

# Close-up

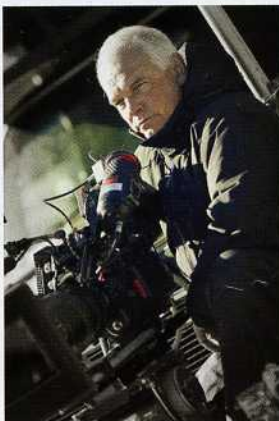
## Theo van de Sande, ASC

### When you were a child, what film made the strongest impression on you?

At the age of 8, peeping through a crack in a door, I saw Tarzan (Johnny Weissmuller) captured by natives, who were dancing wildly around a fire and threatening to burn his eyes with an iron rod. That got my attention.

### Which cinematographers, past or present, do you most admire?

From the past: Sergey Urusevskiy, for his virtuosity; Gregg Toland [ASC], for his deep angles and strong contrast; Kazuo Miyagawa, for his unusual approach; Jörgen Persson, for his super-romantic tone; Conrad Hall [ASC], whose every story had its own specific style; Pasqualino De Santis, for his innovative work; Sven Nykvist [ASC], for his simplicity and natural light. From the present: 'Il Maestro,' Emmanuel Lubezki [ASC, AMC]; Bob Richardson [ASC], for his guts; Eduardo Serra [ASC, AFC], for his depth of light; Christopher Doyle [HKSC], for his intimate detail and grand scope; Vittorio Storaro [ASC, AIC], for who he is; and Roger Deakins [ASC, BSC], for his controlled perfection.



### What sparked your interest in photography?

At age 13, I took a still of a weeping willow with my 12-dollar Kodak Brownie. The lens was inferior and the picture was blurry and out of focus. I made a big print on chamois paper. The result was beautiful — the perfect imperfection!

### Where did you train and/or study?

The Netherlands Film Academy in Amsterdam.

### Who were your early teachers or mentors?

Dr. Peters, director of the film academy and one of the very few professors in film aesthetics; Anton Koolhaas, who steered me toward cinematography by brutally criticizing my scriptwriting; Jack Hildyard; Skeets Kelly; and Jan DeBont [ASC], a camera virtuoso — I was his AC for two years.

### What are some of your key artistic influences?

Rembrandt, for his chiaroscuro light, and Vermeer, for composition. Being born 10 miles from Vincent van Gogh's birthplace and 9 miles from where Hieronymus Bosch lived, some healthy insanity must have rubbed off on me. I love the Italians: Fellini, Pasolini, Bertolucci, Visconti, Scola. The Japanese films *Woman in the Dunes* and *Rashomon*. Composers Wagner and Mahler.

### How did you get your first break in the business?

Still at the Dutch Film Academy, I worked as the C-camera 2nd AC on *Puppet on a Chain* for Jack Hildyard, and as 2nd-unit B-camera 1st

AC for Skeets Kelly. During downtime they both taught me a lot. Skeets was fearless — 56 years old and missing some teeth from previous stunt work. I joined him in a speedboat chase through the Amsterdam canals. I will never forget that!

### What has been your most satisfying moment on a project?

In documentaries, when your camera gets in the same rhythm as what's happening in front of you, technical stuff disappears and you become one with your subject. Also, the Oscar nomination for our documentary *Colors Straight Up*.

### Have you made any memorable blunders?

On the first day of shooting my first film, I used a Bolex camera but didn't know that the previous cinematographer had used it for stop-motion and had left the gate closed. All the dailies were blank!

### What is the best professional advice you've ever received?

In Hollywood: Stay on schedule and on budget, and you are free as a bird.

### What recent books, films or artworks have inspired you?

The Academy's foreign-language film selections always inspire me. Also, "The Scandalous Art of James Ensor" at the Getty Museum. Between scripts, I try to keep up with new Dutch writers.

### Do you have any favorite genres, or genres you would like to try?

Period, period!

### If you weren't a cinematographer, what might you be doing instead?

Biochemistry/cloning, DNA — manipulation of life instead of light.

### Which ASC cinematographers recommended you for membership?

Harry Wolf and Victor J. Kemper.

### How has ASC membership impacted your life and career?

Harry Wolf, [who was president of the ASC in 1987], sent me a letter in Amsterdam about how much he liked my work in *The Assault*. He said if I ever had plans to visit Los Angeles, I should meet him at the ASC. Neither of us knew that I was just 200 yards up the hill from the Clubhouse, living in a small apartment, prepping my first American film, *Miracle Mile*. The moment I realized this, I walked down and met Harry. He received me with great hospitality, took me under his wing and showed me Hollywood. I don't know of any other organization where passion is shared so genuinely. It gives me confidence that I am doing the right thing. ●