

November 14, 2020

There is a FENCE between acts of violence and the acknowledgement of those acts as history.



“the FENCE”

**from Montreal filmmaker Viveka Melki and Tortuga Films
premieres Sunday, December 6 at 9 p.m. ET/PT on
*documentary Channel***

Digital Media Site:

<http://www.thefencedoc.ca/>

Watch *the FENCE* trailer: <https://cutt.ly/tqAV1Vk>

Download Photos & Press Kit: <https://cutt.ly/ngAVIKA>

Visit *documentary Channel*'s website:

<https://www.cbc.ca/documentarychannel/docs/the-fence>

Montreal – ***the FENCE***, a new feature-length docu-drama from Montreal filmmaker Viveka Melki and Tortuga Films, will have its **world premiere on *documentary Channel* Sunday, December 6 at 9 p.m. ET/PT.**

The film's airdate commemorates the anniversary of the beginning of Battle of Hong Kong, which began on December 8, 1941 and marks the beginning of the stories told in the film.

the FENCE takes place during one of the longest incarcerations in the Second World War, one that began following that battle, when 1,975 Canadians were imprisoned for nearly four years in Japanese POW camps in Hong Kong and Japan.

the FENCE tells two interwoven stories, one on each side of the transparent internment camp fence. Inside the barbed wire enclosure, two Canadian soldiers, George MacDonnell and George Peterson, witnessed the atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army. Now among the last surviving Canadian veterans of that experience, the soldiers share their shocking, full stories for the first time.

On the other side of the fence is 10-year-old Luba Estes, a Russian living with her mother and sister in Hong Kong. She walks the fence line to see her father, Alexander, a member of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, imprisoned inside Sham Shui Po prison alongside the Canadians. If the guards notice Luba looking directly at her father through the fence, he will be shot. Luba was a witness to war crimes that changed history and shares her story in the film for the first time in 75 years.

In the face of Japanese revisionist history, director Viveka Melki rebuilt parts of Sham Shui Po Prison Camp as exact replicas from sketches Luba's father secretly drew and hid during his imprisonment, and which miraculously survived the war intact. Dramatic reenactments in the film heighten the impact of Luba's memories for the viewer.

The story of ***the FENCE*** includes elements of both ritualized and casual cruelty, torture, rape and cannibalism, both proved and documented for the first time in this film. The truths revealed in this story are a testament to the survival of the human spirit under the most difficult of circumstances. Reflecting on this intentionally hidden period of history are Japanese professor Dr. Yuki Tanaka and Hong Kong Historian Dr. Chi Man Kwong.

the FENCE explores the difference between remembered and witnessed history. The film exposes a total, official void in Japan's history regarding the suffering of thousands of POWs. Together, these threads tell a common history that highlights the futility of nationalism and war.

A unique, immersive digital media project, in tandem with and complementing the film, is also going live this month at <http://www.thefencedoc.ca/> This showcase website is a central point of information on the project, where visitors can access exclusive video interviews with war veterans, watch the trailer, check out background materials, and photographs. Other exclusive content includes 10-year-old Luba Estes' journal entries from December 1941 to January 1942, and a long-form article written by the Hong Kong war historian Tony Banham. New content will be added through November and December 2020, to further understanding of this difficult period in our human history.

"The Battle for Hong Kong may seem to be an inconsequential, small battle in the face of others that occurred during World War II," says ***the FENCE*** writer and director Viveka Melki. "But it was the longest incarceration of Allied POWs anywhere. This project has taken nearly ten years to come to fruition, from my first idea for it, through research and then filming. It took a very long time and a great deal of research to understand on a deeper level a debate around 'apology' and Japan's revisionist history policies."

For more exclusive material visit:

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/TheFenceDoc/>; and
at <https://www.facebook.com/vivekamelkifilms> or @vivekamelkifilms

Instagram - <https://www.instagram.com/Lubasdiary/>; and at
<https://www.instagram.com/vivekamelki> or @vivekamelki

Twitter - <https://twitter.com/thefencedoc>

the FENCE is researched, written and directed by Viveka Melki. Assistant Director is Graham E. Bradley; Directors of Photography are Christian Lamontagne, Claudine Sauv e and Fran ois Vincelette; Editor is Vincent Guignard; Original Score by Robert Marcel Lepage, Sound Designer

is Claude Langlois; Art Directors are Greg Nowak & Patrick Binette; Costume Designer is Mario Davignon; Producer is Adam Pajot Gendron. Executive Producers are Viveka Melki and Adam Pajot Gendron. For *documentary* Channel: Sandra Kleinfeld, Senior Director, and Jordana Ross, Production Executive.

the FENCE is produced by Tortuga Films in association with *documentary* Channel and with the participation of the Canada Media Fund, the Quebec Film and Television Tax Credit administered by SODEC, the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit, and the Rogers Cable Network Fund.

Tortuga Films is a television production company operating since 2006 in the world of television, film and communications. Located in the heart of the Lower St. Lawrence, in the village of Le Bic, Quebec, Tortuga strives to represent issues at regional, national and international levels. Its mission is to produce films and programs that are informative and thought-provoking to the viewer. Tortuga Films' main creative sector is documentary. The team works in collaboration with professionals from diverse backgrounds and cultures, with a view to creating works with issues that transcend borders. Whether in a series or in single documentaries, our production company's projects focus on historic, scientific, social and environmental topics, as well as on themes that serve to advance the community and society as a whole. In addition to being entertaining, each production aims to trigger discussion, reflection and a search for solutions. Along with *the FENCE*, Tortuga's films include *After Circus*; *Coasters*; *Fear of Dancing*; and *Carricks: In the Wake of the Irish*.

- 30 -

Note to Editors:

There will be repeat broadcasts of **the FENCE**:

Dec. 6: midnight & 3 am ET/ 9 pm & midnight PT

Dec. 8: 11 am, 3 pm & 7 pm ET/8 am, 12 noon & 4 pm PT

Dec. 13: 9 am & 3 pm ET/ 6 am & 12 noon PT

Jan. 8: 9 pm & midnight ET/ 6 pm & 9 pm PT

For preview screener link and interview requests, please contact:

Jeremy Katz

Publicist, **the FENCE**

Toronto

Office: 416.656.6970;

Cell/Text: 416.997.6970

Email: jeremyk@sympatico.ca

About Viveka Melki

the FENCE writer/director/researcher/executive producer



Viveka Melki is a Canadian filmmaker, curator and producer based in Montreal. She has lived, worked and travelled in cultures where repressive regimes are dominant. From these experiences have been born her projects around conflict - and the capacity of the human spirit for resilience. Born in The Gambia, West Africa of Brazilian/Lebanese descent, and educated in the UK before immigrating to Canada, Melki sees the world through a multicultural lens. Co-founder of Tortuga Films in 2006, she produced **Hippocrate** and **Campesinos**, and then went on to direct the two-part series **War Correspondence** (Radio-Canada, RDI).

Her feature-length documentary **After CIRCUS** (2015) received acclaim after screenings at several North American film festivals, including *The Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Film Festival* in Toronto and the *Rencontres Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal*, as well as at the prestigious *Sunny Side of the Doc Festival* in La Rochelle, France. *After CIRCUS* is currently broadcast across Canada on CBC's documentary Channel and on CBC GEM.

Her 2017 documentary **Carricks: dans le sillage des Irlandais** (*Carricks: In the Wake of the Irish*) (Radio-Canada & RDI) tells the tragic story of Irish immigration to Canada in 1847, and the Francophone-Irish diaspora in Canada.

Melki also created and curated **WAR Flowers: A Touring Art Exhibition**, a multi-sensorial art exhibition that enthralled visitors and received rave media reviews over a three year period as it travelled from its opening at Reford Gardens in Grand Métis (Quebec), and then on to the Canadian War Museum (Ottawa), the Visitor Education Centre of the Canada National Vimy Memorial (Vimy, France), as well as to venues in Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton and Mississauga.

Melki wrote, directed and executive produced **the FENCE**. It took her nearly ten years to research, and the film includes never-before-seen archives from inside Hong Kong and Japan. For the film, Melki and her team built replicas of Hong Kong's Sham Shui Po prison, circa 1941, to exact scale in Cuba. Cuba was chosen due to its topography and architectural similarity to a now-vanished 1940's era Hong Kong. Melki explains: "*In a story that addresses revisionist history, I felt our veterans deserved not only the highest production quality possible for their story, but that every single detail of the film is historically accurate and verified by several military historians and archives*".

In 2020, Viveka Melki, founded her own production company, Melki Films.
<http://vivekamelki.com/>