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Introducing Iris

The latest feature from Finnish director of photography Robert Nordström, FSC, FSF (*Jälkilämpö*, *The Year of the Wolf*) is *Iris*, a hauntingly beautiful and unusual coming-of-age tale. Set in 1890, Iris's artist mother leaves Stockholm for the summer and sends her 9-year old daughter to stay with an uncle in the Finnish archipelago. Restricted by the conventions of upper class Swedish society, the girl learns to play with other children and discovers the joys of friendship in the remote Åland Islands.

Nordström chose as visual references the evocative late 19th century paintings of Danish artist P.S. Krøyer and his Finnish contemporary, Albert Edelfelt. While Krøyer painted upper class people strolling on white sandy beaches against the bluest of skies and seas, Edelfelt's work, with its very saturated greys and browns, features poor people in the Finnish archipelago. The film reflects the two widely different looks.

Nordström and director Ulrika Bengts (*Innan det vita, Avsked*) knew each other well and relied on long phone conversations during pre-production. "I was in Sweden and she was in Finland, so I mailed her storyboards, which we discussed. Where the story-telling had great input or was technically difficult I prepared exact storyboards, but in the dialogue scenes with the children, where we needed to build up energy, we talked through our options," he says.

Despite budgeting for RED for the 40-day shoot, Nordström convinced producer Mats Långbacka that for practical and aesthetic reasons *Iris* could not be shot on any format but film. "We knew that capturing dialogue scenes of children in small sailing boats in the strong summer sun, with dazzling reflections on the water and flapping sails, would prove challenging enough," notes Nordström, who shot from a small ferry boat. "In the archipelago the lighting emanates from a large area and the reflections at sea act like a big bouncer. The weather there changes so rapidly that we would need to capture sunny and



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cloudy versions of scenes; a difficult way to work," he explains. "One day we were shooting at sea in very high humidity when it started pouring. I had a rain cover for the camera and a rain deflector, but nothing else. We got soaked, yet the shots are beautiful. I can almost promise that a digital camera would not have worked in those conditions. I also felt that with digital the picture would have been too clear and plastic-looking. Mats understood my arguments very quickly. He knew I felt free with film and gave me the latitude to go with it."

Nordström used slightly wider lenses on the ARRI LT in the bright summer daylight ambience of Stockholm. But when *Iris* first arrives in the archipelago he switched to longer lenses for a slightly crowded feeling. He exposed much of the film at T4 and utilised the softer Cooke S4 series of prime lenses and an Optimo zoom. "I wasn't looking for crisp skies and I didn't want polarising filters that would increase exposures. I needed a feeling of warmth and heat," he says.

"I wanted a very natural organic look for *Iris* and had no intention of lighting exteriors. If necessary, I used boat sails or white surfaces to bounce light. I exposed KODAK VISION2 50D Color Negative Film 5201 very much for the shadows and let the highlights go, knowing that I'd capture everything I needed. I mixed artificial light with the KODAK VISION3 250D Color Negative Film 5207 because it seemed more natural to me that the look went towards warm rather than blue, and it handled the situations very well. If I had to choose just one stock, this would be it!" declares Nordström. He also used KODAK VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219 for flexibility in the dark, low light interiors.

Iris will be released in Scandinavia in September.