

HOLDING LIAT

Regie Brandon Kramer

USA | 2025
93 Min. | Englisch, Hebräisch mit englischen Untertiteln

Kamera Yoni Brook, Omer Manor. **Montage** Jeff Gilbert. **Musik** Jordan Dykstra. **Sound Design** Tristan Baylis. **Ton** Jim Choi. **Produzent*innen** Darren Aronofsky, Lance Kramer, Yoni Brook, Ari Handel, Justin A. Gonçalves. **Executive Producers** Elliott Joseph, Janine Frier, Alexandra Shiva. **Koproduzent*in** Hilla Medalia. **Produktionsfirmen** Meridian Hill Pictures (Washington, DC, USA), Protozoa Pictures (New York, USA). **Mit** Yehuda Beinon, Liat Beinon, Atzili, Chaya Beinon, Tal Beinon.

Weltvertrieb Meridian Hill Pictures

Synopse

Ein Film, wahrhaft ins Offene gedreht, Zusammenhängen folgend, obwohl sich – als er begonnen wurde – das Geschehen nicht vorhersehen lässt. Liat wird am 7. Oktober 2023 von Mitgliedern der Hamas gewaltsam aus ihrem Kibbuz entführt, kurz danach dreht Brandon Kramer mit ihrer Familie. Er ist dabei, sehr nah, wenn die Eltern Yehuda und Chaya versuchen, mit ihrer Angst umzugehen – oder im Austausch mit Behörden Einfluss zu nehmen auf das Schicksal ihrer erwachsenen Tochter und das ihres Gatten. Als US-Bürger fliegt Yehuda in die USA, begleitet von Liats Sohn, den nicht nur die öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit belastet, und Liats Schwester, die versuchen wird, Yehudas Temperament und Wut abzufangen. Denn Polarisierung gibt es auch in dieser Familie: Der Vater sieht trotz seines Schmerzes Israels Rolle im Nahost-Konflikt kritisch, ist Pazifist und lässt sich auch im geopolitischen Epizentrum von Diplomatie und Trauma nicht vom Weg der Aussöhnung abbringen. Beharrlich schwimmt er gegen den Strom, legt sich mit sich selbst und allen an und schimpft auf die israelische Regierung. Ein offener Film zur Stunde. Einsichten kommen nicht von der Politik, sondern von Liats Familie. (Christiane Büchner, Barbara Wurm)

Brandon Kramer lebt in Washington, D.C. und ist Filmemacher und Mitbegründer von Meridian Hill Pictures mit seinem Bruder Lance. Brandon führte Regie bei THE FIRST STEP (Tribeca, AFI DOCS); CITY OF TREES (Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, PBS, Netflix); und der mit dem Webby Award ausgezeichneten Dokumentarserie THE MESSY TRUTH (CNN). Brandon ist Film Independent Fellow, DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities Fellow, kooperiert mit Kartemquin Films und lehrt am John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Brandon hat einen BA in Film und Kulturanthropologie von der Boston University.

Filme: 2015: City of Trees. 2016: The Messy Truth. 2021: The First Step. 2025: Holding Liat.

Kommentar des Regisseurs

Mehr Verständnis

Intimität und Tiefe jenseits der medialen Scheinwerfer

Nach dem 7. Oktober 2023 kontaktierten mein Bruder Lance und ich unsere Großfamilie in Israel, um uns zu erkundigen, ob sie wohlauf sind.

Als wir mit unserem Verwandten Yehuda sprachen, erfuhren wir, dass seine Tochter Liat und sein Schwiegersohn Aviv in ihrem Kibbuz als vermisst galten und vermutlich als Geiseln in Gaza festgehalten wurden. Da Liat eine von einem Dutzend vermister amerikanischer Staatsbürger*innen war, erklärte Yehuda, dass er mit seiner Familie zu uns nach Washington, D.C. kommen wolle, um sich für ihre Freilassung einzusetzen.

Wir wussten nicht, was auf uns zukommen würde, aber wir hatten das Gefühl, dass wir die Erfahrungen der Familie unbedingt dokumentieren sollten. Wir begannen damit, Fragen zu stellen, zu beobachten und in ruhigen Momenten präsent zu sein, in denen oft keine anderen Kameras da waren. Schon in den ersten Drehtagen staunten wir über die Vielzahl der Perspektiven innerhalb der Familie, wie man Geiseln befreien, den eskalierenden Krieg beenden und einen Weg zur Versöhnung finden könne. Die Gefangenschaft von Liat und Aviv warf Fragen zur Identität jedes einzelnen Familienmitglieds auf, und zu ihren Beziehungen zueinander. Unsere Kamera wurde für jedes Familienmitglied zu einem Gegenüber, dem es sich ehrlich und ohne Vorurteile anvertrauen konnte.

Es war eine besondere Chance, den historischen Moment auf diese Weise durch die Augen einer Familie zu dokumentieren. Aufgrund unserer bereits seit Jahrzehnten vor dem 7. Oktober bestehenden Beziehungen waren wir in der Lage, mit einer Intimität und Tiefe Zeugnis abzulegen, die über das grelle Rampenlicht der Medien hinausging. Wir filmten die Familie in ihren Häusern, in den Hallen des Kongresses und hinter den Kulissen bei Demonstrationen, während sie ins Epizentrum dieser geopolitischen Krise gerissen wurden. Die Geschichte führte uns tief an einen Ort, den wir uns zu Beginn nicht hätten vorstellen können.

Mehr als ein Jahr nach dem 7. Oktober sind weiterhin Menschenleben in Gefahr: Geiseln werden noch immer festgehalten, zehntausende Palästinenser*innen wurden getötet und die Menschen in der gesamten Region leiden. Unsere Diskussionen über all diese Themen sind nur noch polarisierter geworden, selbst innerhalb von Gemeinschaften und Familien. Indem wir die Geschichte einer unmittelbar betroffenen Familie erzählen und wie sie mit den Differenzen untereinander umgegangen ist, hoffen wir, neue Möglichkeiten für das Verständnis dieses Konflikts zu eröffnen und dazu beizutragen, die unerbittliche Gewalt in der Region zu beenden.

Wir sind uns sehr wohl bewusst, dass dieser Film nur die Geschichte einer Familie von unzähligen anderen ist und dass viele wichtige Geschichten tragischerweise womöglich nie erzählt werden. Wir hoffen, dass das Publikum durch die Widerstandsfähigkeit und Offenheit der Familie sowie durch

andere israelische und palästinensische Filme, die für mehr Verständnis sorgen wollen, den Raum findet, vertiefende Fragen zu stellen, um den Weg zu Heilung und Versöhnung zu ebneten.

Brandon Kramer

Interview

An Inviting and Disarming Experience

A conversation about acting responsibly as a filmmaker and a relative in the epicenter of one of the most significant geopolitical crises of our time

DAS GESPRÄCH WURDE AUF ENGLISCH GEFÜHRT.

*Barbara Wurm: Wonderful, Brandon, that we have the possibility to meet before the festival and the world premiere of your film **HOLDING LIAT**. This is a project that is so special as it is always full of the moment. It exists so much in an open present because you never know what's going to happen next. We are shortly before the premiere in Berlin, and it is maybe also on a larger scale a historical moment in the negotiations. The hostage question is on the front pages of current politics. Maybe you can share your feelings or your thoughts about this. Will it influence your expectations with this premiere of the film?*

Brandon Kramer: From a very early point in production, we knew we had a responsibility not only to tell this story with the highest level of care and craft, but also to ensure that we could complete the film as rapidly as possible. We're in a moment where the dialogue around this conflict is extremely polarized and the stakes could not be higher. Telling complex stories about the lived experience of people directly impacted by this crisis feels more urgent now than ever. The story in our film is one that does not fit neatly into a box, and reveals more questions than it answers. This world premiere at the Berlinale is the first of what we hope are many spaces where the film can contribute to a deeply fractured and urgent conversation.

Christiane Büchner: Can you tell us how the project started? As I understand, you are in a distant way part of the family. How early did you approach your relatives with this idea, and what did you agree on at this moment?

BK: A few days after Liat and Aviv were taken, Lance and I reached out to Liat's parents - who are distant relatives of ours. We called to check in on them, and had no intention of making a film. On that call, Liat's father told us that he was going to travel with other members of the family to our hometown Washington, DC to leverage Liat's American citizenship to try to get her and Aviv home. After that conversation, my brother Lance and I dropped what we were doing. We felt a responsibility to pick up our camera. For the past 15 years, we've been making observational films of directly-impacted people navigating complex social and political crises, and now, our relatives were thrust into the epicenter of one of the most significant geopolitical crises of our time. The entire world was discussing the hostages, and we had a unique access point to document the nuances of what this experience was like for this one family. We discussed the idea of filming with the family and they agreed that documenting their experience felt important. Liat is a history teacher, and her family believed that she would want her family's story documented for history's sake. We had no idea at that point if Liat and Aviv would survive, or where this journey would take us.

CB: At what point did you know this would be a film?

BK: We didn't know this would be a film at first. One of the first scenes we shot in DC was a conversation between Liat's father,

her sister and her son. Each one of them shared divergent views about how to get Liat and Aviv home and seek an end to the broader conflict. Yehuda spoke about the need to get Liat and Aviv home and also advocate for peace and reconciliation. Liat's sister felt that this was not a time to focus on a broader political solution and that Liat and Aviv should be the only priority. Liat's son was coping with the immediate crisis of both his parents held in captivity and having barely survived the attack himself. In that initial conversation, we witnessed how trauma and politics affected the identity of these three family members. Right in front of our camera, we saw three different generations, confronting their differences on how to handle this impossible situation. It was that moment that we realized that the complexity of what this family was experiencing is an urgent story that must be told.

BW: There was no resistance against being filmed? They were all okay with it?

BK: It was an ongoing process. One of the most challenging parts about telling this story was trying to understand how to show up as a relative to this family in crisis while also having a responsibility as a documentarian to capture their experience in all its complexity. A huge part of documentary filmmaking like this is cultivating relationships. For my brother and me, it was critical to first and foremost be sensitive to the fact that the family was going through an extraordinarily painful experience, and to have a high degree of care in the way the camera was introduced. Since we have known Liat's parents for decades, there was a lot of trust from the get-go, but filming them in the most painful moments of their lives was challenging even with a level of trust built. We had constant conversations with the family about the importance of documenting the story with editorial independence, with having the ability to follow their experience as authentically as possible, including some of the more challenging moments they were navigating. We always made clear we were never trying to exploit their pain, but to understand the nuances of what they were going through. Our mentor Gordon Quinn (co-founder of Kartemquin Films) taught us to never look down the lens of our camera at anyone, and we tried hard to carry that ethic into this film. There were plenty of moments where I pushed too hard to film a moment and I had to rebuild trust afterwards, and there were other moments where I didn't film and just showed up as a relative and sometimes regretted not having the camera. It was a constant creative and ethical line we had to walk to tell this story.

BW: I had in mind more the moments when it becomes clear that now the film opens up to present also the political spectrum of attitudes and ideologies. That's why I thought maybe some were shyer than others to have their political position in the film.

BK: It was important to us to empathize with every perspective within the family, and that required building a close relationship with each person individually. Within this one family, every person had different experiences and political views that they had to confront amongst themselves. With Liat and Aviv's lives at stake, they had no choice but to face these disagreements head on. The multiplicity of views and responses to this tragedy within the family seemed to echo some of the diversity of perspectives felt in communities and families across the world on this conflict. Every family member's values and experience felt important, nuanced and not well represented by other media. We wanted the film to present the kaleidoscope of experiences that we were witnessing as authentically as possible, and how these differences impacted their evolving relationships with one another. Their family experience felt both profound and universal.

CB: How long did you film? And how did you proceed with editing?

BK: We started filming two weeks after October 7th, 2023 and filming continued until the end of 2024. Within the 54 days that

Liat was held in captivity, we had documented some of the most intimate and revealing moments I have ever witnessed. Producer/Director of Photography Yoni Brook and I were basically living with the family for a majority of these days. For example, we were literally sleeping on the floor outside the family's hotel room, so we could capture the middle of the night phone calls the family received from the IDF. After Liat was released, we paused to review the footage we had captured, and reflected that we needed to begin the edit immediately, even as we knew we had to continue filming. We all agreed that we would somehow both continue production and begin the edit simultaneously without cutting any corners creatively or editorially. These dual goals made for an extremely daunting task, which was only possible because of the extraordinary editorial work of our editor Jeff Gilbert, and the brilliant full throttle producing work of Lance, Yoni Brook, Justin Gonçalves, Darren Aronofsky and Ari Handel to create and support both production and editorial teams working simultaneously. We reached out to editor Jeff Gilbert because he edited one of my favorite films called *THE OVERNIGHTERS*, and is a master of revealing complexity and humanity in his storytelling. There was a few hundred hours of footage already filmed when Jeff started and we had only just begun to film Liat's journey returning after captivity. Once Jeff watched every minute of footage and caught up to where we were in production, his voice was an instrumental part of shaping what we decided to film in those final months of production. One of the most important guiding principles in the edit (and in production) was to always keep the frame of the film on the family. We literally had the words "Family" taped up on the edit room wall. One of the other critical values within production and in the edit was to surround ourselves with advisors with different expertises and from different backgrounds. Before every shoot and at every cut of the film, we workshopped countless ethical and creative decisions with trusted advisors to help us not only strengthen the narrative craft of the film, but also help us understand the broader political and social context which the story rests within.

BW: One of the editing decisions is to frame the film with Liat and her extraordinary vision of world politics that is also special because it goes beyond the Gaza fence. Tell us more about this scene when you film her at Yad Vashem.

BK: After Liat was released, we immediately knew that the story must shift to her point of view. We just spent nearly two months following Liat's family's journey trying to get her home. Now that she had returned, it was important to us to better understand the meaning that she was creating from her experience in captivity. Thankfully, Liat believed in what we were trying to do with this film. Amidst a flurry of interview requests from media outlets, I think Liat was somewhat relieved by the space and openness that the documentary form allows for someone to share their story. The scene at Yad Vashem happened a few months after she returned from captivity when she started going back to work. Liat is a high school history and civics teacher, and she also is a guide at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial and Museum in Jerusalem. We wanted to capture the internal and external parts of her processing her experience as authentically as possible. We did not know at the time what her views would be, and how she would express them. The story ends with these difficult questions Liat asks about empathy and peace because she is the one who went through this experience most directly, and therefore we felt Liat should have the final reflections of the film.

BW: But in addition to that, the scene when Yehuda is with the authorities, and he has this conversation with a Palestinian advocate. Can you talk about this scene as well?

BK: In this scene, we were filming with Yehuda as he walked the halls of Congress in DC advocating for Liat and Aviv's release and a path for peace and reconciliation. Yehuda had just given an interview where he was critical of the Israeli government's leadership. As he walked away from the journalist, a Palestinian

man who was also walking the halls of Congress approached Yehuda. He found out that Yehuda was the father of one of the hostages and wanted to talk with him. This man had lost many members of his family in the war in Gaza. In this incredible and spontaneous moment, they both connected on a shared sense of loss on both sides of the fence. The moment is so special because there is a connection across these lines being formed in real time, but also some palpable sense of tension as well. This wasn't just a moment of kumbaya. The hurt and anger is deeply present for both of them. I think in that moment, we were able to see a rare glimpse into grief, anger, and the capacity to see one another's humanity.

CB: Maybe we go back to the beginning of our talk. What kind of realm for discussion do you expect? Coming to Germany and discussing this film in the triangle between the US, Israel, and Germany?

BK: I think Berlin is really the perfect place to premiere the film, especially at a festival that has a long history of tackling bold and important political and social issues of our time. We're deeply grateful for the Berlinale for seeing the humanity and urgency of this story, and having the courage to program the film. Some may feel that it's a lot easier to decide not to present these kinds of stories and avoid treading into these prickly, contentious topics and dialogues. The fact that the Berlinale is providing this film such a huge platform for its debut is something that we take very seriously. Given the different perspectives represented within this story, I'm hoping that the film can be an inviting and disarming experience for many different kinds of audiences and ignite a kind of constructive conversation that isn't happening nearly enough. One that confronts divergent views head on, and one that carries empathy, care and an open mind, and helps contribute to a more peaceful future.

BW: I think we completely share this hope, and we are already extremely grateful that you found also the words for this feeling and expectation we have. It's a remarkable film in many ways, but for me, the biggest challenge is to keep this thin line between completely functionalizing a film's view and sharing the hope that is connected with it.