

A FILM BY ALEX PITSTRA

# DIE WELT

العالم



AN ALEX PITSTRA MEDIA AND SCHAFTKIP FILMS CO-PRODUCTION  
SCREENPLAY ALEX PITSTRA THIJS GLOGER ABDALLAH REZGUI CO-PRODUCER RENE HOUWEN  
WITH ABDELHAMID NAOUARA MOHSEN BEN HASSEN RAHMA BEN HASSEN ILSE HEUS JUDITH VAN DER MEULEN KAMEL BEN KHALFA IMED SASSI FOUAD CHENETI MEHDI CHENETI  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MOEZ KAMOÛN LINE PRODUCER ROSAN BREMAN ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS REMY ANEDDA DAVID INDEN  
EDITORS ALEX PITSTRA THIJS GLOGER RENÉ DUURSMA SOUND DESIGN AND MUSIC RENGER KONING  
CINEMATOGRAPHY THIJS GLOGER PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY ALEX PITSTRA

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kunstraad groningen

**DIE WELT**

A film by Karim Alexander (Alex) Pitstra

An Alex Pitstra Media film in co-production with Schafkip Films,  
in co-operation with Sindbad Production.

2012

**50-WORD SYNOPSIS**

*Die Welt* is a moral drama about a society in the vacuum between dictatorship and democracy. We follow the young DVD salesman Abdallah, who becomes increasingly frustrated by his inability to realize a fulfilling existence for himself. This feature debut shows contemporary Tunisia with fresh cinematic audacity.

**SHORT SYNOPSIS**

*Die Welt* is an audacious hybrid between fiction and documentary, showing contemporary Tunisia shortly after the Jasmine Revolution in 2011. In this insightful moral drama about a society in the vacuum between dictatorship and democracy, we follow the young DVD salesman Abdallah, who becomes increasingly frustrated by his inability to realize a fulfilling existence for himself. After meeting the Dutch tourist Anna, he starts dreaming of a better life in Europe, or *Die Welt*, as his father calls the promised land on the other side of the Mediterranean. Will Abdallah succeed—like his father did in the past—in getting to Europe with the help of a Dutch woman? Or will he have to find another way to escape his native country? And does he want to leave at all?

In his debut, Dutch film director Alex Pitstra investigates his Tunisian roots, which he was unfamiliar with most of his life. He paints a mesmerizing picture of the current state of affairs in his father's country, seen through Western eyes. Pitstra worked with both professional actors as well as family members in supporting roles, including his father, his half-sister and his cousins from France. Together with filmmaker and friend Thijs Gloger, who operated the camera and assisted in writing and editing, and with the help of the young Tunisian screenwriter Abdallah Rezgui, Pitstra has given the film a fresh cinematic edge that draws the viewer right into the immediacy of everyday life in Tunisia.

**EXTENDED SYNOPSIS**

'I know die Welt,' says Abdallah's father when he talks about Europe. This 'promised land' for Tunisian dvd-seller Abdallah, lies on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. According to his Westernized cousins from France, everything is possible in Europe. Abdallah's father also travelled there once. And it's not a coincidence that the DVDs Abdallah sells, illustrate the life that he dreams of.

In *Die Welt* we see 23-year-old Abdallah around the summer of 2011. He and his sister live with their father on the outskirts of Tunis, in Ben Arous. Tunisia is looking forward to its first free elections, since Ben Ali has fled the country: the hopes are high. The country is in need of a new government that can tackle the many problems in Tunisia, like the steeply growing unemployment rate. Many young Tunisians take advantage of their newly gained freedom, by seeking a better life in Europe. Abdallah doesn't really have any plans. He is ambitious and smart, but because there are hardly any interesting jobs around, he hasn't much hope of becoming successful in life. He cannot afford university, so the odds of him finding a good job are next to nothing. Abdallah's desire to flee to Europe becomes even stronger when he visits a family member's wedding in

seaside resort Sousse. There he, his father and his uncle meet Dutch tourists Anna and José. Because the women are compelled by the idea to see an authentic side of the country, they decide to accept an invitation to come to the wedding party.

After a one-night stand with Anna, Abdallah starts longing for a new life in the free world, where he can take charge of his own life. Preferably with Anna at his side. However, for a poor Tunisian it is practically impossible to enter Fort Europe. After his adventure in Sousse, Abdallah finds the DVD shop closed and his boss has suddenly disappeared. Abdallah tries to find a new job, but it's not easy. There is hardly any work at all, and boredom lurks around every corner. The relationship between Abdallah and his father, who makes a living as a car mechanic, is constantly under pressure. His father never found the life he was looking for in Europe, and when he returned to Tunisia, he became a hard working Muslim. In fact, that's what he expects his son to do, too. Abdallah finds work at the Sunday car market through a friend of his father, but he's not satisfied with the job.

In the meantime, Abdallah sees how Tunisian society is gradually changing. Traditional values are being challenged, as a result of suddenly gained freedom. His sister is begging her father for a new laptop; his friends don't do anything but hang out and smoke in their self-fabricated shed and his cousins describe Europe as the promised land. Tunisia is in a vacuum. The dictator has left, but the problems have remained.

Abdallah cannot avoid unemployment either. He becomes more and more frustrated about not being able to make a good living for himself. He is still too dependent of his father. At the car market he is offered the opportunity to cross the Mediterranean. Abdallah isn't sure what to do: follow his dreams? Or could his future still be bright in his own country?

The film's cinematographic style switches from Hollywood-like framing with smooth transitions, to a more direct and organic approach. These two different styles represent the harsh features of an Arab country that has to deal with more and more Western influences every day.

The developments in *Die Welt* are viewed from a low-set perspective. The shots are suggestive, as if taken from a child's point of view; looking up in amazement. This perspective was a deliberate choice: In *Die Welt*, we see Tunisia through the eyes of an outsider.

Director Alex Pitstra has a Dutch mother and a Tunisian father, who was absent during most of his life. *Die Welt* is partly based on his father's past. He came to Europe in his twenties, seeking fortune and happiness with a European woman.

The film is about Pitstra getting to know his second identity, projected on to a fictional half-brother in Tunisia, but at the same time it is a retrospective of his father's past.

## PRODUCTION

On January 14, 2011 Ben Ali's regime is overthrown, and the dictator flees to Saudi Arabia. The Jasmine Revolution is the onset of the Arab Spring, and Alex Pitstra, who lives in the Netherlands, is intrigued by the developments that are taking place in the North African country. The past couple of years, the Groningen based filmmaker has been thinking about making a film in his father's country, but the plans for his script rapidly succeed when the revolution breaks out.

Karim Alexander Ben Hassen is the son of a Tunisian father and a Dutch mother, and he grows up in the Netherlands. His father, Mohsen Ben Hassen, is absent for the most part of his life, both during his childhood and his adult years. At sixteen, he changes his Tunisian last name to that of his mother (Pitstra), and from then on, only his appearance gives away his Arab descent. "I don't remember much of my childhood years with Mohsen," says Pitstra. "I remember that he taught me how to ride a bike. And him fighting with my mother. I used get angry when I thought of him, but I was confused too. And at some point he kind of ceased to exist for me."

When Alex is 25 years old, he receives a letter from his father, asking him to come and visit him in Ben Arous, an area on the outskirts of Tunis. His absent father wants a second chance to get to know the son that he's only known during his infant years. A couple of months later Pitstra is on a plane on his way to Tunis.

“I had no idea what to expect. Maybe my father was a member of the Taliban, living in a mud hut, deep in the desert, surrounded by goats”. This was not the case. Mohsen turned out to be a good-natured family man and devout Muslim. “My father came to the Netherlands in his twenties, with false illusions of what to expect. At the same time he was pressured by his family to build up a successful life in this foreign country. He could not live up to their expectations.”

After his adventure in the Netherlands, Mohsen travelled to Switzerland, where he had a daughter with a Swiss woman. When this marriage also failed, he returned to his country to build up a new life with a Tunisian woman.

On arrival, Pitstra was received in a modest upstairs apartment in Ben Arous, a suburb of Tunis, by Mohsen, his wife Leila and his half sister Rahma. “I was then introduced to the many other family members and in-laws. I was immediately overcome by their hospitality and their sense of togetherness, and I was immediately curious about their way of life and their manners that were new to me.” It was, however, also quite confusing to get to know his second identity. Not only for himself, but also regarding the culture that was new to him. “I became confused. About poverty behind the façade of the abundance of food and drink. About close-knit family ties that make privacy impossible, and at the same time form the basis for the flexibility and independence of the community. The pride they took in showing me Tunisian culture, even though just one wrong word about the existing regime could have you disappear from the face of the earth.”

When the revolution breaks out in January 2011, his plan to make a film about his family history unfolds more rapidly. Pitstra doesn’t waste any time, and comes up with a rough outline for *Die Welt* in one evening in January, together with filmmaker friend Thijs Gloger. “The script is partly based on my own and my family’s experiences, but also on reports about the increase of the number of young men who make their way to the Italian island Lampedusa in small boats. I was curious to know why they were leaving at that time, now that the country was liberated.”

According to co-scenarist and director Abdallah Rezgui, it was about time that a film was realised about Tunisians fleeing the country. “*Die Welt* deals with a theme that concerns a lot of young people. Many things are still disorganised since the revolution broke out. Tunisians are exercising damage control for the most needy: a section of the population that was ignored by the regime for many years, and that is now affected very severely. That so many young people want to flee the country is not a main concern for most politicians.”

Abdelhamid Naouara was selected as leading actor at a casting session in Tunisia. “We weren’t just looking for anybody. We wanted an actor who could bring across Abdallah’s passion and repressed anger, convincingly. Abdelhamid made himself familiar with the character of the central figure without effort, and he possessed a wide range in his acting skills. He was composed and he presented the role accordingly”, says Pitstra. “Besides that, there was something mysterious about him; something profound that I didn’t see with any of the other actors.” Ilse Heus was casted in the Netherlands to play the role of Anna, and Judith van der Meulen plays her friend. A mixture of family members and Tunisian actors plays all other supporting roles. *Die Welt* was shot within 24 very hot days in Tunisia, in July 2011, and the crew returned in October to film another six days. It took four days to shoot the remaining scenes in the Netherlands, and the very last scene was captured in October 2012. It took the crew 35 days in total to shoot all the material for the film, and this took place on more than forty different locations. In Tunisia these locations were in Tunis, Ben Arous, La Marsa, El Mourouj, Sousse, Hergla and Korbous. The scenes in the Netherlands were shot in Zaandam, Groningen and Makkum. The editing and postproduction of the film took about one year.

In November 2012 *Die Welt* will premiere at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival in Qatar. “The Doha Tribeca Film Festival allows me to present *Die Welt* to the Arab world. But the festival does more than that: their professional employees are passionate about promoting Arab cinema worldwide. So let’s hope that *Die Welt* can benefit from that too. The postproduction budget that was contributed by the Doha Film Institute, gave us the opportunity to complete the film effectively. I’m anxious to learn of the audience’s reaction and I’m looking forward to visiting the festival in November,” says Pitstra.

## STATEMENTS

**Alex Pitstra** – Director, producer

“To me *Die Welt* is an exploration of both myself and of the person I could have been if my father had made different choices in life. Abdallah’s character is partly based on me. He views his country from a distant perspective, just like I see the country from a Western point of view. I made notes of my observations during my travels, and integrated them in the film.

I think that in *Die Welt* we see Tunisia through Western eyes. We see a country that is a lot more modern than what we see on the news on TV. On the other hand the film presents Tunisian society in a way that Tunisians are not yet familiar with.

I myself am a child of Fort Europe. I discover my Tunisian identity in *Die Welt*.

Karim and Alex travel in opposite directions. We meet each other half way, in search of a new identity.”

## ABOUT THE MAKERS

### **Karim Alexander Pitstra**

Karim Alexander Pitstra, better known as Alex Pitstra, directed his first film at the age of fifteen, for a school project. Then when he studied Audio-visual Communication in Leeuwarden, he made the short film *Mixtape* in 2004, based on his own experiences as a DJ/producer in the music industry. He then followed a Film Studies MA-programme, (one of the disciplines of the Arts, Culture and Media Studies), at the University of Groningen, and made the short, absurdist film *Solex* in 2006.

Pitstra directed two shorts for the *48 Hour Film Project* and was cameraman for a number of films, including the fictional films *Nicci* (2011, Arjen Nolles), *Sam* (2011, Roeland Dijksterhuis, Pepijn Sonneveld) and *Prooidieren* (2008), *Holland* (2009) and *Bebop* (2011) by Thijs Gloger. He also did camera work and editing for projects of the Groningen based director Nathalie Beekman (Pavlov E-lab). Furthermore, he was commissioned to make countless films for clients like Rijkswaterstaat (the executive arm of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment) and the local council of Groningen.

### **Thijs Gloger**

Autodidact Thijs Gloger made his first film at secondary school, and has continued to make numerous films ever since. His first success was *Holland* (2009). This film was selected for the international film festivals in Moscow and Buenos Aires. *Holland* was the first collaboration between Gloger and producer Rene Houwen, under the name Schaftkip Films. After *Holland*, they produced *Prooidieren* (2010) and *Bebop* (2011). Gloger’s latest film, *Buitenlanders/Foreigners/Ausländer*, is a triptych that he realised in collaboration with the directors Joren Molter and René Houwen. The film premiered in September 2012 at the Netherlands Film Festival in Utrecht.

### **Abdelhamid Naouara**

26-year-old Abdelhamid Naouara studies philosophy at the University of Tunis. He started acting when he was still at school, and continued to do so as a university student. In 2006 he joined the theatre company of Korba, his native town, and he featured in several theatre productions in both Korba and in Tunis. *Die Welt* is Naouara’s film debut.

## PUBLICATIONS

- ‘Terug naar mijn ‘eigen’ land?’ (‘Back to my ‘own’ country’), an interview with Alex Pitstra for the Humanistische Omroep (Humanist Broadcaster) blog, Tuesday May 31, 2011. <http://www.human.nl/blog-40979-terug-naar-mijn-eigen-land>

## EQUIPMENT

Most of the scenes in *Die Welt* were shot with a Sony F3-camera that was connected to a KiPro mini-recorder that records to ProRes422 HQ 1080p HD. A number of other scenes were shot with a Canon 5DmkII.

## CREDITS

### Crew

Produced and directed by	ALEX PITSTRA
Screenplay	ALEX PITSTRA THIJS GLOGER ABDALLAH REZGUI
Co-Producer	RENE HOUWEN
Executive Producer	MOEZ KAMOUN
Line producer	ROSAN BREMAN
Associate Producers	REMY ANEDDA DAVID INDEN
Cinematography	THIJS GLOGER
Editors	ALEX PITSTRA THIJS GLOGER RENÉ DUURSMA
Sound design and music	RENGER KONING

### Cast

Abdallah	ABDELHAMID NAOUARA
Hassan	MOHSEN BEN HASSEN
Ahlem	RAHMA BEN HASSEN
Anna	ILSE HEUS
José	JUDITH VAN DER MEULEN
Samir	KAMEL BEN KHALFA
Mohamed	IMED SASSI
Fouad	FOUAD CHENETI
Mehdi	MEHDI CHENETI
Jamil	JAMIL FERCHICHI
Djo	YOUSSEF HAMMAMI
Abdallah's friends	HOUCEM AL BIB SLIM AL AMIRI ABDERRAHMEN REZGUI

## TECHNICAL DETAILS

Title: Die Welt  
With: Abdelhamid Naouara, Ilse Heus and Mohsen Ben Hassen  
Length: 80 minutes  
Language: Arabic, Dutch and English  
Subtitles available: Dutch, English, French and Arabic.  
Aspect ratio: 1:1.85  
Audio: 5.1 Surround (DCP) Stereo LTRT (HD-CAM)

## PRESS CONTACT INFORMATION

**Carla Wolbers**

0031 628 348 047

[carlawolbers@gmail.com](mailto:carlawolbers@gmail.com)

[www.diewelfilm.com](http://www.diewelfilm.com)

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