

**When your world is crumbling,  
who do you turn to?**



**Fighting a lifelong battle for compensation for her crumbling house, an elderly woman finds a young refugee living on her doorstep.**

**Filigree Films present**

# **MORTARS**

**A hybrid feature film, traversing documentary & fiction,  
by writer/director, Iqbal Barkat.**

## Synopsis

Jackie has lived for more than fifty years on the edge of Western Sydney. For most of that time she has sought compensation from the Australian Defence Force – the house that she built is crumbling around her as a result of munitions detonations at the nearby military base.

Into this fraught environment comes a young fugitive. There is war in his history too – untold violence in unknown lands. Jackie offers him shelter, but the connection between the two is never completely easy. Can she trust him with her safety? Can he trust her with his?

Jackie's story, the crumbling beauty of the home, and the words given to the silent young man through the poet Labīd, are artfully combined in this multi-layered story that asks us to think more deeply about the other's experience. This is a story with unstable foundations at its core, and the compassion that can thrive in spite of that.



*Filmmakers*  
*Writer/ Director, Iqbal Barkat*  
*Producer, Natalie Oliver*  
*DOP/Editor, Vincent Tay*  
*Sound & Music, Matt Lord*  
*Key Cast, Jacoba Van Dykk*  
*Daalmeijer & Chris Kharoufeh*

Running at 73 mins, *Mortars* is suitable for festivals, cinema release, 'event' screenings/discussion (social issues, refugees, the aged), broadcast community and educational use.

Watch the trailer: <https://vimeo.com/108588145>

## Director's Statement

When I think back to the time I met Jackie (Jacoba), I was on the trajectory of making another film, a very different film. I was not looking for another film to make and was in fact avoiding that very possibility, trying not to fall into the trap getting entangled in projects that will never be finished, a trap that filmmakers know so well. But the most incredible aspect of our banal lives on this earth is surely the possibility of that chance encounter, of going down a rabbit hole in which our lives are forever transformed. And this was what Jackie presented to me.

Jackie had a sad story to tell, an individual's struggle against a faceless, brutish state – unfortunately, an all too common story served up daily, only with different garnishes each time. I knew I could not represent what was literally fifty years of blood, sweat and tears. Instead, I chose to turn the camera eye to an aspect of Jackie that intrigued me: her generosity of spirit. In the house that is crumbling around her, she has given refuge to ailing family members, strangers, wild and domestic animals. But it is generosity that is given without, what we would perhaps call, accompanying emotion, though what we mean is some socially-acceptable notion of niceness. Jackie assists simply because there is a need; she is not motivated by flimsy notions of phatic communion. This is the hallmark of ethical behavior which I have learnt from Jackie and which I celebrate in the film.

The need to focus on particular aspects of Jackie's story led me to a hybrid form, between documentary and fiction for *Mortars*. Not having to conform to a notion of documentary truth or a plot-based fictional trajectory allowed me freedom to take the film along uncharted paths such as having a voice-over narration of lines from the poetry of Labīd Ibn Rabī'ah, the 7<sup>th</sup> Century Arab poet.

Labīd is our constant companion in the film. He sits near our jugular whispering warnings of our impending death but also exhorting us to look carefully for effaced signs of our secret history, of what remains beyond this mortal coil. Labīd links the different sorrows in the film, the past and the present, the fugitive and Jackie.

If there is one take-away morsel from *Mortars*, it is this: anxiety and compassion can coexist. Neither Jackie nor the fugitive ever completely disarm. We have far too many stories in which a character, upon seeing the face of the other breathes a sigh of relief and is no longer anxious. To me this strikes a false note. Anxiety is never anxiety for the other. It always points to our incomplete self – our pathetic identity which we believe the other will expose. Knowing this will not lead to overcoming anxiety but to the possibility of compassionate action.

## **IQBAL BARKAT - Director, Producer, Story, Writer**

Iqbal Barkat is a director, writer and founding partner of Filigree Films in Sydney, Australia. MORTARS is his second feature film.

MORTARS tells the story of an elderly woman and a young refugee who is hiding in her home. In writing the film, Iqbal brings together the true story of the lead female character whose home is damaged by years of weapons disposals, as well as a response to the policy of mandatory detention and negative mainstream attitudes in Australia towards refugees.

Iqbal is a natural and prolific storyteller, reflecting the plurality of identity and story-telling cultures in Singapore where he grew up. He has over 20 years' experience in directing both film and theatre. Iqbal began his career in theatre and directed over 90 plays at Gung Ho Theatre Ensemble, the successful company he founded in Singapore. He was forced to shut down due to political pressure by the government and moved to Australia in the late 90s, by which time he was already making films and had shifted his career focus to writing and directing for film. Iqbal then founded Filigree Films in Sydney. He directed his first feature film **DUSK** in 2000.

He is a proponent and practitioner of community and participatory filmmaking and has produced many films in education, youth issues and health across Australia. He also collaborates on a number of research projects with researchers/artists from University of Western Sydney and Macquarie University.

Iqbal is a co-author of **SCREEN MEDIA ARTS**, a tertiary teaching text. It is published by Oxford University Press and includes an instructional DVD on film making techniques. In 2014 Iqbal completed his PhD at the University of Western Sydney and now teaches screen production at Macquarie University.

Iqbal's completed films and media projects include:

**WATER VESSEL (2013)**: a short experimental film that Iqbal wrote and directed. It was selected for the 30th Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival in 2014; Victoria's Campfire Educational Film Festival 2014; and the 2013 Indie Fest in La Jolla, California where it received an Award Of Merit. Featuring shadow puppets and a haunting original score, the film was inspired by stories Iqbal heard as a child growing up in Singapore and Malaysia. It reflects the collision of culture from east and west. **WATER VESSEL** was shot on film initially, and the later sections on a

digital camera. These two types of filming represent the co-existence of the old and new which is also a theme of the film.

**WHY DO YOU WANT TO SEE MY FACE (2011):** a short film essay written and directed by Iqbal. It portrays the thoughts and feelings of a young Sudanese refugee in Australia. The film screened at many global film festivals including New York's African Diaspora International Film Festival; Africa World Documentary Film Festival (Barbados & Nigeria) and Culture Unplugged Film Festival; and in Australia at the Brisbane International; Dungog NSW; and Blue Mountains NSW film festivals 2012.

The film was selected for the 2014 open-air arts event *Sleepers Awake*, hosted by the Museum of Contemporary Art & Western Sydney Parklands. The screening was presented as a performance piece and was a return to Iqbal's theatre roots. The work is a collaboration between Iqbal and Youl Youl who arrived in Australia as a refugee from Sudan. He stars in the film and the performance piece is based on the true events of Youl's life.

**FACEBOOK SUICIDE (2012) (formerly Last Testament):** a short film written and directed by Iqbal. It was shot entirely on the iPhone 4 and was a humorous reflection on how social media can leave us more isolated than ever.

**SINGER SONGWRITER SERIES (2011):** an 11-part television series featuring independent musicians presenting original work. Iqbal was the creative producer on this project. Filmed as a run of live concerts at Sydney's Metro Theatre, the series was broadcast on Television Sydney (TVS) in November-December 2011 and was the highest rating show in its timeslot.

**TUFA (2001 – 2008):** Iqbal was the creative director for the music and performance collective featuring artist Weizen Ho. Iqbal created the visual-installation content and directed the performance pieces for TUFA's numerous concerts including at the Sydney Opera House, Government House Sydney and Newtown Theatre.

**PARRAMATTA PEOPLE & PLACE (2000):** a 20-minute film on the history of Parramatta. It remains as a permanent exhibition in Parramatta Visitors Centre.

**In development:**

**PENRITH** is Iqbal's latest feature film project. The film conveys the love story of an elderly couple in Sydney's western suburbs; the woman Anglo-Australian, the man a migrant from Iran. The script is a

collaboration with Sako Nishanian and reflects Iqbal's on-going interest in community and place.

## **VINCENT TAY – Cinematographer/DP, Editor, Producer**

Vincent Tay is a cinematographer, editor and founding partner of Filigree Films. Vincent is a full member of the Australian Cinematographer's Society. **MORTARS** is Vincent's second feature film.

During his previous career as a barrister Vincent began shooting films in Singapore. He left the legal profession to work solely as a filmmaker. Vincent has shot on all formats, his early experiences and first feature, **DUSK**, being with 35mm film, and later 16mm for many short films. His love for the film medium endures, however he now works primarily with digital cameras. Working as a cinematographer for over fifteen years, Vincent has honed his observation of story and in 2002 began his foray into editing.

Some examples of Vincent's films are:

**WATER VESSEL (2013):** Iqbal Barkat's 2013 short film was filmed and edited by Vincent. It was selected for the 30th Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival in 2014; and the 2013 Indie Fest in La Jolla, California where it received an Award Of Merit.

**WHY DO YOU WANT TO SEE MY FACE (2011):** Iqbal Barkat's short film essay told from the viewpoint of a young Sudanese refugee in Australia. The film was shot and edited by Vincent and had numerous official festival selections in 2011 and 2012 including Brisbane International; Dungog; and Blue Mountains, all in Australia; the African Diaspora International Film Festival in New York; Culture Unplugged Film Festival; and the Africa World Documentary Film Festival (Cameroon, Barbados & Nigeria).

**30.5 (2012):** a short by director Phoenix Lau was a further project for Vincent as cinematographer. 30.5 was selected for the Los Angeles festival "Asians On Film" 2012; and Sydney's "World Of Women's Cinema" film festival 2013. The film received an Award Of Merit from California's "The Accolade Competition" in 2013.

**HANNAH'S ZOMBIE (2012):** a short by Jodin Meyer. Vincent was both cinematographer and editor. **HANNAH'S ZOMBIE** screened at BUSHO Budapest International Short Film Festival; Rhode Island International

Film Festival NY; and Scare-A-Con Film Festival in Syracuse NY.

**MOTHER'S DAY (2012):** a long short by Kosta Nikas. Vincent was the cinematographer and Editor. **MOTHER'S DAY** was shot on the Red. It was selected for Canada's Edmonton International Film Festival; and the Sydney Intercultural Film Festival.

**LIGHT (2011):** a short film by Kosta Nikkas. Vincent was cinematographer, editor and associate producer on **LIGHT** and shot it on the Canon 5D Mark II. **LIGHT** won Best Experimental Film at the prestigious LA Shorts Festival 2011 and was later purchased for distribution by a German tv network.

**AN AMERICAN CAT IN THE LION CITY (1998):** a 50 minute documentary about a jazz musician living in Singapore. This was one of Vincent's early films as cinematographer.

## **NATALIE OLIVER – Producer**

Natalie is a producer. She graduated from the Australian Film TV and Radio School (AFTRS) in 2011 having been accepted into the highly competitive Graduate Certificate Film Producer course. Natalie is also a financial advisor, bringing investment and business expertise to all her film projects. **MORTARS** is Natalie's first feature as producer.

In 2011, Natalie joined the creative team at Filigree Films, as its principal producer. In this role her works for Filigree Films include the three short films **FACEBOOK SUICIDE**, **WATER VESSEL** and **WHY DO YOU WANT TO SEE MY FACE** (see official screenings noted above), and the feature film **MORTARS**.

Natalie also collaborates more widely with other producers, directors and artists. In 2013 Natalie collaborated as a producer on the short film **HANDYMAN** with producer Karen Radzyner of Dragonet Films. **HANDYMAN** (writer/director Sonia Whiteman) was selected for the 2014 Flicker Fest.

In that same year, Natalie was producer of the music video **GOOD CLEAN FUN**, for artist James Reyne. She worked with director Jad Haber of SSS Productions on the project. It won the 2013 Best Australian Pop Music Video at the Australian Independent Music Video Awards, Canberra; and was also a nominee in the Australian Directors Guild Awards 2013 for best director of a music video.

In 2012 Natalie teamed up with Jodin Meyer (Director) to produce HANNAH'S ZOMBIE, a light hearted romantic short with a flesh eating zombie twist! HANNAH'S ZOMBIE screened at BUSHO Budapest International Short Film Festival; Rhode Island International Film Festival NY; and Scare-A-Con Film Festival in Syracuse NY.