

Hole in the Sky - the scars of 9/11

A Film by Katja Esson

"Where the towers should be, I see an amputated skyline – a hole in the sky". That's how Cheryl describes the view from her rooftop in Red Hook. Five years have passed since the attack on the World Trade Center, five years since fear touched New York and forgetting became impossible.

On the surface the city looks vibrant, alive, better off than ever. No one expected that four years ago. The real estate market has exploded. Headlines such as "Come-back City" or "Boom Town New York" transport this message to the rest of the world. "People pay prices for real estate that no one ever imagined in 2000", says the Grande Dame of Luxury Real Estate, Alice Mason. She should know having sold condos to Woody Allen and Tommy Hilfinger among others. And the self-proclaimed taxi philosopher Phil Frabosilo states simply: "People have forgotten".

Have they really? Behind this façade of glitter and glamour, the city is still fighting the demons of the past. "There is still a lot of hurt and pain in the city, but you have to look deep to find them", says Dr. Craig Katz, specialists for disaster psychiatry and Director of the World Trade Center Mental Health Intervention and Treatment program. He and his colleagues treat New Yorkers who cannot forget. People who worked at Ground Zero taking away rubble and human remains, office workers who were able to escape at the last minute, firemen and EMS drivers like James Dobson, who says: "I always plan to go out and do something, but then I end up staying home. I hardly go out anymore".

Saying good-bye is hard, especially when there is no place to mourn. Lois Gartenberg lost her son Jimmy in the North Tower and like many others, only received an urn with dust and pieces of debris because the remains of her son were never found. "I gave ours away. I don't want debris, I want my son".

The trauma of 9/11 lies deep inside the heart of New York and can't be glossed over. But New Yorkers fight on. The restaurant Colors seems like an island. It was founded by surviving employees of Windows on the World, the restaurant on top of the World Trade Center. The early shift died in the collapse, the others created a multi-cultural cooperative called "Colors" to honor their dead colleagues. "Every day I thank God", says bar keeper Patricio, "Every day".

The thought of leaving never crossed most New Yorkers' minds. "We rather die in New York than live in Ohio" states Dominique Richard, also a luxury real estate broker. And taxi driver Phil Fabrosilo speaks for all New Yorkers when he says: "They can knock us down, but they'll never get rid of us."

Running Time 53 min.

Directed by Katja Esson, whose documentary short "Ferry Tales" was nominated for the 2004 Academy Awards®.

Synopsis:

This documentary explores the remarkable recovery and lingering trauma five years after the terrorist attacks in New York City. Layer by layer the film dissects the state of a city and the soul of its people in images and encounters - finding fear, ambition, desires and wisdom.

Broadcast Premiere on German Television:



Das Erste Wednesday, 06. September 2006

Press Excerpts:

"... There are many shades of memory in this insightful, intelligent film, but weepiness it not one of them."

(DER SPIEGEL, 36/2006)

"... different than so many other 9/11 films is this one does not need to constructed the feeling of reliving the event....through alleged chance meetings it draws an picture of the city - but of course nothing in this film is coincidental... ...everywhere Esson meets New Yorkers who talk about themselves and by doing that they also talk about their still recovering but fierce city- or vice versa. This is the secret of this film ..."

(SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG, 6. September 2006)

"... an unusual perspective...Katja Esson does not bank on sensationalistic effects ... in an sensitively she tries to find answers to the question how New Yorkers really feel..."

(DIE WELT, 6. September 2006)