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RIEFENSTAHL

A DOCUMENTARY
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
ANDRES VEIEL

PRODUCED BY
SANDRA MAISCHBERGER

SUPPORTED BY
FFA, BKM, MBB, FILMSTIFTUNG NRW and DFFF



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LOGLINE

A captivating insight into the private estate of Leni Riefenstahl, who became world-famous with her Nazi propaganda film TRIUMPH OF THE WILL but kept denying any closer ties to the regime.

SYNOPSIS

Leni Riefenstahl is considered one of the most controversial women of the 20th century as an artist and a Nazi propagandist. Her films TRIUMPH OF THE WILL and OLYMPIA stand for perfectly staged body worship and the celebration of the superior and victorious. At the same time, these images project contempt for the imperfect and weak. Riefenstahl's aesthetics are more present than ever today - but is that also true for their implied message? The film examines this question using documents from Riefenstahl's estate, including private films, photos, recordings and letters. It uncovers fragments of her biography and places them in an extended historical context. How could Riefenstahl become the Reich's preeminent filmmaker and keep denying any closer ties to Hitler and Goebbels? During her long life after the fall of Nazism, she remained unapologetic, managing to control and shape her legacy. In personal documents, she mourns her "murdered ideals". Riefenstahl represents many postwar Germans who, in letters and recorded telephone calls from her estate, dream of an organizing hand that will finally clean up the "shit-hole state". Then, her work would also experience a renaissance, in a generation or two this time could come - what if they are right?

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ANDRES VEIEL

How did you come to the subject?

After the death of Riefenstahl's partner in 2016, Sandra Maischberger had gained access to the estate and initiated and pre-financed the move for it to be provisionally made available. In 2018, she had contacted me about the project. From the beginning I felt a strong commitment from Sandra and her team: they wanted a film with a new formal and thematic approach, and they wanted to make it with me and the brilliant editors Stephan Krumbiegel and Olaf Voigtländer, with whom I had already edited *Beuys*. Alfredo Castro was going to join our team as well.

This began a multi-year journey - and an elaborate search to translate the enormous treasure trove into a cinematic narrative. In 2020, I received the first digital images - first a diary from 1948, then recordings of private phone calls, for example with Albert Speer. I was able to look at the collection of unpublished photos and Standard 8 mm footage from the 1930s, as well as the drafts of the memoirs, some of which differed significantly from the printed version. These findings sparked my curiosity right away, but they raised questions at the same time. Had Riefenstahl deliberately left behind certain materials while sorting out others? Where should I consult other sources?

Was the estate manipulated by Riefenstahl?

Firstly, it is everyone's right to look through their papers and documents and decide what should be preserved for posterity. It would have been surprising if Riefenstahl had not made use of this possibility, which is indicated by at least a few "gaps" in her estate.

Can you give an example of one of these "gaps"?

We came across the announcement of a 1934 *Daily Express* interview with Riefenstahl, but the actual interview was missing. We then obtained it from the newspaper's archives. Here Riefenstahl declares that she had read Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in 1932 and, after the first pages, had already become an enthusiastic National Socialist. Such a document would have demolished, in one fell swoop, the painstakingly constructed legend that she was an "apolitical person." So the question became all the more relevant: How can I approach a protagonist who not only in her life, but also in her estate did everything in order to maintain her legends, half-truths, and lies? And then the actual work began: to familiarize myself with the 700 boxes of the estate with the help of the archive producer Monika Preischl and the literary scholar Christiane Cæmmerer. And despite my mistrust, to remain open to what the 700 boxes have to tell us.

You then spent a year and a half writing different versions of a treatment.

The abundance of the estate material presented us with the opportunity to look at seemingly familiar fragments of Riefenstahl's life story with a completely different perspective. I looked in the personal documents for key experiences and influences. At the beginning of our research, for example, I came across a twenty-five-page, typewritten bundle of papers in

which she outlines her childhood and adolescence. This was written in the early 1970s, long before she began her notes for the memoirs. Especially striking are the vivid descriptions of her father's physical violence that she experienced as a little girl, and also as a seventeen-year-old. During her years of puberty, Riefenstahl's father always hit her when she played with her feminine charms. In the drafts and the later published memoirs, these orgies of violence are significantly toned down, and much of it is not mentioned at all. Already in the drafts, she struggles with the public image she wants to convey of herself. Moments of powerlessness and weakness are crossed out.

In an attempt to describe Riefenstahl as a victim, do you not run the risk of absolving her of her responsibility of having produced propaganda for a tyrannical regime?

No. Already in the writing process, I was concerned with precisely determining her guilt and responsibility - on the basis of new, previously unpublished documents. I wanted to understand the figure of Riefenstahl in her development, without exculpating her in the process. Wanting to understand a person is not the same as looking at them sympathetically.

Can you approach a figure like Riefenstahl, the staunch propagandist of a regime of terror, with an ambivalent openness?

I also had moments when I had to force myself not to simply turn away from her. I overcame this state of reluctance, otherwise there would have been no reason to make the film. There is a life before guilt. Her life could have developed quite differently in the 1920s. Her enthusiasm for the Nazi regime did not begin in 1932. There were numerous biographical, historical, and generational influences in the decades before. The estate, together with other sources, give us the opportunity to approach Riefenstahl in all her contradictions. This is not just a matter of gently circling around her, so to speak; on the contrary, this work has a destructive element. I need to break something open in order to look deeper. And in this way curiosity arises, together with new questions. They are what drove forward the writing process - which was not free of crises.

This sounds like a difficult undertaking.

Yes, it was. After about a year of preliminary work, I reached a dead end. I had succeeded in bringing the findings from the estate into a non-linear but quite tight narrative. But something crucial was missing: the development of the character. In the biographical narrative, there is no reformation, if you will: no redemption of the main protagonist. Riefenstahl refuses the classic turning point in her life story. She remains with her legends until the end of her life, she regrets nothing, doesn't call anything into question. This meant that at a dramatic level, I was missing a third act.

How did you get out of this dilemma?

I researched and continued writing. It was a complex process of searching that also involved the editors. A first liberation was the idea of developing an author figure who asks a fictional Riefenstahl all the questions that were not asked. I wanted to free myself from the prison of the existing interviews in which, most of the time, she stereotypically presents her legends:

that she was a non-political director who was only committed to her art, she had hardly anything to do with prominent party figures, and so on.

You then discarded this idea.

Yes, with the outbreak of the Ukraine war in late February 2022. I soon discovered Riefenstahl's aesthetic in the current images of a Moscow parade: a low angle on Putin, his view from above of the marching columns. And in the footage from the opening of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, I found a similar aesthetic to that of Olympia, it was the well-known imagery of the heroic and victorious - all of this now incredibly topical. The playful approach of the fictional level lost all legitimacy.

The topicality of the material was then the substitute for the missing third act?

Yes, and the frightening permanence of Riefenstahl's aesthetic ultimately also provided the justification to make the film in the first place. The timeless realization is that totalitarian power and even arbitrary terror not only have an effect of deterrence, but also of attraction. In the gesture of submission to an imperial potentate, there is a hidden reward - to be part, as an individual, of an empire that is returned to historical greatness. It is the universal narrative of superiority and invincibility. At the heart of these images pulsates resentment: contempt for the other, the weak, the supposedly sick. And that brings us directly to the visual aesthetic of Leni Riefenstahl.

In the finished film, you work exclusively with historical archive material, there are no eyewitness interviews, no current material - the Moscow parades you mentioned also do not appear.

Much of Riefenstahl's estate is frighteningly topical today, but presenting things in relation to current events would have undermined a nuanced examination of her and the materials of her estate.

In your film you quote from a speech by Goebbels, whose anti-Semitic tirades also sound topical today.

Anti-Semitic resentment is currently experiencing a massive recurrence, combined with the longing for a nation state in which everything was supposedly better, more orderly and safer in the past. In this context we also quote Leni Riefenstahl. While she was still alive, she hoped that the German people would return to decency and morality; after all, she felt, they had the ability to do so. This quote could also have come from prominent representatives of the AfD, Germany's far-right, nationalist party.

You edited your Riefenstahl film for more than eighteen months. Wasn't that extreme?

The challenges were greater than in any previous film project. First of all, this has to do with the gigantic amount of material available. At times the work pushed me to my limits. I would not have gotten through it without the people who have been at my side during these years:

my navigators through the estate, Christiane Cæmmerer, Monika Preischl, and Mona El-Bira. And at the same time the editors Stephan Krumbiegel, Olaf Voigtländer, and Alfredo Castro, who continually contributed their own ideas and have significantly influenced the film.

In the finished film, you arrange the estate as it was left by Riefenstahl: personal documents in folders, photos in albums, as a contact sheet, in parchment-like protective sheaths, in cardboard boxes, film reels on a light table, filmed in motion or as a still image.

This allowed us to bring the materials from the estate into a narrative. We bring something into focus from a selection of documents, cover something else that does not seem important to us. With the selection of photos, we tell the story of Riefenstahl's growing older or vice versa, have her grow younger again in material from the 1960s.

A central element of the film's narrative is the use of excerpts from the talk shows and TV interviews.

We don't use these excerpts just for informational purposes. Sometimes we show them without sound and in slow motion, we can then simply observe Riefenstahl with her gestures and facial expressions.

Can you talk about the interplay of montage and music?

At the beginning, Freya Arde composed musical sketches without any knowledge of the actual material, in which she intuitively approached the figure of Riefenstahl. I was not familiar with this kind of preparatory work, and so I was all the more surprised by how helpful these first sketches were for us. To our delight, there were even some compositions that were kept for the final version. In addition, Arde was able to record some of the compositions with the Babelsberg Film Orchestra - with a quantum leap in sound quality. In her music, she has managed to create a sort of hovering distance toward Riefenstahl's stories. Sometimes in the film excerpts of Riefenstahl, we just needed to answer, instead of with the original music, with Arde's minimalist musical language - and immediately spaces of questioning, skepticism, doubt open up.

For the first time in your films, you work with a commentary.

At first, I was convinced that I could not let the material of the estate speak for itself. We would need the voice of an author who categorizes and questions the findings, and sometimes even deciphers them. At which moments do I believe her? What other materials from further research need to be consulted? What do her legends represent, what does she need them for? However, the character of the commentary changed fundamentally during the course of the editing process. In the beginning, it was more judgmental, one could say more about unmasking. As an author, I had to resist her lies, expose them. More and more, however, this role of deciphering her narratives was taken over by the editing. And almost exclusively using the materials of the estate itself. Evidently she did not recognize that many of the materials essentially incriminate her.

Do you still see Leni Riefenstahl as the filmmaker who created iconographic imagery?

Riefenstahl was a master of montage. We show excerpts from Olympia, such as the well-known high diving sequence. In this way we give space to Riefenstahl's celebration of the beautiful, strong, and victorious. The sequence still has a strong impact today, it would be wrong not to show it. What these images conceal, we tell elsewhere - in the context of the fate of the cameraman Willy Zielke, for example. He had shot the prologue of Olympia largely on his own. Shortly after filming, he had a breakdown and was committed to a mental hospital. Less than six months later, he was forcibly sterilized. Leni Riefenstahl was informed of this, but did not intervene. In the film, we tell about the dark aspect of Riefenstahl's aesthetic: the contempt for the other, up to his or her eradication. Riefenstahl denied this connection all her life.

PRODUCER'S NOTE BY SANDRA MAISCHBERGER

An email from Munich in early March 2017 began a long journey. I learned that Horst Kettner, Leni Riefenstahl's partner, had died, "without warning - a sudden cardiac death". Riefenstahl's housekeeper and confidante had found the 74-year-old lifeless in his bed on December 11, 2016. The house of the director, who had died in 2003 at the age of 101, had been sealed and was to be offered for sale.

In the spacious villa, however, there was still Riefenstahl's entire estate. She had bequeathed it to the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in Berlin: relics of her long life and at the same time important traces of her work during the darkest years of German history. Packed in 700 boxes. A vast amount of contemporary testimonies about a world-famous filmmaker and highly controversial figure in post-war Germany during her lifetime.

My preoccupation with Leni Riefenstahl had begun much earlier. In 2002, I conducted an interview with the centenarian in that very house in Pöcking for a film for the European TV channel arte. It was the last major interview the director gave before her death. At that time, I left the house in Pöcking with significantly more questions than new insights. Since then, I have been telling journalism students about the "Riefenstahl principle," because something became clear to me for the first time during this meeting: As an interviewer, you can tell when the other person is lying straight to your face. But it is much more difficult or even impossible to look behind the facade of a lie that the person has told himself for so long that he by now believes it to be the truth.

Riefenstahl didn't simply start with the conversation. She "received" my camera team and myself in her house. We waited in the living room for the director, surrounded by African sculptures, European paintings, and private photographs. After some time, Riefenstahl came from the upper floor. She descended the stairs, stopped in the middle, smiled. Only then did she take the last steps. She did what she had always done: staged herself as a star, no matter what the stage. Even here, in her own home.

Among fellow journalists, there is the saying about the "record" that someone puts on - that is, the same story, well-rehearsed, told over and over again, recognizable by the effort to avoid real answers and further questions.

Leni Riefenstahl had played her "record" not only for me. Around the time of her hundredth birthday, the view of her had become more lenient after decades of fierce debates, and she was even courted and admired. Film research wanted to "decouple the conflict between art and fascism" in order to be able to freely approach her work and aesthetics. Jodie Foster, Rammstein, and many others celebrated the artist without seeking to dwell too long on her political and historical involvement. "She was the best director that ever lived. To see that, all you have to do is watch her Olympia films." Quentin Tarantino used these superlative terms in an interview with *Der Spiegel*.

Riefenstahl had gained interpretative sovereignty over her biography up to the end of her long life.

Was it possible that evidence of a different truth could be found in the 700 boxes? This thought wouldn't let go of me.

I managed to reach an exclusive agreement with the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation: we, Vincent Productions, would be permitted to undertake an initial thorough examination of the estate and, in exchange, make use of the material for a documentary film.

The second fundamentally important step came afterwards: we were able to engage Andres Veiel for this project. A piece of good fortune. Not least because Andres had just proven with BEUYS how masterfully he could not only grasp and decipher a vast wealth of material intellectually, but also turn it into an artistically satisfying film.

With his help, we put together a team of archivists and researchers who, over many months, took almost every page, every image, every snippet of film in their hands, catalogued it, and deciphered it. A mammoth task, especially under the difficult conditions of the covid restrictions - for a few months, access to the state library was not possible at all, and after that only very limited.

For four years, the team was occupied with viewing and taking stock of the huge estate. What we found reinforced our desire to turn it into a film: despite the expected and visible traces of careful purging, we discovered numerous pieces of evidence of Riefenstahl's deliberate manipulation of her biography. In addition, and this seemed even more important to us, the new documents from the estate now also made it possible to integrate the development of her controversial visual language into the context of her life and her thoughts about current political events, and to relate them to one another.

My personal view of Leni Riefenstahl has changed once again during these years of extensive involvement with her estate. The image of an extremely ambitious, above all opportunistically motivated artist who would have put her talent at the service of any power that would only provide her with sufficient resources and opportunities, could not be maintained. Instead, I found an "activist" who was thoroughly convinced of the National Socialist idea and who could not let go of her old ideals up to her last breath. As I read it today, Riefenstahl experienced the end of the war as a personal defeat. It wasn't just the abrupt termination of her dazzling success that she mourned. Rather, she no longer saw any point in practicing an art that did not at the same time glorify the ideology she believed in until the end of her life.

This also explains why she refused to be reformed, inwardly and outwardly, until the end, and also surrounded herself in her later years with "like-minded" people in the truest sense of the word. Numerous traces in the estate serve as proof: the words "NPD" (Neo-Nazi and ultranationalist political party in Germany) and "Vote NPD" scribbled, seemingly thoughtlessly, on a page of her calendar; in a correspondence with a long-time companion, the openly expressed and undiminished regret about the end of the good National Socialist era; words of thanks from a well-known Holocaust denier. Above all, however, her exchanges with friends and admirers in numerous telephone calls, many of which Riefenstahl had recorded. Especially distressing to listen to are the tapes where Riefenstahl is celebrated after her appearance on the WDR program *Je später der Abend*.

Why is it so important to examine Riefenstahl's work and life again today?

Because it comes at a time when not only fascist patterns have become topical again, even socially acceptable. We are also encountering propaganda, distortion, "fake news" on a daily basis. War and totalitarianism in immediate proximity also threaten us. We are painfully reminded of the vulnerability of our democracies, the important role played by deception, and the destructive power of autocratic thinking. Many modern "Riefenstahls" are involved.

It is precisely at this critical moment that the last witnesses are leaving us who could tell younger people the story of how an entire nation succumbed to a criminal regime and its seemingly harmless ideals of strength and beauty. And what role the regime's propagandists played in this.

This is what Riefenstahl is all about. The hundred-year history of Leni Riefenstahl's life and impact is a key to understanding the mechanisms of manipulation as we are currently encountering them again. This makes the journey into the depths of her estate more than an important cultural and historical task.

Deciphering her work means unmasking an original sin of film propaganda so that we can recognize it in today's world.

THE LIFE OF LENI RIEFENSTAHL

22.08.1902	Helene Bertha Amalie "Leni" Riefenstahl is born as the daughter of Alfred Riefenstahl and Bertha Riefenstahl (b. Scherlach) in Berlin-Wedding.
1908 - 1918	Childhood and youth in Berlin. Intermediate school certificate. She learns to play the piano and is enthusiastic about various sports. Against her father's wishes but with her mother's support, she takes dance lessons at the Grimm-Reiter School on the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. If we can believe Riefenstahl's notes, her dancing ambitions lead to a rift between her parents. The impending divorce can only be averted with difficulty.
1918 - 1923	At her father's request, she takes painting and drawing courses at the Staatliche Kunstgewerbeschule in Berlin. This is followed by a one-year stay in a boarding school in Thale (Harz) to complete her education and relax the family situation. After returning, she works in an office in the family business, a heating and installation company. With her father's approval, she takes dance lessons with Eugenia Eduardova, Jutta Klamt, and Mary Wigman over the next few years.
23.10.1923	Debut as a solo dancer in Munich with financial support from banker Harry R. Sokal. Three days later, she dances in Berlin. Mixed press reviews. Riefenstahl will only remember the positive reviews later. Her father is enthusiastic.
1923 - 1926	Engaged for solo dance performances at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin on the initiative of Max Reinhardt. Afterwards, numerous appearances in Germany and Europe. Her mother accompanies her and takes care of her costumes.
06.1924	Riefenstahl's appearances are met with a divided response. Some critics praise her, others write scathing reviews. Riefenstahl ends her dance career in June 1924. She herself cites as the reason a serious knee injury during a Prague performance.
1925	First encounter with the mountain films of director Arnold Fanck. Specially for Riefenstahl, Fanck writes the screenplay DER HEILIGE BERG (The Holy Mountain), in which Riefenstahl takes the lead role. Harry R. Sokal buys the nearly insolvent Berg- und Sportfilm GmbH from Fanck to enable the production of the film. The film is a success with critics and audiences.
1926 - 1932	Riefenstahl practices climbing and skiing to enable her to appear in more mountain films. Filming for the ski comedy THE GREAT LEAP (1927) and the drama THE WHITE HELL OF PITZ PALU (1929). Her attempts to succeed as an actress outside of mountain films (DAS SCHICKSAL DERER VON HABSBURG) fail. Roles in Fanck's first sound films: STORM OVER MONT BLANC (1930) and DER WEIÙE RAUSCH (1931). Her voice and

	Berlin dialect increasingly cause her problems in the sound films now becoming popular. Language and voice training.
1932	First independent directorial work, THE BLUE LIGHT (1932) with the participation of Arnold Fanck's cameramen. She incorporates what she has learned from Fanck in terms of directing and camera work with. The screenplay is by Hungarian writer and film critic Béla Balász, who also co-directs the film; Harry Sokal provides the funding. Since the first cut of the film was not convincing, Arnold Fanck undertakes a new cut. Mixed reviews in Germany, at the Venice Biennale the film is awarded a silver medal. Enthusiastic reviews in France, Great Britain, and the USA. The names of her Jewish collaborators are removed when it is shown again in Germany in 1938.
02.1932	Letter to Adolf Hitler asking for a personal meeting after she heard one of his speeches at the Sportpalast. In May 1932 meeting on the North Sea coast in Horemersiel. Riefenstahl writes in her notes that Hitler asked her to make the films for his "movement" after his seizure of power.
1932	One day after her meeting with Hitler, she departs for Greenland to shoot the film S. O. S. ICEBERG directed by Arnold Fanck. The polar explorer and geoscientist Ernst Sorge, who is part of the film crew, observes that Riefenstahl is enthusiastically reading <i>Mein Kampf</i> .
09.1932	Return from Greenland and first encounter with Joseph Goebbels. There are conflicting sources in the estate in which she remembers Goebbels' advances.
23.08.1933	Announcement that Riefenstahl will shoot the party convention film DER SIEG DES GLAUBENS, cameramen include Sepp Allgeier, Franz Weihmayr, Walter Frentz, Richard Quaas, and Paul Tesch. Riefenstahl had already worked with some of them with Arnold Fanck. Germany-wide screenings, occasionally using mobile sound film trucks in order to reach remote regions without movie theaters. Hitler is displeased with the prominence of SA chief Ernst Röhm in the film. After the Röhm Putsch on July 1, 1934, no further screenings of DER SIEG DES GLAUBENS.
1934	First attempts at making the film LOWLANDS, based on the opera of the same name by Eugen d'Albert, one of Hitler's favorite operas. Trip to Spain for preliminary research.
19.04.1934	Commission to produce the party convention film TRIUMPH OF THE WILL. Hitler makes around 300,000 Reichsmarks available for production. Riefenstahl has 18 cameramen, 19 camera assistants, and around 130 other employees. Sepp Allgeier, Walter Frentz, Franz Weihmayr, Karl Attenberger, and Paul Lieberenz once again participate.

	First screened on March 28, 1935. Awarded the National Film Prize on June 25, 1935 by Goebbels. Prize for the best foreign documentary in Venice. Later also wins a gold medal during the 1938 World Exhibition in Paris.
1935	Production of TAG DER FREIHEIT commissioned by Hitler to portray the Wehrmacht, which featured little in TRIUMPH OF THE WILL. Among the cameramen is Willy Zielke, who is known as an independent film artist.
1936	Filming at the Olympic Games in Berlin commissioned by the NSDAP. The party provides a budget of 1.5 million Reichsmarks for production. Riefenstahl will exceed the budget by 500,000 Reichsmarks. Up to 1938, two films, OLYMPIA: FESTIVAL OF THE NATIONS and OLYMPIA: FESTIVAL OF BEAUTY, are cut from around 400 km of film material. In addition, educational films are made about various sports. Willi Zielke develops and shoots the "Prologue" in Greece and at the Curonian Spit. Immediately after submitting it, he falls seriously ill and is admitted to a mental hospital. Here he is forcibly sterilized.
20.04.1938	Premiere of the OLYMPIA films on Hitler's birthday. Promotional tour of Europe. Riefenstahl regularly reports to Hitler about her journey.
04.11.1938	Promotional tour of the USA with a sympathetic reception. First reports about Kristallnacht on November 9/10 lead to a boycott in Hollywood. Almost all producers and directors cancel their planned meetings. Meetings with Walt Disney, Avery Brundage, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
09.1939	War correspondent with her own war correspondent team at the beginning of the war. Riefenstahl follows Hitler to Poland. Eyewitness to a massacre of Polish Jews in Końskie on September 12, 1939. Immediately afterwards, return to Germany.
1939/1940	Resumption of filming for the LOWLANDS project. Since Spanish extras are not available, Roma and Sinti are recruited from the forced labor camps Maxglan near Salzburg and Marzahn in Berlin. First encounter with Major Peter Jacob on set.
1944	March 21 Marriage to Peter Jacob in Kitzbühel, to which Riefenstahl had retreated with the film crew to escape the bombing of Berlin. She brings Willy Zielke from the mental hospital to Kitzbühel to assist her in the completion of LOWLANDS. From the 1970s, Zielke and his second wife will accuse Riefenstahl of exploiting Zielke and appropriating his photographic work.
07. 1944	Death of her father Alfred Riefenstahl. Her brother Heinz falls at the front a few days later. The family business is inherited by Leni Riefenstahl together with her brother's underage children. She assumes guardianship at her brother's request and thus gains control of the family business.

04.1945	Capture by American soldiers in Kitzbühel. Imprisonment in Dachau, where Hermann Göring and Hitler's confidants Josef Dietrich and Johanna Wolf are also being interrogated. Release on June 3.
1946/47	Re-arrest by the French. Seizure and transfer of the film material to Paris. Expulsion from Tyrol by the French. Her mother, her husband, and she settle in the Freiburg area. Divorce from Peter Jacob. Brief stay in a psychiatric clinic. Love affair with Anders Lembcke.
1948/1952	Resumption of cinematic work. Efforts to reacquire the footage brought to Paris. Four denazification trials in Baden-Württemberg and Berlin, from which she emerges as a "fellow traveler" or as "exonerated." Long stay in Italy to find funding for the film project DIE ROTEN TEUFEL. New cut and revival of THE BLUE LIGHT. The film is withdrawn after a few days, and potential producers for new projects distance themselves. Further new film projects are unable to be realized. The only glimmer of hope: Riefenstahl recovers the LOWLANDS film from France and completes it.
11.02.1954	Premiere of LOWLANDS in Stuttgart. The film flops in Germany and Austria. Efforts to screen it at Cannes are rejected by the German federal government.
1954/1960	Repeated attempts to obtain the rights to the films TRIUMPH OF THE WILL and OLYMPIA. Since the films were commissioned by Hitler and the NSDAP, the legal situation is unclear.
1953/1963	New film projects conceived during a stay in Spain already fail in the planning stage and financing. Planning of a film about the slave trade, DIE SCHWARZE FRACHT.
1956	First trip to Kenya, which ends in a serious car accident. A photo by British photographer George Rodger in <i>Stern</i> magazine kindles her desire to visit and film the Nuba in Sudan.
12. 1962	Travel to Sudan with the Nansen Society (University of Göttingen). Several months' stay with a Nuba tribe and then further trips in Sudan and Kenya. Riefenstahl later uses the extensive film and photo footage for slide presentations.
12. 1964	Travel to the Nuba of the Masakin region. A portion of the film footage from the trip turns out to be discolored and unusable. Death of her mother, the trip is broken off at the beginning of 1965.

1965	Interview with Canadian journalist Waterman (Wassermann) for the CBC, who, as the child of a Jewish family, had to flee from Austria via England to Canada.
1966/1968	Further trips to the Nuba. 1968 for the first time accompanied by Horst Kettner.
1969	The Federal Court of Justice rules that Riefenstahl does not own any rights to the films TRIUMPH OF THE WILL and OLYMPIA. Riefenstahl's years of efforts to regain control of the works fail. Nevertheless, the collecting society for the films of the federal archive, Transit Film, gives her a share of the films' revenues for the rest of her life. Title story in <i>Stern</i> magazine (Dec. 14) about the Nuba expeditions. Further publications in Europe and the USA.
1970	Photo safari in East Africa. First acquaintance with the underwater world while snorkeling.
1972	Work as an accredited photographer for the <i>Sunday Times</i> at the Olympic Games in Munich.
1973	Publication of the book <i>The Last of the Nuba</i> .
1973/1974	Travel to the Nuba of Kau with her cameraman and later partner Horst Kettner. The Nuba are initially skeptical of the photographer. Riefenstahl mostly photographs with a telephoto lens.
1974	First diving expeditions in the Indian Ocean and the Maldives. Diving course and numerous dives with film and photo camera.
1974	Continued photographic work for the <i>Sunday Times</i> : Riefenstahl photographs a series with Mick and Bianca Jagger.
02.10.1975	Photo spread in <i>Stern</i> magazine about her journey to the Nuba of Kau.
1976	Riefenstahl is invited as a guest of honor at the Summer Olympics in Montreal.
10.1976	Publication <i>The People of Kau</i> .
30.10.1976	Appearance in the WDR talk show JE SPÄTER DER ABEND... with host Hansjürgen Rosenbauer, singer-songwriter Knut Kiesewetter, and union leader Elfriede Kretschmar. Despite critical questions, she succeeds in convincingly presenting her self-image as a non-political artist. This is followed by a flood of positive audience feedback, which reinforces Riefenstahl's stance.
1977	Further trip to the Nuba of Kau on behalf of <i>GEO</i> magazine for the story "Farewell to the Nuba."

1978	Publication <i>Coral Gardens</i> .
1978	Moves to a prefab villa in Pöcking, Bavaria.
1980	Major exhibition of Nuba photographs at the Sheibu Museum of Art in Tokyo.
1982	The TV documentary TIME OF SILENCE AND DARKNESS by Freiburg filmmaker Nina Gladitz addresses the use of Roma and Sinti during the filming of LOWLANDS, giving them a voice for the first time. Riefenstahl takes legal action against the film.
1982	Publication of <i>My Africa</i> .
1987	Publication of <i>Leni Riefenstahl: A Memoir</i> . The critical responses to Riefenstahl's self-styled portrayal are restrained. Translation into nine languages.
1990	Publication of <i>The Wonders Under Water</i> .
1991/92	Further exhibition in Tokyo.
07.10.1993	Filming with Ray Müller for the internationally successful and Emmy Award-winning documentary THE WONDERFUL, HORRIBLE LIFE OF LENI RIEFENSTAHL about Riefenstahl's life and work First broadcast of THE WONDERFUL, HORRIBLE LIFE OF LENI RIEFENSTAHL
10. 1995	First major retrospective of her films in Germany at the documentary film festival in Leipzig.
1996	Performance of the dance theater piece <i>Riefenstahl</i> by Johann Kresnik at the Cologne Schauspielhaus. Exhibitions in Kuopio and Milan.
1997	Attempts to edit the underwater material on a computer.
1998	Interview with Alice Schwarzer for <i>EMMA</i> magazine. Published a year later with the title "Propagandist or Artist?"
12/1998-2/1999	Major retrospective at the Filmmuseum Potsdam
2000	Last trip to the Nuba for the documentary LENI RIEFENSTAHL: HER DREAM OF AFRICA by Ray Müller. She reunites with some old acquaintances from her previous visits. The helicopter crashes on its way back to Khartoum. Riefenstahl is rescued from the wreck with serious injuries.
2000	Publication LENI RIEFENSTAHL: FIVE LIVES edited by Angelika Taschen. Book presentation with Riefenstahl at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

2002	Interview with Sandra Maischberger for the film DIE MASSLOSIGKEIT, DIE IN MIR IST on behalf of ZDF/arte.
2002	Premiere of the underwater film IMPRESSIONEN UNTER WASSER shortly before Riefenstahl's 100 th birthday on August 22. Large celebration at Lake Starnberg with numerous prominent guests, including Siegfried and Roy, who read a congratulatory message from Michael Jackson.
2003	Release of Ray Müller's film LENI RIEFENSTAHL: HER DREAM OF AFRICA abroad. In Germany the film is unable to obtain a broadcaster.
2003	Leni Riefenstahl dies on September 8 at the age of 101 in her villa in Pöcking near Lake Starnberg.
2016	Horst Kettner dies in the villa in Pöcking. The household is dissolved, the artistic estate (letters, written documents, photos, films) is transferred to the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in Berlin.

Sources: *Leni Riefenstahl. Die Verführung des Talents* by Rainer Rother (Henschel Verlag), *Riefenstahl. Eine Deutsche Karriere* by Jürgen Trimborn (Aufbau Verlag), *Leni Riefenstahl* by Mario Leis (rororo Verlag), estate of Leni Riefenstahl, Wikipedia.

THE CREW

WRITER & DIRECTOR

ANDRES VEIEL

Andres Veiel's approach to filmmaking is characterized by intensive research which sometimes takes several years. In the course of his artistic career, he has been honored with well over fifty awards for his documentaries and feature films as well as for his theater productions and writings, including the European Film Award, several German Film Awards, the Grimme Award, and the German Federal Cross of Merit 1st Class. Veiel earned wider attention with his documentary *BLACK BOX BRD* (2001), in which he juxtaposes the life stories of the bank manager Alfred Herrhausen and the RAF terrorist Wolfgang Grams, as well as the feature film *IF NOT US, WHO?* (2010) about the history of the RAF, which premiered in the Berlinale competition, winning the Alfred Bauer Prize. His plays have been translated into several languages, performed on more than 100 stages, and invited to the Berlin Theatertreffen, among other venues.

While still studying psychology in West Berlin in the 1980s, Veiel completed directing and dramaturgy training with Krzysztof Kiesłowski at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien and staged several plays with a prison theater group at the Berlin-Tegel correctional facility. His first feature-length documentary *WINTERNACHTSTRAUM* (1992) was followed by the documentary *BALAGAN* (1993), which won the Peace Film Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival and the German Film Award. Here he combined his work at the theater with his cinematic work - another common thread that runs through his entire oeuvre. In 1996, he made the documentary film *DIE ÜBERLEBENDEN*, which deals with the suicide of three of his classmates. The work is considered one of Veiel's most personal films and was at the same time celebrated as a brilliant contemporary portrait of his generation. The long-term project *DIE SPIELWÜTIGEN* (2004), which deals with the challenges of training and growing up faced by four acting students at the renowned Ernst Busch acting school in Berlin over a period of seven years, had its premiere at the 2004 Berlinale, where it won the popular Panorama Audience Award. It was followed by the semi-fictional film *DER KICK* (2006), based on his play of the same name, which was premiered at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin under his direction. For the twenty-four-hour documentary project *24H BERLIN - EIN TAG IM LEBEN* (2008) by director Volker Heise, he filmed the part about the editor-in-chief of the tabloid *Bild*. In 2013, he accompanied a UN employee in Palestinian refugee camps for the *24H JERUSALEM* project.

Another of his feature films is devoted to the controversial artist Joseph Beuys. For *BEUYS* (2017), he researched in various archives for over three years and spent more than eighteen months in the editing room with his team of editors. The film, which for the most part consists of previously unpublished archive material, does not focus on Beuys' artistic work, but on the person behind it. The film had its world premiere in 2017 in the Berlinale competition and, among other prizes, received the German Film Award for the best editing and the best documentary film.

Another controversial film by Veiel, which provoked many discussions in Germany, was the television film *ÖKOZID* (2020). Here the director places the Germany of the future before the International Court of Justice in order to address the years-long circumvention of EU environmental requirements. Veiel also presented *ÖKOZID* in the theater in 2022.

In January 2025, the book *Close-up Leni Riefenstahl. New Perspectives from the Estate* (2024, Fischer Verlag) will be published in Germany, which Veiel wrote together with Klaus Dermutz and in which he reflects on his work on the film and the complexity of the person and oeuvre of Leni Riefenstahl.

Filmography (selection)

2024	RIEFENSTAHL	Director & Screenwriter
2020	ÖKOZID	Director, Screenwriter with Jutta Doberstein
2017	BEUYS	Director & Screenwriter
2011	IF NOT US, WHO?	Director & Screenwriter
2006	DER KICK	Director & Screenwriter
2004	DIE SPIELWÜTIGEN	Director & Screenwriter
2001	BLACK BOX BRD	Director & Screenwriter
1996	DIE ÜBERLEBENDEN	Director & Screenwriter
1993	BALAGAN	Director & Screenwriter
1992	WINTERNACHTSTRAUM	Director & Screenwriter

PRODUCER

SANDRA MAISCHBERGER

Sandra Maischberger, born in 1966 in Munich, has long held a firm place in the German media landscape and is considered one of the country's best-known and most successful journalists and television presenters. The many awards with which she has already been honored in the course of her career include the German Television Award, the Bavarian Television Award, the Golden Camera, the Media Award for Language Culture, the Romy, and the Federal Cross of Merit in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Maischberger grew up in Garching near Munich and started a career as a radio presenter at Bayern 2 directly after graduating from high school. In addition to her freelance work with various newspapers and radio stations, she also graduated from the German School of Journalism in Munich. Soon after, she switched to television, where she worked for both private and public broadcasters such as Tele5 and Bayerischer Rundfunk in the following years. In 1989, as the successor to Günter Jauch, she hosted the youth program LIVE AUS DEM SCHLACHTHOF on Bavarian television, which quickly becomes a great success. This was followed by a number of programs such as TALK IM TURM, 0137, SPIEGEL TV INTERVIEW, and GREENPEACE TV. In addition, she worked as a freelancer for several ARD stations as well as for such different magazines as DER SPIEGEL and the monthly women's magazine AMICA.

From 2000 to 2006, Maischberger moved to the news channel n-tv, where she hosted a talk show with her name for the first time. The show MAISCHBERGER quickly established itself as one of the most popular talk shows on German television, and is awarded the Hanns Joachim Friedrichs Award in the same year. In 2003, Maischberger becomes host of the ARD talk show MENSCHEN BEI MAISCHBERGER, which is now titled MAISCHBERGER following changes in format and content and can be seen twice a week on ARD. Sandra Maischberger continues to impress with her aplomb as a presenter and her sensitive and well-informed discussions of even highly controversial topics.

In addition to her work as a presenter, Maischberger is also active as a writer and film producer. As well as several book publications on socio-political topics, she has been producing a number of documentary, docudrama, and reportage formats along with feature films with her Vincent Productions company since 2000.

EDITING

STEPHAN KRUMBIEGEL

Stephan Krumbiegel, born in 1964, is well established as an editor in the film industry and also teaches as a professor of film editing at the Konrad Wolf Film University of Babelsberg. After studying technical engineering, he began his film work as co-director and editor of a documentary on development aid in West Africa. Since then, he has worked as a freelance editor and has contributed to a variety of documentaries and feature films. The films he has edited include the comedy LOST KILLERS (2000, directed by Dito Tsintsadze), the documentary BERLIN SYMPHONY (2001, directed by Thomas Schadt), the drama THEY'VE GOT KNUT (2003, directed by Stefan Krohmer), and the documentaries WEISSE RABEN - ALBTRAUM TSCHETSCHENIEN (2005) and LULLABY (2010) by directors Johann Feindt and

Tamara Trampe, for which he was nominated for the Documentary Editing Award in 2005 and won the award in 2010.

Together with the director Volker Sattel, he also received the 2012 Documentary Editing Award for his work on the documentary UNTER KONTROLLE (2011). Stephan Krumbiegel received the Bavarian Film Award for his work on the documentary PETER HANDKE - BIN IM WALD. KANN SEIN, DASS ICH MICH VERSPÄTE... (2016, directed by Corinna Belz), as well as for his work on BEUYS (2017). The documentary BEUYS was his first collaboration with director Andres Veiel, for which he and his co-editor Olaf Voigtländer received the German Film Award for best editing.

His collaboration with Andres Veiel continued with the television film ÖKOZID (2020) and with RIEFENSTAHL (2024). Stephan Krumbiegel shares the credit for the editing of both films with co-editors Olaf Voigtländer and Alfredo Castro. All three combine a great openness to innovative approaches in film editing with a subtle sense for passing details.

THE PRODUCTION COMPANY

VINCENT PRODUCTIONS

Vincent Productions, based in Berlin, was founded in 2000 and, in addition to the production of the MAISCHBERGER program, is responsible for the development and production of high-quality films and television programs. These include reportage series, documentaries, miniseries, docudramas, portrait and infotainment formats.

Our award-winning productions include A REGULAR WOMAN, which won the Bavarian Film Prize, the long-term documentary HELMUT SCHMIDT AUSSER DIENST and the weekly talk show MAISCHBERGER.

The managing partner of Vincent Productions is Sandra Maischberger.

CREDITS & TECHNICAL DETAILS

Documentary / 2024 / Germany / 115 min / 1:1,85 (16:9) / Sound 5.1

MAIN CREW

Written and directed by	Andres Veiel
Producer	Sandra Maischberger
Executive Producer	Enzo Maaß
Editors	Stephan Krumbiegel, Olaf Voigtländer, Alfredo Castro
Archive Producer	Monika Preischl, Mona El-Bira
Archive Research	Christiane Cammerer
Director of Photography	Toby Cornish
Music by	Freya Arde
Sound design & mix	Matthias Lempert
Narrator	Andrew Bird
Production Manager	Markus Ropenhagen
Associate Producers	Sylvia Nagel, Ulrich Stein
Supported by	Film und Medienstiftung NRW, MBB, FFA, BKM, DFFF
In collaboration with	Rai Cinema
Co-Production Companies	WDR, NDR, BR, SWR and rbb
Commissioning Editors	Christiane Hinz (WDR), Mirjam Dolderer (SWR), Marc Brasse (NDR), Matthias Leybrand (BR), Rolf Bergmann (rbb)
Production Company	Vincent Productions GmbH
German distributor	Majestic Filmverleih
Italian distributor	Rai Cinema
World Sales	Beta Cinema



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