

WE THE PEOPLES FILM FESTIVAL 2013 LONDON

WTP Film Festival meets Heiko Lange, Director, *The Noise of Cairo*

How long does it take to produce the film?

The idea for this documentary came when I watched the beginning of the demonstrations in Egypt on Al Jazeera in 2011. I was overwhelmed by the power and creativity of the people on the streets. From that moment on, it took us almost a year to complete the film. I started researching as early as February that year and it then took me 6-8 weeks to get most of the artists together and another month to get permission and to get organised to start filming. We filmed for only 10 days in Cairo and after that, we started to translate all the interviews from Arabic and French into English or German. Then editing took 60/70 days but not in one go because as this documentary is self-financed, we had to earn some money over the period. We were at the time working with Sönke Düwer, the jazz musician from Hamburg, on the film score. Anyway, in all, it took us a year to complete the film.

How many people in your crew?

I believed that a small crew could get closer to the people in the streets and not draw too much attention. Most of the time, only three people were involved in the shooting; myself as director, Marc Falk, DOP and a Camera /Sound Assistant from Cairo, Remon Mansour. On some days, my colleague, Co-Producer and editor of the film, Alexander von Sturmfeder visited us in Cairo and of course he was involved when we returned to Berlin to edit the film.

How did you find the artists that you show in the film? And which most impressed you and why?

Some of them, I found through the internet. But a friend in Cairo helped in selecting different and interesting artists as well. So some of them I contacted beforehand like Khaled Hafez and Hany Rashed and others I met in Cairo while shooting the film. Khaled Hafez who supported and helped me from the beginning made the contact with Osama and with the street art project in Imbaba. I was very happy shooting there because this was a scene I could never have found through internet research. When I arrived in Imbaba, a poorer area of Cairo, I was fascinated by the hospitality of everybody and their trust in both the film and myself from the very beginning. This scene impressed me very much but I guess I was impressed by most of the artists because at the time, there was such a burst of creativity that it was almost impossible not to be impressed.

What was the most difficult challenge?

First of all, I must say that we had no problems with censorship during our stay in Cairo. The most difficult part of the documentary was not to fall into the trap of the revolution – from a filmmaker's point of view. There was so much going on that time that it was difficult to stay focused on the idea of my documentary. I met other filmmakers that somehow appeared to get lost in the emotions of the revolution. They were confused about what, when and where they should shoot. For example, on the last day of our shooting, there was another "march of the millions". Some people told us not to go because they believed there could be something bad, interesting going on. But we asked ourselves if we really needed these shots for our own documentary and agreed that we didn't and that we should get on with our own project.

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What are (if you have found) the social consequences that produced the Egyptian revolution, that you had not considered, and that you have discovered during the filming?

For me this question is too difficult and complex to answer at this moment of time. I think it will take some more years till we realize what kind of social consequences are directly connected to the changes in Egypt.

What was the reaction of people in the streets during the filming?

During filming, the reaction from people in the streets was very friendly and hospitable. Everybody tried to help us make the film. We had no problems by walking through the streets with our camera. Everybody was very interested in what kind of film we were making. I guess it was the opposite of what is going on right now if you walk through Cairo with a camera in your hand.

I must say I was a little bit nervous when it came to how artists and the art scene in Cairo might react because I am not an Egyptian filmmaker, nor do I live in Cairo. So it could have sounded a little bit arrogant from someone to come to Cairo from Germany and shoot a documentary in 10 days about the art scene after the revolution. But everybody was happy and proud to be part of this film.

All work experience brings us something. What was the lasting impact on you of this film?

The Noise of Cairo is not only about art or artists. It is about freedom of speech. I know there is still a disconnect between the idea of freedom of speech and the reality. While shooting the film, I realised how fast people get used to freedom of speech and I believe they will defend it. I guess freedom of speech is more than a language expressed through art. But there should be a freedom of expression in art. Maybe this documentary helps to defend this freedom of expression.

What thought processes in people do you think you have started with *The Noise Of Cairo*?

The Noise of Cairo is not about the riots, nor about the religious or political behaviour in Egypt and that is what makes the film unique. It is a film about a small community of artists who believe in the changing of Egypt. Audience have been happy to see that there are so many artists working on the film as for 2011, it is a snapshot of a moment when everybody was enthusiastic about what was going on. There was so much positive energy around that came directly from the events. Cairo was vibrating and the dynamic of life in Cairo overtook us all. When people see this documentary, memory of those days flood back to them and they feel proud and inspired. *The Noise Of Cairo* belongs to the people in Cairo, those who are still working on this revolution and who are making a lot of noise.

What will be your next project?

Currently I am working on a documentary about the underground scene in West Berlin in the 1980s. It will be screened in September 2014.