

Where is Anne Frank: The new animated film from Ari Folman (Waltz with Bashir)

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Where is Anne Frank is an animated film directed by Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman, best known for his remarkable *Waltz With Bashir* (2008) devoted to the 1982 Israeli war in Lebanon. Commissioned by the Anne Frank Fonds Basel, the new, intentionally disturbing movie is made up of 159,000 individual drawings created in 15 countries using a new technique that combines static backgrounds with classic, animated figures in 2D.

Anne Frank, the young German-Jewish girl who hid with her family from the Nazis in Amsterdam during World War II, addressed her famous diary to Kitty, an imaginary friend. Folman's film, which took eight years to create, brings Kitty to life and places her in contemporary Amsterdam.

The film opens on an inclement morning outside the Anne Frank House museum in Amsterdam, where a long line of harried people wait for the famed institution to open. The crowd is apparently oblivious to the situation of a nearby family of refugees whose flimsy tent is being blown away by a gusty wind.

Inside the museum, a red-haired, freckled teenage girl, Kitty, materializes from the swirling ink of Anne's Diary.

In fact, it was on her 13th birthday in 1942 that Anne received a red-plaid autograph book and began using it as a diary. The first words she wrote were: *"I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support."*

The teenager continued to chronicle her life living in Amsterdam under the tyranny of German occupation, as she and her family hid from the Nazis. After two years, in August 1944, they were discovered and deported, first to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Unaware that 75 years have gone by, Kitty (voiced by Ruby Stokes) is convinced that if she is alive, Anne (Emily Carey) must be too. The film tells the story of Kitty's journey across Europe in search of her beloved

friend. Armed with the precious Diary (which she has stolen) and with help from her friend Peter (Ralph Prosser), who runs a secret shelter for undocumented refugees, Kitty follows in Anne's footsteps, from the Annex where the Frank family hid to her tragic end in the Holocaust.

As policemen comb the city like stormtroopers for the Diary's whereabouts, one overblown official claims that the document is "the biggest spiritual treasure this country's produced since Rembrandt."

Various themes emerge, directed primarily toward the present, including the refugee crisis in Europe. In today's Amsterdam, Anne Frank's name is ubiquitous—on a hospital, a theater, a bridge, a school, etc. But the question is posed: where and how well is the essence of her story understood? A character argues, "Everyone knows who she is, but no one talks about what happened to her."

As Kitty follows the path Anne took in Europe, the first stop is the Westerbork transit camp in the northeastern Netherlands, then Auschwitz in Poland and finally Bergen-Belsen in northern Germany. Throughout the film, ominous black-caped Nazis with skeleton faces march in unison. Folman explains that the creators designed "the Nazis as giants of the Underworld with masks and ferocious dogs. And we [drew] on Greek mythology which Frank was very fond of."

Playing an important part in the narrative is an African girl, Awa (Naomi Mourton), a refugee, whose family faces persecution in present-day Netherlands. Kitty finally holds the Diary as a "hostage," demanding the African family's freedom and freedom for all refugees. She addresses a crowd with a bullhorn, "Anne didn't write her Diary so you could worship her...The pages themselves are not important. What's important is the message that is passed down to the tens of millions of children who read this Diary...And that is why I shall burn this Diary unless all these people [thousands of refugees]

are guaranteed shelter, a guarantee that they can stay in this country as free people for as long as they wish.”

In an interview, Folman spells out that Kitty, “a child of our times,” began as “Anne’s imaginary friend, basically. But in the movie she is building a bridge between the past and the present. As she ventures out into the world, she meets young people such as herself who are in danger—maybe because they have to flee from war zones. That reminds Kitty of Anne and the fact that Anne did not have an opportunity to flee during her relatively short time in hiding. This experience turns Kitty into an activist.”

The director, the son of Holocaust survivors, further elaborates that the conception of the film was altered by the eruption of the refugee crisis. As the flight of refugees from war zones to Europe “reached an apex in 2018 and 2019, I rewrote the script...The second part originally dealt with girls in war zones. I then went over those sections and focused on children fleeing from war zones to seek safety in Europe...”

“Today, we see populism, right-wing extremism, even fascism, and definitely racism and xenophobia in various countries. I don’t believe a film can change anything, but I believe it’s important that, as filmmakers, we do everything to fulfill our hope of films playing a part in reintroducing a different mental and political attitude.”

The film’s production notes assert that “Anne and Margot Frank were two of 1.5 million Jewish children killed during the Holocaust. Children are still fleeing from conflict zones and their lives are in danger; minorities, refugees and individuals are still discriminated against. Reading the Diary without putting it into the context of the present is meaningless as we need to learn the lessons of the past to make a difference.”

“I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn.”—Anne Frank



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