

BERLIN 2018 Forum

Review: *The Waldheim Waltz*

by MARTA BALAGA

🕒 17/02/2018 - BERLIN 2018: Ruth Beckermann addresses the infamous 1986 Austrian presidential campaign and ends up with something more timely than one could ever have expected



When Austrian diplomat and former UN Secretary-General **Kurt Waldheim** announced his bid for presidency in 1986, most viewed it as a rather obvious, if not entirely welcome, decision. That is, until it was discovered that during all those years spent in the public eye, he somehow forgot to mention his Nazi past. Despite his subsequent claims that he didn't know about all the atrocities committed during the war, the country immediately split in two, while the rest of the world tuned in to watch the strange show. In the months leading up to his election, urged to withdraw from the race by the World Jewish Congress, Waldheim went from being the trusted face of the United Nations to a "liar" and a "Nazi". And yet... He still managed to win. Sound familiar? Of course it does.

(The article continues below - Commercial information)

It's hard not to think about recent political whirlwinds and the whole "alternative facts" debacle when watching [The Waldheim Waltz](#) [+], **Ruth Beckermann's** latest, a documentary showing in the [Berlinale](#) Forum. "Nixon resigned not because of Watergate, but because he lied," we hear at one point, but after the Waldheim affair, such words have seemingly lost all meaning. Although set in the 1980s and made up entirely of archive footage, this film really does feel surprisingly well timed.

It is dynamic, too, because instead of focusing solely on the materials derived from the state-run radio and television, Beckermann actually uses her own. In the era before smartphones, she was out on the streets with a camera she didn't yet know quite how to use, "half demonstrating and half documenting". This makes for a fascinating watch, as what emerges from these black-and-white shots is a country struggling with its past while simultaneously trying to figure out its future.

Although her calm narration gives the whole thing the feel of an unusual bedtime story, its content is more than enough to keep you awake. Still, it helps that Beckermann has an amazing eye for detail and a sense of humour, finding time not just for demonstrations or high-profile talk shows that Waldheim visited on his never-ending apology tour, but also signs of everyday rebellion. "Waldheim is lousy in bed," scribbles someone on an old poster, and it's by showing such small gestures that she manages to capture her countrymen's growing frustration. Frustration that – it has to be said – can be felt throughout the whole film, as she goes on to show how little has changed, especially as far as populism is concerned. "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time," goes a statement by Abraham Lincoln that she quotes at the very beginning. Perhaps but nothing can stop you from trying.

The Waldheim Waltz was produced by Ruth Beckermann for [Ruth Beckermann Filmproduktion](#) with support from the [Austrian Film Institute](#), [ORF – Austrian Broadcasting Corporation](#), [FISA](#) and [Filmfonds Vienna](#). International sales are handled by [Wide House](#).

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