

'CACKLING IS NOT LAYING EGGS'

A Dutch Suffragette Propaganda Show 1916/2019

Sarah Dellmann, Ine van Dooren and Gwen Sebus

In 1919, Dutch women finally got the active vote and full suffrage. Now, a hundred years later, it is time to commemorate this. The motto of the 10th international *Women and the Silent Screen* conference, held on 26-29 May 2019 at the Eye Filmmuseum in Amsterdam, was 'Sisters'. Thus, sisters in spirit – MLS members Gwen Sebus, Sarah Dellmann and Ine van Dooren – presented a double bill of magic lantern spectaculars to an audience of film historians, archivists and museum professionals.

The 2019 performance was based on a truly extraordinary 1916 lantern show called *Kakelen is geen eieren leggen* ('Cackling is not laying eggs'). In this parodic lantern revue, the Dutch suffragette movement commented on the Parliamentary debates of November 1916, when the Dutch Parliament discussed women's suffrage but only gave women the passive vote, enabling them to be elected but not vote. It would not be until 1919 that Dutch women gained general suffrage and, in the Dutch colonies, women got the vote even later – women from local communities were the last to obtain full suffrage. The title of the show is an appropriation of a quote uttered by deputy Van Nispen tot Sevenaar who argued against women's suffrage. Just because women could organise protest marches, he said, it does not follow that they were able to take on the serious duty of a Member of Parliament or of electing one: 'cackling is not laying eggs'.

The ladies Groot, Gratama and Van Wulfften Palthé, active members of the *Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht* ('Organisation for Women's Suffrage') wrote the revue and it was performed at some 20 venues, at least, in Dutch cities, towns and villages, at events organised by local branches of the organisation. The 1916 parody of the Parliamentary debate, the male MP's opinions about women's suffrage, and their failure to provide the right answer of equality, is exquisite. The three authors of this show certainly hit the nail on the head (with a hammer of course) using a balance of due anger and humour, in a lovely juxtaposition of imagery – full of caricatures – and recitations in rhyme.

Employing a creative experimental research method, we (Gwen, Ine and Sarah) came up with (we hope) a dazzling and inciting interpretation of this show, fit for a 2019 audience. In true lantern fashion, we took up the torch and performed our 2019 creative 'reconstruction' in English rhyme. From documentation found in the archives of the International Institute for Social History, we can reconstruct the images that were screened, but sadly, as far as we know, none of the original slides survived. Undeterred, our trio dug

into Gwen Sebus's collection and assembled a series of appropriate and amusing slides in keeping with the spirit and enthusiasm so apparent in the 1916 text. True sisterhood in today's magic lantern world too.

The show, followed by a conference paper in which we gave details of our historical research and research methods, was a great success. The lantern, once again, proved its versatility and ability to move and rouse audiences. The early cinema scholars were certainly convinced. We would like to thank the Eye Filmmuseum, especially Anna Dabrowska, Giovanna Fossati and the organising team for their technical support, as well as the people who helped us with our presentation and slide research: Joke Sebus, Aad Kok, Annet Duller, Michael van de Leur and Anja Goldschmidt. It was especially fitting to have the 'premiere' of our show at Eye Filmmuseum, formerly Netherlands Film Museum (NFM). In the late 1980s the NFM organised several international magic lantern festivals. Some of our long-standing members, including Laura Minici-Zotti, Karin Bienek, Ludwig Vogl-Bienek, Willem Albert Wagenaar and Annet Duller, gave wonderful shows. But among the Dutch performers was also Joke Sebus, a dedicated collector and lanternist who gave shows for over 50 years. Joke



Gwen Sebus and her magic lantern (above) and (right) the three modern suffragettes – Ine van Dooren, Sarah Dellmann and Gwen Sebus



Dutch suffragette with the hammer



The 2019 suffragette's button (left) and woman with the fan, rolling her eyes (right)

especially charmed and amazed children, and the young at heart, with her numerous shows but many MLS members may not know that Joke also had shows focussing on women in her play list. Few too may know that Joke, now 90, has for a large part of her life been active in the Dutch women's organisation *Vereeniging Vrouwenbelangen* (the successor of the Dutch women's suffrage organisation) and the International Alliance of Women. Passing down both the passion for the magic lantern and her activities for women's equality to her daughter Gwen, the venue, the lantern and the topic went full circle.

For those of you who missed the performance in Amsterdam, fear not. You will have the chance to see this show at one of our forthcoming Magic Lantern Society meetings. Watch out for the announcement of a repeat performance!