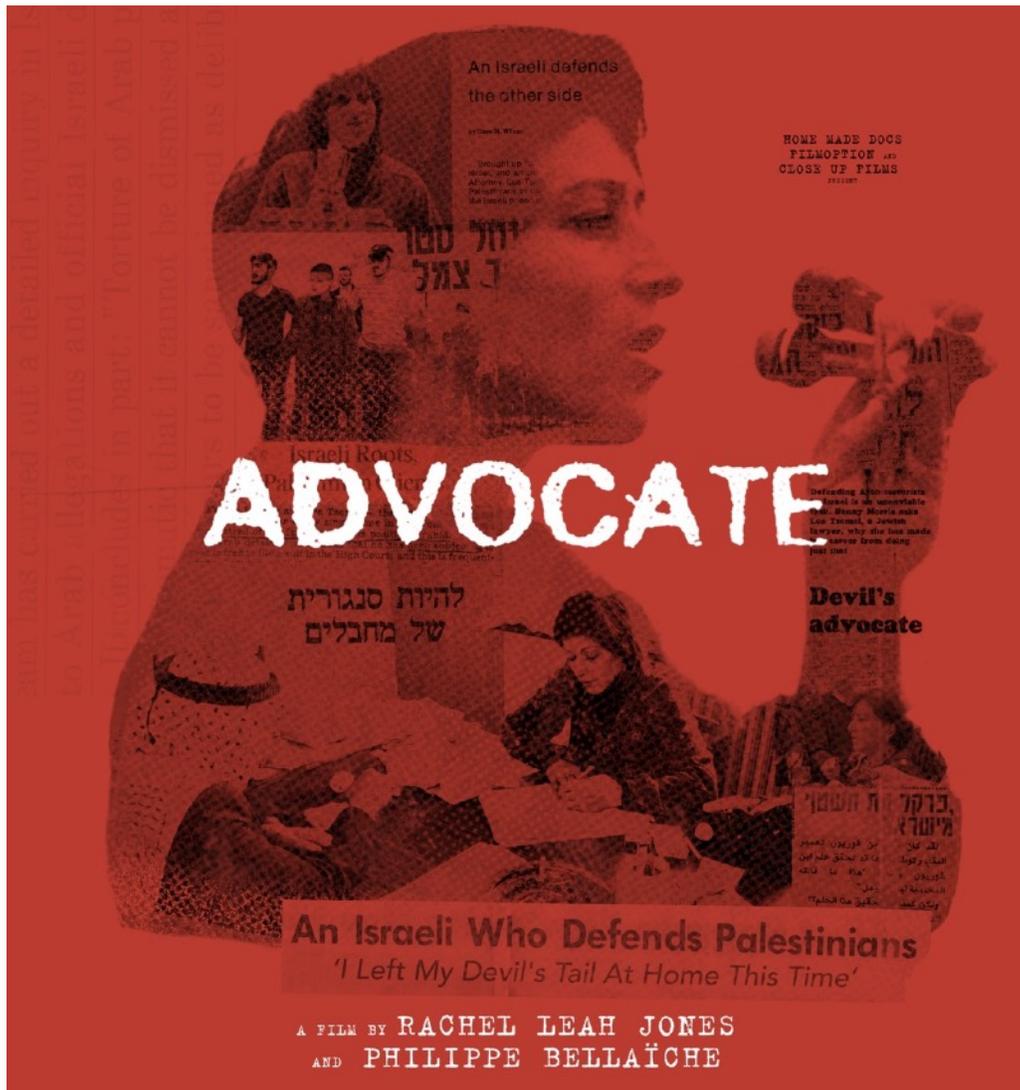


## PRESS KIT



Running Time: 108 minutes

Opening Theatrically **JANUARY 3, 2020**  
in **NEW YORK** at Quad Cinema & in **LA** at Laemmle's Royal Theatre

### PRESS & PRODUCTION CONTACTS

#### Awards Publicist

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# ADVOCATE

a film by **Rachel Leah Jones** and **Philippe Bellaïche**



## SYNOPSIS

Lea Tsemel defends Palestinians: from feminists to fundamentalists, from non-violent demonstrators to armed militants. As a Jewish-Israeli lawyer who has represented political prisoners for five decades, Tsemel, in her tireless quest for justice, pushes the praxis of a human rights defender to its limits.

As far as most Israelis are concerned, she defends the indefensible. As far as Palestinians are concerned, she's more than an attorney, she's an advocate.

ADVOCATE follows Tsemel's caseload in real-time, including the high-profile trial of a 13-year-old boy – her youngest client to date – while also revisiting her landmark cases and reflecting on the political and professional significance of her work as well as the personal price one pays for assuming the role of "devil's advocate."

When they aren't busy chasing Tsemel through the courthouse halls, directing duo Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaïche assume the privileged position of a fly on the wall in Tsemel's office, where a year of documenting is like gathering a lifetime of evidence. This evidence attests to the wrongs of occupation but also to the faults of those who try to resist it, the failings of those who try to defend them, and the fundamental flaws of a legal system that purports to serve justice but in fact serves the powers that be.

Tsemel spoke truth to power before the term became trendy and she'll continue to do so after fear makes it unfashionable. As such, she's a model we're hard-pressed to preserve in Israel/Palestine, and elsewhere.

On the one hand, she's the boy calling the Emperor naked, i.e. exposing the underbelly of Israeli security jurisprudence: the occupier is judging the occupied. On the other hand, she's the boy with his finger in the dam, doing her utmost to uphold the rule-of-law before the flood of injustice drowns us all.

## **PRESS (select)**

"With their Sundance-premiering *ADVOCATE* they've created an in-the-trenches portrait of this unapologetic firebrand... A remarkable character. A warrior for justice who's spent her entire adult life taking punch after punch, she forever gets up undaunted to fight another day."

**-Filmmaker Magazine**

"Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaïche's riveting new documentary pays tribute to the tenacity and selflessness of Jewish Israeli lawyer Lea Tsemel, a divisive figure in her home country on account of her unwavering dedication to Palestinian rights... A deeply bittersweet portrait of a magnetic individual."

**-Sight & Sound**

"Absorbingly up close and personal... Compelling."

**-The Hollywood Reporter**

"It's what we need right now, an engaging way to crack open our thinking about something many of us are sure we already know. A fantastic main character you have to love. A riveting story that will make you mad and give you hope that there are people fighting the good fight. Great filmmaking."

**-The Document**

"A heroic portrait of an Israeli lawyer who defends violent Palestinian offenders, *ADVOCATE* is a lively exercise in documentary advocacy. This self-described "angry and optimistic woman," is a natural cinema vérité performer, full of flashing energy, quick sardonic retorts and unselfconscious in her moral convictions."

**-Point of View Magazine**

"Lea Tsemel is a real, flesh-and-blood person, but if you saw someone like her in a fictional film, you might fault the screenwriter for inventing such an implausible character. *ADVOCATE* is not just a celebration but a continuation of the work she's dedicated herself to."

**-Film Threat**

"Thrilling and Exact."

**-Haaretz**

## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

We first met Lea 25 years ago. By then, the once anonymous firebrand law student who, after the 1967 war, had fearlessly distributed flyers on campus warning her fellow Israelis to end the occupation or risk a vicious cycle of violence – was already a household name. For us, socially and politically engaged filmmakers, her rebellious spirit and radical zeal were an inspiration. But we could never do what Lea does; most people couldn't. In her life, as in her work, Lea straddles an incredible divide. On the one hand, she's the little boy calling the Emperor naked, i.e. naming the system's most fundamental fault: the occupier is judging the occupied. On the other hand, she's the boy with his finger in the dam, doing her utmost to uphold the rule-of-law before the flood of injustice drowns us all. As one military court judge once put it: "If Lea Tsemel didn't exist, we'd have to invent her."

Lea, who has spent a lifetime going against the grain of Israeli society, is as much a product of it as she is an exception to it. Through her, we tell another kind of Israeli history, without a capital H. Not the usual: "We came, we saw, we conquered, we shot, we cried." More like: "We cooked, we cleaned, we cursed, we tried to better the world, but didn't always manage ..." Unlike the seminal works of recent years ( *The Law in These Parts*, *The Gatekeepers*, *Censored Voices* ), this is a female-centered story. Lea is almost always the only woman, or the only leftist, or the only Jew – in the room.

For the past two decades, we've watched Lea work with a mixture of awe and admiration, marveling at the fact that interrogators still infuriate her, prosecutors still madden her, judges still frustrate her, verdicts still disappoint her – and clients still break her heart. If we did our job, yours will break too.



## BIOGRAPHIES

### **RACHEL LEAH JONES (Director/Producer)**

Born in Berkeley, California in 1970 and raised between Berkeley and Tel Aviv, Jones is a critically acclaimed documentary filmmaker whose work focuses on Israel/Palestine. She has a BA in Race, Class and Gender Studies and an MFA in Documentary Media Arts. Her directing credits include: 500DUNAM ON THE MOON (2002) commissioned by France Channel 2; ASHKENAZ (2007) commissioned by Israel Channel 8; TARGETED CITIZEN (2010) commissioned by Adalah: the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel; and GYPSY DAVY (2012) commissioned by Israel Channel 8 (Sundance 2012). In addition to making her own films, Jones has produced extensively with others, e.g. WALL by Simone Bitton (Cannes 2004; Special Jury Prize Sundance 2005) and has been affiliated with progressive media outlets such as DEMOCRACY NOW! in New York.

### **PHILIPPE BELLAICHE (Director/Producer)**

Born in Paris, France in 1967, Bellaiche is an award-winning DP whose credits include BETWEEN FENCES (Berlin 2016); ONCE I ENTERED A GARDEN (Rome 2012); Z32 (Venice 2008); and AVENGE BUT ONE OF MY TWO EYES (Cannes 2005) by Avi Mograbi; THE SETTLERS (Sundance 2016) and HOTHOUSE (Special Jury Prize Sundance 2007) by Shimon Dotan; GYPSY DAVY (Sundance 2012) by Rachel Leah Jones; THE FLAT (Tribeca 2012; Israel Academy Award 2011) by Arnon Goldfinger; INCESSANT VISIONS (Jerusalem 2011), THE JOURNEY OF VAN NGUYEN (IDFA 2005) and RAGING DOVE (First Prize Doc Aviv 2002; Certificate of Merit SFIFF 2002) by Duki Dror; ROUTE 181: FRAGMENTS OF A JOURNEY THROUGH PALESTINE/ISRAEL (Second Prize Yamagata 2005) by Eyal Sivan and Michel Khleifi; FROM LANGUAGE TO LANGUAGE (First Prize Doc Aviv 2004) by Nurith Aviv; FORGET BAGHDAD (FIPRESCI Award Locarno 2002) by Samir Jamal al-Din. A cinematography lecturer and master class teacher, Bellaiche also received the Cinema Arts Award in 2013.



**PAUL CADIEUX (Co-Producer)**

In his more than three decades as a producer, co-producer, executive producer and distributor, Paul has won numerous awards, among them a Genie for the Oscar-nominated animated feature LES TRIPLETTES DE BELLEVILLE. Recent documentary credits include THE SETTLERS by Shimon Dotan (Sundance 2016) and PS JERUSALEM by Danae Elon (Berlin 2016).

**JOËLLE BERTOSSA (Co-Producer)**

Joelle Bertossa is founder and managing director of CloseUp Films, and produces a wide range of projects including fiction, documentaries, TV series and web docs. Recent credits include: THE SHADOW OF WOMEN by Philippe Garrel (Director's Fortnight Cannes 2015) and the Oscar-nominated I AM NOT YOUR NEGRO by Raoul Peck.

**YAEL BITTON (Editor)**

Born in Geneva, Switzerland in 1971, Bitton is an editor and story consultant based in Paris. Recent editing credits include: MACHINES by Rahul Jain; THE WONDERFUL KINGDOM OF PAPA ALAEV by Noam Pinchas and Tal Barda; MUCHACHAS by Juliana Fanjul; TACACHO by Felipe Monroy; PETITS ARRANGEMENTS AVEC L'AMOUR by Ilana Navaro; THINGHIR: ECHOES FROM THE MELLAH by Kamal Hachkar; WATERMARKS by Yaron Zilberman. Over the years, he has taught and consulted in numerous frameworks such as Femis, Cinédoc, DOK.Incubator and Rough Cut Service.



## **CREDITS**

### **Directed by**

Rachel Leah Jones, Philippe Bellaïche

### **Produced by**

Philippe Bellaïche, Rachel Leah Jones // Home Made Docs

### **Co-Produced by**

Paul Cadieux // FilmOption International

Joelle Bertossa // Close Up Films

### **Co-Produced with**

Channel 8

CBC/Radio Canada

RTS Switzerland

SWR/NDR Germany

EOdocs

BBC/Storyville

### **Produced in Collaboration with**

Blue Ice Docs

### **Produced with the support / participation of**

DR Denmark

YLE Finland

SVT Sweden

VGTV Norway

Bertha Foundation

OFC Switzerland

CineForom / Loterie Romand Switzerland

Makor Foundation for Israeli Films

Sundance Documentary Fund

### **With the help of**

CoPro

Hotdocs Dealmakers

IDFA Forum

IFP

## **AWARDS**

Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival // WINNER Golden Alexander

Thessaloniki International Film Festival // WINNER FIPRESCI Prize

Hong Kong Film Festival // WINNER Jury Prize

Docaviv Film Festival // WINNER Best Israeli Documentary

Krakow Film Festival // WINNER Golden Horn

Moscow Jewish Film Festival // WINNER Best Documentary Feature

Antenna Film Festival // WINNER Best Film

Antenna Film Festival // WINNER Audience Award

Festival des Libertés // WINNER Prix Smart

Loft Film Festival // WINNER Cinema Art Award  
International Confederation of Art House Cinemas

UK Jewish Film Festival // WINNER Best Documentary

Verzio Human Rights Film Festival // WINNER Best Human Rights Film

Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) // WINNER Best Documentary Feature

Israel Documentary Forum Awards // WINNER Best Documentary Feature

Israel Documentary Forum Awards // WINNER Best Editing

## **NOMINATIONS**

International Documentary Association Awards (IDA)  
NOMINEE Best Documentary Feature

International Documentary Association Awards (IDA) // NOMINEE Best Directing

Producers Guild of America (PGA) // NOMINEE Best Documentary Feature

European Film Awards (EWA) // Documentary Selection

Cinema Eye Honors // NOMINEE Unforgettables

## FESTIVALS

Sundance Film Festival  
World Cinema Documentary Competition

Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival

FIFDH Geneva

Hong Kong International Film Festival

CPH:DOX  
NOMINEE Politiken Audience Award

It's All True International Documentary  
Festival Brazil

Moscow International Film Festival

Hot Docs International Documentary Film  
Festival Toronto

Dok.Fest München

DocAviv

Krakow Film Festival

Biografilm Bologna

Sheffield Doc Fest

Human Rights Watch Film Festival – NYC  
Opening Night Film

DocEdge Film Festival

San Francisco Jewish Film Festival

Stronger Than Fiction Film Festival

Dokufest Kosovo

Etat Generuax du Documentaire Lussas

March on Washington Film Festival  
Closing Night Film

Aegean Docs // Opening Film

Irish Film Institute Documentary Festival

Reykjavik International Film Festival

Antenna Documentary Film Festival

Jewish International Film Festival  
Australia

Film Festival Diritti Umani Lugano

IndieCork Film Festival

Festival de Libertés Brussels

Verzio International Human Rights Film  
Festival Budapest

UK Jewish Film Festival

Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival

Philadelphia Film Festival

Milwaukee Film Festival

Scottsdale Film Festival

DocNYC // Winner's Circle

Boston Jewish Film Festival

Other Israel Film Festival  
Opening Night Film

IDFA // Best of Fests

Human Rights Film Festival Zurich

Palm Spring International Film Festival

FIPADoc Biarritz

DocPoint Helsinki

HUMAN International Documentary Festival

ZagrebDox