

PICTURE TREE INTERNATIONAL  
PRESENTS

A FILM BY  
**THOMAS ROTH**

# SCHÄCHTEN

**A RETRIBUTION**

 PICTURE TREE  
INTERNATIONAL

**PRESS KIT**



**Original title:** Schächten  
**Director:** Thomas Roth  
**Cast:** Jeff Wilbusch, Paulus Manker, Miriam Fussenegger, Julia Stemberger, Christian Berkel, Georg Friedrich, Michael Abendroth, Konstantin Frank  
**Genre:** Drama  
**Length:** 110 min  
**Country of Origin:** Austria  
**Language:** German  
**4K/Dolby Atmos**  
**Production Company:** Cult Film  
**Coproduction Company:** Hallmann Entertainment Company  
**World Sales:** Picture Tree International

SCHÄCHTEN is a CULT Film production in coproduction with Hallmann Entertainment Company and was created with the support of the Austrian Film Institute (ÖFI), Filmfonds Wien, FISA - Filmstandort Austria, Land Niederösterreich, Land Salzburg and in cooperation with ORF.

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# SHORT SYNOPSIS

Vienna 1960s - The young Jewish business man Victor has to witness how the prosecution of a Nazi crime against his family fails. The political and legal system is still virtually run by former Nazis with large parts of society being entangled in the past. When Victor also loses his grief ridden father and his girlfriend's family opposes their relationship and his identity, Victor begins to lose faith in formal justice and takes matters in his own hands.



## KEY CAST

Actors

Jeff Wilbusch

Christian Berkel

Georg Friedrich

Robert Hunger-Bühler

Julia Stemberger

Konstantin Frank

Miriam Fussenegger

# LONG SYNOPSIS

As a child, VICTOR DESSAUER, a Jew born in Vienna in the 1930s, witnesses his grandparents being murdered by Nazi thugs and his parents and sister hauled off to Mauthausen Concentration Camp. The SS officer in charge: the Commandant of Mauthausen, KURT GOGL. From this moment on, 8-year-old Victor is completely alone, left in the remote hiding place in the forest where his family was discovered by the SS. Somehow, the child will have to survive the rest of the war all by himself. Twenty years later, the social upheaval of the early 1960s has also reached Vienna, where Victor and his father PAUL – the only two survivors among the entire extended family – have a textile business. When Victor and his father get word that Kurt Gogl – who also killed Victor's mother and younger sister in Mauthausen – is living in the Salzkammergut region of Austria, where he works as a school headmaster and has never been brought to justice, Paul approaches the Nazi hunter SIMON WIESENTHAL and asks him to track Gogl down. In due course, Kurt Gogl is found and charged with crimes against humanity. However, seeing as Austria is still infested with former Nazis at this time in history, Gogl is acquitted. When all further legal attempts to make Gogl pay for his actions end in failure, Victor goes to see the former SS officer himself, hoping to persuade him to make a confession. But Gogl chases Victor away and threatens him with violent retribution if he ever comes near

his house again. Shortly after, Victor's father passes away due to weakened health and the distress of the situation,. At this point, Victor resolves to take the law into his own hands and keep constant track of Gogl. He does so in secret, keeping it even from his girlfriend ANNA and his best friend ARIE. But in a country where a large number of senior political and administrative positions are still occupied by former Nazis – very few of whom have ever been held accountable for their actions – Victor's attempts to confront Gogl constantly fail. One day, as he is secretly following Gogl and his entourage on a hunting trip and has the opportunity to shoot him, Victor suddenly begins to doubt whether he is doing the right thing. He doesn't pull the trigger. But then he is discovered and just barely manages to escape before the furious men are able to kill him. From this moment on, Victor and those he holds dear are themselves hunted down by Gogl and the former Nazis who are still loyal to him. Victor and Anna are attacked and badly beaten. At this point, WERNER KOHLMEIER, an agent of the Mossad, approaches Victor and offers to get him out of the country safely, but Victor refuses to abandon his quest to obtain justice for his family. He comes up with a daring plan...putting Gogl in the same situation Victor himself experienced as a small child, that is, alone and abandoned in the forest, in a hole in the ground with no apparent chance of escape.



# THOMAS ROTH

## Director's Statement

Victor Dessauer is old enough to have experienced the horrors of the Nazi Regime as a child and is still young enough to carry the anger of youth when we begin our story. I wanted to capture his awakening and confrontation with this Nazi past which became characteristic for Victor's generation and opened the door for a spirit of a wider rebellion that painfully changed society, while being inseparable from the present. Much of this story radiates into our present society and how quickly the cycle of hatred can re-emerge in all of us.

## Director's Bio

Thomas Roth has worked as a freelance director and author since 1995. He's received multiple awards, including the Erich Neuberg Prize, the Golden Romy and the Golden Ticket for his film "FALCO, verdammt wir leben noch". He is the screenwriter and director of the multiple award-winning TV series "Trautmann". He has also contributed many films to the prominent German-language series "Tatort", "Der Kommissar und das Meer", "Kommissar Dupin" and "Der Kriminalist".







# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

**Would you describe your project as a drama, or more as a crime film or thriller?**

Thomas Roth: To put it succinctly, “Schächten” is a drama set in the 1960s Austria that deals with themes of law, justice and revenge.

**You’ve brought together a stellar cast, including Christian Berkel as Simon Wiesenthal. To what extent is the story based on facts?**

Roth: I’m absolutely delighted about our film’s truly high-end cast. “Schächten” is inspired by a true story that I used as a basis for the fictional story. A few years ago, I was approached by a young Jewish film producer from Munich, whose family originally came from Vienna. He asked me whether I might be interested in developing a screenplay that explored the lives of Jews in Vienna after World War II in the broadest sense. At the time, I’d actually already been doing intensive research on precisely such a project, and I’d also explored the work of Simon Wiesenthal. Ultimately, I wrote the screenplay over a period of five years.

**In a recent statement, you said that Austria’s dark past is “more relevant than ever” for the present day. Could you elaborate on that?**

Roth: I don’t think it’s something that applies exclusively to Austria, but I do think it’s particularly horrifying how little this country has learned from its past. We still haven’t come to terms with this dark period in any really sustainable way. My film explores the themes of anti-Semitism, racism and the exclusion of minorities. It focuses on the extent to which the judicial system is determined by political forces. It’s about the role of the media, and it examines the question of whether or not individuals have the ability and responsibility to rise up in opposition. These issues are just as relevant today as they were 60 years ago. And this is the case pretty much everywhere in the world.

**For “Schächten”, you once again wrote the screenplay yourself. To what extent do you take a holistic approach to your projects, and would it even be conceivable for you to direct a script written by someone else?**

Roth: I’ve directed several TV projects based on scripts written by other authors. Usually, almost always, however, I’ve created a director’s version of the screenplay, and I’ve often ended up rewriting the material quite a bit. In that sense, I do indeed take a very holistic approach. I see film as a Gesamtkunstwerk, a total work of art. Writing a screenplay is a wonderful journey that requires a lot of courage. As a director, however, you have to be able to feel comfortable enough to transcend the author and find your own way through the story. The ability to do both gives me a great sense of happiness, but also a piece of existential artistic freedom.

**“Schächten” was always intended to be a film project. Was it clear to you from the very beginning that the material was not suited to TV? And in light of the current situation, have you ruled out the possibility of finding distribution channels other than cinemas for it?**

Roth: “Schächten” was conceived as a feature film from the very beginning. It deals with radical themes that are far removed from any conventions. The freedom provided by film projects is the type of artistic freedom that shields you from any specifications or parameters associated with a particular broadcaster, time slot or streaming service. Our industry is currently undergoing a transformation, with all of the new distribution channels opening up new possibilities, and that’s great. But as far as I’m concerned, the only way to decide what’s best for a film is to look at each film on an individual basis. And let’s not forget, countless streaming productions have been known to disappear within a few days – sometimes after going completely unnoticed – into the dark expanses of the digital universe.



# PRODUCTION COMPANY

With over 150 national and international productions under its belt, Cult Film has enjoyed an outstanding reputation far beyond the borders of Austria for almost 30 years now. Founded in 1992 by Burkhard Ernst, the film production company has been co-managed since 2018 by producer Katharina Ernst and continues to produce and develop film and television projects, fictional content and documentaries.

# THE PRODUCER

**Burkhard W.R. Ernst, Katharina Ernst, Thomas Roth, Konstantin Seitz**

“Just because something is in the past, doesn’t mean it’s over”.  
*(Elias Canetti)*

The act of remembering the Holocaust is faced with a constant set of new challenges. For example, as we see in our current news cycle, anti-Semitism in Austria has increased. As a humanist and as a person who will never shy away from working to come to terms with Austria’s history, I am confronted with the same questions over and over again: How is this possible? Are we forgetting to remember our past?

It’s important to me as a producer that I contribute to a culture of remembrance, in particular by portraying the breach of civilization associated with the Nazi dictatorship and the long-term effects of those years in the post-war era. The way I contribute to this culture is by telling stories and willingly taking on the burden of memory. This kind of commitment to exploring Austria’s dark past often triggers large amounts of criticism and hostility, but I see it as my democratic duty as a humanist to put up with the enmity and to work against it whenever I can.

Memory is one of the most essential cultural practices that we humans engage in, but it’s also an activity that certain political ideologies are constantly trying to devalue and invalidate or, on the other hand, glorify for their own purposes. What they forget is that the act of remembering has an important anthropological, social and cultural significance. It inscribes itself on our collective memory and helps us evolve as a society and as individuals. We cannot let memory and the act of remembering become the prey of radicals who seek to instrumentalise it for their own purposes and somehow manage to link it to their own reprehensible values, most of which are contemptuous of human dignity. Memory and the act of remembering must be based on an ethical premise associated with

the undisputed value of human rights. Part of this act of remembering involves listening to voices that have gone unheard or are no longer able to speak for themselves, because these voices testify to a past that is by no means “done with”. Indeed, just because something is in the past, doesn’t mean it’s over. We cannot claim to have come to terms with the past if individuals still have to actually fight for recognition, acknowledgement, reparation, reconciliation and remembrance.

Producing “Schächten” is our way of conveying the historical biographies we need as a society in order to be able to reflect critically on the past and truly come to terms with it – each one of us as individuals and in a deconstructive manner. In “Schächten”, we experience the Nazi dictatorship and atrocities from the point of view of a young man who, as a survivor of the Holocaust, attempts to achieve justice for himself and his family. He seeks a form of justice that was never granted to him in a country that continued to foster right-wing Nazi groups even after the war ended. Indeed, until recently, Austria has continued to hide behind its supposed “victim” status, even though there is no doubt the country was also a willing accomplice. From the end of the war to the turn of the millennium, Austria’s collective memory has been marked by the denial, trivialization and shutting away of the Nazi era. This is why it continues to be necessary that we convey stories that provide updated criteria for our ongoing critical evaluation.

*Mag. Katharina Ernst, Bakk.phil. (Cult Film GmbH)*



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## WORLD SALES

Picture Tree International (PTI) is an energetic and fast-growing world sales company with its headquarters in Berlin. The core business is worldwide licensing across all platforms, with the company maintaining a presence at all the major film and television markets. Alongside licensing, PTI is also able to act as your German co-producer and local distributor via a fully integrated business model that offers producers individual sales and financing strategies in a results-driven and transparent partnership, something essential in today's ever changing audio-visual industry landscape. PTI's line-up of up to 15 films a year is designed to ensure the right mix of arthouse and crossover productions to fully maximize the revenue potential of each film. Picture Tree International was founded in December 2012 by Andreas Rothbauer and has been run jointly by his partner and co-managing director Yuan Rothbauer since 2017.

## CREW LIST

**Director:** Thomas Roth  
**Screenplay:** Thomas Roth  
**DoP:** Clemens Majunke  
**Production designer:** Uta Wiegele  
Sebastian Thanheiser  
Georg Resetschnig  
**Editor:** Birgit Gasser  
**Sound:** Hjalti Bager Jonathansson  
Johannes Baumann  
**Sound design:** Karim Weth  
**Sound mix:** Alexander Koller  
**Composer:** Erik K.Skodvin  
**Casting directors:** Eva Roth  
**Costume designer:** Erika Navas  
**Make-up:** Monika Fischer-Vorauer  
**Line Producer:** Konstantin Seitz  
**Production Manager:** Igor Orovac  
**Producers:** Burkhard W.R. Ernst  
Katharina Ernst  
Thomas Roth  
Konstantin Seitz  
**Co-producers:** Klemens Hallmann  
Michel Wagner

DOP CLEMENS MAJUNKE / PRODUCTION DESIGNER UTA WIEGELE SEBASTIAN THANHEISER GEORG RESETSCHNIG  
EDITOR BIRGIT GASSER / COMPOSER ERIK K. SKODVIN / COSTUME DESIGNER ERIKA NAVAS / MAKE-UP MONIKA FISCHER-VORAUER  
SOUND HJALTI BAGER-JONATHANSSON JOHANNES BAUMANN / CASTING EVA ROTH  
SOUND DESIGN KARIM WETH / SOUND MIX ALEXANDER KOLLER / PRODUCTION MANAGER IGOR OROVAC / WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY THOMAS ROTH  
PRODUCERS BURKHARD ERNST KATHARINA ERNST THOMAS ROTH KONSTANTIN SEITZ KLEMENS HALLMANN MICHEL WAGNER

A CULT FILM PRODUCTION IN COPRODUCTION WITH HALLMANN ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY