

ANIMATING IN AN ALLOTMENT GARDEN

Liller Møller and Maria Mac Dalland are animation directors who met at Jannik Hastrup's studio in the early 1980s. The two women represent different generations in Danish animation. **FILM** met with them to talk about their current films that are about teddy bears, Christmas elves and hope.

■ BY ULLA HJORTH NIELSEN

The summer sun is beating down on Mozart Haveby in Copenhagen's South Harbour, an allotment garden society that has grown into year-round housing for many filmmakers and other visual artists. The two animation directors Liller Møller and Maria Mac Dalland live and work here just a few doors down from one another.

Danish animated shorts used to be created in teamwork with many other animators. Today, they tend to be solo projects made on the computer. That's how Mac Dalland works, while Møller has a Swedish co-animator, Lasse Person, on her new film, *Where is the Land of Christmas?*

WHERE IS THE LAND OF CHRISTMAS?

Liller Møller is best known for her trilogy, *Sex - A Guide for Young*, 1987, *Safe for Life*, 1989 and *So That's How*, 1990, entertaining and informative films that are still used in sex-education classes in several countries.

Møller's new film is based on her stylish, illustrated book, *Where Is the Land of Christmas?* This charming animated shrieker is about a pipe-cleaner elf, Ludvig, who lives with 11 other elves in a typical Christmas landscape in a store window display.

During the day, the elves stand perfectly still, but at night, when no one is looking, they go bobsledding and skiing on the cottony slopes. One night, Ludvig falls out the shop door and has to survive in a cold and harsh, but fascinating, world he never knew existed. Ludvig is a scaredy cat, but a doll, a bird and a pair of trolls help him, and after a perilous

journey he manages to get back to the window display. But what good is a safe, domestic elf's life when the elf has got a taste for challenge and adventure? Once Christmas is over, we know, the elves will be returned to their box to sleep until the next holiday season. The film, which has broad Nordic financing, has the makings of a Christmas classic. Completion is scheduled for spring 2006.

THE LITTLE BEAR & TRANSIT TO HOPE

Maria Mac Dalland's most recent film was *Odin's Eye* (2004), the second half of a two-part on Norse mythology (*The Voluspa - The Creation* (1996) was the first instalment). Jumping off from treasured Norse myths, the films are couched in contemporary language. The characters are inspired by ancient rock carvings, and the backgrounds are painterly and magical. Mac Dalland knows how to make everything sparkle.

A new pool, Talent Development for Documentaries, administered by the short-film consultants at the Danish Film Institute, is putting up the funds for Mac Dalland's new film, *Transit to Hope* (opening at year's end). Combining animation and documentaries, the film examines how Denmark - a nation once humane, now selfishly complacent - treats its asylum seekers.

"I want my film to speak directly to people's

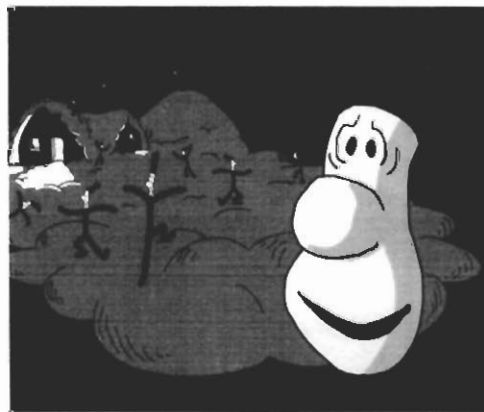
empathy," Mac Dalland says. "Asylum seekers get three meals a day but zero cash. Parents are denied the ability to give, even if it's giving their children nothing more than an in-between-meal snack. People get sick - some of them have been there seven years - they are wrecked as people. How could we?"

Mac Dalland filmed and interviewed people in the Avnstrup asylum centre, intercutting powerful and silent live footage with an animated desert journey leading to a pyramid-shaped oasis. A voice-over tells the story of the hanging gardens of Babylon, where the king built a garden in the middle of the desert, out of love for his queen who was pining for the verdant hills of her homeland.

The director is currently working on *The Little Bear*, a 15-minute film for children aged 2-3, opening in spring 2006. Technically, Mac Dalland cut some corners by filming actors in costumes and masks, and then treating the footage on the computer. She enjoys electronic and her experience is starting to pay off.

"I'm 40 now, but when I was young I thought it had to be hard work, that it shouldn't be fun," Mac Dalland says. "I've learned that too, with time," Møller adds. "That even if it's fun and comes easy, it can still turn out good."

See catalogue back of this issue.



Where is the Land of Christmas?



The Little Bear