

OBITUARY

ANNET DULLER (1948–2022)

The medical staff and volunteers of the hospice where Annet stayed during the last five weeks of her life had probably never seen a magic lantern show, but they met with a great number of Dutch and Belgian lanternists. Else Flim and Adrian Kok of the Dickens Theatre visited Annet several times, and so did Monique Wezenberg, Ditmar Bollaert, Henk Boelmans Kranenburg and Robert, Philippe Khazzaka and Dominique Santens (who even surprised Annet with a chamber concert), Michael and myself. Of course, her partner and assistant during lantern shows, Wim Bos, appeared every day. Wim also brought Annet's cat Sam for visits. Only my mother, Joke Sebus, could not make it in time to pay a visit to Annet. Both Adrian and Else – and later myself – dropped by on 9 November. We noticed that Annet's condition might have taken a turn for the worse but she was mentally as clear as ever and full of magic lantern anecdotes. That she died the next morning on 10 November was a complete surprise and shock for us all.

In the last few years, I had regularly asked Annet for permission to interview her as a 'prominent lanternist' for *TML*. Modest as she was, she always refused, not seeing herself as an important person in the magic lantern world. Only five weeks before her death she agreed to be interviewed. Unfortunately, she died before the project could be finished, in part due to our constant reminiscing about the good old magic lantern times.

Annet's life was full of creativity. She attended the Academy of Visual Arts in Utrecht (Netherlands) and there met her partner Wim and through him also became friends with Else and Joke, and later Michael and myself. She also gave drama lessons to children with Else, made hand-puppets and together with Else started a puppet theatre. Annet gave lantern shows for the benefit of UNICEF and also for a children's series on television. She developed a great interest for anything pre-cinema but the magic lantern became her specialty. She started to collect slides and became the happy owner of an 1879 Tyler biunial lantern. Her magic lantern shows were invariably performed with her partner Wim as her assistant providing music and sound effects.

In the 1980s, prominent Dutch and Belgian lanternists gathered together in the home of Cor van Mastrigt who invited Willem Albert Wagenaar, my mother Joke Sebus, Herman Bollaert and Annet, constituting the Dutch/Belgian 'Big Five' of magic lanternists. In the meantime, the existence of the Magic Lantern Society was spotted by Annet and Joke, and they both joined in 1987. In May 1988 Annet, Joke, Willem Albert, Cor and Herman organised the first MLS meeting in the Netherlands, held in The Hague. Since then, Dutch/Belgian members have been regular participants in MLS meetings and searchers for lanterns and slides in various markets and shops in the UK. In different combinations, they performed at



Annet projecting in the Dickens Theatre, Laren (Photo: Adrian Kok)

magic lantern or early film festivals in the Film Museum in Amsterdam and at Nora Tours' house in The Hague. Joke, who had expanded her own collection, and Annet also organised a special show on women and women's rights in 1987.

Annet did a great deal of research and became an expert in the techniques used in the production of magic lantern slides. She laid the foundation for accessing and describing the collection of lantern slides and pre-cinema artefacts at the EYE Film Museum in Amsterdam as well as advising other museums. She helped several enthusiasts to become lanternists, among them Daan Buddingh and Monique Wezenberg. She also contributed to exhibitions in museums, like the West-Fries Museum in Hoorn for the Jubilee Exposition of the Dutch Photographica Collectors Society.

For more than 20 years she participated in the Laterna Magica Galantee Show of lanternist Herman Bollaert. Willem Albert Wagenaar asked Annet to be the co-author of the book *Dutch Perspectives* (published by the MLS in 2014). When Willem Albert died in 2011, she finished the book with Margreet Wagenaar. In 2011 she was also instrumental in the establishment of the Dickens Theatre in Laren where she performed for two years and passed on her extensive magic lantern knowledge.

Annet regularly performed with Henk Boelmans Kranenburg in his Toverlantaarn Museum in The Hague and at some MLS conventions, such as in 2017 with their *Shadowplays*. At the same event, she also projected the unique slides of Honoré Le Sablais made for Maison de la Bonne Presse. Dutch magic lanternists look back with a smile on the Halloween show Henk and Annet did together in 2019 in Henk's Toverlantaarn Museum. The Dutch lanternists all appeared dressed as witches and wizards!

When Annet was diagnosed with cancer and had to accept that giving performances would be too much of a strain, she continued to help others by sharing her knowledge. Until the end, for example, Annet helped Dominique and Philippe, originally in Herman Bollaert's show, to become lanternists.

May 1988 MLS meeting in the Hague (left). Herman Bollaert's first MLS performance and Annet's debut as his assistant (Photo: Joke Sebus).

2002 Photographica Collectors Society, Zoetermeer (Netherlands) (right). Annet and Herman now experienced performers, with Herman's triunial (Photo: Gwen Sebus)



2017 MLS Convention,
Birmingham (left). Annet
and Monique Wezenberg

April 2022, Birmingham.
Annet operating a lantern
for the last time when
giving Else Flim a hand
(Photo: Gwen Sebus)



She especially enjoyed working with Bart Moens in researching her favourite slide makers – Maison de la Bonne Presse. This resulted in the last performance in which she contributed: the B-magic Project in Antwerp in May 2022. Ditmar and his partner Els projected fantastic La Bonne Presse slides from Annet's and Ditmar's collections.

We will all miss Annet very much. The Dutch lanternists are organising a remembrance event in March 2023, focusing on Annet and the magic lantern.

Gwen Sebus

Some personal recollections from close Dutch and Belgian friends with shared magic lantern interests:

Adrian Kok – The purposeful Annet

She always set goals and she had resolved that one day I would read stories with her Charles Dickens story slides. But, for work, I travelled all over the world, so she had to be patient. Annet kept repeating her request and one day the time was right! She had already listed her collection and noted possible stories in a book. We later called that 'Annet's Dickens Bible'. But, after researching Charles Dickens and his famous public readings, I decided to become a Dickens actor and to perform in the way Charles Dickens had done. Else translated the stories and made stage adaptations. The rest is history! (See *TML* 32, pp. 11-13)

The three of us gave many, many performances in the Dickens Theatre behind our home. Annet was our magic lantern teacher and, of course, the lanternist. Once we were able to buy a near-complete lantern slide set of *The Bloomsbury Christening*, a story from Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*. Unfortunately, one of the coloured slides was missing, and we were only able to obtain this slide in black & white. Annet, as an art graduate, could help in an unparalleled way. She borrowed the preceding and following slides and then hand-painted – with a thin brush, steady hands and original vintage magic lantern slide paint – the B&W slide in the identical colours.

Even in the last weeks of Annet's life, the magic lantern was important to her. George Auckland knew via our e-mails that her health was deteriorating and he quickly edited Herman Bollaert & Company's performance of *The Galantee Show* for the MLS 2009 Convention at the University of Westminster. At the hospice, I showed it to Annet and she was impressed by the beginning because, as she said: "Herman didn't often compliment." We repeated it a few times, to her delight. Herman Bollaert (directly to Annet): "Ladies and gentlemen, last but not least: Annet Duller. I am grateful for the opportunity to say 'thank you' Annet for everything you have done for us."

Else Flim – Annet dispensing knowledge

Annet explained to Adrian the world of the magic lantern and the techniques of the lanternist. I found Annet's work far too difficult. She was pushing us towards joining the MLS!

Annet enjoyed the performances in the Dickens Theatre and the

buzz that showtime gives. When the show started and I came down to the front to take the audience back to 1869, Annet was beaming beside the lantern. She knew my lines but every time she looked full of wonder, as if it was all new to her. That sweet look of approval and that smile were my confidence in performance.

On one occasion, four days before the mayor was due to visit our show, Annet caught the 'flu. She was convinced that I could operate the lantern that day because she had explained everything to Adrian! For three days, I kept practising and practising. Then, with much stress, I managed to operate the lantern – Annet thought I was now fit to be a lanternist. She had achieved her goal and could move on again with new 'pupils', such as, for instance, Belgian musicians Philippe and Dominique who gave their first performance in December 2022.

During a hospital visit in October, she asked us to contact Henk. She wanted the proposed performance *Turbulent Times 1770-1820* to be submitted for an MLS Award 2022. She actually wanted to put on that show at the April MLS Meeting with Henk, Philippe and Dominique. We wrote her CV and Henk quickly put together the proposal. She smiled contentedly when we told her at the hospice that *Turbulent Times* was submitted.

On 22 October, Adrian managed to connect the television in Annet's room to the livestream of the MLS Autumn Meeting and she enjoyed Mary Ann Auckland presenting a variety of skipping slides and Lester Smith as the lanternist. It was the last time she was connected with her beloved MLS friends.

Monique Wezenberg

More than 15 years ago Annet was asked by the Toy Museum in Deventer for advice so that one of the magic lanterns from the collection could be used to give small demonstrations for the public. A few months later I became a volunteer at the Toy Museum, saw a magic lantern for the first time in my life and became the one who stood behind the lantern and gave the demonstrations for visitors and school classes. Soon after I met Annet and she encouraged me to do something with a lantern myself – at that time I had no idea what it could be. Annet arranged the acquisition of my first lantern for me (years later I had a wonderful meeting in the Toy Museum with the children of the original owner), she urged me to join the MLS (the *what* society?? ... but I joined) and went to my first convention in London.

Going out with my magic lantern I have experienced the most wonderful adventures over the years. And from time to time I shared them with Annet. She understood exactly what I was talking about, how I felt and what had happened to me. Annet also experienced wonderful adventures that you cannot imagine in advance – and we found each other in that. I miss her.

Gwen Sebus

The day before Annet died, when I visited her in the hospice, we had a good laugh together remembering the times in the 1990s and early

2000s when we were in London for MLS meetings (at venues including the Architectural Association, the Art Workers' Guild and The Magic Circle). Annet, Joke, Herman and I (later also Henk), got up very early, took a taxi together to the Bermondsey Market arriving there at six o'clock in the morning, searched for lantern slides and rushed back to the Bonnington Hotel where we stayed, to be back in time for breakfast. As good Dutch/Belgian members we would not miss the breakfast we had already paid for. Later in the day, Annet strolled through London, to find magic lantern sheet music, visit archives and find other lantern-related information. Thinking back to those years, I realise that Annet acquired a great deal of knowledge about pre-cinema objects at a time when it was hard to find anything on the internet. That makes me admire Annet even more. It is a great loss for all of us.

Margreet Wagenaar-Fischer

I have known Annet and Wim for a long, long time. In fact we knew Wim first. Around 1970 our children watched a very good Wednesday afternoon television programme with fairy tales and puppet shows, but the best was KnutselWim ('craftsman Wim'). He made fantastic things and encouraged children to make things too – very popular in our family. What joy when we went to an exhibition of magic lanterns in Hilversum and discovered the lady on duty was KnutselWim's wife! Our children decided immediately that she must be just as special. Sometimes little children can be very wise and this was such a time.

We had such wonderful times with them. We created magic lantern shows with life model slides of ourselves. Annet made dressing up clothes for many people. Annet and Wim also created the sets and the props. They photographed everything and Willem Albert made slides from the photos. It was wonderful to have a part in the play and almost even more wonderful to watch it in the magic lantern performance.

To be with Annet and Wim in London at the Magic Lantern Society meetings was always interesting; my family learned so much from Annet. She created wonderful shows, she knew everybody and she was such a good narrator. Willem Albert admired her for her different approach to researching magic lanterns and the stories. Many MLS publications deal with the technical side of lanterns and slides. Annet investigated what people liked and wanted to see – religious stories, tearjerkers or fairy tales. What were the popular subjects? How can you investigate this subject?

Annet decided to read every author who mentioned magic lantern performances and to study pictures of them – in a house, a church or outside at a market. She also interviewed family members of magic lantern performers from long ago. She collected a great deal of information this way. Of course she knew that it is difficult to obtain reliable data like this, but it was a great start. Willem Albert was very interested in Annet's work and wanted to write a book with her about the Dutch invention of the magic lantern and the impact it had on society, but he died before the book was finished. So Annet and myself tried to write the rest of the book. Of course Annet knew all the people we needed and everybody was willing to help her. It took us some time but in 2014 the MLS published *Dutch Perspectives. 350 years of visual entertainment based on the research of Willem Albert Wagenaar and Annet Duller*.

Annet helped me catalogue the 50,000 slides and 200 magic lanterns Willem Albert had collected. For a whole year she visited me on every Monday to do this. Cataloguing is rather boring, but with Annet it was a party because of all the interesting and funny things she told me. I looked forward to every Monday with her.

She was such a special, dear friend. I am very sad she is not with us any more but happy that I have known her.

Dominique Santens and Philippe Khazzaka

We got to know Annet in the year 2002 when Dominique stood in for another musician in the Herman Bollaert Company. In 2007 she went along to perform with the Company in Washington DC at the Washington French Film Festival. The group was dispersed over several planes, and she flew on the same plane as Philippe with two stops *en route* to Washington DC. So there was time enough for Annet and Philippe to get to know each other well!



April 2022. Annet and Philippe enjoying the show (photo: Gwen Sebus)

Full of patience, as she always was, she 'endured' the setting up of the lantern. Together we did five performances in Washington in an auditorium at the French Embassy. A very special highlight was that the *Washington Post* decided to put us on the front page of the cultural section! After the shows were over Annet really enjoyed visiting the museums in front of the Capitol building.

Her warm welcome at each encounter and her patience and empathy made us really feel 'at home' in the company. We also had the pleasure of performing with her at the Cinémathèque française in Paris, the film festival of Torino and many more, right up to the last show of the company in 2016 in a film studio in Gent.

Instead of trying to explain the magic lantern to friends and family we both decided to show them. We sat down with Annet and put our first show together in our home town of Wetteren. Annet brought her lantern, we sang, played guitar, accordion, clarinet and bagpipes.

We got back in touch at the occasion of the funeral of Herman, in the middle of the pandemic. Not long after Annet contacted us with an opportunity to acquire our own lantern (from Daan Buddingh). She helped us with advice on lenses, on sequences of slides and also on how to search the internet and what to look for specifically. We renewed our friendship with several visits to her (and Wim's) house.

We will always remember her as a warm and kind woman who lit the flame in us for the magic lantern, generously helping us on our way to our first show. We are so sad that she won't be able to join us for that first show.

Bart Moens

To me, Annet symbolises the warm and passionate community that makes up the MLS. I got to know her in 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, through extensive email exchanges about the slides of Maison de la Bonne Presse. As the expert on the subject, she shared her profound knowledge and enthusiasm in an extraordinarily generous manner, which fully reflected her big-hearted personality. As soon as possible, we met at the marvellous magic lantern museum in Scheveningen. Henk projected Maison de la Bonne Presse images on the screen, and we discussed them. It was a delightful and enlightening day, and we made plans for future research and collaborations. One of them resulted in Ditmar's projection in Antwerp as part of the B-magic conference, but many others should have followed.

Ditmar Bollaert

From the very beginning in 1988, Annet was a driving force, together with my father Herman Bollaert, behind the Laterna Magica Galantee Show. Her creative contribution in developing the show was invaluable. Never did she mind travelling for rehearsals from Hilversum to Belgium and it was a joy having her with us on our tours across Europe. How I will miss her optimism, her generosity, her sense of humour and her heart for the magic lantern.

Joke Sebus

Annet was my oldest magic lantern friend. Because our homes were not far from each other, I used to see her quite often. So I also regularly saw the magic lantern shows she put on in the Hilversum Museum. It was always a surprise to see and to hear her new stories that accompanied her projected slides. The show we did together for women and women's rights was the project I always will remember. It was a show close to our hearts. I will miss her deeply.