

IN SEARCH OF LANDSCAPE LOST

Documentary: 40 min

Written and directed by: Leo Kantor

Artistic consulting: Zbigniew Rybczynski, Oscar, 1983 for film "Tango"

Photography, research, archive materials: Artur Lukaszewicz, Jacek Knopp

Producer: Kulturforum Sweden, Leo Kantor & V-Film Wrocław Poland, Andrzej Stachecki

Production: Stockholm, Sweden; Wrocław, Poland

Opening night: Warsaw, May 2014, Wrocław, June 2014

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There was a time before World War II when 20,000 Jews lived in Breslau. This was one of the most dynamic Jewish communities in Germany. But after WW2 they were gone. In 1946 half of the 200,000 Polish Jews who had survived the Holocaust moved there. About 100,000 settled in 35 small towns in the region, and 15,000 went to live in Breslau – now Wrocław, Poland. Before the War Poland had a population of 3.5 million Jews. And after the War, in Europe's largest enclave of Holocaust survivors – 115,000 Jews just in Wrocław and its environs – not a single poem has been written about this: no essay, story or novel, let alone a film. As early as 1968 things happened really quickly. The communist authorities organised an aggressive anti-Semitic campaign by depriving Jews of work, their theatre, schools, places at university, their meagre belongings and human dignity. Adolescents were offered emigration or the army. On the border they were deprived of their university diplomas and unfinished academic research. They were robbed of their valuables. Though these Jews survived the Holocaust, just twenty years after the War their children would leave Poland. The last 20,000 Jews would go to the USA, Canada, Sweden, Australia, Israel and Denmark.

LEO KANTOR

After 46 years Leo Kantor (born in 1940) – a Polish director and columnist of Jewish background and a resident of Sweden since 1968 – returns to Wrocław to relate the history of the Jews in the area. He himself was saved in the Urals together with his mother, who managed to jump into the last evacuation carriage leaving Kharkov. He was just one when his father died on the Russian front near Kharkov. After the war they were taken to a small town near Wrocław by a Polish Jew who escaped from the Holocaust, Grzegorz Kantor. Little Leo went to Poland with Kantor, thus becoming a witness of this extraordinary, unspoken and forgotten oasis of survivors.

OTHER ABOUT FILM

This film was rejected by the majority of Polish state institutions, which for years sponsored Polish film productions in all their diversity and expression. The Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw, which promotes Polish culture abroad, the Mayor of Wrocław and the Jewish Community of Wrocław have yet to answer letters sent to them. The Odra Film Municipal Foundation in Wrocław regarded the film as unnecessary.

However, the outcome turned out to be spectacular. Poland's biggest newspaper – Gazeta Wyborcza – described the film as an extraordinary and exceptional filmic event depicting true historical facts.



Zbigniew Rybczyński, who in 1983 became the first of Poland's two Oscar winners hitherto, referred to the film as a pearl amongst documentary films. TVP 2 (Polish Television), which considers this film to be important and worth watching, purchased licences for three screenings. Universities and international research centres use the film as part of their programme.

There are now 90 Jews living in Wrocław, a third of whom no longer leave home. In 2016 Wrocław will become a European Capital of Culture. An important aspect of these celebrations is the emphasis on multiculturalism and tolerance.

It is worth remembering what this multiculturalism was actually like, and what has remained of it. The world should see how fast a beautiful culture, created over a period of almost 900 years, can disappear.

It was this land that gave birth to no fewer than five Nobel Laureates and one Catholic, St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) – all of Jewish background. It was to here that the young Felix Mendelssohn travelled to – to Duszniki-Zdrój, 70 kilometres from Wrocław, where his uncle ran a company.

But what about the rest – those ordinary people, so charming in their simplicity and honesty, who are scattered all over the world?

It is these people that the film is about.