

OFFICIAL SELECTION
Frameline50
San Francisco International
LGBTQ+ Film Festival

**down
town**



LOGLINE

After ruling Amsterdam's most electrifying gay club in the '80s, three friends reunite to relive a time of wild nights and reckless love, as hidden truths come to light.

SYNOPSIS

Lennart and Ronnie find themselves in the centre of the hedonistic nightclub Downtown in 1980s Amsterdam. While Ronnie sets the mood from the DJ booth, Lennart owns the dance floor and catches the eye of many men, but only one truly catches his: 20-year-old artist Bas. As the three of them begin planning their future, more and more regulars start to vanish from Downtown. Over time, the atmosphere in the local paradise changes, and with it, the relationship between the three young men. When they reunite years later, their bond, rooted in memories of love and euphoric excess, still lingers as they revisit the unspoken truths and choices that changed their lives forever.



International Title: Downtown

Original Title: Downtown

Year: 2026

Country: The Netherlands

World Premiere: Frameline50, San Francisco, USA

Genre: Drama

Language: Dutch (Netherlands)

Film running time: 98min

Screening format: 4K 2,39:1 - SCOPE

Shooting Format: Arriraw 4.6K 16:9
(recording resolution 4096x2304)

Color: yes

Aspect ratio: 2,39:1 - SCOPE

Speed/Frame Rate: 24

Sound Format: 5.1 / 2.0

TRAILER

DIRECTOR'S Q&A

Is this your most personal project to date?

“That is difficult to say; I think every film and series I make has a personal connection for me. But this story is very close to my own life and to that of Frank Houtappels, the screenwriter. We are not the main characters one-to-one, but we did personally experience the eighties and the impact AIDS had on the community. I was in a stable, monogamous relationship with the man I am still with after more than forty years. So we weren't running any major risks ourselves. But we did notice that AIDS was starting to become part of our lives and our community. Suddenly, you heard more and more stories of people getting sick. The uncertainty and the sheer number of funerals made an impression and left their mark on us.”

Is it an advantage or a disadvantage for a director to be so closely connected to the subject of his film?

“I am a director who believes it is an advantage. I always need to feel a personal connection with the characters in my films and series. In any case, I am a director who would rather cry along on set than stand at a distance giving directions.”

The film is set in the period just before the AIDS epidemic exploded.

“Initially, we didn't know anything at all. You heard more and more stories about a mysterious virus that mainly affected flight attendants. We didn't know exactly how the virus spread. But suddenly, people in your circle of friends started dying. In 2021, I made the documentary series *The Pink Revolution*, about the history of the Dutch LGBTQ+ community. Then it suddenly came back to me how we had lived in fear and uncertainty for all those years. In my mind, sex with other men was synonymous with dying. I, and many of my peers, had that feeling until the HIV prevention pill PrEP came along.”

The community seems to consider it important that the AIDS era is not forgotten.

Downtown is part of a small boom in international films on this subject.

“I am 62 now. Many gays do not have children – the realization is growing that these stories will disappear if we do not pass them on. Then we and what we have been through will not be part of history. I notice that within the community, there is sometimes a lot of criticism directed at old sis-gay men like me. That is allowed. But I also often think: you don't know what we went through forty years ago and what we fought for. That was one of the reasons for making this film.”

You started developing Downtown when the corona epidemic broke out. During that period, the friends of yesteryear find each other again in the film.

“The corona period reminded many gays like me a lot of the eighties. Suddenly there was a mysterious virus that claimed many victims; initially, no one knew exactly what to do about it. The big difference, however, was that back then we really felt like we were on our own: other people didn't seem to care what was happening to the gays. With corona, it was a major societal problem that affected everyone. And one that everyone had to come to terms with.”

The film is set in Amsterdam, which was seen as the gay capital of the world. Did you find it important to situate the story in that specific location?

“I was living in the Dutch city of Delft myself at the time, but for us, Amsterdam was the center of the world. And it is a city that has a reputation among gays in the rest of the world as well. For a while, we seriously considered shooting part of the story on Fire Island, which was an epicenter of the epidemic in the US. The characters Bas and Lennart would go there on vacation and see the impact of the AIDS era for the first time. But that turned out to be very complicated for various reasons. That is why we kept the entire story in Amsterdam.”

Downtown shows the contrast between the freedom gays felt in the early 1980s and the fear of the AIDS epidemic.

“It was very bitter that this happened when we, as a community, finally dared to show ourselves, after the Stonewall riots. At the time, the outside world also reproached us for AIDS being a punishment for our godless behavior. That was, of course, a completely unfounded notion. But in the film, I also wanted to make clear how strong the sense of community was during that period, and how wonderful it was that we finally felt the space to be ourselves. Above all, I wanted to prevent Downtown from becoming a boring history lesson.”

The film features six main characters: three actors who play the characters in their younger years, and three actors who play them as sixty-year-olds. All six actors are gay themselves. Was that a conscious choice?

“Yes, I felt that was important in this case. We actually fought for it. There aren't that many films that are truly solely about our community. And I feel that gay actors get real 'hetero roles' less often. Moreover, I had a very strong feeling that in this case, it contributed significantly to the feeling the film conveys. Certainly, the three actors who play the men as sixty-year-olds have memories of that period themselves. Actor Hans Kesting, who plays the older Lennart, is also HIV-positive and is very open about it.”

Did you cast the 'old' actors first, or did you look for the younger versions first?

“I've known Hans Kesting for quite a long time. And for the role of Ronnie, I quickly had my eye on Yorick van Wageningen. He experienced the Amsterdam nightlife scene intensely; it shaped him into who he is today. Roeland Fernhout, who plays the older Bas, worked at the legendary Amsterdam club RoXY, one of the clubs that formed the center of the gay community back then. I think you can feel that in the performance. Only then did the search for the young actors begin.”

If you had to choose a character, who do you identify with the most? The extroverted Bas, the self-assured Lennart, or the serious Ronnie?

“The characters are archetypes for recognizable figures in the gay world. I have always been a Ronnie myself: someone who stands on the sidelines and mainly keeps an eye on his friends instead of showing off on the dance floor. Ronnie is the one who steps up as savior and caregiver, the one who considers it important that the message is conveyed afterwards. I have never been a hunter like Lennart, who is never satisfied and for whom the night always seems too short. And I wasn't a fun, energetic young thing like Bas either.”

Is there still a lot of shame about HIV within the community?

“That surprised me. When we announced the project, people suddenly came up to me telling me that they have an HIV infection. And that they were so glad I was making this film. I asked: why didn't you tell anyone sooner? And the answer is always: shame. So those people have been walking around with a secret for decades; sometimes only their partner knows they have HIV. That strengthened my belief that this film had to be made.”

Did you make this film for the gay community, or in the hope that straight people will also come to understand what happened?

“Of course, I want everyone to know and understand this story—including people who are not part of our community. The impact has been so great. Within the community, I hope that my peers recognize themselves in the story and understand that we need to talk about this. That they understand that we are damaged and that there is nothing we can do about it. And I hope to show the younger generation what happened back then and what memories we carry with us. They don't have to do anything further with that; I hope they focus primarily on the future. But I do want young queers to know what happened back then. And that they understand that it is important for us to pass on our story.”



CAST

Yorick van Wageningen
Hans Kesting
Roeland Fernhout
Daniel Cornelissen
Sebastián Mrkvicka
Thor Braun

CREW

Director

Michiel van Erp

Writer

Frank Houtappels

Production company

Kaap Holland Film & Het Familiedrama

Producers

Maarten Swart
Monique Busman
Michiel van Erp

Coproducers

Peter Bouckaert
Wilco Wolfers
Caspar Wenckebach
Robert Kievit

Cinematographer/DoP

Coen Stroeve n.s.c

Set Designer

Vincent de Pater

Editor

Axel Skovdal Roelofs n.c.e

Sound Editor/Mix

Thomas Vertongen & Matthias Hillegeer

Composer

Justine Bourgeus

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The Netherlands Filmfund & the Netherlands Film Production Incentive, Cobo Fund, The Flanders Audiovisual Fund (Vaf) & The Tax Shelter Of The Belgian Federal Government



MICHEL VAN ERP

DIRECTOR

Michiel van Erp is an award-winning director of feature films, television series, documentaries, and theatre productions. Over the course of his career, he has received a range of awards and nominations, including the Prix Europa, the Golden Calf, the Silver Nipkowschijf, and two Dutch Directors Guild Awards.

Born in Eindhoven in 1963, Van Erp graduated from the Technical University of Delft in 1988 with a degree in Industrial Design. Between 1988 and 1992, he worked as an actor before turning to directing in 1993. He first gained widespread recognition with the documentary series “Long Live...”, which portrayed the hopes and desires of ordinary Dutch people and ran for seven years on Dutch television, earning both national and international awards. His feature documentary debut, “A Funfair behind the Dikes” (“Pretpark Nederland”, 2007), became a major success in Dutch cinemas.

Van Erp went on to direct several acclaimed documentaries. His international feature documentary “I Am a Woman Now” (2011) explored the lives of the first generation of transgender women to undergo gender reassignment surgery. In “MH17: A Nation’s Grief” (2015), he offered a powerful portrait of how the MH17 disaster in Ukraine impacted Dutch society. His drama debut, the television series “Ramses” (2014), was both a critical and commercial success, winning several national and international awards. Many notable drama productions followed. After the release of his feature film “Stromboli” in 2021, Van Erp directed his first English-language feature, “A Beautiful Imperfection”. That same year, he completed the critically acclaimed series “Een van Ons” (“The Hunt”), which received awards for Best Direction, Best Actor, and Best Screenplay. Alongside his film and television work, Van Erp is also an established theatre director. He has worked extensively with International Theatre Amsterdam, home to renowned directors including Ivo van Hove, Simon Stone, and Nanouk Leopold.

Since 2004, Van Erp has been co-owner of the production company De Familie Film & TV and Het Familie Drama together with producer Monique Busman.



YORICK VAN WAGENINGEN

OLDER RONNIE

Yorick van Wageningen is a Dutch actor with a broad international career. He starred in *The Mayor of Kingstown* (2024, SkyShowtime), Dutch high-end series *Rampvlucht* (2023, NPO) and in the international series *The Letter for the King* (2020, Netflix) and in films such as *De Veroordeling* (Golden Calf award Best Supporting Actor, 2021), the remake of the 1973 film *Papillon* (2017) next to Charlie Hunnam and Rami Malek, Leonardo Guerra Seragnoli's *Last Summer* (2014), *De Wederopstanding van een Klootzak* (2013), David Fincher's award-winning *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), Emilio Estevez's *The Way* (2010) alongside Martin Sheen, *The Chronicles of Riddick* (2004) and *Beyond Borders* (2003) next to Clive Owen and Angelina Jolie.

HANS KESTING

OLDER LENNART

Hans Kesting has been performing with Dutch theatre company ITA (formerly known as TGA) since 1987 and was part of the permanent ensemble from 2003 to 2025. At ITA, he appeared in numerous productions. In recent years, he has been seen in; *Wie Heeft Mijn Vader Vermoord*, *Judas*, *The Damned*, *A little life*, *Ibsen Huis*, and *Age of Rage*. For his performances as 'Richard III' in *Kings of War* and 'Roy Cohn' in *Angels in America*, he was awarded the Louis d'Or award. He is also a recipient of the Albert van Dalsum Ring and a Knight in the Order of the Dutch Lion.

In addition to his work at ITA, he has appeared in films such as *Vincent & Theo* (directed by Robert Altman), *Character* (Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language Film), *Niemand in de stad* (like *Downtown*, directed by Michiel van Erp), *Do Not Disturb* (directed by Jude Law), and *Nr. 10* (2021, directed by Alex van Warmerdam). Together with Dutch tv personality Paul de Leeuw, he toured through the country as a live voice-over for the tv show *Busje Komt Zo*, and for many years he has appeared as Sinterklaas in the show *Sint & De Leeuw*. He has also played roles in television series such as *Baantjer*, *Intensive Care*, *Keyzer & De Boer Advocaten*, *CMC*, *DNA*, *Ares*, *Hoogvliegers*, *Het Klokhuis*, the "Welkom in" series, *Een van ons* (also directed by Michiel van Erp) and *Sleepers*. In 2026, Hans will appear in the films *Boomers*, *Downtown*, and in the tv series *Basta*.



DANIEL CORNELISSEN

YOUNGER RONNIE

Daniel Cornelissen graduated from the Amsterdam Academy of Theatre and Dance (Toneelschool & Kleinkunstacademie) in 2012. Since then, he has appeared in films such as *Feuten het Feestje*, *Moos*, and *De Zevende Hemel*, and on television in *Jeuk*, *Nieuw Zeer*, *Het Klokhuis*, and *Dag & Nacht*. In theatre, he has performed in productions by DeLaMar Producties, Theater Oostpool, MORE Theatre Productions, Bod Theatre Productions, Toneelschuur, and Het Zuidelijk Toneel, as well as at renowned festivals including De Parade and Oerol. For his performance in *Marvellous*, he received a nomination for a Musical Award for Best Leading Actor. Most recently, he appeared in *COCK* by Theater Oostpool and in *The Grandiose Death of Siegfried and Roy* at De Parade festival.

SEBASTIÁN MRKVICKA

YOUNGER LENNART

Sebastián Mrkvicka studied at the ArtEZ School of Acting in Arnhem, the Netherlands, and has since become a familiar face both on stage and on screen. He plays one of the leading roles in the popular television series *Dertigers*. The third season, set to air in the summer of 2026, will feature Sebastián. In addition to his television work, Sebastián has proven himself in theatre.

He has performed with companies such as Toneelgroep Oostpool and Theatergroep Golden Palace, and appeared in the graduation production *Suicide Sisters* by directing student Eva Van Kleef (Maastricht Theatre Academy). He also created and performed his comedic graduation show *De Les*, which was staged at venues including Frascati. His performance piece *No Party At My Place* was presented at the Over het IJ Festival, and his role in *Filter* by Theater Oostpool was praised by Theaterkrant: “His generous and engaging performance immediately wins the audience’s sympathy.” On television, Sebastián has appeared in series such as *Flikken Maastricht*, *SpangaS* (in which he played Jurriaan for 15 episodes), *Follow de SOA*, *Dirty Lines* (Netflix), and *Moordvrouw*. In 2025, he appeared in *Haantjes* (Netflix) and *Mocro’s* by Shariff Nasr. In 2026, besides of appearing in *Downtown* by Michiel van Erp, Sebastian has also joined DOX, where he continues to develop his own performance *The Desire Club*.



ROELAND FERNHOUT

OLDER BAS

Roeland Fernhout is a popular stage and screen actor. He starred in series such as Anoniem (2023–2026, NPO), Take the Money and Run (2026, ZDF), De F*ckulteit (2025, Videoland), Een van ons (directed by Michiel van Erp, 2024, CANAL+), Costa!! De Serie (2024, Netflix), Childhood Dreams (2023, NPO), Five Live (2022, SBS6), Commando's (2020, NPO), Killing Eve (2019, BBC One), Women of the Night (2019, NPO), Meisje van Plezier (2017–2020, RTL/Videoland), Zwarte Tulp (2015–2016, RTL), Floor Faber (2009, NET5) and All Stars (1999–2000, NPO). He starred in the films Costa!! (2022), The Photo Camera (2022), My Best Friend Anne Frank (2021), A Certain Kind of Silence (2019), Brasserie Valentijn (2016), The Admiral (2015), Dummie the Mummie (2014, 2015, 2017), Phileine Says Sorry (2003), Blind Date (1996), and Zusje (1995).

He has also performed in several theatre productions, including 40-45 (2025-2026), and was a member of the International Theatre Amsterdam (ITA) ensemble led by Ivo van Hove (1999 to 2015).

THOR BRAUN

YOUNGER BAS

Thor Braun is a Dutch actor and theatre maker whose career began in youth theatre before he established himself as one of the Netherlands' most recognizable young screen talents. He first gained national attention with leading roles in the feature films Het Geheim (2010) and the International Emmy Award-winning Rabarber (2014), followed by his acclaimed performance as Rikkie in De Boskamp's (2015). Over the past decade, Braun has built a diverse body of work across film and television. His credits include Welkom bij de Romeinen, De 12 van Oldenheim, The Missing (BBC One/Netflix), Zeven Kleine Criminelen, and the hit Dutch drama series Oogappels, in which he portrayed Chris Larooi from 2019 through the series' successful run recently. His film work includes De Belofte van Pisa (2019), for which he received a Dutch Academy Award nomination, and Mijn Vader Is Een Vliegtuig (2021). Alongside his screen career, Braun trained as an actor at ArtEZ School of Acting, where he further developed his artistic voice as both performer and creator. He has appeared in productions with Toneelgroep Oostpool and, in 2025, presented Jongens, his debut solo theatre performance and graduation project. Drawing on his own experiences and inspired by the work of filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, the production marked his emergence as a theatre maker with a distinctive personal and visual style. Working across film, television, and theatre, Thor Braun continues to expand his creative practice, combining a strong screen presence with an increasingly personal and innovative approach to performance-making.

KAAP HOLLAND

PRODUCER

Kaap Holland Studios is an independent, Amsterdam-based production studio founded by producer Maarten Swart, that produces films and (high-end) series. Kaap Holland Studios has a solid track record of genre, crossover and mainstream films and high-end series and works with experienced and emerging talents and showrunners who strive to create ambitious, urgent and challenging productions for a wide audience.

Kaap Holland Studios consists of the production companies and labels Kaap Holland Film, Kaap Holland Series, Dead Duck Productions, Huntu Productions, Marine Biologie, Red Herring, Saturnino & Kongo Productions, Stoked and Wonderboys Media and works closely together with renowned production companies Big Blue, Circe Films and Eleven Film.

Our work includes the (co)productions: Jackie (dir: Antoinette Beumer, met Holly Hunter, TIFF 2012), Het Diner (dir: Menno Meyjes, TIFF 2013), Dunkirk (dir: Christopher Nolan, winner of 3 Oscars and nominated for 8 Academy Awards in 2018), Le Fidèle (dir: Michaël Roskam, TIFF en Venice 2017), The Goldfinch (Dir: John Crowley, TIFF 2019), Burning Days (Dir:: Emin Alper, Cannes – Un Certain Regard 2022), Krazy House (Dir: Steffen Haars & Flip van der Kuil, Sundance 2024, with Nick Frost, Alicia Silverstone and Kevin Connolly), Baby (Dir: Marcelo Caetano, Cannes – Semaine de la Critique 2024), A Beautiful Imperfection (Dir: Michiel van Erp, with Dar Zuzovsky and Jonah Hauer-King) and Wander to Wonder (Dir: Nina Gantz, Oscar-nominee 2025 and BAFTA-winner 2025).

HET FAMILIE DRAMA | DE FAMILIE FILM & TV

PRODUCER

De Familie Film & TV is an award winning production company in the Netherlands, founded in 2005 by producer Monique Busman and director Michiel van Erp. Based in Amsterdam, the company produces drama series and fiction for theatrical release and television and is part of the EAVE network. In 2014, De Familie Film & TV released the Emmy Award and Prix Europe winning drama series Ramses and in 2018 we released their first feature film Open Seas (script Philip Huff & Marnie Blok, director Michiel van Erp), and in 2020 drama series I.M. (script Hugo Heijnen, director Michiel van Erp), which premiered at the Netherlands Film Festival. Seeds of Deceit premiered at the Sundance Film Festival 2020. The film Stromboli was coproduced with Levitate Film (2022, also directed by Michiel van Erp). Downtown will be the opening film of the Netherlands Film festival in 2026. Currently, the film Confettiregen is in production.

EYEWORKS BENELUX

COPRODUCER

Eyeworks Film & TV Drama (formerly MMG) was founded in 1981. Over the years, Eyeworks has grown into one of Belgium's leading independent producers of film and television drama. With acclaimed films such as The Alzheimer Case, Ben X, The Verdict, Marina, Don't Shoot, and Butterflies at Night, as well as hit drama series including Eigen Kweek, Cordon, Flikken, In Love with You, Red Light, The Twelve, Styx, Juliet, Chantal, and 1985, the production company has built an outstanding reputation across the Benelux region. Since 2014, Eyeworks has been part of Warner Bros. International Television Production, one of Warner Bros. Discovery's international production divisions, operating under a European management team based in London and focused on local productions across territories outside the United States. For more than 45 years, Eyeworks has continued to do what it does best: creating high-quality local productions, powered by Belgian creative talent and produced with Belgian expertise and resources.

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