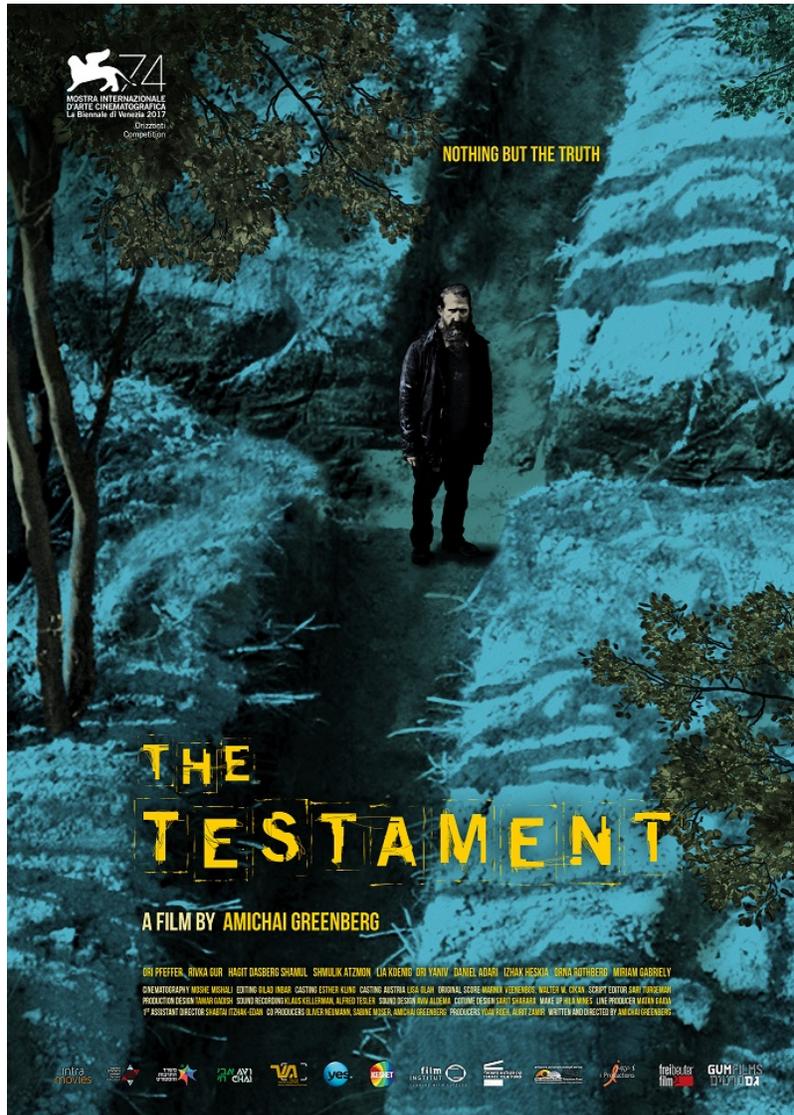


# The Testament

A Film by Amichai Greenberg



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Yoav Roeh, Aurit Zamir, Sabine Moser and Oliver Neumann  
present

# HA'EDUT (THE TESTAMENT)

a film by  
**Amichai Greenberg**

a production  
GUM FILMS

a Co-production  
FREIBEUTERFILM

with the support of  
ISRAEL FILM FUND  
JERUSALEM FILM FUND  
AUSTRIAN FILM INSTITUTE  
KESHET TV  
YES TV



## Cast

Yoel	Ori Pfeffer
Fania	Rivka Gur
Rina	Hagit Dasberg Shamul
Micky	Ori Yaniv
Miriam	Orna Rothberg
Yonatan	Daniel Adari
Yehoshua	Shmulik Atzmon
Sylvie	Iréna Flury
Rabbi	Izhak Heskia
Lea	Lia Koenig
Shoshana	Miriam Gabrieli
Austrian politician	Michaela Rosen
Austrian mayor	Michael Fuith
Mali	Irit Barak
Bodyguard	Helmuth Häusler
Archivist	Emanuel Cohen

## Crew

Director	Amichai Greenberg
Screenplay	Amichai Greenberg
Casting	Esther Kling, Lisa Oláh (Austria)
Photography	Moshe Mishali
Editing	Gilad Inbar
Original Music	Marnix Veenenbos, Walter W. Cikan
Soundtrack	Klaus Kellermann, Alfred Tesler
Sound design	Aviv Aldema
Production Design	Tamar Gadish
Line producer	Matan Gaida
First AD	Shabtai Itzhak-Eden
Costume design	Sarit Sharara
Make-up	Hila Mines
VFX	Gabriel Wagon
A production	GUM FILMS
A Co-production	FREIBEUTERFILM
Produced by	Yoav Roeh, Aurit Zamir
Co-produced by	Sabine Moser, Oliver Neumann
With the support of	ISRAEL FILM FUND JERUSALEM FILM FUND AUSTRIAN FILM INSTITUTE KESHET TV YES TV
Genre	Drama
Length	94'
Year	2017
Countries of production	Israel, Austria
Languages	Hebrew, German, English, Yiddish
World Sales	Intramovies
International Press	Alibi Communications

# **HA'EDUT**

Yoel, a meticulous historian leading a significant debate against holocaust deniers, discovers that his mother carries a false identity. A mystery about a man who is willing to risk everything to discover the truth.

## ***Brief Synopsis***

Yoel, an international expert in Holocaust research, has spent over fifteen years diligently studying the Nazi's methods of annihilating Jews in Austria and Hungary. In the course of his research he discovers, almost by chance, classified documents which hint to the fact that his mother is living under an assumed identity. The further he plunges into his research the more he doubts his mother's Jewish identity. A mystery about a man who is willing to risk everything to discover the truth.

## **Synopsis**

Yoel, an international expert in Holocaust research, has spent over fifteen years diligently studying the Nazi's methods of annihilating Jews in Austria and Hungary. Yoel is in the midst of a high profile legal battle between the institute of Holocaust he works for, and entities in Austria that want to bury an unpleasant incident from their past - the brutal murder of 200 Jews during a debauched party in the fields of the small town of Lendsdorf. Yoel has difficulty finding undeniable evidence of the location of the mass grave, the people of Lendsdorf deny it ever happened, the last witnesses are dead, and most of the evidence was destroyed by the Nazis. Since a family of well-known, wealthy German industrialists on whose land the massacre took place is working on a major real estate project in the town, Yoel begins to suspect that the reason for it is to "bury" the scandal for good. Yoel, confident that he's right, insists on bringing the truth to light and proving that the project is a clear case of Holocaust denial. He sees revealing the horrific historical truth as his mission in life.

Yoel is a religious man. To him, Judaism is an established fact which defines his identity. He's an intellectual, with an analytic mind who delves into the finest details of his research and refuses to let his emotions interfere with his study of the Holocaust. He insists that the fact that his mother and father are Holocaust survivors has no bearing on his professional conduct. In the course of his research he discovers, almost by chance, classified documents which hint to the fact that his mother is living under an assumed identity. Yoel is certain that this is a mistake, but the further he plunges into his research the more he doubts his mother's Jewish identity.

As a religious man this information tears his world apart since according to Jewish law, if his mother is a gentile, so is he. Yoel goes straight to the rabbinic authority to find out what to do. The rabbi looks over the information and rules that it's a case of doubt. He instructs him not to tell anyone, to stop digging into his mother's past and to go back to his normal life.

Yoel, who's conducting a double investigation - personal and scientific - is trapped between walls of silence. On one hand are the massive fields of Lendsdorf which conceal the bones of the murder victims and the villagers who are covering up the massacre, and on the other hand are his elderly mother's silence regarding her past.

Since he's used to standing on solid factual ground, this situation tears a black hole in his identity. His uncertainty disconcerts him, but as a person utterly dedicated to the truth he decides to carry on his mission to reveal the truth. The pressure on Yoel increases as he fails to find the evidence needed for his legal battle. At the same time, his greatest fear becomes fact. Yoel is faced with the greatest crisis of his life which threatens to break his spirit. Stripped of his sense of identity, Yoel turns out to have the strength, intellectual and emotional, to fight on all fronts simultaneously. It's a struggle for survival at the end of which he rediscovers himself in the most real and intimate way. The discovery that changes both his spiritual and scientific approach is that the essential truth of his identity as a person comes not from external, objective laws and facts but from his personal choices and the values to which he devotes his life.

## ***Director's note***

I was brought up with the understanding that being an observant Jew, and the son and grandson of Holocaust survivors, are the roots of my existence, the true essence of my identity, that is greater than me and life itself. As a child, I was enthralled by my grandparents' Holocaust stories. I grew up in the midst of heroic, "larger than life" stories, where only a narrow margin separates life and death. For me, they were the best adventure stories ever.

But my daily life was at contrast to this drama.

As a son of Holocaust survivors I grew up in a household devoid of emotion, where for me, something was always missing. Something elusive, which remained unnamed.

This giant chasm has left me mute. This script is my struggle to penetrate through the transparent walls of silence.

***Amichai Greenberg***

## ***The Director***

Amichai is a graduate of the Maale Film School in Jerusalem. His graduate film was screened and awarded at festivals worldwide. He has been writing, directing and producing for TV, film and new-media since graduation. His projects include local as well as international educational and commercial institutions such as TV channels 1, 2 & 10, video journal, ZDF, Mandel institute, Yad-Vashem and the Spielberg visual history foundation. The Testament is his first feature film.

## ***The Production***

**Gum Films** is a Tel Aviv based boutique production house. The company produced films and TV series, both fiction and documentary, that have presented successfully, and critically acclaimed, in Israel and worldwide. Gum Films founders, Yoav Roeh and Aurit Zamir, studied film at the Sam Spiegel Film school, and are in the art and business of making movies since for over past 10 years.

Among their films - "The Testament" by Amichai Greenberg (Venice FF official selection) / "Manpower" by Noam Kaplan (Cinemart, Cannes Atelier, Palm Springs FF) / "Off White Lies" by Maya Kenig (Berlinale, Busan FF, Palm Springs) "The Lab" by Yotam Feldman (Visions Du Reel, HotDocs, IDFA Forum, Dok Leipzig, DocAviv-best debut) / "The Cursed" by Hagai Levi ("In Treatment", "The Affair") and many more.

**FreibeuterFilm** was founded in 2007 by producer & editor Oliver Neumann, directors Sudabeh Mortezaei and Sebastian Meise, and producer and production manager Sabine Moser. FreibeuterFilm offers a platform for innovative, director-driven projects in the areas of creative documentaries and fiction film, focused on cinematic release. FreibeuterFilm values a creative atmosphere for production, one in which the filmmaker and his or her stories take center stage, and their work is encouraged by a flexible environment. Since its foundation FreibeuterFilm has produced 15 feature length fiction and documentary films which have succeeded internationally, e.g. in Berlin and Cannes, and won numerous prizes at renowned festivals.

## **Interview with Director Amichai Greenberg: “Life is complex, and the journey of creating this film has helped to heal me”**

We met up with Israeli debutant director Amichai Greenberg, whose film *The Testament* is taking part in the Orizzonti Competition of the 74th Venice International Film Festival, to discuss his inspiration, the power of memory and the importance of identity today.

*Cineuropa: What was the inspiration for The Testament?*

My inspiration for this story was silence – loaded silences. I was brought up in an emotional and existential void, and it took me years to be able to put it into words. The story I chose portrays a man stuck in between gaps. It portrays the silence of his mother as she hides her truth and the silence of the local villagers denying their history.

*Did you base your story on real events?*

The historical background of the film is inspired by the actual massacre of Rechnitz, in Austria. Most of the names and dates are accurate. The Austrian testimonials shown in the film are by actual villagers, whose names I've changed, and who were interviewed for the 1994 documentary *Totschweigen (A Wall of Silence)* by Eduard Erne and Margareta Heinrich, who were so kind as to allow me to use their footage. The substantial difference is that in reality, the mass grave was never found.

*Do you think the Holocaust is still a subject that affects people's memories?*

I guess it depends who you ask... For me, this isn't about intellectual memory, but rather a more visceral one – that memory that resides in your flesh and comes from things that you have never seen but that still affect you deeply. Events that you have never discussed, but you feel the void that they leave behind. As a matter of fact, most of the witnesses in the film forget, confuse or deny. And this is what we're left with.

*What led you to create a film that is closer to a thriller than a drama?*

I do not want to impose emotions, especially when the Holocaust is in the background. It is better to allow people to relate to the mystery and to choose, if they want, to be involved emotionally. My main aim was to create a real interest for the audience, and for the story to have an actual relevance in our contemporary life. I wanted to offer a fresh, new perspective on the importance of identity and how we have access to it, and to observe what remains when we lose it and have nothing left behind.

*Is the Jewish identity still considered so important nowadays?*

Jewish identity is a very charged and intense ingredient of Jewish life, even today. Nevertheless, in *The Testament*, I'm interested in asking how identity is relevant to all of us as humans, and what defines us as who we are. I also find this question extremely relevant to the Western world these days.

*How was your experience co-producing with Austria?*

I must say I was intrigued. The crew, the actors and the producers were extremely warm and kind, even though I'm sure the script wasn't easy for them to digest. I saw they were emotionally moved enough to participate in the movie, and that also moved me. On the other hand, as I was scouting locations in remote villages in Austria, I saw those memorial plaques for World War II Nazi soldiers with fresh flowers laid on them. It shocked me, especially knowing that my father, who was a seven-year-old kid back then, had been running for his life just a few kilometres away, 72 years prior. Life is complex, and I find the journey of creating this film has helped to heal me.

<http://www.cineuropa.org/it.aspx?t=interview&l=en&did=334136>

## ***The Testament* review: In search of the absolute truth**

*Israeli director Amichai Greenberg delivers a Holocaust-related, close-knit thriller that becomes more universal, as everyone needs to find out where the truth lies.*

Having forged a career spanning 15 years, in writing, directing and producing, mostly concentrating on TV productions in his homeland and abroad, Israel's Amichai Greenberg is no stranger to the festival circuit. Two years ago, his medium-length title *Vice Versa* travelled far and wide, attending many, mainly Jewish-focused, international film festivals. This year, his debut feature, *The Testament* [+], is taking part in the Orizzonti competition of the 74th Venice International Film Festival.

On the night of 24-25 March 1945, about 200 Jewish forced labourers were murdered in the fields of Lendsdorf, a village in Austria. Apparently, there were no witnesses to the massacre, and the exact location of their mass grave remains unknown. The local government wants to sweep it under the carpet by renovating the entire area. Yoel Halberstam (Ori Pfeffer) is a historian, a senior researcher at the Jerusalem Holocaust Institute and an Orthodox Jew. He is trying to delve further into this massacre and uncover all of the hidden evidence that no one is willing to divulge. During his meticulous research, he comes across a classified testimony made by his mother, which he did not previously know about. According to her testament, her identity is not the same as the one that everyone knows. Yoel must search for the truth, but at the same time, he is trapped in his own personal dilemma.

Starting from the premise of another film that deals with the issue of the Holocaust, Greenberg, who also wrote the screenplay, creates a close-knit thriller where drama is always overcome by mystery. His main hero, Yoel, is not a typical modern Jew, as his religion, his traditions and, more importantly, his family always come before his personal needs. He is a conservative man who theoretically can't accept any challenges in his life, but he is ready to sacrifice a part of himself, maybe the part that identifies him most strongly, just to serve the greater good and the truth. Indeed, the absolute truth forms the basis of his life. On a professional level, he focuses on finding the truth behind the facts, and his religion requires him to believe in one absolute, true God. Despite the consequences, he must either accept or reject this truth.

This perfect anti-hero is the core of *The Testament*; he is someone who sees everything around him collapsing, but he follows his path silently in order to remain faithful to his professional and religious integrity. It is a constant balance that he has to strike and maintain as the two worlds coexist and surround him. Jerusalem is modern, secular, austere, noisy and progressive, in line with the aesthetics and the people of the institute, but it is simultaneously claustrophobic, damaged, conventional, quiet and outmoded, much like the Orthodox neighbourhoods where the hero lives. These are two sides of the same Israeli society, which usually have nothing in common apart from their collective historical memory. This is their unique reference point for the past and for the future, and Yoel believes that this should be preserved over and above anything else.

<http://cineuropa.org/nw.aspx?t=newsdetail&l=en&did=334150>