

AVENUE B presents

EIN  
BETULOT  
BAKRAYOT

# VIRGINS

a film by  
KEREN  
BEN RAFAEL



In Kiryat Ham, small town on the north coast of Israel, everything seems to have stopped. Lana, a rebellious teenager, vowed to fight against resignation and immobilism. She couldn't imagine that the rumor of a mermaid off the coast would wake up her town from its torpidity.



## INTERVIEW WITH KEREN BEN RAFAEL

**VIRGINS** shows how the small seaside resort of Kiryat Yam, in Israel, is turned upside down by an alleged mermaid sighting... How did you come out with that story?

This really happened in Kiryat Yam a few years ago. The story was all over the news, and the mayor really offered a million dollars to whoever could prove the existence of the mermaid. I knew right away that I wanted to make a film about it, and show how a mere rumour brings about cynical behaviours in some people (like the mayor, for instance), but also sparks a strong connection to fantasy and belief in other characters.

The mermaid story seeps into the film quite prosaically. It is first told by Vladimir, then passed on via Lana's inaccurate translation, and then by Chipi's article...

I wanted the audience to feel how words penetrate the whole film, and how all characters experience it. Old Vladimir is filled with emotion, Tamar is transcended, Lana takes it as a joke, the mayor uses it to try and save his town, and the mother to save her café... This wonderful, surreal story gets woven into reality quite naturally. Therefore fantasy becomes as relevant as life itself, and ends up being a part of it.



When told by Vladimir, the story also seems to take on a historical and political dimension, as it echoes the journey of emigrants to Israel...

Above all else, I wanted to tell a universal story, but yes, the old man's tale is reminiscent of History itself and of immigration to Israel. But the idea of leaving Israel is also mentioned quite often in the film, notably with Lana's wish to leave town, or with her mother, a Russian emigrant, and how difficult it was for her to land in Kiryat Yam as a child... Actually, I think that the Israeli tend to have itchy feet!

As evoked in the title, virginity is a major topic in the film.

The figure of the mermaid made me think about the story of a teenage girl addressing her sexuality. Mermaids are by definition virgins, and "mermaid" in Hebrew literally translates as "virgin of the sea". Lana cannot wait to lose her virginity, to become an adult.

More broadly speaking, virginity raises the question of metamorphosis, of a girl becoming a woman, and what kind of woman, with what kind of relationship to the world and men... To me, it was very important to have strong women as heroines.

More broadly speaking, virginity also relates to people's way of looking at things, to their capacity to open up to the supernatural.

Yes, it involves both the body and the mind. I think that, somehow, we can all become virgins again... We grow up, we get old, but we never lose that possibility and that desire. Incidentally, the two characters who believe in the mermaid are the little girl and the old man - the two extremes of life. Belief is one of the major topics in the film, in the broad sense of the word, close to hope. Believing that a mermaid truly exists is finding reasons for hope in this world.



FRANCE | ISRAEL | BELGIUM  
90MIN | DCP | 1.85 | COLOR

## CAST

LANA Joy Rieger  
IRENA / ERIKA Evgenia Dodina  
CHIPI Michael Aloni  
TAMAR Manuel Elkaslassi Vardi  
HALUBA Rami Heuberger

## CREW

DIRECTOR  
Keren Ben Rafael

SCRIPT  
Keren Ben Rafael, Elise Benroubi

IMAGE  
Damien Dufresne

EDITING  
Daniel Avitzur, Frederic Baillehaiche

MUSIC  
Renaud Mayeur

PRODUCER  
Caroline Bonmarchand

COPRODUCERS  
Moshe Ederi, Leon Ederi, Ofer Naim,  
Dafna Prenner, Shai Eines,  
Jean-Yves Roubin, Cassandre Warnauts

PRODUCTION  
Avenue B (France)

IN COPRODUCTION  
WITH  
United King Films, Artza Productions,  
Frakas Productions, Eurimages

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE  
Hebrew

WITH THE SUPPORT  
CNC

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
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Movie Tax Shelter, Sam Spiegel  
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Fund

IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
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ORIGINAL LANGUAGE  
Hebrew

**PYRAMIDE**  
INTERNATIONAL