



*And the king said, what a*

# FANTASTIC MACHINE

by AXEL DANIELSON & MAXIMILIEN VAN AERTRYCK

Sweden, Denmark  
2023 | 85' | Documentary



## SYNOPSIS

What happens when humanity's infatuation with itself and an untethered free market meet 45 billion cameras...

Filmmakers Axel Danielson & Maximilien Van Aertryck (*Ten Meter Tower, Jobs For All!*) once again turn their cameras directly on society, this time to explore, explain and expose how our unchecked obsession with image has grown to change our human behavior.

From Camera Obscura and the Lumieres Brothers all the way to Youtube and the world of social media, the film chronicles how we went from capturing the image of a backyard to a multi-billion- euro content industry in just 200 years.

With an exclusive use of archival and found footage, the film uses the very medium it examines, in a self-reflective yet hilarious montage.

## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

**Axel Danielson & Maximilien Van Aertryck** , Filmmakers

Filmmakers Axel Danielson and Maximilien Van Aertryck have collaborated since 2013 under the banner of the Swedish production company, Plattform Produktion.

The two filmmakers work both as a directors and producers of their own films, under the umbrella of Plattform Produktion, home to f two Palme d'Ors winners (Ruben Östlund's *The*

*Square and Triangle of Sadness*). Plattform Produktion is a small company that works like a collective: colleagues nurture each other with conversation and ideas, and see to it that their films come out the best possible way.

As in their previous work, Axel and Maximilien's feature film debut, **FANTASTIC MACHINE**, also studies human behavior, but this time from the perspective of our modern media landscape: When image overtakes all other forms of communication, does it shift our fundamental human behaviors? **FANTASTIC MACHINE** uses nearly 100% archive images to create a fun, intense, breathtaking ride—with human beings at the center.

The duo's award-winning short films have premiered at Berlinale, Cannes, Toronto, Hot Docs, Aspen, Palm Springs and Sundance. In their most well-known short film, *Ten Meter Tower*, the two filmmakers asked people to climb up to the top of a diving tower and decide whether to jump...or climb back down. They wanted to see how humans look and behave when faced with such a dilemma.

*Ten Meter Tower* (2016), premiered at the Berlinale before moving on to compete in over 100 festivals including Sundance and Palm Springs, winning both the Jury and Audience Awards in Clermont-Ferrand. Millions saw the film online as it went viral through the New York Times' website. It has been acquired by the Finnish Museum of Modern Art and exhibited at the Venice Biennale; won over 30 international prizes, was shortlisted for a 2017 Academy Award, and nominated for an Emmy Award.

*Ten Meter Tower*, along with their most recent short, *Jobs for All!*, can be seen on *The New York Times'* Op-Docs website.



# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*“The person who portrays their world with the camera, shapes the image of our society to their own mirror -- **FANTASTIC MACHINE** is an attempt to sharpen our gaze and to shift our perspectives of the images we consume.”*

## **The camera is a fantastic machine.**

On the one hand, the camera is a lengthening of our eyes, the expansion of our field of vision.

On the other, there is always someone behind the camera, directing the camera's gaze for their own agenda, political platform, financial interest...

We have now arrived at the time of 45 billion cameras on the planet, so do these billions of images sharpen our vision of the world or only blur it?

## **The digital revolution has changed our viewing habits.**

Where do we meet now to share and discuss images; is it only our individual screens where we dopamine-scroll without reflection?

And if so, is it true that the camera never lies – true that what we are seeing in these images is somehow “truth”?

If not, then can our collective discussions about them be trusted?

As consumption of images, seen without a critical eye, flourishes, we experience the world becoming more and more polarized.

Since 2010, the number of countries turning into dictatorships is higher than the number of countries turning into democracies. UNESCO posits that “Media and Information Literacy” needs to become a human right, as they see this literacy as a defining part of these troubling trends.

The exponential rise of the camera and its product, i.e. the photographic image, has become a means of modern communication akin to the Printing Revolution of 1450. However, while we spend our school years learning how to interpret communication –learning to write and be critical of the writings of others -- very little is taught when it comes to photographic images, even though nearly 80 percent of our sensory impressions are registered through our eyes.

As filmmakers, we love the camera. We can't stop marveling at the possibility to “let nature represent itself” (as you can read in the newspaper articles of 1839, the year the invention of

the camera was revealed to the public). We believe in the camera as a tool that can link humanity together by sharing our experiences, and create a common understanding.

As filmmakers we are part visual anthropologists and sociologists: every time we see incredible, complex or horrifying examples of the camera's impact on society, we saved it in our personal archive. This was actually very fun work.

The next step came quite naturally: put all of those images in a film; make the camera the central subject to contextualize those images, and show the audience our point of view through our editing.

We hope this film will foster critical thinking. It covers nearly 200 years of history, from 1839 to today -- from the very first images, to what we now call our "content industry". The title **FANTASTIC MACHINE** refers to, of course, the camera itself. Additionally, however, the "Fantastic Machinery" speaks to the worlds that use this particular machine – the business, the culture, and the industry, of image.

This is something we should shape for our needs together as a society because "*like atomic energy, (it) can be used for incalculable good but it can also do irreparable harm.*" (Eamon de Valera, President of Ireland).

The camera has come to stay; now we have to start formulating, together, what we will use it for. It is time for us to shape this "Fantastic Machine".

## **DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY**

### **Maximilien Van Aertryck**

EXTRAMATERIAL | 2016 | Sweden | 59 min  
FIGHT ON A SWEDISH BEACH | 2016 | Sweden | 14 min  
BECAUSE THE WORLD NEVER STOPS | 2016 | Sweden | 10 min  
TEN METER TOWER | 2016 | Sweden | 17 min  
A GOOD WEEK FOR DEMOCRACY | 2018 | Sweden | 76 min  
JOBS FOR ALL! – 2021 | Sweden | 13 min  
FANTASTIC MACHINE | 2023 | Sweden | 85 min

### **Axel Danielson**

FIGHT ON A SWEDISH BEACH | 2016 | Sweden | 14 min  
BECAUSE THE WORLD NEVER STOPS | 2016 | Sweden | 10 min  
TEN METER TOWER | 2016 | Sweden | 17 min  
A GOOD WEEK FOR DEMOCRACY | 2018 | Sweden | 76 min  
JOBS FOR ALL! – 2021 | Sweden | 13 min  
FANTASTIC MANCHINE | 2023 | Sweden | 85 min

## MAIN CREDITS

**Title:** And the king said, what a FANTASTIC MACHINE

**Directors** Axel Danielson, Maximilien Van Aertryck

**Cinematography** Axel Danielson, Maximilien Van Aertryck

**Producers** Axel Danielson, Maximilien Van Aertryck In association with Kathleen McInnis

**Co-producers:** Vibeke Vogel, Rikke Tambo, Jenny Luukkonen, Ami Ekström, Annelie, Kustfält, Emelie Persson

**Edited by** Mikel Cee Karlsson, Axel Danielson, Maximilien Van Aertryck

**Sound Design** Anne Gry Kristiansen

**VFX** Peter Toggeth Karlsson

**Production Assistant** Stina Eriksson, Gustav Boman, Andrea Gyllenskiöld

**Executive Producers** Erik Hemmendorff, Ruben Östlund

### Cast

Maximilien Van Aertryck, **Narrator**

**Produced by** Plattform Produktion

**Co-produced by** SVT, Film i Väst, Bullitt Film

**With support from**, Swedish Film Institute, Danish Film Institute, ARTE GEIE, Nordisk Film & TV Fund, Swedish Arts Grants Committee, Göteborg Municipality

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