

ARTFORUM

FILM

GOING DUTCH

On the 52nd International Film Festival Rotterdam
February 10, 2023 • Beatrice Loayza

...2023 marks the physical return of Rotterdam after two years of virtual festivities as well as extensive layoffs that hit many of its longtime programmers. The gloomy Dutch city felt extra gloomy this time around, but the feeling was not unfamiliar—it's that discrete malaise of modern-day arts institutions buoyed by a high price of admission, underpaid (and/or) volunteer workers running on fumes of passion, and the memory that it used to be different.

The titles of the combined short-to-mid-length programs radiated a similar distress. “9-5,” “Shared Spaces,” “Private Recollections,” “Centuries.” I was particularly taken by the three entries in “PoMoFoMo”—Postmodern Fear of Missing Out—a package loosely about the smallness of the individual in the face of monolithic and perpetually surveilling forces: Mateo Vega’s “Center, Ring, Mall,” an incantatory meditation on the false hopes embodied by once-revolutionary developments in urban infrastructure; **James J.A. Mercer and Yifan Jiang’s “Vacation,” a punchy animation in throwback Microsoft threads about a man who communes with the natural world only to discover that the animals work office jobs**, too; and the veteran Croatian experimentalist Boris Poljak’s “Horror Vacui,” which applies the Aristotelian maxim to contemporary militarization, presenting overlapping, detail-saturated images of tank parades and war tourism via extreme long lenses to lugubrious, miragelike effect...