AUGUSTE ORTS

QUIETLY ATTENDING



LEON DECOCK IN CONVERSATION WITH ANOUK DE CLERCQ
ABOUT **LOVE THAT MOVES THE SUN**

INTRODUCTION BY LEON DECOCK

We float above a dark forest stretching to the horizon. A meteor shower streaks across the sky. A few of them strike in the distance. Small islands of light appear in the clear night sky. Blue slowly turns to purple, then red as the sun rises. We glide over the treetops and descend until we find ourselves among the trees.

Love that Moves the Sun *takes us into a forest sprung from Anouk De Clercq's imagination. We are carried along in a single, carefully choreographed animated shot with a wordless guide who seems intent above all on letting us wander into our own imagination.*

Glinting eyes and silhouettes await us in the dark. Animals appear between the trees, at once familiar and strange. This is a forest that need not obey its own rules. An owl has the eyes of one species and the ears of another. The sun halts in the sky and goes dark as fireflies turn into startdust.

The film invites us to look closely. The deer, the wolf and the owl all looking back, without the work seeming to direct our attention towards anything in particular. The invitation is simply to follow its rhythm and movement. Rest, sleep, boredom, rapture or memory: there is room for it all.

Perhaps you begin to wonder why you only hear natural sounds. Where is the distant traffic, or the plane passing overhead? Where are the people? Is this a post-apocalyptic world, or an untouched one? And why is a forest fire the first thing that comes to mind when I see a landscape full of trees? But then the image turns upside down, following the sun. For a moment, you feel the earth turning beneath your feet. And then we begin again.

It is a film as meditation, poised between the human and the planetary scale. To move with the imagination for a moment, to dance around the Earth's axis, and then to find your feet again. Under that same sun, in a world that has kept turning all the while.

LEON DECOCK

The first thing that struck me was how quiet the film is. Perhaps your earlier work had led me to expect more music. You told me before that initially, there was more of it. How did that silence come about?

ANOUK DE CLERCQ

In my earlier work, the image was more abstract, so there was more room for the music. Here, the image already carries so much on its own. But the silence comes mainly from what inspired this work: my experience of sleeping in a forest at night. I never film or take photographs, but I do a lot of listening. Once, I was lying in a hammock and woke to the sound of a beaver gnawing away at my tree. I heard an owl in the distance, and then another answering very close by. I find that so playful. The way sounds are magnified in a forest at night, as though you were listening through a telescope and a microscope at the same time.

As we worked on the soundtrack, I realised that this was exactly the experience I wanted to convey: lying in a hammock in a forest at night, listening to what is happening around you. But our first score covered everything up. It was as though the animals and nature were being suffocated. The sound felt too human. At first, I thought the animals needed voices so they could sing, but that didn't work at all.

For the deer, I suggested trying a musical saw. Seb [Gainsborough, aka Vessel] went out and bought one, and was shocked that it sounded better than his modular synthesiser. The owl's flapping wings are rubber gloves being waved about. The fireflies now sound like little rascals, slightly dissonant and mischievous. The wolf is a howling wind.

In the end, we threw out everything that felt human, including most of the music. If you want to see something special at night, you have to keep quiet and make yourself small. That was the experience I wanted to convey, in the hope of inviting people to attend quietly. Something we are invited to do far too rarely.

What draws you to that quiet attention?

ANOUK DE CLERCQ

I often return to Annie Dillard's book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.* What I find so beautiful about it is that she wanted to teach herself to see differently. She withdrew from the city to pay attention to smaller things.

I love work that invites me to look in that way. It does me good; it allows me to relax. It is almost a spiritual experience, perhaps closest to religion or prayer. Over the centuries, people have found a way to ground themselves through that quiet attention. It does something good inside you, in your chest, your heart, your mind, your soul.

That is what I try to achieve with my work too. The way that single shot unfolds, the movement of the camera and the sun, the actions and how they follow one another: all of that matters a great deal. I want it to become a kind of wave you can float on, something that works on a visceral level. It is hard to explain, but people who see my work tell me they find calm in that movement. Sometimes they come up

afterwards and say they want to meditate or write while spending time with the work, and I take that as a compliment. That they feel safe enough to let themselves go in that way, to take a moment's respite from everything happening in the world or in their own lives.

I find it very soothing to spend time in that untouched world, but I also feel a certain tension in it. It reminds me of a line by Marwan Makhoul: 'To hear the birds, the warplanes must be silent.' For the film, you visited, among other places, the Białowieża Forest, on the border between Poland and Belarus, where a humanitarian crisis is also unfolding. I wondered how you experienced those two realities: the beauty of the forest and what is happening at the border?

ANOUK DE CLERCQ

I spoke about that with a Polish nature journalist who lives there, a well-known nature writer and activist. When I was there, I thought: I have to do something about this, about the suffering in the forest and at the border. To which he said: everyone is already doing that, everyone is writing about it. But for us, this is a place of hope. I don't want it to become a place of despair. And if you take anything with you, I hope this will be it.

He told me how the village cares for the forest, how people come together to look after it. Bringing food to refugees or guiding them to safety. How they leave the forest to the animals at night. Those are quite radical gestures. It is about their absolute love for that forest, and for everything and everyone in it. There is real passion there. Above all, he wanted me to take that sense of care with me, as well as the awareness that everything is connected. I wouldn't say I did that literally, but it stayed in the back of my mind. I didn't necessarily have to do what Agnieszka Holland did with *Green Border*, for instance. And of course, this isn't a film about that particular place, either.

It is a discussion I also have with myself. What do you do as an artist at a time of such political tension and crisis? It makes me think of Mary Oliver's poems or Ursula K. Le Guin's essays. They write things that breathe, yet are so deeply rooted in the suffering of the world. In looking at the world.

When I am in that space at STUK and see people giving themselves over to that world, I notice that it sets something in motion. Sometimes people tell me that the experience felt warm, that their imagination was stirred; sometimes they are moved. They think of their own stories, or of something else entirely. You see the child in them emerge, something vulnerable and unguarded, something they might otherwise suppress. The work makes no grand statements, but isn't that the difference between breathing and speaking? To live, you don't necessarily have to speak, but you do have to breathe.



Anouk De Clercq · *Love that Moves the Sun* (2026) · Still

As a student, I once talked to you about my feeling that I was making the same work over and over. I remember you saying you always felt that way. When I saw *Love that Moves the Sun*, I was reminded of that conversation. I recognise a lot of *Birdsong* in it, as though the films inhabit the same world. Both seem to offer a moment to catch your breath.

ANOUK DE CLERCQ

I recently showed *Birdsong* in Vilnius, a place where the threat of war is a constant reality. There I was, with my two birds, a colourful sky and a poetic text. You feel almost hesitant bringing it there, knowing what people are living through.

But afterwards, I heard that people had returned to the work several times because they found a kind of peace there that they could no longer find elsewhere. It was sobering and illuminating at the same time. There was also a long newspaper article by a young woman who described her experience of that harsh reality alongside her experience of the work. How there is panic everywhere, in the world, in the news, and how people came there precisely to find some calm.

Perhaps it also has something to do with people no longer going to church. I am not Catholic myself, and I don't particularly want people to go back to church, but apparently something is missing from what is offered to us elsewhere. A museum can also be a place of stillness. Somewhere to find calm, or to give yourself over to beauty, to find solace.

Birdsong was originally made for a piece by Messiaen, *Quatuor pour la fin du temps (Quatuor for the end of time)*, music he wrote during the Second World War while imprisoned in a German prisoner-of-war camp. Here is a composer and musician, locked up in a dark place at one of the darkest moments in history, yet he manages to write one of the most beautiful pieces of music in the world. His preface to the

score is full of references to every colour of the rainbow, angels and profound rapture. When I hear that music, I imagine the score as something bursting with colour, a kind of antidote to the utter misery he was living through.

It almost makes me cry to think about it. It is as though he is making himself a rope to pull himself up towards space, light and freedom.

Something else that stands out is how the sun keeps returning in your work. In *Love that Moves the Sun*, we even move along with it.

ANOUK DE CLERCQ

For me, my fascination with light and darkness is bound up with the magic of cinema. Seeing another world appear in a dark room, drawn in light. It is a kind of apparition, a ghost. Like a dream suddenly becoming real. I can't quite grasp it; I still find it so incredibly beautiful.

That's also part of what draws me to the sun. And to the way the smallest things connect with the largest—a spark or a firefly with the sun, for instance. I find that really moving.

Sometimes, in nature, I have moments when I feel I am dissolving into what I see. As though there were no longer a boundary between me and my surroundings. Those are moments of utter happiness, when you simply disappear into where you are and what you see.

And I also found the idea of that camera movement at the end, the backward somersault, quite adventurous. Above all, I was curious to see what it would look like. It began with the camera moving from high to low, like a dance with the rising and setting sun. From there, it felt natural to follow the rising sun, then let it go and make that rolling movement ourselves, a revolution.

It is as though the sun first does its thing and the camera learns from it. And then the camera thinks: now I'm going to try that too. And the audience gets to join in.



Anouk De Clercq · *Love that Moves the Sun* (2026) · Still

And then the whole movement starts again.

ANOUK DE CLERCQ

I love the fact that there is an owl at the beginning and at the end of the loop, as though the two are communicating. The fireflies become stars and the game begins again. It is wonderful and hopeful to know that everything is in constant motion.

About that owl: three people have already come up to tell me that an owl makes no sound when it flies. I know that too; I have heard and read about it. But this is an imaginary space, and anything is possible here. Normally, an owl can only turn its head 270 degrees, but in this world, it can turn 360 degrees. And so here, it does make a sound when it flies.

Every time that owl lands on the branch, it makes me laugh. The sound is so present, even though it can't actually happen in real life. But that also comes from my experience of the forest at night, lying there listening, when even the faintest sounds suddenly seem so loud.

During your artist talk at the opening at STUK, Thomas [De Brabanter, who created the animation] also shared your mood board. I loved seeing how a film could take shape through so few words—just a short description, a few quotes and, above all, lots of images. How do you convey something like that to others? How do you convince people of something you find hard to put into words?

ANOUK DE CLERCQ

What you don't see in that mood board, of course, are all the video calls and messages. But it certainly isn't easy. Especially with this project, because I am less interested in telling a story myself than in creating an experience. Something sensory, almost a ritual. An invitation to viewers to find a story of their own. It's hard to put into words, let alone get other people to believe in, as long as they cannot see

or experience it. So in a mood board I circle around the thing or feeling I want to capture, using old and new images, reproductions of paintings, fragments of text and short descriptions.

I read Jung's *Man and His Symbols* as a child. My father gave me the book when I was ten. It has so many illustrations, and I could look at those symbolic images endlessly. Mandalas, for instance: I found them endlessly fascinating. Perhaps that has something to do with it too.

The idea that you can make or find images people recognise themselves in, whatever their background or age. Images that are part of a collective memory. That is something I love to immerse myself in. It is work I enjoy doing: trying to lift a story that may be very personal into something more universal. There too, you find my enduring fascination with the encounter of the very smallest and the very largest of things.

Precisely when the world grows dark, when things become complex, we need places that restore us. As Rebecca Solnit recently put it so well: "We have arrived in hell. You can build paradises and sanctuaries there too." It is good and necessary to build safe places where people can come together in wonder, where they feel held, uplifted and transported. So that they can climb out of that hammock in the forest and step back into the world with renewed courage.