



Stillframes from the Sachtler Imagefilm

Sachtler 50 years an interview with Heide Fliegner

Heide Fliegner successfully produces commercials, documentaries and feature films – in which time and again she also acts as cinematographer. Besides, she directs and writes her own scripts .

Her debut, the feature film with the working title *kick* will be completed in its German as well as in its English version, screened in double length, by the end of this year.

Heide Fliegner, very much an insider's tip and an exceptional all-rounder.



Since you mainly produce, write and when it comes to commercials even direct, one could think you are a cinematographer in passing ...

When it comes to producing you can deal with several projects at the same time. As cinematographer or director you can only deal with one in earnest. That's why I produce more but only have a single piece of work that I prepare and shoot as cinematographer. Since I realize many materials I prefer to look for movies that are entirely produced independently when deciding for a job on the camera. This way I feel artistically independent and can click off the producer inside me.

Heide Fliegner, your feature film with the working title “kick” -the director’s cut is a two-parter- of which German and English version will be completed this year is a visually powerful work even though you had to cope with minimalist means.

The visual language is quite remarkable, the style unusual yet thrilling. How did you prepare for that as the director of photography?

Preparation is the foundation for being able to work creatively and to react flexibly on the set. Concerning this particular movie you had to be present during rehearsals, sensing the faces, the mimics, to build the pictures around them; not just to sense the ‘right’ camera position but to come to know with the philosophical point of view within the scenery of the characters. It was about developing a picture language that would capture the inner worlds of the protagonists. Since this movie had to be very authentic the leading roles were cast with ‘actors from the streets’ which made a sensitive, dramaturgical, nevertheless incredibly spontaneous working method necessary. Complex and tricky.

I handled the lighting design similarly. Light does not have to be logical. The head of the lighting department, Michael Rosen, created an associative compatible light, free of the logic of the time of day and the sun’s actual position but rather responding to the characters’ inner emotional experience. Light must comply with the way of telling the story, therefore pursue an internal logic of the respective script which consists of its abstract, dramaturgical context.

Regarding these kinds of works you are subject to a very intuitive working process and you stay open to many of those spontaneous impressions that have to flow into the realization.



Stillframes from the independent feature film with the working title “kick” – in postproduction

Although you drew up a complete storyboard for that movie, together with your production design-team Dennis Rohmer and Paul Hintermeier ...

Storyboards are like doing your homework. It is like an expedition into the inner world of the story; exploring the perspective possibilities of the movie. They are there for having the prospective imagery on set, in flesh and blood. But above all, to make you feel free in allowing alternative ways as opposed to those originally planned; to be able to respond to every situation on set and not to lose sight of the overall objective. Spontaneity is particularly important when working with amateur actors.

That’s what I love about the art of making movies. It is tremendously complex, wholistic and requires the attention of all your senses.

How did you operate in the making of the *Sachtler Imagefilm*? You as well developed the film's visual concept although you worked together with two further cinematographers on that project, Oliver Froeschke and Namche Okon, while shooting a part of it yourself.

Regarding the *Sachtler Imagefilm* my intention was to achieve a certain pace. Since this film is build upon several elements and also contains changes in speed I needed a very high tempo for the inserts. The mixture of documentary events on the one hand and visual appetizers on the other needed to produce speed. Combining two different styles with each other made working on this project interesting and highly complex. I started thinking only in terms of how it would be edited later on. We, the director Ralf Schmökel and I, may got storyboards done but only for the transitions and important scenes.

The reason why I ended up doing the editing myself was that nobody could do it as quickly since I had had everything precisely in my head; each and every scrap already had its place. So, I did the rough version before getting it finished by editor Uwe Wrobel.

This image movie had existed in my head and was then made in the editing process. I think, those who before were not really able to picture it eventually understood what I had been trying to tell them. A not quite typical procedure when it comes to commercials.

The *Sachtler Imagefilm* is screened in various showrooms worldwide at the end of 2008 due to an award won on a platform dedicated to commercials. The image movie *Die Pinakotheken im Kunstareal München* of which set the making-of material for the *Sachtler Imagefilm* comes from won an *Intermedia Globe* in silver at the *World Media Festival* in 2007. Which function did you take over in this image movie on the *Pinakotheken*?

I was the responsible producer as well as creative producer and contributed to the team as the copywriter together with the director Ralf Schmökel.

How many projects are you producing at the moment?

Momentarily I look after 14 projects in various genres and all states of production. During my, let's say 'daily routine', I act as the main producer of *rollcallproductions munich*, together with Bruno Brunkow, and as creative producer at *rollcallproductions* in Los Angeles, together with our agent on the scene, Carolyn Jaden Stuessi. Soon there also will be small contact-offices in New York City and Dubai. That secures the possibility to work with and coordinate an even bigger number of projects together with young cinematographers around the world during periods in which I myself am not shooting.

Why do you work in the movie business?

Without light and without music I wouldn't be working with movies. Light determines the photography and with it you can enrich every film location, no matter how unspectacular, with a fascinating atmosphere. Along with that goes the choice of the right sound. And with having that already during the shooting-period it can form interesting synergies. Those two elements, sound and light, can most powerfully influence the viewer existentially in the very moment of his perception. In the way of them being two tools of this craft they are defined by the strength of the protagonist's inner world. In case this world is not sufficiently present during a particular scene, let's say because of a weak performance or a poorly written script for example, there is almost always an access to enchant the audience by taking advantage of the elements of light, sound and perspective, thereby compensating for the possible flaws of the other departments. That does sound revolutionary and there's hardly anyone who would speak that out loud. I have dealt with that for a long time now and it can be a decisive alternative.



Fotos by Curt Schaller

You mentioned earlier that you also edit?

When it comes to commercials I often as well take a seat in front of the editing place but usually this one's taken by my regular editor Sonja Tschumpel. Editing is one of the most important craftsmanship for enhancing one's skills as a cinematographer. Regarding commercials I frequently do the sound design and the music composition myself, too. When doing a commercial the impact needs to be exact and that no matter about which budget we are talking about here.

Presently you often work in America. How do you assess the two different markets?

To learn the craft of moviemaking in Europe is a magnificent chance. You may not be understood right away when making things differently, plus sponsorship systems are often a handicap, too, since it eats time.

Of course, big advantages for a movie market like that of the US result from it being a well working and primary branch of industry: A bigger variety of products for instance, and you can feel greater creative freedom. Established producers like investing in young people who are keen on tackling delicate issues and on realizing courageous styles. That's a big plus, as well regarding the timetable.

Yet in Europe we just as well have access to fantastic equipment and a number of resources. We more easily can experiment with new technology available and quickly learn how to realize big things using only little means. Besides, we learn how to make movies from the bottom up. We are ambitious and we should never underestimate that we always can fall back on a tremendously old cultural treasure, referring to all departments.

I love Europe and the European cinema.

And still your next feature will be shot in English, a part of it will even be done in America ...

Europe also speaks English, doesn't it? I as well love America, especially in its variety of cultures.

Europe remains being Europe as well as America will remain being America. I sometimes prefer to link things ...

Fortunately, the world's bigger than just Europe and America ...

Which will be your next project as cinematographer?

May, in Los Angeles. A documentary with rather scenic elements. Set in Germany, Switzerland, Dubai and Los Angeles. Working title, *Secret Trees of Inspiration*.

How does your cooperation with *Sachtler* look like?

I have been working together with *Sachtler* for quite some time now. You strongly notice the products' grand vision at the bottom of it. *Sachtler's* founder, Wendelin Sachtler, was a cameraman himself and designed these products on the basis of the requirements of the respective shooting- and set-situation. Over and over again I am surprised that new, really reasoned products are put on the market which truly assist and help making things easier. Above all considering documentaries and small independent features I preferably work with *Sachtler* tripods and heads.

The *Artemis* stabilizing system is marvelous. For the *Sachtler Imagefilm* I was allowed to create gripping pictures using the *Artemis* technology for the first time while being assisted by its inventor, Curt Schaller. Even for the area of HD-productions this system was ingeniously manufactured down to the last detail. Here, equipment serves and does not nearly hinder. Tremendously important for the documentary sector. I very often employ it as well for scenic productions when I want to remain flexible.

Sachtler likewise is a company which lets the creatives have their say, a company that closely works together with cinematographers and which lets the know-how of the most different genres slip into its development- and construction-processes. I regard that as important. You only have to look at the products to see all that. And through the merger with other sellers, additional expertise could be included from which most of the products benefited a great deal. As well *Vinten*, *O'Connor* and *Manfrotto*, for example, come under *CameraDynamics*. A pool of know how so to speak.



Stillframes from the filmlet „Soon“, 13 min., English, 2001, shown 4 times at the Hof international film festival, international filmlet festival – Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-foundation, shown at the long night of the munich museums at the Kunstpavillon, audience award at the Wilhelm Löhle theme night. Film will be integrated in a planned art installation on the topic of dying in our society. Camera Oliver Froeschke, visual concept and directing Heide Fliegner

What pieces of equipment does rank with your favorites?

For my next docu -that's what I speak for now: *Sony HD-Cam* and *Digiprimes*. Or *Arri's D20*, of course, including a film-lens system.

In addition, a *Sachtler* tripod, ... a *Sachtler* fluid head, ... a baby tripod ... and the *Artemis* system, together with Curt Schaller. Then I could do all the tracking shots in the desert and as well could capture all the other locations -Venice Beach, for instance- exactly the way I had imagined it.

The preparations are not completed yet and I'm eager to know with which equipment we will really end up with.

Thank you, Mrs. Fliegner!

May I say one more thing?

Go ahead.

Happy Birthday, Sachtler! May the *Sachtler* technology help realize still more visions and continue to assist us filmmakers in depicting the true, the shocking and the beautiful.

Happy Birthday!

Interview by Lisa Stocker for Sachtler's 50th anniversary
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