

Mărculești, Moldova was the site of an unimaginable atrocity.  
Years later, few speak clearly or honestly about what happened.



“Must-see. A sublime expression of both a country and a mentality.”  
Stefan Dobrou, *Cineuropa*

AN ICONOCLASTIC FEATURES MOTION PICTURE IN ASSOCIATION WITH WESTERN TRANSYLVANIA STUDIOS AND WILLONA PROD SUISE  
SOUND BORJA SAU RAZQUIN FILM EDITING MARC COHEN CINEMATOGRAPHY MICHAEL MARIUS PESSAH CO-EXEC. PROD. MAX GUTBROD  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS SHARON CORYELL KE JEFFERY SHEN WILLIAM M. CARTWRIGHT MATTHEW MISHORY  
AND CHRISTOPHE VAUTHEY PRODUCED BY SABIN DORHOI EDWARD SINGLETARY, JR. AND RANDALL WALK  
WRITTEN BY MARC COHEN AND MATTHEW MISHORY DIRECTED BY MATTHEW MISHORY

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“Must-see! Mishory cuts his documentary almost like a thriller, gradually revealing information. [*Absent* is] the documentary equivalent of Radu Jude’s *Afermin!*, winner of this year’s Berlinale Silver Bear for Best Director.”

-- **Stefan Dobroiu, *Cineuropa***

“Fascinating. A film about the difficulty, the impossibility, of language when the subject is unspeakable.”

-- **Michael Silverblatt, *KCRW***

“Brilliant! A meaningful document of denial.”

-- **Arnold Schwartzman (Academy Award Winner, *Genocide*)**



# ABSENT

Iconoclastic Features + Western Transylvania Studios + Willona Prod Suisse Present

A Film Directed & Co-Written by Matthew Mishory

Produced by Sabin Dorohoi + Edward Singletary, Jr. + Randall Walk

Romania - USA - Switzerland / 2015 / 71 minutes

**Sales and Festivals:** Lights On Distribution, Torino

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## The Film

For over a hundred years, Mărculești was a vibrant Jewish agricultural and mercantile community in Bessarabia (now present-day Moldova). In July 1941, the village was the site of an unimaginable atrocity. Seventy-four years later, few speak honestly or completely about what happened.

**ABSENT** is a cinematic portrait of the ghost village of Mărculești, its current inhabitants, and their very complex relationship to their own history. Working entirely on location with a very small crew (and often without electricity), filmmaker Matthew Mishory documents one of Europe's poorest, most remote, and least-visited places.

The result is a nuanced, complex, and unforgettable snapshot. We are transported to a rural Moldovan village grappling with an unspeakable past and facing, in the context of global capitalism, an uncertain future.



## The Vision

**ABSENT** has no voice-of-god narration and no emotionally manipulative score. There are no easy answers and no easy judgments. Instead, we experience a filmmaker working in a style that recalls the European arthouse and the Romanian New Wave. There are breathtaking vistas, beautifully composed observations of daily rural life, and exquisite long-duration takes as the mayor's young son leads us through a killing field. But the filmmaking itself is never hidden. In handheld vérité sequences taken in tiny crumbling houses and hard-to-film corners, we catch the occasional reframe, focus buzz, even words between the crew. The imperfect process itself (and the filmmakers' presence) becomes a part of the fabric of the film.

Careful attention is paid to the sonic landscapes. As critic Michael Silverblatt writes, "The sound of the natural environment becomes a score.

"It is the sound of the world on the brink of destruction. Not by fire; this world will crawl to its end. In the meantime, the birds chirp. This is a place that was once filled with music, but as a monoculture, it has not found its sound. It is filled with silence."

Of course, **ABSENT** is ultimately a film about words, "a film about the difficulty, the impossibility, of language when the subject is unspeakable." In a mere 71 minutes, we witness nearly every imaginable nuance of evasion, denial, and — finally, wrenchingly — acceptance. There are modest heroes in the final calculation, but for many in this Moldovan village, it is simply too late for reconciliation with the past. Silverblatt again:

"The characters are not monsters, but in their avoidance of the questions, [they] don't have the ability to come to terms with their own history — and that is worse."

## The Director

For filmmaker Matthew Mishory, **ABSENT** is the most personal film he has ever made. Mishory's father, who passed away during the editing of this movie, was born in Mărculești and escaped with his parents before the onset of the Holocaust. Matthew is the first member of his family to return to Moldova in over 75 years. He approaches the material and the characters with great sensitivity. Mishory balances a desire for information and accountability with an empathy for the inhabitants of a region that has suffered tremendously since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Mishory (born 1982, Santa Monica, California) has been named a "rising talent" by *Variety* and "a new major figure in U.S. independent cinema" by French magazine *Les Inrocks*. His 35mm feature film debut, *Joshua Tree, 1951: A Portrait of James Dean* (official selection: Palm Springs, Seattle, Guadalajara, Rio de Janeiro, Transilvania, and Reykjavik international film festivals, among others) was released theatrically in the United States, the UK, and Germany. *Artforum* pronounced it "a nuanced portrayal of an entire era", and *Film International* declared that "Matthew Mishory has managed to capture an austere beauty of a kind little known and little understood by all but the likes of Baudelaire."

Matthew previously directed the award-winning experimental short film, *Delphinium: A Childhood Portrait of Derek Jarman*, recently re-released in the U.K. by the British Film Institute as part of its year-long *Jarman2014* commemoration. The film was also selected for preservation in the BFI's National Film Archive.

**ABSENT** was a close collaboration with Mishory's friend and Romanian producer Sabin Dorohoi, who also traces Jewish heritage to the region. The filmmakers met at the Transatlantic Talent Laboratory in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 2009. **ABSENT** was shot on a low budget in just over a week in difficult filming conditions in rural Moldova.

## The Crew

**Director & Co-Writer** Matthew Mishory

**Producers** Sabin Dorohoi, Edward Singletary, Jr., & Randall Walk

**Co-Writer & Editor** Marc Cohen

**Cinematographer** Michael Marius Pessah

**Sound** Borja Sau Razquin

**Production** Iconoclastic Features, Western Transylvania Studios,  
& Willona Prod Suisse

**Sales & Festivals** Lights On Distribution



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**Teaser Trailer** <http://bit.ly/19xPp7p>

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