

PRESS KIT

THE HUMAN SHELTER

A documentary film by Boris Benjamin Bertram



Human Shelter a provoking documentary to illustrate UN-Habitat 'Housing for All' Campaign

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) will run a five-week campaign on the theme 'Housing for All' starting on the World Habitat Day, 5 October 2020. The central message of the campaign is that housing is not just a roof. It is a human right and contributes to health, dignity, safety, inclusion and well-being.

'The Human Shelter', a documentary film directed by the Danish filmmaker Boris Benjamin Bertram, will be used throughout the five weeks to raise awareness on the meaning of housing and the fundamental role of homes for people and communities. The documentary is an inspirational exploration filmed on four continents, taking the public to extreme conditions worldwide and presents a series of profound testimonies that query the many dimensions of human living. The film is produced by Creative Alliance in collaboration with Good Company Pictures.

Showing from 5 October to 6 November 2020.

[Human Shelter - 2 minute Trailer](#)

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CONTENTS

Page 2:	Introduction
Page 3:	Synopsis
Page 3:	Production notes
Page 3:	Directors motivation
Page 4:	Short biography
Page 5:	About the production company, Creative Alliance
Page 6:	About Copenhagen Architecture Festival
Page 6:	The film is supported by

INTRODUCTION

"Poetically humans dwell on this Earth." (Hölderlin)

How do we construct homes in today's worldwide hotspots which are facing the challenges of climate change, globalization and migration? How do people create shelters and feel at home with others and in their bodies?

Boris Benjamin Bertram's film **The Human Shelter**, explores different people's ways of creating their homes around the globe. In a refugee camp outside Mosul, in a shanty town on the lagoon in Lagos, or in six square metres in the megacity of Tokyo... The exploring director also visits the Sami reindeer herders in the arctic circle, and NASA's futuristic Mars habitat in Hawaii, USA. It's a poetic expedition around four continents. An existential film about how we construct and articulate stories about our homes.

The Human Shelter comprises seven chapters. Every chapter has a shelter with a human story and a poetic performance. Every one of these representations pushes the audience to think about what 'home' means to them. To you...

As Boris Bertram writes in his director's motivation:

"Each location and scene in the film is intended to surprise the audience eye. In the making of the film, I have met human beings living on next to nothing, but insisting on living poetically in a world which is constantly changing. That is inspiring!"

The film's method is, in many ways, inspired by my mentor Jørgen Leth and his kind of film poetry. The thing about travelling out into the world bringing an almost naïve openness and curiosity towards what he calls 'the presence of coincidence.' The cinematic compass is controlled by desire and curiosity. That's how the film has become what it is. "

(read the full statement from Boris Benjamin Bertram on page 3)

SYNOPSIS

The documentary **The Human Shelter** is an anthropological and poetic journey, which investigates how we, as human beings, create our homes. In a sentient and playful way, the film explores our idea of the concept of 'home'.

During the film we travel to some of the world's extremities concerning climate change, growing megacities and conflict zones. Those exact places where we, as humans, are challenged in the world

right now. Here, the film glimpses at people's ability to live and express themselves poetically when creating a home. No matter if you live in a lagoon settlement in Lagos, in a refugee camp in Iraq or in six square metres dwelling in Tokyo.

During more than two years, director and explorer Boris Benjamin Bertram travels across four continents and films in nine different countries. Throughout the journey he asks questions like: When does a refugee camp shelter in Iraq become a home? What can a Sami reindeer herder teach the modern human about the concept of time? Why can the smell of a glacier in spring make us feel at home in our bodies? And, what would a home on Mars look like in the future?

PRODUCTION NOTES

During the last four years I have travelled the world's conflict zones with war photographer Jan Grarup. We have filmed people fleeing from war and nature disasters in Iraq, Kurdistan and the Central African Republic. People in motion and without homes. It was here I started filming for **The Human Shelter**. 'Shelter' is the first concept we have of a home. The shelter. A place where we, as human beings, are supposed to feel safe. During extreme circumstances the body itself is the first kind of shelter we lean on. A human, a refugee or a homeless person, lying on the bare ground, using their body to shelter from the environment. It was throughout these journeys where the idea about making a film and investigating how we create a home in the world appeared.

I have been working with three of the best film photographers in Denmark: Henrik Bohn Ipsen, Adam Philp and Lars Reinholt. Our common vision was to create an extraordinary cinematic piece. A global, work portraying the world right here right now. In addition, the photographers Jan Grarup and Sofie Amalie Klougart have contributed with their unique style of still images.

The film contributors consist of a wide range of personalities, *new thinkers*, all of whom have their own personal story to tell about the concept of 'home':

- Sean Anderson, curator at MOMA, New York
- Elle Marja Eira, Sami nomad and artist from Finnmark
- Kim Bindsted, professor at HI SEAS Mars Habitat, a NASA financed research project
- Amira, a 13-year-old poet from Iraq, from the UNCHR refugee camp in Kurdistan
- Johan Karlsson, designer of refugee shelters from Better Shelter
- Yuri, a female art photographer from Tokyo
- Andri Snær Magnason, Icelandic writer
- Godfrey Kato, environmental activist from Uganda.

DIRECTOR'S MOTIVATION

By Boris Benjamin Bertram

"From the beginning I was encouraged to make an experimental and curious film. A strong, visual presentation of how we, as humans, construct homes in the present world. Places where humans experience the greatest challenges related to climate change, urbanization, humanitarian catastrophes, migration and globalization. How do people create their home here? In a refugee camp a few kilometres outside Mosul... in a vast shanty town on the lagoon in Lagos... with the Sami reindeer herders in the arctic circle. Or in just six square metres in Tokyo, or near a melting glacier in Iceland... in the NASA Mar Habitat project. It was important to me, to create a film that was a journey across all four continents. A journey into a new landscape. An existential film on how we, as human beings, construct and tell the story about our home. In other words, a different story than the one we see on the news, for example about the refugee camps.

The film's method is in many ways inspired by my mentor Jørgen Leth and his poetic approach to filmmaking. The idea of travelling out into the world, bringing an almost naïve openness and curiosity towards what he calls 'the presence of coincidence.' Here, the cinematic compass works by desire and curiosity. That's how the film has become what it is. Every location and scene in the film is supposed to surprise the audience. Every chapter has a shelter and a human description of 'home' as the central story. Here we have made room for the contributors to express their feelings and thoughts on their home and their belonging to it.

Recently I found a Martin Heidegger quote, which I find captivates the essence of the film: *"Poetically humans dwell on this Earth."*

I have filmed on four continents and met people who have next to nothing, but still insist on living poetically and personally. They are innovative and live with dignity. That is an important recognition, which I want to express!

We travelled in the footsteps of the refugees who were fleeing Mosul after the Islamic occupation that lasted more than two years, on their way trying to find a new shelter and a new home. We have been on expedition to the vast lagoon settlements in Lagos, a place called "The Venice of Africa", where we had to smuggle in our equipment and film with armed guards. It's predicted that by 2050 every third human could be living in a slum area. Therefore new, innovative solutions are important for these areas. Makoko in Lagos, is a living example of a more organic urbanization. The large terraces on stilts create a community and a common area for kids and adults.

We filmed in the arctic circle in Finmark, despite it being so cold that our sound cables froze and broke. And funnily enough, it was precisely here that I found a feeling of belonging, I felt at home. By experiencing our Scandinavian origins. A landscape totally untouched and so quiet that I could hear my own heart beat. A feeling of coming home, in a landscape where "time doesn't go... time arrives."

I want the film to show the fundamental human values, values that count like: community, family, nature and our common home - the Earth.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Boris Benjamin Bertram is a filmmaker, producer and partner in the Copenhagen-based Good Company Pictures. Educated at the National Film School of Denmark as a documentary director in 2005, he also holds a graduate degree in social psychology and communication. He is the creator of award-winning, international documentaries, sold to more than 30 countries and has made a variety of documentaries for the National Danish Television. As a director he has a global outlook and a keen interest in international politics, conflict resolutions, humanitarianism and art.

His latest feature film, *THE WAR PHOTOGRAPHER* (2019), an intimate portrait of the renowned Danish photographer Jan Grarup, was the best-selling theatrically released documentary in Denmark in 2019. Bertram has recently collaborated with the artist Taryn Simon in creating a performance film from her impressive installation work *AN OCCUPATION OF LOSS* (2020).

Besides *THE HUMAN SHELTER* (2018), exploring the universal idea of home, his earlier work includes *DIPLOMACY* (2008) where he followed Kofi Annan as Secretary-General on the UN peacekeeping mission in the Darfur crisis, *TANKOGRAD* (2010), about a modern dance company in one of the most radioactively polluted cities in the world, Chelyabinsk in Russia, and the award-winning film *THE WAR CAMPAIGN* (2013) focusing on the media campaign which sold the illegal war against Iraq to the international community.

His films have won many prizes at esteemed ceremonies, such as The Moscow Film Festival, Camden International Film Festival, Chelyabinsk Film Festival, MCA Awards, TV-Gold award for best Danish documentary, and has been shown at special screenings at the UN headquarter, Stanford University and The Museum of Natural History in New York. Boris Bertram has been supported by The Danish Arts Council in 2011, 2015 and 2020.

ABOUT GOOD COMPANY PICTURES

Good Company Pictures is an award-winning film production company established in 2013 in Copenhagen, Denmark. It is owned by three directors and two producers. GCP produces creative documentaries for national and international audiences. Our previously released films include Beautiful Something Left Behind (winner of Documentary Feature Competition at SXSW 2020), False Confessions (the Audience Award winner at CPH:DOX 2018) and Photographer of War, which was the most seen documentary in the Danish cinemas in 2019.

More information: www.goodcompanypictures.com

ABOUT UN-HABITAT

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat, is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. The main documents outlining the mandate of the organisation are the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, Habitat Agenda, Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium, the New Urban Agenda and Resolution 56/206. UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries to promote transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action.

More information: www.unhabitat.org

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