

## The Power of Perspective

### *PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI COUNTER-IMAGES*

#### *A Virtual Reality Documentary Experience*



## Project Summary

**The Power of Perspective** will be an immersive dive into the various worlds coexisting within the beautiful and moving city of Jerusalem. We'll be using the empathic elements of VR to allow users to enter the rich and human world of 'the other' in a realm that is so politically and socially contested.

The city of Jerusalem embodies perhaps the greatest social, political, and human challenge of our age: can we transcend ethnic, religious and cultural difference to live in peace with one another? The narrative in this conflict tends to be an exclusive, either/or narrative: either you have sympathy for the Israelis or the Palestinians, or for Christians, or Jews, or Muslims; for secular or religious. Their stories are often met with either deeply ingrained fear or sympathy.

We intend to look at stories of lives beyond easy categorization – the psychiatrist who treats tourists afflicted with Jerusalem Syndrome (sudden belief that they are messianic or biblical figures); the pony-tailed man in the market selling lemon-scented olives from Syria; the widowed Palestinian antiques expert in a cramped Old City shop; the young Ethiopian girl riding her red bicycle through the Old City; the old Rabbi who each month takes shreds of prayer stuffed into cracks of the Wailing Wall and carefully carries them to the Mount of Olives, where he buries them. One of the great powers of VR is in immersing the viewer in the world of the subject. We believe our common humanity to be the best doorway into understanding for an audience.

We will use the powerful POV capabilities of VR to help us cross boundaries between the two communities, and will involve both of them in the production process. One can imagine turning from the crowded streets of the Old City and opening a door, to be welcomed into a Palestinian Arab home on a Friday, and joining them for a meal, a celebration. Likewise, a parallel scene in a Jewish home. In both scenes, the VR POV image would stand in for a welcomed visitor, and the family would interact with it warmly, as they would a guest.

VR has the potential here for a radical change of perspective in a place where it is so desperately needed. We also intend, of course, to use the heartbreaking beauty of the images of city to draw the viewers in.

For more than 3,000 years Jerusalem has symbolized peace and spiritual longing – and for nearly all those years has been witness to the most brutal persecutions committed in its name. ***The Power of Perspective*** will look at how ideology, religion, and national narrative have formed our views of the other and - just maybe - help break down a barrier or two.

## Target Presentation

Upon its completion **The Power of Perspective** will be distributed to international film festivals that program VR projects such as *Hot Docs*, *Sundance*, *SXSW*, and *AFIDOCs*.

At a later stage of the project we intend to have the Jewish resident of Jerusalem wear the VR headgear and 'feel' what it is like to be immersed in the human environment of the Palestinian home, and vice versa. One of the heartbreaking developments over the past two decades is the ever-declining direct contact between these two communities, and a rise in the dehumanization on both sides. We will see whether such a 'virtual' encounter can play a role in defeating the alienation and objectification of the other.

After this initial stage, we will build the VR scenes we collected into an experience available for viewers throughout the world, first at selected exhibitions/festivals, and then through a web-based portal.

### **Current Stage of the project**

On February 2018 we travelled to Jerusalem for an intense week of filming with a cutting-edge Insta360 PRO VR camera. In the limited time we had we managed to achieve a great variety of materials, combining atmospheric shots of the city as well as intimate portraits of individuals. Some of the scenery we captured include a mass funeral of 150,000 Hasidic Jews, a capoeira class for Palestinian children in East Jerusalem, coffee shops and stores in the old city, Mahne Yehuda market in the midst of rush just before shabbat, a monk's music class, and audio interviews with residents of the city. These colourful materials embody the richness as well the divide that exists between these different worlds. They also present a human, intimate, and non-judgemental look into the stories of individuals who live in this city.

We are currently in the post production stage, and we are seeking finance to bring the materials we filmed to completion. It will take a powerful computer that can deal with multiple 6k 3D cameras, as well as sound mix, image correction, and VFX, in addition to the time the editing process requires.

After completion, we'll be using the funds to set up exhibition spaces in Jerusalem, where residents of the city will have the opportunity to experience the world of the other. This interactive experience will be documented and added to our virtual platform.





## ∇The Creators

### Michal Conford

Michal has worked in documentary film for more than twenty years, particularly focused on the human side of political issues. His first feature documentary, about the case of the Native American religious leader David Sohappy, *River People*, won the David Wolper Award from the *International Documentary Association* and the Best Documentary Award from the *American Indian Film Festival* (as well as awards at *Black Maria* and a screening at the *Council on Foundations Film Festival* as an example of well-spent foundation funding). It aired on BBC, PBS, RTE, NHK and other stations around the world. His Middle-East film, *Through The Eyes of Enemies*, played widely on European television stations. His film about unrecognized Arab villages within the state of Israel, *Not On Any Map*, premiered at the *Jerusalem International Film Festival* and won a Golden Gate Award at the *San Francisco International Film Festival*.

Michal has lived for various periods in Jerusalem (notably 1993-1995) and still maintains a wide array of contacts in the city, a number of whom (Hanan Ashrawi, Sari Nusseibeh, Saeb Erakat, A.B. Yehoshua, Meron Benvenisti, etc.) he has interviewed for previous films. Due to his previous work in both the Arab community and the Jewish community he has remarkable access in what can be an intensely polarized situation.

## **Brendan Mills**

Brendan is a Canadian documentary filmmaker based out of Toronto. His latest film *El Nazareno*, winner of the Best Documentary Award at the *Ryerson University Film Festival* explores the Panamanian coastal community of Portobelo and their inhabitants as they prepare for the annual tradition of The Festival of the Black Christ. Brendan has previously collaborated with Dean Gold on both *El Nazareno* and their previous documentary *The Final Road*.

## **Dean Gold**

Dean is an Israeli/Canadian filmmaker with years of experience shooting films in both Israel and Canada. His films discuss questions of Jewish identity, community, and conflict. Dean has collaborated with Brendan Mills on numerous documentaries, most recently on *El Nazareno*; a film shot entirely in Portobelo, Panama, and *The Final Road*; an exploration of the history of Nazi hunting in North America. Dean's latest fiction film *Shehita* is a study of the boundaries of faith and morals within a Jewish Hasidic community in rural Quebec. He's a graduate of the Thelma Yellin School of the Arts in Israel, and Ryerson University's film program in Toronto, Canada.