



© Photographer Edan Sasson

# Inertia

## Idan Haguel

**Producer** Elad Peleg, Haggai Arad. **Production company** Daroma Productions (Moshav Kochav Michael, Israel). **Director** Idan Haguel. **Screenplay** Idan Haguel, Ifat Makbi. **Director of photography** Edan Sasson. **Editor** Dafi Farbman. **Music** Zoe Polanski. **Sound design** Erez Eyni Shavit. **Sound** Ben Levi. **Production design** John Yonatan Jacoby. **Costumes** Sara Mizrahi.

**With** Ilanit Ben Yaakov (Mira), Mohammad Bakri (Max), Galia Yshay (Salin), Ami Weinberg (Gidi), Loutof Nousser (Ihab), Dudu Niv (Benny), Florence Bloch (Female Policeofficer), Gita Munte (Saleswoman).

DCP, colour. 72 min. Hebrew.

**Premiere** 1 October 2015, Haifa International Film Festival

**World sales** Oration Films

Mira Segal wakes up with a start and lets out a shriek, noticing afterwards that her husband Benny has disappeared. Something happened to him in her dream. Now she looks for him, reports him missing, puts up posters than carry his picture. Months pass, but he does not return. Bit by bit, Mira seems to find some satisfaction in the situation.

The film creates an atmosphere which itself takes on dreamlike dimensions at times. It's only that Mira's nightmare almost turns into a dream she wishes were true. The intensity with which everyday life is perceived, the almost bizarre settings, unusual camera perspectives, the speeding up and slowing down of the plot and the sparing use of a specially composed soundtrack are the tools with which Idan Haguel works, tools which have always made film seem the most appropriate art form for depicting what happens in dreams. It's a pleasure to interpret such symbols as water or the horror stories of marriage and family that Mira's mother tells. Will Benny return? Or perhaps life already contains as many temptations as there are shiny chrome taps in a DIY store?

*Anna Hoffmann*

## Numbness and bursting out

As a child I spent time with my grandparents, who lived in Haifa – an exotic city compared to Rishon LeZion, where I grew up. My grandfather worked at the Haifa port and he used to take me to work with him and show me the Arab parts of the city. He was originally from Lebanon, so he felt more at ease in those areas. Haifa was the perfect place for him to live this duality. My grandmother, on the other hand, cursed the day she came to Haifa from Bucharest, Romania. She was embittered by her life choices. She felt that making a family in Israel with my grandfather was a mistake. Their relationship suffered from her not coming to terms with the life she lived, and this saddens me to this day. Observing their marriage created a big fear in me of committing to a relationship and to the prescribed Israeli narrative. This was the inspiration behind *Inertia*: feeling numb and alone in a relationship, contemplating my grandmother's situation and giving her an alternative way out of her relationship. What if she hadn't had kids? What if her husband disappeared? Would she have left the relationship or still hung around waiting? Is the power of the routine of day-to-day life – even in an unfulfilled marriage that you know you would like to escape – so strong for a person that, given an alternative context, you might do the same as you have done all your life?

Idan Haguel

## “There are moments when we mistrust ourselves”

*Inertia starts with the image of the sea in motion, as if contradicting the title. Why did you choose this opening?*

**Idan Haguel:** I don't think the sea is a contradiction of the title; by definition, 'inertia' can be something not moving that continues to not move, or something moving that will continue to move. We can only guess what made this 'thing' start moving or not moving... I felt 'inertia' captured the energy of the story and its characters.

Also, as the film was shot in the city of Haifa, it was only fitting to begin its life story at the deepest and darkest sea. Haifa and its port played a big part in my childhood; my grandfather worked at the harbour and he lived with my grandmother in the same apartment building where the character of Mira lives. I had a childhood intimacy with the neighbourhood and the city and it got into my bones.

*How did you develop the story of Inertia?*

I once had a nightmare. I woke up and opened my eyes after hearing a terrible scream, and felt my throat aching. Although it was reasonable to think that I was the one who was screaming, I could never be sure because I did not witness it. That uncertainty remained with me for a few years and in some ways it formed the story of *Inertia*.

I was working on two different scripts for a few years after finishing film school, but could not raise the budget to make either of them. I decided to make a film with no funding and did not want to use an already-written screenplay that did not come from a low-budget frame of thought.

So my aim was to create a story using only what I already knew I could use in order to make it; I had a bit of money that I had managed to save, locations that I knew by heart and wanted to shoot, actors I already liked and had cast for an unmade

project, and whom I wanted to work with, and a producer whom I liked and who trusted my instincts enough to invest a bit more. So *Inertia* was trying to create a film that utilises all the 'haves', and trying never to dwell on the 'have-nots'. A film that will embrace and celebrate its limitations and out of that comes a form. I took a week's writing vacation in Haifa to write the outline – using ideas for scenes I wrote for a different project.

At one point I even thought of filming and improvising the whole film using only that outline. But once I needed actors to commit to the project, they started demanding scenes with dialogue, so I started writing scenes just to convince actors to commit.

Then I realised that with no screenplay, I needed to meet every person I wanted for the film and explain my 'vision' in person – and it would be better to just send a screenplay. So I developed the whole screenplay along with Ifat Makbi, who is a good friend of mine, and we wrote it while already in pre-production and finished it two weeks before shooting.

*Mira seems to develop in a direction that she doesn't expect. What were your options for the character while you were writing the screenplay?*

Ifat and I thought of the logical options that we would face in Mira's situation, and those are: to stay out of a heartfelt conviction, to leave because it's the right thing, or to just hang around without really choosing... I find that most people just hang around hoping for things to improve.

*How did you find your actors?*

Through casting a previous project, I knew I wanted to work with Ilanit Ben-Yaakov and Galia Yshay. When that project was scrapped and I was planning *Inertia*, I wanted to write characters with both of them especially in mind. There were a couple of other actors I knew from those previous auditions. And Lotuf Noisar acted in two short films I made, so I wrote something for him too.

Since Haifa is one of the few cities with relatively healthy state of co-existence between Arabs and Jews, I wanted to cast Arab and Jewish actors to play non-specifically Arab or Jewish characters – just people living and intertwining in Haifa. *Inertia* is one of the rare occasions when you get to see the great Mohamad Bakri just playing the role of a lover. Usually he is cast as the 'Arab'. That was the reason he was drawn to the role – this relatively simple role of a man flirting was, ironically, a breath of fresh air for him because it was not obviously political. A man flirts with a woman, with no political outcome or agenda – just two people magically meeting on the beach.

*The film offers strong images of the mental state of the protagonist. How did you develop your visual approach to your subject?*

There are moments in life when we mistrust ourselves and doubt our own memory. These moments may last only seconds, but in a film you can zoom in on those strange little moments, prolong and explore them – so you can experience it more deeply.

My basic motivation was to establish guilt in Mira – who dreams of killing her husband in cold blood.

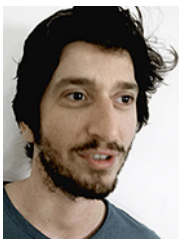
This film is mostly from a single perspective, meaning that what Mira knows, the audience knows; so we remain in that

foggy realm of uncertainty and self-doubt that the character is in because of her dream and her husband's disappearance. That single point of view, focusing on one character, was crucial to establishing her state, and I wanted to frame Mira in such a way that the audience would suspect her, as she would suspect herself. That is why in parts of the film we do not see her eyes, or we only get to see her from the back.

*What were the production conditions like?*

They were rough; we had only thirteen days to shoot everything with no fancy nothing. Small crew, long days, and bad food. But out came our movie, and we are very proud of it.

*Interview: Gabriela Seidel-Hollaender, January 2016*



**Idan Haguel** was born in Holon, Israel in 1980. He completed film studies at Sapir College in Israel. After graduation he worked as a journalist and magazine writer for various Israeli publications, including *Haaretz* and *Time Out*. He currently lives in Tel Aviv. *Inertia* is his first full-length feature film.

#### Films

2006: *Haifa Fish Soup* (14 min.). 2007: *I Lost My Job, Mira* (18 min.). 2016: *Inertia*.