

## **Gilles Laurent, a Filmmaker With an Eye for Sounds, Dies in Brussels Attacks**

By DAN BILEFSKY – MARCH 31, 2016



Gilles Laurent

LONDON — Gilles Laurent, 46, a Belgian sound engineer and documentary filmmaker, had such an intimate connection with the noises of everyday life that his collaborators say he “looked” at sounds as if observing an object, a color or a shape.

“He not only had an ear but heard and looked at sounds like a Buddhist would,” said Tom Heene, a filmmaker and friend from Brussels.

Alex Davidson, his longtime film collaborator, said Mr. Laurent had a humanistic but unsentimental approach to filmmaking that reflected his personality. Whether working on a Mexican art house film or documenting survivors of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Mr. Laurent preferred for the sounds in his films to enhance a moment rather than overwhelm a scene.

Mr. Davidson recalled a crucial scene in *Le Chambre de Damien*, a documentary about a 20-year-old Slovenian convict who was released from prison after killing a homeless man and was then reunited with his mother. Rather than filming the meeting in the room where the two were reunited, he said, Mr. Laurent instinctively knew the emotional impact would be stronger if the conversation was recorded from the hallway outside to emphasize the emotional power of their words.

“He realized that by not inserting himself in the scene it would be more powerful,” Mr. Davidson said, describing his friend as a “stubborn visionary.” Mr. Laurent was far more at home working on small art-house projects than on big commercial projects, he said.

Mr. Laurent was living in Tokyo with his wife, Raiko, when he went to Brussels to put the final touches on the documentary film, “*The Abandoned Earth*,” his directorial debut.

He was on his way to watch a final edit of the film when he was killed during the attack at Maelbeek subway station on March 22, Mr. Davidson said.

The film centers on Tomioka, a village of 15,000 people, living in the shadow of the Fukushima nuclear reactor. Most of the town’s residents decided to leave the irradiated area. The quiet but obstinate determination of a man who has decided to stay behind forms the center of Mr. Laurent’s film.

An understated approach was typical of Mr. Laurent, who was drawn to Buddhism, and woke up every morning at 6 a.m. to meditate, practice taekwondo — he was a master — and study Japanese. Friends say he was devoted to his two young daughters, Suzu and Lili, and to his wife. She sang a haunting Buddhist prayer in Japanese at a small Catholic service on Thursday at a church in Bouillon, a serene municipality with a medieval castle in the south of Belgium where Mr. Laurent was born and raised. Friends also played and sang a rock ballad.

Friends said Mr. Laurent had escaped the rural confines of Bouillon and attended film school in Brussels in his 30s, after traveling and working as a bartender. A restless bon vivant, he traveled across South America, lived in Spain and had been a sound editor on projects that included modern dance recitals and a documentary about cartoonists from around the world. He had lived in Tokyo for three years.

“He was supposed to be a simple guy from the deep south of Belgium, where you don’t have much of a future unless you open your mind,” Mr. Heene said.

Mr. Davidson said Mr. Laurent would have liked to be remembered as “a good guy to have a beer with.” He added, “A Belgian beer.”