

"THERE ARE NO DANGEROUS THOUGHTS;
THINKING ITSELF IS DANGEROUS."
- HANNAH ARENDT

VITA ACTIVA

THE SPIRIT OF
HANNAH ARENDT

A FILM BY ADA USHPIZ



INTUITIVE PICTURES and AU FILMS PRESENT VITA ACTIVA, THE SPIRIT OF HANNAH ARENDT WRITTEN BY ADA USHPIZ, PRODUCED BY INA FICHMAN, ADA USHPIZ, DIRECTED & EDITED BY ADA USHPIZ, PRODUCED BY PRODUCERS ITAI NEEMAN, GERMAN GUTIERREZ, PHILIPPE LAULETE
EDITED BY HOPUS RAULON ORIGINAL MUSIC BY JOHN WILSON SOUND DESIGNER MICHEL LAMBERTI ALISON DANCY RESEARCHER HANNA ARENDT'S ESTATE ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS CHRISTINE ROCHELLEAU DESIGNER PRODUCERS HELINA COLOSCHI-AMUT STEFAN PANNEN MANUSCRIPTS COGIFILMS

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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

VITA ACTIVA

THE SPIRIT OF HANNAH ARENDT

A brand new documentary about one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century.

The German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt caused an uproar in the 1960s by coining the subversive concept of the "Banality of Evil" when referring to the trial of Adolph Eichmann, which she covered for the *New Yorker* magazine. Her private life was no less controversial thanks to her early love affair with the renowned German philosopher and Nazi supporter Martin Heidegger. This thought provoking and spirited documentary, with its abundance of archival materials, offers an intimate portrait of the whole of Arendt's life, traveling to places where she lived, worked, loved, and was betrayed, as she wrote about the open wounds of modern times. Through her books, which are still widely read, and the recent release of Margarethe von Trotta's biopic *Hannah Arendt* (also a Zeitgeist Films release) there is renewed interest in Arendt throughout the world, especially among young people who find her insights into the nature of evil, totalitarianism, ideologies, and the perils faced by refugees, more relevant than ever.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ADA USHPIZ

SCREEN DAILY

By Melanie Goodfellow

Documentary film-maker Ada Ushpiz tells Screen about charting the life and fertile mind of a great thinker in her new film *Vita Activa, The Spirit Of Hannah Arendt*.

When Ada Ushpiz's timely documentary *Vita Activa, The Spirit Of Hannah Arendt*, exploring the roots and legacy of the legendary philosopher's thinking, premiered at Munich International Film Festival earlier this year it played to a packed-out theatre. "There was not a ticket to be had," says respected film-maker Ushpiz, whose credits include *Good Garbage*, *Desert Brides* and *Detained*. Today's screening at Jerusalem Film Festival, where the film is playing in the documentary competition, is also sold out.

"They're not just coming for the documentary," declares Ushpiz. "They're also drawn by the figure of Hannah Arendt. She remains as popular, if not more popular, than when she was alive because she was ahead of her time."

"She is beyond post-modernism. She was a thinking person. She didn't subscribe to any set doctrine or school of thought but based her writings on experience and what was really happening. She had the ability to universalise her personal experience."

Arendt's writings, notes the film-maker, have influenced movements as diverse as Poland's Solidarity and the pro-democracy Arab Spring. To this day, they also remain a source of inspiration for the Jewish secular movement. The philosopher's life-long defence of the need for a plurality of thought and voices makes Arendt's work particularly timely, Ushpiz adds.

In *Vita Activa, The Spirit Of Hannah Arendt*, she hones in on Arendt's early writings, focusing in particular on her most famous work, *Eichmann In Jerusalem*, based on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, for his role as an administrator supporting the deportation and extermination of Jews during the Holocaust.

It was in this work that Arendt crystallised her theory about the "banality of evil", stemming from Eichmann's assertion that he wasn't guilty because he had simply been carrying out orders. "I came to the whole thing because I was intrigued by the idea of the banality of evil," says Ushpiz. "The more I live in this world, the more I believe it is relevant."

The documentary traces how Arendt's thinking and writing grew out of her experiences growing up in Germany, leaving the country during the rise of the Nazi party and subsequently living a peripatetic life across Europe.

She touched down in Prague, Geneva and Paris, and was briefly interned by the Nazis in France before fleeing to the US in 1941. This period in Arendt's life resulted in her writings on what it meant to be a refugee.

Her theory that stateless people find themselves "superfluous" to society remains as relevant now as it did at the time of its formulation in the late 1940s.

Ushpiz's film also touches on Arendt's complex relationship with her philosophy professor Martin Heidegger, who was later discovered to be a Nazi sympathiser.

"Her relationship with Heidegger was complicated," says the director. "Researchers have recently come across lectures he gave in 1933 and 1934 while he was the rector of the University of Freiburg. He speaks in real Nazi language, it's really terrible."

Vita Activa intercuts archival audio and video footage of Adolf Hitler and his military chief Hermann Göring, 1930s Europe, refugee conveyors, the horrors uncovered in post-war Europe and the Eichmann trial with contemporary interviews with academics who either knew Arendt or have studied her writings in depth.

Arendt's words on the subject of being a refugee, for example, run over footage of people being loaded into lorries, a soup kitchen for Jewish refugees in Paris in the 1930s and images of Hitler addressing his followers.

Where possible, Arendt's story is told through her own words, either by an actress reading her writings and letters, or through television interviews. "I did a lot of interviews but decided in the end it was important for her to tell her own story, through her own words, either in interview or her writing," explains Ushpiz. "She writes very emotionally, which is nice."

Having spent five years researching, financing and producing the documentary, Ushpiz says she would like to make a second feature that would examine Arendt's work in the final decade of her life, and its impact in the subsequent decades. "For me," concludes Ushpiz, "the work of her final years was in many ways even more interesting."

ADA USHPIZ

Director and Producer

Ada Ushpiz is a renowned Israeli film producer and director. She has a B.A. in philosophy and M.A. in history from Tel Aviv University and a significant journalistic experience in political-social writing for the prestigious *Ha'aretz* newspaper. She directed a number of remarkable documentaries in recent years - *Detained* (2001), *Bloody Engagement* (2004), *Desert Brides* (2008) and *Good Garbage* (2012) - which have been awarded numerous awards in Israel and around the world.

INA FICHMAN

Producer

For over twenty five years, Ina Fichman has been producing award-winning documentary and fiction films for television and theatrical release. Recent productions include *Malls 'R Us* directed by Helene Klodawsky, *Six Days in June* directed by Ilan Ziv, *S&M: Short and Male* directed by Howard Goldberg, and *That's Poker* by Hervé Martin-Delpierre.

Other documentaries include Gemini Award winning feature *Undying Love* which also won awards at the Int'l Jerusalem Film Festival, was nominated for 2 Prix Gemaux and won both WGC and CSC Awards; *Black Coffee* and *Being Dorothy*.

Non-fiction youth TV credits include *My Brand New Life/Je vie ta vie*, *La quee* and *Active-Toi*.

As a producer/executive producer of fiction, Ina has a number of credits including the alternative drama *Family Motel* directed by Helene Klodawsky, the *Mow la force de l'age*, and the teen series *Vampire High*.

Intuitive Pictures and AU Films present

VITA ACTIVA

THE SPIRIT OF HANNAH ARENDT

a film by Ada Ushpiz

Produced by Ina Fichman, Ada Ushpiz

Director & Writer Ada Ushpiz

Directors of Photography Itai Neeman, German Gutierrez, Philippe Lavalette

Editor Hadas Ayalon

Original Music John Wilson

Sound Design Michel Lambert

Alison Darcy as Hannah Arendt's voice

Associate Producer Christine Rocheleau

Executive Producers Hedva Goldschmidt, Stefan Pannen

World Sales Go2Films

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In German, English and Hebrew with English subtitles

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