and an international audience. This encouraged us to continue exploring this approach.

**Siebren de Haan:** Our second participatory film, *Dee Sitonu A Weti* (*Stones Have Laws*, 2018), was made with the Saamaka Maroons in Suriname, a Dutch colony until 1975. One reason for making the film was that many people in our country seemed unaware of this colonial legacy and its repercussions in the present. We wanted to shed light on this history from a different angle. In Suriname we looked for collaborators from the Maroon community. When we met Tolin, we noticed that our storytelling approaches had a lot in common.

**Tolin Alexander:** We talked about the plays I had created in the interior of Suriname using methods from Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed." These were site-specific productions I had created to address sensitive topics, such as safe sex and polygamy, and which allowed for open discussion. In these plays, community members were the actors. Through improvisation, we would stage recognizable situations. Then, we would encourage the audience to respond.

When an audience member would suggest how an actor should have acted differently, the scene would be adjusted and performed again.

**SdH:** In *Stones Have Laws*, the Saamaka people share oral histories of their resistance to colonial rule. They recount how their ancestors escaped slavery and forged a new culture in the rainforest, drawing on African traditions and what they learned from Indigenous peoples.

**LvB:** *Monikondee* begins where *Stones Have Laws* leaves off, exploring the resilience of communities that had to deal with disruption of cultures and ecosystems through capitalist interventions. Set in the Maroni River basin, along the border between Suriname and French Guiana, the film is situated in an area where gold and other resources have been extracted since the late 19th century.

**JF:** How do you approach the intersecting dynamics of local tradition, neocolonialism and contemporary capitalism in *Monikondee*?

**SdH:** We know that our ancestors brought plantation culture, slavery, and capitalism to Suriname. Through this ruthless regime, land, plants, and people were commodified. Since the 17th century, the Dutch have proudly identified themselves as a trading nation, a country of merchants, a fact that is reflected in the Dutch language. The word "goederen" (goods), for example, is derived from "het goede" (the good). The word "koopwaar" (goods for sale) has an etymological link to the word "waarheid" (truth).

**LvB:** Maroons and Indigenous peoples lived until quite recently in societies where goods and services were not exchanged for money. They had other social systems to take care of themselves, such as barter, and *pansu*—the collective sharing of plant materials. Our film explores how these practices have transformed under the influence of the money system.

**TA:** Internationally, we are known as "Marrons," but in our own language, we call ourselves "Fiiman." Boatmen have traditionally served in Fiiman community as intermediaries. They brought the interior into contact with the more urbanized coastal plains, where the plantations were located and goods were for sale. Fiiman still call this area *bakaa* (land of the whites), or *monikondee* (money land). With the rise of freight transport, inequality also entered our community. Boatmen became wealthy. They were no longer committed to the collective

society but instead focussed on their own commercial interests. In our society, you are considered antisocial if you don't share your belongings with the community. In the past, you might have even been viewed as a witch. A practice emerged in which the priests of the Sweli oracle confiscated the possessions of deceased individuals who were believed to be witches. This practice was the community's response to the disruption caused by the influx of money.

**LvB:** Today, the world is grappling with a climate crisis and profound inequality. What intrigued us about Tolin's stories is that the Ndyuka people recognized these two dangers, and established institutions and customs to keep them in check.

**TA:** But all of these laws are now being violated. Less than a generation ago, Fiiman would spend weeks or months praying to nature gods. While they were praying, certain places were left undisturbed, which was good for our natural ecology. But now, the western time-is-money lifestyle has taken precedence.

**JF:** What does collaboration and co-authorship mean for you?

**SdH:** Capitalist relations have saturated every aspect of our lives, including art and culture. Auteur cinema can be seen as a form of resistance against the profit driven approach of the film industry. The producer becomes less powerful, and the director reclaims its agency, gaining more space to act. But the risk is that the director is regarded as the sole author.

**LvB:** As creative makers, we're indebted to others—crew members, fellow creators, people who entrust their stories to us. And that's not even considering nonhumans, who also exert their influence. Isn't filmmaking a much more collective endeavor?

**TA:** When I look at western society, it seems focused on claiming as much authorship as possible. In the west, something only exists if it is written down, or recorded. Written sources take precedence over oral sources. The west is accustomed to turning what is collectively owned into private property. Like many Indigenous peoples, we Fiiman have to fight for collective land rights. Land is not considered individual property by our peoples. As a collective, we divide the land along matrilineal lines. People have belongings in our culture, but you are expected to share what you own when someone makes a request. Under the influence of Western culture, this is now changing.

**JF:** Can you talk about the challenges of collectively producing films within an environment that was once a Dutch colony?

**LvB:** We often heard from people living in Suriname's interior that westerners will photograph or film them, without permission, and that they never see the results. That's why many are wary of westerners, and especially ones with cameras. However, during the making of *Monikondee*, we didn't really encounter such aversion. It's probably because we didn't immediately go into the communities with a camera, and because we worked as a team with people from Suriname, who were aware of these sensitivities.

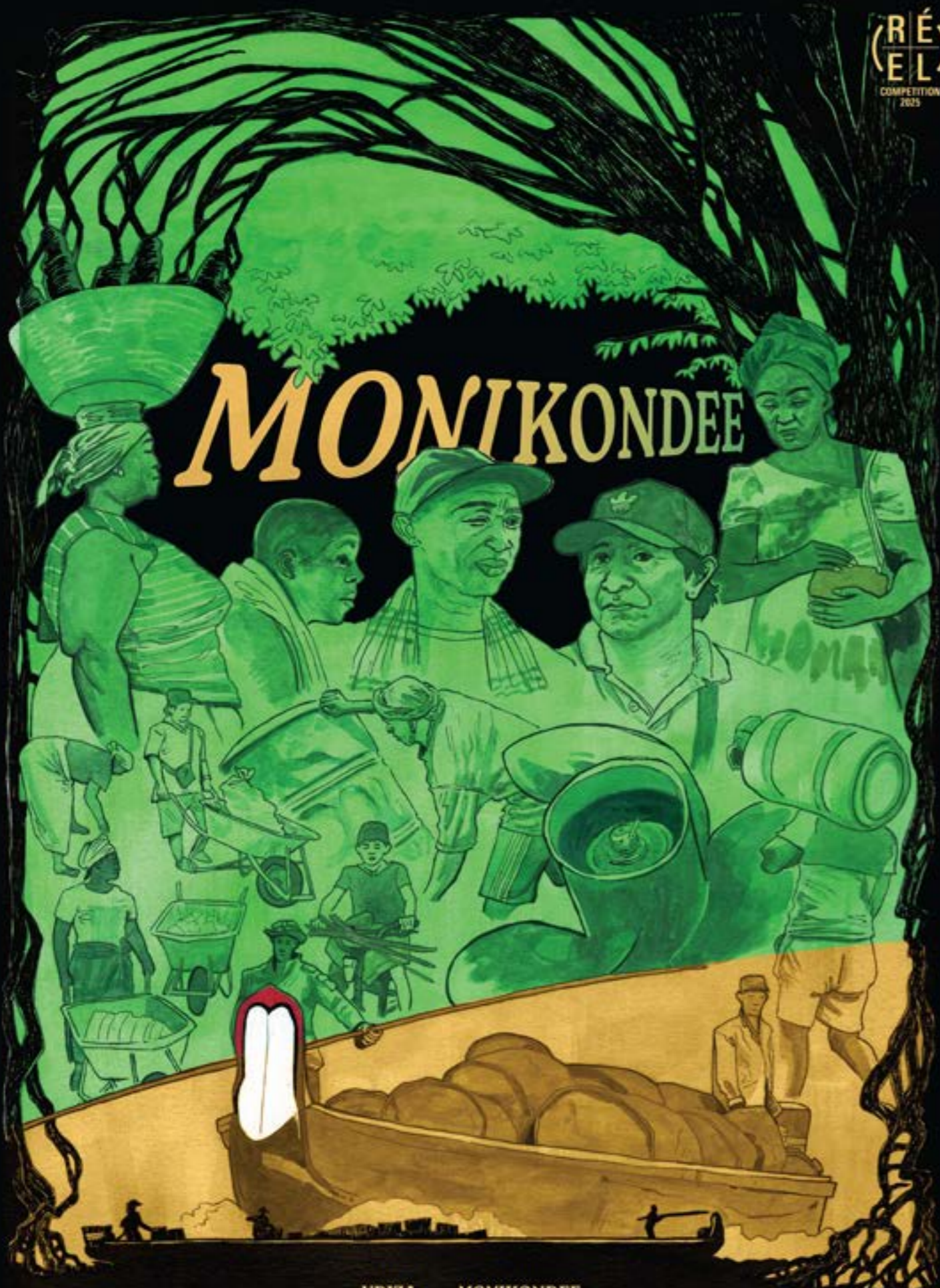
**TA:** The project began with a long research period. We visited the different communities to discuss with the people what they felt was meaningful to contribute to the project. Based on these conversations, we created a provisional script. Then we went back to the communities and held *kuutus* (small village meetings) to discuss the script. Each community nominated the people they wanted to act in the film.

**JF:** How did you meet Boogie, whose journey along the Marowijne River gives structure to the film?

**SdH:** Anyone traveling to Suriname's deep rainforest relies on boatmen. There are no roads, only waterways. We were familiar with these river trips from *Stones Have Laws*, albeit on a river less turbulent than the Maroni. When Tolin proposed to follow a boatman in the film, we were immediately enthusiastic, envisioning how a boat trip could take the camera's eye to various river communities, through a labyrinth of rapids, rocks, islands, and creeks.

**LvB:** To scout for a boatman, we stayed in Albina for a few weeks, a harbor where boatmen frequently pick up cargo. It was here that we met Boogie. He builds his own boats, knows his history, and is proud of his Maroon culture. At the same time, he is a real entrepreneur who always has one foot in *monikondee*.

**TA:** Boogie is a true connector of the river. He comes from Bigiston, a village where Indigenous people and Fiiman live together. Every month, he delivers oil to the Kalina Indigenous people in the mouth of the Maroni River. Boogie's father is Pamaka, and his mother Ndyuka. He's Surinamese, but his wife is from French Guiana. She is Christian, while Boogie's grandmother is a priestess in the Ndyuka



# MONIKONDEE

VRIZA PRESENTS MONIKONDEE

A FILM BY TOLIN ALEXANDER AND LONNIE VAN BRUMMELEN AND SIEBREN DE HAAN

WITH BOOGIE ADIJONTOE AND THE MAROONS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF EAST-SURINAME

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SANDER COUMOU ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SIEBREN DE HAAN EDITOR BOBBIE ROELOFS AND LONNIE VAN BRUMMELEN

SOUND DESIGNER AND MIX IDI LEMMERS COSTUME DESIGNER AND MAKEUP JAIM SAHULEKA COLOR GRADING AND FINISHING BAREND ONNEWEER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ANN HERMELIJN

spiritual tradition, which has many rituals to honor Mother Earth.

**LvB:** All of these connections make him a compelling character, personifying the complexities his culture is wrestling with. Moreover, we noticed during our first encounter that he seemed completely at ease when we filmed him. He had no anxiety around the camera at all.

**JF:** How did your interest in making the natural environment a character in the film influence the formal choices you made during filming and later in post production?

**SdH:** The film is set on the Guiana Shield of Amazonia, a two-billion-year-old stone plateau covered by rainforest, where a labyrinth of rivers like the Orinoco and the Amazon carve their paths. One of its winding rivers, the Maroni, provides the film with continuity, flow, and rhythm. Boogie leads the viewer through unknown and undefined territory, both physically with his boat, and by infusing the story with his own river of thoughts.

**LvB:** Life in the rainforest is a constant struggle against the elements. There is no connection to the power grid, no running water, and no road network. It takes great physical effort to transport things in the scorching heat, across uneven terrain. During filming, we aimed to transport viewers into this reality. We tried to make tangible the delicate balance between the people and the forces of nature by using a travelling camera that accompanies the people as they move, work, bargain and deliberate.

**SdH:** Therefore we chose not to use drone shots. No “view from above,” but rather a “terrestrial perspective,” as Bruno Latour puts it.

**LvB:** During both the filming and the editing process, the river gradually became a character with its own unpredictable nature. Its colors shifted, growing bluer as it neared the sea, redder or yellower near the gold mines, and browner—or even blacker—under the forest canopy, due to the sunken leaves. The river carried the boatmen and their cargo, but it also held them back when the currents were too strong, or when the water level dropped due to the relentless drought, halting both their journey and ours.

**TA:** The river tells us something about itself. When you see the water becoming yellow or red near gold mines, that’s the river telling us what humans do to it.

**JF:** Can you talk about the *mato* tradition? What led you to apply this technique in *Monikondee*?

**TA:** *Mato* takes place in the evening and it is also an integral part of our death ceremonies. In the *mato*, a storyteller tells a story, but the audience can interrupt with their own storylines or songs at any time. The storyteller's narrative then continues after the interruption. The stories that are shared can be folklore, fables, or personal experiences. People can fantasize about the future. Fiction is used to strengthen nonfiction. There's room for creativity and everyone can contribute. *Mato* is an activity that connects the community.

**LvB:** We recognized in the *mato* a kind of Brechtian approach *avant la lettre*, a collective, interactive, and participatory practice which breaks the fourth wall. It's an inclusive approach to storytelling, where anyone can participate by introducing alternative viewpoints.

**TA:** The layered nature of the story is emphasized by someone we call the "pikiman." This person confirms and emphasizes what a storyteller says without interfering with the content.

**SdH:** As filmmakers, we were intrigued by the role of the pikiman, who contributes to the story by guiding the audience and maintaining its focus. We recognized in the role of the pikiman the function of the cinematic apparatus. Camera, sound, editing—these are all tools we use to engage the audience's senses.

*Jason Fox is the founding editor of World Records Journal, published with New York University's Center for Media, Culture, and History*



*links*

[trailer of the film](#)

[project page](#)

[Monikondee research interviews](#)

*more information*

[info@vriza.org](mailto:info@vriza.org)

[www.vriza.org](http://www.vriza.org)

