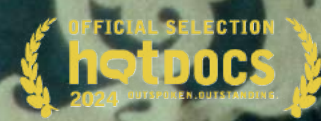


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THESSALONIKI
INTERNATIONAL
DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2024
TIDF26

FILMGERBEREI GMBH PRESENTS

IMMORTALS

A DOCUMENTARY BY MAJA TSCHUMI

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PREAMBLE

IMMORTALS gives us a rare and cinematic insight into the life of the young generation living in Baghdad these days.

After the end of the war against IS, Iraq became a dark spot on the map and a pawn in the fight between Iran and the USA.

Little is known about the country with 60 per cent of its population under the age of 25.

The film accompanies a war-torn generation raising their voices and following their dreams and goals.

IMMORTALS was co-written by the main protagonists, allowing them to tell their own story.



FILM FACTS

LENGTH 94 minutes
COMPLETION January 2024
PRODUCTION COUNTRIES Switzerland & Iraq
SHOOTING Iraq
PRODUCTION Filmgerberei GmbH
CO-PRODUCTION Rola Productions & Swiss National Television
LANGUAGE Arabic
SUBTITLES (SRT AVAILABLE) German, English, Greek
FILM CATEGORY Documentary
CAMERA RED Helium
SHOOTING FORMAT Digital 2K
SCREENING FORMAT DCP 2K / Scope / ProRes / MP4
WEBSITE & TRAILER Immortals-documentary.com





LOGLINE

IMMORTALS is an insight into the hopes and broken dreams of a new generation that has known nothing but war since the U.S.-led occupation.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Milo, a strong-willed feminist, discovers the long-sought power to wander around freely in Baghdad by dressing in her brother's clothes. Khalili, a young and ambitious filmmaker, realizes that his camera would be the strongest of all weapons. In the aftermath of the 2019 revolution, Milo and Khalili are the faces, the eyes, and the voices of an Iraqi youth that is relentlessly fighting for a better future. IMMORTALS is an insight into the hopes and broken dreams of a new generation that has known nothing but war since the U.S.-led occupation.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Milo is a rebel, a feminist from Baghdad. She sneaks out of her house every day in her brother's clothes. Pretending to be a boy allows her to experience a freedom she does not have as the daughter of a conservative family. When her father finds out she is taking part in the large protests that rocked Iraq in 2019, he locks her up. But Milo doesn't give up. She continues to fight for her freedom and that of other women in Iraq. A dangerous game that eventually forces Milo to make a brave decision.

Khalili is a filmmaker and a fighter. During the „October Revolution“ he was ready to sacrifice his life for a new Iraq. He filmed everything with a Go-Pro

camera, giving us exclusive insight into the protests, putting his life in extreme danger. Traumatized by the bloody crackdown, Khalili now longs for stability. He decides to start a new chapter and gets engaged. When conflicts between two fractions of the government arise again, he has to choose between his family and his camera.

In three chapters, IMMORTALS follows the protagonists in the aftermath of the “October Revolution”. Milo and Khalili reflect two sides of a gender-segregated society, giving us extraordinary access to an unknown and hopeful side of Iraq: its youth.



CAST & CREW

MILO Melak Mahdi
KHALILI Mohammed Al Khalili
AVIN Avin

WRITER & DIRECTOR Maja Tschumi
CO-WRITERS Melak Mahdi & Mohammed Al Khalili
PRODUCERS Nadine Lüchinger
IRAQI PRODUCER Mohammed Alghadhban
CAMERA Silvio Gerber
OCTOBER REVOLUTION FOOTAGE Mohammed Al Khalili
SOUND Kurt Human
EDITOR Alex Bakri
SOUND DESIGN Kurt Human & Julian Joseph
MUSIC Manouk Roussyalian
COLOR GRADING Jürgen Kupka

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Genesis I have been politically active since I was 18 years. In Berlin in 2019, I met A., an activist from Baghdad, where the so-called “October Revolution” reached its peak. At that time, I was working on my film ROTZLOCH about refugees from the Middle East in Switzerland and became more interested in that region. When I heard about the uprising in Iraq, I was inspired by the youth’s incredible courage to fight for a better future despite overwhelming violence by the ruling elites. A. and I decided to work on a film together, shedding light on a youth that is often overlooked by the rest of the world. For safety and personal reasons, A. had to withdraw from the project after a few months. Yet, by this time, I had already met Khalili, who had entrusted me with his film material from the “October Revolution” and introduced me to the Iraqi film producer Mohammed Alghadhban. I decided to continue the project. As a foreign filmmaker, I felt the duty to continue documenting the realities of modern-day Iraq and share the stories of the people I had met.





Who tells the story and how? I discussed this question with everyone involved from the beginning. Documentaries are based on trust between filmmakers and protagonists, and on the fact that compassion and understanding are possible. In the case of *IMMORTALS*, it is crucial that I reflect on my privileged position and the responsibility that comes with it, including geopolitical relations and Orientalism.

To me, the Iraqis are the experts of their own stories, whereas I see my role as a translator for a Western audience. I always looked for ways to keep the protagonists' own voices represented in the film. For me, this film is a collaboration and learning process, a dialogue between West and East.

Khalili met this criterion as he had filmed himself during the uprising. He urgently wished to entrust his footage to a foreign filmmaker to tell his story without any censorship and ensure global reach.

Including a woman's voice was very important to me. Women in a gender-segregated society, such as Iraq's, face completely other problems than men. It was not easy to find a female protagonist due to issues that arise when women appear in public. Milo was eager to participate despite the risk and contributed ideas from the onset of our collaboration. When I met her, she was confronted with increasing threats and had already decided to leave Iraq.

From day one, I have been in a daily exchange with Milo and Khalili. I made several research trips and was able to build extraordinary trust in the protagonists and the Iraqi crew. Our Iraqi co-producer became my sparring partner. He educated me on security-related red lines and opened many doors for me. I spent long discussions with Iraqi filmmakers, artists, journalists, and activists looking for ways to tell the story of the “October Revolution” without crossing red lines that would endanger the Iraqi crew.

Milo and Khalili have the role of co-authors of the film. They should remain in control over how the film depicts them. Throughout the whole process, it was important to me that Iraqi and Arabic people outnumbered the Swiss in our crew. Working with the Germany-based Arabic editor Alex Bakri should further counteract a Western bias.

Re-enactment We decided against clandestine filming to keep everyone safe. This constraint impacted the storytelling, leading us to a subjective hybrid narrative form (re-enactment). The protagonists became heavily involved in building the storyline and character development. The re-created scenes were shot along dramaturgical arcs but display events or dialogues that had taken place in this way.

Artistic vision The film’s backbone is Milo’s and Khalili’s life now. As in a flashback, we delve into Khalili’s footage of the revolution and learn how this uprising profoundly changed the protagonists’ lives and shaped an entire generation.

Milo and Khalili are two very different protagonists who mirror and complement each other. Structured in three chapters, the film thoughtfully expresses this individuality through distinct cinematic narratives.

To me, there is something anachronistic about Baghdad. The wars threw the city back in time. Yet, the youth is virtually connected to the modern world. I wanted to express this tension in the film’s language. I elaborated an appropriate visual concept that combines Khalili’s digital images of the youth protests with analogue-looking images of Iraq today.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 2003, a US-led coalition invaded Iraq and introduced a political and economic system based on sectarian quotas. Social tensions erupted into bloody sectarian conflicts. After US troops were withdrawn from Iraq in 2011, the country continued to face sectarian insurgencies. In 2014, ISIS conquered a third of Iraqi territory. However, after four years of war, ISIS was defeated.

In October 2019, the largest popular protests since 2003 broke out, particularly in the Southern provinces. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets across the country - including an unprecedented number of women. The youth-led grassroots movement sought to tackle the crisis of the political system on the streets. Political debates that had been carried out in the back rooms of the regime were now being discussed in public. The protesters demanded bread, freedom, and social justice, as well as the overthrow of the entire post-2003 regime. A young generation seemed to be standing up requesting its long-promised civil rights. Their demand: "We want a homeland!".

Tent cities were erected on squares. The most significant being the one on Baghdad's Tahrir Square,

reflecting a new vision of Iraq: non-violent forms of protest, gender equality, freedom of expression, art, and the rejection of corruption, political sectarianism, and the influence of foreign powers and religion were all commonplace.

Iraq is truly a country of teenagers: the average age is 21; nearly 50% of Iraq's population is under 18 and has little in the way of prospects for the future.

The ruling elites responded with extreme violence. 782 people were killed and 33,000 injured. Nevertheless, the "October Revolution" achieved massive successes: the Prime Minister resigned, early elections were called, and a new electoral law was passed, making room for new voices in parliament.

However, established political forces and organizations managed to usurp the "October Revolution". The candidates of the "October movement" were unable to prevail against established politicians in the elections of October 2021. A power struggle within the Iraqi regime continued, with a pro-Iranian coalition forming a new government in 2022 after violent clashes.

PROTAGONISTS

MILO

Milo has a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Baghdad. During her studies, she worked as a social worker and photographer and was involved in various civic projects. As a volunteer for women's organizations, she offered computer courses, psychological support for victims of abuse and violence, and was active in various self-organized feminist groups. She is a passionate painter.



KHALILI

Khalili graduated from the University of Baghdad with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in film. Following his graduation, he worked as a cameraman in the commercial sector until the "October Revolution" broke out, and he devoted all his energies to the political struggle. Today, he works as a video content manager for Toyota in Baghdad.



PRODUCER'S NOTE

Production practices Regarding security, IMMORTALS is a very sensitive film. Activists, women, and dissidents are especially vulnerable in Iraq. To assess the volatile security situation, we built a solid network of local confidants during Maja Tschumi's three research trips. Our Iraqi co-producer and sparring partner educated us on security-related red lines and opened many doors throughout the production. Maja's network of local journalists, filmmakers, and activists assisted her with fact-checking.

All contributors signed off on the final film and confirmed they feel safe. All have consented in writing to the unrestricted distribution of this film. Meanwhile, Milo and Avin have managed to leave the country and have applied for asylum. As human beings and filmmakers, it is our - Maja Tschumi's and the production team's - joint ethical and moral responsibility to assist them in this process.

Our mission IMMORTALS portrays the voice of a young generation. Iraq is a country where half of the population are teenagers. Even though the young Iraqis' struggles seem different from those of our youngsters, there are many parallels, such as their virtual communities, pop culture, and the quest for happiness and independence. We firmly believe we need to emphasize similarities; they lead to understanding instead of separation and fear. The footage reveals impressive and surprising images of the Iraqi youth culture, a world from the inside hardly known by Western audiences.

Today, memories of the „October Revolution“ are increasingly fading, the space for dissidents is narrowing, and young people are having to come to terms with their shattered dreams. For this reason, and twenty years after the U.S.-led occupation, it is urgent to strengthen the voices of young Iraqis and bring them to the world.

BIOGRAPHY

MAJA TSCHUMI

Maja was born in 1983 in Switzerland. She lives and works in Zurich and Berlin. She is known for her intimate portraits of outsiders rebelling against various forms of psychological, social, and political oppression. Maja holds a master's degree in Philosophy and Literature from the University of Zurich (2013). She worked as a playwright and theater critic for various renowned Swiss theaters and completed a master's degree in film directing at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne (2023). She released her first feature film, ROTZLOCH, in 2022.





FILMOGRAPHY MAJA TSCHUMI

2022 ROTZLOCH

Feature-length documentary |
96min | Distant Lights Filmproduk-
tion | Author & Director

2019 DER GEBANNT KRIEG

Short documentary film | 9min |
Academy of Media Arts Cologne
(KHM) | Author & Director
& Editor

2018 REGIMES

Short documentary film |
20min | Filmgerberei GmbH |
Director

2016 DER HEXER

Short documentary
film | 22min | Filmgerberei
GmbH / Author & Director

FILMOGRAPHY

FILMGERBEREI

Filmgerberei GmbH is a film production company in Switzerland, founded by the brothers Flavio and Silvio Gerber in 2008. We produce documentaries for cinema and TV, feature films, short films as well as commercials and corporate films. Nadine Lüchinger joined the team in 2014 as a producer. Since then, we

have been continuously expanding our department for independent film production. We cultivate a culture of inspiration and shared growth and encourage directors to develop their own creative style.

RELEASED (SELECTION)



2023

OUR CHILD

Short film, drama
Directed by Samuel Flückiger
Written by Philippe Grob & Samuel Flückiger, 17 Min, OV ch/georg/
eng, Co-Producer: SRG SRF (Swiss National Television)
World Sales: Quat Media
Award: Winner of LA Shorts Screenplay competition



2022

EVERYTHING ABOUT MARTIN SUTER. EVERYTHING BUT THE TRUTH.

Feature/TV-Documentary
Author & director: André Schäfer, 52/90 Min,
OV ch-de/de,
Co-Producer: Florianfilm (DE), SRG SRF (Swiss National Television)
World Sales: DCM Distribution
WORLD PREMIERE: LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL



2021

ROGER FEDERER - THE REUNION

TV-Documentary
Written & directed by Flavio Gerber, Alun Meyerhans
52 Min, OV eng
World Rights: Rise and Shine



2020

ALA KACHUU

Medium Length Film, Drama
Author & director: Maria Brendle
Director's Cut: 48 Min, Festival Cut: 38 Min, Digital 4K, DCP
OV kirg, ST de/en/fr/it
AWARDS (SELECTION): OSCAR® NOMINATION 2022, AUDIENCE CHOICE AWARD BEST SHORT FILM AT CLEVELAND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, MARLYN MASON AWARD AT FLICKERS RHODE ISLAND IFF, BEST LIVE ACTION SHORT FILM AT PITTSBURGH SHORTS AND A LOT MORE.



2020

METTA DA FEIN

Webseries, Black Comedy
On behalf of RTR
Author & director: Carlo Beer & Urs Berlinger
Co-Author: Alexander Seibt
4 x 22 Min, OV Rhaeto-Romanic, ST de/fr/it



2019

EXISTE!

Short Fantasy
Author & director: Luca Zuberbühler
9 Min, Digital 2K, DCP
OV fr, ST de/en
In Coproduction with LUCA School of Arts
AWARD: BEST FILM AT 5. BUCHAREST SHORTCUT CINEFEST



2018

RUDERN AM LIMIT

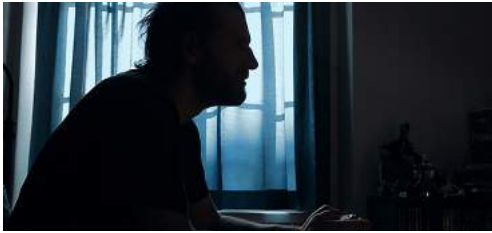
Documentary and Series
On behalf of: Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF)
Director: Chris Grüner
90 Min and 100 Min. (4x 25 Min TV Series), Digital 4K



2018

REGIMES

Short Doc
Author & director: Maja Tschumi
20 Min, Digital 4K, OV rus, UT de/en
In Coproduction with KHM
AWARD: KHM AWARD FOR STUDENT TALENTS 2018



2016

DER HEXER

Short Doc
Author & director: Maja Tschumi
22 Min, Digital 2K, DCP
OV ch-de, ST de/en/fr
AWARD: BEST DOCUMENTARY AT 47TH WOMEN MEDIA ARTS AND FILM FESTIVAL 2017



2016

DOUG & WALTER

Short Roadmovie
Author & director: Samuel Morris
25 Min, Digital 2K, DCP
OV ch-de/en, ST de/en
AWARDS: SHORT RUN PREIS (BEST SCRIPT) AT KURZFILMTAGE WINTERTHUR 2014, TOP 10, REGARD 20TH EDITION, 1. PRIZE CATEGORIE D, SCHWEIZER JUGENDFILMTAGE 2016, INTERNATIONAL SCRIPT AWARD BY FESANCOR 2016



2015

PUPPENSPIEL

Short Fantasy
Author & director: Ares Ceylan
18 Min, Digital 2K, DCP OV ch-de, ST de/en/fr,
On behalf of: SRF
AWARDS: OPENING FILM AT KURZFILMNACHT ZÜRICH 2016, BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN AT WARSCHAUER GRAND OFF 2016, CLUJSHORTS TROPHY 2017, BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY AWARD AM NICKEL FESTIVAL 2017



2013

SCHULANFANG, ACHTUNG KINDER!

Short horror comedy
Author & director: Ares Ceylan
15 Min, Digital 2K, DCP
OV ch-de, ST de/en/fr
AWARDS: BASLER FILMPREIS ZOOM BESTER KURZFILM 2013, PUBLIKUMSPREIS & 2. JURY PREIS JUGENDFILMTAGE 2013, 2. JURY PREIS A BERTOIR WALES INT. HORROR FESTIVAL 2013







Production: Filmgerberei GmbH

Nadine Lüchinger
nl@filmgerberei.ch
+41 44 542 21 03

World Sales: CAT&Docs

Catherine Le Clef (CEO)
cat@catndocs.com
+33 1 44 61 77 48

Aleksandra Derewienko (Sales)
aleksandra@catndocs.com

Maëlle Guenegues (Festivals)
maelle@catndocs.com

WEBSITE & TRAILER immortals-documentary.com
FACEBOOK facebook.com/ImmortalsDoc
INSTAGRAM instagram.com/immortals.doc
TIKTOK [@immortals.doc](https://tiktok.com/@immortals.doc)
IMDB imdb.com/title/tt18298510