



PANOPTIC

a film by Rana Eid

Panoptic (Banoptic)



Content

Panoptic is a letter from a daughter to her deceased father in an attempt to reconcile with her country's turbulent past.

Panoptic delves into Beirut's underground to explore Lebanon's schizophrenia: a nation that thrives for modernity while ironically ignoring the vices that obstruct achieving this modernity.

While the Lebanese population has chosen to turn a blind eye to these vices, Rana Eid, an ordinary citizen, explores the nation's paradoxes through sound, iconic monuments and secret hidings.

Credits

documentary film, Rana Eid, Lebanon 2017, 69 min, Arabic with English or French ST

Director	Rana Eid
Writer	Rana Eid, Rania Stephan
Camera	Talal Khoury
Sound	Rana Eid
Editing	Rania Stephan
Original Music	Nadim Mishlawi
Sound Design	Rana Eid
Producer	Myriam Sassine

From the Press

A new take on the genre of city symphony/documentary essay, Eid's film offers a complex and poetic inquiry into Beirut's underground and the roots of conflict in her country. (Variety)

Panoptic is a visual work, but Eid's ability to play these images against experimental soundscapes results in a harrowing, affecting and captivating debut. (4:3 - Four Three Film)



Film-maker Rana Eid

Born in 1976 in Beirut, Rana Eid received her BA in Cinema in 1999 and her MA in Film Sound in 2002 both from Université Saint Joseph, IESAV.

In 2002, she traveled to Paris, France where she trained for a year in Sound Editing. Rana has been working as a sound editor since 2003, having gained the reputation of being one of the Lebanese film industry's most acclaimed practitioners.

She has worked with some of the most acclaimed Arab directors and producers such as Ghassan Salhab, Vatche Boulghourjian, Khalil Joreige, Joana Hadjithomas, Ali Essafi, Philippe Aractangi, Joud Said among others.

In 2006 Rana opened db STUDIOS for audio post production. Rana currently lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon where she teaches sound for film at Université Saint Esprit de Kaslik (USEK).

Director's Filmography:

2017: Panoptic, creative documentary

Sound Designer's Selective Filmography:

2017: Crossing the Seventh Gate, Ali Essafi, feature documentary

2016: Tramontane, Vatche Boulghourjian, feature fiction

2015: 3000 Nights, Mai Masri, feature fiction

2014: Guardians of Time Lost, Diala Kashmar, feature documentary

2013: The Disquiet, Ali Cherri, short fiction

2013: Ladder to Damascus, Mohammad Malas, feature fiction

2012: The Lebanese Rocket Society, Khalil Joreige and Joana Hadjithomas, feature documentary

2011: It's All in Lebanon, Wissam Charaf, feature documentary

2011: Sector Zero, Nadim Mishlawi, feature documentary

2010: Waiting for Abou Zeid, Ali Atassi, feature documentary

2010: The Mountain, Ghassan Salhab, feature fiction

2010: Stray Bullet, George Hachem, feature fiction

2009: 1958, Ghassan Salhab, feature documentary

2008: The North Road, Carlos Chahine, short fiction

2008: How Bitter My Sweet, Mohamed Soueid, feature documentary

2006: The Last Man, Ghassan Salhab, feature fiction



Interview with the Film-maker

About Panoptic: Interview with Rana Eid - Conducted by film critic Nadim Jarjoura, Beirut, July 2017

How did the film idea come to your mind?

The idea did not come neither in an organized nor chronological way. It started developing from the very first moment I knew that there was an underground prison attached to the General Directorate of Public Security in Beirut, which I thought was a parking lot. Some mistakes happened in the official papers of the maid that was working in my house, and so she was arrested there. When I went to check on her, I discovered that under the bridge there was an underground detention center.

I immediately thought of the sound and wondered: what do those detainees hear? Little by little, other matters started emerging from me: the death of my father, a former officer in the Lebanese Army, the diseases I suffered at certain moments in this country's History, during the civil war and after it ended; my relationship with the city; my confusion; my pending questions...

Still, the presence of the father is prominent, as the film tells his story in parallel with the country's, as well as your story with him and with the country?

First, I did not know how to portray my father in the film. The whole matter started when I discovered accidentally the detention center. At that moment, everything deeply buried in my unconscious started emerging. I remembered the shelter during the days of the Lebanese civil war. Then, I felt pain in my ear. Medical tests revealed that it was infected with otosclerosis. I went through an obligatory operation, which I was told had only 50% chances of succeeding. Afterwards, I started psychotherapy, as many things were stuck, and I had to dig deeper. There are also matters related to the military establishment, which my father was part of, for many years. The issue of discovering the general security detention center awoke me to the question of the notion of "underground": what happened there and what was still going on? I started practically working on the film. Abla Khoury, the co-producer (from Ginger Beirut Productions), repeatedly told me that the film is about my father that I kept on denying. Two and a half years passed, until I admitted to myself I was doing a film about him.

Fine. But what about the idea of sending him a letter? This reminds me of your graduation film, Letter to My Palestinian Friend (1999)?

This letter emanated from several letters and writings my father used to send me. Once, while I was working on the film, my mother asked me to sort out my stuff in our family house, within the "Mina" area of Tripoli (Northern Lebanon), which was on sale. At that time, I did not know how to structure the film, and I was asking for help from close friends, including Mohamed Soueid, who followed my project from the start. While sorting my own stuff, I found those letters. Suddenly, I was aware of the style I wanted.



Later on, I remembered my graduation film. At that period of my life, I was trying to understand my relationship with Palestine. Perhaps in my subconscious, I consider that letters are my way to solve pending questions.

Despite the discovery of a detention center for foreigners who do not have official papers to live in Lebanon, the film is not directly related to them.

I wanted to interview officers who had ties to this place, but I couldn't meet everyone. I felt that the required encounters would not happen, and that they wouldn't achieve what I wanted. I asked myself: Do I want to talk about military uniforms to make a documentary about their owners? I focused on the most important issue: not to make judgments, I do not accuse anyone of anything. My friend Mohamed Soueid advised me to read Michel Foucault's writings about prison, which included detailed definitions about the difference between the prison maker and the prison "resident". This led me to wonder: on which side are we? There is a side for those who built the prison, and another for prisoners in it.

I did not want a film about the prisoners, we all know their suffering. I wanted to explore the other side, dig further in the military and security establishment, which declares its desire for justice, but at a later stage of the Amnesty Law (1991) .

What you're saying is important: a contradiction between what is being said and what is being done. Besides, you created a link between this world and you personally.

Let's go backwards a bit: during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, I found out that I had asthma. In the early 1990s, shortly after the end of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the amnesty law was issued and I had tinnitus in my ears. In conjunction with the July 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, it turned out that there was weakness in my eye's muscle. Linking the country's events with my numerous diseases made me laugh. As if my diseases were reflecting what was happening in the country. My short breath was also worth highlighting, as well as my inability to stop smoking. When I completed the film, I stopped smoking. Mind-blowing.

My letters to my dad tackle my utmost concerns: the symbolic of the military suit, power, the authoritarian regime. Stuck that are stuck in reality. I actually realized that I did not bury my father, I did not know how to bury him, as we do not know how to bury our dead. Let's look at our situation together: our country witnessed martyrs. And yet, are they really buried? There are people whose death is just collateral damage, and others who die for no reason. Still, all of them are not buried. Remember what my father told me in the film: "There are disturbed souls?" We do not know how to die. Lebanese people don't die; they become "zombies." Let's put it this way: we are stuck between "above ground" and "underground," to the degree that I really wish someone would die. We are all undead, and that is exhausting.

Let me tell you something else: the city is "calcified." To what extent do we listen to each other? The ears otosclerosis is a widespread disease in the Middle East. Auto-immune diseases are widespread in this region. It's funny. Our body is fighting itself in the Middle East. It begs to question: why are these diseases heavily spread in this region?



And what about the sound?

We do not listen to the city nor to each other. In the film, mostly the sound and image are out of sync and the perspective of the sounds is intentionally broken. For example, some shots are filmed from above whereas their correspondent sound is taken from below.

Isn't all this a sign of love towards the city, more than any other feeling?

I love the city, and maybe that's what makes me feel sad somehow; because I loved it and did not leave it, even when I could have. I constantly ask myself why I stayed here. I work here and I'm still trying to expand my business. I am currently expanding my personal studio "DB Studios". In 2006, during the July war, I founded "DB Studios" even if it started small. I'm diving deeper and deeper here. The "dirt" of the city and its "calcification" are sources that grant me many subjects to talk about.

Thanks to the sound, I hear more details, omissions and soundscapes than others. This "love - hate" relationship to the country enriches my work. It enriches me from within, and I won't find anywhere else. What I like in here, is this microcosme I created. In other words, to have a family, friends I chose and love, to have streets and places, where I feel good despite of everything. Although they're not that numerous. This microcosm conveys to me a sense of respect for the individual, in a region that does not respect individuals.

There is a sentence in the film that comes back many times: "Honor your dead through burial". Who or what do you specifically mean by that?

I think this sentence is related to my father although it is important to bury other matters as well. I need nostalgia to help me understand my relationship with my dad. He always told me: "I won't catch fish for you, but I will teach you how to catch fish". It made me struggle in order to discover how to live, grow, confront and challenge. There was a pleasant friendship between us. He was wearing a military uniform and serving in the military establishment, but he would let me join the Lebanese Communist Party.

In the film there are 3 places and 3 storylines: the public security prison under the Al-Tahwita Bridge, the Murr Tower and the Beau Rivage Hotel. In other terms, the official authority, the time of the militias, and the period of the Syrian occupation. In parallel, the storylines are: the story of a father, a civil war that has not ended, and the path for peace that is incomplete and fragile. All of it merging with your own storyline.

Let's start with the detention center, as it's the starting point of the film. I wanted to do something special about this place. This place exists underground and is responsible for wrongdoings against all kind of human rights. The mistake is inherent as a concept and in its execution. It is true that those who do not hold official documents are left in confinements until they are tried in courts. However, practice unfolds contrarily to this. What justice can they talk about when we live under a general amnesty law?



This is not meant to blame the army or the military security establishment. I am not pointing out the guilty party here. And yet, somewhere, questioning the army is necessary. Responsibilities are falling on many officers who must be held accountable for their actions.

Let's go back to the places you were asking me about. I went to places where its forbidden to enter. Why? Some people say they used to hear screams coming from the underground of Al-Murr Tower. Could we say that there are people who disappeared during the civil war and were liquidated in that tower, as I have repeatedly heard without being able of proving anything?

I did not understand why we are forbidden to enter these places I filmed. Why weren't I allowed to shoot in the sewers of the city? Were there things actually "hidden"? Things they didn't want to reveal? This has made me more and more certain that we are living in a dual situation between above and below. The war is over but hasn't ended yet.

You remind me of the novel *Byretus: Underground City* (2009) by Rabih Jaber.

I read it while I was working on the film. Yes, some artists paid attention to the issue of "above and below." This is a sensitive and important issue. We must examine it and understand it before we try to be free from it. Let me tell you more about it: What happened in 2008 (May 7, armed groups invaded Beirut and occupied it for several days, and a month later, my father died)? Do you know that downtown Beirut is a cemetery? I am not prosecuting, but I say what I see and feel. What does it mean for the downtown of a city to be a tomb or a cemetery?

Let's shift the conversation a little bit and discuss how you worked on the film.

I thought of the film in terms of sound. The sounds of the city itself occupies a large part of the film. I worked on the image as I worked on the sound: layers above layers. Things that do not specifically match. My biggest challenge lies in the lack of any sound effects. All sounds are real, captured as they are, and I have not manipulated them.

There is a quote by the English editor Joe Walker (who worked with Steve McQueen, Canadian Denis Villeneuve and many others) that caught my attention and I recall it now: "As an editor, sound often leads me. It gives me rhythm."

I think this expresses exactly how I worked on *Panoptic*.

What about the difficulties when it comes to shooting? Such a film made in such a country, must have faced many difficulties and challenges.

I certainly had numerous difficulties, but I managed to get what I wanted. Few military and security officials have shown a great willingness to help, and that is what happened. Thanks to them, I was able to get into the places I wanted, shoot what I needed, even if I had access for only few limited hours. I had restrictions, but nevertheless I managed to capture what I wanted.



Coming from the world of sound in cinema, I have always worked with a sound recording team. I tell the camera team what I want, and the situations and emotions I want to film, and then I stay with the sound team. I revolve my work around them so that I can feel the place. However, in some places, the opposite happened; which means I filmed with no sound, in order to capture sounds afterward so I can work better on the “out of Sync”.

During the editing, I reached moments when I would feel totally lost. Rania Stephan (the editor) would insist on reminding me of my original idea. She knew how to bring me back to it. I asked her if I could watch the rushes again. She refused and advised me to listen to the sound rushes. She asked me many questions, to bring me back to the core of it all. After my work on the sound design, we went back to the editing. I knew the cost would increase. Still, I had no other choice. The sound design changed the rhythm of the editing.

I noticed that there is little space for music.

I did not want to put a lot of music in the film, because I wanted the sound of the city to be present. Nadim Mishlawi (the music composer) proposed to put music in the sequences where we needed to feel a certain emotion, and I think it worked.

mec film
Emdener Strasse 48d
10551 Berlin
Germany

++49-30-66766700
info@mecfilm.de
www.mecfilm.de