

A TORTUGA FILMS PRODUCTION  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH *documentary* CHANNEL

# the FENCE

圍網 フェンス

A FILM BY VIVEKA MELKI

STARRING LUBA ESTES GEORGE MACDONELL GEORGE PETERSON DR. CHI MAN KWONG DR. YUKI TANAKA  
DARRIANNE RAMIREZ BLANCHETTE GAËLLE POULIQUEN JARLYS RAMIREZ RAFAEL MARRERO

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY VIVEKA MELKI PRODUCED BY ADAM PAJOT GENDRON ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GRAHAM E. BRADLEY

DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY CHRISTIAN LAMONTAGNE, CLAUDINE SAUVÉ & FRANÇOIS VINCELETTE ART DIRECTORS GREG NOWAK & PATRICK BINETTE EDITOR VINCENT GUIGNARD

ORIGINAL SCORE ROBERT MARCEL LEPAGE SOUND DESIGNER CLAUDE LANGLOIS COLOURIST VICKIE-LYNN ROY ONLINE EDITOR FRANÇOIS BONNELLY AUDIO MIXER JEAN-PIERRE BISSENETTE

SENIOR DIRECTOR SANDRA KLEINFELD PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE JORDANA ROSS EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS VIVEKA MELKI & ADAM PAJOT GENDRON

TORTUGA  
FILMS

 documentary  
channel

 ROGERS  
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Media Fund

Québec  
Film and Television  
Tax Credit

Canada  
SODEC

GRAPHIC DESIGN: YANG ZHANG



# SYNOPSIS

## LOGLINE

**HONG KONG, 1941-1945. Prisoners of War and survivors reflect on how one of the longest incarcerations in WW2 affected their lives. In a broader sense, the film examines how time and history have created a 'fence' separating truth, memory and forgiveness.**

[LINK TO THE TRAILER](#)

Beginning in December 1941, 1 975 Canadians suffered one of the longest incarcerations in the Second World War, imprisoned for nearly four years within Japanese POW camps in Hong Kong and Japan. GEORGE MACDONELL and GEORGE PETERSON, two of the last surviving Canadian veterans of this war-time experience, witnessed the atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army inside the barbwire enclosure. On the other side of The FENCE... It is 1941 and 10-year-old LUBA ESTES, a White-Russian, lives stateless in Hong Kong. She walks the fence line to see her father, imprisoned inside Sham Shui Po alongside the Canadians because he was part of the Hong Kong Home Guard. If the camp guards notice her looking directly at him, they may kill him. Reflecting on this history is Hong Kong Historian Dr. CHI MAN KWONG, currently living in a Hong Kong being torn apart by politics and conflict. The Fence is about what remains in-between remembered and witnessed. It is a documentary featuring those who have humanity as their 'nation', together with intimate drama portraits of acts of darkness... and light. Together, these threads make up a common history that highlights the futility of nationalism and war.



## CREDITS

# THE FENCE | 2020 | 78 MIN | HD

Writer, director and researcher

**Viveka Melki**

Assistant Director

**Graham E. Bradley**

Director of photography

**Christian Lamontagne  
Claudine Sauvé  
François Vincelette**

Editor

**Vincent Guignard**

Original Score

**Robert Marcel Lepage**

Production

**Tortuga Films  
Productions III inc,  
Adam Pajot Gendron**

Executive Producers

**Viveka MELKI  
Adam PAJOT GENDRON**

Type

**Documentary**

Country of Origin

**Canada**

Country of Filming

**Canada, Cuba , Hong  
Kong , Japan**

Original version

**English**

## Download Files

[LINK TO FILES](#)

[ASK FOR A VIEWING LINK](#)

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## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

There is a FENCE. Between the act of violence, and the reflection upon those acts. Human nature wants the narrative of war to be black and white: we had a 'good' war; we fought on the 'right' side...otherwise, our human suffering has had no meaning. This film is about what stays in between remembered and witnessed. It is a documentary with those who have humanity as their 'nation' that runs concurrently with intimate drama portraits of acts of darkness ... and light. Together, these lines make up a common history that highlights the futility of nationalism and war. The actions of war are never black or white. The perception of the acts of violence differ depending on whether you're the one enacting, enduring, or just watching. Memory is what slips through the gap in THE FENCE to become what we imagine, as history.

Over 10 years, and late into the night, I would spend months linking together pieces of stories to make a whole picture. This was a story with little visual proof, Japan has never prioritized the classification of its WW2 archives, and the Imperial Army took thousands of Propaganda footage. So I worked with the POW Research Network of Japan, with GUWALO, with Mansfield, and websites off the grid to find the truth.

Japanese historian Dr. Tanaka says, "We are sorry for what you suffered, but we are sorry for what we suffered also". I am so sorry that you suffered... that Japanese Veterans came home to Japan and had to hide, made to feel shame for what they had done - or for what you, their government, ordered, drove, and condoned them, to do.

I am sorry that you suffered.... Canadian Veterans sent into a battle you were never going to win. That

Mckenzie King sent you a Christmas Card wishing you well - while you were inside a POW camp starving in Christmas 1942. There is no grey zone when it comes to acknowledgment and apology. Just as for me there was no grey zone wherein every detail of the film had to be reconstructed to historical accuracy.

Ten years ago, when I met the Veteran's children, they who grew up in houses where walls were filled with silence; with father's whose memories were violently triggered by seeing a bowl of rice; who slept on the floors beside their beds... Yet, how could these men possibly tell their loved ones what they had experienced? Some tried, too many were not believed - not only where they never compensated for their work in the shipyards and mines of Japan, they were never compensated by the Canadian government well into the 1950's. "When they came home, many of them never recovered from 4 years of systematic starvation" (George MacDonell). Too many Veterans died in their late 40's and 50's, their bodies damaged from starvation.

They never told what they saw through the Fence, unlike many prisons, the Fence was not a solid wall. You could see through it, and so were forced to watch, helpless, your fists clenched, your voice muted in your cage. For me this film was about acknowledging suffering on all sides; and forgiving yourself for a time when you were unable to act. But that was not my time. My time is now, a time to use my voice, to stand up for a modern day battle of democracy, to bring forward erased history, and to tell this story with as much grace, and truth as I can manage.

—Viveka MELKI



## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

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 TheHot 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.



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

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 nine 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".

# INTERVIEWEES

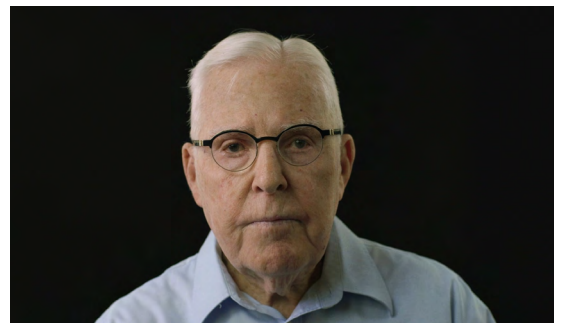


## Luba ESTES

White-Russian and stateless when the war in the Pacific breaks out, Luba is transformed from a privileged 10-year-old living in Hong Kong to a starving child outside the POW camp, determined to see her imprisoned father. After the war, she becomes a ballerina, a theatre actress, and then a CIA operative. “The USA is now my country, but Hong Kong is the home of my heart”, she says. Luba and her story are the backbone of the film. Through her child’s eyes, we see a world torn apart by the cruelty of war. She represents “the memories that we ache about”.

## Veteran George MACDONELL

George MacDonell is the published author of several books about his experiences in wartime Hong Kong and Japan, including “They Never Surrendered”. Dedicated to education around this story and the importance of history in the classroom, George is one of a handful of surviving Hong Kong Veterans. George was imprisoned first in Sham Shui Po, then Yokohama, and finally in Ohashi, where he was in part responsible for the final liberation of the 500 Canadian POWs under his charge. They were liberated, as luck would have it, on the very day they’d all been sentenced to die!



## Veteran George and his daughter Pat PETERSON

George Peterson is the last surviving member of the Winnipeg Grenadiers. Throughout his incarceration he carried the tiny baby shoe of his niece in his pocket: a symbol for him of hope and of a return home. With the consent of his daughter Pat, a social worker in Winnipeg, George shares in the film some of horrific war crimes he witnessed, important historical facts about his POW experience that have never been told in any history book.

## Dr. Yuki TANAKA

Dr. Tanaka is the renowned author of HIDDEN HORRORS. His research uncovered the proof of cannibalism practiced by the Japanese Imperial Army in the Pacific during the Second World War. He is Professor Emeritus of the Hiroshima Peace Institute. Dr. Tanaka is a peace activist and a member of the POW Research Network of Japan, a group dedicated to telling the true history of the Second World War.







## Dr. Chi Man KWONG

Dr. Kwong is an Associate Professor of History at Hong Kong University. He is an eight-time published military historian. A graduate of Cambridge University, his research discovered the documentary evidence of cannibalism in Hong Kong under the Japanese occupation.

## MAIN ACTORS

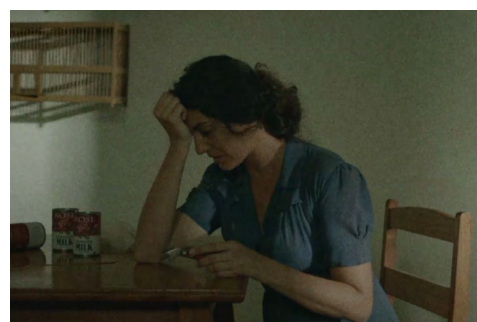


Actress, **Darianne RAMIREZ BLANCHETTE**  
(Luba ESTES 10-14 years old)

Darianne is a talented and award-winning KRUMP dancer. She also participated in a French dance competition called Live Battle. This is her first major role in a film. She was born and raised in Montreal. She bears a close resemblance to the real Luba at that age.

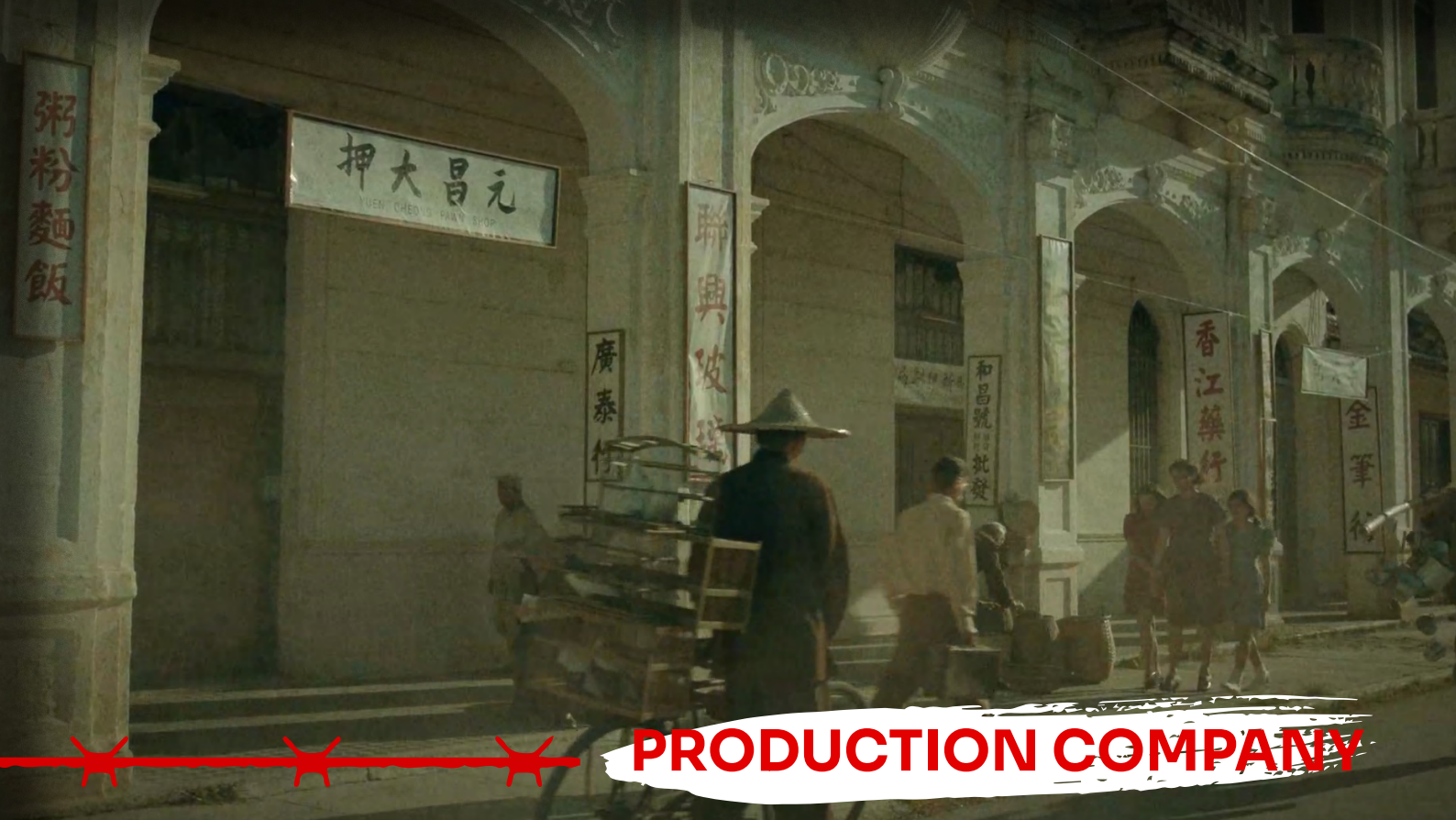
Actress, **Gaëlle POULIQUEN**  
(Luba's mother)

Gaëlle is a noted Canadian actor based in Montreal. Born in Paris and trained at the National Theatre School of Versailles, Gaëlle is of Romani ancestry. She is a professional Gitan dancer and instructor in Montreal.



Actor, **Jarlys RAMIREZ**  
(Luba's father)

Jarlys Ramirez is an internationally renowned Cuban actor. He was trained at the National Theatre School of Havana and in the Science of Theatre at ISA Havana.



# TORTUGA

FILMS

Tortuga Films is a television production company with over 10 years of experience 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.

Tortuga's films include **After Circus; Coasters; Fear of Dancing; and Carricks – In the Wake of the Irish.**



### Louis-Philippe Cusson Photographie

- p. 10 Darianne RAMIREZ BLANCHETTE  
(Luba ESTES 10-14 years old)
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- p. 13 Jarlys RAMIREZ (Luba's father)
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- p. 15 Bol of rice

### Tortuga Films

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*Dan & Philippa Carson*  
PHOTOGRAPHY









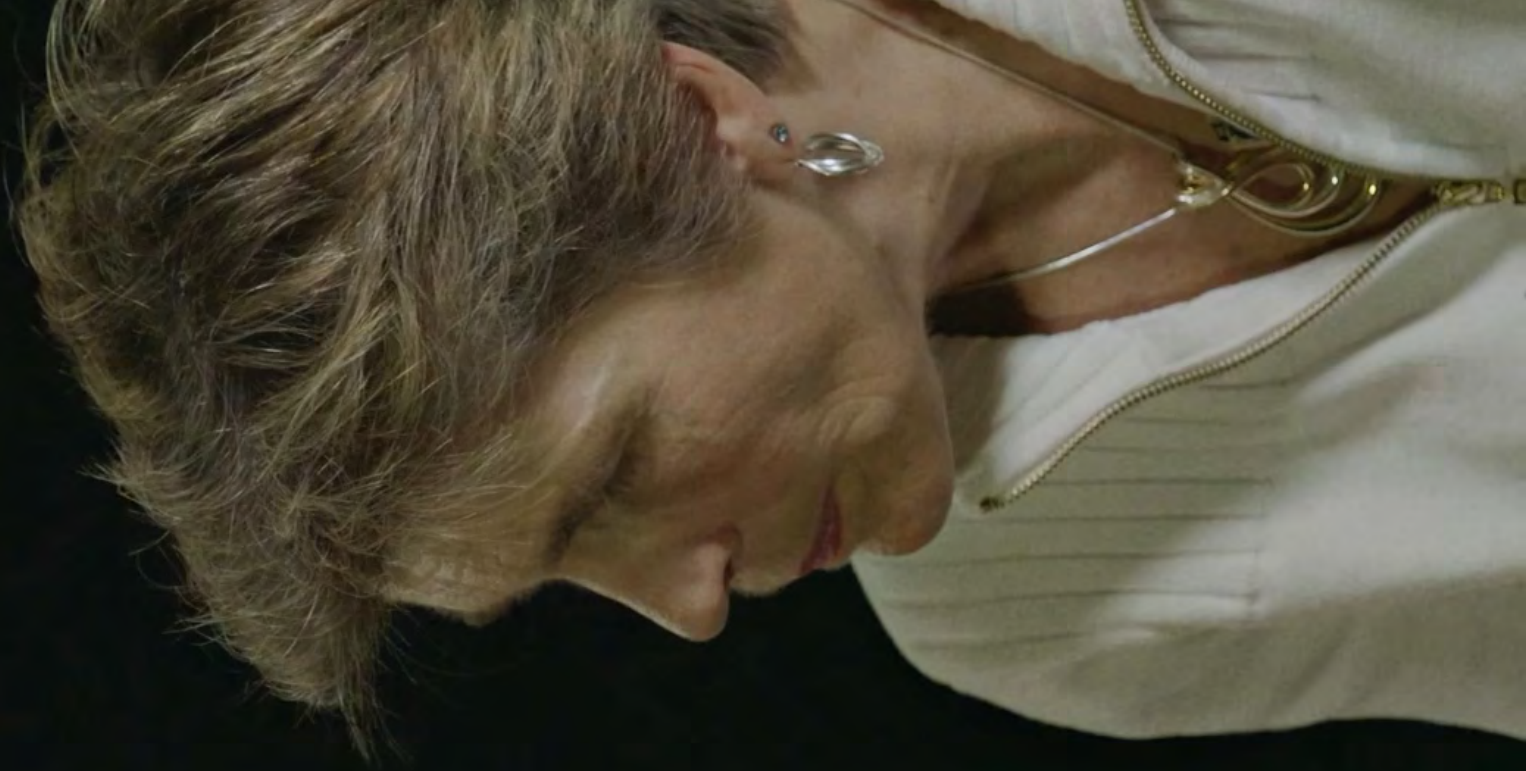






















# FILMOGRAPHY

<b>Campesinos ... we will inherit the earth</b>	2008	1 X 52'	Radio Canada/TFO - <b>Producer, Screenwriter</b>
<b>Hippocrate</b>	2012	6 X 30'	<b>Producer</b>
<b>The Time It Takes</b>	2010	11 min	<b>Director</b>
<b>War Correspondence</b>	2014	2 X 30'	Radio Canada RDI, <b>Director</b>
<b>After Circus</b>	2015	78'	Canada, RDI, <b>Director</b>
<b>Carricks, in the wake of the Irish</b>	2017	52'	Radio Canada - RDI, <b>Director</b>
<b>The Fence</b>	2020	78'	Documentary Channel, <b>Director Screenwriter</b>