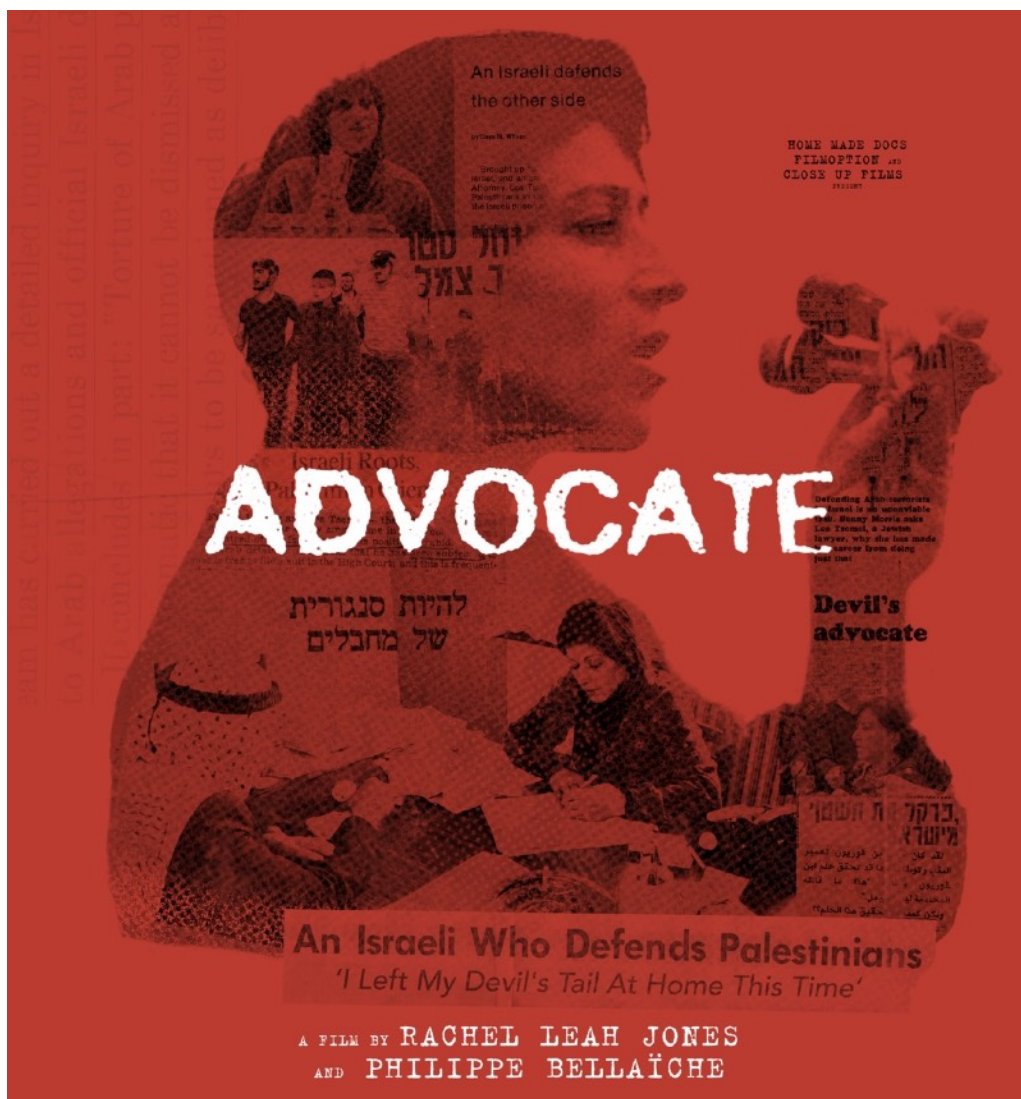


PRESS KIT



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

For almost 50 years, Jewish-Israeli lawyer Lea Tsemel has made a career out of defending Palestinians in Israeli courts: from feminists to fundamentalists, from non-violent demonstrators to armed militants. As far as most Israelis are concerned, she defends the indefensible. As far as most Palestinians are concerned, she's more than an attorney, she's an advocate.

In *ADVOCATE*, filmmakers Philippe Bellaïche and Rachel Leah Jones deconstruct this controversial figure. While her stated goal is to guarantee a fair trial for her clients within a legal system that regards Palestinian political prisoners as "enemies," her motives go beyond criminal justice; as the film reveals, Tsemel has always been an outspoken advocate for Palestinian rights in the tribunal of public opinion. What Israelis loath about her, and Palestinians love, is that Tsemel refuses to pass judgement on the defendants she represents, insisting instead that an occupier has no right to tell the occupied how they should conduct their struggle. *ADVOCATE* follows Tsemel as she takes on two new cases, and illustrates her decades-long clash with the Israeli establishment.

"To many, Tsemel is a hero, a fearless and tireless warrior for justice. To others, she is 'the devil's advocate.' To everyone who knows or has heard of her, regardless of their political views, she is larger than life" [*Jadaliyya*]. As a woman who spoke truth to power before the term became trendy (and will continue to do so after fear makes it unfashionable) on behalf of the far-left – but within the confines of a culture moving ever to the right – Tsemel pushes the definition of a human rights defender to its limits.

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 Bellaiche

Produced by

Philippe Bellaiche, 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	Irish Film Institute Documentary Festival
Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival	Reykjavik International Film Festival
FIFDH Geneva	Antenna Documentary Film Festival
Hong Kong International Film Festival	Jewish International Film Festival Australia
CPH:DOX NOMINEE Politiken Audience Award	Film Festival Diritti Umani Lugano
It's All True International Documentary Festival Brazil	IndieCork Film Festival
Moscow International Film Festival	Festival de Libertés Brussels
Hot Docs International Documentary Film Festival Toronto	Verzio International Human Rights Film Festival Budapest
Dok.Fest München	UK Jewish Film Festival
DocAviv	Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival
Krakow Film Festival	Philadelphia Film Festival
Biografilm Bologna	Milwaukee Film Festival
Sheffield Doc Fest	Scottsdale Film Festival
Human Rights Watch Film Festival – NYC Opening Night Film	DocNYC // Winner's Circle
DocEdge Film Festival	Boston Jewish Film Festival
San Francisco Jewish Film Festival	Other Israel Film Festival Opening Night Film
Stronger Than Fiction Film Festival	IDFA // Best of Fests
Dokufest Kosovo	Human Rights Film Festival Zurich
Etat Generuax du Documentaire Lussas	Palm Spring International Film Festival
March on Washington Film Festival Closing Night Film	FIPADoc Biarritz
Aegean Docs // Opening Film	DocPoint Helsinki
	HUMAN International Documentary Festival
	ZagrebDox