

Belfilms Presents:



A Film Unfinished

A film by Yael Hersonski

Editor
Joëlle Alexis

Director of Photography
Itai Neeman

Music
Ishai Adar

Sound Design
Aviv Aldema

Producers
Noemi Schory & Itay Ken-Tor

A production of :
Belfilms Ltd

In cooperation with:



World sales: www.cinephil.co.il

A Film Unfinished

A documentary film by Yael Hersonski

Producers: Noemi Schory & Itay Ken-Tor, Belfilms Ltd.

89', English, Hebrew, German, Polish, Yiddish with English subtitles, Israel 2010



"History decomposes into images, not into narratives." (Walter Benjamin)

A film about an unfinished film which portrays the people behind and before the camera in the Warsaw Ghetto, exposing the extent of the cinematic manipulation forever changing the way we look at historic images.

Screenings in Berlin

Monday 15.02 CineStar 7 14:30 (European Premiere)

Tuesday 16.02 MGB Kinosaal 09:00 (Market Screening)

Tuesday 16.02 CineStar 7 12:00

Wednesday 17.02.10 Colosseum 1 15:30

Synopsis

This film is the quest for the truth behind one of the most mysterious Nazi propaganda films ever shot in the Warsaw Ghetto. The film, which was shot just a short time before the deportation of the inhabitants of the ghetto, is a rough first draft of a silent film that juxtaposes meticulously staged scenes of Jews enjoying a life of luxury in the ghetto with other, chilling images that required no staging at all.

Ironically, after the war, filmmakers and museums used images from the film as objective illustrations of the narratives they had collected from witnesses and written documents. Few people were aware of the cynical manner in which these images were created and the true, yet inconceivable witness they bear. The cinematic deception was forgotten and the black and white images remain engraved in memory as historical truth. Documents revealing who initiated the project and why it was never completed have yet to be found.

The film interweaves diary entries written by ghetto inhabitants during the filming, the testimonies of a few living survivors and the protocol of the interrogation of one of the German cameramen testifying about the filming.

By juxtaposing the filmed scenes with this behind the scenes testimony, this film reveals how the Nazis used the Ghetto as a film-set, the inhabitants as actors, and the decaying bodies as exhibits.

A Film Unfinished shakes our confidence in the photographic image and the way we think we know our history.

Background

The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest of the Jewish ghettos during World War II. The population was estimated to be 440,000 people. Thousands of Polish Jews as well as some Roma from the countryside were continuously brought into the Ghetto. Typhus, starvation, and random killings kept the number of inhabitants more or less constant.

Average food rations in 1941 for Jews in Warsaw were limited to only 184 kcal per day. Thus over 100,000 of the Ghetto's residents died even before the Nazis began massive deportations of the inhabitants from the Ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp. Between July 23 and September 1942, about 254,000 of the Ghetto residents were sent to Treblinka and murdered there.



The Director's Statement

The Holocaust confronted humanity not only with inconceivable horrors but also, for the first time, with their systematic documentation. More than anything else, it is the photographic documentation of these horrors that has changed forever the way in which the past is archived. Atrocities committed by the Nazis were photographed more extensively than any evils, before or after. Yet since the war, these images, created by the perpetrators, have been subjected to mistreatments: in the best of cases they were crudely used as illustrations of the many stories; in the worst, they were presented as straightforward historical truth.

With the prospect in mind of a time when no survivor will be left to remember the events, I tried in this film to examine the silent footage, which alone will remain; to critically inspect the potential of the photographic image to bear witness as well as the limits of its ability to do so.

In what ways can archival footage filmed by the perpetrators testify to the suffering of the victims? And in the case of Nazi propaganda footage, where does cinematic manipulation end and reality begin?

For me, it begins with the victim's gaze into the camera. That gaze contains what is perhaps the only emotional truth not crushed under the wheels of propaganda, the only truth that cannot be possessed and that remains forever, as if to testify: "I was there, I existed in this world that words cannot describe".

I wanted to expose the message enfolded in this captured gaze, but at the same time also to question the twenty-first-century viewer's perception of the past, to undermine his confidence in his knowledge of history and reinforce his emotional ability to see beyond the layers of time.

Yael Hersonski

Yael Hersonski, Director

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Yael Hersonski has been working as a freelance director and editor since graduating with high honors from the Sam Spiegel Film & Television School seven years ago. After serving as the content editor of the chief weekly documentary program of Channel 10 (an Israeli commercial television station), which won the Israeli Academy Award for the best documentary television program in 2004, she currently edits documentary and fictional drama programs for Israeli television. A Film Unfinished is her first feature documentary film.

Born in Israel, 1976

Education:

- 1998-2003 Film studies at the Sam Spiegel Film & Television School, Jerusalem
- 1996-1998 Philosophy studies at Tel-Aviv University

Films:

- 2009 Director of A Film Unfinished, a feature-length documentary film.



Noemi Schory & Itay Ken-Tor, Producers

Noemi Schory, documentary film director and producer, founded Belfilms in 1988 as an independent production house, active in Israeli and many international co-productions, primarily in the documentary field.

In 2005 was elected president of Input, the international public television conference.

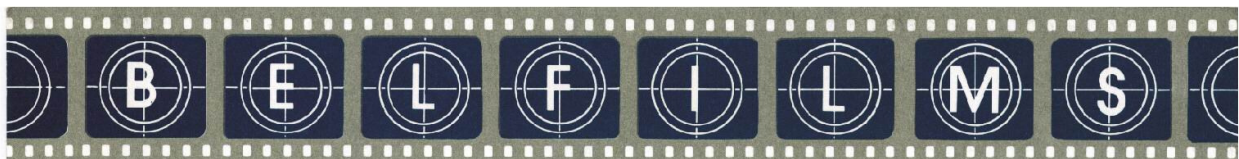
Itay Ken-Tor, graduate of the Tel Aviv university department of film & television, is a documentary film director and producer. Since 2000 he has been working at Belfilms as director and producer of documentary series as well as single feature documentaries. In the last 3 years has been managing Belfilms.

BELFILMS LTD.

A film and television Production House based in Tel Aviv, Israel founded in 1984 by Katriel and Noemi Schory and managed by Itay Ken-Tor.

BELFILMS Is one of the leading production houses in Israel, producing for Israeli and foreign broadcasters amongst them are the BBC, Arte, ZDF, SBS, TV2, YLE, VPRO and more.

BELFILMS' is the only Israeli company selected for the world's top 100 influential production houses list of the RealScreen magazine 2006.



Belfilms Productions

"Life in an Enclave", Israel, 2009, documentary, 3x 52 min.

Portraits and dilemmas of the Ultra-orthodox society in Israel.

Directed by **Ron Ofer & Yohai Hakak**

Produced for Keshet, Channel 2

Best TV Documentary, Religion Today festival, Trento

"Paris Retour", Israel, 2009, documentary, 70 min., An intimate portrait of affection surviving old age, looking with fear at the years ahead.

Directed by **Yossi Aviram**

Produced for Yes Docu, ZDF/ARTE, ERT

"Voices from El -Sayed", Israel, 2008, documentary, 73 min.

The story of the largest deaf community in the world in a Bedouin village in southern Israel.

Directed by **Oded (Adumi) Leshem**

Produced for the 2nd Authority for Television and Radio

The Guggenheim Emerging Artist Award, Full Frame Festival 2009

"Jerusalem Cuts", Israel, 2008, documentary, 52 min.

3 different narratives of Jerusalem in 1948 as reflected in the images of a Palestinian photographer, an Israeli feature film and a British- American photo-journalist.

Directed by **Liran Atzmor**

Co-produced with BBC, ZDF/ARTE and Channel 8

Yad Vashem, Israel, 2005, 93 short films for the new Historic Museum of Yad Vashem.

"The Era of the Generals", Israel, 2003, 5X52 min.

Documentary series about Israeli leaders which examines the impact of military thinking and training on civilian leadership.

Directed by **Paul Jenkins, Ruth Walk and Itay Ken-Tor**

Produced for BBC, ARTE, TV2(Denmark), YLE (Finland), VPRO (Holland), VRT (Belgium), SBS (Australia), History Channel (Canada) and Channel 8 (Israel)

"The Settlers", (Tel Rumeida), Israel, 2002, documentary, 56 min.

Daily life in one of the most isolated and extreme settlements in the occupied territories,

Directed by **Ruth Walk**

Co-produced with BBC, Arte, TV Ontario, the Soros Fund and the New Documentary Fund,
Israel

Festivals: Berlin 2002, Docaviv, Director's award- Marseille 2003

"The Inner Tour", Israel, 2001, documentary, 98 min.

A group of Palestinians in a bus touring Israel, places burdened by their memories, a tour in the present, a tour into the past, showing Israelis an alternative narrative of history.

Directed by **Ra'anan Alexandrowicz**

Co-produced with DAR productions, Ramalla for Arte, BBC, VPRO, SVT and Telad, 2nd channel, Israel, the Soros Fund and the New Fund for documentaries, Israel

Festivals: Berlin (2001), Sundance (2001), Docaviv Special Mention award

"Luciano Berio", Israel, 2000, documentary, 58 min.

Musical biography of composer Luciano Berio, culminating in his last operatic work "Cronaca del Luogo".

Directed by **Reuven Hecker**

Co-produced with ARTE, ORF, NOGA, the Documentary Channel Israel

Festivals: FIPA 2000.

A Film Unfinished

Main Credits

Director:	Yael Hersonski
Producers:	Noemi Schory, Itay Ken-Tor
Editor:	Joëlle Alexis
Director of Photography:	Itai Neeman
Music:	Ishai Adar
Sound Design:	Aviv Aldema
A production of:	Belfilms Ltd
Co-produced with:	MDR, SWR, Yes Docu
In cooperation with:	Arte
Supported by:	The New Israeli Foundation for Cinema and Television, Yad Vashem Film Project, YES Docu. Developed with the assistance of Greenhouse
World sales:	Cinephil, www.cinephil.co.il



Festival & Awards:

World Premiere: Sundance Film Festival 2010 (World Doc Competition) – Winner Editing Award

European Premiere: Berlin Film Festival 2010 (Panorama)



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By John DeFore, January 26

Bottom Line: Harrowing Nazi footage of the Warsaw ghetto is made to reveal more than its makers intended in this historically invaluable doc.

PARK CITY -- Built around a remarkable document and providing just enough supplementary material to bring it to life, "A Film Unfinished" is tough viewing but has clear value. Whether it can sustain much of a theatrical run or not, the doc could become a staple of Holocaust studies on video.

The eponymous film (which director Yael Hersonski says has never been presented in its entirety) is a work of propaganda shot in the Warsaw ghetto by SS cameramen. Lacking voiceover narration or titles, its exact intentions are unclear, but the film's juxtaposition of starving Jews with privileged ones seems intended to present the ghetto's inhabitants as an inhumane community deserving of extermination.

Combing through the journals of a ghetto social leader, the testimony of a Nazi cameraman, and newly discovered outtakes from the film, Hersonski reveals the extent to which these scenes were fabricated, with residents forced to put on a show to back up the official narrative.

Manufactured or not, the footage affords a rare look at the life of Jews who would within months be sent to camps like Treblinka; wrenching images of the starving, the filthy, and the dead underline what we already know, while scenes like one of children who have been caught smuggling food bring the period to life in fresh, heartbreaking ways. Hersonski enriches this evidence by bringing in survivors of the ghetto, who tell stories of life there while watching the film themselves.

The found footage becomes more horrific as it progresses, and by the time we see skeletal men being forced to bathe beside well-fed women, many viewers will be desperate for the doc to end. Unbelievably, "A Film Unfinished" still has one tool left: a few minutes of color footage, evidently shot by a cameraman on his own time away from the official production, that make what we've been seeing even more immediate while simultaneously giving evidence of the manipulation behind its manufacture.