

A LONG GOODBYE

BY KATE VOET & VICTOR MAES



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2025
Venice Immersive
Achievement Prize



ΣΥΝΟΠΣΗ

A Long Goodbye tells the story of Ida, a 72-year-old pianist living with dementia. In this animated, interactive VR experience, we walk in Ida's shoes. We experience a day in her life, as her reality is fading. The apartment, where she spent a lifetime with her beloved husband Daniel, first feels empty and undefined. When we interact with objects and play the tape recordings of her husband, her playful world gradually comes to life, as if drawn in paint before our eyes.

Like pieces of a puzzle, memories and conversations help Ida to rediscover herself. But we also discover Daniel's struggles, as he hopes to stay connected and realizes their remaining time together may be short. A Long Goodbye is a poetic experience about the impact of dementia, but above all it is about love and the long goodbye of two lovers who shared a life together.



the heart remembers...



WORLD PREMIERE
82nd Venice International Film Festival

Winner Venice Immersive Achievement Prize



directors note

When we put the VR headset on, the first questions that come to mind are: Who am I? And where am I? This confusion is exactly what our protagonist is dealing with and this became the starting point of the story.

We were drawn to this theme because of Victor's grandfather who lived with Alzheimer's disease, and whose health declined rapidly after Victor's grandmother passed. The experience of having witnessed this emotional transformation closeby, made us explore how dementia is experienced and how it influences the relationship with your past, with yourself and with your loved ones?

A Long Goodbye is at once a personal and a universal story about human connection. It serves as a reminder that people are always so much more than their illness. Instead of focusing on what is lost, we need to stay close and hold on to shared affection.

Kate Voet & Victor Maes



facts

6DoF interactive VR - single user

Genre: animation, fiction

Hardware: standalone - Quest 3

Duration: 25-30 minutes

Production countries: Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands

Languages: English, Dutch

Selected markets: VR Days '21, Stereopsia Booster Lab '21, NewImages XR Development Market '23 & '25, Venice Gap-Financing Market '23, IDFA Doclab Forum '24

Selected festivals '25: Venice International Film Festival, Film Fest Gent, Thessaloniki IFF, IDFA Doclab, Breedbeeld, Docfest Brugge, Kortfilmfestival Leuven, United XR, Filmfestival Oostende, Clermont- Ferrand, Fipadoc, SXSW.

Awards: Venice Immersive Achievement Prize, Golden Alexander at Thessaloniki IFF, Best Art Direction at United XR Awards, Best Applied Game at Belgian Game Awards, Best Non-Fiction Work at XR Must Awards.

press materials

Stills:

<https://mab.to/zRx0gmgUHvJya/eu1>

Portrait directors:

<https://mab.to/6qvrpbA0c18gQ/eu1>

Teaser:

<https://vimeo.com/1114250539>

Poster:

<https://mab.to/AJnwKNPqE56xy/eu1>

Website:

www.alonggoodbyevr.com

Instagram:

@alonggoodbyevr

team & partners

Written & directed by Kate Voet & Victor Maes

Cast Elizabeth Counsell (UK), Richard Wells (UK), Marlies Heuer (NL), Derek de Lint (NL)

Composer Joep Beving

CG supervisor Gael Chaize

Art director Daniel Balage

Digital art studio Velvet Flare

Lead developer Frederik Smolders for Polygoat

Sound designers Niels van der Leest & Lars Tesselaar for Game Audio Squad

2D animations Mathieu Jadin, Tom Lemmens, Pieter Vanluffelen

Additional design & coding Victor Maes

Producers An Oost, Emmy Oost

Co-producers Donato Rotunno, Richard Valk

A co-production by Cassette for timescapes, Tarantula, Valk Productions

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Sales: Astrea



BLO's DIRECTORS

Kate Voet is a Belgian film director and screenwriter of fiction projects. She studied directing and English literature in Amsterdam, New York and Brussels. Her projects have been selected for development labs and markets such as the Venice Gap-Financing Market, Torino Film Lab, and IDFA Doclab Forum. Her short films Les Homards Immortels (2017) and The Tears of Things (2021) toured festivals internationally and received several awards.

www.katevoet.com

Victor Maes graduated from LUCA School of Arts Brussels' film program with a short animation film and studied cinematography at the Global Cinematography Institute in Los Angeles. He's been working as a camera assistant on feature films since 2016 (Close & Girl by Lukas Dhont, Holly by Fien Troch). As a cinematographer he recently shot Ever Since, I Have Been Flying by Aylin Gökmen (Locarno & Toronto IFF '23).

www.victormaes.com

BLO's CAST

Elizabeth Counsell has had a career spanning over six decades, her screen credits include EastEnders (BBC), Outlaws (Four Eyes Entertainment), Call the Midwife (Neal Street Productions), Unforgotten (ITV), The Invitation (Sony), Born to Kill (Channel 4), Grace of Monaco (Stone Angels), Cold Call (Channel 5), Born To Kill (Channel 4), Bull (Ingenious Entertainment) and Brush Strokes (BBC).

Elizabeth's extensive theatre work includes many leading roles in Shakespeare, including Rosalind, Viola, Titania, Beatrice and Lady Macbeth (this last opposite Michael Gambon).

Other stage work includes Blonde Poison (St. James Theatre), Miss Dietrich Regrets (St James Theatre), The Glass Menagerie (Lyric Theatre) and The Birthday Party (Theatre Clwyd). She is also active in radio drama (BBC Radio 3 & 4, Augustine Institute, etc.) and showcases fine soprano singing; her accolades include a nomination for Best Supporting Actress at the ATC Seneca Awards for radio.

Richard Wells is a classically trained actor and linguist living in Brussels, with over three decades of experience. He has voiced over 10,000 projects, spanning multiple formats - including advertising, documentaries and animations as well as playing numerous roles on television and in feature films. Richard is surprisingly famous in the gaming industry for voicing "PEGI 18" in video game trailers, which gained him a huge following on TikTok. His first self-introduction video charted millions of views and likes quickly building a devoted fanbase.

Marlies Heuer was born in 1954 in Netherlands. She received her training at the Amsterdam Theaterschool's mime school in the early 1970s, where she studied movement dance and drama. Since then, she has worked as an actress and theatre maker in all kinds of theatre productions. She is known for her roles in Alex van Warmerdam's 'The Last Days of Emma Blank' (2009, Venice Film festival), Theo Van Gogh's 'May 6t'h (2004) and 'Rooksporen' by Frans van de Staak (1992, IFFR).

Derek de Lint has had a career of more than 40 years and is one of the greatest Dutch actors with an impressive international career. Derek has appeared in series such as Gooische Vrouwen (2024-2025, 2005-2009), and the international series Jack Ryan (2022, Amazon Prime), Silent Witness (2011, BBC), The L Word (2005, Showtime), Into the West (2005, DreamWorks), NCIS (2004, CBS), and Poltergeist: The Legacy (1996-1999, Showtime). He had his breakthrough in The Unbearable Lightness of Being (1988) opposite Juliette Binoche and Daniel Day Lewis. He has performed in feature films such as The Admiral (2015), Valentino (2013), Stealing Heaven (1988) and Mascara (1987) with Charlotte Rampling. He also played a leading role in the Dutch feature film The Attack, which was awarded the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1987 and in Soldier of Orange (1977) directed by Paul Verhoeven, alongside Rutger Hauer.

BLO COMPOSERS

Joep Beving is a Dutch composer and neo-classical pianist based in Amsterdam who considers his work simple music for complex emotions. Given the sparse, emotionally vulnerable nature of his music, his physically imposing appearance (six-foot ten height with long hair and a beard) stands in sharp contrast to his languid, haunting creations. Beving's compositions are sparse, simple, and usually quite minimally adorned.

Joep Beving was catapulted into stardom when his self released debut album Solipsism, initially made for family and friends, was picked up by Spotify and brought to millions of ears around the world. Where it was never really his intention to become a performing artist, he now is traveling the world and has played in sold out venues from the USA to Australia. Joep's music borrows from the classical vocabulary but seems to appeal to a broader audience, racking up over 190 million streams to date on Spotify alone.

www.joepbeving.com

BLO'S PRODUCERS

Cassette for timescapes produces films and XR projects that merge innovative storytelling with social and political engagement. As a leading Belgian company for author-driven documentary and VR, we have successfully co-produced projects with partners in the US, UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Finland. Our films are distributed worldwide, often accompanied by tailored impact strategies.

Recent highlights include A LONG GOODBYE by Kate Voet and Victor Maes (Venice FF

2025), THIS IS MY MOMENT by Lieven Corthouts (DOK.fest München 2024), FLOATING WITH SPIRITS by Juanita Onzaga (Venice 2023, Cannes 2025), and ALL-IN by Volkan Üce (CPH:DOX & Hot Docs 2021). Previous co-productions include SHADOW WORLD by Johan Grimonprez (Tribeca FF 2016) and THE IMAGINARY FRIEND VR by Steye Hallema (Venice 2023).

Cassette for timescapes is led by a team of women—An Oost, Magalie Dierick and Emmy Oost—who have collaborated for over a decade. VR producer An Oost has pitched at VR Days, NewImages, IFFR CineMart and the Venice Gap-Financing Market, and served on the FIPADOC Smart Jury. In 2019 Magalie Dierick won the Eave producers network award at When East Meets West. Emmy Oost began her career producing films for internationally acclaimed Belgian filmmaker Johan Grimonprez (DOUBLE TAKE, Berlinale & Sundance 2009). She received the Flanders Prize for Film in 2016 and in 2019 founded Filmpect, an organization promoting social impact through film in Flanders.

www.timescapes.be

Tarantula Luxembourg was founded 30 years ago by the Luxembourgish producer, director, and screenwriter Donato Rotunno. Since 1995, Tarantula Luxembourg has become a well-established company that makes bold artistic choices. Present in the main international festivals including Cannes, Toronto, Venice and Locarno, Tarantula has produced many fiction and documentary films of all length. A significant amount of them address the context of immigration and politics with a sense of poetry and a specific artistic vision.

Amongst Tarantula's most famous coproductions feature are the critically acclaimed "A Piece of Sky" by Benedicte Liénard (Un Certain Regard official selection in Cannes 2002) first feature film ever produced by Tarantula, "Fratricide" by Yilmaz Arslan (Locarno Festival, 2005). More recently was "Two of us" by Filippo Meneghetti (Best Foreign Language Film selection for the Golden Globes, 2021), "Harka" by Lotfy Nathan (Un Certain Regard, Cannes, 2021), Blanquita by Fernando Guzzoni (Official Competition, Venice, 2022) followed by "Holly" by Fien Troch (Official competition, Venice, 2023), "Horizonte" by César Augusto Acevedo (TIFF, 2024) and

“Floating with Spirits” by Juanita Onzaga (Venice Immersive Official Competition, 2023 & Cannes Immersive 2025).

www.tarantula.lu

Valk Productions was founded in 1999 by director and producer Richard Valk and produces short artistic animation projects, like It’s Nice in Here (Semaine de la Critique Cannes 2022 and Oscars shortlist 2022) by Robert-Jonathan Koeyers, documentaries like Douwe Dijkstra’s Neighbour Abdi (Locarno Film Festival, winner of the Pardino d’Oro for Best International Short Film 2022) and VR projects like Adriaan Lokman’s Flow VR, Februar by Maarten Isaak de Heer and The Miracle Basket by Abner Preis (Venice Immersive 2022).

An important resemblance in all productions can be found in the fact that they are independent, artistic films and VR projects, such as the collaborations with Daphna Awadish, Hisko Hulsing, Juliana Erazo, Arjan Brentjes, Abner Preis, Daan Lucas, Suzie Templeton and many projects with Rosto (†), but also with international talent such as Dmytro Hreshko and Sandra Desmazières. In addition, Valk Productions likes to collaborate with international co-producers like Autour de Minuit (FR), Cassette for timescapes and Take Five (BE), Twenty One Pictures (NO) and Animaux (PT).

This artistic level is how Valk Productions likes to profile itself. The focus of the company is to collaborate with creative makers who come up with innovative, original or daring ideas and to tell moving stories from all over the world.

www.valkproductions.com

Interview with Kate Voet & Victor Maes

What drew you to this story?

VICTOR MAES: My grandfather lived with Alzheimer’s disease until he unfortunately passed away. Experiencing this transformation up close had a big impact on me. At one point, my grandfather no longer recognized me and started addressing me as ‘the school principal’. This whole process brought up many questions: how do people experience dementia? How does it change their relationship with themselves, their family, and their past?

In what ways is an animated, interactive VR experience the most effective and compelling form and format for telling this story?

KATE VOET: We have a background in classic cinema. We are both screenwriters and directors, and Victor also works as a cinematographer and camera assistant. However, classic cinema has its limits, as it truly is less immersive than virtual reality. The project stemmed from Victor’s family story — his grandfather lived with Alzheimer’s — and he had long wanted to make a film on this subject. Narratively, we moved away from Victor’s personal story, letting a fictional character embody the themes we wanted to explore. When putting on a VR headset, the questions that come to mind are: Who am I? And where am I? We felt that these questions strongly reflect the experience of dementia, and that is how the project started. Animation, on the other hand, gave us the opportunity to create images with strong emotional resonance that are, in a sense, magical realist. Animation is such a powerful tool to bring a world to life in a dreamlike way. We had the opportunity to work with very gifted 2D animators Pieter Vanluffelen, Mathieu Jadin, and Tom Lemmens, and to incorporate 3D animation as well. The interactivity [of VR] allowed us to create a world where a viewer steps into the shoes of our fictional protagonist, Ida. Thanks to the talent and dedication of our developer Frederik Smolders, this experience became a journey of discovery where we hope the audience will, in a way, get lost while interacting with objects and notes. Step by step, they discover who they are from Ida’s point of view.

VM: Our idea for the project was to let a viewer walk inside this world as if it were a painting, which technically turned out to be a real challenge. We wanted the world to have a watercolor feel, reflecting the fleeting nature of memories. Our experienced and talented art director Daniel Balage and our brilliant CG supervisor Gael Chaize managed to translate this concept into a nostalgic, painterly virtual reality experience. We couldn't have done this without our entire team!

Could you talk about the genesis and evolution of this project? How was it conceived and developed over the years to become A Long Goodbye?

VM: During the pandemic, the Flanders Audiovisual Fund (VAF) launched a call for filmmakers with a cinema background to take part in a 6-month training program, during which we could develop a virtual reality project. We were coached by two amazing VR professionals, Yvonne van Ulden and David Calvet, who taught us a lot about virtual reality. Afterwards, our producers An Oost and Emmy Oost from Cassette for timescapes also got on board, and the project naturally developed into a European co-production. We were very lucky to be able to participate in several labs and markets over the years such as the Venice Gap-Financing Market, IDFA DocLab Forum, the NewImages XR Development and XR Distribution Market, VR Days, Stereopsia's Booster, and Torino Short Film Market. We had so much valuable feedback after each of them, and we took it with us while fine-tuning the project.

Could you tell us more about the narrative journey of this experience, which starts with Ida's questions by a tape recorder and ends with her recorded voice and the fading contours of their bedroom?

VM: The narration, told through a voice-over, starts with a conversation between our fictional characters, Daniel and Ida, as Daniel tries to bring back some memories about their marriage, their daughter and grandson, and her music. We aimed to create an intimate yet playful dialogue that immediately gives a sense of their personalities and the dynamic of their relationship, while also conveying the impact of dementia. We wanted to end the experience with Ida's voice note, which she, in turn, left for her husband. She recorded the message after one of her earlier consultations with her doctor, who had informed her that her condition would progress, and it would be, in a way, unpredictable. This message was her way of telling her husband how she felt and how afraid and uncertain she was about

what's to come, while also consciously saying goodbye to him and assuring him of her love.

Could you tell us about the music and your collaboration with Dutch composer Joep Beving on this project?

KV: Joep Beving is a unique Dutch composer and pianist, and we were thrilled when he confirmed the collaboration. His music is so honest, comforting, and emotional, and we trusted him completely to bring the story to life musically. Joep's music truly ties the whole experience together on an emotional level. It is the beating heart of the experience that enhances the meaning of all visual elements and performances. We worked a great deal on creating a composition for Ida since she is a pianist and composer in the story, but we also wanted this music to feel as if she played it all for Daniel. The music, therefore, had to be intimate and tender — not a grand concert performed by a full orchestra.

VM: We wanted her compositions to be timeless and sincere, and Joep ended up composing a unique musical theme for both Ida and Daniel. There is one scene in a concert hall where Ida recalls losing her ability to play music as her condition progressed. For this scene, Joep composed a beautiful piece where the music transforms: it starts to break up, slows down, and ultimately ends in silence while the world fades out around us.

What was your process in collaborating with the voice actors on this project?

VM: We had an amazing collaboration with both the English and Dutch actors, Elizabeth Counsell, Richard Wells, Marlies Heuer, and Derek de Lint. It was important to us to work with actors who were experienced in cinema and theater, and who could really get into the skin of our characters and play the parts, rather than just read the text. Three of them had a family member with dementia and had experienced it up close, so they felt a sense of responsibility and a strong personal connection to the story. We are so grateful for their emotional performances and bringing the characters and their relationship to life.

Around two-thirds into the journey, Ida finds herself in the darkness of the woods, confronted by a wall of Post-its covering a bus stop and a pile of discarded tape recorders. Could you elaborate on the significance of this scene to the story and experience?

KV: We created a narrative where the scenes revolve around certain themes that are related to

dementia, Alzheimer’s disease in particular. Themes such as nostalgia and confusion are more commonly known, but we also wanted to bring in scenes that explore the experience of fear, hallucination, and disorientation. In the preceding scene, our character Daniel tries to have a conversation with Ida about his own illness and that soon he may no longer be there for her. And then Ida —and, in turn, a viewer — find themselves in the woods, all alone. The texts on the notes become more nonsensical, Daniel’s voice has left us, and we have this general sense of disorientation and feeling unsafe, which is a very common experience for people living with dementia, unfortunately. But then the music emerges again, taking you out of the scene.

As the journey progresses, Ida is transported to different environments, from more intimate spaces to exterior ones. A change in scenes and landscapes is always accompanied by familiar objects, like a fish tank, Post-its, family photographs, and music sheets. In what ways was the use of such items productive to the story’s development?

VM: We wanted to approach the notion of confabulation visually: the formation of false, distorted, or misinterpreted memories about oneself or the world. Confabulation often occurs as a consequence of memory loss, compensating for the gaps in memory. By introducing familiar objects and characters first in their usual context and then reusing them later in a different setting, we get the feeling of one’s recollection mixed with confusion. As Ida progresses through her journey, every scene becomes a layering of memories, with the spaces growing more disjointed and subjective. In that sense, these memories are not simply lost but heavily altered, as the contexts and meaning continually shift.

A tape recorder is a recurring visual element, “a box that will keep [Daniel and Ida] inside”, but it is also a narrative tool that propels the story forward. Tell us about your decision to use a tape recorder as a storytelling device.

KV: We wanted the storytelling to unfold through a myriad of elements, creating a rich and detailed personal universe for our character, Ida. There is a lot of environmental storytelling through Post-its, notes, and photos, but we felt that the tape recorder presented a beautiful way to illustrate the loving relationship between Ida and her husband. Knowing that Daniel is struggling with illness himself, you can sense how vital it is for him to leave

behind little voice notes reminding Ida of how to take care of herself, along with recordings of them reminiscing about their shared life. In reality, people living with dementia will eventually reach a point where they can no longer comprehend such voice notes, but Daniel’s desire is an emotional one, a deep need to stay behind in some way to take care of his wife.

A Long Goodbye encompasses different episodes of a life with dementia not only for the person affected but also for their family: from confusion and anxiety to agonizing moments of helplessness. What was your process in gathering these experiences to shape this nuanced portrayal?

VM: There was a lengthy period of research throughout the process of writing, development, and production. Some elements were gathered from my personal experience with my grandfather. However, we also interviewed someone who is living with dementia, as well as caretakers, expertise centers, professors, etc. Remaining respectful of this reality was important to us, and we chose to convey a nuanced portrayal of the condition through a fictional story. Ultimately, however, there are countless stories to be told about this subject, and each journey is a personal one.

KV: We specifically wanted to explore how Alzheimer’s affects a couple’s relationship, and subsequently, their long goodbye. We didn’t shy away from portraying the difficult aspects of it, but we hope the story can bring a comforting perspective to those affected by the condition in their own lives. We wanted to emphasize that people are never defined by their condition, and that it is merely a part of them. We all live rich lives and have individual personalities. And we believe people with dementia continue to have these rich inner lives, and the love they feel for their dear ones remains, along with their passions, which can be a source of comfort and joy. Amid what is lost, we can only hope that people will hold onto their shared bonds and affection.

Interview by Sevara Pan, August 2025

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