

MONIKONDEE

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



INTANGIBLE HERITAGE
AWARD
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: Ndyuka, Pamaka, Aluku, Wayana, Kalina
subtitles English, French, Spanish, Dutch

direction Lonnie van Brummelen, Siebren de Haan, Tolin Alexander
main protagonist Boggi Josef Adjontoe 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
info@vriza.org
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 on their land.

Monikondee (money land) follows Boogie, a boatman who delivers essential cargo to remote Maroon and Indigenous communities along the border river between Suriname and French Guiana. While the communities continue to grow their own food, they are becoming increasingly dependent on boatmen 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 work begin to conflict with his traditional duties. During a winding journey deep upstream, the currents become increasingly unpredictable.

The film is told through a multi-voiced, participatory approach inspired by the *mato*, a collective Maroon storytelling practice in which listeners interrupt the narrator to share their own stories and songs.



logline

A Maroon boatman navigates the border river between Suriname and French Guiana, balancing ancestral obligations with the pressures of survival in a rainforest under threat.

brief synopsis

For centuries, the Maroons in Suriname's rainforest have kept capitalist society at bay. In recent years, however, economic interests have encroached on their land.

Monikondēe follows Boogie, a boatman navigating the border river between Suriname and French Guiana, delivering essential goods to remote Maroon and Indigenous communities. Through the voices of the communities, the film traces resilience as climate change and resource extraction reshape land, water, and culture.

director's statement

Monikondee is the second feature-length participatory documentary directed collectively by Dutch visual artists Lonnie van Brummelen, Siebren de Haan, and Surinamese Maroon theatre artist Tolin Alexander.

Set in a border region between Suriname and French Guiana, the film explores a territory where multiple Maroon and Indigenous peoples live, each with their own languages, histories, and social systems. As directors, we looked for a figure that could connect these distinct worlds. The river emerged as such a figure—and with it, the boatman.

Boatmen possess an intimate knowledge of the river and of the communities along its banks. Historically, they have held a paradoxical role: while connecting communities to one another, they also linked the rainforest to the colonial economy of the coastal plain. Boatmen were often the first to transport miners, loggers, and goods into the interior, and among the first to earn money in a social context where production and exchange were organized through collective labor and barter. This tension—between connecting and extracting—runs through the film.

The story of Boogie—a Maroon boatman navigating traditional responsibilities in a money-driven world—unfolds in a rainforest landscape marked by climate disruption and pollution from gold mining. Along the winding rivers, Boogie guides us, inviting viewers to drift through the currents of his thoughts. He shares his role as narrator with the people he meets along the way, who sing and speak in their own languages about the struggles shaping their communities.

The film is a hybrid documentary developed in close collaboration with Maroon and Indigenous communities, with oral storytelling and dialogue shaping the narrative. It follows participants as they go about their daily routines—transporting oil barrels and tending communal vegetable gardens—alongside re-enactments drawn from lived experience. Through these re-enactments, participants reflect on their realities while participating in the way their stories are told. We treated the camera as a fellow traveler, moving with Boogie and those he encounters, immersing viewers in the rhythms and struggles of these river communities.

The collaborative approach was inspired by participatory cinema and theatre—drawing on the work of Rouch, Brecht, and Boal—as well as the Maroon storytelling tradition of *mato*, where spectators interrupt the narrator with new storylines and songs.

awards

Prix du Patrimoine Culturel Immatériel (Intangible Heritage Award) at the 47th edition of Cinéma du Réel, 2025

Jury's Praise:

Against the current of a border river, this film navigates between two shores, carrying several people along. It begins with the “Free Men”—the Ndyuka, Paamaka, and Aluku Maroons—whose ancestors fled and resisted slavery. Today, they face a new form of capitalism—no longer slavery, but a market economy that gradually erodes the social structures they built in freedom, deep within the forest. The cultural imagination persists, even as its practices wane—a sense of loss that this film invites us to share. With a conversational approach, the film engages with the painful yet invigorating questions of culture—a notion now widely embraced, even in the Amazon.

Two special mentions at ecological filmfestival Pianeta Mare in Napoli, 2025, expert jury & youth jury

Jury's Praise:

Monikondee, a film that gives voice to the Indigenous communities of Guyana and Suriname, threatened by mining exploitation and river pollution. A visually and morally powerful work, calling for a rethinking of the price of progress.

Human Rights Award at the MOVE IT! 21. Filmfestival für Menschenrechte, 2025

Jury's Praise:

The film moves with almost dance-like ease through heavy themes such as climate change, the excesses of capitalism, colonial structures, and geopolitical power games. Through the intimacy of its protagonists and the courage to tell its story in a kaleidoscopic way, Monikondee allows us to understand geopolitics on the level of lived experience.

selection of festivals

IDFA (Signed), Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025
L'Alternativa, Barcelona, Spain, 2025 (award)
Black Soil Festival, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2025
Move It!, Dresden, Germany, 2025 (award)
CinéMartinique, Martinique, 2025
FIFAC, French-Guiana, 2025 (award)
Film festival Pianeta Mare, Napels, Italy, 2025 (2x special mention) Festival
Issni N'ourgh International Du Film Amazighe (FINIFA), Agadir, Morocco, 2025 (2 awards)
Trinidad + Tobago Film Festival, 2025
European Film Festival, Muskat, Oman, 2025
DMZ Docs, Korea, 2025
Pour La Suite Du Monde, Lyon, France, 2025
Film Festival Douarnenez, France, 2025
AFI Silver, DC Caribbean Film Fest & Ecological Film Festival, Washington, USA, 2025
Etonnant Voyageurs, St-Malo, France, 2025
Cinéma du Réel, Paris, France, World Premiere, 26 March 2025 (award)

release & special screenings

Cinema release the Netherlands, Cinema Delicatessen (37 theaters), 20 November 2025
Cinema release Suriname, TBL Cinemas, Paramaribo, 8 November 2025
Mois du Doc, educational screenings, Maripasoula, Papaiston, Cayenne, Manna, French-Guiana, November 2025
Forum des Images, special screening, Paris, France, 16 November 2025
Dag van de Marrons, Koninklijke Schouwburg, The Hague, 10 October 2025
Community screening Diitabiki, Suriname, 13 September 2025 Screening for participants, Moengo, Suriname, 8 Dec. 2024

awards

Intangible Heritage Award at Cinéma du Réel, France, 2025
MOVE IT! Human Rights Film Award, Germany, 2025
Best Screenplay at FINIFA, Morocco, 2025
Best Film at FINIFA, Morocco, 2025
Prix de Jury Lycéens, French-Guiana, 2025
DOCMA Award at L'Alternativa, Spain, 2025
Special Mention Youth Jury at Pianeta Mare, Italy, 2025
Special Mention Concorso Lungometraggi at Pianeta Mare, Italy, 2025

selection of international press

Caribbean Beat, Jonathan Ali (USA)
TaxiDrivers, review Ornella Jumbo (Italy)
100pour100culture, review Jonas Kouassi (France)
RFI, review Isabelle Le Gonidec (France)
Le Club de Mediapart, interview Eva Coatanéa (France)
Business Doc Europe, interview Helen Fripp (EU)
Inreview, review Michael Sicinski (US)

selection of Surinamese press

Waterkant, review (Suriname)
De Ware Tijd, article Euritha Tjan A Way (Suriname)
United News, article (Suriname)

selection of Dutch press

Jacobin Nederland, review Ruben Hordijk (Netherlands)
Volkskrant, review Kevin Toma (Netherlands)
Filmkrant, review Nicole Santé (Netherlands)
Parool, review Roosje van der Kamp (Netherlands)
De Correspondent, review Phaedra Haringsma (Netherlands)
Cinemagazine, review Frank Heinen (Netherlands)
Trouw, review Belinda van de Graaf (Netherlands)
One World, review Omar Larabi (Netherlands)
Historiek, review Kevin Prenger (Netherlands)
Nieuwwij, review Rolf Deen (Netherlands)



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. They have created three feature-length participatory documentaries: *Episode of the Sea* (2014), *Stones Have Laws* (2018), and *Monikondree* (2025), the latter two co-directed with 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

Monikondree (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 (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 Dutch artist-filmmakers Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan, he directed the participatory documentaries *Stones Have Laws* (2018) and *Monikondree* (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 *Het Bos van Suriname* in the museum and biodiversity research centre Naturalis in Leiden.

filmography

Monikondree (103', DCP, 2025)

Stones Have Laws (100', DCP, 2018)

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 Surifesta 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

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 Voetbaldrööm* (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

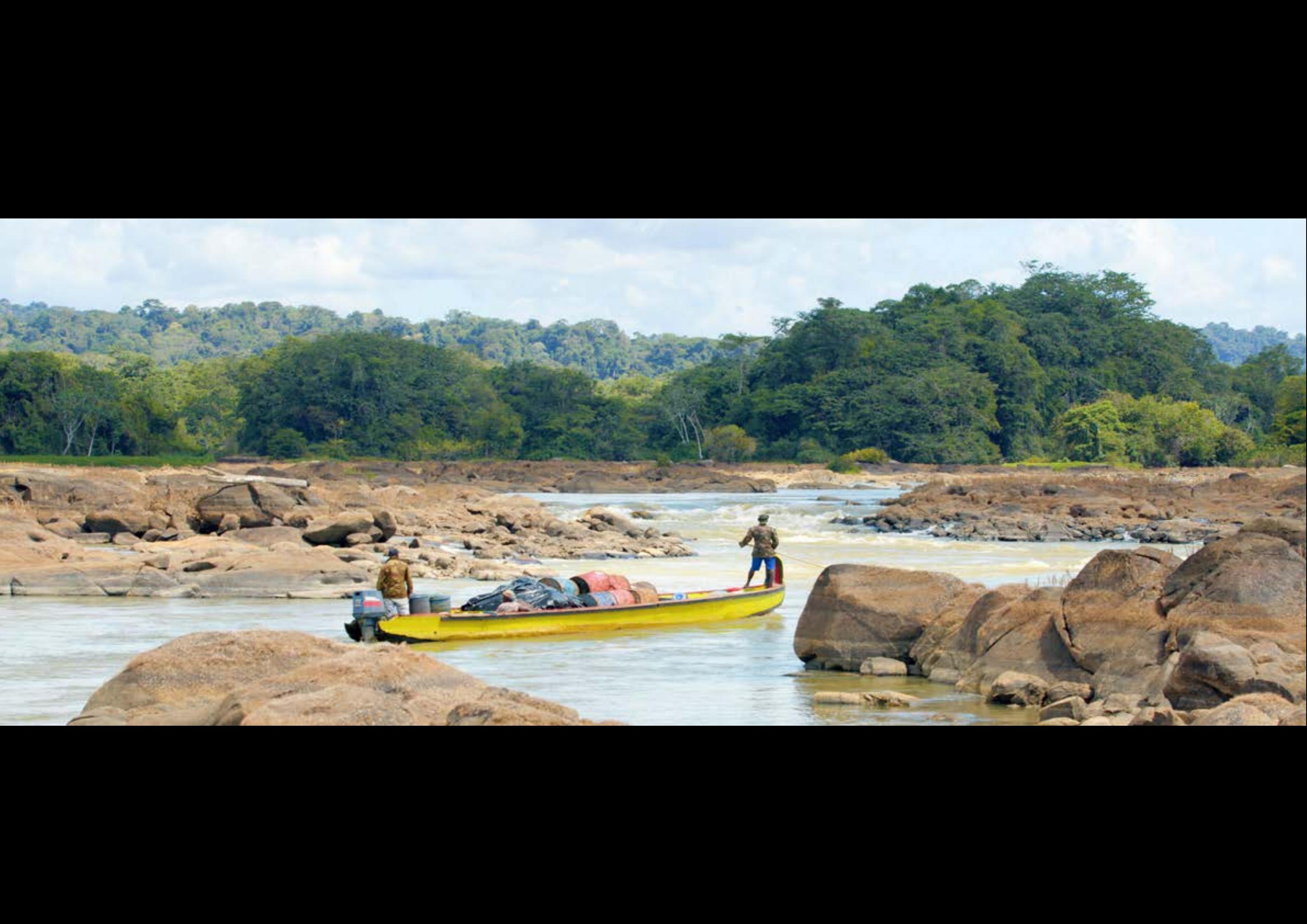
sound recordist: Idi Lemmers

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 (Quinzaine, 2024), the experimental short documentary *Aasivissuit* by Jasper Coppes (IFFR, 2021), and the participatory documentaries *Episode of the Sea* (TIFF, 2014), *Stones Have Laws* (IDFA, 2018) and *Monikondēe* (Cinéma du Réel, 2025) by Van Brummelen and De Haan, the latter two films co-directed by Tolin Alexander. Currently in production, the hybrid documentary feature *Lyrical Vengeance* by Wendelien van Oldenborgh.

www.vriza.org









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

interview with directors by Jason Fox

Jason Fox: *Monikondree* 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 Wetí* (*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: *Monikondree* 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 *Monikondree*?

SdH: We know that our ancestors brought plantation culture, slavery, and capitalism to Suriname. Through this ruthless regime, land, plants, and people were commodified.

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 *monikondree* (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 division caused by 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 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*?

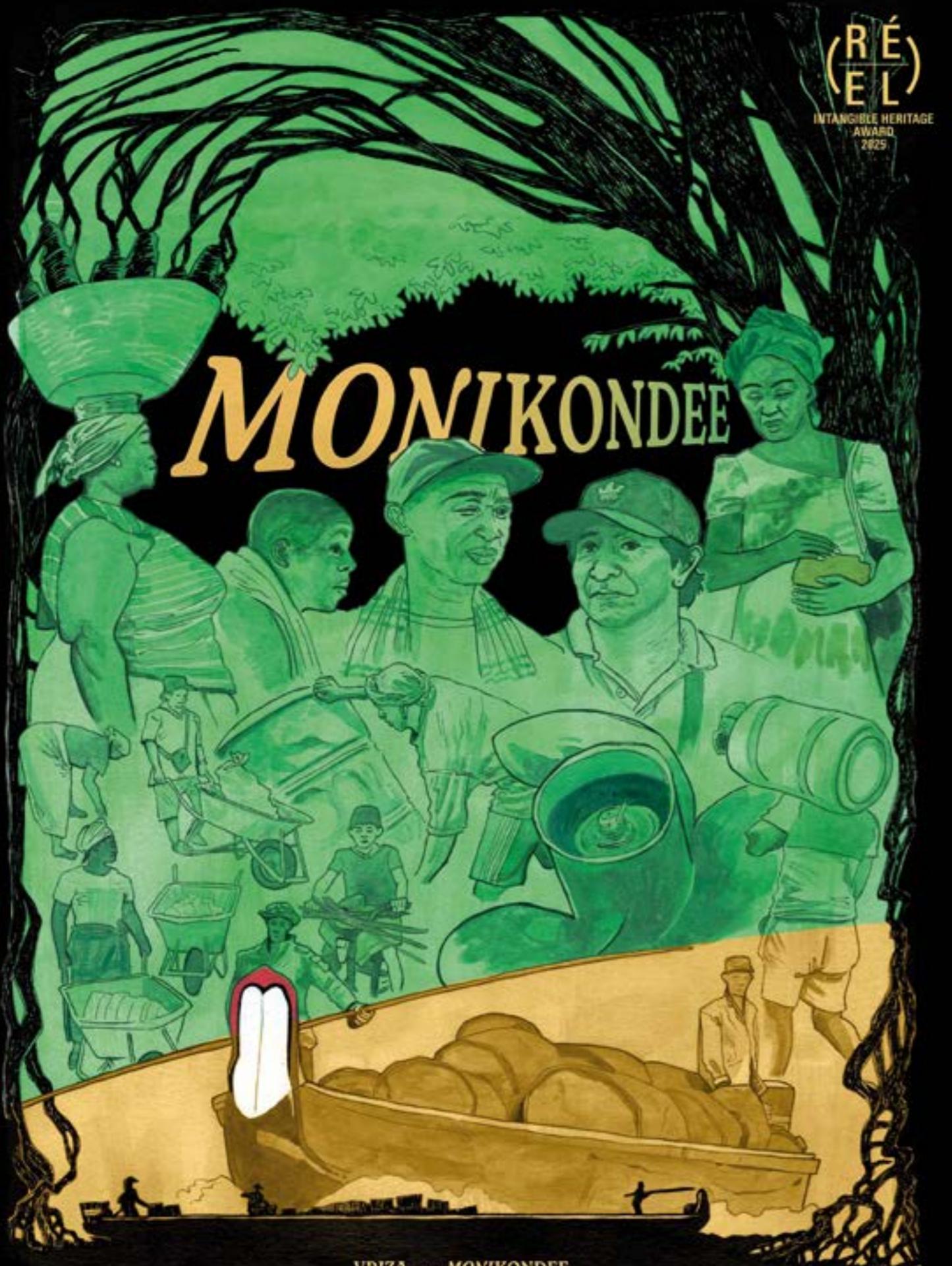
TA: *Mato* takes place in the evening and it is also an integral part of our death ceremonies. In the *mato*, a storyteller tells a story, but the audience can interrupt with their own storylines or songs at any time. The storyteller’s narrative then continues after the interruption. The stories that 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



Poster drawing: Rossel Chaslie.

Chaslie is a self-taught illustrator who migrated from Suriname to the Netherlands when he was 10 years old. He creates contemporary illustrations with art-historical references, which allows him to appeal to a broad audience. Rossel's art embodies subjects that are socially relevant and topics that match his own world of interest: that of a young bi-cultural man who is finding his way – as an artist and young adult – within a polarized Dutch society that's struggling with its colonial past. In 2024 he was Amsterdam's very own city illustrator.
<https://rosselchaslie.com>

Poster design: Janna Meeuws, <https://meeusontwerpt.nl>



links Monikondee

trailer

project page

research interviews

more information

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www.vriza.org



The logo consists of the text "vriza moving image productions" in a black sans-serif font. Each word is preceded by a small black dot and followed by a curved line that connects to the dot of the next word, creating a flowing, circular effect.