

Marthe Thorshaug
b. 1977 in Oslo
Lives and works in Hamar
and Oslo

In Marthe Thorshaug's films the crossover of different genres is important as she blends documentaries with fictitious and mythological elements.

In *Vargmannen* (2003) she went searching for the truth about the alleged Wolfman. The background for the rumours about this creature was the dramatic rise in the number of wolves in Norway and Sweden over the past 20 years, which led people to wonder where the wolves came from. One theory is that the so-called Wolfman put Eastern European wolves on the Swedish side of the border with Norway. The documentary character of the film makes it highly believable, and I am still not sure whether the story is fictional or not.

The survival, rebirth or construction of modern myths is a recurring point of departure in Thorshaug's films. *Comancheria* (2006) is a road movie about the Comanche Indians in the USA. The action revolves around a group of teenagers who are preparing a sweat lodge ritual. Departing from stereotypical portrayals of Indians as harmless, poor alcoholics, these people are energetic, seemingly hungry for revenge and on the warpath. As with *Vargmannen*, it is difficult to know when the documentary veers into the realm of fiction. The blurred boundary can be seen as a reflection over the power of images and how the writing of history, the truth and propaganda are all intertwined.

In *Legenden om Ygg* (2009), Thorshaug continues in the road movie vein, but shifts her focus to the Icelandic horse. The opening sequence of the film is a journey into a Norwegian landscape imbued with national romanticism. Here, we are introduced to the Icelandic horse, the legendary old Viking horse that the Norwegians brought with them to Iceland in the 9th century.

Ygg was one of the angry god Odin's many nicknames, and is Norse for "cruel". The film deals with the fate of a group of girl riders who drive each other to extreme actions. Under the leadership of a charismatic riding instructor at a stable in Utgard in Gudbrandsdalen, the gang of girls develop a bizarre riding technique. Based on an old Icelandic saga, they use roads to test the horse's and the rider's courage, where the aim is to become fearless equestrians. By using the road as a ritual arena they cause mysterious car accidents. The stable gang is a closed sisterhood where the individuals will do anything to show their bravery to the other members of the gang. They eagerly encourage each other to stretch constantly shifting moral boundaries, which finally results in death.

In the storybooks, the nightriders are associated with evil, fixated on death and intoxicated with victory. Thorshaug has moved these literary and historical characters into our time and has created a modern legend of the deathriders for contemporary Norwegian society. It is a story of cruelty that

has its roots in today's pursuit of spiritual needs ; a search for belonging, which ends in extremism.

The musician Dan Persson created the film score and the accompanying soundtrack. For the latter, Persson used electric guitars and a vibraslap, and made references to the Icelandic cult song *Á Sprengisandi*, also known as *Ridum, Ridum*. The song is about being careful when riding out onto the Icelandic moors at night, as you can never know the dangers that lurk in the darkness.

Stina Högvist

Catalogue text MOMENTUM 2009 - Favoured Nations