



presents

# THE WANTED 18

A FILM BY AMER SHOMALI AND PAUL COWAN

Official Selection 2014 Toronto International Film Festival

Palestine/Canada/France | 75 minutes | 2014 | In Arabic, Hebrew and English with  
English Subtitles

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## SYNOPSIS

Through a clever mix of stop motion animation and interviews, *The Wanted 18* recreates an astonishing true story: the Israeli army's pursuit of 18 cows, whose independent milk production on a Palestinian collective farm was declared "a threat to the national security of the state of Israel." In response to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, a group of people from the town of Beit Sahour decide to buy 18 cows and produce their own milk as a co-operative. Their venture is so successful that the collective farm becomes a landmark, and the cows local celebrities—until the Israeli army takes note and declares that the farm is an illegal security threat. Consequently, the dairy is forced to go underground, the cows continuing to produce their "Intifada milk" with the Israeli army in relentless pursuit. Recreating the story of the "wanted 18" from the perspectives of the Beit Sahour activists, Israeli military officials, and the cows, Palestinian artist Amer Shomali and veteran Canadian director Paul Cowan create an enchanting, inspirational tribute to the ingenuity and power of grassroots activism.

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## THE FILMMAKERS

### **Amer Shomali**

Amer Shomali is a Palestinian artist and worked as multimedia designer at Birzeit University and ZAN Studio in Ramallah, Palestine. He uses art and technology to design posters, political cartoons and short animation to support local and international political campaigns and open local social debates. He now lives in England, pursuing his MA studies in animation at the arts institute at Bournemouth.

### **Paul Cowan**

In his 25-year career as a filmmaker, Paul Cowan has never been one to shy away from controversy. He has chronicled the rise and fall of renegade billionaire Robert Campeau, followed Dr. Henry Morgentaler on his controversial abortion crusade, dramatized Donald Marshall's landmark battle against Nova Scotia's justice system, and stirred up a storm of debate in the Canadian Senate with a hotly-contested docudrama about First World War flying ace Billy Bishop. His strength is creative documentaries that combine documentary techniques with evocative images and recreations. Paul recently wrote and directed the feature documentary, Paris 1919.

## CREDITS

A film by Amer Shomali and Paul Cowan

Written by Paul Cowan

Executive Producers: Saed Andoni, Dominique Barneaud, Ina Fichman

Executive Producer: Colette Loumède

Directors of Photography: Daniel Villeneuve, German Gutierrez

Editor: Aube Foglia

### Animation

Design Director: Michelle Lannen

Artistic Director: Dominique Côté

Principal Animator: Myriam Elda Arsenault

Original Music: Benoit Charest

Line Producers: Christine Rocheleau, Mélanie Lasnier (NFB)

Location Sound: Daniel Fontaine-Bégin

Sound Editor: Sylvain Bellemare

Drawings: Amer Shomali

The Cows:

Goldie - Alison Darcy

Ruth - Heidi Foss

Lola - Rosann Nerenberg

Rivka - Holly Uloth "O'Brien"

Casting Director: Rosann Nerenberg

**WANTED 18 Q&A**

with Amer Shomali, Paul Cowan, Ina Fichman and Saed Andoni

**Can you tell us a bit about how this project came about?**

**Amer Shomali:** The first time I heard about the cows' story I was in a refugee camp in Syria. It was around 1990, and at that time I read it in a comic book, the story of Beit Sahour, a small town near Bethlehem. My family is from Beit Sahour, but I didn't know that much about it, so it was through reading the comic book that I started to learn about my town, about the civil disobedience they went through, and the story of the cows.

Then in 1996, we got a permit to go back to Palestine. When I came back to Beit Sahour, I found out that the reality was nothing like the comic book... it was totally different. I started to meet the people who I'd seen in the comic book. These are the characters you meet in the film.

**Ina Fichman:** I was at a documentary pitch event in Ramallah where Amer and his executive producer Saed Andoni presented the project. At that time, they wanted to create a short animated film based on this rather absurd story about 18 "threatening" cows. I was there with a few colleagues of mine from ARTE and Radio-Canada, and we all looked at each other and said "this isn't a short film, this is a major documentary!" When I got back to Montreal, I brought Paul Cowan onboard to write and co-direct with Amer.

**Saed, you were in the Palestinian territories while these events were taking place... Why was it important for you to make this film?**

**Saed Andoni:** For me, The Wanted 18 was a personal film. I was part of the story, part of that young generation that was involved in The Wanted 18 story. For me it was something personal, something inspirational. I was dreaming about doing this film for many years, and finally now I can say one dream of many has been achieved.

**And Paul, what was your reaction when you first heard about it?**

**Paul Cowan:** What interested me most in the project, once I knew that it was an interesting story, was the means of telling the story: that we were going to use animation, and drama, and documentary, that there was a surrealistic edge to it, but that we would be telling a real story. As a filmmaker, I find the format of films really interesting, and this was a chance to try something new, in a story that was important.

Here was a way to look at the conflict from a totally new perspective, that was partly humorous, partly heart-warming, partly sad, certainly dramatic... it gave us a fresh perspective on something that we just kind of took for granted: people are always fighting, Palestinians and Israelis. But now we get a good story, and we understand, from that good story, what it's all about. It's fun to watch, but it tells an important story, and rarely do you get those two things in one film.

**At its heart, this film is a collaboration between Canada and Palestine... Ina, as a producer, what were the challenges of having people and shoots spread out between different countries?**

**Ina:** Well, like any situation where you have part of the team in another country, communication is always a challenge. But, somehow, this worked: Paul and Amer collaborated very well together through Skype and on the phone. During the development phase, Amer even worked with the animation team in Montreal, sending files and drawings back and forth. Paul spent quite a bit of time with Amer in Beit Sahour and Ramallah, and during post-production Amer came to Montreal... I think it takes those kinds of efforts to make collaboration like this one work.

**Much of the live action in The Wanted 18 was shot on location in Palestine... Paul, you've directed many movies over the years, what were the shoots like?**

**Paul:** Once I learned the rules of the game, shooting there was fun. First of all, Beit Sahour is just one community... everybody knows everybody! So you're shooting a scene and a car drives by, and suddenly the AD is over there talking to the people in the car. Or your actors see something interesting or someone they know, and they go over and talk to them. Everyone was curious!

The upside is, you want to get 30, 50, 100 people to do a demonstration for you? There they are. You want to use somebody's house? No problem. You want to close down a street? No problem! A truly amazing place to shoot a film.

**Amer:** Yes, we would be shooting in the street and a car would pass by from the same era, like a 1980s car, and we would say "that's a nice car." So the AD would say "stop, stop!" and we would park the car in the scene, use the car and shoot. And we could also just point at any balcony where we wanted to go to shoot from, and they would open the door to us.

**Paul:** Nobody said no to us. Nobody. Nobody wanted money or anything like that, they would be in the scene, they would bring their kids to be in the scene, it didn't matter. As a North American, I would look at them sometimes and say "come on guys, we're making a film here!" That didn't bother them; they were having a good time. But we got along! They didn't mind my North American uptightness, and I learned to deal with their Palestinian way of working. It was chaotic, but the goodwill made it all work.

**And many people from Beit Sahour were involved in the production, as extras, as crewmembers... what was that like for them?**

**Saed:** For them, it was like living their history again. I remember the scene when we made the demonstration; there were more than 300 people who came just to watch. These were the older generation, who wanted to remember. They just stood on the side watching these young kids with masks on throwing fake stones, and with the fake army chasing them... they were just amazed and astonished at how they could have this memory back again, in front of them.

**The film features a lot of animated sequences as well, with Amer's artwork providing a lot of the look and feel, but how did stop-motion animation become such a big part of The Wanted 18?**

**Ina:** For me, one of the most wonderful things about this process is the animation team. Other than a bit in kid's films, I'd never really done anything with a significant amount of animation, and certainly not stop-motion. It's not used that often. So I called up a colleague of mine at the National Film Board, and he said "go to Concordia University, they have a stop-motion animation festival" So I called Eric Goulet, the man who runs the festival, and he introduced me to a few of the animators and they ended up doing the demo for the film.

When it came time to crew up for the production it was an obvious place to go back to, so we have a few of the animators who did the demo a few years ago, and all of their colleagues, and it's fantastic to work with them. I've shot a lot of documentaries, so I knew it would look okay on the documentary side of things, but I felt this was the more challenging part. During the production, when I walked into the studio and I saw the wonderful sets, the creative animation, and the talent, I was thrilled that we had pulled it off.

**Amer:** There are different realities in this film. We have drawings, we have real people, we have actors, and the stop-motion. We felt that the stop-motion, even though it's still animation, there's something real about it... you feel that they're mini real people. So it's easier to blend all of these realities through stop-motion.

**Paul:** And as someone who's never used animation in films, there's something about stop-motion which is the antithesis of what you see now in animated films, where they're hyper realistic, they're incredibly smooth, they're all computer-driven. In our film, you really feel the human quality of the cows. The cows are real, and it's easy to throw your heart into them. There's just something about stop-motion where you feel the hands of the creator, and it truly works.

**Do you think The Wanted 18 has the potential to reach a broad audience?**

**Ina:** Yes, I really hope it does. For me, it's about making a film that's accessible, that will draw the audience in because of the journey of the activists and the cows, and that will have an emotional impact, but will also make them laugh a little bit. The cows are very cute, they're very funny, and I think audiences will appreciate it. I also think the themes are universal. This is a very specific story about a very specific point in time, but at the same time, I think the values of the activists, of wanting their own space, and wanting to be self-sufficient, these are things that we can all relate to.

**Saed:** The people of Beit Sahour are the audience for me. They need to see this film. And the kids of Beit Sahour need to see this to learn about their history to learn that the situation hadn't always been as bad as it is now... that there is hope for



the future if we look at what we've achieved in the past.

I think the power of the story that it has this human aspect. It's not as much about politics as about human lives and souls looking for their freedom and independence. I think everybody in the world will identify with this. Everybody in the world would love to see this film.